The Ellul Forum - Issues #26-50

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

The Ellul Forum

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Jacques Ellul & Latin America

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

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

1988-Present

Contents

Issue #39 Spring 2007 — The Ethics of Jacques Ellul   537

Re-Viewing Ellul   566

Book Notes & Reviews   570

Issue #43 Spring 2009 — Ellul in Scandinavia   699

Book Notes & Reviews   730

Issue #44 Fall 2009 — Ellul, Capitalism, and the Workplace 735

Book Review   768

Issue #45 Spring 2012 — Ellul in the Undergraduate Classroom   773

Issue #46 Fall 2012 — Technique, Ellul, and the Food Industry   817

Book Review   **852**

Issue #47 Spring 2011 — Pop Culture, Jacques Ellul, and Thomas Merton   857

Issue #49 Spring 2012 — Art, Technique, and Meaning in Jacques Ellul   932

In Review   971

Issue #50 Fall 2012   976

Issue #26 Jan 2001 — Jacques Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau

- Click to view the original PDF

From the Editor

As we enter the 14th year of *The Ellul Forum,* it has the same mission as always, but now in partnership with the International Jacques Ellul Society. You can read about this new home on the back page of this issue. UES is the English-language sister-society of the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul. (See its website for full information: *www.ellul.org')*. For those who become members of UES, *The Ellul Forum* is sent without cost. I applaud David Gill and others who have taken the leadership in forming this society.

And I am grateful to Joyce Hanks for serving as guest editor for this issue. It is immensely informative, and opens new vistas on Ellul and Charbonneau as lifelong friends and academic colleagues.

Clifford G. Christians, Editor

About This Issue

I find it an immense privilege to serve as guest editor for the first issue of *The Ellul Forum* to publish information about the newly-formed Societe Internationale Jacques Ellul/Intemational Jacques Ellul Society, which should be legally incorporated by the time you read this. All of us involved in the *Forum* and the Society hope that you as a reader will freely send us your comments, suggestions, and criticisms as we launch this new venture.

Bernard Charbonneau's intellectual journey with Ellul forms the core of this issue of the *Forum.* We would all do well, I think, to reflect on their friendship as a pattern for us. Neither thinker could have made his contributions without the original stimulus and continual input and criticism of the other. Their work forms a whole in ways not always recognized. In his personal reflections on what Ellul meant to him as professor and mentor, Patrick Chastenet mentions the Ellul-Charbonneau teamwork In my article, I try to show the influence they had on each other, but also the consistent respect and honor they gave to each others' ideas and work Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle's article contains information not widely available in English that is foundational to their early thinking as well as to their later development

For further information on Charbonneau, scheduled for 2001, see the published form of Daniel Cer6zuelle's final lecture in a series of six given at Colorado School of Mines during the school year 1999-2000: "Nature and Freedom: Introducing Bernard

Charbonneau" (forthcoming in *Colorado School of Mines Quarterly Review of Engineering, Science, Education and Research,* vol. 101). Thanks to Carl Mitcham for this information.

Also in this issue, note two book reviews: Carl Mitcham reviews briefly (I hope we will see a more extensive review in these pages at a later date) an important new book by Willem H. Vanderburg, *The Labyrinth of Technology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000). And David Gill reviews my *Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works* (Stamford CT: JAI Press, 2000). This bibliographic volume replaces my earlier bibliography (1984) and updates (published in 1991 and 1995), as far as works by Ellul are concerned. Volume 2, the bibliography listing books, articles, etc., on Ellul, should come out in 2002 or 2003.

Joyce Hanks, Guest Editor
University of Scranton
jmh381@uofs.edu

In This Issue

About the Ellul Forum

History & Purpose

The Ellul Forum has been published twice per year since August of 1988. Our goal is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to aspects of our technological

civilization and carry forward both Ins sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

While **The Ellul Forum** does review and discuss Jacques Ellul, whom we consider one of the most insightful intellectuals of our era, it is not our intention to treat his writings as a body of sacred literature to be endlessly dissected. The appropriate tribute to his work is to carry forward its spirit and agenda for the critical analysis of our technical civilization. Ellul invites and provokes us to think new thoughts and enact new ideas. To that end we invite you to join the conversation in **The Ellul Forum.**

The Ellul Forum is an English-language publication but we are currently exploring ways of linking more fully with our francophone colleagues.

Manuscript Submissions

Send original manuscripts (essays, responses to essays in earlier issues) to:
Clifford Christians, Editor, **The Ellul Forum**
Institute of Communications Research
University of Illinois
810 S. Wright Street, Suite 228
Urbana, IL 61801 USA

Please send both hard copy and computer disc versions, indicating the software and operating system used (e.g., Microsoft Word for Windows 98). Type end notes as text (do not embed in the software footnote/endnote part of your program).

Essays should not exceed twenty pages, double-spaced, in length.

Manuscript submissions will only be returned if you enclose a self-addressed, adequately postaged envelope with your submission.

The Ellul Forum also welcomes suggestions of themes for future issues.

Books & Reviews

Books. The Ellul Forum considers for review books (1) about Jacques Ellul, (2) significantly interacting with or dependent on Ellul's thought, or (3) exploring the range of sociological and theological issues at the heart of Ellul's work. We can not guarantee that every book submitted will actually be reviewed in **The Ellul Forum** nor are we able to return books so submitted.

Book Reviews. If you would like to review books for **The Ellul Forum,** please submit your vita/resume and a description of your reviewing interests.

Send all books, book reviews, and related correspondence to:

David W. Gill, Associate Editor, **The Ellul Forum**
North Park University
3225 W. Foster Avenue
Chicago IL 60625 USA

Subscriptions

A subscription to **The Ellul Forum** is included in the annual membership fee for the International Jacques Ellul Society. To become a member (and receive **The Ellul Forum)** send a check payable to "UES" in the amount of $20 (U.S.). Checks or money orders must be drawn in U.S. funds. Send check with your name and complete address to

UES
P.O. Box 1033
Berkeley CA 94701 USA

Back Issues

Back issues of **The Ellul Forum** are available for $5.00 each, postage included. Send your requests, with your complete mailing address and a check or money order drawn in U.S. funds for the correct amount, to

UES
P.O. Box 1033
Berkeley CA 94701 USA

Jacques Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau

by Joyce Hanks

Traditionally, when someone outlines the primary human influences on Jacques Ellul's thought, Karl Marx, Soren Kierkegaard, and Karl Barth head the list. In terms of historical influences, most scholars would find it hard to argue with the importance

of those three names. When it comes to contemporary thinkers, however, Bernard Charbonneau must receive the credit for helping Ellul see the significance of certain ideas that became central to his life's work: freedom, nature, and Technique. Ellul frequently praised Charbonneau's insights, and claimed to owe him an immense personal and intellectual debt, especially for his input during Ellul's formative years.

These two lifelong friends met in secondary school in Bordeaux, according to Ellul, but began to have serious conversations during the period when Ellul studied law at the University of Bordeaux, during the late 1920's and early 1930's. Charbonneau, something more than a year older than Ellul, had reached firm conclusions about trends in society he considered dangerous, and gradually convinced Ellul of many of his views. He and Ellul disagreed throughout the rest of their lives, however, on most spiritual issues, and continued to enjoy extremely lively debates as a result

Along with many of their contemporaries, Charbonneau and Ellul sensed that their world had begun to come crashing down around them. Nothing seemed to work right anymore. People's driving concerns were grossly misplaced, and the means they used to achieve their ends were unthinkable. Many members of the generation coming of age in the early 1930's in France felt that the civilization they had known was rapidly coming to an end.

A typical North American view of the crises in twentieth-century France would certainly include two world wars, a depression and a cold war, but might omit the early thirties, at least until the delayed effects of the American depression began to affect European economies. In fact, however, these early years of the 1930's constituted some of the most agitated of the century for French society. Especially for the generation coming to maturity in this period, but also for many of their elders, civilization seemed to be undergoing a fundamental crisis.

If we oversimplify, we can trace almost all the apparent causes of this sense of a crisis of civilization to the "nothing works anymore" syndrome. Values seemed to have disappeared, swallowed up by encroaching materialism; confidence in the future had come to an end with World War I and its aftermath; French politics, in pendulum swings back and forth between right and left, had become so unstable that many felt ready to try something new—almost anything—to see if somehow an end could be brought to a cycle of do-nothing governments.

Although far from the Parisian center of power, Charbonneau and Ellul and some of their friends were not about to let their world die a quiet death. Disgusted with feeble national attempts to "put France back together again," they felt a need to start over from scratch. Civilization was crumbling, and would have to be reinvented, piece by piece. Everything had to change. Significantly, this view of civilization and the way society is organized, this sense of a need to reinvent the whole, remained central to Ellul's thinking for the rest of his life. For him, it was no passing notion. As late as 1981, in *Changer de revolution* (Paris: Le Seuil), Ellul spelled out in some detail how society would have to undergo fundamental, overall change if it was to avert approaching

disaster. Many issues remained constant for him, in spite of the many changes since the 1930's.

Ellul and Charbonneau were not subject to any delusions of grandeur, and harbored no dreams of bringing everything right by themselves. But they believed it was essential to analyze the situation and to begin righting what they could, where they were. Thus they called together small groups of young people in the Bordeaux area for times of reflection and discussion. Some of these groups associated for a time with the *Esprit* movement, and they had contact with *Ordre Nouveau* leaders as well (see Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle's article elsewhere in this issue of the *Ellul Forum).*

These groups met in natural settings, in camps in southwestern France, in homes and church-related meeting places—anywhere they had the freedom to gather as a small group. By 1935, Charbonneau and Ellul had spent enormous amounts of time camping in southern France and elsewhere (a new experience for the citified Ellul!), usually taking with them other young people interested in studying societal issues. In recent years I have had the privilege of interviewing some who attended, and they attest unanimously to the powerful effect of these and subsequent camping trip discussions. The format was free and open: participants who wished to present their ideas for evening discussion were invited to inform the leaders of their topic in advance of the camp. Mornings and afternoons were often spent hiking in the Pyrenees.

Charbonneau and Ellul also wrote. Ellul's confidence in the power of the word, both spoken and written, comes through clearly in much of bis subsequent work, especially *La parole humiliee* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1981; English translation, *The Humiliation of the Word,* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985). But as early as the 1930's, Ellul and Charbonneau believed it important to issue a written call to action. One of their first joint efforts produced a statement of 83 ideas intended to help other thoughtful French people in their revolt against society as constituted in the 1930's. They called it "Directives pour un manifeste personnaliste" ("Outline for a personalist manifesto," first circulated in mimeographed form in 1935 or 1936, and recently published for the first time, with notes by Patrick Troude-Chastenet, in *Revue Frangaise d'Histoire des Idees Politiques,* no. 9, [1999], pp. 159-177; see also Troude-Chastenet's article, "Jacques Ellul: Une jeunesse personnaliste," pp. 55-78 of the same issue). It begins with these words:

A world was organized without us. We entered it as it was beginning to lose its balance. It obeyed deep-seated laws we did not know, which were not like those of earlier Societies. No one took the trouble to ferret them out, because this world was characterized by anonymity: no one was responsible, and no one attempted to control it Each person simply kept to the post he was assigned in this world, which came into being by itself, through the interplay of these deep-seated laws.

Thus we also found our place marked, and we were obligated to obey a kind of social determinism. All we could do was to play our role ell, unconsciously assisting in the interplay of the new laws of Society. Faced with these laws, we were disarmed–not only by our ignorance, but also by the impossibility of changing this anonymous

product Humanity was completely impotent as over against Banks, the Stock Market, contracts, insurance, Hygiene, the Radio, Production, etc. We could not struggle, one person against another, as in previous societies, nor could ideas challenge one another directly.

In spite of our impotence, however, we felt the need to proclaim certain values and to incarnate certain forces...

These few lines give the flavor of Charbonneau and Ellul's sense of revolt, their utter rejection of the society in which they found themselves, and their determination to begin anew, constructing a fresh, completely different society, one that would be ready to replace the old civilization whenever it died a natural death. They felt the need to understand and oppose a long list of contemporary societal ills: lack of human freedom, lack of justice, materialism, excessive profits, idealism, fascism, communism, growth of the state, totalitarianism, propaganda, growth of cities, growing anonymity, reliance on Technique, use of human beings as means to various ends, etc.

The last paragraph of their fifteen-page "Outline" challenges the reader to participate with them in the "personalist revolution" they are undertaking in spite of themselves: "Let all those who believe they have a role to play in the coming Revolution, against a civilization that sustains its life only by means of our death, begin their inner preparation. Then, let them come and help us."

Charbonneau and Ellul did not simply sit and wait for others to join them in their effort, however. They sought out the *Esprit* movement led by Emmanuel Mounier, who shared many of their ideas. In a June 1996 interview, I asked Henriette Charbonneau, the widow of Bernard Charbonneau, why she believed Ellul and her husband found themselves so strongly attracted to the young personalist movement in *Esprit,* traveling to Paris to contact it, in spite of their strong sense of provincial identity. Her reponse was three-fold: because of the movement's emphasis on the person, because of its refusal to fit in with existing political categories (including its search for a "third way"), and because elsewhere in society, people were asking the wrong questions. In a separate interview, Charbonneau's son, Simon, suggested that his father felt drawn to the personalist movement because it shared his conviction that the worship of progress was essentially dehumanizing. My own view is that the personalist movement's concerns and views coincided remarkably with Ellul's and Charbonneau's, including the importance of small, independent groups meeting all over France to reflect on the current crisis and take appropriate action. Political philosophies of the time tended to negate the importance of the individual, reducing people to their role in society or the economy. Drawing on their experience, and only secondarily on their already vast knowledge derived from reading, Charbonneau and Ellul felt moved to challenge this state of things.

On the basis of such affinities, and after initial contacts in Paris, Charbonneau and Ellul decided to affiliate with the *Esprit* movement But important differences of emphasis, if not of belief, soon surfaced: Mounier clearly preferred to give priority to reflection, rather than action, contrary to the Bordeaux groups' insistence on attending

to both. In addition, Mounier concentrated on the journal *Esprit* (first published in October 1932), the mouthpiece of his movement, rather than on the small groups spread here and there around the country. He conceived of the groups as support structures for spreading the personalist message rather than as loosely federated groups, each with its own regionally-based agenda and emphases.

Other differences contributed to the cleavage: Mourner's strong Catholicism (as over against Ellul's strong protestantism, and Charbonneau's reticence with regard to organized religion), and his use of the word "person" to refer to the community rather than the individual. Charbonneau and Ellul sensed that they had failed in their effort to midge the national personalist movement in the direction they believed to be essential—that of a revolution coming up from below, rather than one organized from the top down. Mounier and other personalists seemed generally to prefer a gradual, reformistic approach to a simultaneous revolution across the whole of society. Other differences moved them still farther apart: Mounier proved too nationalistic, too inclined to approve current ideologies of progress and Technique, and too authoritarian to suit Ellul and Charbonneau. Finally, in early 1937, they and the groups they sponsored in southwestern France resigned from the *Esprit* movement

World War n of course put most of their projects on hold, along with Ellul's university teaching post, which he lost through his refusal to cooperate with the Vichy government (although the pre-war camping trips took hold again after the war). He spent the war years farming in order to feed his family, and helping Jews and others to hide and escape the German dragnet. Charbonneau did not participate actively in the Resistance, nor did he share Ellul's hope that the confused aftermath of the war might possibly offer an opportunity for the birth of a new civilization along the lines they had dreamed of. Ellul's hopes for a such a revolution following World War II were dashed when he saw how quickly old loyalties and desires for revenge took over after the Liberation.

Neither Charbonneau nor Ellul, however, gave up the revolutionary convictions they had arrived at together in the early days of their friendship. After the war, they failed in their attempts to establish a kind of "parallel university," in which students could pursue their interests without concern for bureaucratic requirements. But several strands from their 1930's proposal eventually came together in the birth of the French ecological movement. Although widespread concern for the environment in France is commonly considered to have begun after the events of May 1968, its roots can be traced to Charbonneau and Ellul in the 1930's, in their opposition to the cult of progress, their concern over the rapid advances of technology, and their insistence on the importance of nature (see Roger Cans, "La France 'ecolo,*Le Monde,* 10 June 1992, p. 14).

These concerns moved them to organize a local movement in opposition to the national government during the 1970's. Charbonneau appears to have initiated their mammoth effort to resist bureaucratic designs for "developing" the Aquitaine coast as a magnet for tourism. But Ellul soon joined his friend in the struggle, uncover-

ing and heading off unpublicized plans before they could become realities, exposing faulty "studies," and encouraging the populace to withstand the government's illegal maneuvers. A glance at Ellul's articles published during the 1970's and early 1980's gives some idea of the effort he put into this resistance, which for him epitomized the principle he had long espoused: "think globally, act locally." I well remember how my earliest interviews with Ellul, in 1981, were frequently interrupted by telephone calls asking for his advice and help on matters related to opposing this government project, which would have ruined the coastal environment and local fishermen, had it succeeded. Ellul consistently gave credit to the economic crisis of the early 1980's for the defeat of the "mission" to develop the Aquitaine coast. But it remains clear that he and Charbonneau played a major role in publicizing and thwarting attempts by centralized government to outwit local citizens.

Charbonneau and Ellul's collaboration extended to making each others' work known, each through his own writing. The earliest Ellul review of a book by Charbonneau I have found dates from 1952, on *L'Etat {The State;* in *Le Monde,* 16 Dec. 1952). Originally published privately by Charbonneau, this book got a chance in the late 1980's for wider circulation when a Parisian publisher agreed to give it a second edition, if Ellul would simultaneously agree to allow publication of a second edition of his *La Technique,* which was sure to attract buyers. Ellul, who had never understood why Charbonneau's books did not manage to get published and sell at least as well as his own, readily agreed. In 1974, Ellul reviews two of Charbonneau's books, one on ecology *{Notre table rase,* Denoel, 1974) and one criticizing development *{Le systeme et le chaos,* Anthropos, 1973), and in 1980, he reviews *Jefus* (another publication by the author, 1980). Finally, Ellul publishes a 13-page "Introduction to the thought of Bernard Charbonneau," including a fresh review of *L'Etat {Ouvertures,* no. 7, Jan.-March 1985).

Over the years of his editorship of *Fol et Vie* (1969-1986), Ellul repeatedly publishes articles by Charbonneau (especially the series "Chronicle of the year 2000"), and also arranges for some of his friend's articles to see the light in *Reforme,* a Protestant weekly. For his part, Charbonneau includes Ellul in a seminar he hosted on ecology in 1972, and publishes two of Ellul's papers in the proceedings of that meeting. When he and Edouard Kressmann found "Ecoropa," a continent-wide environmental group, they include Ellul.

Finally, six months after Ellul's death, Charbonneau publishes a long obituary in which he traces their friendship, their intellectual journey together, and their influence on each other *{Combat Nature,* no. 107, Nov. 1994, pp. 36-39). Charbonneau claims that each halfway "converted" the other, Charbonneau convincing Ellul of the importance of the impact of science and technology on human freedom, Ellul helping to nudge Charbonneau away from atheism. Charbonneau says he finally realized, after the war, that his love of nature and freedom had its source in Christianity, and that this, together with Ellul's disillusionment with certain aspects of the institutionalized church, drew them closer together. According to Charbonneau, one shares pleasure

27

with most friends, but not the meaning of life, whereas he and Ellul shared "what gives value and content to life." He survived Ellul by less than two years, dying on 28 April 1996, shortly before a conference in Toulouse probed his thought, his relationship with Ellul, and his legacy (see the proceedings: *Bernard Charbonneau: Une vie entiere a denoncer la grande imposture,* ed. Jacques Prades; Toulouse: Eres, 1997).

Bernard Charbonneau and the Personalist Context in the 1930s and Beyond

By Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle

"We must try to crush all the forms of centralization crystallized by the blind forces of Technique and money."[1]

Bernard Charbonneau, "Journal intime," *Esprit,* 1936.

"Both of us, at that time, were very attracted to politics. Bernard, for that matter, was much more advanced than I in knowledge of the social, sociological, and political structures. His criticism of society seemed to me to go further than Marx's, and what I still find extraordinary, he made a global interpretation of society. When today I reread his writings of that period, I am stupefied by their timelessness. [. ..] We had formed some small groups in the southwest of France. [. . .] And we looked for a home for our revolutionary yearnings. The adventure of *Esprit* took place in this setting. We both went to a meeting of *Esprit* in 1934. Bernard was, by the way, extremely skeptical. To begin with, the word *esprit* seemed ambiguous to him, allowing the greatest possible misunderstanding and embracing all sorts of compromise. But we met some people there who had conducted the same criticism of modem society that we had in our little group in the southwest. It was therefore a very important encounter. [...] And all the more so because at about the same time, we met Alexandre Marc, Denis de Rougemont, and their group, *Ordre nouveau* [The New Order]. Bernard and I were between the two positions."[2]

These recollections of Jacques Ellul, in his book of conversations with Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange, suggest very explicitly that we situate the development of Bernard Charbonneau's thought in these years with respect to two groups: *Esprit* and *Ordre Nouveau.* More broadly, we can trace Charbonneau's thought as it relates to what we might call the "nebula" of non-conformist groups of the 1930's or the "nebula" of the personalist movement of the 30's.

***

---

[1] [Translator's note: originally published as "Bernard Charbonneau, le contexte personnaliste des annees trente et sa posterite," in *Bernard Charbonneau: Une vie entiere a denoncer la grande imposture,* ed. Jacques Prades (Toulouse: Editions Eras, 1997; ISBN 2-86586-464-2), pp. 23-34. Translated by Joyce M. Hanks, with the permission of Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle and Editions Eres].

[2] Jacques Ellul, *In Season, Out of Season: An Introduction to the Thought of Jacques Ellul,* based on interviews by Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange, trans. *Tani* K. Niles (New York: Harper & Row, 1982),

Setting aside the details behind our analysis for the moment, we can distinguish three tendencies within this nebula:

1) the first group is that of the journal *Esprit,* which clusters around Emmanuel Mounier beginning in 1931. Some people today are tempted to reduce 1930's personalism to this group;

2) the second group is *Ordre Nouveau,* created through the organizational drive of Alexandre Marc. This group centered on a doctrinal corpus based primarily on the theoretical thought of Arnaud Dandieu, whose work was brutally interrupted by his death in 1933;

3) finally, at least until 1934, we must leave room for a third trend, which Mounier called the "Young Right." It consisted of young intellectuals in disagreement with *Action Frangaise*[3] to some degree, who centered especially around Jean de Fabregues and Thierry Maulnier.

This outline applies to what we could call the early appearance of this movement, between 1930 and 1934. We will not embark at this point on a complete and detailed analysis of the stands taken by each of these groups, but the following rather brief reference points will serve to situate their tendencies.

First, very importantly, the thought of these groups developed within the framework of a typical complex problem which we might call a "problem of civilization." All these groups in fact shared the feeling that they were living through a "crisis of civilization"; that is, an all-encompassing crisis which called into question *all* aspects of human existence. This crisis concerned the relationship of people with each other and with their destiny, as well as with their social or natural environment.

This overall set of problems led to a certain number of consequences which we can summarize rather briefly:

1. First, an extremely *critical* attitude toward the *liberal society* of the time, in its political manifestations (a criticism of mass democracy, parliamentary government, and the party system) and in its economic forms (a criticism of capitalism and the "reign of money"). At the beginning of the thirties, this tendency especially took the form of a virulent questioning of "Americanism" and the Americanization of modem societies.

2. In addition to challenging political, economic, and social structures, this criticism also claimed to be *moral and spiritual.* The three groups mentioned above called into question a tendency they perceived in modem society toward *rationalism, productivism,* and *materialism,* which were becoming more and more stifling. These trends were seen as condemning people to a kind of mutilation, coming from both above and below, that reduced persons to an abstraction whose flesh-and-blood roots and spiritual personality had been amputated.

---

pp. 33-35. See also Jacques Ellul, *Jacques Ellul on Religion, Technology, and Politics: Conversations with Patrick Troude-Chastenet,* trans. Joan Mendes France (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), Chapter VI

[3] [Translator's note: for background on *Action Frangaise,* See Eugen Weber, *Action Frangaise: Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth-Century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962)].

3. At the same time these groups lined up in opposition to this "established disorder," they challenged other contemporary movements that also claimed to offer "total" answers to the crisis (namely *communism* and *fascism),* denying that such movements were truly revolutionary. They were not revolutionary because, rather than combatting the drift of modem societies toward governmental control, totalitarianism, and materialism, they exacerbated these tendencies.

4. To remedy this crisis of civilization, these groups declared that they were *revolutionary,* using and abusing what some people ironically labeled their "neither-nor-ism." Critics used this term because these groups, in their frequent refusal of antithetical solutions, tried to find a hypothetical "third way" in most areas. As a result, they often used such slogans as "neither right nor left," "neither communism nor capitalism," "neither governmental control nor anarchism," "neither individualism nor collectivism," "neither idealism nor materialism."

5. They wanted this revolution to be *all-encompassing-,* that is, not just an institutional revolution that would modify societal structures, particularly political and economic structures, but also a "spiritual revolution." They wanted to transform individuals' values and mentality-a simultaneous transformation of people and things.

6. This "total," "spiritual" revolution was to find its foundation in a philosophical approach they called "personalist." This reference to the idea of the "person" seemed especially appropriate as a means of challenging philosophically the idealist/materialist antithesis, and as a way to challenge the indivualist/collectivist divide on political and social grounds. Over against any "monistic" materialism or collectivism, these groups intended to maintain and safeguard the spiritual and unique transcendence of the person in relation to each individual's biological or social conditioning. At the same time, they took care not to separate the person from each one's existence as incorporated within society and history.

7. This "personalism" especially entailed an approach to political and social problems that was characterized by very anti-statist positions, which were declared "decentralizing," "corporatist," or "federalist" These positions had in common an emphasis on the importance of "intermediate bodies"— *spontaneous* forms of organization in civil society, as opposed to the drift toward governmental control seen in modem societies, be they democratic or totalitarian.

8. Finally, this "personalism" expressed itself in the idea of a "personal revolution," which implied the notion of *commitment.* Militants were expected not only to engage in an "outward" action in order to transform the world and society, but also to make an individual effort to embody in their daily life the values and the "lifestyle" of the future "personalist" revolution.[4]
***

Until 1934, the relationships between the three groups we have outlined were not idyllic, but outside observers were conscious of similarities in the stands they took.

---

[4] Fbr more on these points, see Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle, *Les non-conformistes des annees*

The most striking evidence of their resemblance was the October 1932 publication of a special issue of the journal *Nouvelle Revue Frangaise* dedicated to them. In it Denis de Rougemont, who coordinated the special issue, asserted that he saw a kind of common front taking shape among these groups, resting "on a basic similarity of standpoints."

On the other hand, however, this embryonic common front did not survive the shock of the events of February 1934 or their ensuing consequences.[5] Under the pressure of events, the groups had difficulty escaping their traditional habits. In particular, they experienced within their ranks the resurgence of earlier references to the division between right and left, from which they had tried to free themselves. Based on this development, we might be tempted to end their story at this point. But that would surely be a mistake, since this movement, which emerged at the very beginning of the 1930's, as we have seen, had a posterity and later a significant ideological and intellectual influence, in France and beyond.

Nevertheless, it is not easy to analyze this influence, for two reasons that are somewhat connected. First, because their influence was based more on personal commitments and relationships and on phenomena of intellectual cross-fertilization than on the existence of institutional affiliations. Second, because this influence was therefore *diffuse,* running along different paths. In the course of these twists and turns, personalist ideas flowed together with other currents, influencing them, but also being influenced by them. In other words, we can say that the growing reach of the influence of these ideas exacted a price in return: the diluting of the identity of personalist concepts to some degree.

This particular kind of influence, which surely stemmed in part from the intellectual nature of personalism, and in part from circumstances, seems to have been well summed up by a phrase coined by Gabriel Marcel. When someone asked him about the influence of these groups, he answered that it had been "a pointillist influence"; that is to say, diffuse and partly *subterranean* in its advance.

To clarify this advance, it seems wise to take three dates as reference points: 1934, 1940, and 1945. At each of these stages, we find both growth and diluting of personalist influence, compared to what we found at the previous stage.

***

The first reference year is 1934. During the period that follows, from 1934 to 1939, institutional reference points remain, since the previously established groups continue to exist, more or less, especially as evidenced by the continuing publication of their respective journals. But the pressure of events forces them to engage in alliances or political redefinitions that isolate them from each other. They also lose some of their originality in this way:

1. The "Young Right" continues to express itself by means of publications like *La Revue du XX siecle* and *Combat,* but it takes stands on current events that tend to

---

trente: Une tentative de renouveUement de la pensee politiquefrangaise, ed. (Paris: Le Seuil, 1987).

[5] [Translator's note: for details, see Eugen Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (New

relegate it to the fringes of the far right and *Action Frangaise.* After 1934, it is clear that in the mind of Bernard Charbonneau or Jacques Ellul, the "Young Right" is not associated with the type of thought that *Esprit* and *Ordre Nouveau* represented for them.

2. During the same period, *Esprit* also undergoes the pressure of events. Just as the "Young Right" drifts towards the political right, the *Esprit* group is also led to become political. Beginning in 1934, it gives up its "neither right nor left" slogan, and adopts a stance of critical association with the left This development will have repercussions on the relationship of *Esprit* with Bernard Charbonneau and his friends in 1937 and 1938.

3. Only *Ordre Nouveau* seems to have resisted this movement toward politics, but it did so at the price of a doctrinaire hardening in the expression of its positions. Thus it became increasingly isolated, and this fact is related to the disappearance of its journal in 1938.

Movement of the "Young Right" or *Esprit* toward the more traditional circles of the right or left resulted, however, in some penetration of these circles by the ideas that each of these groups continued to defend. In addition to the influence of their publications, we must take personal influence into account. For example, although *Ordre Nouveau* as a movement remained aloof from very politicized commitments, some of its leaders and rank and file became involved in efforts of the right or left to renew the terms of political debate. Thus they found themselves working alongside people of the *Esprit* movement or representatives of the "Young Right." *Ordre Nouveau* members might be working on the left with members of Gaston Bergery's *frontiste* movement and its weekly *La Fleche,* or with leftist Catholic publications such as *Sept* or *Temps present.* On the right, this phenomenon took place, for example, in certain circles associated with the "leagues," around 1935 and 1936, especially with the *Croix de feu* [Fiery Cross] and its affiliate, the *Volontaires nationaux* [National Volunteers]. Also on the right, members of *Ordre Nouveau* sometimes worked within the framework of the first *Parti populaire fran^ais* [Popular French Party], in 1936 and 1937.[6]

To all the above we must add a more or less identifiable influence in the study groups that continued to spring up until the beginning of World War II. Usually short-lived, these groups had rather hazy ideological identities *(La Lutte desjeunes* [Youth Struggle], *L'Homme reel* [True Man], *L'Homme nouveau* [New Man], *La Justice sociale* [Social Justice], *Travail et nation* [Work and Nation], *La Croisade* [Crusade], *Communautd* [Community], *Le pays reel* [The True Country], etc.).[7] During these same years, at the juncture of the influence of *Esprit* and *Ordre Nouveau,* the nucleus of a movement

forms around Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul. Christian Roy calls it "Gascon personalism."[8]

Out of these phenomena emerges a diffuse influence that Mounier will refer to rather bluntly in these terms in 1939: "Several new words that we now see floating around just about everywhere." In this way, the defense of the "eminent dignity of the human person" and the struggle for "spiritual values" became some of the watchwords in the antifascist struggle, whereas the nationalistic leagues and the *Parti populaire frangais* of Jacques Doriot appropriated such slogans as "neither right nor left" and "neither communism nor capitalism." In brief, the upshot of these years can be seen in the mutual permeation at the fringes of the traditional right and left, and in a somewhat influential presence in the more or less successfill attempts of both right and left to modernize the terms of political debate. Another result was a certain number of international contacts between *Esprit* and *Ordre Nouveau.*

***

France's collapse when attacked by Germany in 1940 redealt the cards, so that personalist influence could be found both on the side of the Vichy government and with the Resistance. Two significant reasons explain each of these associations. On the one hand, we see the generalized desire to break with the society of the Third Republic. On the other, a generational phenomenon appears: the thirty-five and forty year olds, who had previously been the "youth of the 1930's," begin to move into leadership positions. This generation had been more or less influenced by the currents of ideas that surfaced in the pre-war period.

In the Vichy government, mainly during the early period,[9] we can see traces of personalist influence in the circles close to the secretariats of Youth and of Information. Sometimes, living under the same governmental "roof," amidst much conflict, one could find former adherents of the "Young Right," *Ordre Nouveau,* and *Esprit.* They might be thrown together in the movement of the *Compagnons de France* [Companions of France], in the cultural association *Jeune France* [Young France], working on the journal *Iddes* [Ideas], or in the schools for leaders, like Uriage.[10] But in such situations the influence was based on a personalism warped by communitarianism and the authoritarian tendencies of the Vichy regime.[11]

In the Resistance, the first networks to organize were often no kinder than the partisans of the Vichy regime in their analysis of what they considered the decay in French

---

[8] See Christian Roy, "Entre pensee et nature: Le personnalisme gascon," in *Bernard Charbonneau: Une vie entiere d denoncer la grande imposture,* ed. Jacques Prades (Toulouse: Editions Erfes, 1997), pp.35-49.

[9] [Translator's note: from 1940 to 1942].

[10] [Translator's note: for background on tire *Compagnons de France,* see Eugen Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (New York: Norton, 1994; ISBN 0393036715); for Uriage, see Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992; ISBN 0520079213)].

[11] See Michel Berges, *Vichy contre Mounter* (Paris: Economica, 1997).

society dining the years preceding Germany's easy victory in 1940. For this reason, the Resistance also experienced the reappearance of themes and men from the personalist groups of the thirties. This happened, for instance, in Henri Frenay's movement "Combat," in *Defense de la France* [Defense of France], *Liberer etfederer* [Liberate and Federate], and in the movement *Temoignage chretien* [Christian Testimony].[12] In these contexts, personalism was induced to compromise with the principles of the republican tradition, and became tinged with a degree of socialist and marxist influence.

Besides those who made such direct, instant commitments, there was the additional influence of those who moved somewhat rapidly from one tendency to the other, from Vichy to the Resistance. Mounier furnishes us with an example, when he ends up back in "Combat" after a very brief interlude with Vichy. Or the School of Uriage, which swung over to the Resistance in 1942. We should note that Uriage was a milieu where personalist influence touched young men who would launch their careers after the war, such as Hubert Beuve-Mery, the future founder of *Le Monde,* and Paul Delouvrier, an important figure in the upper echelons of the Gaullist administration of the Fifth Republic.[13]

Our third period opens in 1945. After the Liberation, the most easily spotted heirs of personalism are divided into two branches. The first is formed by the European federalist movements, which favor both the idea of a united Europe and the federalizing of the European nation-states. Many of the driving forces behind the 1930's groups (such as Robert Aron, Daniel Rops, Jean de Fabregues, Alexandre Marc, Thierry Maulnier and Denis de Rougemont), come back together again after the war. First they come across each other in the *Union europeenne des federalistes* [European Union of Federalists], and later in the context of the *Mouvement federaliste frangais* [French Federalist Movement] or the *Mouvement federaliste europeen* [European Federalist Movement].[14] It is important to note that these bodies brought in men who in some cases came directly from the Resistance, whereas others had more or less flirted with some of the circles related to Vichy that we have mentioned earlier. It is also within this European framework that Jacques Ellul and Denis de Rougemont started a network of ecological study groups in the 1970's, related to the association *Ecoreupa* [Ecoropa, acronymn for "Ecological Europe"].

The second branch of the heirs of personalism after 1945 is the *Esprit* movement. Although some former members of *Esprit* were to be found as individuals in the European context, the journal itself, with Emmanuel Mounier, remained aloof, especially because of the anti-communist tendency which commitment to Europe seemed to entail. This stance calls into question the personalist identity of *Esprit* during the immediate

---

[12] See H. Michel and B. Mirkine Guetzevitch, *Les idees politiques et sociales de la Resistance* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954).

[13] See B. Comte, *Une utopie combattante: L'ecole des cadres d'Uriage* (Paris: Fayard, 1991).

[14] See A. Greilsammer, *Les mouvements federalistes en France de 1945 a 1974* (Nice: Presses d'Europe, 1975); *Du personnalisme au federalisme europeen: En hommage a Denis de Rougemont* (Geneva: Editions du Centre Europ&n de la Culture, 1989).

post-war period, in spite of what Michel Winock has called its "philocommunism,"[15] a term that applied to the journal primarily between 1946 and 1949. In spite of this reservation, it is nevertheless true that *Esprit* was one of the great intellectual journals of the period just after the war, and that it has remained so to some degree until the present Thus it constitutes one of the contemporary elements of the legacy of 1930's personalism, even if its identity as a personalist journal has been somewhat diluted as a result of the ups and downs it has suffered in recent decades.

Along with the *Esprit* networks, we must also mention the importance of the *Vie Nouvelle* [New Life] movement, which had connections with *Esprit.* Standing where social and religious commitment meet, *Vie Nouvelle* was founded by Andre Cruizat, who had come up through the Boy Scouts and the Vichy-related movement of the *Compagnons de France.* Both networks, *Esprit* and *Vie Nouvelle,* contributed to the continued presence of personalism in the intellectual left and in left-leaning Catholicism.[16]

We can consider that beyond this first circle, and through it, but also arriving by means of other routes, certain elements of personalist philosophy also had a rather profound influence on the overall landscape of French politics. In this way personalism has been one of the intellectual reference points of the popular republican movement, and thus of the Christian Democratic tendency, since the end of World War II. Etienne Borne, the intellectual spokesman for this movement, has never hidden his philosophical closeness to *Esprit.* Through some of its themes (participation, for example), and, more widely, through some of its social aspects, Gaullism also has some relation to personalism. This is all the more true considering that some intellectuals close to General de Gaulle came from the circle of *Ordre Nouveau* (such as J. Chauveau, A. Ollivier, and Daniel Rops, who was one of De Gaulle's first editors with Pion publishers). And before the war, De Gaulle himself was a reader of *Temps present,* the weekly that replaced *Sept* in 1937. There was a certain social liberalism, allied with the Christian Democratic movement in the centrist tendency of the Fifth Republic, in which we can also recognize some relationship with personalist inspiration.

Finally, through the role it played in the development of left-leaning Catholicism, personalist influence had an impact on the evolution of the French political left. This influence took two different routes: on the one hand, it came through trade unionism, with the evolution of the *Confederation Frangaise des Travailleurs Chretiens* (CFTC), and then with the creation of the *Confederation Frangaise Democratique du Travail* (CFDT). On the other hand, personalism had an impact by means of politics, through certain clubs for political thought, such as Jacques Delors' *Citoyen 60,*[17] and through

---

[15] Michel Winock, *Histoire politique de la revue "Esprit" (1930-1950)* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1975; ISBN 2020026791); 2nd ed., *"Esprit": Des intellectuels dans la cite, 1930-1950* (Paris: Le Semi, 1996; ISBN 2020282224).

[16] Le *personnalisme d'Emmanuel Mourner, hier et demain. Pour un cinquantenaire* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1985).

[17] See B. Maris, *Jacques Delors, artiste et martyr* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1993).

certain circles within the *Parti Socialiste Unifid* (PSU). Going on from there, we can consider that personalist influence contributed to the emergence of what the 1980's called the "Second Left."[18] Personalism also sUrely contributed to softening up the statist Jacobinism of the traditional left, by emphasizing the importance of such themes as decentralization, community life, and joint worker-management control.

This personalist diaspora spans the period from just after World War II until the present We can illustrate it somewhat anecdotally by means of two quotations. The first comes from Charles Millon, who was at the time leader of the representatives of the UDF party *(Union pour la democratic frangaise)* in the National Assembly. He declared the following, in an interview with *Le Monde,* speaking of what he called the "personalist family": "I am a child of this family, and I believe all the more strongly that it is the path to follow at this time when our society is adrift"[19] At about the same time, we find in a book by J. F. Kesler on *La gauche dissidente et le nouveau parti socialiste* ["The dissident left and the new socialist party"], a statement by Michel Rocard saying that he owed the bulk of his early intellectual formation to three influences: Marx, Jacques Pirenne, and Meunier.[20]

To finish this survey, we must also mention the influence of personalism on what we could call "conciliar Catholicism," through French personalist intermediaries, but also through personalism's international influence. For example, the first post-communist head of government in Poland, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, was an avowed personalist Furthermore, he contributed to the spread of personalist ideas with his journal *Wiercz,* before he became Solidarity's adviser.[21] We can also note that this Polish influence poses a question that goes well beyond Poland, namely that of the relationship of personalism with the political and social thought of Pope John Paul II, who was a personal friend of Tadeusz Mazowiecki when he was Archbishop of Cracow.[22] More generally, we may add that in the course of the last fifty years, international references to personalism have been found in various and sometimes surprising contexts, from the Diem regime in South Vietnam to the Bathist party in the Middle East, from the Lebanese Falangists of Pierre Gemayel to Pierre Trudeau's journal *Cite libre* in the 1950's in Canada.

    ***

This personalist influence has been genuine, but it has also been a *diffuse* influence, diluted through its coexistence with other currents of thought We can wonder about

---

[18] See H. Hamon and P. Roatman, *La deuxteme gauche* (Paris: Ramsay, 1982), and J. F. Kesler, *De la gauche dissidente au nouveau parti socialiste* (Toulouse: Privat 1990).

[19] *Le Monde* (19 Nov. 1990). See also *Le Monde* (17 Sept 1991).

[20] In an interview with J. F. Kesler, *De la gauche dissidente au nouveau parti socialiste* (Toulouse: Privat 1990), p. 437.

[21] See J. M. Domenach, "Lintemationale personnaliste," in *Le personnalisme d'Emmanuel Mounter, hier et demain: Pour un cinquantenaire* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1985). '

[22] See John Hellman, in *Le personnalisme d'Emmanuel Mounier, hier et demain: Pour un cinquantenaire* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1985), p. 129. See also, in the same volume (p. 176), the testimony of J. M. Domenach: "The influence of *Esprit* touched Cardinal Wojtyla; he told me so himself."

the reasons for this influence, and may be tempted to find two basic causes for the attraction people have found in it:

1. The first seems to lie in the "problem of civilization" We spoke of earlier; that is, in personalism's comprehensive approach, which tends to consider humanity in all dimensions of its existence. Humanity is called into question by the evolution of modem societies, and not just by some political or economic dimension. If there is a crisis of modernity, it concerns our entire personality.

2. The second is more ambiguous, and seems to stem from what we can call the temptation of the "third way"; that is to say, from the concern to escape from the constraints of choices between two alternatives. Such alternatives, experienced as mutilating, have often seemed to be imposed by the realities of twentieth-century life: left/right, capitalism/communism, individualism/collectivism, idealism/materialism.

In this second perspective, part of personalism's appeal has probably been its ability to attain a synthesis beyond the usual pairs of options. It has allowed people to satisfy and reconcile aspirations that seemed at first to be contradictory. But here libs the problematic question of whether this dimension of synthesis has not sometimes amounted to a syncretistic dimension, the expression of a certain eclecticism.

This question seems all the more justifiable in the light of what we have observed, which we might call the "plasticity" or "polymorphism" of personalism: its ability to adapt on occasion to contexts with considerably different characteristics and orientations. This may lead some to wonder if we should use the singular or the plural: whether we should speak of "personalism" or "personalisms." The philosopher Jacques Maritain asked this question right after World War II, and history since that time has not diminished its relevance: "Nothing would be farther from the truth than to speak of 'personalism' as a school or doctrine. It is a phenomenon stemming from reaction against conflicting errors, an inevitably mixed phenomenon. There is no personalist doctrine—just personalist aspirations. There are at least a dozen personalist doctrines, and often all they have in common is the word "person." Some of these doctrines lean toward one of the opposing errors between which they place themselves. There are personalisms with a Proudhonian slant, personalisms tending towards dictatorship, and personalisms tilted towards anarchism."[23]

Even if we do not necessarily share all the points of view expressed by Maritain in this quotation, his words offer a particularly interesting basis for reflection on the extent and the ambiguities of the later influence of the personalism of the 1930's, as we have examined it, especially when we add to Maritain's various "personalisms" the "ecological personalism" or the "personalist ecology" of Bernard Charbonneau.

---

[23] Jacques Maritain, *La personne et le bien common* (Paris: Desclee de Brouwer, 1946), pp. 8-9.

"GASCON PERSONALISM"
Cherbonnier, Ellul

RESISTANCE

VICHY

"ESPRIT"
"VIE NOUVELLE"

EUROPEAN
FEDERALISM

THE SECOND
LEFT

CONCILIAR
CATHOLICISM

ECOLOGY

CHRISTIAN
DEMOCRACY

GAULLISM

BORNE
LACROIX
SIMON

DANIEL-ROPS
MARC
de ROUGEMONT

MAULNIER
VINCENT
BLANCHOT

NON CONFORMISTS OF THE THIRTIES

FRONTISME
"LA FLECHE"
"SEPT"

LEAGUES
POPULAR FRONT 1936
"COMBAT"

"COMMUNAUTÉ," "LA LUTTE DES JEUNES," "L'HOMME NOUVEAU,"
"L'HOMME RÉEL," "LA JUSTICE SOCIALE," "TRAVAIL ET NATION," &c.

INFLUENCES

MARXISM BERGSON CHRISTIAN EXISTENTIALISM PROUDHON NIETZSCHE SOCIAL NEO-THOMISM CHARLES
DEMOCRACY CHRISTIANITY MAURRAS

ESPRIT

ORDRE NOUVEAU

YOUNG RIGHT

Patrick Chastenet Remembers Jacques Ellul

"It is not possible to build a just society with unjust means. It is impossible to create a free society based on slavery. These assertions lie at the heart of my reasoning."[24]

- Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Religion, Technology and Politics: Conversations with Patrick* Troiwfe-*Chastenet,* trans. Joan Mendes France; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998, p. 28.

My first encounter with Jacques Ellul must date back to the fall of 1974, on the Talence campus of the University of Bordeaux. I had just turned 19 years old, and I was a second-year student at the Institute of Political Studies of Bordeaux at the University. Right from the first meeting of Ellul's course, my fellow students and I were struck not only by the size of the class, but also by its unusual makeup. The "lower hall" was full to overflowing (having no other way of distinguishing the Montesquieu Auditorium from the Siegfried Auditorium, we had taken to calling them the "lower hall" and the "upper hall." That terminology caught on, and is still in use).

About thirty American students, easily recognizable by their backpacks (not yet common on French campuses at that stage), crowded around to hear him. In the first rows, we could also see a blind man using a tape recorder to record the master's words[25], and several austere gentlemen who looked like pastors who would have seemed more at home attending classes for senior citizens.

Even before hearing him speak, we said to each other under our breath that we were going to be dealing with an unusual professor. I was not yet acquainted with the work of Ernst Junger, but later, I could not help seeing something of the Ellul I had known in this character in *Eumeswil* (1977): "Vigo is one of those prophets who enjoy a wider reputation abroad than in their own country. His name is a byword among those in the know, from Beirut to Uppsala, provoking secret anger among his colleagues. And explaining why listeners come from afar are always found at his lectures.

The first course of Ellul's that I attended was called "The Philosophy and Thought of Karl Marx." I have just looked up my notes from those lectures for the purpose of writing these lines. As I reread them, I cannot find a trace of one of his remarks, deeply engraved on my memory, which went more or less like this: "It does not really matter to me if you are marxist or anti-marxist. In either case, I want you to be what you are for good reasons; that is, knowing what you believe and why."

A concern for objectivity should be the most basic rule for every teacher. And we know, at least since Max Weber, that we must distinguish value judgments from

---

[24] [Translator's note: these originally untitled lines were written shortly after Ellul's death in 1994, and intended for inclusion in the *Ellul Forum's* commemorative issue (no. 13, July 1994), but were inadvertently not included. Since that time, tire author has received the coveted "Agregation" degree, having moved up the academic ladder from Assistant Professor ("Maitre de Conferences")].

[25] Only Willem Vanderburg could say if he was the person in question.

judgments of fact, and that the scholar's vocation differs from that of the politician. But in the area of the social sciences, especially in the 1970's, university lecterns sometimes turned into veritable political grandstands.

In what context did Ellul expound Marx's thought? Valery Giscard d'Estaing had just begun his seven-year presidential term. The political right was in power. But although the Socialist candidate Francois Mitterrand had been beaten again, the political left held sway over people's minds. Most intellectuals' thought was leftist, and marxism and its various permutations dominated the social sciences as a whole. On the local scene, the Law School of Bordeaux remained very conservative, whereas the majority of the students in "Sciences-Po" (the Institute of Political Science) had leftist convictions.

As for me, I had several Trotskyite friends, but I was moving more in a situationalist and libertarian direction. I will always rememer the disappointment of a fellow student, a Maoist leader of the PCMLF (Marxist-Leninist Commuist Party of France), as we left one of Ellul's lectures. Although this student had admired for weeks our Wednesday professor's presentation of marxist philosophy, suddenly he charged Ellul with betraying Marx. But I had not noticed any change of direction in Ellul's tone or in his method.

Was this professor objective? As much as a person can be when treating such a subject Beginning in 1977,1 had cause to re-read, and to learn, the content of this course. I had been given the responsibility of assisting Ellul by giving some of the oral examinations his students had to take. Between file two of us, we had 250 students to evaluate. At the same time, I had the job of instructing the American students who took courses at the Institute of Political Studies. In this role I supervised about 30 students every year from universities in California and Colorado. It was my job to explain Ellul's course to them, and I found real pleasure in doing this usually unrewarding job of tutoring.

It goes without saying that in both the oral examinations of French students and my instruction of the Americans, I made it a point of honor to respect scrupulously the vision of Marx given by the author of *The Betrayal of the West* (French, 1975; English, 1978), even if my own ideas at that time were somewhat different. Ellul, for example, considered that Lenin was not the successor of Marx, but that Marx was the precursor of Lenin. Was it "objective" to assert that Lenin was already contained within Marx, or to claim that if Hitler had won the war, marxism would have disappeared off the face of the earth?

As for the rest, Ellul demonstrated admirably that marxist thought constituted a veritable system, from which it was impossible to detach any one of its elements without the risk of distorting it. Thus it was impossible to separate its method and its content, or to try to eliminate materialism from the theory as a whole. A warning to Christians who find the author of *Das Kapital* appealing!

Ellul avoided speaking explicitly of this in his classes, but at the time, both the Communist Party's "politics of the outstretched hand" and the Church of Liberation

Theology were in fashion.. Bookstores were inundated with books of encounters between the principal communist officials (such as the ineffable Georges Marchais) and Christian leaders enamoured of dialogue with the officially recognized defenders of all the damned of the earth.

At the end of the 1970's, within this context, when part of the Church was flirting with the Communist Party, Ellul published *Jesus and Marx* (French, 1979; English, 1988). In this book, Ellul again went against the stream, as he showed the radical incompatibility between the Biblical message and marxist doctrine. For Ellul, both the Old and New Testaments lead one to dispute all forms of political power. For this reason, as he wrote in his books (although he never said so in his classes), one should choose Bakunin over Marx.

Ellul's various stands, always unusual, finally had the Parisian intelligentsia placing him in the category of "rightist thinkers," the abomination of abominations on any campus! I was unaware at the time that starting in the mid-1930's, with Bernard Charbonneau, and prompted by "Gascon" leanings within Personalism, Ellul had refused to submit to the very reductionist and very French distinction between left and right.

Rereading just now my notes from another of Ellul's courses, "Marx's Successors" (1977-78), I reflect on the fact that 20 years have passed, and that I am now Assistant Professor at Montesquieu University and at the Institute of Political Studies of Bordeaux, where I teach political science. Which of my present students would be capable of handling the examination questions I used to assign to Ellul's students: revolution and strategy in Bernstein; economic and tactical criticisms addressed by Kautsky to Bernstein; Rosa Luxembourg's explanation of the economics of imperialism; Lenin's responses to the criticisms formulated by Kautsky?

Although it enjoyed hegemony for a long period in French universities, marxism had already fallen from fashion when it failed to survive the implosion of the Soviet regime. Ellul, however, taught me to distinguish the "vulgarization" of Marx's thought from the work of Karl Marx, and, above all, I believe, an ethic that consists of presenting ideas one does not agree with as faithfully as possible . This is a matter of "scientific" honesty of the most elementary sort, but primarily a question of respecting the freedom of the individual that lies dormant within each student.

Going well beyond marxism, Ellul also taught me to be on my guard against any thought structured in the form of a system. Freedom of thought implies giving up all forms of intellectual complacency.

In a more personal vein, Ellul only increased my distrust, which has grown over the years, concerning all forms of political power. He believed in relativizing politics; that is, in refusing just as vigorously both the political illusion and its symmetrical opposite: apolitical smugness. Relativizing politics means recognizing the adversary in my enemy, and the neighbor in my adversary. In other words, putting politics back where it belongs.

Much later, I began to read the theological side of Ellul's work, in preparation for writing my book Lire *Ellul: Introduction a I'oeuvre socio-politique de Jacques Ellul.*[26] I discovered that, although perhaps I could not be *leaven,* or a bit of that *salt of the earth* the Scriptures speak of, I could at least act as the *"sentry"* called for by the prophet Ezekiel. In this way, at my humble level, I could join with the long cohort of watchmen magnificently exemplified by another . famous Aquitanian: Etienne de la Boetie. The "watchman" is the one who lives not isolated, but *at a distance* from the struggles of the City.

*****

Ellul Forum Index (1988-)

25 July 2000 Ellul in the Public Arena
"Jacques Ellul: 20th Century Prophet for the 21st Century" (Andrew Goddard); "The Trend Toward Virtual Christianity" (Randall E. Otto); "Jacques Ellul's Influence on the Cultural Critique of Thomas Merton" (Phillip M. Thompson).

24 January 2000 Academics on a Journey of Faith
"Science and Faith: A Personal View" (William T. Newsome); "Experiences of God's Guidance" (Richard H. Bube); "Now a Convinced Theist" (Robert G. Olsen).

23 July 1999 Jacques Ellul on Human Rights
"Human Rights and the Natural Flaw" (Gabriel Vahanian); "Law, Rights, and Technology" (Andrew Goddard); "Natural Law or Covenant?" (Sylvain Dujancourt).

22 January 1999 Conversations with Jacques Ellul
"Jacques Ellul on Religion, Technology and Politics" (Patrick Troude-Chastenet); "The Poetry of Ellul" (James Lynch).

21 July 1998 Thomas Merton & Modern Technological Civilization
"Thomas Merton's Critique of Modem Technological Civilization" (Christopher J. Kelly); "Gianni Manzone's *La Liberia Christiana e le sue mediazioni sociali net pensiero di Jacques Ellul*" (Virginia Picchietti)

20 January 1998 Tenth Anniversary Issue
"Hie Residue of Culture: An Ellulian Dialogic Analysis of Religious Imagery in a Network Television Drama" (Rick Clifton Moore); "Jacques Ellul's Web" (Joyce Hanks); "My Encounter with Ellul" (Bill Vanderburg); "Ellul and the Sentinel on the Wall" (Marva J. Dawn); "All That Counts" (Daniel B. Clendenin); "Reflections on Ellul's Influence" (Gabriel Vahanian); "Jacques Ellul was the First" (Peter Tijmes); review of Andrew John Goddard, *The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul with Special Reference to his Writings on Law, Violence, the State, and Politics"* (Joyce Hanks); review of Jacques Ellul, *Silences: Poemes* (Olivier Millet).

---

[26] [Translator's note: Reading Ellul: Introduction to die socio-political work of Jacques Ellul." Published in French at Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1992; ISBN 2-86781-129-5].

#19 July 1997 Technique and the Illusion of Utopia

"Singapore: Technique and the Illusion of Utopia" (Lawson Lau); review of Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital,* Neil Postman, *Technopoly,* Clifford Stoll, *Silicon Snake Oil,* Edward Tenner, *Why Things Bite Back"* (David Gill).

#18 January 1997 Lewis Mumford, Technological Critic

"Updating the Urban Prospect: Using Lewis Mumford to Critique Current Conditions" (James A. Moore); "Mumford and McLuhan: The Roots of Modem Media Analysis" (James W. Carey); "The Coming of the Millenium" (Darrell J. Fasching; with a review by David Gill); review of Marva Dawn, trans. & ed., *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul Thai Set the Stage* (Andrew J. Goddard).

#17 July 1996 Ian Barbour on Religion, Science, and Technology Review of Ian Barbour, *Religion in An Age of Science* and *Ethics in an Age of Technology* (The Gifford Lectures, 1989-91) (Richard A. Deitrich); "Technology and Theology" (Ian G. Barbour); "Norms and the Man: A Tribute to Ian Barbour" (James A. Nash); "Ellul and Barbour on Technology" (Richard A. Deitrich); review of Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text* (Joyce Hanks); review of Charles Ringma, *Resist the Powers with Jacques Ellul* (Donald Bloesch).

#16 January 1996 The Ethics of Jacques Ellul

"The Concept of 'the Powers' as the Basis for Ellul's Fore-ethics" (Marva J. Dawn); "The Casuistry of Violence" (John Howard Yoder); "From Criticism to Politics: Jacques Ellul, Bernard Charbonneau and the Committee for the Defense of the Aquitaine Coast" (Daniel Cerezuelle); "Ellul's Ethics and the Apocalyptic Practice of Law" (Ken Morris); review of Patrick Troude-Chastenet, ed., *Sur Ellul* (Joyce Hanks); review of Carl Mitcham, *Thinking Through Technology: The Path between Engineering and Philosophy* (Pieter Tijmes).

#15 July 1995 Women and Technology

"Women and Technology: A(nother) Crisis of Representation" (Susan Kray); "The Symbolic Function of Technique' as Ideogram in Ellul's Thought" (Daryl J. Wennemann); review of Lana Rakow, *Gender on the Line: Women, The Telephone, and Community Life* (Jonathan Sterne); review of Judy Wajcman, *Feminism Confronts Technology* (Jacqueline Ciaccio).

#14 January 1995 Frederick Ferre on Science, Technology & Religion

"The One Best Way of Technology?" (Pieter Tijmes); review of Frederick Ferre, *Hellfire and Lightning Rods: Liberating Science, Technology, and Religion* (Darrell J. Fasching); "New Metaphors for Technology" (Frederick Ferre); "Frederick Ferre's 'New Metaphors for Technology'" (Robert S. Fortner, with a response from Frederick Ferre); response to Timothy Casey's review of *Technique, Discourse and Consciousness* (David Lovekin); "Darrell Fasching's *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima"(Peter J. Haas, with a response by Darrell Fasching); review of Patrick Chastenet, *Entretiens avec Jacques Ellul* (Joyce Hanks); review of Os Guinness, *The American Hour* (Donald Evans).

#13 July 1994 In Memory of Jacques Ellul, 1912-1994

"The Truth Will Set You Free" (Jacques Ellul); "Jacques Ellul, 1912-1994" (Joyce Hanks); "Jacques Ellul, Courage and the Christian Imagination" (Stanley Hauerwas); "Thinking Globally, Acting Locally: In Memory of Jacques Ellul" (Bill Vanderburg); "My Journey With Ellul" (David Gill); "Merci, Mon Ami" (Vemard Eller); "Ellul's Prophetic Witness to the Academic Community" (Clifford G. Christians); "In Memorium for Jacques Ellul" (David Lovekin); "Anarchy and Holiness" (Gabriel Vahanian); "Jacques Ellul: The Little Giant" (Darrell J. Fasching); "An Address to Master Jacques'" (Ivan Illich); "Ellul's Response to the Symposium in his Honor at the University of Bordeaux" (Jacques Ellul).

#12 January 1994 Ethical Relativism and Technological Civilization

Review of Peter Haas, *Morality After Auschwitz* (Darrell J. Fasching); "Moral Relativity in the Technological Society" (Peter J. Haas); "Beyond Absolutism and Relativism: The Utopian Promise of Babel" (Darrell J. Fasching); review of Darrell J. Fasching *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz* (Peter Haas); reviews of Darrell Fasching *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* (Richard A. Deitrich, David P. Gushee).

#11 July 1993 Technique and Utopia Revisited

"Ellul and Vahanian on Technology and Utopianism" (Maurice Weyembergh); "Back to Ellul by Way of Weyembergh" (Gabriel Vahanian); "Ellul and Vahanian: Apocalypse or Utopia?" (Darrell J. Fasching); review of Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Lire Ellul* (Gabriel Vahanian); review of Neil Evemdon, *The Social Creation of Nature* (Nicola Hoggard Creegan).

#10 January 1993 Technique and the Paradoxes of Development "Reflections on Social Techniques" (Daniel Cerezuelle); "Jacques Ellul on Development: Why It Doesn't Work" (Joyce M. Hanks); "'Good' Development and Its Mirages" (Serge LaTouche); review of David Lovekin, *Technique, Discourse and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Timothy Casey).

#9 July 1992 Ellul on Communications Technology

"Ellul on the Need for Symbolism" (J. Wesley Baker); "Where Mass Media Abound, the Word Abounds Greater Still: Reflections on Robert Cole's Study of Children, Movies and Ethics" (Darrell J. Fasching); "Communication Theory in Ellul's Sociology" (Clifford G. Christians); review of Quentin J. Schultze, Roy M. Anker, et al, *Dancing in the Dark: Youth, Popular Culture and the Electronic Media* (Philip Lee); review of William F. Fore, *Mythmakers: Gospel, Culture, and the Media* (Mark Fackler); review of Robert Abelman and Stewart M. Hoover, eds., *Religious Television: Controversies and Conclusions* (Gudm. Gjelsten); abstract of J. Wesley Baker's 1991 Ph.D. dissertation, *The Hope of Intervention: A Rhetorical Analysis of the English Translations of the Writings of Jacques Ellul-,* abstract of Lawson Liat-Ho Lau's 1991 Ph.D. dissertation, *The Technological City: 1984 in Singapore;* "Bibliographic Notes on Theology and Technology" (Carl Mitcham).

#8 January 1992 Ivan lllich's Theology of Technology

"Health as One's Own Responsibility: No, Thank you!" (Ivan Illich); "Against Health: An Interview with Ivan Illich"; "Reflections On 'Health As One's Own Responsibility"' (Lee Hoinacki); "The Teddy Bearracks" (David B. Schwartz); "Posthumous Longevity" and "Toward A PostClerical Church" (Ivan Illich); "Dear Kelly' Memo" (Lee Hoinacki).

#7 July 1991 Jacques Ellul as a Theologian for Catholics

"In Memory of Mme Yvette Ellul" (Joyce Hanks); review of Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff* (Nicola Hoggard Creegan); review of Jacques Ellul, *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* (Daniel Clendenin); review of Gene L. Davenport, *Into the Darkness: Discipleship in the Sermon on the Mount* (Darrell J. Fasching); "Jacques Ellul and the Catholic Worker of the Next Century—*Therefore Choose Life"* (Jeff Dietrich); "Jacques Ellul: A Catholic Worker Vision of the Culture" (Katherine Temple); "Bom Again Catholic Workers: A Conversation Between Jeff Dietrich and Katherine Temple"; "Jacques Ellul and Thomas Merton on Technique" (Gene L. Davenport); review of Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel* (David Werther.

#6 November 1990 Faith and Wealth in a Technological Civilization

Review of Jacques Ellul, *Money and Power* (Daniel Clendenin); review of Max L. Stackhouse, *Public Theology and Political Economy: Christian Stewardship in Modem Society* (Daniel Heimbach); review of

Justo L. Gonzalez, *Faith and Wealth* (Michael Novak); "Some Reflections on Faith and Wealth" (Justo L. Gonzalez); "Luke 14:33 and the Normativity of Dispossession" (Thomas E. Schmidt);

5 June 1990 The Utopian Theology of Gabriel Vahanian

Review of Robert Wuthnow, *The Struggle for America's Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals, and Secularism* (David L. Russell); "Gabriel Vahanian's 'Utopian Connection'— Speaking of God, the Human and Technology" (Darrell J. Fasching); review of Gabriel Vahanian, *God and Utopia: The Church in a Technological Civilization* (Lonnie D. Kliever); review of Gabriel Vahanian, *Dieu anonyme, ou la peur des mots* (Philippe Aubert); "Theology of Culture: Tillich's Quest for a New Religious Paradigm" (Gabriel Vahanian); "Law and Ethics in Ellul's Theology" (Sylvain Dujancourt); "Notes on the Catholic Church and Technology" (Sergio Silva); "Bibliographic Notes on Theology and Technology" (Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote).

4 November 1989 Judaism & Christianity after Auschwitz & Hiroshima

Review of Jacques Ellul, *Un Chretien pour Israel* (Darrell J. Fasching); review of Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe* (Daniel J. Lewis); review of Jacques Ellul, *Le bluff technologique* (Gabriel Vahanian); "After Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Judaism and Christianity in a Technological Civilization" (Darrell J. Fasching); "On Christians, Jews and the Law" (Katherine Temple); "Vemard Eller's Response to Katherine Temple"; "Michael Bauman's Response to Jacques Ellul"; "Bibliographic Notes on Theology and Technology" (Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote).

3 June 1989 Eller and Ellul on Christian Anarchy

"Be Reconciled" (Jacques Ellul); "Response to Michael Bauman" (Jacques Ellul); "The Paradox of Anarchism and Christianity" (Jacques Ellul); "Ellul's Crowning

Achievement" (Hu Elz); "Christian Anarchy" (Vemard Eller); review of Jacques Ellul *Anarchic et christianisme* and Vemard Eller *Christian Anarchy* (Katherine Temple); review of Jacques Ellul, *Jesus and Marx* (Daniel Clendenin); Bibliographic report on some recent British discussions regarding Christianity and technology" (Carl Mitcham).

2 November 1988 Ellul's Universalist Eschatology

Review of Willem Vanderburg, *The Growth of Minds and Cultures* (Katherine Temple); Review of Jacques Ellul, *Jesus and Marx* (Michael Bauman); "The Importance of Eschatology for Ellul's Ethics and Soteriology: A Response to Darrell Fasching" (Ken Morris); "A Second Forum Response to Fasching" (Marva J. Dawn); "Fasching's Reply to Morris and Dawn"; "Bibliographic Notes on Theology and Technology" (Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote).

1 August 1988 Debut Issue

"Welcome" (Darrell Fasching); Review of Daniel B. Clendenin, *Theological Method in Jacques Ellul* (Marva Dawn); "Freedom and Universal Salvation: Ellul and Origen"; "The Ethical Importance of Universal Salvation" (Darrell Fasching); "A Visit with Jacques Ellul" (Marva Dawn).

Book Reviews

The Labyrinth of Technology by Willem H. Vanderburg, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000

Willem H. Vanderburg's extensive (476 + x pages) new volume has just appeared. In his own words, he has been influenced by the "assistance of many people, including my French mentor, the late Jacques Ellul, who taught me the dialectical method for doing interdisciplinary research" (p. xvi). In an analysis that has extensive implications for, especially, engineering education, Vanderburg examines preventive approaches to technological problems (part one); mapping the ecology of technology, upon which he argues the development of preventive approaches depends (parts two and three); and applying preventive approaches (part four). According to Vanderburg, "modem civilization is lost in a labyrinth of technology created by its social and environmental implications." His effort to map this terrain is thus an effort to find a way out.

Reviewed by Carl Mitcham, Professor of Liberal Arts, Colorado School of Mines, Golden, Colorado.

Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works by Joyce Main *Hanks*

Research in Philosophy and Technology, Supplement 5. Stamford CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pp.

This is the fourth major bibliographic work on Jacques Ellul published by Joyce Main Hanks (Professor of French, University of Scranton). The earlier volumes were also published in the *Research in*

Philosophy and Technology series (1984, 1991, 1995). The current effort is confined to Jacques Ellul's own works (books, articles, reviews, interviews) and omits the secondary literature about him.

With the corrections and additions Joyce Hanks has made to this version, it is the most accurate and comprehensive bibliography of Ellul's work ever available. The listing by itself is a monumental achievement of tenacity and detective work in several languages. But this volume is further enriched by a fine three-page biography Of Ellul

and by Hanks's helpful annotations on all fifty of Ellul's books and most of his thousand articles and reviews. Because of these annotations all Ellul scholars and students will find great pleasure in browsing each page. One learns a great deal about Ellul just from this volume. The annotated bibliography runs to 140 pages (not 99 pages as the errant table of contents suggests). It is followed by a thirty page "select subject index" and a thirty-three-page list of Ellul's publications in alphabetical order.

I thought I found a mistake and an omission when I first looked over this book— and that would hardly be a shock in view of the mass of details on its pages. However, when I checked again, more carefully, I discovered the bibliography was right after all. The only mistake I could find was on the table of contents pagination!

Bibliographic work like this is not very glamorous and does not make any best-seller lists but its value to scholars and students is impossible to praise sufficiently. We are once again, more than ever, indebted to Joyce Main Hanks for a wonderful effort and to Carl Mitcham and *Research in Philosophy and Technology* for their support.

Reviewed by David W. Gill, Carl I. Lindberg Professor of Applied Ethics, North Park University, Chicago, Illinois.

International Jacques Ellul Society

Berkeley, California

⊠ **an association of scholars and friends**

The UES links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our three objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his penetrating social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

The DES is the English-language sister-society' of the French-language *Association Internationale Jacques Ellul.* Together, we maintain a web site—*www.elluL.org*—as our common communications link for announcements and news of interest to our members, and as a resource for anyone with an interest in Jacques Ellul.

From time to time we announce meetings, lectures, and conferences (small or large, formal or informal, sponsored by the DES/ADE or by others) related to Ellul and his concerns.

⊠ **preserving a legacy**

Jacques Ellul published more than fifty books and nearly a thousand articles and reviews. Our mission is to preserve and make broadly available this great legacy by

(1) completing the publication of Ellul's work in French (several works remain),

(2) completing the English translation of his work and encouraging translations in other languages,

(3) republishing (in electronic as well as print formats) works that are no longer available,

(4) publishing a critical edition of Ellul's complete works in both French and English,

(5) maintaining a current, comprehensive bibliography of works by and about Ellul,

(6) organizing and making available the audio and video recordings of Ellul's lectures and interviews,

(7) making available an accurate biography of Ellul.

⊠ extending a critique

Jacques Ellul is best known around the world for his penetrating critique of "la technique"—of the character and impact of technology on our world. The forces and institutions which shape 21st century life and which pose the greatest challenges to the health and future of humanity and nature were Ellul's critical interest Our mission is to encourage continued research and critical thought in this tradition, with a special focus on technology but also including politics, economics, globalization, education, art, language, communication, religion, and popular culture. The UES is not an antiquarian society interested only in a reverent inspection of Jacques Ellul's works; it is, in the spirit of Ellul himself, a movement to encourage the extension of a serious critique of technological civilization.

⊠ researching a hope

Jacques Ellul was not just a social critic but a theologian and activist in church and community. Because of his profound faith in the "Wholly Other" breaking into human history, he refused to become a pessimist about the predominantly negative social trends he studied. He insisted that he was above all a man of hope and freedom and searched for signs of hope in Holy Scripture and in history. Our mission is to encourage continued theological and ethical research on hope and freedom, with a special focus on the Jewish and Christian Scriptures.

Join the IJES

Anyone and everyone is welcome to become an DES member— on two conditions:

(1) agreement with the society's statement of purpose

(2) payment of the annual membership dues

— if your address is *in the USA* send a check for the annual dues of $20 U.S..

— if your address is *outside the USA*, send a bank check or money order drawn in US dollars for the amount of $25

Send your payment with your name, complete address including postal code, and *your e-mail address if you wish* to be on our DES news e-mail distribution list

DES membership automatically confers membership in the French ADE.

Contact the UES

e-mail: UES@ellul.org

post: DES, Box 1033, Berkeley CA 94701

Support the UES

The major publication projects which the DES is undertaking require substantial funding. The DES pursues such funding from charitable foundations, grant-making

organizations, and publishers, but this is a long and unpredictable process. However, with the generous support of DES members and friends, we can achieve a great deal together. Please contact us by e-mail or letter if you would like more detailed information on our budget, plans, and giving opportunities.

The DES is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. All gifts are taxdeductible for U.S. taxpayers.

UES Activities

Please forward any news or announcements relevant to the members and friends of the DES. We want to do whatever we can to promote the discussion of Jacques Ellul and the extension of his critical interests.

We encourage the formation of study groups and sections of scholarly societies devoted to Ellul studies. We are currently exploring the best strategies for organizing annual gatherings in North America to discuss Ellul's sociology and his theology and ethics.

With the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul we are currently exploring how best to organize a series of international colloquia.

UES Leadership

The International Jacques Ellul Society and L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul have been founded by a group of long-time students, scholars, and friends of Jacques Ellul, with the counsel and support of Jean, Yves, and Dominique Ellul, and as a French-American collaboration.

Board of Directors
Patrick Chastenet, *Professor of Political Science, University of Rheims, France*
Clifford Christians, *Professor of Communications, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana IL*
Darrell Fasching, *Professor of Religious Studies, University of South Florida, Tampa FL*
David Gill (President), *Professor of Applied Ethics, North Park University, Chicago IL*
Joyce Hanks (Vice-President), *Professor of French, University of Scranton, Scranton PA*
Ken Morris (Secretary-Treasurer), *Attomey-at-Law, Berkeley CA*
Carl Mitcham, *Professor of Liberal Arts, Colorado School of Mines, Golden CO*

Advisory Board

Jean Ellul (President dhonneur)
Dominique Ellul

Yves Ellul
(others to be named shortly)

Issue #27 Jul 2001 — Ellul and Social Theorists

- Click to view the original PDF

From the Editor

Ellul is often listed with the great intellectuals of the 20th century in which he lived. As an indication of his stature, he was debated by the leading academics of his era. Ellul disdained elitism, for himself and others. He disapproved of cultic attention. However, he did engage the theorists of his time-social philosophers, political scientists, economists, theologians, and historians. He knew that ideas matter, and held his own with integrity and passion.

This issue of *The Ellul Forum* sets Ellul in the intellectual context of his contemporaries. Antonio Gramsci continues to be widely cited in the scholarly literature. This issue compares his notions of hegemony and civil society with Ellul's *la technique* and the technological order. Calvin Troup argues for including Ellul among the academics who dominate courses in rhetorical theory and criticism at today's universities—Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Frederic Jameson, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jurgen Habermas and others. Troup challenges his colleagues to take Ellul seriously even though he questions many of the sacred assumptions of their academic heroes.

This issue only introduces a tiny fraction of the important issues at stake. How Ellul's ideas compare with and contradict those of other influential scholars has a host of important dimensions. Over its 14 years, the *Forum* has dealt with many of them and will continue to do so in the future. In the process, the *Forum* recognizes that Ellul himself worked in a large public arena not confined to academics. As described in Issue #25, Ellul's "defining orientation was public life as a whole. His thinking was geared to citizens, church members and consumers." He had a heart for everyday life and the non-specialist. His prophetic voice engaged the community.

And this larger framework we capture in the *Fourm's* subtitle, "For the Critique of Technological Civilization." Coming to grips with the technological society and living distinctively within it is our common and public obligation as citizens. It requires collaborative work, international and cross-cultural understanding, and interdisciplinary thinking. The *Forum* is not limited to Ellul but a roundtable on the challenges of the technological order.

Clifford G. Christians, Editor

Henriette Charbonneau, the widow of Bernard Charbonneau, kindly offers two corrections for the article "Jacques Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau" by Joyce Hanks in the January 2001 issue (326) of the Forum. First, contrary to Hanks' statement that Charbonneau and Ellul broke with the personalist movement "in early 1937" (p. 4), Mme.

Charbonneau correctly states that this rift took place after the 28 July-1 August 1937 personalist congress held in jouy-en-Josas. She adds that Ellul and Charbonneau began to consider their project of a "free university" during the summer of 1938 rather than after World War H (also on p. 4 of Hanks' article).

In This Issue

About the. Ellul forum

History & Purpose

The Ellul Forum has been published twice per year since August of 1988. Our goal is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to aspects of our technological civilization and carry forward both Ins sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

While *The Ellul Forum* does review and discuss Jacques Ellul, whom we consider one of the most insightful intellectuals of our era, it is not our intention to treat his writings as a body of sacred literature to be endlessly dissected. The appropriate tribute to his work is to carry forward its spirit and agenda for the critical analysis of our technical civilization. Ellul invites and provokes us to think new thoughts and enact new ideas. To that end we invite you to join the conversation in *The Ellul Forum.*

The Ellul Forum is an English-language publication but we are currently exploring ways of linking more fully with our francophone colleagues.

Manuscript Submissions

Send original manuscripts (essays, responses to essays in earlier issues) to:

Clifford Christians, Editor, **The Ellul Forum**
Institute of Communications Research
University of Illinois
810 S. Wright Street, Suite 228
Urbana, IL 61801 USA
Please send both hard copy and computer disc versions, indicating the software and operating system used (e.g., Microsoft Word for Windows 98). Type end notes as text (do not embed in the software footnote/endnote part of your program).

Essays should not exceed twenty pages, double-spaced, in length.

Manuscript submissions will only be returned if you enclose a self-addressed, adequately postaged envelope with your submission.

The Ellul Forum also welcomes suggestions of themes for future issues.

Books & Reviews

Books. The Ellul Forum considers for review books (1) about Jacques Ellul, (2) significantly interacting with or dependent on Ellul's thought, or (3) exploring the range of sociological and theological issues at the heart of Ellul's work. We can not guarantee that every book submitted will actually be reviewed in **The Ellul Forum** nor are we able to return books so submitted.

Book Reviews. If you would like to review books for **The Ellul Forum,** please submit your vita/resume and a description of your reviewing interests.

Send all books, book reviews, and related correspondence to:
David W. Gill, Associate Editor, **The Ellul Forum**
363-62nd Street
Oakland, CA 94618

Subscriptions

A subscription to **The Ellul Forum** is included in the annual membership fee for the International Jacques Ellul Society. To become a member (and receive **The Ellul Forum)** send a check payable to "IJES" in the amount of $20 (U.S.). Checks or money orders must be drawn in U.S. funds. Send check with your name and complete address to
    UES
P.O. Box 1033
Berkeley CA 94701 USA
    Back Issues
Back issues of **The Ellul Forum** are available for $5.00 each, postage included. Send your requests, with your complete mailing address and a check or money order drawn in U.S. funds for the correct amount, to

Ellul versus Gramsci

By Clifford Christians

Radical scholarship today appeals often to Antonio Gramsci. His ideological hege-mony is widely considered a framework of unusual power. For many, Gramsci sets the standard for critical theory and propaganda studies.

But this essay contradicts the conventional wisdom by contending that Jacques Ellul has actually given the totalizing view its most sophisticated formulation. While likewise critical, covert in inflection, and all encompassing in his assumptions, Ellul centers the problem on the technological order and thereby offers a more surehanded direction for social change.

Gramsci's Civil Society

The workers' movement in northern Italy failed after World War I. No insurrection against Fascism developed among the laboring class of western Europe, and Antonio Gramsci had a prison lifetime to account for the defeat.

During student days at the University of Turin he joined the Italian Socialist Party, and wrote for the socialist newspapers *Il Grido del Popolo* and *Avanti.* In 1919 he founded the weekly journal, *LOrdine Nuovo*, interpreting the Russian Revolution for

Italian factory councils and aiming to build working class power.[1] He developed into a formidable commentator whose influence extended far beyond the ranks of the party itself. From 1922-24 he collaborated with the Comintern in Moscow and Vienna, all the while believing the urban and rural poor would unite in rebellion against capitalism.[2] Upon his election to the Italian Parliament in 1924, Gramsci returned home, took control of the Italian Communist Party, wrested it from sectarianism, and molded the ICP toward a mass-based revolutionary force.

But by 1926 the Fascist police had conquered, sentencing him to twenty years behind bars. Doctors had earlier attempted to cure his malformed spine by suspending him for long periods from a ceiling beam; but the treatment left him hunchbacked, and barely five feet tall. Gramsci suffered with nervous disorders and precarious health. He never met his second son bom soon after his jail term began, and his wife's nervous breakdown destroyed family contact forever. Prison censorship and the unavailability of books or archival resources crippled him too. Only when Mussolini intervened was he moved terminally ill to the Formia Clinic midway between Rome and Naples where he died a few months later of a cerebral hemorrhage at forty six. Meanwhile, his sister-in-law Tatiana Schucht and cellmate Trombetti had smuggled out thirty-three notebooks via diplomatic bag to Moscow - 2,848 handwritten pages, published posthumously in seven volumes with arguments impacted on each other, but guaranteeing that this national anti-Fascist hero had become an original Marxist theoretician of historic importance.

To account for the absence of a revolutionary consciousness, Gramsci centered on the profound political transformations of monopoly capitalism. Politics can no longer be understood as a specialized and separate activity, but as a struggle for power permeating social life on all levels. A narrow, legal-institutional state apparatus coercing the masses is inverted in Gramsci's political theory to a protracted "war of position" over occupying civil society as a whole (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 108-10, 229-39).[3] And the instrument for mobilizing public support into a power bloc Gramsci identified as ideological hegemony. He launched the concept already before imprisonment, but brought it to precision in the isolation of his cell:

What we can do, for the moment, is to fix two major superstructure! levels: the one that can be called "civil society," that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called private, and that of "political society" or the State. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of hegemony which the dominant group exercises throughout

---

[1] Turin was a sophisticated laboratory for Gramsci's writing and analysis during this period. It was home of Italy's most advanced industry-armored cars, airplanes, and Fiat tractors. More than *Vi* million of its popoulation were factory workers in 1918, and the city was rocked with labor revolts between 1912 and 1920.

[2] Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith (Gramsci, 1971, p. xlvii) conclude: "Until more is known about Gramsci's life and activity in Moscow (May 1922 - November 1923) and Vienna (December 1923 - May 1924), it will not be possible to reconstruct fully his political biography for these crucial years."

[3] For elaboration, see Gramsci's (1971, pp. 206-276) essay "State and Civil Society." For a review of the ambiguities in his use of this distinction, see Anderson (1977). Fbr detailed autobiographical accounts, see Ellul (1981b, 1982,1989).

society and on the other hand to that of direct domination or command exercised through the State and juridical government (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12).

By *Prison Notebook 4* hegemony assumes its classic Gramscian dimension as a fusion of economic, moral, political, and economic objectives through ideological struggle. A hegemonic class, in other words, absorbs the value systems of other social groups into its own. Previous ideological terrain is transformed when a common worldview emerges as the "unifying principle for a new collective will" (Mouffe, 1979, p. 191). "Politics thereby ceases to be conceived as a separate specialist activity and becomes a dimension which is present in all fields of human activity ... There is not one aspect of human experience which escapes politics and this extends as far as commonsense" (Mouffe, 1979, p. 201). A nation-state is not fundamentally a political order but a social system.

Gramsci defines ideology as a conception of the world "which becomes a cultural movement, a 'religion,' a 'faith,'" implicit in all "manifestations of individual and collective life" and producing practical activity. Given this definition, "the problem is that of preserving the ideological unity of the entire social bloc which that unity serves to cement and unify" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 328). And Gramsci insists that a power bloc in advanced captialism does not merely impose its ruling ideology on the subservient. An extensive struggle is essential to forging control, "first in the ethical field and then in that of politics proper" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 333). Whereas coercion may be the province of the State apparatus, hegemony in civil society is an ongoing and historically contingent process of containment, of mobilizing diverse ideological elements into a coherent discourse and common set of practices. For Gramsci, in its normative meaning, hegemony is the "political, intellectual and moral leadership of the working class over all anti-capitalist sectors" (Mouffe, 1971, p. 15). But that normative sense cannot obscure historically contingent and unpredictable outcomes in constituting social power.

Hegemony is not the always, ever-present, guaranteed position of dominance of a ruling class or a dominant social bloc. Rather it represents the struggle of such a bloc to articulate a variety of social and ideological practices within a "structure-in-dominance" so as to achieve a dominant social alliance to exert leadership, direction and authority over a whole social formation, including over the dominated classes within it (Grossberg and Slack, p. 89).

The road to hegemony is creating consensus by a revolutionary dialectic of disarticulation and rearticulation - coopting rival hegemonic principles and colonizing the popular consciousness into a controlling worldview. Intellectuals who organize the web of beliefs which infuse civil society are particularly crucial as a social force, and intellectuals were Gramsci's (1971, p. 5-23) starting point in the prison notebooks. Through intellectuals, broadly understood, the ideology that wins the war of position becomes exercised through all available hegemonic apparatuses: schools, churches, the media, art and architecture, the legal system, economic activity, and even the name of the streets (Mouffe, 1971, p. 187). The hegemony of a particular historical bloc occurs when there is intellectual and moral unity on the fundamental questions that drive the

struggle, thus creating the dominance of "a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups" and constituting an organic popular unity for the life of the state as a whole (Gramsci, 1971, p. 182).

In recapturing a non-instrumental and permeating politics, Gramsci contributes substantially to theoretical debates in Marxism. Orthodox Marxism defines ideology as false consciousness directly determined by relative class position. Rather than reducing hegemony to inculcation by an already constituted class power, Gramsci understands it as a terrain on which social groups acquire consciousness of themselves. Thus he rejects a unified ideological subject — for example, "the proletarian with its 'correct' revolutionary thoughts or blacks with their already guaranteed anti-racist consciousness." He favors instead "a multifaceted... complex, fragmentary and contradictory conception" of pluralistic selves (Hall, 1986, p. 22) Moreover, in the Marxist tradition Gramsci develops a total and radical critique of a mechanistic, shrunken economism in which a society's economic foundations alone are determining. The Second International presumed that capitalism's collapse followed inevitably from economic contradictions; believing in economism, Gramsci concluded, was the root cause of the massive worker defeats.

As an alternative to such reductionism in which political and ideological factors become epiphenomena, Gramsci substitutes a philosophy of praxis. In hegemony a national popular culture becomes dominant, with ideological superstructures primary and the economy determinant in the last instance. Likewise, Gramsci's hegemonic collective renounces a strict corporatist conception of "class-belonging aimed at cultivating pure proletarian values." As a result, "Gramsci has left us much more than a theory of politics: in fact his legacy to us is a new conception of socialism" (Mouffe, 1971, p. 15). He was a political journalist lacking the general theoretical scope of Emile Durkheim or Max Weber, but without him "Marxist theory cannot adequately explain the complex social phenomena which we encounter in the modem world" (Hall, 1986, p. 6). Gramsci is a major starting point for critical theorists who integrate the culture-politics relationship. His enlarged state combining a system of coercion plus consent has opened the way for understanding how power operates in the social order. Chantal Mouffe (1971, p. 188) insists that the *Prison Notebooks* anticipated Althusser: "The material nature of ideology, its existence as the necessary level of all social formations and its function as the producer of subjects are all implicit in Gramsci." Mouffe's post-Marxist theorizing with Ernesto Laclau (1985, p, 4) "goes far beyond Gramsci," yet they rank Gramsci "of capital importance" nonetheless. Raymond Williams (1977, pp. 108-14) devotes a chapter to him. *Policing the Crisis*, a key text in the history of cultural studies, represents Stuart Hall's return to Gramsci. As Hall characterizes it, cultural studies had been struggling over two dominant paradigms, the one semiotic or intersubjective (represented by Raymond Williams) and the other structuralist in character (represented principally by Althusser). Gramsci releases us from a dead-end debate, enabling us to identify power conceptually while deeply grounding it in concrete historical conditions. As a practical consequence for Hall, Gramsci's hegemony

brings ethnicity and gender decisively into our analysis. Todd Gitlin (1979) has organized his understanding of entertainment and news around Gramsci. John Fiske (1987, pp. 40-41) quarrels with some of the applications, but does not question hegemony's conceptual power.

In order to critique Gramsci adequately, this expanded body of work with all its trajectories ought to be included in the assessment. But given his seminal role and in order to deepen the argument, I concentrate on Gramsci's framework itself. He is clearly a heavyweight in Marxist political theory regarding the modem state. Every serious critical theory of public opinion formation finds hegemony inescapable. But Gramsci also serves as a philosopher of social transformation, and in this arena I find his framework fundamentally flawed.

For all of his sophistication in integrating power, politics, and discourse, Gramsci includes no philosophy or sociology of technology. His social theory does not radically account for the impact of twenty-first century technology on ideological formation.[4] And it is this lacuna that Jacques Ellul fills in a distinctive manner without sacrificing political vibrancy.

Ellul's Technocratic Culture

Ellul's political activism matches the intensity of Antonio Gramsci. He participated briefly in the Spanish Civil War, joined the Paris riots against the Fascists, and openly opposed the Vichy government in 1940 until he was dismissed from his professoriate at the University of Strasbourg. During World War II, along with Camus, Malraux, and Sartre, he was a leader in the French Resistance, operating from a small farm outside Paris. After liberation, Ellul worked for three years as the deputy major of Bordeaux concentrating on commerce and public works. On the national scene, he spearheaded a group of intellectuals who forced the French government to withdraw from Algeria.

While Gramsci's crusades landed him in prison, Ellul spent the bulk of his career (1947-1980) as a Professor in the Institute of Political Studies at the University of Bordeaux - specializing in the history and sociology of institutions, Marxism, Roman law, technology, and propaganda. Ellul's assessment of political involvement becomes integrated with his historical and theoretical analyses of social institutions, leading him to a different conclusion about twentieth century culture than Gramsci's. Instead of the latter's civil society, Ellul focused on technocratic culture.

Ellul developed the argument that the technological phenomenon decisively defines contemporary life. We can no longer divide society into capitalists and workers as Gramsci did; the phenomenon is completely different and more abstract. We now have technological organizations on one side and all humanity on the other — the former driven by necessity and human beings demanding freedom. Ellul insisted that we read the world in which we live, not through the window of capitalist structures, but in terms of the technological order. From Ellul's perspective, we have now entered a tech-

---

[4] For the general failure of ideology theory to anticipate fully modem technology, see Gouldner (1976).

nological civilization. Technology is not merely one more arena for philosophers and sociologists to investigate, but a new foundation for understanding the self, human institutions, and ultimate reality. A society is technological, Ellul argues, not because of its machines, but from the pursuit of efficient techniques in every area of human endeavor. Unlike previous eras where techniques are constrained within a larger complex of social values, the pervasiveness and sophistication of modem techniques reorganize society to conform to their demand for efficiency. Scientific techniques are applied not just to nature, but to social organizations and our understanding of personhood. Civilizations across history have engaged in technical activities and produced technological products, but modem society has sacralized the genius behind machines and uncritically allowed its power to infect not just industry, engineering, and business but also politics, education, the church, labor unions, and international relations.

Ellul's concern is not primarily with machines and tools but with the spirit of machineness that underlies them. In his view, modem society is so beguiled by technical productivity that it unconsciously reconstructs all social institutions on this model. Because of their extraordinary prowess, modern techniques tend to subordinate all other, less efficient values to their requirements. As a result, all appearance of change created by techniques remains fundamentally an illusion. In this sense, for Ellul, finding freedom in a technological civilization is in essence a religious problem. Unable to establish a meaningful life outside the artificial ambience of a technological culture, human beings place their ultimate hope in it. Seeing no other source of security, and failing to recognize the illusoriness of their technical freedom, they become slaves to the exacting determinations of efficiency. The transition to a technological society is for Ellul (1989, pp. 134-5; cf. 1980) more fundamental than anything the human race has experienced over the last five thousand years.

Critical Consciousness

The absence of a critical consciousness is the enemy for Ellul as it was for Gramsci. But rather than resistance in the face of political coercion and consensus, Ellul centers on defying the technological imperative. He is not calling for opposition to technological products, but to technicism. He is not a medievalist, a neo-luddite, or an anti-technologist. The issue is the psycho-political imaginary universe which humans constitute and reinforce. A critical consciousness entails that we desacralize technology, and we free our language from technological metaphors. Those empowered with a critical consciousness condemn technicism. The essential condition for social transformation, is destroying technicism as unacceptable worship of a modem god. The empowered resist the idolatrous attitudes, intentions, and aims that drive technology forward. They condemn unqualified worship of the technological enterprise for its own sake. Against an overweening technocratic mystique that ridicules the spiritual as invalid, a culture must be developed in which questions of meaning, life's purpose, and moral values predominate. To demythologize technology effectively means to sever at its root the blind faith that technological prowess will lead to one achievement after another. It drives home the contrast between a technology touted as˜ humanity's best

hope for the future and one of limited means to achieve particular ends, between a technology that becomes an end in itself and an instrument in achieving chosen ends. Ellul (1964, p. vi) castigates the mind-set that is "committed to the quest for continually improved means to carelessly examined ends." He opposes the powerful phenomenon of machineness as a dehumanizing force and exposes it as contrary to the norms of love and justice.

Technicism in politics insists on direct participation as the catchword for effective government. Through sophisticated communications technology, everyone can share in the decisionmaking process and finally achieve in practice the popular democracy long heralded in theory. Electronic hardware, we are assured, can provide accounts so detailed, swift, rich and accurate that at last people will bring their "intelligence to bear on resolving the central problems of society" (Westin, 1971, p. 1). In that spirit, technicists anticipate a vast decentralization of political authority made possible by mechanized information networks. By contrast, Ellul regards direct democracy—in all its variations—as a dangerous delusion which actually resolves nothing since the fundamental issue lies elsewhere, embedded in the nature of technology itself.

Being liberated from technicism is not merely a question of message, but of the medium as well. There can be no isolated, neutral understandings of technology as though it exists in a presuppositionless vacuum. Instead technology proceeds out of our whole human experience and is directed by our ultimate **commitments.** Technology is value-laden, the product of our primordial valuing activities as human beings. It not only arises as technology interacts with political and social factors, but emerges from the basic fact that technological objects are unique, not universal. Any technological instrument embodies particular values which by definition give to this artifact properties that other artifacts do not possess.

Gramsci's social theory, sharpened in the teeth of Italian Fascism, generates a rich conceptual capital: hegemony, traditional and organic intellectuals, civil society, passive revolution, historical bloc, and transformism. These motifs invigorate socialist theory across a broad spectrum; but they are still centered on political transformation within monopoly capitalism. On the other hand, Ellul's technocratic culture, situated in terms of the broad patterns of history, forces advanced industrialism to the forefront. Even if Fascist hegemony were replaced by progressive democracy, Ellul (1971) would argue, or Stalinism by enlightened socialism, without a radical reversal of the technicism in those political orders, the revolution is illusory. And in the process of orienting the debate around technology, Ellul builds up a repertoire of crucial distinctions about technology and its role in the body politic.

Ellul is thus more detailed and precise than Gramsci regarding the enemy identified by a critical consciousness. And while both emphasize resistance, Gramsci's opposition involves an ongoing struggle without guarantees. Ellul's resistance is as stridently oppositional but aims in a normative direction. One label for Ellul's (1969) strategy is radical nonviolence, a careful decision to withhold some vital part of self, a conscientious exclusion of all physical and psychological violence. The critical matter for

Ellul, as it was for Max Weber (Mayer, 1943, p. 128), is withstanding a pre-emption, protecting oneself from "the parcelling out of his soul, from the supreme mastery of the bureaucratic way of life." Ellul does not advocate ideological or pietistic pacifism, but our taking deliberate exception to today's monolithic apparatus. He (1967b, p. 221) does not recommend that we abandon all interest in the res publica, "but on the contrary... achieve it by another route, come to grips with it again in a different way, on a more real level, and in a decisive contest." Pre-emption is the initial phase, not the conclusion.

Ellul places himself in that powerful tradition of moral philosophy, self-realization ethics, where effectiveness emerges only from opinions fundamentally altered, lives nourished deeply at a fresh source, reordered patterns not under *la technique's* tutelage. However, Ellul is very careful here. Our choices are always existential ones, their precise content freely determined at each new moment of decision. Any prefabricated programs may simply be another realm of necessity which prevents our liberation. Thus Ellul does not construct a fixed model, always insisting instead that we think out for ourselves the meaning of our involvement in the modem world.

Certainly we should be concerned about cataloguing various forms of oppressive power — sexual, economic, psychological, and political. However, Ellul continually asks how we can empower people instead. He understands how easily we make people cannon fodder for our own self-styled revolutions. He deals with personal issues, but not at the expense of structural ones. He merely insists that we must first fill our own political space before our revolutionary action can mean anything. Ellul presents a theory of non-oppressive praxis, but it is systemic, too. The question is how we develop a process of social transformation that is totally opposite in character from *la technique.*

The revolutionary axis is at the interstices of institutions. While most social institutions are oppressive and warrant confrontation, Ellul believes that for any groundswell to continue we must build a new culture. The revolution can only be nurtured in the open spaces, that is, within voluntary associations, among families and neighborhoods and tribes not completely bureaucratized by the political and economic elite. It is futile to presume an entire restructuring of the politicalindustrial system in the absence of vital insurgency at the interstices. Only an infrastructure autonomous from dominant power will develop the appropriate conscientization — as long as it is not seen merely in negative terms as retreat or a hostile barricade. Ellul is concerned that sub-groups be agents of activism and not just centers of contemplation or protest To argue against action at the interstices rather than at the institutional center, Ellul believes, entails fullscale destruction and bloodshed, and may even be a misguided primitivism.

Conclusion

A cultural shift is evident currently in the humanities and social sciences, though the axis on which a theory of culture turns remains in dispute. Is it hegemony or technicism? Or could it be ideology (Stuart Hall), meaning (Clifford Geertz), the public (James Carey), symbol (Ernst Cassirer), moral order (Robert Wuthnow), the dialogic

(Paulo Freire), liminality (Bernard Lonergan), or interpolated self (Louis Althusser)? While not defending technology as the central problematic of culture vis-a-vis its competitors, this essay at least exemplifies how cultural theory with a technological epicenter operates.

My intention has not been to treat Gramsci and Ellul in evenhanded terms. I indicate Gramsci's central influence among those with a totalizing view, but do not elaborate on the ways his disciples have applied and patched up the theory. Nor should I be misunderstood regarding Ellul's legacy. His weaknesses in detail and with sub-units are obvious, and I have shared elsewhere in articulating the criticisms myself.

Yet I have entered enough of the argument to indicate how the technological imperative can be integrated into our theories of culture. The failure to do so becomes particularly obvious when a solution is articulated. I believe Ellul gives us a solider framework within which to plot our future course. Gramsci indicates the contradictions in capitalist societies, while Ellul brings all technological cultures — capitalist and socialist — under the same urgency to confront technicism. Gramsci saw his task as reconstructing political philosophy. In Ellul's scheme, our compelling need at present is not merely a political theory but a theory of technology which encompasses politics in its philosophical purview.

It would be appropriate to conclude that these two paradigms represent antinomies in the sense that both sides can be justified independently as internally consistent. No mighty fulcrum or grand experiment stands outside of them to render a final judgment Yet Ellul's focus on technicism—in contrast to Gramsci's ellipsis between economism and statism—avoids three crucial weaknesses.

First, Gramsci leaves us trapped in the distributive fallacy. He places intellectuals in the vanguard, though Gramsci's broad scope includes all clearthinking humans across the social spectrum and not merely the academic bourgeoisie. But such admirers as Alastair Davidson (1977, pp. 254-5) have noted an increasing elitism in Gramsci's appeals, especially after 1930. On the other hand, Ellul (1965, pp. xvi-xvii, 110) maintained that intellectuals are even a readier mark for sociological propaganda than ordinary citizens. Their self-styled superior discernment beguiles them into the subtle trap of *la technique.* Nothing in Gramsci's social philosophy precludes it from the distributive fallacy where one strategic slice of the social structure represents the whole. Even though for him every normal person is rational— hence an intellectual, broadly speaking—only some of them actually have an intellectual function. What in Gramsci's ideological hegemony guarantees that his enlightened cadre, or, if not them, a revolutionary working class, or a persecuted minority, or a panopoly of protestors—violent and benign-are not made universal by a faulty logic of substitution?

Second, Ellul brings the media technology literature into our calculus, while Gramsci unwittingly sides with those who presume technology is neutral, merely a tool which can be applied rightly or wrongly. I find that definition deficient in scope; technology is a cultural activity driven by our ultimate commitments (Christians, 1989). If technology does not exist in blank space but arises from our worldviews, then an ethical

framework becomes a self-evident need for orienting the technological process responsibly. Ellul puts a theory of normative technology squarely on our agenda, and that is a scholarly task the ideology and hegemony literature tragically undervalues. Ironically a value-saturated view of technology is more compatible with Gramsci's hegemony than the neutral view which he adopts by default.

Third, Ellul opposes technological necessity to human freedom. Thus in communication theory, the radical alternative entails a dialogic model of communcation and such a theory is alien to Gramsci. Through language we continually re-enact our humanness and maintain a social order. When our everyday discourse is coopted by technological, mass-mediated symbols, we become complicators in technocratic culture. And as the Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin argues correctly in *The Dialogical Imagination,* only oral language under those circumstances represents a dependable source of opposition and struggle.

For Ellul, the technical artifice is decisively new. Thus Gramsci's theorizing, for all its revolutionary intent, is anchored in a previous era. The realities of modem technology create a firestorm of complicated issues at present. Global information systems are redefining national boundaries and economic structures. Ellul's penetrating discourse strikes at the heart of today's conundrums and paradoxes. While we never encounter truth pure, Ellul orders the territory around theoretical insights of the highest magnitude.

Anderson, P. (1977). "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci," *New Left Review*, no. 100, Nov. - Jan., pp. 5-78.

Bakhtin, M.M. (1981). *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Baudrillard, J. (1981). *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign.* Trans. Charles Levin. St Louis, MO: Telos Press.

Christians, C. (1989). "A Theory of Normative Technolgy." *Technological Transformation*: *Contextual and Conceptual Implications*, eds. E. F. Byrne and J. C. Pitt Dordrecht Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Davidson, A. (1977). *Antonio Gramsci: Towards an Intellectual Biography.* London: Merlin Press.

Ellul, J. (1957). "Information and Propaganda," *Diogenes: International Review of Philosophy and Humanistic Studies.* June, pp. 61-77.

Ellul, J. (1964). *The Technological Society.* Trans. John Wilkinson. New York: Vintage.

Ellul, J. (1965). *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes.* Trans. Konrad Kellen. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Ellul, J. (1967a). *Presence of the Kingdom.* Trans. Olive Wyon. New York: Seabury Press.

Ellul, J. (1967b). *The Political Illusion.* Trans. Konrad Kellen. New York: Alfred A. Kropf.

Ellul, J. (1969). *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective.* Trans. Cecelia G. Kings. New York: Seabury Press.

Ellul, J. (1970). *The Ethics of Freedom.* Trans. Geoffrey Bromiley. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Ellul, J. (1971). *Autopsy of Revolution.* Trans. Patricia Wolf. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Ellul, J. (1980). "Nature, Technique and Artificiality." *Research in Philosophy and Technology.* Vol. 3, pp. 263-283.

Ellul, J. (1981). *Perspectives on Our Age.* Trans. Joachin Neugroschel. New York: Seabury Press.

Ellul, J. (1982). *In Season Out of Season: An Introduction to the Thought of Jacques Ellul.* Trans. Lani K. Niles. New York: Harper and Row.

Ellul, J. (1985). *The Humiliation of the Word.* Trans. Joyce Main Hanks. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Ellul, J. (1989). *What I Believe.* Trans. Geoffrey Bromiley. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Ellul, J. (1990). *The Technological Bluff.* Trans. Geoffrey Bromiley. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Gouldner, A. (1976). *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology.* New York: Seabury.

Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks.* Trans. Quintin Hoare and Nowell G. Smith. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Gramsci, A. (1977, 1978). *Political Writings 1910-1920* (vol. I), trans. John Mathews; 1921-26 (vol. II), trans. Quintin Hoare. ' New York: International Publishers.

Gramsci, A. (1985). *Selections from Cultural Writings.* Trans. D. Forgacs and G. Nowell Smith. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Grossberg, L. and J. Slack (1985). "An Introduction to Stuart Hall's Essay." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication.* 2, pp. 87-90.

Hall, S. et al. (1978). *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order.* New York: Holmes and Meier.

Hall, S. (1986). "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity." *Journal of Communication Inquiry.* 10:2, pp. 5-27.

Laclau, E. and C. Mouffe. (1985). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics.* Trans. Winston Moore and Paul Cammack. London: Verso.

Mouffe, C., ed. (1979). *Gramsci and Marxist Theory.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Westin, A. (1971). *Information Technology in a Democracy.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and Literature.* New York: Oxford University Press, ch. 6.

Include the Iconoclast: The Voice of Jacques Ellul in Contemporary Criticism

By Calvin C. Eroup

Continental theorists of the postmodern era have become "must reads" in courses on rhetorical theory and criticism (Ivie, 1995, p. 266). A common, though not exhaustive, list of theorists and critics who appear in anthologies and syllabi for such courses includes names like Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jurgen Habermas, Frederic Jameson, Jacques Lacan, and Jean-Fran$ios Lyotard. These thinkers have influenced scholarship in the field of communication and rhetoric, most evidently in the advent of critical rhetoric and what has been termed the "ideological" turn in criticism. The recent debate between critical rhetoric and textual criticism reflects the intellectual authority vested in continental versions of postmodernism among practicing critics and theorists in the field. Work in contemporary rhetorical theory and criticism demands a certain fluency with the ideas of French and other continental postmodernists. Serious rhetoric scholars have read their works.

Contemporary rhetorical theory stands to gain what Kenneth Burke refers to as "perspective by incongruity" (Burke, 1954, pp. 69-70) on the continental postmodern canon of theorists by including Jacques Ellul's *Humiliation of the Word,* in which Ellul argues against many of the basic assumptions of postmodernism, calling poststructuralism an error. In this essay I raise the question about Ellul: Can and should we include such an irreverent voice in any canon of contemporary rhetorical theory? Theorists we venerate, he considers as colleagues to be engaged and challenged; he addresses their ideas as idols for destruction.

Ellul's perspective integrates two decisive factors. First, his novel sociological ideas on technique and the technological system offer a radical reorientation to ideological, social, and cultural issues and to that which drives them. Second, he advocates human speech as a continuing paradigm for language, an ancient assumption in a postmodern context From these axiomatic commitments, Ellul presents us with a novel incongruity: he suggests that poststructuralists are not revolutionary but are in ideological lock-step with the forces of technological society-bureaucracy, domination, and oppression.

Canonicitv. Textualitv, and Absence

A number of ironies emerge from the status of postmodern theorists among communication scholars. First, to canonize the works of people considered "canon smashers" is no small paradox. Barthes and Foucault have provided some of the most elegant arguments proclaiming the anonymity of texts and the demise of "authority" (Barthes, 1989, p. 716; Foucault, 1989, p. 724). Furthermore, the canon of postmodern thinkers is just as certainly imposed by people in authority (professors, publishers, 8

editors, etc.) and just as effectively excludes texts that might rightfully be included, as any canon of literature (or speeches) that has ever been authorized. Scholars still argue about the value of the chosen theorists' contributions and debate the comparative

quality of interpretations in the secondary literature. Today, the portion of our work in contemporary theory and criticism that deals with postmodemism-especially - French postmodernism-orients itself to language based on thinkers who concentrate primarily on writing and literary texts, paying little attention to spoken public discourse (Davis and Finke , 1989, p. 718). While French masters give us a diversity of perspectives and places from which to theorize and criticize discourse, on the question of the relationship of speech and writing they share a predisposition to prioritize the written text over the spoken word.

In the "Father of Logos," among other places, Jacques Derrida makes a case for giving precedence to writing and textuality over speech. Although Derrida may be the most explicit apologist for the superiority of the written word, the ascendancy of textuality has already been mentioned as commonplace within the canon of French postmodernist intellectuals introduced at the beginning of this essay. Derrida, the father of deconstructionism, argues in "The Father of Logos" that writing need not come to speech "like a kind of present offered up in homage by a vassal to his lord" to have its value assessed by speech (pp. 750ff.). Indeed, textual discourse emerges as the only means of assessing the value of speech, which Derrida correlates with fatherhood. Speech (the father) presents itself as speaking from a point outside language, "But the father is not the generator or procreator in any 'real' sense prior to or outside all relation to language" (p. 753). Roland Barthes, similarly, states that the limit condition of human language is the written word, not the spoken word. In *S/Z*, Barthes lays out his assumptions about language in reference to semiotics, saying that the science of semiology must finally acknowledge itself as *"writing"* (p. 8). In his theorizing, Barthes (1989) concerns himself exclusively with "text," a two-dimensional field of written discourse (pp. 714-715).

The third irony is the virtual absence of oppositional voices being taught alongside postmodern critics and theorists of discourse to counter the simple equation of all discourse with text and the critical primacy of written over spoken language. In many if not most cases, critics must begin with a text, and in that regard the directives above are entirely unobjectionable. However, the only voice in the textbook quoted above is the voice of the critic. The focus of critical attention is always a "text" The lack of questioning on this point suggests the possibility that when we visit and elevate the canon of French postmodernism in courses on contemporary theory and criticism, we risk assuming the priority of written text over spoken word *without ever explicitly raising the question,* one that has been crucial for our field and throughout the history of rhetoric.

My purpose, in the remainder of this study, is to consider this third irony, and to propose Ellul's *The Humiliation of the Word* as one voice we could employ as interrogator of some of the most popular works from the continental canon for courses in contemporary rhetorical theory on the distinction between the written and spoken word. Iconoclast or not, we stand to gain much by including Ellul in our theoretical-

critical dialogue, especially when considering the ideas of Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan.

Sacralization and Desacralization

Debunking, demystifying, demythologizing, and desacralizing are prime critical activities in the modern/ postmodern world. Among postmodernists who hold to post-structuralist views of language (like Barthes and Derrida) such critical moves are the logical outworking of their philosophical commitments about language and meaning. They deny any transcendental meaning, and attempt through critical acts to depose the idea that foundational and essential meaning can ever exist, in language or otherwise (Eagleton, 1983, pp. 130-138). Demythologizing and the other critical activities noted above assume that the sacred emerged to account for the unexplainable, the fearful, and the uncontrollable things in the world (Wennemann, 1991, p. 238). This sociological perspective, which Ellul affirms, considers as sacred "whatever form of power human beings believe themselves to be dependent on for their existence and well being" (Fasching, 1991, pp. 82-83). In this sense, Ellul shares much in common with the postmodern theorists mentioned so far.

However, critics who purport to liberate us from antiquated or oppressive ideas of the sacred often presume that deliverance means escape from the sacred altogether into a rational, non-religious world (Wennemann, 1991, p. 240). Ellul advocates liberation but denies the existence of a non-religious world. He argues that one sacred replaces another and that the desacralizing agent becomes the new sacred (Fasching, 1983, p. 83; Wennemann, 1991, p. 240). Ellul distinguishes between the sacred and the holy. The sacred is a construct of human society of which religion is one manifestation while the holy is Wholly Other than human society. Therefore, critics may "demystify" a traditional religion and replace it with a new sacred-one which may look nothing like traditional religion. But the human cycle of sacralization and desacraliztion has no effect on the holy. In other words, Ellul critiques the corruption of human religious institutions without relinquishing ultimate, transcendent meaning. Holy and sacred are antonyms for Ellul because people construct the sacred through language, but the holy is not a human construct (Fasching, 1991, p. 88). However, Ellul argues that the successful subversion of religious institutions has not eliminate the sacred or rampant religiosity. Ellul calls the new sacred *La Technique* (Lovekin, 1991, p. 89).

The form of consciousness Ellul calls "technique" circulates around the dual poles of technology and politics, which became sacred in late 20th century society (Fasching, 1991, p. 83; Wennemann, 1991, p. 243). Ellul's critique of technique gravitates toward current questions regarding speech, writing, language, discourse, and symbols in his later work. For example, David Lovekin's work is based primarily on *The Humiliation of the Word.* In this work, as in others, Ellul (1985) argues that technology and politics have been enshrined in the wake of technique's desacralizing presence:

Our reality is no longer nature, the gods chosen for us to see are those of the technical and political world. They are the gods of consumerism, power, and machines, and they range from dictators to atomic piles. Now everything is invested with an

extra dimension: it is not lived reality, but since this reality is visualized, it is magnified, idealized, and made sacred, through the symbolization accomplished by the mass media (pp. 228-229).

The *Humiliation of the Word* engages the issue of the impact technique has had on human communication; particularly the study of human language, symbol, and discourse. Ellul focuses his attention throughout his work on the effects of technique on language and meaning. He identifies structuralism and what we refer to as post-structualism as the application of technique to language and considers their effect on communication and the human communication from this unique vantage point.

Technique and the Critique of the Structuralisms

In the *Humiliation of the Word* Ellul raises a crucial issue for rhetorical theory and criticism that we may not be accustomed to thinking about: How do structuralism and/ or poststructuralism affect our assumptions about spoken language and speaking? Ellul claims, in a variety of ways, that people who build their theories of communication on structuralist and poststructuralist assumptions hate language and the spoken word and, although they take language very seriously, apply technique in an attempt to subdue it entirely (p. 165).

Ellul moves toward this claim by beginning with the enduring question of the comparative value of speaking versus writing. He comes down squarely on the side of the spoken word (p. 1). Speech is the exclusive and definitive human language, that "ushers us into another dimension: relationship with other living beings, with persons. The Word is the particularly human sound which differentiates us from everything else" (p. 14). By contrast, "The written word is continually repeated and always identical; this is not possible for the true word. Ask the person speaking with you to repeat the explanation he has just given, and it will be different But you can reread a page" (p. 44). The inability of the written word to provoke dialogue signals its secondary status to speech: "The word is, of necessity, spoken to someone... It calls for a response" (p. 16).

The status of spoken .versus written language should be a contested issue among rhetoricians in communication departments. By canonizing the likes of Barthes, Derrida, Foucault and Lacan as guides, we may have implicitly adopted a position that works to manufacture reams of text efficiently at the expense of neglecting the dynamics and meaning of human speech in the process. Ellul calls this condition "logorrhea" and suggests that technique demands the decisive rupture between speaker and word, finally accomplished by post-structuralism (pp. 156-157). He says specifically in *The Technological System:*

Language has to take on an objectivity permitting it to correspond to the objectivity of the technological system...The "one," and "it," the field (all Lacanism, etc.) is purely and simply magianism-just as incidentally, the style of Lacan, and so many other writers, is-very significantly-sheer incantation. It is a *mechanical* expression of the compensatory reaction by the technological system. But on the other hand, language must itself be integrated into the system in order to play its role. Hence, the

structuralist studies of language, which are precisely characteristic of that technicization; hence, likewise, the trend toward viewing the text as an entity in itself, an object. And the orientation toward focusing on *how* one says something rather than on *what* one says, in order to demonstrate technologically. Here, Roland Barthes is very directly one of the reducers of language to its function of compensating for the technological system (pp. 115-116).

Nevertheless, Ellul does not argue that deposing the word by image is impossible, but that speech in all its once-comprehensive fullness has been emaciated efficiently by the dominance of the image. He further argues that intellectuals, far from defending the human, spoken word, have overseen its demise by unwittingly applying the technical imperative for visualization to language. Ellul identifies the technical imperative as the driving force of technique which insists that "when a technological possibility exists, it must be applied" (1985, p. 148). The application of technique to word is structuralism/poststructuralism.

The Obedience of Poststructuralists to Technique

Ellul argues that poststructuralist theories of language are not anti-modem but hyper-modem. They demonstrate technique-a child of modemism-at work. We noted earlier that the authors under consideration tend to privilege written texts over speech. The significance of the assumption in favor of writing is that written text is an image of spoken language that "has placed the word in an ambiguous and defensive position" (Ellul, 1985, pp. 160-161). Technique can arrest, observe, and analyze text, which is impossible with the spoken word.

An advocate for the primacy of written text over the spoken word might dispute the distinction between speech and writing, claiming that the voice is every bit as material as the written word (Eagleton, 1983, p. 130). But a living voice is not material and does not "mean" merely by signs. The human voice is not digital. It may be digitized and analyzed as text via writing, printing, or audio recording-subjected to technological manipulation. But the voice itself and the meaning it carries cannot finally be subsumed under the simple process of "difference and division." A living human voice cannot be captured. Any honest analyst must contend with the fact that what is being analyzed is only a material trace. The issue rests exactly here: that the voice must be nothing more than material if technique is to control it. The equation of word and text apparently subjects the word to complete human control. If we can control words by techniques, we can then make pronouncements about their meaning or meaninglessness and definitively explain why. As Ellul (1985) comments:

The word has become image: the word made for computers, dominated by writing, inscription, and printing, and changed into a thing, into space and something visible. Now it must be seen to be believed, and we think we have finally fathomed all of language when we apply a semiotic diagram to it (p. 160).

By transposing text for speech as the paradigm for human language, technique sets us up to accept the image as not only real, but also as the truth about language. Then we interpolate the "truths of language" learned from writing back into the realm of

the spoken word and human reality (Ellul, 1985, p. 141). In other words, we analyze an artificial image to examine the realities and truths of human life, neither of which textual analysis can provide as such.

Part of Ellul's iconoclastic tendencies show in his insistence that although post-structuralists may not be aware of it, they appropriate semiotics as the truth about language. He implies that the poststructuralist move is not a bold stroke against the status quo establishment, but a reinstantiation of the technical imperative. In the early seventies he was already taking the offensive: "Structuralism is in no sense an intellectual advance, a better way of understanding. It is a reflection of the current human condition in this closed and organized society" (Ellul, 1974, p. 6). In one of his last books, he continues to press the point home:

The word always refers to something beyond it. A phrase apart from the speaker and hearer has no meaning. What gives it value is the secret intention of the speaker and the individuality of the heart. In other words, language is never neutral. We cannot analyze it objectively. It depends on the makeup of those in dialogue, and it is inseparable from these persons. We can engage in as many analyses as we like; the essential point escapes us (Ellul, 1989, p. 27).

He makes his case most clearly in the *Humiliation of the Word* stating that "by making the word an object, we elevate excessive scientism to its highest point;" that semiotic study of language reduces it to an exclusively visual project; and that structuralism is the mode and method consistent with visual images (pp. 153, 159, 165). Much detailed analysis of the intricacies of Ellul's argument with structuralism/poststructuralism could be laid out, however for the purposes of this essay, I will concentrate on the primary issues he raises in his critique of familiar postmodern icons.

Iconoclast at Work

Ellul states, without hesitation, that the poststructuralist ideological complex fits comfortably within technological society. His project is to rescue the "degenerate" word from the prison house of technique. He argues that language cannot be reduced to a visual code or system of visual signs (Ellul, 1985, p. 4). Further, he posits the direct link between speaker and language, a link that Derrida holds up for derision, as the affirmation of personality and security of the existence of meaning (pp. 24, 39). Language doesn't speak itself, people speak language (p. 16). In all of this, Ellul presents an enigmatic view of language, allowing that how language actually functions is mutable-that the connections of personality and meaning and the way language functions in a society can change and be altered-but he maintains a strict line on the appropriate perspective on and use of language. For instance, in his comments on Lacan's play with language he concludes by saying This [free play with signifiers] is a frightening step to take, and its effects have spread to the entire language: you can do anything, and make words say anything. You can construct any discourse with them: they do not defend themselves. But our very human life-and not only our reason or our intelligence-is profoundly altered by this process (Ellul, 1985, p. 165).

Obviously, Ellul is not concerned, like E.D. Hirsch (1967) might be, that one just cannot do what Lacan does with language (pp. viii-ix). Ellul is concerned with the consequences when society and language get to the point where one can do such a thing, as though it were a liberating activity. Again, he defies the now-conventional wisdom that targets language as the source of oppression and looks to deconstruction, and various other post-structuralist strategies as revolutionary and freeing. He parrots disgust at being bom into language as violating his supposed right to linguistic self-construction, "I am forced to enter a prefabricated scheme; I am taught to speak according to a certain model. Scandalous!" and then continues his parody saying, "Language is an instrument of oppression and alienation used by the ruling class to keep the oppressed classes in bondage" (Ellul, 1985, pp. 173-174). But he dispenses with these commonplaces as "para-Marxist" employing a mechanistic and rigid concept of language and the word, mixed with a certain ignorance of the history of revolutions and the role of language in them. To the contrary, he argues that the expressed hatred of the word accomplishes the goals of the ruling classes-neutralizing challenges and promoting propaganda, which depends on a lack of clear referents to work effectively (1985, pp. 175-177). But he cannot easily shake the pervasiveness of the anti-language sentiment:

We are left with a nagging question: however did these things manage to come into being-this collection of cliches (hollow but thought to be profound!), this hatred of language, and this simplistic equation: "established discourse = ruling class = language"? (1985, p. 181).

In his answer to the question he gestures toward Foucault, "the lunatic's language suddenly seems fascinating because it fails to transmit any idea or continuity." Later he argues more extensively that the fascination with the asylum testifies to "the basic catastrophe of our society: human solitude and the technicalization of relationships" (Ellul, 1985, pp. 181, 372). He lauds the motive of such studies that attempt to open language up and destructure social stereotypes, but judges that they fail because the "passion for the language of mental illness destroys reasonable language" and instead "produces utterly closed discourse" (p. 373). This points to Ellul's primary attack on poststructural theory at its basic, linguistic level. He says, "The rupture between the speaker and his words is the decisive break" (p. 157).

This puts Ellul also directly at odds with Roland Barthes, over the issue of whether or not. language is an open or closed system. Barthes (1974) asserts that no place exists outside of language; Barthes is also a major proponent of the notion that language writes subjects into existence (p. 8). Ellul further denies any importance to meaning, finding the interesting question to be how language works, not what it says (1980, p. 116). Again, Ellul notes how this point suggests that Barthes marches to the beat of technique:

We want to see how a thing works: the process of circulation and deformation. As we indicated above, the process is what matters. It just so happens that this is what

interests the technician. Finalities do not concern him, nor does meaning! Without knowing it, structuralists are possessed by the spirit of technique (1985, p. 170).

Ellul ends up affirming that language is an open system, one that is neither totalizing nor immutable. People speak, and language is more elusive than can ever be captured in writing. Not held captive to technique, it is not subjected to analytical vivisection in the sense that anyone can ever declare it to be meaningless or deconstruct it. Of course a text can be constructed and deconstructed, it simply does not follow that such operations can be performed on language, which is the hope that the word offers to people in relationships of all kinds, including people suffering injustice and oppression. The word Ellul loves cannot be found on a page, it can only be heard.

Inclusion

In this essay, I have traced some of the basic moves Ellul makes to desacralize poststructuralism as an icon of the sacred technique and have highlighted a few direct connections to a few prominent and influential authors in our canon of contemporary theorists.

That Ellul argues for a radical Word that integrates faith, theology, ideology, and language may challenge students of rhetoric, should they assume that a relationship between faith, language, and rhetoric belongs only in the rhetoric of religion or theology courses. Ellul (1989) himself declares elsewhere that his views of speech, word, and language are grounded in faith in God and the incarnate Word, "because the God I believe in is Word. Hence every human word is for me decisive and irreplaceable" (p. 23). These commitments are deeply intertwined and unmistakable, leading some readers of the *Humiliation of the Word* to declare Ellul a typical protestant iconophobe (Jay, 1993, p. 14). But the reasons for adding Ellul to the canon of contemporary theory are not primarily religious. In fact, in his own way Ellul is more intensely anti-religious than the voices of postructuralism.

I have attempted to weave together an argument for the inclusion of Jacques Ellul with his poststructuralist colleagues in the study of contemporary rhetorical theory for a few simple reasons. First, he raises the substantial issue of the precedence of speech versus writing and contests the assumption of a number of influential poststructuralist in his stand for speech as paradigmatic. Second, he engages the issue of whether language is a closed, totalizing, universal object-the same in every place and time-from a provocative perspective. Third, he defies the conventional wisdom about the comparative value of certain theoretical authorities in contemporary rhetorical theory and criticism.

Finally, he advocates a robust role for rhetoric that values the word, speech, and its necessary role in rescuing society from the brutalizing grasp of bureaucracy and self-validating technology. He promotes public dialogue and believes it can be meaningful; more and less than a mask for the will to power. He is rigorous in his consideration of theory and a friend of criticism:

Criticism is the preferred domain of the word. In its relations with images, the word is called

on to criticize the image, not in the sense of accusing it, but in the more basic sense of separation and discernment of true and false. This is one of the noblest functions of the word, and discourse should relate to it (Ellul, 1985, p. 34).

Clearly, to include Ellul's *Humiliation of the Word* in the canon of contemporary rhetorical theory and criticism is to risk dialogue with an interlocutor who would question many sacred assumptions and perhaps be rejected as impious. Of course, the benefit is in advocating that good minds should take such risks.

Barthes, Roland. "From Work to Text" *Literary Criticism and Theory: The Greeks to the Present.* Eds. Robert Con Davis and Laurie Finke. New York: London, 1989. 713-718.

_ _ _ , *S/Z.* Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1974.

Burke, Kenneth. *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose.* Berkeley, CA: U of California Press, 1954.

Davis, Robert Con and Laurie Finke, *Literary Criticism and Theory: The Greeks to the Present.* New York: London, 1989.

Derrida, Jacques. "Father of Logos." *Literary Criticism and Theory: The Greeks to the Present.* Eds. Robert Con Davis and Laurie Finke. New York: London, 1989. 750-756.

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction.* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983.

Ellul, Jacques. *Hope in Time of Abandonment.* Trans. C. Edward Hopkin. New York: Seabury Press, 1974.

_ _ _ . *Humiliation of the Word.* Trans. Joyce Main Hanks. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985.

_ _ _ . *Jesus and Marx.* Trans. Joyce Main Hanks. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988.

_ _ _ . *The Technological Society.* Trans. John Wilkinson. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964.

_ _ _ . *The Technological System.* Trans. Joachim Neugroschel. New York: Continuum, 1980.

_ _ _ . *What I Believe.* Trans. Jeffrey W. Bromily. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989.

Fasching, Darrell J. "Mass Media, Ethical Paradox, and Democratic Freedom: Jacques Ellul's Ethic of the Word." *Research in Philosophy and Technology* 11 (1991): 77-103.

Foucault, Michel. "What is an Author?" Literary Criticism and Theory: The Greeks to the Present. Eds. Robert Con Davis and Laurie Finke. New York: London, 1989. 720-732.

Gill, David W. *The Word of God in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul.* Metuchen, NJ: The American Theological Library Association and The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1984.

Hanks, Joyce Main. *Jacques Ellul:* A *Comprehensive Bibliography.* Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1984.

Hirsch, E.D., Jr. *Validity in Interpretation.* New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1967.

Ivie, Robert L. "What's at Stake for Public Discourse?" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81 (1995): 266.

Jay, Martin. *Downcast Eyes: the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-century French Thought.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1993.

Jenkins, Bill. "Walker Percy and Jacques Ellul: Technique and the Humiliated Word." *University of Dayton Review* 22.2 (1993-4): 89-99.

Leff, Michael C. and Andrew Sachs. "Words Most Like Things: Iconicity and the Rhetorical Text." *The Western Journal of Speech Communication,* 54 (1990): 252-273.

Lovekin, David. *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul.* Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh U P, 1991.

McGee, Michael Calvin. "Another Philippic: Notes on the Ideological Turn in Criticism." *Central States Speech Journal,* 35 (1984): 43-50.

___ . "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture." *The Western Journal of Speech Communnication,* 44 (1980): 274-289.

Wander, Philip. "The Ideological Turn in Modem Criticism." *Central States Speech Journal,* 34 (1983): 1-18.

Wennemann, Daryl J. "Desacralization and tire Disenchantment of the World." *Philosophy and Theology,* Spring (1991): 237-249.

Wichelns, Herbert A. "The Literacy Criticism of Oratory." *Studies in Rhetoric and Public Speaking in Honor of James Albert Winans.* New York: Russell & Russell, 1962. 181-216.

Book Reviews

Technology as Magic: The Triumph of the Irrational by Richard Stivers

New York: Continuum, 1999

Richard Stivers provides insights into the practices of magic in the context of technology and its social and psychological consequences. Connecting technology and magic, two disparate phenomena that on the surface seem totally unrelated, makes for a refreshing intellectual journey.

With Ellul's *Technological Society* as his primary inspiration, he constructs a paradigm that juxtaposes the human experience grounded in spiritual ritual with modem and postmodern promises of social, managerial and political efficiency. The result, Stivers fears, is a world falsely enlightened through magical slights of hand with the purpose of adjusting humans, "to a technological civilization, to bring them in line with technical progress" (p. 8).

Illustrating that Ellul's seminal ideas still resonate with twenty-first century problems, Stivers argues in his introductory chapter that today's managerial techniques have social and psychological consequences that result in efficient ordering of our world, an order that for the most part is almost invisible to the unwary observer. Examples include corporate models that are designed to beguile and herd employees with scientific and humanistic management techniques inspired by administrative magic. Citing best-selling authors Robert Greenleaf and Peter Drucker, he suggests that scientific, statistically measurable techniques are, "actually a means of manipulating employees into being servants to their managers . . . Psychological techniques such as these, I argue, are forms of magic" (pp. 10-11).

Stivers does more than simply expose the problems. He provides counterpoints and countervailing arguments. He suggests that human activity that is truly qualitative cannot be measured and predicted. He cites Henry Mintzberg, who goes against prevailing management technique by advising that the most valuable kind of information in organizations is intuitive and holistic, informal and nonstatistical.

By narrowing the term magic to mean "an attempt to influence, predict and control the future" through symbolic means, Stivers does a convincing job of connecting magic with science and technology. Symbolic words and actions of magic "work according to the principles of persuasion, retribution and causality" (p. 42). They provide an "indirect or symbolic link between information and outcome." Here is where Stivers

invokes Ellul's theory of the three milieus: nature, society, and technology. The nature of the magic you practice changes with the milieu you live in, because magic deals with the most powerful force in your milieu. The most powerful force is different in each of the three milieus. In our technological milieu, our magic acquires the image and aura of technology, but the function and effectiveness of a placebo.

The most powerful of magics in our technological milieu is the mass media. In terms of emphasis, Stivers gives more than double the coverage to his advertising critique compared with public relations. He might have given the invisible magic of public relations a more critical examination. Although he addresses its power and influence, he fails to recognize that public relations may be more influential than advertising. Audiences tend to be more skeptical of advertising and they always know its source. In contrast, people readily accept public relations messages as more credible. Indeed, compared to advertising, public relations should have been characterized as the more magical slight of hand because consumers believe most of their daily news is coming from the media rather than from a company or institution.

Stivers makes a convincing argument that advertising symbolically links consumption to happiness. Not only does advertising sell technological products; it promotes the notion of comodification of all things human. It creates a magical Disney-like kingdom of happiness framed in the milieu of consumption. "Advertising's magic is the visualization of the commodity for spiritual consumption. In the process, human beings become objectified as commodities, and as such are equal to their image. Ultimately, human image becomes more important than lived reality itself (p. 121). Stivers transfers this argument to the topic of celebrity as "crucial to advertising, celebrities are themselves first and foremost commodities" (p. 122). Citing Kierkegaard, Stivers questions the ethics of celebrity worship in advertising because it capitalizes on the deadly sin, envy: "envy is the negative unifying principle" in celebrity worship in advertising.

Television and other mass media are less important than advertising in Stivers' view. He proposes that television "programs are ads for advertisements" (p. 40). Television programs also sell the philosophy underlying the technological milieu by focusing on forms of power, sex, and violence.

Perhaps Stiver's most promising critique centers on the magic that emanates from the institutions of higher learning. He laments the humanities that were at one time a preparation for reflective participation as citizens and for intellectual labor. Our evolution into an industrial society is now infatuated with the magic of simulated images and the requirement for high-salary careers rather than soul satisfying intellectual labor or even manual labor. "The public, business, and parents demand technicians, and we give our customers what they want" (p. 208).

Many scholars would agree that the modem university is becoming almost completely technical and magical in its administration, teaching, research, and student services. "Our educational administrators are magicians par excellence as they recycle models and magical practices from the business world, including various assessment and accountability measures and planning exercises" (p. 208). The distressing conclu-

sion is that in our magical, technologically driven universities we give our students the impression that all knowledge can be quantified, precisely measured, and most importantly, reduced to logic and rationalism without the intellectual labor of critical examination.

A key point Stivers revisits throughout his text is that the technological society, with its drive for efficiency in all things, has corrupted language and eroded its symbolic, ritual value. In its place, magical techniques fill the symbolic vacuum by weakening language and they fill it in such a way as to reinforce the hegemony of the technological society, a society that Stivers urges us to resist in his admonitions throughout the book.

On the whole, Stivers does an excellent job of revitalizing the Ellulian premise that people must remain awake and alert to recognize that democracy is elusive, and that it is a human enterprise, not a technologically efficient machine run by untouchable political celebrities. He concludes with an admonition that the struggle is not against technology, but against a technological system of production and consumption. "Without magic, technology would have no fatal sway over us. It is here that the struggle for freedom must begin" (p. 212).

Reviewed by Dennis Martin, Department of Communications, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
　　*****

Technology and the Good Life?

Edited by Eric Higgs, Andrew Light, & David Strong Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000

Critics and theorists who take on the mantle of 'philosopher of technology' do so at the risk of having their best thoughts ignored, certainly within the larger field of philosophy. Editors of *Technology and the Good Life?* illustrate the point by describing a volume that the United Kingdom Royal Institute of Philosophy published on the theme of philosophy and technology. Despite the stated purpose to have respected philosophers address concerns about technology relevant to their work, "there is not one reference in any of the papers in the volume to any of the prominent members of the Society for Philosophy and Technology, and thus, we can assume, to any of the prominent philosophers who have considered themselves doing philosophy of technology" (p. 372). The impacts of contemporary technologies continue to emerge as "the most pressing issue of our age" (p. 2). Yet, those commentators who are specifically committed to forming "discriminating judgments" about the character of technological practices discover that the subfield they have created and advanced is placed "curiously on the sidelines" (p. 5) when visible and influential disciplinary discussions involve their subject matter.

An even more fundamental concern inspires the contributors to *Technology and the Good Life?.* This is the limited success that philosophy, or any other scholarly discipline,

has had in enlarging the current, constricted public discourse that surrounds technology. Albert Borgmann, whose seminal works in philosophy of technology are the subject of the collected essays in this volume, declares a "task for philosophy" that the editors endorse, "to engage the public more broadly in a reflective conversation about matters of great concern to all" (p. 20). The essays assembled here attempt to model for readers what such a reflective conversation about technology should look like as it attempts to address broad questions about human wellbeing. Extending beyond their own project, the editors envision that the eventual dialogue "must be much more widespread than a debate among a handful of academic specialists." This volume proves to be a fruitful start in this direction.

The goal of active public involvement is a difficult one to achieve. And the contributors' own reservations must be taken seriously about whether intellectual advances in the "discipline of philosophy" (p. 20) can be made more relevant to the public "task of philosophy," particularly as it may entail actively intervening in the apparently irresistible trajectory of technological developments within contemporary society and culture. Accordingly, the contributions brought together in this volume are characterized by a shared concern to clear an intellectual space where the limiting preoccupations of mainstream philosophical traditions can give way to more public forms of discourse. The project encompasses a rethinking of technology in its socio-cultural, economic, political, and ecological significance, as well as in its overall impacts on the spirit and ethos of our age. The scope and seriousness of this effort, which inspires the volume, deserves attention and appreciation.

The choice of Albert Borgmann's work as the thematic focus for the essays was both deliberate and fortuitous. A yearlong series of conferences, workshops, and seminars culminated in a 1995 gathering in Alberta, Canada devoted to the topic of "Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life," which is also the title of Borgmann's major treatise on technology. The fortuitous aspect is that the tenth anniversary of the appearance of Borgmann's book, published in 1984, coincided with the intensified interest in his subject matter that the sequence of programs and discussions occasioned among the relatively small, but dedicated, philosophy of technology community. The chapters of this volume began as presentations at the Alberta workshop and are brought together for publication under five major headings that provide a survey of the field along with appreciative and critical paths into Borgmann's work.

The first section, "Philosophy of Technology Today," summarizes a trajectory of work originating with Jacques Ellul, Martin Heidegger, and Lewis Mumford, continuing through the related and often derivative writings of Herbert Marcuse, Daniel Bell, Langdon Winner, Bernard Gendron, David Noble, Andrew Feenberg, Hans Jonas, and Don Hide, to arrive at Borgmann's "neo-Heideggerian" perspective in *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life,* (TCCL). Borgmann's work, and especially his theory and analysis of the "device paradigm," are viewed as a crystallization of major themes that have inspired this lineage of thinkers.

Considering the significant disciplinary barriers and public challenges confronting philosophy of technology, Borgmann's work takes on a two-fold relevance for the field. First, he provides an assessment of the philosophy of technology in specific relation to a central question that concerns all of philosophy, namely, the character and quality of the good life. Second, Borgmann frames his philosophical discussion in terms of "extratheoretical questions of practice" (p. 320) focused on "our bonds of engagement with things." Thus, Borgmann points the direction towards greater disciplinary rigor in linking technological themes with broad philosophical traditions. And, most promising from the standpoint of interest in the transformation of technological practices, his philosophy has the potential to "appeal to a very wide audience partly because it illuminates our shared, ordinary everyday life, such as with 14

things and devices, and partly because the issues it probes cut across the full range of the disciplines" (p. 7).

Paul Durbin, in his overview essay, directs attention back to the appearance of Ellul's *The Technological Society* (particularly the 1964 English translation), as a founding moment for philosophy of technology. Ellul provided seminal, systematic treatment at the level of theory of what had begun to worry philosophers and social commentators as practical and political concerns: "negative impacts of nuclear weapon systems, chemical production systems, the mass media and other (dis)information systems" (p. 38). In addition, *The Technological Society* took seriously the call for intellectuals not only to philosophize but also to intervene in the technological formation of a '"new milieu" for contemporary society by discovering means to '"live out our freedom in the deterministic technological world we have created for ourselves'" (p. 39). Reception of Ellul's work was conditioned, as Durbin remarks, by the fact that his was "[a]mong the first broadly philosophical works to say to those early philosophers of technology (myself included) that this might be a difficult struggle" (p. 38). Overlooking the *"dialectical* nature of Ellul's thinking" (p. 39), many were left asking "how can we act, given Ellul's pessimistic thinking?" Durbin leaves open the question of how one should respond to Ellul's position on "technicized society as an unmitigated disaster, inimical to human freedom" (p. 46). However, he supports the case for focusing attention on Borgmann by observing that while "an Ellulian school has persisted for twenty-five years, so far it has produced no other thinker of note" (p. 44). Might Borgmann be that next seminal thinker?

The chapters in part two and part three of the volume, "Evaluating Focal Things" and "Theory in the Service of Practice," explore various ways in which Borgmann's critique of the "device paradigm" and his advocacy of "focal things and focal practices" take up the challenge. The device paradigm is a sensitizing concept that highlights the technological "transformation of our material world" (p. 28) that has occurred since the advent of industrialization. Under the influence of this paradigm, engagement with "things" –which have "ties to nature, culture, the household setting, a network of social relations, mental and bodily engagement" (p. 29) - is replaced by the *"machinery ... of the device,"* which "makes available a particular commodity" in a manner that encour-

ages pervasive concern with *"mere means* and *mere ends."* The resulting technological dependencies entail the loss of a capacity to appreciate fully "that practices ... [can be] ... experienced as good in their own right and useful too."

The focal things and'practices that Borgmann wants to recover are cooking a meal; chopping wood for the hearth; fishing for trout; arts and crafts of producing painting and pots; long-distance running over a natural course; backpacking through wilderness; grooming, training, and riding a horse. Contributors take up these themes in chapters that consider the ideal of focal commitments in its broad contours and in specific manifestations.

The discussions often focus on philosophical concerns that could seem overly technical were it not for the authors' unifying determination to demonstrate how philosophical inquiry can enhance our capacities to evaluate and to make discriminating judgments about everyday tensions between the technological device and the focal thing and practice. For example, Lawrence Haworth's (pp. 55-69) explication of four different models for understanding how focal practices/things are counterposed to machinery/commodity ("parallelism model," "guarding model," "internal goods model," "synthetic model") proceeds to evaluate these models in relation to Studs Turkel's narratives of ordinary occupational lives. Haworth points out how people create layers of meaning for work as a focal practice, often striving "against the odds" (p. 67) that the imperative '"to earn a living'" can be transformed into a practice "worth doing provided only that it is done right."

Similarly, Gordon G. Brittan, Jr. directs his reflections on "the two great concepts of moral philosophy, excellence *(arete)* and happiness *(eudaimonia)"* (p. 75) towards consideration of such concrete examples as "the case of the rural doctor whose 'engagement' in the practice of medicine is threatened by the use of expert diagnostic systems [which] reduce her role to that of a mere go-between" (p. 85). In common with other contributors who blend theoretical with practical concerns in their essays - e.g., Larry Hickman on the Deweyan model of education (pp. 89-105); Carl Mitcham on how sacraments confer character in Buddhist and Christian traditions (pp. 126-148); Philip Fandozzi on the potential of films to critique devices and to celebrate focal practices (pp. 153-165); Paul Thompson on farming as a foundational, even "salvific" focal practice (pp. 166-181); Jesse Tatum on design as the possibility of choosing focal commitments (pp. 182-194); Eric Higgs on ecological restoration as an instance of such design (pp. 195-212) — Brittan concludes that Borgmann's work, by identifying the "special hallmarks of our freedom" as our engagement with focal things and practices, displays distinctive value for "reopening" consideration of the conditions of the good life in a "'devicive' world" (p. 87).

Part four, "Extensions and Controversies," views Borgmann's concepts and examples in the light of contemporary issues raised by feminist thought (Diane Michelfelder, pp. 219-233), postmodern critiques of the ideal of focal realism (Douglas Kellner, pp. 234-255), and cyborg 'mythology' with its celebration of irony and ambiguity (Mora Campbell, pp. 256-270). Chapters by Thomas Michael Power (pp. 271-293) and An-

drew Feenberg (pp. 294-315) help to distill the concerns expressed about Borgmann's work into questions about the underlying "fundamentalism" (Power) or "essentialism" (Feenberg) that Borgmann arguably evinces. Power focuses his commentary by means of a response to Thompson's earlier chapter on fanning. Arguing against an "economic fundamentalism" (p. 288) that valorizes what are seen as "'quintessential focal practices'" such as those that directly support human biological survival, Power argues for a more pluralistic conception of focal values. He emphasizes how "it is within that margin of safety where we are protected against imminent loss of life that our art, thought, play, love, and hope evolve into human cultures" (p. 289). Power acknowledges that here he stands on common ground with Borgmann who advocates "communal celebration built around focal things and practices" (p. 291). But he also raises the further question of how the determination should be made about what it means to commit oneself *appropriately* to focal things and practices. Citing Borgmann's dictum that "In a finite world, devotion to one thing will curb indulgence in another," Power urges a broader critical perspective on how social institutions "structure the choices so that only the truly heroic and saintly can afford to make the right choices" (p. 292). _ If our "moral failures" are aided and abetted by the economic and social institutions that provide context for actions, then we need to comprehend the processes at work and to challenge them politically so as not "to lash at ourselves and our neighbors as we sink into the cynicism and sullenness Borgmann rightly decries."

Andrew Feenberg carries critique of Borgmann further, arguing that "Borgmann's conclusions are too hastily drawn and simply ignore the role of social contextualizations in the appropriation of technology" (p. 301). Among the examples Feenberg cites is the "Prodigy Medical Support Bulletin Board devoted to ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis or Lou Gehrig's disease)" (p. 302). Carrying discussion back into the deep thickets of philosophy of technology and the lineage of thinkers that the book began with, Feenberg questions how the Heideggerian position from which Borgmann's work derives would account for such contemporary instances where the technological medium "opens doors that might have remained closed in a face-to-face setting." Feenberg concludes that "[w]hen modem technical processes are brought into compliance with the requirements of nature or human health, they incorporate their contexts into their very structure, as truly as the jug, chalice, or bridge that Heidegger holds out as models of authenticity" (p. 313). On the basis of this claim, Feenberg envisions the possibility of technological support for "reskilled work, medical practices that respect the person, architectural and urban designs that create humane living spaces, computer designs that mediate new social forms." Feenberg concludes with a note of skepticism about whether Borgmann's philosophy is adequate in itself to point the way "from essentialism to constructivism," which is the path that Feenberg believes we must follow towards "general reconstruction of modem technology so that it gathers a world to itself rather than reducing its natural, human, and social environment to mere resources."

Borgmann has the opportunity to respond to Feenberg and other contributors in a Postcript, which includes the editors' "Afterword" (pp. 371-374) and Borgmann's "Reply to My Critics" (pp. 341-370). This valuable chapter provides the opportunity for Borgmann to summarize the prospects for reform he envisions in "The Completion of the Philosophy of Technology." Borgmann argues that the rise of technology's promise "is not the transhistorical cause of technology but its first epiphany" (p. 347). Accordingly, technology's mature 'epiphany' must embody a "new cosmology" (p. 369). Conceiving the future as a new Atlantis, Borgmann figures "focal things as islands, once the high country of an ancient continent and still anchored and connected with one another beneath the surface of technology." Will we be able to raise this lost world and make it new again? Will our steps be steady as we travel its terrains with reformed technologies rescued from being mere devices?

It may be too much to expect of a philosophy of technology that it should provide answers to such questions. Nevertheless, the reflections that Borgmann's work has inspired in *Technology and the Good Life?* represent a valuable initial mapping of the world of meaning that Borgmann believes we should conscientiously seek, obscured beneath the depths of our technological involvements.

Reviewed by Wayne Woodward, College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters, University of Michigan-Dearborn.

Issue #28 Jan 2002 — September 11, 2001

- Click to view the original PDF

In This Issue

From the Editor

Joyce Hanks contacted me in October about an article she was working on from Daniel Cerezuelle about the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington, D.C. Meanwhile, I had read Dan Clendenin's piece, and Andrew Goddard's in *The Third Way.* This issue came together at that moment. The other Contributing Editors of *The Ellul Forum* were contacted, and Patrick Chestenet, Darrell Fasching, and David Gill sent me their reflections shortly thereafter. Several essays recommended for republication by our proactive Board could not be included for lack of space.

Ellul understood the history of ideas and examined with exceptional care the history of socio-political institutions. But he was also an astute observer of ongoing events, one of the keenest inquisitors the 20th centuiy West ever knew. Reflection on the tragic events of September 11 and their aftermath

86

is vintage Ellul. The technological order, violence, political institutions, religions—all of them served as Ellul's frame of reference, and they are vantage points for our Editorial Board members as well.

Patrick Troude-Chestenet's carefully wrought essay was not translated for this issue. Since *The Ellul Forum's* inaugural in 1988, we have consistently translated all contributions into English. But with an expanded issue, and for the sake of precision, the original French is included this time. *The Ellul Forum* is now a unit of the International Jacques Ellul Society, the sister-society of the French-language Association Internationale Jacques Ellul. This two-language number pays tribute to Ellul's bi-lingual legacy.

About The Ellul Forum

History & Purpose

The Ellul Forum has been published twice per year since August of 1988. Our goal is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to aspects of our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

While *The Ellul Forum* does review and discuss Jacques Ellul, whom we consider one of the most insightful intellectuals of our era, it is not our intention to treat his writings as a body of sacred literature to be endlessly dissected. The appropriate tribute to his work is to cany forward its spirit and agenda for the critical analysis of our technical civilization. Ellul invites and provokes us to think new thoughts and enact new ideas. To that end we invite you to join the conversation in *The Ellul Forum.*

The Ellul Forum is an English-language publication but we are cunently exploring ways of linking more fully with our francophone colleagues.

Manuscript Submissions

Send original manuscripts (essays, responses to essays in earlier issues) to:
Clifford Christians, Editor, *The Ellul Forum*
Institute of Communications Research
University of Illinois
810 S. Wright Street, Suite 228
Urbana, IL 61801 USA
Please send both hard copy and computer disc versions, indicating the software and operating system used (e.g., Microsoft Word for Windows 98). Type end notes as text (do not embed in the software footnote/endnote part of your program).
Essays should not exceed twenty pages, double-spaced, in length.

Manuscript submissions will only be returned if you enclose a self-addressed, adequately postaged envelope with your submission.

The Ellul Forum also welcomes suggestions of themes for future issues.

Books & Reviews

Books. The Ellul Forum considers for review books (1) about Jacques Ellul, (2) significantly interacting with or dependent on Ellul's thought, or (3) exploring the range of sociological and theological issues at the heart of Ellul's work. We can not guarantee that every book submitted will actually be reviewed in *The Ellul Forum* nor are we able to return books so Submitted.

Book Reviews. If you would like to review books for *The Ellul Forum,* please submit your vita/resume and a description of your reviewing interests.

Send all books, book reviews, and related correspondence to:

David W. Gill, Associate Editor, *The Ellul Forum*
363-62nd Street
Oakland, CA 94618

Subscriptions

A subscription to *The Ellul Forum* is included in the annual membership fee for the International Jacques Ellul Society. To become a member (and receive *The Ellul Forum)* send a check payable to "UES" in the amount of $20 (U.S.). Checks or money orders must be drawn in U.S. funds. Send check with your name and complete address to

UES
P.O. Box 1033
Berkeley CA 94701 USA

Back Issues

Back issues of *The Ellul Forum* are available for $5.00 each, postage included. Send your requests, with your complete mailing address and a check or money order drawn in U.S. funds for the correct amount, to

UES
P.O. Box 1033
Berkeley C A 94701 USA

On September 11th

by Daniel Cereguelle

I was deeply shocked on Tuesday Sept. 11th , when I heard about the attacks against the World Trade Center. Of course what makes this tragedy more atrocious than an «ordinary» technological disaster is that it has occurred because some people have decided that it should happen, have summoned all their skills and their spiritual strength to destroy as many civilian lives as they could! But the political dimension is just one aspect of this tragedy. There are other dimensions which should not be neglected.

The ordinary causes of exceptional disasters: What Americans and all of us who live in a modem technological environment are reminded of through this tragedy is that the possibility of deadly events of this magnitude is an intrinsic component of the world which we have created. The 1995 Oklahoma City blast is the sign that a technological society provides imaginative, determined and flawed minds with an unlimited supply of powerful destructive devices. As the French philosopher Jean Brun wrote " *it is in the essence of the tool that sooner or later it can be turned into a - weapon".* There is no way we can prevent powerful tools used in daily life such as planes, fertilizers, or computers from being turned into powerful weapons.

The World Trade Center attack is a reminder that we live in a technological environment which, independently of evil doings, is by itself a source of danger. Great causes have great effects. Buildings of the size of the World Trade Center are a potential disaster. Their height and bulk result in a huge accumulation of potential energy which is hidden by the counteraction of equally huge bracing forces which impose a static balance to the structure. The dreamy appearance of these buildings makes us forget that at any time those forces can be unleashed by some unexpected accident. The concentration of population which is the mercantile *raison d'etre* of such structures makes the human impact of such a collapse as gigantic as the forces which allow it. It is not impossible that a disaster of this type might occur because of some accident. One may answer that the occurrence of such an accident is so unlikely that we take a reasonable risk when we build skyscrapers or huge aircraft. But of course we say it is unlikely as long as we do not know how and why it will happen.

A culture of denial: A long time ago, at the beginning of the industrial civilization, the American poet Edgar Allan Poe in his grotesque tale *The angel of the odd,* published in 1844, pleasantly warned us against the metaphysical flaw of our current way of assessing risks: when the probability of occurrence of a dangerous event is low, we believe that we can reasonably neglect this risk, whatever the magnitude of the consequences might be; we are prone to forget that an odd concatenation of seemingly unlikely events remains always possible, as is exemplified by the recent *Concorde* accident. Poe knew that we modems have such a strong reluctance to acknowledge and take into account the potentially unpleasant consequences of our technological endeavours that only some kind of angel can compel us to do so. History tells that we are often ready to accept huge losses of human lives, provided we do not know in advance which individuals will die; and when we claim afterward that we have been taken by surprise we should not be believed since as social beings we are ready to accept mass killing. We should not forget that today our technological prowess currently results

89

in technological disasters of a much bigger size than the attack on the World Trade Center: the American transportation system kills almost 50,000 people every year and medical technology around 70,000; but these risks have become socially acceptable because they have grown slowly and their huge impact is spatially dispersed so we cannot see the heap of corpses. Nevertheless, in term of risk assessment, compared to driving or going to the hospital, terrorism is still peanuts. Of course this may change since it is difficult not to think that the next step could be nuclear or biological terrorism which might be easier to organize and as difficult to detect and prevent.

The grapes of growth: Terrorism is not an external and unlikely phenomenon which can be eradicated by an appropriate policy; it is -and has been-a normal feature of the modem world. Fascination for destraction and self-destruction has always been an essential component of the human psyche. History provides us with countless examples of individuals as well as entire societies seized by morbid frenzies resulting in mass slaughter or suicide. Education or, more generally, civilization which provides ethical codes and traditional behaviour-patterns reinforced by strong symbolic overtones is a fragile attempt at limiting the power and the seductiveness of this death instinct. Unfortunately what we today call *development* creates not only ecological and technological risk, but also cultural disorganization which is an underestimated factor of risk in our technological world. All over the world rapid technological and economical change has resulted in the large scale disruption of communities, of ways of life. The process of destraction-creation which is essential for a dynamic economy results also in the disruption of the symbolic patterns which organize life and provide a barrier to our violent compulsions. Exposure to the unprecedented power of modem technology not only creates frustration and resentment but also has a dramatic counterpart m the downgrading of spiritual traditions and of established symbolic ethical models. The history of the twentieth century tells abundantly how this predicament has nurtured all sorts of individual and collective neuroses, loss of meaning, perversion of values and of spiritual traditions. Development is a humus on which -among many other venomous flowers-terrorism seems to prosper. The generous but naive ideas of the Enlightenment enticed us into believing that the diffusion of science and technology is a buttress against fanaticism and jingoism; but since Fedor Dostoevski and Joseph Conrad we should know better. As a matter of fact many of the modem terrorists have training in science and technology; significantly they have not been recruited in traditional communities but in modem universities; these *heimatloss,* dreaming of a fantastic fatherland, are typically modem. Not only is it an illusion to believe that rapid economic and technological change will result in peaceful universal brotherhood and democracy but, on the contrary, we can be certain that it will result in various sorts of dangerous social and political pathologies.

A bad example: The evil projects of modem terrorists do not stem from some unique wickedness; they are an expression of the modem predicament and of modem culture. We should not forget that everything terrorists do or plan doing to hasten the coming of their own version of the Kingdom of Justice has been already publicly

planned, done and justified during the twentieth century by our so-called rational Nation-States. What is embarrassing is that we have given them the example of what can be done and the tools to do it. During World War I France and Germany gave the world a lesson in mass killing of human beings with gasses. The possibilities of biological warfare were first explored in western (including American) military laboratories and some of the best places where terrorists can go shopping for anthrax and other biological niceties are the military warehouses of "civilized" countries. During World War II, in the name of civilization, the English and the Americans carried out mass bombing of civilians in Dresden, Hamburg and Hiroshima on a much greater scale than the blitz of nazi Germany. Finally, accepting the idea that *everything* should be done to defend a country, western societies, disregarding the teaching that no dominion is eternal on Earth, have built enough atomic bombs to destroy human life on Earth; by so doing Christian nations of the West have in practice turned the Nation-State into an absolute to which all mankind may be sacrificed. But once a State has authorized itself to do so in the name of national sovereignty, it thereby implicitly grants all the other States permission to do the same; why would anyone convinced of the sanctity of his mission resist the temptation of using such means if he could?

The price of development: Our belief that thanks to "progress" we could enjoy not only an abundance of commodities and services at a low price but also peace and democracy is dangerously short sighted. Focusing on technological and economic assets we forget too easily that development is a multidimensional process with far-reaching societal consequences. Rapid techno-economic development creates both technological vulnerabilities and scarcity of some essential cultural resources such as symbolic ethical patterns and vigorous traditions. For a long time we have ignored these indirect costs of development. But when the two distinct trends towards technological vulnerability and depletion of strong symbolic guidelines, which characterize the modem world, finally intersect, then the world may become a dangerous place to live in. Limiting the dangerousness of our predicament will be very difficult. So far cultural creation cannot be engineered: the establishment of strong symbolic ethical guidelines is a slower process than their destruction by an ever-changing technological and economical environment; at any rate it is difficult to conceive how such a cultural creation could be achieved without a serious slowing-down of techno-economic development and, obviously, we are not ready for that. Another path to security, more akin to the modem mind, consists of enhancing social control to the same level as we have developed technological power. As Bernard Charbonneau used to say: *The greater our power grows, the stricter order must be.* Today our techniques of social control are lagging far behind the destructive potential of our technologies; in order to obtain security we may devote our energy to overcoming this discrepancy between power and control. But this again is a risky path: not only is it far from certain that this huge task can be achieved at all, but it is likely that it could be achieved only at the expense of individual freedom, as Aldous Huxley warned us in 1921.

The pursuit of development will not be the cure to insecurity; it is part of the problem.

* * * * *

September 11th, 2001: On Violence, Divine and Human

by Darrell J. Fasching

On September 11th, like Americans everywhere, I sat stunned watching again and again as those two planes crashed into the World Trade Center. There was no escaping those images. Every time I changed the channel, seeking relief, the images would reappear. And as I watched the ball of fire repeatedly explode from those towers I could feel the wave of hatred that motivated these acts sweep over America. Thousands tragically died that day, but all Americans knew they were equally desirable targets, although not all were equally accessible. Never in my life had I experienced so unambiguously the reality of being hated by people I didn't know and hadn't ever met.

On the day the bombing of Afghanistan began, a tape of Osama bin Laden was broadcast explaining to us our situation. "These events have split the whole world into two camps: the camp of belief and the camp of disbelief. There is only one God, and I declare that there is no prophet but Muhammad." Bin Laden and the al Qaida, according to a discovered terrorist manual, are clear about the goal: "overthrow of the godless regimes and their replacement with an Islamic regime." This goal, says bin Laden, authorizes Muslims to kill Americans and all unbelievers. The killing of even innocent women and children is not only permitted but religiously required.

At firstbin Laden explained his actions as a response to the religious offense of American soldiers, whose very presence in Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War, profaned the land that harbors the most sacred places of Islam. In bin Laden's eyes, it seems, it was the most flagrant sign of the pollution of the sacred world of Islam by the secularity of modem Western civilization. As the conflict escalated, bin Laden widened the scope of his enemies list to embrace all nations who participate in the United Nations including "those who pretend they are leaders of the Arab world and remain members of the U.N." - an organization that divided Palestine in 1947 and "gave the Muslim country to the Jews."

The power of the sacred, Ellul would have reminded us, when left unchecked, always divides the world into two camps, one sacred and the other profane. Such a sacral vision offers war as a ritual of purification by which to cleanse the world of everyone and everything profane.

Nevertheless, if we wish to call into question such sacral interpretations of Islam we had better be prepared to call into question certain sacral interpretations of Christianity as well. We have heard bin Laden's style of dualistic rhetoric before. It has infected

significant strands, not only of Islam but of Christianity and of Western civilization. "Two world's face one another" said Hitler in *Mein Kampf,* "the men of god and the men of Satan! The Jew is the anti-man, the creature of another god... Today I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator: by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord." Hitler took his inspiration from many sources, including Martin Luther: "Know Christian that next to the devil, thou hast no enemy more cruel, more venomous and violent than a true Jew." And the well from which Luther drew goes deep into the past - all the way back to the anti-Judaism of the Gospel of John (Chapter 8) where Jesus is portrayed as saying to "the Jews": "Do you know why you cannot take in what I say? It is because you are unable to understand my language. The devil is your father, and you prefer to do what your father wants. He was a murder from the start... . he is a liar, and the father of lies ... If you refuse to listen it is because you are not God's children."

We can no longer afford to indulge in the apocalyptic rhetoric of the cataclysmic struggle between good and evil that infects these sacral visions and permits the "cleansing" of the earth through the "removal" of all who are profane and therefore portrayed as "less than human" or worse "demonic." The sickness that infects important strands of the biblical religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) is in great part rooted in a vision of God's "final solution" to the problem of evil as an act of cosmic violence that separates believers from unbelievers, in order to give the world over to the former. As the history of Christian anti-Judaism and the role it played in the Holocaust well illustrates, it is not an unimaginable leap from "the Jews are not worthy of eternal life" to "the Jews are not worthy of life." This is the kind of leap bin Laden, it seems, has been able to make with regard to both Christians and Jews, from within his Islamic apocalyptic world view.

Jacques Ellul taught us that we are not inevitably locked into a sacral reading of the scriptures, not even of *The Apocalypse* or *Book of Revelation.* Ellul embraced what he called the biblical tradition of the holy that comes to expression in hospitality to the stranger and rightly rejected the interpretation that the final solution to evil offered by the Book of Revelation is through God's violence. He looks instead to the suffering Christ and Christ's teachings on love of one's enemies as the central message and finds in the Book of Revelation, the message of salvation for the whole human race.

The command to welcome the stranger is not only the most often repeated commandment in the Torah it is also the core of Jesus message of non-violence in the Sermon on the Mount, where we are asked to love our enemies and do good to those that persecute us. In the biblical tradition, to welcome the stranger is to welcome either God, the Messiah or an angel (messenger) of God. And to reject the stranger is to turn one's back on God.

How are we to respond to Islamic terrorists after September 11th? I am not suggesting that returning love for hate in any direct way would have any influence on bin Laden and the members of al Qaida. However, I do believe that in the long term only hospitality and compassion can solve the terrorist problem. Two days after the

destruction of the World Trade Center the New York Times took a poll that showed that 85% of those surveyed said we should respond with military violence. Of these 75% said, even if innocent civilians are killed, and of these 85% said even if thousands of innocent civilians are killed. At that moment, Americans showed that they too are willing to become terrorists.

Fortunately, indiscriminate bombing in Afghanistan has not been our policy so far. While it may be possible to win the battle against Osama bin Laden and al Qaida by violence, it is quite possible that we could win that battle and yet lose the war against terrorism. Our response to September 11th must not be that revealed in the New York Times poll. To retreat into insular patriotism and see the world as "us against them" is to play into the apocalyptic vision of Osama bin Laden who wants to divide the whole world into two camps as a precursor to an apocalyptic struggle to cleanse the world.

We do not need to give the fire of hatred that spewed forth from the World Trade Center the power to divide us - whether along, religious or nationalistic/political lines. That fire of hatred is best answered with the living flame of love and compassion. Two things happened to Americans after September 11th .that offer us this option - an option that undermines the violence of the sacred and embraces the hospitality of the tradition of the holy. (1) For the first time in the experience of many Americans we knew personally and viscerally what it was like to be the object of hatred and prejudice by people who only know us through stereotypes. Many minorities in this country know what it is like to be viewed in that way but most middle and upper class white Americans do not - or rather, did not before September 11th. (2) For perhaps the first time in our history, all Americans were perceived as victims and received unprecedented expressions of compassion from countries and their citizens around the world. Far from dividing us, one from another, September 11th demonstrated that compassion for victims can transcend international political and religious boundaries.

Knowing what it is like to be the victim of hatred and prejudice and what it is like to receive compassion should awaken in us a compassion for victims everywhere in the world. No longer can we distance ourselves from the suffering found in the world. September 11th should move us to engage in those personal, community and public actions and policies that will build an international wall of compassion to circle the world and turn back the wall of hatred and violence that washed over the world on September 11th. Only such a wall of compassion can choke out the fires of hatred that motivated the terrorist acts of September 11* , rendering their stereotypes implausible. Before September 11th the Bush administration was pursuing an arrogant international policy of unilateralism (in ecological policy, missile defense, etc) Now such policies should seem to us unthinkable. Now we should know and act on the truth, that *we are members of one another.* Now we should turn our back on the god of violent "final solutions" and embrace the stranger. There is no other way either to God or to peace except through hospitality to the stranger.

The Dysfunctions of a Global Technological Era

by David W. Gill

Jacques Ellul's writings provide not one but several perspectives from which to view critically the horrors of September 11. Most immediately, perhaps, one thinks of Ellul's discussion of violence and counter-violence. What will be the result of relying on overwhelming force to suppress Al Qaeda? Could American Christians with any legitimacy claim God's support for their military actions against their Muslim enemies? Is it possible to break the cycle of violence? What would it take? Ellul's answers to such questions would not be likely to please large numbers of people.

Ellul's thinking about religion is also pertinent. He was very critical of various aspects of the Muslim tradition (cf. *Subversion of Christianity,* 1984; Eng. trans.1986; ch. 5 "The Influence of Islam") including its legalism, repression of women, and its support for slavery, colonization, and holy war. One wonders where Muslims and non-Muslims could possibly find common ground for peaceful co-existence after reading Ellul (and his longer book-length study of Islam was never published because the French publishers thought it politically too hot to handle!).

But it should not be thought that the critique of Islam ends the discussion of religion for Ellul. He was tougher still on Christians for selling out their unique witness for an unholy political/cultural/economic replacement faith that in practice worships money, power, and technology. The outrage that many Muslims feel toward the West and America is most emphatically not due to the "offense of the Gospel" or the "scandal of the cross" as the New Testament puts it. It is not the suffering, redemptive love of the cross but the blustering, arrogant greed of corporate and cultural imperialists that has won the west and now is a stench in much of the world's nostrils.

Ellul's views of revolution, revolt, and social change would also provide interesting lenses through which to view the rise and character of Muslim Fundamentalist movements like the Taliban and the Iranian leadership. Are these mere revolts in protest of a juggernaut technological development? Or do they have genuine revolutionaiy potential?

Nevertheless, what interests me most in thinking about Ellul and 9/11 is his description of the irresistible "universalism" of Technique (cf. *Technological Society,* 1954; Eng. trans.1964; pp. 116-133). In our contemporary terminology, globalization is inevitable: all parts of the globe will be conquered by technology and technological rationality. In all parts of the globe, distinctive, traditional values, habits, and techniques will yield to a common technological platform.

Wherever technology invades, it conquers and replaces old cultures. Ellul argues that religion is receding before technology. Buddhism and Hinduism are collapsing. He does not mention Islam or Christianity but he clearly intends us to think that they too must yield to technological development.

September 11 demonstrates this triumphant universalism of technology in several ways. It is globalized technology that has invaded Afghan societies, arming them to

fight against the Soviet Union in the 80s. It is global technology that brings an increasingly homogeneous and aggravating media diet into homes and neighborhoods around the globe. It is global technology that enabled the organization of Al Qaeda and it was advanced technology that was used to bring down the World Trade Center. Our lives are thoroughly interwoven by technology. And, of course, the anti-terrorist response is also carried out on the most advanced global technological platform. The whole experience will knit us more tightly together technologically than ever. Commerce and war were the great drivers of technological universalism in the past, Ellul argued. Looks like little has changed there.

But we must come back to Islam. For it appears that Islam is not so easily disposed of or coopted by technological society. Ellul criticized technological society as being ultimately meaningless and dehumanizing, and so it is. But isn't this why Islam has such an appeal? It is a powerful counter-narrative of history and meaning.

Can a fundamentalist Muslim civilization stand up to and overcome technological civilization? I doubt it. But I also doubt that it will take "No" for an answer from the global technological society. A succession of progressively more destructive "revolts" and rebellions (in effect "suicide bombings") is probably in our future, more so after the bombing of Afghanistan than before, because of the inexorable laws of violence.

Unless! In the face of what looked like technological determinism, Ellul was steadfastly a man of hope throughout his life. He believed in a Wholly Other" God breaking into human history in surprising ways. He believed that individuals and small communities could have tremendous long-term impact if they stopped trying to manipulate and calculate such impact and instead gathered intransigently and wholeheartedly around truth and then lived out that truth in the midst of the world's reality.

Something Still Stands

by Andrew Goddard

The terrorist attacks on New York and Washington DC released a welter of emotions, from horror to grief to rage. But is there an authentic Christian response?

For those first few hours on the 11th September, as live pictures streamed into our homes and offices, silence seemed the only proper response. So many powerfill feelings were stirred up - horror, incredulity, shock, anger, grief, fear, pain, vulnerability - words failed us. Even now, after the explosions have been endlessly replayed, we struggle to find language, for each of us personally, for our society, for our world, that enables us to make some sense in the face of such non-sense. That enables us to think and act and live aright in response to great evil.

Christians, too, must find a language with which to speak. If we are to do that our vocabulary must express a perspective shaped by God's revelation in Jesus and in scripture. We must beware of just using the same words everyone else is using.

Unless we are discerning and critical, we run the risk of repeating what is, in effect, propaganda, hiding the truth rather than speaking it in love.

As we continue to mourn with those who mourn, almost everyone, whatever their nationality or religion, concurs with two basic truths: first, that the acts of the hijackers and of the men who directed and financed them were wholly wicked, and must be totally and unreservedly condemned. In cold blood to murder thousands of human beings, and terrorise millions! No suffering, however cruel, no end, however just, could ever legitimate such acts of violence by anyone.

Second, we must also speak of signs of grace and hope - the courage and self-sacrifice of thousands in response to such horror, the countless acts of human love in the face of such unspeakable human evil.

But here we are on the brink of falling into the first trap. We have divided those involved in this affair into those who have done great evil and those who have done good - and those who have done evil this time are those who are most different from us, while those who have done good are those who are most like us.

Two days after the attack, the headline in the *Times* read: 'Good will prevail over evil.' That as it stands is a vital message of hope with which all who believe in a God who raised the crucified Jesus from the dead must agree.

We may then think that we will prevail. But we must never identify any nation, or any political or economic system, with 'good' and with the work of God in the world. Nor can we subscribe to the view that good achieves its victory over evil through military and economic might.

In the immediate aftermath, other words fell easily from many lips. The language that was used was revealing, and needs to be examined. The attack, we were told, was not only evil but 'cowardly.' But why is it cowardly to be so devoted to one's goal (however wicked) that one is willing to die to achieve it? Is it not more cowardly to wage war by dropping bombs from miles up in the sky, secure from enemy fire, or by firing cruise missiles from a safe distance?

Again, we have been told repeatedly that this was an attack upon 'civilisation.' But this is at best only half true. Inasmuch as the Pentagon has developed weapons of mass destruction and given funding and training to both military regimes and violent insurgents, it is hardly a symbol of civilisation.

Perhaps more than anything else in the immediate aftermath we heard the opinion expressed that 'the world will never be the same again.' And yet the scale (at least) of this horror is sadly not unparalleled. As I stood watching the live pictures, someone, struggling to find words, said: 'Surely no major city has ever seen anything as sudden and destructive as this?' To which the obvious response was one unsettling name: Hiroshima.

One does not need to go back to the war to appreciate that such a massacre is not unprecedented. What about the seven thousand Muslim men and boys murdered in the 'safe haven' of Srebrenica? Or as many Tutsis killed in a single church in Rwanda? What of the 'turkey shoot' of fleeing Iraqi forces - mostly conscripts - on the road to

Basra at the end of the Gulf War? Or even the slaughter of 1,800 Palestinians in the Sabra and Chatilia refugee camps?

So, why does what we have just lived through feel qualitatively different? In part, it is because the cameras were there and so we saw it happening. In part, because they were people like us, living like us, who were terrorised and killed. We all feel, 'It could have been me on one of those planes, in one of those offices.' And so it makes us feel vulnerable in a way those other, distant atrocities never could.

Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Wales, who was in Manhattan at the time, spoke of this experience of powerlessness and observed that it is a real and frighteningly regular experience for millions of people. We have, in our emotional response to this horror, been provided with an opportunity not for vengeance but for grace. We have glimpsed what it would really mean to identify with victims of war and terrorism and oppression around the globe. We have sensed what it would really mean to 'remember ... those who are being tortured as though [we ourselves] were being tortured' (Hebrews 13.3).

It is crucial that such feelings are not overwhelmed by the (understandable) popular reaction that talks of being unbowed, of getting back to normal and of inflicting punishment or seeking revenge. Perhaps the particular calling of Christians now is to find a distinct language that can express those feelings and assist reflection to shape a different response.

Scripture gives us various examples. The Book of Lamentations reminds us how Israel reacted to the destruction of Jerusalem, and offers a pattern of prayer and worship which is sadly missing from so much of our church life, but is essential in times like these.

Job, struck suddenly and devastatingly by enemies, 'arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshipped'. He did not deny his weakness, but acknowledged, ⊠Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord' (Job 1.201).

That peaceful attitude of humility and prayerful dependence not on one's own resilience but on God is also expressed in many of the psalms:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea...

'Be still, and know that I am God!

I am exalted among the nations,

I am exalted in the earth.' (Psalm 46. If & 10)

It is when we come to God in this frame of mind that we may begin to discern a deeper reason why this particular massacre seems so different - seems, indeed, to have changed the world. We are already aware that the strength of our reaction is not simply explained by how many were killed, and how suddenly and publicly. It is also because of where it took place. This was an assault not only on civilians but also on

the great symbols of the economic and military might of the world's one remaining superpower.

On the Sunday following the attack, the church I attended found its own alternative to the media's response in the words of a great hymn of trust in God, 'All my hope on God is founded.' Its second verse suddenly had new depths of meaning:

Pride of man and earthly glory,

Sword and crown betray his trust;

What with care and toil he buildeth,

Tower and temple, fall to dust.

But God's power,

Hour by hour,

Is my temple and my tower.

Even secular commentators, without recognising its significance, have compared the World Trade Center to the tower of Babel. That ancient skyscraper represented the zenith of human power and achievement and the urge to make a name for ourselves and dominate the world (Genesis 11.4). How many people, witnessing the 'apocalyptic' scenes that Tuesday afternoon, thought of the disturbing words of Revelation 18: 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!'?

There, in that chapter, may we not find another reason why this attack on the US mainland has been so shocking to so many?

'In her heart she says,

"I rule as a queen;

I am no widow,

and I will never see grief'...'

And the kings of the earth ... weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning; they ... stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say,

'Alas, alas, the great city,

Babylon, the mighty city!

For in one hour your judgment has come'

(Revelation 18.7b & 9f)

The Book of Revelation is notoriously difficult to interpret. Many have sought to read into it a literal timetable for future world politics, reducing its bold language of the imagination to a crude code for particular states and events. I do not think we should ever use God's word in that way. Nevertheless, the possible implications for our present situation of this difficult and much abused part of scripture are extensive and uncomfortable if we allow it to give us a glimpse behind the veil of human history.

Its graphic account of a sudden, devastating attack on a secure and confident economic and military power, and its traumatic global repercussions, bears powerfully on what we have just witnessed. It suggests that we can only really make sense of what has happened within the framework and through the language of a biblical theology of principalities and powers and the rise and fall of empires.

But, like the hymn, this passage calls us above all - as individuals, societies and nations - to examine ourselves and the way our pride and power represent a lack of trust in God that distorts and destroys human lives, and indeed the whole world.

Jesus' response to people's struggle to make sense of lives cut short by falling masonry and murderous intent is unsettling. His warning is simple: 'Unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did' - and he supplements this with a vivid story of a fruitless vineyard being given its last chance (Luke 13.1-9).

When we are confronted with our frailty and our powerlessness in the face of great evil, the temptation is to focus on what has attacked us. But scripture calls us instead to concentrate on God. The fundamental responses it seeks to elicit from us are those of lament, penitence for our own sin, humility, patient prayer and worshipful trust in God. The good news of the Book of Jonah is that when these, rather than retaliation and revenge, are our response, even the rebellious imperial spirit of a superpower (then, the Assyrians) can be truly vanquished, not by human violence but by divine grace.

But what of justice? Was this evil not an act of war that requires retribution? Christians find themselves unable to agree on a common language here. Some believe that the teaching and example of Jesus demand that we must always oppose all forms of violence. Others think there are circumstances in which a political authority can, and sometimes should, use coercive military power against others.

But even Christians who subscribe to this latter, just war' theory must be cautious about its application in the present situation. At its heart is the belief that the pursuit of justice God requires of political authorities (see, for example, Romans 13.1-7) cannot be limited solely to actions within the geographical boundaries of their jurisdiction or restricted to the normal juridical means of legal processes. In the fight against injustice and oppression in this world, such an authority may under certain conditions properly use what the apostle Paul called 'the sword' outside its own legislative realm.

There is absolutely no doubt that a monumental act of injustice and inhumanity has been perpetrated on US soil, against citizens of the United States and many other countries. It is therefore incumbent on all those with political and judicial power - particularly the US government - to seek to bring to account anyone who survives who planned this dreadful crime and to prevent any more such atrocities.

However, only actions whose aim is to secure that specific and limited end - and that have a reasonable prospect of achieving it - can ever be justified. Only actions that distinguish between the guilty and the innocent can ever be right. Only actions that are controlled and constrained by the goal of ensuring justice are legitimate. Such stringent conditions distinguish just war from terrorism.

In struggling to understand what had happened and the mentality of those involved, Jack Straw, the British Foreign Secretary, was quick to condemn the terrorists for being trapped in a psychosis in which their ends justified any means. It is frightening, and sadly ironic, that much of the subsequent discussion about how we are to respond has betrayed signs of exactly the same psychosis. How many voices have we heard saying that we must, or shall, 'do everything in our power'? We must insist that there may

be technically and politically possible means to secure a just end that ought never to be used because they are morally wrong.

In fact, describing the assault on Manhattan and Washington DC as an 'act of war' is highly debatable, on both technical and moral grounds. The language of war is best used for conflicts between political authorities that claim legitimacy as representative leaders of an identifiable political community. It may, therefore, be better to consider those attacks in terms of crime (though their ferocity and scale could justify speaking of a private war).

This crux of derinition draws attention to another fundamental, and frightening, problem we now face in seeking to enact justice. Since the perpetrators lack any public political function and any established political and military structure, it is very difficult to wage a just war against them. A real danger then arises that, in a reversal of George Bush's claim, war waged against terrorism ceases to be just, as it can itself now only take the form of terrorism. Some of the more belligerent responses that have been suggested would appear, under the cover of a justified war, to amount to a form of mass societal torture.

It is vital that, whether we are pacifists or committed to the 'just war' tradition, Christians should find a language that is truthful about our response to this evil and that discerns what is right and what is wrong. If we do not, we face the real and terrifying danger that the governments of the US and Britain and our allies, carried along by their own propaganda, will become like the terrorists they oppose, slaves to an unquestioning belief in their own ideology, and willing to use disproportionate and indiscriminate violence in their cause.

Does this Christian language leave us powerless in the face of such wickedness? In one sense, yes. Political rhetoric that promises that we will not rest until we have eradicated evil from our world represents a fundamentally godless politics which, because it no longer believes in the final judgment by God, thinks that such a judgment can and must somehow be enacted by us. But when we exert human power in the face of great evil we run the risk of allowing evil to triumph even more through our own actions, and thus finding ourselves under God's judgment.

Instead, the biblical response acknowledges that when we ourselves are powerless, evil is not victorious, because God is God and he will judge:

O Lord, you God of vengeance, you God of vengeance, shine forth!

Rise up, O judge of the earth...

O Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult? (Psalm 94. Iff)

We not only await God's future judgment of evil but look back to his past judgment of it in Jesus. Here is the event - a demonstration of the power and wisdom of God which is so momentous that we may truly say the world will never be the same again.

We have, quite rightly, heard much talk of our enemies; but Jesus called us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5.43f). His enemy-love, his turning the other cheek, led him to the cross - and there he reconciled us to each other and to God, and there he overcame the principalities and powers. He achieved this

by having his body broken and his blood poured out. He suffered the terrorism of the cross, sharing the fate of the zealots who sought to defeat Rome by violence - and it was, amazingly, in this way, while we were his enemies, that God showed his love for us.

And that past judgment is something in whose light we must now live in the Spirit of Jesus. It gives us an understanding of God, and of our own sinfulness in the face of great evil, that does not leave us powerless but, rather, grants us the wisdom to make sense of these difficult times, the language with which to speak and help others to speak, and the power to respond by living the truth in love.

As Paul urged us: 'Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good' (Romans 12.14-2 1).

First published in *Third Way October* 2001. www.thirdwav.org.uk/past ("articles"). Used with permission.

Bombs Bursting in Air

by Dan Clendenin

This week American and British bombs began raining down upon Afghanistan. Defense Secretaiy Rumsfeld has declared the skies are now clear for us to bomb 24 hours a day, although some jets now return to aircraft carriers with missiles intact due to a paucity of targets. No doubt the Presidents ratings will spike in the polls.

As a Christian who worships the Lord who loves all peoples and nations, this fills me with deep sadness. Terrorized by the Taliban, devastated by its war with the Soviet Union (I million deaths, 4 million refugees), Afghanistan, like many places in the world today,[1] is hardly a nation in the normal political sense of the term, What it is is an unqualified humanitarian catastrophe.

I am greatly inspired by the pacifist possibilities proposed by King and Ghandi, but it seems like non-violence as a national policy would allow evil to rule unchecked. So, I believe that some sort of military intervention is called for on our part, just as it was in the Second World War or, more recently, in Yugoslavia. In both of those cases wholesale genocide was taking place and military intervention helped to stop it. There

---

[1] See Robert Kaplan, *The Ends of the Earth* (New York: Random, 1996).

is an argument to make, too, that if we had intervened sooner and more forcibly in Europe and the former Yugoslavia, we might have saved even more lives, just as we might have in the Rwandan genocide where we did nothing at all.

Given the apparent necessity of a military response, I nevertheless have tried to identify in my own mind just what it is that disturbs me as a Christian about our war against terrorism. Three matters come to mind: the ambiguous consequences of violence; the inflated sense of national cause to make it almost contiguous with God's cause; and the restricted sense of justice to exclude our opponents' moral claims.

First, violence often begets more violence. I wonder whether the bombings will prevent future terrorist acts (which the Taliban have already promised) or actually provoke even more of them by radicalizing and inflaming the militant fringe, and drawing in even moderate Muslims. Only time will tell.

Further, although I recognize our military response as somehow necessary, I feet very uneasy about calling it morally good. To me the bombings are necessary, regrettable and morally ambiguous. What disturbs me the most is the rhetoric of religious nationalism that is invoked to narrate our cause, namely, the idea that God is on our side in a uniquely special way, that our cause is His cause. Senator John McCain put it this way: "They hate us because we are good and they are evil." Defining the kingdom of God in nationalistic terms, or one's national interests in divine terms, is nothing new. Compare these four examples.

Adolf Hitler stated his case this way. "I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator ... By defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord." His rival General Eisenhower used the language of jihad: "This war was a holy war; more than any other in history this war has been an array of the forces of evil against those of righteousness."[2] Now fast forward to the present crisis.

On October 7, 2001, after the United States and Britain launched its attacks on Afghanistan, the Arab television news network al Jazeera broadcast a speech by Osama bin Laden. We don't know exactly when this tape was made, and I have made some slight paraphrases to improve the awkward translation of bin Laden's speech.

America has now tasted only a small portion of the humility we have experienced for 80 years. . In Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan, and the like, no one complains when innocent children and civilians are killed. No guilt is attached to this. No one thinks of these as war crimes ... I say that these events have split the whole world into two camps: the camp of the believer and the camp of the infidel ... God has given America back what they deserve ... This is America, God has sent one of the attacks by God and has attacked one of its best buildings. And this is America filled with fear from the north to the south, and east to west, thank God.

Here, America is the great Satan.

---

[2] Cited by James Canoil, *Constantine's Sword* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), pp. 256-257,

George Bush likewise invoked divine sanction for our country's actions. In his September 20 speech to the joint session of Congress (viewed by 82 million people, according to Nielsen) he remarked:

Every nation, in every region, now has a decision. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists ... I will not forget this wound to our country, or those who inflicted it.

I will not yield. I will not rest... I will not relent in waging this struggle for the freedom and security of the American people ... The course of this conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them ... Fellow citizens, we will meet violence with patient justice assured of the rightness of our cause.

In this instance it is the militant Muslims who constitute an evil empire.

Let me be clear. To me there is no moral comparison between Hitler and the allies, or between terrorist values that turn jets into bombs and western liberal political values enshrined in the likes of the UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948). But all four people above invoke God for their cause and divide the world neatly into the evil infidel and the righteous believer. That makes me nervous. Flying the flag in a church or a mosque, as if to signify either figuratively or literally that the interests of the kingdom of God coincide with the interests of one's country, is a more benign example of the same phenomenon.

Thirdly, sometimes our sense of justice is truncated, tailored to serve our own narrow cause while myopically ignoring our enemy's moral claims. Having traveled in numerous countries of the two-thirds world, I must say that I get frustrated when Americans fail to appreciate why many people around the world "hate us."

I resonate with some of what bin Laden says about the political humiliation, economic exploitation, military domination, and overall "cultural colonialism" that nations like his feel. What about the the moral filth we export around the world for a handsome profit, from movies by Madonna and Schwarzenegger to MTV (which, as the world's largest television network, can now be viewed in 342 million households in 140 countries).[3] Does our sense of justice weep as much for the 100,000 Iraqis killed in the Gulf War (1991) as for the 148 allied casualties,[4] as much for the one million deaths in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) as for our 44 Americans slain in Mogadishu (1992)? Bin Laden's terrorist response is tragically flawed and will do his cause harm; but his analysis has at least some merit. From the vantage point of the world's disenfranchised, western triumphalism is not a pretty picture.

Bombs are not a quick fix and may, in fact, cause not only collateral damage but unintended consequences. The kingdom of God is something far different than a national

---

[3] Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World* (New York: Ballantine, 1995). See also Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (NY: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2000).

[4] These are the US government estimates; some human rights groups put the figures much higher.

cause. And a consistent sense of moral justice does not know any national boundaries. May God have mercy on our country; and on Afghanistan too.

Terrorisme international et communication politique dans les societes techniciennes

by Patrick Troude-Chastenet

"Je n'ai pas 1'habitude de faire des amalgames faciles, et je dis done en pesant exactement mes termes que les terroristes sont des nazis." Jacques Ellul, *Les combats de la liberte,* 1984

L'Histoire, la grande, nous dira peut-etre un jour si nous avons eu raison de faire commencer le XXIeme sidcle a la *date* du 11 septembre 2001. Quoiqu'il en soit, si 1'attaque terroriste, et surtout la riposte militaire, a donne lieu aux interpretations les plus contradictoires, personne n'a os6 contester 1'importance de cet evenement inouT, "radicalement nouveau" pour Claude Lanzmann, 6v6nement pur, "I'6v6nement absolu" selon la formule de Jean Baudrillard.

L'ampleur de ce drame ne doit pourtant pas nous empecher de consider le terrorisme modeme comme une forme particuliere de communication politique dont la significa- tion profonde est inseparable du caractdre technicien des socidtes contemporaries. Cet "hyperterrorisme" fonctionne i la fois comme indicateur de niveau de vulnerabilite des societes techniciennes et comme reveiateur de la fragilite intrinsdque des democraties pluralistes. Il a aussi pour effet de rappeler - par sa brutalite spectaculaire - que la force sinon la violence est toujours et partout le moyen specifique, 1'ultima ratio, de Faction politique.

La contestation armee de la pretention de l'etat modeme au monopole de la violence physique legitime, renouvelle partiellement le theme de-1'articulation de la politique et de la guerre. Enfin, si le terrorisme *"intrinsequement mauvais"* selon Jacques Ellul, n'est pas - en soi - une nouvelle forme de totalitarisme mais seulement une arme aux mains de differents groupes ou regimes totalitaires, les solutions employees pour le combattre posent a leur tour la classique question des moyens et des fins.

Sous cet angle, peut-on desormais tirer quelques lemons de la tragedie du 11 septem- bre 2001 en revenant d'abord sur le film de l'evenement tel que nous l'avons vecu, avant d'examiner ensuite ses consequences, e'est & dire la guerre multiforme qui s'en est suiv- ieet les questions, morales et politiques, qu'elle souldve des deux cotes de l'Atlantique?

I. L'evenement -1'Amerique attaquee au nom de la Justice

Que s'est il passe ce jour H? Si 1'on essaie de se reporter mentalement en arridre, comment avons nous - sur le moment - re?u et per$u cet evenement encore inedit?

1. Images du pouvoir et pouvoir des images

Au-dela de ce qui a ete immediatement presente comme une declaration de guerre *h* 1'Amerique et/ou au monde occidental, voire comme le debut de la premiere guerre du XXI° siecle, la premiere interrogation concemait le choix des cibles. Leur nature. Ce qui revenait a poser cette serie de questions eiementaires: qui a fait quoi, comment, et avec quels resultats?

Et 1'interrogation persistante sur 1'identite du ou des auteurs - la question du qui - a eu tendance a eclipser la question du quoi. La question du comment etant litteralement absorbee par 1'image - diffusee en boucle - des Boeing s'encastrant dans les tours.

Nous reviendrons sur la dimension symbolique des cibles mais il n'a echappe a personne que ce sont des lieux de pouvoir — des representations, des images du Pouvoir - qui ont ete vises. Pouvoir economique et financier: le World Trade Center. Pouvoir militaire: le Pentagone. Pouvoir politique: l'attentat avorte contre la Maison Blanche.

La dimension visuelle est essentielle dans le sens oil, de bout en bout, 1'affaire a pris Failure d'un spectacle - tragique certes - mais d'un spectacle, et qui plus est televise... en direct live.

Le 11 septembre a marque le retour en fanfare, du temps et de 1'image CNN[5]. Un retour, qui s'av^rera trds provisoire du reste, non pas de la chaine de Ted Turner en tant que telle mais d'un genre si critique, en France du moms, durant et au lendemain de la Guerre du Golfe (1991).

Diffusion universelie d'images provenant d'un emetteur unique, risque de manipulation et de censure, information sous influence, omnipresence des gdneraux et des experts sur les plateaux de television, etouffement de toute voix discordante...

Pendant quarante-huit heures environ des specialistes en aeronautique, en contre-espionnage et en terrorisme international se succederont sur les ecrans dormant & l'evenement des airs de deji vu, sans pour autant se montrer capables de se hisser a sa hauteur. Le soir meme, la question n'etait deja plus de savoir si, mais quand, les Americains riposteraient.

Par le truchement de la chaine d'information en continu CNN, allions nous revivre cette obscene spectacularisation de la guerre: le ciel de Bagdad illumine par des bombes aux allures de feux d'artifice, Ies raids aeriens filmds sous 1'angle d'innocents jeux video?

Mais revenons aux attentats. Qu'avons-nous vu ce 11 septembre? *America under attack,* en direct sur tous les teieviseurs de la plandte.

La premidre frappe (tour nord) a eu lieu & 8h45 heure de New-York (14h45 Paris). Elle n'a ete vue par personne[6]. La seconde frappe (tour sud) a eu lieu a 9h06, soit 21 mn plus tard, comme si la fonction de la premiere attaque avait ete, non seulement de

---

[5] De fa£on symptomatique, la chaine Qatarie d'informations en continu Al-Jazira sera imm&iiatenient qualifide par les mddias fianfais de " CNN du monde arabe".

[6] La scene a ndaiunoins 6t6 filmde par un Fran;ais cingaste amateur dont les images ont etd difiusdes par CNN seulement vers minuit heure locale.

commencer par faire des victimes mais surtout d'attirer l'attention des televisions, et des teiespectateurs sur le veritable carnage qui allait suivre. Et en effet, l'attaque du second Boeing a pu etre filmee en direct par une camera automatique de CNN, et vue en direct l'apres-midi en Europe et le soir au Proche-Orient et en Asie.

"Ce moment a ete l'apotheose de I'ere postmodeme" notera plus tard le romancier Martin Amis. Mais quels ont ete dans l'instant les effets sur nous, spectateurs involontaires et captifs de la catastrophe qui se deroulait en direct sous nos yeux? Oserait-on en la circonstance parler de dommages collateraux?

Punir l'Occident par la ou il a peche? Le culte de l'image

Devant la mort en direct & la television, on ne pense pas ou plus, le cerveau en apnee, scotche & l'actualite spectaculaire des images qui defilent en boucle sur nos ecrans. L'enormite meme de l'evenement nous empeche de decoller les yeux du teieviseur. On assiste impuissant a la mise entre parenthese de certaines de nos fonctions "vitals", dont la fonction critique.

Comment echapper a la tyrannic de l'image qui hypnotise les consciences. Choc des images, etat de choc... On est submerge par les images de la catastrophe que l'on nous passe et nous repasse sur toutes les chatnes. Le "on" designant tous *les heavy viewers* que nous sommes devenus pour l'occasion.

Il y a soudain comme une impossibilite de se defaire de ce drame si teiegenique. Aprds la catalepsie, l'addiction? Nous oscillons entre deux maux: le risque d'overdose et l'etat de manque.

La diffusion repetee de ces images qualifiees par tous les temoins d'incroyable, d'impensable, d'inimaginable, finit par cr6er un besoin suppiementaire d'images, comme pour dormer une sorte d'authentification *a* un spectacle juge "invraisemblable", "hallucinant." Conditionnement, accoutumance, dependance...

La vue de ces Boeing dcrasant les tours fait naitre chez le teiespectateur indigne par tant de cruaute un nouveau besoin, inavouable, une sorte d'attente inconsciente: celle d'images des prdparatifs de la riposte militaire, des avions qui decollent, de jeunes militaires Americains, blancs et noirs, tous unis dans le meme desir de venger leur pays...

Autrement dit, des images herofques dignes du meilleur (ou du pire) cinema americain.

L'effet boomerang ou l'arroseur arrose

En 1998 dejA, *Couvre-feu* d'Edward Zwick, mettait en scdne une serie d'attentats islamistes visant New-York. En fait depuis plus de trente ans, Hollywood inonde les ecrans du monde entier de ses films-catastrophes.

De *Airport* (1969) a *Couvre-feu* (1998) en passant par *L'Aventure du Poseidon* (1972), *La Tour Infernale* (1974), *Piege de cristal* (1988), *Independance Day* (1996) et *Mars attacks!* (1997), l'Industrie cinematographique americaine deverse un flot ininterrompu de ces productions a grand spectacle.

Le genre a ses lois. La catastrophe opdre it la fois comme revdlateur et comme moyen de redemption. Elle permet generalement a des timores de se comporter en

aventuriers intrepides, a des mediants declares de racheter leurs crimes tandis que de faux courageux tombent le masque et que des gens apparemment biens sous tous rapports se conduisent en parfaits salauds.

Par une ironie dont seule 1'Histoire a le secret, les terroristes ont retoume cette arme ideologique, ou ce message culture! contre son emetteur. Con?u a 1'origine comme une fiction de divertissement, le scenario catastrophe est brutalement transpose dans le monde red par les ennemis de l'Amerique. Une sorte de retour -sangiant-& l'envoyeur 1

"11 se pourrait bien qu'ils aient intentionnellement utilise le langage des films .americains. Ils ne semaient pas simplement la terreur, ils creaient aussi des images"[7] *This time, the scene was real.* Du coup, les experts de la CIA consultent les scenaristes d'Hollywood pour anticiper la forme de nouvelles attaques.

Au cinema, la catastrophe r6vde aussi le heros qui sommeille dans le *regular guy,* le type ordinaire. Dans la realite, beaucoup d' Americains considdrent que La Maison Blanche a ete sauvee du vol 93 de United Airlines, 1'avion qui s'est ecrase pres de Pittsburgh, par une poignee de sportifs amateurs.

2. Symboles du pouvoir et pouvoir des symboles

Ce ne sont pas des immeubles qui ont ete attaques mais avant tout une metaphore, ou si 1'on prefere des symboles. Et pas n'importe lesquels, les symboles de 1'hyperpuissance americaine, symboles du pouvoir economique, du pouvoir militaire et du pouvoir politique.

Les cliches joumalistiques contiennent toujours leurpart de v&ite. "On a vise le cceur de 1'Amerique." "L'Am^rique touchee en plein coeur." Les tours jumelles constituaient bien le haut lieu symbolique de la puissance economique et financiere des USA. SituS a quelques pas de la Bourse de Wall Street, la presse ddsignait parfois le World Trade Center come le *Temple du Commerce.*

La connotation religieuse s'applique dgalement au Pentagone lorsqu'il est qualify de *Sanctuaire de la guerre 1* Quant ii La Maison Blanche, elle symbolisait bien evidemment le siege du pouvoir du chef de l'etat le plus puissant du monde. Autrement dit, un lieu sacre par excellence.

Dans les trois cas, attaquer ces lieux symboliques de pouvoir prend valeur de sacrilege. Par leur gigantisme meme, les *twin* avaient en effet des allures de cathddrales. D'ailleurs, meme si l'aveu ne fait pas necessairement le coupable, on notera que 1'inspirateur presume de ces attentats (I'&netteur du "message") est venu confirmer, un mois aprds les faits, ce qui n'&ait encore qu'une interpretation; parmi d'autres possibles. "Les vraies cibles dtaient les icdnes du pouvoir militaire et economique americains."

En utilisant le terme d'icones, Oussama Ben Laden semble vouloir donner raison a Jean Baudrillard, dont il n'a vraisemblablement jamais entendu parler. "Cette violence terroriste n'est pas ''re'eZZe". Elle est pire, dans un sens: elle est symbolique."[8] Selon ce

---

[7] Neal Gabler, New York Times, 16/9/2001

[8] Jean Baudrillard, " L'esprit du terrorisme ", *Le Monde,* 3/11/2001

dernier, nous aurions tous rev£ de cet evenement et dans leur strategic, les terroristes savent "qu'ils peuvent compter sur cette complicite inavouable." En se situant deiiberement sur le terrain de 1'inconscient collectif, le philosophe fran?ais echappe ainsi Zl toute discussion mais s'interdit du meme coup la moindre pretention scientifique.

Le fondateur d'Al-Qaida justifie le massacre d'innocents par une rhetorique politico-religieuse tendant *i* gommer la realite physique des victimes pour mieux souligner la puissance symbolique des cibles. Ainsi done, les victimes n'etaient pas visees en tant que telles mais avaient pour seul tort de se trouver au mauvais endroit au mauvais moment. Elles en sont mortes. Et d'une certaine fagon Ben Laden les tue symboliquement une seconde fois en leur deniant le statut de cibles veritables. Que lui importe si la destruction de ces pretendues icones impliquait la mort de milliers de personnes bien reelles, faites de chair et de sang.

Le lendemain du drame, le dessinateur Plantu croquait 1'Oncle Sam en g6ant, marchant au milieu des gratte-ciel new-yorkais, blessd aux jambes par 1'impact du premier avion. L'image n'etait pas sans evoquer quelques scenes fameuses du film fantastique King-Kong (1933), les twin ayant d'ailleurs remplac6 l'empire State Building dans le remake de John Guillermin. Mais comment ne pas songer au Colosse aux pieds d'argile ou meme au Colosse de Rhodes des peplums d'antan.

Prdcis&nent, si 1'on veut mesurer le pouvoir symbolique de la cible, il faut se rappeler que le colosse grec mesurait seulement 32 m de haut, que les ziggourats de M&opotamie ayant inspire la parabole biblique de la tour de Babel mesuraient de 40 & 100 m alors que les tours jumelles atteignaient 420 m de haut.

Pour un religieux fondamentaliste, le *skyscraper* am£ricain n'est il pas l'equivalent modeme de la tour de Babel? "Une tour dont le sommet pdnetre les cieux" (Genese, 11). Une sorte de d6fi lancS par 1'homme Prometheen a Dieu pour affirmer sa puissance. Le gratte-ciel consid6re comme gratte-Dieu? L'episode biblique de la tour de Babel evoque bien une faute de demesure.

D'ailleurs, pour des chr6tiens ultra-conservateurs comme pour des musulmans integristes, New-York e'est Babylone ou Sodome et Gomorrhe. Une ville cosmopolite aux mceurs decadentes qui merite destruction et chatiment divin.

Serait ce faire injure a la psychanalyse que de la meler a un lieu commun? Les tours comme representation de la puissance sexuelle, le gratte-ciel comme symbole phallique? Dans cette perspective, l'attentat 6quivaudrait a une sorte de castration, architecturale et urbanistique. L'Am6rique atteinte dans sa virilite, emascutee en direct par un ennemi encore inconnu mais forc&nent sauvage.

Statue ou iedne de La Liberty?

A la une du quotidien *Le Monde* date du 13 septembre, sur le tiers gauche de la photo, on ne voit plus que la Statue de la Liberte. En arriere plan, on observe une epaisse fumde noire. Comme si l'effondrement des tours jumelles du World Trade Center faisait resurgir le symbole meme de la liberte.

De son cote, le numero special de 1'hebdomadaire TIME consacre a la tragedie montre en couverture recto les deux tours en flamme, et en "quatrieme" au verso,

la Statue de la Liberte en premier plan, tendant haut le bras, silhouette etincelante au milieu d'un rideau de fumee noire. L'image de cette statue intacte contemplant impavide un champ de ruines fait naitre une curieuse impression.

Au lendemain des faits, il existe au moins deux "lectures" possibles de cette nouvelle *skyline.* En l'absence de revendication immediate, la ceidbre statue apparait dans le ciel new-yorkais comme une sorte de signature. Un attentat commis au nom du droit a l'inddpendance? La liberation des territoires occupes, la liberation des Lieux saints, l'arret des bombardements americains en Irak, la liberation de tous les opprimes du monde! Preuve qu'il fallait detruire le temple du mercantilisme occidental pour replacer *a* 1'horizon le symbole meme de la liberte.

A contrario, on peut considerer qu'elle illustre l'echec meme des terroristes qui ont detruit des immeubles et tue des innocents sans parvenir *a* ecorner l'essentiel, Timmateriel, l'ame de 1'Amerique, son principe, ses valeurs, symbolises par cette statue ceidbre dans le monde entier. D'ailleurs, si la liberte est la veritable religion des Etats-Unis, la sculpture de Francois Bartholdi en constitue la premiere icone, e'est if dire une "representation symbolico-hypostatique," une simple image conductrice e 1'origine qui, par nature, risque toujours de susciter 1'idolatrie.

De ce point de vue, la statue de la Liberte aurait constitue une cible autrement plus symbolique que les Twin ou le Pentagone. L'objectif etait sans doute plus difficile A atteindre et le message risquait de devenir plus confus. Car si 1'on prend au serieux Ie discours d'Oussama Ben Laden, le terme d'icone peut conduire & penser que la cible des attentats n'Stait pas l'AmSrique en soi mais le module inavou6 qu'elle incame aux yeux d'une poign^e de leaders corrompus du Moyen-Orient, a commencer par ceux de son pays d'origine 1'Arabie-Saoudite.

Enfin, on notera que la d6couverte de citoyens am&icains parmi les combattants talibans n'est pas le premier ni sans doute le dernier paradoxe de toute cette affaire. De meme qu'on a pu qualifier le milliardaire terroriste, expert en circuit financier, de "secret de famille de I'Am&ique" ou de "double noir de son president" (A. Roy), on peut se demander si les pirates de Fair kamikaze qui avaient s6joum6 aux Etats-Unis suffisamment longtemps pour se fondre dans la masse n'etaient-ils pas, eux aussi, par leur mode de vie et surtout par leur culture technicienne, un peu Am6ricains?

3. Techniques de communication et communication de la technique

Qui pourrait nier que les Etats-Unis representent Farchetype, sinon la matrice, des sociytys techniciennes? A 1'heure du cyberterrorisme, l'attaque terroriste du 11 Septembre permet de poser la question plus generale du role de la technique dans les societes modemes.

La communication Internet

Internet passe pour etre une invention d'ing^nieurs am^ricains utilis^e i 1'origine par Farmee puis par les universitaires am&icains d6sireux d'6changer plus rapidement des informations avec leurs colldgues i l'etranger. L'enquete policiere tend & ytablir que les organisateurs de F operation ont privilege cette technique de communication pour assurer la coordination des attentats.

Plus discret que le telephone, le courrier yiectronique permettrait la dissimulation de messages par une combinaison de ciyptologie et de *steganographie.* Les messages seraient au pr^alable codds puis dissimul^s (dans la partie grise non visible a 1'oeil humain) au milieu de photographies d'apparence anodine (notamment les images les plus banales sur la Toile, c'est a dire des photos pomos) et transmis sous la forme de fichier attach^.

Selon, Ron Dick, directeur adjoint du FBI, non seulement les pirates se servaient d'Intemet, mais ils "s'en servaient bien."

Le choix des armes

La dimension paradoxale de l'6v£nement ne pouvait ychapper personne. Alors que le president George W. Bush tentait d'imposer son projet de "bouclier antimissiles" cense transformer le sol am^ricain en sanctuaire, en le prot6geant des "Etats voyous/ Rogue States," ce sont de banals cutters que Fon retrouve a la base de ce d&astre.

De meme que le danger n'est pas venu d'armes nucldaires, pas meme d'armes conventionnelles, mais de simples avions civils transform^ en armes de guerre. Il y a eu dytoumement, dans les deux sens du terme: des avions d£toum& de leur route et d6toum6s de leur objet.

Mais il y a eu aussi un retoumement ou un "effet Frankeinstein." La technique a bel et bien yty retoumde contre son inventeur ou promoteur. Des avions am^ricains, des Boeing 767, jugds parmi les plus stirs du monde en raison meme de la complexity de leur systdme de commande et de regulation. Des compagnies americaines 6galement prestigieuses: United Airlines et American Airlines. Des pirates de Fair formas par des pilotes am6ricains, sur du materiel americain et sur le territoire americain (ecoles de Floride).

Quant a l'argent, nerf de la guerre, on se contentera de rappeler deux elements trop connus pour etre developpes. Si le regime des talibans a persecute les cultivateurs de pavot, une partie non negligeable de la fortune d'Al-Qaida provient du trafic d'opium. Ou comment s'enrichir en empoisonnant les infiddles? L'heroTne consommee par les toxicomanes americains provient majoritairement d'Afghanistan alors qu'en meme temps 1'administration Bush finance la lutte antidrogue dans ce pays. Qui parlait de vendre aux capitalistes la corde pour les pendre?

Second paradoxe: le r61e pour le moins ambigu des banques americaines travaillant regulierement pour le compte de richissimes hommes d'affaires de la peninsule Arabe ou du Golfe Persique. Avec un peu plus de curiosite sur 1'identite exacte de ses clients, la Citibank aurait peut-etre pu se dispenser de financer les pilotes kamikazes installs en Floride. Au moins depuis les attentats contre les ambassades americaines en Afrique de FEst et le dernier en date visant *I'USS Cole,* on pouvait s'attendre a un minimum de vigilance. Or Moustappha Ahmad, le tresorier d'Al-Qaida, n'a eu semble-t-il aucune difficulte pour transferer des fonds au chef des commandos, FEgyptien Mohammed Atta, par le truchement du siege new-yorkais de la Citibank.

Ambivalence de la puissance technicienne

L'attaque terroriste contre le World Trade Center et le Pentagone est a replacer dans le contexte global des sociytys techniciennes. Il y a dyj A presque un demi-sidcle, Jacques Ellul a montr6 que le phynomdne technique se caractyrisait notanunent par 1'unity et la totalisation[9].

La technique fonctionne comine un reseau de ramifications complexes qui vient bousculer les distinguos traditionnels opposant la forme au contenu, ou le civil au militaire. Qui peut garantir, par exemple, Fusage pacifique de 1'industrie nuciyaire, pharmaceutique ou chimique? A part la couleur de la bache, qu'est-ce qui diffyrencie un camion militaire d'un camion civil?

Si les terroristes utilisent dysormais des foumitures scolaires dans leur panoplie (les cutters), ils savent aussi transformer un avion de ligne en arme de guerre. On retrouve cette unity d'un systdme compose d'yiyments interdypendants dans le phenomene des factions en chaine dyclenchee par l'attaque du 11 septembre: krach boursier, faillite des compagnies ayriennes, licenciements dans 1'industrie ayronautique et dans le secteur du tourisme, ryduction des budgets de communication, baisse de la consommation, rycession yconomique...

En outre, la specialisation implique une totalisation. Chacune des parties compte moins que le systdme de connexions les liant entre elles. Ce qui fait la force du systdme technicien mais aussi sa faiblesse. La structure par ryseaux augmente la fragility de sociytys techniciennes rendues vulnerables du fait meme de leur haut degry de sophistication.

Pour les terroristes modemes, les cibles ne manquent pas. On pense aux virus sur la Toile, aux maladies transmises par voie postale (on a recensy en France une moyenne de 100 fausses alertes par jour au bacille du charbon), & l'empoisonnement du ryseau d'eau potable d'une ville ou au systdme de climatisation d'un grand h6tel ou d'un hdpital sans parler des *nauds de communication*: ayroports, gares, centrales yiectriques ou nuciyaires.

Les tours geantes ou 1'on concentre la population d'une ville moyenne sont 1'illustration parfaite de la fragility de ce que Alain Gras[10] nomine les macro-systymes techniques.

Les auteurs de l'attentat du World Trade Center ne s'y sont pas trompys, se payant le luxe de passer aupres d'une partie de Fopinion intemationale pour les nouveaux David terrassant le Goliath amyricain.

Dans nos sociytys modemes, la technique est ambivalente car elle libere autant qu'elle alidne. Elle cree des problemes aussitot qu'elle en resout et s'accroit d'elle-meme par les solutions — techniques — qu'elle apporte. De nouveaux equipements sont deja a Fetude pour renforcer la securite des transports aeriens. Ils seront dejou& un jour par une nouvelle generation de terroristes qui suscitera a son tour de nouvelles parades.

---

[9] Jacques Ellul, *La technique ou I'enjeu du siecle,* Armand Colin, 1954.

[10] Alain Gras, *Grandeur et dependance, Sociologie des macro-systemes techniques,* Puf, 1993.

Mais le progrds technique a un prix qui n'est pas seulement financier. Ses effets negatifs sont inseparables des effets positifs et ce progres comporte toujours un grand nombre de consequences imprevisibles. Il est sans doute du devoir de nos gouvemants de chercher a tout pr6voir. Il est non moins certain que la prudence nous invite a garder h l'esprit la part de risques inherents h toute societe fondde sur la puissance technicienne.

Il est egalement sage de se mefier de tous les discours promettant de concilier security et liberte a Finterieur de l'etat conune de tous ceux prdtendant combiner la guerre et la justice a Fexterieur. A cet egard, le nom de code de la riposte militaire, *Infinite Justice* puis *Liberte immuable,* peut etre interprete comme le titre du film de propagande projete par le gouvemement americain sur le grand ecran mondial.

II. La riposte: 1'Afghanistan bombarde au nom de la liberty

La guerre est-elle "la continuation de la politique par d'autres moyens" ou au contraire, Michel Foucault a-t-il raison d'inverser la formule de Clausewitz en faisant de la politique la continuation de la guerre? En 1'occurrence ici, on a pu dire - non sans quelques raisons - qu'elle etait "l'absence de politique par d'autres moyens."[11]

Dds l'apres-midi du 11 septembre, commence la guerre des images et des mots. Plus tard, George W. Bush qualifiera Faction militaire engagˆe en Afghanistan de "bataille de la civilization."

1. Guerre des mots et mots de la guerre

La communication est sans doute a la propagande ce que la publicity est a la reclame mais si 1'habillage change, 1'objectif demeure. Jacques Ellul a dˆmontrd que, contrairement aux iddes regues, 1'information (domaine du Bien et de la Verite) ne se distingue pas si facilement de la propagande (instrument du Mal et du mensonge). Loin de s'exclure 1'une 1'autre, 1'information est la condition d'existence meme de la propagande. En outre, la propagande est une nˆcessite pour les gouvemants comme pour les gouvemˆs. Elle repond a une volonte de participation politique et rassure en simplifiant une realite rendue plus complexe par la multiplication de 1'information. Le discours politique du President Bush constitue une excellente illustration de ses theses.

"La lachete sans visage s'en est prise ce matin a **la liberty,** et **la liberty** se defendra. Je veux rassurer le peuple americain," declare George W. Bush le mardi 11, "les Etats-Unis poursuivront et puniront les responsables de ces viles attaques."

Au-delh du recours h la classique figure de rhetorique de la personnification, le discours presidentiel se situe immddiatement au plan moral, pour mieux evacuer la dimension politique. La lachete (terroriste) s'oppose a la vertu (amdricaine). Ce n'est pas un Etat, ce n'est pas une superpuissance voire ce que certains nomment aujourd'hui une *hyperpuissance,* qui a ete attaquee, pas meme un pays, c'est une valeur, et la plus belle, la plus noble: La Liberty (incamee par 1'Amˆrique).

---

[11] Jean Baudrillard, artcit.

Ici les "blancs" du discours comptent largement autant que Ies idees exprimees. Le President ne prononce pas un seul mot sur la politique etrangere de "1'Empire le plus puissant de 1'Histoire" (Amo J.Mayer), sur ses interets strategiques dans le monde ou sur ses alliances au Moyen-Orient.

Le soir meme, en direct du bureau Ovale, il poursuit sur le registre de 1'omission:

"Ces meurtres en masse visaient a effrayer notre nation et h la plonger dans le chaos et le repli. Mais ils ont echoud. Notre pays est fort. Un grand peuple s'est leve pour defendre une grande nation."

Parler de meurtre est encore une fagon de ddpolitiser en criminalisant l'adversaire. Il s'agit la aussi de rassurer la population en r6veillant la fibre patriotique. Grand peuple, grande nation. Les variantes sont destinies a marteler la meme idee. La redondance est volontaire. Bush utilise A nouveau la personnification: L'Amerique s'est levee comme un seul homme ! Dans ce contexte de crise majeure, le President cherche a renforcer le sentiment d'unite nationale.

"Aujourd'hui notre pays a vu le mal, ce qu'il y a de pire dans la nature humaine. Nous y avons rdpondu par ce qu'il y a de meilleur en Amdrique: l'audace de nos sauveteurs, les soins portds if autrui. (...)

George W. Bush reste sur le registre de la personnification: voir le Mal. Comme s'il s'agissait -du mal absolu, et comme s'il etait tout entier contenu dans les images de 1'attentat. Le pays a vu le mal comme on dirait "il a vu le diable." Au pire, on repond par le meilleur. Le President exprime la une representation manicheenne du monde. La noirceur de Fame humaine oppos^e a un concentre de vertus americaines. Il s'agit d'une symetrie factice dans la mesure ou l'aide aux victimes constitue une obligation dans le cadre des societes modemes (Etat-Providence et/ou Etat Zorro) et que la veritable reponse viendra plus tard, sous la forme de represailles militaires.

"Ce sont la liberte et la democratic qui ont ete attaques," dedare-t-il le mercredi. "Ce sera *[a monumental struggle of good versus evil*] un combat monumental du Bien contre le Mal. Mais le Bien l'emportera."

George Bush pdre comparait Saddam Hussein h Adolf Hitler. Son president de fils ressuscite la terminologie Reaganienne de *I'Empire du Mal* designant a l'epoque 1'URSS et traduit - inconsciemment? - sa vision simpliste pour ne pas dire infantile du monde. A croire qu'il annonce un nouvel episode de "Starwars" ! Le 13 septembre enfin, il lache le mot de "croisade" au moment oh 1'on redecouvre les thdses de Samuel Huntington[12], terme particulierement mal choisi pour quelqu'un voulant eviter Famalgame entre Islam et terrorisme.

On pourrait multiplier h l'envi les declarations oh le manicheisme le dispute au simplisme binaire: le Bien contre le Mal, la Democratic contre 1'archaTsme, la Civilisation contre la Barbaric, la lumidre contre les tenhbres, le Bon contre le Mediant... Oussama Ben Laden jouant h merveille le role du croque-mitaine, de genie du Mal, un chef du *Spectre* version James Bond converti h 1'islamisme radical.

---

[12] Samuel Huntington, *Le Choc des civilisations,* Odile Jacob, 1997, *(The clash of Civilizations.*

Comme en echo du lapsus (?) presidentiel, sur le meme mode manicheen opposant 1'Owmma (la nation musulmane ou la communaute des croyants) au reste du monde, les dirigeants d'Al-Qaida lui repondront le dimanche 7 octobre, moins de deux heures aprds le debut des frappes americano-britanniques sur le sol Afghan.

"La guerre des croisades promises par Bush a effectivement commence," affirme le porte-parole de la secte politico-religieuse. Aprhs avoir appeie au djihad, il evoque ces "milliers de jeunes qui veulent autant mourir que Ies americains veulent vivre."

Le musulman authentique est decrit par ces "fous de Dieu" comme celui qui tient plus au respect de sa foi qu'a sa propre vie (ici bas). Le thyme est recurrent dans le discours de 1'islamisme radical: la cause mdrite que 1'on sacrifie sa vie pour elle et les moudjahidin n'ont pas peur de mourir. Les propos de Ben Laden s'inscrivent dans cette logique.

"Voici I'Amdrique frappee par Allah, dans son point le plus vulnerable, dytruisant, dieu merci, ses edifices les plus prestigieux, et nous remercions Allah pour cela. Voila 1'Amerique remplie de terreur, du nord au sud et d'est en ouest, et nous remercions Dieu pour cela."

Tout au long de sa declaration, Ben Laden se rdfere a **l'Amerique** et non pas a un pays particulier, les Etats-Unis. L'Amerique non comme continent mais comme entite maiefique. Outre 1'omnipresence des references a Dieu, il est question de "point le plus vulnerable" (le talon d'Achille ou le colosse aux pieds d'argile) et d'edifices "prestigieux" (prestige, honneur, humiliation: confirmation que les cibles etaient bien avant tout des symboles). L'Amerique "remplie de terreuf": divine bien sur!

"Ce que 1'Amerique endure aujourd'hui ne constitue qu'une infime partie de ce que nous [les musulmans] endurons depuis des dizaines d'annees."

Le procede rhetorique de legitimation consiste a presenter 1'attentat sangiant du 11 septembre comme un juste retour des choses, et encore, la soufirance causde serait infiniment moms grande que la soufirance subie. Il s'agit de faire passer la victime pour le bourreau, de justifier auprds de 1'opinion publique - musulmane en particulier mais pas exclusivement - 1'operation consistant a faire payer a des employes de bureau anonymes, a des gens ordinaires y compris des musulmans, les consequences de la politique intemationale du gouvemement americain.

D'ou 1'importance du recours au terme generique d'Amerique. La personnification permet ce tour de passe-passe. Ce ne sont pas des milliers de citoyens americains qui ont ete tues, blesses, endeuilies, ou seulement traumatises... mais **l'Amerique,** un etre abstrait et maiefique selon la thematique du "Grand Satan" utilisee nagu6re par 1'Iran de l'ayatollah Khomeini.

"Notre nation *[Oumma]* subit depuis plus de 80 ans cette humiliation ; ses fils sont tues et son sang coule ; ses lieux saints sont agresses sans raison."

"Notre nation." Ben Laden s'adresse & cette nation encore imaginaire qu'il s'agit precisement de construire. Il parle en son nom. Il parle d'elle, a elle, et a ses ennemis. Ce

---

1993 Foreign Affairs).

faisant, il commence i la faire exister reellement... dans les esprits ou les representations mentales. "Quand dire, c'est faire."[13] Il s'agit de passer de la nation potentielle (plus d'1,2 milliard de musulmans repartis dans le monde) la nation reelle. Si 1'on accepte de definir le nationalisme comme l'adoration de la societe par elle-meme, n'oublions pas que ce ne sont pas les nations qui engendrent les nationalismes mais le nationalisme qui cree les nations[14].

"Dieu a dirige les pas d'un groupe de musulmans, un groupe d'avant-gardistes, qui a detruit 1'Amerique, et nous hnplorons Allah d'eiever leur rang et de les recevoir au paradis."

Conformement i la strategic habituelie du reseau terroriste Al-Qaida, 1'attentat n'est pas expressement revendique. Ben Laden se feiicite du succds de 1'operation sans toutefois s'en attribuer la patemite. Il entretient le doute en privant l'ennemi d'aveux circonstancies. On pent y voir le respect de la ligne suivie des 1'origine de la confrontation opposant le regime des Talibans au gouvemement americain: arguer de l'absence de preuves pour justifier le refus de livrer Ben Laden.

L'argument servira d'ailleurs de leitmotiv en terres d'Islam: "Si Oussama est bien le responsable des attentats du 11 septembre, pourquoi 1'Amerique n'en donne-t-elle pas Ies preuves? " On peut aussi interpreter cette absence de revendication a la lueur de 1'information selon laquelle le fondateur d'Ai-Qaida ne serait qu'un "scelerat d'opyrette," manipule par un "gouvemement international de l'Islam" commanditaire de l'assassinat du Commandant Massoud et des attaques terroristes ayant ensanglantd les Etats-Unis[15].

Mais la thematique des aveux et des preuves formelies vise surtout 1'opinion publique occidental et elle fait sens dans le cadre d'une justice humaine. Or le message a ici un second destinataire: 1'opinion publique musulmane qui s'adresse 1'information principale: le veritable instigateur de 1'attentat du 11 septembre n'est autre que Dieu lui-meme ! Ben Laden, en la circonstance, n'dtant que son humble porte-parole ou son modeste interprdte.

"Quand ils [le groupe de musulmans] ont riposte, au nom de leurs fils opprimds et leurs freres et soeurs en Palestine et dans beaucoup d'autres pays musulmans, le monde entier s'est indignd, comme Pont fait les mdcrdants et les hypocrites."

Le verbe "riposter" vise a legitimer 1'attentat. Il s'agissait apres tout d'un acte de Idgitime defense. Les musulmans sont opprimes par les americains, il est normal qu'ils se dyfendent. La reference a la Palestine - tres rdcente dans son discours - vise a etendre son potentiel de sympathie. Depuis la creation de l'etat d'Israel, l'antisionisme constitue un puissant vecteur d'unification de 1'opinion publique musulmane, bien au-dela du Proche et du Moyen-Orient. Il a touche la une corde sensible comme en

[13] John L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words,* Oxford University Press, 1962.
[14] Ernst Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism,* Oxford, 1983
[15] Alexandre Khokhlov, Izvestia, Courtier International, 31 Octobre 2001.

t^moignera l'explosion de sa cote de popularity auprds de la me arabe et d'une partie de la jeunesse africaine.

Dans le contexte de la seconde Intifada *(the Aqsa intifadeh),* Ben Laden instrumentalise la cause Palestinienne. Il se garde bien de dire que 1'O.L.P. a condamnd 1'attentat et que Yasser Arafat s'est fait filmer en train de dormer son sang en signe de solidarity avec les victimes amdricaines.

"Les Amdricains sont des ddbauchds qui se sont allids au mal en soutenant le bourreau contre la victime et 1'injuste contre l'enfant innocent, et Dieu leur a infligd ce qu'ils myritent."

Apres une allusion on ne peut plus transparente au soutien des Etats-Unis *i* la politique israyiienne, il martelle 1'idde selon laquelle 1'attentat est en ryalitd un chatiment divin et que les terroristes n'ont fait qu'exycuter la volonty d'Allah.

"Ces yvynements ont divisy le monde entier en deux parties: ceux qui ont la foi et gont sans hypocrisie, et ceux [qui sont] des mycryants ; que Dieu nous en pryserve !"

Le simplisme du discours contraste avec la complexity du ryel. Le message de Ben Laden constitue le symytrique inverse de celui de George W. Bush: *"Either you are -with us, or you are with the terrorists."* Mais si le premier prdtend combattre 1'injustice (au nom de 1'Islam) et le second dyfendre la liberty *(immuable),* les discours sont en partie interchangeables. Ben Laden revendique la liberty pour tous les musulmans opprimys et Bush conduit sa guerre de reprysailles pour faire oeuvre de justice.

Au serment du fondateur d'Al-Qaida rypondra, un mois plus tard, celui du prysident americain devant 1'Assembiye gynyrale de 1'ONU: "L'heure de la justice viendra. (...) Je fais cette promesse a toutes les victimes de ce regime: les jours des talibans qui protegent les terroristes, font du trafic d'heroine et brutalisent les femmes sont comptes. (...) Nous avons 1'occasion d'ecrire 1'histoire de notre dpoque, celle du courage ddfaisant la cruautd et de la lumiere triomphant des tenebres. "

Les deux locuteurs partagent la meme vision manichdenne du monde. On se trouve en presence d'une veritable relation de rivalitd mimdtique pouvant illustrer la thdorie de Rene Girard. La ressemblance va se nicher dans des domaines inattendus conune celui de la santd. Le president Bush jurant publiquement qu'il n'a pas contracts la maladie du charbon *{anthrax) ,* Ben Laden expliquant a la presse pakistanaise que ses "reins vont tres bien."

"Tout musulman doit se **dresser** pour defendre sa religion car le vent de la foi et du changement a souffle pour aneantir **l'injustice** dans la peninsule de Mohamed."

Aux amdricains qui se Idvent rdpondent done les musulmans qui se dressent. La pdninsule arabique est une terre saerde car le prophete est nd et a vecu a La Mecque. Ben Laden reproche aux actuels dirigeants de l'Arabie Saoudite de toldrer la presence d'infideles (militaires amdricains stationnds depuis la guerre du Golfe) & proximitd des lieux saints de 1'Islam

"A 1'Amdrique, j'adresse des mots comptds. Je jure par Dieu que l'Amdrique ne connaitra plus jamais la securitd avant que la Palestine ne la connaisse et avant que toutes les armdes occidentales athdes ne quittent les terres saintes."

Il y a la comme une figure de construction reciproque du monstre. Dans les heures ayant suivi l'attaque terroriste le nom seul de Oussama Ben Laden a dtd jetd en pature a la presse et a 1'opinion. La rhdtorique prdsidentielle et mediatique s'est focalisee sur cet dpouvantail. L'intdressd colie done a son personnage avec application et non sans talent. En prophete inspird d'Allah, il prend complaisamment la pose du justicier defiant l'empire a lui seul.

2. Guerre des images et images de guerre

Au-delii des menaces profdrdes <1 l'encontre de l'Amdrique, ce dimanche 8 octobre, le succds de 1'opdration de communication rdside d'abord dans l'effet de contraste entre nos dcrans neigeux ou 1'on ne voit rien des bombardements (quelques points verts dans la nuit noire) et 1'apparition soudaine, b la hunidre du jour, de l'ennemi public N°l, une fois sa diatribe terminde sirotant son thd devant sa caveme avec la sdrdnitd du prophdte.

Si 1'on veut s'arrdter quelques instants sur la communication non verbale, la mise en sedne audiovisuelle de ce discours ne peut que ddconcerter le tdldspectateur occidental habitud a d'autres codes. Elle provoque chez lui un sentiment de fascination/rdpulsion ou pour le moins d'inquidtante altdritd. A contrario en terre d'Islam, elle contribue & renforcer Taura du leader charismatique.

Une grotte dans le ddsert pour seul ddcor. Les musulmans du monde entier savent que Mahomet s'dtait cachd pendant trois jours et trois nuits dans une grotte pres de La Mecque, pour dchapper A ses ennemis qui avaient jurd sa mort. En son temps, le prophdte haranguait la population pour lui demander de renoncer au culte des idoles et d'adorer le Dieu unique. Son clan (des Hachdmites) subit alors des persdeutions. En proie d 1'hostilitd des oligarchies et des chefs religieux polythdistes, Mahomet dut alors fuir La Mecque, contraint de s'exiler, en Abyssinie d'abord puis lors d'une seconde dmigration (L'Hdgire) dans 1'oasis qui deviendra Mddine.

Ben Laden aujourd'hui, comme le prophdte jadis, a lui aussi dtd expulse de son pays l'Arabie Saoudite (1991), puis renvoyd du Soudan (1996) avant de trouver refuge a Kandahar, chez les talibans. Mahomet avait du lui aussi se cacher avant de faire triompher sa cause par les armes: en 630, a la tdte d'une troupe de 10.000 hommes, il dtait retoumd a La Mecque en chef de guerre victorieux.

Les mains croisdes, les yeux mi-clos, dans une attitude de mdditation Ben Laden est sagement assis sur les talons au milieu de trois autres barbus assis en tailleur. La position du corps est conforme au rite musulman codifiant les cinq prieres quotidiennes. Il adopte a la fois la posture du sage et du guerrier. Comme le prophete! Barbe de religieux. Treillis militaire et turban blanc. Une lampe a petiole est posde sur un rocher, au fond, dans l'alignement de l'egyptien Ayman Al-Zawahri, exleader du Djihad islamique, mddecin et conseiller de Ben Laden.

Son arme fetiche, le Kalakov (AK-74), prise a un soldat russe a Tissue d'un combat, posde sur la paroi de la grotte, est visible mais seulement en arridre plan durant une bonne partie de son intervention. Elle est Id pour rappeler le Djihad, et peut-etre aussi que 1'Islam des temps hdrolques a triomphd par 1'dpde. Dans les prdeddentes cassettes

de propagande, le chef d'Al-Qaida entretenait sa rdputation de cavalier intrdpide et de tireur d'dlite. Le Kalakov dvoque dgalement la guerre victorieuse contre 1'Armde Rouge. Message: les musulmans vaincront demain le "tigre de papier" amdricain comme ils ont vaincu hier le Grand Satan sovidtique.

Mais Oussama Ben Laden n'aurait pas pu jouer les *Fantomas* sans la complicitd de la chaine d'information en continu Al-Jazira et surtout sans le suivisme des tdldvisions occidentales converties a la seule religion du profit, done de la course d 1'audience.

Au nom de la ddfense nationale, des le lendemain 8 octobre, les responsables des principaux *networks* amdricains seront rappelds a 1'ordre par le gouvemement aprds ce moment d'dgarement. Sous le prdtexte fallacieux que les viddos d'Al-Qaida pouvaient contenir des messages codds destinds d ddclencher de nouvelles attaques terroristes, la Maison Blanche demanda aux grandes chaines amdricaines de visionner, avant diffusion, toutes les images foumies par la tdldvision Qatarie.

Le rdsultat a sans doute ddpassd les espdrances des conseillers pour la sdcuritd nationale puisque les images de Ben Laden ont pratiquement disparu totalement des dcrans. L'autocensure a dgalement joud dans la presse dcrite. Alors que dans son numdro du 1" Octobre, TIME publiait en couverture la photo de Ben Laden avec pour seule Idgende: *Target* (la cible) ; il fallait les semaines suivantes scruter attentivement les pages intdrieures pour trouver de maigres extraits de sa ddclaration de guerre 2i 1'Amdrique.

Le philosophe Bernard-Henri Ldvy a exprimd 1'opinion de nombreux Fran^ais en qualifiant Al-Jazira de "chaine de Ben Laden." D'un point de vue occidental, l'accusation n'est pas sans fondements. Elle mdrite toutefois d'dtre relativisde sinon nuanede. Il est un fait que jusqu'ii la prise de Kaboul par 1'Alliance du Nord, la "CNN du monde arabe" a bdndficid d'une situation de monopole obligeant les tdles du monde entier *b* redifiuser ses images affubldes d'un large bandeau en indiquant la provenance.

Mais prdcisement Al-Jazira s'est trouvde en Afghanistan dans une position comparable a celle de CNN durant la guerre du Golfe. Alors que la chaine de Ted Turner passe toujours aux yeux de 1'opinion publique intemationale pour un pur produit culture! "made USA" au meme titre que Coca-Cola, son correspondant avait dtd le seul autorise a rester a Bagdad. Le pouvoir Irakien[-]avait ainsi accorde des moyens exceptionnels a Peter Arnett qui jouissait de l'exclusivite en contrepartie de la censure. Parce que CNN montrait au monde entier les dommages causes par les bombardements am6ricains sur la population civile, elle fut accusde de faire le jeu de Saddam Hussein.

Il en est aile de meme avec Teyssir Allouni, 1'unique reporter autorisd a rester dans la capitale Afghane avant 1'inversion du rapport de forces militaire. Insistant sur les erreurs de frappes et les victimes civiles, montrant complaisamment des cadavres dans des villages bombard6s par l'aviation amyricaine, donnant la parole exclusivement aux Kaboulis denonfant cette guerre contre 1'Islam, exhibant les propres enfants de Ben Laden armes jusqu'aux dents chantant les louanges de "I'dmir des croyants," le mollah Omar, avec pour toile de fond les carcasses d'un helicoptdre et d'un avion

prdtendument abattus par les talibans, le joumaliste a rendu Al-Jazira trds impopulaire aupres de Washington.

Accusˆe par les autoritds americaines de diffriser la propagande d'Ai-Qaida, la chaine arabe repondit par une retrospective diffusee en boucle de visages mutilds sur des lits d'hopitaux, d'enfants estropies et de b6bds defigurds au nom de cette pretendue "bataille de la civilization." De son cdte, la direction de CNN contraint ses employes d'assortir chaque image de victimes civiles des bombardements americains d'un rappel en forme de rituel: "les taiibans protdgeht des terroristes responsables de la mort de 5000 personnes innocents."

Si Al-Jazira n'a pas convaincu les occidentaux de sa neutralite en refusant de trancher entre "la guerre contre le terrorisme, comine dit 1'Amerique" et "la guerre contre les impies, comme dit Al-Qaida," le pays de la liberty de la presse et du Premier Amendement a battu tous les records en matiere de controle des images. Au nom de la sdcuritd de ses soldats, le Pentagone a meme dtendu son emprise aux documents photographiques. Pendant la moitid du conflit, faute de joumalistes indˆpendants sur place, les medias ddsireux d'illustrer la presence amyricaine au sol ont du se contenter des seules images des commandos US prises et sdlectionndes par le departement de la Defense.

La fidvre patriotique ddclenchde au lendemain des attentats ne s'est pas limitde & l'explosion des ventes de bannieres dtoildes. Alois qu'd la difference du conflit viet-namien, la presse amdricaine a plutot pdchd par excds d'autocensure, les joumalistes ont dtd accuses de mettre en danger la vie des *"Boys "* en foumissant d l'ennemi des renseignements trop precis. Proces d'intention quand on sait que les dites informations dmanaient des briefings ou du site web des charges de communication du Pentagone mais ce type de fantasme en dit long sur les attentes d'une bonne partie de 1'opin-ion. Les joumaux s'etant risques a publier les images de bdbds Afghans tuds par des bombes amdricainesˆont ete agoni d'injures. Le concept de "dommages collateraux" est acceptable, a condition precisement de rester au niveau d'une abstraction ddsincamde !

Jacques Ellul ne se trompait pas lorsqu'il ddcrivait la relation de complicity unissant le propagandiste au propaganda. Le citoyen de base n'a aucune envie de voir de photos de nourrissons massacres alors que le president Bush en personne lui a parld d'une lutte du Bien contre le Mal, mende par une nation rysolument bonne et pacifique mais dytestye car incomprise. "Le peuple Afghan va connaitre la gynyrosity de 1'Amdrique. En meme temps que-nous frapperons des cibles militaires, nous larguerons des vivres et des medicaments" avait-il promis le jour meme ou Ben Laden profyrait ses menaces a la teldvision.

Les petits containers jaunes contenant les rations alimentaires ayant la meme couleur que les explosifs dispersys par les bombes a fragmentation ont enframe bien des apprises, pour employer un euphymisme. Combien de victimes pour combien de vies sauvyes? Le bilan "humanitaire" de ces largages tdlegeniques pourrait s'averer un exercice cruel pour son promoteur. Mais quel ytait 1'objectif visy: persuader le monde

de la bonty amyricaine ou entretenir la bonne conscience des partisans de cette guerre (plus de 80% selon les sondages), ddja ultra-majoritaires dans le pays?

”La parole est seule relative a la Vyrity. L'image est seulement relative a la ryality.” Aux consommateurs d'images que nous sommes, devenus boulimiques depuis le 11 septembre, Jacques Ellul nous rappelle que nous aurions tort de prendre le ryel pour le vrai. Alors que la parole reldve de la vyrity - et done aussi du mensonge -, 1'image peut parfaitement coller a la ryality sans jamais etre vraie. La vue donne a voir 1'yvidence, la parole toujours incertaine l'exclut.

3. Guerre contre la dymocratie et democratic dans la guerre

La guerre oblige chacun de nous a choisir son camp. Elle oriente notre regard, conditionne notre mymoire visuelle, nous fait voir ce que nous voulons voir et oublier les images qui ne cadrent pas avec nos grilles de lecture. La propagande rassure car elle filtre, ordonne et simplifie. Mais il faut faire montre d'une belle outrecuidance intellectuelle pour croire la propagande (mensongere) rdservee au bon peuple et 1'information (vyritable) aux yiites. Il faut pareillement faire preuve de beaucoup de candeur ou de cynisme pour croire au discours de la **guerre juste.** Car il n'y a pas de guerres justes, il n'y a que des guerres nycessaires !

Non, la confre-attaque amyricaine n'est pas la guerre de **La** liberty contre **Le** terrorisme mais celle d'un Etat - dymocratique - ddfendant lygitimement ses intdrets de puissance au nom de valeurs & prytention universaliste.

D'abord, la liberty ne peut pas faire la guerre, meme si 1'on prytend la faire en son nom. La violence est toujours du domaine de la ndcessitd, e'est *a* dire 1'antithdse de la liberty. Ensuite, le terrorisme est une notion yminemment subjective pouvant recouvrir des rdalitds fres diffyrentes. On se souvient que les nazis 1'utilisaient pour disqualifier la rdsistance fran?aise durant 1'Occupation. On voit bien aujourd'hui 1'intdret d'un Vladimir Poutine a prdsenter ainsi les indypendantistes Tchytchynes qui risquent d'ytre sacrifiys sur l'autel de l'antiterrorisme, avec la bdnddiction honteuse des Occidentaux.

A ddfaut de pouvoir les empecher, les organisations intemationales se sont contentyes de codifier les guerres. Les membres de 1'Union Europyenne ont dyfini comme terroriste "tout acte destiny a tuer ou blesser gridvement un civil, ou toute autre personne qui ne participe pas directement aux hostilitds dans une situation de conflit armd, lorsque, par sa nature ou son contexte, cet acte vise a intimider une population ou a contraindre un gouvememement a accomplir ou s'abstenir d'accomplir un acte quelconque."

Qui pourrait jurer que cette dyfinition n'englobe pas les bombardements et l'embargo dont souffre la population Irakienne depuis dix ans? Comme A son habitude, la critique de Noam Chomsky est encore plus impitoyablea 1'ygard des puissants: "En pratique, le terrorisme est la violence commise contre les Etats-Unis - quels qu'en soient les auteurs. On aura du mal a trouver a cela une exception dans 1'histoire."[16]

---

[16] Noam Chomsky, Cette Amfrique qui n'apprend rien, *Le Monde,* 22/11/2001

L'article 51 de la Charte des Nations Unies reconnait un droit nature! *(inherent right)* A la legitime defense en cas d'agression armfie. Ce droit pose alors la question de la **proportionnalite** de la riposte. Les conventions de Geneve distinguent objectifs civils et militaires et tendent a proscrire 1'usage disproportionnfi de la force. Le problfime de la proportionnalitfi ne se rfiduit pas a sa dimension juridique et pose a l'evidence des questions d'ordre moral.

La strategic du tapis de bombes adoptee dans le cadre de l'op6ration "Liberte Immuable" n'est pas sans susciter de malaise au sein des esprits les mieux disposes fi 1'figard des Etats-Unis. Les moyens employes en Afghanistan en dficembre risquent de susciter des remords chez ceux-lfi meme qui, sous le coup d'une emotion legitime, s'fitaient proclamfis «tous Antericains » en septembre.

Fallait-il bruler la botte de foin pour trouver l'aiguille? Sous prfitexte que Ben Laden fitait aussi difficile fi chercher qu'une aiguille dans une botte de foin, avait-on le droit de brfiler toute la botte, et une partie du champ? En bombardant a outrance un pays d£j A ravage par la guerre et la famine, on ne fait qu'ajouter des victimes aux victimes. Selon les organisations humanitaires, les tonnes de bombes deversees autour de Tora Bora ont dfija causfi la mort de nombreux civils.

Sans oublier ce que eette comptabilite a de sordide, on peut dfija prfivoir, dans les mois a venir, une revision a la hausse des «dommages collateraux» en Afghanistan inversement proportionnelle au nombre des victimes avfirfies des attentats new-yorkais, evalue en septembre a plus de 6000 et en dficembre a moins de la moitte.

Le president Bush a feint de dficouvrir rficemment le sort atroce rfiservfie aux femmes Afghanes. Sans le savoir, il a employfi pour justifier sa guerre - o ironie de THistoire - les arguments invoqufis fi 1'fipoque par Georges Marchais, leader du Parti Communiste Fran?ais, pour se teliciter de 1'intervention sovtetique de 1979: mettre fin un rfigime ffiodal humiliant les femmes.

La violation des droits de 1'homme en general et ceux de la femme en particulier, sans parler de la scandaleuse destruction du Bouddha gfiant de Bamyan, n'ont pourtant pas empfichfi l'administration amfiricaine de nfigocier avec les talibans jusqu'en juillet dernier: la livraison de Ben Laden contre une reconnaissance intemationale du rfigime. Avec pour toile de fond le lobby petrolier, cher au clan Bush, intfiressfi par les gisements de l'Asie centrale ! D'un strict point de vue de Real Politik, l'avenir a montrfi qu'il efit fitfi plus judicieux d'aider le principal adversaire des talibans: le commandant Massoud.

Pour rester sur le registre de 1'hypocrisie et du cynisme, faut-il rappeler que 1'instigateur prfisumfi des attentats du 11 septembre fut longtemps un auxiliaire prficieux des Etats-Unis, armfi et formfi par une C.I.A. prfite fi tout, - et n'importe quoi -, dans son combat contre le communisme international. En fiquipant ses troupes, de missiles Stinger notamment, les antericains en ont fait un hfiros victorieux de la lutte antisovifitique en Afghanistan. Pour des raisons qui lui appartiennent, la erfiature s'est retoumee contre son erfiateur a Tissue de la guerre du Golfe. Oil 1'on dficouvre que les ennemis de nos ennemis ne sont pas toujours nos amis...

Dans le meme sens, le partenariat pour convenances mutuelles unissant Washington a Islamabad a conduit les USA a fermer les yeux sur les violations des droits de 1'homme au Pakistan et sur la fabrication iltegale d'une arme nucleaire, qualifiee symboliquement de "bombe islamique" par le president Bhutto lui-mfime. Sans l'aide du gouvemement Pakistanais, sous-traitant les interfits amfiricains dans la region, sans 1'appui de ses "volontaires" et de ses services secrets, les talibans n'auraient jamais pu s'emparer de Kaboul.

Parce qu'ils continuaient de raisonner dans un contexte de guerre froide, les Etats-Unis ont soutenu les militaires Pakistanais qui ont installe au pouvoir les talibans qui ont ensuite protege les rfiseaux de Ben Laden. L'idfie fitait anglaise, le financement saoudien, l'exficution pakistanaise mais la conception de cette bombe fi retardement incombe au gouvemement amfiricain.

Il ne saurait fitre question ici de faire passer ici une explication historique pour une justification subreptice. Aucun crime, reel ou supposfi, du gouvemement des Etats-Unis ne peut prfitendre excuser 1'horreur des attentats. Inutile d'invoquer Dilthey ou Weber pour bien distinguer, au plan analytique, les differences entre expliquer, comprendre et justifier.

La meilleure propagande, e'est a dire la plus efficace au plan technique, ne se construit pas sur des mensonges mais a partir d'informations incomplfites ou partielles.

Au nom de 1'anti-imperialisme, un certain nombre d'intellectuels se sont empresses de se dfisolidariser de la riposte amfiricaine en invoquant sa politique inique au Proche-Orient et cruelle a 1'figard du peuple Irakien. Or le conflit israfilo-palestinien n'explique pas plus l'attaque terroriste du 11 septembre que la crise economique n'explique la Shoah. En outre, on aurait du mal a citer le nom d'un seul chef d'Etat europfien en ayant fait plus que Carter et Clinton pour essayer de ramener la paix dans cette partie du monde. Quant a 1'Irak, ceux qui parlent des enfants irakiens morts des consfiquences de l'embargo - en gonflant outrageusement des chiffres dfija terribles: 600.000 selon 1'UNICEF, de 1 fi 1,5 million selon leurs propres statistiques - n'fivoquent jamais le sort des 150.000 Kurdes exposfis aux armes chimiques et biologiques selon la volontd de Saddam Hussein. En une seule joumfie, le 17 mars 1988, son armfie a gazfi une ville du Kurdistan Irakien provoquant la mort de 7000 civils dans une atroce agonie.

On ne peut pas reprocher en mfime temps aux Amfiricains de ne pas avoir de politique et les rendre responsable de tous les malheurs du monde. Si comme le pensent les belles ames, le terrorisme est le symptome et non la maladie, si la misfire ficonomique rfisultant de la globalisation libfirale - done Amfiricaine 1 - en est a la source, alors il faudrait nous expliquer pourquoi Ben Laden est un milliardaire Saoudien et non pas rm paysan du Sahel.

Le terrorisme pose un terrible dilemme aux dfimocraties en les condamnant soit fi renier leurs principes vitaux, soit fi disparaitre sous les coups. Pour rfisister en tant que rfigime politique, hie et nunc, elle n'a pas d'autres choix que de bafouer les valeurs qui la fondent en tant qu'idfial normatif.

Restriction des libertfis publiques, chasse aux sorcifires dans la presse et pressions sur les mfidias, arrestations arbitraires, prolongation de la durfie de garde fi vue des fitrangers, mise en place d'une justice d'exception et de tribunaux militaires, fouille des vfihicules et des personnes, dfiveloppement des ficoutes tfilfiphoniques et de la surveillance des courriers filectroniques...

Y compris dans un cadre Ifigal (loi antiterroriste dite *USA patriot Act* aux Etats-Unis, loi sur la sficuritfi en France) et avec l'assentiment d'une opinion publique trop dfisireuse d'fichanger sa libertfi contre la promesse du retour a 1'ordre, les derives securitaires a I'intdrieur contredisent l'esprit democratique aussi dangereusement que les violations du droit de la guerre 4 I'ext&ieur. Une enquete nous dira peut-etre un jour dans quelles conditions exactes sont morts les centaines de prisonniers detenus dans la forteresse de Qalae-Jangi?

Cette guerre 6tait sans doute inevitable a defaut d'etre aimable mais elle n'etait en rien une guerre juste, car s'il existe de justes causes il ne saurait exister de guerre juste.

"Les plus nobles fins assignees a la guerre sont pourries par la guerre» nous rappelle Jacques Ellul pour qui non seulement la fin ne justifie pas les moyens mais pour qui les moyens corrompent les fins. Plus les fins seront r^putdes nobles, plus les mdthodes employees pour les atteindre se rev61eront cruelles. Tout le discours du gouvemement amdricain a consists, precisSment, justifier 1'usage de moyens inhumains en Afghanistan en guise de riposte A une "agression contre 1'humanitS tout entiere."

La politique n'est pas une Industrie fondSe en morale. Max Weber cite un personnage des 'Histoires Florentines ' declarant qu'il fallait fSliciter ceux qui avaient prSfSrS la grandeur de leur CitS au salut de leur ame. Machiavel nous a appris qu'en politique la force etait juste quand elle etait nScessaire. Weber nous a montre qu'en politique on obtenait pas toujours le Bien par le Bien. Ellul n'a cesse, quant a lui, de proclamer que 1'on ne pouvait fonder un monde juste avec des moyens injustes, crSer une sociStS fibre avec des moyens d'esclaves[17].

International Jacques Ellul Society

Berkeley, California
an association of scholars and friends
The UES links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. The UES is the English-language sister-society of the French-language *Association Internationale Jacques El-luL* Together, we maintain a web site— *www.ellul.org*—as our common communications

---

[17] Jacques Ellul on Religion, Technology and Politics, Conversations with Patrick Troude-Chastenet, Scholars Press, 1998.

link for announcements and news of interest to our members, and as a resource for anyone with an interest in Jacques Ellul. From time to time we announce meetings, lectures, and conferences (small or large, formal or informal, sponsored by the UES/ AUE or by others) related to Ellul and his concerns.

Join the IJES

Anyone and everyone is welcome to become an UES member—on two conditions:

(1) agreement with the society's statement of purpose

(2) payment of the annual membership dues of $20.00. Please send a check or bank draft drawn in U.S. dollars.

Send your payment with your name, complete address including postal code, and *your e-mail address if you wish* to be on our UES news e-mail distribution list. UES membership automatically confers membership in the French AUE.

Contact the IJES

e-mail: IJES@ellul.org

post: UES, P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705

IJES Activities

Please forward any news or announcements relevant to the members and friends of the UES. We want to do whatever we can to promote the discussion of Jacques Ellul and the extension of his critical interests. We encourage the formation of study groups and sections of scholarly societies devoted to Ellul studies. We are currently exploring the best strategies for organizing annual gatherings to discuss Ellul's sociology and his theology and ethics.

IJES Leadership

The International Jacques Ellul Society and L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul have been founded by a group of longtime students, scholars, and friends of Jacques Ellul, with the counsel and support of Jean, Yves, and Dominique Ellul, and as a French-American collaboration.

Board of Directors

Patrick Chastenet, *Professor of Political Science, University of Rheims, France* •>

Clifford Christians, *Professor of Communications, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana IL*

Andrew Goddard, *Wycliffe Hall, Oxford University*

Darrell Fasching, *Professor of Religious Studies, University of South Florida, Tampa FL*

David Gill (President), *Institute of Business, Technology, and Ethics, Berkeley, CA*

Joyce Hanks (Vice-President), *Professor of French, University of Scranton, Scranton PA*

Ken Morris (Secretary-Treasurer), *Attomey-at-Law, Berkeley CA* Carl Mitcham, *Professor of Liberal Arts, Colorado School of Mines, Golden CO*

Langdon Winner, *Professor of Political Science, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY*

Issue #29 Jul 2002 — Rethinking Ellul's Theory on the Role of Technology

- Click to view the original PDF

In This Issue

From the Editor

In this Issue, Dell deChant uses Ellul to critique American society. He focuses on consumerism in the United States through that fabric of American life known as its annual festivals. While utilizing Ellul to critique a specific culture, the audience and the problem are understood to be far-reaching and multi-national. One country's public celebrations become a laboratory for fulfilling the *Forum's* purpose, that is, critiquing technological civilization.

In previous issues of *The Ellul Forum,* we have used Ellul's framework to reflect on a particular event - September 11, 2001. Through Ellul we have examined Christian anarchy, communications technology, and human rights. In all these case, the particular illumined the general. As with this Issue, the vitality of scholarship in Ellul's legacy becomes transparent.

Dell deChant's essay and Darrell Fasching's response have the added benefit of interrogating the adequacy of a major component of Ellul's theory. DeChant disagrees with Ellul's primacy of technique, arguing for the economy instead. While defending and clarifying Ellul's central thesis, Fasching celebrates deChant's bringing Ellul into the postmodern debate. Members of the Universify of South Florida faculty in its Department of Religion, deChant and Fasching are both indebted to Ellul—especially his *New Demons*—for demonstrating how to call our age into question.

About the Ellul Forum

History & Purpose

The Ellul Forum has been published twice per year since August of 1988. Our goal is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to aspects of our technological civilization and cany forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

While *The Ellul Forum* does review and discuss Jacques Ellul, whom we consider one of the most insightful intellectuals of our era, it is not our intention to treat his writings as a body of sacred literature to be endlessly dissected. The appropriate tribute to his work is to carry forward its spirit and agenda for the critical analysis of our technical civilization. Ellul invites and provokes us to think new thoughts and enact new ideas. To that end we invite you to join the conversation in *The Ellul Forum.*

The Ellul Forum is an English-language publication but we are currently exploring ways of linking more fully with our francophone colleagues.

Manuscript Submissions

Send original manuscripts (essays, responses to essays in earlier issues) to:

Clifford Christians, Editor, *The Ellul Forum* Institute of Communications Research University of Illinois

810 S. Wright Street, Suite 228

Urbana, IL 61801 USA

Please send both hard copy and computer disc versions, indicating the software and operating system used (e.g., Microsoft Word for Windows 98). Type end notes as text (do not embed in the software footnote/endnote part of your program).

Essays should not exceed twenty pages, double-spaced, in length.

Manuscript submissions will only be returned if you enclose a self-addressed, adequately postaged envelope with your submission.

The Ellul Forum also welcomes suggestions of themes for future issues.

Books & Reviews

Books. The Ellul Forum considers for review books (1) about Jacques Ellul, (2) significantly interacting with or dependent on Ellul's thought, or (3) exploring the range of sociological and theological issues at the heart of Ellul's work. We can not guarantee that every book submitted will actually be reviewed in *The Ellul Forum* nor are we able to return books so submitted.

Book Reviews. If you would like to review books for *The Ellul Forum,* please submit your vita/resume and a description of your reviewing interests.

Religiosity and the Sacred in Postmodern America

by Dell deChant

While it certainly can be maintained that American holidays have become secular events, this paper proposes that it is precisely their "secular" (materialist/ commercial/ consumerist) dimension that makes them most obviously religious events in the context of postmodern/ latecapitalist culture. Rather than being casualties of the struggle between commercial interests and traditional values for dominance in the cultural marketplace, it appears equally plausible that the loss of conventional holiday meanings may actually be the consequence of the inability of older civic and religious institutions to successfully compete in another sort of marketplace — the marketplace of religion.

The theoretical basis for this type of understanding was initially sketched in a paper I presented at the American Academy of Religion in 1996. In that paper, I argued that contemporary American holidays (and Christmas in particular) reveal affinities with festivals of ancient cosmological cultures. In this regard, it can be observed that postmodern holidays have not so much lost their religious or cultural significance as their *transcendental* religious significance and their *traditional* cultural significance. More-

over, what is witnessed here is more of a transference rather than a loss of significance; from transcendental to cosmological,[18] in the case of religion, and from traditional to postmodern, in the case of culture. This line of inquiry represents an updating and slight reconfiguring of an argument first presented by Jacques Ellul about twenty-five years ago.[19]

The premise of this variation of Ellul's argument is that America's late-capitalist, postmodern culture is best classified as cosmological and, if so, America's holidays, as representative religious events of such a culture, necessarily manifest characteristics of a cosmological engagement with the sacred. This paper offers a sketch of the theoretic background for this sort of understanding and how it might be utilized methodologically in the analysis of contemporary culture. Although my particular focus is on American culture, and specifically its holidays, I believe the general approach outlined here is potentially applicable to other postmodern cultures — e.g., those of Western Europe and Japan. A more detailed exposition of my methodology is offered in my forthcoming book, *The Sacred Santa*[20]

The paper is divided into five parts. The first two parts present working descriptions of religion and postmodern culture (respectively) as used in this analysis. Part three brings together the two descriptions to form a theory of religion in postmodern culture. Building on this theory, part four contains an analysis of consumption as a sacred ideal and part five briefly outlines how contemporary holidays may be understood as the functional holy days of postmodern culture. The conclusion specifies the possible implications of this method of inquiry and analysis.

Probing the Sacred Ground of Contemporary Culture: What Is Religion?

The first and perhaps most obvious concept to explicate in the context of studies of this type is the notoriously ambiguous, yet theoretically unavoidable concept of *religion* itself. The understanding offered here is essentially functional, but only in so far as the functional approach is seen as acknowledging the legitimacy of a sacred realm as an object of human intending. The other theoretical issues dealt with in the paper, and the general line of analysis are necessarily related to this working description of religion:

Religion is about power. It mediates our relationship with the source(s) of ultimate (sacred) power by suggesting, teaching, or commanding (1) a *belief* that the ultimate truth and meaning of human life is derived from and related to an order and purpose

---

[18] In brief "cosmological" refers to religions and cultural systems that locate the Ground of Being or Ultimate Power in the natural world. Such systems are contrasted with "transcendental" systems, which locate the Ground of Being in a supernatural dimension –literally, a realm beyond and radically different from nature. The use of terms "cosmological" and "transcendental" to distinguish these two types of systems was introduced by Eric Voegelin. See Voegelin *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952) and *Israel and Revelation* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1956).

[19] See Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

[20] Dell deChant, *The Sacred Santa: The Religious Dimensions of Consumer Culture* (Cleveland, The Pilgrim Press, 2002).

based on or decreed by the ultimate (sacred) power (e.g. gods, God, nature, cosmic principles, social order). (2) This belief is necessarily shared by a group or *community.* (3) This belief is *maintained* because of (a) the community's participation in certain special and uniquely patterned actions either personal or communal, typically called *rituals,* and (b) special (numinous) narratives, typically called *myths,* which deal with unique persons and/or events related to the sacred concerns and elements. (4) This belief in the foundational truth and meaning of human life is understood by participants in the religion to allow them (as individuals and as a community) a certain degree of *power over material conditions* (in so far as they live and act in. harmony with the ultimate power) and to supply them with *answers to ultimate questions* regarding nature and the human condition (such as death, the afterlife, evil, one's place in society, why one succeeds or fails).

Of special note here is the character and function of myths and rituals. Myths are narratives about the sacred and humanity's relationship to the sacred. Typically, these narratives are set in a primordial time of origins and depict the actions and teachings of venerated ancestors, heroes, saviors, and gods. These actions and teachings disclose both the foundational reality of life and articulate the relationship of the believer to this reality. For the believer, myths communicate truths of such profundity that they cannot be doubted; truths so fundamental that even in the face of falsifying material and/or historical evidence the believer accepts the reality of the myth. To the degree that myths lose their radical truthfulness, they lose their primary religious function.

Myths can be divided into three classes: "meta," secondary, and tertiary.[21] The meta-myth is the master story of a culture, which articulates "the true motivating and psychological foundations of [a] civilization... expressions of the very being of the collective and universal civilization in which we are living."[22] Secondary and tertiary myths are narratives that offer more accessible versions of meta-myth, serving to personalize, vivify, and make it immediately relevant to individuals. In their secondary and especially their tertiary forms, myths guide and motivate religious activities. In their most formal sense, such activities are called rituals.

For the believer, rituals are the formal processes through which one participates in or otherwise affirms a proper relationship to the sacred. In this regard, the "texts" that religious rituals follow are the myths of the religion, because these are the narratives that articulate the sacred realm and humanity's relationship to that realm.

In a religious sense, then, rituals and myths are intertwined in such a way that rituals reenact myths and myths illuminate rituals. Through rituals, the believer experiences the sacred realm described in myths and is brought into communion with the

---

[21] The specification of three classes of myth is derived, with some modifications, from Jacques Ellul. My meta-myth corresponds to what Ellul refers to as the "basic" or "essential" myth of a culture. My designation of secondaty and tertiary myths is derived from Ellul, although, in my deployment, the two are more precisely distinguished from each other. See Jacques Ellul, *New Demons,* trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 88-121, esp. 100-110.

[22] Ibid., 109.

foundational reality of life. In a practical sense, the interrelation of myth and ritual is revealed in the relationship between mythic narratives such as the Exodus story and the ritual of Passover; the narrative of the Last Supper and the ritual of communion; or the narrative of the Buddha's enlightenment and the ritual of meditation. There is, thus, a dynamic nexus when the sacred reality disclosed in myths is fully experienced through the performance of rituals. In an analysis of New Year's festivals in the ancient world, Mircea Eliade uses the term "mythico-ritual" to characterize this synergy.[23] And as argued in *The Sacred Santa,* many contemporary American holidays reveal this same sort of mythico-ritual dynamism.

Although healthy religions routinely reveal the positive dimension *of the* synergy of myths and rituals, it can also be reflected negatively because the loss of plausibility for one may undermine the meaningfulness of the other. In other words, when believers begin to doubt either the radical truth of the myths or the re-creative power of the rituals, the religious significance of both may decline. Doubt of the truth of the myths leads to a weakening of the meaning and value of the rituals, just as doubt of the power of rituals causes a corresponding erosion in the plausibility of mythic verities. As such doubts become more widespread among participants, religious communities decline.

******

This exploration and analysis of myth and ritual is undertaken in the context of what Paul Tillich introduced and first developed under the heading of "Theology of Culture" and as further detailed in Darrell Fasching's contemporary interpretation of Tillich's method as a form of social ethics.[24] There are two crucial elements in this approach. First, as Tillich recognized, "every culture has an inherent religious dimension, even as every religion is shaped by the culture in which it emerges [and] culture is driven by its religious 'substance,' which is the human need for meaning expressed and embodied in its...'ultimate concerns'"; and second, theology of culture is specified as "a critique of the religious dynamic at work in the diverse autonomous spheres of human endeavor that typify modem culture."[25] I argue that this religious dynamic is found in the myths and rituals of a culture and most explicitly in what Eliade called its mythico-ritual dynamic.[26] Following Tillich's proposal, then, as a theology of culture, my subsequent inquiry into contemporary myths and rituals can be understood as a "theological questioning of all cultural values,"[27] since the myths

---

[23] For example, see Eliade's usage of the term in *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), 68-70.

[24] See Darrell Fasching, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1993), chap. 4, esp. 134-141.

[25] Tillich as explicated by Fasching in Ibid., 137, 139.

[26] For example, see Eliade's use of the term in *Cosmos and History,* trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper and Row, Harper Torch Books, 1959), 68-70.

[27] Paul Tillich, "Uber die Idee einer Theologie der Kultur," in *Kanstudien* (Berlin: Pan Verlang, Rolf Heise, 1920). Found in translation in *What Is Religion,* trans. James Luther Adams (New York: Harper and Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1969), 165.

and rituals of this culture form the religious "substance" of these values –affirming their basis in truth and allowing experiential interaction with the reality of this truth.

As Tillich understood theology of culture to be a "critique of the religious dynamic at work in ... modem culture," in my application, the critique is of the religious dynamic at work in a postmodem culture, which is seemingly secular. It is also, necessarily, a postmodern critique. What, however, does a postmodern critique of the religious dynamic of postmodern culture look like? I think the jury is still out on this, but to my mind it involves irony, indirection, and no small bit of playfulness and humor — at least those are elements I tried to deploy in developing the critique offered in *The Sacred Santa.* Postmodern critique aside, however, for purposes of this paper, my use of Tillich and Fasching, bring into focus two other terms that require contextual explication: "religious dynamic," and "postmodern culture." Postmodern culture will be dealt with first.

Probing the Sacred Ground of Contemporary Culture: What Is A Postmodern Culture?

My intent here is not to resolve the complex nest of issues commingled in and around the term, postmodem. The term is in extreme flux today, in part due to its magnificent popularity in both popular and academic culture. One of those ferociously alluring labels, postmodern can at once classify an incredibly vast array of cultural phenomena while simultaneously (and necessarily) defying any and all efforts to stabilize its meaning with anything close to precision. It is a term of conjure and conjecture, and ultimately, I suspect, uncertainty for many. This uncertainty may not be diminished here, although it is my hope to approach postmodernism from a new direction that brings into focus an overlooked element in the ever-expanding discussion of its meaning. For this purpose, a helpful place to begin is with Fredric Jameson's explication of postmodernism.

Jameson's theory of post-modem culture follows Ernest Mandel's thesis in his *Late Capitalism,* and in a Marxist reading, Jameson argues that cultural changes follow changes in modes of production and technology. Thus, Mandel's market capitalism corresponds to the cultural period Jameson refers to as "realism"; Mandel's monopoly capitalism corresponds to Jameson's "modernism"; and Mandel's third stage (variously termed postindus trial-, multinational-, late-, or consumer-capitalism) corresponds to Jameson's "postmodernism."[28]

Of primary interest here are Jameson's comments on changes that have occurred in both the modes of and the popular attitudes *toward* consumption in postmodern culture due to the impact of late capitalism's incredible capacity to produce and reproduce both material objects and images. For Jameson, late capitalism or "consumer capitalism ... is the purest form of capitalism yet to have emerged, [which witnesses]

---

[28] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 35-36.

a prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas," such as the "unconscious" through "the rise of the media and the advertising industry."[29]

In the postmodern world, "'commodity production [is based on the] frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever great rates of turnover,"[30] in which there is "an immense dilation of... the sphere of commodities ... a commodity rush, our "representations' of things tending to arouse an enthusiasm and a mood swing not necessarily inspired by the things themselves" (x). The '"culture of consumption" is presented as a dynamic force, which when "unleashed" consumes persons "to the point of being unable to imagine anything else" (207). Moreover, "'we are *inside* the culture of the market and ... the inner dynamic of the culture of consumption is an infernal machine from which one does not escape by the taking of thought (or moralizing positions)" (206). It offers "an infinite propagation and replication of 'desire' that feeds on itself and has no outside and no fulfillment" (206). He notes that "the force, then, of the concept of the market lies in its 'totalizing' structure'...; that is, in its capacity to afford a model of a social totality" (272).

Jameson's reading of consumption as the dominant characteristic of postmodem culture is affirmed and advanced further in the work of Jean Baudrillard. As noted by his critical exegete, Douglas Kellner, Baudrillard interprets postmodem culture as a culture of consumption in which "participation ... requires systematic purchase and organization of domestic objects, fashion and so on into a system of organized codes and models."[31] In Baudrillard's words:

We have reached the point where "consumption" has grasped the whole of life, where all activities are connected in the same combinatorial mode... In the phenomenology of consumption, this general climatization of life, goods, objects, services, behaviors and social relations represents the perfected, "consummated" stage of evolution which, through articulated networks of objects, ascends from pure and simple abundance to complete conditioning of action and time and finally to the systematic organization of ambience, which is characteristic of the drugstores, the shopping mall, or the modem airports in our futuristic cities.[32]

Kellner further interprets Baudrillard: "The consumer ... cannot avoid the obligation to consume, because it is consumption that is the primary mode of social integration and the primary ethic and activity within the consumer society. The consumer ethic and 'fim morality' thus involve active labor, incessant curiosity and search for novelty, and conformity to the latest fads, products and demands to consume."[33] Through the

---

[29] Ibid., 36. See also his earlier work, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983), 111-125.

[30] Ibid., 5. Subsequent citations in this section are given parenthetically in the text.

[31] Douglas Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1989), 13.

[32] Baudrillard, cited in Ibid.

[33] Ibid., 16.

acquisition of commodities, "our entire society *communicates* and speaks of and to itself."[34] Finally, and most importantly, Baudrillard "describes the consumer mentality as a form of *'magical thought* which reigns over consumption. It is a miraculous mentality which rules everyday life, a primitive mentality in the sense that is defined as a belief in the omnipotence of thoughts: in this case, belief in the omnipotence of signs.'"[35]

It is the premise of this -paper that Jameson and Baudrillard are correct in their interpretation of postmodern culture as fundamentally a culture of consumption; a culture defined materially and psychically in and through the consumption of objects and images. Moreover, this interpretation should be expanded and further clarified to include the observation that mere consumption does not adequately describe our relationship with objects and images. The association is more complex. Rather than simply consuming objects and images, postmodern culture can be understood as explicating meaning and value through a three-stage process, which begins (1) with the acquisition of items, (2) is clarified in the consumption of items, and finally (3) is fulfilled in the disposal of items. In critical texts, the first and third stages are typically subsumed by the second, as in Jameson, Baudrillard, Miller, and Schor,[36] but the first and third make both logical and psychical claims to equal importance. The first stage is of absolute importance for without it, actual consumption cannot occur. One must first acquire the item before the item can be consumed. In light of this, it is notable that studies of compulsive/ addictive behavior indicate the compulsive/addictive subject is often driven as much (or more) by the desire to acquire as by the actual possession/consumption of objects. The final stage is equally important because it allows the process to begin again, and preferably with a higher quality object or image within a particular class of items. Although researched studies of compulsive behavior have not revealed particular interest in this feature of the process, the satisfaction of disposing of the consumed item may well equal the satisfaction of acquiring it initially, because only when the item is disposed of can the process begin again.

What is largely missing in the interpretation of the process of consumption (or the process of acquisition-consumption-disposition as argued here) is the recognition that the process may be decidedly religious in character. It is here that the work of Jacques Ellul and Eric Voegelin provide the critical hermeneutic machinery.

Probing the Sacred Ground of Contemporary Culture: What Is Religion In A Postmodern Culture?

While there are a number of good ways to go about investigating the religious character of postmodern consumerist culture, the work of Jacques Ellul and Eric Voegelin supply especially reliable theoretical instruments for such an inquiry. Unlike Jameson

---

[34] Baudrillard, cited in Ibid.

[35] Kellner with citation of Baudrillard, Ibid., 14.

[36] Jameson, Ibid.; Baudrillard, in Kellner, Ibid., Daniel Miller, ed., *Unwrapping Christmas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 18-19; and Juliet B. Schor, *The Overspent American* (New York: Basic Books, 1998).

and Baudrillard, Voegelin and Ellul do not minimize or marginalize the religious dimension of what typically is presented as secular culture. Rather than relegating religion to its classical forms and explicating it in the context of its eclipse or its problematic status in postmodern culture, Voegelin and Ellul allow interpreters to recognize what Tillich calls the "religious dynamic" in the seemingly secular process of acquisition-consumption-disposal. More than a quarter of a century ago, first Voegelin and then Ellul developed theories that designated the religious substance of contemporary culture as something substantially different from what ordinarily passes for religion. In application, their theories recognized that the institutions typically characterized as religion may neither be the dominant material embodiments of contemporary religiosity nor the belief systems that accurately serve to mediate human relations with the sacred.

For them, those material institutions and theoretical assemblages typically classified as religion (namely, classical and modern embodiments and sectarian variations of traditional transcendental' religions [post-Vedic Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam]), face a serious challenge from alternative forms of religiosity that are at once uniquely contemporary in form and function while also being incredibly ancient in foundational structure. Ellul and Voegelin recognized that these alternative forms of religious expression are not only completely unrelated to the traditional religions with which culture is most familiar, they are the antithesis of such religions. Where traditional/normative religions are transcendental (in their locus of the divine) and anthropological (in their locus of human meaning and value), the alternative religions recognized by Ellul and Voegelin are cosmological (in their locus of the divine) and sociological (in their locus of human meaning and value).

In a description of the cultures of the ancient Near East, Peter Berger offers a helpful summary explication of the term, cosmological, as used in this context. Crediting Voegelin as the source for the term, Berger observes that in cosmological systems:

[T]he human world (that is, everything we today would call culture and society) is understood as being embedded in a cosmic order that embraces the entire universe. This order not only fails to make the sharp modem differentiation between human and non-human (or "natural") spheres of empirical reality, but, more importantly, it is an order that posits continuity between ... the world of men and the world of the gods. This continuity, which assumes an ongoing linkage of human events with the sacred forces permeating the universe is realized (not just affirmed but literally re-established) again and again in religious ritual.[37]

The cosmological worldview is the starting point for Ellul's analysis of religion in contemporary culture. Illuminating the character of the sacred in cosmological cultures, in *The New Demons* he writes: "In a world which is difficult, hostile, formidable, man...attributes sacred values to that which threatens him and to that which pro-

---

[37] Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969), 113. Berger cites Voegelin as the source for the term "cosmological."

tects him, or more exactly to that which restores him and puts him in tune with the universe."[38] In ancient cosmological cultures, which depended on the cycles of nature and fertility of the natural environment, nature and the natural environment were the ground of the sacred — the ground of ultimate concern, awe and fascination, dread, and enchantment.

Today, however, Ellul argues that technology has replaced nature as the sacred ground and locus of ultimate concern. As he notes: "The novelty of our era is that man's deepest experience is no longer with nature... Hence [nature] is no longer the inciter and place of the sacred"(100). Instead, "the modem western technical and scientific world is a sacral world" and "technology is the god who saves"(70, 73). In essence, in today's world, technology has come to occupy a place analogous to that of nature in antiquity. It is the source of ultimate power and ultimate dread, what Rudolf Otto would call the *mysterium tremendus et fascinans;* and so, like nature of old, technology elicits a religious response. Importantly, although Ellul analogizes the sacred power of this era (technology) with the sacred power of traditional cosmological religions (nature), he does not equate it with the sacred power of the traditional transcendental religions of the West (God), at least, not in a conventional manner. While Ellul is correct in his general approach, he may err when specifying technology as the sacred ground. For reasons to be discussed later, the Economy may better embody the sacred in contemporaty culture.

As with the cosmological systems of yore, modem cosmological religious expressions seek to relate persons and all of culture to the source of sacred power. Just as the ancient cosmological religions utilized myth and ritual to establish and legitimate this relationship, so too does the modem cosmological religion; but because the source of sacred power has changed, so too have the myths and rituals. In Ellul's reading, where once the myths told of a sacred time of ancestors and heroes, gods of nature and fertility, today they tell of the sacred origins and mysterious processes of a technological world and one's right relationship with technology (113). Here again, Ellul's commitment to technology as the ground of the sacred may weaken his analysis of contemporary myths.

Following his specification of technology as the sacred, Ellul designates the "two fundamental myths of modem man" as "history and science"(98) and the sacred texts of the "secular religions" as Das *Kapital, Mein Kampf,* and *The Little Red Book.* Importantly, he also recognizes advertising as "the liturgy and the psalmody of the consumer religion"(146), but he does not quite tell us how the liturgy relates to the myths or the sacred texts. Ellul may be somewhat off the mark in designating history and science as the dominant myths of today and quite a bit off the mark in his designation of the sacred texts (although we can certainly excuse his citation of specific texts that carried more political power in the time of his writing than they do today). He comes closer to the mark in citing advertising as the liturgy of the consumer religion, but his failure to

---

[38] Ellul, *New Demons,* 50. Subsequent citations in this section are given parenthetically in the text.

clearly explain how the liturgy relates to the myths points up a fundamental problem in his analysis.

Consumption as a religious expression is not legitimated (mythically) by history and science, and while its liturgy may well be advertising, this liturgy seems significantly disconnected from Ellul's sacred technology - notwithstanding his own observation that it would not be difficult to "show how it [advertising] is planted in the sacred and in the religious structure" (146). Rather than history and science being the dominant myths of today, we might look to narratives that articulate the meaning and order of life in a world dominated by the Economy — perhaps focusing on narratives of economic success and material acquisition. The delivery system for these myths is the mass media, with television being the primary vehicle.

In the case of ritual, for Ellul, it is political activity, for politics is the process through which citizens participate in the sacred work of the state, which mediates their engagement with technology. In fact, in chapter six of *The New Demons,* Ellul offers a rather elegant argument supporting his claim that politics is the religion of the contemporary world. As noted above, the sacred texts of today are political texts; and, looking more closely, Ellul finds messiahs (for example, the proletariat, in Marxism), theories of resurrection (of the race and the Volk in Nazism), millennialism (as with the Chinese cultural revolution), dogmas (Marxist theory), clergy, and heretics. Of course, there is also worship and liturgy; these are the great political festivals, such as those at Munich and Nuremberg or "Chinese assemblies of Tien Am Mem." Curiously, and somewhat inaccurately, 1 believe, Ellul finds these political religions to correspond perfectly with Christianity (189), and their modification from radical movements to "guarantors of the established order" (circa the mid-1970s) to be analogous to the modification of Christianity when it became politically successful (196-7). Although his primary focus is on totalitarian states, he observes: "there is a sacralizing of all political activity elsewhere, in the liberal democratic, bourgeois and capitalist countries" (197). He does not support or develop this observation, but it seems that this could be done easily enough, following his thesis. Especially keen is his analysis of the ritualistic function of politics in the technological society. As he writes:

The political behavior of the modem citizen makes manifest the sacred of the state, and the fact that the participating citizen is endowed with an exciting grandeur. Politics has become the place of final truth, of absolute seriousness, of radical divisions among men, of the separation of good from evil... In the end it is there [in the political domain] that people experience the deepest conviction that everything is at stake. (198)

Thus, as with the source of sacred power and the myths that illuminate it, the religious rituals that relate persons to this power are decidedly different from those of traditional religion. But is Jacques Ellul correct? I think he is, but only up to a point.

Like Baudrillard, whom he cites, Ellul observes: "Consumption... is no longer a materialistic fact. It has become the meaning of life"(144). And he does recognize a distinctive religious quality to consumption. Still, for Ellul, politics functions as the de-

cisive form of religious expression in technological societies, and these political religions are presented as essentially variations on Christianity, a transcendental religion.[39]

Voegelin, for his part, also sees modern political movements as religions.[40] In his analysis of contemporary culture and his reading of politics as religion, Voegelin, like Ellul, recognizes that the fundamental impulse of such cultures is harmonial and integrative, and like Ellul, he cites Soviet Marxism and Nazism in this regard. What Voegelin does, and Ellul does not (at least not thoroughly or convincingly), is recognize the similarities between these and other contemporary social and political systems and the cosmological religions of antiquity.[41] In his words:

The self-understanding of a society as the representative of cosmic order originates in the period of the cosmological empires in the technical sense, but it is not confined to this period. Not only does cosmological representation survive in the imperial symbols of the Western Middle Ages or in continuity into the China of the twentieth century; its principle is also recognizable where the truth to be represented is symbolized in an entirely different manner. In Marxian dialects, for instance, the truth of cosmic order is replaced by the truth of a historically immanent order.[42] cosmos and the immediate natural environment. It also served to maintain collective unity in the society. In fact, and in distinction to contemporary transcendental religions, religion was not a discrete institution in these cultures. It simply was, and through myth and ritual it affirmed and acted out (in a heightened and intensified sense) the truth that the way things were, was the way they should be. For these cultures, is was ought.

Like Ellul, Voegelin clearly recognizes that contemporary culture evinces this same sort of worldview. He also misdiagnoses the religious character of this culture by looking to politics as the religious institution that typifies this worldview. Again, like Ellul,

---

[39] Ibid., chap. 6. Ellul notes that he is following Aron and Simondon in his analysis of politics as "secular religion" and this approach may ultimately account for his too-brief depiction of consumption as religion (144-147) and the internal contradiction this depiction sets up with his argument that politics is the functional religion of the contemporaty world.

[40] See Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952); *Science Politics and Gnosticism* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1968); and his early work *Die Politischen Religionen (The Political Religions)* (Vienna; Bermann-Fischer, 1938). Curiously, Voegelin interprets "political religions'" as variants of ancient Gnosticism.

[41] There are important similarities between Ellul and Voegelin and I think that when used together, as here, they disclose much more than either of them when used independently. Darrell Fasching has done the best job yet of revealing the significant affinities between the work of Voegelin and Ellul and then successfully deploying both their theories, essentially in tandem, to illuminate contemporary ethical dilemmas. See especially, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima,* chap. 4. In short, Fasching argues that Voegelin's distinction between cosmological and anthropological is the same as Ellul's distinction between sacred and holy, with the latter term in both being essentially analogous to what I have termed "transcendental" and the former term functioning essentially as Voegelin and I (here) have used the term. I think the analogy works well in terms of the sort of ethical analysis Fasching is doing, and could possibly work here to reconfigure Ellul's analysis of political religion. But it would take a *reconfiguration* of Ellul, and this is hardly necessary when Voegelin's theory works perfectly well as a *clarification* of Ellul.

[42] Voegelin, 59-60.

he nicely analyzes the structures of politics and other cultural institutions as religious in character, but then, despite what would seem to be his own overwhelming evidence, he concludes that these institutions are Gnostic — dependent on a mystical sort of salvific knowledge about history and human destiny. This is no more satisfying or accurate than Ellul's efforts to analogize these institutions to Christianity. And although Voegelin labored long and hard to make this argument, ancient Gnosticism itself was, at best, minimally cosmological, while in Voegelin's own presentation, contemporary Gnosticism is clearly cosmological, with myths of history and progress serving to illuminate the sacred realm and political movements serving the religious function of integrating persons and whole societies with this realm. Voegelin's much disputed '"Gnostic thesis" is probably the greatest flaw in his far-reaching and highly regarded inquiry into the order and process of history. How much better it would have been had he forgone the problematic Gnostic thesis altogether, and expanded his brief and passing analogies of contemporary culture with cosmological civilizations into a working argument.

Despite their flaws, Ellul and Voegelin, when used together in a complementaiy fashion, supply what was missing in Jameson and Baudrillard — the basis for an analysis of the religious dimension of contemporary culture. The question remains, however, what is the proper way to interpret this dimension? This is a fundamental question, because if Ellul and Voegelin are correct about the cosmological character of contemporary Western culture (and it is the presumption of this paper that they are), then the religious expression of this culture is cosmological and so the rituals and myths of this culture should reveal characteristics of a cosmological engagement with the sacred. It is here that the Ellul-Voegelin theory seems to fall apart, for although they both seem to strongly suggest that the essence of contemporary culture is cosmological (not withstanding their clumsy ˆattempts to Christianize or Gnosticize specific religious expressions), they fundamentally misdiagnose the religious dimension itself by looking to politics rather than to a more clearly cosmological phenomenon –consumption. Ellul and Voegelin, thus, need to be linked with Jameson and Baudrillard. This is what I attempt to do in developing a theoretical basis for the study of religion in postmodern culture presented in *The Sacred Santa.* In short, I bring Ellul-Voegelin together with Jameson-Baudrillard - which might well have troubled the former pair of thinkers. How this somewhat paradoxical combination works can now be sketched.

In ancient cosmological cultures, religion functioned to integrate society and internal social structures with the

The Idea of Sacred Consumption

The central problem with designating politics as the religious dimension of contemporary culture is found in the failure of politics to generate sustainable representative myths and associated rituals. If what we are dealing with in the postmodern era is a cosmological culture, politics does not offer a reasonable approximation of religion because the myths and rituals of political reality lack the sort of massive plausibility and culturally unifying dynamic demanded of the religious expressions of such cul-

tures. While Ellul is accurate in recognizing the quasireligious role of consumption, his designation of politics as the process through which moderns "manifest the sacred," experience "exciting grandeur," and find the basis of "final truth" simply overstates the religious function of politics. Today, politics is typically dismissed as a charade at the level of popular culture and its substance (the quest for and maintenance of social power) tends not to generate community-sustaining myths and rituals, but instead, communitydestroying narratives and socially disorienting activities, often of the most disconcerting type.

The search for the religious character of postmodern culture must therefore lead elsewhere, and the elsewhere to which it leads is back to Jameson and Baudrillard and their carefully articulated study of the social function of commodity consumption. Following Baudrillard (and entirely in the context of Jameson), Kellner observes:

[T]he consumer ... cannot avoid the obligation to consume, because it is consumption that is the primary mode of social integration and the primary ethic and activity within the consumer society. The consumer ethic and "fun morality" thus involve active labor, incessant curiosity and search for novelty, and conformity to the latest fads, products and demands to consume."[43]

In this regard (to the degree that he follows Jameson and Baudrillard), Ellul is absolutely correct when he writes that "consumption ... is no longer a materialistic fact. It has become the meaning of life"; but he errs in not recognizing that consumption, as the "meaning of life," is (much more so than politics) revealed to be the basis of ultimate legitimation of individuals and society as a whole. Through consumption, which begins with ritual acquisition, one gains significance in the cosmic scheme of existence by engaging in a sacred activity and actually penetrating the sacred realm itself. Thus, rather than technology serving as the sacred ground of contemporary culture, it is the Economy; and rather than politics serving as the religious mediation of sacred reality, it is consumption, or more accurately, the experience of acquisition-consumption-disposition.

Using the description of religion given earlier as a guide, consumption may now be described as that which relates persons to the sacred (Economy) through the shared myths and rituals of a community, which, in the case of cosmological religion, is an entire culture. Religion is the phenomenon that harmonizes individual and collective activities and integrates culture as a whole with the order and process of the sacred (Economic) realm. In cosmological systems, this phenomenon is not isolated in discrete institutions, but rather, it is embedded in the collective beliefs of the entire culture. These beliefs give order, guidance, and legitimation to culture as a whole and its residents specifically. It is that which articulates one's right relationship with the sacred and reveals the cosmic meaning of existence, which is also the culturally normative way of life and living. The Sanskrit term and Hindu religious concept *dharma* (sacred/social duty), perhaps best approximates this notion.

---

[43] Kellner, 16.

Thus, if the order and process (or order-process) of the Economy can be read as the ground of the sacred, then religion in its cosmological form and function is the interrelated, comprehensive, and incredibly complex collection of cultural beliefs and practices that explain and motivate one's right relationship with the Economic order and its process. This right relationship is illuminated and vivified in culturally embedded myths. Such myths must be at once believed as elemental (unquestioned) truths of existence. This, by the way, is true of all myths, whether cosmological or transcendental, but it is not true of Ellul's myths of history and science and Voegelin's similar myths of history and progress, which seem to function mythically only in some sort of abstract, academic manner. Rather than myths of history, science, or progress, the myths that relate postmoderns to the sacred realm of the Economy are the much more vital, robust economic narratives of late capitalism.

The paradigmatic model of these narratives can be referred to as a meta-myth.[44] As such, it is the overarching story that communicates the culture's sacred ideal. It is the myth that contains and generates all other myths and to which all other myths in some way refer. In principle and (ritual) practice, the great meta-myth of postmodern culture is the myth of success and affluence, gained through a proper relationship with the Economy, and revealed in the everexpanding material prosperity of society and through the ever-increasing acquisition and consumption of products by individuals. From this meta-myth, all other (more accessible, relative, and domestic) myths derive.

Although the meta-myth is seldom articulated explicitly, the secondary and tertiary myths it spawns are communicated in narratives derived from popular culture and told as much through images as words. Secondary myths are narratives about the masters of business and finance; the stars of movies, sports, and the music industry; persons who win lotteries, make fortunes e-trading, win gameshows—and then "live large" as a consequence of their success. They are the stories of Bill Gates, Michael Jordan, Madonna, Shaquille O'Neal, Tom Hanks, Jody Foster, the person on TV we never heard of who receives the check for millions of dollars, or the one who catches some record-breaking home run ball. Most commonly, secondary myths are spun out in the endless round of talk-shows, sports broadcasts, and to a lesser extent sitcoms and sitdrams. But they also are communicated through news reports, supermarket tabloids, mainstream periodicals, and all the media instruments of culture. Each and all of these stories, in their own way, constantly tell and retell the meta-myth — the myth of material success and achievement, gained through mastery of the mysteries of the Economy. Besides these stories are the wide range of tertiary myths. These generally tend to focus on representative persons from the public at large and reveal how they too participate in the sacred reality of prosperity and affluence through personal rituals of acquisition and consumption.

Like the myths of any era, the myths of contemporary America are the stories its citizens know best, that they listen to most closely, tell to one another, and never tire

---

[44] My "meta-myth" is analogous to Ellul's "basic" and "essential" myth. See n. 4.

of hearing. They want to be like the heroes in the myths, they want to experience the world as the stars experience it; see as they see, live as they live, do what they do, and, in some way, consume as they consume. Stories of history, science, and progress are not in this category; they are academic explanations, theoretic maneuvers. Religious myths are much more vital than these. So too are religious rituals.

As noted earlier, rituals engage religious participants with the sacred realm disclosed by the myths. In their most distinctive cosmological form, these rituals are massive collective experiences that enthrall and enchant the whole of culture and serve to integrate persons and the most important activities of their everyday commonsense world with the sacred order. In postmodern culture, the rituals that integrate citizens with the myths are those activities that allow them to experience a degree of mastery over the mysteries of the Economy; activities that are luminous witness to their own material success and achievement. As the recently popular American TV commercial affirmed: "If I could be like Mike [Michael Jordan]," I would consume a particular commodity. So, to be like Mike, I acquire, consume, and dispose of the product. Then, I acquire another. In this way, I am like Mike, the hero of the myth. I hear the narrative of what the mythic heroes acquire, consume, dispose of: houses, cars, boats; I see the clothes they wear and/or advertise; I learn about the foods and beverages they consume. They are consumers too, and the grandest consumers of all. To be like them, to be close to the sacred world they have mastered, I too consume — as often as I can, in as many ways as I can, and preferably I consume products that are like those that they consume, as well. In this way, citizens of postmodern culture are ritually integrated with the sacred order articulated in their myths and, as is typical of cosmological cultures, the highest form of this ritual integration occurs when the entire culture shares in events of consumption.

In the context of this analysis, it can be said that Ellul and Voegelin err not in their designation of certain elements in contemporary culture as cosmological, but rather in their specification of both the sacred realm and the religious dimension of this culture. In short, neither understands it quite '"cosmologically" enough.

Technology is not the sacred ground because, to use Ellul's terms, it lacks the requisite capacity to '"threaten," "protect," "restore," and '"put [us] in tune with the universe." While it is easy enough to grant that technology can do these things to some extent, it does not do so with the same decisiveness, enormity, and grandeur as the Economy. Technology is the servant of the Economy, as is every other institution and enterprise in contemporary culture. When the Economy foils, it brings disorder, even chaos, to every other institution and enterprise of meaning and value-education, science, the media, government, and technology. On a national scale, technological failures are resolved economically. If a nation possesses adequate economic resources, it quickly and relatively easily resolves technological challenges that may be caused by war or natural calamity. On the other hand, if a nation is not economically powerful, technological challenges are considerably more difficult to resolve. This is witnessed by the way in which the USA quickly and effectively responded to the (technological) destruction

of the events of September 11, 2001, and the inability of Serbia to respond to the destruction wrought by NATO bombing, or Turkey to the August, 1999 earthquake. Economic power can solve problems in all other enterprises that might be claimed to have a sacred significance, but those other enterprises do not exercise a similar power over the Economy. They are its servants and it does use them.

The same is true at the personal level. When my personal engagement with the Economy is interrupted (when I lose my job or am laid off, or if I take a cut in pay because my company is "downsized" or acquired by another), disorder and chaos enter my personal life. This disorder is registered in my inability to participate in the rituals of acquisition and consumption that are religiously necessary to my identity as a citizen of the postmodern world. Only when I am again able to ritually enter into the sacred world, mythically disclosed by narratives of acquisition, can I again be a legitimate member of culture.

The role of the Economy in postmodern culture is eveiy bit the same as the role of nature in primal and archaic cosmological cultures — if not more. Its order and process are beyond my grasp, or anyone's for that matter, including the CEOs of giant corporations and the Chair of the Federal Reserve. Its ways are at times capricious, ruthless, sudden and uncompromising; it cannot be controlled. Its interest in me is indifferent at best; it colors all of my activities, even if I am not immediately aware of it. It tells me who I am, what I am, and what I am able to do. It defines my dharma. James Carville was right when he said (regarding the need for Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign to focus on what was most important to Americans): "It's the Economy, Stupid."

By the same token, and I think as a consequence, politics is not the religion of postmodern culture. Politics is simply not a cosmological religion for it is too distinct an institution. It exists as a separate entity in society and is not usually a part of everyday life for most persons; in fact, for many, it is something to be avoided. Hardly an institution that promotes integrative experiences, politics is, at best, a divisive social enterprise. Likewise, technology is not sacred in a cosmological sense for it is too transcendental. It is one of the grand abstractions (even an ideal) of contemporaiy culture and best understood as a critical explanation for the type of societies that have emerged in the postmodem period. Yet it serves more as a term of analysis and classification of the physical/ material world as we know it than it does a sacred reality that one might experientially encounter in a religious sense.

Remember, in cosmological cultures, and in distinction to those in which transcendental systems dominate, religion is not a discrete institution and the sacred is close at hand. In such cultures, such as America's and others at the postmodem stage of development, religion is indistinguishable from culture itself; indistinguishable from the normative way of life and living, which it legitimates as an expression of the sacred order. Ellul's analysis of politics noted earlier may thus be modified to read:

Consumption by the postmodern citizen makes manifest the sacred of the Economy, and the fact that the consuming citizen is endowed with an exciting grandeur. Consumption has become the place of final truth, of absolute seriousness.

It seems fair to say that many (perhaps most) Americans would grant that they have at times had a sense of this grandeur while engaging in ritual consumption (acquisition-consumption-disposition) and gone about their activities with a seriousness that in earlier times was restricted to religious activity. Still, it is something that most Americans do not think about much. And this is exactly the point. It is just the way things are. What *is* is what *ought* to be. To say otherwise, or to think too hard about it, is not appropriate, not normal, not in harmony with the sacred order and process of the Economy.

This being so, although consumption is ubiquitous, as the specifically *religious* expression of postmodern, cosmological culture, it is nonetheless difficult to find. Moreover, once found, it is hard to distinguish from the rest of culture. Consumption simply is, and through myth and ritual it affirms and acts out (in a heightened and intensified sense) the truth of the cosmic (Economic) order that is already revealed in everyday life. And this truth is that the way things are is the way they ought to be; and the way things are in postmodern culture when things truly *are,* is the way things are when persons consume. Thus, like every other entity in culture, individuals serve the Economy; and when they serve rightly, they prosper. Why? Because of the sacred order and process of the Economy itself. Carville was right and more religious than he could imagine.

In seeking to isolate the religious essence of postmodern culture, our attention should not be directed to discrete, specialized institutions that can be distinguished from other institutions because they are somehow *religious,* but instead to the everyday stories (myths) and activities (rituals) shared by the whole community and communicated and experienced in heightened and intensified ways at specially designated (sacred) times. In these sacred times, we will find what may well be the actual religious phenomena of postmodern culture, and in the finding, discover just how religious it may really be and how hard it may be for its citizens to be different than they are.

Holidays and Holy Days

On the basis of the foregoing, the proposed analysis of holidays as representative postmodern religious events can be briefly sketched. Central to this analysis is the specification of the sacred as the three-fold process of acquisition-consumption-disposition of objects and images; and the specification of religion as the body of myths and rituals that vivify the sacred process for society and individuals.

This being so, and following the socio-economic analysis of Jameson-Baudrillard (and in the context of the religious theories of Ellul-Voegelin), it may be argued that religion in postmodern society is that collection of culturally embedded phenomena that mediate individual and collective relationships with the sacred power of the Economy through acquisitionconsumption-disposal. It is not enough to simply acquire and consume objects and images. One must do both and one must also dispose of the objects

and images for the sacred to be experienced. The entire process must be completed, for only then (in the cyclical manner that is elemental to cosmological systems) can the process begin again. The quicker the process is completed and then begun again, the greater is one's experience of the sacred, and hence the greater one's power in the socio-religious system. For this reason, popular culture venerates~the person who is able to keep up with the trends in fashion, who is able to acquire a new car every year (perhaps also explaining the recent success of automobile leasing), who buys a *new* house, replaces appliances on a regular basis, installs a new lawn periodically, acquires the most innovative type of computer, and so on.

As is doubtless quite evident, the power of this process has decidedly negative consequences. It leads to waste, the destruction of the natural environment, alienation (in all the old Marxist senses of the word), and dehumanization of others (who themselves may be unfortunate enough for one reason or another to have become commodities). It also helps account for and perhaps best explain the proliferation of addictive "diseases" related to consumption. When thus deployed, the sacred significance of this process reveals such addictions (alcoholism, drug addition, food addiction, sex addiction, shopaholism, and so on) as not only diseases of consumption, as they are often classified, but perhaps most accurately challenges related to the proper relationship with the acquisition-consumption-disposition process. Perhaps, then, they are expressions of a religious addiction.

This being said, and not to get too far into the sacred-profane dichotomy discussion, if we can specify the religious through distinction from the non-religious (or locate the sacred apart from the profane), then we can speak of it more explicitly. Thus, because the sacred is the Economy, and religion is the process of acquisition-consumption-disposal, which engages one with the sacred through myth and ritual, then the non-religious would be that which disengages one from the process. This would be production. Although this seems a rather rudimentary and perhaps inconsequential note, it is necessary to recognize the distinction because, in this context, it allows for the isolation of the religious experience itself. It also represents an inversion of the old Protestant work-ethic, which vested religious merit in economic production, thereby fueling early and middle capitalism.

Today, the cultural logic is reversed. It is no less religious, but the religious basis is different; rather than transcendental and production-validating it is cosmological and consumption-validating. Because production (labor/work) prevents one from acquisition-consumption-disposal, it is the antithesis of the sacred. Production has thus become functionally profane, where in earlier times, it was functionally sacred; and acquisition and consumption, which were once religiously restricted, if not actually profane, have become sacred. When I am working, I am not consuming, yet my working/profane endeavors bring me the substance necessary for me to consume. I thus sacrifice time and energy in the profane realm for the sake of the Economy; not because I find any particular satisfaction in contributing to production (and certainly not because of any religious merit, per se) but because I am equipping myself to bet-

ter perform my religious duty. My sacrifice of time and energy in profane endeavors (labor) rewards me with ritual resources (money), which then allows me to participate in the sacred process of acquisition-consumption-disposal.

This threefold process, as opposed to production (the ideal of early and middle capitalism), defines one's primary religious duty (dharma) in the late-capitalist, postmodern world. As a result, postmodems sacralize those times and places where they can maximize the experience of acquisition-consumption-disposal, thus motivating them to reduce the realm in which they are engaged in acts of production. From this motivation is spun off popular ideals (and I would say mythic narratives) embodied in concepts such as the "golden years" of retirement, '"extended vacations," "saving up 'comp' or sick time to use all at once," and a whole class of ideals related specifically to weekends: "T.G.I.F.," "living for the weekend," midweek "hump-day," the '"three-day weekend," and certainly, for some, the "lost weekend." All of these richly evocative concepts express a resistance to activities of production and an idealization of leisure periods when persons can fully immerse themselves in sacred time and space-times when acquisition-consumption-disposal may be fully experienced and spaces entirely divorced from the profane sphere of work/production. What, after all, do most Americans do in leisure spaces, places, and times? While once it might have been relaxing activities or visits with family and friends, every indication is that today what they do is acquire, consume, and dispose. And although leisure time still may include traditional pursuits, such activities are often prefaced by acquisition rituals. In this regard American holidays manifest a genuine sacredness, becoming true holy days when individuals and entire communities can escape the profane realm and reaffirm the sacred truth of their personal and collective existence.

The annual cycle of American holidays, thus, comes into correspondence with a typical cosmological cycle of ritual celebrations: fixed calendric periods that are recognized as particularly sacred and specifically dedicated to mythico-ritual activity. For postmodern culture, these holidays are holy because they liberate persons from the profane realm of work/ production, ushering them into the sacred times and climes of uninhibited acquisitionconsumption-disposal, and supplying the religious dynamic of postmodemity. The extent to which work/production ceases (in both time [calendar duration] and space [sectors of the productive economy]) suggests the relative sacredness of a given holiday, but the real defining feature is consumption itself -how much is spent at the temples and shrines of retail commerce during holiday periods. On this basis, I used retail spending as a measure of sacred significance and classified holidays into various categories, the greatest of which I refer to as holy days.

Using this method, the three greatest holy days are Valentine's Day, Easter, and Christmas, with Back-to-School functioning as something of a religious festival. Less significant holy days include Super Bowl Sunday, Presidents' Day, and the Fourth of July. These and other holiday-holy days are explored in more detail in *The Sacred Santa.* For now it can be observed that the underlying force behind the sacred significance of postmodern holy days is found in the relationship of myths and rituals — what

Eliade refers to as mythico-rituals. First it can be noted that rituals allow persons to participate in or otherwise affirm their proper relationship to the sacred. They are intertwined with myths in so far as rituals reenact myths and myths illuminate rituals. Through rituals, believers experience the sacred time of the myth and are brought into communion with the foundational reality of life. In ancient cosmological cultures, myths were widely communicated and fervently reaffirmed, and entire communities participated in intense and prolonged ritual celebrations of mythic reenactment — drawing all closer to the primordial reality of the meta-myth, which in archaic cultures focused on Nature and its power.

Consistent with archaic religious festivals, the key to the kinetic intensity of contemporary holy days is their capacity to energize the sacred nexus between myth and ritual. Like those of our archaic ancestors, the holy-day celebrations of postmodern culture vivify the critical sacred linkage of myth and ritual, in this case, drawing all who participate into closer contact with the primordial power of the Economy. This distinctive feature of holy days accounts for a number of other characteristic holy-day elements.ˆIt is revealed most strikingly in the proliferation of tertiary myths (advertisements) directly related to a given holiday. Although these are the shortest of all the mythic narratives, they offer powerful and compelling renditions of the meta-myth: success and happiness are gained through a proper relationship with the Economy and revealed in the ever-expanding material prosperity of society and the ever-increasing acquisition and consumption of products by individuals. They also bring persons into closest proximity with the reality of the meta-myth and the threshold of ritual itself.

During holy-day cycles, tertiary myths are widely communicated and fervently reaffirmed; one needs only consider the increased number and size of newspaper inserts on weekends in advance of holidays, TV holiday commercials, and the greater number of ads in the holiday issues of magazines. Additionally, holy-day advertisements (tertiary myths) are acutely focused on the sacred concerns of specific holidays. In these myths persons discover sacred narratives about objects appropriate or simply available for ritual acquisition during specific holy days: lawn and garden tools for Memorial Day, summer foods and beverages for The Fourth, jewelry for Valentine's Day, fall apparel for Labor Day, you-name-it at Christmas, and who-knows-what for America's newest holiday — Patriot Day, to be celebrated on September 11.[45] To the degree that Patriot Day becomes a genuine postmodern holy day, it will generate its own tertiary myths and Americans will respond with rituals of acquisition, for this is what happens on holy days in American culture.

Christmas is, of course, the most vivid illustration of the postmodern sacralization of holidays and the greatest holy-day cycle of postmodern culture. Christmas is, however,

---

[45] The U.S. Congress passed Patriot Day legislation in the Fall 2001, initially introduced by U.S. Representative, Vito Fossella (R-N.Y.) requesting that the president "issue a proclamation each year calling for state and local governments and people to observe Patriot Day [September 11] with appropriate programs and activities." See Ellen Gedalius, "Patriot Debate," in the *Tampa Tribune,* August 12, 2002, 1, 5. As of now (October, 2002) there does not appear to be any noticeable movement toward

only the most dramatic and dynamic example of neo-cosmological religiosity. It is thus different from other holy days, not so much in essence or substance as in degree and size. When it comes to cosmological religious celebrations, however, size does make a difference, and accordingly, *The Sacred Santa* devotes a full section to an analysis of the Christmas holy day cycle —including a chapter that focuses on the apotheosis of Santa Claus.

During Christmas and other holy-day cycles, pilgrimages to shrines and temples (stores and shopping malls) are more frequent. Persons may review the tertiary myths more closely and become more focused in their performance of sacred rituals of acquisition; fulfilling their dharma as consumers, reaffirming their primordial relationship with the Economy's sacred power. The nexus of myth and ritual glistens in these times; the connection between mythic narratives and ritual performances becoming more immediate, vigorous, deeply felt, and religiously significant. It is also experienced by more of the population during holy-day cycles, drawing all participants closer to the primordial power of the Economy. Taken as a whole, holy-day myths keenly remind citizens of the sacred significance of acquisition and the opportunity they have to do so in a certain sanctified period — a holy-day cycle. Thus, when one ritually acquires objects depicted in a holy-day myth, the performance is more purposefill, and the dynamic connection between myth and ritual is clearer, more vivid, more vital, and more sacred for the participant. *The Sacred Santa* is interested in this dynamic connection, why it has risen to religious prominence in postmodern culture, and how it may have replaced traditional transcendental religious practices as the functional expression of contemporary religiosity.

* * * * * * * *

In conclusion, it is my contention that inquiry into the religious dynamic of postmodern culture, using Jameson-Baudrillard *together* with Ellul-Voegelin, reveals the contours of a cosmological sense of the sacred. Moreover, when attention is directed to the holidays of this culture we may find, as Jack Santino tells us in a wonderful book, they take us *All Around the Year* and really are (adding his subtitle) *Celebrations in American Life.*[46] We may also discover that they are celebrations of American life and its cosmological essence; celebrations that uniquely reveal the religious heart of American culture, and celebrations that are more profoundly sacred than their secular guise suggests. In short, and this is the point of my inquiry in *The Sacred Santa:* When considering contemporary holidays in terms of the method outlined here, they emerge as intensely sacred events; and as such they reveal not only how thoroughly religious postmodern American culture has become but also just how difficult it may be for Americans to cease being the consumers the Economy demands that they be.

---

sacralization of Patriot Day, although informational observations revealed a considerable increase in retail sales promotions for patriotic paraphernalia (flag decals and bumper stickers, full-size flags, and apparel with various nationalistic symbols and slogans).

[46] Jack Santino, *All Around the Year: Holidays and Celebrations in American Life* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

The Two Faces of Religiosity in Postmodern Society by Darrell J. Fasching

It is an occasion for great pride and also a sense of humility when one's student becomes one's teacher. Dell deChant was an undergraduate in one of my courses during my first semester of teaching at the University of South Florida in 1982. From the very first week he stood out as an extraordinary student. He went on to prove his promise, finishing his undergraduate and graduate degrees in our program. More recently Dell coauthored *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach* (Blackwells, 2001) with me. And now he is the author of a book on religion and postmodemity — *The Sacred Santa: The Religious Dimensions of Consumer Culture (Pilgrim Press, 2002)* — that is quite provocative offers Ellul scholars much food for thought.

What does religion have to do with economics, the sacred with the secular, or post-modemity with premodemity? Unlike most who would see only "difference," Dell de Chant sees important similarities. What do modem scholars like Paul Tillich, Jacques Ellul, Eric Voegelin and Mircea Eliade have to do with postmodernists like Frederic Jameson and Jean Baudrillard? Conversant with postmodem intellectual trends, deChant is no slave to current intellectual fashions but rather places historical eras and intellectual styles (premodem, modem and postmodem) into critical dialogue with each other in order to illuminate the religiosity of contemporary postmodem secular culture.

Deeply indebted to the thinking of Paul Tillich, Eric Voegelin and especially Jacques Ellul in the way he asks questions, but not necessarily in the way he answers them, deChant probes the religious dimension of contemporary secular and postmodem culture. He attempts to understand the religiosity of the economy much the way I attempted to understand the implications of the religiosity of technology for global public policy ethics in *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima* (SUNY, 1993). What we share above all, of course, is a deep debt to Jacques Ellul, especially his work *The New Demons* (Seabury, 1975). For it is Ellul who taught us how to put our age into question.

While Dell's interpretation puts us at odds over Ellul's thesis concerning the priority of technology over the economy, I find in Dell's work an intellectual challenge worthy of the highest respect. Dell deChant asks us to see ourselves and our society with new eyes. He helps us understand ourselves and our postmodem culture.

A dominant theme of modem thought in the 1960s was that religion would disappear to be replaced by the secular society of a scientific age. It is commonplace now to observe that a global religious resurgence since the nineteen-seventies has proved that claim false. What is still often missed is that, quite apart from the resurgence of religions, our everyday world of commerce and consumerism is saturated with religious myth and ritual. We fail to see this, says deChant, because we tend to identify religion with the transcendental religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam, where God

is understood as different and distant from the natural world. But the religiosity of postmodern society is closer to the cosmological religiosity of premodem primal and early urban societies (as Ellul pointed out in *The New Demons)* where the sacred manifests itself, as it perhaps does in postmodern culture, through a kind of polytheistic diversity rather than uniformity. In this ancient type of society, religion is not a separate realm within society but an aspect of every cultural activity. To participate in the culture is to be religious.

In such ancient societies human beings saw nature as the overwhelming and all-encompassing environment of powers and forces that governed their destiny. Experiencing themselves as totally dependent on these powers, human beings, overwhelmed by a sacral awe, sought to be in harmony with these forces through the myths and rituals of polytheism in all their contradictory diversity. Today the postmodem world mirrors that pre-modem world, deChant argues, except that now the environment that surrounds us and governs our destiny is the postmodem, multinational, global economy. Here deChant uses Ellul to challenge Ellul's central thesis. It is the economy, not technology, he argues, that has transcended and encompassed nature in its marketing strategies. The economy has desacralized nature and turned its abundance into raw materials for commodification while reorienting society's rituals in order to render consumerism a sacred activity serving the new powers that now govern our destiny. Given that the al Qaida chose the World Trade Center in New York City as one of the sacred centers of our society to be destroyed, Dell deChant's thesis has great plausibility. On the other hand, their other target was Washington D.C. — the political/military center of our society. This too needs to be acknowledged. It appears the al Qaida recognized both as manifestations of what we hold sacred.

Despite Dell deChant's major disagreement with Ellul over the primacy of technique, his argument draws heavily upon Ellul's approach, while substituting the economy for technology. Our problem, says Dell, is that we are blinded to the religious/ritual dimension of our economic life by our identification of religion with transcendental religions, seemingly unaware that cosmological, this-worldly, religiosity has been far more typical and pervasive in the history of the human race. And so, in important ways, we fail to fully appreciate our own actions and the religious rhythms of our own culture, defined by a postmodern cycle of sacred festivals.

In his book, *The Sacred Santa* he analyses the myths and rituals that shape postmodern culture through its eclectic cycle of holidays in far more vivid detail than he has space to do in this issue of **The Ellul Forum.** Through his analysis Dell shows us that the economic rituals of our society bring us into harmony with the powers that govern our destiny, now perceived as the powers of the economy. From the mythic stories conveyed by fdm, television dramas and mass media advertising, on through the ritual activities of visiting shopping malls as sacred places of intense religious activity, deChant argues for the pervasive economic religiosity of postmodern culture. This postmodern religiosity is an eclectic amalgamation of postmodern myths conveyed by the mass media and the equally eclectic rituals of American postmodem holidays, from New

152

Years day through Super Bowl Sunday, Presidents Day, St. Patrick's Day, Easter, the Fourth of July and on to the "High Holy Days" of Halloween-Thanksgiving-Christmas, peppered with many secondaty festivals along the way.

I think Dell deChant has done important work that both builds upon and also goes beyond Ellul in his analysis of postmodem religiosity and the economy. His work is important for Ellul scholars because he introduces Ellul into the postmodern debate which must surely happen if Ellul's work is to remain relevant. And his work pays Ellul the highest form of compliment, for Ellul did not want disciples but rather encouraged us all to think new thoughts in relation to the unfolding challenges of our technological civilization.

Having said all that, I do have some reservations about the way Dell characterizes Ellul's position and how he places his own thesis in relation to Ellul's work. I would challenge: (1) his argument for the primacy of economy over technology as the bearer of the sacred, (2) his argument for consumerism rather than politics as a manifestation of sacral activity, (3) his use Ellul's typological classification of the three levels of myth to make his case and (4) his account of the relation between the sacred and profane. The intent of these challenges is not to undermine the validity of Dell's critique of consumerism but to suggest that it may not put him as much at odds with Ellul's position as he suggests.

The core of Dell's provocative challenge is his argument that it is the economy and not technology that is the new bearer of the sacred in postmodern culture. To do this he uses Jameson's Marxist analysis of postmodem culture. One would scarcely guess from Dell's account of Ellul that Ellul too thought of himself as a Marxist. As such he certainly considered the Marxist thesis of the centrality of the economy but he came to the conclusion that to be a Marxist in our time one had to recognize that it is no longer the economy but technology that determines human behavior. Does this mean that economics is now unimportant? Of course not, the economy is part of the technological system, rewarding the consumer is how the system makes the necessities of efficiency palatable. But for Ellul the obvious fact of cross-cultural study was that whether societies were organized upon socialist or capitalist models, they tended to function very similarly because all modem societies were organized around technical bureaucracies oriented to using the most efficient means. With the virtual collapse of socialist societies that obvious contrast is disappearing. Consequently, while the role of technique remains pervasive it becomes more invisible while the importance of the economy, hyped"twenty four hours a day by CNN and a legion of other media outlets, becomes supremely visible and obvious to all.

For Ellul the issue is the levels at which power operates to shape society and the levels of myth through which a society propagates its way of life. For purposes of sociological analysis, in both cases, one moves from the great abstraction to vivid concreteness. In *Hope in Time of Abandonment* (Seabury, 1973, pp. 280-281) he used the analogy of the ocean to identify levels of power that shape society. At the surface we have waves that can sporadically be stirred up by the wind and become powerful

enough to sink a ship. At the deepest level there is only stillness. But in between are the tides and currents that shape fundamental patterns of the ocean and our weather. Applied metaphorically, the surface level is the realm of concrete events that attract our attention especially through media. The deepest level is the abstract level of undifferentiated power. It is in the intermediate level that power becomes differentiated into the underlying patterns that influence the shape of society in a given era. And it is at this level that critical analysis must occur if we are to understand the powers that shape our destiny. In Marx's time, Ellul argued, the currents and tides that shaped societies were those of economics but then the spontaneous convergence of efficient techniques brought about a fundamental transformation that pushed economic activity toward the surface, guided be the deeper currents of technique.

With regard to myth, Ellul divides his analysis of the myths of the technological society into primary, secondary and tertiary myths. As one moves down the scale, from the first to the third, one moves from abstraction to concrete vividness. Dell challenges Ellul's contention that science and history are the basic myths of our civilization and suggests that we look to the myths of the economy - the stories of success and material acquisition promoted through the mass media. Dell thinks science and history are too abstract to function as myth. But I think he misunderstands Ellul here. The primary myths are meant to be conceptual abstractions of the underlying themes of more concrete manifestations. It is not the science of scientists nor the history of historians but the popular imagination of science and history embodied in the secondary myths like the stories of Marxism and capitalism that move people to action and most of all it is the vivid myths or stories of happiness and success (tertiary myths) propagated by the media that energize peoples lives on a day to day basis. The stories and holidays that Dell analyzes belong primarily to the second and third levels of myth but they presuppose science and technique, for the economy is impotent, it cannot fulfill our desires without invention and production. Techniques, like the gods, are both invisible and all pervasive. They only become real through the stories and festivals that structure a society's way of life which occur at the less abstract and more concrete level of economic activity as promoted through the mass media as we move from the intermediate depths to the surface of our society. Without technique there are no products, no glitzy lifestyle to sell and consume.

And this brings us to Dell's third area of critique, namely that Ellul (and Voegelin) are mistaken to identify politics rather than consumerism as the locus of sacred activity in our culture. He points out that politics today is not taken nearly as seriously as consumer activity and he also points out that when Ellul (and Voegelin) talk about politics they both seem to gravitate to the transcendental religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam with their messianic/historical orientations rather than to the cosmological pre-biblical religiosity of the ancient world that most closely parallels the religiosity of postmodernism.

Here I would make two points. First, Dell is writing from a perspective of the post-Cold War era that is barely more than a decade old. Ellul wrote in a world divided

between two political/economic ideologies that threatened global annihilation. In such a world it is hard not to take politics with ultimate seriousness. But of course that is not our situation today, or is it? We may now be entering a new global cold war defined by an age of terrorism. We may not want to take politics with religious seriousness but apparently others do.

My second point, however, is more fundamental. Dell is certainly right that although Ellul identified consumerism as a form of religious activity he did not give it the attention that he gave to politics, and so it remains an undeveloped area of Ellul's thought. Indeed it is an area that Dell deChant has brilliantly developed. Dell is inclined to put himself into an either/or relation to Ellul's work. The issue is not either technology or the economy but rather to see both as part of a comprehensive technical system. The question is: What is the relationship between them? I am inclined to see Dell's work less in opposition to Ellul's as I am as a complement to it, and a further development of Ellul's critique. Dell can be right about the religious function of the economy without Ellul having to be wrong about technique.

When Dell discusses politics and consumerism in relationship to the sacred, he tends to put it in either/or terms. He suggests the Ellul and Voegelin missed the mark by focusing on politics and transcendental religiosity rather than on consumerism and cosmological religiosity. But certainly in the case of Ellul this is not an either/or choice but a "both-and" choice. For Ellul divides propaganda into two categories, integration propaganda and agitation propaganda. Integration propaganda, says Ellul, is the way a society spontaneously advertises its way of life. Its purpose is to integrate individuals into the social order. It is in this category that Ellul places consumerism and economic activity. But the second category, agitation propaganda, has a different task - that of moving people to action.

I would argue, as Ellul did, that the religiosity of our technological society imitates the cosmological religions in integration propaganda organized around consumerism, happiness and fulfillment. But the religiosity of our technological society imitates the messianic/apocalyptic themes of the transcendental biblical religions when it needs to move its citizens to action - a point well illustrated by current apocalyptic rhetoric not only on the part of Osama bin Laden and the al Qaida but also by the "evil axis" rhetoric of the Bush administration (although the political propaganda of the latter does seem a bit inept). Perhaps an even more relevant example is the current Bush administration campaign to make war against Iraq. A cynic might say that because we are addicted to SUVs (and other oil and gas guzzlers) and the other "necessities" advertised (integration propaganda) by our consumer society and made possible by technique, we are prepared to be moved to act upon the administrations apocalyptic rhetoric (agitation propaganda) and make war to protect our sacred way of life. The integration propaganda sets us up for agitation propaganda. Consumerism and politics are two complementary faces of the sacred (cosmological and eschatological/apocalyptic) in a technical civilization.

Dell seems to recognize something like the role of agitation propaganda when he says that "politics tends not to generate community-sustaining myths and rituals, but instead, community-destroying narratives and socially disorienting activities . . ." but takes this as counting against it functioning religiously. However, as Max Weber has pointed out, religion not only serves to legitimate the routine order of society but also, at times, to charismatically upset and transform society.

For Ellul, integration propaganda and agitation propaganda work in dialectical tension with each other, as do the sacred and the profane. Indeed, I would argue that Dell reads Ellul's position on the sacred dualistically rather than dialectically as Ellul intends. When Dell says that today it is no longer "production" (technique) that is sacred but consumption, and that production is the "antithesis of the sacred" he seems to think he is putting himself in opposition to Ellul's thesis. But he goes on to say, that the holidays of postmodern cultures "are holy because they liberate us from the profane realm of work production, ushering us into the sacred times and climes of uninhibited acquisition-consumption-disposal, and supplying the religious dynamic of postmodernity." However, this is exactly how the sacred operates in Ellul's account of consumerism and advertising, as brief and undeveloped as it is.

For Ellul the sacred cannot operate apart from the profane. The sacred/profane are not opposites. They form a single dialectical complex in which the profane is the permitted break with the sacred that only more thoroughly integrates us into the sacred order. We become slaves to the necessity of technique because it promises to reward our every desire. The technical society, says Ellul, will not be "a universal concentration camp" rather "our deepest instincts and or most secret passions will be analyzed, published and exploited. We shall be rewarded with everything our hearts ever desired" *(The Technological Society,* Random House, Vintage Books, 1964, p. 427). Consumerism is the way in which necessity is inserted into technique. It puts a smiling face on technological necessity and buys off our freedom with the promise of happiness.

In expressing these reservations about Dell deChant's argument, I hope it is clear that I do not dispute what I consider to be a brilliant and insightful analysis of the religiosity of consumerism. In this regard he has built upon Ellul and gone beyond Ellul in analyzing the nuances of the cosmological religiosity of consumerism. My only dispute has been with his perception that his thesis puts him at odds with Ellul. He certainly is at odds with Ellul in claiming that it is the economy and not technique that is the jnore fundamental category for understanding our society but when we look at his arguments, many really support and complement Ellul's thesis rather than discredit it. I view Dell deChant's essay and his book, *The Sacred Santa,* upon which it is based as both an important contribution and a vital challenge to those of us who study these issues. And for Ellul scholars, perhaps his most important contribution is to bring Ellul's work into dialogue with postmodernism.

Issue #30 Dec 2002 — Ellul and Utopia

- Click to view the original PDF

From the Editor

South Korea has mushroomed into the world's thirteenth largest economy. Its new President Roh Hyun Moon speaks of it as "the hub economy of Northeast Asia." It has more broadband electronic technology per capita than any country on earth. Professor Myung Su Yang positions his work on Ellul within these technological realities.

Scholarly work on Jacques Ellul occurs around the world. But Asian scholarship has not been well represented in *The Ellul Forum* before. Professor Yang's essay is excerpted from chapter 3 of his book-length treatment published in Korean, with the title translated as *Homo Technicus: Technology, Environment and Ethics.* His Ph.D. in Theology was awarded by Strasbourg University and he is a Professor in the Department of Christian Studies at Ewha Womans University in Seoul.

Utopia is an important entree into Ellul's work, but a concept with subtleties and unending complications. One of *The Ellul Forum's* Editorial Board members and frequent contributors, Gabriel Vahanian, established this territory with his *God and Utopia* in 1977. Both Myung Su Yang and Darrell Fasching have been Vahanian's students and their ability to deal adequately with utopia in Ellul is an obvious benefit. J. Wesley Baker is a veteran student of Ellul's theological work, with a special interest since his doctoral work on "the hope of intervention" in Ellul.

This issue Number 30 completes fifteen years of *The Ellul Forum.* Founding Editor Darrell Fasching carried the editorial load with extraordinary ability for the first ten years. It is emblematic of his leadership and quality scholarship that he contributes to this issue as vigorously as he did to the first.

Katherine Temple of The Catholic Worker Movement passed away on November 22, 2002, and world class scholar Ivan Illich on December 2. They understood Ellul, Temple having written her Ph.D. thesis on him in the early 70s. With him and through him, they contributed enormously to the "critique of technological civilization." Thanks to Carl Mitcham's leadership, issue Number 31 will be a memoriam to their work.

Clifford G. Christians, Editor

In This Issue

About the Ellul Forum

History & Purpose

The Ellul Forum has been published twice per year since August of 1988. Our goal is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to aspects of our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

While *The Ellul Forum* does review and discuss Jacques Ellul, whom we consider one of the most insightful intellectuals of our era, it is not our intention to treat his writings as a body of sacred literature to be endlessly dissected. The appropriate tribute to his work is to carry forward its spirit and agenda for the critical analysis of our technical civilization. Ellul invites and provokes us to think new thoughts and enact new ideas. To that end we invite you to join the conversation in *The Ellul Forum.*

Manuscript Submissions

Send original manuscripts (essays, responses to essays in earlier issues) to:
Clifford Christians, Editor, *The Ellul Forum*
Institute of Communications Research
University of Illinois
810 S. Wright Street, Suite 228
Urbana, IL 61801 USA
Please send both hard copy and computer disc versions, ..indicating the software and operating system used (e.g., Microsoft Word for Windows 98). Type end notes as text (do not embed in the software footnote/endnote part of your program).

Essays should not exceed twenty pages, double-spaced, in length.

Manuscript submissions will only be returned if you enclose a self-addressed, adequately postaged envelope with your submission.

The Ellul Forum also welcomes suggestions of themes for future issues.

Books & Reviews

Books. The Ellul Forum considers for review books (1) about Jacques Ellul, (2) significantly interacting with or dependent on Ellul's thought, or (3) exploring the range of sociological and theological issues at the heart of Ellul's work. We can not guarantee that every book submitted will actually be reviewed in *The Ellul Forum* nor are we able to return books so submitted.

Book Reviews. If you would like to review books for *The Ellul Forum,* please submit your vita/resume and a description of your reviewing interests.

Send all books, book reviews, and related correspondence to:

David W. Gill, Associate Editor, *The Ellul Forum*

P.O. Box 5365

Berkeley, CA 94705

Subscriptions

A subscription to *The Ellul Forum* is included in the annual membership fee for the International Jacques Ellul Society. To become a member (and receive *The Ellul Forum)* send a check payable to "UES" in the amount of $20 (U.S.). Checks or money orders must be drawn in U.S. funds. Send check with your name and complete address to

UES

P.O. Box 5365

Berkeley CA 94705 USA

Back Issues

Visit www.ellul.org for a complete index of back issues of *The Ellul Forum.*

Photocopies of back issues of *The Ellul Forum* are available for $5.00/issue, postage included. Send your requests, with your complete mailing address and a check or money order drawn in U.S. funds for the correct amount, to

UES

P.O. Box 5365

Berkeley CA 94705 USA

Jacques Ellul and Technological Utopia by Myung Su Yang

In "Le projet d'une morale sociale, christianisme sociale" Paul Ricoeur (1966) refers to ideology and technology as the most important issues modem socio-ethics must deal with. It is surely true that the "Death of Ideology" has been discussed for quite some time now, and even in Korea parts of the intelligentsia have joined this movement. However, the concept of ideology still remains the crucial issue in that we have to keep observing its impact. Koreans have confronted a particular ideological situation-—the division of the country, yet on the whole have consciously or subconsciously avoided mentioning the term "ideology" in spite of this unique situation. It is essential that we equip ourselves with a broad vision that points to the most fundamental but neglected questions regarding ideology, and at the same time indicate clear answers to solve these questions.

Meanwhile, we have never lived in such a technically developed era in world history—in other words, we live in the age of technology. The environmental ground for our daily lives is no longer Nature but technology. This remarkable phenomenon has brought serious philosophical questions to human beings since the 1950s, when technologies began to develop at an unprecedented rate. Moreover, as modem philosophical ideas have been modified, technology seems to occupy a basic ground for new metaphysical questions. In other words, technology is beginning to be considered metaphysics itself, and in that sense is a substitute for the modem metaphysical question of Descartes' cogito.

In this context, we cannot but raise this crucial but fundamental question: what is technology? In fact, this query arises from worrying about the potential side-effects that technological advance might bring up: 1) a profit-oriented economic system due to the industrialization of advanced technology; 2) the negative impact that the technical development of vehicles has on daily life; 3) the impersonalization and isolation that mechanical ways of thinking provoke; 4) various problems raised in the field of nuclear energy, the environment, and pollution; 5) ethical issues related to the development of genetic engineering; and 6) the growth of our anxiety and apprehension that the extensive power of technology may acquire dominant power over human beings in the near future.

Therefore, current tendencies to analyze technology from psychological, sociological, philosophical, and religious viewpoints are deeply rooted in a critical and anxious

161

gaze toward technology. Thus disparaging technology may represent criticizing the mechanical way of thinking, or mechanical metaphysics. In *The Decline of the West,* Oswald Spengler warns that Western civilization is destined to decline because it is founded on linear and mechanical ideas of improvement which are only strategies for survival. Heidegger's postmetaphysics claims that we should escape from the category of technological-scientific metaphysics. The French Marxist Henri Lefebvre also denounces the mechanical paradigm of contemporary culture in the name of the "criticism of the quotidian" *(La vie-quotidienne dans de monde moderne,* 1968).

Today, philosophy seems to pay more attention to language than to existence, probably because of the currently critical point of view toward the civilization of technology. Derrida and most of the postmodernists and poststructuralists have insisted that the autonomous signifier takes precedence over the signified; they also put more value on "ecritime" — able to be inferred and assuming distance from it — than on "parole." This may represent their attempt to free themselves free from the unilaterality of mechanical language overwhelming the present. For this reason, the continental philosopher Paul Ricoeur's preference for hermeneutics over analytic philosophy is often spotlighted in America and Britain these days.

Contemporary philosophers are not only struggling to find a solution by investigating language as one of the most fundamental factors comprising human life, but they are also trying to repudiate Technological Language. Heidegger insists that modem technology is incompetent to fulfill the demand and desire of language for "zoon logon echon" *(Holzwege,* 1953, pp. 69-105). His postmetaphysics never believes in the absolute certainty of "cogito," in which the objectified and externalized world can be perceived with human senses. In other words, "cogito" assumes that the technological-scientific world can be portrayed like an object in still-life paintings. If the world exists as a passive and submissive object, then this technological-scientific language does not fit the genuine purpose of language—setting the boundaries of human beings and, at the same time, trying to elucidate our humanity beyond the boundaries, Heidegger claims.

Jacques Ellul thinks of technological language as a language of incantation. It is a language of use, both functional and objectified. Through language, we express what we want to express to express something. In other words, through language we express ourselves to express the world. Under these circumstances, language should be a language of symbols and of existence. Technological language excludes these symbols, and does not raise questions of existence. Technological language signifies the loss of language.

The loss of language means losing the possibility of changing the world. It is language itself that makes the imaginative world, which exists beyond the established boundaries, come true. For this reason, dictators will not set language free. Paul Ricoeur insists that the poetic imagination is the most essential among the three levels of symbols. In fact, metaphoric symbols are likely to be more appropriate for capturing and admitting the variation of language than any other kind of symbols, such as the universal symbols focusing on the imagery, or the dream symbols of Freud. We can feel

162

free only in the surplus world language brings out Symbols enable us to draw a totally different meaning from the habitual language. Through this symbolic language, we can finally imagine the completely new world. Consequently, if we lose our language in this civilization of technology, it means that we forfeit our ability to imagine other worlds different from the one we are living in. And the loss of our imagination prohibits us from seeking other alternatives to technology. At this point, technology is left as the only ideology we can choose. (Here, ideology does not mean a kind of political system or idea but an inclination to maintain and strengthen the present system with false bravado. It is used as an antonym of Utopia.)

Ethics exists where diversity exists. Ethics exists where the possibility of dreaming other worlds is allowed. Ethics comprehends the dreaming of a new world, and pursuing it. New is ethical. Therefore, if there are no possibilities for diversity, no desire to pursue new worlds, no attempt to negate and overcome the present, and no Utopian world that we can find out by going back against the stream of time, then no ethics exists. Without ethics, we will drown in overflowing materials. A society lacking the creative life and the creative person—gained only with creative views—has no ethics. False rumors—false ideologies—might overwhelm it.

I attempt to bring out the negative factors of technology by connecting it with the problems of contemporary theories regarding the philosophy of language. Actually, it is not a simple question to ask, "what is the essence of technology?" Among scholars, there are many different opinions. Some say that technology and humanism cannot exist together harmoniously. Some say that though contemporary technology goes much further than it is supposed to and carries negative results, it might have the potential to come back to its original place and heal itself. And others say that technology should be viewed with a positive and optimistic belief. These positive, negative, or detached attitudes toward modem technology coexist at present.

In my case, I understand technology from a negative point of view. It is not only because most Western philosophers have been on my side, but also because it is really important to know exactly what the negative results of technology can be. Technology has been believed in thoughtlessly in our history. Against this background, I will prove the possibility of utopia, where technology is set free from mechanics and gets closer to human beings. As we know, technology should exist for human beings. Technology should exist for improving human lives. Therefore, seeking its positive effects is as important as knowing its negative side-effects.

Actually, Korea has only a negative impression of technology, regarding it as mechanical and material. It is also true that this negative ideology has been imported from the West. In other words, Koreans have been ignorant of the revolutionary and fundamental spirit of the times when technological development was first initiated. In a way, Korea is following the West's example; it is heading toward a technological civilization. And this situation cannot be denied. To be aware of this situation is the only way to find a solution for it. Besides, as we will see, this technological civilization might a more humanitarian society possible, make us more humane, and make the world a

better place to live. Within today's seemingly barbarian civilization, there must be these latent, if mostly unrealized, potentials. Thus, we must not forget that our most urgent task is to make these possibilities known to people. Lastly, I will seek the proper roles and responsibilities theology can take under the present circumstances.

Jacques Ellul: Did Technology' Become the Object of Idolatry?

I will begin my discussion on technology with Jacques Ellul. He has a reputation for raising comprehensive questions about the negative qualities of technology. Among his books, *La technique ou I'enjeu du siecle* (1990) and *Le systeme technicien* (1974) are especially well known as keen and discerning analyses of the technological civilization in modem society. He approaches these matters with a religious as well"as a social and philosophical point of view. He regards belief in technology as a kind of religious idolatry that manipulates and dominates the modem human consciousness. I cannot completely agree with this point of view, but his attempt to understand the authority of technology with a religious angle looks quite supportable. It might show a possible solution to the struggle for establishing the thesis that the basis of technology is theological.

Ellul provides several possible answers about these problems of technology from various viewpoints. First, he points out that technological development has modified the culture of human society to an enormous degree. It takes us to the society of technology away from the society of nature, to the culture of artificiality from the culture of nature, and thus to an orientation toward technology instead of nature. This transition is such a dramatic and traumatic one that it transforms, not only the content of human culture but also the basic concept of it, into a totally different shape. Before this transition, culture was a term related to nature, but now it reminds us of something artificial, something human-made. Consequently, culture starts to imply artificiality and technology. This change accompanies the modification of humanity itself as well. Now, technology becomes apriori (Marcuse) for human beings, an unconscious superstructure of the human mind (A. Gelen), and the new world of human instincts. At present, discussing human nature or instinct by themselves is a futile effort. Rather, we have to pay attention to technology itself that influences both human nature and instinct.

Second, Ellul asserts that this cultural shift is caused by the de-mystification of technology. From this technological viewpoint, everything is explained mechanically. During this process, the aura of things—which is due to their unexplainableness and reconditeness—is fatally damaged. The transition in religiosity from blind worship to rational reception requires demystification of the idol. And, in a sense, this demystification is essential and indispensable for placing Christianity back in its original place. In Christianity, God is not inscrutable mystery, unreachable master, nor prohibited taboo, but love overflowing into human life through a human being in order to set humans free from the captivity of sin.

In history, the 18th century was a most dynamic and revolutionary period. Technology had developed at an unprecedented rate, and various social and religious taboos

had been broken and diminished. Since then, we have experienced the sense of alienation from the traditional hierarchy our ancestors established. Technology has infiltrated today's society, shattering and dissipating the traditional system, replacing it with a newly created order.

Ellul is convinced that this new spirit resulting from technological ideology does not mean the death of religion. Though religion has been desacralized, demystified, and demythologized, human beings still remain "homo religious." He believes that the age of technology is as much religious as the medieval age, but in a different way. Therefore it demands a different form of religiosity from the medieval.

One problem is that he regards technology as the modem sacred. The sacred is, so to speak, a primitive form of religion and from a Christian point of view, a religion of idolatry. It is a process of idolizing an image or an object. However, it is surely an attractive concept to people of all times and places. The sacred itself is, in a sense, a religion that human beings have ceaselessly made up in order to protect their social system and keep living in this world of chaos. Authority, which is essential to the social system to maintain its present state, can be created, admitted and secured by being sanctified. And within this legitimated society— whose authority is secured through the acknowledgement of religion-people seize onto a protective feeling that their food and life are kept secure. Consequently, even though the sacred seems to have a dimension of the transcendental, sublime, and unworldly, actually it is closely related to the secular aims of religion that justifies people's pursuit of practical benefits. As Eliade says, the sacred has a pragmatic basis *(Traitee d'historie des religions,* 1964). In other words, there is no biblical transcendence, or Bultmann's desacralization. Meanwhile, the religion of the sacred assumes the world is divided into two parts—the sacred world and the secular. This religion is always looking at the sacred world rather than trying to save the secular world. Hence, sanctity is not able to present any dynamic solution for transforming the world into a better state. Strictly speaking, sanctity has so sense of ethics. On the one hand, the sacred makes people move blindly toward the sacred world. On the other hand, it allows and justifies people to pursue their secular benefits. It is a poisonous form of religion, a dangerous opiate.

Jacques Ellul also senses the ambiguity and duality of the sacred. R. Caillois, called a scholar of the sacred, conceptualized the term "duality of the sacred" *(L' home et de sacre,* 1963). According to his thesis, the concepts of "le sacre du respect" and "le sacre de la transgression" constitute the sacred. "Le sacre du respect" exists in a sacred place, while, "le sacre de la trangression" creates the concept of sacred time. It is a ritual time for worship. At the festival of the sacred, the sanctified world is profaned and secularized in this ritual, though the time is limited. It is a departure from the realm of the sacred. However, "le sacre du transgression" is allowed within a limited time span. By being allowed to participate in this ritual of sacred transgression, people have time to feel free from the strict spirit of the sacred. For that reason, the aim of this festival is to preserve the authority of the sacred. Though it is likely to possess an emancipating mechanism allowing one to breakaway from its strictness, sanctity is

actually totalitarian and ideological. It is far from biblical religiosity. Ellul asserts that the sacred cannot find even a small place in biblical revelation.

Hence, Ellul's idea of regarding technology as the modem sacred is different from Christianity. Technology has a tendency to desacralize the sacred, but at the same time it sacralizes itself and tries to occupy the domain of the sacred. The sacred itself never disappears. The object of the sacred is transferred from one to another—in other words, from nature and culture to technology. At present, human beings are sanctifying history through the backing of technology, though sanctifying history as well as nature is strictly prohibited in Christianity. In the modem world, our daily experience is deeply grounded in technology, no longer in nature. As an enchanting magic carrying out the human dream, technology is now worshipped and adored. Therefore, as science plays the trigger role for remythologization, technology leads to resacralization, placing itself in the most sacred and religious position.. Modem society then logically remains sacred—not profane and desecrated. Only the object of symbolization is transferred from nature to technology. Consequently, Ellul posits that the recent phenomenon of the resurrection of religion in this secularized modem society is closely connected to the idolatrous and mechanical religion caused by the sanctification of technology.

Thus, the question arises: why does Ellul insist that technology is the object of modem sacralism, and an idolatrous religion? There are several possible answers. To study them, we will look into a scholarly critical viewpoint toward technology.

. Technology Is the Will to Power

Like Oswald Spengler, Ellul regards technology as a will to power. The religiosity of sanctity fulfills the will to power. This will to power has a close connection-to the matter of justification.

In fact, Ellul states, technology becomes a combination of the will to power and self-justification *(L'esperance oubilee,* 1972, p. 81). Incantation, the most primitive form of technology, is a good example. Incantation objectifies nature and takes advantage of it with human powe>. And at the same time, it appropriates the name of God to justify nself with a spell. Thus, the first technology is the outcome of the combination of the will to power and selfjustification. According to critics, technology is based on the process of objectification, and this objectification is based on the process of cognition, which itself pursues a dominant power in the end. Objectification accompanies representation. (Here, representation means Vorstellung—in other words, the act of putting together everything shattered and fragmented.) In *The Critique of Pure Reason,* Kant provides a detailed explanation of this concept.

For Jacques Ellul, modem technology is not so different from incantation. The desacralization of modem technology results from our attempt to acquire the right of self-justification with our own hands. Now, technology becomes the agency of justifying activity, and the supreme value in modem society. Ellul says, "the development of technology is basically the expression of the will to power of human beings. The realization of the will to power is the purpose of technology and the attainment of materials is no more than a by-product of it" (Le *systeme technicieri).* People express

themselves through technology because technology is the best tool for pursuing power, satisfying our instinct for power. Therefore, the religiosity of technology is actually a religiosity for justifying our activities and ourselves (casuistry). ,This is the essence of technology, as Ellul defines it.

Hence, the language of technology is the language of incantation as it was in the primitive age. The language of technology possesses people with a fantasy that they have omnipotent power over everything in the world. In this fantasy, people feel that every conflict and contradiction becomes reconciled and coexistent harmoniously. This is why, as Marcuse insists, technology functions as a kind of ideology in this highly developed society.

Under the name of technology, which controls the target through the process of objectifying it, everything is estimated by its usefulness or functional faculties. The thing itself and its usefulness is so mixed up that it is almost impossible to distinguish one from the other. Persons are also appreciated for functionality. Whether they have the ability to achieve what is demanded of them, determines each person's worth. Finally, objectification gradually expands its territory from nature to human beings so as to dominate them. Technology objectifies the human species and dominates it. Dragged out of the subject's seat, human beings become passive and impersonal objects in this enormously developed mechanical society. Now, technology is the subject. Communication is performed without "parole." Humanity as a subject of communication is' erased, and only an anonymous somebody as a tool for communication is left. Ellul says that the reason for the overflowing of language is to compensate for the loss of real language. The loss of real language is a loss of humanity. Because the idolatrous religiosity of sanctity victimizes and objectifies human beings, technology, according to Ellul, alientates them and opens the window for communication only to mechanical and artificial things.

Whether Technology Is Autonomous or Not Matters

The self-justification of the will to power, as described above, assumes autonomy. If technology becomes autonomous, it becomes the supreme authority. And whether technology is autonomous or not really matters in approaching the problem of technology. If technology is autonomous, then it exists beyond our control.

If technology is autonomous, from what is it autonomous? The answer is from human beings. Therefore autonomous technology alienates human beings. Modem technology, set free from human beings, goes its own way. Originally, technology was a tool for achieving some purpose, but now it becomes a purpose unto itself. No one asks what technology can do for human beings' benefits any more because this question is now meaningless. Technology operates independently in terms of its own effectiveness. As Jurgen Habermas regards technology as a system of praxis with a practical purpose, so Ellul does not deny that technology has been instrumental. The point is that the instrument has acquired autonomous independence. The boundary between the subject

and object has become blurred and only instruments remain. The epistemology that insists that the object can exist only through the subject's cognition process, or the ontological claim that beyond the subject there exists an agency which restricts the subject— these questions are voided in modem society. The instrument is the only reality. The subject is dominated by the instrument, and the object is the outcome of the instrument. Therefore, it is not correct to regard the society of technology as a kingdom of the object.

Technology objectifying itself as an instrument is characterized by exclusiveness and inclusiveness. Exclusive technology refuses to get mixed with other things, and rather likes to reign over them. The characteristic of technology is to reign wherever it goes. To the modem human, whether to appropriate technology or not is equivalent to whether to live or die. We have no choice. We are living in the age of inescapable technology. Technology is infiltrating into every domain of our society including culture, religion, politics, and even sex. The structure and the pattern of human activities have become mechanized. Troth disappears and only technical skills are left. Without technology, no race can survive in this modem world. Within a mechanized society, distinctive racial qualities become indistinctive. Social, economic, psychological, family, and industrial systems become technologically patterned. The varieties of each culture vanish as the mechanical and technical world comes into its own.

Within the domination of technology, the humane aspects are completely excluded, and human beings themselves are finally alienated from their own activities. Only producing the mathematically perfect outcome really matters. Machines replace human beings, and labor loses its voice. Thinking and working become separated from each other, and the voluntariness of labor vanishes. Technological rationality conquers every field in this world; everything is dependent on technology. Technocrats even lead modem politics. People seem to have the power for the final decision, but in reality the human mind is already set up and manipulated by technology.

In this technological society, adaptation must be one of the highest virtues. Virtuous people are required to agree to technical development, adjust to a reality grounded in technology, and accept the fact that technology produces without thinking about it. Under the technological circumstances in which "ideologic du fait" controls our daily lives, virtue loses its connection to creativity, and instead becomes related to survival. People do not have the freedom of choice any longer, and are reduced to a mechanical instrument seeking after effectiveness.

The exclusiveness and inclusiveness of autonomous technology eliminate all humane dimensions and secure the power of technology over every domain of human society. In Habermas' term, technology—in other words, instrumental action, one-sided monologue, alienated productive action—gulps down all of the channels of communicative interaction, and the praxis of humanity. Instrumental action becomes the paradigm that produces all categories. Everything is absorbed into a productive movement. Consequently, the Marxian theory of explaining social ideology through a connection between productivity and production relation should be modified. Marx thinks that the

latter is subordinated to the former. But in Harbermas, these two terms are replaced by praxis and techne, and thus praxis is subordinated to techne.

According to critics, the fact that techne overwhelms praxis means that technology attains autonomy, and people start to be alienated from their own society-—as Habermas predicts this phenomenon. In a traditional sense, technology is something associated with "poiesis," or production. Here, production means pro-dure, or pro-duct, in other words, "Her-vor-bringen." It is used not only with an instrumental connotation but also with an epistemological implication in that production here covers the process of seeking after troth. However, in modem society, technology is not a simple productive action, nor is it the action of elucidating something. It contains its own systematic pattern. Modem technology is independent of something it is supposed to elucidate, then establishes its own rules and systems in itself, and finally justifies them.

Accordingly, as Marcuse asserts, "it is technically impossible that human beings can decide their life voluntarily." If so, the consideration of human responsibility becomes completely unnecessary. In this context, technology seems to bear the anti-ethical. The society of technology is neutral. Therefore we are now living in an anti-ethical society instead of un-ethical one. We cannot recognize the possibilities of the un-ethics that anti-ethics will bring out in our society in the near future. Emmanuel Levinas says it is an inevitable outcome that people start to lose the feeling of responsibility within this modem society.

Technology Becomes the Only Ideology

Sanctity presumes a social connotation, that is, ideology. Ideology works through integration, totalization, and selfjustification. Especially, sanctity shows an incredible ability for self-justification. Some scholars believe that we have to move forward to a post-modem society because there is no alternative for handling the issue of justification in today's society. But for Ellul, technology is the very alternative that can offer the answer for this problem. The self-justifying ability of technology operates classlessly, so even the proletariat regards technology as an agency of emancipation. Moreover, according to Henry Lefebvre, the technology of self-justification is so deeply rooted in the modem consciousness that we can not feel it as ideology. The ideology of technology is now clad in the armor of science.

Meanwhile, technology performs the integrative function perfectly in organizing a huge societal system. Things anti-technological are regarded as anarchic, and they are not permitted to enter the current society. Only things totalized and centralized are permitted. By computer, everything is thoroughly systematized, and democratization and decentralization become eventually impossible. No negative response can be given to this technological organization where only indiscriminate futileness remains. Technology destroys creativity and oversimplifies the rhythm of life.

Henri Bergson says that life is a continuation of new happenings. However, if technology tends to oversimplify the dynamic power of society and bring it to a standstill,

then we cannot have a real life with technology. Everything becomes standardized and normalized. Normality is a virtue. Unexpected departure from conventional, normal, natural things is considered anti-technological. Hence, in the realm of technology, there is no transcendence. Though it seems to progress at an unprecedented rate without recognizing its speed limit, there is absolutely no possibility of 'transcendence. Heinrich Ott calls it "the transcendence of the black." Technology cannot be adventurous. Rather, it is insular and parochial in that at best it can produce other kinds of technology. In human activities, purpose transcends the accumulated tools, while in the case of technology, by contrast, tools dominate purpose.

To sum up, Ellul regards technology as an idolatrous religiosity—in other words, as a sanctity—that controls the consciousness of the human mind in modem society. But another question follows: Is this enough to explain technology? In the next section, we will examine the nature of technology from a utopian viewpoint. Utopia is exactly opposite of sanctity and provides the possibility of emancipation.

Technology and Utopia

Sometimes it seems that technology is likely to rule all over the world as sacred religion. If so, the secularly of technology would drive out the transcendency of God. Human beings have ah inclination to idolize everything, to worship it. Perhaps, things that have an ability to set people free from captivity are reduced to the captivity itself through our foolish mistakes. If technology is reduced to technologism, then, the same thing would happen. If we forget to pray God for his grace, and try to solve all problems technically, then genuine religion could not possibly exist in this society.

However, technology is not always reduced to technologism. Moreover, technologism is, in a sense, a contradictory concept of technology. Generally, it presumes that its instrumental quality is the only attribute technology has. But in fact technology is a method or a manner of living, not simply a tool. In other words, technology is associated with metaphysical questions rather than economic ones. It is a "manner of life," which betrays the truth and possible ways of life, is surely associated with transcendental qualities. Life is internally transcendental, and when this transcendence is represented to the exterior world, it becomes genuinely transcendental. It cannot exist beyond the tangibility and productivity of life. Embodying and producing the transcendence of life, this is art.

Let us call it utopia. Sanctity has religiosity; so does life. It is true that utopia reminds us of a dream world, but in Western thought utopia has been considered the adventurous spirit that pursues new and unknown truth. In *Das Prinzip Hoffnung,* Ernst Bloch says the most essential quality of utopia is "novum." Psychologists explain that the utopian spirit lies in the unconsciousness of the human mind latently, and is strongly influenced by accumulated experiences. But their explanation cannot be correct because the utopian spirit is not past-oriented but future-oriented. In other words, it is a kind of pro-consciousness, facing the future.

Utopia differs from metaphysics in that the latter explains things that already exist, while the former recreates the present in order to advance toward a new future. Therefore, "novum"—the utopian spirit—is bound to be critical of the present. It seeks after the possibilities of difference from the present situation. In *Ideologic et utopie,* Karl Mannheim also notes the critical qualities that the utopian spirit implies. Both ideology and utopia, as the outcomes of the social imagination, keep some distance from the present society. But, the ideological imagination is engaged in maintaining and justifying the present social system, while the utopian imagination works toward negating and deconstructing the present, and finally establishing the new system..

The fact that utopia faces toward the new, unknown truth does not mean that the essence of the utopian spirit is daydreaming or preposterous. G. Kapouge, who has studied the history of utopia, says: "Utopians did not dream with their own ideas. They vehemently wished that their idea would be satisfied." Mannheim thinks of "Ci vitas Dei" as the essence of the utopian spirit. During the Protestant R. / miation, the Reformationists longed to establish "civitas dei" in the world. They did not wait for the kingdom's coming, but did belie s in its coming. Waiting is passive. It assumes the postponemcni of the kingdom's incarnation. But believing in it is more active. Belief makes the incarnation realized in the world. By strong belief, the future comes true at present. Bloch's and Moltmann's "hope" is closely associated with this belief. In a sense, belief is hope and vice versa. Utopian spirit, a hope toward the realization of the new world, is dynamic. In this spirit, the new world will come true by earnest belief in its incarnation.

In other words, the utopian spirit consists of a beginning and an ending. It is a desire to live in a new world with a new system and new values. Therefore, the transcendence of utopia is different from the transcendence of sanctity. Sanctity attempts to maintain its sacredness by separating the sacred and the secular from each other, while utopia joins the world with "incarnated transcendence," never dividing the sacred and the secular. The transcendence of the utopian spirit seeks after a different system in order to build a new kingdom, excluding the ideological qualities of sacred transcendence. Because of the worldliness and tangibility of utopia, Bloch calls it "transcending without transcendence." The transcendence of sanctity works for each of the selfish desires living upon totalitarian authority, while utopian transcending tends to sacrifice the self for new possibilities. In Gabriel Vahanian's terms, the former is soteriological and the latter is eschatological. Utopian transcendence is a spirit of 'homo viator,' the biblical man, who is willing to refuse a stagnated immobility. At the same time it goes beyond ordinariness, seeking to minimize existence at the bottom and maximize ethics at the top.

I now present how technology implies the utopian spirit and takes advantage of it. First, I will propose technology's newness.

2.1 *Technology, the Possibility to Be Different*

With technology, homo sapiens become human beings. That means that we have opportunities to be different. Exiting from repetitions and normal cycles is the event

of life. Life is newness. Life is the repetition of newness. Thus, it is mystery. Human beings can be human beings when they become a new person. Technology is crucial in this process. In other words, technology makes human beings as a new species.

Intelligence and culture are two main traits of humankind. Intelligence is a door escaping from the instinctive cycle of nature, and culture is the product of intelligence. Intelligence and culture also' relate to technology. Philosopher Henri Bergson pointed out that intelligence is artificiality. For him, artificiality, in particular, means the ability to make tools as tools.

The possibility to be different is culture. The second environment bom through technology, the new artificial milieu— that is culture. Technology is also art. By creating culture, mankind can make the environment without being controlled by it. Humankind can change the first nature into the second nature. When humanity did not hold anything in its hand, nature overwhelmed mankind as a nature-god holding supernatural power. Under these circumstances, mankind and nature stand in opposition, and this confrontation yields chaos. However, when mankind hold tools in their hands, they can change nature for the sake of mankind and they live together. The transcendence of "homo technicus" is a new person and a new world. As long as it pursues newness, it is not eternal but eschatological. When we believe that anything surrounding humanity becomes its counterpart through technology, language is the first technology because people look at the world from a humanities viewpoint.

Human beings deny being a part of nature through technology. Human beings are not a part of nature, but a part of a new man. A real person is a new person. Unlike Ellul's critique, it is not easy to say that the humanization of nature brings the isolation of mankind because it brings denaturalization. The humanization of technology takes a decisive action to escape from an instinctive cycle. Through the de-mystification of nature, technology makes a person to be manlike and nature to be nature. Thus it helps to have a good relationship between mankind and nature.

By creating nature as the de-mystified one, technology shapes nature to mankind, thus making a stage for a new world. Demystification, humanization, and newness exist together. It is the transition from the transcendence of sanctity to the transcendence of utopia. That is also the tradition of the Bible. In the Bible, God made nature. Nature exists in relationship under God. It also means that nature exists in relationship under human beings.

In fact, the responsibility of human beings for nature exists after nature is demystified. Technology asks endless adventures and responsibilities of human beings when it asks mankind to go beyond the natural world. For example, artificial insemination should be understood in this context. It is not right to oppose medical insemination because it disrupts existing ethics and thereby ruins mankind. That kind of attitude cannot solve a fundamental problem. In contrast, the problem of medical insemination elicits our sense of ethics and responsibility. It asks us to demonstrate ethics rather than only discuss it.

In the case of medical insemination, the parents are not real parents of children biologically. In particular, the father is not a real father because the mother uses the spermatozoa of someone ..else. However, when we see that parents accept the children as their real sons and daughters, we recognize that mankind can construct life with love regardless of the biological family concept. Non-biological parenting awakens a new sense of ethics for mankind. Opening our eyes to a new ethics of love shows the possibility that we can make the world new. Medical insemination asks high-level responsibility based on one-way love instead of the responsibility based on mutual love. It shows the possibility that a person who goes with technology becomes a new human. The technological spirit asks mankind to open its eyes. As Jang Brun pointed out, technology is a human effort to escape. In other words, technology should be understood as a metaphysical philosophy that conquers the current situation of human beings.

In fact, technology itself is the continuation of newness. Several scholars studying the process of the technological development have made clear that it consists of discontinuities. Thomas Kuhn pointed out that the development of science begins with a revolution, consisting of a new paradigm that is totally different from normal science. Technology makes something incessantly, but exists over its creation. From this perspective, language is the first technology. Language designates some events through its symbols. Language, as the first technology, exposes something actualized, but consistently overcomes it. Thus this characteristic should be considered as its substance.

According to this account, Ellul's assertion that technology will eliminate a meaningful

mankind because of its autonomy is too serious. Everything belongs to the hand of human beings. Cybernetics shows this trend well, clearly demonstrating the difference between mankind and technology. The difference is the space that mankind is involved with incessantly. People worry that cybernetics, cutting-edge technology', would rein in human beings by invading their original space. However, according to scientists who examine cybernetics, cybernetics makes clear the difference between mankind and technology.

The cognition of mankind is always overall knowledge, while the program of cybernetics consists only of simple cognition. Even recently developed expert systems are helpless in the face of abruptly occurring events because they act according to premade programs. As long as the essence of cybernetics is reappearance, what reappears is important.

Human beings decide what is important. The final decision always depends on mankind. The development of technology therefore does not threaten mankind. It asks more responsibility of us. The self-control of technology is not acceptable. When we accept the self-control of technology, our responsibility will be lost. Schumacher preferred a middle range technology to supertechnology and pointed out as follows: "I believe the new direction for developing technology is that it gratifies the needs of mankind" *(Small is Beautiful)*.

Technology is the technology of mankind. Automation is based on patterns following the strategies that mankind pre-made. The most important thing to emphasize at this point is the way in which mankind selects. The process of decision is an ethical decision involving values. The development of technology does not create anti-ethics, but asks for a high level of ethics. In sum, technology makes us know who we are as cybernetics only hints at. And it makes us realize that we are going for a new world ourselves. Technology cannot copy mankind. Humans as beings of language exceed technology and cybernetics.

Pierre Levine, the French cybernetics scholar, points out that human beings are able to know what they do not know. They can go to the unlimited world of imagination. Humankind is not just what we currently are; it is more that that. Technology actually incites this kind of understanding of mankind. With technology, mankind looks upon a man as a real man. The hope of humans is humanity. In Ellul's criticism, humans only know the means of technology without knowing its ends. That is a very good opinion. However, technology is not teleological, but eschatological in the sense that technology is waiting for the appearance of newness. Through breaking down the absoluteness of existing authorities, technology liberates people from social constraints and helps them to deny naturally a given society.

As G. Hottois explains, the world of technological science surrounded by a new environment is totally different from the phenomenological-analytical world or metaphysical philosophy *(Le signe et la technique,* 1984, p. 81). The phenomenological-analytical world tries to evaluate tradition and history in many ways. Metaphysical philosophy focuses on explaining a given world while thinking of nature. The technological society that thinks of transforming things focuses most intensely on the imagination of the future. Hottois expresses well the characteristics of the utopia of technology. For him, the development of technology fulfills through rapid change what we have never expected.

Whether we take advantage of technology, or produce oppression or alienation due to the characteristics of dehumanized technology, depends on our attitude. Technology itself is not the problem. For instance, we have many leisure hours because of the development of technology. Since we have spare time, we can think unusual things that differ from our daily life. Technology is very close to the transcendence of utopia that repeatedly asks new things.

. Technology, Realization of Eschatology

Our thought and imagination need technology for their realization. To be concrete something needs technology. Utopia is also realized with technology. Here, we want to examine another dimension of utopia—its eschatological aspect. And eschatology means what Bultmann says. For him, eschatology is to decide something while considering the present as the end. The end is energy to pull the future to the present and embody it. Our belief makes it so.

Imagination must be realized if it is to change the world. Materialization needs technology for effective realization. The materialization of unlimited newness that preempts

the future is technology. The possibility of newness that technology predicts always considers reality. That is the directness of technology. Thanks to technology, newness is always considered as a concrete realization in the world. It is similar to language. The symbolism of language has its meaning under the condition of directness. The imaginary world that technology provides is a preliminary process that fulfills newness in the world. Materialization in the world is the characteristic of the end of technology. Technology always considers realization in a concrete situation, unlike science. Technology is more instinct than science in terms of its power to make human beings humanlike, because technology provides embodiment. With technology mankind gives up the idea of leaving this world and participates in the world.

Hottois has told us that modem philosophy considers language as its subject because it is the opposite of the directness of technological eschatology. Since technological language always directs in a clear way, modem society loses the wealth that the symbols of language bring. Therefore, the main subject of modem language philosophy—without analytical philosophy—is to emphasize that language is not something that controls directly. This trend is clearer in the language philosophy of Derrida's poststructuralism than that of Paul Ricoeur's phenomenology. For Derrida, the secondary characteristic of language is that the true meaning of language becomes blurred because original language is divided into several sub-categories. It is the autonomous signifier in contrast to the significant.

When Derrida talks about the autonomous signifier, some aspects are similar to the opposition of technological language. Marcuse also mentioned the desolateness of technological language spreading throughout today's industrial society. He thought that technical language always tries to fabricate something, so indicates something directly. For him, therefore, language is buried in the immediately correct.

This kind of criticism of technological language exaggerates, although it is true in some sense. Derrida's idea is an overstatement seeking to change modem society in a different direction. In fact, it is useless if language does not indicate the realities of life out of texts. As he pointed out, to be "deconstruction," language should be a thing that indicates something, that is, constructs as well as demolishes. The correctness of technological language should be understood as a directness that realizes certain purposes. It should not be understood as a tool to make our life dreary. The eschatological characteristic of technological language is to make something. Technology does not know the difference between theory and practice because of the character of technological language. However, since technology does not know the planner and the practitioner, it offers a new epistemology and gives unlimited imagination to the world of knowledge.

Because of its eschatological character, a technological view of the world differs from teleology. In the teleological view, the present cannot be new because it has already been designated by the given purpose of the futures That is what physicists and biologists want to explain. F. Jacob in France speaks of the process of the development of life, rather than the taking apart and assembling of engineering. Jacob borrows Levi-Strauss' vocabularies. Here, engineering is work with a specific purpose. Taking apart

175

and assembling something indicates directness flowing from fortuity. J. Monod also argues that the development of life was not followed by any sequence made by nature. He says that the development of life fulfills itself through unanticipated new things. A view of the world in the field of physics is neither determinism nor probability. In sum, the world that technology wants to seek is the world that leaves our destiny in our hands. The knowledge of technology is not far from ethics. Instead, it raises ethical questions by insisting on clear responsibility. It does not demolish ethics although it creates new movements in the methodology of ethics.

Thus far, we have studied the spirit of utopia in terms of a technical view of the world that has newness and eschatology as the central concepts. The main interest of technology is not to know, but to change. It does not mean that technology changes the world without knowing the current situation. It means that technology focuses on changing the world while withholding a core knowledge of the realities of life.

. Conclusion

How do we manage these technological phenomena? It is possible when we resuscitate the spirit of utopia in Christianity. Let's answer with several propositions.

The Technical Phenomenon Requires Changes in Religion

The advent of the technological world does not ask for the obliteration of religion, but for new characteristics of religion. As J. Fourastie has pointed out, if religion is a view of the world, the advent of a new view of the world requires a new religious view of the world *(L'eglise a-t-elle trahi? 1974)*. It asks for a new view of God and a new view of the church. Revelation is always related to some time and someone. Therefore, revelation is always open. As G. Friedman argues, the crisis of mankind in technological culture is not temporary, so we need a new religious view of the world. Friedman insists that we have to expect that a new spiritual life will come into full bloom in the new technological environment *(La puissance et la sagesse,* 1970).

In any case, it is important to consider technology as a problem of religion. We cannot replace the achievement of technology with the supernatural aspects of religion. It is necessary to awaken sleeping religion by accepting the new view of the world that technology institutes.

Accept the World Fundamentally

Theology should have an optimistic attitude to the world. The world is not just a place humanity enters. The world is the world of people for people. God should'be the final principle for explaining the world and its people. There should be some fundamental acceptances of the world and people. Although the world is evil, although my life and the lives of others are ugly, this kind of belief accompanies the ethical power that conquers the world. Theology persuades the public to avoid pessimistic fatalism. This pessimistic fatalism spreading through churches relates to the struggle

for existence that seeks egoistic selfishness instead of interlocking human responsibility with the sacredness of God. The world is the place of God's love, and the place where the creative responsibility of people is fulfilled. In fact, waiting for a new world without doing anything with this one is equal to giving up on God.

Here, we deny any attempt to divide the area of religion and technology. This kind of attempt is the perspective of several scholars who want to take technology seriously. Their way of thinking is that technology gives learning and religion gives knowledge. In this methodology, technology makes and religion acts. The former gives material abundance and the latter gives the meaning of life. However, if we think that technology consists of modem culture, and the spiritual world of religion is different, it is possible to uphold a fundamentally optimistic attitude toward the world.

The cultural philosophy of J. Maritain does not give us any progressive solution. For him, technology itself is good, though it is important how mankind uses it. He thinks that technology brings material abundance. In other words, for him, technology makes it possible for mankind to escape material poverty, but it is not related to anything spiritual. His logic is that technology is about secular things, so it handles materials, while the arena of spirit belongs to religion. In his philosophy, he divides technology and religion. " The church is holy and the world is secular." There is no fundamental affirmation of the world. There is no effort to see the world as the condition of God.

That perspective loses the power of ethics because the transcendence or newness of the core concept of ethics comes when we affirm the world. That is also a message that the culture and ethics of Schweitzer gives. As he clearly pointed out, eventual optimism is ethics. Affirming the world and life fundamentally and eventually gives birth to the power of ethics that changes current disciplines. "Ethics is no more than fulfilling the idea of affirming the world and life." Unlike the natural philosophy of Hegel, Schweitzer believed that only an optimism affirming the fact that life is originally beautiful makes the current era new.

The Total Otherness of God

The greatness of God is not in the order of the world, but God participates in the world. Technology left alone seeks a boon, one that falls into historical incoherence because it seeks a total newness. It denies that the de-mystification of nature becomes the link to the sacredness of the history. As Oscar Culmann puts it, "The New Testament does not teach religion over the world. However, it needs to have an eye for denying the current order of the world" *(Dieu et Cesar,* 1956).

The total otherness of God is the source of revolutionary iconoclasm. Thanks to the otherness of God, the people go to a new world with the hope of a new people. Theology should insist on the otherness of God to prevent technology from falling into technological determinism. That is also the spirit which technology embraces.

From Ch. 3 of Homo Technicus: Technology, Environment, and Ethics *by Myung Su Yang (Seoul: Korea Theological Institute, 1995). Translated by Dal Yong Jin.*

****

Ellul and Technological Utopianism

A Response to Myung Su Jung
by Darrell J. Fasching

Myung Su Yang's Challenge to Ellul

Myung Su Yang is a kindred spirit, whose paper I read with great interest, for it is clear from reading his essay that we both deeply appreciate two great theological critics of technology, Jacques Ellul and Gabriel Vahanian - the first as an iconoclastic critic of technological utopianism and the second as an iconoclastic advocate of it. Yang's essay is complex and at times even a little confusing, and yet very illuminating. In the first two sections of this response I shall simply try to restate the core arguments as I understand them. In the third and final section, I will try to asses the strengths and weaknesses of his argument.

"Korea," says Myung Su Yang, "is heading toward a technological civilization. ... To be aware of this situation is the only way to find a solution for it." Ellul, we are told, helps us to understand the perils of technological civilization - the autonomy of technology and the dehumanization it brings in its wake. And yet Yang immediately follows'this observation with an expression of optimism; namely, that technological civilization also offers new possibilities to create a more humanitarian society. To make people aware of this other possibility , says Yang, is "our most urgent task."

Myung Su Yang makes it very clear that while he appreciates Ellul's pessimistic critique of technological civilization and finds much of it valid, nevertheless he fears that Ellul's analysis tells only half the story. For technology, he argues, deconstructs one understanding of our humanity only to make way for another, more biblical understanding. Yang seems to play Ellul off against thinkers such as Ernst Bloch and Gabriel Vahanian, arguing with the latter that technology has deconstructed an understanding of our humanity based on nature only to open up the possibility of a more biblical or eschatological view. Yang lays out his understanding of Ellul's thesis and then critiques it, in order to offer his more optimistic theological view.

Yang's Account of Ellul's Thesis

Myung Su Yang is appreciative of Ellul's work for showing that the central problem of a technological civilization, dehumanization, is located in religiosity. This religiosity gives technology its autonomy by "sanctifying" it so that technology comes to be treated with the reverence reserved for the sacred. Human beings come to worship the work of their own hands as if it is something wholly other, and so end up in alienation.

Yang interprets Ellul as following R. Caillois' thesis of the duality of sanctity in which "the religion of sanctification assumes the world is divided into two parts - the sacred world and the secular" in such a way that "the sacred of transgression" is a ritually permitted time of chaos that profanes and secularizes the world so that "people can have a time to feel free from the strict spirit of the sanctity." Such a permitted time of revolt then passes only to more securely reaffirms "the sacred of respect" that legitimates the autonomy of technology and renders choice an illusion. As a result everyone ends up living in a society where people seem to have a choice and yet the autonomy of technology renders these choices irrelevant. It is a world in which technology orchestrates everything and nothing, new and unexpected can happen.

Such a society, says Yang, is not so much unethical as it is 'anti ethical." What role could ethics possible play in a civilization in which choice is an illusion? And so this technological religiosity becomes the opiate of the people. Finally, as a result of this dialectic of respect and transgression, technology has desacralized the world as sacred order of nature only to resacralize the world as a sacred technological order whose "will to power" is justified not by the "natural superiority" of some over others as by technology and its efficiency.

Yang's Utopian Critique of Ellul

Having laid out Ellul's analysis and critique of technological civilization, Myung Su Yang asks: "Is this enough for explaining technology?" and proposes to look at technological civilization from another perspective , that of utopia. "Utopia," says Yang, "is exactly the opposite of sanctity and provides the possibility of emancipation."

When technology is sanctified or made sacred, says Yang, it is reduced to instrumentalism or technologism, which has no place for transcendence. But technology need not be reduced to technologism for it is "not simply a tool" it is a "method or manner of living" that embodies transcendence and truth. Recalling *techne 's* root in Greek thought, as an art or skill and its association with *poesis,* meaning to make or produce — this way of life embodies *techne* as the poetic or symbolic skill of imagining and making a new world - utopia.

Unlike metaphysics, utopianism is not so much interested in "what is" as in "what is not" - in making possible something new. So utopianism is "critical of the present." Following Karl Mannheim, Yang asserts that while ideology serves to justify the status quo, utopia seeks to "deconstruct the present" and bring into a existence something new. "Sanctity attempts to maintain its sacredness by separating the sacred and the secular from each other, while utopia joins the world with 'incarnated transcendence,' never dividing the sacred and the secular." Following Gabriel Vahanian, Yang asserts that "the former is soteriological and the latter is eschatological." Technology, in the poetic sense, "makes human beings a new species," an artificial or cultural creature. For culture is our second nature, the one we assume poetically when we transcend nature and realize our unique humanity as linguistic beings.

179

Language is the first technology, the one needed to create a human world. Technology in demystifying nature opens us up to our humanity as creatures of language and imagination. "Demystification, humanization and newness exist together. It's the transition from the transcendence of sanctity to the transcendence of utopia" - the same transition witnessed to in biblical eschatology as fallen nature gives way to new creation. The ethical implications of this, says Yang, are exemplified in artificial insemination. An ethic oriented to protecting human nature finds such a practice problematic but an ethic oriented to new creation welcomes it, for our humanity does not reside in our biology but in our poetic capacity to make the child our son or daughter and so "we recognize that mankind can construct life with love regardless of the biological family concept." In this way technology makes us new creatures and calls us to new levels of responsibility.

In light of such observations Myung Su Yang suggests that Ellul's assertion that the autonomy of technology is robbing us of our humanity is overstated. The attempt to develop artificial intelligence or cybernetic "expert systems" illustrates the selflimiting character of technologism and the necessity of technology as eschatology and *poesis.* for such systems do not handle the unexpected (the new) well, nor can they decide what is important. For these things human *techno-poesis* is required - the symbolic imagination. Such technology does not eliminate our humanity but calls humans to a more demanding level of ethical responsibility. It is not, as Ellul suggests, according to Yang, a question of "means' replacing "ends" but of new creation. Technology, says Yang, is not so much teleological as it is eschatological. It is about imagination, embodiment, transformation and the future. It is about utopia and new creation. The theological task, as Yang understands it is to affirm optimism and "avoid pessimistic fatalism" by "interlocking human responsibility with the sacredness of God" and refusing to separate religion from .technology or the church from the secular. Yang's conclusion suggests the influence of Gabriel Vahanian, for Yang argues, using Vahanian's phraseology, that we must see "the world as the condition of God." This does not mean we simply affirm "the current order of the world," but rather understand "the total otherness of God is the source of revolutionary iconoclasm," which calls this order into question in order to make everything new.

A Response to Myung Su Yang's Critique

Myung Su Yang's paper on "Jacques Ellul and Technological Utopia" is filled with wonderful insights but also with some statements whose meaning seems obscure or, at times, even self-contradictory. Many of these, I suspect, may simply reflect the problem of translation from Korean to English.

The Sacred and the Holy: A Kev Problem of Interpretation

However, a serious problem is Yang's use of the terms "sacred" and "sanctification" interchangeably in describing Ellul's thought. Ellul would never speak of sacralization as the same as sanctification, nor would he speak of "interlocking human responsibil-

ity with the sacredness of God." Ellul viewed the sacred and the holy as opposites, antonyms not synonyms. As a result Yang not only confuses the sacred with the holy but the profane with the secular.

Very early in Ellul's work in *The Presence of the Kingdom (Presence au monde modeme,* 1948) he made a distinction between the terms "sacred" *(le sacre)* and "holy" *(le saint)* and then in *Man and Money (L'Homme et L'Argent,* 1954) worked out the alignment of the sacred with the demonic and these distinctions then became definitive for the rest of his work. The sacred, for Ellul, is not a term that can be applied to God or related directly to God. It is part of the order of this world, an order which divides everything into the spheres of sacred and profane. The Holy, by contrast, is directly related to God and manifests the power of God to desacralize the world, rendering it, at the same time both secular and holy. An ethic of holiness, says Ellul, can *rehabilitate* the sacred, so that institutions become liberated from the demonic powers that distort the sacred. When this occurs institutions once more reflect God's will and God's justice. And whenever that happens, the human city becomes an eschatological anticipation of the city of God. Ellul even goes so far as to claim that the human drive for revolution can be rehabilitated and liberated from the dialectic of the sacred of respect and the profane

(i.e., the sacred of transgression) so as to introduce an apocalyptic moment of genuine change into history.

Ellul on Utopia

It is striking, given Myung Su Yang's topic, that he never refers directly to what Ellul has to say about utopia. For most of his career, Ellul considered utopian thought to be the epitome of what Yang defines (following Mannheim) as "ideology" — ideas that, while promising change, serve to maintain the status quo. Indeed, Ellul calls utopianism "a consolation in the face of slavery, and an escape from something one is unable to prevent" *(The New Demons,* p. 117). Ellul is quite blunt about this: "I fail to see a positive value in utopian views. They do humanity no good" *(Search for an Image,* pp. 24-25). Utopianism's only purpose is to feed humanity false hopes for a better world that are designed to win their allegiance to the technological order that enslaves and dehumanizes them.

For Ellul, it is apocalyptic thought that plays the role that Mannheim ascribes to "utopian thought" - that of breaking with the ideological order of the present and calling it into question so as to bring about a something new and unexpected - a transformation of all things in an eschatological moment of new creation. For Ellul, an apocalyptic ethic has the power to desacralize a technological civilization in order to sanctify it (i.e., claim it for God's service), rendering it both holy and therefore secular (i.e. no longer claiming to be sacred or to take the place of God.) When God alone is holy, the world is truly secular, that is no longer subject to the dualism of the sacred and the profane.

The paradox here, of course, is that this leads to the conclusion that Ellul's apocalypticism is, by Manneheim's definition, is a form of utopianism. In fact, Mannheim

uses Thomas Muenzer's apocalyptic revolt during the Reformation as an example of what he means by utopianism *(Ideology and Utopia,* p.213) Indeed that was what I argued in my doctoral dissertation some twenty years ago, which was eventually rewritten to became the first single-author book ever published on Ellul's work - *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Edwin Mellen Press, 1981).

The book was based on my doctoral thesis, written under the direction of Gabriel Vahanian, and argued that despite Ellul's protestations against utopianism, Ellul was a utopian thinker. Implicit in my argument was an attempt to reconcile the positions of Ellul and Vahanian whose rhetoric made it seem that they held polar opposite positions on technological utopianism. This argument was later made more explicit in the opening chapter of my book *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* (SUNY Press, 1993). There (on p. 48) I put it this way:

If Ellul is phobic about *utopianism,* Vahanian is phobic about *apocalypticism,* which he equates with an ideological dualism more concerned With changing Worlds than with changing the world. Ellul's work, however, should serve as As reminder to Vahanian (who already acknowledges a large indebtedness to Him) that biblical apocalypticism is not about *changing worlds* but precisely About *changing the world.* Ellul's understanding of the apocalyptic narrative Tradition sounds suspiciously like Vahanian's understanding of the utopian Narrative tradition. The problem is that Ellul fails to appreciate the utopianism Of the very apocalyptic tradition which stands at the center of his thought. By Same token Vahanian fails to appreciate that Ellul's apocalypticism does Really draw on the _ authentic utopianism of the biblical tradition. Despite their Seeming opposition it does not seem to me that the disagreement between them is substantive. For Vahanian's eschatological *novum* like Ellul's apocaplypse of the escahatan is nothing other than the presence of the Wholly Other in the here and now which calls into question the sacred order of "reality," making all things new.

If I am right then Ellul might be a more constructive resource for Myung Su Yang's theological optimism regarding technological utopianism than Yang is able to envision in his essay.

To my surprise Ellul wrote me (May 2, 1982), after reading the copy of my book that I had sent him, to say that I had given a completely accurate account of the development of his thought and then went on to say: "You are quite right on the subject of Apocalypse and Utopia. That which makes me uneasy is not at all the thought of Vahanian on the subject of Utopia/Technique. On the contrary, that is very convincing. But it is the word itself, on the one hand, in its historical usage and , on the other hand, as it is used by modem intellectuals - not at all the way Vahanian understands it."

What I find underdeveloped in Yang's essay is how we make the transition from technology as our fate to technology as the advent of new creation - technological utopianism. Yang sometimes seems to say that by demythologizing the myth of our "human nature" technology automatically leads to utopianism. It would be more ac-

curate to say that this demythologizing opens up the opportunity for new creation, provided technology itself is demythologized. For Ellul, that is the task of an apocalyptic Christian ethic and for Vahanian that is the iconoclastic task of the church in a technological age. The ideology of technologism has to be unmasked, not just in theory but in practice, before utopian possibilities can be realized or embodied in a new way of life that will be at once both holy and secular.

Ellul, Jacques. *The Presence of the Kingdom.'N'T:* Seabury Press, 1967.

. *The New Demons,* NY: Seabury Press, 1975.

Fasching, Darrell. *The Thought of Jacques Ellul.* NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1981.

The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia. SUNY Press, 1993. Mannheim, Karl, *Ideology and Utopia.* NY: Harcourt, Brace and World, inc., 1936.

Vahanian, Gabriel. *God and Utopia: The Church in a*

Technological Civilization. N.Y.: Seabury Press, 1977.

Anonymous God. Aurora Colorado: The Davies Group, 2001.

Darrell J. Fasching is the Founding Editor of The Ellul Forum. *He is a Professor of Religious Studies at the University of South Florida.*

Utopia and Mope: JLtResponse to Jacques Tdfrd and Mchnotoflical Utopia J. 'Westey 'Baper

For those of us living in the highly technological environment of the Western world, we daily see the advantages technology has brought to our lives. Efficiencies in business, advances in medical diagnosis and treatment, changes in approaches to teaching and learning—these are a part of our everyday lives. As Porat's (1977) analysis first revealed, we have come to this point as our major economic base has moved from agricultural to industrial to informational. Those in the Eastern world, whose economies remained agriculturally-based as the West moved through these transitions, have taken note and have often adopted, as national priorities, goals to move to industrial-or information-based economies as quickly as possible. For all of us, East or West, Ellul's sociological critique of *la technique* is inconvenient. His call for us to examine the values of the technological system and the negative impact they can have stands in the way of an unreserved embrace of a system that produces such evident advantages.

, These are the kinds of struggles that I believe are at the root of Professor Yang's attempt to find a reconciliation through the concept of "Utopia." The Republic of Korea, through an aggressive program of industrialization and importation of technology, has become one of "Four Tigers of East Asia" and its economy is currently ranked as the 13'[h] largest in the world. Should it put the brakes on its rapid development until it can consider the potentially negative impact a technological system will have on its traditional society? In face of the seeming impracticality of this, there must be a way

of finding a positive side to technology. This Professor Yang seeks to do through his "Utopian" approach—one in which we recreate "the present in order to advance toward the new future." He suggests that human use of technology can actualize humans ("With technology, human beings become human beings.") and, at a broader level, can open up opportunities for change, creating "a stage for a new world"—" the unlimited world of imagination" or Utopia. His What has made the study of Ellul's position on la *technique* particularly difficult is his refusal to merge the two analyses into a single comprehensive critique (Ellul, 1970, p. 6). Rather than synthesizing them, as a dialectic thinker Ellul played these two tracks against each other, each of his sociological works countered by a theological work. His work as whole, he explained, "has from the first turned on 'the contradictions between the evolution of the modem world [notably the technical evolution] and the biblical content of revelation" (Holloway, 1970, p. 20; brackets in the original).

In his sociological work, Ellul viewed social development in systemic terms and sought to show us how the technological system would develop apart from our intervention. "I analyze reality," he said. "I see Its most probable course of view is that Ellul's critique masks these possibilities. "Ellul regards technology as an idolatrous religiosity," a position, he argues, that leads to hopelessness in the face of autonomous technology, rather than an acceptance of our responsibility and the possibility of "self-control of technology."

Professor Yang offers a standard criticism of Ellul when he contends, "Ellul's assertion that technology will eliminate a meaningful mankind because of its autonomy is too serious." It is this common reading of Ellul that causes him to look for an alternate view "where technology is set free from mechanics and gets closer to human beings." In this response, I will argue that, when viewed in its totality, Ellul's analysis is not unrelievedly pessimistic, but that Ellul presented a hope that is not far from Professor Yang's theological optimism.

To address the question of Ellul's pessimism, let us begin by going back to a written debate between Robert Theobald and Ellul in 1965. Theobald comes to the debate having read *The Technological Society,* so he is familiar with Ellul's statements about the autonomy of technology. Yet, through the exchange, he is taken aback by something Ellul says, something that seems irreconcilable with his assumption of where Ellul stands.

I find Ellul's position on this issue ambiguous: he seems at many points in his book *The Technological Society* and in his reply to deny man's power to influence the technological environment. Indeed, at times, he appears to believe in a rather extreme technological determinism. Yet in spite of this, at the end of his reply, he quite clearly states that man can find "the path to a new freedom" (Theobald, 1965, p. 569).

What Theobald bumped up against is a common stumbling block for many of Ellul's critics—the assumption that his sociological critique of *la technique* is all there is. As I have noted elsewhere, "Ellul's work follows two separate tracks—the more widely

known sociological works and the less well-known, but crucially important, theological writings" (Baker, 1991, p.10).

development, but that doesn't mean I approve of it; on the contrary, what I see is the interaction of blind forces, nature taking its course, and the human role is precisely that of mastering or preventing this chain of events" (Ellul, 1981/1982, p. 46). Thus, *The Technological Society* was written as "a warning of what may happen if man does not come to understand what is happening and makes no attempt to control the situation" (Ellul, 1965, p. 568). But, contrary to the common criticism, this did not lead him to fatalism. He did not "believe in a permanent determinism, in the inexorable course of nature" (Ellul, 1981/1982, p. 106) and "never said that technology was not dependent on anything or anyone, that it was beyond reach, etc." (Ellul, 1977/1980b, p.139). It is only if no action is taken, if people resign themselves to what they see as the inevitable course, that Ellul speaks of things deterministically. "Fate operates when people give up," he says (Ellul, 1981/1982,-p.106). With this background, we can now put into context the statement that caused Theobald such consternation:

So long as man lulls himself into thinking his perils imaginary, that ready-made solutions exist, or that others will devise a remedy, he will do nothing but wait. I am still convinced, however, that if we can be sufficiently awakened to the real gravity of the situation, man has within himself the necessary resources to discover by some means unforeseeable at present, the path to a new freedom (Ellul, 1965, p. 568).

To summarize, Ellul's sociological works describe how he viewed the development of the system, but—and in each of these statements he consistently adds this condition (though his critics just as consistently miss it)—that development would occur only if we do not intervene to . change it. Amid his analysis is the hope of intervention.

This hope is the theme of his religious writings which "confront" the sociological analyses. The "path to a new freedom" may be discovered by those who have been awakened to the likely course of the technological system and seek to intervene in its development. But who can intervene into a system that seems so complete and autonomous? The integrating nature of the technological system leads Ellul to argue that no one within the system can provide us with help in breaking the power of the system. Thus he called for an "exterior intervention," a term that goes back to his 1948 work, *The Presence of the Kingdom.* At its core the call is religious.

The possibility of an "exterior intervention," Ellul (1948/195 1) argues, "can only come from the admission of a superior authority which is imposed from outside on the mind of man, and gives him a rule, while at the same time it restores to him his genuine function" (p. 135). Writing as a Christian, Ellul (1981) says the "Christian Revelation" provides "the outside vantage point that permits the critique of the system" because God is outside the system which binds us (pp. 100, 102). He contends that "Christians in particular are called" to challenge the system of la *technique* "because it is possible for them to see the true situation of man better than other people, and because, better than others, they can see where this ought to lead, and what is its aim" (Ellul, 1948/1951, p. 143). Rather than, as Professor Yang contends, "sanctifying

185

the concept of technology," Ellul's religious argument results in what Christians (1989) calls a "prophetic witness" which "confronts technicism and insists on desacralizing it" (p. 137; cf. Ellul, 1980a, p. 247). In sum, Ellul believed that an "exterior intervention" is possible because of a God who is Wholly Other and therefore completely outside the technological system. Surely this is not far from Professor Yang's argument: "The total otherness of God is the source of revolutionary iconoclasm. Thanks to the otherness of God, the people go to a new world with the hope of a new people. Theology should insist on the otherness of God to prevent technology from falling into technological determinism that is also the spirit which technology embraces."

Professor Yang argues for a positive side of technology, that "(t)echnology should exist for improving human beings." Ellul (1972/1973) recognized the positive contributions of particular technologies, as well. He readily admitted that technology (as contrasted with the technological system) does have a place, that "there is a legitimate use when it is put back into the movement of hope. That is the only place from which one might, with a great many difficulties moreover, rethink the whole problem of technology and come up with the true import of man's tremendous discovery" (p. 237). "What we have eventually to do as Christians," he wrote, "is certainly not to reject technology, but rather, in this technological society and at the price of whatever controversy, we have to cause hope to be bom again, and to redeem the time in relation to the times" (p. 232).

Although Ellul did not present us with a program for how to accomplish this, he did, in his religious work, provide hope that we can find a "path to a new freedom." "In aiming a certain number of challenges, objections, and basic criticisms at the foundations," Ellul (1981/1982) said, "we can make Technique change its orientation and begin . . . what we might call a new historical period in which it will once again be in its proper place, that of a means subordinated to ends" (p. 208)—a hope, I would submit, that is the same, in spirit, at least, as Professor Yang's "utopian imagination" which "works toward negating and deconstructing the present, and finally establishing the new system."

References

Baker, J. W. (1991). *The hope of intervention: A rhetorical analysis of the English translations of the writings of Jacques Ellul.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University, Columbus.

Christians, C. (1989). A theory of normative technology. In E. F.

Byme & J. C. Pitts (Eds.), *Technological transformation: Contextual and conceptual implications (pp.* 123-139). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers. Ellul, J. (195 1). *The presence of the kingdom* (O. Wyon, Trans.).

Philadelphia: Westminster Press. (Original work published 1948)

Ellul, J. (1965, May 24). The biology of technique (M. Josephson, Trans.). *The Nation,* 24,567-568.

Ellul, J. (1970). From Jacques Ellul ... In J. Y. Holloway (Ed.), *Introducing Jacques Ellul (pp.* 5-6). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. .

Ellul, J. (1973). *Hope in time of abandonment (C.* E. Hopkin, Trans.). New York: The Seabury Press. (Original work published 1972)

Ellul, J. (1980a). The power of technique and the ethics of non-power (M. Lydon, Trans.). In K. Woodward (Ed.), *The myths of information: Technology and postindustrial culture (pp.* 242-247). Madison, WI: Coda Press, Inc.

Ellul, J. (1980b). *The technological system* (J. Neugroschel, Trans.). New York: The Continuum Publishing Corporation. (Original work published 1977)

Ellul, J. (1981). *Perspectives on our age: Jacques Ellul speaks on his life and work* (W. H. Vanderburg, Ed.; J. Neugroschel, Trans.). New York: The Seabury Press.

International Jacques Ellul Society

Berkeley, California
☒ an association of scholars and friends

The UES links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our three objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his penetrating social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

The UES is the English-language sister-society of the French-language *Association Internationale Jacques Ellul.* Together, we maintain a web site—-*www.ellul.org*—as our common communications link and as a resource for anyone with an interest in Jacques Ellul.

☒ preserving a legacy

Jacques Ellul published more than fifty books and nearly a thousand articles and reviews. Our mission is to preserve and make broadly available this great legacy by

(1) completing the publication of Ellul's work in French (several works remain),

(2) completing the English translation of his work and encouraging translations in other languages,

(3) republishing (in electronic as well as print formats) works that are no longer available,

(4) publishing a critical edition of Ellul's complete works in both French and English,

(5) maintaining a current, comprehensive bibliography of works by and about Ellul,

(6) organizing and making available the audio and video recordings of Ellul's lectures and interviews,

(7) making available an accurate biography of Ellul.

☒ extending a critique

Jacques Ellul is best known around the world for his penetrating critique of "la technique"—of the character and impact of technology on our world. The forces and

institutions which shape 21ˢᵗ century life and which pose the greatest challenges to the health and future of humanity and nature were Ellul's critical interest. Our mission is to encourage continued research and critical thought in this tradition, with a special focus on technology but also including politics, economics, globalization, education, art, language, communication, religion, and popular culture. The UES is not an antiquarian society interested only in a reverent inspection of Jacques Ellul's works; it is, in the spirit of Ellul himself, a movement to encourage the extension of a serious critique of technological civilization.

☒ researching a hope

Jacques Ellul was not just a social critic but a theologian and activist in church and community. Because of his profound faith in the "Wholly Other" breaking into human history, he refused to become a pessimist about the predominantly negative social trends he studied. He insisted that he was above all a man of hope and freedom and searched for signs of hope in Holy Scripture and in history. Our mission is to encourage continued theological and ethical research on hope and freedom, with a special focus on the Jewish and Christian Scriptures.

Join the UES

Anyone is welcome to become an ITES member—on two conditions:

(1) agreement with the society's statement of purpose

(2) payment of the annual membership dues of US $20 Send bank check or money order (drawn in US dollars) with your name and complete address including postal code.

Contact the UES

e-mail: UES@ellul.org

post: UES, Box 5365 Berkeley, CA 94705

Support the UES

The major publication projects which the UES is undertaking require substantial funding. The UES pursues such funding from charitable foundations, grant-making organizations, and publishers, but this is a long and unpredictable process. However, with the generous support of UES members and friends, we can achieve a great deal together. Please contact us by e-mail or letter if you would like more detailed information on our budget, plans, and giving opportunities. The UES is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. All gifts are tax-deductible for U.S. taxpayers.

UES Leadership

The International Jacques Ellul Society and L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul have been founded by a group of long-time students, scholars, and friends of Jacques Ellul, with the counsel and support of Jean, Yves, and Dominique Ellul, and as a French-American collaboration.

Board of Directors

Patrick Chastenet, *Professor of Political Science, University' of Rheims, France*

Clifford Christians, *Professor of Communications, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana IL*

Andrew Goddard, *Wycliffe Hall, Oxford University*

Darrell Fasching, *Professor of Religious Studies, University of South Florida, Tampa FL*

David Gill (President), *Institute of Business, Technology, and Ethics, Berkeley, CA*

Joyce Hanks (Vice-President), *Professor of French, University of Scranton, Scranton PA*

Ken Morris (Secretary-Treasurer), *Attorney-at-Law, Berkeley CA*

Carl Mitcham, *Professor of Liberal Arts, Colorado School of Mines, Golden CO*

Langdon Winner, *Professor of Political Scien ce, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY*

Issue #31 Spring 2003 — Remembering Ivan Illich and Katharine Temple

- Click to view the original PDF

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

"I believe that our vocation on earth is to establish a harmony that includes all that we call justice, liberty, joy, peace, and truth. "

Jacques Ellul

"Sheer gratitude has led me to meditate on a spirituality of friendship as one possible orientation to the mystery of God. "

Katharine Temple

"I consider conviviality to be individual freedom realized in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value. "

Ivan Illich

Contents

194

David W. Gill

Seven Valuable Ellul Resources 20

Information on The Editorial Board & More

The Ellul Forum
For the Critique of Technological Civilization
Founded 1988

The Ellul Forum is published twice per year, in the Spring and Fall. Its purpose is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to aspects of our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

Editor:

Clifford G. Christians, Univ. of Illinois, Urbana

Associate Editor:

David W. Gill, Berkeley, California

Contributing Editors:

Patrick Chastenet, University of Poitiers, France Dan Clendenin, Stanford, California

Peter F. W. Davies, Buckinghamshire College, UK Marva Dawn, Vancouver, Washington

Darrell J. Fasching, University of South Florida Andrew Goddard, Oxford University, UK Joyce Hanks, Univ. of Scranton, Pennsylvania David Lovekin, Hastings College, Nebraska Carl Mitcham, Colorado School of Mines Pieter Tijmes, University of Twente, Netherlands Gabriel Vahanian, Strasbourg University, France Willem Vanderburg, Univ. of Toronto, Canada

Publisher:

The Ellul Forum is published by the International Jacques Ellul Society (http://www.ellul.org][www.ellul.org) P.O.Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA Tel/Fax: 510-653-3334

Subscriptions:

The Ellul Forum is sent twice per year to all members of the IJES or its francophone sister society, the AIJE.

An annual membership/subscription, anywhere in the world, costs US $20. Please send check or money order (e.g., international postal money order) drawn in US funds for $20 to "IJES", P.O.Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA

Change of Address:

Please be sure to notify IJES of any change in your address. Our mailings are infrequent and postal forwarding orders expire.

Manuscript Submissions:

From the Editor

In this issue of *The Ellul Forum* we honor our recently departed friends and colleagues, Katharine Temple and Ivan Illich. Katharine Temple (June 8, 1944 - November 22, 2002) was buried on November 30 at her home parish, the Anglican Church of St. John, Port Hope, Ontario. Ivan Illich was born in Vienna in 1926 and passed away on December 2, 2002 in Bremen, Germany. He was buried in the cemetery of Oberneuland in Bremen. They represent the spectrum of Ellul's influence, from a social activist in the Catholic Worker House in Lower Manhattan to a world class scholar in academia. In their own ways, Katharine Temple and Ivan Illich carried on Ellul's mission as emblazoned on *The Forum* masthead: "the critique of technological civilization."

Katharine Temple wrote her superb 1976 doctoral thesis (under George P. Grant) at McMaster University on "The Task of Jacques Ellul: A Proclamation of Biblical Faith as Requisite for Understanding the Modern Project." Her frequent contributions to *The Catholic Worker* often mentioned Ellul's work and ideas. We honor her memory with a sample of her short essays but Kassie's greatest legacy is her life of joyful, sacrificial service among the poor.

Ivan Illich once said that Ellul was "a master to whom I owe an orientation which has decisively affected my pilgrimage for forty years" (*Ellul Forum* 13 (July 1994): 16). Illich's own brilliance and creativity produced a significant body of work that is a wonderful complement to that of Ellul. Countless new-generation scholars of technology use the books of both side-by-side.

Special thanks are owed to Contributing Editor Carl Mitcham for his work on this special issue. From his numerous contacts around the world, and his unbelievable bibliographic skills, he assembled this material with his trademark collegiality. The obituary Carl wrote in Spanish for the Madrid daily *El Pais* is included here in the original to honor Ivan Illich's Cuernavaca and his mastery of 14 languages.

Associate Editor David Gill, President of the International Jacques Ellul Society, provides the first of a regular series of columns in this issue of the *Forum* ("How Big Is the Tent?" p. 19), along with new "News and Notes" and "Resources" sections that will be of interest to Ellul students.

* * * *

The focus of the upcoming Fall 2003 issue of *The Ellul Forum* will be the technologies of cyberterrorism and hate. We will also review important new books on Ellul by Andrew Goddard and Jean-Luc Porquet. Our Spring 2004 issue, guest edited by Joyce Hanks, will focus on the tenth anniversary of Ellul's death.

Manuscripts you wish to have considered for *The Forum* are welcomed by the editor. Material for "News and Notes," "Ellul Resources" and queries about book reviews should be sent to David Gill.

The Ellul Forum and the International Jacques Ellul Society are all-volunteer activities, funded entirely by membership dues and small donations. We appreciate your solidarity and support.

Clifford G. Christians, Editor editor@ellul.org

Remembering Kassie

by Jim Grote

Two characteristics come to mind whenever I think of Kassie—"personally endearing" and "intellectually combative." One of her most outstanding qualities has been a continual source of guilt for me—she was a great letter writer and I am a terrible correspondent. I first wrote her many years ago because we had a mutual friend, Phil Hanson, who, like Kassie, studied under George Grant in Canada. Also, I had lived at two Catholic Worker houses. I still owe Kassie a letter in response to her letter dated Friday the 13th in 1998. She concluded with a comical P. S. about the irony of writing a letter during Lent and on Friday the 13[th.] As Kassie never crossed the Rubicon into the Church of Rome, I'm sure she's smiling at my Catholic guilt and my five-year delay in answering her letter.

One endearing memory is Kassie hitch-hiking all the way from New York to the hills of Kentucky to attend my wedding, a method of travel I'd used to visit her a number of times. And I can never forget drinking beer together and singing Cab Calloway's "Stormy Weather" on a number of occasions. The sweet way my children used to pronounce her name in their pre-school years sticks in my mind. Their pronunciation caught something of her inner spirit.

However, when it came to the life of the mind, Kassie was not nearly so sweet! I was always a fan of Simone Weil and Kassie had little tolerance for any criticism of Judaism. I remember going to a Simone Weil conference with Kassie and Carl Mitcham and the two of them getting into a huge argument during the question and answer session (I

can't recall the source of the dispute). On the way home in the car I exclaimed, "I can't take you two anywhere together." Another time at a philosophy of technology conference in Canada, Kassie (who was the only woman in the room) stood up and attacked the speaker for his feminist tendencies, going into a long involved defense of natural law. When I expressed my surprise later about a student of Ellul defending natural law, she smiled and replied, "I just can't resist bashing liberals!"

One final admission of guilt. During a visit to the New York Catholic Worker, I spent a couple days editing a paper of Kassie's, "The Sociology of Jacques Ellul," for publication in an early issue of *Research in Philosophy and Technology*, The manuscript was fifty pages long and true to Kassie's Catholic Worker spirit, it was typed on the back of old donated stationary and there were no Xeroxed copies of the manuscript. I inadvertently lost the paper and begged her to kill me in order to assuage my guilt. She was remarkably light-hearted about the whole affair. Upon eventually finding the paper, after retracing my steps all over New York, I took pause to contemplate both Kassie's forgiving smile and Ellul's theory of universal salvation. The two still go together in my mind.

February 2003. Louisville, Kentucky

Fascinated by the Instruments of Power

by Katharine Temple

During a news show, early on in the international military build-up in the Persian Gulf, an Egyptian correspondent opined that Arab populations might not fully support the United States, for they might see this as a colonial war. She was immediately cut off, and the scene switched to the American boys in the desert. Whether or not this was deliberate censorship, presumably it was felt she had overstepped the mark. Presumably, the American audience could not consider that their country (nor its allies, including Israel, which, although not formally part of the coalition, plays a major part in it) could be involved in an imperialist enterprise. This did not go along with the program, the concerted image projected by the media.

If we look to the past, though, there are no grounds for surprise at such a suggestion. As Paul Fussell writes in his introduction to *The Norton History of Modern Warfare*, "One need not be a cynic to understand ... that the modern union of neurotic nationalism and complex technology has defined war in a way unknown before." As for these specific preparations, the friend who sent me the Fussell article put the same point this way. "I guess Bush is determined to wage war on Saddam Hussein. I wonder exactly what is at stake? I suppose oil and national pride. The UN is behaving even worse than usual." And I would add in Mr. Bush's intimate involvement with the CIA and Texas oil money.

It is true that the analysis cannot remain focused on one man and one product. Rather, we should look at the forces they represent, what President Bush himself has called "our way of life"—that union of technology (the material organization of resources) and the state (the bureaucratic organization of the nation and its resources.) This union is the new imperialism, an expansion beyond classical colonialism.

Nor can we blame only one country, for, although U.S. is in the vanguard, the development is worldwide.

In the September 1990 *CW*, we considered these ideas in the thought of Jacques Ellul, especially from his book *The Technological Society*. He sees our whole civilization as being informed by technique, that is, the totality of a technical system, based on the efficient impersonal logic of machines, and all the ways in which, in every area of life, we integrate ourselves into that logic—to the exclusion of any other way. Technique gains strength because we give our allegiance to the streamlined mastery of nature (both human and non-human) as our source for power and security. In their essence, the forces of technique are aggressive, controlling and expansionist in every direction.

In a recent book, *The Technological Bluff* (Eerdmans, 1990) Ellul has said: "We have the existence of the so-called military-industrial complex, which really ought to be called the technico-military-statist complex. The original term applies only to a capitalist organization and even there it is too narrow. Not industry, but the technical system, is to blame, along with the state, which is the engine and primary user of techniques and which organizes the military." This account may sound abstract, but the reality of the war now going on in the Persian Gulf is anything but abstract.

The war is an all too concrete example of the domination imposed by the technico-military-statist complex, and its symbols are the car, the bomb, the TV, the computer—all essential to the parties in this conflict.

The car is the popular symbol of our needs. It is the outward sign of our highly mechanized and mobile society, whose wheels are kept turning by oil. Without oil, it is believed, the national system would be in jeopardy. Not only would the price of gas and oil company profits be affected, but beyond that, also the whole U.S. financial structure (already nervous because of expansions in information technologies in other countries). And so, if the oil supply is threatened, all other considerations, even an economic recession, back seat in the interest of technological state-power. On the other side, oil is the only leverage, in this game, that Saddam Hussein has at his disposal.

The car may well represent what we are all about, but the Pentagon is the spearhead of technique (in hardware, organization mentality) with its ever-expanding arsenal nuclear and non-nuclear weapons, whose alleged purpose seems thwarted by the end of the Cold War. As someone remarked, "All that might and personnel trained on Eastern Europe has to go somewhere to spread itself out." If the military complex were to shrink, the whole technical infrastructure could collapse. This is indeed a war economy, thanks to the technical primacy of the military. And a war economy tends to bring about war!

In this instance, the two forces—machines and the military—come together almost to demand a war from the state. The particular geo-political realities in the Middle East (and we cannot forget the further complexities of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which will never be ameliorated until there is an adequate response to the Palestinian *Intifade*) need to be seen in this context. It is a war needed by the technical system, a war desired by both presidents, a war made possible only by complex computer centers ("the mastery of the micro-chip over muscle" in the words of one commentator). It is also a war brought to us by television, which gives facile analyses and an illusion of participation in some strange and titillating way.

All of this adds up to expansionism. No matter what the outcome, it seems it will be a victory for the technico-military-state system and a defeat for the populations subjected, willingly or unwillingly, to it.

To go back to the news show: To suggest that Arabs, who have seen wave after wave of Western commercial expansion for resources, might see this as a colonial war is hardly outrageous. In fact, to deny the possibility adds further layers of anti-Arab racism (whether American, European or Israeli) to the imperialist pie. Probably the most accurate historical, political, economic, military and technical analysis comes in *Hosea* 8:7. "For they sow the wind and they shall reap the whirl wind." A current sense of the same thing comes from Amos Elon (writing from Jerusalem for *The New Yorker*, Dec. 24, 1990). "The feeling of being beset by blind forces is especially strong "

But, none of this is openly stated, for it is not material for war propaganda. We simply do not want to hear about it, for it is part of the American ethos to see itself as different from other, wicked nations, as a state that acts only as the righteous, innocent policeman for a dangerous world. George Hunsinger has called this belief the heresy of American exceptionalism. "From the genocide of Native Americans to the incineration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to the open veins of Central America, the myth of our exceptional virtue, backed by the blasphemy of our national divine election, has served again and again to make us tolerate the intolerable, accept the unacceptable and justify the unjustifiable." (Quoted in *CW* Oct.,-Nov., 1988.) If this war really is an exception, it has yet to be shown. (Sad to say, this is similar to the political critique of the state of Israel—a small nation, founded as a sanctuary against murderous persecution, metamorphosed, in worldly terms, into a technico-military state to guarantee an elusive security.)

Means and Ends

The question comes up: Are you so naive as to think that Saddam Hussein is merely an innocent victim? Of course not. The violence he has perpetrated and threatens is what people are talking about when they call this a just war (assuming an acceptance of the theory in the first place, or its applicability to modern warfare). The arguments for a so-called "just war," however, should be looked at more realistically, in terms of means and ends.

"Some day our children will be taught that this battle ... was fought to protect freedom and democracy. My generation was brought up to believe that Britain, France

and the United States waged war against Nazi Germany to save Jews and other non-Aryans in Central Europe from extinction. Would that we had, but we didn't. The world tolerated Adolf Hitler's internal crimes and his invasions, just as it did Saddam's, until he crossed a line that had little to do with a concern for humanity and everything to do with the balance of power." (Charles Glass, *The Spectator* (London), Aug. 25, 1990). The point I see is that this war has nothing to do with justice. It seems to me, therefore, that we cannot simply hope for some inadvertent justice, such as more freedom for the people of Kuwait and Iraq, or security for Israelis, through an insatiable will-to-power. Furthermore, "the balance of power" is a euphemism for the clash between expanding powers. There are no limits, as the history of modern warfare, modern techniques and the modern state has taught us. Their power itself becomes irrational and all of us are caught up in its whirlwind. Saddam Hussein's own pursuit of technological sophistication and state power, pitched in frighteningly anti-Semitic tones against the Zionist state, will not be overcome by more of the same from the West—raised to the power of "blind forces."

It is not my point to come up with better national policies (though surely there must be some) so much as to strive for clarity about a war that has been veiled and distorted by the powers that be. This war is the way of the state. That's the hell of it. We must learn not to accept those terms, to reject the madness that leads only to further war.

How, then is it possible to proceed? It all sounds so overwhelming, beyond the reach of personal responsibility. Nevertheless, clarification is a requirement and a discipline that requires the greatest attention. Above all, we must learn the art of not being distracted. Not distracted on many levels—not by official versions shot through with lied; not by the electronic media circus which presents these versions to us; not by discussions that suck us into the web of tactics (e.g., whether chemical weapons, a small nuclear bomb, air strikes, a long siege, a simple assassination is "best") that are neither politics nor morality, but only the slippery slope to insanity through a fascination with the instruments of power.

Finally, we must develop habits to prevent us from being distracted from the deadly reality, the dominant drive, of our way of life. In the last section of the *Technological Bluff*, Jacques Ellul talks about the ways we are prone to being "fascinated people," held in thrall to technique by computers, tele-terminals, television, advertising, games, sports, etc. Interestingly, he concludes: "Those who are most susceptible to propaganda (and advertising) are the intellectuals [and on the same page he adds a list of the various shapers of public opinion] while the hardest to reach and budge are those rooted in traditions, whose ideas are fixed, who live in relatively stable environments (like farmers up to the 1950s) or those in structured relations (like members of unions)."

If we want to work to see the war in the Persian Gulf for what it is, perhaps we should take his point to heart as an admonition, and be freed from a fascination with technique. Perhaps those of us who wish to remain rooted in the Christian tradition,

to stand with those not in influential circles, could make the practice of clarification (which, in traditional terms, is the virtue of prudence) our Lenten discipline.

From The Catholic Worker, March-April 1991, p.3.

Capitalist Starbuckers

by Katharine Temple

The World Economic Forum (WEF) is an unofficial gathering of 3000 of the most powerful people on earth, a handful of whom must be on scholarship to add a touch of color or class. (Some of them are also religious or literary figures who, at first glance, would seem more likely to appear at the World Social Forum, a counterpart gathering of more grassroots groups who met in Porto Alegre, Brazil at the same time.) Usually, the WEF meets in Switzerland. This year it was in NYC—for reasons that vary with who is asked—at the Waldorf Astoria. On the second night they were in town, as protesters also arrived, we had a discussion at the St. Joseph House dinner about reactions from the city.

Reggie told us how many Starbucks, McDonald's and Gap stores had NYPD in front. We all wondered why. Roger said perhaps the police were getting easy overtime instead of a pay raise. Or, perhaps they thought the protesters, being barred from the hotel, would look for something else to do before their legal demonstration. The hope would be that respect for the NYPD, after September 11, would stifle any questions about anything.

It is true that these corporations, among others, have been highlighted before. I opined that, with or without the WEF, I would be glad to see an organized boycott of these stores. If I had to choose one (and I don't shop at any of them), it would be Starbucks. Someone once asked me why I do not go there, and I replied, "Let me count the ways: prices, anti-union practices, running local coffee shops out of business, involvement in the prison industry, a symbol of what is wrong with the economic system."

The general sense in the dining room was that this heightened police presence was part and parcel of the hype about the war on terrorism. After all, the WEF came on the heels of the president's warnings in his "State of the Union" speech. As the media would have it, fundamentalists abroad are the threat, while anarchists are at home. The revival of this old saw since the decline of communism is fascinating, especially as anarchism was the political ground Dorothy kept going back to, to reclaim it from negative overtones of violence. I guess we, too, have to revisit the terrain in a new context. In either case—whether the authorities were worried or opportunistic—the very visible NYPD made priorities clear: large corporations protected by force.

"This is like a movie, a f ing movie." Eleanor's refrain

(and she is a beloved NYCW matriarch now of blessed memory) came to me later, as I saw the scene Reggie had described. After a while, you get so used to it that your Pavlovian response is in those terrible mythic terms of "us" vs. "them." (Another angle on the film triangle is "John Q," where it is so easy to sympathize with Denzel Washington's plight that I am a bit surprised this hostage plot got to the theaters.) Also, it gets harder and harder to distinguish between virtual reality on the screen and the suffering in real violence. That, Eleanor knew about.

The second topic at dinner that same night began when Gerry told us how many banks had uniformed guards for ATMs. Although most were from private companies, the impression was the same. (And I do recall seeing a piece about the increasing privatization of even the military!) The question this time: What is this ATM sabotage about? In a nutshell, it would not be about robbing banks, but trying to slow down robbery by the banks.

At this point, Tanya jumped in to question if such sabotage was really going on. More likely, she said, protesters are using ATMs, not making them useless. I had to confess it would be a temptation for me, if I could accept the destruction of property as a nonviolent tactic. The appeal is like the Luddites in nineteenth-century England breaking looms that were the means of their own oppression and displacement. Bank activities in the realms of credit, mortgage and debt are legion. Unrestrained usury (in the sense Marty Corbin talks about in this issue) is at the center of our economic system and is responsible for huge amounts of violence in the world. Nevertheless, this cardinal sin is seldom talked about, at least not in North America, though I gather it was more up front and center in Porto Alegre.

Then, there are advances in financial technology, On the one hand, ATMs represent the closing of small branches, with job losses for bank tellers and other low-paid workers. On the other hand, the technology is crucial for the speedy transactions that make global integration and the current concentrations of power (personified in the WEF) possible. Included in these processes is speculation as the new form of usury. Now, more than 90% of financial transactions are speculation (i.e., making money by guessing what will make money), while a few years ago, the stock market (which I never did trust) was 90% investment, however gouging, in goods and services. What a difference speed and coordination can make.

Cui bono? Look to the major players at the WEF. Cui malo? Look to countries where wars are waged, end with the most current devaluation and debt.

It is a short step to tie together the technology of financial institutions (of which the ATM is the most publicly visible and, so, a temptation for me) with the interlocking military technology—not the least of which is the abstraction in the activity. High-tech maneuvers, like the movies, distance us from results like unsanitized wars, or cut-backs from IMF controls or the destruction brought by huge hydro-electric projects. The machine and its integrated institutions shield us from these human effects. To steer as clear as possible from participation could only be a good thing.

Over the WEF weekend, the alleged threats did not materialize, not even peaceful demonstrations at the stores or banks. (One group did go to the Manhattan headquarters of Enron.) Sad to say, not a lot more talk like our table talk either. Although I heard suggestions for democratic control over corporations, I did not hear a lot about the economy itself. And, although I heard a fair amount about the ravages of capitalism, there was not much about the technological-military complex that is capitalism's hardware.

The next such discussion in the dining room was not until the Superbowl, a fitting entertainment for the fourth day of the WEF. This time, none of the themes was missing, each melded into the others: the economy of consumerism, high-tech and globalization, the pride of patriotism (underlined by shots of the American troops in Kandahar), altogether in a classic movie plot, wrapped up in the U2 half-time show. (I was sure Bono, who is a promoter of debt reduction, would have a heart attack, or else I would!)

Our modest gathering had enough people able to separate the game from propaganda (or, is that, too, self-delusion?), enough people from New England who couldn't careless about the name of their team, enough of us who always root for the underdog (and Jimmie, who supported both teams) that we managed to enjoy ourselves while we waited for the truck with the vegetable donations. It was a great show!

From The Catholic Worker, May 2002, p.5.

Jacques Ellul—the Word of God in a World of Technique

A Catholic Worker Conversation Between Jeff Dietrich and Kassie Temple

[Folks at the Los Angeles Catholic Worker have been studying the social analysis and theology of Jacques Ellul for about a year. This spring, Jeff Dietrich got in touch with Katharine Temple at Marybouse, to discuss a three-part series planned for *The Catholic Agitator,* and especially the importance of Jacques Ellul's thought for the *CW.* We then decided on a joint effort, and the result is this conversation between Jeff and Kassie, which also appears (edited and revised slightly differently) in the July *1990 Agitator. - Eds. Note]*

JEFF DIETRICH: I talked to you a while back, and told you how excited I was about the reading I have been doing in Jacques Ellul. I feel like a born-again Catholic Worker, if one can say that. I feel that what Jacques Ellul has done is to give us a consistent, contemporary critique of the culture in which we live, which makes what the Catholic Worker does so pertinent. I feel that sometimes people just dismiss us as "saints," or just nice people. Folks say, "Oh, you do such nice work," "You are such good people." That's not why we're doing it

To have someone like Ellul, who gives you this elaborate perspective to work from, makes me feel liberated, even though I know some people find his perspective rather depressing.

KASSIE TEMPLE: While you were talking, I was remembering that I knew some of the writings of Jacques Ellul before I knew much about the Catholic Worker, and 1, too, was very taken with his analysis of society and his other writings about what it means to be Christian in the world in which we five. And as I learned more about the Catholic Worker movement, it seemed that its philosophy and theology were the only ones around that resonated with Ellul's kind of understanding.

JEFF: I feel that, as the Catholic Worker movement, we really haven't updated our analysis of the culture since Peter Maurin died. And the way Ellul talks about "the technological society," I feel as though Peter, would, if he were alive today, either be saying the same thing, or writing "Easy Essays" about Jacques Ellul.

KASSIE: Well, I think that's true. I think the requirement for good social analysis as necessary for social change is one thing they would have in common. At the same time, Jacques Ellul would probably see Peter Maurin's thought as focusing directly on industrial society and what it has become and what it has done to people. Ellul himself, on the other hand, has focused, since 1935, on what he calls "the question of technique." He sees industrial society as having moved to a different phase, and so the analysis would be different.

JEFF: What Ellul seems to be saying is that the industrial revolution has come to an end, and that we've entered a new era. For instance, if you believe what Ellul is saying, you would analyze events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union as having been brought about by technique. They've got to catch and retool, because the world is moving toward a uniform economic and political, technical culture that will include the Soviet Union, Europe, China, and the United States and Japan in a single system. This seems be exactly what Ellul was saying—that revolution has come to an end, and that we've entered a new era.

KASSIE: Yes. Certainly he would see the changes in Eastern Europe as necessitated by the Soviet Union's economy coming into a new world environment. The relationship of production to the political and social forms cannot sustain economic growth. There needs to be change. But I think Ellul would say that it is a mistake to focus on the economic question as the main question. The economics are within this new technicized framework.

I think he would agree with Dorothy Day, who focused on the state and the large bureaucratic institutions. But, for him, even that thinking is perhaps still too much in terms of the Marxist "mode of production." The mode of production has changed and we need to describe that in a way that is more exact.

For instance, the computer shouldn't be shunned simply because Peter didn't like machines. We should examine the role of the computer; what makes them different from other machines?

JEFF: It seems to me that Ellul, in *The Technical System,* is saying that the computer as an information processor has brought about a completely different environment. Previous to the computer, the techniques of the state, education, propaganda and various other techniques were separate and could not be coordinated. But now they can be integrated into one smooth-running technical system through the information processing machine.

KASSIE: Right. And we need to analyze that, not moving away from our philosophy of what that is doing to people, how it brings about poverty. The whole emphasis on the works of mercy would not change, but rather our analysis of where the enslavement comes from, where the oppression lies; there would be a shift in emphasis to a changed situation.

JEFF: So often it looks like these changes liberate people, and people speak of the machines, satellite communications and information processing as personalized, liberating developments, when that's not necessarily so.

KASSIE: And I think we need to look precisely at the poverty in Los Angeles, the poverty in New York, at why people come to our doors, how this poverty is being shaped and formed, what this is doing to people.

JEFF: You realize the hypocrisy of American politicians, all politicians, who preach family values with one breath, and preach technological growth with the next, and don't recognize that the two are incompatible,

KASSIE: And don't recognize that this new formulation of the information society, or the technical society, is depersonalizing. You can't use impersonal means to bring a more personalist way of being.

JEFF: In reading Ellul's theology, I felt supported in what the Catholic Worker does in simple living, the green revolution.

Ellul makes this contrast between the "means of God" and the "means of the world"— that God very rarely works directly in the world, that God most often chooses a human medium through which to work. It would follow, then, that God does not work through the technical means of the world, and the more our culture becomes enslaved to technical means, the more difficult it is for God to work in the world.

Also, there are all those metaphors from the Gospels that are so important to Ellul— to be the leaven in the loaf, to be a light unto the world, to be wakeful and watching, the pearl of great price. All of these things are the "little way" of the Catholic Worker.

You so often feel overwhelmed by the means of the world. I know I've always had a tendency to buy into that perspective of "we're not being very effective here." So, you stick with the Catholic Worker way out of a kind of faithful, spiritual perspective.

What Ellul does is give you the ability to look critical1y at what the technical means are and say "no, you can't use these to bring about the Kingdom of God." You can't use mass elections to bring about the Kingdom of God, you can't use television and radio to bring about the Kingdom. Each person has to have a conversion of the heart and be open to the Word of God, and be ready to be used by the Holy Spirit. That's the only way it works and none of us wants to believe that.

KASSIE: That seems a clear summary of what Ellul is saying to Christians, and I think it's a clear summary, perhaps in different language, of what Peter has said. That is, the call is to all Christians, not just a select few, to witness to the way of God, the truth of God, which is different from the powers of the world. But they would both say that we need to do it in the world in which we live, and to know that world.

For instance, when Peter talked about voluntary poverty, not only is that a traditional means in Catholic thought, but ours is also a society that is unusually obsessed, dominated by money. The weight of consumerism is literally killing people, and the Christian is called to open that up and witness to another liberation. You can't be liberated from the power of money simply by spending more money. Peter said you accept voluntary poverty in order to end the enslavement to money.

Or, to take another example, if large-scale bureaucracies are the order of the day, then we need small communities which embody personalist, non-bureaucratic ways of living our lives together.

JEFF: This is the whole issue of personalism. It seems when we go out and talk about it or when we write about it in our papers, I feel self-conscious almost because it seems like this is a quaint kind of perspective of the world, and what we really should do is have a massive revolution, or elect Jesse Jackson president or convert the editorial board of the *L.A. Times*. That this personalist perspective of person-to-person action, doing the works of mercy—that's a nice thing to do, and if you want to do it, that's fine, but those of us who are really going to make a difference in the world and bring social justice about, or bring in the Kingdom, we're going to work through these massive means to change the world.

Ellul gives me a way of looking critically at these technological means and saying no, they're not going to work, that's not going to bring about the kind of justice that you want. In fact, these technological means are doing exactly the opposite of what you think they're doing. Fortunately or unfortunately, you have to work on this personalist level.

KASSIE: I think another reason we sometimes eschew personalism is that it can look like we're going to retreat into a world of ones and twos. The outside world is so overwhelming that I'm going to look after only my own well-being, that I'll try to make atmosphere where "my own personhood is affirmed," etc.

But that isn't what was meant by personalism, certainly not by Dorothy or Peter. For them, it was a public response in the world.

The means and ends are the same—this is a theme for both Ellul and Peter. If you want a society that is personalist, is communitarian, is based on the well-being of the other, you can't reach that through impersonal, bureaucratic fund-raising means. Dorothy used to quote, "All the way to heaven is heaven," another statement about the question of ends and means.

JEFF: And this is exactly why the Catholic Worker espouses an anarchist, non-statist perspective. But again, there hasn't been a strong intellectual groundwork for

an anarchist perspective, and we all get sucked into the cultural ritual of elections and the media surrounding it.

KASSIE: We've certainly had many discussions around here about whether people prefer the word "personalist" or "anarchist". But I think the importance of the anarchist critique (certainly in social theory, Ellul gives an anarchist critique of technological society, in distinction to a Marxist critique or a liberal critique) is that the form of anarchism that the Catholic Worker should espouse is a personalist anarchism. It is precisely a critique of statism—that the increasing power of the bureaucratic state is the source of domination. So that in our relationship to the state, we cannot simply say, "Well, we'll take the advantages from the state that we can and it won't have any repercussions on how we run our house." Rather, the state is a key point in our analysis of this society to see where the increasingly monolithic power structure is.

JEFF: I was particularly taken with Ellul's introduction in his book *The Political Illusion* where he talks about the French revolution. We tend to think of the kings of France as being absolute, total monarchs, the "Sun King" and all that. Before the French Revolution, though, the king had difficulty creating a standing army, he couldn't raise enough taxes to support a drive for empire. But after the Revolution, once the king was deposed and all people became part of the state and responsible for the state and to the state, then everybody, of course, served willingly. Then, once so-called democracy was there, people voluntarily enslaved themselves and gave themselves over to a taxation system and a system of law that they would never have done under a monarchy.

When you start looking at it that way, the whole idea of people just giving themselves over completely to the state, you need to have a stronger foundation to this anarchist-personalist perspective. I think that's what Ellul gives us.

KASSIE: Yes. At the end of that same book he talks about what is needed, and these are just a few little excerpts from that: "It is important, above all, never to permit one's self to ask the state to help us. Indeed, we must try to create positions in which we reject and struggle with the state, not in order to modify some element of the regime or force it to make some decision, but much more fundamentally, in order to permit the emergence of social, political, intellectual, artistic bodies, associations, interest groups or economic or Christian groups totally independent of the state. What is needed are groups capable of extreme diversification of the entire society's fundamental tendencies, capable of escaping the unitary structure, presenting themselves not as negations of the state, which would be absurd, but as something else not under the state's tutelage."

JEFF: It sounds exactly like something Dorothy would have written.

KASSIE: Yes. I think one of the great strengths of the Catholic Worker is that both Peter and Dorothy had this call to do something else, not just to do the negative, not just to say what was wrong, not just to say "no," which of course is part of it. This idea of communities that would be doing something else, is certainly the essence of the "green revolution," no matter how quaint some of Peter's plans appear.

JEFF: Just as you say that, talking about something else, I think one of the criticisms of Jacques Ellul is that he won't tell you what to do. It seems to me it goes to the heart of the differences between the Catholic Worker and Jacques Ellul. While I want to say that Ellul is describing the Catholic Worker, I'm very careful about making that kind of statement.

KASSIE: Well, I think there is a great difference between them in terms of Jacques Ellul being Protestant and Peter Maurin being Roman Catholic. It is interesting, and perhaps it is just a sign of our times, that because they are both strongly rooted in their respective traditions, that seems to draw them closer together. The idea that the strongest critique of modern society would come from something pre-modern, makes them seem remarkably similar. This includes the view that, "There is not something a little bit wrong with the world; there's something a whole lot wrong with the world."

On the specific question of their separate theologies—unlike Martin Luther, one of Ellul's favorite books is the book of James which says "faith without works is dead." And so, for Ellul, there can be no Christian theology of grace without incarnation, without works. But I think Ellul sees his particular calling as a Christian—and this is certainly within a Protestant understanding—as that of raising questions about what we are doing. We cannot formulate an alternative unless we are willing and able, through grace, to raise the most serious questions and recognize that this society is not the Kingdom. It is not going to be the Kingdom. At the same time, we must incarnate our faith within this society.

Ellul's refusal to spell out a blueprint is somewhat the difference between a Catholic and a Protestant, but also it comes from the belief that if you give an answer in advance, you have cut off the thing that is most needful for Christians today and that is the raising of the deepest questions. You know that in this society, you can hold all sorts of opinions that people can find interesting or not interesting. But if you raise a serious question on the things that matter most, then there is a complete dismissal.

You raised, for example, the question of the power of the state. You can be as critical of a particular regime as you want, but if you say, "I don't vote because voting doesn't make any difference," that goes too far. The raising of questions is something that is so rarely done, so rarely done among Christians as well.

Some of this thought comes from Jacques Ellul being Protestant. I think that Peter probably thought it was possible to separate from society, in order to build a new one along Christian principles. Perhaps Peter's is the Catholic idea that there is such a thing as a Christian society, or that society can be transformed to be Christian. Ellul, on the other hand, thinks that the Kingdom, the Presence of the Kingdom, will always be hidden, will always be the injection of the Word of God into an alien country And that will be the case until the end time.

From The Catholic Worker, September 1990, pp.4-5, and The Catholic Agitator, July 1990.

En memoria de Ivan Illich, un anarquista entre nosotros by Carl Mitcham

Ivan Illich, uno de los mayores criticos sociales del siglo XX, acaba de morir a sus 76 anos en Bremen. Nacido en Viena en 1926, fue ordenado sacerdote en Italia y vivio gran parte de su vida en Estados Unidos y Mexico. Con una prometedora carrera dentro de la Igelsia, renuncio a ella. Rector de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, profesor en Penn State University y en la Universidad de Bremen, fue un viajero y conferenciante incansable. Con multiples licenciaturas y doctorados en ciencias y letras, plurilingue, su trabajo intelectual se puede resumir en un incansable esfuerzo por pensar hasta las ultimas consecuencias las ideas de progreso y desarrollo, tan caras a expertos y politicos.

En la decada de los setenta escribio los primeros libros que le hicieron ser conocido internacionalmente. *La sociedad desescolarizada* es un ataque al sistema educativo moderno, *La Nemesis Medical* analiza la perversion de los sistemas de salud y *La convivencialidad* somete a un despiadado escrutinio los ambiciosos programas de desarrollo de esos anos sesenta. Estos libros inciden sobre las tres "vacas sagradas" mas importantes que una izquierda progresista abandero como camino de modernidad. Carlos Barral, editor sensible y culto, entendio que Illich era uno de los criticos mas lucidos del momento y se encargo de hacer conocer en la Espana franquista y tecnocratica sus textos. *La sociedad desescolarizada* vendio varios millones de copias, se tradujo a unos veinte idiomas, convirtiendose en nuestro pais en un libro de obligada lectura para ensenantes y pedagogos. La perspicacia del autor le permitio ver con asombrosa claridad el futuro, nuestro presente, de una sociedad demasiado confiada solo en sus capacidades economicas. Entre los anos ochenta y noventa cambio el ambito de sus intereses intelectuales. *In the Vineyard of the Text*, comentario sobre el *Didascalion* de Hugo de Saint Victor, le permitio dirigir su atencion hacia el analisis de la vida actual, cada vez mas alejada de los sentidos y de la verdadera amistad. Mucho antes de la moda contemporanea de reflexionar sobre la lectura y la escritura a la luz de las nuevas tecnologi'as, Illich mostro con erudicion de historiador y consideracion critica del filosofo las implicaciones de los cambios culturales que sufre un acto tan cotidiano como leer.

A pesar de la creciente presion economicista de la sociedad posidustrial, trato de buscar los medios para poder volver a vivir una vida que se experimentara en un cuerpo, capaz ademas de aceptar a los otros como tales, como amigos. Esta es su llamada revolucionaria en la epoca de globalizacion hipertecnologizada, en la era de Windows XP. Desafortunadamente, ya no contamos con Barral para que siga ofreciendonos su trabajo en espanol. A veces el desarrollo acelerado produce olvidos significativos. Algunas ediciones como *El Genero Vernaculo* siguieron publicandose en Mexico y es dilicil encontrar hoy en dia este hermoso texto sobre la antigua armoni'a entre hombres y mujeres. Tal vez sea este uno de los trabajos mas apasionantes e incomprendidos de Illich,

tal vez por ello fue injustamente marginado. *H₂ O o las aguas del olvido* es una joya. Su maestria de historiador nos gula por un intrincado viaje de del agua entendida como el elemento magico que nos limpia, nos otorga el olvido, nos remueva, refresca, vivifica y sana para acabar reduciendola a una molecula qulmica. una abstraccion insipida.

Los ultimos anos de su vida han sido especialmente dolorosos porque, consecuente con su pensamiento y reluctante de las innovaciones medicas, no acepto los alivios terapeuticos, afirmando su cuerpo y lo que este le trajera. Su gran leccion esta ahi: siempre consecuente, es uno de los ultimos intelectuales donde vida y obra, pensamiento y accion se entrelazan mtimamente. Radical, anarquista, cultivador de la amistad, pero tambien rechazado, mantuvo alta su talla de intelectual inconformista e insobornable.

Carl Mitcham, profesor en la Colorado School of Mines (EEUU) y coeditor de The Challenges of Ivan Illich (2002) / Andoni Alonso, Profesor en la Universidad de Extremardura y autor de La Nueva Ciudad de Dios (2002).

El Pais, martes 10 de diciembre de 2002

In Memoriam: Ivan Illich, 1926 — 2002

by Aaron Falbel

Ivan Illich, a former Catholic priest, philosopher, historian, theologian, social critic, and activist, slipped away without much fanfare on Monday, December 2, at the home of a close colleague and friend in Bremen, Germany. The few obituaries that appeared pronounced him a has-been, a relic from the '60s and early '70s when his writings were briefly in vogue. However, this assessment belies his many important contributions toward a more modest, respectful, just, caring, humane, and peaceful society.

Born in Vienna in 1926 to a Catholic father of aristocratic Dalmatian descent and a mother who was a Sephardic Jew, Illich was forced to go underground in 1941 due to his mother's ethnicity. He escaped with his family to Italy, and, upon completing his university studies and ordination, he came to the United States in 1951. After spending an intense five years as a much-loved parish priest in a Puerto Rican neighborhood on the tip of Manhattan, he was appointed vice-rector of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico, a position he held for another five years until he was forced off the island due to a political controversy there. (He strongly and vociferously objected to church officials using the church's status and authority to meddle in local electoral politics.)

Illich achieved notoriety in 1961 when he opened a center in Cuernavaca, Mexico that served as the main training ground for missionaries and other do-gooders bound for Latin America. The purpose of the center, eventually called the Center for Intercultural Documentation, or CIDOC, was deeply subversive though by no means secretive: to thwart the cultural imperialism and neocolonialism inherent in such missionary initiatives as the American Catholic Church's "Alliance for Progress" and Kennedy's secular analogue, the Peace Corps. In such lectures and essays as "Yankee, Go Home,"

"The Seamy Side of Charity," and "Violence: A Mirror for Americans," Illich tried to dissuade American volunteers from going to Latin America to "help" the "poor." He pointed out that their good intentions would in no way cancel out the inevitable damage they would do by being "vacationing salesmen for the middle class 'American Way of Life,'" — a way of life not only unsustainable in the rich, overdeveloped countries but simply unattainable for the vast majority of people these programs were attempting to "help." Unwittingly, their interventions also "maintained or swept into power military regimes in two-thirds of the Latin American countries" and helped to open Latin America as a massive market for U.S. goods and as a source of cheap labor. "The compulsion to do good," wrote Illich, "is an innate American trait. Only North Americans seem to believe that they always should, may, and actually can choose somebody with whom to share their blessings. Ultimately this attitude leads to bombing people into the acceptance of gifts." In response to such sarcastic criticism, Illich was beaten with chains and actually shot at—actions very likely orchestrated by the C.I.A. Fortunately, the assassination attempts failed. Clearly he had struck a nerve close to the center of power.

Indeed, the forces of power were mobilizing against him. Illich was summoned to the Vatican in 1968 to defend CIDOC's activities and his own religious and political views, but he refused to cooperate. The Vatican responded by placing an interdict on CIDOC in early 1969, banning all religious personnel from attending its classes, lectures, and seminars. The ban had little effect; the place had achieved a magnetism all it's own, and Illich had always insisted that CIDOC was a secular organization. Rather than continue to cause a political scandal within the Church, Illich, announced his "irrevocable decision to resign entirely from Church service, to suspend the exercise of priestly functions, and to renounce all titles, offices, benefits, and privileges which [were] due to [him] as a cleric."

In the 1970s, CIDOC became a "thinkery" for broadening this sort of critique by examining the damaging side-effects of modern institutions in general. Illich became even more radical, in the etymological sense of "getting to the root" of things. His conclusions were surprising, even shocking, to many, and certainly controversial. Like Gandhi before him, Illich was a caustic critic of industrial society. He saw dangers not only in the environmental degradation caused by the industrial mode of production but also in a type of social degradation due to an overabundance of services. His critiques of education *(Deschooling Society)*, of the medical establishment *(Medical Nemesis)*, of technocratic, technological society *(Tools for Conviviality)*, of transportation systems *(Energy & Equity)*, of the helping professions *(Disabling Professions)*, of commodity dependence in a market-intensive society *(The Right to Useful Unemployment)*, and especially of development *(Celebration of Awareness; Church, Change, and Development* and *The Development Dictionary,* ed. W. Sachs) ruffled many feathers and earned him many detractors across the political spectrum.

Illich was one of the first to take note of the "paradoxical counterproductivity" of modern institutions when they reached a certain size and level of intensity. This

resulted in schools that made people stupid, hospitals that made people sick, prisons that made people violent, high-speed transportation that created traffic jams and ever-increasing passenger miles, development agencies that created more and more "needy" people, and so on. Once institutions grow beyond a certain threshold, Illich observed, they end up thwarting the very purposes for which they were allegedly established. They tend to become dysfunctional and to incorporate other purposes that actually impede their stated objectives.

Illich decried modern society for becoming more and more machine-like, more automated, more sewn-up, more impersonal, more pervaded by "systems" of one sort or another. Such a society, he argued, cannot help but degrade friendship, love, care, community, hospitality, learning, dwelling, and, ultimately, the art of suffering and dying, by replacing all these human acts with ministrations of professional services, bureaucracies, systems, and techniques. He saw modern society as deeply violent in its essence and not just because of its frequent recourse to military intervention. Again, his words were radically surprising: "[T] he plows of the rich can do as much harm as their swords. United States trucks can do more lasting damage than United States tanks." As before, Illich was critical of those who, perhaps with good intentions, sought to promote peace through economic development.

"Development," he wrote, "has always signified a violent exclusion of those who wanted to survive, without dependence on consumption, from the environment's utilization values. *Pax economica* [or peace through economic development] bespeaks war against the commons." Protection of the commons—from enclosure, from exploitation, from being turned into a "resource," and from the regime of artificial scarcity—was, according to Illich, a fundamental component of *pax populi,* of the people's peace, of true peace, throughout much of history. At times, Illich characterized the industrial age as "the war against subsistence" and culture as "unique arrangements by which a given group limits exchange relationships to specific times and places." Such insights preceded the present anti-globalization movement by several decades.

In the latter years of his life, in the '80s and '90s, Illich moved away from his provocative, sometimes inflammatory critique of modern institutions to explore the historical question of how the mindset and social conditions that gave rise to these institutions came into being. No longer the political gadfly or rabble-rouser, he ceased to have entertainment value for the media and faded from public view. He now divided his time between Germany and Mexico (with short visits to the United States and elsewhere), leading seminars, lecturing, and writing. He once likened his historical method to the motion of a crab in flight: "The crab moves backward, while its popping eyes remain fixed on the object [it] flee[s]. ... I want to explore what happens if I begin to move backwards, with my eyes fixed on the present." As a historian of the Middle Ages, Illich immersed himself in the past in order to see more clearly how radically different and unprecedented our modern times are from any past historical epoch. "And when I come out of the past and enter-the present," he wrote, "I find that most of the axioms generating my mental space are tinged with economics."

From these explorations in the historical archaeology of ideas and perceptions came a number of books: *Shadow Work*, *Gender*, *H2O and the waters of Forgetfulness*, *ABC: The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind*, *In the Mirror of the Past,* and *In the Vineyard of the Text.* In these works, Illich examined various "certainties," "axioms," "necessities," or "needs" with which we live today, and he showed how each of them had an origin in history. And that which had a beginning, as Illich liked to point out, can also plausibly have an end. His historical perspective reveals that the certainties we take for granted today, such as the need for education, medical care, employment, literacy, transportation, markets, energy, police, prisons, news media, etc., were not always so certain. His crab-like journeys into the past serve to loosen the grip that modern certainties have on our perceptions and imagination. The institutional and political realities we live with today are thus neither immutable nor inevitable. This is Ivan Illich's message of hope in these dark times.

In his essays and lectures, Ivan Illich frequently made a distinction between expectation and hope. He once remarked, "I am very pessimistic but hopeful." He was also a man of deep faith. When asked by a student how he defined faith, Illich replied, "Faith is a readiness for the surprise. We must have a sarcastic readiness for all surprises, including the surprise of death." The lockstep, planned, predictable, mechanical aspects of modern society are thus more than just damagingly counter-productive; their raison d'etre lies in their attempt to wipe out and safeguard us from all the surprises in life. The institutionalization of genuine human acts replaces hope with expectation through attempting to offer us something called "security." But for Illich, such security is an idol we worship at our peril. His life's work dares us to have trust and faith in nature, in our own senses, and in each other. There are no guarantees with such risky, foolhardy trust. But there may be surprises, both good and bad. Are we ready?

December 16, 2002. Amherst, Massachusetts

A Note on the Death of Ivan Illich

by Barbara Duden and Silja Samerski

On Monday, December 2, 2002, Ivan Illich died. Although he had been preparing for several years, death came as a surprise. He was in the midst of preparation for his seminar on the *corruptio optimi*, the corruption of the best. The seminar was scheduled to occur at the University of Bremen on the upcoming weekend, and Ivan had hoped to reflect with friends and students on his ideas about the ecclesiastical origin of uniquely Western certainties. These historical investigations on the perversion of the Gospel ran like a red thread through the last decade of his teaching in Bremen. With the help of friends he hoped to finish a manuscript on this subject within the next months.

On Thursday, December 5th, we buried him in the cemetery of Oberneuland in Bremen. During the preceding days many people came to his Bremen home for the death watch and to bid him farewell. At the beginning of the funeral Mass in St. Johann,

Wolfgang Sachs read the following text ["The Loss of World and Flesh"], in which Ivan bemoans the loss of the art of dying. It is a letter of congratulations Ivan wrote in 1992 to Hellmut Becker, then director of the Max-Planck Institute for Educational Research in Berlin.

At the end of January 2003, Ivan had hoped to lecture in the second winter term. Johannes Beck is preparing a convocation for February 7-8 at the University of Bremen.

There we will try to spin out further threads from Ivan's thinking.

December 2002. Bremen, Germany

The Loss of World and Flesh

by Ivan Illich

Formerly, one left the world by dying; until then one lived in it. Both of us belong to that generation that was still being born "into the world," but which is now threatened by dying without a foothold in the world. Unlike any other generation, we have lived through a break with the world.

In earlier times, a dropout set off on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela; or begged for *stabilitas* on the porch of a monastery; or joined the lepers. The Russian and Greek worlds also offered the possibility of becoming not a monk but a fool, and for the rest of one's life to lodge with dogs and beggars in the atrium of a church. But even for such extreme fugitives from the world, the world remained the sensual frame of their passing existence. The world continued to be a temptation, especially for the one who wanted to renounce it. Most of those who left the world soon caught themselves cheating. The history of Christian asceticism is a record of heroic attempts to be faithful to the renunciation of a world to which every fibre of one's being adheres. When dying, my uncle Alberto still had them serve him the *Vino santo* that was harvested in the year of his birth.

Today all this has changed. The two thousand-year epoch of Christian Europe is gone. The world into which our generation was born has passed. Not only for the young but also for us, the old, it has become impalpable, incomprehensible. The very old have always remembered better times, but that is no excuse for us, we who were alive during the regimes of Franco, Roosevelt, Hitler, and Stalin, to forget that farewell to the world we lived through.

I remember the day I became senile once and for all. I cannot forget the dark March clouds obscuring the evening sun and the vineyard on the Sommerleite between Potzleinsdorf and Salmannsdorf near Vienna, two days before the *Anschluss.* Until that hour it had been a certainty for me that I would give children to the old tower on the Dalmation Island. Since that lonely walk this has seemed impossible for me. As a twelve-year-old boy, I experienced the disembedding of the flesh from the warp and weft of history, even before a command was issued from Berlin to gas all fools in the Reich.

To talk to each other about this break in the experience of world and death is a privilege of our generation who knew what had been before. Hellmut, I believe I am writing to someone who knew that.

When very young, destiny made me into a colleague, counselor, and friend of women and men several generations older. I thus learned to let myself be cultivated and shaped by people who were too old to take part in the experience of that disembodiment. By contrast, our students, without exception, are offspring of the epoch after Guernica, Leipzig, Bergen-Belsen, and Los Alamos: Genocide and the human genome project; the death of forests and hydroponics; heart transplants and medicide through insurance— all these are also tasteless, without smell, impalpable, and non-worldly. The Feast of Advent from the Erlanger Corpus celebrates the bottomlessness of the worldless non-human. We who are old and yet young enough to have lived through the End of Nature, the end of a world fit for the senses, should be able to die like no one else.

What the past composed can also decompose. Further, the past can be re-evoked. But Paul Celan knew that only smoke remains from the world-dwindling that we have experienced. It is the virtual drive of my computer that serves me as the symbol for this unretrievable disappearance, and through which the loss of world and flesh can be envisaged. The worldliness of the world is not deposited like ruins in deeper layers of the ground. It is gone, like a deleted line of the rain drive.

This is why we, seventy-year-oldsters, can be unique witnesses, not only for names but also for perceptions that no one any longer knows. Many who have stood in this break have been broken by it. I know some who themselves tore their existence to threads before the atom bomb, Auschwitz, and AIDS. Deep in their hearts in the middle of their lives they have become *viejos verdes,* old greens, who pretend it is possible to have fathers in the manageable show that has become a system. What was propaganda in the Nazi period, what could be undermined by hearsay, is now being sold: As a menu with the computer program or the insurance policy; as counseling for education, bereavement or cancer treatment; as group therapy for those at risk. We old ones belong to the generation of pioneers of that non-sense. We are the last of that generation that helped transform the systems of development, communication, and services into worldwide needs. Worldly disembodiment and the programmed helplessness we have propagated exceed by far the fallout that in our generation has been deposited in heaven and on earth, in the stratosphere above and the waters below.

We were in the key positions when TV removed daily life from people. I myself fought so that a university TV station broadcast weather predictions of rain in every village square of Puerto Rico. I did not then know how much this would inevitably reduce the range of the senses, and how much the horizon would be barricaded by administered presentation furniture. I did not consider that soon European weather from the evening news show would discolor the first light of dawn seen through the window. For decades I have been careless in handling unfathomable abstractions like one billion people in a bar chart. Since January, my account statement from the Chase Manhattan bank is decorated with a graphic chart that allows me to compare my ex-

penses for restaurants and office material at a glance. Hundreds of detailed ingratiating services in information, administration, and counselling deliver an interpretation of my *conditio humana.* When I discussed that topic with you, Hellmut, more than twenty years ago, I could not imagine that the integration of the educational enterprise into lifelong everyday life would be so smooth and slick.

Sensual reality submerges deeper and deeper under the coverage of commands on how to see and hear, feel and taste. Education in an unreal construction begins with textbooks whose content has shrunk to subtitles for graphic boxes, and ends with the dying who grasp encouraging test results about their condition. Exciting soul capturing abstractions have extended themselves over the perception of world and self like plastic pillow cases. I notice it when I speak to young people about the resurrection from the dead. Their difficulty consists not so much in a lack of faith, as in the disembodiment of their perception and life through constant distraction from their soma.

In a world that is inimical to death, you and I prepare ourselves not to come to a mortal end but to die in the intransitive sense. On the occasion of your seventieth birthday, let us celebrate that friendship in which we praise God for the sensual glory of the real world through our good-bye from it.

Translated by Barbara Duden and Silja Samerski from Ivan Illich, "Welt -abhanden," in Gerold Becker and Jurgen Zimmer, eds., *Lust und Last der Aufklarung: Ein Buch zum 80.*

Geburtstag von Hellmut Becker (Basel: Beltz, 1993), pp. 76-79. Used by permission.

Ivan Illich: In Memoriam

by Pieter Tijmes

Ivan Illich was an impressive person, at once intimidating, and receptive. He had access to the great of the world and the heroes of the mind, but the less powerful and famous had access to him. He gathered them around him, he associated with them; he inspired and supported them. He was a magician in their company, and he charmed them, even when they did not always understand him. They knew what he said was important even when they were not sure what he was saying. At his funeral in Bremen these friends put in their appearance and bid him adieu, participating in the rituals of church and graveyard.

Two things in the service were noticeable: the open invitation to those present to testify briefly to their relationship with Illich, and the reading of a letter written by Illich on the occasion of Hellmut Becker's 70th birthday. In this letter Illich specifically objected to the modern loss of being able to die one's own death. In his own remembrance service, this reading was an appropriate witness to that for which Illich stood during his entire life.

Ivan I1lich was born 1926 in Vienna. After the *Anschluss* of Austria with Germany, the Illich family took refuge in Italy because of his mother's Jewishness. He studied

science and philosophy in Florence, and later theology at the Gregoriana in Rome. He followed the calling to become priest and in the 1950s the slums of New York became his field of pastoral activity. Later he founded the Centro Intercultural de Documentation (CIDOC) in Cuernavaca, Mexico. After extensive debates with the Vatican, he renounced all priestly functions in 1969. This did not reduce his attachment to the Gospel as enduring inspiration in his life.

Intrigued by his permanent rebellion against contemporary political and ecclesiastical affairs, I once asked whether he really believed in God in the traditional Trinitarian terms of the Church's creed. His answer was apodictic, foreclosing all objections: "Of course, God was father, otherwise I (Ivan) could not be your brother, and vice versa." I was reduced to silence, since I did not dare question our brotherhood while a guest in his home. But the point of my question to him, as an "avant-garde revolutionary," came from my puzzlement. His acute appreciation of secularization and the historicity of the Christian faith made me wonder about his view of traditional revealed truth. Then I had to live with his existential answer to my intellectual question. It was an acutely Illichean answer, but not a response to the intention of my original concern.

Ivan Illich can be best described as a merciless critic of culture. He had no fixed station; on the contrary, he had a travelling existence. He taught at universities all over the world, especially in the United States and Germany. His early books, such as *Celebration of Awareness*, *Deschooling Society*, *Tools for Conviviality*, and *Medical Nemesis*, gave evidence of his keen eye for the discrepancies, inconsistencies, and irrationalities of our modern way of life. He designated capitalism as counter-productive. All that glitters is not gold. He wrapped his message in a vigorous and aggressive language. I could not always understand his energy, attacking people who conformed and adapted to our modern technological world, His special attention was directed to the pride of modernity, i.e., technology.

On the waves of the 1970s tide of social criticism, he became known among students. That Erich Fromm wrote a preface for one of his books made it plausible, to the outsider, that Illich belonged to the New Left. But from the beginning there was already an obvious difference in tone. He appreciated premodern ways of living in their particularity, and not just as preparatory trials that took their value from the modernity we achieved.

Let me return to Illich's 1992 letter to Becker. This document, "The Loss of World and Flesh," is representative of the last stage of his criticism of modernity. It mirrors his unremitting resistance, his refusal to surrender to what he saw as the corruption of modernity. He made clear that he had once

known a world he loved, but that he had to live in a world he abhorred. In this love and aversion, he thinks of the world of the flesh, the body and the senses, in contrast with the world today where flesh, body, and senses evaporate and have less and less meaning in themselves. In a dramatic way, he writes about a break in history he had already experienced as a young man of twelve. It was, so to say, a proleptic experience

of a disembodied future in which he found his own corporal existence set aside by history.

In articulating this break, Illich emphases the fact that in the modern world people have become different. They may still hear, look, and feel, but they do so no longer with natural bodies. They no longer experience the world in their flesh. This he describes as becoming disembodied or disincarnated. On the basis of his own books and articles, one might add that it is due to technology that our bodies and flesh are no longer what they once were, but are more and more altered by the electronic media with which they engage and their bio-cybernetic transformations. In the letter itself, he does not explicitly examine the cause of the historical break, but only refers to students who are children of the era of Guernica, Bergen Belsen, Los Alamos, and the era of heart transplants, genocide, medicide. These students live on the opposite side of a great historical divide.

The letter is not so much a treatise as a deeply felt response to a friend. Contemporary ills and serious troubles from atom bombs to AIDS are pressed together in one breath. In one way or another these are, in his view, all related. He places himself as a transition figure, one who was born into a world of the flesh and the senses but now lives in a world of non-sense, among people alienated from the world and senses, as part of a generation that promoted the programmed helplessness of people. The abstractions of science and technology have taken over the place of the experience of the world and the self. Abstractions are like cushion-covers that supersede the traditional sensory perception.

Illich's perceived break with the past coincides with the demise of Christianity. In some way, this is involved with the passing bimilleneal age of European Christianity. But his point in the letter is not, in the first place, that the Christian faith is fading away—at least he does not elaborate on this issue. For a deeper understanding of the relationship between his Christian faith and criticism of culture, I have to quote Barbara Duden, for whom "it is impossible to understand his thinking during the last twenty-five years without attention to the flesh." According to Duden, I1lich

treats the flesh apophatically, and the clearer this becomes the better I understand that for him the flesh orients one inexorably toward the Incarnation, toward the mystery in the world of his faith, and ultimately toward the Cross [For Illich] the tradition of

Western medicine [cannot] be grasped without reference to the Cross and its denial [since], after all, the rituals fostering the myths of disincarnation - be they medical, hygienic, or other—[must also be] understood as cultural denials of the Incarnation in a society that has grown out of the Christian West. (Barbara Duden, "The Quest for Past Somatics," in Lee Hoinacki and Carl Mitcham, eds., *The Challenges of Ivan Illich_* [Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002], pp. 220-221)

The reading of Illich's letter evoked a world full of nostalgia and struggle, and he ends with the words: "In a world hostile to death, we do not prepare for passing away but for dying intransitively. On the occasion of your 70th birthday, let us celebrate

that friendship in which we want to praise God for the sensual reality of the world, even by taking leave of it."

Ivan Illich had strong views that were often not easily accessible. They were provocative, because they did not harmonize with our knowledge of past and present. Unfortunately, the time is over when we can still ask him for clarification. We have to judge for ourselves about the plausibility of his vision. His contributions to the understanding of our world undoubtedly rest with his observations of trends that have to do with our orientation in the world, and he often speaks as if dichotomies such as embodiment and disembodiment, worldliness and unworldliness, necessarily and always exclude each other. Yet it is the task of philosophy to discover what different experiences have in common. Even theology should, in my view, have a say in this debate. Illich cannot be better honoured than by a critical examination of his historical intuitions. The heritage of his ideas is now a departure for our own reflections on technology and modernity —or, as it may be, post-modernity.

January 2002. Enschede, The Netherlands

"All Things Considered"

National Public Radio, December 4, 2002
Carl Mitcham on Ivan Illich
JACKI LYDEN, host: Ivan Illich, a former Catholic priest and champion iconoclast, has died in Germany. He was 76. Illich's writings challenged mandatory schooling, even though he was an educator, and the Catholic Church, even though he'd been a priest. In the process of his questioning, he helped remake the sociological map for the baby boom generation. At one time a worldwide intellectual tour de force, Illich's ideas were much less in vogue in the decades before his death. Carl Mitcham is professor at the Colorado School of the Mines, who's written about Illich's sociological theories and his turbulent relationship with the Catholic Church.

Professor CARL MITCHAM (Colorado School of the Mines): He was a radical social critic who, because of his fundamentally radical Christian commitments, saw the Catholic Church as not living up to its own ideals, and felt like he had to try to call it to account. I would compare Ivan Illich, in some ways, with Dorothy Day, who was one of the founders of the Catholic worker movement. She was a loyal member of the Catholic Church, but she felt like that in many instances, the church wasn't living up to its own Gospel ideals and, therefore, had to criticize it.

LYDEN: But Illich didn't just talk about the failings of the church in society. He talked about many sociological phenomena has having failed the populous, whether it was science or a more secular notion of education. He said it often made people dumb. And he came to say that hospitals created more sickness than they did health. His ideas seemed to bleed over into becoming provocative almost for the sake of being provocative.

Prof. MITCHAM: But I think that's really a misreading of Illich to say that he was just a radical provocateur for the purposes of being a provocateur. He really identified something which he called 'counterproductivity.' Oftentimes in many areas of our lives, we pursue something to the point where it becomes counterproductive; it doesn't get us what we're after. But because we're so committed to the pursuit of this—which, at one point, was effective—we failed to be able to step back and take a critical look at what we're doing. And he saw this operative in many different social institutions. And I think in a lot of areas, we now almost take some of his insights for granted.

LYDEN: Did you ever meet him?

Prof. MITCHAM: Yes. I've known Illich for 15 years.

LYDEN: And what sort of a person was he? You've undoubtedly had conversations.

Prof. MITCHAM: Well-educated, multilingual, in some sense, autodidact. He loved to have conversations around a dinner table; a little pasta, a candle, good friends, talking. But the conversation would be going on simultaneously in German, in French, in English and in Spanish. And he would be trying to translate for people who were missing things in other languages and yet carrying on the conversation, sort of like a maestro, almost like a music conductor. And at the same time, pushing everybody to think harder, to think more deeply about what they were saying. It was a remarkable experience.

LYDEN: Did he feel, in any sense, Mr. MITCHAM, at the end of his life that history had passed him by?

Prof. MITCHAM: Yes. I think that at the end of his life, he was completely ready to die because he realized that his historical role had been completed.

LYDEN: Well, thank you very much for speaking with us, Mr. MITCHAM.

Prof. MITCHAM: Thank you.

LYDEN: Carl Mitcham is co-editor of the book "The Challenges of Ivan Illich: A Collective Reflection." He spoke to us from Golden, Colorado.

The Death of Ivan Illich: A Personal Reflection

by Lee Hoinacki

On Monday, December 2, 2002, Barbara Duden called me from Bremen, Germany. Here in Philadelphia where I now live it was about half-past twelve noon, and we were eating lunch. She said that Ivan Illich had died that morning.

Since I had seen Ivan in September, and since we had such a good talk at that time, I was reluctant to attend the planned funeral. Barbara would be surrounded by good friends.

That afternoon and evening I started calling and sending emails to people on this side of the Atlantic. One answer, for example, from Gustavo Esteva, contained a column for the Mexico City newspaper, *Reforma* on Ivan's death; he had already written this!

The next morning, I continued contacting people. In the afternoon a Bremen friend, Antje Menk called, saying that the young people there (Silja Samerski and Matthias Riger, I guess) were insisting that I come, and she was sending a ticket. I was unable, then, to finish going through my list of people to notify.

I called Peter Bohn, another Illich friend in Philadelphia, since we had agreed to meet downtown the next day after a demonstration against the war in front of the Federal Building; I told him I was going to Germany and would not be there to meet him.

He said he, too, would check on a ticket. Later, he called back to say he had a ticket for me that evening to Frankfurt. Then Samar Farage called from Germany to say that they couldn't buy a ticket for me from that side of the Atlantic. I explained that Peter had just bought me an electronic ticket. I had a few minutes to pack and get to the airport.

Arriving in Frankfurt, I took a train to Bremen. In the train station, I was joyfully surprised to find Michael, a young friend, there to meet me. He took a chance that I would come in on that train! We walked to Barbara's home, getting there shortly after 3 p.m.

Michael had seen Ivan early Monday morning, and they talked about a seminar Ivan was to direct on the weekend. Ivan said he was tired and lay down on a futon in the living room. Michael left and, some minutes later Si1ja, who lives down the street, came in (she has a key to the house), and found him dead. Barbara, who was in Hannover at her teaching job, had spoken to Ivan on the phone about noon.

When I arrived at the house, each person, Barbara especially, warmly embraced me; I felt embarrassed by such a genuine outpouring of affection. I entered the front room and found the body of Ivan resting on the futon where he had died. A burning candle and cut flowers stood nearby ... a symbol of life ... an image of death.

Using the Breviary that contained the Latin Vulgate, the one Ivan and I said each day whenever we were together, I recited some of the *Officium defunctorum,* the office of the dead.

Wednesday evening was a time to greet old friends who had come for the wake and funeral. So many good people, all of whom had been introduced to me by Ivan since the time I first visited him in Germany in 1978 ... some now close friends.

Early Thursday morning we lifted the body into a plain wooden coffin, and the lid was screwed down with finger-nuts.

The large church of St. Johann was nearly filled the next morning for the Mass. Various friends of Ivan participated in the ceremonies, well arranged by Wolfgang Sachs. The pastor, Propst Ansgar Luttel, who had been to see Ivan some days earlier, spoke the homily/eulogy, acknowledging his awareness of who the man, Ivan Illich, was.

222

Many of those at the Mass gathered in the chapel of the distant cemetery, Oberneulander, for a short service, then proceeded to the gravesite for the burial. I was especially impressed by the ceremony in which each person present went up to the open grave and threw a handful of dirt on the lowered coffin; some also threw flowers.

All were then directed to a hotel for coffee and a bowl of soup. For some, it was the last event of the celebration, since they had to return to their jobs and homes.

My final feeling was one of joy. Various factors together, not in any order, contributed to this feeling. From reports of those persons who were present, the meeting between Ivan and Propst Luttel, some days before Ivan's death, was most cordial and filled with understanding. In the light of this report, I must regard the visit, especially the time the two of them were together alone, as a grace-filled moment for Ivan.

At the church, just before the Mass, a young man came up to greet and embrace me. Almost ten years earlier there had been a serious break between him and Ivan ... from close intimacy to anger, distance, pain on both sides. He and Ivan never again spoke to one another.

Before and after the break, I visited him, stayed with his parents, and tried to be a friend; we had been quite close. Because of his lack of enthusiasm for my visits, several years ago I had stopped traveling to the town where he lived.

He traveled five hours to get to the funeral, and had to return home almost immediately after the ceremonies for his teaching duties the next day. He came back to Bremen to see me on Saturday and Sunday; we had long talks. I think that much of the woundedness that divided him and Ivan is now healed.

Another person, a young woman, was also bitterly estranged from Ivan. She had moved from a close friendship to a kind of smoldering anger. She and I had also been good friends, but I had not seen her for two or three years. While in Bremen, I sent her a greeting card, and received an immediate friendly reply by email (sent to the Illich email address). She was happy to hear from me, and invited me to come visit her and her family.

These three events were beyond what I could have hoped for ... they do not respond to my sense of causality ... they are, strictly speaking, gratuitous gifts, manifestations of merciful Providence.

Well, maybe. They may also represent a kind of higher superstition, that is, my superstition. True, they are signs, but signs of what? I take them to be signs of grace. But the very fact that I interpret them in this way may indicate a superstitious need in me ... I need signs of grace (there's a hard saying in the New Testament in which the Lord rebukes those who seek signs; see, e.g. Mk. 8.12).

I regard these events as a blessing on Ivan's life, as indicating a good far beyond what even the most perceptive eulogists will be able to cite. They indicate the important aspect of Ivan's stance: How he stands before God ... (again, maybe!).

Ivan suffered from physical pain which, as far as I could tell, was constant and almost unremitting ... and this for some years. I think he also suffered certain effects from the opium that he took to help bear the pain, but as I don't know anything about

the physical pain, I know even less about the effects of opium. He was also greatly and increasingly distressed in his attempts to be a friend to different people.

I think, however, beyond all the above, he experienced another terrible pain: the inability to say what he wanted to say: about the *corruptio optimi,* the *misterium iniquitatis,* the relationship between these two realities, their respective relationships to the world and to the Church, and the interrelationships of all these complex cultural/ historical/ecclesiastical, divine affairs.

In our long conversations on these themes, the struggle and frustration were evident ... and awful to witness. He who had said so much so well in his life was now unable to speak. And he was acutely aware of his inability to articulate what he vaguely felt to be the truth.

Given the other pains and sufferings, maybe especially the long-range effects of the opium, it was impossible for him ever to overcome this final confusion. Therefore, I felt it was good that he died sooner rather than later. In a sense, it was already years too late.

David Cayley is now working on some tapes he recorded in which Ivan attempts to make a last statement. I've read most of the transcripts and there are nearly insuperable problems ... of clarity and theological precision. But maybe Cayley can pull off what he did with the life and thought of Simone Weil! From her eminently difficult writings, he put together a magnificent intellectual/witness portrait.

So, my overall feeling is one of immense gratitude. Ivan Illich suffered various quite different kinds of pain in the days, weeks, months, and final years preceding his death. All that is now swallowed up in the fulfillment of his faith.

In Review

The Fall 2003 Ellul Forum review section will expand to include regular "re-views" of Jacques Ellul's books along with other significant works.

Harvard and the Unabomber: The Education of An American Terrorist

by Alston Chase. New York: Norton, 2003. 432 pages.

Alston Chase, a writer and independent scholar specializing in intellectual history, was the author of a major article on "Harvard and the Making of the Unabomber" in *The Atlantic* in June 2000. His new book is a brilliant, extremely well-researched expansion of that article. The focus of the narrative is, of course, Theodore Kaczynski, now serving a sentence of life in prison without possibility of parole for his bombs which murdered or maimed several people during his 1978-95 "Unabomber" terrorist attacks on representative leaders of "industrial society."

By an eerie coincidence, Kaczynski was a professor of mathematics at the University of California, Berkeley, for my final two years enrolled there, 1967-69. I was an odd combination history major and math minor, preparing at that time to be a high school teacher, but had no math classes with Kaczynski and wasn't even aware of his existence in our huge university, embroiled in a great deal of chaos and protest those years.

More to the point for *Ellul Forum* readers, Kaczynski was a great enthusiast for Jacques Ellul from 1971 or 1972 onward. Kaczynski said about Ellul's *Technological Society*, "when I read the book . . . for the first time, I was delighted, because I thought, 'Here is someone who is saying what I have already been thinking'" (p. 92). Kaczynski's brother David later said that Ellul's *Technological Society* "became Ted's Bible" (p. 332). According to author Chase, Kaczynski even exchanged letters with Ellul. Now those would be a fascinating read!

Kaczynski, you will recall, managed to get the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* to print his very lengthy essay "Industrial Society and Its Future" (the "Unabomber Manifesto") in September 1995 by promising to cease his terrorist killings if they did so. This "victory" led to his defeat because David Kaczynski recognized the author of the text as his brother and blew the whistle on him.

The "Manifesto" did not refer specifically to Ellul (thankfully!) but it is indisputable that Ellul's concept of "Technique" as a way of thinking (not just a set of tools), as

an ensemble of means that had become an end in itself, ever expanding throughout the world and into every domain of life, having a virtually deterministic, necessary character, was central to Kaczynski's view of the world.

Alston Chase gets three cheers from this reviewer for the understanding of Ellul he brings to his analysis. "Despite corresponding with Ellul, Kaczynski ignored virtually all that the French philosopher had written since 1964 . . . It would seem Kaczynski 'imprinted' on the early Ellul and ignored what followed. . . he did not even own a copy of *The Ethics of Freedom.* Kaczynski's faith in the efficacy of revolution had apparently remained unchanged despite, not because of, the later admonitions of Ellul" (p. 93).

"Curiously, Kaczynski revered Joseph Conrad and Jacques Ellul, both of whom deplored violence and advocated the spiritual life. . . Blinded by scientism and rage, he missed the message of Ellul, Paz, and Conrad altogether" (pp. 363364). Chase shows how Kaczynski's "revolution" illustrated precisely the phenomenon against which Ellul warned in his *Autopsy of Revolution:* a violent, technological response simply reinforces the grip of Technique!

Chase's careful personal and intellectual biography of Kaczynski delivers a read that is not only fascinating but illuminating and persuasive. It offers insights not just into Kaczynski himself but into the broader topic of terrorism. Terrorists use ideas to justify appalling acts of violence but ideas alone do not create terrorists. Families, teachers, institutions, experiences, and, finally, personal choices are all part of the true explanation. Kaczynski emerges not as a clinically insane person but as a brilliantly twisted, deluded, enraged, and evil man. Chase shows how technological society is partly, but not wholly, to blame for the creation of a Kaczynski. A remarkable book.

Reviewed by David W. Gill

Advert: The Jacques Ellul Special Collection at Wheaton College

A Report from David Malone, Librarian

Wheaton College, a private liberal arts college founded in 1860, located just west of Chicago, has gathered the most comprehensive collection of Jacques Ellul materials outside of France. In the mid-1980s, Dr. Joyce Main Hanks began to transfer copies of Ellul materials to Wheaton College.

The Wheaton collection now includes nearly all of Ellul's published books, articles, and essays, reviews of his work, as well as various book manuscripts, course lecture notes, public lectures and addresses, and some unpublished material. It includes audio (and some video) materials, such as sixteen taped interviews of Ellul by Joyce Hanks. The most significant recent addition was nearly 200 audiotapes of Ellul's lectures and Bible studies made by Bordeaux physician Franck Brugerolle. We collect as many works

by and about Ellul as possible, regardless of form or language, including master's theses and doctoral dissertations.

Our purpose is not only to preserve Ellul's archives but to encourage the study of his works and ideas. Our hope is for increased awareness and involvement by Ellul scholars, researchers, and academicians. We invite your dialog, encouragement, recommendations, and ideas for additional materials. We would welcome the development of lectures, seminars, and study programs extending the study of Ellul and enhancing the collection's use.

Access an inventory of the Ellul collection at: http://www.wheaton.edu/learnres/arcsc/collects/sc16/ Contact staff at 630-752-5705 or Special.Collections@wheaton.edu

News & Notes

Please send any news, announcements, or inquiries of interest to Ellul Forum readers. E-mail to IJES@ellul.org or mail to IJES, P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA. Deadline for Fall 2003 issue: September 15.

—**Etienne Dravasa**, Professor Emeritus at the University of Bordeaux, recently wrote: "I was deeply touched to receive a copy of the December 2002 issue of *The Ellul Forum.* Jacques Ellul's work and his legacy deserve the exceptional homage which is paid to him in *The Forum* It was a great honor for me to be a personal friend of Jacques Ellul for more than fifty years."

—**Grant Shoffstall** (gwshoff@ilstu.edu), a graduate student in sociology working toward the M.A. with Prof. Richard Stivers at Illinois State University, will present a paper on Jacques Ellul at the August 15-19, 2003, meeting of the American Sociological Association in Chicago. Grant welcomes contacts with other sociologists interested in Ellul and is seeking information on doctoral level sociology programs and faculty conducive to his further study of Ellul.

—**VIRGINIA LANDGRAF** (kaencat@hotmail.com) successfully defended her Ph.D. dissertation in Christian Ethics at Princeton Theological Seminary, "Abstract Power and the God of Love: A Critical Assessment of the Place of Institutions in Jacques Ellul's Anthropology of Dialectical Relationships" under the direction of Prof. Max Stackhouse. Ginny, a lay theologian active in the Presbyterian Church (USA), spent two years in Thailand with the Peace Corps and has an M.A. from the Graduate Theological Union. She is interested in seminary teaching, preferably abroad.

—**RANDY ATAIDE** (rataide@MountainViewFruit.com) is receiving his M.A. in Theology (supervised by Prof. Mark Baker) from Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno CA. His thesis was entitled "If We Serve a God of Productivity Is There Room for Jesus? An Analysis and Application of Jacques Ellul's Thesis of Technique in the Agri-Business World." A full-time businessman operating a group of fruit storage, distribution, sales, and marketing companies (www.MountainViewFruit.com), Randy completed the J.D. before his M.A., and has been accepted into the Executive Edu-

cation Program for Owners/Presidents of Companies at Harvard Business School in February 2004. He plans to continue making business his primary career but welcomes contacts and opportunities to share his ideas, possibly including the publication of his thesis.

—MAX KIRK (maxkirk@canada.com) is a mediator in private practice in British Columbia. He is looking for conversation and dialogue about the struggle within Judaism with the religious challenge of modern technology—and how this struggle may be at the heart of the conflict concerning Jerusalem today. Max had a very brief correspondence with Jacques Ellul and would welcome contacts with others familiar with Ellul's thought.

—ANDY BAKER (jesusradicals@jesusradicals.com) and a few friends organized the "Jesus Radicals" web site originally as a tribute to Vieques student protesters who were detained and barred from the base. The site evolved into a place to network, discuss issues, and find resources on radical Christianity and anarchism. Many visitors to the web site are encountering and appreciating Ellul's ideas on anarchy, money, and power for the first time. Andy is headed for the M.A. program at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary this fall and hopes to follow that with a Ph.D. somewhere.

—KUNIHIDE MATSUTANI (kuni0070@yahoo.co.jp) is now finishing his Ph.D. in political theory and intellectual history at Tokyo's International Christian University. His doctoral thesis focuses on the development of Ellul's theory of technology in the context of the political and intellectual climate of France in the 1930s, with particular emphasis on anarchism, non-conformism, and personalism. Masutani earned his B.A. from Massachusetts and his M.A. at ICU (Tokyo) with a thesis on Foucault. A few of Ellul's works have been translated into Japanese but Matsutani's thesis would be the first monograph on Ellul to appear in Japanese.

—STEVE PEARSON (brainypirate@hotmail.com) informs us that a Yahoo discussion group on Jacques Ellul has been intermittently active with discussions of both Ellul's theology and his technology. No guarantees on quality in these free-for-all cyberspace discussions, of course, but if anyone is craving some interaction about Ellul . . . here is a possibility. Steve, himself, is beginning a Ph.D. program in Comparative Literature at the University of Georgia with a focus on the devotional literature of prayer and spirituality. Contact Steve if you are interested in Ellul's take on the spiritual life and in what an Ellulian literary theory might look like.

—SEBASTIAN LUPAK (sebastian.lupak@gdansk.agora.pl) is a journalist is Gdansk, Poland, with an interest in acquiring more of Ellul's books—and in meeting or corresponding with other students of Ellul's thought.

—CARLO CARRENHO (carlo@carrenho.com.br) has a small publishing company in Brazil and is interested in publishing Ellul in Portuguese. Anyone interested in supporting or participating in this project should contact him.

—MATTHEW PATTILLO (matthewpattillo@hotmail.com) will present a paper on Jacques Ellul and Rene Girard at the June 18-21 meeting of the Colloquium on

Violence and Religion in Innsbruck. Others interested in Girard's mimetic theory and its bearing on Ellul's work should contact him.

—**JEAN**-**LUC** P**ORQUET**, a journalist at the French satirical political journal *Canard enchaine*, has just published a book entitled *Jacques Ellul: L 'homme qui avaitpresque toutprevu* (Paris: Le cherche midi, 2003. 286 pages). The book can be purchased from Librairie Mollat (www.mollat.com) for 18 euros (plus shipping). Porquet presents Ellul as "the man who foresaw almost everything." The heart of the book is Porquet's review of twenty ideas and phenomena of our technological civilization which Ellul discussed and analyzed well in advance of their dominance. Porquet's book will be reviewed in the Fall 2003 issue of *The Ellul Forum*

—A**NDREW** G**ODDARD** (andrew.goddard@wycliffe-hall.oxford.ac.uk) has recently published a new book, *Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Paternoster Press, 2002, xxiv, 378 pages; www.paternoster-publishing.com). It can be purchased in the US through Eisenbrauns (www.eisenbrauns.com) for about $30 plus shipping. *Ellul Forum* review scheduled Fall 2003.

How Big Is the Tent?

by David W. Gill
President, International Jacques Ellul Society
Not too long ago I attended a concert by Diana Krall and heard her make a sardonic reference to unnamed "jazz police" who had questioned her jazz authenticity. More recently a couple friends of mine in the "opera police" sputtered and fumed at a giant poster promoting the latest album from Italian singing star Andrea Bocelli, which hung just across the train platform from us.

Such experiences raise the question of whether The International Jacques Ellul Society—or any other individuals or organizations—might be tempted to act as a sort of "Ellul police," passing judgment on who is or is not qualified as an "authentic" representative of Ellul's thought. Another way to put it is to ask whether we want a "little tent" accommodating only those with whom we agree—or a "big tent" that welcomes diversity and disagreement.

The IJES choice is to welcome anyone who in any way supports the goals of (1) preserving and disseminating the literary and intellectual heritage of Jacques Ellul, (2) extending his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) extending his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom. Affirm these goals, pay your annual dues, and you are in our "big tent" Ellul organization.

One reason for our "big tent" philosophy is tactical: all of us who care about Ellul need to work together if we want to accomplish the goals listed above. We are relatively small in number and scattered all over the globe. Publishing projects, conferences, and

the like, are costly and laborintensive. If we really care about Ellul's legacy, this is the time for collaboration, not fragmentation.

The historical reality is that an incredibly diverse group of people looks back to Jacques Ellul as a primary teacher and source of inspiration. Our current IJES leadership reflects some of that diversity: our professions range from attorney to university professor to independent scholar; our specialties range from communications to history, philosophy, language, theology, religion, ethics, political science, and law; some are active in churches (of various denominations) and some are not; we live in all regions of the United States and in England and France.

In the early 1970s, I recall being impressed at seeing Ellul's name in a catalog course description for Cal's Boalt Hall law school—as well as in sociology and theology course descriptions in other departments and schools. I was amazed at the diverse parade of Ellul admirers which I soon became aware of: mainstream Lutheran historian Martin Marty, *Brave New World* author Aldous Huxley, L'Abri evangelical intellectual Os Guinness, ex-Watergate-con, "born again" Prison Fellowship leader Chuck Colson, Anabaptist theologians John Howard Yoder and Vernard Eller, Catholic Worker leader Jeff Dietrich, counter-cultural historian Theodore Roszak, southern Christian church social activists Will Campbell and James Holloway, French professor Joyce Hanks and others now on our IJES board . . . and this is just a sample. Today, the Ellul tent stretches to include Jose Bove, the French farmer and anti-globalization activist, and Andy Baker and his "Jesus Radicals," who, inspired by Ellul's version of Christian anarchy and discipleship, are out there bearing witness and getting arrested for protesting America's international violence.

This diversity among the students of Jacques Ellul is a wonderful thing in a world of partisan orthodoxies and narrow affinity groups. Little or nothing is gained, and much can be lost, by evading discussion with those different from ourselves and with whom we may disagree. Learning is rarely enhanced by narrowing our debates too soon. Whether based on fear or ignorance (two common sources), a strategy of exclusion is misguided.

The bottom line on this topic is that Jacques Ellul himself engaged all comers and viewpoints. He read widely and welcomed engagement with his critics as well as enthusiasts. He constructively stimulated the thinking and behavior of an unusually wide and diverse group of listeners and readers. He often wrote and said that his objective was not to provide a set of answers but rather to provide people with improved means to think for themselves. If Ellul's "anarchy" means anything, it allows for freedom, risk, transgression, deviance, and a readiness to be out of control.

In light of all of this, the IJES tent is designed to be big. We welcome your entry, your ideas, and your participation, and we encourage you to spread the word about the IJES to everyone you think might be interested.

Advert: International Jacques Ellul Society

www.ellul.org

P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705, USA IJES@ellul.org Tel/Fax: 510-653-3334

The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

The IJES and AIJE have been founded by a group of long-time students, scholars, and friends of Jacques Ellul, with the counsel and support of Jean, Yves, and Dominique Ellul, and as a French-American collaboration.

Board of Directors

Patrick Chastenet, University of Poitiers; Clifford Christians, University of Illinois; Andrew Goddard, Oxford University; Darrell Fasching, University of South Florida; David Gill (President), Berkeley; Joyce Hanks (Vice-President), University of Scranton; Ken Morris (Secretary-Treasurer), Berkeley; Carl Mitcham, Colorado School of Mines; Langdon Winner, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

Joining the IJES

To become a member, anywhere in the world, and receive the twice-yearly Ellul Forum, submit annual dues of US $20 to "IJES" (use an international postal money order or bank check drawn in US dollars) with your name and complete mailing address.

Seven Valuable Ellul Resources

WWW.ELLUL.ORG
An Indispensable Web Site
Julianne Chatelain, a long time student of Ellul's thought, has voluntarily, in her spare time, helped construct and maintain the joint web site of the IJES and AIJE at http://www.ellul.org][www.ellul.org. This is where you will find • information about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, • a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, and • a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English.

The Ellul Forum: **1988-2002, Issues 1-30 (compact disc)**
The Ellul Forum was founded by Prof. Darrell Fasching in 1988 as a twice-yearly publication for those interested in Ellul to exchange ideas and opinions and maintain contact while scattered all over North America and beyond. The first thirty issues

of The Forum, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for $15 (postage included). Send payment with your order to "IJES," P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

Cahiers Jacques Ellul
Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne
The first volume of an annual journal called Cahiers Jacques Ellul has just appeared in France and is available for 20 euros (postage included) to individuals outside France, and for 25 euros to libraries. The theme of the initial 2003 volume is Les Annees Personalistes ("The Personalist Years"), with articles by Patrick Troude-Chastenet, and Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle as well as from the Jacques Ellul archives.

The editor of Cahiers Jacques Ellul is Patrick Chastenet, President of L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul, the sister society of the IJES. Cahiers Jacques Ellul promises to be an essential new reference for those seriously interested in Ellul's ideas.

Librairie Mollat—new books in French
Librairie Mollat is one of the great bookstores you will ever visit, occupying a labyrinthine building in the center of old Bordeaux. If you cannot visit in person, Mollat's web site (http://www.mollat.com][www.mollat.com) is an excellent resource for finding French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works
by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. $87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit www.elsevier.com for ordering information.

Alibris—used book source
The Alibris web site (http://www.alibris.com][www.alibris.com) recently gave thirty titles of used Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices. Alibris could be the answer if you are searching for an out-of-print Ellul title.

Reprints of Nine Eerdmans Books By Ellul
The William B. Eerdmans Company published several English translations of Ellul volumes that have been out of print for a few years now. Now, by arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of these volumes can be purchased and in your hands in a week or so. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: The Ethics of Freedom ($40), The Humiliation of the Word ($26), The Judgment of Jonah ($13), The Meaning of the City ($20), The Politics of God and the Politics of Man ($19), Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes ($28), The Subversion of Christianity ($20), and The Technological Bluff ($35). Sources and

Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

To order any of these books, go to your bookstore (or on-line book dealer) and have them "back order" the titles you want. Do not go as an individual customer to Eerdmans or Ingram/Spring Arbor. For more information visit "Books on Demand" at http://www.eerdmans.com][www.eerdmans.com.

Advert: Change of Address?

Don't forget to notify IJES if your address changes! Postal forwarding orders expire after a period of time. Forwarding practices are sometimes unreliable.

You don't want to miss out on *The Ellul Forum.*

We don't want to lose touch with you.

Send your address change immediately to:

IJES@ellul.org

Or

IJES, P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 _____

Issue #32 Fall 2003 — Violence, Terrorism, and Technology

- Click to view the original PDF

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Jacques Ellul at age 70.

Photo by Lucia Gill, July 1982

"Liberating violence cannot establish a society s values; for if they are to be communal values they will have to be accepted as good and true by every member of the community (not only by a majority).

But that can never happen when the values are imposed by, or as the result of, violence. . . The Algerian war certainly has not led the Algerians to accept Western values. ”

Jacques Ellul

Violence 1969 pp. 114-115

Contents

© 2003

International Jacques Ellul Society Berkeley, California, USA www.ellul.org

Information on The Editorial Board & More

The Ellul Forum
For the Critique of Technological Civilization
Founded 1988

The Ellul Forum is published twice per year, in the Spring and Fall. Its purpose is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

Editor

Publisher

The International Jacques Ellul Society www.ellul.org Tel/Fax: 510-653-3334 P.O.Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA

Dues, Subscriptions, & Payment Options The Ellul Forum is sent twice per year to all members of the IJES or its francophone sister society, the AIJE. An annual membership/ subscription, anywhere in the world, costs US $20. Please send check or money order (e.g., international postal money order) drawn in US funds for $20 to "IJES", P.O.Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA—or make payment to "IJES" electronically at www.paypal.com. Be sure to note your address and the purpose of your payment.

Change of Address

Please notify IJES of any change in your address. Our mailings are infrequent and postal forwarding orders expire.

Manuscript Submissions

For Ellul Forum writers' guidelines, visit www.ellul.org—or e-mail: Editor@ellul.org— or write Cliff Christians, EF Editor, Institute of Communications Research, University of Illinois, 810 S. Wright St., # 228, Urbana IL 61801 USA We welcome your proposals.

Books, Reviews, News

Send books for review, book reviews, and news to David Gill, EF Assoc. Editor, P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705. E-mail: IJES@ellul.org

Back Issues

Visit www.ellul.org for a complete index of back issues. Issues #1-30 are available (only) as a complete collection on a compact disc for US $15. Issues #31 onward are available for $5 per copy.

© International Jacques Ellul Society
Contact IJES for permission to copy EF material.

From the Editor

Jacques Ellul understood violence personally and came to grips with it intellectually. He lived in the maelstrom of war and violence. During World War II years, 1939-45, he was fired from his position on the Strasbourg University faculty (1940), his father was imprisoned and died under German military detention (1942), and Ellul and his family subsisted as refugee farmers while working with the Resistance in the Entre-deux-Mers region outside Bourdeaux. The rancorous debates over the Algerian fight for independence from France during the Fifties, the student revolts of the Sixties, and the ongoing street-level conflicts of juvenile delinquents and gang members were among Ellul's special concerns after the War.

Ellul's *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective* (1970 English; 1972 French *Contre les violents*) is a provocative analysis not confined to war in a narrow sense but ranging broadly across the spectrum from coercive political acts to revolutionary violence to institutional violence. Mennonite Professor Mark Baker "re-views" this classic on page 20.

In his major analysis of Ellul's work on violence, Andrew Goddard observes that it is "structured around the poles of freedom and necessity" (*Living the Word, Resisting the World,* Paternoster, 2002, p. 197). Certainly it is natural that *The Ellul Forum* dedicated to "carrying forward Ellul's analyses in new directions" would publish this issue on violence and terror, and do so in broader terms than war itself. From the myriad problems in this violent 21st century, we focus on three— war, terrorism, and surveillance.

In this issue, Andrew Goddard examines Ellul's refusal of just war theory, despite its dominance in the Christian tradition. As a Professor of the History and Sociology of Institutions in the Law Faculty, Ellul would have appreciated Dal Yong Jin's historical and legal analysis of the technology of cyberterrorism. David Lyon is the research director of the international Surveillance Project based at Queen's University, investigating surveillance, risk management, and social ordering in global information societies. He reflects on the rapid growth in existing surveillance trends produced by 9/11.

The Ellul Forum nurtures networks of discussion and learning. Interested readers are invited to engage the authors directly (contact info given at head of each major article). As always, manuscripts (or proposals) you wish to have considered for *The Ellul Forum* are welcomed by the Editor. Material for "News and Notes," "Ellul Resources," and queries about book reviews should be sent to the Associate Editor, David Gill.

Our upcoming Spring 2004 issue (#33), guest edited by Joyce Hanks, will mark the tenth anniversary of Jacques Ellul's death.

Mea culpa: our last issue (Spring 2003, #31) mistakenly omitted the name of Andoni Alonso from the title line as co-author (with Carl Mitcham) of the Ivan Illich obituary we republished from the Madrid daily *El Pais.* Our apologies to Andoni Alonso.

Clifford G. Christians, Editor editor@ellul.org

Ellul on Violence and Just War

by Andrew Goddard

Andrew Goddard (andrew.goddard@ wycliffe-hall.oxford.ac.uk) is Tutor in Christian Ethics at Wycliffe Hall and a member of the Theology Faculty at Oxford University. His new book Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul *(Paternoster, 2002) is reviewed on page 19 of this issue of* The Ellul Forum.

How should Christians respond to the violence of war? What are those, who want to be faithful disciples of Christ, to say and to do? As Ellul states in the opening sentence of his book on the subject, "The churches and theologians.. .have never been in unanimous agreement in their views on violence in human society".[1] There has, nevertheless, been a predominant approach to the question of war, namely that of the "just war tradition". Ellul is a trenchant critic of this way of thinking and yet, as often in his writing, his comments are lacking in detailed engagement with the specific arguments of his opponents. Instead, he provides a broad-brush account and critique. While making some strong and valid objections, this is bound to leave anyone sympathetic to the just war tradition feeling rather dis-satisfied, perhaps even that they have been subjected to the "violence" of caricature.[2]

Given the importance of this subject and the strong differences of opinion found among Christians which results in divided witness to the world, it is necessary to step back and identify the fundamental differences between the just war tradition and Ellul's thinking and to ascertain whether any constructive dialogue can take place between them. This article highlights two areas in which the wider rationale and method of Ellul and the just war tradition stand in tension with each other, and it acknowledges both strengths and weaknesses that can be seen when the two approaches are placed in dialogue.

The heart of the divergence between Ellul's account of violence and that of the mainstream Christian tradition is perhaps most easily understood by reference to the two terms which identify that tradition - "just war". Ellul questions both the central

---

[1] Jacques Ellul, *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective* (London: SCM Press, 1970), p. 1. All page references in the text refer to this volume.]]

[2] The main critiques and account of the historical origins of the tradition are found in his categorisation of this approach as one of "compromise" (*Violence*, pp. 1-9) and his appendix on conscientious objection (*Anarchy and Christianity*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991, pp. 915). A less polemical account of the origins of the Christian just war tradition is found in his study of the history of institutions (*Histoire des Institutions Vol 2*, (Paris: PUF, 1989, pp. 506-7, 525-7). Particularly given our current context,

moral category and frame of reference to be used in thinking about the subject and the central moral task of such moral thinking.

Subject Matter - War or Violence?

It is of the utmost importance that Ellul's account is focused on *violence,* and interestingly, in the original French is entitled *Contre les violents.*[3] The specific question of *war* is therefore set in the wider context of the phenomenon of *violence.* He does not concentrate on "hostile contention by means of armed forces, carried on between nations, states, or rulers, or between parties in the same nation or state; the employment of armed forces against a foreign power, or against an opposing party in the state."[4] Instead, he insists that thinking about this specific subject can only be properly done once there is, in the words of the title of his book's third chapter, "Christian realism in the face of violence".

This approach marks a significant shift in understanding the question. The great Christian theologians of the just war tradition generally approach their discussion from two angles. In some contexts, it is a question about how a confessing Christian with a particular political or military responsibility in society is to act or indeed whether they can faithfully remain in certain positions given the duties that will be incumbent upon them.[5] In others, it is seeking to elucidate the obligations of love and the prohibitions entailed by the specific commandment against murder.[6] In thinking about "war", in other words, we are being asked to reflect on a form of practical, political action that raises a fundamental moral question because it requires participants to be involved in the taking of human life.

Ellul, from the opening pages of his book, resets and critiques this tradition within his own predominant category of violence. So, categorizing this strand of Christian thinking as "compromise", he places the early Christian concerns about the state in relation to "violence". "They saw that the state.used violence against its enemies, internal or external. For war certainly seemed violence pure and simple, and the police operated by violence" (p. 2). The challenge that remained even when Christians held political office and the state ceased persecution of the church is expressed in the following terms - "the political power.continued to use violence" (p. 3). Ellul then explains how theologians and canonists responded to this challenge of what he insists on calling "internal violence" and "external violence" by the state.

---

it is also important to note that he sees this tradition in part shaped by Islam's subversion of Christian faith (*Subversion of Christianity*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), pp.100-4.

[3] Jacques Ellul, *Contre les violents* (Le Centurion, 1972).

[4] Oxford English Dictionary's primary definition of 'war'.

[5] So, in the tradition, among the key classic texts are Augustine's letter to Count Boniface (Letter 189, from 418AD) with the counsel, "Do not think that it is impossible for any one to please God while engaged in active military service" and Luther's "Whether Soldiers, too, Can be Saved" (1526) written to respond to the concerns of Assa von Kram of Wittenberg about reconciling his Christian faith and military profession.

[6] Thus Aquinas' main discussions in the *Summa* are (a) *ST* II-II, q40 which is entitled "of war" and, importantly, under the discussion of charity and (b) *ST II-II,* q64 "Of Murder".

In relation to "internal violence" Ellul discerns two key redefinitions taking place. A distinction is drawn between the state and human beings, and it is held that the state "never acts by violence when it constrains, condemns and kills" (p. 3). Instead, its actions are distinguished from "violence" by being conceived of as "force" so that the state "is the institution which demonstrates the difference between violence and force.There is all the difference between violence and force" (p. 4). The issue then becomes whether or not the state's use of force is "just" or "unjust" and conformity to the law is here the determinative factor. However, even when the state does not conform to the law it still uses force - albeit now unjust force - rather than violence. This reasoning, Ellul claims, was an attempt "to clear the state of the charge of violence by explaining that it was not violence" (p. 5).

In relation to the external violence of war, Ellul contends that the church reasoned this way: "To deny the state the right to go to war was to condemn it to extinction;" yet the state was ordained by God, and therefore the state "must have the right to wage war" (p. 5). This he claims (though without citing any supporting evidence) was the origin and fundamental rationale for "the casuistry of the just war" whose evolving tradition he sums up in terms of seven conditions to make a war just. Although Ellul acknowledges that these "have theoretical solidity" (p. 6), he questions their practicality and relevance, especially in the contemporary world.

Ellul's own contrasting approach to the question is shaped by what he calls "Christian realism." "The Christian who wants to find out what he ought to do, must be realistic; this is the first step". The problem is that we need first to be clear what the Christian must be realistic about and herein lies the fundamental weakness of Ellul's work. "Violence" we have seen to be the lens through which he re-interprets and critiques the just war tradition. It is the phenomenon about which he insists we must be realistic. But "violence" is itself never defined by Ellul.[7] Clearly it is broader than the just war tradition's focus on the taking of human life, but just how broad it is remains unclear. The signs are, however, that for Ellul the term is exceedingly wide-ranging in its scope - "economic relations, class relations, are relations of violence, nothing else" (p. 86), "psychological violence.. .is simply violence, whether it takes the form of propaganda, biased reports, meetings of secret societies that inflate the egos of their members, brainwashing or intellectual terrorism" (p. 97). It would appear that Konyndyk is broadly correct that violent behaviour for Ellul is "coercing someone in a way that violates his personhood".[8] Given that "violence" is to be the over-arching interpretive category for Christian reflection on war, and is being used to explain Christian moral assessments in history which did not themselves primarily use this category, it

---

[7] This is a common criticism of Ellul's writing; for example, "The first question, then would seem to be: What is violence? But, strangely, Ellul does not address it" (Kenneth J. Konyndyk, "Violence" in Clifford G. Christians & Jay M. Van Hook (eds), *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (University of Illinois Press, 1981), p. 256.

[8] Konyndyk, *op.cit.*, p. 256.

would help if such a definition - or preferably a more precise one - had been given by Ellul himself.

Despite this weakness, there are two great strengths in Ellul's approach. Firstly, it refuses to mask the fact that punitive measures taken by political authority have the same basic structure as the wrong actions to which they respond. So fines (like stealing) take away people's property without their consent, imprisonment (like kidnapping) deprives persons of their liberty. Although this should be more obvious in war, the language of "force" means that it can be effectively forgotten. As Glover comments, "It is widely held that killing in war is quite different. It is not, and we need to think about the implications of this".[9] But this similarity need not mean moral differentiation is impossible: materially the act of sexual intercourse has a common structure whether it is joyful marital sex, adultery, fornication or rape; the insertion of a knife into human flesh could be an act of surgery or grievous bodily harm. Ellul formulates a stark law of the identity or sameness of all violence. When it is given a moral focus in order to insist that we cannot distinguish between just and unjust violence or violence that liberates and violence that enslaves, this simply asserts what really needs to be argued for.

Secondly, Ellul also highlights the continuity between the internal coercive actions of political authority ("police functions" as we might call them) and the external actions (military functions in war). Here there is continuity with the traditional just war understanding. That tradition similarly refuses to treat these as two independent spheres with different moralities or criteria for action. Ellul thus will be sympathetic to a common critique made by just war theorists. They point out that there is a tension (if not incoherence) in being a principled advocate of nonviolent pacifism but not being a non-violent anarchist (Ellul's own position) or being committed to just war thinking but absolutely opposed in all circumstances to capital punishment. Where Ellul differs fundamentally is that the just war tradition is marked by seeing the task of political authority as one which can legitimately be fulfilled - at home and abroad, through police and through military - through the subordination of all uses of "violence" to the pursuit of justice.

Ellul himself held such views in his first published book where, in discussing biblical texts such as Romans 13 on the "use of the sword", he writes,

The use of the sword in itself is not condemned.The use is subject to eventual condemnation.which will become a reality only if the sword.serves either the obstruction of justice or the spirit of power. Within this eschatological perspective, man's judgment in the realm of law assumes its rightful value. His judgment is the reason why the use of the sword will not be condemned. Any use of it apart from man's judgment runs counter to God's will..It is law which, before God, permits the use of force.[10]

---

[9] Jonathan Glover, *Causing Death and Saving Lives* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 251.

[10] Jacques Ellul, *The Theological Foundation of Law* (London: SCM Press, 1961), p. 113.

Although it is difficult to be clear as to why Ellul departed from this viewpoint, one factor is perhaps found in his comment that the just war tradition is "based on the conviction that man can retain control of violence, that violence can be kept in the service of order and justice and even of peace" (pp. 5-6). Ellul's realism about violence appears to have led him to reject this fundamental presupposition which is essential to just war thinking. In contrast to the just war tradition and his own early views, not only does he place all reflection about war under the broader rubric and laws of violence, he sees violence (and so war as a subset within that) as a force which rules human beings. Occasionally in this writing he relates this to his theological understanding of the principalities and powers by naming violence as "one of the 'rudiments' (*stoicheia*) of this world".[11] This is, once again, a feature of Ellul's work which frustratingly he does not develop but it stands as a further reminder that the just war tradition, in making judgments about war, must avoid an unrealistic picture of sovereign individuals abstracted from the reality of power making choices about their actions. In making moral judgments about particular actions it is also vitally important to consider in all our thinking the work of the powers in the wider shaping of our society and politics.

The Purpose - Justification or Confession?

Ellul's differences with the just war tradition are not limited to his insistence on approaching the subject of war through the much larger category of violence then understood by him in a much more globalistic and quasi-deterministic fashion. He has a fundamental objection to just war's attempt to provide justification for certain violent actions. This objection would appear to take two forms.

First, in his realistic analysis of violence, one of the features Ellul identifies - his fifth and final law of violence - is that "the man who uses violence always tries to justify both it and himself" (p. 103). The horror and agony caused by violence means, he claims, that everyone who uses it seeks to demonstrate that they have acted morally when they have turned to violence. More controversial still - especially given that the Augustinian strand of the just war tradition appeals to "love of neighbor" as its rationale for the use of coercive force - Ellul explains that this universality of justification derives from the fact that "violence is an expression of hatred, has its source in hatred and signifies hatred_.It is absolutely essential for us to realize that there is an unbreakable link between violence and hatred" (p. 104). The just war tradition is, therefore, in Ellul's eyes simply one of the multiple forms of self-justification inevitably developed by fallen human beings in the face of their own violence.

Second, although Ellul can apparently accept that Christians will use violence, he refuses to accept their justifications for this. Instead, he emphasizes that "as Christians we must firmly refuse to accept whatever justifications are advanced" (p. 140). He is insistent that "in their radical refusal to justify violence, Christians must not leave the smallest breach" (p. 141). Although particularly clear in his discussion of violence, this reflects a wider feature of Ellul's approach to the task of Christian ethics. He

---

[11] Jacques Ellul, *Prayer and Modern Man* (New York: Seabury, 1970), p.174.

is constantly on the alert to prevent a Christian ethic from becoming a means of human self-justification that escapes God's gracious gift of justification by faith in Christ.[12] Violence, Ellul argues, is a sign of the fact that we have sinned and ruptured our communion with God. We must not, therefore, formulate means to justify it in certain circumstances. Instead, we must confess our sin and seek God's forgiveness. For Ellul, the important truth is that the Christian cannot have a good conscience. "The Christian, even when he permits himself to use violence in what he considers the best of causes, cannot either feel or say that he is justified; he can only confess that he is a sinner, submit to God's judgment, and hope for God's grace and forgiveness" (p. 138). It is, however, important to realize that Ellul as emphatically rejects pacifist-inspired forms of self-justification which are developed for a policy of non-violence. He is quite honest that, "in the face of the tragic problem of violence, the first truth to be discerned is that, whatever side he takes, the Christian can never have an easy conscience and never feel that he is pursuing the way of truth" (p. 138). Yoder is therefore right to describe Ellul as holding the view that "the Christian will have to use violence but will know that it is sinful",[13] but Ronald Ray is also correct in drawing attention to the fact that "even the Christian position of non-violence involves guilt".[14]

This approach to the question of a Christian attitude to war provides a necessary challenge to some of the uses Christians make of the just war tradition. That tradition too easily becomes a means by which "our side" in a military conflict is able to claim moral superiority over the enemy and believe itself not guilty. Too many politicians and Christian leaders uncritically apply the "criteria" for a just war in a simplistic manner. They can simply become a checklist of tests in order to show that the decision to go to war is justified and that right is on the side of their government. Ellul, in contrast, highlights the painful and tragic reality of living in a fallen world and being, in Luther's famous phrase, *simul justus et peccator*.

There is, however, a major weakness in Ellul's approach. This is found in the fact that in its aversion to any form of self-justification it is of little or no practical help to people faced with the harsh realities of living and acting in the real world. Two pieces of evidence show the dangers in Ellul's approach. Firstly, he appears incoherent and inconsistent when he attempts to make moral distinctions between different violent acts. He will state that as a Christian he "cannot call violence good, legitimate and just" (p. 133) and yet there are situations when he says he approves of certain violent acts (p. 69). Indeed, in the original French, he even writes of conditions in which the use

---

[12] The fullest account of this is his *To Will and To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969) where (p.108), Ellul asserts, "Every honest reflection must absolutely begin by acknowledging that...there cannot be a Christian ethic". I have discussed this point more fully in my *Living the Word, Resisting the World* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002), pp. 108-112.

[13] John Howard Yoder, *Nevertheless* (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1992), p. 177. n16.

[14] Ronald Ray, *A Critical Examination of Jacques Ellul's Christian Ethic* (unpublished Ph.D., University of St. Andrews, 1973), p. 196, n3.

of violence is acceptable and not condemnable.[15] Yet later he can write that violence is always condemnable.[16][17]

Secondly, when it comes to the full and extreme horrors of war, we see the further difficulty in treating all violence as the same and refusing to offer any means of moral discrimination. Here, Ellul appears to accept that "anything goes" once war has begun and to refuse any moral constraint lest those who accept the proposed limits then believe they are justified in the limited violence that they do use. So, in conversation with Patrick Troude-Chastenet he reflected on the French experience in Algeria in these terms:

According to me, once you have decided to go to war you have to go all out and use every means at your disposal. This is the case that applied in Algeria. Everyone was shouting their heads off against the torture that was going on. But the real problem was not the torture but the war itself. There is no morality in war. If you want to win you must pull out all the stops.[(1)]

Ellul is thus in a paradoxical situation compared to the just war tradition. That tradition seeks to limit war by acknowledging certain carefully delineated situations in which the use of coercion is justified. In so doing, it also lays down clear boundaries and a duty in certain contexts to sue for peace rather than to use immoral means. Ellul, in contrast, stands resolutely opposed to violence. However, his refusal to distinguish between different forms and levels of violence, his rejection of anything that could be construed as justification for violence, and his emphasis instead on the need to confess our necessary sinfulness in the fallen world, means that Christians guided by his approach may find themselves ending up involved in torture as a sad necessity (or presumably dropping nuclear weapons) in military conflict.

In short, Ellul has an aversion to any approach to moral thinking that he believes risks facilitating selfjustification or denying the continuing presence of sin in all our actions. Pushed to an extreme, however, this makes his writing incapable of providing moral guidance or setting clear and realistic moral limits. As Oliver O'Donovan comments in his discussion of whether killing is a moral evil that we are bound at all costs to avoid and thus participation in war totally prohibited,

The curious hybrid notions of "sin within the realm of necessity"(J.Ellul) and "responsible assumption of guilt" (H. Thielicke) capture dramatically the subjective moral tension which belongs to a decision of such gravity, but they leave the deliberative question in paradox and so seem to have more rhetorical than conceptual persuasiveness.[18]

---

[15] "acceptable, non condemnable" *(Contre les violents),* p. 170.

[16] "La violence est *toujours* condamnable" (*Les combats de la liberte* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1984), p. 166 (italics orignal).

[17] *Jacques Ellul on Religion, Technology and Politics: Conversations with Patrick Troude-Chastenet* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), p. 39.

[18] Oliver O'Donovan, "War and Peace" in McGrath, Alister (ed), *The Blackwell Encylopedia of Modern Christian Thought* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1993), pp. 655-6.

[(1)] Repeat of footnote 17.

Perhaps nothing illustrates the difficulty more sharply than Ellul's startling claim that "apart from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the use of violence is always an *a priori* contrary to the will of God".[19] How one discerns the Spirit's inspiration to use violence is, sadly, unelaborated. Presumably to attempt to do so would be to deny divine freedom and risk providing a means of self-justification!

Conclusion

Ellul and the just war tradition clearly approach the subject of moral judgment in war from quite different perspectives. It is important to recognize that these different approaches to the subject then shape their different conclusions.

In the light of the valid criticisms and cautions raised by Ellul but also the serious weaknesses in his own method, the challenge is whether or not a third way is possible. This could represent a chastened form of just war thinking in the light of Ellul's critique. In contrast to Ellul's work (where his attempt to reconfigure the Christian tradition by making "violence" the controlling concept risks distorting the structure of the tradition's account of morality in war) this would recognize and build upon the strengths of the just war tradition. Rather than just subsuming war under a strong account of "violence" and eschewing anything that could amount to self-justification, this would provide a careful structured analysis of the key questions which must be addressed in thinking about going to war and conducting war: who is to wage war? why should they have recourse to war? when should they do so? how should they fight? It would draw on the wisdom of the just war tradition to discern where significant moral boundaries lie in each of these areas.

In particular, like Ellul in his earlier writing, it would be based on the conviction that the structure and limits which must be placed on any use of destructive or lethal force are defined by the fact that just judgment is not only necessary but good and the divinely ordained task of government in a fallen world. It is therefore certainly true that "violence" is a sign of the fallenness of the world - Ellul's emphasis on this must not be ignored even if it needs to be tempered - but it does not follow that all recourse to violence is the same and so moral discrimination impossible.[20] There is, for example, a difference between war in order to right wrongs (just cause) and war for self-aggrandisement even if the latter is sometimes masked behind a claim that it is the former. There is a difference as well as a similarity between attacking opposing armed forces and engaging in torture of prisoners of war or blanket bombing of noncombatants.

---

[19] *The Ethics of Freedom* (London: Mowbrays, 1976), p. 406.

[20] "The distinction between a moral and a non-moral evil can be rendered in terms of what is evil *as action* and what is evil *as suffering.* Not every action that involves the suffering of evil is an evil action. The non-pacifist tradition has represented the justified belligerent as suffering the evil of necessity, but not as doing evil" (O'Donovan, *op. cit.,*p. 655).

This approach would, however, need to remedy the weaknesses in the just war tradition that become evident in the light of Ellul's approach. In particular it must redress the tendency to be unrealistic about the nature of human violence. There has to be a challenge to the idealism about human control in the face of the power of violence that so often undermines just war thinking. Perhaps most important of all, Ellul's critique has highlighted the tendency of the just war pattern of thinking to be hijacked for self-justification which masks the pervasiveness of human sin. The tradition could, however, be used as a more critical and prophetic tool. It would then raise before those holding political power and claiming to act justly, the challenging questions of their own complicity in global injustice and their enthrallment to the powers of Technique and propaganda as they make decisions about war in the contemporary world.

As in so many spheres of his thought, Ellul's work on violence runs the risk of an "all or nothing" response. Those attracted to the just war tradition easily ignore him as of no relevance to the realities of international power politics. Those eager for a prophetic Christian voice easily buy uncritically into his sweeping analysis of violence and by dismissing the tradition as "casuistry" and "compromise" find they are unable to offer guidance to those - including many Christians - with the terrible `responsibilities of political authority. By recognizing the deeper divergences in method and focus between Ellul and the just war tradition and outlining both his strengths and weaknesses, it is possible to go beyond Ellul's work and develop a realistic analysis of the nature of war today that draws on the majority Christian tradition Ellul himself once embraced in order to encourage a prophetic yet discriminating voice for those seeking to be faithful disciples of Christ.`[21]

Advert: Change of Address?

---

[21] I have explored some of these issues a little further in the booklet *When Is War Justified?* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2003), available from www.grovebooks.co.uk

Beyond Cyberterrorism: Cybersecurity in Everyday Life by Dal Yong Jin

Dal Yong Jin (daljin@uiuc.edu) has degrees from Yonsei University (B.A. in Public Administration, and M.A. in Public Policy) and the University of Texas-Austin (M.P.A.). He is a Ph.D. candidate in Communications at the University of Illinois-Urbana.

Introduction

The attacks of September 11, 2001 against the United States reflect a growing use of the Internet as a digital and physical against terrorism. Since September 11 many computer and security experts have looked at the issue of cyberterrorism in a new light. Governments throughout the world have come to understand that terrorists and cyber criminals, such as crackers—reckless computer geeks aiming to crack codes, or bring havoc to computer traffic—are using today's information infrastructure to bring havoc to computer traffic and threaten safety. The number, cost, and sophistication of these attacks are rising at alarming rates, with aggregate annual damage worldwide now measured in billions of dollars. The September 11 attacks have awakened the world to consider the real possibility of cyberterrorism.

There are several reasons why the Sept. 11 attacks point to cyberterrorism. One is Osama bin Laden's networks and his use of the Internet to organize the attacks. He used laptops with satellite uplinks and heavily encrypted messages to liaison across national borders with his global underground network even before 2001. The other is the possibility of using steganography, a means by which one can hide messages in digital photographs or in music files but leave no outward trace that the files were altered. Osama bin Laden reportedly used steganography to conceal his messages for the September 11 attacks ("Veiled Messages," 2001).

Moreover, concerns heightened that future cyber and physical attacks—not just for human targets, but for the telecommunication infrastructure as well—might be combined. Many New York citizens indeed could not use telecommunication and online systems for hours after the terrorist attacks due not only to overload but also destruction of the telecommunication infrastructure—including that in the World Trade Center. At that time, the United States narrowly avoided a complete shutdown of its critical financial transaction system—the nation's mechanism for electronically transferring funds (Scott, 2002).

Such threats existed before the Sept. 11 attacks around the world, but the possibility of a significant attack, specifically, a combined cyber and physical assault, is being taken much more seriously since those events (Thibodeau, 2001).

The growing threat of terrorism, which has become one of the most significant global issues in recent years, raises the specter of increased security risks for informa-

tion managers—ranging from the nuisance of Web site defacements to the possibility that systems could be targeted in conjunction with a physical attack to maximize disruptions. Computer and security experts fear that cyberspace could be terrorist's next target because they saw a clear warning in the terrorists' reliance on, and expertise in, information technology. It had become clear that the computer communication infrastructure, on which wealth, information, and power in our world depend, is highly vulnerable to intrusion, interference, and disruption. Naturally, cybersecurity measures have come to the attention of governments as the most significant method to protect society from cyberterrorism.

This paper studies the development of the concept of cyberterrorism in cyberspace. In particular, it examines cultural aspects of cyberterrorism to ascertain its characteristics. This paper discusses the specific question of the relationship between cyberspace and cyberterrorism, as well as several cultural aspects, such as the relationship between humans and technology, and privacy. Then this paper addresses the significance of cybersecurity for protecting our society from cyberterrorism. Finally, it analyzes the importance of cybersurveillance and discusses the function of encryption as a valuable cybersecurity tool in everyday life in a digital society.

Cyberterrorism in Cyberspace

In the wake of the September11 attacks, many scholars, computer experts, and government officials around the world quickly jumped to conclusions that a new breed of terrorism is on the rise and that society must defend itself with all possible means. They understand that cyberattacks are sufficiently destructive to generate fear comparable to that of physical terrorism. Attacks that lead to death or bodily injury, extended power outages, plane crashes, water contamination, or major economic losses are examples.

Before developing the concept of cyberterrorism, however, it is necessary to explain the concept of terrorism. Computer experts and government officials borrowed the definition of terrorism to explain cyberterrorism, though no one definition of terrorism has gained universal acceptance. Brian Jenkins (1996), a former advisor to the National Commission on Terrorism, described terrorism as the calculated use of violence such as fear, intimidation or coercion, or the threat of such violence to attain goals that are political, religious, or ideological in nature. The U.S. Department of State (1996) defined terrorism as premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents. Meanwhile, Noam Chomsky used the term terrorism as the use of coercive means aimed at civilian populations in an effort to achieve political, religious, or other aims. He explains the World Trade Center bombing as an example of this kind of particularly horrifying terrorist crime (Barsamian, 2001, p.19).

Many security experts borrowed these different definitions to explain cyberterrorism; however they cannot agree on one single definition on cyberterrorism because

terrorism in cyberspace is difficult to define. Among these, Barry Collin (1996), a senior research fellow at the Institute for Security and Intelligence in California, defined cyberterrorism as the convergence of cybernetics and terrorism. The United States Federal Bureau of Investigation defines it as any politically motivated attack against information, computer systems, computer programs, and data which results in violence against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents. Possible cyberterrorism targets, therefore, include the banking industry, military installations, power plants, air traffic control centers, and water systems (Cyberterrorism, 2001). Hence, cyberterrorism is sometimes referred to as electronic terrorism, netwar or information war.

Cyberterrorism represents a new stage in that it occurs in and with cyberspace, and means an attack on the information structure and function. Examples of cyberterrorist activity include use of information technology to organize and carry out attacks, support group activities and perception-management campaigns. Depending on their impact, attacks against critical infrastructures such as electric power or emergency services could be acts of cyberterrorism. Attacks that disrupt nonessential services or that are mainly a costly nuisance would not be (Denning, 2002). In other words, the potential impact of cyberterrorism on private corporations and government agencies goes well beyond the traditional civil and criminal definitions of damage.

The damage from cyberterrorism has not been viewed only in physical terms. In this regard, computer and security experts assess the probability of various types of cyberattacks, which will occur in the near future:

- Very likely: Electronic warfare is the threat feared most. It could come in the form of denial-of-service attacks, in which crackers overwhelm and disable Web sites with junk data. Other electronic attacks include computer worms and viruses—malicious computer programs that spread via the Internet and erase computer data or clog Internet traffic ("Experts fear," 2001). Online harassment such as harassing email, unsolicited pornographic pictures, and online stalking is also included.

- Likely: State-sponsored computer warfare is aimed at mainly the U.S. although it targets other countries. More than 30 countries have developed asymmetrical warfare strategies targeting vulnerabilities in U.S. computer systems. Because of U.S. military superiority, the countries see electronic warfare as their best tool to puncture U.S. defenses.

- Unlikely: The cutting of hundreds of fiber-optic cables—which carry Internet traffic between major hubs—knocks out portions of the Internet. Such an operation would require intimate knowledge of where key data hubs are, which only a handful of Internet firms know. It also would require a Herculean effort: most fiber cables are underwater or buried underground, so they are not easy to attack.

- Very unlikely: The bombing of Internet facilities, such as major data hubs, cripples the Internet. However, it is nearly impossible because the Internet resembles a cobweb of geographically dispersed facilities. For instance, in the United States, there are major routing hubs in Silicon Valley, Washington, Chicago, and Dallas ("Experts fear," 2001). Likewise, Ericsson world network is centered in Sweden, the Nokia world network is centered in Finland, and the NEC world network is centered in Japan.

As can be seen in this dichotomy, computer and security experts do not take seriously the connection between computer and physical attacks, i.e., attacks on human beings. Terrorists could coordinate a cyber attack with other forms of attacks against physical infrastructure, such as those on September 11. For computer and security experts, however, the main defense against cyberterrorism is to protect the information infrastructure. Cyberterrorism could be understood as a means to attack computer systems and infrastructure rather than to attack people.

Cultural Aspects of Cyberterrorism

It is generally recognized that technological decisions are made first, and then reflect on them ethically after they are developed. Throughout the history of technological innovations its main architects have often denied their moral responsibility. In this frame of mind their solutions do not require any ethical reflection. In fact, many users of technology argue that technology is essentially amoral and an entity apart from values. They point out that, if people use technology for destruction or pollution, as in the case of nuclear weapons and chemical pollution, it should not be blamed on technology, but on its misuse by politicians, the military, big business and others.

However, the historical emergence of a technological culture has made the issue of moral responsibility for technological development increasingly urgent because technology inevitably brings significant risks, as well as great benefits. Computer and cyberspace, in which cyberterrorism occurs, also brings about risks because they were not created by sheer act of will. Computers and the Internet indeed draw attention to the commercial, political, and military interests from the beginning. Therefore, it is indispensable to seriously consider the human and social aspects of cyberterrorism in cyberspace. As Jacques Ellul (1964) emphasized, one should be looking at technology in its sociological aspect because technology is not an isolated fact in society but is related to every factor in the life of modern man. With Ellul, Clifford Christians (1989, pp. 124-125) points out, "technology is the distinct cultural activity in which human beings form and transform natural reality for practical ends with the aid of tools and procedures." He argues that cultures are humankind's distinctive and immediate environment built from the material order by men and women's creative effort.

In this light, cyberterrorism could be understood based upon the relationship between man and technology. It requires understanding the relationship between commu-

nications and control together because cyberterrorism affects the relationship between communication technology and the humans who handle it. As Norbert Wiener argued (1957, p.16), society can only be understood through a study of the messages and the communication facilities which belong to it; and that in the future development of these messages and communication facilities, messages between humans and machines, between machines and humans, and between machine and machine, are destined to play an ever-increasing part. Indeed, communication and control belong to the essence of a person's inner life, even as they belong to our social life.

Regarding the relationship between people and technology, cyberterrorism occurs when humans use potentially harmful aspects of the technology. Cyberterrorism occurs because some consider cyberspace as a zone of unlimited freedom, a reference grid for free experimentation, an atmosphere in which there is no barrier (Robins and Webster, 1999, p.91). For instance, crackers try—without permission—to enter computer systems by breaking through security measures. Breaking into a computer system with criminal intentions is illegal and a case for criminal prosecution.

Meanwhile, cyberspace is a geographically unlimited, non-physical domain, in which—independent of time, distance and location—transactions take place between people, between computers, and between people and computers. Unlike physical attacks, cyberattacks are carried out from the comfort of their home and can occur in more than one place at a time through cyberspace. Cyberspace enables terrorist organizations to plan attacks more easily on multiple targets and spread their own organizations over a larger geographic area. It is not closed, but open—where we live everyday. To cyberterrorists, distance is meaningless. The Internet provides them with the ability to be halfway around the world instantly, in many places at once, and have an army of compromised machines to do their bidding (Robinson, 2001, pp.17-20).

In fact, one characteristic of cyberspace is the impossibility of pointing to the precise place and time where an activity occurs or information traffic happens to be. As Lefebvre observes, space and time are intertwined in nature and in society, and space organizes time in a network society (Lefebvre & Nicholson, 1991). This is possible because cyberspace plays a fundamental role in altering the nature of information's production, distribution, and consumption by allowing radically greater amounts and speeds of information flow (Jordan, 1999, p.117). Since more and more objects are provided via digital facilities, they acquire forms of intelligence, can communicate with each other, and thus create a permanent virtual space in which time and space lose their absolute significance. The spaces of the physical and the virtual world are closely interconnected.

Naturally, the threat of cyberterrorism, which has these cultural forms mentioned above, has increased with the development of computers, the Internet, and broadband because Internet communication allows terrorists to be decentralized, and thus harder to identify and observe their attacks. By the end of 2001, there were 455 million computers around the world. Internet users have also increased 17.5-fold between 1994 and

2002, from 38 million in 1994 to 665 million in 2002 (Computer Industry Almanac Inc, 2002). In the U.S. alone, almost 160 million United States households and businesses used the Internet for communication and commerce in 2002. With the rapid growth of computing and online systems, almost \$2.2 trillion in goods and services were sold via the Internet in 2001. That is expected to grow to \$12.2 trillion in 2006 (UN Conference on Trade and Development, 2002). Furthermore, every day, 1.4 billion emails were sent in 2001(Swartz, 2001).

Under these circumstances, the number of cyberattacks rose to almost 35,000 during the first three quarters of 2001 alone, from 21,756 in 2000, and 2,134 in 1997, respectively. Among these, the Love Bug virus hit over 55 million computers and crippled email systems around the world in May 2000. Approximately four percent of the total computers that received the virus required human intervention to reconfigure them or in some way repair them, which resulted in \$10 billion in economic damage. The Code Red worm also infected about a million servers in July and August in 2001 and caused \$2.6 billion in damages (Denning, 2002). Cyberattacks caused \$12 billion in damage and economic losses in 2001 alone (Squitieri, 2002).

The number and damage of cyberattacks worldwide is growing with the development of broadband (high speed Internet services) in recent years. Broadband users are seen as being more vulnerable to attacks because their computers are always connected to the Internet. In particular, several East Asian countries, which are showing rapid growth of broadband, produce the most cyberattacks of any country apart from the U.S. Asian and Pacific Rim countries indeed produced 91 percent of all attacks during the fourth quarter of 2001. Among these, computer-related crime in Korea, which boasts 10 million broadband users, soared. Computer-related crimes in Korea zoomed 13.6 times higher to 33,289 cases in 2001 from 2,444 a year earlier (National Policy Agency, 2002).

The next generation of terrorists will grow up in a digital world, with ever more powerful and easy-to-use cracking tools at their disposal. They may see greater potential for cyberterrorism than do the terrorists of today, and their level of knowledge and skill relating to cracking will be greater. Cyberterrorism could also become more attractive as the real and virtual worlds become more closely coupled with automobiles, appliances, and other devices attached to the Internet. Unless these systems are carefully secured, conducting an operation that physically harms someone may be as easy as penetrating a Web site is today. In other words, societies that apply many digital systems are extremely vulnerable to cyberterrorism. With relatively simple tools the key functions of such societies can be disrupted. Therefore, cybersecurity is the essential topic in current debates on new forms of war on terrorism because the relationship between men and technology must be secure.

Cybersecurity in Everyday Life

Security risks in digital systems can be caused by totally unpredictable factors, such as earthquakes, floods, fires, and lightning as well as cyberterrorism. Security can also be threatened by electromagnetic signals that suddenly open or close electronic gates and doors or set electronic toys in motion (Hamelink, 2000, p.116). However, the government and business have not paid much attention to security until recent years. In the business sector, corporations have spent billions of dollars for electronic security in recent years, however, companies spent, on average, only about $250 for security measures out of every $1 million they spent on information technology in 2001 (Lemke, 2002, p.31). At the government level, the situation was not far different. For instance, the United States government spent $938 million in 2000 to protect federal computer systems.

Increased security concerns in the wake of the September11 attacks have stimulated spending for cybersecurity. The U.S. government sought about $4.5 billion in its 2003 budget request, which accounts for 8 percent of its information technology budget (Berkowitz & Hahn, 2003). Despite tight information technology spending budgets, the worldwide security software market was also projected to be at $4.3 billion in 2002, an 18 percent increases over revenue of $3.6 billion in 2001, according to Dataquest Inc. (2002). Meanwhile, the U.S. government created the Department of Homeland Security for protecting the country from both physical terrorism and cyberterrorism in November 2002. The department would have about 170,000 employees and $37 billion budget. In addition, the U.S. and U.K. homeland security teams are to hold joint exercises as part of efforts to prevent simultaneous cyber terror attacks on the two countries beginning in April 2003.

Alarmed by the September11 attacks, government and security experts are clamoring for the world to craft better cyberdefenses. They want tougher laws against crackers, more resources, and closer cooperation among agencies to thwart attacks. As noted, they worry that the threat of cyberattacks will grow seriously as business and government use the Internet more. They point out that society needs cybersecurity tools and control strategies for society's security. In fact, cybersecurity issues are so much an intrinsic part of everyday life today because most of our social encounters and almost all our economic transactions are subject to electronic recording, checking, and authorization. For instance, we unblinkingly produce passports for scanners to read at airports, feed plastic cards with personal identifiers into street bank machines, fill out warranty forms when we buy appliances, key confidential data into online transactions, or use bar-coded keys to enter offices and laboratories. However, the growth of electronic commerce and electronic recording has brought about several negative effects for society, such as property damage, and business disruption through online fraud. As Robins and Webster addressed (1999, p.122) information is thought to be the key to a new phase of economic growth, but it also causes severe damage for today's information society.

As for computerized surveillance and security issues, one of the most important is encryption. Encryption is the art of scrambling messages to a predefined code or key and thus ensuring only those who know the key can read the message. Encryption technology empowers users to protect their digital property from unauthorized use because only the intended recipient—the key holder—can access the information. In particular, the public key approach is the most powerful method of authentication. Two sets of keys are used. In the public key system, one key is publicly revealed and the other is known only to the user. The keys are linked in such a manner that information encrypted by the public key can only be deciphered by the corresponding private key. Specifically, the public key (the product) is used to encrypt a message. A message encrypted with the public key cannot be decrypted with the same key; only the corresponding private key may decrypt it.

In conventional correspondence two devices are employed to ensure security and authentication. For privacy purposes, it is customary to place a letter within an envelope. But we want the intended recipient to know that we sent the letter, not some impostor. When we sign a letter, that signature serves to confirm our identity. This is exactly what occurs in public key encryption. By applying the recipient's public key to the message, we are assured that only recipients read it.

As the significance of the Internet increases, encryption policy becomes more critical in transferring and protecting information. Under an open and nonsecure Internet system, the issue of encryption places emphasis on security, authenticity, identification, and validation in information exchange. For instance, as an effort to prevent unauthorized access or modification and to secure Internet commerce, the U.S. government indicates that a secure Global Information Infrastructure (GII) should incorporate the following aspects:

- Secure and reliable telecommunications networks.

- Effective means for protecting the information systems attached to those networks.

- Effective means for authenticating and ensuring confidentiality of electronic information to protect data from unauthorized use.

- Well-trained GII users who understand how to protect their systems and data (U.S. Government, 2000).

In order to ascertain the characteristics and merits of cybersurveillance, it is worth comparing cybersurveillance with electronics-based surveillance technology, such as Closed-Circuit TV (CCTV) technology. Electronic-based surveillance technologies are recognized as the primary surveillance technologies today. They are very useful tools in prohibiting some teenagers from entering shopping malls for shoplifting or displacing them from certain city streets. The recent growth in the use of the open-street CCTV

system has been accompanied by a proliferation in the use of visual surveillance in a wide range of different institutional settings, including hospitals, schools, high rise housing blocks, and the workplace (McCahill, 1998, p.44). It is useful because cameras in public places may deter criminals. However, CCTV surveillance is not useful in cyberspace because it is not a cybersurveillance tool that functions in cyberspace.

CCTV also raises concern about privacy. While CCTV is a useful tool for protecting shoplifting in department stores, it also keeps watch over every guest without their permission. While some government agencies and businessmen believe surveillance is more important than privacy in order to protect physical property and even life, privacy is actually part of the problem (Lyon, 2001, p.66). Hence, in many countries electronic surveillance is mushrooming; however, the sanctity of privacy has also been eroded by the increasing intrusion of surveillance technology. Although safety and security are important, privacy should not be sacrificed for society's safety.

In addition, electronic surveillance is not adequate to protect global data and money flows. As seen thus far, protecting global data and money flow in a digital society should be one of the main functions of surveillance and cybersecurity. As global flow of technology, information, people, images and symbols rise in volume, surveillance should be employed to track and monitor these movements. More delicate and effective surveillance tools, such as high level encryption technology, become essential for protecting our lives and our property.

Unlike CCTV, encryption tools reduce threats to an invasion of privacy while protecting global data and money flows. Considering personal privacy, encryption applies to medical records, personal credit ratings, and spending histories. The problems of failing security need urgent solutions, in particular, for the success of digital trading. The combination of security, privacy, and authentication should make electronic commerce, whether conducted on private networks, the Internet or even in person, the preferred medium for financial transactions of all sorts. The widespread use of encryption is necessary for safe financial transactions online (Jordan, 1999). More importantly, strong encryption hinders cyberterror because terrorists cannot interpret the message easily. Although some terrorists have some decoding skills, it is not easy for them to overcome the encoding skills of security experts. One of the most obvious signs of surveillance is the overhead "electronic eye" of the closed-circuit television camera, and encryption is one of the most effective "cyber eyes" of cyberspace. With these forces behind it, strong encryption might be thought of as an essential element of cyberspace.

Conclusion

Cyberterrorism is becoming a common phenomenon. The next terrorist attack may be not physical in nature but could come through cyberspace to disrupt the communication infrastructure. Cyberattacks on the military, economic and telecommunications infrastructure around the world can be launched from anywhere in the world, and they can be used to transport the problems of a distant conflict directly to America's heart-

land, as well as other countries. However, it is true that the impact of this risk to the physical health of humankind is still minimal, at present, although the current state of cyberspace is such that information is seriously at risk. Computers do not currently control sufficient physical processes, without human intervention, to pose a significant risk of terrorism in the classic sense. Therefore, a proactive approach to protecting the information infrastructure is indispensable for preventing its becoming more seriously vulnerable.

Computer-based security technology, in particular high-level encryption, is strongly needed for securing today's society from terrorist attacks. Encryption is essential to protect the telecommunication infrastructure. This has obvious advantages for users' privacy, and it deters the members of criminal organizations accessing secret communication. Surveillance and security are not simply coercive and controlling. They are often a matter of influence and persuasion. We are all involved in our own surveillance as we leave the tracks and traces that are sensed and surveyed by different surveillance agencies. Encryption is a non-coercive security and surveillance technique in cyberspace.

In conclusion, cyberterror and cybersecurity have become part of our everyday lives. Everyday life has been conducted more and more in cyberspace in modern times, and this has strong implications for surveillance. On a daily basis, life in cyberspace entails surveillance in constantly increasing contexts.

References

Barsamian, D. (2001). "The United States is a Leading Terrorist State: An Interview with Noam Chomsky by David Barsamian." *Monthly Review*, 53 (6), 10-19.

Berkowitz, B., & Hahn, R. (2003). "Cybersecurity: Who's watching the Store?" *Issues: In Science and Technology (Spring 2003)*, 1-12.

Christians, C. (1989). "A Theory of Normative Technology." In Byrne, E., & Dordrecht, J. Pit. (Eds.). *Technological Transformation: Contextual and Conceptual Implications*. Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Collin, B. (1996). The Future of Cyber-Terrorism. Proceedings of 11th Annual International Symposium on Criminal Justice Issues. Chicago: The University of Illinois at Chicago.

Computer Industry Almanac Inc., (2002, December 16). USA tops 160M Internet Users (press release).

Cyberterrorism (2001). Retrieved from:
http://searchsecurity.techtarget.com/sDefinition/0 „sid14_gci771061,00.html

Dataquest Inc. (2002). Security Software Market will Grow 18 percent in 2002 (press release).

Denning, D. (2002). *Is Cyber Terror Next*? Retrieved from: http://www.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/denning.htm

Ellul, J. (1964). *The Technological Society*. New York: Vintage.

"Experts Fear Cyberspace Could Be Terrorist's Next Target." (2001, October 9). *USA Today,* B1.

Jenkins, B. (1996). *The Future Coverage of International Terrorism.* Retrieved from: http://www.wfs.org/jenkins.htm

Jordan, T. (1999). *Cyberpower: The Culture and Politics of Cyberspace and the Internet.* New York: Routledge.

Hamelink, C. (2000). *The Ethics of Cyberspace.* London: Sage.

Lefebvre, H., & Nicholson, D. (1991). *The Production of Space.* New York: New York University Press.

Lemke, T. (2002). "Cyber-terror a certainty, and government is most Vulnerable." *Insight on the News,* 31 (1).

Lyon, D. (2001). *Surveillance Society: Monitory Everyday Life.* Philadelphia: Open University Press.

McCahill, M. (1998). "Beyond Foucault: Towards a Contemporary Theory of Surveillance." In Norris, C., Moran, J., & Armstrong, G. (Eds.). *Surveillance,Closed Circuit Television and Social Control* (pp.41-65).

National Police Agency. (2002). *2002 Policy White Paper.* Seoul: National PolicyAgency.

Robins, K., & Webster, F. (1999). *Times of the Technoculture: From the Information Society to the Virtual Life.* London: Routledge.

Robinson, C. (2001). "Physical Disaster Propels Cybersecurity Initiatives." *Signal,* 56 (3).

Scott, W. (2002). "Nation's Inforsec Gaps Given New Scrutiny Post-Set.11." *Aviation Week & Space*, 59-61.

Squitieri, T. (2002, May 6). "Cyberspace full of terror targets." *USA Today.*

Thibodeau, P. (2001, September 24). "War against Terrorism raises IT Security Stakes." *Computer world*, 39.

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

(2002). E-Commerce and

Development Report. (New York: UNCTAD).

U.S. Department of State. (1996). *Patterns of Global Terrorism Report.* Retrieved from http://www.state.gov/www/global/terrorism/1996 Report/1996index.html.

U.S. Government.(2000). *Whitehouse, A Framework for Global Electronic Commerce.* Retrieved from: http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/New/Commerce / about.html.

"Veiled Message of Terror may Luck in Cyberspace." (2001, October 30). *New York Times*, F1.

Advert: You Can Help Build the Movement

Surveillance After September 11: Ellul and Electronic Profiling by David Lyon

David Lyon (lyond@post.queensu.ca) is Professor of Sociology and Coordinator of Graduate Studies at Queen's University (Canada). He is also the research director of the international Surveillance Project based at Queen's, investigating surveillance, risk management, and social ordering in global information societies (http:// qsilver.queensu.ca/sociology/Surveillance/intro.h tm).

In a classic one-liner, Jacques Ellul once suggested that "To be sure of apprehending criminals, it is necessary that *everyone* be supervised."[22] Substitute the word "terrorists" for "criminals" and we have an uncannily accurate description of the world since 9/11. Anti-"terrorist" measures, from securing airports to intercepting emails, are everywhere. The dramatic events of 2001 served to accelerate processes of general "supervision" that had been underway since Ellul's prophetic words were written, in the early 1960s. Especially in the USA, but also in countries around the world, we are creating sophisticated surveillance societies in which everyone is supervised, or watched over.

Let me clarify two things right away. One, in this world that we help to make, what I'm calling surveillance is partly a by-product of modern bureaucratic efficiency. More mobility means that many things are done at a distance. So some ways are needed of keeping track of transactions or keeping tabs on populations. Surveillance fills that gap - PINs, barcodes, video images, and scans are tokens of trust that compensate for the fact that in a global village we can't all know everyone else. So surveillance is not just sinister; but neither is it simply benign. It's deeply ambiguous, and increasingly influential. In this piece, however, I focus on the risks.

Two, what follows is not just a paranoid whine about intensified intrusions, still less a plea for more privacy. In the context of today's rampant individualism, the antidote to more surveillance is quickly seen in terms of personal space and personal solutions.

---

[22] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (Knopf, 1964), p. 100.

Of course, some government departments or corporations have no business prying into our personal affairs, and even traffic light cameras can pick up passenger images that should never be recognizable. But while some aspects of privacy may be important - human dignity based on the imago dei would make selfcommunication a voluntary, limited activity within relations of trust - the language of privacy fails to touch many crucial issues. As well, privacy is also ambiguous.

Or should domestic violence in a "private" space be exempt from public scrutiny?

9/11 produced a rapid augmenting of existing surveillance trends. Many companies, government departments and organizations (such as the American military) saw 9/11 as an opportunity to put in place measures previously proscribed because of privacy or civil liberties scruples. Multiple use smart cards, for example, have been around for over a decade, but few large scale uses have been found for them. No wonder Larry Ellison, of Oracle Corporation, quickly offered free software to the US government to create a national ID. Mercifully, despite the emotionalism and panic, he was turned down.

This reflects one major trend in surveillance, to automate and integrate systems of processing personal data. What was once done using ranks of filing cabinets and index cards in large offices could be done much more easily with computers. Add telecommunications, so they could network, and software for searching databases, and the stage was set for surveillance in its dominant twenty-first century forms. This isn't the topdown nightmare of eerie telescreens featuring *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*'s Big Brother, but the Google model of homing on hits using keywords. It's algorithmic surveillance, that sorts for suspects.

But not only for suspects. The categories cover all kinds of persons, lifestyles, occupations, interests, positions and preferences. Just as the firm might fire you for failing to meet your performance requirements, the bank may well do the same if your business is worth less to it than your neighbour's. The Royal Bank of Canada does it by sending letters that explain their new financial features, which reveal that not all customers will qualify.

Still, if we're thinking about 9/11, suspects are exactly what surveillance seeks. Indeed, hasty legislation (in the USA and elsewhere) and new surveillance technologies combine to create an expanded version of what Onora O'Neill calls a "culture of suspicion."[23] Vague and prejudicial definitions of "terrorist" help to widen the net, while dubious surveillance softwares serve to tighten the mesh. But those are only the first steps. The culture of suspicion spreads as trust is eroded at every level. New York Muslims called "Mohammed" are finding their American Express cards withdrawn; companies are hiring consultants to do "security" checks on people who apply for jobs; and hotlines proliferate for letting ordinary people be the "eyes and ears" of law enforcement.

---

[23] Onora O'Neill , *A Question of Trust* (Cambridge, 2002).

Unfortunately for those spending millions on high-tech security devices, the systems aren't really up to snuff. The brand new facial recognition cameras at Logan Airport in Boston, from which two planes containing global guerillas took off on 9/11, have been criticized by an independent security contractor for having blurred shots and excessive false positives.[24] In short, they won't work for the purposes stated. And this is also true of several other surveillance schemes for identifying, locating, and capturing "terrorists."[25]

But while the new surveillance is unlikely to prevent terrorism, this does not mean it is ineffective. Those drawn into the net include a vast range of persons - all of us, one way and another - whose personal data are extracted from us as transaction records (such as phone, credit cards), behaviours (what cameras and scanners see in car parks or airports), body indicators (iris scans or fingerprints), and other traces are transmitted to databases. True, we may falsify records on the internet, or evade the street camera, but most of us comply, cheerfully or otherwise, most days.

Notice what goes into the system. Just bits of data, fragments of information. They may be built into a larger profile but even that will scarcely be recognized as a reliable image by the person concerned. No matter, it's the fragments that count. The system isn't interested in "who" you really are. All it can do is create situational controls, momentary management opportunities. These surveillance devices are meant to channel flows, to inhibit some activities, to promote others. "Entry denied," flashes the sign; "Do you wish to redeem your points?" asks the cashier; "You have been selected..." says the SPAM. Morality does not really feature, here. Mere management has taken over.

This means that we are all targets, and that justice reduces to the actuarial. The smug response that those who have nothing to hide have nothing to fear is pernicious nonsense. The fact of being placed in a category of suspicion, or even in a marketer's niche, means that our life-chances and our choices are already affected. Systems designed to sort are there to classify our lifestyles and our proclivities, discriminating between one and another. Different insurance rates, promotional offers, treatment by police, and speed of passage - such as through airport check-in - are the result. That your neighbourhood becomes high-risk may not be your doing, and that you're a single mother on welfare not your fault. The automated label sticks, until you can find some way of removing it. So much for presumptions of innocence!

But let's go back to those global guerilla fighters. No one wants to see them succeed, and every right thinking person believes, correctly, that terrorism is a curse to be opposed. If reports of capture, whether in Pakistan, Germany, Indonesia or Canada are correct, then one checks in vain for reports of high tech devices being crucial. In fact, where terrorist cells have been busted, or dangerous individuals apprehended, it

---

[24] Technology and Liberty Program of the ACLU, Sept. 2, 2003 *(*www.aclu.org/Privacy/Privacy.cfm*)*

[25] Details of some such failed schemes are in David Lyon, *Surveillance after September 11* (Polity Press, 2003).

seems that old-fashioned intelligence-gathering, under-cover work, and informers are responsible.

So why all the hype about technology? Well, this is where Ellul becomes relevant once more. He maintained that in the modern era an obsessive search for the one right way of doing things - the correct "technique" - was fast becoming dominant. Hence his critique of "technological society." Appropriate goals were being obscured as the myopic quest for the best means filled the cultural horizon. The idol would bind its adherents to a single program, and blind them to its consequences and alternatives. "In displacing spirituality," summarises Karim Karim, "technique itself becomes an object of faith."[26]

Of course, Max Weber had made similar observations, much earlier in the twentieth century, but he seemed to despair of ever finding away out of this "iron cage." His insights are indispensable, but incomplete. On the other hand, despite his apparent view that technology is an unstoppable juggernaut, Ellul actually insisted that choices could still be made. Having been a member of the French World War Two resistance movement against the apparently invincible German occupation, his position had some credibility. Ellul parted company with Weber at the crossroads of the spiritual. The latter confessed to being "religiously tonedeaf" while the former pursued parallel paths of sociological and theological analysis.

So what directions are suggested by this line of thinking? The first is a general point about the priority of "technique." From the Renaissance, the idea took root that peace and prosperity could be engineered, and the Enlightenment took this notion further. Technology was among the tools for manufacturing desirable social conditions. But this is an inversion of priorities. Loving one's neighbour and seeking social justice are stressed by the Hebrew scriptures as prior conditions for peace and prosperity. Doing technology falls under the same rubric. It is subject to norms, to morality and to ethics. You can't engineer security or safety, although technology may play an appropriate role in achieving such goals.

Moving closer to the aftermath of 9/11, what might a socio-theological approach have to offer? Assuming there is some merit in the above argument, key issues concern what we might call "embodiment" and "embrace." Why these?

First, the garnering of personal data fragments makes it possible to assemble profiles that proxy for persons. I may not recognize my data-image but it's the data-image that plays a key role in my life-chances. The abstract data-image is not the embodied person, even though it seems to have taken over the task of defining me. In the twenty-first century, electronic proxies are likely to proliferate. Modern(ist) notions of the independent individual are already imperiled by such developments. But at the core of Christian commitment is the notion that persons are relational and embodied. Those

---

[26] Karim H. Karim, "Cyber-Utopia and the Myth of Paradise: Using Jacques Ellul's work on propaganda to analyse information society rhetoric" *Information, Communication, and Society,* 4:1, 2001, 113-134.

relationships, echoing the sociality of God, are central. And our being "enfleshed," which was affirmed by the "enfleshment" (incarnation) of Jesus, is equally so. So whenever a data-image is privileged over the person, damage is done.

Second, the use of searchable databases for surveillance means they act as a form of triage, screening behaviours and activities in order to assign different treatments. It's an exclusionary process that cuts out or creams off without recourse to ethics. Loving one's neighbour flies in the face of this, demanding instead inclusion and embrace. As Miroslav Volf poignantly notes, exclusion may be overt, flowing from domination, or it may be occluded, subtly producing abandonment.[27] In the twenty-first century, we have found ways of automating the practice of "passing by on the other side." As soon as "Arab-Muslim" or "not credit-worthy" features in a database, mental sirens should sound.

None of this is meant to imply that policy makers, politicians, or technologists for that matter, have easy decisions to make. Rather, appropriate priorities should be recovered and highlighted as each issue is confronted. Equally, everyone needs to be informed and involved. In the twenty-first century, the politics of information are shifting to a much more central position than formerly, and democratic citizenship demands that all take an interest in how this plays out. We shall surely get the technologies we deserve if we do not make our voices heard in dissent and re-direction. Already, popular outcry has helped to rein in some of the most egregious aspects of the "Total Terrorist Awareness" and "Computer-Assisted Passenger Pre-Screening" programs in the USA.

Although present surveillance trends were visible well before 9/11, those events have served to accelerate and also to highlight them. Technological decisions are now far too important to be left to politicians and engineers. They affect all of us, and, at a simple level, we can all contribute to shifts in thinking and practice. It behooves those who believe that loving neighbours and seeking justice are key priorities to expose the lie that having "nothing to hide" exempts one from the consequences of today's surveillance. Likewise, the emphasis on justice requires that mere "privacy" solutions be re-thought. Profiling, not prying; sorting not spying; these are the real issues. Whenever someone suggests that "intrusion" is the problem, remember that "exclusion" is at least equally dangerous.

Having begun with some references to Ellul, I'll let him have the last word too. I have no special brief for Ellul; indeed, I am also a critic of some of his ideas. But his insights, developed at the dawn of the computer era, have a compelling resonance with what's happening today. He once commented that in the antique cities of Babylon and Ninevah, peace, prosperity and security were sought through city walls and military machines. But he also reminded readers of another city, where inclusion is the key - the gates are always open - and where the light is always on.[28] Trust, not suspicion,

---

[27] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Abingdon 1996).
[28] Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City* (Eerdmans, 1970).

and embrace, not exclusion, are the watchwords. We don't yet see this city. But as another sage once said, it's not too much to hope for.

References

Advert: Make Payments to IJES Electronically?

The IJES office can accept payments only in US dollars because of the huge collection fees otherwise charged by US banks.

A new option in many countries is to go to www.paypal.com and use a credit card to make a payment to "IJES@ellul.org." If you try this option, be sure to note your name, address, and purpose of payment.

Issue #33 Spring 2004 — Jacques Ellul Today

- Click to view the original PDF

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

"We must get to the roots of our society (technology, political power, psychological manipulation) and attack it there. . . . I believe that it is only through complete refusal to compromise with the forms andforces of our society that we can find the right orientation and recover the hope of human freedom."

Jacques Ellul

"Mirror of These Ten Years," trans. Cecelia Gaul Kings Christian Century, 87.7 (18 Feb 1970): 203.

Contents

© 2004 International Jacques Ellul Society Berkeley, California, USA www.ellul.org

Information on The Editorial Board & More

Mirror of Another Ten Years

by Joyce Hanks, Guest Editor

Much as Ellul in 1970 surveyed the previous decade when he wrote the words on our cover, in this issue of the *Ellul Forum* we review the ten-year period since he died, on 19 May 1994. We have looked at both his sociology and his theology, in broad outline and by way of specific example, attempting to assess the relevance of his thought for our time.

Nothing had prepared me for the amazing displays of new books by and about Ellul that awaited me when I arrived in France for a spring 2003 sabbatical. The first of Patrick Chastenet's new annual series, the *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, providing us with previously unpublished and difficult-to-find early writings by Ellul, as well as helpful articles about him, had come out. A journalist unknown to me, Jean-Luc Porquet, had just published a book detailing connections between Ellul's main themes and recent events, demonstrating the current importance of Ellul's thought. This volume made

quite a splash, with standing-room-only public presentations by the author, prominent reviews in widely-read publications, and an almost immediate second printing—all giving evidence of Ellul's ability to challenge us years after he stopped writing.

A team of three serious students of Ellul's work crowned years of painstaking effort by publishing their first volume, also in 2003. Gerard Paul, Jean-Pierre Jezequel, and Michel Hourcade had gathered, pieced together, edited and annotated various sets of notes taken during Ellul's lectures over many years (as well as lectures tape-recorded by Willem Vanderburg, a contributing editor of the *Ellul Forum*), to produce *La pensee marxiste*, a kind of posthumous cooperative venture between Ellul and his three editors, published by La Table Ronde. This same publisher, having previously provided us with second editions of several of Ellul's long out-of-print books, offered another one in 2003: *Sans feu ni lieu* (originally published in English in 1970 as *The Meaning of the City*). Add to this a second edition of *Trahison de l'Occident* (*Betrayal of the West*), published through the efforts of Ellul's daughter, Dominique North, and you begin to imagine what I saw spread out in bookstores across France a year ago. More work by Ellul has been published since last spring, and more is on the way.

Why do we still consider Ellul's ideas important, given how our world has changed? Jean-Luc Porquet, the journalist mentioned above, gives us his take on that question, as do Gerard Paul, a banker, also mentioned above, and Olivier Pigeaud, a French Reformed pastor in Bordeaux. I have requested, translated, and edited their articles, and wish to express my thanks to Clifford Christians and David Gill for agreeing to publish the original articles in French as well. As you read the reflections of these three writers who have carefully studied Ellul's thought, you will undoubtedly find yourself taking issue with them at certain points. But I feel certain that such lively disagreement would have suited Ellul just fine!

Ellul Today

by Jean-Luc Porquet

Why did it take me such a long time—45 years—to become aware of Ellul? I was born in 1954, the year his *The Technological Society* was issued in France.[29] Obviously I could not read it when it first came out. In high school, no one mentioned it to me. At the university, utter silence. I studied engineering. Although professors spoke a great deal about fluid mechanics, methodology, computer science, physics, etc., not a single course was devoted to critical reflection on the profession they were preparing us for.

My generation turned fourteen years old at the time of the pivotal events of 1968. As far as the press goes, many of us cut our political and intellectual teeth on such publications as the daily newspaper *Liberation,* launched in 1973, and sponsored by the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. Other formative publications included *Politique Hebdo*

---

[29] Trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964).

(the weekly mouthpiece of the far Left), *Charlie Hebdo*, a bitingly witty libertarian weekly, *La Gueule Ouverte* (the first real environmentalist monthly, created by the staff of *Charlie Hebdo*), and *Actuel* (an underground monthly to which I would contribute from 1982 to 1987). Somewhat less influential was the *Nouvel Observateur* (closely affiliated with the Socialist Party), together with its ecology supplement, *Le Sauvage*. This list indicates what I, at least, was reading at the time.

These publications introduced us, helter-skelter, to the thought of Herbert Marcuse, Ivan Illich, Wilhelm Reich, Rene Dumont, Michel Foucault, the 1974 Club of Rome report on the limits of growth, etc. But none of these sources ever spoke of Ellul! True, Ellul's alter ego, Bernard Charbonneau, wrote a column for *La Gueule Ouverte*, but he scarcely mentioned his friend. The only interview with Ellul in *La Gueule Ouverte* appeared in the eleventh issue (September 1973)—a long and boring affair, with "Mr. Ellul, Doesn't What You Say Lead to Despair?" as its theme. Ellul himself sometimes contributed to *Le Monde*, the establishment daily paper, but I read only *Liberation.* At the time *Libe*, as we called it, was the "Bible" of "rebellious" youth. Like so many others of my generation, I managed for years to avoid Ellul in this way!

Of course, his name finally became familiar to me. I finally learned that he was *the* thinker in the field of Technique. So, one fine day in the year 2000, having only this scanty acquaintance with Ellul's reputation, I happened to pull *The Technological Bluff*[30] off a second-hand book dealer's display shelf on the Boulevard Saint-Michel in Paris. A stroke of luck, since Ellul's books are hard to find in bookstores: they seem to be reprinted by the eyedropper-full. Besides, as a second-hand book dealer once remarked to me, "We rarely handle anything by Ellul: people hang on to good books!"

When I ran across Ellul's *The Technological Bluff*, I was working as a journalist for the weekly *Le Canard*

Enchaine, a satirical weekly paper that will soon celebrate a century of publication. It has stayed alive by always refusing all advertising, and looks critically at current events (someone has even called it the paper that serves as a filter for the impurities of the democratic system). At the time, I wrote rather often about what we now call "the mad cow scare," the result of thousands of cows in England falling ill after eating feed containing animal protein. Once we had proof that this bovine spongiform encephalopathy could be transmitted to human beings, all of Europe went through an earthquake-like experience of a kind never seen before. From that day on, everyone looked suspiciously at the food on his plate: will this piece of meat kill me gradually, subjecting me to excruciating pain? Parents insisted that beef be banned from schools. Experts explained that measures had been taken, that beef was safe. Politicians tried to reassure us, all the while taking care to protect themselves against any future prosecution. The media spoke of "psychosis," but continually put more fuel on the fire.

---

[30] Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990; French ed. 1988).

At the same time, I was reading in Ellul's *The Technological Bluff* that technical progress requires us "to make constant decisions about problems that are infinitely beyond us" (p. 10). Not only did his analysis clarify the situation perfectly, it enabled me to come up with a list of other such problems: global warming, the thinning of earth's protective ozone layer, nuclear waste (France depends more on nuclear reactors than any other country in the world), blood products contaminated with the HIV virus and knowingly used for transfusions to hemophiliacs, pesticides (France ranks second in the world in use of pesticides), genetically modified food, extremely dangerous industrial sites called "Seveso" sites,[31] mercury-contaminated plumbing, cell phones, multiplication of cellphone towers, videosnooping (it is impossible to find out how many of these video surveillance cameras we have in France: 200,000 or a million?), atmospheric pollution, cloning, sewage sludge in fields (is it toxic or not?), the explosion of allergies, hepatitis B vaccine (does it cause multiple sclerosis or not?), the Balkan syndrome, reduced male fertility, etc.

These unsolvable crises that point the finger at Technique were multiplying in the year 2000, and appearing on the front pages of newspapers. But not a single French intellectual (and so many people claim to belong to this category!) could be found who really thought through these urgent issues. I began to read other Ellul books, and each one confirmed my first impression: here was a dispeller of illusions on a grand scale, a shedder of light, a visionary, plowing the same furrow his whole life long. He had a carefully constructed, methodical way of thinking (and not just mere opinions based on idle political discussion): solid, rigorous analytical methods inspired by Karl Marx. Ellul's style was uneven, certainly, and he could be difficult to understand, but often he was brilliant (as in *A Critique of the New Commonplaces*[32]), or inspired (*Anarchy and Christianity*[33]). In any case, he wanted to make himself clear to thinking people generally, and not just to his intellectual peers. All this he applied to Technique, a subject that apparently causes thinkers to go to pieces.

I talked constantly about Ellul to people I knew, and discovered to my distress that they recognized his name, but that no one had read him. I quoted Ellul repeatedly in my articles. Then one day my friend Cabu (the cartoonist who honors me with his illustrations of my weekly column, and who regularly inquires about the subject of my next book), shot off: "So, write his biography, already!" Of course! I decided to write a kind of intellectual biography, centered around the weightiest ideas in Ellul's immense output: the ones that still have the power to enlighten us today. I would illustrate these ideas by means of examples taken from current events.

I looked over the theological side of Ellul's work. This was definitely not the aspect of his thought that interested me; only his writing on Technique did (still, I devoted a

---

[31] After the accidental explosion of a chemical factory in Toulouse that caused around thirty deaths, French citizens learned that their country had no fewer than 1,250 industrial sites dangerous enough to be classified as "Seveso."

[32] Trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Knopf, 1968; French ed. 1966).

[33] Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991; French ed. 1988).

few pages to his theological work, which one cannot simply dismiss with a snap of the fingers!). After a difficult selection process, I settled on twenty forceful ideas. Three of them seemed overwhelmingly crucial to me. But before we look at those, here are some of Ellul's prophecies that seem striking to me. They exemplify how he functioned in his role as a veritable sentinel—a watchman who was more clairvoyant and visionary than many others:

1. On terrorism: Ellul makes a remark in *The Technological Bluff* that might have seemed crazy before September 11, 2001: we will see "Third World terrorism which can only grow worse and which cannot be stamped out so long as the terrorists are ready to sacrifice themselves. When everything becomes dangerous in our world, we will be on our knees with no power to resist" (pp. 234-235).

2. On propaganda: Ellul understood the fact that the information we are bombarded with, supposedly an extension of democracy, ends up producing a need for propaganda. We can see in our day the glaring results of that need (including "embedded" journalists, the homogenizing of the American people manipulated by the propaganda of George W. Bush, etc.).

3. On the confused thinking that equates information with culture: the appearance of the Internet (unknown to Ellul), and the rhetoric that accompanies its increasing power continually reinforce this confusion between culture and information. The current technical obsession involves continually increasing the number of channels, stuffing them with so-called cultural material, and then churning out all of this without interruption. This process is justified as a way to save us time and as a means of cultural improvement. Having access to millions of data bases is useful, of course, particularly for the purpose of training information specialists and technicians. But it adds nothing to culture, and does not affect the number or quality of cultured people.

4. On the growing numbers of those we must call "human discards." Whether they be the homeless, the poor, the aged, or others, the technical system rejects more and more people who do not fit its criteria.

Now, three of Ellul's powerful ideas:

1. Technique creates problems that it promises to resolve by means of Technique. We can confirm this idea almost daily, in every area. Each time technical progress resolves a problem, it creates new ones, "and we need more technology, always more and more, to solve them."[34] Yet such technical advances are presented to us as new successes. For instance, with each oil spill (the last one in Europe, in 2002, was caused by the oil tanker Prestige), we are shown wonderful machines that can clean up the petroleum oozing out over the surface of the ocean. But no one questions our insane over-consumption of oil. We respond to the loneliness of the elderly by inventing high-tech houses equipped with electronic mats that tell time when a person walks on them. As for the mounting anguish and depression stemming from the mass media

---

[34] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980; Fr. ed. 1977), p. 225.

and technique-induced work conditions, we offer antidepressants (of which the French consume more than any other nation). To the increasing demand for energy, we respond with massive recourse to nuclear reactors . . . which leave us with the problem of nuclear waste (but we will surely find a solution!). To the pollution caused by pesticides, we counter with genetically engineered crops, etc.

Ellul singles out at least two "vast problems [that] will arise with the new stage of the technical system" (*Bluff*, p. 54): the ecological problem and the situation of the Third World. The first is well known. Anyone can draw up a list of outrageously damaging environmental events, and a shorter list of measures taken to limit such damage. But Ellul affirms that "pollution will continue to develop at the pace of technical growth" (*Bluff*, p. 232). As for international law, agreements and regulations, Ellul simply does not believe in them. And unfortunately, current difficulties over the Kyoto agreement on global warming would seem to prove him right.

What about the Third World? Noting that the "West implicitly refuses to give up its own extravagance and expansion of high tech," Ellul prophesies that we are going to be "engaged in a true war waged by the Third World against the developed countries" (*Bluff*, p. 234). Isn't this just what is happening to us with terrorism?

2. Technique simply goes its own way, riding roughshod over democracy. Most technical choices sidestep democracy, according to Ellul: technical progress requires efficiency and speed, bypassing all democratic procedures. The public is never consulted about it! In this way, for example, France has become the most nuclear-dependent country in the world. Another example: within a three-year period, French cellular telephone interests have put together a network of 30,000 wireless towers, without ever demanding anyone's opinion.

Technicians obviously face a problem concerning their failure to consult, which they can hardly deny. They always seem to think they have resolved the difficulty by means of their repeated: "We must inform the public." But their "informing" involves this unspoken assumption: "Once people have been informed, they will see the wisdom of our choices." On the other hand, Ellul observes that if it were necessary to inform people about every technical issue, it would take each person a lifetime to figure things out! How could people work out reasoned positions on energy choices, cloning, biotechnology, nuclear waste, industrial agriculture, global warming, the some 30,000 different byproducts regularly spewed out in massive quantities by the chemical industry, etc.? Ellul points out the paradox that the more the public is informed, the less it can come to a conclusion one way or another.

Some have tried to get around this problem by creating "consensus groups" that empower ordinary people to choose among technological options. One begins this process by gathering a group of fifteen or so "uninformed" people who receive two weekends of instruction in the main problems involved in making a given technological decision. Then this group meets with specialists, questioning them at will, after which time the group makes its recommendations. In France, the first of these consensus groups met in 1998, in order to decide under what conditions genetically modified foods could be

grown and sold. It was a model democratic exercise. The group members made sensible recommendations, including that such organisms be prohibited if they had a certain gene that was resistant to antibiotics (such organisms would be dangerous, since they might develop bacteria that would not respond to antibiotics). But a month later, the government authorized the cultivation of two types of genetically altered corn that had this particular gene. So the consensus group was a farce. Here again, Ellul foresaw this sort of thing. He reminds us that we cannot count on the State to conduct itself honestly when it claims to act in the general interest, since the State is "a technological agent itself, both integrated into the technological system, determined by its demands, and modified in its structures by its relationship to the imperative of technological growth" (*Technological System*, p. 132).

In the months following the decision of the consensus group, people opposed to genetically engineered crops swung into action. Convinced that democratic processes had not worked in this situation, they began "harvesting" genetically altered plants. They ran into trouble with the law for this: Jose Bove and his accomplice, Rene Riesel, each received a six month prison term. Only two days after Bove began to serve his time, a group of about 800 French scientists signed a public declaration concerning the usefulness of genetically modified foods. But even today, these specialists wonder how one could arrange a genuine public debate about such foods, instead of simply imposing them on everyone. So Ellul's analysis is utterly relevant to this burning question.

This kind of controversy continues to multiply, and sometimes has dramatic consequences. For example, in Saint-Cyr-L'Ecole, a Paris suburb, brain cancer has been diagnosed in a number of pupils from a public school located near cellphone towers. The panic-stricken parents rose up in arms, insisting that cellular telephone companies remove their towers. Although the parents finally won, the phone companies maintained that they had given in only to calm people down, and that their towers were harmless. The snag is that no study has been carried out to determine the effects of these wireless towers on health. And now thousands of people live in dread, wondering if the tower near their home can cause serious illness. After the nuclear threat and genetically engineered foods, we can expect that nanotechnologies will be next in line, trying to impose themselves by force.

3. Advertising and the technological bluff are the driving force behind the technological system. Ellul noted in 1987 that advertising had just gone through a spectacular seachange. Its budgets had begun to swell inordinately, it was becoming an enormous economic and financial power, and it no longer aimed at selling basic products, but rather high-tech gadgets, pure and simple. These had become the key to economic development. This analysis rings even truer today: the entire French audio-visual system now depends on publicity, whereas this was not true twenty years ago, before the time when almost all French public television channels fell into private hands. Advertising has become invasive, molding the consumer's life, to the point where he believes that the new high-tech products he hears about (CD's, DVD's, the internet, digital cameras, etc.) are indispensable for life in the technological system. This mounting pressure

seems increasingly intolerable to a handful of French people, who have formed such groups as "ad destroyers" (following the example of American "ad busters"), and leave their graffiti in the subways. But here again, the problem seems to have no solution. How can the public resist the bombardment of advertising? How to construct a different view of the world? Or resist submitting to technological propaganda?

In 1954, Ellul said "It is only fair to wonder what consequences these propagandistic manipulations will have. The real consequences are not discernible because the mechanisms have been operating for too short a time. And, of course, when the consequences finally appear, we still will not recognize them. We will have been so absorbed and manipulated, rendered so indifferent that objective knowledge on this score will be impossible. We will no longer even have any idea of what men might once have been" (*The Technological Society*, pp. 368-369). Fifty years later, this question remains central: how can we take our distance from this world; how can we look at it objectively?

Over just the last few years, a movement of thinkers and militants has advocated "convivial growth decrease." In France, Serge Latouche and the Association of the Friends of Francois Partant have led this effort. It has met with a growing response, especially among the "altermondialists." This movement is utterly consistent with the thought of Ellul. Ten years after his death, he is more relevant than ever, and I believe it essential that we read his books. We need his thought in order to nourish not only a new kind of critical thinking, but also in order to arrive at new individual behavior and collective actions.

Ellul aujourd'hui

Jean-Luc Porquet

Pourquoi m'a-t-il fallu tout ce temps, 45 ans, pour connaitre Ellul? Je suis ne en 1954, l'annee ou parut en France « la technique ». On comprendra que je n'aie pas pu le lire des sa parution... Au lycee, personne pour m'en parler. A l'universite, silence complet: je suivais des etudes d'ingenieur, et si les professeurs parlaient abondamment de mecanique des fluides, de bureau des methodes, d'informatique, de physique, etc, pas un seul cours n'etait consacre a une reflexion critique sur la profession a laquelle ils nous preparaient. Quant a la presse... Pour une grande partie de ma generation, celle qui a eu 14 ans en 1968, l'apprentissage politique et intellectuel s'est fait a partir du quotidien Liberation, lance en 1973 et parraine par Sartre, de Politique Hebdo (porte-voix de l'extreme-gauche), Charlie-Hebdo, journal libertaire, humoristique et corrosif, de la Gueule ouverte, premier vrai mensuel ecologiste (lance par l'equipe de Charlie Hebdo), d'Actuel (mensuel underground, auquel je devais collaborer de 1982 a 1987), et, dans une moindre mesure, du Nouvel Observateur (proche du parti socialiste), ainsi que de son supplement ecolo, « le Sauvage ». Telles etaient en tout cas mes lectures. Et si ces journaux nous initiaient, en vrac, a la pensee de Marcuse, Ivan Illich, Reich, Rene Dumont, Foucault, au rapport du club de Rome, etc, aucun ne parlait jamais d'Ellul!

Certes, Bernard Charbonneau, l'alter ego d'Ellul, tint chronique dans « la Gueule ouverte », mais il n'evoquait guere son ami - celui-ci, d'ailleurs, n'eut droit qu'a une interview, longue et ennuyeuse, sur le theme « Monsieur Ellul, ce que vous dites n'est-il pas desesperant? », dans le numero 11 de la Gueule Ouverte (septembre 73). Ellul lui-meme, donnait parfois des tribunes au « Monde », quotidien institutionnel: or je ne lisais que « Libe », qui etait alors la Bible de la jeunesse dite « contestataire ». Et voila comment je suis passe durant toutes ces annees a cote d'Ellul, comme tant d'autres de ma generation !

Bien sur, ce nom a fini par me dire quelquechose... J'ai fini par savoir qu'il etait « le » penseur de la technique. Et c'est equipe de ce maigre savoir qu'un beau jour de l'an 2000 je mis la main, chez un bouquiniste du boulevard Saint Michel, sur « le bluff technologique ».[35] Coup de chance, car, faut-il le preciser? les livres d'Ellul, reedites au compte-goutte, sont difficiles a trouver en librairie, et, comme me le disait un bouquiniste, « chez nous on les voit rarement passer: les bons livres, les gens les gardent chez eux ! ». Journaliste au Canard enchaine, hebdomadaire satirique qui depuis bientot un siecle, vit en refusant toute publicite et jette sur l'actualite un regard critique (on a pu dire que ce journal etait le filtre des impuretes du systeme democratique), j'y ecrivais assez souvent a l'epoque sur ce qu'on appelle aujourd'hui la « crise de la vache folle »: on sait que, nourries de farines animales, des vaches anglaises tomberent malades par milliers, et que, des le jour ou il fut prouve que l'encephalite spongiforme se transmettait a l'homme, l'Europe entiere vecut un seisme d'un genre inedit.

Desormais, chacun jetait sur son assiette un regard suspicieux: ce morceau de viande allait-il nous tuer a petit feu et dans d'atroces souffrances? Des parents exigeaient que la viande de breuf soit interdite a l'ecole. Des experts expliquaient que les mesures avaient ete prises, et que la viande etait saine. Les hommes politiques essayaient de rassurer, tout en prenant soin de se proteger des possibles suites judiciaires. Les medias parlaient de « psychose », et ne cessaient de l'alimenter.

Et au meme moment, je lisais dans Ellul que le progres technique nous sommait « de prendre constamment des decisions au sujet de problemes ou de situations qui nous depassent infiniment » (*Bluff*, pp. 25-26). Non seulement son analyse eclairait parfaitement la situation, mais elle me permettait d'en apprehender d'autres: rechauffement climatique, trou d'ozone, dechets nucleaires (la France est le pays le plus nuclearise au monde), sang contamine par le virus du sida et transfuse en toute connaissance de cause aux hemophiles, pesticides (la France est le deuxieme plus gros consommateur au monde), OGM, sites Seveso (suite a l'explosion accidentelle d'une usine chimique a Toulouse, laquelle fit une trentaine de morts, les Francais decouvrirent que leur pays comportait pas moins de 1250 sites industriels classes Seveso, c'est-a-dire extremement dangereux), plombages au mercure, telephones portables, multiplication des antennes-relais, videoflicage (impossible de savoir combien il existe de cameras de

---

[35] Jacques Ellul, *Le bluff technologique* (Paris: Hachette, 1988).

videosurveillance en France: 200 000 ou 1 million?), pollution atmospherique, clonage, boues d'epuration dans les champs (sont-elles ou non toxiques?), explosion des allergies, vaccin contre l'hepatite B (provoque-t-il ou non des scleroses en plaques), syndrome des Balkans, baisse de la fertilite masculine, etc: les crises inextricables mettant en cause la technique se multipliaient, faisaient la Une des journaux. Et aucun intellectuel francais -Dieu sait pourtant s'ils sont nombreux a renvendiquer ce titre !-pour penser vraiment ces crises. Je me mis a lire d'autres ouvrages d'Ellul, et chacun m'en apporta la confirmation: il etait un demystificateur de grande envergure, un eclaireur, un visionnaire, creusant le meme sillon toute sa vie, arme d'une pensee construite, methodique, (et pas uniquement d'opinions dignes du cafe du commerce), de methodes d'analyse inspirees de Marx, solides et rigoureuses, d'un style inegal, certes, parfois ardu, mais souvent brillant (exegese des lieux communs[36]) ou inspire (anarchie et christianisme[37]), de la volonte en tout cas de se faire comprendre de l' « honnete homme », et pas uniquement de ses pairs intellectuels... Et tout cela applique a la technique, un domaine devant lequel les penseurs semblent perdre leurs moyens.

Je parlais sans cesse d'Ellul autour de moi (et me desolais de m'apercevoir que son nom « disait quelque chose », mais que personne ne l'avait lu), je le citais a plusieurs reprises dans mes articles, et un jour mon ami Cabu, dessinateur qui me fait l'honneur d'illustrer ma

chronique hebdomadaire, et me demande regulierement le sujet de mon prochain bouquin, me lanca: « Ecris donc sa biographie ! ». Tilt ! Je decidai d'ecrire une sorte de biographie intellectuelle, de choisir dans l'œuvre abondante d'Ellul ses idees les plus fortes, celles qui aujourd'hui encore peuvent nous eclairer, et de les illustrer par des exemples pris dans l'actualite. Je jetai un mil au versant theologique de son œuvre: decidement, ce n'etait pas cet aspect de sa pensee qui m'interessait ; uniquement celui sur la technique (je consacrai cependant quelques pages a l'œuvre theologique, qu'on ne peut isoler du reste d'un claquement de doigt !). Apres un tri delicat, je distinguais vingt idees fortes. En voici trois qui me paraissent des plus cruciales. Mais auparavant, voici quelques propheties d'Ellul qui me semblent frappantes, et montrent en quoi il etait reellement une sentinelle, plus clairvoyant, plus visionnaire que beaucoup:

-sur le terrorisme, cette remarque dans « le bluff technologique » (1988), qui pouvait paraitre delirante avant le 11 septembre: « Il y aura un terrorisme tiers-mondiste qui ne peut que s'accentuer et qui est imparable dans la mesure ou ces « combattants » font d'avance le sacrifice de leur vie. Quand tout, dans notre monde, sera devenu dangereux, nous finirons par etre a genoux sans avoir pu combattre » (p.
280)..

-sur la propagande et le fait que le bombardement d'informations, sense etre une avancee democratique, finit par entrainer une demande de propagande: on constate

[36] Jacques Ellul, *Exegese des nouveaux lieuxcommuns* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1966; 2[e] ed Paris: La Table Ronde, 1994).

[37] Jacques Ellul, *Anarchie et christianisme* (Lyon: Atelier de Creation Libertaire, 1988; 2[e] ed. Paris: La Table Ronde, 1998).

aujourd'hui le retour eclatant de cette derniere (journalistes « embedded », peuple americain malaxe par la propagande de Bush Jr, etc)

-sur la culture que l'on confond avec la documentation: l'apparition d'Internet-que n'a pas connu Ellul-et les discours qui accompagnent sa montee en puissance ne cessent de renforcer cette confusion entre culture et documentation. L'obsession technicienne qui consiste a ouvrir sans cesse de nouveaux canaux, a y enfourner des produits dits culturels, et a les deverser sans interruption, s'autojustifie en pretendant nous faire gagner du temps et elever le niveau culturel. Or avoir acces a des millions de banques de donnees, c'est interessant, notamment pour former des documentalistes et des techniciens, mais cela n'apporte rien a la culture, et n'accroit ni le nombre ni la qualite des gens cultives.

-sur la multiplication « de ce que l'on est obliges d'appeler des dechets humains ». Que ce soit les SDF, les pauvres, les personnes agees, etc, le systeme technicien rejette de plus en plus ceux qui ne correspondent pas a ses criteres.

Trois de ses idees fortes, maintenant:

-La technique cree des problemes qu'elle promet de resoudre par la technique. On peut verifier cette idee d'Ellul, chaque jour ou presque, dans tous les domaines. A chaque fois que le progres technique resout des problemes, il en souleve de nouveaux, « et il faut plus de technique, toujours plus de technique pour les resoudre ».[38] Et on nous presente ces avancees techniques comme de nouveaux triomphes.

Ainsi, a chaque maree noire (la derniere en Europe, due au Prestige, date de 2002), on nous montre de merveilleuses machines capables de nettoyer le petrole repandu a la surface de la mer (et l'on ne s'interroge pas sur notre aberrante surconsommation de petrole). A la solitude des vieillards, on repond en imaginant des maisons hi-tech (le tapis electronique qui donne l'heure quand on marche dessus). A la montee des angoisses et des depressions dues aux medias de masse et aux conditions de travail dues au progres technique, on repond par les antidepresseurs (dont les Francais sont les premiers consommateurs au monde). A la demande croissante d'energie on repond par le recours massif au nucleaire... ce qui pose le probleme des dechets nucleaires (mais on trouvera bien une solution !). A la pollution due aux pesticides, on repond par les OGM, etc. Ellul identifie au moins deux « vastes problemes qui seront souleves lors de la nouvelle etape d'expansion du systeme technicien » (*Bluff*, p. 75): le probleme ecologique et la situation du tiers-monde. Le premier est bien connu. Chacun peut dresser la liste effarante des degats sur l'environnement, et une liste, moins fournie, des mesures prises pour limiter ces degats. Mais Ellul l'affirme: « La pollution va continuer a se developper au rythme de croissance de la technique » (*Bluff*, p. 278). Le droit international, les conventions, les reglementations? Il n'y croit tout simplement pas... et les mesaventures actuelles du protocole de Kyoto semblent malheureusement lui donner raison.

---

[38] Jacques Ellul, *Le systeme technicien* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1977), p. 245.

Le tiers-monde? Constatant le « refus implicite de l'Occident de mettre fin a ses gaspillages et a son expansion des *high tech* », il prophetise: « Nous allons etre engages dans une veritable guerre menee par le tiers monde contre les pays developpes » (*Bluff*, p. 280). N'est-ce pas ce qui nous arrive avec le terrorisme?

-La technique n'en fait qu'a sa tete et pietine la democratie. La plupart des choix techniques echappent a la democratie, dit Ellul: le progres technique exige l'efficacite, la rapidite, et contourne toutes les procedures democratiques. On ne consulte jamais le citoyen a son sujet ! Et c'est ainsi, par exemple, que la France est devenu le pays le plus nuclearise du monde, ou qu'en trois ans, les operateurs du telephone portable ont bati un reseau de 30 000 antennes-relais, cela sans jamais demander l'avis des citoyens. Ce fait, difficile a nier, pose evidemment aux techniciens un probleme qu'ils pensent toujours avoir resolu grace a ce leitmotiv: il faut informer le citoyen. Sous-entendu: lorsqu'il sera informe, il comprendra a quel point nos choix sont judicieux. Mais, note Ellul, s'il fallait informer le citoyen sur tous les choix techniques, celui-ci y passerait sa vie ! Comment pourrait-il se forger une opinion serieuse sur les choix energetiques, le clonage, les biotechnologies, les dechets nucleaires, l'agriculture industrielle, les 30 000 substances rejetees massivement par l'industrie chimique, le rechauffement climatique, etc? D'ou ce paradoxe pointe par Ellul: « Plus le citoyen sera informe moins il pourra prendre parti ». Certains ont tente de contourner cette difficulte en imaginant des « conferences de consensus » pouvant permettre a des citoyens lambda d'arbitrer des choix techniques. On commence par reunir une quinzaine de « candides », qu'on initie en deux week-ends aux principales problematiques d'un choix technique, puis on les confronte a des specialistes, qu'ils peuvent interpeller comme ils le desirent, a la suite de quoi ils forment leurs recommandations. En France, la premiere de ces « conferences de consensus » eut lieu en 1998. Elle avait pour objet de savoir selon quelles modalites les OGM (organismes genetiquement modifies) pouvaient etre mis en culture et commercialises. Ce fut un bel exercice democratique. Les citoyens firent des recommandations de bon sens, reclamant par exemple que soient interdits les OGM a gene de resistance aux antibiotiques (dangereux car risquant de developper des bacteries resistantes a ces medicaments). Mais un mois plus tard, le gouvernement donnait l'autorisation de cultiver deux mais transgeniques equipes de ce fameux gene. C'etait donc pure mascarade... Et la encore, Ellul avait prevu la chose, en rappelant qu'on ne pouvait compter sur le fait que l'Etat joue honnetement son role de garant de l'interet general, car il est lui-meme « un agent technique, a la fois integre dans le systeme technicien, determine par ses exigences, et en meme temps modifie dans ses structures par rapport a l'imperatif de croissance technique » (*Systeme technicien*, pp. 144-145).

Dans les mois qui suivirent, les opposants aux OGM, convaincus que les processus democratiques etaient inoperants en la matiere, se lancerent dans des « fauchages » de plants transgeniques. Et furent pour cela poursuivis en justice: Jose Bove et son complice Rene Riesel, ecoperent chacun de six mois de prison. C'est seulement deux jours apres que Bove soit jete en prison qu'une poignee de scientifiques lancerent une lettre ouverte sur l'utilite des OGM (appel signe par 800 chercheurs). Mais aujourd'hui

encore, ces chercheurs se demandent comment faire en sorte que les OGM fassent l'objet d'un veritable debat public, et ne soient pas purement et simplement imposes aux citoyens. L'analyse d'Ellul est donc d'une actualite brulante.

Et ce type de controverses, qui ne cesse de se multiplier, a parfois des consequences dramatiques. Ainsi sur les antennes-relais: a Saint-Cyr-L'ecole, en banlieue parisienne, plusieurs eleves d'une meme ecole publique pres de laquelle se trouvaient des antennes-relais ont ete atteints d'un cancer du cerveau. Affolement des parents, mobilisation contre les operateurs pour qu'ils retirent leurs antennes... Si les parents ont finalement eu gain de cause, les operateurs ont affirme qu'ils cedaient pour apaiser les esprits, mais que leurs antennes etaient inoffensives. Le hic, c'est qu'aucune etude n'a ete faite sur les effets sanitaires de ces antennes-relais. Et que desormais, des milliers de gens vivent dans l'angoisse, se demandant si l'antenne pres de laquelle ils vivent peut ou non les rendre gravement malades...

On peut s'attendre a ce que demain, apres notamment le nucleaire et les OGM, ce soit au tour des nanotechnologies d'essayer de passer en force.

-La publicite et le bluff technologique sont le moteur du systeme technicien. Ellul notait en 1987 que la publicite venait de connaitre un changement d'echelle spectaculaire: ses budgets s'etaient mis a enfler demesurement, elle devenait une enorme puissance economico-financiere, et ne visait plus a ecouler des produits de premiere necessite, mais de purs et simples gadgets high tech, lesquels sont devenus la cle du developpement economique. Analyse encore plus vraie aujourd'hui: l'ensemble du systeme audio-visuel francais est desormais dependant de la pub (ce n'etait pas vrai il y a vingt ans, avant la privatisation quasi-totale des chaines publiques). Elle est devenue envahissante, et sert a modeler le style de vie du consommateur de facon a ce qu'il soit convaincu que les nouveautes high tech qu'on lui vante (CD, DVD, Internet, appareils photos numeriques, etc) sont indispensables pour vivre dans le systeme technicien. Cette pression de plus en plus forte parait de plus en plus intolerable a une poignee de citoyens, d'ou la naissance de groupes comme « casseurs de pub » (sur le modele de « adbusters »), et quelques actions de graffitis dans le metro. Mais la encore, la question parait insoluble: comment le citoyen peut-il resister a ce bombardement? se forger une autre vision du monde? ne pas se soumettre a la propagande technicienne?

En 1954, Ellul s'interrogeait: « L'on est en droit de se demander quelles consequences entrainent ces manipulations? On ne peut pas encore les discerner completement, car il y a trop peu de temps que ces mecanismes sont en marche pour qu'on en voie les consequences veritables. Il est vrai que lorsque ces consequences auront paru, nous ne les reconnaitrons pas non plus parce que nous serons tellement absorbes, tellement indifferencies, tellement manipules que nous ne pourrons plus objectiver cette connaissance et que nous n'aurons plus aucune idee de ce que pouvait etre l'homme, avant ».[39] Cinquante ans plus tard, cette question reste centrale: comment prendre des distances avec ce monde, comment l'objectiver?

---

[39] Jacques Ellul, *La Technique ou l'enjeu du siecle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1954), p. 333; 2[e] ed.

Depuis quelques annees a peine, un mouvement de penseurs et militants (en France, notamment: Serge Latouche et l'association des amis de Francois Partant) prone la « decroissance conviviale ». Il trouve un echo grandissant, surtout chez les altermondialistes. Il s'inscrit dans la droite ligne de la pensee d'Ellul: dix ans apres sa mort, celui-ci est plus actuel que jamais, et je suis persuade que la lecture de son oeuvre est indispensable pour nourrir non seulement une nouvelle pensee critique, mais deboucher sur de nouveaux comportements individuels ainsi que sur des actions collectives.

A Look at Ellul the Biblical Scholar

by Olivier Pigeaud

Presentations of Jacques Ellul's work begin with Ellul the historian of institutions and Ellul the sociologist, and only then mention Ellul the theologian. In that connection, one usually refers, and rightly so, to *The Ethics of Freedom*[40], but less often do we hear of Ellul's books of biblical exegesis. Many know that Ellul preached, but his leadership of Bible study groups, even during the last years of his life, is not often mentioned. I am not a professor of theology, but rather a pastor working locally with Bible study groups. Perhaps this activity I have in common with Ellul entitles me to put forward a modest interpretation and description of some of Ellul's biblical writings.

Ellul published a number of biblical studies, including *La Genese aujourd'hui*[41], *Ce Dieu injuste,* a study of Romans 9 to 11[42], *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation*[43], and *Conference sur l'Apocalypse de Jean.*[44] But we will concentrate on two of his books: *The Judgment of Jonah*[45], and *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes.*[46] Jonah is Ellul's first book of biblical interpretation, and Ecclesiastes is his last one. He wrote in his "Preliminary, Polemical, Nondefinitive Postscript" that this commentary on Ecclesiastes forms an "adequate conclusion" (p. 3) to his work: not just to his theological writings, but to his work overall.

Style in Ellul's Commentaries

We will begin by looking at some formal aspects of Ellul's style in his biblical studies. The reader is immediately struck by Ellul's frequent use of the first person singular, but he does this in many of his books. More notable is his way of involving the reader.

(Paris: Economica, 1990), p. 334.

[40] Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976; Fr. ed. 2 vols [1973, 1974] .

[41] With Francois Tosquelles (Ligne, France: AREFPPI [1987]).

[42] (Paris: Arlea, 1991).

[43] Trans. George W. Schreiner (New York: Seabury, 1977; Fr. ed. 1975).

[44] ([Nantes, France: AREFPPI, 1985]).

[45] Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971; Fr. ed. [1952]).

[46] Trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990; Fr. ed. 1987).

Instead of writing about humanity in general, or about believers and unbelievers, he says "we." In this way he places himself alongside his readers, showing that he speaks as much to himself as to them. This is especially true in the two commentaries we have singled out. Even when we omit such turns of phrase as "we note that, in the biblical text...," or "we conclude that...," *Jonah* contains a good thirty passages, some of them long, of the "we" type, and Ecclesiastes has about forty.

Here are two examples: in the commentary on Jonah, in Ellul's treatment of Matthew 12:39-41, we read: "after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we know why this word was spoken and we take it more seriously by referring it to the sole miracle, Jesus Christ living eternally for us" (p. 67). Pages 160 and 161 of *Reason for Being* offer us some sentences with "we," some with "I," and others with "you": "Since we do not know what tomorrow will bring, how could we know beyond any doubt what is good today? . . . As far as the situation I am acquainted with today goes, I can play my role and make an excellent decision, but when everything has changed tomorrow, my actions may prove catastrophic

You claim you can tell a person what is good for him by means of morality? What an illusion . . . We cannot tell what is good."

This kind of language clearly contrasts sharply with the style of most biblical commentaries, except perhaps those of Alphonse Maillot, a theologian whom Ellul knew well and appreciated very much. In his commentaries, Maillot the preacher often comes through as much as Maillot the commentator. I do not consider this aspect of Ellul's style as an attempt to make his writing more lively or to grab the attention of the reader. Instead, he gives priority to challenging the reader, rather than constructing a dogmatic system.

We must not conclude that Ellul lacks acquaintance with the "scientific" commentators, or that he looks down on them. On the contrary, he quotes them, basing his argument on them or distinguishing his views from theirs. He is more galvanizer than systematician. Underlying this is his view that faith cannot be systematically expressed. The reader reminds me of Ellul's admiration for Karl Barth, systematic theologian par excellence? I respond that Barth's initial dialectical thought is profoundly opposed to the construction of a closed theological system!

Perhaps you think that involving the reader is nothing new when we consider present-day leadership styles for biblical groups, where leaders make skillful use of the principles of group dynamics, and place importance on "existential" matters. But this was not really the situation in 1952. And in any case, let me repeat that Ellul's writing style was not a technique for manipulating people, but rather a seamless part of his profound understanding of the biblical message.

Content in Ellul's Commentaries

Now let's examine some aspects of the content in Ellul's commentaries. We can certainly see in these works some of his strongest theological and sociological views, as

expressed, for example, in his summary work, *What I Believe*.[47] If we know the biblical book of Jonah, we will not feel surprised to find passages in Ellul's commentary (see p. 32, for example) in which he put forward the doctrine of universal salvation, which he felt strongly about. Although Ecclesiastes does not often treat the question of salvation explicitly, it is a universalist text. Ellul addresses the words of Georges Bernanos to everyone when he places them at the beginning of his study (after the preliminary postscript): "In order to be prepared to hope in what does not deceive, we must first lose hope in everything that deceives" (p. 47).

God's policy of non-intervention, his voluntary choice of non-power (not to be confused with imposed powerlessness), is another of Ellul's strong convictions. The whole end of the book of Jonah gives Ellul an opportunity to express this concept (see pp. 79, 93-98). In the case of Ecclesiastes, the entire text conveys the believer's confusion in the face of God's apparent failure to intervene.

We should note that in his commentaries Ellul does not use the major theological terms we have just cited. Nor does he make use of other words he holds dear, such as "transcendence" and "dialectic." He means to suggest possible directions for thought and faith, rather than to promote previously packaged theological positions.

Now that we have examined some of Ellul's theological points in these commentaries, we will consider his sociological positions. His criticism of Technique, more precisely his critique of the technological system, does indeed come through often in his biblical commentaries. As early as 1952, when Ellul's commentary on Jonah saw publication in French, he warns us against "all our organizations and techniques and works" (p. 65). In his commentary on Ecclesiastes, Ellul often develops these themes (see pp. 104, 145, 153-154, 225). In one especially relevant passage, he writes: "Technique . . . has, like money, become *the mediator of everything*, whereas in itself, it is nothing. In an earlier time, the allurement of money dominated people. Today the allurement of technique plays this role" (p. 92). We can see clearly that what Ellul rejects in Technique is its all-encompassing aspect. The technological system is an absolute system, utterly closed.

His rejection of systems extends to any "system of history" (*Apocalypse*, pp. 150-151), or of justice (*What I Believe*, p. 130). One of the things he likes about the author of Ecclesiastes is that he has no philosophical system (*Reason for Being*, p. 126). All systems tend to live for and by themselves, with no purpose or external controls. Because of this they lead directly to totalitarianism in philosophical and religious thought, and to political totalitarianism.

Conclusion

Clearly the same point of view determines both the form and the content of Ellul's biblical commentaries, and this point of view is consistent throughout his work: a

---

[47] Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989; Fr. ed. 1987).

continuous struggle against all forms of absolutism that would put human work and organizations in the place reserved for God alone. This final quotation from *Reason for Being* says it best: "I must not make use of the Bible for my own ends, but rather take myself out of the picture as much as possible, in order to listen and learn. This way I may hear a word that has never entered into the human heart and that will catch me unawares" (p. 127).

Regard sur Ellul bibliste

Olivier Pigeaud

Quand on presente Jacques Ellul, on commence par I'historien des institutions, l'analyste de la socictc.. ,et on ne parle qu'ensuite du theologien. On cite alors en general, a juste titre, *Ethique de la liberte*[48] mais moins ses auvres d'exegese des textes bibliques.

On sait en general qu'il a ete predicateur, on dit moins qu'il a ete animateur de groupes bibliques et ce jusque dans les dernieres annees de sa vie. C'est ce qui autorise peut-etre quelqu'un qui n'est pas theologien universitaire, mais animateur biblique de terrain, a proposer une modeste relecture de quelques ecrits d'Ellul bibliste pour en degager quelques caracteristiques.

Sans oublier *La Genese aujourdhui*[49], *Ce Dieu injuste*[50], consacre a Romains 9 a 11, *L'Apocalypse: Architecture en mouvement*[51], et *Conference sur l'Apocalypse de Jean*[52], nous nous concentrerons sur *Le livre de Jonas*[53], Cahier Biblique de Foi et Vie de 1952, et sur *La raison d'etre: Meditation sur lEcclesiaste*[54], de 1987.

Jonas est le premier ouvrage ellulien de lecture biblique et l'Ecclesiaste est le dernier. Il y ecrit, dans le post-scriptum liminaire (p. 9), que ce commentaire est une « conclusion adequate » a son auvre non seulement theologique, mais aussi au sens le plus large.

Le Style des commentaires.

Commencons par examiner de facon tres formelle le style d'Ellul dans ses ouvrages de bibliste. Ce qui frappe tres vite c'est que Jacques Ellul ecrit souvent a la premiere personne du singulier, mais il le fait souvent dans bien de ses ecrits. Plus remarquable est sa facon d'impliquer le lecteur. Il ne parle pas de l'etre humain en general, du croyant, ou de l'incroyant, il ecrit « nous », se placant d'ailleurs lui-meme du cote des lecteurs, concerne autant qu'eux.

---

[48] 2 tomes (Geneve: Labor et Fides, [1973, 1974]).
[49] Avec Francois Tosquelles (Ligne: AREFPPI [1987]).
[50] (Paris: Arlea, 1991).
[51] ([Paris]: Desclee, 1975).
[52] ([Nantes: AREFPPI, 1985]).
[53] (Paris: Cahiers Bibliques de Foi et Vie, [1952]).
[54] (Paris: Le Seuil, 1987).

C'est particulierement vrai dans les deux commentaires auxquels nous nous attachons. Sans tenir compte des phrases du style « nous constatons que, dans le texte biblique.. », ou « nous concluons que. », le commentaire de Jonas compte une bonne trentaine de passages, parfois longs, ou Ellul ecrit « nous » et il y en a une quarantaine dans le commentaire de l'Ecclesiaste.

Voici deux exemples: dans le commentaire de Jonas nous lisons, page 65,: « apres la resurrection de Jesus-Christ, nous savons en plus pourquoi cette Parole a ete dite et nous pensons plus completement a la prendre au serieux en la depouillant de son caractere prodigieux, pour l'amener a ce seul miracle: Jesus-Christ vivant eternellement pour nous ». La page 155 de *La raison d'etre* nous offre et des phrases en « nous » et d'autres en « je » et en « vous »: « puisque nous ne savons pas ce que sera demain, comment

pourrions-nous savoir sans nous tromper ce qui est bon pour aujourd'hui? » « par rapport a la situation que je connais

aujourd'hui, mon role, ma decision peuvent etre excellents, mais tout ayant change pour demain, cela peut devenir catastrophique. » « Vous pretendez dire par la morale ce

qui est bon pour l'Homme? Quelle illusion. ».. « Nous ne pouvons pas « dire » le bien et le bon. »

Cela tranche bien evidemment par rapport au style de la plupart des commentaires bibliques sauf peut-etre ceux du theologien bien connu et tres apprecie d'Ellul, Alphonse Maillot, qui est souvent autant predicateur que commentateur.

Il ne s'agit pas, bien sur, d'un style « pour faire vivant », pour accrocher le lecteur, mais c'est ainsi que je l'interprete, d'un type de lecture qui vise prioritairement l'interpellation du lecteur et non la construction d'une dogmatique.

Ce n'est pas qu'il ignore, neglige ou meprise les commentateurs « scientifiques », il les cite, s'appuyant sur eux ou s'en demarquant. Mais c'est qu'il est animateur plus que systematicien. Plus profondement encore on peut dire que, pour Ellul, l'expression de la foi ne peut pas etre systematique. On me rappellera l'admiration d'Ellul pour Karl Barth, systematicien par excellence. Je repondrai que la pensee dialectique initiale de Barth est profondement opposee a une construction d'un systeme theologique ferme !

Sans doute pensez-vous qu'impliquer le lecteur n'a rien d'original dans l'animation biblique actuelle, qui maitrise bien les outils de l'animation de groupes et qui par ailleurs a le souci de l' « existentiel », mais ce n'etait sans doute pas le cas en 1952 et de toutes facons. chez Ellul, le style d'ecriture n'est pas, redisons le, un « truc » d'animateur, mais il est coherent avec sa facon profonde d'apprehender le message biblique.

Leur contenu.

Venons-en donc a l'examen de certains aspects du contenu des commentaires d'Ellul, pour constater que s'y trouvent bien quelques elements forts de ses vues theologiques

et societales telles qu'on les retrouve, par exemple, dans son ouvrage synthetique *Ce que je crois*[55], de 1987.

On ne sera pas etonne, connaissant le recit de Jonas, de trouver des passages du commentaire ou Ellul met en avant l'universalisme du salut auquel il tient beaucoup. C'est le cas, par exemple, page 27. Il est peu question explicitement de salut dans le livre de l'Ecclesiaste. C'est pourtant un texte universaliste et Ellul adresse a tous cette phrase de Bernanos qu'il place en frontispice a sa meditation: « Pour etre pret a esperer en ce qui ne trompe pas, il faut d'abord desesperer de tout ce qui trompe » (p. 49).

Autre point fort des convictions ellulienes: le non-interventionnisme de Dieu, sa non-puissance volontaire (a ne pas confondre avec l'impuissance subie). Toute la fin de Jonas donne a Ellul l'occasion de s'exprimer dans ce sens, page 77, puis pages 92 et suivantes. Pour ce qui est de l'Ecclesiaste c'est l'ensemble du texte qui exprime le desarroi du croyant devant une certaine absence d'intervention de Dieu.

Notons que dans ces commentaires Ellul n'emploie pas les grands mots de la theologie que nous venons de citer, pas plus que d'autres qui lui sont chers comme transcendance ou dialectique. Il cherche plus a suggerer des mouvements de pensee et de foi qu'a promouvoir des positions theologiques etiquetees d'avance.

Apres les references theologiques d'Ellul dans ses commentaires venons-en a ses positions societales. Sa critique de la technique et plus precisement du systeme technicien est en effet tres presente dans ses commentaires bibliques.

Deja dans le commentaire de Jonas, page 63, il y a une mise en garde contre « nos organisations, nos techniques, nos œuvres ». Dans le commentaire de l'Ecclesiaste les developpements sur ces sujets sont assez nombreux (pages 103, 140, 148, 215). Un passage particulierement interessant se trouve page 91: « la technique est devenue (comme l'argent) la *mediatrice de tout*, alors qu'en elle-meme elle n'est rien.. .aujourd'hui c'est la seduction de la technique. » On saisit bien que ce qu'Ellul rejette dans la technique, c'est son caractere totalisant. Le systeme technicien est un systeme absolu et ferme.

C'est bien sur a rapprocher du refus ellulien d'un « systeme de l'histoire » (*L'Apocalypse*, p. 157), de sa mefiance de la justice quand elle devient un systeme (*Ce que je crois*, p. 174). Une des choses qu'il aime chez l'auteur de l'Ecclesiaste c'est qu'il n'a pas de systeme philosophique (pages 123-124). Tout systeme tend a vivre par et pour lui-meme, sans finalite et sans controle exterieurs . Cela mene directement au totalitarisme de la pensee philosophique et religieuse, au totalitarisme politique.

Conclusion.

C'est bien la meme veine qui determine et la forme et le fond des ecrits d'Ellul sur les textes bibliques et elle est tres coherente avec l'ensemble de son œuvre: une lutte permanente contre toute forme d'absolutisme qui mettrait l'oeuvre humaine et les organisations mondaines a la place reservee a Dieu seul.

---

[55] (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1987).

Cette derniere citation de *La raison d'etre* (p. 125) le dit au mieux: « et je n'ai pas a utiliser la Bible mais a devenir moi-meme aussi absent que possible pour me mettre a l'ecole, pour ecouter, seulement ecouter une parole qui n'est pas montee au cmur de l'homme et qui me surprendra toujours ».

New Metamorphoses of Bourgeois Society

by Gerard Paul

For all his readers and disciples, Jacques Ellul is the philosopher, or at least the sociologist, of the technological system, rather than of Technique. And long ago, it was agreed that his work comprises a sociological component and a theological component. But Ellul's thought is too rich and has too much unity, and his different books refer to each other too often, for us to go along with this division. Even considered simply as a means of classification, this opposition oversimplifies his work.[56] When we consider the sociological aspect of Ellul's work, we naturally think of *The Technological Society*[57], *The Technological System*[58], or *The Technological Bluff*.[59] A common thread obviously connects them. We can more or less categorize other books by Ellul as belonging to this sociological group: *L'empire du non-sens*[60] and *The Humiliation of the Word*,[61] for instance. And theological inspiration is evidently present in Ellul's ethical studies[62], in *Hope in Time of Abandonment*[63], and in *Reason for Being*.[64] But some titles prove

---

[56] This remains true in spite of the fact that Ellul himself used this distinction, and thus to some degree lent it validity. See interviews in Jacques Ellul, *In Season, Out of Season: An Introduction to the Thought of Jacques Ellul: Based on Interviews by Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange*, trans. Lani K. Niles (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982; Fr. ed. 1981), and *Jacques Ellul on Religion, Technology, and Politics: Conversations with Patrick Troude-Chastenet*, trans. Joan Mendes France (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998; Fr. ed. 1994). The sociology/theology division has become a kind of commonplace in the understanding of Ellul's thought.

[57] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964; Fr. eds. 1954, 1990).

[58] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980; Fr. ed. 1977).

[59] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990; Fr. ed. 1988).

[60] Jacques Ellul, *L'empire du non-sens: L'art et la societe technicienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980).

[61] Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985; Fr. ed. 1981).

[62] Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976; Fr. ed. in two vols., [1973, 1974]). Jacques Ellul, *Les combats de la liberte* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, and Paris: Le Centurion, 1984). Jacques Ellul, *To Will and To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969; Fr. ed. 1964).

[63] Jacques Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1973; Fr. ed. 1972).

[64] Jacques Ellul, *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand

more difficult to classify, such as *Money and Power*.[65] This is even more true of *The Meaning of the City*[66], a book in a class by itself. This study resulted from thorough biblical exegesis, and refers implicitly to the earliest manifestations of Technique and human activity with a demiurgic aim.

We have paid too little attenttention, I believe, to Ellul as historian. History was his inclination and his choice, for both his education and his professional life. He was a historian of law–of human, social questions, and his five-volume *Histoire des institutions*[67] served as a basic textbook for many generations of French law students. In an interview with Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange, when Ellul recalls which books affected him most, and had a formative influence on him, in a sense, between the age of eighteen and twenty, he cites the Bible and Karl Marx's *Capital* (*In Season*, pp. 1115). We cannot possibly put these two books on the same plane, but for Ellul, they remained strongly tied together. He saw them as connected simply because of their historical inspiration. In his course on Marxist thought which he taught for thirty years in the Institute for Political Studies (at the University of Bordeaux), Ellul made it clear that Marx referred to Revelation because he wrote a book of history: "history as we find it in the Bible: history filled with meaning."[68]

Along with Ellul's books on Technique and those connected with theology or spirituality, we find a third series of works that seem off to one side, or perhaps between his two main areas of concern. It does not really matter very much what word we use to group together these books that do not quite fit with either of Ellul's other areas of concern but have some connection with both of them. Among his less well-known works, we find one that sheds a particularly clear light on his ideas, because it deals with the profound nature of the ideology that lies at the root of the technological society: bourgeois ideology. Ellul's *Metamorphose du bourgeois*,[69] a reflection on the origins of Technique, also enables Ellul to analyse, understand, lay out, and foresee the evolution of the ideologies resulting from Technique.

In his lectures at the Institute for Political Studies in Bordeaux, when Ellul spoke of the central place given by Marx to economics, he rarely failed to point out that in our

---

Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990; Fr. ed. 1987).

[65] Jacques Ellul, *Money and Power*, trans. LaVonne Neff (Downers Grove IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984; Fr. ed. 1954).

[66] Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, trans. Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970; Fr. ed. 1975).

[67] Jacques Ellul, *Histoire des institutions*, 5 vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955-1999; many eds.).

[68] Jacques Ellul, *Jesus and Marx: From Gospel to Ideology*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988; Fr. ed. 1979), p. 9.

[69] Jacques Ellul, *Metamorphose du bourgeois* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1967), has been little referred to, and probably rarely read or re-read by "Ellulians." It has not been translated into English (an observation that English-speaking readers of this article may take as a friendly hint!), but came out in a second French edition in 1998, in the "Petite Vermillon" collection (Paris: La Table Ronde). We find this comment among the remarks on the back cover: "Indispensable for understanding where we are,

day "it is perhaps no longer economics we should consider determinative"[70] It is quite clear that in Ellul's thinking, for the second half of the twentieth century, Technique constitutes the main factor—or, more precisely, the main fact. By saying this, he does not invalidate Marx's insight; he simply believes that the evolution of Technique and the way it has become a global system make it for now the central social fact. For Ellul, Technique is not limited to machines, or even to the increasingly close-knit combination of technical means of transportation and transformation or manufacture of objects. What makes the modern world a "technological system" is its characteristic global organization, which has an all-encompassing , or even a "totalitarian" quality. It includes and makes use of all the supplementary, non-material techniques, from the most ancient and relatively simple (such as law or accounting) to the most recent and complex (insurance, economic calculation, data processing, or advertising, which has for many years made use of the techniques of propaganda, and in the future will perhaps rely on techniques of molecular biology). Ellul is perfectly clear on this point when he writes: "What Toynbee calls *organization* and Burnham calls *managerial action*, is technique applied to social, economic, or administrative life" (*The Technological Society*, p. 11).

In his works with with a "historical" dimension, and in particular in the earliest of these, *Metamorphose du bourgeois* (1967), Ellul extends his sociological analysis much farther than what he had outlined in *The Technological Society* (1st Fr. ed. 1954). More precisely, he places the technical phenomenon and the systematization of Technique in their historical perspective, thus enriching his earlier thought by adding the basis of its true originality. In this process, Ellul offers us a coherent explanation of cultural, ideological, and philosophical transformations, and deduces from this pattern the developments most likely to occur in the future—or certain to occur. When we draw together the personal reflections that Ellul offered students in his course on Marxist thought, his pages on bourgeois society in *The Technological Society* (pp. 218-227), and finally, the entirety of *Metamorphose du bourgeois*, we discover a global analysis that resembles a philosophy of history. Although the confines of this article will limit my observations to a somewhat sketchy overview, I will try to show here (1) on the one hand, that Ellul's philosophy of history follows a continuum that extends from Marx to the Situationists, and

(2) on the other hand, that the recent and humanly foreseeable evolution of our societies follows the direction that Ellul endeavored to describe and decipher between 1954 and 1994.

From the outset, we must try to eliminate two possible sources of misunderstanding. First, I will make no attempt to reveal Ellul as a crypto-Marxist, since he was sufficiently clear on this point to remove any possible ambiguity. He never hid or denied

---

and where we are going."

[70] Jacques Ellul, *La pensee marxiste: Cours professe a lInstitut d'etudespolitiques de Bordeaux de 1947 a 1979*, ed. Michel Hourcade, Jean-Pierre Jezequel, and Gerard Paul (Paris: La Table Ronde, 2003), p. 104.

what he owed to his reading of Marx, no more than he hid or denied what separated him radically from Marx. He made it clear to his students that a person could not be both a Christian and a Marxist. Ellul's thought has stirred up controversy and differing interpretations in the past, and will surely continue to do so in the future, but at least one point cannot become a matter of debate: the depth of his faith. On the other hand, I will not claim that the writers mentioned below were influenced by Ellul's writings, making them into something like "Ellulians without knowing it." Some of them may have little or erroneous knowledge of Ellul's thought, and others no doubt disagree with him. Quite simply, the historical, economic, or social analyses they put forward serve to strengthen conclusions that Ellul, in another time, drew from his own observations. One final preliminary remark: when I refer to Ellul's thought, or compare his thought with that of other writers, I have ignored chronological considerations or possible mutual influence. My purpose is not to offer an exegesis of Ellul's sources, but simply to show the diversity of such sources, and the very useful character of his analyses for the present day.

Metamorphose du bourgeois was published in 1967, the same year as Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*[71] and Raoul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life*.[72] This is no accident: Ellul was interested in the thought of the Situationists, with whom he had some contact around the middle of the 1960's.[73] For, contrary to a common view, although Ellul was certainly a rather isolated man, clearly we cannot call him a "solitary thinker." Whatever subject he wrote on, Ellul read everything that mattered. Sometimes he criticized what he read, and often he maintained a certain distance from it, but he also approved, quoted, used, developed, and confirmed the thought of a large number of French and international thinkers from every imaginable outlook, who represented the most widely diverse disciplines and schools of thought.

We cannot begin to understand Ellul's interest in the Situationists' thinking unless we go back to the body of thought he had in common with them. Within Marxist thought, Ellul reserved a prominent and privileged place for the fundamental economic and social analysis of Marx, and also for what has weathered the forces of events and politics. In the course he gave for thirty years in Bordeaux, he paid special attention to Marx's presentation on commodities (the first chapter of *Capital*), alienation, and work.[74] And in Ellul's books, these topics constitute the main areas of borrowing from and references to Marxism (but this applies only to his positive references to Marx,

---

[71] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1994; Fr. ed. 1967).

[72] Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Seattle: Left Bank Books, 1983; Fr. ed. 1967).

[73] We have very little information about these contacts, their nature, how long they lasted, and their extent. With whom did Ellul have contact? Did he meet with someone, or exchange letters? The only explanation we have about why contact was broken off is that there was an insurmountable disagreement over the issue of faith. That is not really surprising.

[74] In July 1980, Ellul wrote two articles, an introduction and a conclusion, for a theme issue on work of *Foi et Vie*, a journal of which he was editor at that time. The introductory article analyzes

since Ellul did not hesitate to criticize other aspects of Marxist philosophy, or the followers and misinterpretations of Marx).

To summarize very briefly the intellectual approach of the Situationists, essentially by means of the thought of Debord, we must begin by referring to the very first sentence of Marx's *Capital*: "The wealth of societies in which the *capitalist mode of production* prevails appears as an 'immense collection of *commodities*.'"[75] Here is the first sentence of Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*: "The whole life of those societies in which *modern conditions of production* prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*" (p. 12; emphasis added). The meaning and implications of the differences between these two sentences are obvious: Debord's phrase, "all of life," underscores the extent of the economy's hold over all of society. Likewise, whereas Marx analyzed "the capitalist mode of production," Debord sees, quite correctly, "modern conditions of production." It is true that when Debord wrote, any sufficiently clear-eyed, objective observer could see that the so-called socialist economies amounted in reality to state capitalism. Debord's "modern conditions of production" are fundamentally just one more manifestation of Ellul's Technique.

But Debord's first thesis leads to a second statement, just as important: "All that once was directly lived has become mere representation" (p. 12). In other words, the economy has subjected to its laws the totality of social life, and, in the last analysis, the life of each person individually. The concept of spectacle in Debord has little to do with the increasing influence of the media, which involves only one manifestation of his principle, among others—perhaps its most "spectacular" manifestation, but surely not the most fundamental. The spectacle, "whose very *manner of being concrete* is, precisely, abstraction" (p. 22), is also the supreme stage of alienation. In one of the best and clearest introductions to Debord available, the Italian Anselm Jappe writes: "Debord's analysis is based on the everyday experience of the impoverishment of life, its fragmentation into more and more widely separated spheres, and the disappearance of any unitary aspect from society. The spectacle consists in the reunification of separate aspects at the level of the *image*."[76] In a later section, Debord writes: "Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle" (p. 20).

Ellul does not make use of this concept of spectacle. Instead, he bases his thought on the historical process of the individual's alienation, stemming from the loss of control over the product of one's work. The end result is the loss of control over one's work itself, extending to the loss of mastery over one's whole being. Ellul follows this line of thought when he writes in *Metamorphose*:

---

the historical evolution of work, its place in traditional societies up to the present time. The conclusion analyzes the value of human activity from an eschatological perspective. These two articles make it clear that for Ellul, there was no radical incompatibility between objective sociological analysis (which we could call a purely materialist analysis) and considerations of faith.

[75] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique ofPolitical Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 125. Emphasis added.

[76] Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Berkeley: University of California

"The individual is progressively eliminated as subject (that is, as a person able to decide, autonomous and unique) by technological growth. This growth imposes lifestyles, behaviors, and rules that are calculated, systematized, and increasingly rigid, on the individual, who is subjected to progressive 'reification,' as objects invade his life. He lives in a universe that teems with more and more artificial objects, and he must live, and place himself, in relation to that universe. He himself is treated as an object, whenever the need for organization, production, or consuming requires it. This leads to humanity's notorious reification, much more so than does our feeling dispossessed from the product of our work. A hundred years ago, the Marxist theory of commodities that served to explain such reification held true. But now, that explanation amounts to a mere detail: in our day, reification extends to every sector of human activity and life. It affects our family life as well as our leisure and our culture. Reification does not result from a given economic structure, but from the growth of the technical environment. And this reification brings with it a corollary: the progressive elimination of human beings by human beings" (p. 237 [1967]; pp. 273-274 [1998]).

In fact, Ellul and Debord carry out utterly parallel analyses. We could multiply criss-crossing quotations, always keeping in mind, however, that Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* and Ellul's *Metamorphose du bourgeois* were written concurrently, and therefore did not influence each other. Neither does Ellul turn his *Metamorphose* into an instrument for criticizing Debord's propositions. But let's examine the fundamental differences between the two writers, showing what makes Ellul original, and, from my point of view, how his analysis goes farther than the ideas of the Situationists. For Ellul, the idea of Technique's development as the central social phenomenon of modern society is an issue that has been settled once and for all. So he is in a sense more of a materialist than Debord, who places spectacle, a single element, at the center of his social analysis. Debord is quite objective in this, but it remains true that spectacle belongs to the order of the "superstructure," to use a Marxist term. Jappe writes: "It will be evident by this time that the spectacle is the heir of religion" (p. 8). However, Jappe refuses to see the invasion, or rather the transformation of social life into a spectacle, into a representation of a virtual society, as "a fatality [or] the inevitable result of technological development" (p. 8). For the Situationists, the remote origin of the spectacle, which separates us from the real world and gives us only a "representation" to see, lies in the earliest institutionalized separation: that of Power. The crux of the problem thus becomes identifying "Power" for our day. For, unless we give up on the transformation of society (and such transformation constitutes precisely the Situationists' goal), the issue of Power remains central. This is true, whatever the processes of transformation may be (it is true even if the aim becomes to abolish or annihilate Power, rather than to take it up, which has up to now always been the objective of every revolutionary). On this point, the Situationists' thought seems very weak to me: they see Power sometimes as personified in a some mythical bourgeoisie,

sometimes as identified with a "social practice" that is both anonymous and collective, but rarely as something readily identifiable that would enable us to imagine the forms that any efficient action might take.

Contrary to all this, Ellul's thought enables us to go farther in understanding the mechanisms by which modernday society functions: he calls this the "technological system." According to him, it is the bourgeoisie that developed the ideology of "doing," and this ideology made possible, justified, sustained, and supported the development of technique. Of course, and Ellul was perfectly clear on this point as well, the ideology of "doing" is not the result of the thinking of several groups of intellectuals whom we could locate precisely in time and space. Ellul's "bourgeois" is both the Renaissance merchant and the nineteenth-century industrialist, and no doubt also the eighteenth-century philosopher and the member of the 1789 Convention, perhaps also Pascal and Descartes. And Racine. And the Pilgrim Fathers. Furthermore, this uncertainty concerning the origins of the bourgeoisie, along with its diversity, is probably what gave such power to the ideology of doing and gave the bourgeoisie its capacity to assimilate everything that could enable it to survive. Ellul's whole idea in *Metamorphose* is to show how bourgeois "doing," at the beginning, enabled the bourgeois to capture the reality of Power: economic power at first, then political power, and finally intellectual power. Intellectual rather than artistic power: during the industrial era, hard science is bourgeois, as is the political economy, as Marx clearly pointed out. The only opposition to the ideological bourgeois order comes from the world of art, the novel, painting, poetry, the theater, and philosophy. But, as Ellul demonstrates, the bourgeois ideology of "doing" includes precisely the unlimited ability to take over and absorb everything that at first would seem to be most opposed to it.

So with the passage of time, bourgeois "doing" leaves its mark on the whole of society. Ellul never wrote that all men became bourgeois—on the contrary. But he did maintain in everything he wrote after 1967 the idea that the technological system is essentially bourgeois by nature, and, in a sense, bourgeois "by birth." It is, after all, a system within which individuals, even titans of the economic or political world, have absolutely no power to significantly change its course.

This is because, for its part, the development of Technique moulds society in such a way that it eliminates all leeway for movement, all free spaces. We can credit the Situationists with having proposed the concept of spectacle to describe a society that is both a world of abstraction (in its intellectual, scientific, and technical foundations) and a world of appearances (in the kind of life it proposes). It is an intrinsically "false" world, in which "the detachment of the commodity from any genuine human need has succeeded, with the advent of patently useless objects, in attaining a quasi-religious level."[77] In fact, bourgeois "doing," which was originally the expression of an individual

---

[77] Jappe, p. 10. Debord suggested collections of key rings used for advertising purposes as an example of commodity fetishism. On a symbolic level, he was entirely right. Unfortunately, the problem is less superficial, as the amazing changes in consumer behavior since 1967 amply demonstrate.

will, and then of a democratic will to live together, seems to have mutated now into an autonomous "doing" in a world which has not only lost but abandoned control over its future. We can find multiplied instances of this downward spiral, the most basic doubtless being those that affect humanity itself. For this reason, we will develop three basic aspects of it: the disappearance of values, the alteration in our relationship with time, and questions concerning our biological being .

Of course, one could object that no value (in the sense of a moral category, whether positive or negative) has actually "disappeared": Good, Evil (we have proof in the existence of an "Axis of Evil," which implicitly supposes that we should oppose it with an "Empire of Good"), solidarity, compassion , and so on. Do we need to go on? The issue does not lie in these, but rather in the stated or proclaimed reasons for action: values in the general sense of motives. To be more specific, or even trivial about it, what are, in their own eyes, the justifications for action of modern entrepreneurs and current leaders of great nations? We must not idealise the past; most certainly, concupiscence, cupidity, and sublimation of the sexual urge were not absent from the actions of our ancestors. However, these probably remained secondary to (and no doubt often had less intensity than) loftier ambitions. But in reality, we cannot help noting the absence, or at least the near absence, of transcendent objectives. No, when I use the word "transcendent," I do not mean to refer to the Other or the Beyond. I simply suggest a kind of motivation that would rise above the action in itself. In the not so distant past, and, ironically, in precisely decreasing order of transcendence, we had, in succession, Salvation, then the ideology of Happiness, then material well-being (with it being generally understood that this was the condition and guarantee of moral progress and spiritual improvement for the future).

We have changed all that, moving wthin a few centuries from the quest of Salvation to "shareholder value," from Pascal's wager to the most senseless technological wagers. In a world of competition, there is no other meaning than mere survival; the proof comes when one merely listens to the prevailing talk about decisions in the business world: "We have no choice," "Forge ahead or die out." Such language may seem acceptable and justifiable in the case of a company that, however large it may be, represents only a minuscule percentage of human society. But the same kind of language seems destined to inspire whole nations in the future. In this way "doing" is purged of any end outside of itself, and motivation (I no longer dare to use the term "value" in this context) is limited to the pursuit of survival, or of individual or collective security. However surprising it may seem when we consider the variety and the efficiency of all sorts of tools offered by Technique, the technological society no longer seems to offer to itself the possibility of changing the world. On the contrary, it imposes adaptation on a permanent basis. An extreme lack of meaning has been attained when we can read in *Le Monde* (30 September 2003) that "change becomes a value" (although we do not know if the author is recognizing the state of things or setting out a rule to follow). When will we understand that competition can have only two meanings, in the area of human relations: that of a game in which the stake is pure intellectual satisfaction,

or that of the survival of the fittest and the corresponding elimination of the weakest? The second alternative is the one our distant ancestors confronted over a period of several millennia.

Of course, we would be insulting managers and other organizational consultants if we implied that they are not aware of the emptiness of the "values" put forward. This is especially true in cases where change is necessary because of the effects of inadequate strategy, and cannot be assumed to improve things except in comparison with the worst possible outcome: the loss of one's job. But even without going into such dire possibilities, the fragmentation of activity (including that of the tertiary sector and executives) has led some to conceive of ways of organizing work that are supposed to value and develop individual qualities, autonomy, and the spirit of initiative. "The new spirit of capitalism"[78] thus takes mainly the form of "management by project," which indeed seems perfectly suited to the fragmentation of skills and knowledge. But it is doubtful that this approach can long continue to delude people within the framework of a kind of business organization that has remained hierarchical and pyramid-shaped almost everywhere.

Secondly, with respect to a different matter, the evolution of the technological society has profoundly modified our relationship with time. This is true both at the level of the individual within a social organization (whether within or outside of the workplace, although sometimes the dividing line between the two seems very blurred), and with respect to the whole of society. Over the last twenty years, we have seen many books devoted to our relationship with time.[79] In *The Technological Society*, Ellul mentions Enrico Castelli's *Le temps harcelant*, in which the author "shows how the man of the technical world lives without past or future and how the loss of the sense of duration deprives law and language of their meaning.... Technique, as a result of the perfection of means which it has placed at the disposal of modern man, has effectively suppressed the respite of time *indispensable to the rhythm of life*."[80] All the uneasiness of modern people in their relationship with time is described in these words from more than fifty years ago (an eternity within the context of the increasingly fast passage of time as we live it now)! Fifty-six years later, Nicole Aubert merely updates the analyses of Castelli, whom she does not mention (the reader should not take this remark as a criticism, but simply as an observation that there is such an abundance of literature on this subject that books written in the midtwentieth century are no longer considered essential references; the overwhelming majority of the more than two hundred books and articles mentioned by Aubert were published after 1990).

This uneasiness with respect to time would seem initially to affect only the individual, or at most the organizations that work in the field of economics, where the

---

[78] Title of a book by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).

[79] One of the most recent, for example, is Nicole Aubert, *Le culte de l'urgence: La societe malade du temps* (Paris: Flammarion, 2003).

[80] *The Technological Society*, pp. 329-330, n.1. See Enrico Castelli, *Il tempo esaurito* (Rome: Bussola, 1947). Emphasis added.

cult of urgency naturally reigns. But this time-related malaise really affects society as a whole much more profoundly in the way society situates itself in the present with respect to its past and its future. In his very recent book, Francois Hartog analyzes what he calls "historical regimes": how societies experience different ways of being in time, the various forms of circumscribing and "connecting the past, the present, and the future."[81] After an era in which the past was seen as a fixed model to be endlessly repeated, thinking evolved during the period of the philosophy of Enlightenment and the French Revolution, toward a concept in which the future was identified with the promise of continuous, guaranteed progress. Hartog notes that our current collective conception of time amounts to historicizing the present. We see the present as something self-sufficient, massive, invasive, omnipresent, "a perpetual, elusive, and almost motionless present that seeks in spite of everything to produce for itself its own historical time" (p. 28). "The present has become the horizon. With no future and no past, it generates, from one day to the next, the past and future that it needs, day after day, and it bestows value on immediacy" (p. 126). We can see signs of this concept in the way we hide death, and, at the same time, in the permanent presence of memory, in the desire to preserve our heritage and to celebrate, and in our tendency toward repentance and pardon across the centuries. All of these offer opportunities to write a new history, better adapted to the needs of the moment. The reader must pardon me for what may sound like a bad joke, but how could a person fail to feel ill at ease, when he lives in a present that is poorly connected to the past and the future, and at the same time he is obliged to adapt very quickly to non-stop technological changes?

We have seen how the modern individual is left without landmarks because he has no values by means of which he might find meaning in his actions. He is also dispossessed of the world around him, by means of the organization of spectacle, which is the height of alienation. In addition, he is deprived of temporal reference points, which he might have received from an understood and accepted past and a future that he might have had reasonable hope (although no certainty) of controling. Finally, he is questioned in his biological being.

The theme of the elimination of the person by Technique is very present in Ellul's writings. He emphasizes this idea in his commentary on Marxist political economy, noting that the absence of the human factor in the thought of bourgeois economists does not stem merely from a desire for ease of explanation. It also represents quite accurately the economic reality of their time. This is much more true two centuries later. But we have not yet arrived at this point in analyzing the consequences of Technique's development. In 1967, in *Metamorphose du bourgeois,* Ellul refers to the ethnologist Andre Leroi-Gourhan: "Since the beginning, man has followed his distinctive genius by creating technical objects: he gives himself the means of dominating a hostile world, but at the same time, the entire development of the technical process consists of an

---

[81] FranQois Hartog, *Des regimes d'historicite: Presentisme et experiences du temps* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2003), p. 27.

elimination of man through his own techniques."[82] We find this idea again, developed and amplified, in Ellul's later works: *Autopsy of Revolution,*[83] *The Technological System*, and *The Technological Bluff.*

The continuous development of ancient or new techniques now touches us very directly in our very being. It is not a matter of eliminating human beings (since engineers, fighter pilots, and even more so, consumers, are still necessary) , but rather of improving our "performance," through the contribution of techniques. The improvement of sports performance through the use of pharmaceuticals is certainly nothing new. We will just note here the utter absurdity of the widespread use of such substances, strictly from the point of view of sports achievement. But, of course, economic and financial considerations are at stake. So . . . Similarly, the availability of calculators, simulators, etc., is nothing new: the difference between the Chinese abacus and a Cray 2 computer lies in the fact that the person who used an abacus increased his power, whereas the engineer has lost part of his.

But the recent tendencies we wish to emphasize have little to do with the questionable practices of certain athletes or the production of more and more powerful means of computation. Technique calls us into question biologically in two ways: on the one hand, the evolution of certain tools shows human capacity to be obviously inadequate. For example, piloting some military airplanes can no longer be done simply by relying on the "normal functioning" of human beings, on the speed of our brains' responses and the quality of our reflexes. The time is coming when it will become necessary either to bypass human pilots (we see this tendency in the parallel development of cruise missiles and drones), or to increase the speed of the circulation of information between human beings and tools— in a sense, to improve the quality and reliability of the

"connections" between the two. On the other hand, developments in the neurosciences enable us to envisage the appearance of a new Technique, neuromarketing, based on a better understanding of the human brain, and therefore of its receptivity to certain forms of advertising. This example symbolizes the functioning of the technological system, or of what some call "technoscience." Scienticists describe a chemical, biological, or other type of law. Immediately, practical applications are searched for (in the case of neuroscience, these might be a treatment for Alzheimer's disease, an improvement in language learning, etc., although we are not aware of such applications). But above all one must quickly find profitable applications, and this brings us to neuromarketing.

On this last note, we will attempt to arrive at a tentative conclusion in the form of a question. There is no questioning the issue of efficiency or profitability in the development of new techniques of neuromarketing, which we must now consider as almost a given. We should note that, since efficiency is measured primarily in terms

---

[82] *Metamorphose*, p. 237 [1967] ; p. 274 [1998] . See Andre Leroi-Gourhan, *Le geste et la parole* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1965).

[83] Jacques Ellul, *Autopsy of Revolution*, trans. Patricia Wolf (New York: Knopf, 1971; Fr. ed. 1969).

of profitability, the only issue that might call neuromarketing into question would be inadequate profitability. Does anyone question the ethical dimension of the issue? Yes, certainly: Olivier Oullier, a researcher in neuroscience at the Center for Complex Systems and Brain Sciences at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, poses the question of the legitimacy of using neuromarketing, conjuring up the specter of George Orwell. He then suggests that legislators decide the issue.[84] But in reality, the problem is already resolved, and in any case, it is a false problem: the techniques of neuromarketing are only an improvement, achieved through progress in scientific knowledge, of earlier traditional and practical techniques of advertising and propaganda. Since this is so, how could anyone show objectively that any great harm would be involved? In fact, there is only one question that has not been asked, and that will not be asked: what is the real usefulness of neuromarketing? But in order even to have the desire to ask this question, it would be necessary for society to have previously established its utimate ends: the only ones that could serve to establish a standard for measuring indisputable social usefulness.

Advert: Make Payments to IJES Electronically?

Nouvelles metamorphoses de la societe bourgeoise

Gerard Paul

Pour tous ses lecteurs ou disciples, Jacques Ellul est le philosophe, ou a tout le moins le sociologue, non pas tant de la technique que du systeme technicien. Et il est depuis longtemps admis que son auvre comporte un versant "sociologique" et un versant "theologique".

Or la pensee d'Ellul est trop riche, comporte trop de coherence et les differents livres trop de renvois les uns aux autres pour qu'on puisse se satisfaire de cette opposition ou meme seulement classification quelque peu simplificatrice[85].

---

[84] Olivier Oullier, "Le 'neuromarketing' est-il l'avenir de la publicite?" (*Le Monde*, 24 October 2003).

[85] Bien qu'elle ait ete utilisee et par la-meme, dans une certaine mesure validee par Ellul, par exemple dans les entretiens avec Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange ou Patrick Chastenet jusqu'a devenir en quelque sorte un lieu commun de la comprehension de la pensee ellulienne. Jacques Ellul, *A temps et a contretemps: Entretiens avec Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1981); Patrick Chastenet, *Entretiens avec Jacques Ellul* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1994).

Lorsqu'on evoque le "volet" sociologique de l'œuvre, on pense spontanement a *l'enjeu du siecle*, au *systeme* ou au *bluff*. Incontestablement, un fil court de *La technique ou l'enjeu du siecle* (1954)[86] au *Bluff technologique* (1988)[87] en passant par *Le systeme technicien* (1977)[88]. D'autres titres peuvent etre plus ou moins rattaches au "versant sociologique", *L'empire du non-sens*[89] ou *La Parole humiliee*[90]. L'inspiration theologique est evidemment presente dans *Le vouloir et le faire* et les trois volumes de *L'ethique de la liberte*[91], *l'Esperance oubliee*[92] ou encore la meditation sur l'Ecclesiaste[93]. Mais deja, au sein de cet ensemble, quelques titres sont moins faciles a classer, *L'homme et l'argent*[94] et davantage *Sansfeu ni lieu*[95] qui constitue un cas particulier, resultat d'une exegese biblique approfondie et renvoyant implicitement aux plus anciennes manifestations de la technique et d'un "faire" humain a visee demiurgique.

Il me semble qu'on a trop oublie qu'Ellul etait un historien. Par gout et par choix, de formation et de metier. Et un historien du droit, donc de l'humain, du social, l'auteur d'une *Histoire des Institutions*[96] ayant servi d'ouvrage de reference a plusieurs generations d'etudiants en droit. Lorsque Jacques Ellul evoque, aupres de Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange (*A temps*, pp. 14-22), les lectures qui l'ont marque, des lectures de formation en quelque sorte, ce sont, presque en meme temps, entre sa dix-huitieme et sa vingtieme annee, *la Bible* et *Le Capital*, deux livres qu'il n'est certes pas possible de placer sur le meme plan mais qui, dans l'esprit d'Ellul, resteront fortement lies. Et lies tout simplement par leur inspiration historique: dans l'enseignement sur *La pensee marxiste* qu'il a dispense trente annees durant a l'Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Bordeaux, il mettait en evidence que Marx renvoyait a la Revelation pour avoir ecrit une Histoire "comme celle de la Bible, . . . chargee de sens"[97].

Entre les livres consacres au phenomene technicien et ceux relevant de la theologie, voire de la spiritualite, emerge une serie d'ecrits qui parait se situer quelque part a cote

---

[86] Jacques Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siecle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1954; 2[e] ed. Paris: Economica, 1990).

[87] Jacques Ellul, *Le bluff technologique* (Paris: Hachette, 1988).

[88] Jacques Ellul, *Le systeme technicien* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1977).

[89] Jacques Ellul, *L'empire du non-sens: L'art et la societe technicienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980).

[90] Jacques Ellul, *La Parole humiliee* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1981).

[91] Jacques Ellul, *Le vouloir et le faire: Recherches ethiques pour les chretiens: Introduction (premiere partie)* (Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1964); *Ethique de la liberte*, 2 vols. (Geneve: Labor et Fides, [1973, 1974]); *Les combats de la liberte: Ethique de la liberte, t. 3* (Geneve: Labor et Fides; Paris: Le Centurion, 1984).

[92] Jacques Ellul, *L'esperance oubliee* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972).

[93] Jacques Ellul, *La raison d'etre: Meditation sur l'Ecclesiaste* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1987).

[94] Jacques Ellul, *L'homme et l'argent (Nova et vetera)* (Neuchatel: Delachaux & Niestle, 1954; 2[e] ed. Lausanne: Presses Bibliques Universitaires, 1979).

[95] Jacques Ellul, *Sans feu ni lieu: Signification biblique de la Grande Ville* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975; ed. en anglais 1970).

[96] Jacques Ellul, *Histoire des institutions*, 5 vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955-1999, en multiples editions).

[97] Jacques Ellul, *L'ideologie marxiste chretienne* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1979), p. 15.

ou peut-etre entre les deux ordres de preoccupations. Peu importe le terme qui n'est avance que pour tenter d'unifier des titres qui ne se rattachent explicitement a aucun des deux "versants" de l'auvre mais qui ont a faire, dans une certaine mesure, a l'un et a l'autre. Et dans ces ouvrages (un peu) meconnus[98] d'Ellul, on trouve une reflexion particulierement eclairante de ses idees parce que portant sur la nature profonde de l'ideologie qui inspire la societe technicienne, l'ideologie bourgeoise. Cette reflexion sur les origines du developpement de la Technique permettra aussi a Ellul de mieux analyser, comprendre, exposer et prevoir l'evolution des ideologies elles-memes produites par ce developpement.

Lorsque Jacques Ellul, dans son enseignement a l'Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Bordeaux, evoque la place centrale donnee par Marx a l'economie, il manque rarement de signaler que "dans la societe actuelle, ce ne serait peut-etre plus l'economie qui serait determinante."[99] Il est tout a fait evident que dans l'esprit d'Ellul, parlant dans la seconde moitie du XXeme siecle, c'est a la Technique que revient le role de facteur ou plus exactement de fait preeminent. Pour autant, il n'invalide pas la demarche de Marx, considerant simplement que l'evolution de la technique et sa constitution en systeme global en fait desormais le "fait social central".

La Technique, chez Ellul, ne se reduit pas a la machine, ni meme a la combinaison de plus en plus serree des moyens techniques d'extraction, de transport, de transformation et de fabrication des objets. Ce qui fait du monde moderne un "systeme technicien", c'est son caractere d'organisation globale, totalisante (on pourrait aller jusqu'a dire "totalitaire") par le fait qu'elle utilise et inclut toutes les techniques annexes immaterielles, des plus anciennes ou simples (relativement) telles que le droit ou la comptabilite, aux plus recentes ou complexes, l'assurance, le calcul economique, plus generalement le traitement de l'information, ou encore la publicite qui emprunte largement depuis longtemps aux techniques de la Propagande (et demain peut etre a celles de la biologie moleculaire). Ellul est parfaitement clair sur ce point lorsqu'il ecrit: "Ce que M. Toynbee appelle *organisation* ou M. Burnham *managerial action*, c'est la technique appliquee a la vie sociale, economique ou administrative" (*La technique*, p. 9).

Or, dans les ouvrages comportant une dimension "historique", et particulierement le premier publie, *Metamorphose du bourgeois*, Ellul pousse l'analyse sociologique bien au dela de ce qu'il avait esquisse en 1954 dans *La technique*. Plus exactement, il replace le phenomene technicien et la "systematisation" du fait technique dans une perspective

---

[98] Jacques Ellul, *Metamorphose du bourgeois* (Paris: Calman-Levy, 1967), est peu cite, probablement peu lu ou relu par les "elluliens". L'ouvrage n'a pas ete traduit en anglais (remarque que les lecteurs anglo-saxons du present article pourront prendre comme un appel amical!). Il a cependant ete reedite en 1998 (Collection "Petite Vermillon," Paris: La Table Ronde), avec en quatrieme de couverture ce commentaire lapidaire: "Indispensable pour comprendre ou nous en sommes, vers quoi nous allons".

[99] Jacques Ellul, *La pensee marxiste: Cours professe a l'Institut d'etudes politiques de Bordeaux de 1947 a 1979*, ed. Michel Hourcade, Jean-Pierre Jezequel, et Gerard Paul (Paris: La Table Ronde, 2003), p. 104.

historique, donnant ainsi a sa pensee ce qui fait sa veritable originalite. Dans cette demarche, Ellul donne une explication coherente des transformations culturelles, ideologiques, philosophiques et en deduit leurs evolutions futures les plus probables sinon certaines.

Lorsqu'on rapproche les reflexions personnelles que Jacques Ellul livrait aux auditeurs de son cours sur *La pensee marxiste*, quelques pages sur la societe bourgeoise dans *La technique* (pp. 198-206 [1954]; pp. 200-208 [1990]), enfin le propos tout entier de *Metamorphose du bourgeois*, on decouvre une analyse globale qui s'apparente a une philosophie de l'Histoire. Nous nous proposons d'essayer de montrer - tres superficiellement dans le cadre de cet article - d'une part que cette philosophie de l'Histoire s'inscrit dans une continuite qui va de Marx aux situationnistes, d'autre part que l'evolution recente et previsible a vue humaine de nos societes est dans la ligne du mouvement qu'Ellul s'est efforce de decrire et de decrypter entre 1954 et 1994.

Efforcons-nous de dissiper d'emblee deux sources possibles de malentendus. Tout d'abord, il n'est pas question d'essayer de devoiler en Jacques Ellul un crypto-marxiste, l'interesse ayant ete suffisamment clair sur ce point pour que toute ambiguite soit levee. Il n'a jamais ni cache ni renie ce qu'il devait a sa lecture de Marx, pas davantage ce qui l'en separait radicalement lorsqu'il declarait a ses etudiants qu'on ne pouvait etre a la fois chretien et marxiste. Or si Jacques Ellul a suscite et suscitera encore certainement des interpretations divergentes et des controverses, un point au moins ne fera pas debat: la profondeur de sa foi. Symetriquement, il ne peut etre davantage question de pretendre que les quelques auteurs cites ci-apres aient pu etre influences par les ecrits de Jacques Ellul, d'en faire d'une certaine maniere des "elluliens qui s'ignorent". Certains d'entre eux peut-etre connaissent peu ou mal la pensee d'Ellul, d'autres sans doute la contestent. Simplement, les elements d'analyse historique, economique ou sociale qu'ils mettent en evidence sont de nature a conforter les conclusions qu'en d'autres temps Ellul avait tirees de ses propres observations. Un dernier point merite une remarque preliminaire: en me referant a la pensee d'Ellul, de meme qu'en effectuant des rapprochements de sa pensee a celle d'autres auteurs, je me suis affranchi de toute consideration temporelle et de toute recherche du sens dans lequel a pu s'operer l'influence reciproque. Mon propos n'est pas de livrer une exegese des sources de la pensee d'Ellul mais plus simplement de montrer la diversite de ces sources et le caractere toujours aujourd'hui tres operationnel des analyses elluliennes.

*   *   *

Metamorphose du bourgeois parait en 1967, la meme annee que *La societe du spectacle* de Guy Debord[100], et le *Traite de savoir-vivre a l'usage des jeunes generations* de Raoul Vaneigem[101]. Ce n'est pas un hasard: Ellul s'est interesse a la reflexion menee par les situationnistes avec lesquels il eut des contacts vers le milieu des annees soixante[102].

---

[100] Guy Debord, *La societe du spectacle* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1967; 3[e] ed.: Paris: Gallimard, 1992). Nous citons la troisieme edition.

[101] Raoul Vaneigem, *Traite de savoir-vivre a l'usage des jeunes generations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967).

[102] Tres peu d'informations existent sur ces contacts, sur leur nature, leur duree, leur etendue. Avec

Car, contrairement a un autre lieu commun bien etabli, si Ellul etait tres certainement un homme assez isole, on ne peut a l'evidence pas le qualifier de "penseur solitaire". Ellul ecrivant, sur quelque theme que ce soit, a lu tout ce qui compte, critique parfois, prend ses distances souvent, mais aussi approuve, cite, utilise, prolonge, conforte les reflexions d'un grand nombre de penseurs francais et etrangers, de tous les horizons, et representants des disciplines et des ecoles les plus diverses.

On ne peut rien comprendre de l'interet qu'a pu susciter chez Ellul la demarche intellectuelle des situationnistes sans remonter au "tronc commun" des deux reflexions. Dans l'ensemble de la pensee marxiste, Ellul accordait une place preeminente et privilegiee a ce qui est au fondement de l'analyse economique et sociale de Marx et qui est aussi ce qui a resiste a l'epreuve des evenements et des politiques. Dans le cours donne pendant trente ans a Bordeaux, l'expose des reflexions sur la marchandise (le Chapitre 1[er] du Capital), sur l'alienation et sur le travail[103] est particulierement developpe. Et dans le reste de l'œuvre, c'est sur ces themes qu'on retrouve l'essentiel des emprunts et des references au marxisme (references positives et emprunts revendiques car Ellul ne se prive pas par ailleurs de critiquer d'autres aspects de la philosophie marxiste, de ses prolongements et de ses deviations).

Pour resumer tres sommairement la demarche intellectuelle des situationnistes, essentiellement a travers la pensee de Debord, il faut en premier lieu se referer a la toute premiere phrase du Chapitre 1[er] du *Capital*: "La richesse des societes dans lesquelles regne *le mode de production capitaliste* s'annonce comme une immense accumulation de *marchandises*"[104]. La premiere these de *La societe du spectacle* est ainsi redigee: "Toute la vie des societes dans lesquelles regnent *les conditions modernes de production* s'annonce comme une immense accumulation de *spectacles*" (p. 3; c'est nous qui soulignons). Le sens et la portee des differences entre les deux phrases sont evidents: la formulation de Debord, "toute la vie", marque l'extension de l'emprise de l'economie sur la societe toute entiere. De meme, la ou Marx analysait "le mode de production capitaliste", Debord voit, fort justement, "les conditions modernes de production": il est vrai qu'a l'epoque ou il ecrit, tout observateur suffisamment lucide et objectif a compris que les economies dites socialistes ne sont pas autre chose que des "capitalismes d'Etat". "Les conditions modernes de production" de Debord ne sont pas fondamentalement autre chose qu'une des manifestations de "la Technique" ellulienne.

---

qui Ellul a-t-il eu des contacts? Sous quelle forme, entretiens ou echanges de lettres? Le seul element explicatif de leur interruption qui ait ete fourni est que le desaccord a ete insurmontable sur la question de la foi. Ce qui n'est pas veritablement surprenant.

[103] En juillet1980,Jacques Ellul ecrit, pour un numero special consacre au theme du Travail de la revue *Foi et Vie* dont il etait alors le directeur, deux articles d'introduction et de conclusion. Le premier analyse l'evolution historique du travail, de sa place dans les societes traditionnelles jusqu'a l'epoque contemporaine, le deuxieme la valeur de l'activite humaine dans une perspective eschatologique. Ces deux textes font apparaitre clairement que dans l'esprit d'Ellul, il n'y avait pas d'incompatibilite radicale entre une analyse sociologique objective (purement materialiste pourrait-on dire) et une demarche de foi.

[104] Karl Marx, *Oeuvres*, tome I, *Economie*, Bibliotheque de la Pleiade, trad. Joseph Roy, ed. Maximilien Rubel (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 561. C'est nous qui soulignons.

Mais cette premiere these comporte une seconde phrase, tout aussi importante: "Tout ce qui etait directement vecu s'est eloigne dans une representation" (p. 3). En d'autres termes, l'economie a soumis a ses lois l'ensemble de la vie sociale et pour tout dire la vie de chaque personne individuellement. Le concept de spectacle chez Debord a peu a voir avec la montee de l'influence des medias, laquelle n'en est qu'une manifestation parmi d'autres, la plus "spectaculaire" sans doute mais non la plus fondamentale. Le spectacle, "dont le *mode d'etre concret* est justement l'abstraction" (p. 15) est aussi le stade supreme de l'alienation. Dans une des meilleures et plus claires introductions a Debord qu'on puisse trouver, l'italien Anselm Jappe ecrit que: "L'analyse de Debord s'appuie sur l'experience quotidienne de l'appauvrissement de la vie vecue, de sa fragmentation en spheres de plus en plus separees, ainsi que de la perte de tout aspect unitaire dans la societe. Le spectacle consiste dans la recomposition des aspects separes sur le plan de l'image"[105].

Et plus loin Debord ajoute: "La *separation* est l'alpha et l'omega du spectacle" (p. 13).

Sans utiliser cette categorie du spectacle, s'appuyant historiquement sur le processus d'alienation de l'individu du fait de sa perte de maitrise du produit de son travail, donc de son travail lui-meme, jusqu'a la perte de la maitrise de son etre tout entier, Ellul est exactement dans la meme ligne lorsqu'il ecrit dans *Metamorphose*: "L'homme est progressivement elimine en tant que sujet (apte a decider, autonome, singulier), par la croissance technicienne, qui lui impose des modes de vie, des comportements, des regles calculees, systematisees, de plus en plus rigoureuses. L'homme est soumis a une "reification" progressive par l'invasion des objets. Il vit dans un univers de plus en plus fourmillant d'objets artificiels, et se doit d'etre, de se situer par rapport a cela. Il est traite lui-meme en objet lorsque la necessite d'organisation, de production, de consommation l'exige. Et c'est en cela que consiste la fameuse reification bien plus qu'en une depossession de son travail produisant des marchandises. La theorie marxiste de la marchandise pour expliquer cette reification etait exacte il y a un siecle. Elle n'est plus qu'un detail. La reification porte maintenant sur l'ensemble des secteurs de l'activite, de l'etre de 1'homme. Elle concerne aussi bien sa vie familiale que ses loisirs, que sa culture. La reification n'est pas liee a une certaine organisation economique, mais a la croissance du milieu technicien. Et cette reification comporte un corollaire sur l'elimination progressive de l'homme par lui-meme" (p. 237 [1967]; pp. 273-274 [1998].

En fait, Ellul et Debord menent des analyses tout a fait paralleles. On pourrait multiplier les citations croisees en ayant bien toujours a l'esprit que les deux textes, *La societe du spectacle* et *Metamorphose du bourgeois* ont ete ecrits en meme temps donc n'ont pas ete influences l'un par l'autre. Et Ellul ne fait pas davantage de *Metamorphose* un instrument critique des theses de Debord. Pourtant, il faut bien en venir aux differences fondamentales et mettre en evidence ce qui fait l'originalite d'Ellul et -

---

[105] AnselmJappe, *Guy Debord*, 2[e] ed. (Arles: Sulliver; Marseille: Via Valeriana, 1998), p. 22.

de mon point de vue - la plus grande portee de son analyse par rapport aux idees des situationnistes.

Pour Ellul, est posee une fois pour toutes l'idee que le developpement de la Technique est le phenomene social central des societes modernes. Ainsi Ellul se montre d'une certaine maniere plus materialiste que Debord qui, lui, met au centre de son analyse sociale un element, le spectacle, qui est parfaitement objectif mais n'en demeure pas moins de l'ordre de la "superstructure" pour utiliser le vocabulaire marxiste. ".. .Il devient evident, ecrit Anselm Jappe, que le spectacle est l'heritier de la *religion*" (p. 24). Cependant, le meme Jappe refuse de voir dans "tout ceci" (p. 25), c'est-a-dire l'envahissement de la vie sociale ou bien plutot la transformation de la vie sociale en spectacle, en representation d'une societe virtuelle "ni un destin, ni un produit inevitable du developpement de la technique" (p. 25). Pour les situationnistes, l'origine lointaine du spectacle qui separe l'homme du monde reel en ne lui donnant a voir qu'une "representation" se situe dans la separation la plus anciennement institutionnalisee, celle du Pouvoir.

Le fond du probleme devient alors de savoir ce qu'est aujourd'hui le "Pouvoir". Car sauf a renoncer a la transformation de la societe - transformation que precisement les situationnistes posent en objectif - et quels que soient les processus de cette transformation, la question du Pouvoir demeure centrale (quand bien meme on se fixerait pour but de l'abolir, de l'aneantir plutot que de le prendre, ce qui a toujours ete jusqu'a ce jour l'objectif de tout revolutionnaire). Et sur ce point, la pensee des situationnistes me parait extremement faible: le Pouvoir est tantot personnalise dans une bourgeoisie mythique, tantot identifie a une "pratique sociale" aussi anonyme que collective, rarement quelque chose de bien identifiable permettant d'imaginer les formes d'une action efficiente.

A l'oppose, la pensee d'Ellul permet d'aller plus loin dans la comprehension des mecanismes de fonctionnement de la societe actuelle, celle qui merite l'appellation de "systeme technicien". Pour lui, c'est le bourgeois qui a produit l'ideologie du "faire" et c'est cette ideologie qui a permis, justifie, soutenu, supporte le developpement de la technique. Bien entendu, et sur ce point aussi Ellul a ete parfaitement clair, l'ideologie du "faire" n'est pas le produit de la reflexion menee par quelques cercles d'intellectuels qu'il serait possible de situer tres precisement dans l'espace et dans le temps. Le "bourgeois" d'Ellul est a la fois le marchand de la Renaissance et l'industriel du XIXeme siecle, et sans aucun doute le philosophe des Lumieres et le Conventionnel de 1789 ; et peut etre aussi Pascal et Descartes. Et Racine. Et les Pilgrim Fathers. C'est probablement d'ailleurs cette incertitude des origines et leur diversite qui a fait la puissance de l'ideologie du faire et la capacite du bourgeois a assimiler tout ce qui peut servir a sa survie.

Tout le propos d'Ellul dans *Metamorphose du bourgeois* est precisement de montrer comment le "faire" bourgeois a, dans un premier temps, permis a celui-ci de prendre la realite du Pouvoir, economique d'abord, puis politique, puis intellectuel. Intellectuel, pas artistique: dans toute la periode industrielle, les sciences "dures" sont bourgeoises

; et meme l'economie politique, Marx le dira suffisamment. La seule contestation de l'ordre (ideologique) bourgeois vient du monde de l'art, le roman, la peinture, la poesie, le theatre, la philosophie. Or, Ellul demontre que l'ideologie bourgeoise du "faire" comporte precisement la faculte infinie de s'approprier, phagocyter tout ce qui a premiere vue semble lui etre le plus contraire.

Ainsi au fil du temps, le "faire" bourgeois imprime sa marque a la societe toute entiere. Jamais Ellul n'ecrira - au contraire - que tout le monde est devenu bourgeois. En revanche il maintiendra dans tous les ecrits posterieurs a 1967 l'idee que le "systeme technicien" est "bourgeois" par essence et en quelque sorte "de naissance". Et il s'agit bien d'un systeme au sein duquel les individus, fussent-ils des potentats du monde economique ou politique, n'ont strictement aucun pouvoir d'en inflechir sensiblement la marche.

* * *

Car en retour, le developpement de la technique faconne la societe de telle sorte qu'elle elimine les marges de manreuvre, les espaces de liberte. On peut donner acte aux situationnistes d'avoir mis en evidence le concept de spectacle pour qualifier une societe qui est a la fois un monde de l'abstraction (dans ses fondements intellectuels, scientifiques et techniques), un monde de l'apparence (dans le mode de vie qu'elle propose), enfin un monde intrinsequement "faux" dans lequel "le detachement de la marchandise de tout besoin humain authentique atteint finalement un niveau pseudo-religieux avec les objets manifestement inutiles"[106] En fait, le "faire" bourgeois qui etait a l'origine la manifestation d'une volonte individuelle, puis d'un "vouloir-vivre ensemble" democratique, semble s'etre desormais mue en un "faire" autonome dans un monde qui n'aurait pas seulement perdu mais abandonne la maitrise de son avenir.

On peut trouver de multiples manifestations de cette derive, les plus fondamentales etant sans doute celles qui desormais touchent l'etre humain lui-meme. C'est pourquoi nous nous attacherons a trois elements qui nous paraissent fondamentaux: la disparition des valeurs, la modification du rapport au temps, la mise en question de notre etre biologique.

Bien entendu, on pourra objecter qu'aucune valeur (au sens de categorie morale, positive ou negative) n'a "disparu": le Bien, le Mal (la preuve, il existe meme un "Axe du Mal" qui suppose implicitement qu'on doive lui opposer un "Empire du Bien"), la solidarite, la compassion, ... Faut-il en citer davantage? Ce n'est pas de cela qu'il s'agit mais d'objectifs a l'action affiches, proclames, des valeurs au sens general de motivations. Pour etre plus concret, sinon trivial, quelles sont, a leurs propres yeux, les justifications d'action des entrepreneurs modernes ou des dirigeants actuels des grandes nations? Il ne saurait etre question d'idealiser le passe: tres certainement, concupiscence, cupidite, sublimation de la pulsion sexuelle n'etaient pas absents de

---

[106] Jappe, p. 27. Debord citait en exemple du fetichisme de la marchandise les collections de porte-cles publicitaires. Au niveau symbolique, il avait tout a fait raison. Le probleme est malheureusement moins superficiel, les modifications phenomenales des comportements de consommation depuis 1967 le demontrent amplement (*La societe du spectacle*, pp. 43-44).

l'agir de nos peres mais au cote vraisemblablement (et sans doute souvent au-dessus en intensite) d'ambitions d'un ordre plus eleve.

Mais en realite, on ne peut que constater l'absence ou au moins la quasi-absence de transcendance des objectifs. Oh, lorsque nous employons le mot de transcendance, nous n'entendons faire aucune reference a un Autre ou un Au-dela. Nous visons seulement une nature de motivation qui depasserait l'action en elle-meme. Dans un passe pas si lointain, et dans l'ordre decroissant precisement de transcendance, on a evoque successivement le Salut, puis l'ideologie du Bonheur, puis encore le bien-etre materiel (etant generalement sous-entendu qu'il etait pour l'avenir la condition et le garant du progres moral et de l'elevation spirituelle).

Nous avons change tout cela, passant en quelques siecles de la quete du Salut a la "valeur pour l'actionnaire", du pari de Pascal aux paris technologiques les plus insenses. Dans un monde de competition, il n'y a pas d'autre sens que la simple survie ; il suffit pour s'en convaincre d'ecouter le discours dominant du monde de l'entreprise sur la justification des decisions: "Nous n'avons pas le choix", "Aller de l'avant ou disparaitre". Or, si ce discours est acceptable, justifie, s'agissant d'une entreprise qui, si grande soit-elle, ne represente toujours qu'une part minuscule de la societe humaine, le meme discours semble etre desormais celui destine a inspirer les nations. Le "faire" est ainsi purifie de tout objectif autre que lui-meme et la motivation (je n'ose plus ici employer le terme de valeur) se limite a la recherche de la survie ou de la securite individuelle ou collective. Aussi surprenant que cela puisse paraitre lorsqu'on considere la variete et les performances des outils de toutes natures qu'elle offre, la societe technicienne semble ne plus offrir la possibilite de changer le monde. En revanche elle impose l'adaptation permanente. Le sommet du non-signifiant est atteint lorsqu'on peut lire dans *Le Monde* du 30 septembre 2003 que "le changement devient une valeur" (sans qu'on sache d'ailleurs tres bien si l'auteur constate un etat de fait ou enonce une regle de conduite). Prendra-t-on conscience rapidement que sur le plan des relations humaines, la competition ne peut avoir que deux significations: celle d'un jeu dans lequel l'enjeu est de pure satisfaction intellectuelle, celle de la survie des plus forts et de l'elimination correlative des plus faibles. Le second cas de figure est celui que nos lointains ancetres ont affronte pendant quelques millenaires...

Bien entendu, ce serait faire injure aux managers et autres conseils en organisation que de laisser croire qu'ils n'ont pas conscience de la vacuite des "valeurs" mises en avant, particulierement dans les cas ou le changement, impose par les consequences d'une strategie deficiente, ne peut etre affecte d'un signe positif qu'au regard du pire, en l'occurrence la perte de l'emploi. Mais sans meme aller jusqu'a evoquer des hypotheses aussi noires, l'emiettement de l'activite, y compris dans le secteur tertiaire et chez les cadres, a conduit a imaginer des modes d'organisation du travail censes valoriser et developper les qualites individuelles, l'autonomie, l'esprit d'initiative. "Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme"[107] s'incarne donc principalement dans le "mode de gestion par

---

[107] Titre d'un livre de Luc Boltanski et Eve Chiapello (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).

projet" qui apparait en effet parfaitement adapte a l'emiettement des competences et des savoirs. Il est douteux qu'il puisse longtemps faire illusion dans le cadre d'une organisation de l'entreprise demeuree presque partout hierarchisee et pyramidale.

Dans un autre ordre d'idee, l'evolution de la societe technicienne a modifie profondement le rapport au temps, que ce soit au niveau de l'individu integre dans une organisation sociale incluant a la fois le travail et le nontravail (parfois d'ailleurs en laissant tres floue la separation entre les deux), ou au niveau de la societe toute entiere. On a vu depuis une vingtaine d'annees se multiplier les ouvrages consacres a ce sujet sensible du rapport au temps[108]. Or, dans *La technique*, Jacques Ellul evoquait l'ouvrage intitule *Le temps harcelant* dont l'auteur, Enrico Castelli, montrait "comment l'homme du monde technique vit sans passe et sans avenir, comment la perte du sens de la duree ote son sens au droit et au langage". Et encore: ". la technique, grace aux moyens perfectionnes qu'elle met a la disposition de l'homme, supprime effectivement tous *les delais qui etaient indispensables au rythme de vie*"[109].

Tout le malaise de l'homme moderne dans son rapport au temps est contenu dans ces mots datant maintenant de plus de 50 ans (une eternite dans le contexte d'acceleration du deroulement temporel tel que nous le vivons maintenant !). Cinquante-six ans plus tard, Nicole Aubert ne fait qu'actualiser les analyses de Castelli qu'elle ne cite d'ailleurs pas (qu'on ne voie pas dans cette notation un reproche mais le simple constat que l'abondance de la litterature sur le sujet est telle que des ouvrages ecrits vers le milieu du vingtieme siecle ne constituent plus des references obligees - l'immense majorite des titres references par Mme Aubert, plus de 200 livres et articles, sont dates apres 1990).

Or, ce malaise par rapport au temps, qui, dans une premiere approche, semble ne toucher que l'individu, ou tout au plus les organisations reuvrant dans le champ de l'economique ou regne justement ce "culte de l'urgence", affecte en realite beaucoup plus profondement le corps social dans la maniere dont il se situe dans le present par rapport a son passe et a son avenir. Dans son livre tres recent[110], Francois Hartog analyse les differentes manieres, ce qu'il appelle les "regimes d'historicite", c'est-a-dire comment les societes vivent les differentes manieres d'etre dans le temps, les diverses formes de delimitation et "d'articulation du passe, du present et du futur" (p. 27). D'une epoque ou le passe etait vu comme le modele indepassable a repeter sans fin, on avait evolue, avec la philosophie des Lumieres et la Revolution francaise. vers une conception dans laquelle l'avenir etait identifie a la promesse d'un progres continu et garanti. Or, constate Hartog, notre conception collective du temps est celle de l'historicisation d'un present qui se suffit a lui-meme, un present massif, envahissant, omnipresent,

---

[108] L'un des derniers en date: *Le culte de l'urgence*, sous-titre *La societe malade du temps*, de Nicole Aubert (Paris: Flammarion, 2003).

[109] *La technique*, p. 297-298, n.1 [1954] ; p.298, n.1 [1990] . V. Enrico Castelli, *Il tempo esaurito* (Rome: Bussola, 1947). C'est nous qui soulignons.

[110] FranQois Hartog, *Des regimes d'historicite: Presentisme et experiences du temps* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2003).

"un present perpetuel, insaisissable et quasiment immobile, cherchant malgre tout a produire pour lui-meme son propre temps historique" (p. 28).

"Le present est devenu 1'horizon. Sans futur et sans passe, il genere, au jour le jour, le passe et le futur dont il

a, jour apres jour besoin et valorise l'immediat" (p. 126). Signes de cette conception, la mort escamotee et, en meme temps, la presence permanente de la memoire, le gout de la conservation du patrimoine, de la celebration, du repentir et du pardon par dela les siecles, toutes occasions de reecrire une histoire nouvelle, mieux adaptee aux besoins du moment.

Qu'on veuille bien me pardonner ce qui pourrait passer pour une plaisanterie facile. Mais comment pourrait-il echapper au malaise, cet individu qui survit dans un present mal relie au passe comme au futur, et est en meme temps contraint de s'adapter a toute vitesse a des changements techniques permanents?

Prive des reperes que sont les valeurs par lesquelles il pourrait trouver un sens a ses actes, depossede du monde qui l'entoure par l'organisation du spectacle, paroxysme de l'alienation, prive des reperes temporels que lui donneraient un passe compris et assume et un avenir qu'il aurait, sinon la certitude, au moins une esperance raisonnable de maitriser, l'etre humain est enfin remis en question dans son etre biologique.

Le theme de "l'elimination de la personne" par la technique est tres present chez Ellul. Il met deja cette idee en valeur dans son commentaire de l'economie politique marxiste en notant que l'absence du facteur humain dans la pensee des economistes bourgeois ne repond pas seulement a une commodite d'exposition mais traduit tres precisement la realite economique du temps. A fortiori, la realite economique deux siecles plus tard. Mais nous ne sommes pas encore la dans l'analyse des consequences du developpement de la technique. Des 1967, dans *Metamorphose du bourgeois*, Ellul invoque l'ethnologue Leroi-Gourhan (*Le geste et la parole*) en ecrivant: ". l'homme depuis l'origine en creant des objets techniques obeit a son genie particulier, il se donne les moyens de dominer un monde hostile, mais *en meme temps* tout le developpement du processus technique consiste en une elimination de l'homme par ses propres techniques"[111]. On retrouve cette idee, developpee et amplifiee, dans tous les ouvrages ulterieurs, *Autopsie de la Revolution*[112], *Le systeme technicien, Le bluff technologique.*

Or, le developpement continu d'anciennes ou de nouvelles techniques touche maintenant tres directement la personne dans son etre: il ne s'agit plus de l'eliminer (pour l'instant on ne se passe pas - pas encore - de l'ingenieur, du pilote de chasse, moins encore du consommateur) mais d'ameliorer la "performance" par l'apport des techniques. L'amelioration des performances sportives par l'apport de substances pharmaceutiques n'a rien d'un phenomene nouveau. On notera seulement ici le caractere totalement absurde de la generalisation de telles pratiques, du point de vue strict de l'exploit sportif.

---

[111] *Metamorphose*, p. 237 [1967] ; p. 274 [1998] . V. Andre Leroi-Gourhan, *Le geste et la parole* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1965).

[112] Jacques Ellul, *Autopsie de la revolution* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1979).

Mais bien entendu, des considerations economiques et financieres sont en jeu. Alors ... De meme, la mise a disposition d'outils de calcul, de simulation, etc. n'a rien non plus de tres nouveau: la difference entre le boulier chinois et un ordinateur Cray 2 tient a ce que l'utilisateur du boulier accroissait son pouvoir tandis que l'ingenieur a perdu une part du sien.

Mais les tendances recentes que nous voulons mettre en lumiere ont peu a voir avec les pratiques douteuses de certains sportifs ou la production de moyens de calcul de plus en plus puissants. La technique met en question l'etre humain biologique sous deux aspects:

-d'une part, l'evolution de certains outils met en evidence l'insuffisance des capacites humaines: le pilotage de certains avions militaires ne peut plus etre assure seulement en s'appuyant sur le "fonctionnement normal" d'un etre humain, sur la rapidite de son systeme neuronal, la qualite de ses reflexes. Le temps est proche ou il deviendra necessaire, soit de se passer du pilotage humain (c'est la tendance au developpement parallele des missiles de croisiere et des drones), soit d'accroitre la vitesse de circulation de l'information entre nous et les outils, en quelque sorte d'ameliorer la qualite et la fiabilite des "connexions" entre les deux . D'autre part, le developpement des neurosciences permet d'envisager qu'apparaisse une technique nouvelle, celle du neuromarketing fondee sur une meilleure comprehension du cerveau humain, donc de sa receptivite a telle ou telle forme de publicite. Or, cet exemple est emblematique du fonctionnement du systeme technicien ou de ce que certains denomment "Technoscience". Des scientifiques mettent en evidence telle ou telle loi physique, chimique, biologique, etc. On met immediatement a l'etude quelques applications positives (dans le cas present des neurosciences, ce pourrait etre - mais nous n'en avons pas entendu parler - la therapeutique d'Alzheimer, l'amelioration de l'apprentissage des langues, etc .). Mais il faut surtout trouver tres vite des applications "rentables", d'ou le neuromarketing.

* * *

C'est sur cette derniere notation que nous nous essaierons a une conclusion toute provisoire en forme de question. Dans la mise en muvre, qu'il faut considerer maintenant comme quasi acquise, des techniques nouvelles du neuromarketing, l'idee de l'efficacite ne fait pas debat. Sa rentabilite non plus. Il convient de remarquer que l'efficacite etant mesuree principalement a l'aune de la rentabilite, le seul element de nature a provoquer une remise en cause du neuromarketing serait le constat d'une rentabilite insuffisante. S'interroge t-on sur la dimension ethique de la question? Certes, et M. Olivier Oullier, chercheur en neurosciences au Center for Complex Systems and Brain Sciences a la Florida Atlantic University de Boca Raton, pose la question de la legitimite de l'usage du neuromarketing, et evoquant le spectre d'Orwell, renvoie finalement la balle au legislateur[113]. Mais en realite le probleme est deja resolu et c'est d'ailleurs un faux probleme: les techniques du neuromarketing ne sont qu'un perfectionnement, apporte par les progres de la connaissance scientifique, aux vieilles techniques artisanales et em-

---

[113] Olivier Oullier, "Le 'neuromarketing' est-il l'avenir de la publicite?" (*Le Monde*, 24 octobre 2003).

piriques de la publicite et de la propagande ; comment pourrait-on, dans ces conditions, en demontrer objectivement la plus grande nocivite?

En fait, il n'est qu'une question qui n'a pas ete posee et qu'on ne posera pas: quelle est l'utilite reelle du neuromarketing? Mais pour avoir seulement envie de poser cette question, il serait prealablement necessaire que la societe ait etabli les fins superieures qui seules pourraient constituer l'etalon de mesure d'une utilite sociale incontestable.

Advert: Change of Address?

Re-Viewing Ellul

Presence of the Kingdom

by Jacques Ellul

Reviewed by Virginia Landgraf

Presence au monde moderne: problemes de la civilisation post-chretienne. Geneva: Roulet, 1948. English translation by Olive Wyon published with a foreword by William Stringfellow as *The Presence of the Kingdom* (New York: Seabury, 1967). Second edition of Wyon's translation, with a new preface and afterword by the author and an introduction by Daniel B. Clendenin, published under the same English title (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989).

This 1948 book is Ellul's manifesto. Declaring an opposition between the spirit of "this present age," which he believes is always a will to death, and the spirit of Christ which Christians are called to bear in this world, he announces his diagnosis of the problems of contemporary civilization and sketches what Christian resistance might look like.

The diagnosis of civilization's problems will look familiar to those who know Ellul's later work. A vicious circle is operating based on the reverence for facts (even dreadful realities such as the atomic bomb); technical, political, and social activities aimed at material effectiveness; and the drowning out of communication between persons by mass media and ideological myths. The elements of this circle rob people of transcendent reference points by which to question these facts, activities, or noises. Means for material success have become ends in themselves, altars on which are sacrificed the time, freedom, and lives of flesh-and-blood human beings.

In face of this vicious circle, Ellul criticizes some common approaches of the churches as unbiblical and ineffectual. Spiritualization of the Christian message, as if the material world did not matter, denies the calling of Christians to live *in* the world. Baptism by the churches of worldly projects, such as socialism or post-war reconstruction, denies their calling to be not *of* the world. Either of these options destroys the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" in this world prior to the eschaton. Christians may be called to withdraw from worldly projects or to join them, but their refusal should never be escapism, and their cooperation should never be confused with identification of a given activity as the one Christian way.

Ellul believes that the true calling of Christians is to bear the eschatological presence of Christ here and now. This presence is a truly revolutionary force because it brings

judgment to bear on the forces of the world and hope for a future beyond the vicious circle of material facts. This presence should issue in a Christian "style of life" which appears as a sign to those outside the church, an alternative to the way things are currently going. Ellul is reluctant to give programmatic specifics about this style of life, except to say that it involves one's material commitments, personal relationships, and involvements in the wider society.

Because this is one of Ellul's earliest books, he sometimes makes arguments which he developed at length elsewhere, such as the autonomy of technique. Even one who knows the details of these arguments may question the hyperbolic nature of some of his statements. Do the workings of the world always lead towards suicide? One may agree that many forces today drive the world towards self-destruction without being able to isolate a diabolical element in every phenomenon. It is ultimately a theological assumption to believe that this world is ruled by powers opposed to God. Without such an assumption, many of Ellul's arguments would not make sense. One might believe that these forces will reach a point of exhaustion and right themselves.

Similarly, one may disagree with the positive side of his proclamation if one holds different theological assumptions. A theology of gradual improvement may have no use for a tension between the "already" and "not yet." One who does not believe in the decisiveness of Jesus Christ may question whether that event can bring a transcendent perspective to bear on a closed system.

However, if one accepts that the world is fallen and that the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are decisive for the redemption of creation, Ellul's argument still holds appeal today. Even if technique is not as autonomous from human ends as Ellul thought, technique still manifests a kind of excess, and the desire to create more powerful means leads to the forced adjustment of human beings to these means. Consider the obsolescence of computer hardware and software which are in good working order. Desires for technical effectiveness, power over others, and economic wealth are probably mixed in most people's psyches into a more generalized desire for security or safety. Attempts to isolate any one of these desires as *the* driving force of society in a given time may be mistaken. However, analysis of the ways in which technical effectiveness, political power, or financial capital become ends in themselves is still helpful.

News & Notes

—**International Colloquium on Ellul: POITIERS**, 21-22 **OCTOBER** 2004

Patrick Chastenet, AIJE President and Professor of Political Science at the University of Poitiers, has announced the program for the international colloquium taking

place 21-22 October 2004. The overall title of the program is "Jacques Ellul: Libre examen d'une pensee sans frontieres." The nineteen scheduled papers will cover explore a wide range of topics including technology, politics, law, art, propaganda and ethics. For further information, including how to register, visit www.ellul.org or www.jacques-ellul.org.

—A**LPHoNSE** M**AiLLoT**, a pastor and theologian in the Reformed Church of France died on December 5, 2003 at the age of 83. Maillot was a good friend and colleague of Jacques Ellul in the Reformed Church and one of Ellul's favorite biblical scholars. Among his many published books were a three-volume commentary on the Psalms, an exposition of Romans, and a study of the Beatitudes. In his own forthcoming book on the Ten Commandments, David Gill writes that Maillot's book on the Decalogue is by far the best and most insightful work he has ever read on the topic.

—XNASTS S**YMPoSiuM oN E**L**LuL**. Bill Vanderburg informs us that a special symposium on Jacques Ellul took place February 21, 2004, at the annual meeting of the National Association for Science, Technology, and Society in Baltimore. Some or all of the ten papers presented at the meeting will be published in a future issue of the *Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society.* More information available at www.nasts.org.

—S**oCiALCRiTiC**.**oRG**. The *Social Criticism Review,* (Hans Talmon, Editor), web site www.socialcritic.org, is a "forum for ideas that go against the current." Based in the Netherlands, SCR offers an outstanding selection of over 1000 online readings on the crisis of modernity, including material by Jacques Ellul. Check out this terrific resource.

—M**EDiA E**C**oLoGY A**SS**oCiATioN C**o**NFERENCE**, 1013 J**uNE** 2004. Joyce Hanks will be a speaker on "Media Education in a Technological Society" at the annual convention of the MEA at Rochester Institute of Technology in New York. The MEA is an association of media and communications scholars interested in the work of thinkers like Jacques Ellul, Neil Postman, Walter Ong, Marshall McLuhan, and Harold Innis.

—C**HRiSTiANiTY** & A**NARCHiSM C**o**NFERENCE**, 31 J**uLY** 2004. Andy Baker invites all interested to participate in a one-day conference on "Engaging the Powers: Anarchism, Christianity, and Social Change," July 31, 2004, in New York City. Topics will include voting, imprisonment, social change, and the Catholic Worker movement. More info by writing Andy at 332 East 19th Street, #14, New York NY 10003, by visiting http://conference.jesusradicals.com, or by telephoning 646-425-3272.

Advert: International Jacques Ellul Society

grounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (191294), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

The IJES and AIJE have been founded by a group of long-time students, scholars, and friends of Jacques Ellul, with the counsel and support of Jean, Yves, and Dominique Ellul, and as a French-American collaboration.

Board of Directors

Patrick Chastenet, University of Poitiers; Clifford Christians, University of Illinois; Dell DeChant, University of South Florida; Andrew Goddard, Oxford University; Darrell Fasching (Vice-President), University of South Florida; David Gill (President), Berkeley; Joyce Hanks, University of Scranton; Ken Morris (Secretary-Treasurer), Berkeley; Carl Mitcham, Colorado School of Mines; Langdon Winner, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

Joining the IJES

To become a member, anywhere in the world, and receive the twice-yearly Ellul Forum, submit annual dues of US $20 to "IJES" (use an international postal money order or bank check drawn in US dollars—or pay electronically with a credit card to "IJES@ellul.org" at www.paypal.com) making sure to note your name, complete mailing address, and purpose of payment.

Cahiers Jacques Ellul

Pour une critique de la societe technicienne
2004/2
Directeur:
PATRICK TROUDE-CHASTENET
Secretaire:
FRANCE-ANNE DE CLERMONT
Comite de redaction:
SYLVAIN DUJANCOURT
PATRICK TROUDE-CHASTENET
Conseil Scientifique:
ABEL OLIVIER, Institut Protestant de Theologie, Paris BALLE FRANCIS, Universite Pantheon-Assas, Paris II BOURG DOMINIQUE, Universite de Technologie de

Troyes

BRAUD PHILIPPE, Universite Paris I Pantheon-Sorbonne DRAVASA ETIENNE, Universite Montesquieu Bordeaux

IV

DUJANCOURT SYLVAIN, Eglise Reformee, Strasbourg

FASCHING DARRELL, Universite de South Florida, Floride

GILL DAVID, Berkeley, Californie

GODDARD ANDREW, W ycliffe Hall, Oxford University

HANKS JOYCE, University of Scranton, Pennsylvania

LAFORE ROBERT, Sciences Po Bordeaux

MARLIN RANDAL, Carleleton University, Ottawa, Canada

MEDARD JEAN-FRANCOIS, I.E.P. de Bordeaux

MITCHAM CARL, Colorado School of Mines, Colorado SADRAN PIERRE, Sciences Po Bordeaux

SFEZ LUCIEN, Universite Paris I Pantheon-Sorbonne TROUDE-CHASTENET PATRICK, Universite de Poitiers VAHANIAN GABRIEL, Universite Marc-Bloch, Strasbourg VITALIS ANDRE, Universite Michel de Montaigne-Bordeaux III

Sommaire: 2004/2

La Technique

Editorial

POINT(S) DE VUE

Didier Nordon: Restons petits !

David W. Gill: How Big is the Tent?

ACTUEL

Jacques Ellul: Les chretiens et la guerre

Patrick Troude-Chastenet: Guantanamo: le Droit entre parentheses

Franck Bousquet: les *Blockbusters* hollywoodiens des annees 90, un discours cinematographique au service de la societe technicienne 27

DOSSIER: LA TECHNIQUE

Editorial

Le premier numero des *Cahiers Jacques Ellul* a trouve son public. Ce succes est un encouragement pour son editeur, l'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul. Paradoxalement, cette reussite nourrit aussi chez certains quelques inquietudes. Didier Nordon a fait un (mauvais) reve: la pensee d'Ellul, ou du moins son ersatz, citee a tort et a travers par l'ensemble de la classe politico-mediatique. Pour eviter sa banalisation et sa trahison, il encourage l'A.I.J.E. a rester ellulienne, donc petite !

A l'inverse, notre ami David W. Gill s'inquiete moins du deviationnisme que des risques de division en petites chapelles recroquevillees sur elles-memes. Il milite resolument en faveur de l'ouverture et du pluralisme. La publication en version originale (outre l'occasion d'entretenir notre lecture de l'anglais et de rendre la politesse a *The Ellul Forum*) de l'article du president de l'*International Jacques Ellul Society* a valeur de symbole. Elle renforce les liens qui nous unissent aux amis americains d'Ellul par dela toute consideration de politique internationale.

Les attentats du 11 septembre 2001 et le declenchement de la « guerre contre le terrorisme » en Afghanistan, en Irak et ailleurs, sont l'occasion de rappeler l'exigence chretienne radicale d'Ellul en la matiere. Non seulement il refute la fameuse theorie de « la guerre juste » qui legitime le recours a la violence mais il plaide aussi en faveur de la « non-puissance », c'est-a-dire le refus delibere d'exercer sa puissance. Si la guerre peut s'averer inevitable du point de vue politique, elle ne peut jamais se justifier au regard de la foi en Christ.

Sur le meme sujet, Patrick Troude-Chastenet se demande si l'on peut vouloir faire la guerre au nom (de la defense) du Droit sans risquer soit de perdre la premiere soit de bafouer le second. Le traitement que l'Amerique reserve a ses prisonniers - au nom de l'efficacite ! - illustre selon lui la difficulte des democraties pluralistes a respecter leurs propres regles lorsqu'elles sont confrontees a la menace terroriste.

Il est toujours question des Etats-Unis avec Franck Bousquet qui decrit les films hollywoodiens comme l'illustration parfaite de la societe technicienne analysee par Ellul. Ne retrouve-t-on pas en effet le principe technique - la recherche de l'efficacite et donc la valorisation du specialiste - a l'origine de la plupart des scenarios des *blockbusters*?

Daniel Cerezuelle s'est interesse pour sa part a deux films de science-fiction symptomatiques de notre fascination pour les techniques informatiques. A la maniere complaisante de *The Matrix* ou plus distanciee de *Avalon*, cette plongee dans le monde virtuel flatterait nos desirs regressifs et nous eloignerait aussi dangereusement du « sens des realites » que le ferait une drogue.

Le *Dossier special* de cette livraison est consacre a la technique. Il debute par ce que Jacques Ellul lui-meme presentait comme le resume d'un livre longtemps introuvable *Le Systeme technicien* (1977).

Si Dominique Bourg reconnait volontiers a l'auteur de *La Technique ou l'enjeu du siecle* (1954) la primaute d'une reflexion sociologique argumentee sur la question de l'autonomie de la technique, il ne partage ni ses premisses ni ses conclusions. Sa methode reposerait, selon lui, sur un substrat moral qui en reduirait singulierement la validite. Cette interpretation critique confirme la pertinence et l'actualite de la pensee d'Ellul en cette annee marquant le dixieme anniversaire de sa mort. Alain Gras souhaite pour sa part completer la critique ellulienne en soulignant l'importance du probleme energetique et le privilege accorde au feu dans notre modele de developpement. Refutant la these evolutionniste d'un progres technique continu, il considere que la bifurcation nous ayant conduit a la « societe thermo-industrielle » n'avait rien d'ineluctable, et que seule la voie de la decroissance nous fera sortir de cette impasse.

Le milieu technicien dans lequel nous vivons permet-il encore la reflexion indispensable a une culture veritable? La culture technicienne se reduit en fait a une masse d'informations placees sous le signe de l'eclate et de l'ephemere. Jacques Ellul rejoint ici Edgar Morin pour diagnostiquer « le deferlement d'un nouveau type d'ignorance dans l'accumulation des connaissances ». La culture n'existe selon Ellul que si elle souleve la question du sens de la vie: la question du pourquoi et non pas celle du comment.

La rubrique *Archives* s'ouvre par un texte tire d'un manuscrit encore inedit intitule: *Theologie et Technique*. Nous sommes reconnaissants a ses enfants de nous avoir autorise a en publier un premier extrait dans lequel notamment Jacques Ellul confronte ses propres recherches aux travaux de Rene Girard.

Alors que l'reuvre de Max Weber continue de susciter de nouvelles traductions, il nous a paru interessant de publier la recension de la premiere edition en francais de *L'ethique protestante et l'esprit du capitalisme* (1964). Apres avoir expose fidelement la these weberienne, Ellul ecarte les critiques traditionnelles resultant pour la plupart d'une lecture hative et leur substitue ses objections personnelles qui n'invalident pas pour autant la demonstration generale du grand sociologue allemand.

Enfin, Jacques Ellul formule quatre propositions pour tenter de fonder une ethique dans une societe technicienne. S'appuyant pour commencer sur les notions de seuils

et de limites cheres a Ivan Illich, il prone une ethique de non-puissance, de liberte, de tension et de transgression.

Resources for Ellul Studies

www.ellul.org & www.jacques-ellul.org
Two indispensable web sites
The IJES/AIJE web site at www.ellul.org contains (1) news about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, and (4) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The new AIJE web site at www.jacques-ellul.org offers a French language supplement.

The Ellul Forum CD: 1988-2002
The first thirty issues of *The Ellul Forum*, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for US $15 (postage included). Send payment with your order to "IJES," P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

Cahiers Jacques Ellul
Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne
The second issue of *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, an annual journal edited by Patrick Chastenet and published by our sister society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul, is now off the press. It is available for 20 euros (postage included) to individuals outside France, and for 25 euros to libraries. The theme of the second issue just released is "La Technque."

Cahiers Jacques Ellul is an essential new reference for those interested in Ellul's ideas.

Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. $87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit www.elsevier.com for ordering information.

Alibris—used books in English
The Alibris web site (www.alibris.com) recently gave thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

Librairie Mollat—new books in French

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux (www.mollat.com) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

Used books in French:

two web resources

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are www.chapitre.com and www.livre-rare-book.com.

Reprints of Nine Ellul Books

By arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of several Ellul books originally published by William B. Eerdmans can now be purchased. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: *The Ethics of Freedom* ($40), *The Humiliation of the Word* ($26), *The Judgment of Jonah* ($13), *The Meaning of the City* ($20), *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* ($19), *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* ($28), *The Subversion of Christianity* ($20), and *The Technological Bluff* ($35). *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul* translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

Have your bookstore (or on-line book dealer) "back order" the titles you want. Do not go as an individual customer to Eerdmans or Ingram/Spring Arbor. For more information visit "Books on Demand" at **www.eerdmans.com**.

Ellul on Video

French film maker Serge Steyer's film "Jacques Ellul: L'homme entier" (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site www.meromedia.com. Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul's ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbus 43021, 1009 ZA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.

Issue #34 Fall 2004 — Jacques Ellul on Sports

- Click to view the original PDF

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Contents

321

Ellul & the Internet
by Boyan Koutevski
Re-Viewing Ellul
The Technological Society
Reviewed by Rustum Roy
In Review
Enough: Staying Human in an
Engineered Age
by Bill McKibben
Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks of His Life & Work
Edited by Willem H. Vanderburg
Political Illusions & Realities
by David W. Gill
Resources for Ellul Studies
© 2004 International Jacques Ellul Society Berkeley, California, USA www.ellul.org

Cover

Jacques Ellul in the 1960s
"The mechanization of actions is accompanied by the mechanization of sporting goods—stop watches, starting machines, and so on... The individual, by means of the discipline imposed on him by sport, not only plays and finds relaxation from the various compulsions to which he is subjected, but without knowing it trains himself for new compulsions... [R]eal play and enjoyment... improvisation and spontaneity all disappear. "
Jacques Ellul
The Technological Society (1954; ET 1964), p. 383

Information on The Editorial Board & More

The Ellul Forum
For the Critique of Technological Civilization
Founded 1988
The Ellul Forum is published twice per year, in the Spring and Fall. Its purpose is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.
Editor
Clifford G. Christians, Univ. of Illinois, Urbana Associate Editor
David W. Gill, Berkeley, California
Contributing Editors

From the Editor

From 1935 until his death in 1994, Jacques Ellul argued for *la technique* as the twentieth century's most distinctive phenomenon and its most powerful, defining force. Technique, he wrote, is "the totality of methods rationally arrived at and have absolute

efficiency in every field of human knowledge" (*Technological Society,* (1954) ET 1964, p. xxv.).

Developed most conspicuously in his classic trilogy (*Technological Society, Political Illusion,* and *Propaganda)*, rearticulated and extended in *Technological System* and *Technological Bluff, la technique* is the organizing idea for all of Ellul's work. He exhaustively portrays one thesis—that industrialized nations are beguiled enough by machine productivity to reconstruct all their social institutions on this model. The technical mystique so captivates our thinking that we cast aside all other imperatives "as in ancient days men put out the eyes of nightingales in order to make them sing better" (p. 75).

In coming to grips with Technique, Ellul addressed a wide-ranging audience of practitioners as well as theorists, thoughtful people both inside and outside the academy. In this issue Michel Hourcade and Boyan Koutevski continue that tradition, both academically-trained but serving also as a government official (Hourcade) and media professional (Koutevski). Hourcade wants to understand sports decisively and chooses Technique as his critical lens, rather than professionalization, money, and media spectacle. Koutevski explores the Internet in terms of Technique.

Little needs to be said about the importance of assessing the explosive growth and challenge of the Internet in the decade since Ellul's death. With the record-setting attendance and skyrocketing economics of sport in our era, with the Tour de France, Wimbledon, Olympic Games, U.S. baseball World Series, the popular film "Bend it Like Beckham," the influential book *How Soccer Explains the World,* and many other evidences, it is also timely to focus some Ellulian attention on sport.

We are also honored to have Professor Rustum Roy's "review" of *The Technological Society* in this fiftieth year after its initial publication (p. 19). Associate Editor David Gill is provoked both by the contentious and superficial political contest this fall in the U.S. and by the fortieth anniversary of the Free Speech Movement at his alma mater, UC Berkeley, to reflect on Ellul's contribution to a better politics (p. 23). Gill also provides a review of *Ellul Forum* Contributing Editor Bill Vanderburg's newly reissued *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work*, a fine little introduction to Ellul's thought that Vanderburg edited from his interviews twenty-five years ago (p. 21).

Next up (Spring 2005, Issue 35) we will be thinking about the relationship of Rene Girard's ideas to those of Ellul. In Fall 2005 (Issue 36) we are planning an issue on Ellul's biblical studies. We gratefully welcome your ideas, news, manuscripts, feedback, support, and ongoing participation in the IJES.

Clifford G. Christians, Editor editor@ellul.org

Sport, Technique, & Society: Ellul on Sports

by Michel Hourcade

Michel Hourcade is a comptroller for the French government, having served 20 years previously at the French ministry of Youth and Sport. He is a graduate of the Institute of Political Studies at the University of Bordeaux, co-editor of Jacques Ellul's course lectures on Marxist Thought (Paris: La Table Ronde, 2003), and author of articles on sports.

"I find sports boring." This admission by Jacques Ellul, expressed in the course of his correspondence with Didier Nordon[1], seems like a sufficient reason for ruling out any effort to study his opinions and ideas on the subject of sports. Also, of course, sufficient to discourage the reader from venturing beyond the first few lines of this article. However, the context of Ellul's words deserves attention, because it reveals a thought process that is both critical and self-critical.

Here is the context of Ellul's statement: "I do not go to the trouble of making a critical analysis of social phenomena that bore me, that I have nothing to do with. I find sports boring, but I can conceive of someone taking pleasure in going in for a sport. I do not understand how someone can feel passionate as a spectator, however. But since I am not involved with them, I take care not to write about sports as sports I did so once, and made huge mistakes!)." So (to quote the title of a recent book on Ellul[2]), "the one who foresaw (almost) everything," once took the liberty of writing about sports, and later recognized that he had gone far afield.

Should such a modest effort (just one text on sports, and mistaken at that!) cause us to consider closed the subject of Ellul on sports? Or, on the contrary, should we keep the issue on the table, and try to locate Ellul's comments on sports, and, secondarily, his "huge mistakes"? The second option naturally appeals more to me, considering that in 2004 Ellul is still an important author, and sports remain a major facet of our civilization.

My reading in Ellul so far (probably incomplete) has uncovered five separate references that would constitute his "sports bibliography":

1. Brief references in two of his very early writings, in the mid-1930's;
2. A section in one chapter of a major book, *The Technological Society*[3];
3. A section in one chapter of *The Technological Bluff*[4];
4. An aside in one of his last books (see above);
5. An article requested by a critical sports journal in French.

---

[1] Jacques Ellul and Didier Nordon, *L 'homme a lui-meme: Correspondance* (Paris: Felin, 1992), p. 173.

[2] Jean-Luc Porquet, *Jacques Ellul: L'homme qui avait (presque) toutprevu* (Paris: Le Cherche-Midi, 2003).

[3] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964; Fr. eds. 1954 and 1990).

[4] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990; Fr. ed. 1988).

The publication in 2003 of the first issue of the *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*[5] gives us access to some of Ellul's earliest writings, written as he was finishing his studies. It seems worthwhile to place ourselves at least briefly in the center of his thinking at that time in his life.

Ellul's seventeen-page essay "Fatality in the modern world"[6] shows the weight of new forces that press heavily on man and leave him with only one possible response: passivity. Centralization; gigantic size; Technique (already a concern of Ellul's!) which makes centralization and hugeness possible; and the powerlessness of politics—all of these serve as examples of this fatality that turns all men into proletarians.

What strikes Ellul about this society is the importance of the masses, a concept he takes care to define, and then goes on to illustrate, in particular by means of references to the phenomenon of sport. Ellul states that "man becomes part of the crowd. He will become an element within a mass, that is, within a grouping of men, which has come together under some external pressure, for a given purpose they share. Such a grouping lasts only a short time, but such masses occur again and again, almost without interruption, in our society. They are constantly re-formed: the individual becomes part of a mass in the workplace, whether office or factory, he belongs to the mass of readers of the same evening paper, the mass of moviegoers, the mass of *sports enthusiasts*" (p. 110; emphasis added). These words, in a text to which we can assign a date of 1936 or 1937 (p. 95, n. 1), probably constitute one of the first references to sports in Ellul's work. As we saw above, sports are not Ellul's favorite topic, but that does not keep them from surfacing spontaneously in his mind when he is describing society.

Ellul's second reference to sports comes in an essay written around the same time as the above text, in 1937: "Le fascisme, fils du liberalisme" ("Fascism, Offspring of Liberalism").[7] The very subject of fascism offers a hint as to Ellul's probable inspiration in making a reference to sports: the Berlin Olympic Games of 1936 and their context, the Nazi regime and its propaganda display. In this essay also, Ellul points out the role of the masses in human submission. But in this case he offers a more expanded study (some 25 pages in the *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*), intentionally based on Emile Durkheim's sociology, with some references to Georges Gurvitch. The essay concludes with a quotation from Alexis de Tocqueville.

Ellul approaches Fascism and liberalism by means of Durkheim's classical distinction between the two forms of solidarity: mechanical and organic. In mechanical solidarity, an individual is subject to society, whose collective consciousness overlays individual consciousness, and penal law is the juridical expression of society. In organic solidarity,

---

[5] *Cahiers Jacques Ellul: Pour une Critique de la Societe Technicienne,* no. 1, "Les annees personnalistes," ed. Patrick Troude-Chastenet (2003).

[6] Jacques Ellul, "Fatalite du monde moderne," *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, ed. Patrick Troude-Chastenet, no. 1 (2003), pp. 95-111.

[7] Jacques Ellul, "Le fascisme, fils du liberalisme," *Esprit*, vol. 5, no. 53 (1 Feb. 1937), pp. 761-797; reprinted in *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, ed. Patrick Troude-Chastenet, no. 1 (2003), pp. 113-137.

society breaks down into many subgroups, and the will of the individual plays an important role. The individual is not directly connected to society as a whole, but rather to its parts. The juridical expression of this society is civil, contractual law.

Another distinction, based on duration, is added to this distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity: the masses, distinguished by their temporary character, are seen as distinct from more permanent arrangements, such as groups, the abstract collective, etc. Ellul identifies still another group: the abstract masses, which passively receive external influences, and can transform themselves into concrete masses, thus giving birth to Fascism. As for sports, "liberalism has brought about a social passivity unprecedented in history. It has permitted the creation of abstract masses [. . .] in which the life of a man is covered over by a series of overlapping circles that completely engulf the individual: the cafe group, the club group, *the sports group*, and the trade or professional group" (pp. 135136; emphasis added).

In *The Technological Society*, first published in French in 1954, Ellul devotes a separate section to "Sport" in his fifth chapter, in which he deals with human techniques. Between sections entitled "Amusement" and "Medicine," he devotes two pages to the many aspects of sport, using a distinctly critical tone.[8] Two main themes are taken up, illustrated by examples that initially seem disconcerting. First of all, Ellul notes that sports are connected with big cities (perhaps an allusion to English "rural sports" in the 17th century, such as hunting), and with industrialization: first English, then American, and finally Soviet. We should note that this correlation between industrialization and the appearance and development of modern sports is quite commonly laid out in modern studies on sports. Most authors limit themselves to mentioning the historical co-existence of these two developments, with only a few writers daring to answer the question: is the appearance of sports inevitable in a society in the process of industrialization? The boldest writers emphasize the relationship between the gymnasium and the factory. Some more careful ones enumerate the inventions (in transportation and telecommunications) that have enabled different disciplines or sports events to reach the level of fame, passion, or myth (for example, football, baseball, the Olympic Games, and the Tour de France). Still other authors search out possible cultural or national factors. Richard D. Mandell does this: "The same forces that made the young nation a populous industrial power made American sport."[9] Although Ellul did not originate the idea of a connection between industrialization and sports, we should recognize that he pointed it out, half a century ago. Perhaps he discovered it in reading the history or sociology of sport, or, just as likely, he may have come up with this linkage on the basis of his own reflection on the history of Technique.

Ellul continues in *The Technological Society* by saying that sport is also connected with the world of Technique, and is itself a Technique. Here we enter Ellul's preferred

---

[8] *The Technological Society*, pp. 382-384.

[9] Richard D. Mandell, *Sport, a Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 184.

domain, in which he proceeds pretty much on his own, since his keen understanding of the technical phenomenon constitutes an original approach to sport. For instance, the distinction he makes between swimming and the competitive sport of swimming is quite clear and appropriate. The degree to which sports involve technical skill is only rarely noticed and commented on by others,[10] implicitly confirming Ellul's understanding of Technique as omnipresent in society, to such a degree that it becomes invisible.

We could extend Ellul's principles by noting that physical exercise initially constitutes the least technical human activity. For this reason, it is the most susceptible to Technique. The nude Greek athlete apparently shocked the Romans and then the Church; according to etymology, the gymnast was similarly nude. Modern athletes wear scarcely more clothes, but their scanty attire has been carefully designed to offer the least possible aerodynamic resistance. Such clothing is made of the most efficient new fiber blends. This modern athlete's movements and stride have been filmed, dissected, compared, and improved. His food intake obeys the dictates of dieticians, he is medically monitored, and his real or perceived deficiencies are offset by inventions straight from the laboratory. A psychologist completes this medical engineering of sport.

Swimming vs. natation: the athlete is Technique in human form. Should we soften this statement by thinking about diversity in the practice of sports? For example, the difference between high-level sports and recreational sports, or between professional and amateur sports? I am not inclined to think so. The most anonymous athlete, even the beginner, will choose equipment that imitates the champion's. He buys performance enhancing agents at the drugstore or online, and wears tiny electronic devices that measure his pulse and keep track of how far he has run. A study in November 2003 revealed that ten percent of French teenagers who take part in sports use stimulants. According to this same study, young French athletes begin to use such substances at the age of fourteen; Americans apparently begin at eight years of age.

Ellul continues with a reference to the use of equipment such as stopwatches: "This mechanization of actions is accompanied by the mechanization of sporting goods [. . .] In this exact measurement of time, in this precision training of muscular actions, and in the principle of the 'record,' we find repeated in sport one of the essential elements of industrial life" (p. 383). So when science and budding industrial technique met in England, sport very quickly became infused with a modern mentality that would lead to amazing consequences. After all, expressions we commonly use today, such as: "running the hundred meter dash in ten seconds," presuppose that we have previously defined the length of the meter, and that we can measure in seconds. None of this was scientifically and technologically possible before the end of the eighteenth century, which saw the measurement of the earth's meridian and the invention of the Swiss watch. Unexpectedly, but significantly, we can observe these same aspects of modern

---

[10] See, however, "Presence de la technique," in Georges Vigarello, *Du jeu ancien au show sportif: La naissance d'un mythe* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2002).

mentality, and therefore of sport mentality, in the early days of mountain climbing,[11] at about the same time.

After considering the relationship of sports, industry, and Technique, Ellul comes to the question of the subjection of man to totalitarian society through sports. At this point Ellul's analysis converges with that of an active minority among sociologists who are critical of sport, represented in France by Jean-Marie Brohm, of whom we will speak later. Ellul states that sports enable a man to relax from the pressures he experiences, but at the same time, surreptitiously, they adapt him to new constraints. This "insidious Technique" extends to the masses. In the guise of team spirit, sports prepare people for the totalitarian spirit, so that sports are essential for Fascist, Nazi, and Communist dictatorships. In "developing" countries, we can see the concurrent penetration of techniques and sports.

Ellul is scarcely gentler in speaking of the United States as the country that first developed sport as Technique, and in calling it "the most conformist of all countries" (p. 383; here Ellul apparently takes up an observation usually attributed to Tocqueville). What can we say to this indictment? As noted above, the analysis of sports by means of Technique is rather uncommon, and radical critique of sports comes only from a minority of voices. Clearly, it is dangerous to pontificate on the degree of conformity among Americans. We can point out simply that there are arguments both for and against. A significant amount of sports sociology, especially in America, follows a functional approach that tends to recognize the role, implicitly positive, of sports in adapting people to social values and in socializing them. As Aesop might have said, sports are the best thing and the worst thing.

Leaving this debate behind momentarily, I suggest to the reader that we examine the sometimes disconcerting examples cited by Ellul to support his argument. He offers three, all related to the relationship between sports, industry, and Technique. Here is the first: "The only country in central Europe which had organized sport, Czechoslovakia, was the only one which was industrialized" (p. 382). Since we have no additional precise references from Ellul here, we can speculate that Ellul had in mind the "sokol" movement, founded in 1862 in what would become Czechoslovakia. It was an organization that aimed at developing "a healthy mind in a healthy body." This movement took root in the United States beginning in 1865, and apparently continues to flourish. Ellul's rather abrupt statement thus seems to refer to an established episode in the history of sport. In this example we can see something of the extent and the diversity of his knowledge, which casts some doubt on his claim to have no interest in sports.

The second example, from ancient history, seems less surprising coming from the pen of Ellul the historian: "The enormous contrast between the athletes of Greece and those of Rome is well known. For the Greeks, physical exercise was an ethic for

---

[11] Nicolas Giudici, *La philosophie du Mont Blanc: De l'alpinisme a l'economie immaterielle* (Paris: Grasset, 2000).

developing freely and harmoniously the form and strength of the human body. For the Romans, it was a technique for increasing the legionnaire's efficiency" (pp. 382-383). Evidently, Ellul knew at least some of the many studies on physical exercise in antiquity, which conclude that the Romans had a concept of physical activity different from the Greeks, a concept directly oriented toward its military application. On the other hand, historians of ancient Greece emphasize the very strong religious connotation of physical activity, especially the Olympic Games. In descriptions of modern sports, and not only of the Olympics, the parallel between sports and religion recurs often. We might consider it paradoxical that Ellul, who devoted much of his writing to religious issues, did not note this comparison, which has become almost a cliche.

The third and final example Ellul offers is the most disconcerting: "The best athletes come from workingclass environments. Peasants, woodsmen, and the like, may be more vigorous than the proletariat, but they are not as good athletes. In part, the reason for this is that machine work develops the musculature necessary for sport, which is very different from peasant musculature. Machine work also develops the speed and precision of actions and reflexes" (p. 382). We probably cannot uncover the sources that enabled Ellul to arrive at this clear distinction between worker and peasant performance We can credit him with considerable knowledge of lumberjacks' capacities, since he is known to have occasionally borrowed an ax to chop down a tree, for relaxation and exercise. But "the one who foresaw (almost) everything" may still have surprises in store for us. French statistics dating for the most part after Ellul's writing of *The Technological Society* indeed demonstrate, on the one hand, that workers go in much more for sports than peasants, and, on the other hand, that physical aptitudes are correlated with height. Also, according to statistics, peasants tend to be smaller than workers.

In Ellul's trilogy on Technique, *The Technological System*[12] and *The Technological Bluff*[13] follow *The Technological Society*. Although absent from *The Technological System*, sports surface again in the "*Bluff*," as a six-page section inserted between those on games and the automobile, in a chapter on diversions. By way of introduction, Ellul refers briefly to *The Technological Society* and outlines his dual approach involving spectacle and technological discourse, which "has transformed sport into an enormous spectacle" (p. 366).

Clearly, by "spectacle" Ellul means television, and the overwhelming presence of sport in this medium, as illustrated by many statistics. We can also suggest that Ellul may have borrowed at this point from *The Society of the Spectacle*,[14] the best seller of Situationist literature, published in 1967, and well known to Ellul (who was cited in the sacred texts of the *Internationale Situationniste*). Technological discourse is the

---

[12] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980; Fr. eds. 1977 and 2004).

[13] See note 4.

[14] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1994; Fr. ed. 1967).

key term underlying this third part of Ellul's trilogy, following his earlier volumes on the technological society and the technological system.

As in his earlier book, Ellul amazes us in the "*Bluff*" with the multiplicity of his examples, which prove that he did pay attention to sports, in clear contradiction to the lack of interest in them that he claims elsewhere. We also note some naive touches or throwbacks ("Originally a city team used to be made up of people from that city," p. 368; "But where is the tennis of yesteryear . . .?," p. 368), and this unassailable title quoted from the discerning anarchist Cavanna: "Dying as a Fool for Paris-Dakar" (p. 370). Ellul mentions the place of sports in the media, professionalism, money, and violence, offering an abundance of examples and figures, in keeping with the overall tendency of this book, which overflows with statistics and references. But Ellul does not draw only on current events. Comparisons with antiquity mushroom as he writes. The sale of professional soccer players "reminds us of the auctioning of gladiators, pugilists, and chariot drivers at Rome" (p. 368, n.11). The Olympic Games of antiquity (another backwardlooking touch?) "were something quite different . . . there was a truce, fighting stopped, Greek unity was restored" (p. 369), in precise contrast with modern-day Olympic boycotts applied to the United States, the Soviet Union, and South Africa. Ellul suggests that the Games have become an expression of conflict "due to the technicizing of society (not its politicizing, for no world was more political than the Greek)"! (p. 370).

I find three of his observations especially striking because of their relevance or their originality. First, Ellul (who knew sailing well from time spent at the Arcachon Basin, a favorite spot for the sport not far from Bordeaux) describes the racing of yachts, which have become a medium of advertising and "monstrous gadgets" (p. 367, n.9). They are outfitted with satellite navigation systems, weather decoders, on-board computers, and television cameras for retransmission by the media—all presented by the press without irony as "Technology in the Service of Fantasy" (p. 371). A fine example of technological discourse that masks the technical reality and leads us to confuse the real with the virtual, the cause with the effect.

Next, the creation of events: no empty slots may be left in the feeding of the spectacle-hungry public. Does such creation stem, as Ellul suggests (for example, an event "has to be staged," p. 370) from the will of mysterious forces, from the constraints of implacable Technique, or simply from the logic of media programming, which abhors a vacuum and loves publicity revenue? The observation of a so-called journalist shouting out his lungs, with heavy use of hyperbole, in his commentary on the retransmission of a dull but expensive sporting event, can serve as evidence in this debate. Note that this staging of events mentioned in Ellul's section on sports could take its place just as well in other parts of the book: Games, Diversions, Information, etc.

Finally, in counterpoint to this downward spiral in sports and the media , Ellul surprises us with a rather unexpected reference to bullfighting: "the barbarous game has been ritualized," and its "collective behavior set within a kind of communal ethic" (p. 369).

331

We will conclude this consideration of sports in *The Technological Bluff* with a passage that shows Ellul's originality in reflection and action. In connection with the inordinately high cost of signing professional soccer players, he mentions the financial difficulties of soccer clubs (a problem that was just beginning when Ellul's book came out, but which has continued in its importance since then), the generous subsidies offered to them by municipalities, and the use for this purpose of taxes levied on many taxpayers who have no passionate interest in sports at all. In 1988, Ellul was certainly one of the first to have identified and raised this problem of subsidies to professional clubs. Beginning in 1994, it would become the object of sharp debates and decisions aimed at limiting such generosity by local governments. But in particular, as he mentions in a footnote, Ellul had proposed a tax reduction for those who did not care about sports clubs (p. 367, n.10). As a pioneer of "think globally, act locally," whether or not he invented the slogan, Ellul singled out sports for his participation in local affairs, along with the environment in Aquitaine and its coastline, and action to prevent young people from becoming delinquents.

In April 1991, the journal *Quel Corps?* published its 41st issue, entitled "The Cannibalism of Sports." In this number of more than two hundred pages, Ellul had an article that ran to seven pages: "Sport et technique" (Sports and Technique).[15] The journal's director, Jean-Marie Brohm, wrote two articles for the same journal issue: "La guerre olympique" (The Olympic War) and "Le sport est un assassin" (Sport is an Assassin), whose very titles give evidence of the existence in France of the critical school of sports sociologists mentioned above. Can we find in this article by Ellul the "huge mistakes" he admitted to in his 1992 correspondance with Nordon? In any case, we probably owe this article in *Quel Corps?* to Nordon, a friend of both Ellul and Brohm.

After explaining his understanding of Technique, in the introduction to this article, Ellul sets out the image of sports prevalent in 1930, and then describes the impact of the technological society: on sports, on the bodies of those who practice sports, and on sports equipment. He concludes with the role of money. According to Ellul, around 1930, when the era of Technique really began, the image of sports was that of a game played locally, to act on the imperative of "a healthy mind in a healthy body." There were sports for the rich, and other sports for everybody else. For all, sports meant fair play, according to rules that prepared one for life in society (note here the function of sports in socialization, mentioned above).

In this passage, Ellul is careful to look at sport objectively. He limits himself to describing the image of sport at the time, since it quickly became an ideological, idealized concept. As in the material from *The Technological Society* and *The Technological Bluff* we have examined, Ellul here illustrates his ideas with many specific examples. He calls boxing "one of the first sports to be regulated" (p. 78), and indeed, although it was not the first sport to be organized and to have rules, boxing was organized as a sports association in England in 1884, on the basis of the Marquis of Queensberry

---

[15] Jacques Ellul, "Sport et Technique," *Quel Corps?*, no. 41 (April 1991), pp. 77-83.

rules. Ellul cites another example, from soccer, which he says already existed professionally in Great Britain in 1900-1930. Here also, Ellul is right, since soccer became a professional sport in Great Britain in 1885. We cannot fault him in this first part of the article. In his enthusiasm, he cannot resist the pleasure of adding a few historical details, which curious readers would surely try to verify: "of course, fair play was not always observed: cyclists in the second Tour de France were knocked senseless by regional fans of another team" (p. 78 n.1). Here is another one: "in auto races, people sometimes put nails on the track" (p. 78 n.1).

What happened to sport as it was practiced at the beginning of the twentieth century? Ellul indicates that in the technological society, winning, and thus competition, became decisive values. In sports, a competitor must choose the winning method at all costs, because Technique teaches us we must always win. Images broadcast around the world by means of new techniques, coupled with our hunger for entertainment, have encouraged aggressiveness, replacing the earlier value accorded to beauty and elegance of movement. Perhaps idealizing the past a bit, Ellul offers the boxer Georges Carpentier as an example. He makes a perceptive observation, however, when he applies this aspect of Technique to tennis: "muscles that pack a powerful punch" (p. 79). What would Ellul have said about tennis in the new millenium, and especially women's tennis?

Next, Ellul examines techniques of the athletic body as a development of Taylorism. He refers to the use of film, physical and psychological preparation, dietetics, and chemical agents and drugs. His thoughts on the banning of illegal drugs need to be quoted in full: "This prohibition can be perfectly understood in the case of two men (or two teams) opposing each other, who would have been like all the others, for whom sports were a hobby, much as other people might take part in amateur theater. But is this prohibition really so understandable in the case of two opposing machines, whose only purpose is to show their power and win?" (p. 80).

Ellul's point of view calls for two comments. First of all, the article was published in 1991, well before 1998. In that fateful year, the Tour de France, the bicycle race that had been exalted to mythical status, and that enjoyed international renown, was the object of devastating revelations concerning the massive use of illegal drugs in both professional and amateur cycling. Since 1998, drug use in sports has become a matter of widespread public interest. Its existence is divulged from time to time in detailed revelations which prove embarrassing for the sports world, whereas earlier, the mere suggestion of such a thing was often considered obscene or sacriligious ("sportingly incorrect" as well as "politically incorrect"). Now drug use is no longer such a taboo subject. The year 1998 enables us, then, to make a ruthless distinction between those who had enough perception and intellectual honesty to deal with the drug problem, and those who merely got on the train after it had already begun to roll, or who even discovered the existence and the importance of the sports phenomenon by means of attention paid by the media to the drug scandal. And we must note that Ellul belongs to the first group.

Secondly, the use of chemical substances, as part of the mobilization of all possible technical resources for the purpose of improving performance and achieving victory, may indeed seem perfectly consistent. Drug use is just one more demonstration of the impact of Technique on our society. Its tacit acceptance in sports circles and the relative indifference of public opinion show rather clearly the moral standards that prevail in a technological society. Sports in general, and drug use in particular, fit in perfectly with Ellul's analysis.

His article continues with a denunciation of the ridiculous precision involved in the calculation of records and the use of sophisticated devices to distinguish between competitors when the human eye cannot detect any difference between them; he calls this "the irony of a human spectacle utterly outclassed by human technical inventions" (p. 81). Ellul mentions another gadget: the racing car, "a strange instrument that resembles a car only in that it has four wheels" (p. 81). Then he assesses automobile research, carried out by people who are "more and more specialized, in typical technical fashion" (p. 81). In reality, Ellul's commentary sheds little light on the subject of auto racing and does not really enrich his analysis of Technique.

On the other hand, he spends considerable time on the bicycle, which he believes has undergone the most spectacular transformation. And it is true that the bicycle used in racing or in the time trials of the Tour de France has undergone very visible changes. But Vigarello[16] would no doubt remind us that the bicycle underwent a series of important changes right after it was invented: the free wheel, pressurized tires, and the gear shift. This last invention was long banned for reasons of "sportsmanship." So perhaps the distinction between the early period and the advent of the technological society should be sought in the change from concern with the perfecting of machines to concern with obtaining the maximum performance from the human machine. After examining these concrete examples, Ellul alludes briefly to developments in pole vaulting and skiing. Then he questions the meaning of such "progress" in performance, the supposed reality of the superiority of contemporary athletes over earlier ones, or over ordinary people in previous historical periods. He concludes that sports records become values in themselves, and that they demonstrate the triumph of techniques over bodies and equipment.

Ellul closes his article by considering how money has become the ultimate justification for sport. He spells out the reciprocal relationships, the "self-augmentation" (alluding to one of the characteristics of Technique that he has outlined in his books) resulting from the media, advertising, rebroadcasting rights, sponsorship, sports organizations, spectators and TV viewers. Ellul also mentions the role of government authorities in the construction of sports venues. The end result of the interaction of these different players parallels the conclusions of current economic and sociological analyses of trends in sport. In his conclusion, Ellul defines sports as "entertainment that allows us to absorb unused passions (in a society that no longer has any values),

---

[16] See note 10.

in the midst of millions of men who no longer believe in anything" (p. 83). In this way sports fall into "this empty space with no meaning that characterizes our time, and that stems from the replacement of personal action with the spectacle of collective expression" (p. 83).

What main impressions can we gain from Ellul's views on sports, spread out over more than fifty years, from his first to his last writings? Clearly, his alleged lack of interest and the mistakes he claims to have made are largely contradicted by his remarks, which go to the heart of the subject, with accurate aim. Except for some examples we cannot confirm and an occasional hasty word, Ellul makes use of established arguments based on current events and important books. It is perhaps surprising that he fails to refer to Norbert Elias, a historian and sociologist like Ellul, but fifteen years older. There are other parallels between them: both treat the subject of sports in summary fashion in a major work (*The Technological Society* in French in 1954 in Ellul's case; *The Civilizing Process* for Elias[17]). But of the two, only Elias would return at length to the subject of sports, which he considered a key for understanding the evolution of modern societies. He wrote a number of articles since gathered into a single volume in translation.[18]

Another item we note as missing, already referred to, is the importance of religion in sports, and the role of sport as a possible substitute for religion: Pierre de Coubertin proclaimed this, and many have suspected it. Paradoxically, Ellul barely touches on the matter, merely mentioning the "millions of men who no longer believe in anything." In reality, for Ellul sport is only a technical epiphenomenon in a world in which man "transfers his sense of the sacred to the very thing that has destroyed its former object: to technique itself."[19]

Translated by Joyce Hanks, University of Scranton.]]

Sport, technique et societe Le sport vu par Jacques Ellul

Michel Hourcade

« Le sport m'ennuie »...

Exprime au detour d'une de ses correspondances, cet aveu suffirait a disqualifier toute tentative d'etude des opinions et reflexions de Jacques Ellul sur le phenomene sportif et, accessoirement, a dissuader tout lecteur d'aller au-dela des premieres lignes

---

[17] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (New York: Urizen, 1978); *La civilisation des moeurs* ([Paris]: Calmann-Levy, 1973; original German ed. 1939).

[18] Norbert Elias, *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process* (New York: B. Blackwell, 1986); *Sport, violence et societe: La violence maitrisee* (Paris: Fayard, 1994). The title of one of the articles in this volume, "The Quest for Excitement in Unexciting Society," seems to parallel Ellul's words.

[19] *The Technological Society*, p. 143.

du present texte. Le contexte de la citation merite toutefois d'etre mentionne car revelateur d'une demarche a la fois critique et autocritique.

« Je ne me donne pas la peine », nous dit Ellul, « de proceder a une analyse critique de phenomenes sociaux qui m'ennuient, ou je me sens etranger. Le sport m'ennuie, je conçois qu'on prenne plaisir a pratiquer un sport - moins a le regarder et a se passionner. La, je ne comprends pas. Mais dans la mesure ou il m'est etranger, je me garde d'ecrire sur le sport en tant que tel (je l'ai fait une fois et j'avais commis de belles erreurs!) ».

« Celui qui avait (presque) tout prevu », pour reprendre le titre d'un ouvrage recent qui lui est consacre,[20] se serait donc laisse aller a ecrire sur le sport (une fois) et reconnaitrait s'etre fourvoye.

Tant de modestie (un seul texte, et errone de surcroit!) doit-il nous inciter a refermer le chapitre du sport vu par Ellul ou au contraire a le garder ouvert en recherchant les ecrits elluliens sur le sport et, subsidiairement, ses belles erreurs? La seconde option m'a naturellement paru plus stimulante si l'on veut bien considerer qu'en 2004 Jacques Ellul est toujours un auteur important et que le phenomene sportif reste une manifestation majeure de notre civilisation.

La « bibliographie sportive » attribuable a Jacques Ellul recouvre, en l'etat actuel (probablement incomplet) de mes lectures, cinq references bien distinctes:

- Une breve reference dans deux ecrits "de jeunesse" (vers 1936)

- Un sous-chapitre dans son ouvrage majeur *La technique ou l'enjeu du siecle* (1954)[21][22]

- Un sous-chapitre dans *Le bluff technologique* (1988)[23]

- Une contribution sollicitee par une revue critique du sport française (1991)

- Une mention dans un de ses derniers ecrits (1992; voir ci-dessus)

La publication en 2003 du premier numero des *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*[24] permet d'acceder a des textes qui comptent parmi les plus anciens sous la plume d'Ellul, qui achevait alors ses etudes. Il n'est pas sans interet de se replacer, au moins succinctement, au cwur de la reflexion qui l'anime alors.

---

[20] Jacques Ellul et Didier Nordon, *Lhomme a lui-meme: Correspondance* (Paris: Felin, 1992), p. 173.

[21] Jean-Luc Porquet, *Jacques Ellul: L'homme qui avait (presque) tout prevu* (Paris: Le Cherche-Midi, 2003).

[22] Jacques Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siecle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1954; 2[e] ed. Paris: Economica, 1990).

[23] Jacques Ellul, *Le bluff technologique* (Paris: Hachette, 1988).

[24] Cahiers Jacques Ellul: Pour une Critique de la Societe Technicienne, no. 1, "Les annees personnalistes," ed. Patrick Troude-Chastenet (2003).

Le texte *Fatalite du monde moderne*[25] enonce en dix-sept pages le poids des forces nouvelles qui pesent sur l'homme et ne lui laissent qu'une possibilite: la passivite. La centralisation, le gigantisme, la technique (deja!) qui permet leur realisation, l'impuissance de la politique, illustrent cette fatalite qui fait de tous les hommes des proletaires. Ce qui frappe Ellul dans cette societe, c'est l'importance des masses, concept qu'il s'attache a definir et qu'il va illustrer, notamment, par reference au phenomene sportif. L'homme, nous dit Ellul, « rentre desormais dans la foule. Il sera l'element d'une masse, c'est-a-dire d'une reunion d'hommes, faite sous une pression exterieure dans un but determine pour chacun d'eux, et qui ne dure que peu de temps - mais ces masses se renouvellent presque sans interruption dans notre societe - elles sont incessamment refaites - l'individu fait partie de la masse de son travail - au bureau ou dans l'usine - de la masse des lecteurs de Paris-Soir, de la masse des spectateurs de cinema, de la masse de la *societe sportive* » (p. 110; c'est nous qui soulignons).

Voila pour ce qui est probablement une des premieres mentions du sport dans l'reuvre ellulienne a travers ce texte que l'on peut dater de 1936 ou de 1937 (p. 95, n. 1). On l'a vu plus haut, le sport n'est pas le sujet de predilection de Jacques Ellul, ce qui n'empeche pas qu'il lui vienne assez spontanement a l'esprit dans sa description de la societe.

Le second texte a mentionner le sport, intitule *Le fascisme, fils du liberalisme*,[26] a ete ecrit a la meme epoque (1937) que le precedent. Le sujet meme du fascisme nous fournit un indice assez vraisemblable des origines de l'inspiration d'Ellul faisant reference au sport: l'organisation des Jeux Olympiques de Berlin en 1936, dans le cadre du regime nazi et de son deferlement de propagande. La masse est ici encore le groupe humain designe pour son role de soumission de l'homme, mais a travers un developpement plus etoffe (vingt-cinq pages dans les *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*) d'inspiration deliberement sociologique, empruntant pour l'essentiel a Durkheim, ponctuellement a Gurvitch et concluant sur une citation de Tocqueville.

Fascisme et liberalisme sont abordes a travers la distinction classique formulee par Durkheim entre les deux formes de solidarite, mecanique et organique. Dans la solidarite mecanique, l'individu est soumis a la societe, la conscience collective recouvre les consciences individuelles. Le droit penal est l'expression juridique de la societe. Dans la solidarite organique, la societe se fractionne en sous-groupes nombreux et la volonte individuelle y joue un role important. L'individu n'est pas rattache directement a la societe globale mais a ses parties. L'expression juridique de cette societe est le droit civil, contractuel.

Sur la division solidarite mecanique-solidarite organique vient se greffer une autre division selon la duree, la masse qui se distingue par son caractere passager d'autres

---

[25] Jacques Ellul, "Fatalite du monde moderne," *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, ed. Patrick Troude-Chastenet, no. 1 (2003), pp. 95-111.

[26] Jacques Ellul, "Le fascisme, fils du liberalisme," *Esprit*, vol. 5, no. 53 (1 fev. 1937), pp. 761-797; reimprime dans *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, ed. Patrick Troude-Chastenet, no. 1 (2003), pp. 113-137.

notions plus permanentes (le groupe, le collectif abstrait). Ellul distingue en outre les masses abstraites, qui recoivent passivement des influences de l'exterieur, et peuvent se transformer en masses concretes, donnant alors naissance au fascisme. Quant au sport: « le liberalisme a entraine un amorphisme social probablement sans precedent dans l'histoire. Il a permis la creation de ces masses abstraites [...] ou la vie de l'homme se recouvre d'une serie de cercles qui se recoupent et qui absorbent totalement l'individu. Groupe du cafe et groupe du club, *groupe du sport* et groupe du metier » (p. 795, 1937; pp. 135-136, 2003; c'est nous qui soulignons).

Dans *La technique ou l'enjeu du siecle* publiee en 1954, le sport fait l'objet d'un traitement specifique a l'interieur du chapitre V consacre aux techniques de l'homme. Entre *divertissement* et *medecine*, deux pages sont consacrees au sport sous ses multiples facettes et dans une tonalite nettement critique.[27]

Deux themes principaux sont abordes, emailles d'illustrations et d'exemples a premiere vue deconcertants.

Le sport, note d'abord Ellul, est lie a la grande ville (allusion possible aux *rural sports* anglais du 17eme siecle, comme la chasse a courre) et a l'industrialisation, anglaise, americaine puis sovietique. On observera que cette correlation entre industrialisation et apparition et developpement du sport moderne est aujourd'hui tres couramment exposee dans la litterature consacree au sport. Si la plupart des auteurs se bornent a mentionner la concomitance historique des deux evenements, peu se hasardent a repondre a la question: l'apparition du sport etait-elle inevitable dans une societe en cours d'industrialisation? Les plus hardis souligneront la parente entre gymnase et manufacture. Plus prudents, d'autres enumerent les inventions (transports, telecommunications) qui ont permis a des disciplines ou des manifestations sportives (que l'on songe au football, au base-ball, aux Jeux Olympiques ou au Tour de France) d'acceder a la notoriete, a la passion ou au mythe. D'autres encore recherchent une tracabilite culturelle ou nationale. Ainsi R.D. Mandell: « the same forces that made the young nation a populous industrial power made American sport ».[28] A defaut d'originalite, il faut sans doute reconnaitre a l'auteur de *La technique* le merite d'avoir, il y a un demi-siecle, identifie ce lien, que ce soit a partir de lectures sur l'histoire ou la sociologie du sport ou, tout aussi vraisemblablement, sur la base de sa propre reflexion sur l'histoire de la technique.

Le sport, poursuit Ellul, est aussi lie au monde technique, il est lui-meme une technique. Nous sommes evidemment ici dans son domaine de predilection, ou il evolue un peu seul il est vrai, tant sa perception aigue du phenomene technique constitue une approche specifique du sport. La distinction qu'il opere entre, par exemple, nage et natation, est tout a fait explicite et pertinente. La part de technicite incorporee au sport est rarement perdue et commentee,[29] confirmation implicite de la perception ellulienne

---

[27] *La technique*, pp. 346-348 (1954, 1990).

[28] Richard D. Mandell, *Sport, a Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 184.

[29] Voir cependant "Presence de la technique," in Georges Vigarello, *Du jeu ancien au show sportif:*

d'une technique omnipresente dans la societe et qui finit par devenir invisible. Dans le prolongement du texte, on pourrait avancer que l'exercice physique est au depart l'activite humaine la moins technicisee et qu'elle recele donc le plus fort potentiel de technicisation. L'athlete grec etait nu, ce qui choqua parait-il les Romains, puis l'Eglise. Le gymnaste, etymologiquement, arborait la meme nudite. L'athlete moderne est a peine plus vetu. Mais le peu de vetement qu'il porte a ete soigneusement etudie pour ne pas offrir de prise au vent. Son materiel utilise les materiaux nouveaux les plus performants. Son geste, sa foulee, ont ete filmes, decortiques, compares et ameliores. Son alimentation observe les prescriptions du dieteticien, son suivi medical est assure, ses carences reelles ou supposees compensees par des produits concus en laboratoire. Le psychologue vient parachever cette ingenierie medico-sportive.

La nage et la natation. Le sportif est la technique faite homme.

Convient-il de relativiser le propos en ayant presente a l'esprit la diversite des pratiques sportives, par exemple la separation entre le haut niveau et le sport de masse, le professionnalisme et l'amateurisme? Je ne suis pas enclin a le penser. Le sportif le plus anonyme, et meme le debutant, copient leur equipement sur celui du champion, achetent en pharmacie ou sur l'internet les « aliments de l'effort », annexent a leur corps de minuscules capteurs electroniques qui mesurent leur pouls et calculent les distances parcourues. Une etude revelait en novembre 2003 que les adolescents francais qui pratiquent un sport sont 10% a recourir a des substances dopantes. Selon la meme etude, c'est a quatorze ans que les jeunes sportifs francais commenceraient a recourir a ces produits ; pour les jeunes Americains, ce serait a huit ans...

La mecanisation des gestes poursuit Ellul, correspond a la mecanisation des appareils utilises pour le sport (chronometres.). La mesure de precision, la formation des gestes, le principe du record, qui sont des elements importants de l'industrie, se retrouvent donc dans le sport (p. 347). Au confluent de la science et de la technique industrielle naissantes en Angleterre, le sport s'impregnerait ainsi tres tot d'une mentalite moderne appelee a de fameux prolongements. Apres tout, l'expression aujourd'hui banale « courir le 100 metres en dix secondes » suppose bien que l'on ait prealablement defini la notion de metre et que l'on soit capable de chronometrer en secondes, ce qui ne fut scientifiquement et techniquement possible qu'a partir de la fin du 18[eme] siecle avec la mesure du meridien terrestre et l'invention de la montre suisse. De facon inattendue mais assez significative, on retrouve ces ingredients de la mentalite moderne, et donc sportive, des les balbutiements de l'alpinisme, a la meme epoque.[30]

Apres avoir aborde le theme des rapports entre sport, industrie et technique, Ellul en vient au theme de l'assujettissement de l'homme a la societe totalitaire par le sport. Nous sommes ici resolument dans une approche critique du sport, approche qui correspond a un courant minoritaire mais actif a l'interieur de la sociologie du sport,

---

La naissance d'un mythe (Paris: Le Seuil, 2002).

[30] Nicolas Giudici, *La philosophie du Mont Blanc: De l'alpinisme a l'economie immaterielle* (Paris: Grasset, 2000).

represente en France notamment par Jean-Marie Brohm dont nous reparlerons plus loin.

Le sport, indique Ellul, permet a l'homme de se delasser de ses contraintes mais l'adapte aussi a son insu a de nouvelles contraintes, et cette « technique insidieuse » s'etend a la grande masse. Sous couvert d'esprit d'equipe, le sport preparerait a l'esprit totalitaire. Il est indispensable aux dictatures fascistes, nazies et communistes. Dans les pays « nouveaux », on assiste a une penetration conjointe des techniques et du sport. Guere plus tendre avec les Etats-Unis, Ellul constate que le sport technicise s'y est developpe d'abord en leur qualite de « pays le plus conformiste ».[31]

Que repondre a cette charge? Comme indique plus haut, l'analyse du sport a travers la technique est assez peu repandue et la critique radicale du sport n'est le fait que de courants minoritaires. Il est evidemment perilleux de disserter sur le caractere plus ou moins conformiste des Americains. Avancons simplement que les arguments peuvent etre reversibles. Une bonne part de la sociologie du sport, et de la sociologie americaine en particulier, obeit a une approche fonctionnaliste qui se plait a reconnaitre le role - implicitement positif - du sport dans l'adaptation aux valeurs sociales et la socialisation. Le sport, aurait dit Esope, est la meilleure et la pire des choses.

Pour quitter provisoirement le debat d'idees, je propose au lecteur de revenir sur les exemples parfois deconcertants apportes par Ellul a l'appui de son raisonnement.

Ils sont au nombre de trois, tous lies a la relation entre sport, industrie et technique.

Premier exemple: « le seul pays d'Europe centrale ayant une organisation sportive etait le seul industrialise: la Tchecoslovaquie » (p. 346). En l'absence de toute reference ou indication plus precises dans le texte, on peut avancer l'hypothese qu'Ellul avait a l'esprit le mouvement sokol, fonde en 1862 dans ce qui allait devenir la Tchecoslovaquie, mouvement visant a developper « un esprit sain dans un corps sain ». Ce mouvement s'est implante aux Etats-Unis des 1865 et il semble y etre toujours vivace. L'affirmation un peu abrupte d'Ellul correspondrait ainsi a un episode avere dans l'histoire du sport ce qui donne une idee de l'etendue et de la diversite de ses informations et relativise le pretendu desinteret qu'il professait a l'egard du sport.

Le second exemple, emprunte a l'histoire de l'Antiquite, surprendra moins sous la plume de l'historien qu'etait Ellul: « on sait la grande opposition qui a ete faite entre les athletes grecs et les athletes romains. Pour les premiers, l'exercice corporel etait un jeu qui tendait a developper harmonieusement et librement les formes et les puissances corporelles. Pour les seconds, il s'agissait d'une technique pour avoir plus d'efficacite et vaincre » (p. 346, 1954; p. 347, 1990). Visiblement, Ellul avait connaissance d'une partie au moins des abondantes etudes relatives aux exercices physiques de l'Antiquite dont il ressort, effectivement, que les Romains avaient une conception des activites corporelles differente de celle des Grecs, et directement tournee vers l'usage militaire. En revanche, les historiens de l'Antiquite grecque ne manquent pas de souligner la tres

---

[31] P. 347, 1954; p. 348, 1990. Ellul reprendrait ici un constat que l'on prete habituellement a Tocqueville.

forte connotation religieuse des activites physiques, et des Jeux Olympiques en particulier. Dans la description du sport moderne, et pas seulement des Jeux Olympiques, le parallele entre sport et religion revient frequemment. On pourra juger paradoxal qu'un auteur qui a consacre une partie considerable de son reuvre au probleme religieux n'ait pas manifeste de sensibilite a ce rapprochement devenu presque un cliche.

Le troisieme et dernier exemple propose par Ellul est le plus deconcertant: « Les meilleurs sportifs sortent des milieux ouvriers: les paysans, les forestiers, qui peuvent etre plus vigoureux, sont de moins bons athletes. Cela tient au fait que le travail a la machine developpe une certaine musculature, juste celle qu'il faut pour le sport, tres differente de la musculature paysanne ; et d'autre part ce travail developpe la rapidite, la precision des gestes, des reflexes » (p. 346, 1954; p. 347, 1990).

Les sources qui permirent a l'auteur de proposer cette distinction tranchee entre performances ouvrieres et paysannes resteront probablement inconnues. Nous porterons a son credit qu'il etait sans doute bon connaisseur des aptitudes des forestiers puisque l'on sait qu'il ne dedaignait pas d'emprunter une hache pour abattre un arbre, a l'occasion, a titre de detente et d'exercice physique. Mais « celui qui avait (presque) tout prevu » pourrait encore nous reserver une surprise. Des donnees statistiques franchises largement posterieures a l'epoque de redaction de *La technique* montrent en effet d'une part que les ouvriers pratiquent beaucoup plus le sport que les paysans, d'autre part que les aptitudes physiques sont liees a une taille elevee. Or, toujours selon les statistiques, les paysans seraient plus petits que les ouvriers...

Dans la trilogie ellulienne consacree a la technique, *Le systeme technicien*[32] et *Le bluff technologique*[33] font suite a *La technique.*[34] Absent du *Systeme technicien*, le sport est a nouveau a l'honneur dans *Le bluff technologique*, avec un sous-chapitre de sept pages intercale entre le jeu et l'auto, a l'interieur d'un chapitre consacre au divertissement.

En introduction, une breve reference a "mon premier livre" (*La technique*, donc) et une double approche a travers le spectacle et le discours technologique: "le discours technologique a transforme le sport en enorme spectacle" (p. 430). Le spectacle, c'est evidemment la television, et l'omnipresence du sport dans ce media illustree par de nombreuses statistiques. Avancons aussi l'hypothese d'un emprunt a *La societe du spectacle*[35] best-seller de la literature situationniste publie en 1967, bien connu d'un Ellul lui-meme cite dans les textes sacres de l'Internationale Situationniste. Le discours technologique, c'est, apres la societe technicienne et le systeme technicien, le maitre mot qui sous-tend le troisieme volet de la trilogie.

Comme dans l'ouvrage precedent, Ellul etonne par la multiplicite des exemples choisis, preuve d'une attention portee au sport en parfaite contradiction avec le desinteret

---

[32] Jacques Ellul, *Le systeme technicien* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1977;2[e] ed. Paris: Le Cherche-Midi, 2004, avec une preface de Jean-Luc Porquet).

[33] V. la note 4.

[34] V. la note 3.

[35] Guy Debord, *La societe du spectacle* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1967; 3[e] ed. Paris: Gallimard,

et l'ennui professes ailleurs. On relevera aussi quelques notations naives ou passeistes ("autrefois, l'association bordelaise pour le football etait composee de Bordelais," p. 432; "mais ou est donc le tennis d'antan?," p. 432), et cette formule sans appel empruntee au subtil anarchiste Cavanna: "mourir comme un con pour le Paris-Dakar" (p. 434).

La place du sport dans les medias, le professionnalisme, l'argent, la violence, sont evoques avec abondance d'exemples et de chiffres, a l'image de l'ensemble de l'ouvrage qui regorge de statistiques et de references. Mais Ellul ne puise pas seulement dans l'actualite. Les comparaisons avec l'Antiquite

fleurissent sous sa plume. Les achats de footballeurs professionnels "rappellent exactement la vente a l'encan, a Rome, des gladiateurs, des pugilistes, des conducteurs de char" (p. 432, n. 8). Les Jeux Olympiques de l'Antiquite (autre notation passeiste?) "etaient tout autre chose" (p. 433): la guerre s'arretait et l'unite de la Grece etait reconstituee, a l'inverse des boycotts americains, sovietiques et sud-africains. Les Jeux, avance Ellul, sont devenus un moyen de combat du fait de la technicisation de la societe, et non de sa politisation "car il n'y avait pas de monde plus politise que le monde grec!" (pp. 433-434).

Trois observations d'Ellul me frappent par leur pertinence ou leur originalite. Il decrit d'abord les courses de ces voiliers (le bassin d'Arcachon, proche de Bordeaux et prise par les adeptes de la voile, lui etait familier), qui sont devenus des supports publicitaires et des "monstres de gadgets" (p. 430, n. 6) equipes d'appareils de navigation par satellite, de decodeurs meteo, d'ordinateurs de bord, de cameras pour la retransmission mediatique et que la presse presente sans rire comme "la technologie au service de l'imaginaire" (p. 435)! Bel exemple de ce discours technologique qui masque la realite technicienne et nous amene a confondre le reel et le virtuel, la cause et l'effet.

La creation d'evenements ensuite: ne pas laisser de vide dans l'alimentation spectaculaire du public. Cette creation resulte-t-elle, comme le suggere Ellul ("il faut" creer; "on" cree) de la volonte de forces mysterieuses, des contraintes d'une technique implacable, ou plus simplement de la logique d'une programmation mediatique qui a horreur du vide et adore les recettes publicitaires? L'observation du journaliste (sic) s'epoumonant a commenter, a grand renfort d'hyperboles, la retransmission d'une rencontre sportive languissante mais cherement payee peut servir a alimenter ce debat. Notons que cette creation d'evenements mise en evidence dans la partie de l'ouvrage consacree au sport s'appliquerait avec autant de pertinence a bien d'autres chapitres de l'ouvrage (jeux, divertissement, information...).

En contrepoint des derives sportives et mediatique, Ellul nous surprend enfin par une reference un peu inattendue: la corrida, "jeu barbare ... ritualise" (p. 433), ou encore "comportements collectifs integres dans une sorte d'ethique commune" (p. 433).

Terminons cette presentation des pages du *Bluff technologique* consacrees au sport par un passage qui campe Ellul dans l'originalite de sa reflexion et de son action.

1992).

A propos de l'achat a prix d'or des joueurs professionnels de football, il mentionne les difficultes financieres des clubs (probleme naissant a la sortie de l'ouvrage et qui n'a cesse d'etre d'actualite depuis), les subventions genereuses que leur versent les municipalites et le prelevement fiscal qui en resulte pour des contribuables qui ne sont pas tous des passionnes de sport. En 1988, Ellul etait certainement l'un des premiers a avoir identifie et souleve le probleme des subventions aux clubs professionnels qui devait faire l'objet, a partir de 1994, de vifs debats politiques et de decisions visant a limiter la generosite des collectivites territoriales. Mais surtout, il avait, comme il le rappelle en note, propose une reduction fiscale pour les contribuables qui ne s'interessaient pas aux clubs sportifs (p. 431, n. 7). Pionnier, sinon createur, du *think global, act local*, Ellul avait choisi le sport pour sa participation a la vie locale, au meme titre que la protection de l'environnement aquitain et de son littoral ou l'action en direction des jeunes delinquants.

En avril 1991, la revue *Quel corps?* publiait son numero 41 intitule « Anthropophagie du sport » (sic). Riche de plus de deux cents pages, ce numero incluait un article de sept pages intitule « Sport et technique » signe de Jacques Ellul.[36] Le responsable de la publication, Jean-Marie Brohm, signait pour sa part deux articles (*La guerre olympique ; Le sport est un assassin*), dont l'intitule meme illustre assez bien l'existence en France du courant critique evoque plus haut.

Trouvera-t-on dans cet article les « belles erreurs » qu'il reconnaissait dans sa correspondance de 1992 avec Didier Nordon? C'est en tous cas a ce dernier, ami commun de Jacques Ellul et de Jean-Marie Brohm, que l'on doit probablement cette contribution a *Quel corps?*.

Apres avoir rappele en introduction ce qu'il entend par technique, Ellul expose l'image que l'on donnait du sport vers 1930, decrit ensuite l'impact de la societe technicienne sur le sport, le corps du sportif et son materiel, pour achever son expose avec le role de l'argent.

L'image que l'on donnait du sport vers 1930, lorsque commence vraiment l'ere technicienne, nous dit Ellul, etait d'abord celle d'un jeu pratique au niveau local, avec un imperatif de « mens sana in corpore sano ». Le sport, qui se divisait en sports de riches et sports pour tous etait alors synonyme de fair play, avec des regles a respecter qui favorisaient l'apprentissage de la vie en societe (notons que l'on retrouve ici la fonction de socialisation evoquee plus haut).

Dans ce passage, Ellul prend soin de garder ses distances avec le sport. Il se borne a decrire l'image que l'on en faisait, tant il est vrai que le sport est rapidement devenu une representation ideologique et idealisee.

Comme dans les textes tires de *La technique* et du *Bluff technologique*, l'expose des idees s'appuie sur des exemples precis particulierement nombreux. Ainsi de la boxe, « un des premiers sports a etre regle ». Effectivement, sans etre la plus ancienne dans son organisation et ses regles, la boxe fut constituee en association sportive en Angleterre

---

[36] Jacques Ellul, "Sport et Technique," *Quel corps?*, no. 41 (avril 1991), pp. 77-83.

343

des 1884, sur la base de la codification effectuee par le marquis de Queensberry. Autre exemple de l'auteur relatif au football, le professionnalisme en Grande Bretagne qui existait « deja » en 1900-1930. Mention encore une fois exacte, le football y etant devenu sport professionnel en 1885. Incollable dans cette premiere partie de l'article, notre auteur, decidement tres en verve, ne resiste pas au plaisir de l'anecdote, que les lecteurs les plus curieux ne manqueront pas d'aller verifier: « bien entendu, le fair play n'etait pas applique partout: des coureurs du second Tour de France furent assommes par des partisans regionaux d'une autre equipe ». Ou encore: « dans des courses automobiles, on placait des clous sur la piste... ! ».

Qu'est-il advenu du sport tel qu'on le representait au debut du 20[eme] siecle? Dans une societe technicienne, indique Ellul, la reussite, donc la competitivite sont devenues des valeurs decisives. En sport, il faut choisir a tout prix le moyen de gagner car la technique nous a appris a toujours gagner. La diffusion mondiale des images par les techniques nouvelles, le gout pour le divertissement, ont encourage l'agressivite, releguant le beau jeu et l'elegance. Et de citer (idealisant peut-etre un peu le passe) l'exemple du boxeur Georges Carpentier. Observation lucide en revanche sur l'extension au tennis « des muscles qui tapent avec violence » (qu'aurait dit Ellul du tennis du troisieme millenaire, et particulierement du tennis feminin?).

Les techniques en rapport avec le corps sont ensuite examinees dans leur filiation avec le taylorisme. Ellul cite l'usage du film, la preparation physique et psychologique, la dietetique, et aborde les produits chimiques et les dopants. Sur l'interdiction des produits dopants, sa pensee merite d'etre reprise dans son integralite: « Cette interdiction se comprend

parfaitement lorsqu'il s'agissait de l'affrontement de deux hommes, (ou d'equipes) comparables a tous les autres, et qui pratiquaient le sport comme une sorte de distraction, comme d'autres font du theatre amateur. Mais est-ce encore tout a fait aussi comprehensible lorsqu'il s'agit de l'affrontement de deux machines uniquement destinees a montrer leur puissance et a gagner? ».

Une telle prise de position merite un double commentaire. En premier lieu, l'article a ete publie en 1990, soit bien avant 1998, annee fatidique au cours de laquelle le Tour de France, epreuve cycliste erigee en mythe et de notoriete internationale fut l'objet de revelations accablantes sur l'usage massif du dopage dans le cyclisme professionnel et amateur. Depuis 1998, le dopage dans le sport est devenu un sujet "grand public". Son existence est divulguee periodiquement par des revelations circonstanciees, embarrassantes pour le milieu sportif, alors que sa seule evocation etait auparavant souvent consideree comme indecente ou sacrilege (« sportivement incorrecte » aussi bien que « politiquement incorrecte »). Le dopage n'est plus tout a fait un sujet tabou. L'annee 1998 permet des lors d'operer une distinction impitoyable entre ceux qui avaient eu assez de lucidite et d'honnetete intellectuelle pour aborder le probleme du dopage, et ceux qui se sont contentes de prendre le train en marche, voire qui ont decouvert l'existence et l'importance du phenomene sportif a travers le scandale mediatise du dopage. Et force est de constater qu'Ellul se range dans la premiere categorie.

En second lieu, dans la mobilisation de toutes les ressources techniques au service de la performance et de la victoire, l'absorption de substances chimiques peut en effet paraitre parfaitement coherente. Le dopage est une demonstration supplementaire de la technicisation de notre societe. Son acceptation tacite par les milieux sportifs et la relative indifference de l'opinion illustrent assez bien la morale qui prevaut dans une societe technicienne. Le sport en general, le dopage en particulier, s'inscrivent parfaitement dans l'analyse ellulienne.

L'article se poursuit par la denonciation du caractere derisoire de la precision apportee au chiffrage des records et du recours a des engins sophistiques pour departager des concurrents que Trail humain est incapable de differencier: « derision du spectacle de l'homme parfaitement declasse par ses engins techniques ».

Autre engin evoque, l'automobile de competition « instrument etrange qui n'a plus de l'auto que les quatre roues ». S'ensuit une appreciation sur la recherche en matiere automobile par des chercheurs « de plus en plus specialises, ce qui est le processus typique de la technique ». A vrai dire, le commentaire d'Ellul apporte peu sur le sujet de la course automobile et n'enrichit pas veritablement son analyse de la technique. Il s'attarde en revanche sur la bicyclette qui aurait selon lui connu la mutation la plus spectaculaire. Et il est vrai que l'engin utilise sur piste ou dans les etapes contre la montre du Tour de France a connu des modifications tres visibles. Georges Vigarello[37] ferait sans doute observer que, des les premieres annees de son invention, la bicyclette connut egalement des modifications successives notables avec l'apport de la roue libre, du pneumatique et du derailleur. Ce dernier mecanisme, on le sait, fut d'ailleurs longtemps prohibe pour des raisons propres a « l'esprit sportif ». Peut-etre alors la distinction entre les deux epoques (la premiere precedant l'avenement de la societe technicienne, comme indique plus haut) serait-elle a rechercher dans le passage d'un souci de perfectionnement de la machine a un souci d'obtention de la performance maximum de l'homme-machine.

Apres l'examen de ces exemples precis, completes par une breve allusion a l'evolution du saut a la perche et du ski, Ellul se livre a une interrogation sur le sens de ce « progres » des performances, sur la realite de la superiorite des sportifs contemporains sur leur predecesseurs ou sur l'homme quelconque a d'autres periodes de l'histoire. Le record, conclut-il, devient une valeur en soi et atteste du triomphe des techniques sur le corps et sur les instruments.

L'article se termine sur l'evocation de l'argent dans le sport, devenu sa « raison derniere ». Ellul developpe les liens, « l'auto accroissement » (par reference aux caracteristiques de la technique qu'il a definies dans ses ouvrages) entre medias, publicite, droits de retransmission, sponsoring, organismes sportifs, spectateurs et telespectateurs. Est en outre mentionne le role des pouvoirs publics dans la construction des equipements sportifs. Le cumul de ces differents intervenants correspond bien, en effet, aux analyses economiques et sociologiques actuelles sur le developpement du sport.

---

[37] V. la note 10.

Citons les phrases conclusives de l'article qui definissent le sport comme « un divertissement qui permet d'investir des passions inemployees (dans une societe qui n'a plus de valeurs) face a des millions d'hommes qui ne croient plus a rien ». Le sport est ainsi tombe dans « ce vide de sens qui caracterise notre epoque, provenant du remplacement de l'action personnelle par le spectacle d'une manifestation collective ».

Quelles impressions dominantes retirer de ce discours sur le sport echelonne sur une periode de plus d'un demi-siecle, des premiers aux derniers ecrits?

Il est assez clair que le desinteret affiche et les pretendues erreurs commises sont largement contredits par une reflexion qui porte sur l'essentiel du sujet, qui vise juste et qui apporte a la demonstration, a cote de quelques illustrations inverifiables et de formules parfois hatives, des arguments averes recueillis dans l'actualite aussi bien que dans des ouvrages. Parmi ces derniers, il est peut-etre etonnant de ne trouver ni mention ni allusion a Norbert Elias, de quinze ans l'aine d'Ellul et comme lui historien et sociologue. Le parallele pourrait etre pousse plus loin: chez les deux auteurs, le sport est aborde rapidement dans une reuvre maitresse (*La technique* pour Ellul en 1954, *La civilisation des mmt.rs* en 1939 avec une traduction fran^aise en 1973 et anglaise en 1978 pour Elias[38]). Mais seul ce dernier reviendra longuement sur le sport, dont il fait une cle pour la comprehension de l'evolution de nos societes a travers differents articles repris en traduction fran^aise sous le titre *Sport, violence et societe, la violence maitrisee.*[39]

Autre absence, deja relevee, la part du religieux dans le phenomene sportif, son role possible de substitut de la religion; Coubertin le proclamait, beaucoup en ont l'intuition. Paradoxalement, Ellul effleure a peine le sujet, mentionnant simplement ces « millions d'hommes qui ne croient plus a rien ». C'est qu'en realite, le sport n'est pour lui qu'un epiphenomene technicien dans un monde ou l'homme « reporte son sens du sacre sur cela meme qui a detruit tout ce qui en etait l'objet: sur la technique ».[40]

Advert: Make Payments to IJES Electronically?

---

[38] Norbert Elias, *La civilisation des moeurs* ([Paris]: Calmann-Levy, 1973; ISBN 2702101291).

[39] Norbert Elias, S*port, violence et societe: La violence maitrisee* (Paris: Fayard, 1994). On mentionnera le titre de l'un de ces articles, "The Quest for Excitement in Unexciting Society," qui semble faire echo aux propos d'Ellul.

[40] *La technique*, p. 131 (1954); p. 132 (1990).

Ellul & the Internet

by Boyan Koutevski

Boyan Koutevski is a senior creative executive with MAG Communications, Bulgaria. He is completing his Ph.D. in Communications and Public Relations at the University of Sofia.

Forecasts of the future usually reflect the fortune teller's mysticism, and we tend to doubt them. The main reason for our distrust is the claim of their authors that these are prophecies; that they, but no one else, has "the gift" to see far into the coming future. In describing and defending themselves, they actually identify with the mage of James Frazer's "social magician."

Jacques Ellul didn't make for himself this common claim for prophecy—he didn't need to. His prophecy emanated from his very personality. His ideas were clearly enough explained and argued. There are no absolute formulas. The skilled scientist cannot afford to have a passion different from the passion toward knowledge. Ellul didn't make glamorous statements. He didn't produce neologisms. So much social phenomena needed clear and simple, but at the same time, precise explanations. Ellul never hesitated to express his point of view; he never made critics by simply mentioning different theories or others' viewpoints. Explanation and persuasion are for me the two keywords that describe his scientific approach.

Ellul foresaw the estrangement among people caused by emerging technologies and by the bewildering consumption of goods and symbols. He warned us against the depersonalization of the individual; against the scarce knowledge resulting from image-based culture; against the opportunities, which overinformation have provided the propagandists for disabling one's critical judgments; against the equalization of truth and reality in a society ruled by fake images. The French philosopher examined in depth the transition from industrialism to the technological age—an age, which today has become a vast evolution of information technologies. Though the Internet form of those technologies emerged after Ellul's death, it is relevant to ask how his thinking comprehends it.

Let's not forget that the Internet started its existence simultaneously in the university and in military research centers in the USA, hence its "parents" are totally different. Meanwhile, we shall note that for Ellul technologies go beyond the control of their physical creators and owners. Therefore, we need a broader perspective than to see the Internet in terms of its parentage, which have become synonyms for the freedom of the mind and oppression respectively.

In *The Technological Society* (1954) and its "up-grade" *The Technological Bluff* (1990) Ellul argued one of the main ideas in his works— technologies push people into compliance and the chase for perpetual effectiveness, transforming individual personalities into an obedient mass. The inevitable consequence of this malfunction of civilization is the emergence of the mass-man. Ellul gave the example of advertising's technique, whose main goal has always been the creation of artificial needs as emotional

desires among the biggest possible target group, without paying any attention to the negative results of this influence. Ellul implied that the notion "technological society" is an evolution of Raymond Aron's "industrial society." We can define the Internet society along the same logical lines.

After this brief survey of information in the past, we must now assess the complete change in our own day. Confronted with what now passes for information, we note at once the intellectual and conceptual gulf that separates us from the computer. What is information for the computer? Information is defined as data. Facts and ideas are formalized in such a way that they can be communicated or manipulated by different procedures. But that data have first to be represented. This representation is used throughout. The process consists of handling the data, which may or may not be memorized. It is interesting to note that in analyses of the information handled by the computer, we find again the ideas of knowledge-information and service-information, but the words have now changed their meaning. The knowledge at issue here is comparable merely to the predigested knowledge of an encyclopedia, which gives a certain picture of the world but bears no reference to reality[41].

Ellul spoke against the transformation of technologies from being an instrument for human progress in society and the final objective of this progress. The Internet has been mutating menacingly from the means of communication among people into communication for the sake of the process itself— alienating people and making them an easy prey for attempts to bring compliance. As knowledge media become over-informative media, they exhaust the mind in their attempt to convert this information into a subjective judgment. Ellul summarized the common principles, which drive the technologies, especially media technologies and explained their impact on culture. Technologies themselves have been emerging on a cultural base, making them adaptive to the culture system and allowing them to change it. The scientist doesn't resist technological progress, he only warns that technologies have been developing beyond human control and progress becomes a goal in itself. Internet as practically unlimited emerging media fits this definition and that's the reason it has been chosen as the research object of this retrospective study. The easy mass access to the Internet, which doesn't require some scarcely spread technical equipment, draws the problem out of the technique of physical actuality. The analysis of the Internet must get more and more philosophical rather than be only technological in nature.

A similar evolution in understanding technological innovations has been observed with any new revolutionary means of communication: steam printing press, telegraph, phone, radio, TV, and lately, with the emergence of the global electronic network. However, in contrast to its predecessors, the Internet relies more on the already existing infrastructure and industrial capacities. Therefore, its technological destiny and development dynamics, including virtual "social processing," have been forseen.

---

[41] Ellul, J. *The Technological Bluff* http://t2100. *dct.Kippona.net/public/ellul,* 19.01.2004.

As noted earlier, the Internet went through several stages of development to build the infrastructure that would support networking innovations. The Department of Defense, the military, the National Science Foundation, and many more, financed and helped develop the infrastructure that would eventually become today's Internet. The Internet was not immediately successful. But, as time passed, its users and builders found ways to implement the technology, slowly changing its character[42].

Ellul developed a way of thinking and acting that is necessary when thinking of technology, but is not necessarily connected with machinery. *Technique*, as described by Ellul, refers to governments as well as to artifacts. In fact, it is, *the ensemble of practices by which one uses available resources to achieve certain valued ends.* The printing press is technique. Slavery is technique. The alphabet is technique. Government is technique. Steam power is technique. Ellul claims the key characteristics of technique are rationality, artificiality, the automatism of technical choice, selfaugmentation, monism, universalism, and autonomy[43].

These are the Internet's basic features which are unique for this medium: it's the answer to the rational needs of the globalizing world; it creates artificial reality; consumption becomes a stereotype; it grows from the human desire not to stay apart from the technological advantages of computer networks; it's an autonomic medium; it covers every aspect of life; the development limitations are minimal. Ellul's view of technology is that once it is let out of the laboratory, technology cannot be turned off. Technology begets more technology. The modern world, therefore, is one in which more technology is inevitable. "Fixing" or remediating the impact of a technology like water pollution requires—you guessed it—more technology[44].

To the science of persuasion, Ellul's biggest contribution was the analysis of technology's social development and being. In contrast to American researchers, he didn't stick with proving the "technologies-propaganda" interaction, using examples from social practice and strict definitions of the persuasion approaches. What he did was search for the deeper psychological and social prime movers leading to propaganda's success. As a sociologist, Ellul didn't limit his effort to the standard process: the subject uses persuasion technique with X results. He researched the process as complex interaction in its systematic specificity; in so doing, he opposed the theory that only via influence and attitude change is propaganda effective. Ellul's point of view was that a person or social group could be pushed toward certain desires by the propagandist's action without being preliminarily convinced of its correctness. This decision-making pattern appeared to Ellul to be caused very much by the influence of technique.

Marshall McLuhan's review of *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* for *Book Week* summarized Ellul's general finding: "...when a new technology encompasses any culture or society, the result is propaganda"[45]. Blocking critical thinking, together

[42] *Intepreting the Net, www.engl.virginia edu/ 'pas6b/2 docs/interpreting.html,* 07.06.2000.
[43] http://www.rheingold.com/texts/technopolitix/ *technquotes/ellul/html,* 16.01.2004, p. 1.
[44] www.xenky.com/news/20030213/bookreview *20030213. html,* 19.01.2004, pp. 1-2.
[45] Ellul, J. *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes,* New York, 1973.

with the belief that the machinery (including computers) is totally reliable, are ideal premises for successful persuasion. Professor Robert B. Cialdini also demonstrates this interconnection and defined it as "primitive automaticity" similar to animals' instinct. We are likely to use those lone cues when we don't have the inclination, time, energy or cognitive resources to undertake a complete analysis of the situation. When we are rushed, stressed, uncertain, indifferent, distracted, or fatigued, we tend to focus on less of the information available to us. When making decisions under these circumstances, we often revert to the rather primitive but necessary single-piece-of-good-evidence approach[46].

The total technological foundation of contemporary society has also made the propaganda total—totally pervasive, presented in every form of public communication. Ellul rejected all attempts to research propaganda in small experimental groups. To him propaganda was a unique phenomenon, springing out of almighty powers, pushing the persons in the technological society in a way that could not be reproduced in an experimental environment. The most powerful form of propaganda—sociological propaganda—has found in the Internet an excellent medium. Sociological propaganda is a phenomenon much more difficult to grasp than political propaganda, and is rarely discussed. *Basically it is the penetration of an ideology into its sociological context*[47].

In his conversations with the French journalist Patrick Troude-Chastenet, featured in the book *Jacques Ellul on Religion, Technology and Politics*, the social philosopher made a precarious balance which was unknown to the book's readers and to researchers. Ellul summarized his analysis of technological developments during his lifetime, and in the process gave his forecast for the Internet's unseen future:

I would say that I have tried to show how technology is developing completely independently of any human control. Carried away in some Promethean dream, modernman has always thought he could harness Nature, whereas what is happening is that he is building an artificial universe for himself where he is increasingly being constrained. He thought he would achieve this goal by using technology but he has ended up its slave. The means have become the goals and necessity is a virtue[48].

I merely have tried to start analyzing the determinist characteristics of technology with this essay. The main problem of the vast majority of texts critically examining the men-and-technology interconnection is that they are limited to human labor activity and the concrete negative ends for people in their relations with technology. I have tried to analyze it in the way Ellul did—developing the problem in more general terms, while researching also the changes in real time. In this way, he destroyed the utopia of balanced control in society, executed via some kind of technology in the way Aldous Huxley had done with his *Brave New World.* But keep in mind that Huxley's

---

[46] Cialdini, R. *Influence: Science and Practice*, Boston, 2001, p. 235.

[47] Ellul, *Propaganda*, p. 63.

[48] Troude-Chastenet, P. *Jacques Ellul on Religion, Technology and Politics*, ch. 13, http://t2100cdt.kippona.net/public/ellul, 19.01.2004

work is conditioned by and is clearly anti-utopian, in contrast to Ellul's describing real processes in contemporary society.

Jacques Ellul left this world before the Internet had shown its true social power. Mentioning here its drawbacks to social development, mainly caused by its nature as a technologically based medium, it is fair to praise its ability to change technology's role in the social process. The combination of image, sound, text and the hyperlink have brought back the opportunity to choose the messages received. Internet isn't simply one of the electronic media—it limits information access only minimally. The development of search machines containing artificial intellectual elements could not only improve the quality of the information found but also lead to its critical interpretation. The critical analysis of the global network shouldn't be done in a retrograde mode. The lack of technological progress or its violent delay or stop has always led to a distortion of the principles of democracy, not just technically but also in their very core. This analysis is necessary for society, to protect it from beocming a mass of consumer spectacles in real time, and to leave the anti-utopia nightmares of Geroge Orwell, Aldous Huxley and Robert Sheckley in the sci-fi thriller genre. The critical point of view plays its role of "socially-tolerated pessimism." It always tries to find problems (real or imagined) as if obsessed by paranoia, but it guarantees the transparency of the processes and the development of human-oriented technologies. Maybe the critical perspective is on its way to transform the technologically determined society into a society determining its technologies.

Re-Viewing Ellul

Fifty years ago, in 1954, Jacques Ellul published what would become his most famous and influential book, La Technique, *which in 1964 was published in an English translation as* The Technological Society. *To mark this half-century milestone, the* Ellul Forum *asked the distinguished Penn State University professor of materials science, Rustum Roy, to re-view Ellul's great book and its contribution to our thinking.*

The Technological Society

by Jacques Ellul

Translated by John Wilkinson. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1964. Revised American edition, New York: Knopf/Vintage Books, 1967.

Original edition *La Technique ou I'enjeu du siecle.* Paris: Armand Colin, 1954. Second ed. Paris: Economic, 1990.

Reviewed by Rustum Roy

Founding Director STS Program, Penn State University; Founding Director, Materials Research Laboratory, Penn State University

Master Jacques Ellul: A Tribute*

In the euphoric time surrounding the release of Pope John XXIIIrd's "Pacem in Terris" at a symposium in New York, John Wilkinson mentioned a book creating a stir in Europe called *La Technique* by a Professor of Law named Jacques Ellul. These comments made no connection for me until the conversation turned to the content of the book and the summary of its thesis. Put crudely: Ellul, it was said, claimed that "Technology" was not controllable by human society. That in a sense technology was ultimately an enemy of human development.

As the only working high tech scientist usually present in such theological groups, I had become accustomed to the next question, "And how would Rustum Roy respond?" In this case my interlocutors were surprised by both my reply, and the tone of delivery. My response then, as it remains today was: Ellul not only was right, but he had *underestimated* the size of the problem, and how great a danger to the future of the human race the scientific/technological enterprise *as practiced today*, posed.

I had been introduced to the thoughts of Jacques Ellul through his slim volume *The Presence of the Kingdom* (1948; ET 1953). In the radical new Christianity emerging after WWII, Dietrich Bonhoeffer had emerged as its prophet - with his "religionless Christianity." And here was Ellul expressing very similar ideas. So when his *Techno-*

logical Society painted similar ideas on a broader canvas, it was clearly destined to be a masterpiece. Notice I do not identify "science" or "technology" *per se* as dangers to humanity, only the *present "system,"* Ellul's clearly identified "technological society" which has emerged in our time.

All great societies have had science and "technology" - much of it very sophisticated. From the Egyptian pyramids to Brunelleschi's Florentine cathedral there were dramatic technological achievements. The great insight Ellul brought into play was that in the contemporary technological society, technology had surreptitiously usurped the function of mythopoesis. Why? Because it had become something quite new: a *system*; thence: the "Technological-Society"—technology completely integrated into the warp and woof of culture. That remains Ellul's and this book's greatest insight, still hardly appreciated, even in academia.

The technological society was a conspiracy without conspirators. As Ellul clearly understood, our collective universal conspiracy is to allow our baser personal desires to be manipulated to undercut the collective good. Why? Because we had abandoned the transcendent values: we had dethroned all gods and God. Over the years I have phrased it thus: Technology is America's religion— with rigid practices, rituals, and liturgies— and Science has become its rather onedimensional theology. It is surely necessary for academics never to discuss together incommensurable units such as "science and religion": one can not measure volume (the three dimensions of religion) in the units of length, linear science (cm). Our arguments should pit technology against religion as they interface in Ellul's *Technological Society.*

The other great insight of Ellul was that modern technology had mastered the art of using appropriate feedback loops to take over larger and larger spheres of human activity. Technology gives humans what their hearts desire, and for which humans will gladly sacrifice all their cherished values.

As we at Penn State helped seed and shape what was to become the national (and later international) Science, Technology & Society movement, it became clear that Ellul was in some ways the philosophical rock on which our call rested. I therefore approached him to join our fledgling movement to bridge the divide in C. P. Snow's "Two Cultures" world. He joined me as a CoEditor in Chief for the *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society.* At an early national Conference of the National

Association for STS, Ellul sent over a 45 minute speech in French for the opening plenary lecture. We played it, as I remember, with an English translation in voice-over. It appeared in the *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society.* That surely was appropriate, for in "STS" as an emerging academic field no one could be more relevant than Jacques Ellul and now as his various updates of the Technological Society have emerged, I would hope that no one can get any degree in STS without a real familiarity with Ellul's Technological Society concept. It is particularly fitting that Ellul's Canadian protege, Prof. W. Vanderburg has succeeded both of us as Editor in Chief of that Journal.

But there is another way in which Ellul underestimates the danger we stand in - that is the danger, not only from technology, but from "science" of various degrees of "basicity." Unlike Ellul, I have lived 100% immersed in that world of academic basic science *and* its applications in the real world for, six decades, while being, like Ellul, simultaneously a committed socially-and-politically *active* liberal, inclusivist Christian and, also like Ellul, an active but "outsider" participant in established church circles. I have very little patience for the esoteric *academic* science - religion dialogues about the Big Bang, evolution, etc. distracting citizens and even believers from the full bodied nature of religion and the Gospel imperatives of feeding the poor or loving enemies. Ellul, to the best of my knowledge, never discussed the fine points of evolution or string theory, and its relevance to the nature of God!! Nothing would be more irrelevant to the existential relation of "S/T" to religion as practiced. My experience is that modern science *as practiced today* has become, in fact, "scientism". It has created in the West an oxymoronic "culture of disbelief"; since all other cultures cohere around a set of beliefs (*resultant practices and rituals*). "Scientism", by actual acknowledgement or default, seduces most regular scientists into a frame of reference that has *all* reality subjected to evaluation by scientific measurements however narrow or irrelevant they may be. With the incredible degree of reductionist fragmentation, (disciplinary specialization in the common parlance) which creates a hitherto unknown condition: where no one "specializes" in the whole, i.e. in the biggest overarching issues of life in Society—in a word— religion. This is what Ellul did. He put together *in his life* his academic and theological insights with his actions - his praxis.

The part (science) is claiming, putting on airs, indeed positioning itself as the whole (Religious behavior), while entering into so-called conversations on "Science & Religion." Among the world's theologians, only Huston Smith (see his book *Religion Matters*) has clearly spotted this trend and attacked it vigorously. Among distinguished scientists, only C.F. von Weisacker has identified the danger. In the closing paragraphs of "The History of Nature" Weisacker writes:

But when knowledge without love becomes the hireling of the resistance against love, then it assumes the role which in the Christian mythical imagery is the role of the devil. The serpent in paradise urges on man knowledge without love.

Anti-Christ is the power in history that leads loveless knowledge into the battle of destruction against love. But it is at the same time also the power that destroys itself in its triumph. The battle is still raging. We are in the midst of it, at a post not of our choosing where we must prove ourselves.

Ellul was at his post proving himself!!

Yet a final topic which must be addressed is the Janus-like character of Ellul's work: his deep, voluminous theological works on the one hand, and his "STS" writings including his cornerstone, *The Technological Society* on the other. There was little cross-referencing between the two realms in Ellul's own writing. I have not seen this commented on widely by others. Perhaps only Willem Vanderburg, with his five year apprenticeship under Ellul, could fill out this story for the community. And in fact

in a short second Appendix to his recent book "Perspectives on our Age" Vanderburg has given his very sound hypothesis on why Ellul did not link his two foci explicitly. I found the case very well argued. Contemporary culture simply cannot be mapped on to a Christian mythos. These worlds remain separated, with the rare working participants in both shuttling between them, fitting in, incognito, in both camps - rarely betraying their other allegiances. Like Kierkegaard's Knight of Faith, the sensitized believer appears no different from other knights in the ordinary world (of technology.) Like Petru Dumitriu's believers living in the even more constrained communist bloc, described in his great classic work, "Incognito," they learn to use a special, largely unspoken, language when communicating among themselves.

In summary: Ellul is with little doubt the most significant author for the STS field; the unchallenged philosopher of technology, and the theologian providing a "Guide for the Perplexed" for believers living in a "Technological Society." *This appellation, "Master Jacques" used by my friend and colleague, Ivan Illich, at a celebrating event shortly before Ellul's death, has a great ring to it.

Advert: Change of Address?

Don't forget to notify IJES if your address changes. Postal forwarding orders expire after a period of time. Forwarding practices are sometimes unreliable.

You don't want to miss out on *The Ellul Forum.* **We don't want to lose touch with you.**

E-mail your address change immediately to: IJES@ellul.org

Or write to: IJES, P.O. Box 5365, *Berkeley CA 94705 USA*

In Review

Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age by Bill McKibben.

New York: Henry Holt, Times Books, 2003. xiii., 272 pp. Reviewed by David W. Gill

Bill McKibben writes regularly for the *New York Review of Books, The New York Times, The Atlantic,* and many other publications. Among his previous books are *The End of Nature* and *The Age of Missing Information.* McKibben's *Enough* is an impassioned call for debate on whether we should set limits on developments in human genetic engineering and advanced forms of robotics and nanotechnology. His belief is that these technologies "may alter our relationship not just with the rest of nature but with ourselves" and "call into question, often quite explicitly, our understanding of what it means to be a human being." (xii).

McKibben fends off the possible charge of impeding progress and playing the Luddite by saying such charges are "as silly as accusing someone of being a prohibitionist because he'd rather leave a barroom with a warm glow than a spinning head" (xii). Is it possible that our technological reach is now far enough? Can we limit ourselves? Should we do so?

McKibben is especially concerned about germline genetic engineering and cloning. So far this has not been successfully done on humans but recent progress on both plants and animals and the lack of public discussion is an ominous portent. Part of McKibben's concern is with the potential for unintended, dangerous, even macabre consequences. But the center of his argument is with the erosion of our humanity as we turn ourselves into technical objects, devices, engineered phenomena. Part of what it means to be human is to struggle against our limits; to transgress all limits by technological decisions would be to erase one of the essential features of our humanity.

Echoing Bill Joy's famous article, McKibben also argues that nanotechnology, miniaturization, selfreplicating assemblers, and robotics are to inanimate matter what biotechnology is to animate matter. The two realms are threatening—and converging.

McKibben's answer is that we say "enough" and pronounce the world we live in "good." He quotes technophile futurist Lee Silver as saying we are on a "journey into a rapidly evolving future that no man, or woman, could stop" (p. 163). It is this arrogance and assumption of inevitability that McKibben challenges. McKibben gives examples of how various societies and groups have said "no" at various points. The

Amish lifestyle, the European rejection of genetically modified food, the rejection of DDT, the resistance to nuclear power plants, some progress in controlling population growth . . . there are examples of a human capacity to resist what looks like inevitable scientific-technological prescriptions for our lives.

The scientists and their business investors are unlikely to be willing to stop on their own; a broader social debate is necessary. The answer is most certainly not to stop all scientific and technological advance; rather, it is to set some boundaries at critical points where our humanity is clearly at stake. McKibben's argument is well-written, provocative, and deserving of careful consideration.

Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work Edited by Willem H. Vanderburg

Revised edition. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2004. xvii, 131 pp.. Original edition , 1981.

Reviewed by David W. Gill

Bill Vanderburg is the founding director of the Centre for Technology and Social Development at the University of Toronto and the author of The Growth of Minds and Cultures and The Labyrinth of Technology. Vanderburg is one of a long procession of students, researchers, and activists from North America and around the world to travel to Bordeaux for shorter or longer periods of study with Jacques Ellul. Vanderburg carried out "four-and-a-half years of postdoctoral work" with Ellul during the 1970s (p. x) and has continued to ponder and extend the ideas of Ellul during a quarter century as a professor working with engineering students and others.

Perspectives on Our Age is a superb introduction to Jacques Ellul's core ideas and perspectives and we can be grateful that it has now been republished. Vanderburg first worked with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to create a series of radio programs on Ellul with interviews of Ellul himself and commentary by others. (It would be great if these programs could be reissued on a compact disc). Following the radio broadcasts in 1979 and 1980, Vanderburg developed the material into the present manuscript. Vanderburg mapped out the organization and questions; Ellul provided the answers and narrative.

Perspectives has four main sections: (1) The Questions of My Life, (2) Understanding our Age, (3) The Present and the Future, and (4) Faith or Religion? Ellul's basic perspectives on technique/technology, Marx and Marxism, politics and the state, and Christianity and religion are all sketched out in an understandable way, with a lot of helpful personal and historical context.

The original preface to the first edition was not included in the Seabury Press publication of 1981 for some reason. It is now included along with a new preface

and two additional appendices from Bill Vanderburg. Appendix 1 gives Vanderburg's understanding of Ellul's concept of technique; appendix 2 gives his understanding of the relation of Ellul's sociology to his Christian faith and theology. Some readers will, no doubt, find the Vanderburg additions helpful.

Advert: Ellul Forum Back issues

Visit www.ellul.org to see the complete contents of each issue of the *Ellul Forum*. Back issues #31 onward are available for $5 per issue.
The current issue is only available by joining the IJES for $20/year annual dues
#33 Spring 2004 "Jacques Ellul Today"
#32 Fall 2003 "Violence, Terrorism, and Technology"
31 Spring 2003 "Remembering Ivan Illich and Katharine Temple"
Issues #1 through #30 (1988-2002) are available (only) in electronic form as a collection of the entire 500 pages or so published during our first fifteen years. The price of the collection on compact disc is $15 per CD.
30 December 2002 Jacques Ellul and Utopia
29 July 2002 Rethinking Ellul's Theory on the Role of Technology
28 January 2002 September 11, 2001
27 July 2001 Ellul and Social Theorists
26 January 2001 Jacques Ellul & Bernard Charbonneau
25 July 2000 Ellul in the Public Arena
24 January 2000 Academics on a Journey of Faith
23 July 1999 Jacques Ellul on Human Rights
22 January 1999 Conversations with Jacques Ellul
21 July 1998 Thomas Merton & Modern Technological Civilization
20 January 1998 Tenth Anniversary Issue
19 July 1997 Technique and the Illusion of Utopia
18 January 1997 Lewis Mumford, Technological Critic
17 July 1996 Ian Barbour on Religion, Science, and Technology
16 January 1996 The Ethics of Jacques Ellul
15 July 1995 Women and Technology
14 January 1995 Frederick Ferre on Science, Technology & Religion
13 July 1994 In Memory of Jacques Ellul, 1912-1994
12 January 1994 Ethical Relativism and Technological Civilization
11 July 1993 Technique and Utopia Revisited
10 January 1993 Technique and the Paradoxes of
Development
9 July 1992 Ellul on Communications Technology
8 January 1992 Ivan Illich's Theology of Technology
7 July 1991 Jacques Ellul as a Theologian for Catholics

Advert: International Jacques Ellul Society

Joining the IJES

Political Illusions & Realities

by David W. Gill

President, International Jacques Ellul Society

In this year of great anniversaries, a local one that has special meaning for me has been the 40th anniversary of the Free Speech Movement at the University of California. This past month in Berkeley we have had various reunions, reminiscences, panel discussions, speeches, rallies, and even a reenactment of Mario Savio's speech standing on top of a police car surrounded by thousands of seated demonstrators on Sproul Plaza.

I was an 18-year-old freshman student just starting at Berkeley when the student movement started in October 1964. I often joke that it is hard for me to study without the smell of tear gas in the air because the two are so closely associated in my experience! I loved the Free Speech Movement (and, for that matter, I was an enthusiastic participant in most of the movements that followed: demanding multicultural studies options, more diversity in the student body and on the faculty, a more thoughtful university development approach ("People's Park!"), and a rejection of the catastrophic Vietnam war).

The university was dramatically improved by these movements and the forty-year celebration is fully warranted. But there were two aspects to these movements that began to trouble me within a year of the launch of the Free Speech Movement.

Two Weaknesses in the Student Movement

The first problem was the *inconsistency*, even hypocrisy, of some of the movement and leadership. "Free speech for me, but not for thee"—was one way this played out. No, I didn't like Dow Chemical or R.O.T.C., either, but authentic free speech means having debates, not shouting down those we don't agree with. I was then, and am now, an advocate of radically free speech, not a selectively permitted speech (one reason why the IJES is a "big tent," inclusivist group rather than a sectarian elite as some would have it).

Same with violence: the Free Speech Movement, like much of the Civil Rights Movement, was nonviolent, using tactics like administrative office sit-ins, class disruptions, campus work stoppages, and the like. But when these non-violent tactics were replaced by some violence against people (including some innocent bystanders)—and truly idiotic destruction of property—I had to protest against the protesters.

The second problem was *naivete*. We needed social challenge and change and there was some great thinking that went on in those days. But there was also some truly awesome naivete regarding human nature, communities, tradition, and social and political change.

Enter Ellul

This is where Jacques Ellul stepped into my picture. I had heard about him in the mid-1960s but it was only in 1971 that I finally read *The Meaning of the City* for an article on urbanization I was writing. Then in 1972 I read four of his books in quick succession: *The Political Illusion, The Politics of God and the Politics of Man, Presence of the Kingdom,* and *False Presence of the Kingdom.* I had seen these titles listed on the fly-leaf to *The Meaning of the City* and now read them to help me prepare

to cover the Democratic Convention in Miami Beach in summer 1972 (with a press pass from *Radix Magazine* in Berkeley).

To say that I was "blown away" by the stunning political insight of Ellul is an understatement. With Ellul's help I was able to see much more clearly the political illusion and reality of the McGovern/Nixon contest and the larger society which hosted it. (Almost on a whim I sent some of my book reviews and articles to Ellul in the fall of 1972; his encouraging letter back to me was the beginning of a 22-year correspondence and what I recently added up as about 24 months of residence in Bordeaux over the years).

Deeper Forces Driving Political Reality

Jacques Ellul's political insight struck me first of all with its *depth*. Most political discussion and thought today is conducted in the world of images, he explained. Ephemeral current events, news sound bites, slogans, and image management—this is where the political passions of the citizens are engaged. Since Ellul's analyses of forty to fifty years ago, all of this has become more blatant than ever, embraced by journalists, politicians, and voters alike.

Meanwhile, underneath this surface froth the actual directions of our society and world are set by the deeper forces of technique, bureaucratization, the globalizing-technological-corporate economic order, the desperate search for survival, social order, and meaning by Islamic societies, and so on. Failing to insist that we explore, understand, and engage these deeper forces— rather than just adding rhetorical fuel to the fires passing for today's political debate—is a betrayal of our calling as thoughtful, reflective people in our world.

Self-criticism and the Search for a Third Way

The second contribution Ellul made to my political thinking was his continual call for self-criticism and an end to hypocrisy. We must help our "side" to understand the other side and to recognize and address our own failures and inconsistencies, not just those of our opponents. Christians, especially, should search for a "third way" beyond the standard options of Left and Right.

Radical, deep, courageous, self-critical, liberating, innovative, humane . . . these are some of the central characteristics of Ellul's political orientation. In the era of Bush, Kerry, Nader & Co. (to speak only of the American context) . . . it is of the highest urgency that some voices be raised for a different political path with these characteristics.

Resources for Ellul Studies

www.ellul.org & www.jacques-ellul.org
Two indispensable web sites

The IJES/AIJE web site at www.ellul.org contains (1) news about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, and (4) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The new AIJE web site at www.jacques-ellul.org offers a French language supplement.

The Ellul Forum CD: 1988-2002

The first thirty issues of *The Ellul Forum*, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for US $15 (postage included). Send payment with your order to "IJES," P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

Cahiers Jacques Ellul

Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne

The second issue of *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, an annual journal edited by Patrick Chastenet and published by our sister society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul, is now available for 20 euros (postage included) to individuals outside France, and for 25 euros to libraries. The theme of the second issue is "La Technque."

Cahiers Jacques Ellul is an essential new reference for those interested in Ellul's ideas.

Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. $87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirtypage subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit www.elsevier.com for ordering information.

Alibris—used books in English

The Alibris web site (www.alibris.com) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

Librairie Mollat—new books in French Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux (www.mollat.com) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul.

Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

Used books in French:

two web resources

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are www.chapitre.com and www.livre-rare-book.com.

Reprints of Nine Ellul Books

By arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of several Ellul books originally published by William B. Eerdmans can now be purchased. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: *The Ethics of Freedom*

($40), *The Humiliation of the Word* ($26), *The Judgment of Jonah* ($13), *The Meaning of the City* ($20), *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* ($19), *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* ($28), *The Subversion of Christianity* ($20), and *The Technological Bluff* ($35). *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul* translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

Have your bookstore (or on-line book dealer) "back order" the titles you want. Do not go as an individual customer to Eerdmans or Ingram/Spring Arbor. For more information visit "Books on Demand" at www.eerdmans.com.

Ellul on Video

French film maker Serge Steyer's film "Jacques Ellul: L'homme entier" (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site www.meromedia.com. Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul's ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbus 43021, 1009 ZA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.

Issue #35 Spring 2005 — René Girard and Jacques Ellul

- Click to view the original PDF

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Contents

© 2005 International Jacques Ellul Society Berkeley, California, USA www.ellul.org

Cover

"In the area of scriptural interpretation we are clearly faced with ideological choices... Recently we have witnessed the appearance of a new interpretive grill presented by Rene Girard... Rather than presenting merely another interpretation, Girard gives us a genuine method. Since it fits no ideological canon, I feel certain it will never attract notice or be taken into account by biblical scholars. "
Jacques Ellul
in *Jesus and Marx: From Gospel to Ideology (1979;* ET 1988), p. 86 n2.

Information on The Editorial Board & More

The Ellul Forum
For the Critique of Technological Civilization
Founded 1988
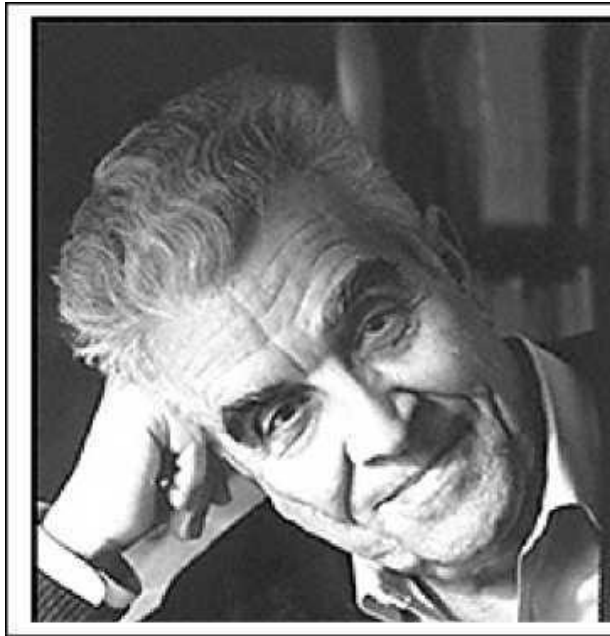
The Ellul Forum is published twice per year, in the Spring and Fall. Its purpose is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

Editorial Board

Dues, Subscriptions, & Payment Options The Ellul Forum is sent twice per year to all members of the IJES. An annual membership/ subscription, anywhere in the world, costs US $20. Please send check or money order (e.g., international postal money order) drawn in US funds for $20 to "IJES", P.O.Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA—or make payment to "IJES@ellul.org" electronically at www.paypal.com. Be sure to note your address and the purpose of your payment.

Change of Address

Please notify IJES of any change in your address. Our mailings are infrequent and postal forwarding orders expire.

Manuscript Submissions

For Ellul Forum writers' guidelines, visit www.ellul.org—or e-mail: Editor@ellul.org—or write Cliff Christians, EF Editor, Institute of Communications Research, University of Illinois, 810 S. Wright St., # 228, Urbana IL 61801 USA We welcome your proposals.

Books, Reviews, News

Send books for review, book reviews, and news to David Gill, EF Assoc. Editor, P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705. E-mail: IJES@ellul.org

Back Issues

From the Editor

This issue illustrates how *The Ellul Forum* carries out its mission. One purpose is to advance Ellul's "sociological and theological analyses in new directions." In order to accomplish that goal, *The Forum* feeds from a world network of Ellul scholars and friends, even as it nurtures that society in return.

Months ago, contributing editor Carl Mitcham proposed an issue on Ellul and Girard. Jim Grote knows Ellul's work and Rene Girard personally, so he became our point man in moving this good idea forward. In Innsbruck, Jim hears an ambitious and authoritative paper by Matthew Pattillo, a young Ellul scholar, on this very topic. And with this issue, a version of that paper becomes part of the network and invigorates our thinking. Pattillo demonstrates how Girard provides "theoretical underpinnings for Ellul's theology" while Ellul offers him a "more biblically consistent content" for the life of faith. In the process of establishing these interconnections, the importance of human relationships (and Christians would say "of the Body of Christ") vis-a-vis the global state becomes transparent.

French scholar Michel Hourcade on Sport and Technique, Korean scholar Myung Su Yang on Utopia, and American scholar Dell DeChant on the Sacred and Postmodernism, illustrated the same process in other recent issues of *The Ellul Forum*. The editors will depend on the idea-specialist cycle for enhancing our mission in the future.

In addition to Jim Grote's introduction and Matthew Pattillo's marvelous essay, we have Darrell Fasching's interesting "re-view" of Ellul's *New Demons* and a brief interview of Rene Girard by David Gill. David also reviews Jim Grote and John McGeeney's Girardian business ethics text, *Clever as Serpents,* and Jacques Ellul's new book on Islam, made available posthumously through the efforts of Jacques Ellul's daughter, Dominique.

The theme for *Ellul Forum* Issue 36 (Fall 2005) is Ellul's biblical interpretation. Ellul published several biblical studies and commentaries—always "edgy" and provocative, sometimes maddening, always valuable and illuminating. We welcome your ideas and input on this and future issues of the *Forum*.

Our back page "News and Notes" reports on two great colloquia on Ellul in France last Fall. We would love to sponsor something similar in North America but must wait for funding, timing, location, and other issues to be resolved.

Clifford G. Christians, Editor editor@ellul.org

Introducing Rene Girard

by Jim Grote

Jim Grote, CFP, a financial writer with over 20 years experience as a development officer, has been an adjunct professor in business ethics and philosophy at several universities. His book on Girardian business ethics (co-authored with John McGeeney), Clever as Serpents: Business Ethics and Office Politics (reviewed on p. 22 below)*, was recently translated and published in Germany and Indonesia. [jimgrote@hotmail.com]*

Born on Christmas Day, 1923, in Avignon, France, Rene Girard's work has been a blend of history, literature, anthropology and theology with implications for science, technology, and ethics that have only begun to be appreciated. He graduated from the Ecole des Chartes in Paris in 1947 (as a specialist in medieval studies) with a thesis on private life in his hometown of Avignon in the second half of the fifteenth century. A year's trip abroad turned into a Ph.D. in history from Indiana University, after which Girard remained in the United States, where he retired as a professor of French Language, Literature, and Civilization from Stanford University in 1995.

Girard's early historiographic publications soon gave way to an avalanche of literary criticism. His first book, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (1966), contrasted the romantic lie of individualism with the novelistic truth of what he called "imitative" or "mimetic desire." Among five major novelists (Cervantes, Stehnhal, Flaubert, Proust and Dostoevsky) Girard discovered a triangular structure to desire where the protagonists struggle with the realization that their deepest aspirations were are mere imitations of a model or rival - hence the infamous love triangle. Adultery remains the archetype for this phenomenon as illustrated in Dostoevsky's novella, *The Eternal Husband*. The husband is obsessed by his wife's lovers, who inflame, validate and aggravate his own desire. Girard's students have likened his discovery of imitation in the social sciences to Newton's discovery of gravity in the physical sciences. The vast secondary literature on mimetic desire now extends these early insights into the diverse fields of economics, sociology, psychology, theology and anthropology.

Violence and the Sacred (1977), an anthropological study, offers a rational explanation for sacrificial rituals (as well as religious myths and prohibitions) in what he terms the "victimage mechanism." Mimetic desire is inevitably conflictual. "Rivalry does not arise because of the fortuitous convergence of two desires on a single object; rather, *the subject desires the object because the rival desires it*" (1977, p. 145). Ancient religion developed as an unconscious method of keeping the peace where the mimetic war of all against all is replaced by the more efficient war of all against one - the community's sacrifice of a scapegoat. Sacrifice acts as a kind of vaccination whose small doses of violence inoculate the community against greater violence.

This sacrificial mechanism is examined in more detail in a work of biblical criticism, *The Scapegoat* (1986). While the mimetic conflict of model and disciple cannot be resolved by sharing the same object of desire (which is a source of the conflict), it may be resolved or at least mitigated by sharing the same object of revulsion - the

scapegoat. Nothing unites people like a common enemy. "This is the terrible paradox of human desires. They can never be reconciled in the preservation of their object but only through its destruction; they can only find agreement at the expense of a victim" (1986, p. 146).

Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World (1987), a conversation between Girard and two French psychiatrists, explores an anthropological foundation for Girard's theories. The discussion includes a hypothesis of a "founding murder" among mimetically hysterical primates that initiated the long, slow process of hominization as well as sacrificial mechanisms. Girard sheds new light on the often-discarded speculations on primal murders found in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. He also proposes the controversial thesis that the Judeo-Christian revelation of the victimage mechanism provides the anthropological tools necessary to demythologize pagan religious practices, which for Girard includes much of Western Christianity. According to Girard, Christ's death was not a sacrifice willed by an angry God to atone for an original sin, but simply a revelation of human brutality and violence by a loving God.

The remainder of Girard's major work includes two works of literary criticism, *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare* (1991) and *Oedipus Unbound: Selected Writings on Rivalry and Desire* (2004) as well as two works of biblical criticism, *Job: The Victim of His People* (1987) and *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (2001). Girard's recent book on Satan may seem worlds removed from his first work on novelistic love triangles. But it was the recurring patterns of seduction in the novel that led Girard to take the idea of Satan seriously - not as a prudish rejection of the world or a projection of childhood fears, but as an explanatory (one is tempted to say, scientific) principle. Throughout his works, Girard contrasts the Hebrew word Satan, the technical term referring to the accuser before a tribunal, with the Greek word for the Holy Spirit, the *parakletos* or defense attorney.

For Girard, modern science and technology are an inevitable consequence of the demythologization of sacrificial violence and magical thought. Magical thought always seeks a social/moral explanation for pain. For example, the Black Plague was often attributed to the Jews poisoning the water supply. As Girard quips, "Those who are suffering are not interested in natural causes" (1986, p. 53). However, with a loosening of magical thought, the search for natural causes slowly becomes a more reasonable path toward the "relief of man's estate" (Francis Bacon). "The invention of science is not the reason that there are no longer witch hunts, but the fact that there are no longer witch hunts is the reason that science has been invented. The scientific spirit, like the spirit of enterprise in an economy, is a by-product of the profound action of the Gospel text" (1986, p. 204).

Yet Girard's attitude toward science contains a certain Freudian ambivalence. Science is necessarily part of the Christian concern for victims and is a consequence of this charitable impulse. At the same time, modern technology has an apocalyptic edge to it. With the loosening of ancient sacred restraints and prohibitions, modern technology like modern economy, unleashes the phenomenon of mimetic desire in a wave of con-

sumerism, ethnic rivalry, media frenzy and politically correct victimology. For Girard it is no accident that names for nuclear weapons are "taken from the direst divinities in Greek mythology, like Titan, Poseidon, and Saturn, the god who devoured his own children" (1987, p. 256).

Bibliography

Girard, Rene. *Deceit, Desire and the Novel.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1965. French original, 1961.

_____ . *Violence and the Sacred.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977. French original, 1972. . *The Scapegoat.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986. French original, 1982.

_____ . *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987. French original, 1978.

_____ . *Job: The Victim of His People.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press,1987. French original, 1985.

_____ . *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

_____ . *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001. French original, 1999.

_____ . *Oedipus Unbound: Selected Writings on Rivalry and Desire.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004.

Grote, Jim. "Rene Girard," *The Encyclopedia of Science, Technology, and Ethics* (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005).

_____ . "Oops, I Did It Again; An Introduction to the Thought of Rene Girard Via Britney Spears," *Spirituality* [Ireland] 10, no. 53 (March/April 2004), 10, no. 54 (May/June 2004), 10, no. 55 (July/August 2004). . "The Imitation of Christ as Double-Bind: Toward a Girardian Spirituality," *Cistercian Studies* 29, no. 4 (1994).

_____ . "Rene Girard's Theory of Violence: An Introduction," *Research in Philosophy and Technology*, vol. 12 (1992).

Williams, James, ed. *The Girard Reader.* New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996. The best introduction to Girard's thought.

Christianity, Violence, & Anarchy: Girard and Ellul

by Matthew Pattillo

Matthew Pattillo is a founding member of Munkhaus, a Christian anarchist collective. He is currently completing his M.Div. at Princeton Seminary. matthew.pattillo@ptsem.edu

This essay will examine the personal and social consequences of sin, biblically defined, and will contend that Christian faith necessitates a rejection of the secular political order. Exploring and contrasting the thought of Rene Girard and Jacques

Ellul, we will demonstrate that Girard's mimetic theory supplies crucial theoretical underpinnings for Ellul's theology. Ellul, in turn, sequencing the Biblical narrative somewhat differently, provides Girard the more biblically consistent content of the life of faith.

The ethical content of the life of faith is a continuation of the salvation narrative inaugurated in Genesis 1-2, incarnated and perpetuated in Israel and later, the universalized community of the Abrahamic blessing. The historical content of this faith demonstrates the incompatibility of political power with freedom in Christ, and the Christian church's ill-fated attempts to maintain an authentic practice of faith while legitimizing the secular order are exposed by the Biblical critique of power. While the growth of the global state has made a total withdrawal from the political order inconceivable, it is precisely its utter domination today that makes critical the continued defiance of the Body of Christ.

Original Sin

Girard observes that when the snake first appears in the Genesis account of the humanity's primal sin, it is already in conflict with God, opposing him as a jealous rival. Eve is enticed by it to covet what belongs to God - the knowledge of good and evil - and to herself become his rival.[1] Her imitation of the serpent's covetousness forms "an alliance of two against one,"[2] and God is expelled from the relationship. The contagion of metaphysical desire, or mimesis, soon claims Adam and what began as a relationship of obedience without conflict between God and human beings is forever changed. An acquisitive mimesis turns antagonistic and rivalrous.[3] When called to account for her disobedience, Eve blames the serpent. Adam in turn blames Eve, implying that God is himself at least partially culpable: "The woman whom *You* gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."[4]

In the earliest account of human origins then, rivalry with God produces rivalry between people. Girard argues that although conflict must inevitably lead to violence, here "God takes the violence upon himself and founds humanity by driving Adam and Eve far away from him."[5] God's banishment of the first humans only mirrors the expulsion implied by human collusion with the snake.

"Now we know that covetousness is the crux of the whole affair," Ellul writes, "since sin always depends on it. 'You shall not covet' (Exodus 20:17) is the last of the commandments because it summarizes *everything* - all the other sins."[6] Prior to the Fall, Adam and Eve are not required to choose between good and evil. "All that counted

---

[1] "Every victim of metaphysical desire... covets his mediator's divinity." Rene Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Johns Hopkins, 1965), 182.

[2] Rene Girard, "From Ritual to Science," *Configurations* 8 (2000): 171-185.

[3] Rene Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford University, 1978), 95.

[4] Gen. 3:12 (NKJV unless otherwise noted); emphasis mine.

[5] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 142

[6] Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word* (Eerdmans, 1985), 101; see also Rene Girard, *I See Satan Fall like Lightning* (Orbis, 1999), pp. 7-12.

was the relation to God and its expression in action."[7] Here Ellul understands freedom as obedience to God's commandments *within the context of a relationship with God.* Independence from God is mere slavery: "Adam seeks to liberate himself from the limits which God has set for him and in so doing he enters into rivalry with other forces and becomes subject to sin."[8] The knowledge that Adam and Eve covet and usurp from God is "the power to *decide* on one's own *what is good and what is evil.*"[9] Consequently, human morality is seen as founded on the order of the Fall, and Girard concurs: the ethical always derives from victimary unanimity,[10] in this case the rejection of God.

For Ellul "covetousness is equivalent to the spirit of power or domination,"[11] and "no society is possible among people who compete for power or who covet and find themselves coveting the same thing."[12] Civil order between rivals in the Genesis prehistory can only be founded on blood. All the elements of the violent origin of civilization are present in this text. Cain murders his brother and rival, Abel, becoming the founder of the first city. The threat of contagious violence is described by the multiplication of Cain's murder into a sevenfold revenge, which becomes his descendant Lamech's seventy-seven-fold revenge, so that by the time of Noah violence engulfs the world. The acceptability of Abel's blood sacrifice is read by Girard as an adumbration of the sacrificial protection on which all social order will be founded: the violence of all against all will be kept in check by the ritualized violence of all against one. For Girard, Cain represents the chaotic mob in the grip of a violent frenzy, uniting against a single victim, a scapegoat. This unity achieves a real peace and allows for the development of all that is collectively termed civilization.[13] In the emergent order legal codes address that which must be prohibited to maintain that peace, and ritual describes the action by which it was first secured.[14] For Girard the fundamental character of ritual is reenactment of the immolation of the victim,[15] as it is this act that first brought concord out of chaos. Culture in all its expressions, the arts and sciences, every mode

---

[7] Jacques Ellul, *Ethics of Freedom* (Eerdmans, 1976), 51.

[8] Ellul, *Ethics*, 49.

[9] Ellul, *Humiliation*, 96n (emphasis Ellul's).

[10] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 236.

[11] Ellul, *Humiliation*, 101; cf also Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity* (Eerdmans, 1991), 20: "Sin is a break with God and all that this entails. When I say that people are not good, I am not adopting a Christian or a moral standpoint. I am saying that their two great characteristics, no matter what their society or education, are covetousness and the desire for power.Rene Girard has fully shown what the implications of covetousness are." Note Ellul's humble confession, p. 7: "I do not pretend to be able to unveil things hidden from the beginning of the world."

[12] Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity* (Eerdmans, 1991), 20.

[13] Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe* (Eerdmans, 1989), 59: "For years now we have been playing the scapegoat game. It has a profound source, as Girard has recalled.the possibility of universalizing it is the exclusive work of television, the radio, and the press. These attach the label and thereby justify whole nations and each and every individual."

[14] Rene Girard, *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, Rene Girard & Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, ed. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly (Stanford University, 1987), 93.

[15] Girard, *Violent Origins*, 107; compare Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons* (Seabury, 1975), 9: "We

of communication, is seen as having as its *fons et origo* the same ritualized coaxing of order from disorder.[16]

Arguing in a similar fashion, Ellul represents the first city as founded on Cain's rejection of God, specifically his offer of protection against vengeance,[17] and his choosing instead to create his own protection - the city. The city "expresses the attempt to exclude God, to shut oneself off from him, to fabricate a world which is purely and exclusively human."[18] Such an exclusively human world is necessarily founded and maintained through force,[19] which is legalized and ritualized:

In its origin law is religious. This is confirmed by almost all sociological findings. Law is the expression of the will of a god; it is formulated by the priest: it is given religious sanction, it is accompanied by magic ritual. Reciprocally, religious precepts are presented in juridical garb. The relationship with the god is established by man in the form of a contract.

The priest guarantees religion with the occult authority of law.[20]

The civil or secular order is understood as founded on violence and maintained by force.[21] The clear implication is that what humans esteem as "law and order" is established by a crime, and is therefore fundamentally *unjust*. Inasmuch as the founding murder is *arbitrary* violence, there can be no authentic *justice* in the city.[22] The victim upon whom the city is founded is innocent, and what is believed just is itself only the legitimization of an unjust order, the illusion of justice serving to suppress all consciousness of its criminal origins. In the city "justice" can only mean that the victim of arbitrary violence is also given credit for the establishment of (temporary) peace.[23] Justice comes too late for the victim, but is timely enough for the consciences of the perpetrators, for whom the ensuing peace confirms the correctness of the original divi-

---

all know, obviously, the close link between religion and violence..The psychological reasons for this have been a matter of question..The fact that Christianity, the revelation of the God of love, could have so changed..sets one thinking..Religion *always* produces violence. When violence comes first, it requires the appearance of a religion."

[16] Jacques Ellul, *Autopsy of Revolution* (Knopf, 1971), 246: "Human society is based on the creative violence which has engendered individual consciousness as well as social order."

[17] Ellul's is the more literal reading of Gen 4:15: "And the Lord said to him, 'Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.' And the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him."

[18] Ellul, *Ethics*, 39.

[19] Jacques Ellul, *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective* (Seabury, 1969), 84: "Every state is founded on violence and cannot maintain itself save by and through violence."

[20] Jacques Ellul, *The Theological Foundation of Law* (Doubleday, 1960), 18.

[21] No distinction can be made between force and violence. Jacques Ellul, *False Presence of the Kingdom* (Seabury, 1971), 151: "It is shortsighted, both politically and spiritually, to say that there is a violence which liberates and another which subjugates. All violence is a crime before the eternal." Compare Girard, *Things Hidden*, 266: "The illusion that there is difference within the heart of violence is the key to the sacrificial way of thinking."

[22] Legal execution, for example, is only ritualized violence (Girard, *Things Hidden*, 173).

[23] Girard, "From Ritual to Science," 185.

sion. Still, the memory of the victim is never effaced and he becomes with time a sort of god, a sacred being who is simultaneously, mysteriously malevolent *and* benevolent. The deification of the victim and the ritualized reenactment of the crime establishing peace serve to suppress from memory the malevolence of the perpetrators and the victim's innocence. The legal system is thus revealed as a religious phenomenon and its charter becomes the seal of our bondage to the secular order.[24] Ellul writes:

Why, after all, does one obey the state? Beyond factors that may be understood and analyzed, not everything can be accounted for, as in the case of the soul that the scalpel cannot find no matter how close the analysis. The residue is a spiritual power, an exousia, that inhabits the body of the state.[25]

Society of Technique & the Sacrificial Order

The Biblical narrative confirms the necessity of law in a fallen world - social laws, moral laws, physical laws that govern every aspect of life but which are all forms of the same necessity. "From the moment when Adam separated himself from God," Ellul writes, "when his freedom was no longer love but the choice between two possibilities, from that moment Adam moved from the realm of freedom into the realm of necessity."[26]

The immediate relationship of the Garden is broken in the Fall, disrupting the relation between humans and God, between man and woman, and between man and nature. No longer in the fellowship of love with God, humans are subjected [[to the laws of necessity, and begin to learn and master them, altering their world according to these laws. They adopt means of mediation in their approach to one another, to nature, and to God. Cain's descendants are read by Ellul as inventors of these mediating techniques - the domestication of animals, music-making, and the fashioning of tools. These means are derivative of the first successful technique mentioned in the Genesis account, Abel's blood sacrifice, which serves as both a screen between humanity and God and an approach.[27] Girard, too, sees that the sciences and arts, and every form of human communication have their origins in ritual violence.[28] Once the connection

---

[24] Rene Girard, "How Can Satan Cast out Satan?" In *Biblische Theologie und gesellschaftlicher Wandel. Fuer Norbert Lohfink, SJ*, ed. Braulik, G., Gross, W., and McEvenue, S., (Freiburg: Herder, 1993), 137.

[25] Ellul, *Subversion of Christianity* (Eerdmans, 1986), 175.

[26] Jacques Ellul, "Technique and the Opening Chapters of Genesis," in *Theology and Technology*, ed. Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 1984), 134.

[27] Ellul, "Technique," 132. Compare Ellul, *Jesus and Marx*, 86n: "Recently we have witnessed the appearance of a new interpretation grill presented by Rene Girard ...Rather than presenting merely another interpretation, Girard gives us a genuine method. Since it fits no ideological canon, I feel certain it will never attract notice or be taken into account by biblical scholars." Also, p. 87n: "Concerning the contrast of two themes, pollution and debt, I must underline, as a point of comparison, Girard's much more profound interpretation.with respect to the sacrificial and nonsacrificial reading of biblical texts. But Girard's approach involves no socioeconomic infrastructure that would permit a Marxist interpretation. The sacrificial interpretation springs from more fundamental facts about human beings and society!"

[28] Girard, "From Ritual to Science," 171-185.

between ritual and culture becomes clear, the truly religious nature of all human civilization is made plain. The denial of sacrificial origins for the arts and sciences is an indication of the veiled and veiling character of ritual violence. Suppression of the knowledge of its origins enables human culture to flourish.

The Biblical revelation, then, by unveiling the sacred violence at the heart of religion, poses a threat to human society. The demythologizing effect of revelation undermines the sacred structures of our world. Girard sees the progressive influence of the Biblical revelation in the now universal concern for victims and the growing inability of persecutors to impose their own perspectives on others by fiat. "Centuries were needed to demystify medieval persecutors," he writes, "a few years suffice to discredit contemporary persecutors."[29] This does not mean that our world knows less persecution or violence, only that the myths that once protected the persecutors and blinded people to the innocence of their victims have been eroded by the demythologizing power of the Biblical revelation. The world becomes "increasingly apocalyptic,"[30] as time wears on, for without "sacrificial protections," without a means of limiting it, humans are faced with the unhappy prospect of a global deluge of violence. By unveiling the violent foundations of human society, the Biblical revelation robs it of the only means it has ever known for maintaining order. After the proclamation of the innocence of sacrificial victims the violent order can only be maintained by the naked will to power. Girard observes that because of the Biblical revelation, we save and, paradoxically, produce more victims than ever before. This latter result is the meaning of Christ's warning, "I did not come to bring peace but a sword."[31] Both are evidence of the "unrelenting historical advance" of Christian truth in our world.[32]

Ellul also traces the historical desacralization of religious forms accomplished by the Biblical revelation - including the desacralization of "Christian religion."[33] But he contends that the primitive sacred has been replaced by a modern sacred, a secular religion whose myths are Progress, Work, and Happiness, and whose ideologies include Nationalism, Socialism, Democracy, and Capitalism.[34]

For Ellul, this "desacralization permitted the development of technology and the unlimited exploitation of the world."[35] In *The Technological Society*,[36] he argues that

---

[29] Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Johns Hopkins University, 1986), 201.

[30] Girard, *The Girard Reader* (Crossroad, 1996), 274.

[31] Matthew 10.34.

[32] Girard, *I See Satan*, 174.

[33] Ellul, *The New Demons*.

[34] Ibid., 112: "The myth of progress as man's seizure of history in order to make it serve him is probably the greatest success ever brought off by a myth. The myth of work as an affirmation of man's transcendence and everlastingness in the face of, and in relation to, history; the myth of happiness as the joy of participating in a glorious time, which is outside the time in which we now participate, hence both a reality and a promise at the same time - all that appears to be at the very heart of these creations of the modern consciousness. In truth, it is all simply the mythical response to the person in the new situation."

[35] Ellul, *Subversion*, 143.

[36] *The Technological Society* (Knopf, 1965) was first published in French in 1954, the same year

the modern world is increasingly dominated by Technique: not merely technology, but the collection of means - political, economic, scientific, etc. - by which humans utilize and master nature and one another. The Society of Technique is concerned above all with efficiency, and elevates means above ends. The magical nature of primitive ritual has been replaced by the conscious design of social engineering.[37] The worldwide domination of the State, which centralizes and integrates all of the various techniques, is creating a kind of global concentration camp in which individuals are valued only for the "role" each plays in the proper functioning of society. Humans no longer control the means but are controlled by them. When technical developments become possible, people are no longer able to ask whether these developments ought or ought not be pursued. If it can be done, it will be done, and if, for example, the development of nuclear energy and weaponry creates unforeseen environmental and human consequences, the hope is always expressed that future technical progress will at last propose a remedy. Technique always advances according to its own irreversible logic.

Where Ellul saw Efficiency as the defining goal and characteristic of the global society, Girard argues that it is precisely the "the concern for victims... [that] dominates the total planetary culture in which we live The world becoming

one culture is the fruit of this concern and not the reverse."[38] The ineluctable advance of the Biblical revelation renders "new" myths incapable of survival.[39] He considers the principle challenge to the Biblical revelation today to be a kind of "false concern for the victim," the political appropriation of concern for the victims that turns the accusation of victimization against Christians and against the Biblical revelation itself.[40] The result is that the status of victim is eagerly sought, since it is deemed a position of power and a source of political capital. Consider, for example, the debate over abortion rights framed on both sides as concern for the victim, or the American capitalization of its victim-status in the wake of terrorist attacks on its World Trade Center since the turn of the century.

Ellul, too, saw that the great secular metanarratives since the Enlightenment had been largely discredited. Of Kant and Hegel, he writes:

---

that Heidegger's 1949 lecture "The Question Concerning Technology" was first published. The two reach many of the same conclusions.

[37] Jacques Ellul, *Autopsy of Revolution* (Knopf, 1971), 259.

[38] Girard, *I See Satan*, 178; Compare Jean Baudrillard, "The Violence of the Global," available from http://www.ctheory.net/text_file.asp?pick=385; Internet; accessed 23 May 2003: "The analogy between the terms 'global' and 'universal' is misleading. Universalization has to do with human rights, liberty, culture, and democracy. By contrast, globalization is about technology, the market, tourism, and information. Globalization appears to be irreversible whereas universalization is likely to be on its way out. At least, it appears to be retreating as a value system which developed in the context of Western modernity and was unmatched by any other culture."

[39] Girard, *Scapegoat*, 201: "Even if some totalitarian system were to control the entire planet tomorrow, it would not succeed in making its own myth, or the magical aspect of its persecution, prevail."

[40] Girard, *I See Satan*, 180: " *The other totalitarianism* ...does not oppose Judeo-Christian aspirations but claims them as its own and questions the concern for victims on the part of Christians.(It)

It was wonderful to set forth an attractive outline of history and its development, but what a fraud, what a swindle, when the only decisive result was the relentless strengthening of the State, the very place where man should have concentrated all his forces to prevent such a thing.[41]

The same could be said, of course, for Marx, and a host of utopian dreamers since, Christian and otherwise. The history of the twentieth century is an especially cluttered graveyard of capsized myths of progress and new world ideologies run aground. Most of those that made serious claims on the age in which Ellul lived and wrote are little more than historical curiosities today. But even today, in the global-capitalist aftermath of the last century's ideology wars, Ellul's analysis tolls true:

Capitalism has progressively subordinated all of life - individual and collective - to money. Money has become the sole criterion for judging man and his activity...money, the source of power and freedom, must take priority over everything else. This belief is well supported on the one hand by a general loss of spiritual sensitivity (if not of faith itself) and on the other by the incredible growth of technology. Money, which allows us to obtain everything material progress offers (in truth, everything our fallen nature desires), is no longer merely an economic value. It has become a moral value and an ethical standard.[42]

Recent years have witnessed the rise and fall of the "Information Age," with its promise of decentralized power and freedom for individuals through the supposed egalitarianism of the Internet. The vastly increased technical power of the State to house and reference information on the lives of individual citizens, the rabid proliferation of electronic surveillance and identification systems since the early nineties, to name just a couple of recent "advances," have made such short work of this craze that it was scarcely uttered before it was dead in the water. Ellul is again prophetic: "Technical aggrandizement of the state...is the only condition under which a contract between state and individual is possible."[43]

Genesis 1-2, Contingency and Chaos

The seeming inevitability of a world dominated by political power has left humanity very little room to hope for a different social reality. In a world where freedom is limited to "freedom of choice" between good and evil, law or chaos, "the true is a moment of the false."[44] The exigencies of life within the Society of the Spectacle make it difficult to imagine any action one might take that would not merely strengthen the present order.

We have demonstrated the close connection between the Fall and the foundation of the state. In the same sense that justice within the secular order is strictly relative, so

does not openly oppose Christianity but outflanks it on its left wing"(emphasis Girard's).

[41] Jacques Ellul,*Hope in Time of Abandonment*(Seabury, 1973), 278.

[42] Jacques Ellul, *Money and Power* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 20.

[43] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 309.

[44] Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983), 9; Ellul, *Anarchy*, 3: "In 1964 I was attracted by a movement very close to anarchism, that is, situationism. I had very friendly

virtue within the state, too, has use-value only as the personal legitimization of secular power. The personal and the social consequences of the Fall cannot be abstracted from one another: the external secular power is maintained by those who have internalized its constraints and its justifications, while secular power "reinforces human sinfulness and conceals our fallen character from view."[45]

The Genesis narrative places the birth of secular morality (the knowledge of good and evil) before the violent foundation of the civil order, implying that political domination or sovereignty is an external manifestation of the internal rejection of God. Rivalry with God leads to rivalry among people, which leads to the violent contagion of all against all checked only by the violence of all against one. It is thus the civil order emerges.

However, morality or civic virtue is *also* the internalization of the coercive peace of the secular city. As the sacrifice of a scapegoat stills the chaos of unrestrained social violence, so morality is the (violent) inhibition of the supposed chaos of the passions. Ellul writes, "The more complex and refined civilization becomes the greater is the 'interiorizing' of determinations. These become less and less visible, external, constricting and offensive. They are instead invisible, interior, benevolent, and insidious."[46] This interiorization of the political order manifests itself in asceticism, a heroic self-restraint of the passions, and personal enforcement of moral law. As with the "exchangerelations of arbitrary power," freedom is granted only as a concession of power, and a certain mechanical and repetitive peace is imposed; selfdenial and the repression of desire produce an artificial calm but never succeed in uprooting the unruly passions.[47]

On both the social and individual levels, then, fallen humanity *seems* constrained by only two options: "law and order," or chaos; morality, or depravity. Girard writes, "We cannot postulate the existence in man of a desire radically disruptive of human relations without simultaneously postulating the means of keeping this desire in check."[48] John Milbank argues instead that "desire" is not *necessarily* "radically disruptive of human relations." Primeval chaos is an element of the myth that sustains the civil order. Equally tenable, he argues, is the postulation of an already existing hierarchical order justified and maintained with the help of the myth of a chaos always threatening resurgence. The mythical chaos is feared, yet idolized and celebrated in violent spec-

contacts with Guy Debord, and one day I asked him bluntly whether I could join his movement and work with him. He said that he would ask his comrades. Their answer was frank. Since I was a Christian I could not belong to their movement. For my part, I could not renounce my faith."

[45] John Milbank, "An Essay against Secular Order," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 15/2 (1987): 209.

[46] Ellul, *Ethics*, 41

[47] Milbank, "Essay," 221; cf. 208-9: "Augustine is then able to show that all Roman virtue is a merely relative matter because it is only possible within a circle bounded by arbitrary violence: a circle however, which more and more recedes from view as time goes on and political coercion assumes more and more 'commuted' and legally regular forms."

[48] Rene Girard, *Violence & the Sacred* (Johns Hopkins, 1977), 218.

tacles, e. g. the ultra-violence of Hollywood films, or the public spectacle of American football.[49]

Following Milbank's argument, if the passions are thought to be an interior disorder brought to order by the interiorized sacrificial order of "fighting virtue," then the notion of a chaos of desire might be just a "mythic" element of the internal coercive order. This is not to say that people are naturally "good" and that removal of personal and social restraint will produce an ideal society. We merely point out that the absence of alternatives to "law and order, or anarchy" is precisely the enslavement of humanity to the "knowledge of good and evil" described in the Bible. We are concerned in this essay to demonstrate that the Biblical narrative insists on a "third" way beyond law, beyond morality, and beyond chaos.

Girard convincingly traces the violent origins of the secular political order, but what seems less clear is the shape the way out of this order might take. We contend that by ignoring the narrative priorities of the Biblical text Girard makes it difficult to recover the form anti-sacrificial practice takes. Girard privileges the Fall-Cain narrative over the Genesis 1-2 narrative, so that the sacrificial order he so clearly identifies takes on a predetermined quality. Given the covetous nature of humanity, the resulting sacrificial order of Cain is inevitable. However, the Biblical sequencing is the more ontologically correct. Adam's Fall obviously implies a fall *from* something, and the prior condition is described in Genesis 1-2.

Ellul, too, contends the creation story describes an origin fundamentally different than foundational violence. Genesis 1-2 illustrate "no relationship of exploitation, utilization, or subordination," but rather a "directing which nevertheless leaves the other intact."[50] God's word, the power of creation, is not an intellectual analysis that divides and separates, but the language of union and love. Adam's naming of the animals is no mere technique in the Ellulian sense, but "the continuation of the word of God."[51] Christian tradition often places the expulsion of Satan from heaven between days one and two in the creation account, but such an expulsion is not in the Hebrew text. Creation emerges from what is "formless and void," not by violence but by the word of God.[52] The later insertion of Satan's expulsion into the creation narrative may be the result of a "sacrificial reading" of the Hebrew Scriptures[53] via a sacrificial reading of the Gospels - the work of Christian exegetes who fundamentally misunderstood the Gospel revelation.[54]

---

[49] Milbank, "Essay," 208-9; *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Blackwell, 1991), 394-5.

[50] Ellul, "Technique," 131.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Girard, "From Ritual," 183-4: Following Michel Serres, Girard traces in the distinction between void and matter the violence of expulsion, or purge.

[53] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 268: "The Old Testament is.far from being dominated by sacred violence. It actually moves away from violence, although in its most primitive sections it still remains sufficiently wedded to violence for people to be able to brand it as violent without appearing totally implausible."

[54] Girard, "From Ritual to Science," 171-185; compare Jacques Ellul, *Subversion of Christianity*

Genesis 1-2 describe an "immediate relationship of love and knowledge"[55] among those who are different: God and humans, man and woman, humankind and nature. Adam and Eve "needed to follow no method, to apply no technique, because there was no force to exert, no need to fulfill, no necessity to overcome."[56] There was "no protocol or sacrifices"[57] because there was no disorder, only order. Genesis 1-2 argue that the sacrificial mechanisms Girard identifies as maintaining law and order do not *necessitate* a primeval chaos from which order emerged. The hypothesis of an original, divine order prior to the Fall de-naturalizes the sacrificial order of Cain; the creation story insists "it didn't have to be this way," and announces, *from the beginning*, the existence of a different way of life. Moreover, the seventhday creation of the Sabbath marking Jewish practice signals that the Jew-Gentile distinction is not incidental but *inherent to* the "other way of life" embodied in Israel and later, the Church.[58] The record of God's original intentions for humanity and creation contextualizes all of the Biblical narratives, up to and including the Gospel revelation. Biblical salvation is not a *return* to Eden, but rather the *inclusion* of the individual into the narrative inaugurated in Genesis 1-2.

Narrative and Idiom

No mere hypothesis of freedom, the Scriptures insert the individual into the narrative itself - the continuing historical embodiment of the divine revelation in time and space. The Gospel revelation is then first received by members of a community not unfamiliar with its themes. We have mentioned the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel. The authors of these "have recast a preexistent mythology, adapting it in the spirit of their special concerns...inverting the relationship between the victim and the persecuting community." In fact the Hebrew Bible brims with demythologizing reversals of sacred narrative. The book of Job, perhaps the oldest of the Hebrew texts, depicts persecution from the perspective of a victim who protests his innocence, refusing the accusations of his interlocutors, and is at last vindicated by God. The story of Joseph and his brothers previews the self-sacrifice of Christ and the Father's forgiveness in Judah's offer to substitute himself for Benjamin and Joseph's compassion for the brothers who once victimized and expelled him. The Exodus of Israel from slavery in Egypt identifies the community of faith as those who have been set free from bondage to the pagan political order and not merely as those who are free by nature or divine right. The story of Solomon's judgment between two prostitutes depicts the judgment

---

(Eerdmans, 1986), 159: "Grace excludes sacrifice. Girard is quite right when he shows how basic sacrifice is to humanity. There can be no accepted life or social relation without sacrifice. But gracious grace rejects the validity of all human sacrifice. It ruins a basic element in human psychology."

[55] Ellul, "Technique," 128.

[56] Ibid., 129.

[57] Ibid.

[58] R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Fortress Press, 1996), 118.

of God in favor of she who would sacrifice herself to save another, and against the one who preferred the violent sacrifice productive of victims. The binding of Isaac, David's penitential Psalms, Isaiah's songs of the Suffering Servant, the story of Jonah - each in its own way contravenes and reverses the mythic pattern of the secular order.

The revelation of the Hebrew Scriptures is then numerously recapitulated by the Gospels. "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill," Jesus tells those gathered for the Sermon on the Mount. Conversion implies a concomitant break with the pagan narrative, and the reaffirmation of Hebrew Scriptural revelation. Jesus is called "the second Adam," and is represented as taking up the cause of immemorial victims, beginning with "righteous Abel." The creation story begins with a social order radically differentiated from that later inaugurated by Cain, an order historically preserved through the descendants of Adam. Cain kills Abel, but Seth replaces Abel. Violence floods the earth, but Noah and his family escape. Abraham is called out of a pagan culture to become the father of faith for all the world. As a consequence, Gentile converts to the Christian faith are deemed "grafted in" to the historical embodiment of the Biblical revelation, forming an organic unity with Israel and not merely as having superseded it. The Jewish followers of Jesus are not called out of Israel as from a pagan political order, but to a restoration of a way of life consistent with Torah and with the counter-sacrificial practice established by Abraham.

Akedah and the Counter-Sacrificial Gospel

The counter-sacrificial revelation of the Hebrew Scriptures begins in the Genesis prehistory but takes a radical turn when God calls Abraham into a relationship with himself. The epidemic consequences of the Fall are here opposed by an act of divine and world-historical conciliation. Where Adam and Eve are evicted from the Garden, Abraham is led by God to a promised land.[59] Flouting the one, modest prohibition in paradise the first humans seize for themselves the right to decide good and evil. Abraham is found on Mount Moriah submitting to God's demand of something monstrous, an obedience beyond morality. Abraham will inaugurate the historical reversal of the Fall, with the promise in Genesis 12:1-3 that this "other way of life" would be offered to all the world.

Abraham's obedience to God's demand for the sacrifice of his son Isaac (the Akedah, or "binding" of Isaac) stands at once for the reversal of human rivalry with God and of God's expulsion of humankind from his presence. Abraham reestablishes a relationship with God based on obedience and submission. His descendants are the continuing incarnation of this relationship. God gives a son to Abraham with the promise that Isaac will be the vehicle of blessing to Israel and the nations. Abraham's future and the fulfillment of God's promises to him turn on Isaac, so that his offering of Isaac is an offering of his own very hope and life, a return to God who initiated the gift.[60]

---

[59] Cf. Gen. 12:3.

[60] The New Testament confirms that Abraham's offering was not a *disinterested* sacrifice, but that

382

Obeying God *for no other reason than simply to obey*, Abraham repudiates the pride of usurpation and Adam's grasping after divinity. He renounces the rivalry of Adam and Eve and refounds submission as the model for human relationship with God. For his part God recapitulates the avowal of Genesis 12:1-3, enlarging it to incorporate Abraham's obedience.[61]

The prohibition against murder in the Noachide laws and the condemnation of Cain's fratricide argue against the view that the Akedah is a mere polemic against murder or human sacrifice. Furthermore, the tacit approval of animal sacrifice earlier in the Genesis text by Abraham, Noah, Abel and even God himself when he covers the man and woman with animal skins in the Garden renders the deflection of violence from human to animal victims inessential to the meaning of the Akedah. Similarly, Torah's prohibition of child sacrifice[62] makes the Akedah superfluous as a condemnation of the practice.

Neither Abraham nor Isaac was divinized in Israel, nor were they found guilty of any crime, arguing against the Akedah as an instance of the ubiquitous sacred violence. Although God intervenes at the last moment to prevent Abraham from immolating his beloved son, it is not because God is himself bound to a higher moral law. The Hebrew Scriptures know nothing of "natural law" or a set of universally valid ethical claims independent of God's command. Isaac is liberated from his bondage and rescued from death by the offering "God will provide for Himself,"[63] the selfoffering of God in response to Abraham's obedience. Abraham and Isaac are rescued from obligation to the sacrificial order of Cain and freed from the slavery of sin. All future sacrifice in Israel will recall both their forgiveness and the high cost of liberation.[64]

Abraham's obedience to God is mirrored and magnified in Isaac's obedience to Abraham. Isaac takes the form of the victim in the Akedah. Israel is identified with Abraham in his radical obedience to the commandment of God, but is further identified

---

he also expected a return of Isaac; Heb 11:19: "(Abraham) considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; figuratively speaking, he did receive him back." The idea of return can also be seen in God's offering Christ in response to Abraham's offering of Isaac.

[61] Gen. 22:15-18: "And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, 'By myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because your have obeyed my voice.'"

[62] Lev 20:1-5: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Say to the people of Israel, Any man of the people of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, who gives any of his children to Molech shall be put to death; the people of the land shall stone him with stones. I myself will set my face against that man, and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given one of his children to Molech, defiling my sanctuary and profaning my holy name. And if the people of the land do at all hide their eyes from that man, when he gives one of his children to Molech, and do not put him to death, then I will set my face against that man and against his family, and will cut them off from among their people, him and all who follow him in playing the harlot after Molech.'"

[63] Gen 22:8.

[64] One tradition puts Isaac's age at 37 at the time of the Akedah. The reasoning is as follows: Sarah

with Isaac as the innocent victim. Even though Abraham's hand was stayed against Isaac, Jewish tradition credits Abraham for the sacrifice of his son. Similarly, although Isaac is spared, it is as though he had been immolated, and he becomes a "resurrected" sacrifice. Where Israel is described as a priestly nation in identification with Abraham, the high priest of the human race, it is likewise a nation of living sacrifices through Isaac.[65] After the Akedah, God incorporates identification with the victim into the divine promise of Genesis 12:13.

We see then that "all social structure, the entire scapegoating machinery, is revealed as delusional, a delusional quality we are not permitted to see fully unless we observe the victim 'after death' so to speak."[66] It is the resurrection of Isaac that converts Abraham. Isaac's "apparent resurrection is the subjective correlative of something most objective and real, (Abraham's) renunciation of (Adam's) bad desire."[67] The innocence of the victim upon which Cain founded the first city is forever revealed *for Israel* in the resurrection of Isaac, and the people of Israel become the incarnation of the Akedah revelation.

The Levitical sacrifices prescribed by the Torah have meaning to the extent that they participate in the meaning of Isaac's self-offering, and are offered in the spirit of Abraham's self-sacrificial obedience. The nature of the Levitical sacrifices - innocent animals, kosher and unblemished - strengthens the identification with Isaac as innocent victim. The insistence that the sacrifices be offered only on Mount Moriah, the present day Temple Mount, underscores the physical connection between the Akedah and the Levitical sacrifices. The Temple sacrificial system contemporizes the Akedah in Israel's history. God's revelation is thereby preserved until the coming of the Messiah when revelation is proclaimed to the entire world. The Levitical sacrifices are of a qualitatively different nature than those practiced among the nations for the temporary expulsion of violence, pointing back in time to the Akedah and forward to the Messiah's sacrifice.

Careful analysis of the later prophetic critique of sacrifice reveals they were directed at sacrifices without repentance and not at sacrifices as such. The prophetic critique condemns sacrifice that has renounced the spirit of the Akedah and has become instead a mere imitation of what mimetic theory terms the single victim mechanism. However, alongside the many prophetic passages condemning sacrifices[68] stand many extolling

---

was 90 years old when she gave birth, 127 years old at her death. When Abraham told Sarah what he had been commanded to do, Sarah dropped dead at the thought. 127-90=37.

[65] Paul may also allude to Isaac in Rom 12:1: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

[66] Sandor Goodhart, "Response to Willard Swartley's Book," paper presented at 2001 COV&R Conference, available from http://www.ufsia.ac.be/flw/nieuws/Sandor_Goodhart.doc; Internet; accessed 31 October 2001.

[67] Rene Girard, "The Crime and Conversion of Leontes in *The Winter's Tale,*" *Religion & Literature* 22/2-3 (1990): 218.

[68] See, for example, Mic 6:6-8; Is 1:10-17; Jer 6:20; Hos 5:6, 6:6, 9:11-13; Amos 5:21-25.

the virtue of obedient sacrifice and predicting the triumphant return of faithful sacrifice in Israel.[69] The prophets are here seen to condemn sacrifice to the extent that it does not partake of the meaning of the Akedah revelation.

The Gospel revelation is that Jesus entered and brought to light that dark place in our culture where we accuse and execute innocent victims to relieve our own confusion, violence and sin. The heart of the single victim mechanism is dark because its true nature is concealed, as it must be in order to be effective. The veiled reality of this mechanism finds a parallel in the holiest place of the Temple, set apart by a veil, and the Gospels record the rending of the veil at the moment of Jesus' death, and the revelation of that dark place by the light of truth. Israel, of course, always knew what was going on behind the veil in the Temple, even if the revelation remained mysterious in its effects: when the veil was finally removed, the mystery of the Akedah was exposed to all the world. The Gospel revelation is a mystery, but it, too, is a mystery patefied. The once-secret knowledge of the single victim mechanism is now forever brought to light: the Akedah was the Gospel announced to Israel; the Gospel is the Akedah for the nations.

In his life, death, and resurrection Jesus Christ echoes and confirms all of the great realities of the Akedah: self-offering, obedience, identification with victims, and salvation from the sacrificial order of Cain. In his perfect submission to the will of God and self-sacrificial love towards all Jesus embodies positive mimesis, mirroring and magnifying Abraham's, and amplifying the blessings of the Akedah from Israel to the nations, as promised in Genesis 12:1-3. Christ's resurrection fulfills the meaning of the Akedah and announces the counter-sacrificial revelation to all the world.

The relationship of interdependence between Israel and the nations is ultimately intrinsic to God's revelation to the world. God's invitation goes out from Israel to all the families of the earth to embrace the self-sacrificial character of the innocent victim and to join the family of God in submission and obedience to God. The differentiated unity of the Akedah and the Gospel mirrors the divinely intended and enduring relationship between Israel and the nations. The localized Temple sacrifice is universalized in Christ. The temporary sacrifices of Israel are made eternal in Christ. It is in this sense that Christ has come to *complete* the Torah, by the universal extension in time and space of the Biblical revelation and the inclusion of all people across history in the family of God.

Torah and Law

Israel is the continuing incarnation of the salvation of Abraham out of the existing political order and his passage from the compulsory morality of the Fall to the freedom of obedience to God's commandment. The story of Joseph marks the transition from Abraham to Israel in the Biblical narrative. Here the elements of the divine revelation are all clearly discernible. Joseph's brothers covet his favored status and conspire against him, selling him into slavery. The brothers are then forced by famine many

---

[69] See Mic 4:1-2; Is 56:6-7; Jer 17:24-26; Jer 33:17-18.

years later to seek aid from the Egyptian government, of which Joseph is now second in command. Joseph insists that the brothers bring Benjamin, the youngest son and now his father's favorite, in exchange for assistance, at which point his brother Judah volunteers to take Benjamin's place. Joseph, moved by his brother's offer, forgives his brothers and the family is reconciled. Even so, his brothers' initial jealousy and their expulsion of Joseph result in their descendants' eventual enslavement in Egypt. Giving in to covetousness and rivalry brings the family into the bondage of the pagan political order of Cain. Self-offering and forgiveness mark the way of redemption.

Israel is the community then of the Exodus from Egyptian captivity. The Passover lamb refers to the lamb of the Akedah "which God will provide for Himself." It signals redemption from slavery and forgiveness for sin. Having been liberated, the Israelites are able to respond to the Torah given by God, not as to a legal document, but as to the commandment spoken by God to a people who freely answer.[70]

Their liberation exposes the sacrificial order of Cain as well as the content of the "other way of life" God intends for Adam, Abraham, and his descendants. God does not deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt only to obligate them again under a contractual serfdom. The heart of the Torah is the Levitical sacrificial system that incarnates the salvation and conversion of Abraham and Isaac. The Levitical sacrifices describe God's forgiveness of sins not in the simple stroke of an accountant's pen, but at the cost of bearing one another's burdens. The Ten Commandments define a way of life free from rivalry with God: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me"; and free of conflict among people: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."[71]

Girard points out that the Torah contains prohibitions that subvert prohibition. The Torah offers prohibitions like those resulting from sacred violence, yet also contain prohibitions that controvert ritual prohibition, e. g. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself,"[72] which precludes covetousness, interrupts rivalry, and obviates prohibition. In fact the Torah regularly upsets the secular order of exchange relations: the seventh day Sabbath depreciates the brutal necessity of work; the seventh year redemption of slaves and rest from cultivation of fields undermines the compulsion to exhaust nature and other people as if they had only utilitarian value; the prescriptions for fasting and tithing challenge the determination to consume and to possess.

Salvation in Christ, the "living Torah," is salvation out of the pagan political order into the Jewish familial order, conversion from the coercive legalism of the Fall into

---

[70] The well-known tradition that God offered the Torah to all peoples, but the Israelites were the only ones who responded and accepted, indicates that obedience to the Law was not *imposed* upon Israel, but rather freely given.

[71] Ex 20:1-2, 17.

[72] Lv 19:18; Girard, *Things Hidden*, 155.

the freedom of obedience to God. Again, Jesus did not come to destroy the Torah and the Prophets, but to fulfill. St. Paul's "all things are lawful" does not contradict the correct practice of the Torah.[73] Rather, the same freedom beyond morality originally attributed to Adam before the Fall is reestablished by Abraham, offered to Israel in the Torah, and extended through Christ to all the world. The offer of grace has been extended from Israel to the nations, and those who respond are grafted onto the tree, Israel.

Fallen humanity by long habit and a stubborn blindness garbles the radical nature of this liberation, inverting it to fit the sacrificial pattern inherited from Cain. It is precisely this misapplication of the Torah Jesus condemns in his scathing indictments of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and others who make "the commandment of God of no effect."[74] The individual is not set free by God only to submit to slavery under the political order. "Legalism" is a common term in American evangelical circles referring to a kind of sham obedience that seeks to appease an unforgiving god. Unfortunately, legalism is often attributed to the Torah, from which, it is argued, Christ has set us free. The perversity of this reasoning is exposed by putative "Christian Values" that erect a new legality while suppressing their pagan origins by scapegoating the Torah. Compelling Jewish converts to eat pork as proof of their renunciation of "the Law" provides us an especially egregious and risible instance of this tendency from early church history. No less uncomprehending are modern American efforts to legislate Christian morality (prayer in schools, abortion, the debate over posting the Ten Commandments in courtrooms), as if the Christian revelation consisted, like the secular order it oppugns and reverses, in the "restraint of beasts," those afoot in society at large and lurking in oneself.

Salvation and Conversion

The concealed and concealing nature of the secular order is its strength. The innocence of the victims of arbitrary violence is denied and the unjust foundation of law and order suppressed. A godless and self-righteous morality is masked by the appearance of false gods of violence whose anger must be continuously appeased.[75] The individual

---

[73] The ongoing formation of halakhah testifies to the Jewish understanding of Torah not as a disembodied and absolute document, but as a living word from God to be constantly reappropriated and renewed. Halakhah corresponds to the relative Christian ethics Jacques Ellul ceaselessly championed that would prevent examples of relative ethics or halakhah from the New Testament from becoming ossified into absolute law. An example would be Paul's instructions concerning female headdress and behavior in the church, which were apparently important issues in certain early congregations but have little relevance today beyond a general need for order within the community. Like Christian morality, halakhah had a propensity to become legalistic, and it is this legalistic misinterpretation, not Torah itself, that Jesus condemns.

[74] Mt 15:6; Girard, *Girard Reader*, 281: "The mythical mentality can take (the Gospels) and construe them mythically, but quintessentially they are the destruction of myth." The complicity in the condemnation of Jesus on the part of the Jewish people, who were in possession of the revelation of the Hebrew scriptures, indicates that the Biblical narratives, including the Gospels, can be misconstrued.

[75] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 255: "Humans have always found peace in the shadow of their idols - that

is deceived and self-deceiving, both a victim of and a participant in the structures that enslave him. Salvation for the individual consists then in the overcoming of personal "legalism" and his deliverance from secular power,[76] but emerging from the obfuscations of the sacrificial order requires the intervention of something or someone from outside of its closed system.[77]

The Biblical stories are mythic in form yet subvert myth. From Abel onwards, they reveal the innocence of the victims of sacred violence and take their side, disrupting the victimary unanimity upon which the proper functioning of the sacrificial mechanisms depend. In the Gospels, God himself takes the form of the victim and suffers the predictable and fatal outcome of his encounter with the secular order. By unveiling the complicity of myth and ritual in the maintenance of an unjust order, the Biblical narrative decodes mythology and desacralizes the gods and rituals of the violent sacred.[78] It is only in terms of its own truth that the Bible can be interpreted, while at the same time it deconstructs all other mythologies. Milbank observes:

The relationship of the Biblical narratives to the pagan myths is necessarily asymmetric: the former could not be critically read through the latter because it belongs to the mythic grammar to conceal and not to expose arbitrary and fundamental violence. The latter can be critically read through the former because the Biblical narratives constitute and renew themselves through a breaking with sacrificial violence which exposes its social reality.[79]

Both the political order and the legalistic consciousness of the individual are the result of the original sin, rejection of God. The Biblical narrative represents a break with and an exposure of the secular order. It then invites the individual to make that same break.[80] This break, or conversion, involves an identification with the victim and the simultaneous disavowal of complicity with the murderous mob.[81] The individual emerges from the mob when he takes the side of the victim *against* the violence of the

---

is to say, of human violence in sacralized form."

[76] Milbank, "Essay," 220: "Salvation is precisely, *out of* this political domain which constantly reproduces 'original' sin."

[77] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 153: "Rehabilitating the victim has a desacralizing effect." Also, Rene Girard, "Is There AntiSemitism in the Gospels?" *Biblical Interpretation* 1/3 (1993): 350: "If the first Christians managed to secede from the mimetic consensus, it was not their own strength that did it, according to the Gospels, but God's own Spirit . . . he dismantles the consensus against the victims."

[78] Ellul, *New Demons*, 121: "Behind and beyond the myths one discerns the sacred of which they are an expression. It is by a kind of geography of the myths that one can discover the axes of the sacral world."

[79] Milbank, "Essay," 213; compare Girard, *Things Hidden*: "The three great pillars of primitive religion - myth, sacrifice, and prohibitions - are subverted by the thought of the Prophets." And Ellul, *False Presence*, 206: "How can we fail to realize that scripture, *in precisely the same way in which the myths contained in scripture itself are treated*, is the true destroyer of myths?"

[80] Ellul, *Subversion*, 133: "Just as conversion always means a break in individual life, so the intervention of revelation means a break in the whole group, in all society, and it unavoidably challenges the institution and established power, no matter what form this may take."

[81] Girard, *Girard Reader*, 279: "Faith emerges when individuals come out of the mob."

political order[82] and *against* the coercive morality of the Fall. "The proclamation of the Gospel implies, for the liberation of the person to whom it is proclaimed, the indictment of that which holds him captive."[83] In the encounter with the Gospel revelation, the individual is persuaded to take the side of Jesus, the innocent victim, and to admit his own participation in the persecution of innocents. Jesus' forgiveness of his persecutors enables the individual to forgive others, and to be forgiven for his own complicity. The fatal necessity of the pagan order is set aside in the witness of the Biblical narrative that invites the individual, liberated from the political order and from a sinful consciousness, to participate in that witness.[84]

Positive Content of the Life of Faith

The crucifixion of Jesus unmasks the violent nature of the political order, and this revelation sets the individual free from the necessity of that order. The individual may decline the "way of the Cross," and still the offer is made. He is presented with another option and may respond to God's love made manifest in the suffering atonement of Christ, or continue as best as he can to "sleep peacefully in his religious dream."[85] God's forgiveness in Christ interrupts the "pagan sacrificial chain of offense and revenge"[86] binding individuals to the legal requirements of the city of Cain and its vindictive gods. Christ is the incarnation of a love that cannot be integrated into the Society of Technique. He opposes to its means and ends a perfectly 'useless' truth, something fatal to its order, *ipso facto*.[87]

The Gospels are the record of a small minority who disassociated themselves from the social order that executed Christ and instead proclaimed his innocence, his cancellation of the fatal necessity of that order, and his victory over the finality of death. The Gospels and other New Testament writings bear witness to a community who participate in Christ's crucifixion through a penitential way of life and a forgiving practice that liberates and preserves freedom in opposition to the political order.[88] The imitation of Christ in his refusal of violence, his concern for victims, and his suffering endurance of evil constitute the freedom of life "in Christ."[89]

---

[82] Ellul, *Violence*, 86: "Masked violence is found at all levels of society. Economic relations, class relations, are relations of violence, nothing else."

[83] Ellul, *False Presence*, 208.

[84] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory,* 397: "Knowing the shape of sin, and the shape of its refusal, we can at last be radically changed."

[85] Ellul, *New Demons*, 207-8; compare Girard, *Girard Reader*, 278: "The Gospels cannot guarantee that people will act the right way; they are not some kind of recipe for the good society. What the Gospels do is to offer more freedom and to set the example."

[86] Milbank, "Essay," 215.

[87] Ellul, *What I Believe*, 182.

[88] Girard, *Girard Reader*, 278: "What are the prescriptions of the Kingdom of God? Basically, give up a dispute when mimetic rivalry is taking over. Provide help to victims and refuse all violence."

[89] Ellul, *Ethics,* 15: "In Jesus Christ, who is fully obedient and also fully free, the will of God is freedom... The action of Christ takes effect in daily life through the mediation of our freedom."

Given the divine unveiling of the secular legal system, the followers of Christ understand the contradiction inherent to Christian participation in the legal order.[90] Writing to the church at Corinth, Paul asks, "Dare any of you, having a matter against one another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?"[91] Paul harbored no illusions about the nature of secular power or its "convertibility."[92] All surveys of the Biblical critique of power, however, come up against Paul because Romans 13:1-7 seems to challenge all that the Bible, including Paul, has to say on the matter.

Some exegetes have reasoned that Paul's comments in 13:1-7 are too radical a departure from the subject matter surrounding the verses, so that these verses must be a later insertion by redactors. If these verses are deleted, 13:8 seems to follow reasonably from 12:21. Others attribute the traditional interpretation of the verses to Paul, but add counsel concerning extreme cases of political evil not accounted for in Paul's apparently absolute consecration of the powers. Ellul agrees that the verses do come from Paul, but must be properly contextualized both within the epistle and within Paul's other writings. The discussion prior to Romans 13 concerns loving and being at peace with others, both friend and enemy. The last verse of chapter twelve, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good,"[93] leads into the discussion of political power, which is an evil that must be endured. Paul is far from advocating revolution or violent resistance, counseling submission instead. If we owe taxes, we pay them, nothing more. We recognize that these *exousia*, or powers are ultimately subject to God alone, but we know, too, that as Christians we have been called to struggle against these *exousia*.[94] While these powers are already defeated by Christ, for the time being we experience and admit their necessity, but never their legitimacy.

Mark D. Nanos has recently suggested Paul's epistle has to do with the ordering of the community of faith at Rome, which at the time was a synagogue community consisting of Gentile Christians along with both believing and nonbelieving Jews. In the context of the letter, then, Romans 13:1-7 is "not concerned with the state, empire, or any other such organization of secular government."[95] Instead, Paul's concern is "to address the obligation of Christians, particularly Christian *Gentiles* ...to subordinate themselves to the leaders of the synagogues and to the customary 'rules of behavior' that had been developed in Diaspora synagogues for defining the appropri-

---

[90] Ellul, *Subversion*, 158: "(Christian faith) does not change either the structure or the functioning of the state or politics. It sets up a relationship of conflict."

[91] I Cor 6:1; compare Rene Girard, *"To Double Business Bound": Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology* (Johns Hopkins, 1978*)*, 228: "'Violent excess' on the one hand, 'law and order' on the other have always fed on each other. What else could they feed upon? If they did not, we would be rid, by now, of both of them."

[92] Ellul, *Jesus and Marx*, 172-3: "There is no given Christian form of power... the only Christian political position consistent with revelation is the negation of power: the radical, total refusal of its existence, a fundamental questioning of it, no matter what form it may take."

[93] Rm 12:21.

[94] Eph 6:12.

[95] Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans* (Fortress, 1996), 291.

ate behavior of 'righteous Gentiles' seeking association with Jews and their God."[96] Paul's advice is based not on arguments for the legitimacy of power, but rather on his previous arguments in chapters 9-11 concerning the historical, present, and future relationship between Jews and Gentiles. Paul is concerned to insure that the community in Rome continues to maintain a "different way of doing things," that the witness of the reconciled community against the secular order is not undermined by a failure to demonstrate the present reality of its eschatological hope.

In any case, Paul does not suggest that the community of faith will or should seek to overthrow secular government, or that the Kingdom of God will either suddenly or by steady advance appear as the inevitable progression of earthly affairs. His imagery in the letter to the Romans suggests instead the Church as a remnant, a minority whose encounter with the political order will inevitably produce results in "the way of the cross."[97] These seven verses in Romans have become *the* text on secular power and the conduct of the church toward it, in spite of the overwhelming witness of the Biblical record *against* political power. It is unsettling to speculate on the sociological and psychological reasons that lead exegetes to value a few verses more highly than the vast collection of contradictory passages, and allow one brief passage to neutralize the entire thrust of the Scriptures on this matter. In light of our arguments in this essay, the traditional interpretation of the passage results from internalization of the violent order of the state and a secret reflection and validation of secular power. Christian statism is correlative to the "sacrificial reading" of the Gospels. Although they never advocate a fugitive or criminal practice toward the state, both Jesus and Paul consider the state to be neither legitimate nor divinely constituted. Paul was arrested, tried, and executed by the same court system that condemned and crucified Jesus. Their witness attests that the exigencies of secular power are to be suffered rather than sanctioned.[98]

Conclusion

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them," Jesus says, ["]*Yet it shall not be so among you.*"[99] Jesus' refusal of power resulted in his crucifixion, a signal of his failure to overturn the secular

---

[96] Ibid.; It is beyond the scope of this paper to detail Nanos' recontextualization of Paul's letter, but it is worth noting that Nanos is principally concerned with a coherent reading of Paul's letter, not a polemic against the state. Even so, Nanos concurs that "the call to subordination in Judaism carries an implicit, if not always explicit, judgment against foreign governments, even if God was somehow using their evil intentions to accomplish his ultimate goals."(Nanos, *Mystery*, 299).

[97] Ellul, *False Presence*, 209: "The church should always be the breach in an enclosed world: in the world of Sartre's private individual as well as in the world of the perfection of technology, the totalism of politics or the strongbox of the kingdom of money."

[98] Ellul, *New Demons*, 177: "If Christianity remains faithful to its inspiration and object, the God of love, it is incompatible with the exercise of political power. The combination of the two came about by accident."

[99] Mt 20:25-6, emphasis mine.

order. Paradoxically, it is this failure which is also the victory over the powers,[100] and the Church is called to participate in that failure. Ellul writes:

It is truly a *fight* ...against a power that can be changed only by means which are the opposite of its own. Jesus overcame the powers - of the state, the authorities, the rulers, the law, etc. - not by being more powerful than they but by surrendering himself even unto death.[101]

The Biblical revelation calls the Church to be the continuing incarnation of God's atonement, to endure the powers rather than sanctify them,[102] and to bear the burdens of those who inevitably suffer under secular power: "In every situation of injustice and oppression, the Christian - who cannot deal with it by violence - must make himself completely a part of it as *representative of the victims*."[103] Apart from God resistance to the powers amounts to mere Stoic self-denial and masochistic self-sacrifice. Our confrontation of the powers instead proceeds from *concern for the victims* of secular dominion:

Freedom can be obtained only when we strive for it; no power can give freedom to people. Challenging power is the only way to make freedom a reality. Freedom exists if the negation of political power is strong enough, and when people refuse to be taken in by the idea that freedom will surely come tomorrow, if only.No, there is no tomorrow. Freedom exists today or not at all. When we shake the edifice, we produce a crack, a gap in the structure, in which a human being can briefly find his freedom, which is always threatened. In order to bring this bit of play into the system, however, we must bring to it a radical, total refusal. Any concession to power enables the totality of power to rush into the small space we have opened.[104]

Political power cannot self-limit and tends in every case to expand beyond all bounds. The *myth* of its necessity clears the way by paralyzing all resistance. Into this world of fatal necessity, Christ comes announcing liberty to captives: deliverance from the harsh supervision of unmerciful morality and freedom to refuse power's exchange of happiness for servitude. Christ's resurrection defeated death, the true end of all necessity. In Christ we know that *our lives will not always be this way*, and the present hope of our resurrection enables the Church (Jew *and* Gentile) to insinuate freedom into an otherwise ironclad system. We proclaim by our words and demonstrate in our action that another path exists beyond the constraints of the illusory "freedom" purchased or wrested by force from the hand of power. Freedom is realized only when we create it by our radical negation of power and our absolute refusal to submit again to a yoke of slavery under the state.

---

[100] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 166: "The Passion is first and foremost the consequence of an intolerable revelation, while being proof of that revelation."

[101] Ellul, *Violence*, 166.

[102] Ellul, *False Presence*, 36: "The works of the world remain works of darkness, but darkness into which a light has come, which does not validate or justify the darkness."

[103] Ellul, *Violence*, 151-2.

[104] Ellul, *Jesus and Marx*, 174.

"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil."[105] Life beyond morality and beyond the narrow choice that passes for freedom is no simple *idea*. The radical transformation of conversion in Christ holds the promise of a different way of life, not tomorrow, not in heaven, but here in the present world. Today, men and women around us will be set free, or continue to wither under a pitiless master. If we refuse to rescue those for whom Christ suffered and died, we surrender again to the forces of death. Today, brothers and sisters, we are either free men, or slaves.

An abridged form of the essay under the title "Restraint of Beasts: Christianity, Violence and Anarchy," appeared in Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture*, vol. 11 (Spring 2005).*

Advert: International Jacques Ellul Society

www.ellul.org

P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705, USA IJES@ellul.org Tel/Fax: 510-653-3334

The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

The IJES and AIJE have been founded by a group of long-time students, scholars, and friends of Jacques Ellul, with the counsel and support of Jean, Yves, and Dominique Ellul, and as a French-American collaboration.

Board of Directors

Patrick Chastenet, *University of Poitiers;* Clifford Christians, *University of Illinois;* Dell DeChant, *University of South Florida;* Andrew Goddard, *Oxford University;* Darrell Fasching (VicePresident), *University of South Florida;* David Gill (President), *Berkeley;* Joyce Hanks, *University of Scranton;* Ken Morris (Secretary-Treasurer), *Boulder;* Carl Mitcham, *Colorado School of Mines*; Langdon Winner, *Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute*

Joining the IJES

To become a member, anywhere in the world, and receive the twice-yearly Ellul Forum, submit annual dues of US $20 to "IJES" (use an international postal money order or bank check drawn in US dollars—or pay electronically with a credit card to "IJES@ellul.org" at www.paypal.com) making sure to note your name, complete mailing address, and purpose of payment.

---

[105] Deut 30:15.

A Conversation With Rene Girard

David W. Gill made the pilgrimage from Berkeley to Stanford on April 12, 2005, to interview Professor Girard at his home.

David W. Gill: Professor Girard, you and Jacques Ellul have been two of our most creative and penetrating analysts of contemporary society with all of its religion, technology, conflict and ferment. And you were both Christian in a deep way. This is not a normal situation among French intellectuals. Did you and Ellul ever meet each other?

Rene Girard: In 1970 I sat next to him at a dinner party organized by some friends. We had a nice interaction then and at several other brief contacts over the years but always in circumstances where we were interrupted a lot. So I never had a real, serious conversation with him.

I am mostly interested in his views as a sociologist of religion in the modern world. By contrast, I am an anthropologist of religion interested in the contact and opposition between archaic religious phenomena and Christianity. But I find in Ellul many ideas that I share with him completely. In some ways I am trying to do something similar to what he has done.

Gill: Is it true that you became a Christian as an adult?

Girard: My mother raised me as a Catholic but I abandoned it when I was about thirteen. She was quite liberal and didn't force her children to go to church. I didn't return until about 1961 at age thirty-five and then it was because of my work. But I am now a fairly active member of the St. Thomas Aquinas parish here at Stanford.

About the time I returned to the church is when I also encountered Ellul's work. So I'm a little rusty but I have re-read some of his work recently, including *Ce Que Je Crois [What I Believe],* a powerful book which hasn't lost any of its relevance since it was first written.

Gill: Your work places a central emphasis on sacrifice and the scapegoat—whereas Ellul places a central emphasis on Scripture and the word.

Could this be because Ellul was Reformed while you are Catholic?

Girard: I don't think so. The reason is that the relationship between archaic religions and the biblical religion is fundamental in my view. I am very interested in religious anthropology and I believe that there is an enormous break that comes with the Bible and Christianity. I believe in the basic unity of all religions. Religion is always oriented towards peace. Archaic religious phenomena are primarily scapegoat phenomena, a kind of mimetic gathering against victims that are fundamentally random. The killing of the initial scapegoat reconciles the disrupted, divided community. Sacrifice is fundamentally, deliberately reenacting that pattern, with carefully chosen victims, in order to make peace.

Christianity begins fundamentally with that same phenomenon. Jesus is the innocent victim, the scapegoat. But in archaic religion, the victim is believed to be powerful because he too is guilty and violent. Christianity tells us that it's not true. God is totally different from what we think. He is nonviolent. Fundamentally he is himself the

innocent victim who dies for us. So Christianity is both the same and radically different from archaic religion.

Gill: Does this ultimate sacrificial act liberate us to make peace without finding another scapegoat to blame?

Girard: That's what Christianity should be.

Gill: Do we recapitulate that sacrifice by forgiving and bearing the pain of a conflict rather than blaming others (like the Muslims are often blamed today for all that is wrong)?

Girard: Not only the Bible but all of human religion is prophetic in somewhat the same sense—the victim is innocent, whether Joseph, or Job, or the innocent victim of a lynching. It is always prophetic of Christ.

Gill: With this long and continuing story of sacrifice, blame, violence, and threats, and with a contemporary culture that evades responsibility and searches for scapegoats, what do you say?

Girard: We are always practicing some kind of expulsion and victimization and this is becoming increasingly violent because of technology, bringing us closer and closer to total destruction. But the Bible and Christianity direct us against victimization, against viewing the enemy as less than ourselves. Those faced with conflict have to face the truth. There is no shortcut. We cannot be satisfied with half measures and compromises and not looking at the oneness of the world.

Gill: So authentic Christianity should unmask the reality of life so that we can face the truth and cease scapegoating others, especially the innocent?

Girard: Authentic Christianity explicates this truth. Much of the anti-Christian feeling of our own era is because of the way today's church often replicates archaic religious practices. We must see the similarity—as well as the difference—in Christianity. Christianity must denounce its own scapegoating and say it is people who act this way, not God.

Gill: Regarding technology, you have
suggested that it only became possible when people stopped looking for scapegoats (for disease and other misfortunes of life) and developed science and technology.

Girard: In an archaic community, if a roof falls in there must be a culprit somewhere. But as long as you think that way you will not improve your building and construction techniques. Magical explanations are always scapegoating phenomena. The old anthropologists like Fraser often made this point. Christianity preconditioned the type of rationality required by technology. Far from being anti-scientific or anti-technology, Christianity made them possible.

Gill: In *The New Demons* Jacques Ellul argues that Technique has become our new sacred, at the center of our culture. The old religious demons have been exorcised but there are new ones. People look to technology as they used to look to God. Questioning technology is treated as profaning God's name used to be. Ellul would say we must desacralize technology.

Girard: *The New Demons* was very

prophetic. Religion is back in a big way. All the cliches of the Enlightenment are collapsing. Our technology is like the sorcerer's apprentice. It threatens us and must be controlled or restrained in some way.

Gill: How would you describe the "sacred" in today's society?

Girard: The sacred always has aspects of violence mixed up in it. The shift in Christianity was from a violent sacred to love. The great mystery and paradox is that religions begin with a violent sacred in order to suppress violence. If we stay in an archaic atmosphere we sacralize technology, we sacralize power, which means that ultimately we sacralize violence. So to worship technology today, rather than being modern, is really to return to the archaic. The danger from our technology is becoming very obvious.

Gill: What do you make of the rise of Islam? This was something that concerned Ellul.

Girard: For Islam, God is essentially power. There is a great distance between the people and the omnipotent God. With Ellul, I would argue that Christianity shows us a God of non-power, something very different even from nonviolence. God chooses not to use the power he has but instead to leave humanity free. The question is whether people will be capable of exercising this freedom. I think the great mistake of Christianity today is to try to reassure people, to make things more palatable. They think that people want to be reassured. No. They want the truth!

Re-View

The New Demons

Ellul's Genius: Unmasking the New Demons of Postmodernity

by Darrell J. Fasching

The New Demons by Jacques Ellul. Translated by C. Edward Hopkin. Crossroad Book, The Seabury Press (NY: Crossroad Books, Seabury Press, 1975.) *Les Noveaux Possedes* (Librairie Artheme Fayard, 1973).

Twenty four years ago, when I first published my book on *The Thought of Jacques Ellul.* I footnoted my first citation of *The New Demons* with this comment: "This book contains Ellul's sociological analysis of the religiosity of the technological society. It is, I believe, the key to unlocking and understanding the relationship between his sociology and his theology and in that sense his most important work." I still hold that view. And it certainly has been the book that has had the most impact on my own publishing career. If there is one work of Ellul's that has formed the backbone of virtually every one of the seven books I have written it is Ellul's *The New Demons.*

When Ellul's work first began to be published in United States in the sixties and seventies, his readers ***were*** grouped into two camps - his sociological fans and his theological fans, each often unaware of Ellul's "other side". This was especially true of those who followed Ellul's sociological works. They were typically unaware of his theological writings and many would not have known what to make of them if they had been aware. For Ellul, the separation was deliberate. Science should not be confused with theology and vice versa.

Ellul explained his dual authorship identities by saying that in his sociological works he was simply analyzing the challenges of the new technological society that had emerged since Marx. Ellul's analysis was typically branded deterministic and hopelessly pessimistic. But for Ellul, human beings do not live by science alone. The business of science is to analyze the causal chains that determine our lives. This, however, does not mean that there can be no constructive response to such determinisms. But the response is not something that can be accounted for in terms of sociological causal interactions. Human freedom is not rooted in necessities but the apocalyptic eruption of the Wholly Other in Christian freedom through faith and hope. Necessity is the product of the sacralization of society which seduces humans into placing all their hope in technique and so makes them unable to challenge its necessities. The eruption of the holy, he argued, challenges and desacralizes the human social world. Freedom occurs

when hope becomes apocalyptic. This is a hope that breaks with this world and places its hope in the Wholly Other, manifesting itself in a life of holiness that invites the transgression and desacralization of the supposed necessities of a technological society.

To the best of my knowledge it was in *The New Demons* that Ellul, for the first time brought his two identities together. The book is a sociological analysis of the religiosity of a technological society but at the end he added a postscript entitled "Coda for Christians." I have often called *The New Demons* the Rosetta Stone of Ellul's work because it offered the key to understanding Ellul's total strategy by finally directly interfacing his sociology and his theology. Up until I read *The New Demons* I had not really grasped the significance to the constant references to the sacred in his book *The Technological Society.* I had noted them in passing as if they were "just metaphors." Now it was as if the lights were turned on and I could really see what he was doing. Ellul was a revolutionary who understood the power of the word made flesh.

For some time now I have been puzzling over what relationship there may be between Ellul's work and postmodernism. I have finally come to the conclusion that Ellul's work is even more revolutionary than I gave him credit for. Ellul's analysis of the religiosity of technological civilization is a description of the shift from a modern to a postmodern society. Postmodernity is defined, says Jean-Francois Lyotard by the collapse of metanarratives (*The Postmodern Condition*, University of Minnesota Press, 1979)..

The emergence of a mass media technological consumer society has inundated all civilizations with an acute and intimate awareness of the pluralism of cultures, values and religions. This awareness results in a sociological relativizing of every culture's metanarratives, so that the grand public stories of a Christian civilization, a Hindu civilization, or an Islamic civilization, and even modern secular civilization, are reduced to the private stories that individuals embrace at their option. As a result every culture is threatened with the loss of its normative center, including the modern cultures integrated around the Enlightenment myths of science and progress.

This realization in its Western cultural form has often been expressed in terms of "the death of God" and the resurgence of a kind of polytheism of values in its place. This is a key theme of *The New Demons.* When Ellul analyzes a technological civilization by comparing into to ancient polytheistic civilizations he is really mapping the new terrain of postmodern civilization created by the emergence of a consumerist technological society. The response to the powers of technology is analogized to the sacral awe attributed to the powers of nature in polytheism. The function of politics is analogized to the function of ritual in polytheistic societies and the function of mass media is analogized to the materialist/consumerist elements of polytheistic myths that invoke the gods to bring prosperity and the acquisition of the goods of life.

By drawing these analogies, Ellul shows that modern secular technological civilization really leads back into the "sacred heart" of the kind of society once found in ancient polytheism - a decentered, pluralistic and relativistic society. These qualities in turn provoke the reactionary ascendancies of various forms of absolutism –of dominance

through the will to power. So we vacillate between vicious political absolutism (today often taking the form of fundamentalism and even terrorism) and vacuous relativistic consumerism. The fear of relativism breeds absolutism as a reaction and the fear of absolutism breeds the counter-reaction of relativism. This is the unending dialectic of the sacred and the profane, Ellul argues, from which only the way of holiness can liberate us.

This leads us into the second way in which *The New Demons* might be considered postmodern - a postmodern critique of postmodern relativism and the propensities to absolutism that it feeds. I can only be suggestive hear. I am still working out the details in my new book which I am currently writing on sabbatical - tentatively entitled: *Deconstructing Terrorism.* Ellul's theology and ethics interfaces the sacred and the holy whose dynamics are first detailed with clarity in *The New Demons.* The defining quality of the sacred is that it always generates its opposite the profane. The sacred divides the world into polar opposites and by polarizing society invites violence. The holy desacralizes the sacred in order to protect and welcome the alien and the stranger who are rendered profane in a sacralized society. The holy undermines the dialectics of necessity (the dialectic of the sacred and profane) leading to the apocalypse of freedom and introduces a justice that escapes this dialectic and makes all things new.

This is where I see Ellul's work, predicated on the distinctions made in *The New Demons,* intersecting with the deconstructionism of Jacques Derrida. A recent book *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (University of Chicago Press, 2003) by Giovanna Borradori publishes interviews with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, followed by her own commentary on each. Borradori summarizes Derrida's deconstructive project as involving four steps: (1) identify the dualisms operative in the text and in society (the one leads to the other), (2) identify the hierarchy of the dualisms in the text and in society, (3) invert or subvert the dualistic hierarchies by showing what would happen if the negative and positive sides of each dualism were reversed as a way of exposing the ideology of the will to power involved in the dualistic classifications, and finally (4) produce a third term "which complicates the original load-bearing structure beyond recognition" and so deforms and reforms into a new a liberating configuration. To make my case as briefly as possible - steps one and two are what Ellul accomplishes when he analyzes the sacred sociologically, steps three and four are accomplished when he responds theologically and ethically and transgresses the sacred in the name of the holy, introducing transcendence, freedom and justice.

Now justice is not a word that immediately comes to mind when I think of postmodernism. For years I have dismissed deconstruction as irresponsible relativism. In the hands of many of its practitioners it probably is. But I have changed my mind on this with respect to Derrida after I began reading some of his later work, which is deeply indebted to Immanuel Levinas. Derrida's later work is dominated by the themes of grace (the gift), hospitality, the messianic - and also the surprising insistence that justice is the one thing that cannot be deconstructed (*Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, edited by Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld and David Gray Carlson, (Routledge,

1992), Chp. 1). The law can be deconstructed but only in the name of the demand for justice. In fact Derrida insists that justice is the driving force of deconstruction - that they are one and the same. For Derrida, justice, like Ellul's apocalypse of the holy, comes from the outside, as a gift - a gift that subverts all dualisms and makes new beginnings possible. In the concluding chapter of *Deconstructing Terrorism* I hope to make the case that Ellul is a religious postmodernist and that religious postmodernism is able to deconstruct the endless dialectic of absolutism and relativism that plagues secular postmodernism and so exorcise the "new demons" of the postmodern world.

In Review

Clever as Serpents: Business Ethics and Office Politics

by Jim Grote & John McGeeney.
Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1997.viii, 149 pp.
Reviewed by David W. Gill

Clever as Serpents was first published eight years ago but it deserves review in this issue of *The Ellul Forum* as an insightful, "Girardian" approach to business ethics.

In Part One of *Clever as Serpents*, "Theory," Grote and McGeeney use Rene Girard's insights to analyze workplace dynamics. At almost every turn the authors challenge the conventional wisdom and propose a different way of looking at things. Rather than a market that thrives on freedom and is inhibited by regulation, today's markets exist only because of various regulations. Governments are not disinterested spectators but active participants in markets. Like "freedom," "competition" is also a myth. In reality, cooperation is at least as productive as competition (business reality as well as ecological reality).

If not free competition, what is the secret of market economics? Grote and McGeeney propose Girard's concept of "borrowed desire" or "mimetic desire." It is envy and covetousness, exacerbated by marketing and advertising. We are motivated by desire to keep up with the Joneses and have what someone else has, or thinks desirable. Internally, the secret of management is to assign blame or even to find a scapegoat who can be sacrificed.

In Part Two, Grote and McGeeney turn to "Practice" and provide a great deal of practical counsel on how to survive and perhaps even find happiness in this toxic environment. The "currency of blame and credit" is gossip. The authors counsel detachment "from the fear of blame and the craving for credit" to "avoid being swallowed up (p. 80). They teach the "ethics of survival" (dealing with the boss and the mob) through "low visibility and high utility." Don't crave anything too much (wages, credit, visibility) but be sure you are of significant value to others.

The "ethics of success" (dealing with competitors) revolves around pursuing your true goals rather than being sidetracked by craving for others' goals. Grote and McGeeney give lots of practical "political" advice here. A bit too calculating and even cynical for my taste but maybe they are right. The "ethics of service" (dealing with

customers) requires true leadership and the meeting of the needs of others, especially the need to be free; now this I like!

Survival, success, and service: this three-fold practical ethics culminates in a reflection on "the wisdom of tradition: work." The purpose of work is not just to transform the earth but to transform the self. The authors provide great discussion questions to go with each chapter, which makes this not just a good individual read but a great choice for a group study—maybe by your nearest or your favorite executive team. The power of Rene Girard's insights to illuminate our daily reality is certainly made clear in *Clever as Serpents.* This is not about a literary theory but about life.

Islam et judeo-christianisme

by Jacques Ellul.
Paris: Presses universitaires de France (6, avenue Reille, 75014 Paris), 2004. 108 pages
Reviewed by David W. Gill
Thanks to the tireless efforts of Dominique Ellul, a new book by her late father has recently appeared in France. *Islam et judeo-christianisme [Islam and Judeo-Christianity]* contains a 20-page Preface by Alain Besancon, an 8-page Foreword by Dominique Ellul, a previously unpublished 50-page essay on Islam by Jacques Ellul, "The Three Pillars of Conformism," and a 15-page reprint of Ellul's introduction to a 1985 book on the Dhimmi (non-Muslims living in Muslim countries). In discussions of a possible publication of an English translation (no contract just yet!), some of us have urged that Ellul's 20-page chapter on "The Influence of Islam" in *The Subversion of Christianity* be reprinted as part of any English-language edition. We'll see.

During the 1980s Ellul often spoke of a book he was preparing on Islam but found publishers reluctant to publish the sort of critical perspective he felt essential. Events also moved rapidly and his manuscript needed substantial updating after these publishers' delays. In the end the chapter in *Subversion* (and the rather obscure introduction to the book on the Dhimmi) was all we had on Islam from Ellul. The new book is therefore a great help in more fully understanding Ellul's take on Islam.

Ellul's essay addresses three common assertions about Islam and its relations with Christianity and Judaism. First, Ellul disputes the value of the assertion that "we are all the children of Abraham." The three "Abrahamic religions" are often claimed to share an affinity. Ellul insists that Isaac alone of Abraham's children received the divine and paternal blessing—not Ishmael or the other children. Moreover, according to Jesus, it is not blood lineage but living faith that renders one a true child of Abraham.

Second, Ellul disagrees that avowing "monotheism" brings Christianity, Judaism, and Islam into a close and positive relationship. To begin with, Muslims and Jews often dispute that trinitarian Christians are monotheists. More importantly, it is not the fact of having one god that unites people (other religions and even secular "religions"

sometimes have one sacred center, one object of worship and center of meaning). No, it is the *identity* of that God that decides everything. Ellul shows how the Muslim Allah is dissimilar to the God known in Jesus Christ and the Bible.

Third, Ellul rejects the idea that Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are united in being "religions of the book." It is partly about the nature of the holy writing and how it is viewed that establishes big differences; it is supremely about the content of the books—including the ways the Koran contradicts the teaching of the Bible.

Ellul's Introduction to Bat Ye'or's *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam* (1985) reviews and defends the author's research which carefully examined a long history and found that Jews and Christians had a varied experience under Islam, some good, some bad situations. It is not correct to say that they were always protected and flourishing under Islam (today's politically-correct viewpoint), nor were they always persecuted.

Ellul's writings on Islam display his usual passion and intensity. He is taking an unpopular position in a French intellectual milieu that, partly out of guilt over a colonial past and the presence of large numbers of impoverished Muslim immigrants, tended to go to extremes to glorify Islam in an uncritical way. Ellul, on the other hand, fought to protect Jews during the Nazi occupation and for biblical and theological reasons saw a special place for Israel in history. This is a context in which straight talk and candid opinions can be difficult. To have Ellul's views on Islam in this new book is a welcome addition.

What new readers of Ellul need to be aware of is that he was by nature and choice very dialectical in thought and expression. He felt free to express in extreme form either pole in a given controversy. Thus, his criticism of Islam is harsh. But remember that Ellul wrote ten times as much in harsh criticism of the subversion of Christianity, of its mediocrity, conformism, and guilt. And his critique of the religion of Technique is even stronger. In any case, Ellul had no use for violence or nationalism (common reactions to fears of Islam or Christianity in today's world).

Islam et judeo-christianisme is a challenge to re-think Islam (and Judaism and Christianity), to cast off political correctness and comforting myths we may hold, to face the truth with courage, to speak with candor, and then to move forward toward a genuine peace and understanding.

News & Notes

— **International Colloquium on Ellul: POITIERS**, 21-22 **OCTOBER** 2004
More than 150 scholars gathered at the University of Poitiers for a colloquium on Jacques Ellul's thought and its continuing importance, ten years after his death. Organized by our sister society, the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul, led by Poitiers Professor of Political Science, Patrick Chastenet, the Poitiers colloquium was characterized by excellent papers and animated discussion. Randall Marlin (Ontario),

David Gill (California), and Jean Robert (Mexico) were among the program participants. Veteran scholars such as Ellul's friend and colleague, Prof. Etienne Dravasa, were side-by-side with a number of younger scholars now finishing graduate studies in various universities. Sociologists, political scientists, and communications theorists interacted with pastors, ethicists, and theologians. The papers from the colloquium are now being edited for publication in book form. Bravo to Patrick and our AIJE friends.

— CONFERENCE AT BEGLES

Just a few weeks after the Poitiers colloquium, the regional Ellul-Charbonneau Association sponsored a colloquium in Begles, a town near Bordeaux. IJES member Joyce Hanks (University of Scranton) reports that the Begles meeting was also attended by more than 150 people and was "absolutely terrific." Plans are underway to publish the colloquium papers.

— CHRiSTiANiTY & ANARCHiSM CoNFERENCE AuGuST 5-6, 2005, CHiCAGo

IJES member Andy Baker invites IJES members and friends to a two-day conference "Practically Speaking: Anarchism and Christianity in Word and Deed" to be held August 5-6 at the International Conference Center, 4750 North Sheridan Road, Chicago IL.

For information visit: www.JesusRadicals.com

— CAHiERS JACQuES ELLuL

Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne

The third issue of *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, an annual journal edited by Patrick Chastenet and published by our sister society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul, is now off the press. It is available for 20 euros (postage included) to individuals outside France, and for 25 euros to libraries. Further information at www.jacques-ellul.org. Write: *Cahiers Ellul,* 21, rue Brun, 33800 Bordeaux.

—**Special Issue of Reforme**

A special issue of the French publication *Reforms* was devoted to Jacques Ellul in December 2004. The first half (20 pages or so) is devoted to biography, bibliography, and recollections of Ellul by Patrick Chastenet and others. The second half is a reprint of various short articles Ellul published in *Reforms* between 1945 and 1989. A fascinating collection. Web site: www.reforme.net E-mail: reforme@reforme.net. Write: Reforme, 53-55, avenue du Maine, 75014 Paris, France. Six euros plus postage and handling.

Resources for Ellul Studies

www.ellul.org
& www.jacques-ellul.org
Two indispensable web sites

The IJES/AIJE web site at www.ellul.org contains (1) news about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, and (4) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The new AIJE web site at www.jacques-ellul.org offers a French language supplement.

The Ellul Forum CD: 1988-2002

The first thirty issues of *The Ellul Forum*, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for US $15 (postage included). Send payment with your order to "IJES," P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. $87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit www.elsevier.com for ordering information.

Issue #36 Fall 2005 — Ellul and the Bible

- Click to view the original PDF

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Contents

"[T]he criterion of my thought is the biblical revelation, the content of my thought is the biblical revelation, the point of departure is supplied by the biblical revelation, the method is the dialectic in accordance with which the biblical revelation is given to us, and the purpose is a search for the significance of the biblical revelation concerning ethics.

"This rigor in nowise implies that this is a book for Christians. To the contrary, I would expect all its value to come from a confrontation... Every man in our decaying Western civilization is asking questions about the rules of his life. Still less, finally, is the biblical revelation limited to the narrow circle of the elect. It speaks first about all the others. "

-Jacques Ellul To Will & To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians (1969)

Information on The Editorial Board & More

From the Editor

The special focus of Issue 36 of *The Ellul Forum* is Jacques Ellul's use of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. The quotation that graces our cover, from the beginning of Ellul's introduction to ethics, *To Will and To Do,* provides a typical sample of Ellul's passion for the message of the Bible. And yet, as the quotation makes clear, Ellul never thought the Bible was simply for the edification of some holy club withdrawn from the world.

Although Ellul published many studies of biblical themes and passages, he remains much better known for his sociological critique of technique (and its implications for politics, economics, social change, communications, etc.) than for this side of his work. But, just as we don't fully understand Kierkegaard's philosophical works without his edifying discourses (and vice versa), the living dialectic between Ellul's theological and sociological works cannot be ignored.

Ellul's biblical studies are always provocative at the same time they are extraordinarily learned. Many of his readers attest to an experience of finding themselves in disagreement with Ellul on various points—and yet naming him the most helpful, illuminating Bible teacher they ever knew. It is almost impossible to ever view a biblical text the same way after Ellul gets done with it. The secret? Ellul gets us to a place where we can truly hear the text, where the living word comes through the forms of the written word.

We are honored to have a wide range of contributors in this issue, several for the first time. These authors come from very different places but all have an informed, critical appreciation of Ellul's biblical studies. Both older and younger scholars are represented, clergy as well as laity, Christian and otherwise. Their articles and reviews range across many different studies by Ellul. We have also included reviews of theological and biblical studies by four of Ellul's own favorite discussion-partners and fellow students of theology and Scripture: Claude Tresmontant, Gabriel Vahanian, Alphonse Maillot, and Andre Chouraqui.

After volunteering to "guest edit" this issue for our intrepid Editor, Cliff Christians, I can only say "welcome back" to Cliff. He and Darrell Fasching before him have performed an awesome service to us all these past 18 years as editors of *The Ellul Forum.* I can hardly wait to have only my "Associate Editor" and "publisher" hats on again.

David W. Gill, Associate Editor IJES@ellul.org

Jacques Ellul as a Reader of Scripture

by Anthony J. Petrotta

Re-view of Jacques Ellul, Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes *(Eerdmans, 1990), translated by Joyce Main Hanks from* La Raison d'Etre: Meditation sur l'ecclesiaste *(Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987).*

Anthony J. Petrotta is Rector of St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Church (Wilsonville OR) and long-time adjunct professor of Old Testament for Fuller Theological Seminary. He is a graduate of Fuller Seminary (M.A.) and the University of Sheffield (UK)(Ph.D.). He is co-author of the Pocket Dictionary of Biblical Studies *(InterVarsity Press, 2002) and author of many articles and reviews.*

When I started my studies at Fuller Seminary nearly thirty years ago, I took an elective class, "The Ethics of Jacques Ellul," taught by David Gill, then finishing his Ph.D. studies on Ellul across town at USC. At that time I was taking classes mostly in Semitic Languages and wanted to go on in Old Testament studies. Ethics and theology were "recreational" reading for me. I had some interest in Ellul since a friend was urging me to read his books and the class fit my schedule. I managed to talk Professor Gill into allowing me to write a paper on Ellul's hermeneutics and he enthusiastically—as David often does!—accepted my proposal.

I found Ellul to be not only a sociologist, ethicist, and theologian, but somebody who had a deep interest in the biblical text and was conversant with the field. I found that a number of his concerns about interpretation were also being voiced by prominent biblical theologians (in particular, Brevard Childs).

Now, a generation later and with all that has gone on in the field of biblical studies, how does Ellul stand as an exegete, as a reader of Scripture?

I want to center my thoughts on Ellul as a reader of Scripture by looking at *Reason For Being*, his "meditation" on Ecclesiastes. Ellul says that Ecclesiastes is the book of the Bible that he has explored more than any other book. It is a book he read, meditated upon, and taught for more than fifty years. I also want to compare what Ellul has said against two more recent (and more traditional) commentaries on Ecclesiastes: Ellen Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* and Michael Fox, *Ecclesiastes.*

Ellul begins by reflecting on his reason and method for writing *Reason For Being* in his "Preliminary, Polemical, Nondefinitive Postscript," which, of course, appears as Chapter One, an instance of paradox that fits with Ecclesiastes' program of throwing contradictions together for the effect and truth they create. This chapter is very instructive; he reveals a lot about *how* he reads, and by implication, reveals some of what he considers the shortcomings of commenting upon Scripture in the modern sense of the term (Ellul *is* polemical).

Ellul is keenly aware that he is not going about his task as an academician might. He has not compiled an extensive bibliography and he has not interacted with the literature on Ecclesiastes during his writing of *Being.* That is not to say, though, that

411

he has not done the requisite work for writing an informed book on Ecclesiastes. Over the years he has read important studies on Ecclesiastes, and he notes those. More importantly, he "slogged" through the Hebrew text and *nine* other translations as he was writing. After writing *Being* he went back and read through the literature again on Ecclesiastes and though he saw no reason to change what he had written, he did check his thoughts against others who also have studied and written on the book. His reactions to these "historians and exegetes" he put in footnotes after the manuscript was completed.

Ellul says: "This approach seemed to me to be consistent with Ecclesiastes: once you have acquired a certain knowledge and experience, you must walk alone, without repeating what others have said" (p. 3).

I'm not sure that Ellul has "walked alone," at least in this sense: he has read the studies by those who have spent a lifetime reading Ecclesiastes (Pedersen, von Rad, among others). But I think his point is well taken. Ellul has absorbed the thoughts of others *into his thoughts*, arranged them, and set them down through his own extensive— and slow! ("slogged")—reading of the text itself. Ellul is not simply writing what he "feels" but what he has experienced as a reader; his experience of the text itself involves listening to those who have read the text and written through their knowledge and experience. Ellul is in a company of readers, but writing out of his own voice. The distinction is important because he thus steers clear of merely reflecting the studies or opinions of others or lapsing into a pietism.

In an important footnote, Ellul spells this approach out a bit more by invoking the Jewish tradition of four kinds of interpretation: literal, allegorical, homiletical, and the "seed of life, from which new mysteries of meaning continually spring up." He believes that Qoheleth (the Hebrew term for the "preacher" and the name of Ecclesiastes often used in Jewish writings regarding this book) has given us a text where "new mysteries of meaning spring up, with or without new scientific methods" (p. 7). Here quite clearly Ellul points to what he considers the limits of modern commentary and hints at why he writes without those aids ready at hand. Ellul recognizes that however important philological and historical research is, and he clearly values these researches, a text is brought to life as readers open themselves to the forms and thought of the book, and then respond thoughtfully.

The point that reading a text is more than simply understanding the words on the page is worth belaboring a tad. Nicholas Lash talks of "performing" Scripture, of taking the marks on the page and making them alive in our life much as a musician takes the notes of a sonata and realizes them in a recital. "The performance of scripture

is the life of the church"[12]. Ellul does not use this language, but it is implicit in his reading. In his discussion of this point, Lash similarly adheres to the importance of the historical-critical method, but also its limitation. Ellul and Lash (and others) see the reader doing more than making critical notes on a biblical text; as readers of Scripture, we move beyond simple comment to truths that must be lived out in our lives.

It is worth noting that both Davis and Fox make similar assertions about the role of interpretation. Fox, interacting with the tradition of Jewish *midrash,* recognizes that one role of an interpreter is to draw out "the fullness of meaning potential" in a passage (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, p. xxii)[3]. Davis speaks of the medieval practice of "chewing" on the words of scripture. She wisely writes, "We are now a society that 'processes' words rather than one that ponders them" (Davis, *Proverbs*, p. 3). They are, however, more restrained in their comments than Ellul, as we shall see, but this is an editorial constraint I suspect, more than an authorial one.

An example might help show how the subtle differences between Davis, Fox, and Ellul play themselves out. Ecclesiastes 12: 12-14, the "epilogue" to the book, poses problems. For one, Qoheleth is spoken of in the third person and no longer in the reflective first person that we find throughout most of the book (e.g., Ecclesiastes1:13-14). There are also interpretive problems, what certain words mean in this context, and what they refer to beyond simple translation of a term.

Davis, Fox, and Ellul all agree that these verses are not a "pious" conclusion that is tacked on to an otherwise radical book, as has often been a line of interpretation with the rise of historical criticism[4]. Rather, these words are in keeping with the scope of the book; fearing God and God's judgment are not alien to the book. Fox cites Ecclesiastes 3:17 and 11:9 on the judgment of God and 5:5 and 7:18 on the fear of God. In adopting this approach, all three are trying to come to terms with the complexity of the book as a literary document, but also the complexity of the thought of Qoheleth.

To what, however, do the words "they were given by *one shepherd*" refer? The translation is transparent (there is nothing ambiguous about the words). But to whom do they refer? We find different ways of explaining the "one shepherd" in Davis, Fox, and Ellul. Davis appeals to the shepherd as a moral authority, one who "goads" the sheep to new pastures where they will thrive and not overgraze the very ground that feeds them. She goes on to ask who might fulfill this role in our society. She answers,

---

[1] Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000). Michael V. Fox, *Ecclesiastes* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004). These commentaries are not randomly chosen. They are commentaries in a more traditional sense than Ellul's study, but both authors are writing for lay people, pastors, and rabbis, and I know both to be very good readers of Scripture.

[2] Nicholas Lash, "Performing the Scriptures," in *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM, 1986), p. 43.

[3] *Midrash* refers to both ancient Jewish writings on Scripture and to a method of interpretation.

[4] See, for example, G.A. Barton, *Ecclesiastes* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908). Barton calls the whole section a "late editor's praise of Qoheleth, and the final verses as a "Chasid's [a pious person's] last gloss" (p. 197).

"Few teachers or clergy, or even fewer politicians"(Davis, *Proverbs*, p. 226). She reflects on the role advertising has had on our attention to words and how slogans, euphemisms, and so forth have curtailed our ability to grapple with the complexity of truth, and to change our way of thinking and acting. These reflections, I think, would delight Ellul, though it is not the line of interpretation that he takes with this passage.

Fox has a rather lengthy discussion of "shepherd." In the traditional interpretations of the rabbis, the term almost always referred to God. Even, Fox informs us, the words of someone as unconventional as Qoheleth derive from God, say the rabbis. The rabbis often have this "extraordinary openness" to different interpretations of *Torah*. Fox questions this interpretation, however. Rather, the metaphor of shepherd usually refers to protecting and providing, not the giving of words. The words of the wise are not, in Fox's view, like that of law or prophecy. Fox settles on "sages" (not God) prodding people; hence the warning that follows: be careful, sages can overwhelm you with all their ideas (vs. 12). This interpretation is similar to Davis in saying that the "shepherd" are the sages, not God, but differs in that Davis is lamenting the lack of sage advice in our society, whereas Fox focuses on the warning of endlessly listening to other people's advice. Ellul, I think, would find this last part sage advice from Fox, but again, this is not the approach that he takes.

Ellul goes in another direction. He focuses on the words "all has been heard," and interprets this line in two ways and at considerable length. First, God has heard all and "collects" these words, for which you will be judged (citing Matthew 12:37). Second, all has been heard, we cannot go beyond the words of Qoheleth; we have reached "Land's End." From this interpretation, the injunction to fear God and keep his commandments is all that need be said, and Ellul reflects on what "fear-respect" and "listeningobedience" mean for the Christian. It is from these two poles that "the truth and being of a person burst forth" (p. 299).

However, in a footnote (presumably written after Ellul's initial meditation on the text), Ellul draws upon a doctoral dissertation by Jacques Chopineau who ties the phrase *one* shepherd to Ps 80:1, "O Shepherd of Israel, hear . . . " and interprets the reference to God (as in the traditional interpretation). Ellul admits that he "spontaneously wanted" to interpret these words as a reference to God (and, hence, God's revelation), but felt "uncertain" and therefore did not mention that in the reflection proper (p. 291-2, n. 56).

Ellul then goes on in the footnote to reflect on this interpretation[5]. If God is the *true* shepherd ("one"; Hebrew *'echad*), then this ties and contrasts with Abel/*hevel* ("vanity"), Abel being a shepherd also. God, the true shepherd, is the opposite of *hevel*/ vanity. The book is thematically structured around the various vanities, but God is opposite by giving us his commandments, which constitute the "whole person" when we live by them. Chopineau, thus, gives Ellul further support for his interpretation

---

[5] It is not clear to me if this reflection is part of Chopineau's interpretation or Ellul carrying it forward in his own inimitable way. I suspect the latter.

of the Epilogue as a whole, that fearobedience, the encounter with God, and our listeningobedience liberates our whole being. God as the One Shepherd gives us the commandments. In this respect Ellul goes beyond both Davis and Fox, though Davis might be more sympathetic to the revelatory nature of the shepherd/sage and the connection with the commandments.

Davis, Fox, and Ellul agree that fear of God and keeping commandments are the sum of the teaching of Ecclesiastes. Davis concludes her comments by invoking the *Book of Common Prayer*: "Therefore, orienting our lives toward the commandments enables us, 'while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those who endure" (Davis, *Proverbs*, p. 228; the citation comes on p. 234 of the *Book of Common Prayer*). Ellul would quite agree, and Fox says, "The book allows readers to probe the ways of God and man, wherever this may lead, so long as we make the fear of God and obedience to the Commandments the final standard of behavior" (Fox, *Ecclesiates*, p. 85).

To answer my question at the beginning, how does Ellul stand the test of time, the answer, I think, is that he stands rather well. Granted, in picking Davis and Fox I am perhaps not being entirely fair since they are both interested in writing for the laity and clergy of the Church and Synagogue, but that is Ellul's audience as well.

Ellul lingers more in his reflections than either Davis or Fox. His is, after all, a "meditation" and not a commentary in the narrow sense. Ellul, though, stays close to the text, the Hebrew text in this case. Even in his "gutlevel" interpretation of "shepherd" as God, he relegates his comments to a footnote; he is fully aware that this interpretation is not universally accepted, but still in consonant with critical possibilities (a point that Fox makes more sharply than Davis).

I do find it a bit curious that Davis and Fox do not entertain the shepherd-God connection more than they do. That the shepherd is described as "one" seems suggestive in a book that uses words carefully and even "playfully" in the sense that Qoheleth wants to tease the reader to consider that the obvious and the not obvious can occupy the same space. Certainly God as the shepherd is not obvious or necessary; but the fact that commentators have long split on this issue keeps it as a live option to consider. Curiously, Barton notes the options and says that since "shepherd" is usually an epithet of God, it is "probably so here" (*Ecclesiastes*, p. 198).

A final note on my reading of Ellul this time. In my journey as a reader of Scripture, I have found that good readers of Scripture are often those who have honed their skills as readers generally, not just those who are trained to do exegesis in the narrow sense that is taught in books on exegesis for seminary students. What I mean is that a good reader is one who is not just a technician, but one who has, as Proverbs teaches, learned to "acquire skill, to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles" (Proverbs 1: 5b-6). Ellul weaves into his meditations thoughts and interactions with biblical scholars (Christian and Jewish), as we should expect, but philosophers, anthropologists, novelists, poets, and so forth. Ellul's reading experiences are wide and

that is why he can bring his experiences to the task of writing on Scripture, and write with the depth and thoughtfulness that he does.

Ellul's skill as a reader comes out again in his "Preliminary, Polemical, and Non-definitive Postscript." Ellul objects to commentators that *must* find a "formal, logical coherence" in Ecclesiastes. This text is not like any other; scholars treat works on Roman law with more "congeniality" than many biblical scholars treat Ecclesiastes. The scholars would have a "purer, more authentic text" than the one we have received in Scripture (I think Ellul has his tongue firmly in cheek at this point!)[6].

Ellul does not say it this way, but the issue at stake is *receiving* this text as a Hebraic text, I think, and not as a Western text. However much Qoheleth may be interacting with Greek philosophical thought, he is still very much a Hebrew and employs Hebrew forms and Hebrew "logic." The ability to receive a text as it is written is a skill that most of us need to develop as readers of the Bible, especially since our current translations often go out of the way to obscure the differences between the world of biblical texts and our world[7]. We need to learn the language, structure, forms, conventions, and so forth before we can become competent readers of Scripture[8].

The end of the matter is this: Ellul is a model reader for all of us, though he would be disappointed if we merely repeated what he has taught us and not built upon his work.

Ellul on Scripture and Idolatry

by Andrew Goddard

Andrew Goddard is Tutor in Christian Ethics and a member of the Theology Faculty at Oxford University. His Ph.D. dissertation was published as Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul *(Paternoster Press, 2002).*

One of the distinctive features of Ellul's theological work is his conviction that it is Scripture that enables us to see the world aright. Rather than "demythologizing" the Bible, the Bible is the means by which God "demythologizes" our world. The classic example of this approach is undoubtedly his canonical, Christocentric study of the city in Scripture, *The Meaning of the City* (Eerdmans, 1970), but the same approach underlies his approach to many other phenomena. This article provides a brief introductory overview of how Ellul's reading of some biblical texts shapes his understanding

---

[6] See pp. 6-16, *Being*, for a fuller treatment of Ellul's objections to some of the critical stances by biblical scholars.

[7] Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses.* (NY: Schocken, 1995), is a wonderful counter example to the trend to be "contemporary."

[8] I am thinking here not so much of form-criticism but Hebraic rhetorical forms of narrative and poetry. Form criticism often becomes reductionist rather than illuminating the poetic elements in a psalm, for example.

of idols and idolatry and how, in turn, that understanding leads to a critique of certain attitudes to the Bible and explains the heart of his biblical hermeneutic[9].

Ellul's biblical discussion of idols and idolatry is not as thorough and focussed as his study of the city but it is particularly in *The Ethics of Freedom* and *The Humiliation of the W*ord that we find his interpretations of key texts in - as one would expect from Ellul - both Old and New Testaments. Of particular interest is one Pauline text that shapes his account of the idols in relation to the powers[10]. On first glance, we Christians may want to treat idols and powers as synonymous terms and it must be admitted that Ellul himself (here, as in may other areas) is not always consistent and does not always strictly follow his own distinctions that he draws from the biblical text. Nevertheless, when he is careful, he does distinguish his understanding of these two phenomena and he does so because he believes Scripture does so.

The crucial biblical text for Ellul is Paul's discussion of food offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 8, especially verses 4 to 6. There the apostle writes, "Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that 'no idol in the world really exists,' and that 'there is no God but one.' Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth–as in fact there are many gods and many lords–yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist."

Ellul takes great care in his analysis of this text, drawing attention to the paradox that Paul here seems to say both (a) that no idol really exists and (b) that there are many gods. Rather than dismiss Paul's statements as incoherent and confused, Ellul seeks to clarify why Paul affirms both these statements. He claims that gods exist in the following sense: "They are part of the powers that claim to be allpowerful or salvific, etc, and that attract people's love and religious belief. They exist. And they pass themselves off as gods" (*The Humiliation of the Word* (Eerdmans, 1985), p 89). Thus Ellul believes that in order to understand the text and the world we have to see that the language of 'gods' is equivalent to (or, perhaps better, a subset of) the category of the powers. As a result, Ellul insists - against the demythologizers and with such writers as Caird, Berkhof, Wink and Stringfellow - that there are real, spiritual powers and forces which influence human lives and societies. These, we learn from Scripture, set themselves up as powerful and redemptive and, by being viewed as such by humans, they stand as a challenge to the one true God.

In his interpretation of Scripture on the powers, Ellul rejects the Bultmannian demythologization project (that dismisses the language of powers as a worldview we must now reject in the light of modern knowledge) but he also refuses to embrace the common popular evangelical and fundamentalist belief in traditional demons that is often understood as the main alternative. Instead he moves between two other ways

---

[9] For a fuller discussion of this, on which this article partially draws, see my forthcoming article in Stephen Barton (ed), *Idolatry in the Bible, Early Judaism and Christianity* (T&T Clark, 2005).

[10] The powers are a subject on which Ellul wrote much more extensively and which, particularly through the work of Marva Dawn, have become prominent in recent Ellul studies.

of interpreting this biblical language of "gods" and "powers." At times he views them as "less precise powers (thrones and dominions) which still have an existence, reality, a nd... objectivity of their own." Here they are seen as authentic, spiritual realities which are independent of human decision and whose power is not constituted by human decision. At other times - particularly in his later writings - the powers are viewed more as "a disposition of man which constitutes this or that human factor a power by exalting it as such" (*The Ethics of Freedom* (Eerdmans, 1976), p 151) and so "not objective realities which influence man from without. They exist only by the determination of man which allows them to exist in their subjugating otherness and transcendence" (*Ethics,* pp. 151-2).

Ellul's concern in this understanding is to avoid the idea of powers or demons doing their own work apart from human beings. He therefore stresses that the powers find expression in human works and enterprises. It is this important link between the spiritual powers and the material world, especially of human works, that helps us to understand his view of idols. "The powers seem to be able to transform a natural, social, intellectual or economic reality into a force which man has no ability either to resist or to control. This force ejects man from his divinely given position as governor of creation. It gives life and autonomy to institutions and structures. It attacks man both inwardly and outwardly by playing on the whole setting of human life. It finally alienates man by bringing him into the possession of objects which would not normally possess him" (*Ethics*, pp 152-3).

These powers are the false gods that Paul says in 1 Cor 8 really exist. But what are "idols" and why does Paul say that they do not exist? The key feature of idols - in contrast to the powers to which they are linked - is that they are visible and material entities. Although this would seem to give them a more substantial existence, Ellul argues that idols do not exist because "the visible portrayal of these powers which is perceived by the senses, has no value, no consistency, and no existence" (*Humiliation*, p. 89). Any idol is really just "a natural, social intellectual or economic reality." It is strictly a material object under human control. Ellul therefore believes that Scripture distinguishes false gods from idols because the latter are simply "a creation of man which he invests with a value and authority they do not have in themselves" (*Ethics*, p. 156). Idols, according to Scripture, are simply part of the visible created reality and though linked to the gods or spiritual powers they are to be distinguished from them.

In explaining how it is that, in Paul's words, "no idol in the world really exists," Ellul gives the example of money. He claims that money as a power (Mammon) certainly exists. However, a banknote - the material means by which the power works - strictly does not exist because "it is never anything but a piece of paper" (*Humiliation,* p. 89). Here we see a central paradox: idols seek to make the invisible false gods and powers visible and concrete but by this very fact of seeking to mediate a spiritual power in the material world they do not themselves exist. We may today think of the Nike Swoop, the McDonalds Golden Arches or other symbols and logos as contemporary idols which

on their own are meaningless and powerless but are mediators of some of the global powers of our age[11].

Faced with them we need to remember that idols are not only part of the ancient biblical world but still a reality in our post-modern "secular" world and to recall Ellul's judgment based on Paul's words: "They exist neither as something visible and concrete (since in this sense they are really nothing) nor as something spirituals (since they cannot reach this level). They have no kind of existence precisely because they have tried to obtain indispensable existence beyond the uncertainty of the word" (*Humiliation*, p. 89).

Idols therefore, according to Scripture, lack existence per se and are the attempt by humans to domesticate and bring into the visible, material world the invisible spiritual powers that do exist. "Idols are indispensable for mankind. We need to see things represented and make the powers enter our domain of reality. It is a sort of kidnapping. False gods are powers of all sorts that human beings discern in the world. The Bible clearly distinguishes these from the idol, which is the visualization of these powers and mysterious forces . . . Things that can be seen and grasped are certain and at our disposition. It is fundamentally unacceptable for us to be at the disposition of these gods ourselves, and unable to have power over them. Prayer or offering cannot satisfy, since they provide no sure domination. If, on the contrary, a person makes his own image and can certify that it is truly the deity, he is no longer afraid. Idols quiet our fears" (*Humiliation*, pp. 86-7).

This linking of idols to the material or visual, as distinct from the spiritual powers, leads to the second emphasis in Ellul's interpretation of the biblical witness: the priority of listening over seeing.

Ellul reads the narrative of humanity's primal rebellion in Genesis 3 as demonstrating the significance of this - the spoken word is doubted and visible reality is taken as the source of truth (see *Humiliation,* pp. 97ff). The same problem is repeated within God's people Israel. Here Ellul's interpretation of the narrative of the golden calf (Exodus 32) is of crucial importance. It also illustrates that, although (as in relation to 1 Cor 8) Ellul can take great care and wrestle with the literal or plain sense of the biblical text he is also willing to offer a more spiritual interpretation in order to discern Scripture's message. Thus, drawing on a study of Fernand Ryser (a French translator of two of the great influences on Ellul's theology and biblical interpretation - Barth and Bonhoeffer), he highlights that a source of the gold for the calf is the Israelite's ear-rings (v2). He quotes Ryser, "Aaron dishonours the ear; it no longer counts; now just the eye matters. Hear the Word of God no longer matters; now seeing and looking at an image are central. Sight replaces faith" (*Humiliation*, p. 87). It is this attempt to argue for a biblical basis for the priority of the word and hearing over the material image and sight that is a central theme of *The Humiliation of the Word* as a whole and of its exegesis of key biblical passages.

---

[11] I am grateful to Alain Coralie for his work on Nike Culture that has helped me make this

Finally, Ellul's claim for a biblically based prioritization of hearing over seeing must also be applied to the Bible itself. Although Scripture and biblical interpretation play a central part in Ellul's theology and ethics he is clear that Scripture, as a permanent, written record has the ambiguity of all written words Drawing on the biblical narrative of Moses breaking the stone tablets (Exodus 32.19), Ellul is adamant that this challenges a common Christian attitude to the Bible for the Bible "is never automatically and in itself the Word of God, but is always capable of becoming that Word - and as a Christian I would add: in a way denied to all other writings" (*Living Faith* (Harper & Row, 1983), p 128).

Rather, than treating the Bible as a visible divine word Ellul insists that "The destruction of this single, visible, material representation of God ought to remind us continually that the Bible in its materiality is not the Word of God made visible through reading. Godshas not made his Word visiblesThe Bible is not a sort of visible representation of GodsGod's Word must remain a fleeting spoken Word, inscribed only in the human hear . . ." (*Humiliation*, p. 63).

Of course, as Ellul acknowledges elsewhere, God has in fact made his Word visible but he has done so uniquely in the person of Jesus Christ and it is, therefore, Christ the incarnate Word who is the key to the Scriptures.

Ellul, therefore throughout his interpretation of biblical texts works with a thoroughly theological and Christo-centric hermeneutic and a relative disregard for the tools of historical-critical study[12].

Ellul's biblical interpretation of some texts relating to idols and idolatry demonstrates that although Scripture plays a central role in his theology, his theological interpretation of those texts also makes him aware of the danger that Scripture may itself become an idol, a means of escaping the spoken Word of the living God. Ellul therefore challenges us to take Scripture seriously but not ultimately seriously, for ultimate seriousness is to be paid to the Word become flesh to whom Scripture - the Word written - bears witness and it is the living Word not the dead letter that is to be our concern. As a result, Christians are called to participate in a believing and attentive listening to hear the Word of God address us in and through the words of Scripture and to be confident that that Word is one which liberates us from the powers and unmasks all our idols as simply "the works of our hands".

If You Are the Son of God

by Andy Alexis-Baker

---

connection.

[12] For Ellul's fullest account of hermeneutics see his "Innocent Notes on 'The Hermeneutic Question' in Marva Dawn's translation and commentary on a number of Ellul articles, *Sources and Trajectories* (Eerdmans, 1997), pp 184203.

Review of Jacques Ellul, Si tu es le Fils de Dieu: Souffrances et tentations de Jesus. *Paris: Centurion & Zurich: Brockhaus Verlag, 1991. 110 pp.*

Andy Alexis-Baker is currently a student at the Associated Mennonite Theological Seminaries in Elkhart, Indiana. He is also an organizer among Christian anarchists inspired by the work of Jacques Ellul. For more information visit www.jesusradicals.org.

Si tu es le Fils de Dieu: Souffrances et tentations de Jesus (*If You Are the Son of God: The Sufferings and Temptations of Jesus*) is probably one of Jacques Ellul's least read works. A search through the WorldCat database indicated that only fifteen libraries worldwide own a copy. When I went to the Notre Dame library, which has a copy, I found it snug in the shelf, with crisp clear pages, as if it had never been moved since initial shelving, let alone read by a single soul. Perhaps this is partially due to the fact that this work has never been translated into English. I have taken up that task and have completed a version and hope to get it published before long. I will be using my own English translation when I quote Ellul in this review.

Having lived with this work for some time now, I am convinced that it is one of Ellul's most important works. First, this book is his most extended meditation on the life and work of Jesus Christ. Second, this particular meditation on the sufferings and temptations of Jesus provides some rather unique biblical interpretations that add a lot to our understanding. Finally, this book makes a great introduction to Ellul's thought. All of the themes found in his other works are found here: technique, arguments for a kind of biblically based anarchism, placing Jesus at the center of every thought, personalism, etc.

The book is divided into three parts: Introduction; Sufferings; Temptations. At the outset of the book, Ellul claims that Christians have not retained the "total life and teachings of Jesus, the reality: He suffered." This can be seen for example in the way we recite and write down the Creed. We say that, "He suffered under Pontius Pilate" (p. 9). But Ellul claims that this is a distortion of the Latin construction and theologically unsound. The Latin construction is: "He suffered; under Pontius Pilate he was crucified." This reading brings out the fact that Jesus was the Suffering Servant throughout his life. Our version makes suffering a momentary event for Jesus, that is salvific in and of itself.

But Ellul's purpose in this meditation is not to create a "theology of suffering." For Ellul it is not a question of us participating in Jesus' sufferings, but of Jesus participating in ours. A theology of suffering leads to a kind of "morbid orientation" in Christianity: we focus on the gore of the cross and make Jesus into an ethereal creature who could endure great suffering, suffering which in and of itself saves us.

For Ellul, salvation comes through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in its entirety. So he directs most of his attention to the life of Jesus and the ways he suffered throughout his life. He focuses on the way Jesus suffered because of rejection, being the object of ridicule, and the ways in which he suffered through the normal pain of living, such as hunger. For Ellul it is important that Jesus experienced and lived a truly human experience.

Suffering is fundamentally changed by Jesus in two ways. First, when we suffer we can know that we are not alone in our suffering any longer. Lest we think Ellul is engaging in some sentimentality, he likens this knowledge to a friend who stays at the death bed of another and holds their hand until they pass. This is an act of profound mercy and comfort. God is that friend at our death bed.

The second way suffering is actually changed by Jesus' actual sufferings is that suffering is no longer a condemnation but a fact of material forces and absurdities. Jesus took on the real significance of suffering so that we no longer have to live in the shadow of eternal damnation. Our suffering takes on a temporal aspect, some of which we can overcome but some of which we must learn to live with and become more like Jesus.

Ellul's meditation on Jesus' temptations is just as insightful and relevant. All temptations boil down to two main categories as revealed in the Gospels: Covetousness, or greed, and lust for power. These two temptations are bound up with one another. We can only overcome them by a radical reading of the Gospel and following Jesus' way of "non-power."

For Ellul, all temptation is about humanity tempting God. We tempted Jesus precisely because he was the son of God: He had power and an ability to increase his earthly power; therefore we demanded that he use it. In doing so we tempt the God of love not to be the God of love anymore, but a God of terrible violence.

This book provides a welcome correction to many theological and popular meditations on Jesus and his suffering and temptation. Theologians are loathe to remember that Jesus refused to take power to rule over others, and that he demanded that his disciples do likewise. Ellul does not shy away from this aspect of Jesus but points out that it is central to his mission. It might be helpful to put Ellul in dialogue with a friendly reader such as John Howard Yoder who also examines the three temptations of Jesus in the desert in terms of their political and economic significance.

Yoder wrote that "all the options laid before Jesus by the tempter are ways of being king" (*The Politics of Jesus* (Eerdmans, 2nd ed., 1994), p. 25). For Yoder, Jesus' temptation was to set up a kind of welfare kingdom, in which he would rule as a benevolent head of state. But Ellul, goes farther than Yoder does, and examines this temptation in terms of techniques of production. Since Jesus had the ability to satisfy his hunger, we therefore demand that he use his power for himself. Thus Jesus is tempted to prove his divinity in the same way we today "prove" our own divinity: through production. We think we are divine because we are able to transform raw materials to satisfy needs that are also created. "By the miracle of production humanity *proved* that it was divine!" (p. 73). So the temptation for Ellul is both Yoder's welfare king, and also a temptation to power that is godlike and therefore religious.

Likewise, Ellul goes beyond Yoder when he examines the way in which Jesus is tempted to political power. Yoder comments that the temptation to "bow" before Satan is a discernment of the idolatrous nature of state politics. Ellul makes a similar claim but in much more stark terms: "all those who have political power, even if they use it

well . . . have acquired it by demonic mediation and even if they are not conscious of it, they are worshippers of *diabolos*" (p.76).

Ellul provides helpful corrections to popular understandings of the sufferings and temptations of Jesus as well. Mel Gibson's recent film, *The Passion*, perhaps exemplifies popular treatments of the sufferings of Jesus: a fixation on gore and a view of suffering as salvific in and of itself. Jesus is thereby reduced to an entertaining and momentary event, who is less than God but not quite human. Ellul's entire work provides a correction because he examines Jesus entire life rather than just the passion narratives. How much did Jesus suffer when his own family misunderstood him? How much must Jesus have suffered when his own disciples repeatedly tempted him to power, misunderstood him, and finally left him alone and abandoned? Ellul examines in detail how Jesus experienced physical, moral and psychological sufferings throughout his entire life. The cross was merely the culmination of a life of suffering and temptation.

I cannot resist mentioning one point in his treatment on suffering that brought up contemporary images for me. In his reflection on the way Jesus was ridiculed and mocked, Ellul points out that the soldiers who mocked him at his arrest, put a veil (a hood) over his head and then proceeded to punch him, all the while taunting him to do a superfluous miracle...to simply tell them which one just hit him, knowing he could not see. The images of Iraqis in American-run prisons in Iraq immediately comes to my mind. "When we are tempted to make fun of our fellow people, we should always remember that Jesus was the object of mockery" (p. 55).

This is a valuable book. It deserves more attention than it has heretofore been given: this work deserves and needs an English translation. This book might introduce Ellul's thought to a wider Christian audience, and provide a powerful tool for dialogue with others for those of us who believe Ellul's works are still of contemporary importance.

Ellul's Apocalypse

by Virginia W. Landgraf

Re-view of Jacques Ellul, Apocalypse: the Book of Revelation *(Seabury Press, 1977), translated by George W. Schreiner from* L'Apocalypse: architecture en mouvement *(Desclee, 1975).*

Virginia W. Landgraf (Ph. D., Princeton Theological Seminary) works for the American Theological Library Association in Chicago, Illinois. Her doctoral dissertation was on the work of Jacques Ellul.

Jacques Ellul's eschatology deserves to be better known, because it offers an alternative to some popular eschatologies which seem to negate either the truth of God's love for humanity and creation in Jesus Christ or the reality of God's judgment. However, the style in which Ellul's commentary on Revelation is written may be forbidding to a newcomer. (A more prosaic exposition of some of his eschatological beliefs is avail-

able in *What I Believe*). It could be termed "prismatic," because he tosses up multiple meanings for a given symbol depending on the angle from which it is viewed. The French subtitle, "architecture in movement," indicates that the five sections into which he divides the book - of seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, and seven visions of the new creation, framed by doxologies - are in dynamic relationship with each other.

Appropriately, the book is written not as a verse-by-verse commentary from beginning to end, but starting at the middle, where he thinks that the meaning of the work and person of Jesus Christ are shown "as in silhouette." The sections on either side - of the church with its Lord, of the meaning of history as revealed only by Jesus Christ, of divine judgment (yet executed by the Son of Man!) as stripping human beings of their works, and of the new creation - are inexplicable without this core. He presumes that the author of Revelation meant to write "a theological book" which is "a Christian book," saying that the relative absence of Jesus Christ in this section shows precisely God's non-power in history. One may doubt that such a move makes exegetical or theological sense. Yet the vision of eschatology which follows is worth wrestling with, because it is more compelling than some others which have either popular Christian or secular currency.

First, Ellul's eschatology can provide a healthy antidote to premillennialist eschatologies which emphasize the "rapture" of the church away from the earth and God's destruction of creation. Such an eschatology seems to go against both the love of God shown in Jesus Christ and the Noachic covenant. Often these theologies are associated with a belief in Revelation as a chronological prophecy of future events. By contrast, Ellul sees Revelation as expressing a recurring dialectical movement of witness, judgment, and new creation, made possible by the atonement achieved by Jesus Christ. The catastrophes in Revelation are not primarily inflicted by God upon humanity but arise because of creation's shocked reception of the news that God has become human and because people are so bound up with works and powers and principalities which are destroyed by God's judgment. The church and Israel (the two witnesses) are separated from the world not to escape worldly tribulation in a physically removed heaven but to witness to God's truth within a world which rejects them. The New Jerusalem is not a substitute for the old creation but God's assumption of those human works which are fit to enter it (a motif which Ellul developed earlier in *The Meaning of the City*).

Second, Ellul's doctrine contrasts with an eschatology of human progress, whereby human beings incrementally build up God's kingdom on earth and derive meaning and optimism from this task. Whether in the Christian form of "postmillennialism" or as a secular doctrine of progress, this kind of belief seems to contradict the reality of radical evil. Advances in healing power may be accompanied by advances in killing power, and so forth. Ellul rejects a doctrine of progress and disconnects hope from optimism (a theme he took up in *Hope in Time of Abandonment*). He sees Revelation as "the unique example . . . of the meaning of the work of humanity and, equally, of its

nonmeaning." There is no sure way to know which human works will go into the New Jerusalem. But that is not to say that they should not be done; he compares them to eating, which should be done, but is still "strictly relative."

History, Ellul believes, does not reveal any meaning by itself. This revelation must be provided by Jesus Christ, who comes from outside this history to reveal the catastrophes that would have had to occur upon the world if he had not taken God's judgment upon himself. Only because witnesses to the Word of God testify to something from beyond the play of forces in history can they introduce freedom into history. Similarly, Ellul distinguishes hope (contrary to visible evidence) from optimism about the products of human effort. (This contrast reflects his distinction between truth, communicable by the Word, and reality, manifested by visible evidence, which he treated most fully in *The Humiliation of the Word*). It is precisely because God seems to be absent in the central section of Revelation (punctuated by the seven trumpets) that Ellul can call this a section expressing hope. The "pessimistic" stance of Ellul's sociological works, which often show vicious cycles that seem closed in terms of worldly developments (of technique, politics, religiosity, revolutions, etc.), does not contradict this hope but rather provides a context for it.

Third, Ellul's theology provides relief from belief systems (whether religious or secular) that try so hard to be non-judgmental that they cannot acknowledge the existence of personal or structural sin in the world. When these kinds of doctrines predominate among Christians, they often take the form of ignoring eschatology entirely, perhaps seeing Revelation as a book whose catastrophic visions are strictly the result of historical persecutions. This kind of theology does justice neither to prophetic calls for repentance and promises of liberation throughout the Bible, nor to persons' and systems' real needs for repentance and redirection, nor to the impossibility of achieving the repentance needed without God's action. Against this impasse, Ellul strictly distinguishes judgment from condemnation. Judgment is an expression of God's love and is liberation, because human beings will be stripped from the works by which they have tried to save themselves and the powers which enslave them. The spirit of rebellion against God and trying to save oneself, the subordinate powers which it breeds (political power, sexual lust, etc.), and the historic incarnations of these powers (such as political empires) will be condemned. But all of the people and some of their works (without the people's previous relationship of idolatry vis-a-vis their works) will be taken into the New Jerusalem. He sees mentions in the text of people left outside the new creation as referring to their *previous conditions* as idolaters, fornicators, etc., not to the people themselves. (Ellul believes in universal salvation, but he identifies this belief as a "conviction," not a "doctrine" - meaning that his position on what the church should teach as doctrine is perhaps closer to what George Hunsinger calls "reverent agnosticism" with regard to salvation - universal salvation is possible, but the decision belongs to God).

Fourth, Ellul's thought contradicts any tribalism or theology of political conquest, whereby the people on "God's side" will win over "God's enemies" and establish the

425

kingdom of God on earth politically. Such a doctrine - rarely held so simplistically by serious Christian thinkers (e.g., careful liberation theologians) as their ecclesiastical opponents would have us believe - risks denying the universality of sin, the universality of God's love, and the limits of the ability of external structures to change the heart. Not only does such a doctrine raise some of the same problems as the doctrine of progress treated above, but in Ellul's thought, *all* people are in need of judgment. *No* human beings can be presumed to be condemned. God may surprise us by taking some works which we frowned upon as good religious or political people into the New Jerusalem (which is not an excuse for license in things which do not build up - cf. Ellul's dialectic between "All things are permitted" and "Not every thing builds up" in *The Ethics of Freedom*). In fact, according to Ellul, it is as non-power that God enters history and introduces freedom into history. Political conquest can never bring freedom. Empire building, by whatever side, is not the way to defeat the "axis of evil" but feeds into it. (The absolute contrast between freedom and love, on the one hand, and power, on the other hand, does raise problems which will be addressed below.)

Fifth, Ellul's doctrine of judgment breaking into history contrasts with simplistic popular misunderstandings of Christian eschatology which one might label "creeping works-righteousness" even if they are not based upon external works. In these schemas, God keeps a balance and rewards people after death based on various criteria: their works, or right beliefs (faith as works), or perhaps right religious experiences (although any of these might be alternatively seen as gifts within this life from an arbitrary God who rewards some people and not others). By contrast, for Ellul, works do not save, either in this life or the next. Faith is witness to the living God and a relationship venturing forth with this God, and it is not reducible to a set of static beliefs (although, despite his contrast between belief and faith in *Living Faith*, one can analyze Ellul's beliefs about God and find that they do have cognitive content - which he seems to have admitted by writing *What I Believe*). God's decision to seem particularist in choosing Israel and the church is not a matter of saving some and not others, but of revealing God's self to some so that they can witness to others. And the new creation is not something to be hoped for only beyond death but may break into our life here and now, although it is not presumed to be a completed process in this life. Jesus Christ has already won the victory, and it is that from which we are to live; yet we are still in a world which, by visible evidence, is in bondage to the spirit of power and its consequences.

Thus a sketch of Ellul's eschatology can be drawn by means of contrast (for the full prismatic treatment, which is rewarding not only as an intellectual but also a devotional exercise, read the book). It should take its place with serious Christian alternatives to the popular eschatologies listed above. Yet its attractive features do not mean that it does not have problems. One searches in vain for a systematic resolution of the already and the not yet. Is it in the future? Ellul denies that the sequence in the book of Revelation is meant to be chronological, so the new creation does not occur at some future end time. Does it occur after death? Ellul might dismiss such a

presumption, or even the wish for such a resolution, as speculation not provided for by the biblical witness. A more problematic issue for this-worldly ethics is the absolute contrast between love and freedom (which are of God, and of witnessing to God's Word in the world) and power (which is rebellion against God and enslaves both its exercisers and their victims). As this essay is being written, physical, technical power is badly needed to restrain flood waters on the United States' southern coast. It may be true that God appears in history as non-power, but does that mean that God never wants technical power to be exercised? Is there not a third option between love which can only witness, waiting for a free response, and power which crushes - something akin to artistic creation respectful of one's materials? (The argument that human beings should have built in a way more respectful of wetlands' capacity to act as flood buffers comes to mind.) Such are the questions raised by Ellul's treatment of the Apocalypse. Nevertheless, we are all in his debt for a beautiful, provocative book.

Is God Truly Just?

by Patrick Chastenet

Re-view of Jacques Ellul, Ce Dieu injuste...? Theologie chretienne pour le peuple d'Israel *(Paris: Arlea, 1991; Reedition Poche/Arlea, 1999)*

Patrick Chastenet is Professor of Political Science at the University of Poitiers in France. He is the author of Lire Ellul: Introduction a l'oeuvre socio-politique de Jacques Ellul *(1992), editor of the journal* Cahiers Jacques-Ellul, *and President of the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul, the sister society of the IJES. His interviews with Ellul have recently been republished in English translation as* Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity *(Wipf & Stock, 2005)*

"For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all." (Romans 11:32)

Why, if God determines everything, would He punish those forebears he himself created to serve as witnesses to his wrath? If God, exercising his sovereignty as he thinks best, "saves" some and "rejects" the others, how can we accept that those foreordained to be irresponsible should suffer damnation? If God is good, He can do no evil; if he allows evil to be done, he is not good.

But can we really measure out God's goodness or justice? God is "arbitrary," just as love is "arbitrary." To claim that God is "unjust" would imply that there are values over and beyond the values of he who was characterized by Kierkegaard as the "Unconditioned One," the "Wholly Other": God, in other words, is not God.

The Bible, however, makes plain that what is good is wrought by God alone —as Jacques Ellul, the nonconformist Protestant theologian, reminds us in the last book he was to publish during his lifetime. Making full use of all his finely-honed dialectical

skills, he develops a masterly analysis of three of the most neglected and misunderstood chapters 9-11 of Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

In *Ce Dieu injuste …?* Ellul does not forget that he is also –perhaps even primarily – a historian and sociologist. His exegesis, in sum, eschews the purely intellectual exercise. What Ellul sketches out here amounts, instead, to a Christian theology for the people of Israel, in which he confronts the spiritual roots of anti-Semitism: a highly useful project indeed when we realize that certain sectors of the Catholic Church have still not relinquished their old demons.

What has become of the Jewish people? Has it been cast aside ever since the coming of the Messiah? No! Far from being deicidal, the people of Israel serves as the bearer of God in Jesus Christ. The chosen people remains the "chosen" people. This, however, does not mean "saved," but specially "set apart to bear witness," to confirm that the God of the Bible is One, that he is the Lord of the Ages, and that his love is the only truth. Israel's vocation, therefore, is to live out, in accordance with the Law, a historical adventure whose goal is the desire to change the world.

There have, however, been three errors: (1) The Jews have mistakenly considered that the Torah embodies God's will and justice, though God himself refuses to be imprisoned within any text. His justice is not some perfect recompense for "pious deeds," nor can his will ever be fully known. (2) Though entrusted with proclaiming that God's liberation includes everyone, they forgot just how universal this message was. (3) The Jews reserved the Revelation, Covenant and Election for themselves alone.

Hence the "temporary, partial" rejection of Israel which, found wanting in the divine plan to broadcast God's will to set all people free, was replaced by Jesus Christ, the ultimate "remnant of Israel." Whereas the Torah itself is set aside for the Jewish people, Jesus Christ, the Torah's fulfillment, is a gift offered to all people. However, even if it still refuses to consider the Lord as the "Eternal One," Israel–chosen by God for its weaknesses and not its virtues–is not guilty, according to Ellul.

It was, indeed, the 'fall" of the Jews which was to bring about the salvation of pagans. "There, where sin abounded, grace abounded even more." Isaac and Ishmael, Moses and Pharaoh, the "Yes" and the "No": each complements the other. Israel is always both simultaneously chosen and rejected: the "positivity of negativity," as it were, inasmuch as such disobedience serves God's ultimate design. If most Jews have not recognized the Messiah in Christ, it is so that all shall know divine grace and election.

The onus now is on the church to stir up Israel's jealousy by proclaiming an ethic of human liberation. But, as Ellul has previously demonstrated, as long as Christians continue preaching morality, dogmatics, constraint and austerity, instead of salvation, joy, freedom and love, the Jews can legitimately refuse to recognize in Jesus the Son of God.

The Holocaust must force us to undertake a radical rethinking of the whole of Christian theology, condemned to remain a very rickety construct if Israel is left out. Ellul goes on to conclude by establishing a link between Judaism and the end of time:

the Jewish people is, "willingly or unwillingly, the wedge lodged within humanity's heart of oak, and it will stay right there until that selfsame heart of oak has been changed into a heart of flesh."

Dieu et-il injuste?

by Patrick Chastenet

Jacques Ellul, Ce Dieu injuste...? Theologie chretienne pour le peuple d'Israel *(Paris, Arlea: 1991; Reedition Poche/Arlea, 1999).*

« Car Dieu a enferme tous les hommes dans i'infideiite afin de faire misericorde a tous » (Rom. XI, 32).

Si Dieu decide de tout, pourquoi punirait-Il ceux qu'Ii a crees d'avance pour temoigner de sa coiere? Si Dieu - absolument libre dans sa souverainete - "sauve" les uns et "rejette" ies autres, comment accepter que de teis irresponsabies soient damnes? Si Dieu est Bon Ii ne peut faire ie Mai, s'Ii iaisse faire ie Mai c'est qu'Ii n'est pas Bon.

Mais pouvons-nous juger de ia bonte ou de ia justice de Dieu? Dieu est "arbitraire" exactement comme i'amour est arbitraire... Pretendre que Dieu est "injuste" signi-fierait qu'ii existe des vaieurs au-dessus de ceiui que Kierkegaard nomme precisement *l'Inconditionne*; ce qui reviendrait a dire que Dieu n'est pas Dieu !

La Bibie nous montre que ie Bien c'est uniquement ce que Dieu fait, rappeiie Jacques Eiiui qui tente de sortir de cette serie de contradictions iogiques par une pensee diaiectique deja soiidement eprouvee (Cf. notamment *La raison d'etre. Medita-tion sur i'Ecclesiaste*, Paris, Seuii, 1987, reedition Seuii, 1995). Ce theoiogien protestant non conformiste a consacre ie dernier iivre pubiie de son vivant a i'anaiyse des trois chapitres (IX, X, XI) de i'Epitre de saint Paui aux Romains ies pius ignores ou ies pius mai compris.

Eiiui dans ce texte n'oubiie pas qu'ii est aussi -et peut-etre avant tout-historien et socioiogue. Son exegese a donc fort peu a voir avec un simpie exercice inteiiectuei. Ii s'agit ni pius ni moins dans ce texte d'esquisser une theoiogie chretienne pour ie peupie d'Israei et de combattre ies racines spiritueiies de i'antisemitisme. Projet particuiiere-ment utiie iorsque i'on sait que certains secteurs de i'Egiise cathoiique n'ont toujours pas renonce a ieurs vieux demons.

Que devient donc ie peupie juif depuis i'avenement du Messie? Est-ii rejete? Loin d'etre deicide, Israei est ie peupie porteur de Dieu en Jesus-Christ. Le peupie eiu reste ie peupie "eiu". Ce qui ne veut pas dire "sauve" mais « mis a part pour temoigner ». Sa mission est d'attester, que ie Dieu bibiique est unique, que ce Dieu est maitre de i'Histoire et que son Amour constitue ia seuie verite. Ainsi ia vocation d'Israei est de vivre seion ia Loi une aventure historique caracterisee par ie desir de changer ie monde.

Mais trois erreurs ont ete commises: 1) ies juifs ont confondu ia Torah avec ia justice et ia voionte de Dieu, or Dieu ne se iaisse pas enfermer dans un texte. Sa Justice n'est

pas i'exacte retribution des "oeuvres" et Sa Voionte est impossibie a connaitre dans son entier 2) charges de ia prociamation du Dieu iiberateur pour tous, iis ont oubiie i'universaiite de ieur message 3) ies juifs se sont appropries ia Reveiation, i'Aiiiance et i'Eiection.

D'ou ie rejet « temporaire et partiei » d'Israei qui a de^u ie projet divin de transmettre Sa voionte iiberatrice a tous, et son rempiacement par Jesus-Christ: i'uitime reste d'Israei. Aiors que ia Torah est reservee au seui peupie juif, Jesus-Christ est un don offert a tous ies hommes, autrement dit ia Torah accompiie. Maigre ceia ies juifs refusent toujours de considerer ie Seigneur comme i'"Eternei". Choisi par Dieu pour ses faibiesses et non pour ses vertus, Israei n'est pas coupabie seion Eiiui.

La "chute" des juifs a en effet permis ie "saiut" des paiens. « La ou ie peche a abonde, ia grace a surabonde. » Isaac et Ismaei, Moise et Pharaon, ie "oui" et ie "non", vont de pair. Israei est toujours et en meme temps ie peupie eiu et rejete. On peut aiors parier de "positivite de ia negativite" dans ia mesure ou cette desobeissance meme sert ie dessein uitime. Si ia majorite des juifs n'a pas reconnu ie Messie en Christ, c'est pour permettre a tous ies hommes de connaitre ia grace et i'eiection.

Ii revient donc a i'Egiise, aujourd'hui, de susciter ia jaiousie d'Israei par une ethique d'homme iibere. Or, comme i'avait deja montre (Eiiui *La subversion du christianisme*, Paris, Seuii, 1984 ; reedition Paris, La Tabie Ronde/ La petite vermiiion, 2001), tant que ies chretiens precheront une moraie, une dogmatique, une contrainte, une austerite en iieu et piace du saiut, de ia joie, de ia iiberte et de i'amour, ies juifs pourront iegitimement refuser de reconnaitre ie Fiis de Dieu en Jesus.

La Shoa doit nous conduire a penser autrement toute ia theoiogie chretienne, theoiogie a jamais bancaie sans Israei. Et i'auteur de conciure en etabiissant un iien entre ie judaisme et ia fin de i'Histoire: qu'ii ie veuiiie ou non, ie peupie juif « est ie coin enfonce dans ie coeur de chene du monde et ii y restera jusqu'a ce que ie coeur de chene soit change en coeur de chair ».

Advert: IJES E-mail & Payment Info

Ellul's God's Politics

by Chris Friesen

Chris Friesen serves as a pastor in Edmonton, Alberta. He is completing an MA in theology at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno, California.

Once a person has tasted some of Jacques Ellul's biblical interpretation, he or she looks to another of his studies with the expectation, Okay, he's going to crack this text open for me. He's going to think through it as far as anyone can and press beautiful new meanings out of it, some of which will become lodged in my own imagination as the actual Word of God contained in this or that biblical passage. Yes, I'm going to have to read and re-read to keep pace with the surge of his rhetoric, and I'm going to raise an eyebrow here and there, sometimes even become downright annoyed, but in the end he's going to win me over to many of his interpretations because of the vibrant God-and neighbor-loving place at which they arrive.

In all these respects, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* does not disappoint. It is in fact a classic example of Ellulian hermeneutics. The same familiar features are here: the non-negotiable (though not un-nuanced) high view of the text's origin and authority, the trans-canonical reasoning, the robust Christocentrism, the constant thrust of existential application. Jacques Ellul takes the Bible as a richly-intertwined, self-illuminating unity of divine revelation intended to speak concrete direction to the desires, decisions, and actions of individuals and communities today the same as ever; with Jesus Christ, and God's saving work in Jesus Christ, as primary interpretive key.

Ellul's essential method of study in this volume, an idiosyncratic commentary/ meditation on the Old Testament book of Second Kings, is outlined in an early footnote: "We shall adopt the simple attitude of the believer with his Bible who through the text that he reads is ultimately trying to discover what is the Word of God, and what is the final meaning of his life in the presence of this text" (p.12). Readers are advised to listen for some polemical tone in and around that statement. Ellul had little patience for either the methodological dogmas of historical and form criticism or the orthodoxy of skepticism embodied in Rudolf Bultmann's program of demythologization. Thus, although he gives the nod here and there to historical approaches and has clearly enriched his own store of knowledge by them, Ellul in the main handily sets aside a scientific orientation as he does his own critically incorrect work of extemporizing (so it seems) on the narrative as if his life, and ours, depended on it.

The particular aspect of life's meaning that Ellul as believer constantly chews on is the possibility for authentic action in this world on the part of both individual Christians and the gathered church. What is to be done? How is it to be done, and why? What can it accomplish? What is the world's typical mode of action, especially in its politics? What is God's? If God in Christ has already done everything, what is left to do? What is life for, anyway? These are the questions that drive Ellul's "simple" turning to the text of Second Kings in *The Politics of God/Man.* (Incidentally, for a consideration of similar issues from a secular, sociological perspective, an inquirer

should turn to this book's antecedent companion volume, *The Political Illusion* [Knopf, 1967]).

The introduction of *Politics* identifies the primary revelatory significance of Second Kings as twofold. Firstly, as "the most political of all the books of the Bible," Second Kings specially demonstrates the interventions of God in, and the judgment of God upon, human politics (defined by Ellul as, properly, "the discharge of a directive function in a party or state organism"). Secondly, Second Kings displays a live-action, historical elaboration of the old problem of human freedom within and over against divine sovereignty. The main body of Ellul's work investigates these two elements, politics and freedom, in a selective study of major personalities in Second Kings, which, for its part, presents a theo-historical narrative of Israel and Judah's international relations from the death of Ahab to the Exile, in counterpoint with the activity of the prophets Elijah and Elisha.

Ellul reflects deeply upon the careers of Naaman, leprous general of Aram; Joram, abdicating and faithless king in besieged Samaria; Hazael, scourge of Israel; Jehu, genocidal "religious cleanser"; Ahaz, pragmatic political deal-maker; Rabshakeh, Assyrian propagandist; and finally Hezekiah, paragon of prayerful humility. Interspersed throughout the virtuosic demonstration of paradigm-oriented hermeneutics (type three of ethicist Richard Hays' four modes of appeal to Scripture; cf. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* [HarperCollins, 1996]) are reflections on the crucial role of the prophet within and beside the maelstrom of political events, as well as dense excurses on themes such as the ultimate salvation of those undergoing judgment in earthly life ("They are put outside God's work but not his love" [p. 54]), the problem of Christian efficacy ("We have simply to be... a question put within the world and to the world" [p. 141]), and the role of the supernatural in history ("All other miracles receive their significance from this.that God enters into the life of man even to the point of this death" [p. 186]). The book concludes with a brief "Meditation on Inutility" that flirts with the pessimism of which Ellul is prone to be accused but ultimately issues in an encouraging affirmation of the true character of Christian freedom.

Of particular interest in the series of personality studies is the chapter on Jehu, both for its occasional hermeneutical fragility (e.g. the attribution of Jehu's whole murderous career to the supposed unauthorized modification of Elisha's message by an intermediary) and for its poignant relevance to our own time. "[Jehu] is a man of God, but he uses all the methods of the devil" (p. 99), judges Ellul. "He wants to do what God has revealed but he confuses what God has shown will come to pass with what God really loves" (p. 115). Indeed, we meet in Jehu the prototype of religious voluntarism who substitutes his own efficient means for God's, who "uses prophecy in the interest of politics while pretending to use politics in the service of prophecy."

Notwithstanding Ellul's convincing reading of the man, however, Jehu's adventure poses a significant interpretive challenge for Ellul because of his equally strong convictions about both biblical authority and violence. Ultimately, his attempt to insulate Elisha and God from specific responsibility for Jehu's purges retires to a daring theod-

icy, in what is one of the most memorable passages in the book: "When Jehu fulfilled the prophecy, it was on God himself that his violence fell. It was God whom he massacred in the priests of Baal, none of whom was a stranger or unimportant to God, since the Father had numbered all the hairs of their heads too. All the violence of Jehu is assumed by Jesus Christ... It is in this way and in these conditions that Jehu does the will of God. In his zeal for God, it is God himself that he strikes" (p. 110).

How does Ellul resolve the focal issue of his study, that is, the question about the interaction of human and divine freedom? Does the God of Second Kings boss people and history around? In paraphrase, the richly-argued sequence of positive and negative character paradigms comes together to communicate the following: God does indeed act (God's "politics"!) within human history, but not in a coercive manner and rarely even in an obviously supernatural manner. Rather, God relies on a whole nexus of real human decisions taken in the presence of his sometimes ambivalent and always contestable word (which, for its part, can be transmitted by the humblest of folks). Many human acts done according to purely human calculations (e.g. the reconnaissance of the Syrian camp by the four lepers) accomplish "just what God had decided and was expecting," while many others, particularly those which aim for assured results and appear most successful (e.g. Ahaz' adoption of an Assyrian altar) accomplish nothing at all and are swallowed up in the crushing fatality of history. Nevertheless, "in this medley, this swarm, this chaos, this proliferating incoherence of man, there is a choice that is God's choice" (p. 70); and so, like Elisha and Naaman and Hezekiah, we must make it, accepting the humble means of the kingdom and leaving the results to the Holy Spirit.

Particularly for the Christian this choice has become authentically possible. For through the once-for-all-time, redounding Event of the cross, Jesus Christ has shattered fatality and set in motion the power and possibility of true freedom within the course of history. A preeminent sign of its appropriation, surprisingly enough, will be the apparent uselessness of actions subsequently undertaken. Ellul avers, "To be controlled by utility and the pursuit of efficacy is to be subject to the strictest determination of the actual world" (197). By contrast, "To do a gratuitous, ineffective, and useless act is the first sign of our freedom and perhaps the last" (p. 198). Thus, in the teeth of a world that values only the measurable accomplishment, Christians perform their childlike acts of prayer and witness with the joy of unconcerned, freely chosen obedience, living out a love that does not seek "results." Life exists to provide scope for this freedom in love.

To whom would I recommend this book? I should confess that, in terms of my own ongoing sojourn as a believer trying to discover the final meaning of his life in the presence of the Bible, it was an interesting time to read both Second Kings and Ellul's meditation on it. I found myself continually distracted by critical concerns in my preliminary study of the Old Testament chapters: Who wrote these things down? When and why? How did they come to know or conceive of the events and explanations they related? Underneath my fitful deconstructive speculation ran the unspoken question,

What can be trusted in all this? What is really true here? I realize these are the typical and chronic symptoms of that modern affliction, "looking at the beam" (cf. C. S. Lewis's "Meditation in a Toolshed"), but it seems to happen all by itself. Nevertheless, forthwith Ellul comes along and says, by his own example, Look *along* the beam. The story itself can be trusted. The story is true. As a heuristic discipline, give the narrative the benefit of the doubt, taking it on its own terms. In its movement "we are in the presence of life itself at its most profound and most significant. We must not let it slip away from us" (p. 16). In this way Ellul refocuses one's literary attention to a depth of field closer to the surface of the text, making the narrative itself sharp for real-time signification.

That being said, I do have a persevering critical question. That is, If God really deals with human beings in the way Ellul describes (and I believe that God does), then did not the same flexibility, the same tolerance for error, the same non-coerciveness, the same incomprehensibly humble willingness to adapt to human choice and preference and to assume human attempt and aspiration, obtain for those human beings who spoke and inscribed the words of human language which have become our Scripture? Saying so would not be to imply that those words can't limn our faith and practice reliably, can't witness to capital-T truth and capital-D doctrine; but it would be to imply that the absolute non-negotiable of Revelation which often gives Ellul's interpretive debate a certain punch might need to be held a little more loosely. Is there authentic Christian faith that takes the Bible less as an unbreakable rock and more as a kind of river or wind or vegetable garden? What does such faith look like in practice? I'm not exactly sure, but I realize that Jacques Ellul acts as a kind of helpful tether on my leg as I wander out and back trying to find examples.

I need to tie up my earlier question: Who should read *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*? Remember, one doesn't pick up one of Ellul's biblical studies for a careful reconstruction of historical and redactive contexts or a catalogue of alternative critical perspectives autographed with his own judicious vote; one picks it up to see just what variety of narrative details will get caught in his widely-flung, imaginative hermeneutical net and how he will gut, fillet, and fry them up in a vigorous flurry of argument that never fears to imply, "Thus saith the Lord." Therefore to "Who should read?" I would answer, in partial echo of Ellul himself, both Evangelical deists who fancy themselves saving souls from eternal hell while the Father files his nails in the study, and all manner of other good-hearted people strung out on too much responsibility for establishing the shalom of the kingdom. I would also answer, Bible-olatrous theocrats pulling strings to get the right flags saluted in the public squares of villages local and global. And I would especially suggest, people like me, who may experience Holy Scripture's Word-of-God-ness as a variable phenomenon and who are always deeply grateful when a flaming mind like Jacques Ellul's takes the text and reveals revelation in it once again.

Judging Ellul's Jonah by Victor Shepherd

Re-view of Jacques Ellul, The Judgment of Jonah *(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), translated by G. W. Bromiley from* Le Livre de Jonas *(Paris: Cahiers biblique de Foi et Vie, 1952).*

Victor Shepherd is Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology, Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, Ontario, and Professor Ordinarius, University of Oxford.

Repeatedly Jacques Ellul's *Judgment of Jonah* reflects his characteristic love/grief relationship with the church, the church's lack of discernment, and an ecclesiastical agenda that finds the church somnolent, feckless and desultory. As sad as he is scathing, Ellul notes, "A remarkable thing about even the active Christian is that he *(sic)* never has much more than a vague idea about reality. He is lost in the slumber of his activities, his good works, his chorales, his theology, his evangelizing, his communities. He always skirts reality. _ ..It is non-Christians who have to waken him out of his sleep to share actively in the common lot" (p.31).

More foundationally, *Judgment* exudes Ellul's characteristic conviction concerning the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ. While the book of Jonah is deemed "prophetic" among Jewish and Christian thinkers, Ellul understands prophecy strictly as an Israelite pronouncement fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

As readers of Ellul know from his other books (e.g., *Apocalypse* and *The Political Illusion*, commentaries on the books of Revelation and 2nd Kings respectively), Ellul has little confidence in the expositions of the "historical-critical" guild of exegetes insofar as their preoccupation with speculative minutiae blinds them to the substance of the text; namely, the word that God may wish to speak to us through that text. . Unlike many in the the professional exegetical guild, Ellul sees Jesus Christ present in the Older Testament. Ellul regards the guild's preoccupation with the history of the formation and transmission of the text as a nefarious work wherein the guild "dissects Scripture to set it against Scripture".(p.74) Exegetes often deploy their "expertise" just as the Bible describes the tempter in both the Garden of Eden and the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness—undermining its status as God's word. In light of this it's no surprise that only three-quarters' way through *Judgment* Ellul left-handedly admits that the book of Jonah was "rightly composed to affirm the universalism of salvation" (p.77), when exegetes customarily insist that the sole purpose of the book of Jonah was to protest the shrivelling of post-exilic Israel's concern, even to protest the apparent narrowness, exclusiveness and concern for self-preservation found in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

If what is crucial to most is peripheral to Ellul, then what is the epicentre of the book of Jonah? It is certainly not a compendium of moral truths, let alone a test of credulity (which test Christian apologetics paradoxically attempts to eliminate by finding rational explanations for the miracle of the great fish). Neither is the book an extended allegory; nor even an instance of the prophetic literature found in Scripture

since the book shares few of the concerns of the prophetic books (e.g., no prophetic address is spoken to Israel) while features of the book aren't found in prophetic literature (e.g., the books named after Jeremiah and Amos don't feature biographical portrayals). The core of the book lies, rather, in its depiction of Jonah himself as a figure, a type, of Christ. Having argued for this position, Ellul brooks no disagreement: "If one rejects this sense, there is no other." (p.17)

As *Judgment* unfolds it reflects the major themes of Ellul's social and theological thought as well as aspects of his own spiritual development. With respect to the latter, Ellul's understanding of Jonah's vocation mirrors his own self-effacing, autobiographical statements in *In Season, Out of Season* and *What I Believe*: "Everything begins the moment God decides to choose... We can begin to apprehend only when a relation is set up between God and us, when he reveals his decision concerning us" (p21).

As for characteristic aspects of Ellul's thinking, *Judgment* re-states and develops them on every page. For instance, those whom God summons are freed from the world's clutches and conformities in order to be free to address and spend themselves for a world that no longer "hooks" them even as the same world deems them "useless" to it. In this regard Ellul writes of Jonah, "The matter is so important that everything which previously shaped the life of this man humanly and sociologically fades from the scene..Anything that might impel him to obey according to the world has lost its value and weight for him" (p..21). In other words, any Christian's commission at the hand of their crucified Lord is necessary *and sufficient* explanation for taking up one's work and witness.

While vocation is sufficient explanation for taking up their appointed work, Christians cannot pretend their summons may be ignored or laid aside, for in their particular vocations *all* Christians have been appointed to "watch" in the sense of Ezekiel 33. Disregarding one's vocation is dereliction, and all the more damnable in that the destiny of the world hangs on any one Christian's honouring her summons: "Christians have to realize that they hold in their hands the fate of their companions in adventure" (p.35).

Readers of Ellul have long been startled at, persuaded of, and helped by his exploration of the "abyss," the virulent, insatiable power of evil to beguile, seduce, and always and everywhere destroy. (See *Money and Power* and *Propaganda*). Ellul's depiction of evil in terms of death-as-power - rather than in terms of "a kind of lottery...turning up as heart failure" (p.51) –finds kindred understanding and exposition in the work of William Stringfellow and Daniel Berrigan.) The "great fish" *sent* to swallow Jonah (God uses evil insofar as he is determined to punish) is a manifestation of such power.

While in the "belly of the great fish" Jonah is subject to God's judgment upon his abdication as he is confronted defencelessly with the undisguised horror of the abyss. Awakened now to his culpable folly, Jonah understands that even as he is exposed to "absolute hell"(p.45) he hasn't been abandoned to it. At no point has he ceased being the beneficiary of God's grace. *Now* Jonah exclaims, "Thou hast delivered me" - i.e., *before* the "great fish" has vomited him to safety. Deliverance for all of us, Ellul herein announces characteristically, occurs when we grasp God's presence and purpose for us

(and through us for others) in the midst of the isolation that our vocation, compounded by our equivocating, has brought upon us. Percipiently [new word?] Ellul adds, "[T]he abyss.is the crisis of life at any moment."(p.52)

Typically Ellul points out ersatz means of resolving the crisis: we look to "technical instruments, the state, society, money, and science.idols, magic, philosophy, spiritualism..As long as there is a glimmer of confidence in these means man prefers to stake his life on them rather than handing it over to God."(p.57) While these instruments can give us much, they can't give us the one thing we need in the face of the all-consuming abyss: mercy. No relation of love exists between these instruments and us; they merely possess us. The person who "loves" money, for instance, is merely owned. The crisis is resolved incipiently when we "beg in any empty world for the mercy which cannot come to [us] from the world."(p.58) The crisis is resolved definitively as we hear and heed the summons to discipleship and thereafter obey the one who can legitimately (and beneficently) claim us inasmuch as he has betaken himself to the abyss with us.

Here Ellul's Christological reading of the book of Jonah surfaces unambiguously: "The real question is not that of the fish which swallowed Jonah; it is that of the hell where I am going and already am. The real question is not that of the strange obedience of the fish to God's command; it is that of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and my resurrection."(p.63)

Just because the book of Jonah is a prolepsis of Jesus Christ, the book is full of hope. To be sure, signs of grace come and go in all of us - even as grace never disappears. (Recall the gourd given to provide shade for Jonah, even as the gourd soon withered.) While God's people frequently and foolishly clutch at the sign instead of trusting the grace therein signified, the day has been appointed when the sign is superfluous as faith gives way to sight and hope to its fulfilment. At this point the "miracles" that were signs of grace for us will be gathered up in "the sole miracle, Jesus Christ living eternally for us".(p.67)

The note of hope eschatologically permeating the book of Jonah (and Ellul's exposition of it) recalls the conclusion to *The Meaning of the City.* There Ellul invites the reader to share his vivid "experience" of finding himself amidst a wretched urban slum in France yet "seeing" *the* city, the New Jerusalem. While Ellul's "exegesis" of the book of Jonah will be regarded as idiosyncratic in several places, its strength is its consistent orientation to the One who remains the "open secret" of the world and of that community bound to the world. For decades Ellul's own life illustrated a statement he made in *Judgment* concerning the prophet Jonah: "Everything circles around the man who has been chosen. A tempest is unleashed"(p.25). Ellul's writings indicate *passim* that as much characterizes all who discern their vocation and pledge themselves to it without qualification, reservation or hesitation.

In Review: Tresmontant, Vahanian, Mailot, & Chouraqui

Claude Tresmontant, The Hebrew Christ: Language in the Age of the
Gospels (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989); Trans. By Kenneth D. White-
head from *Le Christ Hebreu: La*
Langue et l'Age de Evangiles (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1983).
Reviewed by John L. Gwin

John Gwin lives in Beloit, Wisconsin, where he does some building security and maintenance work while pursuing his interests in language and culture.

By the fall of 1990 I had read and admired Jacques Ellul for perhaps 20 years and had occasionally corresponded, asking questions about his works and related topics. He graciously responded, often taking the time to answer my questions. With the buildup for the Gulf War nearing completion, and concerned that it might lead to a world war, I decided to take a week off work, and bought a cheap, night flight, round trip ticket to Paris.

An interesting side note to this, which reflects poorly on me, but favorably on JE, is that after I bought my ticket, I wrote to him of my plans and asked if I might visit him. He responded by return mail, "No, do not come. My wife is ill, I am busy with preparation for a conference that weekend, and with the hierarchy of the protestant denomination that has closed our little congregation. Can you please rearrange your visit for another date." My ticket, being non refundable, I quickly wrote him back asking if I might attend the conference, but for the whole month preceding my scheduled departure. I heard nothing. I chose to take the flight anyway, and arrived at about 8AM on a Thursday in Paris. I made my way to the little Librairie Protestante which was going out of business, and they so kindly, without charge, made several long distance calls. One was to Prof. Ellul to arrange for me to attend the conference on "Man and the Sacred" at the Andre Malraux Center in Bordeaux. The second call was to Dr. Brenot, chairman of the conference. "We have around 1000 signed up for the 800 openings. What's one more?" was his generous verdict.

At the conference I met a number of very kind and gracious people. At the book table on Sunday, the last day of the conference, Prof. Ellul invited me to meet with him the following day. During our 2-hour visit at his home, professor Ellul spoke with me at length. He introduced me to his wife, who had recently had a stroke. He also gave me copies in French of two books of his, *L 'impossible priere, La genese aujourd'hui,* and a copy of his friend Bernard Charbonneau's book*, Je fus, essai sur la liberte*, for which he had arranged the printing. Professor Ellul also recommended that I get a copy of a new book by Claude Tresmontant, entitled *Le Christ hebreu.* While in Bordeaux, I picked one up at the Librairie Mollat. I worked through it in the next few months, and located by library loan a copy of Tresmontant's retroversion and notes of *L'Evangile de Jean.* I was delighted by what I found.

Contrary to that which is taught in Sunday School, and in New Testament classes in college and seminary, Tresmontant presents an alternative hypothesis as to the origins of the gospels that makes such perfect sense that I wonder why I had never heard it before.

We know that those who first heard Jesus of Nazareth included at least a few scribes, and Pharisees. Why have we assumed that no one took notes? According to the teachings of the late 19th and early 20th century form critical school in Germany, a long oral tradition of 40 or 50 years preceded the step of setting pen to papyrus or parchment to record the memorable words of this most unusual rabbi. Does it not tax the imagination to think of the People of the Book waiting years before actually writing something down! The prevalence of anti-Semitism in Europe of that time provides a perhaps, more or less, unconscious motive for impugning the accuracy of the writing of the gospels and epistles, and the belief in a long oral tradition removing the written record farther from its Source could serve this end.

Tresmontant presents evidence for the hypothesis that the gospels were written first, and early, in Hebrew and almost simultaneously, and literally, into Greek. This was done, not esthetically to please the Greek ear, but literally, to accurately convey the original meaning to the Diaspora readers no longer fluent in Hebrew.

Jean Psichari, Professor of Greek in the Ecole des Langues Orientales Vivantes, himself of Greek origin, described the literal Greek rendering of the Septuagint as very different from the normal Greek of that time. In his *Essai sur le Grec de la Septuagint* he writes, "It is not just the syntax, it is not only the word order that follows Hebrew use. The style itself is perpetually contaminated. It is not Greek."

Tresmontant has proposed that the translators of the Gospels into Greek of the First Century AD used essentially the same Hebrew/Greek lexicon used by the translators of the Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek of the Septuagint. He proposes that the Gospels were derived from notes of Jesus' talks taken during or shortly after they were spoken, and later assembled into collections by various members of His audience, and almost immediately translated into Greek for the Diaspora.

Tresmontant, in four separate volumes translates in reverse the Greek of each of the gospels into Hebrew using the corresponding Hebrew words from which the Greek of the Septuagint was translated and then into French using the insights and meanings gleaned in the process. The wealth of meaning restored to, and depth of insight into long familiar as well as difficult passages; the great amount of information restored to the sacred text, and even the accuracy of words used to translate are all part of what is gained in this process

Tresmontant compares the effect of this uncovering of the Hebrew meaning to uncovering a work of art. "If you put the Venus de Milo beneath a covering, it is difficult to see her form. Passing from the modern (French or English) translations to the originals, that is of the Greek Gospels is a first uncovering. When one uncovers the Hebrew that one finds beneath the Greek translation, one has made a second discovery. The

equivalent of the living woman who sat as model for the Venus de Milo" (*Le Christ hebreu*, p. 36).

Several years ago, I found that *Le Christ Hebreu* had been published in English in 1989, the year before I visited Prof. Ellul, as *The Hebrew Christ* (trans. Kenneth D. Whitehead; Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press).

Tresmontant has done a remarkable work of service both to the world of biblical scholarship and to all those interested in the content of the gospels and related writings. His *Evangile de Matthieu: Traduction et Notes*, is also available in English as *The Gospel of Matthew, Translation and Notes* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 1986). A volume containing his French versions of all four gospels was published by F.X. De Guibert/ O.E.I.L. but is now out of print,

In at least two of Tresmontant's other major works, *Essai sur la pensee hebraique*, and *L 'histoire de I'universe et le sens de la creation,* he compares and contrasts Greek and Hebrew philosophy, and posits that the predominant and continuing dualism of Western (Greek) thought includes a total misunderstanding of the Hebrew ideas of creation, incarnation, freedom, etc. The former philosophy, fostering an ongoing devaluation of the physical world seen as illusory, evil, "descended" from and a shadow of the "Ideal" and resulting in a more or less low-level depression, frustration, and lack of hope for anything new and "creative" in the future. The latter, Hebrew revelation, with its understanding of all things as "created" and declared to be "good" by a transcendent Creator, gives life an ongoing "real" meaning and content and hope of a future completely new and unexpected.

In *The Hebrew Christ*, Tresmontant mentions several other authors, including John A. T. Robinson, whose *Redating the New Testament* is "absolutely decisive" in its argument for the earlier dating of the New Testament texts, and Fr. Jean Carmignac, whose *Naissance des evangiles* (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1984; ET: *Birth of the Synoptics*, Franciscan Herald Press, 1987) presents arguments also supporting the Hebrew origins of the NT.

While translating the Dead Sea Scrolls, Jean Carmignac frequently noticed connections with the New Testament. Upon completion of the translation he had so many notes of correlations that he thought of making a commentary on the NT in light of the Dead Sea documents. Beginning with the Gospel of Mark, and in order to more easily compare the Greek Gospels to the Qumran Hebrew, he began on his own to retranslate Mark into Qumran Hebrew. He became convinced of Mark's derivation from a Hebrew original. Not knowing Hebrew well enough to be incapable of making errors, and so that competent scholars would not dismiss his effort, he had to assure himself that no errors of Hebrew usage got by him. To do this he decided to compare his work of retroversion with many other translations of the NT into Hebrew, beginning with Delitsch's of 1877. Carmignac also began editing and publishing a multi-volume series of Hebrew translations of the New Testament. He died in October of 1987 hoping that this work would be taken up by others.

All this seems to be an example of certain Catholic theologians paying close attention to the Scriptures in ways that perhaps many Protestant theologians, taking

these Scriptures for granted, had not considered. This is reminiscent of the favorable reception by many Roman Catholic theologians of the work of Karl Barth, especially his enormous *Church Dogmatics.* And in a similar vein, I am grateful for Karl Barth's reminder in his *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, that no age is ever "dead." "There is no past in the Church, so there is no past in theology. 'In him they all live. '... The theology of any period must be strong and free enough to give a calm, attentive and open hearing not only to the voices of the Church Fathers, not only to favorite voices, not only to the voices of the classical past, but to all the voices of the past. God is the Lord of the Church. He is also the Lord of theology. We cannot anticipate which of your fellow-workers from the past are welcome in our own work and which are not. It may always be that we have especial need of quite unsuspected (and among these, of quite unwelcome) voices in one sense or another."

Advert: Change of Address?

Don't forget to notify IJES if your address changes. Postal forwarding orders expire after a period of time. Forwarding practices are sometimes unreliable.

You don't want to miss out on *The Ellul Forum.* We don't want to lose touch with you.

E-mail your address change immediately to:

IJES@ellul.org

Or write to: IJES, P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA

Gabriel Vahanian, *Anonymous God*

(Aurora, Colorado: The Davies Group, 2001)

Reviewed by Darrell J. Fasching

Professor of Religious Studies, University of South Florida, Tampa; founding editor of *The Ellul Forum.*

From his earliest best seller at the beginning of the 1960s, *The Death of God*, through *God and Utopia (1977)* to his most recent *Anonymous God (2001)*, to name three of his many books over the last forty years, Gabriel Vahanian's message has become consistently clearer, more forceful and more poetic. In the first we learned of our "cultural incapacity for God" in a scientific and technological civilization. In the second we learned that biblical faith is capable of migrating from one cultural world to another in its journey toward a new heaven and a new earth. This journey of faith can carry us beyond the death of God through its utopian capacity to transform human selfunderstanding, whether that understanding is in terms of nature (ancient & medieval), history (modern) or technology (postmodern).

Now in *Anonymous God* (translated by Noelle Vahanian), Gabriel Vahanian teaches us how to be poets, speaking a new language of faith, a technological utopianism. *Anonymous God* is both a translation and revision of his 1989 book *Dieu anonyme, ou la peur des mots* (Desclee de Brouwer, Paris 1989). It is a fearless poetic exploration of the utopianism of our humanity in trinitarian terms, unfolding in four densely packed stanzas (or chapters) over one hundred and fifty-five pages. Chapter One explores the iconoclasm of language in relation to technology and the utopianism of faith. Chapters Two, Three and Four show how this iconoclasm of the word –in which we live, move and have our becoming –is one yet three as we move from "Language and Utopia: God" to "Salvation and Utopia: The Christ" to "Utopianism of the Body and the Social Order: the Spirit."

"The Bible," says Vahanian, "is not a book to be read but to read through" like a pair of glasses (xv). The task is not to accommodate our selves to some foreign and long gone cosmology that asks us to choose the past over the future but to see in our present world in a new way, in an iconoclastic way that will allow us to invent our humanity anew. Whether we are speaking of the ancient, medieval, modern or post-modern worlds - the world is always in danger of becoming our fate—a prison from which we can escape only by changing worlds. The task today is to do for our technological civilization what those of the first century's eschatologically oriented biblical communities did for theirs, open one's world to an "other" world, a new world rather than "another" world. In any age, we can only be human, Vahanian seems to say, when we have the imagination, courage, ingenuity and grace to invent ourselves anew and so end up changing the world to facilitate our humanity rather than giving up and seeking to change worlds. This biblical eschatological task is the utopian heritage of the West - "eschatology prevails over cosmogony, even over cosmology. And, in short, utopia prevails over the sacred" (xviii).

As human beings, our capacity for technology is given with out capacity for language, which is to say, for God. Faith has no language of its own (27) and so in every age must iconoclastically appropriate what is available, whether it be the medieval language of metaphysics, the modern language of history or the postmodern language of technique. The advent of technological civilization, Vahanian seems to say, in important ways makes this task easier rather than more difficult. For far from being totally alien to the eschatic orientation of Christian faith, technological civilization has a greater affinity with it than either the medieval language of metaphysics or the modern language of history, for technology like eschatology shares the utopian orientation toward making all things new. And utopia is not some impossible ideal but the iconoclastic possibility of realizing the impossible, of reinventing one's humanity in any world, especially a technological one.

This utopianism is predicated on an understanding that always and everywhere –in the beginning is the word and the word is God. God is given with our capacity for language. God is the God who speaks. We do not claim language, language claims us. "We do not speak for God but are spoken for" (2). Metaphor is not one type of language,

language is metaphor - using and yet contesting established meanings to invent the new, and so give birth to a language without precedent. Such language unleashes the utopian possibilities of the human that body forth into culture, making all things new.

Prophecy, *poesis* and *techne* are but three faces of the same capacity, the capacity to invent our humanity and in the process reinvent the world as a new creation - the word made flesh. Being "spoken for," Vahanian tells us, we must "speak up." We must speak up prophetically to change the world, and yet must do this poetically. The poet, as the ancient Greek language testifies, is a wordsmith, someone who has the *techne* (technique or skill) "to make or do." Our humanity comes to expression in and through the word, and is not so much natural or historical, or even technological, as it is utopian –a new beginning that encourages us not to change worlds but to change the world.

This "good news" is not news reserved for some sacred saving remnant but rather given once for all. It is good news for the whole human race. All language, says Vahanian, presupposes otherness. The appeal to any god who excludes others is an appeal to an idol. Whenever and wherever language is iconoclastic, there is no other God than the God of others. Indeed, being "in Christ" is just having this God in common so that Christ "is the designation of our common denominator instead of only the Christian's mere Jesus" (91).

For Vahanian, the God of the biblical tradition is a God who can neither be named or imaged and so remains always "anonymous" - the God of others and the God for others. And so for him, "Christ is much less a believer's Christ than he is a Christ for the unbeliever" (82), for every person whose flesh is claimed by the iconoclasm of the word that makes the invention of our humanity ever and again possible as the "worlding" of the word - the Word made flesh in the structures of our world (87). When the word is made flesh the kingdom of God draws near and God reigns, all in all.

For Vahanian eschatology prevails not only over cosmogony, cosmology and the sacred but also over soteriology. Far from being a religion of salvation, he argues, Christian faith liberates us from obsession with salvation, to embrace our new humanity and new creation, here and now. Christ cannot be reduced to Jesus any more than Jesus can be identified with God. For Vahanian, Jesus is no half-god-half-man but rather, as the Council of Chalecdon insisted, without confusion or mixture Christ is where the radical alterity of God and humanity meet, giving both the words "God" and "human" their authentic meaning (97). "God is the measure of humanity even as our humanity is the measure of God" (96).

When the church assumes its iconoclastic and utopian vocation as body of Christ it becomes the "the laboratory for the kingdom of God," desacralizing both the world and religion. As such its liturgy or "public work" invites both believer and unbeliever to bring to this new world their talents. The public work of the church is to create jobs that hallow and therefore desacralize the social order, and so further social justice by making the invention of our humanity once more possible. Even as the church once created monasteries, hospitals and universities that transformed the human landscape, so today, far from being asked to reject or escape our technological civilization, the

church, is called to embrace those "skills and crafts through which the human being is being human" (134) and so demonstrate that even (or especially) in a technological civilization our humanity can be reinvented. The biological process of evolutionary hominization, says Vahanian should not be confused with the utopian project of humanization. Indeed, only by continual reinvention, he suggests, can we really be human.

This is not a book for the theologically timid who only want to think "orthodox" thoughts and so betray the tradition by repeating it instead of continuing it. To repeat the tradition is to bring it to an end and make it seem as if our only option is to "change worlds." But Abrahamic faith is, after all, a setting out on a journey without knowing where we are going (Hebrews 11: 8). Vahanian's iconoclasm overturns everything in such a way as to make possible the tradition's continuance and in the process encourages us to change the world instead of abandoning it.

The theologically adventurous will find this a book rich with insight. From this perspective, I have only one quibble with Vahanian's poetic adventure - he is more convincing in what he affirms than in what he sometimes denies. His occasional comparative reflections are not nearly as nuanced as those aimed at Christianity. He tells us, for instance, that "the Western tradition is beckoned by the utopian paradigm of religion, in its Greek as well as in its Hebrew (Judeo-Christian) version. While for Eastern religions the spiritual life aims at exchanging worlds, the West, for its part, came and still comes under the preview of a diametrically opposed approach which aims at changing the world" (xvii-xviii).

Later in his argument he makes this observation specifically with reference to Buddhism. Such large contrasts ignore the profound shift from an "otherworldly" to a "this worldly" orientation that came fairly early with the shift from Theravada to Mahayana Buddhism and is also typical of Neo-Confucianism in China. To make his claim work, even for Western religion, Vahanian has had to elevate the eschatological strand and reject the soteriological within Christianity, but he does not seem to see similar strategies at work in other traditions. For example, I think one could argue that Thich Nhat Hanh's "socially engaged Buddhism" does in its own way for Buddhism what Vahanian does for Christianity.

Anonymous God is an extraordinary poetic work of metaphorical transformation. The words are all familiar and yet what is said is quite unfamiliar, new and unprecedented. In a typical book, one might expect the author to offer one, two or possibly three new insights per chapter. In this book one finds one, two or three per paragraph. The poetic density therefore is at times overwhelming. One feels the need to stop frequently and come up for air, lest one get dizzy from an overload of insight. It is a book that is best read slowly and then revisited if you wish to avoid the vertigo that comes with having everything that seems so familiar rendered unfamiliar too suddenly. The final outcome of that patience - -startlingly illumination of the new world that surrounds us –makes it all worth while.

Advert: International Jacques Ellul Society

Andre Chouraqui, Les Dix Commandments Aujourd'hui: Dix Paroles pour reconcilier I'Homme avec I'humain (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2000).

Alphonse Maillot, *Le Decalogue: Une Morale pour notre temps* (Paris: Librairie Protestante and Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1985).

Reviewed by David W. Gill

President, International Jacques Ellul Society

In my recent book *Doing Right: Practicing Ethical Principles* (InterVarsity Press, 2005), the two authors with the most citations in my author index were Alphonse Maillot (37 citations) and Andre Chouraqui (34 citations). *Doing Right,* part two of my introduction to Christian ethics, is structured around the Decalogue, seen through the lenses of the double Love Commandment and the biblical calls to justice and freedom. I see the Ten Commandments as the ten basic ways to love either God or a neighbor ("made in God's image and likeness, therefore..."), the ten basic principles of justice, and the ten fundamental guidelines in a life of freedom.

During my 1984-85 sabbatical in Bordeaux I actually started working on this project (sidetracked a lot by other projects for fifteen years but picked up again with passion

and attention during a study leave in Bordeaux the first half of 2000—there's something about Bordeaux and ethical research, I have to conclude!). I shared some of my early chapter drafts with Jacques Ellul during our Friday afternoon meetings at his home that year. I specifically remember him urging me to start acquiring and studying the writings of Alphonse Maillot. In subsequent years, Ellul also mentioned Andre Chouraqui to me. These authors became two of the three most important modern sources for my understanding of the ethics of the Decalogue (the other was Czech theologian Jan Milic Lochman).

Alphonse Maillot (1920-2003) was a pastor and theologian in the Reformed Church of France. He published several biblical commentaries, including three volumes on the Psalms, a major study of Romans, and a brilliant little work on the Beatitudes.

Le Decalogue: Une morale pour notre temps begins with Maillot rejecting the simplistic and false association of the Decalogue with a legalistic attitude. "We forget that legalism was not created by the Decalogue but by the listener . . . Above all we forget the liberating character of the Decalogue: promise, future, and joy. The Torah (I reject the term 'Law') is not only holy and just, it is *good.* Good for us. It is this liberating goodness of the Decalogue, expressed in particular by the first commandment, that I don't find very often among the commentators" (pp. 7-8; my translation).

Among Maillot's emphases as he works his way through the Decalogue: this is guidance addressed to laity, not just clergy; there is no separation between the religious or worship side of life and one's affairs out in the world—and Maillot warns against a too-strict division of two table in the Decalogue, something that has always seemed misguided to me as well; despite an initial impression of negativity ("Thou shalt not"), the Decalogue opens up a hundred positives for every negative; while the Decalogue is given to the Covenant people liberated from Egyptian slavery, and it must never be imposed on those around us, the messsage is for "all who have ears to hear"; the first command ("no other gods before me"), is the critical foundation—the next nine spell out the implications of have Yahweh as God.

In discussing the command against idols and images Maillot shows how far-reaching are its implications—rejecting our theological and philosophical images of God as much as our physical ones, and warning against viewing people through images and stereotypes. It is a question of life and vitality being replaced by narrow, lifeless substitutes, for God or for others.

In every discussion, Maillot shows his grasp of the historical and linguistic issues but then he takes his readers to the heart, the essential message, of each commandment, both in its negative and positive reach. His discussions and applications are brilliantly insightful and even exhilarating. I never got to meet Maillot in person but I did have the pleasure of reaching him by telephone at the retirement home where he spent the last years of his life, and thanking him for his extraordinary gifts to his readers.

In February of 2000, taking a short break from my work in Bordeaux, on a visit to Sarlat, east of Bordeaux, I was surprised to see in the window of a little book store the title *Les Dix Commandements Aujourd'hui.* This is not a popular theme of retail

books in France (or the USA!). I was further surprised and pleased to see that it was written by Andre Chouraqui, whose name I knew thanks to Ellul.

Chouraqui (born 1917 in Algeria) studied law and rabbinical studies in Paris and worked with the French Resistance during WWII. He settled in Jerusalem in 1958 and served as an advisor to David Ben-Gurion (1959-63) and later in the 60s as elected Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem under Teddy Kollek. Chouraqui is the only person to have published original translations of the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Koran. He is the author of many other books.

Les Dix Commandments is a remarkable study by any measure. Chouraqui was friends with Rene Cassin, the primary editor of the UN Declaration of Universal Human Rights and dedicated this book to him. Chouraqui says that we need a declaration of universal human *duties* to go along with the *rights*—and the Ten Commands serve that purpose. Chouraqui reviews how each of the ten has been interpreted and applied in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—and how each could help us today. The Decalogue should be a helpful foundation for common understanding and reconciliation. This is a brilliant and wise contribution.

News & Notes

— JEAN-FRANCOIS MEDARD

Professor Jean-Francois Medard died on September 23, 2005, at the age of 71. Medard was a student of Jacques Ellul and later a colleague at the Institute for Political Studies at the University of Bordeaux. He was an expert in sub-Saharan African history, politics, and culture, as any bibliographic or web search will quickly show. He was the founding president of the local "association Jacques Ellul" and, more recently an active member of the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul. The conversation and debate were animated and the welcome warm for legions of visitors to the home of Jean-Francois and his wife Burney over the years. Our sincere condolences go to Burney and the family.

— JACQUES ELLUL, PENSEUR SANS FRONTIERES

A collection of articles from the fall 2004 colloquium at Poitiers on Jacques Ellul's thought and its continuing importance, ten years after his death is now available for purchase from Editions l'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Send 21 euros plus 5 euros for shipping and handling.

Edited by Patrick Chastenet, the collection includes "Jacques Ellul's Ethics: Legacy and Promise" by David W. Gill, "Some Problems in Ellul's Treatment of Propaganda" by Randall Marlin, "Peut-on lire sans trahir" by Didier Nordon, "La Technique et la chair" by Daniel Cerezuelle, "Jacques Ellul et la decroissance" by Alain Gras, "L'Idee de revolution dans l'oeuvre de Jacques Ellul" by Liberte Crozon, "Le Droit technicien" by Claude Ducouloux-Favard, "Critique de la Politique dans l'oeuvre de Jacques Ellul" by Patrick Chastenet, "L'historicite de l'ere technologique: convergences et differences

entre Ellul et Illich" by Jean Robert, "La Pensee juridique de Jacques Ellul" by Sylvain Dujancourt, and other essays. This is an esssential volume for students of Ellul's thought.

— WIPF & STOCK TO PUBLISH ELLUL SERIES

Wipf & Stock Publishers (199 W. 8th Avenue, Suite 3, Eugene OR 97401, USA) has recently published the first two volume of their project "Ellul Library" series. Patrick Chastenet's interviews of Ellul are now available as *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity* (Wipf & Stock, 2005) after being expensive, unavailable, or very difficult to find for several years. Marva Dawn's translation and edited introduction to *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul That Set the Stage* has also been reprinted by Wipf & Stock (previously published by Eerdmans).

The IJES is working with our friends at Wipf & Stock to return as many Ellul books into print as possible. Stay tuned for further announcements.

— DOES YOUR LIBRARY SUBSCRIBE TO THE ELLUL FORUM?

Does your library subscribe to The Ellul Forum? Princeton Seminary, the University of South Florida, and Wheaton College all have ongoing subscriptions (among others). But what about Penn State? Cal Berkeley? Notre Dame? Illinois? Scranton? Ohio State? Fuller Seminary? What about your school library? Your alma mater?

Many schools have a standard form for faculty members to submit a request that the library subscribe to a publication. Another strategy would be to donate a subscription for two or three years to help them get the habit.

Hommage a Jacques Ellul

Dominique Ellul, with the help of Jean-Charles Bertholet , has now published a beautiful little 100 page volume entitled *Hommage a Jacques Ellul.* The occasion was a conference in May 2004, ten years after Ellul's death. Included are reflections on Ellul's importance by Michel Leplay, Michel Bertrand, Sebastien Morillon, and Jean Coulardeau. Yves Ellul provides some introduction to Ellul's long—and long-awaited—ethics of holiness, on which manuscript Yves has been working for several years. Brief testimonials are included from Jean-Francois Medard, Alphonse Maillot, André Chouraqui, Elizabeth Viort and others. For more information contact: *diffusion.ellul@wanadoo.fr*.

Resources for Ellul Studies

www.ellul.org & www.jacques-ellul.org
Two indispensable web sites
The IJES/AIJE web site at www.ellul.org contains (1) news about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, (4) a complete index of the contents of all 36 issues of *The Ellul Forum,* and (5) links and information on other resources

for students of Jacques Ellul. The new AIJE web site at www.jacques-ellul.org offers a French language supplement.

The Ellul Forum CD: 1988-2002

The first thirty issues of *The Ellul Forum*, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for US $15 (postage included). Send payment with your order to "IJES," P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

Back issues #31 - #35 of *The Ellul Forum* are available for $5 each (postage and shipping included).

Cahiers Jacques Ellul

Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne

The annual journal, *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, is edited by Patrick Chastenet and now published by Editions L'Esprit du Temps, distributed by Presses Universitaires de France; write to Editions L'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. The theme of Volume 1 was "L'Annees personnalistes" (cost 15 euros); Volume 2 was on "La Technique" (15 euros); the current Volume 3 focuses on "L'Economie" (21 euros). Next year's volume 4 will focus on "La Propagande" (21 euros). Shipping costs 5 euros for the first volume ordered; add 2 euros for each additional volume ordered.

Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. $87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit www.elsevier.com for ordering information.

Alibris—used books in English

The Alibris web site (www.alibris.com) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

Librairie Mollat—new books in French

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux (www.mollat.com) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

Used books in French:
two web resources

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are www.chapitre.com and www.livre-rare-book.com.

Reprints of Nine Ellul Books

By arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of several Ellul books originally published by William B. Eerdmans can now be purchased. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: *The Ethics of Freedom*

($40), *The Humiliation of the Word* ($26), *The Judgment of Jonah* ($13), *The Meaning of the City* ($20), *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* ($19), *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* ($28), *The Subversion of Christianity* ($20), and *The Technological Bluff* ($35). *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul* translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

Have your bookstore (or on-line book dealer) "back order" the titles you want. Do not go as an individual customer to Eerdmans or Ingram/Spring Arbor. For more information visit "Books on Demand" at www.eerdmans.com.

Ellul on Video

French film maker Serge Steyer's film "Jacques Ellul: L'homme entier" (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site www.meromedia.com. Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul's ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.

Issue #37 Spring 2006 — Propaganda and Ethics

- Click to view the original PDF

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Contents

© 2006 International Jacques Ellul Society Berkeley, California, USA www.ellul.org

"Propaganda seems therefore to be, as is the case for most technical elements, a purely neutral instrument in itself, and one which therefore can be used for any kind of cause—a 'good cause' such as peace or the reconciliation of classes or Christianity, an 'evil cause' such as militarism, revolution, or atheism. In reality, nothing is further from the truth!

"No technical instrument is neutral; it carries its own logic within itself and... the most beautiful ideal, once it is carried by propaganda, is modified in its very essence and nature. "

-Jacques Ellul
"The Ethics of Propaganda" (1981)

Information on The Editorial Board & More

The Ellul Forum
For the Critique of Technological Civilization

From the Editor

Propaganda was the first of Ellul's books I ever read, now more than three decades ago. It was required reading then for students of communications and it hasn't yet been surpassed. *Propaganda,* along with *The Technological Society*, and *Political Illusion,* has always been one of the critical foundations of his sociology of the modern world.

Ellul's programmatic little 1948 manifesto, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, already devoted a brilliant chapter to "The Problem of Communication" (which inspired IJES President David Gill's column on p. 23 below). Ellul followed his original publication of *Propagandes* (1962), with many other studies of communication, including an 83-page article on public relations, information, and propaganda in *L'Anee sociologique* (1963), *Histoire de la Propagande* (1967; Reviewed in this issue of the *Ellul Forum*), and *The Humiliation of the Word* (1981, ET 1985; also Reviewed in this issue). *Humiliation* is of particular interest in that it adds a theological counterpoint to the sociology of communication.

In 1981, Ellul wrote an essay on the "Ethics of Propaganda" for *Communication*, a small, theory-oriented journal that is no longer published. This essay circulated among communication scholars, but not much beyond. We are delighted to give it a wider circulation here as our lead article. It is not an easy read, partly because of the rather wooden literalism of the translation, and partly because of Ellul's long, complex sentences. But it is full of challenging, illuminating insights and observations and well worth our study.

Randal Marlin, whom we also welcome as a new member of our IJES Board, is an expert on propaganda and communication studies. He translated (and published as a pamphlet) Ellul's essay on *FLN Propaganda in France During the Algerian War* (Ontario, Canada: By Books, 1982), which Ellul had handed to him in person during his 1979-80 research year in Bordeaux. Prof. Marlin's re-view of Ellul's *Histoire de la Propagande* and his major paper on "Problems in Ellul's Treatment of Propaganda" are two major gifts to this issue of the *Forum.* Marlin's appreciative but critical back-and-forth with Ellul's ideas is exactly the sort of constructive conversation Ellul loved and the sort of thing the *Ellul Forum* is all about.

Also in this issue, Prof. Jay Black provides a superb introduction to the larger context of propaganda studies over the past century, and shows us where Ellul fits in this tradition. Russell Heddendorf re-views Ellul's *Humiliation,* and J. Wesley Baker and David Gunkel review important new books in communication and media studies in this issue.

Our next (Fall 2006) issue of the *Ellul Forum* has "politics" for its main theme. Our world could use some helpful insight on this topic and we know a great figure to get us started on our reflections. Issue 39 in Spring 2007 will focus on Ellul's ethics. Your contributions and ideas are always welcome.

This Spring, in addition to Randal Marlin, we are delighted to welcome Dr. Virginia Landgraf (ATLA, Chicago) and Prof. Mark Baker (Mennonite Seminary, Fresno) to our IJES Board of Directors.

Clifford G. Christians, Editor editor@ellul.org

The Ethics of Propaganda

by Jacques Ellul

This article first appeared in Communication, *6 (1981): 159175. Translatedfrom the French by D. Raymond Tourville.*

At first glance, the question of ethics and propaganda, or of "the ethics of propaganda," seems to be readily resolved: there is no morality in the propaganda game, and therefore it serves no purpose to render a moral judgment on propaganda. It belongs to one of those closed and impenetrable areas where ethics loses its rights. To declare that "to make propaganda" is wrong is irrelevant: the propagandist does not concern himself with such judgments and the propagandee lives with the fact that what his leader or his group says is not propaganda. Ethics in a moral or philosophical sense is strictly without power in this politicosocial activity, and a positive or negative judgment can in no way change this fact. Yet, one can quickly enough realize that this very fact raises a certain number of difficulties.

Propaganda does indeed obey a certain ethic, not taken in the moral sense, but rather as a rule of behavior. Moreover, it, itself, in short constitutes a morality for crowds, for peoples, for groups, for classes, for nations. Finally, and this is the most important fact, it appears more and more that what propaganda builds in man cannot be destroyed by the experience of facts, contrary to what has been normally believed or falsely proven. All this leads me to unveil the ethical criteria which I myself use to underscore the amorality of propaganda.

Propaganda Is a Morality

Propaganda obviously obeys a certain number of working rules. I have studied it as a technique. But as is the case each time one is dealing with a technique affecting men, it can no longer be a question of purely abstract and mechanical rules as if one were dealing in techniques to change a physical or chemical environment. One has to take into account the specific reactions of its being on the one hand and of the human being on the other. In other words, even though for the propagandist or the publicist it is simply a question of applying seemingly rigorous and technical methods, this whole procedure must take on an ideologico-moral appearance, because man does not react in a neutral manner: he cannot admit to being or consider himself simply a manipulated object: in order for him to believe, to follow the desired path, he must receive a satisfaction which is moral in nature.

Thus, in itself, propaganda doesn't follow an ethic, but it is obliged to use one and to build one. As a system of intervention, it is purely practico-formal; as an integrated

455

part of social reality, it needs to have a content of a moral nature, which in no way means that it obeys its content. But it must carry it and have it assimilated. Nor can it be only an ideological content. It is not only a question of the person who is being swayed receiving ideas, an interpretation of the world: in addition, he must be convinced that he himself, his party, his class, his nation are right, that they represent Good and Justice. It is this conviction that is decisive and which effectively sways man into the field of propaganda.

We are, in this situation, in the presence of one of the conditions required for the efficacy of propaganda, and there is no recurrence of this "good" to propaganda itself. Consequently we must now eliminate a prior question: propaganda seems therefore to be, as is the case for most technical elements, a purely neutral instrument in itself, and one which therefore can be used for any kind of cause—a "good cause" such as peace or the reconciliation of classes or Christianity, an "evil cause" such as militarism, revolution, or atheism. In reality, nothing is further from the truth! No technical instrument is neutral; it carries its own logic within itself, and I have already shown in *Propaganda* that the most beautiful ideal, once it is carried by propaganda, is modified in its very essence and nature. In reality, a positive "ideal" has no meaning unless man personally accedes, conquers, and adheres to it through deep conviction and becomes himself a germ of this truth. Otherwise, he is nothing more than a robot, "beyond dignity and freedom," which removes all positive value to this adherence, and by this very fact, to the ideal to which one adheres. For if one adheres to an ideal in such a manner, this means that one could accept any other content, and could uphold, with the same conviction, the opposite ideal.

If, therefore, we are sure that a cause is just, not by measuring it against an infinite ideal, or against some absolute reigning in an Empyrean, but rather in the exact measure in which its supporters themselves are just, and where their own justice renders the cause itself just (and not the reverse), then all propaganda action, which tends to make man act without even being aware of his actions and aware he has chosen, destroys in itself justice and good.

But we are obviously here at a crossroads: 1) Either we consider humanity as a simple means to a superior action, and it is therefore legitimate to manipulate it, to modify the human brain, to artificially produce behavior— but this means that one obeys some sort of in-human truth, which is in no way a guarantee that this truth is super-human (and if it is super-human we have but two choices: either it is unknown to us, and this is what was called the way of negative theology, or it has come down to our level of comprehension, and that is what biblical theology calls the Word (of God) and incarnation); 2) Or one considers that truth can only be human, but in this case, it implies that the particular truth in question cannot be transmitted by means of manipulation, nor by treating man as a pure object, but only by a voluntary adherence. In other words, one can in no way disassociate the means of propaganda from what it claims to carry. It is a particular example of the great debate over "the

ends justifies the means," or "the means corrupt the end," a debate accentuated by the fact that, here, the object upon which the means act is man.

I am certainly not going to take up the entire problem again here, but rather point out the conclusion I reached a long time ago (in *Presence of the Kingdom*): that is to say, that the end never justifies the means because there isn't a differentiation in nature between the two, but, on the contrary, a continuity: that is to say, that no abyss exists between the means and the point to which these means lead us, but rather that the end is the exact result of the means used. In other words, violent means will produce a violent situation and never one of peace. Unjust means will produce an unjust regime and never one capable of exercising justice, and corrupt means will bring about corruption of the final result.

There is, therefore, no distinction to be made between the instrument, that would be neutral, and the cause, which would be good or not good. The instrument participates in the cause, and the latter is shaped by the instrument. To the extent that propaganda rests on a contempt for man viewed as an object to shape and not as a person to respect, this signifies that the cause defended by propaganda implies a de-gradation of man, the impossibility of his acceding to his majority, to his personal responsibility, and that propaganda is evidently a negation of a freedom, either natural, acquired, or to.be acquired. Now, propaganda cannot be anything other than what it is: an instrument of manipulation to obtain an objectively conforming behavior (orthopraxy). That is to say, that it obeys, exclusively, principles of efficacy, technical rules of a psychological or sociological nature, the usage of instruments which are themselves techniques.

It is, therefore, necessarily part of the means that corrupt the ends. It cannot be subordinated to anything but its own end, which is efficacy. Propaganda, in reality, includes in itself both the "apparatus" and "techniques" of propaganda and the message which is transmitted. For it is very evident that in addressing men, it carries a message. It is not merely a signal (although at times it can be reduced to this!). But this message can only be chosen, calculated, combined in relation to and with respect to the efficacy of the complex apparatus. In other words, even if the message is apparently noble and generous, it is integrated into a whole which rests on the one and only concept of "man as object." Propaganda can have no other reference point, no other external value to which it could be subject and from which one could judge it. It is nothing less than its end integrated into its means. And that is why there is no way to make an ethical judgment on it, and those that one could formulate have no common measure with its reality.

Propaganda Creates An Ethic

But here we touch upon a new dimension of the problem: propaganda itself creates a morality, an ethic, a certain type of wished-for behavior. It furnishes man with a criterion for good and evil. This is therefore a rather new situation with respect to traditional societies. We are out of the normal framework of reflection on morality, both the one suggested by Bergson as well as that of Max Weber, the "morality of responsibility—the morality of conviction." We are in the presence of the making of

457

an artificial and ideological morality, and I mean by that a morality which imposes itself upon a group of humans who have not chosen it; neither was it developed slowly through usages and customs, trials and errors, uncertainties and choices, nor was it passed on from generation to generation by a slow cultural transmission, but rather as a whole of systematic behaviors obtained by rapid and active technical means (from whence comes the great difference from the "reproduction" of morality through the flow of the generations), and always with a totalitarian goal, that is to say, encompassing all of man, leaving no latitude of choice nor any field undetermined, which would be completely destructive to propaganda.

It is indeed a question of morality, since, based upon this infusion, man is going to judge what is good and evil; he is going to choose his conduct (but it is simply a question of a choice programmed by his conviction which allows no hesitation on the behavior to be followed, the whole concept having been integrated). But it is a morality with roots neither in personal experience, nor in the past, nor in thought; it is a purely artificial morality, created and diffused outside any context of conviction. The conviction is produced by the system. And it is an ideological morality insofar as the behaviors demanded result from ideological choice.

There is a comparison with religion to be made here. A religion supposes a faithful adherence to certain truths, and this adherence brings with it certain actions, a certain practice. "Christian faith" must translate into "works." In the same manner, political ideology (nationalist, communist, fascist, etc.) or economic ideology (of productivity, of profit, of profit-earning capacity) require certain behaviors: sacrifice for the cause, consumption, work, etc. These are narrowly determined by the ideology one was successful in implanting. There are no choices, there is no distance, much less than in the religious domain, where, even in non-liberating and inveigling religions, the distance between God and the faithful brings about the possibility for the latter to choose certain behavior patterns rather than others. In propaganda, the exact identity of the group ideology and of its behavior excludes any deviations. And we arrive thus at the conclusion announced in the beginning: it is by nature impossible to render a significant moral judgment from the outside on the work of propaganda which is itself a creator of a new type ethics.

We are, therefore, in the presence of a dilemma comparable to the one in which Kautsky had trapped Bernstein, when the latter was making a critique of Marx: Marx created a new Weltanschauung, a global conception. To be able to make a useful criticism of it, one has to situate oneself within the system or vision. It is in applying Marx's method that one can criticize it; it is by using its own premises and its own system as a point of departure that the criticism can become meaningful and efficacious. If not, if one situates one-self in a different perspective, for example religious or liberal or idealist, one can say what one wants to, it would in no way begin to touch Marx's system. That is why philosophical objections based on a dualist or idealist perspective could in no way modify Marx's thought, just as criticism based on a liberal economy as

a starting point simply had no common measure with the goal of a socialist economy: therefore, the entire procedure was useless.

It is exactly the same in this case for propaganda: it constitutes a psycho-political universe, it unleashes an "imaginary" (in the strongest meaning of modern thought) producer of myths and a reconstitution of the universe for whomever adheres to it, which means that if one situates one's self in this universe (for example, in the consumer world, when it is a question of that commercial propaganda known as advertising) and the criticisms that one can make will surely be heard and efficacious, but they will simply add to the reproduction, the reinforcement, and the growth of propaganda. They will bring about a greater interiorization of the imperatives and the rules of conduct, but, of course, no revision of the morality of the propaganda. On the other hand, if one situates oneself on the outside, one can make a very accurate, judicious, and exact moral (or intellectual) critique but which will never begin to touch any structure erected by propaganda, whether on the psychological or sociological level.

Morality and ethics have no power over the results of propaganda action because the latter makes the propagandee live in an ethical rather than in a political or economic universe; these indeed are the realities of the matter, but propaganda has as its goal to hide this reality within an ideological discourse which acts as a justifier because it is moral. To the democrats, Hitler affirmed unceasingly that national-socialism permitted access to a superior type of democracy, one that was more total, more egalitarian, etc. And reciprocally, a "capitalistic" morality has never touched a Soviet. We have witnessed religious conversions which are of another kind. And if there is at the moment a challenge to the universe of Soviet propaganda, this can happen only through the intermediary of those who, having been in this universe, have left it (by conversion) and can speak the exact language which is appropriate, but which has nothing to do with an ethical language: it isn't starting with morality, but rather, on the one hand, with the facts that were revealed (a typically Marxist process!), and on the other hand, with the opposition of one religious attitude to another. The cases of Solzhenitsyn, Maksimov, Sakharov, Vlasov, A. Zinoviev, Yuli Daniel, Sinyaysky, etc., etc., are precisely characteristic of this.

The Useless Experience

There is an affirmation often proposed in these domains, namely, that faced with the facts, propaganda is useless, and that its results are quickly destroyed. It suffices to make known the facts. But it is precisely propaganda that prevents the facts from being perceived as such. The unveiling to which I alluded can only be brought about by those who have been through this universe.

But there is another aspect of the problem which I would like to discuss: that is the renewal of those who are taken in by propaganda, the continual apparition of new generations for whom the experience of their elders is of absolutely no use. And this is a moral problem; in a universe which tends towards anomie, no values are passed from one generation to the other, and by this very fact no experience of the preceding generation is validated in the eyes of the succeeding generation. We have

made political mistakes and would like to have our sons profit from the lesson learned from our mistakes. That is impossible; our discourse goes unheard because it is not inscribed in a commensurate ethical universe, and we see them going down the same paths we did. We can't spare them their mistakes. Popular wisdom has long said: each generation must experience things for themselves. But in a traditional society, this is limited. In our society of global and accelerated changes, this attitude is disastrous, and yet now it is even more widespread than before. I shall take an example relative to propaganda bearing on this triple phenomenon: confrontation of propaganda and fact—the impossibility of transmitting experience to a new generation—the innocence of this new generation given over to propaganda.

The example is the relation of the young people in France to communist propaganda. The young people of my generation, in the years around 1930, were extremely seduced by marxism, by the success of the revolution, by the fantastic accomplishments of the USSR, by the criticisms leveled against the weaknesses of democracy and the injustices of capitalism, and finally by the fact that communism seemed to be the only valid answer to fascism. We were completely sensitive to the communist propaganda and an entire generation drew nearer to the Party.

Then a number of experiences frightened us. First of all, there were the Moscow trials of 1936—the trials in which we saw the great ones whom we had learned to admire, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and subsequently Bukharin himself, condemned to death in trials which immediately appeared to us as scandalous and deceitful. It was absolutely unbelievable to have accused these men of complicity with capitalism, and to have brought them to the point of accusing themselves.

Now during the same period, we experienced other events just as upsetting: the frightening attitude of the Spanish communists toward the anarchists during the Spanish war. It has been said, but it can never be said enough, that Franco's best ally was the Spanish communist party. For the true resistance by the Republic was lead by the anarchists. But the communists have such a hatred of the anarchists (and also of the socialists) that, during the war, they preferred to attack the anarchists from behind and resolve the differences between them by violence, rather than help them fight against the fascist rebellion. Now, all those who took part in the republican resistance were able to see this. We came out of these experiences desperate and hostile toward communism.

One last experience: the German-Soviet treaty of 1938 by which, in reality, Stalin left Hitler free to attack Europe. Curiously, there was a progression in the influence of these facts: the trials left the communist mass indifferent; it, in fact, accepted the explanations and believed the propaganda. The anti-anarchist activity upset only those who participated in the war; on the other hand the "pact" provoked a great crisis in the entire party, and countless members left. Be that as it may, the men of my generation, after this triple experience, could be lucid and would never again be entrapped by communist propaganda.

This wasn't to be, for everything was renewed: the war and the Resistance, the fraternal cooperation with the communist resistors, their heroic actions, the admiration. Older people such as myself remained more distrustful, but powerless; we saw the young people in their twenties enter into an entirely new relationship with the Communist Party: to speak to them of our experience in 1935-1939 meant nothing to them.

Buried memories: what could these do against an all new and fresh propaganda, both by word and ex-ample; we were making moral judgments, and if one had to draw the line, we were the ones who were not to be trusted. We suspected these pure heroes of sinister designs. When the Liberation came, these young people, moralized by the propaganda and the actions, refused to see the "mistakes" the communists were guilty of (massive executions without trials, liquidation of the rightist under-ground by the communist underground), and, when Tito committed the abominable treason of having the real leader of the Yugoslav resistance, Mihailovic (who was clearly anti-communist), arrested and shot, the young people accepted without flinching the idea that this man, who had reorganized the Yugoslav army as early as 1941, and engaged in the resistance a year before Tito, was a traitor and was in the pay of the imperialists. One had to be forewarned as we were to see, simply to see, what was happening.

Now this young generation of the resistance knew in turn some psychological shocks which, for many, led them to abandon the illusions of their youth and of the resistance: the worker's revolt in Berlin in 1953 against the Soviet regime, the Hungarian and Polish revolts of 1956, and finally the revelations of Khrushchev to the XXth congress. What shocks, what disillusions. Many in turn dropped out of the party. The astonishing thing was that it wasn't a complete rout. That shows the weakness of fact against the morality acquired by propaganda, for in all these cases it is a question of a recuperation by morality: communism committed errors, but it was the only one to defend the poor and oppressed, to want liberation of peoples; therefore all that was critical of the party was a betrayal of these poor.

This propaganda argument, apparently superficial, but playing on the moral sen-timent also created by propaganda, reached even intellectuals such as J. P. Sartre; and one can find the same explanations that were given in 1938 on the legitimacy of the proletarian revolution, on the threat of imperialism which is the true menace to mankind, and which is responsible for the riots in Berlin and Hungary: the USSR having done nothing more than to limit itself to respond and to protect peoples who had been wronged by a handful of traitors.

It is remarkable to see how little propaganda renews itself. It is exactly the same moral and justifying discourse which was used in 1938, in 1956, in 1968: morality and virtue are integrated in the propaganda which appears simply to make them explicit. And all will soon be erased by a new generation, for those who were twenty in 1958, for example, the events of the last ten years were totally unknown to them; the only thing left, for example, in France was the evidence of the Algerian war where the Communist Party became once again the protector of the poor, of the colonized, the evidence that

the theory of Lenin on imperialism was correct, and that the only abomination was capitalism: propaganda had digested the facts.

But in turn, this new generation of pure and innocent militants, who saw everything through images furnished by the party, received a profound and double shock: the revolt of the young people in 1968 and the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Faced with the young people's revolt, the French Communist Party took an attitude of extreme harshness, of condemnation, and this was in perfect conformity with the attitude it had always held with respect to anything which might have an anarchist orientation. The Communist Party fears being overwhelmed from the left; it prefers to ally itself with the reactionary right than to allow a leftist and spontaneous revolution to take place. Lenin always condemned leftist tendencies (a childhood disease of communism) and worker spontaneity, for which he had a profound distrust.

But it was difficult for the hard-core militants of the French Communist Party not to be sensitive to the call of the revolution, to the vigor of the slogans and to the authenticity of youth in the streets, who seemed capable of overthrowing the power structure. There was at that point a very strong tension, and the discipline of the party had a most difficult time imposing itself, exactly as in 1938 or in 1956. And even more so, since at the same time the hope of a "socialism with a more humane appearance" was suddenly shattered by the Soviet invasion. It seemed totally unjust to prevent Czechoslovakia from choosing its own way and the argument of a "menacing imperialism" seemed to be miscarrying.

However, in spite of many criticisms and a few rejections, the Communist Party remained stable, and in no way changed its line and propaganda, and decided in favor of a purely formal "disapproval" of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. These "disapprovals" are part and parcel of the "integrated propaganda" to valorize morally the subsequent resumption of contact. The French Communist Party continues to affirm itself in the "general line" with a purely formal divergence. But the militants are disturbed. Nevertheless, from 1970 on, there is no more discussion; the whole affair is dead.

Except for the appearance of Solzhenitsyn. And here we are in the presence of a moral phenomenon of great importance: we have just shown that facts change nothing in the attitude produced by propaganda. The most evident facts submitted to a moral judgment, contrary to all moral norms, are completely helpless faced with their reinterpretation by propaganda. Or more exactly, on the one hand, for adults, we note a certain instantaneous puzzlement, certain questions which arise, which for an insignificant minority mean a rejection and an abandoning of the party; but for the majority, the explanation will produce a situation of moral justification and of sufficient satisfaction. On the other hand, we are dealing here particularly with the new levels, the new generation, and the problem here is simply to obliterate, to have disappear into a continuous history, without contradiction, the facts which had caused the scandal and the moral judgment.

Propaganda has, therefore, as its essential task, to reproduce innocence from generation to generation (in both meanings of the word: ignorance and non-moral culpability). And it can do this precisely insofar as the generations succeed each other, while the apparatus of the party, which makes the propaganda work, remains constant and the party, as in the USSR, believes that communism has eternity in front of it to win the battle. What will bring about the real crisis of the intellectuals and of the leaders of the French Communist Party will not be the fact itself, but the publication of books whose time has arrived (contrary to Kravehenko's), in a favorable climate, and, especially, supported by a remarkable propaganda, which is going to require certain moral questions, heretofore completely hidden by propaganda., to be asked.

In other words, it is the apparition of a "credible" propaganda which is going to arouse the good moral conscience. It was made "credible" by the personality of the witness. Solzhenitsyn's analysis and testimonial are going to brusquely provoke a crisis of moral conscience among communist intellectuals. But it isn't the discovery of the fact itself (the fact of the existence of Soviet concentration camps has been very well known ever since 1948 at least); it is the impact of the propaganda on a humanitarian and moral base.

Communist intellectuals who have been examining moral problems since 1968 are going to make a critique of what they have lived and believed for more than twenty years. But it is that very generation that experienced the period of the resistance: the innocents of 1940-1944. Their departure from the party, their criticisms, are going to have great repercussions and are going to cause great discussions, but only insofar as it is a question of intellectuals using the media. Their departure is spectacular. But there are large factions of the party which disappear thusly at each crisis. It is estimated that about 70,000 members of the French Communist Party leave it each year. And in times of crisis, such as we have previously mentioned, the figures reach 200,000. We don't speak about these defectors because they are ordinary people, obscure people; they hold no rank, and they are immediately replaced by new adherents, ardent and innocent militants, young people who discover the universe through the truth of communism, and they ignore everything, the trials, the Pact, the Hungarian revolt, and the crushing of Czechoslovakia. And now they ignore everything about Solzhenitsyn: the whole matter is settled. The moral shock caused by his books is over. The party had to become a little more liberal, in appearance, for a few years, and the new intellectuals who now adhere to the party no longer feel the need to critique it; the generation of Gar-audy, P. Daix, etc., is gone.

I have just seen a television program on the Communist Youth Congress. I saw the young innocent faces that I have always seen there, the same enthusiasm, the same absolute confidence in the words of the leaders, the same certitude about the revolution and about the excellence of the USSR, and the same admiration for the revolution of 1917. Everything has disappeared. So much so that the Afghanistan invasion raises for these neophytes, once again, an agonizing problem: how can the country of justice, of the struggle against imperialism, of anticapitalism, conduct itself thusly? A stupor

seizes the world: "Never before has this been seen." It has been forgotten that all this has been seen ten times before. And we find anew exactly the same laborious explanations: it's the fault of the Americans who occupy Pakistan; it's the fault of the Pakistanis who are the true aggressors; it's the fault of the rebel minorities; it's the Afghan "people" who have called to the USSR for help. Why bother to make a correct analysis and to invent new arguments since experience shows that this propaganda, in the long run, snuffs out all moral indignation and erases the facts? Yes, there will be a few thousand defectors from the party. And a new generation will appear; they will ignore Afghanistan as well as the rest. In other words, propaganda being strictly anti-moral, spread out over the years, is at the same time creator of a new morality and of a new mental universe founded on instantaneousness, and on the absence of the past.

From Ethics to the Amorality of Propaganda

It is evident that to judge the amorality of propaganda, and the incompatibility between ethics and propaganda, one must admit to the existence of an ethic founded on values; one must construct a certain type of human existence; one must have a certain idea of man. That is why I could say earlier that propaganda is also a conferrer of morality, while at the same time being essentially amoral. To go back to the Marxist-Leninist example, it is evident that if one adopts Lenin's criteria for behavior, one builds a certain morality. Criteria: "All that is favorable to the proletariat in the struggle between classes is good, and all that is unfavorable to it is evil" (the State and the Revolution). And it will justify propaganda favorable to the proletariat, but what we have here is a utilitarianism without values. I am certainly not going to furnish a catalogue of the values by which I was able to appreciate the amorality of propaganda, but rather present the existential attitudes in which I situated myself.

First of all, there is the question of autojustification. Propaganda functions in the following manner: it represents the passage from "there is power" to "it is right and just that there be this power." In other words, it has, in effect, a justifying moral content. Always, even when it is revolutionary and contestant, all propaganda is a process of autojustification (by the denunciation of the other as being evil). It offers justification to the individual adherent as well as being the justification of the group which organizes and diffuses it. But by this very fact, it leads inevitably towards totalitarianism, because, from the moment it is granted that "it is just and good that there be this power," one passes immediately to: "therefore there can only be this power, and all others are consequently unacceptable and to be eliminated."

Each propaganda is by nature totalitarian, and tends to disclaim all pluralism. Now, it appeals to a need, to a request, to a desire of modern man who is looking first and foremost to justify himself, to be justified, to be declared just precisely because he lives in a universe which is very disputed, because he feels himself being drawn into unjust acts and also because he no longer has the resource of a religious reference, for example Christianity, which was precisely a religion of justification. But the great difference is due to the fact that Christianity never gives a justification as such; it never declares to

man that he is just, but only saved, pardoned, justified; and that this is not something acquired but a gift. But modern man, the modern parties, want to be declared just.

A Threefold Critique

I would say that therein lies my first element of appraisal: All processes of autojustification, at whatever level they might be, appear to me to be false, dangerous, and entrapping. It's the gateway to all the present destruction of values and of ethics. All ethical behavior seems to me to imply a questioning of self, a reassessment, and the acceptance of one's values being questioned by others. It is the price that must be paid both to measure oneself to the value, and to have a possible relation in truth. Here, it is neither a question of auto-criticism as it can be practiced in the communist party (in the Middle Ages it was in the Church) nor of culpability as understood in psychoanalysis. One can very well recognize oneself as a liar or as being vain without living in some sort of morbid culpability. But the self-examination, the examination of conscience (as it was called in the old Christian vocabulary), the acknowledgment of one's faults, and the refusal to search at any cost to be just, seem to me to be constituent elements of any ethical life, of any relationship.

It was first of all based upon my objection to autojustification that I was brought to view propaganda as amoral and leading the propagandee to a dangerous behavior (which fact was verified for all propaganda, included among these advertising, which developed consumer bulimia as a being's justification, with all the dangers that carried at all levels, and which are revealing themselves now, in the area of hygiene or in the economy!).

The second axis of my ethical reflection is closely related to my description of the second paragraph of this article: there is no moral existence unless it be rooted in the past, situated in a continuity—the continuity of one's own life just as much as that of one's group or of the history of one's country. There is no morality of instantaneousness. It is false to think that man is in a zero stage and that at each moment he must choose and make decisions. It would be a freedom like that of Buridan's ass.

Man has no moral existence except with reference to the totality of his experiences, or of those which were handed down to him and from which a "lesson" is drawn; and the "Widsom of nations" is a sort of composite of these reflections. This supposes, therefore, a historical continuity, a recall, a recapitulation, an anamnesis, as the experience occurs, an explanation of what has taken place. I'm not speaking here of the great moral principles and values, but of moral existence. And in the area of faith (Christian), ethical existence supposes "repetition" (in the Kierkegaardian sense of the term). No morality exists when one pre-tends to situate one's self simply in the present, in the instantaneous.

This was clearly evident when around the 1930's the idea of a morality of "successive sincerities" was spread by Andre Gide, for example, but also by T. H. Lawrence. "When I say this today, I am completely sincere and true, but in an hour, or tomorrow, I shall feel otherwise, I shall understand other things; I shall therefore be able to say and do the opposite and still be just as sincere" (a very serious problem, for example, of

fidelity towards the other in the couple). This is the very negation at one and the same time of ethics and or moral existence.

Yet, it is precisely in this state of actuality, of the immediate present, of the obliteration of the words and acts of the past, that propaganda places us. There is no greater obstacle to propaganda than history (continuity of generations) and philosophy (explicative reflection on the experience of events). Propaganda is, therefore, destructive of the possibilities, of the foundations, of the basic premises of ethics. But if I judge it thusly, it is, evidently, because I believe that morality exists only in this process (already mentioned) of rootedness and of reflection or anamnesis.

Finally, the third critical theme, the third criterion of ethics (valid for everyone, for I'm not speaking here specifically of a Christian ethic), is the fact that for me there is no possibility of the building of ethics and moral existence except with reference to others, in dialogue and in reciprocal participation in a common life. All ethics is necessarily an ethics of encounter. One doesn't have a moral behavior alone. And it is the exchange of words which allows me to construct myself on the moral level, while at the same time my words allow the other to behave. Together, we choose an orientation (even if it's a question of breaking off, of separating, of differentiating). Ethics presupposes the interplay of differences without exclusions. It dies when it becomes a rigid law imposed from with-out. The process which permits sociability is the interiorization of the law by the child, but this law is not made up of abstract, objective, anonymous commandments; it can only be acquired and in-teriorized if there is relationship, dialogue, research together and, first and foremost, between the child and his parents. Relationship to the other is creator at the same time of both personality and moral existence.

Yet, we have seen specifically that propaganda sub-stitutes.for this relationship a sort of collectivity, where each person remains completely alone and yet still belongs to a collective mass, where there are no interiorizations of a law, where behaviors stem from an external impetus, from a manipulation of which man re-mains completely unconscious. It is, therefore, by its nature the very opposite of any moral existence; and by this very fact, at least according to the three criteria which I have adopted, it can in no way produce an ethic nor be submitted to an ethic. It is the very opposite of any possible ethic.

Problems in Ellul's Treatment of Propaganda

by Randal Marlin
Randal Marlin is an Adjunct Professor at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. A second edition of his book, Propaganda and the Ethics of Persuasion, *will be published this summer. This article with minor revisions is from Patrick Troude-Chastenet,editor,*

Jacques Ellul, Penseur sans frontieres *(LeBouscat: L'Esprit du Temps, PUF, 2005) 370 pp. ISBN 2-84793-068-0.*

That Jacques Ellul is one of the world's leading thinkers in the area of propaganda becomes clearer with each passing decade. Not only has his book, *Propaganda,* stayed continuously in print, but the output of works taking account of his views continues in a formidable stream. What is special about his approach to the subject is the way in which it becomes incorporated into a whole vision of the human being, with all the material and spiritual needs connected with that being. So we find Ellul exploring not just the most extreme and obvious forms of propaganda such as can be found in Nazi tyranny, but also the myths widespread in nominally democratic societies. These myths, of progress, happiness, work, race, the hero, and suchlike, operate on a broader spectrum than merely the political, but they can also diminish human freedom. Witness the person who struggles to keep up payments on the fancy car, which was purchased out of a false sense of the happiness it would bring.

Ellul's most valuable contributions to the study of propaganda include his notion of pre-propaganda, meaning the dissemination and acceptance of certain myths or general assumptions that are especially useful for the purpose of mobilizing human action. Another is his classification of propaganda into eight different types, consisting of two opposed sets of four groupings. The first set readily encompasses what is easily recognized as propaganda: the political, vertical, agitative, and irrational forms. The second set is less readily so recognized: the sociological, horizontal, integrative, and rational forms. Particularly with the movement of deconstruction, it has become clearer over the decades how minds have been manipulated through the use of various strong images, deliberately fostered to create affinities or aversions to some authority, policy, or commercial product. Various symbols create feelings of national pride and serve to integrate a population to the nation-state. Other symbols can fuel hatreds of other people and can foment wars. Ellul has put us on guard against seemingly rational facts and figures when these are presented in a form that does not allow for proper analysis, so that the rational form gives way to an irrational effect in a given audience. Much has already been written in appreciation of Ellul's contributions to propaganda theory, and as I have intimated his contribution is of immense and enduring value. He has spotlighted the phenomenon of modern technological society, with the self-augmentation of different applications of "la technique" and the misplaced faith in the power of politics, science, law and economic activity to solve our problems. As with all genuinely creative thinkers who deal extensively with difficult subjects, there are problems with his theory, and I believe it will be rewarding to focus on these problems both as a means of clarifying inherent and inescapable difficulties, or as a means of finding solutions where such exist.

The problems fall into two categories. The first is that of interpretation. It is not difficult to find inconsistencies between what he says about the phenomenon of propaganda and the way in which he defines the term. How should we react to these inconsistencies? Is this careless thinking? Can his ideas be re-expressed in ways that

avoid inconsistency? The second problem concerns the ethics of propaganda. In a nut-shell, he sometimes treats propaganda as amoral, at other times as immoral. Yet he also feels that under some circumstances propaganda cannot be avoided. Can we derive from all that he says about the subject of propaganda some ethical norms and clear guidance as to how one should deal with the pervasive phenomenon of propaganda in our time?

Before attempting to answer these questions it is appropriate to describe the overall purpose and plan in Ellul's writings. He was not an ivory-tower academic. He wrote for general as well as academic audiences, and he seems to have tailored his language carefully to his different audiences, in true rhetorical style. If Ellul had one single mission, it was to liberate his contemporaries and perhaps future readers as well, from the many, sometimes subtle, ways in which human beings are enslaved. In true Christian fashion, he does not divide the world into one evil group that wants to dominate a good group. As Camus wrote, we all carry the plague within us, and if people are enslaved by propaganda, it is partly because they want to be. So he has importantly drawn attention to the fact that the modern human being, cut loose from so many family, religious and community ties, is looking for some kind of security anchor and finds it by fitting in with the mass consciousness shaped by the current media. Ellul's aim is to shake his contemporaries out of the passive frame of mind, and he does this with various tropes of language. To persuade and give dispassionate analysis are two different things, each of which has ethical pluses and minuses. Which should be uppermost will generally depend on circumstances. Because his writings engage with his readers, tropes suitable for persuasion sometimes take precedence over the philosopher's demands for consistency. Perhaps that is one reason why Ellul preferred not to call himself a philosopher, and seemed to think. like Emerson, that a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds. But if a consistent theory can be constructed which incorporates both the theoretical and pragmatic aspects of his writings, then there will be a better basis for theoretical evaluation of his work.

Consistency of Definition and Intepretation

I turn now to the problem of consistency, starting with the problem of definition. An example is the following: Ellul defines "propaganda" as a "means of gaining power by the psychological manipulation of groups or masses, or of using this power with the support of the masses" (Larousse, *La Grande Encyclopedie*, 1975, p. 9888), yet his discussion of the phenomenon of propaganda appears to extend the boundaries of the concept so-defined. It's not clear, for example, that sociological propaganda is always disseminated for the specific purpose of manipulating the masses to acquire or maintain power. This may be one reason why he distances himself, in *Propaganda,* from the project of defining the term., saying in the Preface "I will not give a definition of my own here" (xii).

Some of his statements about propaganda have definitional implications that are at odds with both his stated definition and some of his discussions of the subject. He writes: "Propaganda must be total" in a context where he is not just saying that

propaganda will be more effective if it is total. For he continues with "The propagandist must utilize all of the technical means at his disposal..." and "There is no propaganda as long as one makes use, in sporadic fashion and at random, of a newspaper article here, a poster or a radio program there.." (9). My point is that psychological manipulation of the masses can be partial in its means and in its effect and still contribute to the gaining of power, thus satisfying the definition. I think most of us would concede, for example, that Michael Moore's documentary film Fahrenheit 9/11 can be viewed in some of its aspects, as propaganda (even though it exposes a lot of propaganda on the "other side," and might on balance be better described as counter-propaganda).

The principle of charity in interpretation requires us to look for the best possible resolution of apparent contradictions. One explanation is that Ellul operates with different understandings of "propaganda" in different contexts. He himself has allowed that "propaganda" has a broad and a narrow sense (xiii). He also makes reference to "extreme propaganda" (11) when he refers to Nazi or Soviet propaganda. So it makes sense that when talking about the impact propaganda has on the human psyche, he should have in mind propaganda that is pervasive. A second reason why he should make statements about the necessity for propaganda being total is that he has his eye on the everexpanding political and commercial public relations specialists, spin-doctors, advertisers and the like. As with "la technique" generally there is an inherent expansionist tendency.

So there is an Aristotelian and Hegelian component to his definition, one which looks organically at a phenomenon, projecting how it will develop according to its inherent nature. Its nature is such that it is impelled toward total domination of the human psyche. This explanation is also applicable to another oddity in Ellul's treatment of propaganda: his claim that modern propaganda is totally different from persuasion in previous centuries. Surely, it might be said, Aristotle's treatment of rhetoric deals with some of the basic ideas governing propaganda as well. Differences there surely are, but they are not "total." Not so, on this interpretation of Ellul. There really is a striking difference, in that the ancient rhetorician might want to praise a person or promote a policy, but was not bent on reconstituting another person's whole mind. By contrast, modern technological society shows a remarkable convergence of the political, ideological and commercial as Disney takes over the news and McDonald's engages in myth-making, as its Ronald character rivals Santa Claus for recognition by young children. Were it not for the power of the Internet I suspect that the whole myth about saving Private Jessica Lynch might have gained acceptance instead of being repudiated as it was in the end.. Art and entertainment have become commercialized and politicized. Ellul was right about the direction in which propaganda was headed.

On this interpretation, Ellul does not have to deny that devious presentations, sly presentation of facts an imagery, are propaganda. All he needs to say is that while these are usefully designated as manifestations of propaganda, they don't reveal propaganda in its essence, which is expansionist and totalitarian. Put another way, one might consider misleading presentations aimed at gaining power over large audiences

to fit the definition of propaganda as commonly conceived, but in saying this an important reality about propaganda becomes, to use Heideggerian terms, covered over. In trying to uncover the truth about propaganda, Ellul looks more profoundly into the phenomenon as it has existed with the advent of modern industrial civilization.

Other questions questions connected with Ellul's definition remain, but are not especially difficult to resolve. Are propagandists necessarily power hungry? For Ellul it is important to distinguish between the Christian message as propounded by crusaders seeking wealth and glory, from that disseminated by monks at Cluny who believed their message would lead to liberation of souls from slavery to false values. The latter is not propaganda for Ellul. Other propaganda theorists would demur, either because they accept a definition according to which propaganda is value neutral (thus including both) or because they believe that sincerity and belief in an influence as liberating is not sufficient to disqualify persuasive communication from being propaganda (thus also including both, but not by reason of value neutrality). The case of the sincere Nazi can be adduced. My attitude on these questions joins Ellul's where he observes (xii) that there is simply no agreed upon definition of propaganda. How one defines the term, explicitly or implicitly, may vary according to the context and circumstances of a given communication. A person should use the word with caution. One who describes certain materials as propaganda, meaning it in a neutral sense, may convey the wrong message to an audience that believes propaganda is inescapably tied to wrong-doing.

On the Ethics of Propaganda

More formidable still is the question of the ethics of propaganda, about which Ellul again seems to have had views of contradictory import. Propaganda is opposed to human freedom. On the face of things, this should make it wrong. Yet Ellul appears in places to accept that propaganda is amoral. It isn't immoral, it just is, he claims. Supporting this position is his view that propaganda is necessary in the modern world. Without, so far as I know, him spelling out the reasoning, there are philosophical arguments that can support this position. If we follow Kant and his "ought" implies "can," along with its modus tollens that "cannot" implies that there is no "ought," (meaning for example that I'm not obliged to jump into deep water to save a drowning person when I cannot swim) then necessity frees us from a moral obligation. If I have no option but to engage in propaganda then I can't be blamed for doing so.

This view is very problematic, both as an interpretation of Ellul's overall considered view, and as an account of the truth about the ethics of propaganda. For example, Kant's stated views about lying might lead us to question whether "we have no option" when it comes to engaging in propaganda. It is hard to accept that Ellul would dissociate propaganda completely from morality. He has made it clear that propaganda, considered in its entirety, is deeply antithetical to human freedom. So one would think that a proper ethical stance should not be to dismiss it as amoral, but rather to expose it and thereby detoxify its pernicious effects. Since propaganda on one side of an issue generates counter-propaganda on the other side, any foray into it should be governed by principles akin to those applicable to so-called just wars. "Dirty hands"

ethics requires one to limit such activity to the minimum necessary to accomplish a just objective, and to seek at the same time to offset the bad effects of one's own norm-violations when the opportunity arises.

In my conversation with Ellul (in 1980), he appeared to agree with this. As an example, he thought that the French government might have offset Nazi propaganda in France in the late 1930s by subsidizing those Leftist publications in France that were foundering with the victory of Franco. These publications were the natural rallying grounds for anti-Nazi feeling in France and with help would have kept alive an important source of opinion formation there, and provided greater support for resistance to Hitler during the period of the "phoney war" before the May Blitzkrieg. Supporting groups who freely express themselves would be less intrusive on freedom than the government directly imposing its own viewpoint upon the public. In calculating the effects of a government engaging in propaganda, one would need to factor in the likelihood of a discounting effect if the source of this propaganda were to be known to the public. The result of this factoring would likely be a need for an increase of propaganda to counter that discounting.

How then do we account for his statement that propaganda is amoral? The resolution to this exegetical question can be convincingly found in his article, "The ethics of propaganda: propaganda, innocence, and amorality" (*Communication* 6 (1981): 159-175; reprinted in this issue of the *Ellul Forum*), where he makes it clear from the beginning that he thinks propaganda is profoundly related to morality, or more precisely (I would add) to immorality. At the conclusion of that essay, he sketches the nature of ethics and moral existence, maintaining that these are only possible "with reference to others, in dialogue and in reciprocal participation in a common life. All ethics is necessarily an ethics of encounter." Ethics requires the "interplay of differences without exclusions" and it "dies when it becomes a rigid law imposed from without." Yet propaganda "substitutes for this relationship a sort of collectivity, where each person remains completely alone and yet still belongs to a collective mass, where there are no interiorizations of a law, where behaviors stem from an external impetus, from a manipulation of which man remains completely unconscious." (174-5). So propaganda appears to be the antithesis of morality. Why not, then, call it immoral?

One answer to why he chooses not to treat propaganda as simply immoral is connected to the definitional question dealt with earlier. If we think of propaganda as something total and pervasive, which in its essence, in Ellul's view, it is, then we need to take into account that it incorporates its own moral system. It becomes an ideological system impervious to critique from without. If we compare it to a legal system it is like the basic norms which form the constitution. The constitution can be changed, but legally only within the structure and norms provided by the constitution itself. The system which propaganda imposes, bearing in mind that the propaganda is total, contains its own morality with it, whether we speak of Communism, Nazism, or any other highly propagandized societies, whether theocracies or technique-dominated liberal and commercial democracies.

That being the case the propagandized system cannot be effectively criticized on the basis of moral philosophies which do not accept the premises of that system. It would be like going to a court of law in the United States and arguing on the basis of Soviet legal practice. To take another pertinent analogy, the propaganda system is like one of Kierkegaard's three spheres of existence. Within each sphere the argumentative base cannot be effectively argued against from the standpoint of one of the other spheres. The aesthete's ideological framework is insulated from the ethical, and the ethical from the religious. One is tempted to say that the relation to Kierkegaard's spheres of existence is not just analogical: propaganda institutes its own ethical sphere. Even a theocracy when established by propaganda negates true faith, which in its essence involves free embracing of beliefs. One recalls Kierkegaard again, and his statement that the truth established by 10,000 yelling men becomes by the means of its dissemination the very opposite of truth.

This account seems to me one way to satisfy the exegetical problem. Ellul believes propaganda to be the reverse of morality, but he can call it amoral insofar as he recognizes that like absolute monarchs and God it is above the law which it imposes. This or that propaganda system is in play, with the consequent morality that it establishes, and any critique based on opposing values will simply not get a hearing, assuming it could even find a way of expressing itself. (If I may be permitted a political aside here I notice that in the presidential debates the idea that the United States should forgo any claim to Iraq's oil so as to prove the purity of its intentions in invading Iraq simply is not raised. The underlying premise of the need for continued U.S. dominance of the world is not subject to debate.)

But this is not the whole story. Traditional thinking about immorality links us with intentional wrong-doing, the deliberate transgression of moral norms. There is room also for wilful blindness, recklessness and negligence. But so-called invincible ignorance has been held to remove the stigma of guilt. Ellul's message is often to the effect that we are deceived, not necessarily through our fault, about the effects of technology ("la technique" more precisely) and of propaganda on ourselves. So that would be a different reason for treating propaganda as amoral. But it is not a reason that can persist in cases where invincible ignorance turns into wilful blindness, and Ellul's efforts help to bring about such a transformation.

When we come to pass from the exegetical question to the substantial question about the ethics of propaganda, then I believe we need to make adjustments to the Ellulian account. We do have freedom of expression, though it is curtailed or devalued by many different influences coming from concealed sources. Among the competing propagandas we still have the freedom to pursue our different faiths with their spiritual and moral messages. From that moral dimension, we can indeed treat propaganda as antithetical to morality, and immoral for that very reason. As Ellul himself says, echoing St. Augustine, the good end does not justify the bad means; rather the means chosen tells us something about the ends and are not to be separated from those ends (recall also Camus on this point).

If we return to the idea that not all of what we term propaganda is total, and that what goes by that name does not always exclude respect for the freedom and integrity of the other, then we have a basis for evaluating each propaganda exercise in its context on a case-by-case basis. What Ellul would have us do is think about the danger of, for example, shortcuts to persuading mass audiences, and to concentrate on the phenomenon of propaganda as a whole, in the context of modern technological society.

I believe that the reason he did not take the case-by-case approach is that he was acutely aware of the imperviousness of his audience, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, to arguments based on moral principles. Positivism was still a reigning influence. To reach and affect an audience, appeal to scientific arguments were needed. By claiming to eschew morality, and by setting up propaganda as an amoral phenomenon to be analysed scientifically, he had exactly the right approach to gain a sympathetic hearing. The moral message comes through in that book , though somewhat problematically, and it helps to have his elucidation in 1981 to reinforce that message. It is a message that bears pondering as we confront a world where the leader of a country with the most powerful military weaponry wants to spend huge amounts to expand its technological capabilities while his opponent would like to expand scientific stem cell research to combat illnesses. In neither case are the moral implications thoroughly confronted in the public debate, and the power of various myths, of freedom, progress and the like, appear once again to be uppermost. Without presuming the answers to these policy matters, one can at least recognize the poverty of the discourse in which they are presented to the public.

Semantics and Ethics of Propaganda

by Jay Black

Jay Black is Poynter-Jamison Professor of Journalism Ethics Emeritus at the University of South Florida-St. Petersburg. He is Editor of the Journal of Mass Media Ethics. *This is an abbeviated version of an essay orginally pubished in the* Journal of Mass Media Ethics, *16: 2-3 (200l): 121-137.*

Early Approaches to Propaganda

One implication of the term propaganda, when it was first used in the sociological sense by the Roman Catholic Church, was to the spreading of ideas that would not occur naturally, but only via a cultivated or artificial generation. In 1622, the Vatican established the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, to harmonize the content and teaching of faith in its missions and consolidate its power. As Combs and Nimmo maintained (1993, p. 201), this early form of propaganda was considered by the Church to be a moral endeavor.

Over time the term took on more negative connotations; in a semantic sense, propaganda became value laden, and in an ethical sense, it was seen as immoral. In 1842 W. T. Brande, writing in the Dictionary of Science, Literature and Art, called propaganda something "applied to modern political language as a term of reproach to secret associations for the spread of opinions and principles which are viewed by most governments with horror and aversion" (Qualter, 1962, p. 4).

Following World War I, R. Wreford (1923) maintained that propaganda had retained its pejorative connotations as "a hideous word" typical of an age noted for its "etymological bastardy" (Qualter, 1962, p. 7). At that time, the forces of propaganda, public relations, and psychological warfare had become inextricably intertwined in the public's mind. Social scientists and propaganda analysts, strongly influenced by models of behaviorism, tended to depict a gullible public readily manipulated by forces over which it had little control (Institute for Propaganda Analysis, 1937; Lee & Lee, 1988). This depiction offended humanists and progressives who feared propaganda as a threat to democracy and saw public enlightenment through education as the best defense against the inevitability of propaganda (see Michael Sproule, 1989 & 1997). In 1929, for instance, Everett Martin wrote (p 145):

Education aims at independence of judgment. Propaganda offers ready-made opinions for the unthinking herd. Education and propaganda are directly opposed both in aim and method. The educator aims at a slow process of development; the propagandist, at quick results. The educator tries to tell people how to think; the propagandist, what to think. The educator strives to develop individual responsibility; the propagandist, mass effects. The educator fails unless he achieves an open mind; the propagandist unless he achieves a closed mind.

In a 1935 book, Leonard Doob drew a further distinction between education and propaganda by saying that

If individuals are controlled through the use of suggestion . . . then the process may be called propaganda, regardless of whether or not the propagandist intends to exercise the control. On the other hand if individuals are affected in such a way that the same result would be obtained with or without the aid of suggestion, then this process maybe called education, regardless of the intention of the educator. (p. 80).

Harold Lasswell (1927) offered the first attempt to systematically define propaganda to assure some degree of validity and reliability in studies of the phenomenon. Propaganda, Lasswell wrote, is "the control of opinion by significant symbols, or, so to speak, more concretely and less accurately, by stories, rumors, reports, pictures, and other forms of social communications" (p. 627). A year later George Catlin (1936) defined propaganda as the mental instillation by any appropriate means, emotional or intellectual, of certain views. He said the "instillation of views may be animated by no strong sense of moral or political urgency," and that "it may amount to little more than the distribution of information, public acquaintance with which is advantageous to the institution concerned" (pp. 127-128). The 1930s and 1940s saw propaganda's definitions reflecting social science's struggles between behaviorism (the "stimulus response"

model) and a more value neutral stance. At the same time, propaganda was applied to increasingly broad categories of social and political phenomena.

Edgar Henderson (1943) proposed that no definition of propaganda can succeed unless it meets several requirements: (a) it must be objective; (b) it must be psychological, or at least sociopsychological, rather than sociological or axiological; (c) it must include all the cases without being so broad as to become fuzzy; (d) it must differentiate the phenomenon from both similar and related phenomena; and (e) it must throw new light on the phenomenon itself, making possible a new understanding of known facts concerning the phenomenon and suggesting new problems for investigation (p. 71). Given these criteria, Henderson claimed previous definitions fell short, and proposed that "propaganda is a process which deliberately attempts through persuasion-techniques to secure from the propagandee, before he can deliberate freely, the responses desired by the propagandist" (p. 83).

Doob (1948) defined propaganda as "the attempt to affect the personalities and to control the behavior of individuals toward ends considered unscientific or of doubtful value in a society at a particular time" (p. 240). Doob employed propaganda in a neutral sense "to describe the influence of one person upon other persons when scientific knowledge and survival values are uncertain," indicating that "propaganda is absolutely inevitable and cannot be exorcised by calling it evil-sounding names" (1948, p. 244).

Past Half Century

Following World War II, propaganda was often defined in accordance with constantly shifting perspectives on political theory and the processes / effects and structures / functions of mass communication. Some scholars, such as Alfred McClung Lee (1952), stubbornly held to earlier models of humanity-as-victim when defining propaganda as something that was vivid, emotional, and attempted to override common sense. Increasingly, however, as media and organized persuasion enterprises in and of themselves were seen to have diminished mind-molding influences, definitions (and, we presume, fears) of propaganda softened.

Many of the midcentury explorations of propaganda considered the phenomenon in terms of the totality of persuasive characteristics of a culture or society. More recently, definitions have incorporated concerns about subtle, long-term but difficult to measure media effects. Also, many modern approaches to the subject have allowed that propaganda need not necessarily be deliberately and systematically manipulative of consumers-cum-victims, but may merely be the incidental by-product of our contemporary technological and/or information society.

Terrence Qualter, in his 1962 book on propaganda and psychological warfare, called propaganda

The deliberate attempt by some individual or group to form, control, or alter the attitudes of other groups by the use of the instruments of communication, with the intention that in any given situation the reaction of those so influenced will be that desired by the propagandist. (p. 27)

Qualter (1962) argued that the phrase "the deliberate attempt" was the key to his concept of propaganda, because, as he claimed, he had established "beyond doubt" that anything may be used as propaganda and that nothing belongs exclusively to propaganda. The significance, he said, was that any act of promotion can be propaganda "only if and when it becomes part of a deliberate campaign to induce action through the control of attitudes" (p. 27).

French social philosopher Jacques Ellul (1964, 1965), whose ideas have significantly informed the propaganda research agenda in recent decades, held a sophisticated view construing propaganda as a popular euphemism for the totality of persuasive components of culture. Ellul (1965) saw a world in which numerous elements of society were oriented toward the manipulation of individuals and groups, and thereby defined propaganda as "a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization" (p. 61). Propaganda performs an

indispensable function in society, according to Ellul (1965):

Propaganda is the inevitable result of the various components of the technological society, and plays so central a role in the life of that society that no economic or political development can take place without the influence of its great power. Human Relations in social relationships, advertising or Human Engineering in the economy, propaganda in the strictest sense in the field of politics—the need for psychological influence to spur allegiance and action is everywhere the decisive factor, which progress demands and which the individual seeks in order to be delivered from his own self. (p. 160)

Although recognizing the significance of the traditional forms of propaganda utilized by revolutionaries and the heavy-handed types of propaganda employed by despots and totalitarian regimes—"agitation" and "political" propaganda, Ellul (1965) focused more on the culturally pervasive nature of what he called "sociological" and "integration" propaganda. What Ellul (1965) defined as "the penetration of an ideology by means of its sociological context" (p. 63) is particularly germane to a study of mass media persuasion. Advertising, public relations, and the culturally persuasive components of entertainment media are all involved in the "spreading of a certain style of life" (p. 63), and all converge toward the same point.

In a sense, sociological propaganda is reversed from political propaganda because in political propaganda the ideology is spread through the mass media to get the public to accept some political or economic structure or to participate in some action, whereas in sociological propaganda, the existing economic, political, and sociological factors progressively allow an ideology to penetrate individuals or masses. Ellul (1965) called the latter a sort of persuasion from within, "essentially diffuse, rarely conveyed by catchwords or expressed intentions" (p. 64). He added that it is instead "based on a general climate, atmosphere that influences people imperceptibly without having the appearance of propaganda" (Ellul, 1965, p. 64). The result is that the public adopts new

476

criteria of judgment and choice, adopting them spontaneously, almost as if choosing them via free will—which means that sociological propaganda produces "a progressive adaptation to a certain order of things, a certain concept of human relations, which unconsciously molds individuals and makes them conform to society" (Ellul, 1965, pp. 63-64). In contemporary society this is "long-term propaganda, a self-reproducing propaganda that seeks to obtain stable behavior, to adapt the individual to his everyday life, to reshape his thoughts and behavior in terms of the permanent social setting" (Ellul, 1964, p. 74)

It is significant to point out that those who produce sociological or integration propaganda often do so unconsciously, given how thoroughly (and perhaps blindly) they themselves are invested in the values and belief systems being promulgated. Besides, if one is an unintentional "integration" propagandist merely seeking to maintain the status quo, one's efforts would seem to be prima facie praiseworthy and educational. However, when considering propaganda as a whole, Ellul (1981) concluded that the enterprise was pernicious and immoral—a view shared by many but not all other students of the subject. Ellul (1981) argued that pervasive and potent propaganda that creates a world of fantasy, myth, and delusion is anathema to ethics because (a) the existence of power in the hands of propagandists does not mean it is right for them to use it (the is-ought problem); (b) propaganda destroys a sense of history and continuity and philosophy so necessary for a moral life; and (c) by supplanting the search for truth with imposed truth, propaganda destroys the basis for mutual thoughtful interpersonal communication and thus the essential ingredients of an ethical existence (Combs & Nimmo, 1993, p. 202; Cunningham, 1992; Ellul, 1981, pp. 159-177; Johannesen, 1983, p. 116).

Persuasion researcher George Gordon's (1971) eclectic definition of propaganda suggested that most teachers and most textbooks, except those involved in teaching abstract skills, are inherently propagandistic. (In his chapter on "Education, Indoctrination, and Training," Gordon argued that one failure of the American educational system is that there is not enough propaganda in the lower grades, and too much in graduate schools.)

John C. Merrill and Ralph Lowenstein (1971) published the first mass media textbook in the modern era that seriously analyzed propaganda and its employment in media. The authors generalized that from the numerous definitions of propaganda they had read they discerned certain recurring themes or statements or core ideas, among them "manipulation," "purposeful management," "preconceived plan," "creation of desires," "reinforcement of biases," "arousal of preexisting attitudes," "irrational appeal," "specific objective," "arousal to action," "predetermined end," "suggestion," and "creation of dispositions" (pp. 221-226). They concluded:

It seems that propaganda is related to an attempt (implies intent) on the part of somebody to manipulate somebody else. By manipulate we mean to control—to control not only the attitudes of others but also their actions. Somebody (or some *group*)—the

propagandist—is predisposed to cause others to think a certain way, so that they may, on some cases, take a certain action. (p. 214)

Notwithstanding the work of Gordon, Merrill, and a few others whose textbooks containing observations about propaganda were published in the 1970s, an honest appraisal of propaganda scholarship shows a void of what Cunningham (2000) called "front-line academic research" between the 1950s and early 1980s. Cunningham (2000) went so far as to call propaganda a "theoretically undeveloped notion" during that period, and lauded the recent Ellulian-motivated resurgence of propaganda scholarship (p. 2). Some of that recent research and commentary (see especially Combs & Nimmo, 1993; Edelstein, 1997; Jowett & 0' Donnell, 1999; Pratkanis & Aronson, 1992; Smith, 1989) has painted propaganda with a wider brush that covers the canvas of media, popular culture, and politics, and posits that propaganda need not necessarily be as systematic and purposive as earlier definitions demanded. Indeed, the likelihood of unconscious or accidental propaganda, produced by unwitting agents of the persuasion industry, makes the ethical analysis of contemporary propaganda ever more intriguing.

Consider only a few of the most recent definitions and discussions of propaganda (Cole, 1998). Ted Smith (1989), editor of *Propaganda: A Pluralist Perspective,* called propaganda "Any conscious and open attempt to influence the beliefs of an individual or group, guided by a predetermined end and characterized by the systematic use of irrational and often unethical techniques of persuasion" (p. 80). Jowett and O' Donnell (1999) recently echoed that perspective, calling propaganda "The deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (p. 279). In Smith's (1989) edited volume Nicholas Burnett (1989) defined propaganda simply as "discourse in the service of ideology" (p. 127).

Pratkanis and Aronson (1992), in *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion*, used the term propaganda to refer to "the mass per-suasion techniques that have come to characterize our postindustrial society," and "the communication of a point of view with the ultimate goal of having the recipient of the appeal come to 'voluntarily' accept this position as if it were his or her own" (p. 8). Media scholar Alex Edelstein, in his 1997 book *Total Propaganda: From Mass Culture to Popular Culture,* said "old propaganda" is traditionally employed by the government or the socially and economically influential members in "a hierarchical mass culture, in which only a few speak to many"(p. 5). It is intended for "the control and manipulation of mass cultures" (p. 4). He contrasts this with the "new propaganda" inherent in a broadly participant popular culture "with its bedrock of First Amendment rights, knowledge, egalitarianism, and access to communication" (p. 5).

Social Psychology of Propaganda

Scholarly analyses of propaganda tend to focus on either the political or semantic/ rhetorical nature of the beast. An equally intriguing set of insights has been offered by social psychologists, concerned as they are with the nature of belief and value systems

and the various psychological needs that a phenomenon such as propaganda tends to fulfill. Until recently, philosophers have been noticeably absent from the fray.

Throughout the 20th century, various schools of sociology and psychology (and, recently, the hyphenated pairing of the two) have concluded that propaganda is produced and consumed by individuals with particular sociopsychological characteristics. What Ellul (1965) has described as sociological and integration propaganda has been the focus of their attention, as it is ours.

The past half-century's concerns over media propaganda have been based on the often stated assumption that one responsibility of a democratic media system is to encourage an open-minded citizenry—that is, a people who are curious, questioning, unwilling to accept simple pat answers to complex situations, and so forth. Mental freedom, the argument goes, comes when people have the capacity, and exercise the capacity, to weigh numerous sides of controversies (political, personal, economic, etc.) and come to their own rational decisions, relatively free of outside constraints.

Open and Closed Mind

A growing body of research on perception and belief systems seems to be concluding that individuals constantly strive for cognitive balance as they view and communicate about the world, and that individuals will select and rely on information consistent with their basic perceptions. This holds true for mass media practitioners as well as for their audiences. A *Journalism Quarterly* study by Donohew and Palmgreen (1971), for instance, showed that open-minded journalists underwent a great deal of stress when having to report information they weren't inclined to believe or agree with because the open-minded journalists' self-concepts demanded that they fairly evaluate all issues. Closed-minded journalists, on the other hand, underwent much less stress because it was easy for them to make snap decisions consistent with their basic world views—especially because they were inclined to go along with whatever information was given to them by authoritative sources (Donohew & Palmgreen, 1971, pp. 627-39, 666).

Social psychologist Milton Rokeach (1960), in his seminal work *The Open and Closed Mind*, concluded empirically that the degree to which a person's belief system is open or closed is the extent to which the person can receive, evaluate, and act on relevant information received from the outside on its own intrinsic merits, unencumbered by irrelevant factors in the situation arising from within the person or from the outside (p. 57). To Rokeach (1960), open-minded individuals seek out sources (media and otherwise) that challenge them to think for themselves rather than sources that offer overly simplified answers to complex problems. Open-minded media consumers seek independent and pluralistic media because they value independence and pluralism—even, on occasion, dissonance—in their own cosmology, interpersonal relationships, and political life. Closed-minded or dogmatic media consumers, on the other hand, seek out and relish the opposite kinds of messages, taking comfort in simplified, pat answers (usually relayed by "authoritative sources"), in conformity, in a world in which the good guys and the bad guys are readily identifiable, in which there is a simplistic and direct connection between causes and effects (Rokeach, 1954, 1960, 1964).

Belief Systems and Media Propaganda

One of the dominant themes in media criticism for much of the past half century or so has been the tendency of media to mitigate against open-mindedness. Recent assessments reinforce the 1922 lamentations of Walter Lippmann concerning the stereotypical pictures in the heads of people, the incomplete reflections of political, economic, and social reality from which individuals make choices and public opinion is produced. If people lack time, opportunity, and inclination to become fully acquainted with one another and with their environment, it is only natural for them to act as Rokeach's (1954, 1960, 1964) dogmatic, closed-minded media consumers—prompted and fulfilled by media whose stock in trade is production of such public opinion-molding propaganda.

There is, of course, an argument that people need media to provide them with predigested views because they can't experience all of life first-hand. By definition, media come between realities and media consumers, and we are certainly not arguing for the elimination of those media. (Some have noted that online media and the Internet may appear to eliminate the mediating, and hence propagandistic, function of traditional media, but that argument falls when one considers that a prime reason to use new media is to pander to self-interest and to reinforce preexisting prejudices.)

The logic of Ellul (1965) is compelling in this regard, as he argued that people in a technological society need to be propagandized, to be "integrated into society" via media. As Ellul (1965) saw it, people with such a need get carried along unconsciously on the surface of events, not thinking about them but rather "feeling" them. Modern citizens, Ellul (1965) concluded, therefore condemn themselves to lives of successive moments, discontinuous and fragmented—and the media are largely responsible. The hapless victims of information overload seek out propaganda as a means of ordering the chaos, according to Ellul (1965). If our nature is to eschew dissonance and move toward a homeostatic mental set, the crazy quilt patterns of information we receive from our mass media would certainly drive us to some superior authority of information or belief that would help us make more sense of our world. Propaganda thus becomes inevitable.

Most of the foregoing emphasizes the propagandee's belief system, showing parallels between dogmatic personality types and the "typical" propagandee. Not much of a case has been made to maintain that propagandists themselves possess the basic characteristics of the dogmatist, but there is much evidence suggesting that communicators who are intentionally and consciously operating as propagandists recognize that one of their basic tasks is to keep the minds of their propagandees closed. The conscious propagandists can operate most successfully by raising themselves above their messages and goals, conducting propaganda campaigns as a master conductor plays with an orchestra. (As Eric Hoffer, 1951, reminded us, Jesus was not a Christian, nor was Marx a Marxist [p. 128]). Unconscious propagandists are another matter; they may have unconsciously absorbed the belief and value system that they propagate in their daily integration or socialization propaganda. Their unexamined propagandistic lives

reflect a cognitive system that has slammed shut every bit as tightly as the authorities for whom they blindly "spin" and as the most gullible of their propaganda's recipients.

As Donohew and Palmgreen (1971) implied, it appears to be very difficult and stressful for both media practitioners and media consumers to retain pluralistic orientations. If people are not undergoing any mental stress, it may be that they aren't opening their minds long enough to allow discrepant information to enter. This is not to say that stress and strain in and of themselves make for open-minded media behavior. They may just make for confusion and result from confusion. However, if media personnel and audiences never find themselves concerned over contradictory information, facts that don't add up, opinions that don't cause them to stop and think, then they are being closed-minded purveyors and passive receivers of propaganda.

Propaganda Revisited

At this juncture, insights from propaganda analysts, media critics, social psychologists, and semanticists can be amalgamated into reasonably objective insights into the propagandistic nature of contemporary society. The insights can be applied to the producers of propaganda, the contents of propaganda, and the consumers of propaganda.

The emerging picture of progandists / propaganda / propagandees and their opposites, as uncovered by the preceding discussions, reveals several definite patterns of semantic/belief systems/ethical/and so forth behavior. Note that on one hand the dogmatist (typical of propagandist and propagandee, and revealed in the manifest content of propaganda) seeks psychological closure whether rational or not; appears to be driven by irrational inner forces; has an extreme reliance on authority figures; reflects a narrow time perspective; and displays little sense of discrimination among fact/inference/value judgment. On the other hand, the nondogmatist faces a constant struggle to remain open-minded by evaluating information on its own merits; is governed by self-actualizing forces rather than irrational inner forces; discriminates between and among messages and sources and has tentative reliance on authority figures; recognizes and deals with contradictions, incomplete pictures of reality, and the interrelation of past, present, and future; and moves comfortably and rationally among levels of abstraction (fact, inference, and value judgment).

The preceding typologies help lead us to an original synopsis of propaganda, one meeting the criteria laid down by Henderson in 1943. It is sociopsychological, broad without being fuzzy, differentiates propaganda from similar and related phenomena, and sheds new light on the phenomena. In addition, it describes the characteristics of propagandists, the propaganda they produce, and propagandees—something sorely lacking in most other definitions. The synopsis is as follows:

Although it may or may not emanate from individuals or institutions with demonstrably closed minds, the manifest content of propaganda contains characteristics one associates with dogmatism or closed-mindedness. Although it may or may not be intended as propaganda, this type of communication seems noncreative and appears to have as its purpose the evaluative narrowing of its receivers. Whereas creative communication accepts pluralism and displays expectations that its receivers should conduct

further investigations of its observations, allegations, and conclusions, propaganda does not appear to do so. Rather, propaganda is characterized by at least the following six specific characteristics:

1. A heavy or undue reliance on authority figures and spokespersons, rather than empirical validation, to establish its truths, conclusions, or impressions.

2. The utilization of unverified and perhaps unverifiable abstract nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and physical representations rather than empirical validation to establish its truths, conclusions, or impressions

3. A finalistic or fixed view of people, institutions, and situations divided into broad, all-inclusive categories of in-groups (friends) and out-groups (enemies), beliefs and disbeliefs, and situations to be accepted or rejected in toto.

4. A reduction of situations into simplistic and readily identifiable cause and effect relations, ignoring multiple causality of events.

5. A time perspective characterized by an overemphasis or underemphasis on the past, present, or future as disconnected periods rather than a demonstrated consciousness of time flow.

6. A greater emphasis on conflict than on cooperation among people, institutions, and situations.

This synopsis encourages a broad-based investigation of public communications behavior along a propaganda -nonpropaganda continuum. Practitioners and observers of media and persuasion could use this definition to assess their own and their media's performance (Black, 1977-1978). The definition applies to the news and information as well as to entertainment and persuasion functions in the media. Many criticisms of the supposedly objective aspects of media are entirely compatible with the aforementioned standards. Meanwhile, because most people expect advertisements, public relations programs, editorials, and opinion columns to be nonobjective and persuasive, if not outright biased, they may tend to avoid analyzing such messages for propagandistic content. However, because those persuasive messages can and should be able to meet their basic objectives without being unduly propagandistic, they should be held to the higher standards of nonpropaganda. (For what it's worth, persuasive media that are propagandistic, as defined herein, would seem to be less likely to attract and convince open-minded media consumers than to reinforce the biases of the closed-minded true believers, which raises an intriguing question about persuaders' ethical motives.)

Conclusions

We are not suggesting that the necessity for mediating reality and merchandising ideas, goods, and services inevitably results in propaganda. Far from it. Yet we do suggest that when there is a pattern of behavior on the part of participants in the communications exchange that repeatedly finds them dogmatically jumping to conclusions, making undue use of authority, basing assumptions on faulty premises, and otherwise engaging in inappropriate semantic behavior, then we can say they are engaging in propaganda. They may be doing it unconsciously. They may not be attempting to propagandize, or even be aware that their efforts can be seen as propagandistic, or

know that they are falling victim to propaganda. It may just be that their view of the world, their belief systems, their personal and institutional loyalties, and their semantic behaviors are propagandistic. But this doesn't excuse them.

It is sometimes said, among ethicists, that we should never attribute to malice what can be explained by ignorance. That aphorism certainly applies to propaganda, a phenomenon too many observers have defined as an inherently immoral enterprise that corrupts all who go near it. If instead we consider propaganda in less value-laden terms, we are better able to recognize ways all participants in the communications exchange can proceed intelligently through the swamp, and we can make informed judgments about the ethics of particular aspects of our communications rather than indicting the entire enterprise.

It is possible to conduct public relations, advertising, and persuasion campaigns, plus the vast gamut of informational journalism efforts, without being unduly propagandistic. In a politically competitive democracy and a commercially competitive free enterprise system, mass communication functions by allowing a competitive arena in which the advocates of all can do battle. What many call propaganda therefore becomes part of that open marketplace of ideas; it is not only inevitable, but may be desirable that there are openly recognizable and competing propagandas in a democratic society, propagandas that challenge all of us— producers and consumers—to wisely sift and sort through them.

A fully functioning democratic society needs pluralism in its persuasion and information, and not the narrow-minded, self-serving propaganda that some communicators inject—wittingly or unwittingly—into their communications and which, it seems, far too many media audience members unconsciously and uncritically consume. Open-mindedness and mass communications efforts need not be mutually exclusive.

References

Black, J. (1974). *General semantics, belief systems, and propaganda: Interrelationships in journalism.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri, Columbia.

Black, J. (1977-1978). "Another perspective on mass media propaganda." *General Semantics Bulletin*, 44/45, 92-104.

Brande, W. T. (1842). "Propaganda." *Dictionary of science, literature and art.* London.

Burnett, N. (1989). "Ideology and propaganda: Toward an integrative approach." In T.J. Smith III (Ed.), *Propaganda: A pluralistic perspective* (pp. 127-137). New York: Praeger.

Catlin, G. E. G. (1936). „Propaganda as a function of democratic government." In H. W. Childs (Ed.), *Propaganda and dictatorship: A collection of papers.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Cole, R. (Ed.). (1998). *The encyclopedia of propaganda.* Armonk, NY: Sharpe.

Combs, J. E., & Nimmo, D. (1993). *The new propaganda: The dictatorship of palaver in contemporary politics.* White Plains, NY: Longman.

Cunningham, S. (1992). "Sorting out the ethics of propaganda." *Communication Studies*, 43, 233-245.

Cunningham, S. (2000, October). "Responding to propaganda: An ethical enterprise." Paper presented at Colloquium 2000 in Applied Media Ethics, Park City, UT.

Donohew, L., & Palmgreen, P. (1971). "An investigation of 'mechanisms' of information selection." *Journalism Quarterly* 48, 627-639, 666.

Doob, L. W. (1935). *Propaganda, its psychology and technique.* New York: Holt.

Doob, L. W. (1948). *Public opinion and propaganda.* New York: Holt.

Edelstein, A. (1997). *Total propaganda: From mass culture to popular culture.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Ellul, J. (1964). *The technological society.* New York: Vintage.

Ellul, J. (1965). *Propaganda: The formation of men's attitudes.* New York: Knopf.

Ellul, J. (1981). "The ethics of propaganda: Propaganda, innocence, and amorality." *Communication*, 6: 159-177.

Gordon, G. N. (1971). *Persuasion: The theory and practice of manipulative communication.* New York: Hastings House.

Henderson, E. H. (1943). „Toward a definition of propaganda." *Journal of Social Psychology*, 18, 71-87.

Hoffer, E. (1951) *The true believer.* New York: Harper & Row.

Institute for Propaganda Analysis. (1937, November). "How to detect propaganda." *Propaganda Analysis*, I, 1-4.

Johannesen, R. L. (1990). *Ethics in human communication* (3rd ed.). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland.

Jowett, G. S., & O'Donnell, V. (1999). *Propaganda and persuasion* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lasswell, H. D. (1927). "The theory of political propaganda." *American Political Science Review*, 627.

Lee, A. M. (1952). *How to understand propaganda.* New York: Rinehard & Company.

Lee, A. M., & Lee, E. B. (1988). "An influential ghost: The institute for propaganda analysis." *Propaganda Review,* 3, 10-14.

Lippmann, W. (1922). *Public opinion.* New York: Macmillan.

Martin, E. D. (1929). "Our invisible masters." *Forum*, 81, 142-145.

Merrill, J. C., & Lowenstein, R. L. (1971). *Media, messages, and men: New perspectives in communication.* New York: McKay.

Pratkanis, A., & Aronson, E. (1992). *Age of propaganda: The everyday use and abuse of persuasion.* New York: Freeman.

Qualter, T. H. (1962). *Propaganda and psychological warfare.* New York: Random House.

Rokeach, M. (1954). "The nature and meaning of dogmatism." *Psychological Review*, 61: 194-206.

Rokeach, M. (1960). *The open and closed mind: Investigations into the nature of belief systems and personality systems.* New York: Basic Books.

Rokeach, M. (1964). "Images of the consumer's mind on and off Madison Avenue." *Et-cetera*, 31: 264-273.

Smith, T. J., III (Ed.). (1989). *Propaganda: A pluralistic perspective.* New York: Praeger.

Sproule, J. M. (1989). "Social responses to twentieth-century propaganda." In T. D. Smith (Ed.), *Propaganda: A pluralistic perspective* New York: Praeger. pp. 5-22.

Sproule, J. M. (1997). *Propaganda and democracy: The American experience of media and mass persuasion.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Wreford, R. J. R. G. (1923). "Propaganda, evil and good." *The Nineteenth Century and After.* XCII: 514-24.

Advert: Change of Address?

Re-Viewing Ellul

Histoire de la Propagande

Jacques Ellul
Presses universitaires de France (Que sais-je?), 1967. 2nd ed. 1976. 128 pp.
Reviewed by Randal Marlin
Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

This immensely useful, highly compact historical study of propaganda somehow never made it into English translation, but perhaps that situation will one day be remedied. The book is a classic, in the sense that one can revisit it thirty years later and still find insights newly applicable to changing historical circumstances. His earlier *Propaganda* shared this feature and continues to sell well today, more than 40 years after first publication. Ellul's *Histoire de la Propagande* was published in 1967 by P.U.F. as part of its *Que Sais-Je* series, with a second edition appearing in 1976. The series put a premium on highly concise, well-organized writing and Ellul delivers superbly well.

The book spans a European time frame from Ancient Greece to World War I, giving us many stimulating and sometimes provocative judgments along the way. As he defines propaganda for purposes of his study, it involves the sum of methods used by a political or religious power (he doesn't include commercial communication) with a view to obtaining ideological or psychological effects. Was Greek tragedy propaganda? It might have helped mould Hellenic identity and thereby shape political power, but he sees it as more existentially than politically motivated. Pisistratus on the other hand qualifies as propagandist with his false news, creation and exploitation of victim status, and portrayal of himself as under Athena's special protection –an early version of "God on his side."

He traces propaganda from Roman imperial times through the rise of Christianity to the development of the nation state, the French revolution, and the postrevolutionary need to address the general population. Propaganda in the fullest sense he links to the arrival of modern means of mass communication and the ability, first seen in the Soviet Union, of sustained and more or less total control of communication by a centralized body.

Ellul is very careful to distinguish politically motivated discourse and action, which he includes as propaganda, from that which is driven by religious or other motivations.

Some crusades were the result of propaganda, others not. Histories can be propaganda, as when the history of a crusade was written in such a way as to stimulate another.

What is freshly relevant? In a passage with uncanny resemblance to what some people see transpiring in the current U.S. situation under President George W. Bush, Ellul writes how Rome originally appealed to other peoples not only by its administrative efficiency, but also by virtue of its democratic and liberating character, its overthrow of tyranny, and its goal of making people responsible for themselves. But just at the time when Roman virtues were fading and freedom disappearing, the myth about these things was expanding. In my moments of pessimism I also anticipate that Ellul's sharp observations about Inquisition propaganda may have special application in years ahead, if they have not already done so.

The Humiliation of the Word

Jacques Ellul,
Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985. xiii, 285 pp. Translated by Joyce Main Hanks from
La Parole humiliee (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1981)
Reviewed by Russell Heddendorff
Professor Emeritus of Sociology,
Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, Georgia

In this book, Ellul returns to a theme first presented in *The Presence of the Kingdom*; communication loses the meaning it had in Creation as it is dominated by the technical. This is because words are humiliated as they are devalued by media and people are denied the truth they were promised. Gradually, these broken promises have led to a broken humanity.

The dominant influence of technology in our modern world has led to this confusion of reality and truth. The meaning of Creation is inverted as we come to believe that truth is found in the image rather than in the word. For this reason, we give priority to seeing the image rather than hearing the word. The result has been "the triumphal progress of the image and the regression of the word in our society."

Ellul does not intend a complete condemnation of images. Rather, his concern is for the distortion of the place images have assumed in modern communication. Words have been "humiliated" by images when they are considered necessary for the proper interpretation of the word. Thus, we affirm the belief that a picture is worth a thousand words. Although Ellul tries to distance himself from the role of a prophet, his understanding clearly anticipates the increased influence of technological control of images and, consequently, the control of people who accept the reality conveyed by the image.

Ellul claims the unique value of language lies in truth which is created by the word and is not limited by public opinion. For this reason, the word has iconoclastic and

paradoxical power while the image becomes idolatrous as it conforms to opinion. There is no mystery in the image and the Wholly Other no longer exists. Ultimately, there is a struggle between "religions of sight" and the "proclamations of the Word", a struggle which favors the former in a culture controlled by technology.

With this struggle, Ellul returns to the important distinction he makes in his work between "created reality" (the Word) and "constructed reality" (the image.) It is a struggle between the artificiality of man's work expressed in culture and the transcendent quality found in God's work expressed in dialogue. And it is in the paradoxical quality of language that the Word "is true to itself when it refers to Truth instead of Reality."

It is as "the Creator, founder, and producer of truth" that the word finds its most important expression and provides the speaker with a "call to freedom." This freedom is possible because the second most important characteristic of the word is that it is paradoxical; it always falls outside of accepted opinion and calls that opinion into question. It is this paradoxical quality which produces the final characteristic of the word; the fact that it is mystery whenever it transcends the assumptions about God or the person and we hear an "echo, knowing that there is something more."

Ellul reminds us that the struggle between image and word is not new; for centuries, the Church has allowed sculpture and glass to arouse religious imagination. But the intended mystery has been replaced by efficacy as images replaced the word in piety and theology. Paradoxically, the Church, as an institution, stimulated the humiliation of the word and the negation of Christian faith. With an emphasis on visible reality, "the illusion of images becomes our ultimate reference point for living."

This illusion has become so dominant in our culture that "the image-oriented person" now relies on an intellectual process that depends more on emotion than reason. Facts are grasped because of intuition, not logic. Consequently, reality is defined in terms of the image so that "whatever is not transmitted audiovisually does not matter."

Ellul is characteristically hopeful despite the pessimism he brings to the problem of modern communication. The image and word may be reconciled but not with any reliance on technology. Rather, there must be an iconoclastic spirit which separates the image from any claims to truth. Further, language must remain open; "it must remain susceptible of being newly filled with unexpected content." In this way, language "permits a continual adventure." And it is in this adventure that Ellul finds the hope that will move us to a genuinely religious dialogue of man with God.

In Review

Perspectives on Culture, Technology and Communication: The Media Ecology Tradition edited by Casey Man Kong Lum

(Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc., 2006).

Reviewed by J. Wesley Baker Professor of Communication Arts, Cedarville University, Cedarville, Ohio

The thought of Jacques Ellul is most often ignored in the fields of communication and media studies. The few references to him in that literature tend to be dismissive, writing him off as a pessimistic technological determinist based upon a reading of the most familiar of his sociological analyses. It is refreshing, then, to find a group of communication and media scholars who consider Ellul to be "one of their own" and who have a good grasp of the whole of his work—sociological and religious. In this collection of essays, edited by Professor Casey Man Kong Lum of William Paterson University, Ellul is embraced as one of the seminal thinkers whose writings contributed to the development of media ecology as a way of understanding media. This embrace is not surprising when one considers that the eclecticism in sources and unorthodoxy in methodology which leave Ellul at the fringes of media scholarship mirror media ecology's "pulling together likeminded ideas and theories from disparate academic disciplines under one roof" (pp. 22-23) in a conscious "revolt against . . . the dominant paradigm in communication" (p. 25).

Lum is among a small group of scholars uniquely positioned to write and edit a volume on media ecology because of his work as a graduate student at New York University with Neil Postman (to whom he credits the naming of the approach) and his close involvement in the development of media ecology as a branch of communication studies in its own right (he was one of the five founders of the Media Ecology Association). His introductory chapter, "Notes Toward an Intellectual History of Media Ecology," provides both an introduction to the approach and a history of its development. Since this "intellectual tradition" largely developed through the Media Ecology program at NYU under Postman, it may be unfamiliar to those who are unfamiliar with that program. Lum's essay thus provides an important contribution in chronicling the emergence of media ecology. "This book was conceived," Lum explains, "to give the readers a general historiographic framework for understanding some of the

issues, theories, or themes, as well as some of the major thinkers behind them that define the paradigm content of media ecology as a theory group and an intellectual tradition" (pp. 38-39).

Lum's introduction is followed by twelve chapters that "focus on a short list of media ecology's foundational thinkers and some of the key theoretical issues they share" (p. 39). Postman's important contribution is recognized in a chapter that publishes remarks he originally delivered as a keynote address to the first convention of the Media Ecology Association. The next set of chapters tend to follow the same structure: provide a "brief intellectual biography" of one of the theorists, then explain the "themes or theories" of that writer and how they contribute to the media ecology tradition (p. 40). Mumford, Ellul (covered in two chapters), Innis, McLuhan, Postman, Carey, and Worf and Langer each receive this treatment. The next two chapters are more integrative as the organizing principle changes from intellectual biographies to communication epochs—Orality & Literacy and Typography. In a short final chapter, Lum describes the current state of the media ecology tradition and suggests future directions for it as a theory group.

The rationale for two chapters on Ellul illustrates the degree to which the media ecologists (unlike most other media scholars) understand Ellul's dialectic approach. Randy Kluver of Nanyang Technological University in Singapore focuses on Ellul's sociological works while Ellul Forum Editor Clifford Christians examines how those sociological works relate to his theological writings.

Although Kluver concentrates on the sociological works, he does not present the kind of limited reading of Ellul that comes from those who have read only those works. His explication of la technique and propaganda are informed by a solid understanding of Ellul's theology and his citations include the less read works in which Ellul more explicitly describes what he is about and how his works are in interplay. While Kluver's review will go over familiar ground for most readers of The Ellul Forum, it is refreshing to find such a well-informed and balanced approach to Ellul finding circulation to a wider audience. His section "Criticisms of Ellul and His Work" clearly lays out four common criticisms of Ellul and thoughtfully counters each. He points out the adverse effect the clash in methodology and orientation between the "social scientific bent" of the field and Ellul's "humanistic, critical approach" has on an understanding of Ellul (p. 111). Kluver also rejects the characterization of Ellul as a pessimist and a technological determinist by drawing from the religious works in which Ellul argues that a "realistic" view from outside the technological system provides an opportunity for hope. Kluver is weakest in dealing with the criticism that Ellul's negative treatments of la technique "don't correspond with our positive responses to technology" (p. 111). Here he tries to extrapolate a position from his assumption that "Ellul, undoubtedly, made use of the best medical technology he could when he was ill" and that he "used the modern media system to disseminate his own writings" (p. 111). Kluver's argument would be bolstered by some statements from Ellul that suggest a tentatively positive view of the potential of "microcomputers" and the networked communication they provide for local groups

of citizens. If networked personal computers could be used for decentralized decision-making, Ellul suggested, they could be "a tool which will allow the society to transform itself." (Interestingly enough, Ellul makes this assessment in an interview published in Etc., A Review of General Semantics, in 1983—when Postman was serving as editor.) Kluver's "Suggestions for Further Exploration" provide suggestions that resonate with the Forum's purpose of "carry[ing] forward both [Ellul's] sociological and theological analyses in new directions."

While Kluver provides an overview of Ellul's thought, Christians plumbs the depths of the personal and intellectual roots that inform that thought. His essay and Kluver's, he notes, enable "readers of this anthology to evaluate Ellul in the terms he himself has specified" (p. 119). Christians chronicles how Ellul's conversion first to Marxism and shortly thereafter to Christianity set up the sociological and theological poles for his dialectic to be dealt with in counterpoint and never reconciled. He then develops Ellul's "theology of confrontation" in The Meaning of the City (which served as a counterpoint to The Technological Society) (p. 120). From there Christians moves to the impact of Karl Barth's neo-orthodoxy on Ellul, with its theme of freedom and "biblical dialectic" of "both the No and the Yes of God's word over the world" (p. 124).

The depth of Christians' work in human intellectual history are revealed in his discussion of Ellul's development of la technique and the triumph of means. Here Christians looks to Galileo as the figure that establishes the materialist assumptions of modern science which privilege empiricism as the test of truth, severing science from philosophy and "relegat[ing] all supernaturalism to the fringes of human experience" (p. 126). Christians then develops in much greater detail what Kluver had time to only touch upon—the "revitalization" (p. 128) that a religious perspective makes possible. But Ellul's Christian understanding of the effects of the Fall sets up yet another dialectic—between "necessity" and "freedom" (p. 131). In order to break free of the triumph of the means and necessity, desacralization of la technique is necessary. Once again, what Kluver introduces Christians is able to develop more thoroughly— those who "attack Ellul's pessimism fail to realize that his vigorous desacralization is but one element in a larger perspective, the first step in a longer journey" (p. 133). Christians ties together the threads developed over the course of the essay to show how they offer a hope that such desacralization is possible through a "spiritual reality" (p. 133).

In terms of presenting an intellectual biography of Ellul, Kluver and Christians combine to provide a full and rich understanding of him. Kluver provides more of an overview and summary, while Christians develops this understanding in a way that is often limited to volumes that are dedicated exclusively to a study of Ellul. In terms of making connections between Ellul and the development of the media ecology analysis, Kluver is much more specific. Christians deals with Ellul's connections with Mumford and McLuhan briefly (and often on general points rather than the media in particular; see esp. pp. 119 & 126-127) and provides an even briefer discussion of Postman and Innis (p. 134). Kluver, on the other hand, has a section headed "Ellul and Media Ecology" (pp. 106-110) in which he does much more to explicate the connections. He identifies

three points of connection between Ellul and McLuhan, Postman, Innis, Mumford and Ong. The first is agreement on "the ubiquity of media and its necessary degeneration into propaganda" (p. 108). The second is the common "emphasis on technology as the defining characteristic of modern society" (p. 108). The third is "the issue of the word, or the means of different technologies of communication" (p. 108), which Kluver develops in some detail. The difference in the directness of connections to media ecology is also reflected in the conclusions at which each of the two authors arrive. While Kluver bemoans the "absence of response to Ellul" (p. 114) by media scholars and suggests specific ways in which Ellul's analysis could be incorporated into media scholarship today, Christians concludes more generally, arguing that "Ellul's explicitly Christian framework" (p. 135) "must meet the standard of religious diversity to be credible" (p. 136).

The essays in this volume suggest the opportunity for Ellul scholars to find a sympathetic and interested audience among media ecologists. One disappointment is that that has not already occurred to a greater degree. Amidst all of the discussion of Ellul, there is only one reference to an article from the Forum—and that was an article dealing with Mumford, rather than Ellul—even though articles that could inform a greater understanding of Ellul's thought and analysis have appeared in the Forum. Conversely, I don't recall having read anything in the Forum that indicated the

degree to which Ellul's ideas form a part of this school of media studies. It is to be hoped that the essays in this volume will help encourage further dialog and provoke continued scholarship that accomplishes the Forum's goals.

Digital Matters: The Theory and Culture of the Matrix

by Paul A. Taylor and Jan Harris
(Routledge, 2005), 210 pp.
Reviewed by David J. Gunkel
Associate Professor of Communication,
Northern Illinois University. dgunkel@niu.edu

Digital Matters: The Theory and Culture of the Matrix is one of those books where the title says everything. In the first place, *digital matters* is a deliberate oxymoron, pregnant with ambiguity. It denotes, on the one hand, a concern with the subject matter of digital technology and culture. And in indicating this, the phrase inevitably calls to mind the essential immateriality that has been the subject of so much theorizing about new media technology and computer systems. Being digital, as individuals like Nicholas Negroponte have argued, is all about a transformation from the antiquated culture and slow-moving economy of atoms— large, heavy, and inert masses—to a new

world of weightless and ephemeral bits of information that circulate through global networks at the speed of light.

On the other hand, *digital matters* can also be interpreted in a much more literal and material sense. In this way, the title names the inescapable and often ignored material circumstances (e.g. the working and living conditions of individuals involved in chip manufacturing, the unequal distribution of and access to information technology, the environmental impact of toxic waste from discarded IT components) that make the digital and its utopian promises of immateriality possible in the first place. *Digital Matters* is a book that not only plays on this double meaning but, most importantly, demonstrates how and why the material conditions of digital technology do in fact matter for all things digital. In this way, the book identifies and critically examines techno-culture's *im/materiality*, a neologism introduced by Taylor and Harris in order to name and give expression to this complex issue.

Second, the subtitle deploys and trades on the polysemia that has accrued to the word "matrix." Clearly the immediate reference for many readers will be the Wachowski brother's cinematic trilogy, not just because of the films' popularity but also because of the numerous academic books and articles that have offered interpretations of the narrative's social and philosophical significance. *Digital Matters*, although employing these popculture materials as a recognizable point of departure, does not mount a direct critical assault on the film and its interpretations. Instead Taylor and Harris address the trilogy indirectly by investigating the larger cultural and theoretical matrices that already inform, animate, and structure the im/material ideology that is articulated by this particular techno-myth.

For this reason, *Digital Matters* understands and deploys "matrix" in the full range of its multifarious meanings, including: environment that shapes, supporting structure of organic form, signal transposition, and the place of reproduction. Understood in this way, Taylor and Harris's investigation can be categorized as an innovative and more sophisticated articulation of *media ecology*, where media technology does not just frame new social environments but innovations in technology are also situated in and informed by a socio-cultural matrix that already shapes and informs technical developments. In other words, *Digital Matters* tracks down and examines both the social and cultural material in which digital technology has developed and the very real social and cultural environments that this immaterial information helps to create.

In order to get at this, Taylor and Harris marshal an impressive array of theorists, many of whom are not usually considered part of the official pantheon of cyberstudies and new media technology. Instead of concentrating on the work of selfstylized techno-theorists like Lev Manovich, Nicholas Negroponte, N. Katherine Hayles, et al., Taylor and Harris turn their critical eye toward Jacques Ellul, Martin Heidegger, Friedrich Kittler, Michel de Certeau, and Walter Benjamin. This is not just an exercise in "old school" theorizing. Instead Taylor and Harris demonstrate how these thinkers' ideas already structure our understanding of digital technology and how they might be re-purposed to introduce innovative methods for critically rewiring the matrix of our

technological present. Consequently, *Digital Matters* does not simply apply, for example, Ellul's work to digital technology, but opens up a critical dialogue between Ellul's theorizing and contemporary media *praxis* that has the effect of transforming both. In the final analysis, *Digital Matters* is a remarkable book that pushes the envelope in new media theory. It should be of interest to anyone concerned with media, technology, and contemporary theory.

Advert: International Jacques Ellul Society

www.ellul.org

P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705, USA IJES@ellul.org Tel/Fax: 510-653-3334

The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

Board of Directors

Mark Baker, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno; Patrick Chastenet, University of Poitiers; Clifford Christians, University of Illinois; Dell DeChant, University of South Florida; Andrew Goddard, Oxford University; Darrell Fasching (Vice-President), University of South Florida; David Gill (President), Berkeley; Joyce Hanks, University of Scranton; Virginia Landgraf, American Theological Library Association, Chicago, Randall Marlin, Carlton University, Ottawa, Ken Morris (Secretary-Treasurer), Boulder; Carl Mitcham, Colorado School of Mines; Langdon Winner, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

Anyone who supports the objectives of the IJES is invited to join the society for an annual dues payment of US$20.00. Membership includes a subscription to the Ellul Forum.

The Word of Jacques Ellul

by David W. Gill
President, International Jacques Ellul Society
"In the sphere of the intellectual life, the major fact of our day is a sort of refusal, unconscious but widespread, to become aware of reality. Man does not want to see himself in the real situation which the world constitutes for him. He refuses to see what it is that really constitutes our world. This is true especially for intellectuals, but

it is also true for all the people of our day, and of our civilization as a whole" (*Presence of the Kingdom* (1948), p. 99).

We live in a world of shadows and myths, Ellul says, oscillating back and forth between the particular and the general, both of which poles are detached from reality. On the one hand, there are particular phenomena, "facts," which come at us like a tsunami. News bites, slogans, bits and pieces of information, survey numbers, a flood of images: this is our normal environment. But it is a world of shadows because these "facts" have no connection to a past or present, and rarely are they verified by our own lived experiences and relationships. In fact, they are a distraction and substitute for lived experiences and relationships.

But people cannot navigate through this flood of images and shadows without seeking some kind of interpretive help. Our psychological survival requires it. And this is where the "explanatory myth" comes in. Ellul mentions the popular post-WWII "bourgeois myth of the Hand of Moscow" (exhibited in the American McCarthy era) and the "Fascist myth of the Jews," among others.

In today's USA, the myth of "the Liberals" (the source of all evil) is embraced by millions; the myth of the "Religious Right" is embraced by others. The myths of technological salvation, of consumer happiness, and of global free market capitalism have great power alongside the myths the advertising and entertainment industries play on. The myth provides a ready-made, simple framework for evaluating all bits of information that one encounters.

One of the most remarkable insights of Ellul's *Propanda* is that propaganda does not just foist lies and falsehoods on its target audiences. It mobilizes its audiences to embrace and act upon accepted "facts" and the orientation of their mythologies. Propaganda plays on prejudices, it doesn't just create them.

We need to remember Ellul's challenge to the intellectual classes here: this vulnerability to drowning in shadows and being misled by myths is not just a problem of couch potato cable television watchers, Google-happy celebrity gossip addicts, and check-out counter tabloid purchasers. It is not just a problem for dazed worshippers listening to ranting Elmer Gantrys.

Propaganda is everyone's challenge, including IJES members and friends. So Ellul writes that "the first duty of a Christian intellectual today is the duty of awareness: that is to say, the duty of understanding the world and onself . . . in their reality" (*Presence of the Kingdom,* p. 118). And this challenge is certainly not confined to Christians.

Ellul gives us a fivefold strategy to get past the blur of shadowy images and the lure of dehumanizing explanatory myths. *First*, he says, is "a fierce and passionate destruction of myths." "Myth-buster" is our first role. It's about raising critical, uncomfortable questions, questioning authority, leaving the "Amen Corner" of our own enclaves, profaning what has been exalted to sacred status in our society, and fulfilling a more critical/constructive role.

But we must not be satisfied with an exclusively negative stance and strategy. The *second* move is "the will to find objective reality, to discover the facts of the life led by the people who surround me" (p. 119). Not shadows, not abstractions, but reality. The will not just to deconstruct and demythologize but to penetrate past the shadows and myths to reality—that's the second step.

Third, this reality of our civilization must be grasped on the human level. We don't just seek to understand what life is like for a generic "neighbor" but for our actual "neighbor Mario," Ellul writes, a man with flesh and blood, a face and a name. The implications are very clear: let's get out of our ivory towers and spend time with the people. Let's get to know our actual neighbors, the people we work with, our students, even those we may think of as our enemies. Any time any of us prefers to treat a colleague through a stereotype or image, rather than actually get to know that person through two-way conversation and common experiences, we are yielding to the veil of ignorance, which begets fear, which begets conflict . . .

The *fourth* part of Ellul's counsel is to look at "present problems as profoundly as possible . . . to find, behind the facts presented to us, the reality on which they are based . . . the true structure or framework of our civilization" (p. 121). Ellul sometimes used the metaphor of the ocean: the surface waves can be so mesmerizing that we fail to look at the great maincurrents below which are the real drivers in the occurrence of storms and surface events.

Faithfully reading "McNews" or watching the bits or pieces of CNN/HNN, or similar activities, isn't going to take us to the deeper awareness of social reality. Among the strategies are reading more history, seeking longer, deeper analyses of topics, learning other languages and listening to what others outside of our linguistic, cultural, philosophical, vocational enclave have to say. It's about depth, breadth, and comparative perspectives. It takes time and reflection.

This is where Ellul's writings have such a brilliant and unique impact: he takes us toward an understanding of the maincurrrents of our civilization (concerning technique, the state, propaganda, the sacred, etc.) and also in biblical studies (dialectic, the city, money, hope, freedom, etc.).

The *fifth* element is an "engagement (or act of resolute commital" (121). We are not done when we write our books or give our speeches. We must act upon the truth in the reality of our neighborhood—or we are still part of the problem.

Resources for Ellul Studies

www.ellul.org & www.jacques-ellul.org The IJES web site at www.ellul.org contains (1) news about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, (4) a complete index of the contents of all *Ellul Forum* back issues; and (5)

links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The new French AIJE web site at www.jacques-ellul.org is also a superb resource.

The Ellul Forum CD: 1988-2002

The first thirty issues of *The Ellul Forum*, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for US $15 (postage included). Send payment with your order to "IJES," P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

Back issues #31 - #36 of *The Ellul Forum* are available for $5 each (postage and shipping included).

Cahiers Jacques Ellul

Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne

An essential annual journal for students of Ellul is *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, edited by Patrick Chastenet, published by Editions L'Esprit du Temps, and distributed by Presses Universitaires de France Send orders to Editions L'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Postage and shipping is 5 euros for the first volume ordered; add 2 euros for each additional volume ordered.

Volume 1: "L'Annees personnalistes" (15 euros)

Volume 2: "La Technique" (15 euros)

Volume 3: "L'Economie" (21 euros).

Volume 4 (forthcoming): "La Propagande" (21 euros).

Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. $87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit www.elsevier.com for ordering information.

Librairie Mollat—new books in French

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux (www.mollat.com) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

Alibris—used books in English

The Alibris web site (www.alibris.com) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

Used books in French:

two web resources

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are www.chapitre.com and www.livre-rare-book.com.

Reprints of Nine Ellul Books

By arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of several Ellul books originally published by William B. Eerdmans can now be purchased. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: *The Ethics of Freedom* ($40), *The Humiliation of the Word* ($26), *The Judgment of Jonah* ($13), *The Meaning of the City* ($20), *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* ($19), *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* ($28), *The Subversion of Christianity* ($20), and *The Technological Bluff* ($35). *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul* translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

Have your bookstore (or on-line book dealer) "back order" the titles you want. Do not go as an individual customer to Eerdmans or Ingram/Spring Arbor. For more information visit "Books on Demand" at www.eerdmans.com.

Ellul on Video

French film maker Serge Steyer's film "Jacques Ellul: L'homme entier" (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site www.meromedia.com. Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul's ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.

Issue #38 Spring 2006 — The Politics of Jacques Ellul

- Click to view the original PDF

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Contents

"We must try to create positions in which we reject and struggle with the state, not in order to modify some element of the regime or force it to make some decision but, much more fundamentally, in order to permit the emergence of social, political, intellectual, or artistic bodies, associations, interest groups, . . . totally independent of the state, yet capable of opposing it, able to reject its pressures as well as its controls, and even its gifts. These organizations must be completely independent, not only materially but also intellectually and morally, i.e., able to deny that the nation is the supreme value and that the state is the incarnation of the nation. "
-Jacques Ellul
The Political Illusion (1965; **et** 1967), p. 222

Information on The Editorial Board & More

The Ellul Forum
For the Critique of Technological Civilization
Founded 1988

From the Editors

In this issue of the *Ellul Forum* we barely scratch the surface of a large arena for study: Jacques Ellul on politics and the state. While Ellul is rightly known best for his work on technique/technology, the topic of politics and the state is never far from sight.

The Political Illusion is his best known analysis of modern politics and its illusions. *The Technological Society* had a major section on "Technique and the State," of course. The volumes on propaganda, revolution, violence, and the sociology of religion all address politics and the state at length from one angle or another. The untranslated, multi-volume *Histoire des Institutions* demonstrated Ellul's profound grasp of the history of political ideas and institutions.

The Politics of God, the Politics of Man was Ellul's primary biblical study of politics, focusing on II Kings in the Hebrew Bible. But *Apocalypse*, *Meaning of the City*, and other theological-biblical writings often addressed political topics as well.

Ellul's ethical and other writings emphasize the threat of a growing, technicized state and political milieu. The first task is to understand this reality and dispense with rhetoric and illusions. What is at stake is nothing less than our humanity, individuality, and freedom. For a Christian, the challenge is to recover one's identity as prophetic ambassador of another way of life and truth—and reject all forms of this-worldly political illusion, nationalisms, etc.. And for everyone, it is to recover a life outside the state, outside ordinary politics. Anarchism is the only sufficiently radical strategic position to take, Ellul argues.

We remember Ellul's oft-repeated point that his purpose was to provide his readers with some assistance in figuring out the meaning and direction of their own existence in the world; there is no "Ellulian" orthodoxy in politics. Ellul also loved the Christian theme of "incarnation"—that God comes into a given historical milieu, "appropriates" aspects of the situation, then creates a dialectical contradiction, and finally "expropriates" aspects of the old into a greater new reality.

We are grateful to AIJE President (and IJES Board member), University of Poitiers Professor of Political Science, Patrick Chastenet for his masterful lead article in this issue. Four colleagues offer their personal reflections on how Ellul has affected their politics; and we re-view four of Ellul's important political books.

Next issue (Spring 2007) our focus will be on Ellul's ethics. And we will return to the political topic by 2008.

Clifford G. Christians, Editor editor@ellul.org
David W. Gill, Associate Editor IJES@ellul.org

The Political Thought of Jacques Ellul A 20th Century Man

by Patrick Troude-Chastenet

Patrick Chastenet is Professor of Political Science at the University of Poitiers, founding President of the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul (www.jacques-ellul.org), editor of the annual review Cahiers Jacques Ellul, and author or editor of several books on Jacques Ellul. This article was translated from the French by Eugenia A. Tumanova

We'll start with the banal suggestion that political thought cannot be understood without considering the context which gave rise to it. In the case of Jacques Ellul, this context was at once rich and tragic. The fact that he was born in Bordeaux, on January 6, 1912, might be of interest only to historians. Still, it is tempting to point out that the author of *The Technological Society* was born six months prior to the sinking of the largest ship in the world, considered unsinkable! In its effect on public opinion, the *Titanic* catastrophe, which claimed 2,196 lives, could be easily likened to a kind of aquatic 9/11. The shipwreck occurred at a time when blind faith in technological progress prevailed and was soon to experience its first gory disillusions. As for the rest, Ellul would be witness to two World Wars, the 1929 economic crisis, the Paris riots of February 6, 1934, the Spanish Civil War, the Popular Front, the German Occupation, the Holocaust, the French Resistance, Liberation and purge trials, the Cold War, the French Fourth Republic, the crisis of May 13, 1958, Gaullism in French government, May 1968, the list goes on.

What else should we note, as we probe deeper for elements that may have defined his relationship to political thought, which for now we will temporarily refer to as "detachment through action"[1]?

Since his high-school days, Ellul retained a strong aversion to xenophobic nationalism, the brutal effects of which he saw first-hand. His "cosmopolitan" roots - son of a French-Portuguese mother (*ne* Mendes) and an Italian-Serbian father born in Vienna - made him immune to the virus of nationalism which reigned in those days. At the Law Faculty, where the great majority of his fellow students sympathized with the far right and demanded "France for the French!," his individualism let his disagreement show. Jacques Ellul had been involved with minority movements since the early 1930s, since by that time he was already engaged in the personalist movement (more on that later). He found himself on a search for a middle path between American-style liberal individualism and mass-produced "political soldiers," branded Fascist or Communist, resulting in his well-known decision to never join the ranks of the French Communist Party.

The great economic crisis plunged his family into poverty. In fact, the first time Ellul heard about Marx was at the university in 1929. For young Ellul, Marx's work, which

---

[1] Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Lire Ellul. Introduction a l'oeuvre socio-politique de Jacques Ellul,*

he read voraciously, provided a theoretical explanation for his father's unemployment: capitalism as a factor in crises, a condemnable regime condemned by history. With great enthusiasm, he read *The German Ideology* and established contacts with communist workers which, to his great disappointment, turned out to be more preoccupied with the party line than with Marxist hermeneutics. Thus, Ellul became "Marxian," not "Marxist," in his thinking method. Moreover, he always insisted that Marx was the one who asked the good questions and that he owed a great part of his intellectual development to him (along with Kierkegaard and Barth).

Despite never having joined the Communist Party, he often joined militant socialists and voted for the Popular Front during the 1936 legislative elections (the one and only time in his life he voted). Together with his spouse Yvette and likeminded Bordeaux natives, he helped the Spanish republicans procure weapons, even though he disapproved of the "internal" strife, which pitted the Anarchists against the Communists.

Under the Occupation, when the Strasburg Faculty was moved to Clermont-Ferrand, Ellul criticized Petain. He was denounced to the French police by one of his students, but was ultimately dismissed by the Vichy government because of his father's status as a foreigner under a law that sought to "Frenchify" the French civil service[2]. On his return to Gironde in the summer of 1940, he settled in a small village to do subsistence farming and prepare for university instructor examinations in Roman law. He also aided the Resistance efforts. He hid escaped prisoners and Jewish families in his house, supplied false documents, served as a mailbox for Gironde resistance fighters, and as a guide to the demarcation line located nearby. He maintained contact with the *Combat* movement, whose motto he liked: "From Resistance to the Revolution."

With the Liberation, he presided over several trials of collaborators and worked to keep the purges from leading to any excesses. He was a member of the Bordeaux city council, presided over by the socialist Fernand Audeguil. This experience lasted just six months, from October 1944 to April 1945, but it is essential for understanding his perception of politics. His brief involvement with the Bordeaux city hall permanently left him with the belief that elected officials were at the mercy of "committees," and that political professionals were powerless in the face of technocrats, the influence of the civil service, and the experts. This conclusion explains his frequent absences from public city council meetings (the important decisions were being made elsewhere and earlier!) and his militant abstentionism (what was the point of voting in a system where elected officials did not govern and in which citizens could not exert any control over the decision-making system?).

Although he refused to be on the list of socialist candidates in municipal elections in the spring of 1945, Ellul actively participated in the October 1945 general elections. That was the one and only time when he participated in "politician" politics! He was

---

1992, p. 185.

[2] Jacques Ellul's paternal grandfather was born in Malta and Joseph, Jacques' father, held a British passport.

third on the list of candidates from the Democratic and Socialist Union of the Resistance[3]. He was completely committed to this electoral campaign. The results were not commensurate with the effort he expended. The UDSR won less than 5% of the cast votes and not a single deputy seat. At 33 years of age, he watched helplessly as the old parties of the Third Republic returned to power. This experience left him with a profound sense of defiance vis-a-vis politics, and would later lead him to refuse to be a running mate of Jacques Chaban-Delmas during the Bordeaux city elections of 1947. However, in reality, his distrust targeted (political) power in general, leading him to decline the post of prefect in the Nord department of France. Ultimately, Ellul would choose an oblique path, one he had already picked during his personalist years.

Personalism of the 1930s

Ellul's political thought was deeply influenced by two movements/reviews: *Ordre Nouveau* and *Esprit*. Far from being simple provincial clones of the non-conformist intellectuals in Paris, Ellul and his friend Charbonneau would lead a third trend within the personalism movement. This "Gascon" approach was resolutely half-way between the *Ordre Nouveau* and *Esprit* approaches. When Alexandre Marc writes that Christianity is "the source of all revolutions," Ellul can only acquiesce, which does not mean that the "Bordeaux group" would not make its own voice heard over the personalist hubbub of the 1930s.

This third kind of personalism sought a path between liberal individualism and collective tyranny, between capitalism and totalitarianism. These young bourgeois revolting against the "established disorder" were keenly aware of their position as a "minority within an aged society." Ellul and Charbonneau seemed to be marginal in a movement that in itself was very much a minority. They met Mounier in Paris in 1933 and decided to merge their little group with *Esprit*. With time, they moved closer to the leaders of *Ordre Nouveau* and had a falling out with Mounier in 1937, caused by the latter's centralist authoritarianism and uncompromising Catholicism.

What distinguished them was their belief that the political process is rendered powerless by science and technology: what Bernard Charbonneau called the "Great Shedding" ["la Grande Mue"] and Ellul "Technique." At twenty years of age, they already had that fundamental intuition that would tie together their entire body of work. The two friends would come to represent the most individualist, libertarian, regionalist, federalist, and above all, the most environmentalist faction of the personalist movement. They sought to develop an appreciation of nature in the most concrete sense of the word, to protect diversity, to create households that can lead autonomous lives but remain connected to others through networks.

How? By organizing camps in the Pyrenees. By encouraging regional encounters and building horizontal connections between these small selfmanaged groups. These camps, placed in the natural environment, demonstrated defiance towards Parisian centralism

---

[3] The UDSR was created in June 1945 to unite noncommunist elements of the Resistance. Francois Mitterrand is one notable member.

and were the first practical implementation of that winning slogan: "Think globally, act locally." They stressed the "carnal" aspect of the revolution. They condemned contrived escapes, individual judgment yielding to that of the "crowd" conditioned by propaganda. The authentic revolution must start "inside each individual," revolution of oneself and together with others, a permanent revolution. To change the political regime, first "start by changing people's lives." The true struggle is spiritual in nature, and the political dimension is secondary.

Therefore, the "necessary revolution" does not happen by taking power at the helm of the State, but through the creation—at the local level—of small, self-managed groups, federated amongst themselves. Functioning like counter-societies, within a global society, these exemplary small groups would embody the new social order that needs to be built and would serve as a testament, here and now, to the immediate revolution. Bit by bit, like a contagion, a beneficial virus or a universal *patch*, this from-the-ground-up network would be capable of extending itself beyond national borders destined to disappear off the face of the earth.

Utopian? Nonetheless, from here on Ellul would advocate "down to earth" political realism and daily resistance to the fatalities of modern society. "It is when revolution becomes impossible that it becomes necessary," affirmed Denis de Rougement. This vision is summarized in a 1935 text cosigned by Ellul and Charbonneau: "Directives for a Personalist Manifesto." This manifesto expounds the thesis that made Ellul famous in the United States thirty years later: the powerlessness of politics in the face of the supremacy of technology.

The Primacy of Technique

Differences between political regimes are secondary to the universality of technique. Fourteen years before Heidegger's first lectures on the subject, Ellul already thought that technique and not politics was now at the "heart of things." The ends intersect, even while the means diverge! Heidegger's work included metaphysical questioning of the essence of modern technique, the *Gestell*, the framework, while Ellul proposed a sociological description of the traits of the technical system based on the construction of a Weber-style ideal type.

Technique gives rise to a society characterized by its "fatalities" and its "gigantism"[4]. The fatality of war: technology renders death banal! The fatality of Fascism: the fruit of the marriage of economic liberalism and technology. The fatality of inequality between different levels of production caused by technological progress and urbanization. Gigantism, signifying the concentration of production, capital, the State, and the population. In the modern city, nature's primary needs are replaced with even more oppressive (in-)human constraints. "When man resigns to living in a world not built on a human scale, he is dispossessed of all sense of measure." Put the economy at the service of mankind, not vice versa! Starting from the mid-1930s, Ellul thinks of technology as a

---

[4] P. Troude-Chastenet, « Jaques Ellul: une jeunesse personnaliste », *Revue Francaise d'Histoire des Idees Politiques*, n° 9, 1st semester 1999.

general process and not simply an industrial tool symbolized by the use of mechanization. The Ellulian concept of technology had already gone beyond a simple critique of mechanization as found in Duhamel's *Scenes de la vie future* (1930) and in less grotesque form in Aron and Dandieu, *Le cancer americain* (1931). According to Ellul, technological progress brings about widespread proletarianization, which goes beyond the one-dimensional economic analysis offered by Marx, and affects *all* people as well as *all* aspects of their life. As he will show later in *The echnological Society* (1954; ET 1964), technological progress is characterized by its ambivalence, not by its ambiguity. Technique is ambivalent because it frees as much as it alienates. It creates problems as soon as it resolves them and it feeds off itself through the solutions that it brings. What autonomous growth means is that in the context of a technical society, all human problems are transformed into technical problems and technique creates new problems for which humans try to systematically find technical solutions.

Gradually, Ellul would refine his own definition of technique but *The Manifesto* can be used to not only verify the prophetic aspect of Ellulian theses but also to show that, from the beginning, he was opposed not to technique itself, but to its autonomy. He recommended "reorienting technique" so that difficult tasks could be carried out by the "collective sector" in the form of "civil service." His definition of technique—"the search for methods having absolute efficiency in every field of human activity" —belongs to a historian doubling as a sociologist, not a philosopher. This also means that Ellul is not Heidegger and that he was not opposed to Technique for ontological reasons.

Not only would it be belittling to just call him a "technophobe," but it would also mean refusing to take into consideration the diachronic aspect of his work. In the mid-1930s, was it not Ellul who maintained that technique, which contributed to the rise of Fascism, could also work in the opposite direction and become an instrument of liberation?[5] This point of view was reaffirmed in 1982: "I kept showing that technique was autonomous; I never said that it could not be mastered."[6] Ellul explained how microcomputing provides self-management and council theories with the material means they seek. This new technique could be used to freely coordinate the free work of small self-managed groups which could lead to the creation of alternative networks and the institution of an authentic local democracy.

From the 1930s to the 1980s, reaffirming the primacy of technique over politics remained a constant: "Purely political movements are outdated" (1935). "Politics in its current form has no effect on technique and is perfectly predetermined" (1982). Ellul's thought remained faithful to itself while continuing to perpetually evolve. The adversaries of *Changer de revolution* (technophobes that were more Ellulian than Ellul himself) and those who looked at his work piecemeal, to make it easier to fossilize and to caricature its author as a reactionary writer, did not admit or understand this aspect of him. Which is why the historical element is so important!

---

[5] J. Ellul, « Le fascisme, fils du liberalisme », *Esprit*, n°53, 1[er] fevrier 1937.
[6] J. Ellul, *Changer de revolution*, 1982, p. 224.

From Hitler's Victory to Newfound Hope?

Historically, the combination of totalitarianism and technological power gave rise to the Moloch State. We should never overlook the fact that Ellul was the direct witness of the advent of the Italian Fascist state and of Nazism (before the war he had even attended a Nationalist Socialist meeting in Germany) and was a contemporary of the Communist dictatorships. With regard to technique and the State, Ellul adopted a comparable point of view: "Technique does not enslave us; rather, it is the sacred that is transferred to the technique" (1973). Without the sacred, without this process of divinization that paralyses our critical sense, technique could be made to serve human development. "The State does not enslave us, nor does the police state or the centralized state; rather, it is its sacramental transformation that makes us worship this amalgam of bureaucracy."

For better or for worse, just thirty years later, in 1973, mankind would adore the State, but this assertion should be reinterpreted in light of the paradoxical proposition according to which, ultimately, "Hitler won the war." This statement, at least mildly troubling, coming from a direct

witness doubling as a historian, should not be taken lightly. This is not a statement out of context or a misprint! This observation was first formulated in 1945, then repeated in two successive editions of *The Political Illusion*, and reaffirmed once more in 1987, in *What I Believe*: "Far from disappearing following the victory over Hitler, the Nazi model has spread across the entire world." To say that, is to say that the defeated had literally corrupted the victors. By choosing power, by opting for total war, to fight evil with evil, democracies perverted themselves by betraying their vital principles. Is it irreversible?

"The law of politics is efficiency. The one who wins is not the best, it is the stronges. In a technical world, efficiency becomes the only criterion for government legitimacy." Ellul concludes that in order to resist competition, "one must adopt the adversarial system.. ..Hitler won the war after all!" Hitler showed the way to sacrifice man to the Moloch State, "this was his Satanic mission in the world."[7] To defeat him, the Allies used his own methods. His military undoing masked his political and moral victory. We are inexorably moving toward dictatorship (absolute power of the State, the primacy of the technicians) and toward universal totalitarianism.

In 1945, Ellul saw no political or technical means to stem this movement, which does not mean he advocated apolitism, "the telltale sign of a prefascist mentality." On the contrary, according to him, "what democracy begins in provoking a distaste for politics, a dictatorship brings to completion by eliminating this preoccupation altogether." This somber, if not desperate, vision should be put in perspective by juxtaposing it with another from 1982, found in the last chapter of *Changer de revolution*: "Toward an end of the proletariat?" Undeniably, here he gives the impression of opening a door, when his entire life he was reproached for being the prophet of misfortune, a pessimist puritan

---

[7] J. Ellul, "Victoire d'Hitler?", *Reforme*, June 23, 1945, N°14.

contemptuous of technological progress and modernity in all its forms. A puritan who, by the way, insisted that it was possible to work just two hours per day for thirty years! After having shown how the technical society produced new forms of proletarianization - in addition to Marx's proletariat there was an

"impoverished proletariat" (unemployed, immigrants, fringe elements) and a "cultural proletariat" (the whole population with the exception of the technical aristocracy) - Ellul maintained that not all was lost.

The essence of socialism, that is to say the abolition of the proletariat and the end of alienation, remains the permanent objective, despite the adulterated means used to achieve it until now. Despite the mockeries of it in existence around the world, "socialism is the only possible political direction." But not just any kind! Not that of the regimes, not that of the socialist parties. He wants an ascetic socialism, founded on want and the refusal of the power of technique; socialism of freedom, which is revolutionary at the same time. Ellul is aware that here he is using concepts emptied of their meaning, having devoted two of his works to them, and this chapter provoked rancor and disappointment among many of his readers! Despite it all, he observes the transformations within the technical system and within socialism. In particular, what can politics still do to counter technique?

Politics in Technical Societies

What are the consequences, in the political arena, of the search for efficiency at all costs, of the primacy of the means over the ends? What outcome is provoked by the combination of the existing political system and technical power? In the technical society, people believe technique is serving them and are serving it instead. Modern people have become the instruments of their instruments. The means has been transformed into the end; necessity has been elevated to a virtue! We live not in a "post-modern" society, but in a "technical society," a society where a technical system has established itself. This living society tends to increasingly blend in with the "technical system": the product of the union between technical phenomenon and technical progress. But it should be noted that for Ellul, the technical society cannot be reduced to a technical system and there are tensions between the two. The technical "system" is to the technical society what cancer is to the human organism. The existence of these tensions is what keeps hope alive that change is possible... change that is radical but which would not take the ways of political illusion, meaning, those of traditional politics! He concludes with an anarchist-inspired: "To commit oneself is to indenture oneself"[8]. Partisan political activism has deeper roots in sociological coagulation than in personal liberty.

In the technical society, politics is based on the Necessary and the Ephemeral. Those governing bustle about to preserve the appearance of initiative, which in reality is left to the experts. With marked Weberian undertones, Ellul condemns the rendering useless of politics through the use of bureaucracy. He observes the inversion of the

---

[8] "L'engagement, c'est la mise en gage", J. Ellul, *L'illusion politique*, 1977, p.239.

democratic model where the administration was subject to the authority of elected officials, and where efficiency is now the only criterion for legitimacy. The technical society also confuses the political and social. Everything is political but politics are only an illusion! Politics has supplanted religion; the modern State has taken the place of God! "Everything is politics" expresses both "the ideology and this reality" where the entire social body is absorbed by politics. This politicization of society necessarily leads to State totalitarianism.

The State is totalitarian by its essence, no matter what its form! "The State regulates all aspects of people's lives and decides what is true; it assumes all the functions. It penetrates to the most profound aspects of our consciousness... and it defines what Good is "[9] State power is made more absolute by the fact that it refuses all constraints, whether legal or moral. In fact, not only is the State not subject to Law but it manipulates law as it sees fit.

This systematic defiance towards the State is one of the principal constants of Ellulian discourse. In a technical society, popular sovereignty is but a myth and universal suffrage becomes incapable of selecting good governments and keeping control over their actions. It is also an illusion to believe that people have control over their representatives, just as it is an illusion to believe that elected figures can exert control over the administration and the experts. The technical State is totalitarian by nature, independent of its legal or institutional form and its ideological or political outer skin. At night, it all looks the same! This has been a recurring theme in Ellul's work since the 1930s... This explains his (relative) indifference to the East/West conflict, his refusal to pick one form of dictatorship over another, because *all* regimes pursue identical ends: efficiency and power. In other words, the combination of the modern State and the technical ideology makes politics illusory and also dangerous. Still, far from making a plea in favor of apolitism—just as illusory—which would only reinforce the grip of the State, Ellul's message seeks to rehabilitate the virtues of a personal resistance to Leviathan. For mankind, existing is resisting! Therefore, we should build up the "tensions"—one of the key words in the personalist discourses—and encourage tensions against all attempts at social integration. He concedes that he is reinventing democracy which "has disappeared a long time ago." And this is where we come to one of the most problematic aspects of his relationship with politics.

We can only agree when he insists on the intrinsic fragility of democracy: it is a formidable perpetual conquest, not a "normal, natural, spontaneous regime." But then, although he had always called for a down-to-earth political realism, he repeats the same error as all idealists since Rousseau: due to his exceedingly demanding vision of democracy, he abandons the idea of distinguishing between its empirical manifestations—admittedly imperfect—and perfectly totalitarian regimes. Instead of admitting with R. Dahl that democratic doctrine has a potentially—because never fully realized—revolutionary dimension, or instead of stressing like C. Lefort its essentially indeter-

---

[9] J. Ellul, *Exegese des nouveaux lieux communs*, 1966, p.110.

minate character, its permanent invention, its structural incompleteness, Ellul seems to believe that polyarchies, or pluralist democracies, are masked dictatorships. Even modern democracy itself is found lacking in his eyes!

In reality, what Ellul is very deeply opposed to is violence contained in all forms of political power, including when this violence claims to be legitimate, like that of the modern State according to Weber's realist definition. He would have none of it from either the great German sociologist or from Leon Duguit, the Dean of the Law Faculty in Bordeaux. Ellul refused violence as a specific means, as *ultima ratio*, not only of the State but of politics in general. Politics which, as Weber reminds us once again, has power as its only stake; politics which obeys merciless laws that are dangerous to ignore as an actor and naive to deny as an observer.

Ellul insisted on the catalytic role of the Christians, on this unique role of a sheep among the wolves. Ellul advocated not only non-violence, but also non-power, and he could have never shared Weber's admiration for the character in the *Florentine Tales* that declared that those who preferred the grandeur of their City to the salvation of their souls, should be congratulated. In reality, having turned his back on Weber, Ellul is even further from another illustrious realist: Machiavelli.

For Ellul, it is absolutely impossible to create a just society with unjust means. Evil shall not beget Good, and same goes for politics. Why? Simply because he had placed his faith, once and for all, in the Wholly Other, in the Unknowable, in the revelation of God in Jesus-Christ. For those who find it convenient to ignore the theological side of his work, let us remember that Ellul himself referred to his Christian beliefs in some of his sociology books[10]. Thus, we need to look further in his system of values if we wish to shed light on his relationship with politics. As the authors of *Melanges* justly observed: "The concept of totalitarianism as applied to all States has no meaning for Ellul except in relation to a religious belief."[11]

The Theological Explanation

The metaphysical backdrop to Ellul's political thought takes us in two contradictory directions. We can focus equally on the hostile and pejorative description of this aspect of social activity or on the opposite, the positive role played by Christians in the modern world. This caricature-like vision of politics reduced to all that is underhanded and vain, was put into words during two colloquia and in Ellul's *A Meditation on Ecclesiastes*. "In the Western world of today, politics is the incarnation of the most profound evil." It is "the place of demons, the place of lies, and place of power" (1979). These statements echo others from a year earlier: "the essence of politics remains the same, and I say that in today's world, in these times, it is demonic."[12]

---

[10] Cf. for example the last pages of *Changer de revolution*. Op. Cit.

[11] E. Dravasa, C. Emeri, J-L. Seurin, *Religion, societe et politique, Melanges en hommage a Jacques Ellul*, 1983, p.XIII.

[12] J-L. Seurin notes that in a democracy politics is not reduced to a desire for power but it is also

The modern man finds himself caught in-between. To take refuge in apoliticism, is to accept the State as one's destiny; by losing interest in politics, one plays the game of "the demonic divination of the State." Plunged into militant activism, he is surrounded by rivaling ideologies, that of the "diabolos" of the New Testament or the "divisor", and accentuates "diabolical politics."

Terrorism and Politics

In the same way that the works of Marx could be re-read with the knowledge of the Gulag, Ellul tries to interpret the nature of modern politics through the prism of terrorism in Europe of the 1970s. The terrorists and their methods were not diabolical, by themselves, but politics brought it out of them. Terrorism unveiled what politics had become, here and now. Terrorism expresses absolute hatred of absolute power. Because State power tends toward absolutism the means to fight it cannot remain relative. The political enemy is considered to be like the religious incarnation of Evil. The refusal to discriminate among potential victims is the consequence of identifying the social body with the political body. Everyone is guilty! Collective responsibility, of the class, the race, or the nation! "Over time the indiscriminate moral or theoretical accusation of all necessarily turns into the execution of anyone, for lack of means to kill everyone." Any means are good as long as they are efficient! Terrorism is but a somewhat more brutal expression of the collective credo. "If we recoil in horror before terrorism, we should recoil in horror before our entire politics."

With *La raison d'etre*, we leave the limited scope of the colloquia for what appears to be, to all appearances, the general conclusion of his work[13]. After having spent 50 years of his life examining texts that were rich in meaning, but all too often laconically simple, he picked his words for a final bouquet. And so, what does Qohelet say of political power? That power is always absolute, power is always power, whatever the constitutional form might be, power brings nothing new, and the adage "*vox populi, vox dei*" is not a lie. Power is nothing but malice, injustice, and oppression! The further one goes up the power hierarchy, the worse the people are. Chapter V starts with a long chain of tyranny described by La Boetie in the *Discours de la servitude volontaire.* Power of one man over another makes him unhappy. "The foolishness was placed at the highest summits." Vanity, oppression, foolishness! "*All power* is thus qualified—without reserve and without nuance!"[14]

But, though Ellul had fully integrated the radical pessimism of the Ecclesiastes, he draws no conclusions with respect to human power to invite his readers to turn back from the political path. He only considers it as absolute and relative and stresses that this is not the path to freedom! This is the thesis that he defends in *The Politics of*

searching for an equitable order in P. Troude-Chastenet, *Sur Jacques Ellul*, 1994.

[13] J. Ellul, *La raison d'etre, Meditation sur l'Ecclesiaste*, 1987.

[14] Op. Cit. p. 84. Italics from Ellul.

God, the Politics of Man[15]. The Church is not a spiritual affair and the politics is not devoid of interest for the Christian or for the modern man. Politics is even where the greatest affirmation of man's desire for autonomy manifests itself. The Christian, therefore, should neither become disinterested in it nor make it his chief preoccupation.

The position of Christians in the modern world is necessarily revolutionary. According to Ellul, the despair of modern man arises primarily from the fact that he no longer hears the promise of salvation and recapitulation; the purpose of Christians is precisely to announce the "good news." Thus, Christians are irreplaceable in this world. On one hand, they cannot make this world less sinful; on the other hand, they also cannot accept it as it is. They must permanently live with this tension! Salt of this earth, light of this world, the sheep among the wolves, Christians are the living sign of God's "politics." They must be God's ambassador and be the prophet of the return of Christ[16]. Christians are revolutionary for saving the world whose logical course leads inexorably towards suicide. They belong to two Cities that can never coincide. They are active in this world and at the same time are citizens of another kingdom. All the human solutions are temporary and marked with sin; Christians find themselves in a permanent revolutionary state, because they must tirelessly renew the divine demand, which is to try to bring a bit of freedom into the society in which they live. They are like leaven: a substance that determines the fermentation of another substance without being changed by the process.

With respect to politics, the role of Christians is that of a catalyst. They also play the roles of watchmen, sentries, as Ezekiel shows[17]. They are tasked with warning people, and they will be condemned if they do not fulfill this mission. The sentry is called to look for signs where the natural man only sees events. The Church is there to light the way and give direction to the human adventure, not to reproduce the divides found in traditional politics, nor to allow itself to be absorbed into the social body. Instead of behaving like a reactionary force faced with a progressive government or like a revolutionary force faced with a conservative regime, the Church must stand out by insisting on the decisive, but uncontested, point: the universal worship of power.

The Christian relationship with politics is characterized by a dialectical contradiction between taking politics seriously and also acknowledging its absolute and relative nature; between respecting the authorities and taking revolutionary action at the same time. From the Christian point of view, Ellul condemns liberal capitalism the same way he does apolitism, just as he had done in his secular writings.

What is really at stake is the ability to exercise choice, since no political Christian doctrine founded on the Revelation exists! The Christian does not need to look for theological legitimacy for his partisan engagement. The key is that he serves as witness to the word of Christ by being present among people, without forgetting that one

---

[15] J. Ellul, *Politique de Dieu, politiques de l'homme*, 1966.

[16] P. Troude-Chastenet, *Lire Ellul.* Op. Cit. p.160.

[17] J. Ellul, *Les combats de la liberte*, 1984.

cannot serve two masters at once. During periods of intense politicization, he must contribute by putting politics in perspective, not to devalue it, but to cleanse it. The Christian's role is that of reconciliation and resolution, which he fulfills by refusing passion, hate, and exclusion. Ellul thus calls for a demystification and de-ideolization of politics, for finding an adversary behind the enemy, and a neighbor behind the political adversary. *If* democracy is the recognition that politics are relative, that competing viewpoints are valid, that power should be limited, minorities respected, *then* this regime offers a Christian a greater possibility for expressing his liberty in Christ.

But, as we have already noticed in his sociological writings, Ellul calls for revolution because he does not consider polyarchies as authentic democracies. This call seems to be a leitmotiv: "In order to save the world, an authentic revolution is now necessary" (1948), "the Christian attitude in the face of History is necessarily revolutionary" (1950), "the duty of every Christian is to be revolutionary" (1969). Although, to be sure, the meaning of this word as penned by Ellul does not refer to either the theology of freedom or any communist or conservative revolution.

"Necessary" Revolution & Ascetic Socialism

A close evaluation shows that for Ellul, the actor and the observer, the Christian and the scientist, become one! Faced with the "established disorder" the revolution is urgently needed[18]. Since their "Directives for a Personalist Manifesto" in 1935, Ellul and Charbonneau proposed the creation of a personalist society within the global society. In light of the impending self-destruction of the current society, this counter-society will prepare the leaders of tomorrow. Its members, who must maximally limit their participation in the technical society, will be guided by a new mentality inspired by a different life style.

This daily behavior, a true incarnation of the doctrine, will be the only external sign of this engagement. A revolution without uniforms, banners, or flags! Elective communities would replace large urban centers. Within these small groups of volunteers, the individual could feel he is rooted somewhere, and in this "city on a human scale," authentic politics, founded on direct communication between those who govern and those who are governed, would exist in full transparency. Federalism alone can be used to fight against "gigantism" and "universalism," or the triumph of a single model of society. The "large countries" will be divided into sovereign, "autonomous regions," to the detriment of the central State, which would only carry out the simple functions of providing council and arbitration. The federal structure will enable both greater internal participation of the citizens and, by reducing the power of the states, it will reduce the risk of armed conflicts. Technique would be used to reduce time spent on work and the race for growth.

---

[18] The term "the necessary revolution" already appeared in the work of Aron and Dandieu, *Déca-*

This text precedes essays on political ecology of the 1970s (Illich, Castoriadis, Schumacher) centered around the principle of "voluntary austerity," and the more recent writings from the supporters of *decroissance,* or "de-growth/reverse growth." While the idea of reducing time spent working is a topic that is already relevant to the left's ideological universe, here the ecological aspect dominates the view of the whole.

For example, Directive 61 provides for control of technique intended to hamper certain types of production "the growth of which would be useless from the human point of view." This text very openly affirms that economic growth is not synonymous with personal development and closes with a call in favor of building an "Ascetic city where people could live..." Here, a "free vital minimum" is available to all and a "minimum of balanced life" for everyone, both material and spiritual. In addition to the idea of "universal allocation", this text contains two classic elements which will later constitute the ecological argument: defense of the quality of life and the principle of social solidarity. "Man is consumed by the intense desire for material pleasure, and for certain others to not have this pleasure."

Isn't it hard not to think of theories that would later examine the concepts of the consumer society and the dual economy? One should also note the process of productivism in a period of global crisis where France's industrial production was still much lower than its 1928 levels. Their idea of the "ascetic city" focuses on the qualitative and anticipates the notion of "voluntary austerity" currently developed by supporters of "degrowth." Consume less to live better! This text cannot be disqualified for being the product of youthful thinking, because the same ideas inspire works written later in life, like *Changer de revolution.* In this major work, Ellul, conscious of using tired terminology, nonetheless advocates for a "revolutionary socialism of freedom" and pins his hopes on small self-managed groups. "Various fringe elements, apolitical ecologists, separatists, feminist movements, Christians seeking to restore themselves, new hippies, spontaneous communities" to which he adds certain intellectuals, "would permit" us to leave behind the two socialisms that have failed.[19]

Ellul explicitly inscribes his revolutionary project in the affiliation of non-violent anarchism, revolutionary socialism, and the word of Christ. He simultaneously castigates the vacuity of political activism in any form and also condemns mystical withdrawal. On one hand, he affirms that awareness is a necessary stage but not sufficient for effective change (he laughs at those who claim "internal freedom"), on the other hand, he elevates contemplation to the position of the only authentic revolutionary attitude. On one hand, he exhorts Christians to become involved in the revolutionary enterprise, and on the other, he condemns movements rooted in the theology of freedom by reminding us that the Second Coming should not be confused with the proletarian revolution and that the biblical condemnation of Mammon cannot be reduced to the anti-capitalist struggle.

---

dence de la nation francaise (1931) before being used as the title of their crowning work published in 1933.

[19] J. Ellul, Op. Cit. p.245

Ellul puts the person at the center of his thought, in conformance with his anarchist convictions and secular view, and with his Christological perspective and theological view. In conclusion, it matters less whether Ellul should be labeled a Christian anarchist or an anarchist Christian, but to understand that his way of being both Christian *and* anarchist at once perfectly illustrates the permanent tension that drives his work and his life. Perpetually doing a balancing act, ever the eternal foreigner, the incarnation of otherness, an anarchist among the Reformed and a Christian among situationists, on the fringes of his own church, and alone among the minorities Politics

should be taken seriously and, at the same time, be kept in perspective. Political illusion is reprehensible in the same way as blissful apolitism. Politics must be desacralized. Ellul invites us to make our detachment visible in action, which is to say, do not stay away from the struggles of the City, just keep your distance!

Jacques Ellul on Politics & the State

From the political, social, and human points of view, this conjunction of state and technique is by far the most important phenomenon of history. It is astonishing to note that no one, to the best of my knowledge, has emphasized this fact. It is likewise astonishing that we still apply ourselves to the study of political theories or parties which no longer possess anything but episodic importance, yet we bypass the technical fact which explains the totality of modern political events, and which indicates the general line which our society has taken . . .

Technological Society (1954; ET 1964), p. 233.

The transformation of the state and the consequent predominance of technicians involves two elements: First, the technician considers the nation very differently from the politician. For the technician, the nation is essentially an affair to be managed . . . . All that the technician can take into account is the application of his instruments—whether in the service of the state or something else is of small importance. For him the state is not the expression of popular will, or a creation of God, or the essence of humanity, or a modality of the class war. It is an enterprise with certain services which ought to function properly. It is an enterprise which ought to be profitable, yield a maximum of efficiency, and have the nation for its working capital. . .

The second element . . . is the progressive suppression of ideological and moral barriers to technical progress. The old techniques of the state were a compound of purely technical elements and moral elements such as justice. . . It therefore imposes limits on the pure technique of private persons. . . But when technique became state technique, when technical instrumentalities passed into the hands of the state, did the state adhere to its old wisdom? Experience must answer in the negative. The techniques, to which the state opposed checks when they were in the hands of private persons, became unchecked for the state itself. There is no self-limitation in this respect.

Technological Society (1954; ET 1964), pp. 263-6.

Finally, technique causes the state to become totalitarian, to absorb the citizens' life completely. We have noted that this occurs as a result of the accumulation of techniques in the hands of the state. Techniques are mutually engendered and hence interconnected, forming a system that tightly encloses all our activities. When the state takes hold of a single thread of this network of techniques, little by little it draws to itself all the matter and the method, whether or not it consciously wills to do so.

Technological Society (1954; ET 1964), p. 284.

The modern western technical and scientific world is a sacral world the modern sacred is ordered

entirely around two axes, each involving two poles, one pole being respect and order, the other transgression. The first axis is that of "technique/sex," the second is the "nation-state/revolution" axis

The nation-state is the second ordering phenomenon of our society. That and technology are the only two. . .

That the state is one of the sacred phenomena of this age seems hard to dispute. . . The state is the ultimate value which gives everything its meaning. It is a providence of which everything is expected, a supreme power which pronounces truth and justice and has the power of life and death over its members. It is an arbiter which is neither arbitrary nor arbitrated, which declares the law, the supreme objective code on which the whole game of society depends. . .

Finally, this sacral status will be carried to the summit, to the point of incandescence, through the fusion of the state with the nation to form the nationstate.... the state is taking the nation in hand It

resolves all national problems. Conversely the nation finds its expression only in a powerful state, which is the coordinator if not the centralizer and the orderer. The fusion is complete. Nothing national exists outside the state, and the latter has force and meaning only if it is national.

The New Demons (1973; ET 1975), pp. 70-71, 80-83.

It is a stereotype in our day to say that everything is political. . . Politization is represented by the importance and growing frequency of ideological debates; and it is manifested by the tendency to treat all social problems in the world according to patterns and procedures found in the political world. . .

The essential element that must be taken into consideration if we want to understand the *total* phenomenon of politization is a fact that is, if not the cause, at least the moving force of this phenomenon. The fact is the growth of the state itself... The nationstate is the most important reality in our day.

The Political Illusion (1965; ET 1967), pp. 8-9.

In fact, values no longer serve us as criteria of judgment to determine good or evil: political considerations are now the pre-eminent value and all others must adjust to them. . . For example, women finally become human beings because they receive "political rights." . . . A person without the right (in reality magical) to place a paper

ballot in a box is nothing, not even a person. To progress is to receive this power, this mythical share in a theoretical sovereignty that consists in surrendering one's decisions for the benefit of someone else who will make them in one's place.

The Political Illusion (1965; ET 1967), pp. 16-17.

The idea that the citizen should control the state rests on the assumption that, within the state, parliament effectively directs the political body, the administrative organs, and the technicians. But this is pure illusion. . .

When we talk of a president, ministers, or an assembly, we have not yet said anything, for the state has become a vast body, dealing with everything, possessing a multitude of centers, bureaus, services, and establishments

A modern state is *not* primarily a centralized organ of decision, a set of political organs. It is primarily an enormous machinery of bureaus. It is composed of two contradictory elements—on the one hand, political personnel, assemblies, and councils, and, on the other, administrative personnel in the bureaus—whose distinction, incidentally, is becoming less and less clear.

The Political Illusion (1965; ET 1967), pp. 138-41.

We are therefore in the presence of the following dilemma: either we must continue to believe that the road to solving our problems is the traditional road of politics, with all sorts of constitutional reforms and "revolutions" of the Right and the Left—and I have already demonstrated that all that no longer has any significance, but merely represents shadow-boxing—or we turn away from the illusory debate and admit, for example, that public liberties are but "resistances," admit that for man "to exist is to resist," and that, far from committing oneself to calculating the course of history it is important above all never to permit oneself to ask the state to help us.

The Political Illusion (1965; ET 1967), pp. 221-22.

I have long affirmed the anarchist position as the only acceptable stance in the modern world. This in no way means that I believe in the possibility of the realization and existence of an anarchist society. All my position means is that the present center of conflict is the state, so that we must adopt a radical position with respect to this unfeeling monster.

Jesus and Marx (1979; ET 1988), p. 156n.

Christians allow themselves to be taken in by the prevailing vogue. They see everybody expressing their own ideas, so why shouldn't they do the same? That's all right, as far as I am concerned, only let them be less pretentious about it, less authoritative, less inclined to expect everyone to follow in their wake. And let them not claim to be representing Jesus Christ! . . .

[I]ncompetence, evident in writings and proclamations, is even more apparent in encounters with the Christian who is actively involved in a party or union. His beginner's training is usually very deficient, both from the point of view of biblical theology and from the point of view of politics and economics. But once he is involved the situation becomes worse, for participation in politics is very fascinating and absorbing.

False Presence of the Kingdom (1963; ET 1972), pp. 155-7.

Naturally it is better to run a city well than badly. If a Christian has a hand in this and is a good administrator, that is all to the good. But any person can be a good administrator. Being a Christian is no absolute guarantee that one will be a better politician or administrator. Seeking the good of a city is not a specifically Christian thing

Christians are needed in all parties and movements. All opinions should have Christian representatives. . . If . . . Christians take up different positions knowing that these are only human, and having it as their primary goal to bear witness to Jesus Christ wherever they are, their splitting up into various movements, far from manifesting the incompetence of Christian thought or the inconsistency of faith, will be a striking expression of Christian freedom.

Ethics of Freedom (1973; ET 1976), p. 379.

How Ellul Influenced My Political Thought and Behavior

Four Personal Reflections

Mark Mayhle

Mark Mayhle is a physician and former Boeing engineer in Seattle, who thanks another Boeing engineer, Arek Shakarian, for introducing him to Jacques Ellul.

The year was 1980. I was 22, a newlywed and finishing up graduate school. The Carter "malaise" was under assault from the Reagan "optimism." My father, nothing if not a patriotic American, was an administrator in a nearby school district and for a number of years it had been his responsibility to run the annual campaign for the district's tax levy request. Under Washington law this required a supermajority of 60% to pass, and failure could be devastating to the afflicted district. Some years earlier, his district had passed their levy with *exactly* 60% of the vote—a single "yes" vote fewer would have doomed them to larger class sizes, loss of music and athletic programs, God knows what. So when he asked if I was planning to vote in the upcoming presidential election, it was mutually understood to be fraught with his passionate belief in the import of every individual vote. I replied to the effect that there was not a candidate I felt I could in clear conscience support. His somewhat sarcastic and largely rhetorical rejoinder was, "So, do you think *nobody* should vote?"

I thought for a moment and then answered, "Well, I don't think it's *necessarily* a sin to vote." Needless to say, Dad was not amused. Regrettably, he passed away two years later, and we never had occasion to revisit the issue in any depth. But 26 years on, largely thanks to Jacques Ellul, I am inclined to stand by this offhanded and somewhat flippant remark of my more callow self. It was a few years after this episode that a friend loaned me *Jesus and Marx*, launching what I anticipate to be a lifelong engagement with Ellul's thought. Intrigued as I was by that work, it was a few passing references to anarchism, even the seemingly-oxymoronic "Christian anarchism," that especially piqued my interest.

When *Anarchy and Christianity* appeared in translation at the local bookstore a few years later, I was not disappointed. Ellul had given substantive articulation to my inchoate political philosophy. Here was (to me) a convincing argument that *choosing* not to vote could be, if not "responsible" in the Niebuhrian sense, certainly a faithful

response to the incredulity toward worldly power structures so evident in the teaching and example of Jesus (and, for that matter, of the apostle Paul.) This was reinforced by an encounter around the same time with the work of John Howard Yoder, and the combination resulted in a quiet conversion from the conservative evangelicalism of my youth to an Anabaptist orientation. That urban Mennonites too often these days seem to fall captive to what passes for the liberal wing of the current American political mainstream perhaps serves as a prudent reminder that no "ism" is ever truly our home, but that's a story for another place and time.

Randal Marlin

Professor Randal Marlin teaches in the communication/media program at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada.

Ellul has certainly had an important and continuing influence on my political views, but it is hard to characterize this influence in definite terms. When I first encountered Ellul's ideas in the 1970s I had already been deeply immersed in civic activism. Our project had been to tame traffic in an older central residential area of Ottawa in order to reverse the decline of the neighbourhood. I had also been teaching existentialism and the debate between Sartre and Camus on violence was very much on my mind, inasmuch as the FLQ (Front de Liberation du Quebec) crisis involving a kidnapping of the British Trade Commissioner and murder of a Quebec Liberal cabinet minister in 1970 was part of recent Canadian history.

On just about any of the politically-oriented topics Ellul has dealt with, I find strong congeniality with my own views, but I frequently find some sticking point that stops me from wholeheartedly accepting the position he appears to be supporting. So, for example, I think I have more optimism than he has shown about the ability of democratic processes to deliver acceptable solutions to societal problems. I do not consider myself an anarcho-syndicalist. But I do agree (as mentioned in my re-view of *The Political Illusion*) that the process alone is not sufficent and must be supplemented by an alert and organized citizenry. I also support whole-heartedly the need to respect political opponents and to try to understand their points of view in a spirit of co-operation rather than hostility.

I have always been critical of some aspects of Sartre's political philosophy, even while approving of his struggle against discrimination and colonial oppression. But I was taken aback somewhat by the vehemence of Ellul's attack on Sartre in one of his lectures at the EUP (Institut d'Etudes politiques) in 1979-80. Likewise, in "FLN Propaganda in France during the Algerian War," he wrote about Sartre: "Knowledge of these matters was of particular importance in an affair of this kind: the Algerian question was extraordinarily difficult, and it was a person unqualified in this area who decided on a whole orientation of essential propaganda." This assessment of Sartre's lack of historical awareness was confirmed in my own mind when I read an article in

which Sartre gave his support for the FLQ. I thank Ellul for reinforcing in my mind the need for careful assessment of factual realities before supporting a political cause, however attractively worded the cause may be.

Post-independence developments in Algeria have amply vindicated Ellul's position, and Sartre later conceded that Camus had been right on the issue of violence and Algerian independence.

I have found in Ellul a useful counterpoise to Sartre on other points as well. Both have freedom as central components of their ethical philosophy. But Sartre's vision of the human is egocentric, while Ellul's is other-and God-oriented. While Ellul guards against complacency, over-optimism, and disguised selfseeking, in the end his vision is hopeful and encouraging for those bent on making a political contribution to their community, in whatever form they choose to make it. I take from Ellul a very human-oriented political attitude, distrustful not only of myth-supported enslaving institutions, but also of threats to freedom that supposed liberators may bring along with their alternate set of myths.

Sharon Gallagher

Sharon Gallagher is editor of Radix Magazine (Berkeley CA). She interviewed Jacques Ellul at his Bordeaux home in 1988.

Jacques Ellul's *The Meaning of the City* changed the way I view politics. The Christian subculture I grew up in was apolitical–as part of a general stance of suspicion and separation from "the secular culture," years before Evangelicals began wielding political power.

By the time I was living in Berkeley in the 1970s I'd become politicized and was passionately opposed to the Vietnam war. But reading *Meaning of the City* transformed my understanding of citizenship. My political stance at that time was mostly "anti"–anti-war, anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-nuke, etc. *The City* gave me a sense of duel citizenship that that called for a positive response–working for the "welfare of the city."

One of Ellul's main texts for *Meaning of the City* was Jeremiah 29, which contains an exhortation to Israelite exiles living in Babylon. It concludes: "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

Here's part of Ellul's commentary on the text: "We are clearly told to participate materially in the life of the city and to foster its welfare. The *welfare*, not the destruction. And the welfare of the *city*, not our own. Yes, we are to share in the prosperity of the city, do business in it, and increase its population . . . We must make it beautiful, because it is a work of man. And because it is such, God looks down even on it with love." (p.74)

In a city like Berkeley with its own foreign and domestic policies (the city council recently voted to impeach George W. Bush) the distinction between local and national issues isn't always clear. But it's often on a local level where we can actually make a difference–making sure that the poor can find places to live, that trees are planted, that all the old, beautiful buildings aren't torn down and replaced by strip malls.

Ellul's exposition of Jeremiah's text is rich. It addresses the individualism that marks American political and religious life–we're to seek the *common* good. We're to care about quality of life and to work toward it. This is a welcome antidote to the dispensationalist view of a doomed world that doesn't really matter. The question is not whether or not we'll be "left behind" but what good we're going to do while we're here.

John Gwin

John Gwin lives in Beloit, Wisconsin, where he does some building security and maintenance work while pursuing his interests in language and culture.

Jacques Ellul is for me a witness of the Truth and of the power the love of God in Christ. All of his many works, both the theological and the scientific or sociological served as profound testimony of God's faithfulness and remind me that faith in Christ is a solid foundation for life today. In a sterile age of science and technology, here was a writer who courageously explored every aspect of this world and our frantic life in it. He saw, and explored the darkest, most terrifying realities and seductive falsehoods of modern life in his sociological writings, and through his many studies of the Hebrew Scriptures elaborated many instances in which God breaks into our world precisely where we have bricked up the doors and windows to keep God out. Ellul credited faith in God with permitting him to rigorously explore and question humanity's commonplace assumptions and to consider fearful realities.

In reading the work of Wm Stringfellow, I came across the forward that he had written to Ellul's English edition of *The Presence of the Kingdom*. I took to heart his recommendation to read Ellul and am thankful that I did.

In *Presence of the Kingdom*, he emphasizes the vital but neglected work of the Christian layman in preserving the world by resisting the temptations to simply follow the world's agenda of action, action and more action. When we neglect wisdom, study of Scripture, discernment and prayer guided by the Holy Spirit we fail to fulfill our God-given calling. In reference to the "terrible triumph of the Nazi spirit that we see everywhere in the world today," Ellul writes, "We have conquered (in WWII) on the material level, but we have been spiritually defeated. Christians alone could wage the spiritual conflict: They did not do so. They did not play their part in the preservation of the world." (p. 25) Quoting Paul in Colossians 4:5-6 and Ephesians 5:15-17, he finds "...an astonishingly living suggestion for the study of the situation of the Christian in the world .placed, as we might say, at the vital point, as a link between conduct

and preaching (or one's witness), between good works, the fruit of wisdom, and the knowledge of the will of God (p. 26), (which confronts us both as judgment and as pardon, as law and as grace, as commandment and as promise, (and) is revealed to us in the Scriptures, illuminated by the Spirit of God. P. 27)

Ellul saw the will of the world as ".a will to death, a will to suicide," which we must not accept and which we must act to prevent. We are ".obliged to understand the depth and the spiritual reality of the mortal tendency of this world; it is to this that we ought to direct all our efforts, and not to the false problems which the world raises, or to an unfortunate application of an 'order of God' which has become abstract; if we act thus we understand that the work of preaching necessarily accompanies all the work of changing material conditions.

"Thus it is always by placing himself at this point of contact (between the will of the Lord and the will of the world), that the Christian can be truly 'present' in the world, and can carry on effective social or political work, by the grace of God." (p. 28,29)

Early on, I read Ellul's *Violence.* My miserable cynicism concerning war and violence and the nation was turned on its head, and I was left to rethink my and my generation's capture by the multiple layers of propaganda flooding our world.

His *Violence* deals with the issues of war and peace and faith and illusion, and the church's tendency to conform to the ideologies of the time, whether they be the royalist, nationalist, leftist anti-war, or rightist pro-war ideology. Ellul also exposes various misunderstandings of the gospel such as the identification of the publicans and harlots with the "poor" and the Pharisees with the "rich." The assumption that the politically correct "poor" are the only poor, forgetting the misery of those who are scorned for their position in society. Also one of the most remarkable lessons I learned from this work in regard to violence is that "whatever its milieu, its motif, its basis or orientation, idealism always leads to the adoption of a false and dangerous position. The first duty of a Christian is to reject idealism." (p. 125)

If I had to personally sum up the impact of Ellul's work, it would be "Relief of Misery." His works, both sociological and scriptural in focus, resulted for me in a renewed comprehension of Biblical Faith and Hope in the midst of the world. Ellul's *Presence of the Kingdom* delineated a coherent and sensible explication of the call of a believer in this world so confusing to me. His *Violence* helped me see more clearly in the fog of the over-simplifications born of the various propagandas obscuring the complex issues of the Vietnam War. His as yet untranslated *Jeunesse Delinquant* describing the work of a club for "unadapted" street youth in Bordeaux gave a respectful portrayal of their lives and outlined the methods used to enable them, without patronizing them, to find their own way forward in a life that had been one of genuine misery.

Re-Viewing Ellul

The Political Illusion by Jacques Ellul

New York: Alfred A Knopf, Inc., 1967 and Random House, Vintage Books, 1972.
Original edition *1'Illusionpolitique* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1965).
Reviewed by Randal Marlin
Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

Forty years ago Konrad Kellen gave the American public a fine translation of *The Political Illusion*, along with an insightful introduction. This work builds upon Ellul's earlier *Technological Society* and *Propaganda*. A central quesiton here is: How can a conscientious citizen in a modern democracy contribute to good government? Those with technical expertise can be expected to look out for their own special interests, not necessarily the public good. Withstanding corruption requires proper checks and balances. But this requires the appropriate knowledge, and who will supply that?

Ellul commonly devotes the bulk of his energies, in his social and political writings, to trenchant diagnosis of social problems. He points the way to solutions, but is careful above all not to encourage complacency. He sounds the alarm, saying in effect: beware the fancy imagery of democracy, behind which the mechanisms of tyranny may be crafted.

Passage of time has shown Ellul to be prescient. Certainly in the United States the Watergate debacle, the Iran-Contra dealings, and the current deceptions of the administration of President George W. Bush to bring his country and a coalition into war with Iraq, followed by use of torture and rights violations of detainees, surveillance of U.S. citizens without court authority, and the like, all reinforce the main claims in this book.

Central among these claims is the idea that uncritical faith in democratic processes, such as the party system and elections, to provide us with good government, is misplaced. The idea that such processes will guarantee democracy is undermined by awareness that votes are valuable only to the extent voters are informed. Once it becomes clear that government, technocrats and co-operative media shape the information and imagery reaching the public, the idea that the ordinary voters are the real determinants of political becomes very dubious.

Upton Sinclair and, more recently, Noam Chomsky have presented us with similar insights, but Ellul goes further in locating the problems as having their source in

popular attitudes and in the dominance of myths concerning progress, happiness, and the ability of the right technique to solve our problems.

The true source of democracy, for Ellul, lies in the attitudes of the people. "A personal conscience," he writes, ". . . is the only thing that can save both democracy and what is real in political affairs." (204) Enemies of democracy can be found even among those who profess to favour it. These enemies are fanaticism on one side, and inertia, leading to opting out of politics, on the other. You can't have genuine democracy without a deep-set respect for the opinions and aspirations of others, including minorities within the larger society.

The idea that happiness will be guaranteed if only we can get people to adjust and adapt to majority views, and if we can maximize material comforts, is one of those myths than emboldens political powers to intrude in the private sphere to encourage uniformity. Ellul refers here to Bernard Charbonneau (to whom he dedicates this book) and what Charbonneau calls the "lie of liberty," namely, liberty conceived as offered to the individual on a platter by a benevolent society. By contrast, "There is no liberty except liberty achieved in the face of some constraint or rule." (211) The aptness of the Saint-Just quotation at the front of the book makes itself felt here: "The people will fancy an appearance of freedom; illusion will be their native land."

Among the many wry observations about Bush's failed (as is currently acknowledged even by original supporters) Iraq war is that the supposed exporters of democracy were simultaneously undermining it at home. The recent November election switched the congressional power from Republicans to Democrats, but it remains to be seen whether much can now be done to reverse the beginnings of civil war there. What good is an election when the die, in the form of a quagmire, has already been cast?

Ellul thinks that unity in a political system means that life has gone out of it. Tension and conflict form personality, "not only on the loftiest, most personal plane, but also on the collective plane." I see a resemblance to Emmanuel Levinas and the latter's perception that the goal of ataraxy conflicts with the obligation to respect the otherness of the other. To avoid disturbances to our tranquillity we would like to make others the same as ourselves. But one only has to look at Canadian history and the effect of Lord Durham's goal of assimilating the French Canadians to see what enduring resentments this attitude can cause.

Ellul is conscious of writing largely from the experience of France since Louis XIV, but he need not apologize for thinking his ideas might have larger application. Centralizing forces exist the world over, and they need to be kept in check. He thinks it important to permit the emergence of social, political, intellectual, artistic, religious and other groups, totally independent of the state, "yet capable of opposing it, able to reject its pressures as well as its controls and even its gifts." (222)

He thinks these organizations and associations should be able to deny that "the nation is the supreme value and that the state is the incarnation of the nation." He allows that there is a risk in reducing the central power but sees this as "the condition of life."

Ellul wrote before the arrival of the Internet. We have seen that the ability of the centralized powers in the United States to shape opinion by false imagery failed spectacularly in the attempts to make war heroes out of Jessica Lynch and Pat Tillman - the latter former professional football star having been in fact a victim of "friendly fire." Contrary credible evidence circulating through Web sites such as Truthout, Common Dreams, PRWatch and the like was sufficient to force the image-makers to backtrack.

But there is no guarantee that the freedom exercized by those Web site operators will continue indefinitely, and we can expect battles in this area as well as on other fronts, such as the attempts to force television stations that show government video news releases to acknowledge their provenance in a way that will minimize their deceptive propensities.

The trouble with illusions is that they are comforting, and if our vision of life is to maximize comfort, why bother attacking them? One reason is that illusions can lead to political mistakes which can have most uncomfortable outcomes. Another reason, though, is that other goals and conditions of a good life include such things as such as honesty, freedom, integrity, and respect for the Other, and these are incompatible with the pertinent illusions.

We have to be willing to engage in political life and work for our desired goals, but always in such a way as to preserve our respect for the freedom and dignity of others, even when our goals collide. "We should forever be concerned with the means used by the state, the politicians, our group, ourselves." (238) We also have to track down those stereotypes and myths in our own thinking so as to free ourselves from them, for as long as they exist "no freedom or democratic creativity is possible." (240) Coming from Ellul, the message is not new, but time and events (including dire environmental forecasts) have merely reinforced its urgency.

Autopsy of Revolution

Jacques Ellul
New York: Knopf, 1971
Original edition *Autopsie de la Revolution* (Paris:
Calmann-Levy, 1969)
Reviewed by Andy Alexis-Baker
Associated Menonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart IN

In this book Ellul delves into history arguing that until the 18th century revolt had been conservative and opposed to political and social change. These upheavals revolted against unbearable situations resulting from increased state functions. As such, revolution (or revolt) reacted *against* the expected course of history and usually wanted to restore a previous situation.

Then came the French Revolution which changed traditional revolt in two ways: a future oriented outlook and belief in the state as the bearer of freedom. The aristo-

cratic leaders envisioned a utopian society which a scientific outlook would bring about. Inspired by the French Revolution, Karl Marx made revolution part of history's evolution. Thus revolution became normalized and predictable. All that was needed were the right techniques to predict the conditions under which the masses would explode and to direct the explosions into seizing control of the state, which under the direction of new management would take on a totally new character: communist.

Ellul argues that in reality the state has its own internal logic and structure so that those who think they can control the state are under an illusion, instead that logic and structure controls the revolutionary. Revolution, rather than decreasing state power, has increased the state's reach. The dehumanizing, rationalized gaze of the state has penetrated into every area of life. It is state power, more than colonialism or class conflict, that truly threatens human freedom. Here Ellul becomes relentless in his attack on every aspect of the nation-state.

Ellul suggest that the alternative to state fetishism is a revolution invoking "direct personal responsibility" (282). Much contemporary discourse is still based upon the notion that where real "politics" or action occurs is in the impersonal machinery in Paris or Washington D.C. Ellul, however, insists that the only real thing is the person—spiritual, physical and mental. Call it anarchism, personalism or situationism (Ellul uses all these terms while recognizing differences), the idea is the same. Real change happens where people begin to take responsibility. For Ellul modern electoral democracy attempts to tame the inherent anarchy and unruliness contained in democracy.

Ellul does not call for traditional individualism. He makes clear how statism and the technological society *create* individuals who are incapable of making decisions that run against nationalist or technological ends. Yet because of his polemic against a herd mentality, he fails to make clear that rootedness and loyalty to a certain type of community helps individuals become whole persons, without which the lures of the technological society quickly overwhelm. For me—a Mennonite—Ellul's failure to place individuals in community is inexcusable. The state is primarily about creating individuals without attachment to healthy community and loyalties that make it possibile to fight the technological society. At times Ellul seems to forget that while the great Fascist and Communist regimes depended upon massive public support, our own democracies depend upon mass apathy and individualization.

Despite his failure to name types of community that resist state expansion and the technological society, this book is valuable for *Ellul Forum* readers to re-read. The dominant emphasis from the *Ellul Forum* has been the pitfalls of the technological society. Yet Ellul insists, "Any revolution against the perils and the bondage of technological society implies an attempt to disassemble the state" (268).

Ellul's claim that the state is the object of revolution is also true for advocates of nonviolent techniques. Gene Sharp and others tout the great "nonviolent revolutions," but using Ellul's outlines it is best to point out that this is just another vulgarization of the word. No revolution has occurred in any Western nation since Ellul's book. What happened were in-house regime changes. No Western "revolution" has success-

fully dismantled the state and the technological apparatus (the Zapatistas in Chiapas, however, come closer to Ellul's vision).

Finally, if a future edition of this book were printed, it would benefit from a critical apparatus and an index. Ellul mentions and discusses numerous names, places and movements that North American readers cannot understand without editorial footnotes. Despite these flaws in the apparatus of the book, the content remains relevant for those of us concerned about the expected course of history. Ellul's call is for revolt against this dark future looming over us. And it remains as dark as Ellul ever predicted it would be.

False Presence of the Kingdom

Jacques Ellul
New York: Seabury, 1972
Original edition, *Fausse presence au monde moderne*
(Paris: Les Bergers et les Mages, 1963)
Reviewed by Virginia W. Landgraf
American Theological Library Association, Chicago IL

False Presence of the Kingdom is a critique of certain kinds of Christian political activity as failing to live up to Christians' true calling. This failure has theological and sociological dimensions. Ellul goes into both aspects in more depth elsewhere. He admits that the book is best understood in the context of *The Political Illusion* and his work on Christian ethics (later published as *To Will and To Do* and *The Ethics of Freedom*). Also, the distinction between truth and reality, not fully elaborated until *The Humiliation of the Word*, is helpful for understanding this book, as is the image from *Apocalypse* of the Word of God (the white horse) providing counterpoint to the forces of history (the other three horses) in Rev. 6:2-7.

At this period in his thought, as developed in the essay "Rappels et reflexions sur une theologie de l'Etat," Ellul allows a legitimate role for political authority (not necessarily the abstract state) as administrator of common patrimony. Thus its responsibilities are within the realm of reality (visible, measurable results, accomplished by power); it goes beyond its bounds if it arrogates to itself the realm of truth (values and ultimate human destiny, communicated by personal words, the precondition for which is freedom). How far one agrees with Ellul's arguments depends largely on how far one agrees with his opposition between freedom and power. Legitimate political authority is in an awkward position: it needs to have a modicum of power over reality (in terms of administrative results), but it should not become possessed by that power, lest it give that power ultimate status, shut out freedom, and claim that reality is truth. Such legitimacy may be a chimera, since, as he states in *The Humiliation of the Word*, when we see reality we want to have power over it.

Once those presuppositions are clear, *False Presence* is the story of Christians grasping at reality instead of listening for truth. Ellul uses examples from the French Reformed Church in 1962. Although the "hot issue" was Algeria, the scenarios are familiar. Polarizing issues seem urgent, and a political solution is demanded. Christians on either side claim that their faith demands these reforms. Ellul thinks that such moralization is irrelevant to the actual world faced by political actors. Because politics is based on power, which is opposed to freedom, political action cannot make decisions based on values. And when Christians plunge fully into politics, they fail to speak a transcendent word because they are co-opted into the world's assumptions: that increased technical power is an improvement; that the state can cure social ills; etc. Co-optation fails to provide the tension which Ellul thinks is necessary for a society to avoid entropy and have the resilience to meet challenges (an argument from secular information theory used in *The Political Illusion*). Therefore, Ellul thinks that this kind of Christian social action functions as the opiate of the people (Marx), "provid[ing] ideological and moral satisfactions to those who are in fact *incapable* of changing the situation" (49, ET 51). Theologically, identification of Christian living with political action betrays the biblical witness about the perils of political power and loses the dialectic between the "already" and the "not yet" of Christ's lordship. Christ is by rights Lord over creation, and his resurrection is the first fruits of his triumph over death, but the prince of death is still the evident ruler of this world.

However, Ellul denies that withdrawal from the world is a Christian option. As in *The Ethics of Freedom*, he identifies specific tasks for Christians in the political realm. Among them are long-term thought about likely future problems; dialogue with political actors on their own terms, showing them the consequences of their positions; and involvement in political organizations on all sides, as people *relatively* committed to causes, ready to risk reconciliation and dialogue. Such practices do not require being convinced of the total opposition between freedom and power. Their presupposition is that legitimate administration of the reality we all face should be capable of long-term, self-critical, reconciling thought and action.

Anarchy and Christianity

Jacques Ellul
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.
Original edition *Anarchie et christianisme* (Lyon:
Atelier de creation libertaire, 1988)
Reviewed by Don Surrency
University of South Florida

Anarchy and Christianity, in title alone, is undoubtedly controversial and contentious. However, in this book, as is common in all of Ellul's work, we find a theological analysis of society and religion that still warrants evaluation nearly 20 years

after publication. This retrospective critique of *Anarchy and Christianity* will offer a brief summary of Ellul's argument, followed by a critique, and then concluded with some general remarks regarding the usefulness and importance of Ellul's theory in light of contemporary culture.

Ellul believed that the attacks on religion commonly launched by anarchists, which accuse all religions of leading to violence, are accurate. However, he makes the curious assertion that "the revelation of Christ ought not to give rise to a religion. . .the Word of God is not a religion. . ." (26). Ellul argues that the true Christian faith is not adhering to dogmas or doctrines, but trusting in Christ. Thus the Christianity that is present in the world is merely the "sociological and institutional aspect of the church. . .not the church." (10).

It is this position, fully articulated in his earlier work, *The Subversion of Christianity*, which serves as the premise for Ellul's critique of society and the Church, and his belief that the true political spirit of the Christian Bible, is a spirit of anarchy. This argument is based on the exegesis of various narratives found in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament that demonstrate the anarchist sentiment found at the core of Christianity. While this is not the proper place, nor is there adequate space, to engage in a hermeneutical critique of Ellul's idiosyncratic exegesis, it is important to note that his interpretation of Jesus as the silent anarchist who portrays "irony, scorn, noncooperation, indifference, and sometimes accusation" (71) in regard to political authority, probably would not be met with agreement in mainline Christianity.

It is in the distinction between "the true Christian faith" and the socio-historical Christian faith where Ellul's methodology is the most problematic. One can go to the sacred text of any religion that has sacred texts, and find differences between the values and teachings within the text and the present state of that religion, but this is not sufficient grounds to argue that the present manifestation of the religion is false. While this approach is common to religionists of many traditions, it is neither helpful nor particularly novel, even in the deployment of Jacques Ellul. The more significant critique might be whether Christian ideals are any more prone to failed embodiment, or, if any historical embodiments of those ideals have been more accurate than others.

Anarchy and Christianity is, indeed, a provocative and compelling analysis of society, politics, and Christianity that is as relevant now, if not more so, than it was when Ellul wrote it. In the post-9/11 world that we find ourselves in, the relationship between religion and political power is both problematic and pervasive. In this work, as well as his others, Ellul does a masterful job of analyzing this relationship, and forcing individuals to evaluate the contemporary cultural situation. In trying to establish a common ground between anarchists and Christians, Ellul illustrates the pivotal role religion has played, and can play within society.

What can be gathered from Ellul's thought is in line with the following observation made by Graham Ward in his critique of culture, *Theology and Contemporary Critical Theory*, "Religion is, once more, haunting the imagination of the West" (vi). This observation is given further analysis by Vincent Pecora in his recent work *Secularization*

and Cultural Criticism when he suggests that "there may be broader and deeper links then we generally acknowledge between the Western intellectual's struggle with the semantic resonances of religious thought (as in Habermas) and the avowedly oppositional perspectives of various intellectuals (from Dipesh Chakrabarty and Asad to Nandy) struggling with the problem of secularization in the postcolonial world" (24). Both the function and the form of religion in postmodernity that is articulated in the aforementioned work, as well as various other current works, can, perhaps, be better understood when Ellul's thought, particularly his idea of the proliferating sacred, is applied.

Anarchy and Christianity is an excellent example of Ellul's attempt to understand the relationship between religion and society. His astute observations and insightful critiques of the Christian church and politics are important and applicable for any cultural critic. Thus, *Anarchy and Christianity* serves as evidence that Ellul's thought can be applied as well today, as when Ellul applied it himself.

Advert: International Jacques Ellul Society

Advert: Change of Address?

Suspicion, Accusation, Fragmentation by David W. Gill

President, International Jacques Ellul Society

One of my favorite Ellul books is *Hope in Time of Abandonment* (1972; ET 1973). I love the reflections on hope, of course. But a section of the book on "the age of suspicion" has always struck me as especially insightful.

Ellul writes: "Nothing is any longer itself. We have learned to look behind and beyond for the nameless, the elusive, the wriggly depths, the hidden forces, the secrets. Such is the supreme lucidity to which we are condemned. It is a strange evolution whereby, beginning with the thinking of a few, suspicion has spread through all the intellectuals, and from there is taking hold of everyone" (*Hope,* p. 48).

The three great "malefactors" here, according to Ellul, are Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Marx taught us to look beneath the surface and discern the economic class interests which are the true reality and agenda behind our surface words and acts. Nietzsche taught us to see a manipulative quest for power behind everything. And Freud urged us to see unconscious sexual and psychological forces beneath the surface.

"School of suspicion—that, in fact, is what it all comes back to. We have learned no longer to place our confidence in anything, no longer to have faith in anyone, no longer to believe a person's word, nor in a sentiment, no longer to accept the lasting quality of a relationship, no longer to believe that it could be authentic or truly representative of the person. We have learned that every good feeling merely expresses some self-satisfaction or some hypocrisy, that all virtue is a lie, that all morality is false, that all devotion is vain or a sham, that all speech hides the truth" (p. 50).

"The era of a chance to hope is gone, for there is no hope where suspicion is king. Every time a possibility, a breakthrough, or a meaning takes shape, immediately the question bursts in on us, 'From what social class, from what complex, from what ideology, from what myth, from what interest does this hope spring, since it is nothing but the falsification of a situation one has refused to face?'" (p. 52).

Alas, the loss of hope is not yet the end of suspicion's trail. When one does not keep one's suspicion to oneself but voices it as an *accusation*, the consequences are still more dire.

In *Apocalypse*, Ellul comments on the important text about the cosmic war between the angelic and demonic forces: "The Satan, the accuser, completes the work of the Devil in launching accusation, either before God to accuse men, or between men. *Every accusation is the work of Satan*" (*Apocalypse* (1975; ET 1977), p. 87; italics added).

Martin Luther is reported to have said that the Christian thing to do is always to "put the best possible construction" on other people's words and deeds.

"People look on the outward appearance—the Lord looks on the heart," God said to the prophet Samuel when he visited Jesse's family looking for a future king to annoint. Of course, the heart, the feelings, intentions, and internal side, are critically important. But only God knows this reality. We human beings are pathetically off base in making judgments about people's motives and intentions.

If we care about someone's motivations, we should *ask them* about it—not just speculate and project our paranoid thinking on them—and then make it worse by spouting off our libelous accusations to those around us.

We don't want to be gullible and naive but when there really is no *concrete* evidence of another's bad faith, it is wrong and bad to go this route. It is incredibly destructive to go through life as a paranoid, suspicious accuser of others. It is anti-Ellulian and anti-Christian, if either of those matter. It is destructive of families, friendships, projects, churches, organizations, and important causes. It is withering and destructive of the paranoid self per se, which lives in darkness and bitterness.

Suspicion and accusation have poisoned and paralyzed political discourse. Example: Because former Clinton V-P Al Gore was the narrator, paranoid, suspicious American neo-cons reject without a hearing the photos, temperature readings, etc., regarding global warming in the recent documentary film *An Inconvenient Truth* (as though Gore himself faked the photos of receding glaciers and polar ice caps!).

But it's not just a disease of big time politics: family members, colleagues who could be working together, people who should be on the same side, same team, sometimes allow their suspicion, paranoia, and accusation to fragment relationships. Whenever it's up to us, let's choose grace, hope, and community.

Resources for Ellul Studies

www.ellul.org & www.jacques-ellul.org The IJES web site at www.ellul.org contains (1) news about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, (4) a complete index of the contents of all *Ellul Forum* back issues; and (5) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The new French AIJE web site at www.jacques-ellul.org is also a superb resource.

The Ellul Forum CD: 1988-2002

The first thirty issues of *The Ellul Forum*, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for US $15 (postage

included). Send payment with your order to "IJES," P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

Back issues #31 - #36 of *The Ellul Forum* are available for $5 each (postage and shipping included).

Cahiers Jacques Ellul

Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne

An essential annual journal for students of Ellul is *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, edited by Patrick Chastenet, published by Editions L'Esprit du Temps, and distributed by Presses Universitaires de France Send orders to Editions L'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Postage and shipping is 5 euros for the first volume ordered; add 2 euros for each additional volume ordered.

Volume 1: "L'Annees personnalistes" (15 euros)

Volume 2: "La Technique" (15 euros)

Volume 3: "L'Economie" (21 euros).

Volume 4 (forthcoming): "La Propagande" (21 euros).

Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. $87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit www.elsevier.com for ordering information.

Librairie Mollat—new books in French

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux (www.mollat.com) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

Alibris—used books in English

The Alibris web site (www.alibris.com) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

Used books in French:

two web resources

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are www.chapitre.com and www.livre-rare-book.com.

Reprints of Nine Ellul Books

By arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of several Ellul books originally published by William B. Eerdmans can now be purchased. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: *The Ethics of Freedom* ($40), *The Humiliation of the Word* ($26), *The Judgment of Jonah* ($13), *The Meaning of the City* ($20), *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* ($19), *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* ($28), *The Subversion of Christianity* ($20), and *The*

Technological Bluff ($35). *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul* translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

Have your bookstore (or on-line book dealer) "back order" the titles you want. Do not go as an individual customer to Eerdmans or Ingram/Spring Arbor. For more information visit "Books on Demand" at www.eerdmans.com.

Ellul on Video

French film maker Serge Steyer's film "Jacques Ellul: L'homme entier" (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site www.meromedia.com. Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul's ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired

Issue #39 Spring 2007 — The Ethics of Jacques Ellul

- Click to view the original PDF

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Jacques Ellul in his twenties

"We are entering into a new form of morality which could be called technological morality [Fr. morale technicienne], since it tends to bring human behavior into harmony with the technological world [au monde technique], to set up a new scale of values in terms of technology [en function de la technique], and to create new virtues. "

-Jacques Ellul

To Will & To Do (1965; ET 1969), p. 185

Contents

© 2007

International Jacques Ellul Society Berkeley, California, USA www.ellul.org

Information on The Editorial Board & More

The Ellul Forum
For the Critique of Technological Civilization
Founded 1988

From the Editors

Our topical focus in this thirty-ninth issue of *The Ellul Forum* is ethics. What is the *right* thing—not just the technologically effective or financially profitable or popular thing—to do in this or that context? What can we say about— and how can we further–*good* character and community?

For more than thirty-five years these have been among the primary organizing questions of my life and work—and Jacques Ellul has been my most important source of insight and challenge on this journey. It is no accident that my work (both teaching and writing) has been in two domains: developing what I hope is a more authentic Christian ethics for the church and developing a better business ethics for the general marketplace and workplace. In the first article of this issue I have tried to summarize the ongoing legacy and promise of Ellul's ethics.

Of course, the late John Howard Yoder and many other students of ethics have drawn deeply and creatively on Ellul's thought. One of the best and most creative among contemporary thinkers drawing on the Ellul tradition is our own colleague Darrell Fasching, founding editor of this journal, and professor at the University of South Florida. Darrell's work on comparative religious ethics is a brilliant contribution, especially to be welcomed in our world of religious misunderstanding and conflict. His article begins on p. 11. Darrell's book on the topic (co-authored with his USF colleague, IJES Board member Dell DeChant) is given a glowing review later in these pages by Prof. Louise Doire.

Randy Ataide, a business leader who wrote a master's thesis on Ellul and who recently started teaching business at Point Loma University, wonders if, somewhere beyond where Ellul's technological experience ended, new technologies might contribute to human community and to a modification of our obsessions with private ownership. Interesting thought piece.

Matt Patillo re-views Ellul's intro to ethics *To Will & To Do,* and Andrew Goddard re-views the organization of Ellul's *Ethics of Freedom.* Daniel Cerezuelle's new book on Bernard Charbonneau (Ellul's closest friend and intellectual conversation partner through his life) gets a brief introduction by Carl Mitcham.

As with any topic we approach, there is something on almost every page of this issue to disagree with. It goes with the Ellulian territory. Dialectic, struggle, tension, wrestling . . . and finally some flaming insight or another.

And now back to *Ellul Forum* Editor Cliff Christians for the next issues!
David W. Gill, Associate Editor IJES@ellul.org

Jacques Ellul's Ethics: Legacy and Promise

by David W. Gill

David W. Gill is President of the International Jacques Ellul Society; his first published book was a revised, abridged version of his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Southern California: The Word of God in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul (Metuchen NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984). This article was originally presented at a colloquium at the University of Poitiers and later published as a chapter in Patrick Troude-Chastenet, editor, Jacques Ellul: Penseur sans frontieres (L'Esprit du Temps, 2005; pp. 61-77). Reprinted by permission.

Introduction

Ten years after his death, it is clear that Jacques Ellul's contributions to the field of ethics and moral theology are of significant and enduring value. Nothing will ever rival Ellul's sociological contributions to our understanding of technique and technology but, like his work on politics, social change, propaganda, communications, history, religion, and biblical interpretation, his work on ethics stands the tests of time and criticism. In this essay we will explore eight important contributions made by Ellul's ethics and then consider two especially promising directions for further developing an Ellulian approach to ethics.

Of course, before Ellul's ethics can be fully assessed, and before any significant further development of his approach can be carried out, a great deal of preliminary work remains to be done. The first challenge is simply to make Ellul's full body of ethical writing available to readers. Specifically,

(a) his introduction to ethics, Le Vouloir et le faire (ET: To Will and To Do), is no longer in print in French or English;[1]

(b) it is uncertain whether any manuscript exists of the second half of this introductory work, promised by Ellul long ago, but the question of its status must be definitively resolved; even his rough notes on the subject would be a great help;

(c) while Ellul's Ethique de la liberte eventually appeared in three volumes in France, its English translation, The Ethics of Freedom, only represented volume one and an abbreviated, early draft of volume three of this important work. About 500 pages of the original 800 made it to the English translation. The entire work needs to be available in both French and English;[2]

(d) Ellul's thousand page manuscript on the ethics of holiness continues to be unavailable in both French and English; apparently Ellul's handwritten manuscript has now been painstakingly converted into a typescript and could now be edited and published, but various problems could still derail the project; the completion of this big project is absolutely essential;

---

[1] Le vouloir et le faire: recherches ethiques pour les chretiens. Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1964. English translation by C. Edward Hopkin: To Will and To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians. Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969.

[2] Ethique de la liberte,(Geneve: Labor et Fides) Tome 1, 1973; Tome 2, 1975; Tome 3 (Les Combats de la liberte), 1984; English translation by Geoffrey W. Bromiley: The Ethics of Freedom. (Grand

(e) Ellul's specific studies of the ethical virtues of hope and faith need to be republished;[3]

(f) while he did not prepare complete studies of love and the ethics of relationship (as he did with faith and hope and the ethics of freedom and holiness), he did write a few essays on love which could be brought together to help complete the overall architecture of his ethical thought;[4]

(g) Ellul's various articles (and extended sections in various books) on various aspects of ethics also deserve to be collected and made available to students of ethics. There are enough such articles and reviews to make up a substantial volume on its own.[5]

As this large body of writing becomes more fully accessible, the critical and constructive exploration of the implications and applications of Ellul's ethics can take place.[6] The general structure and logic of Ellul's ethics, including the points raised below in this essay, certainly deserve further attention. Additionally, Ellul's ethics invite specific application to challenges in such arenas as new technologies, the worlds of business, politics, and economics, and the life of citizens, disciples, nations, and churches.

The fact is that Jacques Ellul's ethical thinking is badly needed in the 21st century. With an astonishing foresight Ellul anticipated the global dominance of technique, on the one hand, and the critical importance of religions old (Islam, Judaism, Christianity) and new (the "new demons/possessors") on the other. Long before postmodernism was fashionable, Ellul fought against, and called us beyond, the dehumanizing "raving rationalism" of the modern. While Ellul's *popularity* may have been greatest during the

---

Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

[3] L'Esperance oubliee (Paris: Gallimard, 1972); English translation by C. Edward Hopkin, Hope In Time of Abandonment (New York: Seabury, 1973); La Foi au prix du doute (Paris: Hachette, 1980); English translation by Peter Heinegg: Living Faith: Belief and Doubt in a Perilous World (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).

[4] For example, "Eros et Agape" and ".. .Et le Reste" in Foi et Vie, vol. 75, no. 2 (March-April 1976), pp. 62-81, 93-100; "Lifelong Love," in What I Believe (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 6686.

[5] For example, "Notes en vue d'une ethique du temps et du lieu pour les chretiens," Foi et Vie, vol. 59, no 5 (Sept-Oct 1960), pp. 354-74; "The Ethics of Nonpower," trans. Nada K. Levy, in Melvin Kranzberg, ed., Ethics in an Age of Pervasive Technology (Boulder: Westview, 1980), pp. 204-212; "The Ethics of Propaganda: Propaganda, Innocence, and Amorality," trans. D. Raymond Tourville. Communication. Vol 6, no 2 (1981), pp. 159-175; "Morale et technique," Medianalyses: Cahiers de recherches communicationnelles, no. 2 (May 1982), pp. 24-29; "Recherche pour une ethique dans une societe technicienne," Annales de l'Institut de philosophie et de sciences morales (Universite libre de Bruxelles, 1983), pp. 7-20.

[6] Several studies of Ellul's ethics have, of course, appeared over the years. The best recent study is Andrew Goddard, Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul (Carlisle UK: Paternoster, 2002), especially pp. 101-114; see also: Darrell Fasching, The Thought of Jacques Ellul (Lewiston NY: Mellen, 1981), especially pp. 93-176; David W. Gill, The Word of God in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul (Metuchen NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984); and Gene Outka, "Discontinuity in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul," in Clifford G. Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, editors, Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1981), pp. 177-228.

1960s and 1970s, his greatest *importance* may be yet to come, as our tottering global civilization begins to come to the end of itself.

* * *

Jacques Ellul made at least eight major contributions to the field of ethics. These are not just accomplishments of the past but promises for the future of the field.

1. "Lived morality" vs. theoretical morality. Ellul's first contribution lies in his exposition of "lived moralities" vis-a-vis the various "theoretical moralities" of philosophy and religion.[7] The actual values by which people live deserve our attention much more than the theories advocated and debated by ivory tower intellectuals. It has been typical for students of ethics to spend much, if not most, of their time studying the ethical theories of Immanuel Kant, Thomas Hobbes, John Stuart Mill, David Hume, and others. But these are *theoretical* moralities. Ellul asks, "Who, apart from the specialists, is interested in Kant's ethics? It is a matter for the philosophers, and the philosophers have no influence over morals No one thinks to govern

his life according to the outcome of the quarrels among the specialists in philosophical ethics."[8] These ethical theories tell us something not just about their philosophical authors but about the society, epoch, and intellectual environment in which they emerged. However, they also distract us from the reality of people's actual ethical experience, character, decisionmaking, and behavior. A history and sociology of values, ethics, and morality will tell us a lot more about the essential character of ethics than a survey of the writings of the great philosophers.[9]

2. The integration of morality with the sacred. A second important emphasis in Ellul's ethics is the inextricable relationship of morality to whatever is regarded as "sacred" in a society. "Every group is organized around what might be called a 'principal motif' . . . It is in relation to this principal motif that the group's hierarchy of values is arranged." "When a society no longer acknowledges a central motif . . . no morality can remain valid: or the same is true when the morality which is affirmed is out of harmony with the principal motif."[10] In *The New Demons* Ellul describes how "it is important to have rules of behavior deriving from the sacred."[11]

Another way to put it is that "our gods determine our goods." Ethical reflection and ethical behavior is motivated, leveraged, and determined by what is our core purpose, our principal motif, our sacred. No ethical or moral reform is possible without addressing the question of what is our sacred, our mission, our god. This point is

---

[7] See To Will and To Do, Chapter 7, "The Theoretical Moralities," and "Chapter 9, "The Lived Moralities," pp. 127-139, 159-171.

[8] To Will & To Do, p. 129

[9] Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has brilliantly called attention to the lessons of lived moralities and the flaws of theoretical ones in his influential works After Virtue (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame, 2nd ed., 1984) and Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1990). Jacques Ellul was already addressing this topic in the early 1960s.

[10] To Will & To Do, pp. 164. 165.

[11] Jacques Ellul, The New Demons (New York: Seabury, 1975), p. 65. Translated by C. Edward Hopkin from Les Nouveaux Possedes (Paris: Librairie Artheme Fayard, 1973).

544

utterly critical in the field of business and organizational ethics today: no improvement is possible without addressing the larger purposes of the organization. It has been common to try to separate ethics from religion and the sacred, on the assumption that the latter is necessarily divisive and is altogether dispensable to ethics and morality. Yet many people attest to the importance of religion as a source and shaper of their values and ethics; and those who do not, typically have some unacknowledged substitute sacred lurking just below the surface of their ethics and values.[12]

3. Technological morality as the dominant "lived morality" of our time. Third, Ellul identified and analyzed the dominant lived morality of our era, "technological morality," with its core values of efficiency, normality, and success.[13] This technological morality is now deeply embedded in all sectors of our society, from business to education to religion. Ellul, far more than any other thinker, exposed the reality and nature of this enemy of an authentic ethics of life and freedom. Many have thought of technology as a "value-free" phenomenon. A means. Ellul showed that it has become a sacred "end," the *telos* of our society, embedded with values. "The fact is that technology is felt by modern man as a sacred phenomenon. It is intangible, the supreme (in the cabalistic sense), unassailable operation. All criticism of it brings down impassioned, outraged, and excessive reactions in addition to the panic it causes."[14]

In our postmodern context, it is often naively assumed that the only values to which we submit are those of our own personal choosing and that, in turn, we are (or we are the creators of) our own gods. Much of this is illusory and many postmodern individuals are unconsciously living out a worship of technique and a conformity to the values of technical morality. "We are entering into a new form of morality which could be called technological morality, since it tends to bring human behavior into harmony with the technological world, to set up a new scale of values in terms of technology, and to create new virtues."[15] But this is not true merely with self-conscious postmodernists; technological morality has also invaded and colonized ethical thinking among Christians and other traditional groups, to a much greater extent than is realized.

4. The legitimacy of the morality of the world (the two ethics). Fourth, Jacques Ellul called attention to the value and importance of the morality of the world, alongside the ethics arising out of a relationship with God. These two ethics each have their legitimacy, their distinctives, and their limitations. Despite Ellul's sometimes harsh critique of *both* of these ethical enterprises, his challenge to work at improving both of them is unmistakable.

"Life is possible within an ethical system. Apart from that it would be constant warfare, and interpersonal relationships would be unthinkable. Therefore we must respect this morality for its utility, since it is useful to man The Christian, because he

---

[12] See David W. Gill, "Ethics With and Without God," in David W. Gill, editor, Should God Get Tenure: Essays on Religion and Higher Education (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 129-145.

[13] To Will and To Do, Chapter 11, "Technological Morality," pp. 185-198.

[14] New Demons, p. 71.

[15] To Will & To Do, p. 185.

is a man, should lend a hand in making the world livable. Morality is part of that task, the common morality, the morality of the group, interpersonal morality. We must respect it, build it, and strengthen it in company with our fellows."[16]

How do we do this? My view is that we begin by identifying the sacred, the central motif, the core purpose of any given group, large or small. What is it that is being treated as sacred? What is at the center of our attention, thinking, and purpose? Then, we critically reflect on whether this sacred stands as a worthy enough center of our common project. Finally, we work together to elaborate ethical guidelines that are in alignment with that "central motif."

5. The necessity and urgency of Christian ethics. Fifth, Ellul was a pivotal figure in convincing a whole generation of Christian theologians (perhaps especially in America) that dogmatics were not enough, that the faith must be articulated in an ethics and lived out in faithful discipleship in the world. The conflict between Christian faith and modern culture was not to be played out merely as a contest of ideas and arguments (as Protestant orthodoxy and Fundamentalism were inclined) but rather in a whole style of life that included behavior as well as thought. But is the language of ethics and morality appropriate here? Ellul is at his most extreme dialectical contradiction in his answer. Christianity is not about morality but about faith, about a life in response to God's presence and word. "The biblical concept of the good as the will of God immediately prohibits us from formulating an ethic. An ethic is always, ultimately, the formation of a good in itself."[17]

"And yet a Christian ethic is indispensable," Ellul says.[18] "The construction of a Christian ethic is necessary, first of all, because it is a guide, an indication given to faith, a real assistance to the brethren."[19] Ellul's dialectic highlights the radical difference between the ethics of the world and the ethics of the Word. What unites both disparate phenomena under the rubric of ethics is their common quest to know what is right and good. Beyond that, they are radically distinctive. The fact that Ellul himself set out to write a massive three-part introduction to a Christian ethics ought to put to rest any thought that Christian ethics is an unworthy pursuit.

6. A Christian ethics centered on Jesus and guided by Scripture. Sixth, in rebuilding a Christian ethic for our times, Ellul made a huge contribution with his insistent focus on Jesus and Scripture. "The word of God is fully expressed, explained, and revealed in Jesus Christ, and only in Jesus Christ, who is himself, and in himself, the Word."[20]

---

[16] To Will & To Do, pp. 80-81.

[17] To Will & To Do, p. 202; see also "Moralism," Chapter 4 of Jacques Ellul, The Subversion of Christianity (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 69-73; Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley from La Subversion du Christianisme (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1984).

[18] To Will & To Do, p. 245.

[19] Jacques Ellul, Presence of the Kingdom (New York: Seabury Press, 1967), pp. 21-22; Trans. Olive Wyon from Presence au monde moderne (Geneve: Roulet, 1948).

[20] To Will & To Do, p. 27.

"We know God fully only in Jesus Christ."[21] And about Scripture, Ellul says "The criterion of my thought is the biblical revelation, the content of my thought is the biblical revelation, the point of departure is supplied by the biblical revelation, the method is the dialectic in accordance with which the biblical revelation is given to us, and the purpose is a search for the significance of the biblical revelation concerning ethics."[22] Ellul's work provided fresh, insightful, and powerful new understandings of the ethical implications of these core authorities in the Christian life.

After Ellul, Christian ethicists paid more—and better—attention to Jesus and Scripture, which simultaneously lends their work credibility in the church and revolutionary distinctiveness in the world. Part of what keeps our ethical systems and approaches humble and temporary, as Ellul urges, is that the criteria of the good and right are located in the authority of Jesus and Scripture. All commentaries, systems, traditions, and teachings are a step removed from these authorities.

7. The priority of a Christian ethics of "being" (over "doing") Seventh, Ellul's ethics emphasize "being" over "doing." "Man always looks for a good which will determine a 'deed' —whereas in Jesus Christ it is always a matter of 'being'."[23] Ellul reflected at great length on the Pauline virtues of faith, hope, and love as accounts of the appropriate stance before the Wholly Other God. "When asked what to *do*, Paul answers by saying what we should *be*."[24] While ethics will sketch out decision-and action-guidelines—indicatives if not imperatives—the heart of the matter in Christian ethics is to be brought into a stance of hope before God (to which God can give freedom), a stance of faith (to which God can provide holiness and distinctiveness), and a stance of love (to which God can respond with the gift of renewed relationships). In a Christian church deeply tainted by the modern scientific quest for abstract, universal laws followed by rational decision and effective action, Ellul's call back to an ethics of stance and virtue, is a powerful antidote.[25]

8. The temporary, limited status of all Christian ethics. Eighth, and finally, Ellul's emphasis on the "temporary" and humble status of any Christian ethic, including his own, is a rare but essential call to freedom and responsibility in the field of ethics. Ellul frequently wrote and said that he was not creating another system but rather trying to provide his readers with the means to think out for themselves the meaning of their

---

[21] The Ethics of Freedom, p. 51.

[22] To Will & To Do, p. 1.

[23] To Will and To Do, p. 28.

[24] Ethics of Freedom, p. 309. My own two-volume introduction to Christian ethics focuses first on Becoming Good: Building Moral Character (InterVarsity Press, 2000) and then on Doing Right: Practicing Ethical Principles (InterVarsity Press, 2004).

[25] Among those who have led the movement back toward virtue, character, and "being" in Christian ethics are Stanley Hauerwas, A Community of Character (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981), and Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1975), Peter Kreeft, Back to Virtue: Traditional Moral Wisdom for Modern Moral Confusion (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), and Gilbert Meilaender, The Theory and Practice of Virtue (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984).

life or faith or ethics. It is an ongoing challenge to all who labor in this field, not to fix the work of Ellul or anyone else in stone but to stand on his shoulders, to learn from him and then push forward to an even better understanding of ethics for the time and place in which we must live. Ethics has so often been a means of judging, condemning, and rejecting others (and often enough oneself also) in an arrogant, domineering way. Ellul shows us a different path that is simultaneously bold and humble.

* * *

Preserving and Extending Ellul's ethical legacy

These eight contributions Ellul has made to the field of ethics are of no small importance to a world and a church that struggle to know what is the right thing to do in so many circumstances and domains. We should remember that Ellul would not be the first intellectual whose work grew in importance after the author passed from the scene. S0ren Kierkegaard's biggest, if not also his greatest, work, the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* sold only a dozen or so copies in his lifetime. But after SK's death, various scholars and friends saw with growing clarity the value of his legacy and refused to let it disappear. Today there are hundreds of thousands of copies of *Postscript* being studied in dozens of languages. Jacques Ellul had greater impact on his contemporaries than did Kierkegaard but we face a similar challenge to promote the publication, translation, distribution, and study of his works. We should aim to do as well with Jacques Ellul's legacy as the intellectual heirs of Kierkegaard did with his.

A Deeper Understanding of Character and Virtue in Ethics

As Ellul's ethical works become more fully available to serious students, one of the most important avenues of further study will be to consider in depth Ellul's work on the ethics that flows from the classic theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. The postmodern attack on modern moral theories (Kant, Mill, et al) has roots not just in the existentialist approach to ethics articulated in different ways by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche but in the virtue ethics traditions of pre-modern societies. How is Ellul's understanding of a theological virtue ethics similar and different to the approaches of moral philosophers and theologians, such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas?

In his *Ethics of Freedom* Ellul provides us with some general comments on ethics and virtue as well as some specific insights into the virtue of hope and the ethics of freedom. Ethics "flows out of the relationship with Christ," Ellul writes.[26] Paul's theological virtues of faith, hope, and love provide a "mediation" of that relationship. Each of these virtues "expresses a specific type of behavior." Thus, hope is expressed

---

[26] Ethics of Freedom, p. 7.

in freedom, faith in holiness, and love in relationship. Ellul published individual books on hope and faith, and extended articles and chapters on love. His three-volume ethics of freedom was published; his thousandpage manuscript on the ethics of holiness may yet be published. He did not write the ethics of relationship. Ellul believed that the hope/freedom studies were the most important studies for our era, a time of loss of authentic hope and freedom. Ellul presented faith/holiness and love/relationship as a dialectical relationship in which the first draws us away (producing a distinctiveness of identity) and the second sends us back (into relationships and presence in the world).

The language Ellul uses to describe hope and freedom helps illuminate what he understands virtue to be. Hope is a "response of man to God's work for him," a "response to God's love and grace."[27] Hope rests on the resurrection and victory of Jesus Christ. Hope is not just an emotion or feeling but an "actualization here and now" of an anticipated life and glory; it is a "way of living." Freedom, in turn, is God's gift and response to man's hope. Freedom is a "situation made for us"—not an expression of our will or our being, a "fruit" rather than a "work," in the traditional Pauline terminology. Freedom is not a virtue or a fragment of the Christian life but the "climate of all virtues." "Freedom is first a power or possibility—a power to act and obey."[28] Ellul says that there is "no incontestable outward sign" of freedom in a life but that there is nevertheless a qualitative difference perceived on a personal and relational level. The freedom that comes from hope characteristically strains toward the future, and leaves the old behind. Freedom is not sitting back and letting God work—it is knowing God's will and doing it."[29] By hoping in God, one is attached and linked to God's future and thereby freed from and in the present.

Ellul's expositions of hope and freedom are exhilarating, not just theologically but politically and culturally. What we can already see in his hints about faith and holiness, and about love and relationship, is equally promising. But how does Ellul's work on virtue ethics relate to that of other ethical writers? From Aristotle onwards, virtues have been thought of as traits and habits of character. Long debate has taken place about the sources of virtue—to what extent is it the training of a natural endowment? To what extent are the virtues gifts of God (the "infused" virtues of Thomas Aquinas)? Whether gifts of nature or God, what are the roles of socialization and personal choice in the nurture and expression of a virtue like hope or love? What does it mean to value and pursue hope or another virtue in my own life? How do I proceed? Is it possible to make a *habit* of the stance of hope or faith? Or must it be an *existential choice* in every given moment and circumstance? Much of the virtue ethics tradition has argued that we must simultaneously seek to appropriate the virtue as an ingrained habit, capacity, and disposition and as a vital, existential stance in the moment. It is not either/or but both/and. And God is fully capable of doing a work of molding character as habit and

---

[27] Ethics of Freedom, p. 13.

[28] Ethics of Freedom, p. 103

[29] Ethics of Freedom, p. 62. Other page references in this paragraph refer to this book.

embedded disposition as well as initiating a stance of hope or faith, in the existential moment. Ellul's language is distinctly tilted toward the Kierkegaardian individual in the moment. But there are also hints of possible connections to a more Thomistic approach.

The challenge is to go (with Ellul) beyond both schools of thought and articulate a virtue ethics appropriate to our time and place.

A Better Understanding of Individual and Community in Ethics

A second promising avenue to explore in Ellul's ethics has to do with the role and importance of *community* (in its various forms). Ellul's work hints at such moral community but places far greater focus on the lone individual and the mass society, at the two extremes. Emile Durkheim's fear of the erosion of intermediate groups, with the anomistic individual pitifully subject to the impersonal mass, seems to have become our fundamental reality. But is this the end of the story? Ellul's dialectical form of expression often results in a very pessimistic answer to the question of moral community. But the same dialectic grounds our radical refusal to yield to such pessimism. Thus, the exploration of moral community is a path begging for ellulian attention.

Ellul argues that social transformation results from the accumulation of a vast number of individual decisions from below.[30] It is only the individual act of freedom that can break the technological system of ideology and belief (though the technological system of material correlation and integration is almost impossible for that individual to break)(195). Individual Christians have sometimes been free, he says, but not the church (289). His ethics is an *individualistic* ethics, not part of a commitment to a collective movement, but it is not *private* (210). This is hard for people to grasp or accept because the modern mind is used to collectivist thought. Sociology tends to give primacy to the group with no real safeguards for the force and validity of individuals, but the individual is key (296). Christian freedom is individual and personal in origin and execution but also necessarily collective in its reference and consequences because of the centrality of love (270). So it is the lay individual who is on the frontier of church and world where the decisive action and conflict takes place. "But it is only on the basis of a church which is a strong body and community that this is possible for the layman" (298).

Whatever the sociologists may say about the life of groups, communities, and institutions, Jesus and the Bible (Ellul's avowed authorities for his ethical thought) certainly provide strong and unrelenting calls to moral community. In a general sense, "it is not good for one to dwell alone" (Genesis 2:18). In a very specific way, the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount (the most famous ethical teaching of the Bible) were given to a community, not to an individual. Jesus sent his disciples out two-by-

---

[30] *Ethics of Freedom*, p. 473.

two, not one-by-one. Jesus promised "wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst" and that whatever two or three "bound on earth" (a metaphor for moral decision-making) would be bound in heaven. Members of the "body of Christ" should value the other parts of the "body" and realize that it takes all parts of a body to make it function properly.[31]

It is certainly important to hear Ellul's warnings about how groups can be the instruments of social conformity and are subject to laws of bureaucracy. It was sad to hear him confess (as he often did) that he never personally experienced community in any significant way that he could write about. Community seemed an impossible ideal to Ellul. He had a good eye for the hypocrisy and conformity of the church. Nevertheless, the actual communities of Israel and the early church are never presented in the Bible as anything other than flawed, imperfect phenomena; they are not dispensable just because they are so far from ideal. Indeed the community is essential for the individual's *discernment* of the ethical right and good, and the community is essential for the *carrying out* of the right and good. The community is where character is formed and where individuals are taught the counter-narrative to the story of technological growth and goodness that otherwise becomes our central motif.

Ellul certainly hints at the importance of moral community, but it is largely undeveloped (much as it was in the writings of Kierkegaard). Perhaps Ellul's work on the ethics of love/relationship would have developed this part of the picture. It is for us now, to pursue the project.

* * *

Looking back at Jacques Ellul's writings on ethics ten years after his death is as challenging and provocative an experience as it was to first encounter them in past decades. It is impossible to measure his influence on the field of ethics; while many scholars and writers owe him a great debt, he has never been a central figure in the "ethics establishment." His role has been that of a prophet to the intellectuals—rather than a guru or creator of a school of disciples. But his legacy continues to challenge and inspire. It will be to our great loss if we do not explore and elaborate Ellul's ethical thought during the coming years.

Jacques Ellul on Ethics & Morality

Ethical Theories

"It would, of course, be impossible to describe, however sketchily, the innumerable theoretical moralities developed in the course of time by philosophers, founders of religions, etc., the moralities of Moses, Confucius, Aristotle, Plato, the Stoics, Saint Thomas, Erasmus, Kant, Nietzsche . . .

---

[31] See David W. Gill, "The Reality of Our Communities," chapter 3 of Becoming Good: Building Moral Character (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 43-61, for a discussion of community

"Let us recall, first of all, that theoretical morality is never 'pure,' that is, unaffected by its milieu. It is always to a greater or less extent, an expression of the environment in which it is elaborated. . . The intellectual, philosophical, religious, scientific trends of the moment strongly (but not totally) determine the moralist in the creation of a new system of ethics. Yet this moralist strives for an exact product. He wants to settle that which *should be* with the maximum of impartiality, to put a group of precepts together logically, to provide a rational justification for the requirements of the moral conscience of the moment, and in pursuing this ambition he goes far beyond the working morality of the group in which he finds himself

"All of this brings us to a consideration of the great weakness of theoretical moralities; namely, their lack of application. Whether applicable or not, they usually are scarcely applied in fact. The inhabitants of a city, the members of a group, the citizens of a nation, give very little heed to the morality developed by one of their number. Who, apart from the specialists, is interested in Kant's ethics? It is a matter for the philosophers and the philosophers have no influence over morals. Even when there is a deep community of interests between the group and the moralist, the latter is still a stranger and his morality is not applied... A few intellectuals know them, but one can say that by the very fact that it is a matter for intellectuals the dialogue remains at that level, rather than at the level of practical behavior. And no one thinks to govern his life according to the outcome of the quarrels among the specialists in philosophical ethics."

To Will & To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians (1964; ET, 1969), pp. 127-129.

Lived Moralities

"A lived morality is located at the sociological level, not only because, as we have said, there is no morality except in relationships among individuals, but also because the various elements of the moral phenomenon are directly or indirectly produced by the social group. . .

"The connection between morality and society is certain First of all, no society can exist and develop

without a morality. We have already indicated that morality is necessary for any group whatsoever. Society must supply its members with a criterion of good and evil, a hierarchy of values, a list of imperatives, goals to be attained which are characterized as 'god,' a definition of the just and unjust, and prohibitions setting the limits to freedom of action. Without these, the society could not operate. Were it based exclusively on self-interest, or exclusively on restraint, it would meet with an insurmountable psychological obstacle or would dissolve into ceaseless conflict. . .

"In every society there is an essential motif, a chief center of interest, an undisputed assumption, a goal recognized by all. . . This principal motif is always both ideological

---

in Christian character formation.

and material. It is bound up with a certain structure and it expreses itself in an aspiration. It is not a belief alone, nor is it a fact alone. It involves a combination of the two. It is in relation to this principal motif that the group's hierarchy of 'values' is arranged, and that the striving toward the desirable and the imperatives of the obligatory are established. . . But this principal motif is always bound up with the various group structures: economic, technological, religious, political, cultural, and demographic. The morality expresses the structures in terms of obligation and duty, with a view to preserving them, perpetuating them, and regulating man with respect to them.

"When a society no longer acknowledges a central motif, or when its structures are no longer felt to be necessary, no morality can remain valid."

To Will & To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians (1964; ET, 1969), pp. 159-65 passim.

Technological Morality

"A transformation in the lived morality is taking place under our own eyes. [Ed. Note: Ellul is writing in the early 1960s]. We are entering into a new form of morality which could be called technological morality since it tends to bring human behavior into harmony with the technological world, to set up a new scale of values in terms of technology, and to create new virtues. . .

"Technology supposes the creation of a new morality. It informs the whole of public, professional, and private life. One can no longer act except in relational to technical ensembles. Hence there is need to create new patterns of behavior, new ideas, new virtues. At the same time, new choices are set before man which he is in no way prepared to face. . .

"The probability is that a new morality will be created which will put its blessing upon man's subjection to the technological values and will make him a good servant to this new master, in trustfulness and loyalty, in the spirit of a service freely rendered. . .

"Contemporary man is very generally convinced that technique is the good, that it concurs in man's good and will bring about his happiness. Should man recoil before this prospect, the proof of the technical good is confirmed, reinforced, and assured by the various pressures at the disposal of the technological civilization: the testimony of its successes, the importance of the necessity for its development, the certainty of progress, the marvelous concordance of the techniques. How can all that fail to convince a man inwardly that he should participate with all his heart in the development of such a good? . . .

"In this technological morality there is also set up a scale of values which are truly valid for man and which the individual accepts as such. Wigthout doubt, one of the important facts in this sphere is the transformation of technology itself into a value. For the man of today, technology is not only a fact. It is not merely an instrument, a

means. It is the critereion of good and evil. It gives meaning to life. It brings promise. It is a reason for acting and it demands our commitment.....

"In this technological society the normal tends to replace the moral. Man is no longer asked to act well but to act normally... the highest virtue demanded of

man today is adjustment. . .

"We should bear in mind a third value characteristic of this morality: namely success. In the last analysis, good and evil are synonyms for success and failure. . .

"[T]he 'more' becomes a criterion in itself.The new morality justifies automatically that which is 'more.'

To Will & To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians (1964; ET, 1969), pp. 127-129.

Christian Ethics

"In reality, the problem that confronts us is that of the Christian ethic, an ethic which has nothing in common with what is generally called 'morality,' and still less with the Christian 'virtues' in the traditional sense. . . It is never a series of rules, or principles, or slogans . . . we can never make a complete and valid description of the ethical demands of God, any more than we can reach its heart. We can only define its outline, and its conditions, and study some of its elements for purposes of illustration.

"The heart of this ethic may be expressed thus: it is based on an 'agonistic' way of life; that is to say, the Christian life is always an 'agony,' that is, a final decisive conflict; thus it means that constant and actual presence in our hearts of the two elements of judgment and grace. But it is this very fact that ensures our liberty. We are free because at every moment in our lives we are both judged and pardoned, and are consequently placed in a new situation, free from fatalism, and from the bondage of sinful habits

"The two dominant characteristics of this ethic are, so it seems to me, (a) that it should be temporary, and (b) that it should be apologetic.

"(a) *Temporary*: because it concerns a given and variable situation. We are not concerned with formulating principles but with knowing how to judge an action in given circumstances. Thus we are not bound to hold closely to moral ideas which must be invariable, but the Scripture teaches us that its ethic varies in form, and in concrete application to situations and places. . . There are consequences of the faith which can be objectively indicated. . . The construction of a Christian ethic is necessary, first of all, because it is a guide, an indication given to faith, a real assistance to the brethren; and then, because it allows us to give a real content to the judgment which God pronounces upon us; and finally, because it is necessary for the life of the Church. But this elaboration must not be substituted for the fight of faith which every Christian must wage; that is why it is indicative, not imperative. We must not imagine that this ethic will give us the permanent solution of all problems. That is why, essentially, it ought to be temporary; it needs to be continually revised, re-examined, and re-shaped by the combined effort of the Church as a whole.

"(b) Further, the Christian ethic is necessarily *apologetic* in character That is to say, that the

'works' done in virtue of, and in consequence of, the Christian ethic, ought to appear in the light of Jesus Christ as veritable good works . . . of such a quality that they lead men to praise God. When they do this, they do constitute an apologetic."

Presence of the Kingdom (1948; ET 1951), pp. 20-23.

The Ethics of Holiness in an Age of Globalization: The Significance of Jacques Ellul's Work for Comparative Religious Ethics

by Darrell J. Fasching

Darrell J. Fasching is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of South Florida, Tampa. His book The Thought of Jacques Ellul (Edwin Mellen Press, 1981) was the first English language monograph published on Ellul. Darrell is also author of The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima (SUNY, 1993) and co-author (with Dell deChant) of Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach (Blackwell, 2001) reviewed elsewhere in this issue. He was the founding editor of The Ellul Forum in 1988.

For more than a quarter of a century now I have been engaged in a theological approach to comparative religious ethics. See especially *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima* (1993) and *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach* (with Dell deChant, 2001).[32] This approach has been built around Ellul's distinction between the sacred and the holy. Ellul first made this distinction in his second book, *The Presence of the Kingdom* (1948, English translation 1967) and gave his most detailed analysis of it in *The New Demons (1973, English* translation *1975.)* These two terms, "sacred" and "holy," are typically used as synonyms, but Ellul uses them as antonyms - opposites. The sacred, he argues, is a reverse image of the holy. It is like looking in a mirror –what seems to be the same is really totally reversed.

Following Durkheim, the sacred is for Ellul the sociological dimension of all societies that provides a sense of order necessary for human social life but which tends to become absolute, totalitarian and demonic. Ellul argues that the word of God manifests the power of the holy to call into question and desacralize all sacred orders. This is what the Christian Gospel did for classical western culture by demytholgizing and desacralizing

---

[32] See especially *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima (SUNY, 1993)* and also *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach, (*with Dell deChant*, Blackwell*, 2001) and my chapter on new and new age religions and ethics in *World Religions Today* (with John Espositio and Todd Lewis, Oxford, 2006). See also, my chapter "Religious Studies and the Alienation of Theology" in *Religious Studies, Theology and the University,* edited by Linell Cady and Delwin Brown (SUNY, 2002).

its myths and rituals –its "sacred way of life" required by the gods of nature. In the modern world, he argued, Christianity is called to do the same for technological society, by desacralizing the sacred technological order that superceded and replaced the sacred natural order.

For Emile Durkheim, religion is to be understood as a human response to the overwhelming (and therefore sacred) power of society upon which we depend for our existence. Without being fully conscious of the reason for their actions, he would say, tribal peoples revere their sacred ancestors or *totems* (both human and non-human) as symbols of the sacred order of their society. For Durkheim the singular purpose of religious myth is to sacralize society so that its customs can be considered sacred and bring social stability to human life.

Yet another of the great founders of sociology, Max Weber, argued that this is not the only social function of religion. Weber argued that while religion functions much of the time to sanction the "routine order" of society (i.e., the sacred customs) as Durkheim claimed, still sometimes religion manifests the dramatic power to desacralize and disenchant society, and in so doing bring about dramatic social change. It does this by calling into question the supposed sacredness of the old order. Indeed the same religious tradition can at different times do both. Sometimes religion sacralizes society and sometimes it secularizes it. Thus Weber argued that Roman Catholic Christianity functioned to sacralize the social order of the Middle Ages while Protestant Christianity functioned to secularize that social order, contributing to the emergence of the modern secular society. (Of course for Weber secularization is irreversible while for Ellul, once a new "secular" order is established there is nothing to prevent that order from becoming a new sacred order, requiring further acts of desacralization.)

Ellul's understanding of the sacred and the holy, it always seemed to me, has a lot in common with Weber's views, but in my conversations with Ellul he always denied the influence of Weber and persisted in giving Marx all the credit. Nevertheless, I still find it useful to understand Ellul through the prism of Weber's perspective, in which he argued that charismatic religion inserts itself into the sacred routine of social order, calls it into question and initiates a desacralizing transformation of society.

For Ellul, that transformation is a moment in which the holy manifests itself as the insertion of a wholly other dimension of transcendence into sacred order. This is made possible by the gift of apocalyptic hope in God as the Wholly Other. The goal is not to destroy a sacred way of life but to call it into question, transform and "rehabilitate" it, by opening it to transcendence –making human freedom and dignity possible in rebellion against all sacred necessities. With these distinctions Ellul opens up an approach to comparative religious ethics as identifying "sacred ways of life" in need of rehabilitation by experiences of the holy. Ellul helps us get things into correct perspective when he argues that "the sacred is not one of the categories of religion.

Most of this essay is drawn from arguments previously made in these publications.

Religion, rather, is one possible rendition of the sacred" alongside of politics, economics, and other cultural enterprises.[33]

Ellul, standing in the French sociological tradition that goes back to Durkheim, is simply stating what is obvious to this tradition; namely, that every society is legitimated by some sense of the sacred. This sense of the sacred pervades every aspect of culture, not just "religion" in its explicit institutional forms. Indeed, in most times and places in history, religion and culture have been indistinguishable.

In making his distinction between sacred and holy, Ellul was not thinking so much about comparative religious ethics as the Christian ethical encounter with society in history. But his work suggested to me a theological path into comparative religious ethics, one useful in defining theology as an academic (rather than confessional) discipline essential to the tasks of religious studies in secular universities. This would not be a Christian theology but what Paul Tillich called a theology of the history of religions. Drawing on Ellul's work, and that of Gabriel Vahanian who also makes this distinction between the sacred and the holy, I have argued that religious studies is about more than "religions" (that is, as Ellul insists, it is about the sacred in all its manifestations) even as theology is about more than "God."[34] From this perspective, comparative religious ethics is about comparing sacred ways of life that are normative for societies and their critique under the influence of diverse experiences of the holy. "Theos" or "God" is only one name for such experiences. Buddhism, for example, offers significant alternatives.

Theological ethics is the task of critical normative reflection on the dimension of the sacred that pervades and shapes all cultural activities. And all critique of the sacred, I would argue, is rooted in some experience of the *holy* as *wholly other*. I will give you three examples: the Biblical critique of society in the name of a God who cannot be named or imaged and in whose image we are created; the Socratic critique in the name of the Unseen Measure as the measure of every human being; the Buddhist critique in the name of the emptiness of all selves. In all three cases the self reflects the image of the holy as wholly other (transcendence) that cannot be defined and confined to any sacred order and which every sacred order must respect and accommodate if it is to be just and compassionate.

In ancient Israel, prophets like Jeremiah (in the 6th century BCE) insisted that God demanded a life of holiness which called into question the sacred order of society in the name of justice for the widow, the orphan and the stranger (those neglected and repressed by the sacred order of society). In a parallel fashion the Buddha (who lived in India about the same time as Jeremiah), called into question the sacred order of the caste system and welcomed lower castes and outcaste into his holy community (the sangha) as equal with persons from all higher castes. The heart of prejudice and injustice is the claim reinforced by sacred social orders that some are more human than

---

[33] *The New Demons*, (Seabury Press, 1975), p. 48.

[34] See "Religious Studies and the Alienation of Theology" as listed in note 1.

others and therefore deserve a more privileged status. But in the biblical tradition all are created in the image of a God who is without image even as for Buddhism all selves are empty, so that for either –no caste or class can claim special privileges.

Some three centuries later, in Ancient Greece, Socrates repeated this pattern in his "invention" of ethics as a category in Western philosophy. The Greek roots of our term "ethics" (*ethos, ethike*) like its Latin parallel (*mos, mores*) "morality" once meant the "customs" of the people - the sacred customs. However, after Socrates, ethics came to mean "the questioning of the sacred customs" by asking: *Is what people call "good" really the good?* This is a dangerous question. Socrates was put on trial and executed for "impiety towards the gods" and "corrupting the youth" because he dared to question the sacred way of life of Athenian society. Yet Socrates' goal was not to demean the Athenian way of life but to rehabilitate it and raise it to a higher level.

The life and death of Socrates (like that of Jeremiah and the Buddha) illustrates the tension between the sacred and the holy. As Ellul insists, every society needs the stability provided by a sense of sacred order. But sometimes order is achieved in society at the expense of virtues such as justice and compassion. As Socrates put it, every society must be more than just the "cosmos writ small" (sacred order), it must also be "the human writ large" (the holy), provided we understand the measure of the human to be the "Unseen Measure." No society can be a good society which sacrifices justice and compassion for human beings in the name of sacred order. Morality need not simply be a mirror of sacred order. It can be transformed to meet the demands of the holy. The goal of the Socratic ethic of the holy is to rehabilitate the sacred order of Athenian society so that its sacred customs or morality, reflect *both* a sense of order *and* of justice.

Socrates crime was asking people whether what they called the good really was the good. It was a crime of corrupting the youth because he taught them to question the sacredness of the Athenian way of life and so led them astray. It was a crime of impiety toward the gods because what people called the good was a way of life legitimated by an appeal to sacred/divine origins. His enemies accused Socrates of being an atheist. But Socrates himself argued that, on the contrary, he was compelled to question the Athenian way of life by some mysterious God (apparently a stranger to the Athenian pantheon) who had sent him as a "gad-fly"_to the city of Athens. Thus Socrates' protest against the sacred order of Athenian society was itself rooted in an alternative type of religious experience. An experience he described as an inward movement of "the soul" toward a wholly other "Unseen Measure" which called all other measures of the public good into question so that no society could be called good that was not just toward it members.

Socrates opposed "the way things are" (Is = Ought) with an understanding of the Good that transcends the sacred order of things and calls it into question (Ought vs. Is). His death in protest of unjust laws became a model of civil disobedience for both Eastern and Western modern exemplars of the ethical life, like Gandhi and Martin

Luther King Jr. It was both an act of respect for morality (he does not flee "the laws") and at the same time an ethical call to transform morality in the name of justice.

To say that a way of life is sacred is virtually, by definition, to say that it is 'beyond questioning." The sacred is typically surrounded by a taboo which forbids all questions. Socratic questioning is inherently subversive and desacralizing, that is, secularizing activity. As with Buddhism, it produces the paradox of a form of religious expression that seems irreligious, even as early Christians seemed atheistic and irreligious for questioning the sacred way of life of the Romans.

As Ellul notes, the Hebrew term for "holy" (*qadosh)* suggests that to be holy is to be "set apart." Ellul finds this occurring through apocalyptic hope in the Wholly Other, I would argue that the experience of doubt and questioning is an equally valid avenue. When we are seized by doubt and by wonder we are seized by the holy: we are *estranged* or set apart from the sacred order of things. We find ourselves alienated from our sacred way of life and able to see it as if through the eyes of a *stranger*. Seeing from this perspective enables us to put all things in question. From this point of view, the inner demand for rationality (i.e., that our doubts and questions be pursued and answered) is an opening of the self to the infinite. All answers are finite and limited. Every answer generates more questions: we always have more questions than answers. Moreover, we do not initiate such experiences of doubt and wonder, they come upon us. We are seized by them the way Siddhartha was when he felt compelled to leave the security of the palace grounds only to encounter the old man, the sick man, the dead man and even more doubts and questions.

Such experiences demand from us the integrity to follow the questions wherever they lead. In saying this, I have in mind Augustine's *Confessions*, where he says that a key turning point in his life was reading Cicero's *Hortensius* which set him on fire with the desire to seek wisdom. This experience, he said, made him resolve never to cling to any partisan answers but rather to follow the questions wherever they led him (Book 3:4). Later in the *Confessions* he suggests that the wisdom he first surrendered to when he first surrendered to his doubts was none other than Christ, the wisdom of God (Book 11:9).

Thus faith begins, for Augustine, with a surrender to doubt— and trusting doubt opens him to the infinite wisdom of God through his quest for insight. Interestingly, it is through reading the pagan author Cicero, not the Bible, that this openness to selftranscendence and divine wisdom first occurs. For Augustine, faith is setting out on a life journey without knowing where he is going, trusting his surrender to doubt, his passion for wisdom, to lead the way. Indeed, in his Trinitarian writings Augustine argued that you cannot seek the God you do not know unless that God is already at work in your doubts and your passion for wisdom, leading you to him.

Without such experiences of the holy we would not experience the gap between 'what is" and "what might be," and between "what is" and "what ought to be." To be human is to be capable of migrating into new worlds in time, space and imagination. Our openness to the infinite requires of us openness to other worlds (both actual

and possible). In this sense, the claims of the holy as a type of human experience demand from us a hospitality to strangers and their strange worlds. Theological ethics, academically

conceived, requires engagement with the plurality of human experiences of the sacred and the holy.

Even from the perspective of Christian theology, while I would argue that there is no way to God except through Christ, I would quickly add -provided you understand that there is no way to Christ except through hospitality to strangers and their strange worldviews. For when we welcome the stranger we welcome either God (Genesis 18:1-5), God's messiah (Matt 25:35) or God's messengers/angels (Hebrews 13:2). To turn your back on the stranger is to turn your back on God. A world without strangers is a world without God. An affirmation of religious pluralism is compelled by the very logic of a biblical ethic of hospitality.

To be faithful to this logic we need to distinguish sacred moralities from various ethics of holiness that have emerged in history because this distinction clarifies the ambiguity surrounding the influence of religion on human behavior by exposing the demonic manifestations of religion for what they are. How is it that most Christians in Nazi Germany, either actively or passively, supported Hitler's attempted annihilation of the Jews while some felt their faith required them to oppose Hitler and rescue Jews? The first divided the world into sacred and profane realms and relegated the Jews to the profane realm of subhumans. These *Deutsch Christians* remade God in their own image as a true Aryan. Or how is it that, in the Southern United States in the middle of the twentieth century, both the proponents of segregation and the opponents of segregation (in the civil rights movement lead by Martin Luther King Jr.) could each think of themselves as following the Christian way of life. The proponents of segregation interpreted the Christian story in such a way as to divide the world into sacred and profane. Only whites were fully human and so permitted full access to the sacred order of society, blacks were profane and less (than) human and permitted only in certain controlled areas (separate water fountains, separate bathrooms, separate entrances to buildings, etc.) The opponents of segregation interpreted the Christian story in exactly the opposite direction, as one that demanded the desacralization of sacred order in the name of all that is holy so as to bring about equality and justice. The histories of religions and cultures are rife with such examples.

The distinction between the sacred and the holy is meant to express the idea that religious experiences are not all the same - the "sacred" and of the "holy" name two categories of types of experiences (in each category the experiences are not necessarily all the same but can be grouped together because they have similar functional impacts on society) that shape the narrative imagination in opposing directions, so that the very same tradition and the very same scriptural stories can be interpreted very differently, encouraging opposing patterns of behavior. By separating the uses of "sacred" and "holy" (and in a parallel manner, "morality" and "ethics") in this way we are saying that the collection of social behaviors that are generally labeled "religious" are not all religious

in the same way. So we are arguing that it is very helpful to give separate meanings to terms that have been used interchangeably in order help us see and understand these differences.

While the center of a sacred society is within its boundaries and measured by all who share the same identity, in a holy community the center is to be found, paradoxically, outside its boundaries, in the stranger who is wholly other. For strangers and outcasts are those whose identity does not fit within the sacred order of things and consequently cannot be named or measured in its categories. A holy community is typically a subculture which functions as a "counter culture," an alternative community within a sacred society whose way of life calls that society's sacred order into question. The experience of the holy desacralizes all sacred societies and sets in motion the development of an ethic of hospitality to the stranger.

Unlike the sacred and the profane, the holy and the secular are not opposites but complementaries. The world is experienced as secular for it is not the holy (the infinite) which is always wholly other (immeasurable and indefinable) than the finite world. The stranger's "difference" is a reminder of this wholly-otherness (for the stranger's ways, like God's, are not my ways and his thoughts are not my thoughts - -Isaiah 55:8-9).

The Appendix (below), a charting of the *Characteristics of the Sacred and the Holy*, outlines some of the key features of these opposing patterns of religious ways of life. In a sacred society all who are alike (for example, sharing a common ethnic identity) form a sacred circle of all who are the same - and therefore "fully human." All strangers - that is, all who are different - are outside this circle and seen as profane and less (or less than) human. One only has full moral obligations toward those who are human.

The experience of the sacred sacralizes the finite order of the society, seeing a society's way of life as an expression of the sacred cosmic order of things. And what is sacred is held to be beyond question. The way things are in this sacred order is the way they ought to be (Is = Ought). A very different form of religious experience gives rise to the holy community. For the experience of the holy generates a human response to the sacred which calls it into question by insisting that ultimate truth and reality are radically different than this world and its sacred powers and sacred orders. Consequently, the holy encourages doubt and questioning. The way things are is not the way they ought to be and so the way things are must be called into question by the way things ought to be (Ought vs. Is).

The distinction we are making between the sacred and the holy is typological. That is, it is a model to be used to help us sort out human experiences and behaviors. If taken too literally, however, it may become a stereotype. The difference between the sacred and the holy is not a difference to be found between religions, as if some were pure models of one and some pure models of the other. Rather, the sacred and the holy should be seen as opposing tendencies or ways of experiencing life, to be found in all persons and all communities/cultures (whether they appear to be religious or not). Every actual culture and religion (indeed every person's identity) is likely to embody tendencies of both models –the sacred and the holy -in a complex and sometimes self-

contradictory way of life. Thus, for instance, to cite the Buddhist sangha as an example of a holy community does not mean that it has not also functioned much of the time as a sacred society. Likewise for Christianity or any other tradition.

The world as we know it is passing away. The great world religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam, or Hinduism and Buddhism, or Taoism and Confucianism go back to the beginnings of civilization and are deeply bound up with the civilizations in which they emerged: the Middle East, India and China. In the past these religions and cultures lived in relative isolation from one another. Today our situation is dramatically different. For today we live at the beginning of an age of globalization created by the advance of techno-economic and communications techniques encircling the globe.

In this environment, the spiritual heritages of the human race have become our common inheritance, forming a rich ecology that can provide us with the wisdom we need to guide us in the new millennium. The more complex an ecology is, the more stable it is. And the more simplified an ecology becomes, the more unstable it becomes until it reaches a point where it is in danger of collapsing, unable to support life. The important thing to remember is that ecological diversity and complexity sustain life. This is as true for world culture as it is for nature.

The time when a new world religion could be founded - the time of a Moses, Jesus, Siddhartha or Mohammed–says contemporary theologian John Dunne, has passed. The spiritual adventure of our postmodern world is different. "The holy man of our time, it seems, is not a figure like Gotama [i.e., the Buddha] or Jesus or Mohammed, a man who could found a world religion, but a figure like Gandhi, a man who passes over by sympathetic understanding from his own religion to other religions and comes back again with new insight to his own. Passing over and coming back, it seems, is the spiritual adventure of our time."[35] What is required today is not the conquest of the world by any one religion or culture but a meeting and sharing of religious and cultural insight. Our common future depends upon our capacity to welcome the stranger, that is, our capacity for hospitality.

The spiritual adventure of passing over into the life of the stranger and coming back with new insight is a world-transforming process whose results have been keenly felt in the emergence of a global ethic of nonviolent resistance to all assaults against the sanctity of human dignity. It illustrates the way in which comparative religious ethics can advance a normative ethic through cross-cultural dialogue.

Martin Luther King, Jr. openly admitted that his own commitment to non-violent resistance or civil disobedience as a strategy for protecting human dignity had its roots in two sources: Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and Gandhi's teachings of nonviolence rooted in his interpretation of the Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita. Belonging to the next generation, King never met Gandhi, but did travel to India to study the effects of Gandhi's teachings of non-violence on Indian society. In this he showed a remarkable openness to the insights of another's religion and culture. In Gandhi and

---

[35] John Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), p ix.

his spiritual heirs King found kindred spirits, and he came back to his own religion and culture enriched by the new insights that came to him in the process of passing over and coming back. Martin Luther King, Jr. never considered becoming a Hindu, but his own Christianity was profoundly transformed by his encounter with Gandhi's Hinduism.

Just as important, however, is the fact that Gandhi himself engaged in the spiritual adventure of passing over. As a young man, Gandhi, at the age of 19, came to England to study law. His journey to England led him not away from his Hinduism but more deeply into it. For it was in England that Gandhi came to discover the *Bhagavad Gita* and to appreciate the spiritual and ethical power of Hinduism. Because he had promised his mother that he would remain vegetarian, he took to eating his meals with British citizens who had developed similar commitments to vegetarianism through their fascination with India and its religions. It is in this context that Gandhi was brought into direct contact with the 19th century Theosophists, for in these circles he met Madame Blavatsky and her disciple Annie Besant, both of whom had a profound influence upon him. His associates also included Christian followers of the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, who, after his midlife conversion, had embraced an ethic of non-violence based on Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount.*

At the invitation of his theosophist friends Gandhi read the *Bhagavad Gita* for the first time, in an English translation by Sir Edwin Arnold, entitled *The Song Celestial.* It was only much later that he took to a serious study of it in Sanskrit. Thus, seeing through the eyes of Western friends, he was moved to discover the spiritual riches of his own Hinduism. The seeds were planted in England, nourished by more serious study during his years in South Africa, and brought to completion upon his final return to India in 1915.

Gandhi was especially influenced by the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy and his understanding of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The message of nonviolence –love your enemy, turn the other cheek -took hold of Gandhi. And yet Gandhi did not become a Christian but rather returned to his own religion and culture, finding parallels to Jesus' teachings in his own Hindu tradition. And so he read his own Hindu scriptures with new insight, interpreting the Bhagavad Gita allegorically as a Hindu scripture of non-violent resistance to evil. And just as King used Gandhi to help him fight non-violently for the dignity of Blacks in America so Gandhi used Tolstoy to help him fight for the dignity of Hindus under British rule, and of the lower castes and outcastes within Hindu society in India.

Gandhi never seriously considered becoming a Christian any more than King ever seriously considered becoming a Hindu. Nevertheless, Gandhi's Hindu faith was profoundly transformed by his encounter with the Christianity of Tolstoy just as King's Christian faith was profoundly transformed by his encounter with Gandhi's Hinduism. For Gandhi, seeing the Sermon on the Mount through the prism of the Gita, "gave teeth" to the message of Jesus, showing that turning the other cheek did not require surrendering to evil but rather required non-violent resistance against all evil. In the

563

lives of Gandhi and M.L.King, Jr. we have examples of "passing over" as a profoundly transforming postmodern spiritual adventure.

Non-violence, King argued, is more than just a remedy for this or that social injustice. It is, he became convinced, essential to the future survival of humanity in an age of nuclear weapons. The choice, he argued, was "no longer between violence and nonviolence. It is either nonviolence or nonexistence." Truth is to be found in all religions, King argued, and "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly." The scandal of our age, said Abraham Joshua Heschel, is that in a world of diplomacy "only religions are not on speaking terms." But no religion, he argues, is an island and we all need to realize that "holiness is not the monopoly of any particular religion or tradition." "Buddhism today" says Thich Nhat Hanh, "is made up of non-Buddhist elements, including Jewish and Christian ones." And likewise with every tradition. "We have to allow what is good, beautiful, and meaningful in the other's tradition to transform us," he says. The purpose of such passing over into the other's tradition is to allow each to return to his or her own tradition transformed. What is astonishing, says Thich Nhat Hanh, is how we will find kindred spirits in other traditions with whom we share more than we do with many in our own tradition.[36]

What may we hope for from the practice of passing over and coming back? Certainly, our goal should not be to make everyone the same. The global ethic I envision emerging from the way of all the earth need not (indeed must not) aspire to make everyone conform. Alfred North Whitehead once noted that approximately 10 % of the European population participated in the Renaissance and yet the Renaissance transformed Europe. Creative minorities can be a powerful fermenting influence, bringing about profound cultural, even global, transformations. Ten percent of the world's population, engaged in passing over and coming back, working through the presence of diverse holy communities–Buddhist, Jewish, Christian and other kindred religious and secular communities –can be a saving remnant.

The journey of passing over and coming back is itself a kind of spiritual practice - a pilgrimage involving hospitality to the stranger. On this pilgrimage we wrestle with the stranger, ourselves, and the mystery of the holy (the one who refuses to give us his name). Like Jacob (Genesis 32:22-31), we may come away limping but blessed, transformed and given a new name -" Israel." The meaning of this new name, we are told is, *he who wrestles with God and humans and wins*, even though no one has been defeated. And like Jacob, we may walk away saying we have seen God face to face. Out of such a pilgrimage could emerge a new way of life for a new millennium in which the

---

[36] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail" in *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World* edited by James M. Washington (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1986 & 1992), p. 85. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays [of] Abraham Joshua Heschel*, edited by Susannah Heschel (N.Y.: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996), pp 241 & 247. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (N.Y.: G.P.

sacred is rehabilitated by an ethic of the holy embodied in the practice of hospitality. In this ethic we pass over into the lives and cultures of stranger only to come back to our own with new insight. As a Christian, that is the only way I can encounter the

Christ who is the wisdom of God. Would Ellul agree? I don't know. However, Ellul, with his commitment to universal salvation, certainly had the spirit of openness necessary for such a view. Moreover, he always encouraged us to "think for ourselves." In my view, this is where the ethics of holiness leads.

Putnam and Sons, Riverhead Books, 1995), pp. 9&11.

Appendix: Characteristics of the Sacred and the Holy

Sacred Society	Holy Community
Center within itself	Center outside of itself in the stranger
Sameness = measure of the human	Difference = measure of the human
Hostility to the stranger	Hospitality to the stranger
Sacred is opposed to Profane	Holy and Secular
Sacralization of the finite cosmos/society, expressed in a sacred way of life	Desacralization or secularization of the finite in the name of the infinite - only the Holy is holy: the world is not profane but secular
Cosmos writ small	Human writ large
Answers are absolute answers imprison us in the finite	Questioning and Doubt as measure of faith: we always have more questions than answers this keeps us open to the infinite (leap of faith)
God in the image of self	Created in the image of a God without image
This-worldly	Other-worldly
Hierarchical	Equality and interdependence
Honor	Dignity
Morality	Ethics
Is = Ought	
The way things are is they way they ought to be.	Ought vs. Is
The way things ought to be calls into question the way things are.	

Re-Viewing Ellul

To Will & To Do: An Ethical

Jacques Ellul
Research for Christians
Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969.
English translation by C. Edward Hopkin from
Le vouloir et le faire: recherches ethiques pour les chretiens.
Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1964.
Reviewed by Matthew Patillo
Princeton Theological Seminary

How can a society or an individual found an ethical system? Is there a transcendental or metaphysical ground from which one can reason ethically, or an absolute standard by which we can decide whether a given action is right or wrong? And, if no such foundation is possible, can we be content, and can society survive relying on casuistry, relativism, and pure pragmatism?

A Christian might be led to conclude that, apart from belief in the one, true God, it is impossible to establish a legitimate foundation for ethics. All other ethical systems must be founded on a false transcendence (Ellul's "theoretical moralities") or would necessarily take some form of moral relativism ("lived moralities"). Christendom has historically presented itself as the only sure guide to human behavior, as possessing the eternally secure basis for ethical decision-making, but it is precisely on this point that Ellul radically challenges Christian thought. It is not the case, he argues, that the Hebrew and Christian scriptures offer the only true ethical system; rather, it is the biblical revelation that condemns all ethical systems, and makes a Christian ethic *impossible.* Instead of saying that apart from God no ethical system is possible, Ellul contends that, apart from God, *only* ethics is possible.

Ellul confesses in his introduction that the biblical revelation supplies the criterion, content, point of departure, method, and purpose for his ethical research. Reasoning from scripture, he argues that when Adam and Eve disobediently appropriated the knowledge of good and evil, what humans assumed is the right to decide for ourselves what is good, and what is evil. Morality—even, or especially Christian morality—is a result of humans' fall into sin. Like death and work, morality is a necessary part of our fallen world, but it is only a necessity. Christ did not suffer, die, and rise again to establish a new ethical system, but to lead humans back to God, whose will alone

determines what is good. Ellul sees in Christ the possibility for humans to obey God's will in a way unmediated by theories, systems, and human choice.

On this last point we might wonder what Ellul has in mind exactly. Although a Christian morality is impossible, society still needs morality; because there can be no Christian morality, it must be a conscious morality, aware of its relativity, humble and under condemnation, in the service of the faithful and not imposed upon them. But how can an individual, much less a society, know the will of God in an immediate way? Here, Ellul relies largely on Karl Barth's dialectic: morality is necessary, but morality is impossible; everything depends on us, but everything depends on God. Each of us is utterly dependent on God, and each of us must reconstitute morality at the moment of every critical act, never allowing our decisions to become calcified in a system that would prescribe future action.

In the nearly 40 years since this book's publication, other writers without Ellul's Christian commitments have come to nearly identical ethical conclusions. One thinks of the impossibility for decision and action in the later writings of Derrida, for example, who complained that all ethical systems make humans no better than "smart missiles" programmed to hit a given target. Considering why and how the ethical theories of a Christian and an atheist agree could be a productive inquiry.

A second investigation that may be necessary is a reconsideration of "Pharisaical" ethics in light of more recent Paul scholarship and the vastly improved scholarship on 2nd Temple Judaism that has appeared since Ellul wrote. The opposition between Jewish and Christian ethics (law versus grace, old versus new, etc.) concealed in the Christian (and anti-Jewish) use of the term "Pharisee" can, and should be overcome.

A final potential objection is that the intervention of the Holy Spirit, which is absolutely crucial to responsible, ethical, Christian action in the world, is not or perhaps cannot be defined and explained by Ellul. But this may well be the main thesis and greatest merit of his work.

Jacques Ellul

The Ethics of Freedom

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976.

Translated and edited by Geoffrey Bromiley from the original *Ethique de la liberte*,(Geneve: Labor et Fides) Tome 1, 1973; Tome 2, 1975; Tome 3 (*Les Combats de la liberte*), 1984

Reviewed by Andrew Goddard

Oxford University

Ellul's *Ethics of Freedom* is the largest of his books in English and yet the English version (517pp) lacks much material that is found in the 3 volume French edition (totalling nearly 900pp). It is, therefore, impossible to do any justice at all to the book(s) in so short a space and so I hope here simply to locate it within Ellul's writing

as a whole, explore the complexities of the inter-relationship between the different volumes and note some of its themes.

Within Ellul's ethical writing project, *Ethics of Freedom* follows the earlier publication of an introduction to his ethic in *To Will and To Do* (1964, ET 1969). It represents, in fact, an early example of the recent recovery of virtue ethics, explicitly rejecting the division between general ethics and special ethics (discussing different issues and areas - sexual, medical etc) in order to explore what it means to live life as a Christian in relationship with Christ.

Ellul's plan was to write an ethic corresponding to each of the three theological virtues - an ethic of freedom relating to hope, an ethic of holiness relating to faith and an ethic of relationship relating to love. Two of these virtues were also explored more fully in other books - *Hope in Time of Abandonment* (1972, ET 1973) and *Living Faith* (1980, ET 1983). Ellul says he resolved to begin this trilogy with the *Ethics of Freedom* back in 1960 (though the seed ideas are evident in articles in the early 1950s on necessity and freedom in Paul, in ET in *Sources and Trajectories*). It remains, to date, the only volume to appear although a manuscript is in existence for *Ethics of Holiness* and may soon be published.

The nature of the relationship between the French and English editions of *Ethics of Freedom* is particularly complex and confused. While the exact inter-relationship will never be totally clear and different and inaccurate accounts have been given (including by Ellul himself and Geoffrey Bromiley, the English editor and translator), it now appears that the situation is roughly as follows. Volumes 1 and 2 of *Ethique de la liberte* appeared in French in 1973 and 1975 with the latter confusingly claiming to have appeared originally in English as *Ethics of Freedom* in 1973.

When *Ethics of Freedom* did finally appear in 1976, Bromiley repeated this account and claimed that Parts I-III in the English edition were Ellul's volume 1 and Part IV was volume 2. In fact, Part IV bears no resemblance to volume 2 in French which is, in fact, unavailable in English. It was only with the appearance of *Les combats de la liberte, Ethique de la liberte Tome 3* in 1984 that the origins of Part IV of the English translation became clearer. In the opening to volume 3 Ellul refers to earlier versions of the material in the book. It was, he says, originally written in 1966, proofreading and modifications occurred in the 1970s and final revision took place in 1980-82.

On comparison it becomes clear that the English Part IV of *Ethics of Freedom* must have been one of the earlier (and shorter) drafts of what appears in this French third volume. Contrary therefore to Ellul's claim to Darrell Fasching that "the English edition is the more complete" the three French volumes - as shown simply by their respective lengths - contain much (the whole of volume 2 and a significant amount in volume 3) that is not found in English translation. We will, therefore, sketch the book's content by reference to the 3-volume French edition.

Volume 1 - parts I-III of the ET - offers a Christologically focussed account of Christian freedom in a world of bondage and necessity. This both illustrates the truth of Ellul's words that the ethics 'has to some extent been inspired by the theology of

Karl Barth' and provides the fullest account of one of the central dialectical features of Ellul's theological ethic - that of being called and liberated to live the life of freedom that flows from communion with God in Christ and to do so in the face of the different forms of necessity that dominate and structure life in the fallen world (and are examined in other of Ellul's works, most famously *la Technique*).

Volume 2 opens with a quotation from another major influence on Ellul's ethics - Dietrich Bonhoeffer - and proceeds to offer descriptions of the characteristics of the life of Christian freedom. Here we have fascinating discussions of the law of freedom discovered through wisdom, the useless, provisional and relative, non-absolute character of lived Christian freedom, the nature of human works, and what it means to be human through non-conformity to the present age. The second chapter focuses on the freedom of the individual and explores such phenomena as living without covetousness, obedience, spontaneity and hypocrisy. We are offered here a portrait of the virtues and character of freedom in the life of the disciple of Christ.

Finally, volume 3 (and its earlier version in part IV of the ET) explores in more depth the implications of Ellul's eschatological ethic and the forms of expression for the life of freedom rooted in hope. It opens with further biblically based explorations of the features of this life - being strangers and pilgrims committed to lives of risk and contradiction - before providing even more concrete discussions of the shape of Christian freedom in various areas of life such as politics and the state (including early discussions of Ellul's anarchist thinking), religious freedom, work, sex (including contraception and homosexuality) and marriage.

Ethics of Freedom is not an easy read and far from being a standard ethical text as it resists the usual categorisations and methodologies of much ethical discourse. For those who persevere with it, however, it provides numerous fascinating insights and offers a stimulating, theological and biblically inspired vision of the life of Christian discipleship and of the characteristics to be found in human lives that faithfully seek to live out the good news that it is for freedom Christ has set us free.

Book Notes & Reviews

Ecologie et liberte: Bernard Charbonneau precurseur de l'ecologie politique.

(Ecology and freedom: Bernard Charbonneau as a precursor of political ecology.)
Lyon, France: Parangon, 2006.
Daniel Cerezuelle
Reviewed by Carl Mitcham
Colorado School of Mines

"Over the course of his long adult life, from when he turned 20 in 1930 to his death in 1996, Bernard Charbonneau reflected on the dangers that resulted for nature and for freedom from what was called the *Great Break*, that is from the rise in power of technical, scientific, and industrial progress. Some specialists in the history of ideas have considered him a precursor and a founder of French political ecology. For a long time this perspective gave him at least a marginal place in the intellectual world. Yet today his work is very little known by the public and is totally ignored by philosophers, although his radical questioning is incontestably philosophical. However, with the passage of time his work appears more pertinent and contemporary; the ecological and political problems that Charbonneau set forth in the 1930s before a generally uncomprehending audience have only increased."

Thus begins Daniel Cerezuelle's important new book on the work of a life-long friend and intellectual companion of Jacques Ellul, one to whom Ellul himself gave credit for much of the originality of his own thinking. As far as I know this is the only monograph in any language to be devoted to some aspect of the life and thought of Charbonneau. Cerezuelle, himself a friend with one of Charbonneau's sons as well as one of Ellul's, has written an analytic appreciation of Charbonneau's major but largely unrecognized contribution to the development of environmental philosophy — in a book that calls strongly for an English translation.

Following a brief introduction (chapter 1) and biography (chapter 2), Cerezuelle presents the central intuition of a "Great Break" (chapter 3) and summarizes Charbonneau's existential approach to social change (chapter 4). The core of the book considers in more detail some of Charbonneau's key analyses: the difference between totalitarianism and social totalization (chapter 5), the disdain of nature by industrial society (chapter 6), the dialectical relation between system and chaos (chapter 7), the reversal of freedom (chapter 8), and the de-incarnation of the spirit (chapter 9). By way

of conclusion, Cerezuelle considers Charbonneau's perspective on the "faire societe," a term of richer connotation than "social constructionism" (chapter 10), and provides a brief bibliography of works by and about Charbonneau (chapter 11).

Of Charbonneau's 22 books approximately half were issued privately or semi-privately, five after his death. Eight more books remain unpublished. Because of his access to and close knowledge of the full complement of this work, Cerezuelle's book exhibits an authority that is, in addition, a deftly crafted volume. Until the French book is translated into English, readers may wish to consult his "Nature and Freedom: Introducing the Thought of Bernard Charbonneau," published as one of a collection of six lectures by Cerezuelle in the *Colorado School ofMines Quarterly*, vol. 100, no. 2 (2000), as the result of Cerezuelle's residency as the Hennebach Visiting Professor in the Humanities, 1999-2000.

Darrel Fasching & Dell DeChant Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach

(Blackwell, 2001)
Reviewed by Louise M. Doire
College of Charleston

In the fall of 2001 I was assigned to teach the Comparative Religious Ethics course at the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina. I had no textbook and began a search on the Internet. It was there that I was first introduced to *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach*, by Darrell J. Fasching and Dell DeChant. I ordered the book and we began to work with it in the classroom. Not three weeks into the course, September 11th arrived.

Teaching a comparative religious ethics course during that semester was a painful challenge. Fasching and DeChant's book provided us with a profound resource for questioning, analysis and hope.

This is a different kind of textbook. First, one does not typically find hope in a textbook. Secondly, the narrative approach recognizes what the world's best teachers have always known; that stories teach. It provides a wonderfully compelling and unique methodological alternative to a study of religious ethics.

The ethical foundations of each of the world's religions are explored through the ancient "stories" of individuals who have been lifted up by the tradition as models for noble and virtuous lives characterized by the seeking after justice and the alleviation of suffering. Krisna and Arjuna, Abraham and Job, Jesus of Nazareth, Siddhartha Gautama and Muhammad are presented as exemplary of the central ethical affirmations within each tradition.

The narratives of these ancient lives are accompanied by the life story of a contemporary figure; Gandhi, Rabbi Abraham Heschel, Martin Luther King, Jr., Thich

Nhat Hanh, Malcolm X who embodied and reflected the ethical foundations of their religious tradition within the context of their lives.

Thirdly, the authors themselves are quite honest in admitting that their book proposes a thesis and that they seek "to persuade." They argue that the world's major religious traditions offer the possibility for locating a common "cross-cultural and interreligious ethic of human dignity, human rights and human liberation." The possibility for this common interreligious ethic emerges convincingly through the presentation of pervasive themes contained within the narratives: "(1) wrestling with the stranger and (2) the quest for an answer to the problems of old age, sickness and death."

These narrative dynamics result in common resolutions of hospitality toward the stranger, compassion and the recognition of the interdependence of all being. My students then, and my students now continue to be most profoundly influenced by an analysis which provides the answer to their confusion as to how adherents within each respective religious tradition can read the same texts, be exposed to the same narratives and yet come to quite different ethical ways of being in the world.

This distinction is expressed in the text through a naming of "the sacred" and "the holy," described as "two categories of types of experience." A religious experience of the "sacred" identifies sameness as the ethical yardstick for measuring what is good; what is "right." An experience of the "holy" measures justice and righteousness by the treatment afforded to the "stranger,' the one who is not alike. This invaluable analysis becomes practical when the experience of the holy is presented by the authors as something that can be cultivated and nurtured. For this, they return to the biographical narratives of those individuals who have "crossed over" to an appreciation of truth and wisdom in religious traditions other than their own and then, have traveled back to their religious roots enriched with renewed insight.

The brilliance of this text is that in the very presentation of the narratives, it offers students the possibility for engaging in that act; the act of crossing over and coming back. The proof of the theses rests not only within the pages of the book, but within the students themselves who express to me over and over again that this book has changed their way of being in the world.

Advert: Change of Address?

Ellul's Technique, Wikinomics, & the Ethical Frontier

by Randy M. Ataide
Personal Reflection
Point Loma University

Recently I came upon a video that stated "We are currently preparing kids for jobs that don't exist using technologies that haven't yet been invented in order to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet." My experience as a business practitioner who recently began a career as an educator of business students at a Christian University, allows me a good perspective from which to attempt determine any validity this caveat has.

On the one hand, Ellul's observations and prophecies of technological development seem truer than ever. On the other hand, could we be entering into an undiscovered country of technological possibilities that Ellul was not able to wholly anticipate?

Technique & Human Community

Ellul suggested that technique would diminish our interest in both the study of the humanities and the building of authentic human community. My early foray into business education seems to confirm Ellul's contention. A student may complain that some general education course interferes with the ability to take advanced courses on money, investing or entrepreneurship. Humanities it has been said, are concerned with "the complete record of human experience" and many students and those in the business world may seem little concerned with this record when the pursuit of a career awaits them. So too, technology can have an isolating effect.

But ironically, some opposite movement seems to be occurring. Technology is now being used to build communities that never existed before. Our progeny have been able to arrive at uses of technology that we did not recognize let alone develop or apply. While it is too soon to say that what is emerging is some form of *neo-technique*, some interesting trends of the use of technology away from the tendency to dehumanize need to be brought to our attention. The ethical implications of these trends upon the field of business are enormous.

Technique & Private Property

From our earliest days of adolescent play we are urged by our parents to "share and share alike." To do so is the essence of activity in the human community as a youth, and at that age we are in some ways a mere conduit freely receiving from our support structure and freely dispensing to our peers.

But in the early teenage years, this community dynamic shifts and the rise of individual possessiveness is dramatic and stays with us our entire lives. This tendency culminates in few arenas as much as our business systems. Indeed, most cultures of any level of organization, regardless of the particular political system, place high value not just on material ownership but on intellectual property, proprietary information, trademark and copyright protection.

Our system of business ethics reinforces follows this primacy of ownership protection for confidential work products. We have seen this play out most clearly in the battles between open-source use of film, music and other entertainment content, a conflict reminiscent of a small Dutch boy holding back a rupturing dam. But few have considered this pending explosion from an ethical perspective.

Open-source technology, in its many well-known forms such as Linux, flickr, MySpace, SocialText and Wikipedia, has fundamentally changed the focus of personal technology from separation and exclusion, two great fears of Ellul, to collaboration and community. The global community is in kindergarten once again, sharing our toys, knowledge and opinions freely and without restriction, except now we are doing it with powerful computers linked throughout the world. SnoCap, Proctor and Gamble's InnoCentive Project, MIT's OpenCourseWare and the FightAids@home initiative are just a few of the many formidable open business efforts. These remarkable low-cost collaborative infrastructures call us to indeed think globally and act locally, but it means something new and equally thrilling and frightening.

However, business ethics continue to focus upon disclosure, reporting and punitive actions and is generally oblivious to what is occurring. What is actually needed is a new Ellulian dialectic on the topic of technology, technique and ethics in business, for few can speak to the emerging reality as insightfully as Ellul. There is a new frontier of ethics and where it begins or ends is unclear. Fresh voices and new insights need to be soon considered.

News & Notes

—International Colloquium: "Telling the Truth: Revisiting Jacques Ellul in an Age of Spin." Ottawa, Ont., 28-30 Sept 2007

A conference at Carleton University is being organised in collaboration with the International Jacques Ellul Society and the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul. The prospects are very positive and planning must proceed now but all is subject to SSHRC funding with results to be announced June 30, 2007.

Proposals for papers must be submitted by email *no later than April 15, 2007,* to the conference director, Prof. Randal Marlin, Department of Philosophy, Carleton University: marlin@ncf.ca.

Whether delivering a paper or not, plan on attending this rare occasion to meet other IJES members and Ellul scholars and readers and to discuss Ellul's provocative and helpful ideas.

Further information will be sent to IJES members in early July 2007.

— "Swords into Plowshares: ANARCHiSM, CHRiSTiANiTY, & PRiNCiPLES oF PEACE"

Conference August 10-11, 2007, at Loras College, Dubuque, Iowa. More info at www.jesusradicals.com

— NiNETEEN ELLuL BooKS FRoM GALLiMARD

Thanks to the indefatigable efforts of Dominique Ellul and Editions Gallimard editor Dennis Tilinac, many of Ellul's French language books have come back into print, often with new introductions.

Le Defi et le Nouveau is the latest product: a collection of eight Ellul books in one thousand-page volume (English title by which they are known: *Presence of Kingdom, Jonah, Money, Politics of God, Violence, Prayer, Israel, If You are the Son of God)* for only 40 euros.

Gallimard also has the following individual volumes (English title by which they are known): *Commonplaces, Anarchy, Metamorphose du bourgeois, Subversion, City (Sans feu ni lieu), Hope, Faith, Jesus & Marx (Ideologie marxiste-chretienne).*

Finally, two recent volumes that are a completely new contribution to Ellul studies are *La Pensee Marxiste* (2003) and *Les Successeurs de Marx* (2007). Each of these volumes is a roughly 250 page account of Ellul's classroom lectures at the Institute for Political Studies, University of Bordeaux, between 1947 and 1979. Former Ellul students Michel Hourcade, Jean-Pierre Jezequel, and Gerard Paul are the team which collected, edited, and annotated these notes.

—TWo RECENT BooKS oF NoTE

Willem H. Vanderburg, Director of the Centre for Technology and Social Development at the University of Toronto recently published a massive (540-page) addition to his critique of technological society: *Living in the Labyrinth of Technology* (Univ. of Toronto, 2005). Lawrence J. Terlizzese's dissertation was also recently published as *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Wipf & Stock, 2005). Both books are scheduled for review in upcoming issues of *The Ellul Forum.*

Advert: International Jacques Ellul Society

www.ellul.org

P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705, USA IJES@ellul.org Tel/Fax: 510-653-3334

The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to

preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

Membership

Anyone who supports the objectives of the IJES is invited to join the society for an annual dues payment of US$20.00. Membership includes a subscription to the Ellul Forum.

Board of Directors

Mark Baker, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno; Patrick Chastenet, University of Poitiers; Clifford Christians, University of Illinois; Dell DeChant, University of South Florida; Andrew Goddard, Oxford University; Darrell Fasching (Vice-President), University of South Florida; David Gill (President), Berkeley; Joyce Hanks, University of Scranton; Virginia Landgraf, American Theological Library Association, Chicago, Randall Marlin, Carlton University, Ottawa, Ken Morris (Secretary-Treasurer), Boulder; Carl Mitcham, Colorado School of Mines; Langdon Winner, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

Resources for Ellul Studies

www.ellul.org & www.jacques-ellul.org The IJES web site at www.ellul.org contains (1) news about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, (4) a complete index of the contents of all *Ellul Forum* back issues; and (5) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The French AIJE web site at www.jacques-ellul.org is also a superb resource.

The Ellul Forum CD: 1988-2002

The first thirty issues of *The Ellul Forum*, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for US $15 (postage included). Send payment with your order to "IJES," P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

Back issues #31 - #36 of *The Ellul Forum* are available for $5 each (postage and shipping included).

Cahiers Jacques Ellul

Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne

An essential annual journal for students of Ellul is *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, edited by Patrick Chastenet, published by Editions L'Esprit du Temps, and distributed by Presses Universitaires de France Send orders to Editions L'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Postage and shipping is 5 euros for the first volume

ordered; add 2 euros for each additional volume ordered.

Volume 1: "L'Annees personnalistes" (15 euros)

Volume 2: "La Technique" (15 euros)

Volume 3: "L'Economie" (21 euros).

Volume 4 (forthcoming): "La Propagande" (21 euros).

Librairie Mollat—new books in French

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux (www.mollat.com) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

Alibris—used books in English

The Alibris web site (www.alibris.com) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

Used books in French:

two web resources

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are www.chapitre.com and www.livre-rare-book.com.

Reprints of Nine Ellul Books

By arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of several Ellul books originally published by William B. Eerdmans can now be purchased. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: *The Ethics of Freedom* ($40), *The Humiliation of the Word* ($26), *The Judgment of Jonah* ($13), *The Meaning of the City* ($20), *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* ($19), *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* ($28), *The Subversion of Christianity* ($20), and *The Technological Bluff* ($35). *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul* translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

Have your bookstore (or on-line book dealer) "back order" the titles you want. Do not go as an individual customer to Eerdmans or Ingram/Spring Arbor. For more information visit "Books on Demand" at www.eerdmans.com.

Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. $87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit www.elsevier.com for ordering information.

Ellul on Video

French film maker Serge Steyer's film "Jacques Ellul: L'homme entier" (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site www.meromedia.com. Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul's ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desire.

Issue #40 Spring 2007 — Jacques Ellul and Latin America

- Click to view the original PDF

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Contents

© 2007
International Jacques Ellul Society Berkeley, California, USA www.ellul.org

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

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

580

Information on The Editorial Board & More

From the Editor

Ellul's work has a worldwide impact. His three master works, *The Technological Society, Propaganda,* and *The Political Illusion,* translated into English in the 1960s, pushed his scholarship from France and the European context to the international arena. *The Ellul Forum* has documented that geographical spread, most recently including Canada, Mexico, the United States and Korea. This issue is oriented to Latin America.

Joyce Hanks lists for us the Spanish and Portuguese writings on Ellul, selected from her comprehensive book, *The Reception of Jacques Ellul's Critique of Technology* (2007). Mark Baker situates Ellul in Honduras. The immediate occasion for this issue was the Media Ecology Association (MEA) Annual Conference at the Tecnologico de Monterrey university in Mexico City. MEA centers on the work of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan in Canada; Mumford, Walter Ong and Neil Postman in the United States. It includes Ellul as one of its important theorists. Ellul himself argues with McLuhan in his *Humiliation of the Word*, he and Mumford work in parallel, and Neil Postman depends heavily on him. MEA and IJES have official affiliation, with MEA granting forums and papers on Ellul scholarship.

The MEA conference featured two major sessions on Ellul, and two papers from those meetings are included here in summary form. The Tecnologico de Monterrey-Estado de Mexico specializes in technology and science. One of its professors, Maria de la Luz Casas Perez illustrates how she introduces Ellul to her students with the goal of inspiring them to further study of his work. Professor Stephanie Bennett wrote her doctoral dissertation on Ellul and communications theory. With the prominence of cell phone technology in Mexico, she was asked to present her research considered important on both sides of the border. One of Mexico's distinguished scholars, Fernando Gutierrez, specializes in technology and society, and is a strong advocate for scholarship on Ellul in Latin America. His summary of internet technology in Mexico is an overall argument for Ellul's relevance as communication technologies grow exponentially around the globe.

Should this issue bring to mind additional work on Ellul on the South American continent, send it to the editor for information and possible publication in *The Forum.* For the 2008 issues, David Gill and I solicit your contributions also. The theme of the Spring issue is theological (Islam) and for the Fall issue we return to politics.

Clifford G. Christians, **Editor editor@ellul.org**

The Internet as a Media Extension: The Case of Mexico

by Fernando Gutierrez

Fernando Gutierrez is Chair of the Department of Communication at the Tecnologico de Monterrey, Campus Estado de Mexico; Vice-President of the Internet Association in Mexico (AMIPCI), member of the Media Ecology Association (MEA) and coordinator of the World Internet Project in Mexico (WIP). His latest research focuses on the new media ecology in Mexico and the impact of new technologies in society. He studies in the International Law doctoral program at the Salamanca University in Spain. He earned a Master degree in Electronic Commerce and another one in Information Technologies from the Tecnologico de Monterrey. He teaches Communication Technologies and Society, and Design and Digital Production.

Abstract: In recent years, we have been studying the organization and arrangement of complex media environments and the new media ecology in Mexico. As in other parts of the world, this new media ecology is the product of some important technologies that have been altering the environment and contributing to the formation of new societies with particular characteristics that differ from the general culture. One of these technologies is the Internet. The purpose of this work is to show how environments are changing in Mexico and the manner in which the Internet gives a fresh perspective to traditional activities in this society.

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin have written in *Remediation* (a term they define as the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms) the following:

"Like other media since the Renaissance -in particular perspective painting, photography, film, and television-new digital media oscillate between immediacy and hypermediacy, between transparency and opacity. This oscillation is the key to understanding how a medium refashions its predecessor and other contemporary media. Although each medium promises to reform its predecessors by offering a more immediate or authentic experience, the promise of reform inevitably lead us to become aware of the new medium as a medium. Thus immediacy leads to hypermediacy. The process of remediation makes us aware that all media are at one level a play of signs, which is a lesson that we take from poststructuralist literary theory." (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 19) [Note: hypermediacy means that knowledge of the world comes to us through the media. Viewers know thy are in the presence of a medium and learn through acts of mediation.]

Any new technology should do work that is clearly and demonstrably better than the one it replaces, but this doesn't always happen. When a new medium is created, it will eventually overtake those media from which it derives its content for innovation. The older medium becomes a ground upon which the new medium stands as

a more noticeable configuration. Marshall McLuhan suggested this idea in his book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man.*

But in the history of mass communication, no new medium has yet made an earlier one obsolete, despite the repeated predictions at the time of each new arrival.

- Photography was supposed to mean the end of painting.

- Film was supposed to mean the end of the novel.

- Radio was supposed to mean the end of newspapers.

- Television was supposed to mean the end of film and radio.

What did happen was that the new medium changed its predecessor but did not replace it. The older medium always adapted itself to fit into the new mix of competitors -redefining itself according to its intrinsic strengths. In this regard, Douglas Rushkoff wrote in *Media Virus: Hidden Agendas in Popular Culture*:

"We should understand the media as an extension of a living organism. Just as ecologists now understand the life of this planet to be part of a single biological organism. Media activists see the datasphere as the circulatory system for today's information, ideas, and images." (Rushkoff, 1996, p.7)

New media extend the old media. For instance, after reading an article in the newspaper or magazine, we may become curious and decide to find out more by surfing the Internet. In this sense, the Internet is also a complimentary tool media for newspaper readers. We can observe the same situation with other traditional media. The Internet extends the functions of this conventional media, and the power of users.

McLuhan said that the media are extensions of our human senses, bodies and minds. And it is also interesting to point out that in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Sigmund Freud had already taken note of the possibility of considering tools as an extension of man:

"With tools, mankind perfects its organs (...) With the camera, it has created an instrument that transfixes fleeting optical impressions, a service that the record player renders to the no less fleeting auditory impression, both constituting its innate faculty to remember, that is, its memory. With the help of the telephone, it hears from distances that even fairy tales would respect as unachievable. Writing, originally, is the language of those who are absent; housing, a substitute for the maternal womb, the first abode whose nostalgia perhaps still persists among us, where we felt secure and well." (Freud, 1930, p. 34)

But also, new media are extensions of traditional media. In the following figure we can see how the Internet extends the power of some traditional media. This is the case of Mexico.

The Internet is an extension for other media industries, not their replacement. Traditional media use the Internet to identify what the public wants, to get interaction,

Media Reach (Mexico)

Internet contributions

TV (Last 7 days) 99.00%	TV + Internet 99.76%	+.76 points
Cable TV 28.40%	Cable TV + Internet 42.60%	+ 14.20 points
Newspapers 32.60%	Newspapers + Internet 48.50%	+15.90 points
Magazines 18.80%	Magazines + Internet 36.10%	+ 17.30 points
Movies (Last 30 days) 23.90%	Movies + Internet 38.30%	+ 14.40 points

Source: TGI México 2005 wave II + III 2006 wave I v.06.20.2006.
Source: Asociación Mexicana de Internet (Estudio AMIPCI, 2006) More information on http://www.amipci.org.mx/estudios.php

Figure1. Internet Extends Media Reach in Mexico (2006)

to amplify technical capabilities, and as a new platform for advertising. But, as Neil Postman explained, a new medium does not merely add something to the culture; it changes everything.

The Internet has contributed to the formation of new societies with particular characteristics that differ from the general culture of which it is a part. When a new technology like the Internet acquires importance in a culture in a given location, certain elements of the society begin to be redefined. In this sense, then, society results from the new technology. For Postman, the consequences of technological change are always fast, often unpredictable and largely irreversible. Technology is always shaped by the social, political and economic systems in which it is introduced.

In any medium, what passes for critical discourse is not independent of the medium in which it is produced and circulated. Media change, therefore, is far more than just a new piece of equipment; changing the medium affects all of our technologies. The Internet, for example, gives a new coloration to every institution. In the past, newspapers, radio and television changed society. Nowadays, the Internet is doing the same. With the introduction of its technologies everything is changing: political campaigns, homes, schools, churches, and companies. The World Wide Web is not merely a software protocol and text and data files. It is also the sum of the uses to which this protocol is now being put: for marketing and advertising, scholarship, personal expression, and so on.

The invention of the Internet has altered the world we live in. Not since the industrial revolution have we seen such profound change in the way we work, we shop, we get our news, and conduct business. The Internet extends the traditional human abilities to see, to speak, and to manipulate. The revolution is not so much one of content but of distribution. Computers allow the manipulation of old content and old media in unanticipated ways.

The Internet as a different tool favors the processes of communication and information exchange within audiences whose dimensions could be considered medium-sized, allowing the users to develop close contact. In this way, by allowing us to share pastimes or have areas of common interest, the Internet can fill an important space abandoned by the conventional mass media.

The Internet occupies a great portion of young peoples' time. According to a Burst Media survey, published on AdAge.com, in the United States teens between the ages of 13 and 17, nearly four in 10 teens (37.4%) are spending at least three hours daily online daily outside of school settings. Just one in five (19.6%) say they're spending less than an hour online outside of school. For teens, the Internet is a more meaningful source for movie and TV news than word of mouth or local newspapers (O'Malley, 2006). In the following figure, we can see in the case of Mexico how the Internet is occupying important spaces that other media cannot fill.

People in Mexico can use the Internet at their schools, libraries and cybercafes. The Internet and traditional media rarely occupy the same physical space. For instance, the opportunity to watch television outside a home environment is less common. There are more public places for the Internet than for television viewing.

The Internet is used more for informational purposes, while television is used more for entertainment and relaxation. Home computing may be displacing television watching itself as well as reducing leisure time with the family. Television viewing is lower among Internet users than non-users in some countries. The competition between television and the Internet is largely happening at home. It is rather difficult for a person to watch television and go online at the same time, especially given the amount of interactivity and involvement needed for the Internet. The following figures show the impact of the Internet versus other media.

In Mexico, people are watching less television and reading fewer newspapers since they began using the Internet. Radio's niche in the media ecology is in many ways modest. It survives because it reaches arenas other technologies do not reach. People can go online while playing the radio in the background. In this sense, there is a positive relationship between the Internet and radio use. The fact that the internet is changing the media business has prompted many traditional media companies to develop digital strategies.

"New digital media are not external agents that come to disrupt an unsuspecting culture. They emerge from within cultural contexts, and they refashion other media, which are embedded in the same or similar contexts." (Bolter and Grusin 1999: 19)
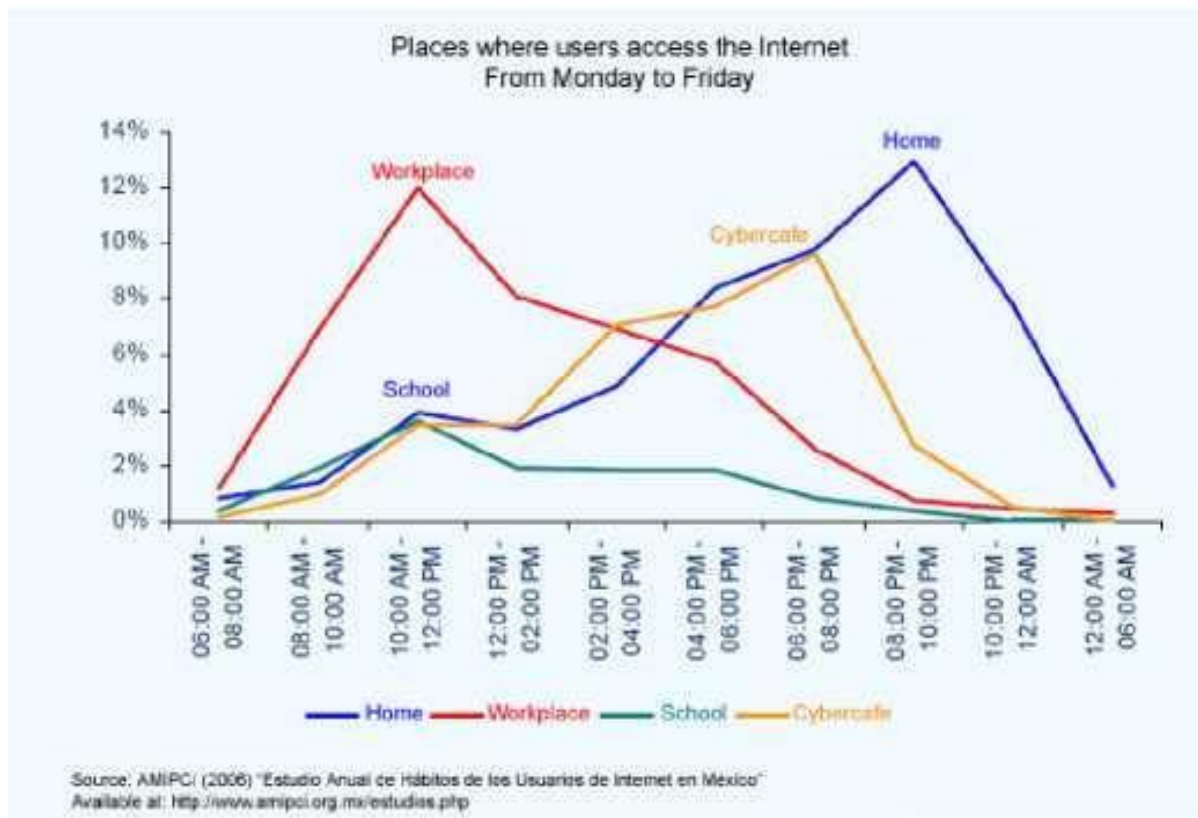
Figure 2. Places Where Users Access the Internet in Mexico. (2005)
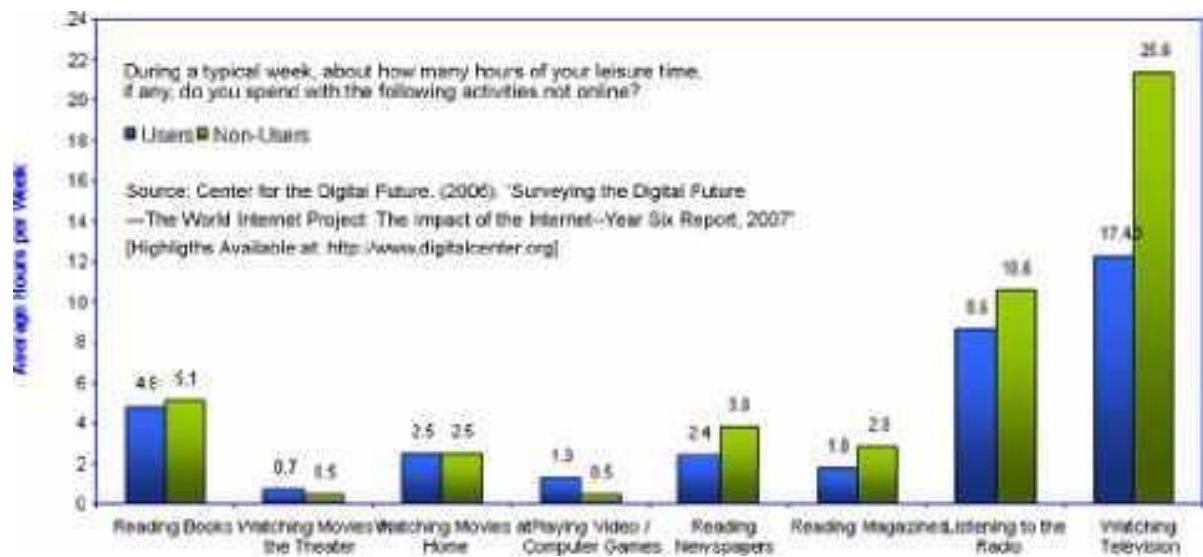
Figure 3. Internet vs. Other Media (United States)

587

	Equal	More	Less
Television	52%	6%	42%
Radio	51%	11%	38%
Newspapers	39%	7%	54%
Magazines	45%	7%	48%
Movies	56%	20%	24%
Listening music	51%	34%	14%

Source: AMIPCI (2004) "Estudio Anual de Hábitos de los Usuarios de Internet en México"
Available at: http://www.amipci.org.mx/estudios.php

Figure 4. Internet vs. Other Media (Mexico)

It is only lately that educators have recognized that the tools of instruction may change, but the problems of learning, ingesting and applying information remain the same as they have been since schools began. That's why Postman said that the "Digital Age" will not pose any problems for us that are more complex than those faced by people in other centuries. Once again, these new digital technologies are giving a new perspective to everything: The same situation occurred with conventional media in other times and it's important for us to understand it.

In some ways, television has affected learning, school performance, the relationship between voters and politicians, family traditions, and so on. We are now observing that the Internet, and new digital technologies are doing the same. Technology is not an educational panacea. It is only a tool to help solve a broad based problem. We have to use technology rather than be used by it. Mexico has become in Postman's terms, a "Technopoly", a system in which technology of every kind is cheerfully granted sovereignty over social institutions and national life and becomes selfjustifying, self-perpetuating and omnipresent. (Postman, 1992)

New technology presents new possibilities and these new possibilities awaken new desires. The intelligent use of the Internet could introduce favorable modifications in our informational models. As a communication medium, the Internet has certain unique characteristics, particularly its total interactivity and its formidable transmission capacity. These characteristics permit any user to access this massive media outlet. It is not far-fetched to assert that through the Internet, the dream of an authentic "global community" could finally come true.

The audience of the traditional mass media faces the problem of a lack of information because of the fewer number of sources which cover news events, and for other processes such as censorship, selfcensorship, and agenda setting. Now the problem is that we have information overloaded, and consequently information is difficult or impossible to assimilate. We think that the more information we have, the better we will be in solving significant problems, and that's not necessarily true. Many people talk about the advantages that a new technology offers in a particular field, but almost none of them talk about the costs of these technologies. And it's important to start to think more about it.

AMIPCI. (2006). "Estudio Anual de Habitos de los Usuarios de Internet" www.amipci.org.mx/estudios.php

Bolter, J. & Grusin, R. (1999) *Remediation.* Cambridge:The MIT Press

Center for the Digital Future. (2006). "Surveying the Digital Future—The World Internet Project: The Impact of the Internet–Year Six Report, 2007" [www.digitalcenter.org]

Freud, S. (1930). *Civilization and its Discontents.* London: The Hogarth Press Ltd.

McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man.* New York: New American Library, Times Mirror.

O'Malley, G. (2006). "Teens Online Doing Homework, Text Messaging and Watching TV". New York: AdAge.com [http://adage.com/mediaworks

Postman, N. (1993). *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology.* New York: Vintage Books

Rushkoff, D. (1996). *Media Virus: Hidden agendas in Popular Culture.* New York: Ballantine Books

Wendell, B. (1990). *What are people for?* San Francisco: North Point Press

Jacques Ellul: Humankind in the Presence of Technology

by Maria de la Casas Perez

Maria de la Luz Casas Perez is a Professora de Planta, Escuela de Negocios y Ciencias Sociales at the Technologico de Monterrey-Campus Cuernavaca. This summarizes her paper presented on June 6, 2007 at the 8th annual convention of the Media Ecology Association in Mexico City. Translated from the Spanish by Marcos Campillo Fenoll.

I do not limit myself to describing my feelings with cold objectivity in the manner of a research worker reporting what he sees under a microscope. I am keenly aware that I am myself involved in technological civilization, and that its history is also my own. I may be compared rather with a physician or physicist who is describing a group situation in which he is himself involved. The physician in an epidemic, the physicist

exposed to radioactivity: in such situations the mind may remain cold and lucid, and the method objective, but there is inevitably a profound tension of the whole being.

Jacques Ellul in *The Technological Society,* author's foreword to Revised American Edition

I would like to start this essay with a personal reflection and an acknowledgment of gratitude. When Professor Claudia Benassino asked me to give a talk in memory of Jacques Ellul, she incited me to reread his writings and to question some of the underlying aspects found throughout his complete work.

At first, my major concern focused on the inability to dedicate the necessary amount of *time* that such an act of reflection deserves. I must also admit, on another note, that I was probably threatened by the worries of not being able to measure up to his thought, and therefore, of not being able to share with you today a valuable commentary. Nevertheless, I mustered up the courage to revisit Ellul's work, which led me through unsettling paths little explored by me before and attracted me each time more and more into the spell of technology and the revalorization of humankind in the presence of its eternal charm.

According to his most knowledgeable biographers, Jacques Ellul published more than fifty books and numerous articles. Among all these writings, where we can find outstanding works on theology, philosophy, history, sociology, and other fields, the one that demanded my attention the most was a work published in 1954 and entitled *La Technique ou l'enjeu du Siecle.* It was translated into Spanish merely as *El Siglo XX y la Tecnica*, a translation that from the very beginning deprives the title of its most enriching notion: one that implies precisely a witty critique and reflection resulting from humankind's fascination with technology. What is at stake? What is it that brings science and technology into consideration? To what extent has technology deprived us of one of the most important manifestations of humankind's rationalization and to what extent has it generated new manifestations? What are the implications of all this?

In his insightful work, Ellul writes about -and refers to-the conditions that the twentieth century posed as well as the development and evolution of technology since its oldest origins to the modern era. However, many of the ideas that the writer expressed in 1954 are nowadays more valid than ever. Some of his most outstanding ideas establish that among the inherent characteristics of all technology are rationality, artificiality, automatism, self-augmentation, monism, universality, and autonomy. Ellul considers that all of these characteristics generate an artificial system that subordinates or eliminates the natural. Suffice it to say that Ellul arrives at this categorization after a long examination of different periods in the history of humanity, where the author discovers that the technological phenomenon is a constant feature of human history.

Ellul assumes that, through all those periods in which the human being has been faced with the need to recognize the presence of an invention or a new discovery, mankind's astonishment has been always the same. Nevertheless, he points out that even though current technology offers the same characteristics that all previous tech-

nologies offered, its current development has been extremely fast but not less amazing because of this; a critique and consideration that, as Ellul himself describes, does not make man become spectator but participant, becoming nevertheless, in many instances, a victim.

Nowadays, technology is recognized as science and technique's instrumental arm, as the ultimate articulation of mankind's rationality and intellectuality in benefit of more sublime ends. For Ellul, technique and consequently technology represent the outcome of the articulation of all the rational methods that allow absolute efficiency for a given period of development.

What is interesting about this phenomenon is that while technology, at its origin, was a tool that adjusted to man's needs, nowadays the opposite phenomenon is taking place: that is, man is the one adjusting to technology. Technology is forcing us to redefine ourselves as human beings and as a complete society. It gets inserted, it is measured out for us, it controls us in each of our daily activities, and therefore it becomes a complete civilizing subproduct. Its existing condition is secured. It is not that man has created technology, but current technology is the one creating man, adapting him to its needs.

We have become accustomed to technology working well, to its determining our living cycles, to letting it tell us what to do and when to do it. Computers, electronic alarms, instant messaging systems, they all condition and guide us. Our whole life is duplicated in its records, our *raison d'etre* is established under technology's observant and constant gaze, under which efficiency is not constituted as an option, but as a need imposed upon every human activity.

The essential question for Ellul is then: to what extent can we distinguish between what technology offers us and what do we lose under technological progress? To what extent has technology allowed us to live in a better way and to what extent does its presence dehumanize us completely?

If twentieth-century technology (which by the way we largely enjoy or endure - depending on how we perceive it-currently in the twenty-first century) is the result of an undeniable fact: just as technology from previous times consisted in replacing the human muscle, we are now witnessing a second revolution consisting in the replacement of the human brain. And if new technology replaces our brains in order to store, order, and systematize an amount of data never before possible in the history of humanity, is it not also possible that it has deprived us of the ability to think by means of our intellect?

It is maybe because of this that current technology is an eminently motor-driven technology, and hence not related to rationality. In order to use it we simply need to push some buttons with the least effort possible and without the requirement of any basic training. Contemporary technology is then characterized by the fact that it has sublimated the attitude of a complete civilization. Its fundamental device in this intellectual transformation is the notion of comfort. What technology can make

for us and our constant dependency on comfort is what has eventually made us so manageable and subject to technological domination.

Of particular interest is Ellul's notion of comfort as the mark of man's personality vis-a-vis the space he inhabits. In this way, while in medieval times mankind was not concerned in the least with furniture but the proportions and the materials which spaces were made of, nowadays we are more concerned about objects and the extent to which they can provide us with some comfort. It is because of this that we can bear the overcrowding derived from overpopulation, a phenomenon to which we have grown accustomed. Because of this we are able to tolerate a growing decrease in the minimum space required for living; in fact, to such a extent that we are reduced to technological solitude. Let's think, for instance, about the new hotels aimed at executives that have burgeoned in Japan, where guests get hardly enough space to slide into a small bed surrounded by artificial atmospherebuilding elements.

It is not fortuitous, however, that man has given way to the technological race in order to put aside even his very own interests. As Ellul states, the exceptional development of technology that we witness nowadays is derived from a previously unknown conjunction of different elements, such as a long technological maturation or incubation, the demographic increase, the economic situation, an almost perfect flexibility of a malleable society open to the propagation of technology, and a clear technical intention. In sum, it has been the fracturing of human societies, among other things, that has become a fertile land for technological domination.

But Ellul reminds us that evolution follows not the logic of discoveries or a fatal progress of technologies, but *an interaction of technology and the effective choices that mankind makes in its presence.* Therefore, while the nature of the relationship between technology, society, and individual is common to all societies, their relationship is not the same in the modern world. For instance, while in previous times the presence of technology was limited by religious or political conditions, in our contemporary world technology is not limited by anything. On the contrary, it spreads towards all domains and encloses all human activities. Its evolution is so fast that it puzzles not only the man in the street, but also scientists and philosophers, posing harder and harder problems.

Throughout all of his writings, Jacques Ellul did not hesitate to promote ecology as one of the essential conditions of human balance. His approach, innovative as others, mentions what we now know as Media Ecology, that is, the ways by which the media affect not only our perception, understanding, feelings, and values, but also the ways in which we interact with the media, that is, technology, enables or hinders our survival possibilities. If, as Ellul says, technology is the product of rationality and artificiality, then reason has led us to the idea of an artificial progress that mankind has paid through an ever growing subordination to the instrument of his freedom.

Because of this, humankind needs to seek his own ecology, his own balance. Ellul finds it in spirituality, not through an opposition to science and technology but through the expression of a project, that can only be carried out by taking its own ways of

expression. This way, action becomes a subproduct of reflection, having technology as an intermediary. Balance is essentially what is important here; not to lose sight that even though technology works as a mediator between nature and humanity, humankind should not get lost in an artificial world which it knows nothing about. This is precisely the risk, giving in to technological and artificial needs that dictate our lives instead of responding to humankind's inherent need: finding our own place in the world.

Silence and Mobile Media: An Ellulian Perspective

by Stephanie Bennett

Stephanie Bennett is a member of the faculty of the School of Communication and Media at Palm Atlantic University. Her doctoral dissertation on Ellul at Regent University was entitled The Disappearance of Silence: A Dialectical Exploration of the Interpersonal Implications of Person Mobile Media as Viewed through the Lens of Jacques Ellul's *La Technique.*

Cell phones, iPods, and the wireless Internet are no longer exotic digital devices used on occasion for emergency situations or used intermittently to overcome the relational obstacles of distance and time. Increasingly, these technologies are being used in primary ways that substitute face-to-face communication for interaction that is mediated. As the relational ramifications of an increasingly mobile society begin to unfold it is important to ask ourselves how these new media influence the effectiveness and richness of interpersonal communication praxis. This essay takes a broad overview of one aspect of the interpersonal situations these new media engender, that is, the erosion of silence as a necessary component of the communicational landscape.

The Disappearance of Silence

One of the largely overlooked ramifications of the new media environment is the exponential rise in acoustic output and intake, an ancillary effect that intensifies the amount of extraneous noise in and around conversational space. This has much bearing on the effectiveness of the interpersonal interaction, particularly as it affects the degree to which one can adequately listen, process, and reflect upon the message. As a result of both internal and external noise, the increasing lack of conversational room to pause, ponder and thoughtfully consider what is being said is already evident in the public sphere, and, when viewed through the lens of Ellul's concept of *la technique,* presents legitimate concern for the richness and durability of traditionally constructed and maintained human relationships.

Unforeseen Consequences

When viewed through the prism of history the many unforeseen consequences linked to technological advance do not typically become evident until after a major shift in societal norms has already taken place. From the alphabet to Johannes Guttenberg's printing press; to the telegraph, film, the radio and television; to the digital media of

today, "media sketch out our world for us, organize our conversations, determine our decisions, and shape our self-identity, they do so with a technological cadence, massaging in our soul a rhythm toward efficiency."[1] Over time, these media of communication engender as great - or even greater - influence on the way society is structured than what they make possible by way of convenience, comfort, or other immediate benefits. That is, these changes do much more than add something new to the world; they become part of the ecological framework of society. Today's media environment is rich with many options for communication, but the technology most prominently rising to the fore is the cell phone, and thus is the focus of the following pages.

The Social Penetration of the Cell Phone

"What characterizes technical action within a particular activity is the search for greater efficiency."[2]

When Jacques Ellul penned the above statement, the computer was still in the early years of commercial use. By the time he died in 1994, personal computers were not as yet available on the average person's desktop[3]. Now, as the nascent stages of the 21st century unfold, the world has long since embraced the personal computer and is in the midst of experiencing a new love affair, this time with personal mobile media (PMM), the cell phone being the most popular device among them. In fact, in the United States, with 81% of cell phone users reporting that their cell phone is always on, and cell phone sales topping $207 million, a great deal more noise is being introduced into the public square. This intense proliferation has already begun to nurture an "always on" mentality, one that advances something one might call a "24/7 social environment." The blinking, buzzing, multi-tasking cacophony that ensues also serves to situate the average mobile media user in a position as to always be ready to receive information (often from multiple sources simultaneously), with one of the least apparent changes to the interpersonal situation being the diminishment of silence.

Similar penetration into the marketplace exists in many other nations; some –such as England and Italy-are growing with even greater proportional use among its citizenry.[4] Africa has recently surpassed Finland and Switzerland, two of the earliest adopters in cell phone growth. In Latin America and Mexico, use of mobile computer technologies has grown exponentially, as well. In Mexico alone, there are 54 million mobile users, as of January 2007.[5] With approximately 2.2 billion cell phone users throughout the world, it may even be said that talking-in-transit has become the magnum opus of

---

[1] Christians, C. (2000), *Studies in Christian Ethics,* p. 83.

[2] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society.* (1964). p. 20

[3] According to the Pew Internet and American Life Research Project, at that time there were fewer than 1 in 7 people online at this time.

[4] Per capita, Western Europe has the highest percentages of cellular users. In 2005, 930 out of every 1,000 people owned a cell phone. [June 28, 2007]http://www.c-i-a.com/pr0206.htm. Today, in England, there are more cell phones than people.

[5] *El Universal* newspaper; [retrieved June 28, 2007]http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/397926.html

modern media.[6] Because of technological growth around the world, Ellul's analysis is relevant outside France and the U.S.[7]

In the midst of this "digital revolution," increased amounts of auditory and visual stimuli stream into the human central nervous system as new mobile media project ever-increasing mounds of information into physical locations where individuals are attempting to converse. This "more efficient" and convenient mode of conversing not only provides means for people to expand communications outside the limitations of time and space, but it is restructuring and reorganizing the way the world conceives of communication. It is changing the delicate balance between silence and speech - eroding the dialectical nature of speech to bring about a type of interaction that conforms to technical necessity.

Silence, La Technique and PMM

"In this terrible dance of means which has been unleashed no one knows where

we are going and the aim of life has been forgotten [. . .] Man has set out at tremendous speed - to go nowhere."[8]

One of Ellul's primary theses regarding technology is that the goals of life disappear "in the busyness of perfecting methods;" the ends are lost in a selfpropelling force that he terms, *la technique* (1951, 1989; p 64). This force encroaches because the "magnitude of the very means [is, *sic*] at our disposal;" allowing us to "live in a civilization without ends" (Christians, 2006 p. 127). Thus, the issue of concern regarding use of PMM is not the desire for more efficient and convenient access to others, but the uncritical acceptance of these means as appropriate for every situation. When this happens, the dominating, self-propelling necessity threads itself throughout all aspects of everyday life, exchanging greater, teleological goals for the means used to attain them. In other words, instead of using cell phones and other PMM to nurture the intended goal of relationally rich connections, these devices quickly become a personal necessity, collapsing the ends by their compulsory use, trading the process of communication for fascination with the method. Christians posits Ellul's thesis as "inescapable;" contending that to the "degree that the technicized dominates, healthy livelihood disappears (2006; p. 127)." When viewed in relation to personal mobile media then, what may appear to be more freeing to the human soul because of factors such as convenience and mobility may actually be in opposition to freedom.

Silence in a Technological Society

While Ellul (1985) did not theorize formally about the role of silence in the communication process, his thoughts on the dialectical nature of speech and silence hold much

---

[6] By the end of 2005 there were 1.8 million cell phone subscribers throughout the globe. Mobile Tracker News. [May 21, 2007]http://www.mobiletracker.net/archives/2005/05/18/mob ile-subcribers-worldwide. Today, cellular use has catapulted to roughly 2.2 billion subscribers.[1]

[7] The 2006 National Survey of Latinos, http://www.pewintemet.org/pdfs/Latinos Online 2007 _ *topline.pdf*

[8] Jacques Ellul (1951, 1989). *The presence of the kingdom,* pp. 63-69.

prescience.[9] According to Ellul, language never belongs to the evident order of things. Rather, he suggests, that language "is a continuous movement between hiding and revealing. It makes of the play in human relationships something even more fine and complex than it would be without language" (1985, p. 16). Max Picard, (1888-1965) a twentiethcentury philosopher who viewed silence as "the necessary bed" or platform, from which conversation must spring" also approached speech and silence as dialectically connected, anthropomorphizing silence as the "friendly sister of the word. (33)" Picard's conception of this dialectical relationship avers Ellul's ideas on the importance of dialogue and affirms the role of silence as having much to do with the creative spark of language as well as the choices one makes in using particular words or phrases.

The infusion of this creativity is what Picard called the "fullness" of speech as opposed to what is commonly called empty chatter; for Picard did not view silence as simply the absence of speech or the absence of noise. Instead, he perceived silence as a phenomenon in and of itself, contending that in order to maintain the creativity of the human spirit speech must retain its connection to language, maintaining the embrace and exchange of "the other" so as to prevent language from becoming a mechanical routine (p. 33). Interpersonal exchanges via the cell phone often occur too quickly to manage much creativity and often reduce conversation to de-contextualized sound bites.

One of Ellul's (1964) contentions involves the nervousness with which modern men and women have to cope because of a constant drive and clatter to find the most efficient means to communicate. This situation is exacerbated with the use of PMM. His position finds some clarity with a query concerning the average citizen's quandary: "What does he find (when he gets home from work, *sic*) He finds a phantom. If he ever thinks, his reflections terrify him" (1964, p. 376). The questions that are left lingering demand an attention. What is this terror? Does it conflate with an environment saturated in too much exogenous noise? Does the sheer quantity of information, both in the form of external noise and internal message overload leave human beings so busy reacting to stimuli that we have no time for reflection? For Ellul, the constant flow of

---

[9] Discussion of the relationship between dialectic and rhetoric has a long history, and highly respected scholars differ greatly in interpretation. Some, like Aristotle, maintain that dialectic is a part of rhetoric; others, such as Plato, uphold dialectic as "higher" or more important than rhetoric, pointing to rhetoric as a means of persuasion through eloquence while dialectic involves argument and a more reasoned and respectable approach to truth. As a dialectician, Ellul's perspective seems to be the opposite of Kenneth Burke's in that (as a Rhetorician) Burke positions rhetoric as replacing dialectic as the operative mode. However, in Burke's dramatistic theory of communication, there are overlaps and intersections between Ellul's depictions of the tragedy and drama of life and the terministic screens through which people communicate. This train of thought may find application to the contemporary configuration and use of PMM in interpersonal communication, in general. The fullest expression of interpersonal communication makes use of both the rhetorical and dialectical modes. With the present use of these digital devices, it is evident that communication behavior requires an incorporation of both. This may be especially so in the present age when the tools of technology have become increasingly sophisticated and embedded in daily use.

information (data, images, words) is most problematic because it obstructs the ability to enter into meaningful dialogue (1985).

Meaningful Dialogue

Meaningful dialogue is not only difficult via cell phone and wireless devices, but often serves to reduce the significance of the communication taking place. Thus, when making regular use of PMM as the sole (or primary) mode of communication it may bring much comfort to individuals relating at great distances, but accomplishes this in increasingly in mediated fashion with extra layers of separation and space between interlocutors. Not only do the missing nonverbal communication cues impact conversational coherence, but listening become more difficult, and the act of engaging in meaningful dialogue is sorely diminished.

Further Philosophical Implications

"There is always a margin around our conversation. More precisely, conversation is like this printed page, framed on all sides by white margins, without words, but which can be filled in with any word at all. The margins situate a conversation and give it the possibility of rebounding and beginning again. They allow the other person to participate with his marginal comments. [. . .] Here again, we are dealing with the unexpected. And we up against the mystery of silence."[10]

Both axiological and ontological, the philosophical implications involved in this discussion are varied and complex, far more extensive than this short essay will allow us to address. One aspect of the problematic that must be mentioned is the interrelationship between PMM, silence, certainty and mystery. The "idea" of mystery in connection with communication is very much embedded in a philosophical approach to language, which is captured in Ellul's thoughts on the way meaning and mystery intersect:

Meaning is uncertain; therefore I must constantly fine-tune my language and work at reinterpreting the words I hear. I try to understand what the other person says to me. All language is more or less a riddle to be figured out; it is like interpreting a text that has many possible meanings. In my effort at understanding

and interpretation, I establish definitions, and finally, a meaning. The thick haze of discourse produces meaning.[11]

Ellul's "thick haze of discourse" necessitates time for reflection along with a respect for the non-verbal elements in interpersonal communication. Both of these elements intersect with the use of personal mobile media and are worthy of greater exploration.[12] Moreover, an essential aspect of the communication process involves pre-conversation, or the intrapersonal sense-making that takes place prior to an interaction. Healthy

---

[10] *Humiliation*, p. 25

[11] From Jacque Ellul's chapter "Seeing and Hearing: Prolegomena" in Anderson, Cissna and Arnett (1994) The Reach of Dialogue." p. 121.

[12] Detailed explication of these elements is available in my dissertation, available via ProQuest. "The Disappearance of Silence: A Dialectical Exploration of the Interpersonal Implications of Personal Mobile Media as Viewed through the Lens of Jacques Ellul's *la technique."*

intrapersonal communication necessitates a measure of "silent time" or solitude, and although the measure of such may differ widely for each individual, quietude is necessary for all. Whereas present trends and "cell phone behavior" might refute this need as superfluous, "time spent thinking, reflecting, is not wasteful" (Stewart, 1990). Forsaking it compromises quality and coherence in numerous ways. Without the strong, functional, structuring apparatus of the intrapersonal, conversational coherence may be seriously compromised.

True Presence and the Art of Listening

Among other dynamics of PMM, the mobility factor changes not only daily communication behavior, but the very way people think about being together. Lack of true presence, a substitution of virtual relationships for actual ones, acquiescence to sound bites instead of conversation, and the veneration of multi-tasking to the status of a core virtue are but a few of these. To ignore the symbolic and dialectical significance of speech and silence could be an incontrovertible social ill and horrific consequence to the flourishing of human beings. Ellul (1994) expands on its symbolic significance of language by lauding the way in which it is used to communicate, saying:

We are in the presence of an infinitely and unexpectedly rich tool, so that the tiniest phrase unleashes an entire polyphonic gamut of meaning. The ambiguity of language and even its ambivalence and its contradiction between the moment it is spoken and the moment it is received — produce extremely intense activities. Without such activities we would be ants or bees, and our drama and tragedy would quickly be dried up and empty. (p. 123)

Ellul embraced the ambiguity of language as integral to the human being and as inferred in the above quotation, using the symbolic tool we call language (and using it well) he explains is "the" human feature that separates us from the beasts. To ignore or truncate the process into something mathematical, scientific, or strictly utilitarian is to denigrate the beauty and intrinsic worth - even necessity - of language as a mean to comprehend our humanness. As Ellul explains so eloquently, "Speech does not take its pattern directly from what there is "to say"; it creates in addition a sphere of unexpectedness, a wonderful flowering which adorns, enriches, and ennobles what I have to say, instead of expressing it directly, flatly, and exactly."[13] Instead, of the expedient transmission of information, conversation is an art, one that requires the commitment to listen relationally.

For Don Idhe (1976) listening relationally involves a process that is different from abstract listening, and it necessitates a certain measure of silence, for, he explains, "silence is the hidden genesis of the word."(p. 202). To clarify this, Idhe uses the term, "communicative silence," which inheres a type of listening that must occur in order to invite speech, suggesting that primary listening precedes meaningful conversation. Further, Idhe explains the significance of silence as a human experience, positing its

---

[13] *(Humiliation, p. 17).*

inception as much farther back than the socialization process of a child. Listening, as a primary part of learning and communicating, begins in the womb. He contends:

Long before [the child, *sic*] has learned to speak he has heard and entered the conversation which is humankind. He has been immersed in the voices and movements which preceded his speaking even more deeply in the invisible language of touch and even that of sound within the womb. Listening comes before speaking, and wherever it is sought the most primitive word of sounding language has already occurred (p. 202).

This key component in the communication process is impossible in an environment saturated with too much noise.

Toward Solution

The development of relationships-on-the-run might not be problematic if the dynamics involving salient and rich conversation could be satisfied by computation or simply by the successful exchange of information, but interpersonal communication entails many unquantifiable elements such as the often humorous, emotion-laden, highly nuanced, meaningrich and other unique qualities that bring a fullness and depth into a human exchange. We must ask ourselves if we are willing to invest in interpersonal relationships that are driven by the principle of utility but lacking in the *poetic*. If not, it will be necessary to take the extra time to foster communication that does more than celebrate quick, efficient, and productive interpersonal interactions. This is by no means the easiest way to proceed. Yet, to inspire the kind of communication that is qualitatively rich and relational one must be increasingly intentional about creating an environment that is conducive to conversation. Uncritical acceptance of a 24/7 mentality fostered by the availability and use of personal mobile media may be one of the quickest routes to dismantling the time honored conversational arts. Without at least a modicum of silence, the hectic pace and acoustic congeries of 21st century life usurps the freedom we cherish. Subjugating silence to the technical necessity of a world of unrelenting information and noise not only increases communication breakdown, but is likely to result in a mental posture devoid of rest, reflection, and quiet repose.

What to do? From a very practical standpoint, this means, among other intentional acts, that we must *really* listen to others. It also means that we avoid the temptation to drive the beautiful mystery of human communication into a technological cul-de-sac. In our busy world of rapid information exchange a healthy respect for the integration of silence can add to the nurturing of a well-balanced, productive, and flourishing life. Without this respect our fascination with all things technological will inadvertently eclipse the beauty and mystery of the gift that most bespeaks our humanness - that ability to use human speech with the dialectical presence of silence as a necessary path to meaningful and vigorous dialogue.

Works Cited

Anderson, R., Cissna, K., & Arnett, R. Eds. (1994). The reach of dialogue: Confirmation, voice, and community. Creskhill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Bollnow, O. F. (1982). On silence - Findings of philosophico-pedagogical anthropology. Universitas, 24 (1), 41-47.

Campbell, S. W., & Russo, T. C. (2003, December). The social construction of mobile telephony: An application of the social influence model to perceptions and uses of mobile phones within personal communication networks. Communication Monographs, 70 (4). 317-334. Retrieved January 11, 2006 from http://web2.epnet.com.eres.regent.edu:2048/external][http://web2.epnet.com.eres.regent.edu:2048/external

Cezezuelle, D. (1993, January). Reflections on social techniques. Ellul Forum, 10. 3-6. Tampa: University of South Florida Press.

Christians, C. (2000). Justice and the Global Media [in] Studies in Christian Ethics, 13: pp76-92.

Christians, C. (1998). The sacredness of life, Media Development, 2.

Christians, C. (1997). Technology and triadic theories of mediation." Rethinking media, religion, and culture, Stewart M. Hoover, S.M., & Kundby, K, Eds.: London: SAGE Publications.

Christians, C. (1981). Ellul on solution: An alternative but no prophecy. In Christians, C., & Van Hook, J. (Eds.) Jacques Ellul: Interpretative essays. Urbana: University of Illinois, pp. 147-173.

Cook, S. L. (2000). Oral residue in an online dialogue. The Speech Communication Annual, (pp. 106 -123).

Craig, R. T., & Karen T. (eds.) (1983). Conversational coherence: Form, structure and Strategy, Sage Series in Interpersonal Communication. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

De Zengotita, T. (2006, July 2). You can't play fetch with an iPod.

LA TIMES. Retrieved July 4, 2006 from

http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/opinion/la-op-zengotita][http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/opinion/la-op-zengotita

Ellul, J. (1994). Seeing and hearing: Prolegomena, pp. 120-125. In Anderson, R., Cissna, K. & Arnett, R., (Eds.) The reach of dialogue. NJ: Hampton Press.

Ellul, J. (1985). The humiliation of the word. (Trans. Hanks, J. M.) Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Ellul, J. (1981; 2006, Spring). The ethics of propaganda. The Ellul Forum 37 Berkeley, CA: International Jacques Ellul Society.

Ellul, J. (1981). On dialogue. In Christians, C.G. & Van Hook, J. (Eds.), Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, pp. 291-308.

Ellul, J. (1965). Propaganda: The formation of men's attitudes. Trans. Kellen, K. & Lerner, J.) New York: Knopf.

Ellul, J. (1964) The technological society. (Trans. Wilkinson, J.) New York: Knopf.

Ellul, J. (1951; 1989). The presence of the kingdom. (2nd ed.). (Trans: Wyon, O.) With introduction by Daniel Clendenin. Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard Publishers, Inc.

Emerson, C. (1994). The outer word and inner speech: Bakhtin, vygotsky and the internalization of language. pp.205-226. In Anderson, R. and Cissna, K. & Arnett, R. The Reach of Dialogue: Voice, confirmation and community. NJ: Hampton Press.

Gardner, M. (2005 December, 15). Sentenced to a cell (phone). Christian Science Monitor. Retrieved June 13, 2006 from http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/1215/p13][http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/1215/p13

Gergen, K. J. & McNamee, S. (2006). Relational responsibility and dialogue. Sage Publications, pp. 141-149. In Stewart, J. Bridges without walls. (9th (ed.) New York: McGrawHill. Gergen, K. J. (1991). The saturated self: Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life. Basic Books, U.S.A. 1976.

Gozzi, R. Jr. (1999) "Jacques Ellul as Technological Ecologist." MEA online newsletter In Medias Res Vol.1 No.1 (Retrieved May 27, 2007) http://www.mediaecology.org][http://www.mediaecology.org

Hanks, J. M. (2000). Jacques Ellul: An annotated bibliography of primary works. Research in Philosophy and Technology series, Supplement 5. Carl Mitcham, Series Editor. CN: Jai Press, Inc.

Idhe, D. (1976). From listening and voice: A phenomenology of sound. (pp 117-121). In Anderson, R., Cissna, K., and Arnett, R., (Eds.). The reach of dialogue, Ohio:Ohio University Press.

Jaworski, A. (1983; 1992). The power of silence: Social and pragmatic perspectives. Language and Language Behavior, Vol. 1. London: Sage Publications.

Kim, R. Staff Writer (May 15, 2007) "More Americans go for cell phones, drop landlines." San Francisco Chronicle. Retrieved May 23, 2007 http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi][http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi

Kluver, R. (2006). Jacques Ellul: Technique, propaganda, and modern media. In Lum, C.M.K. (Ed.). (2006). Perspectives on culture, technology and communication. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Koutevski, B. (2004). Ellul & the Internet. The Ellul Forum. California: Berkeley.

Lum, C. M. K., (Ed.). (2006). Perspectives on culture, technology and communication._Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Lunenfeld, P. (2000). The digital dialectic: New essays on new media. MA: The MIT Press.

Marlin, R. (2006, Spring). Problems in Ellul's Treatment of propaganda. Propaganda & Ethics. The Ellul Forum, 37. Berkeley, CA: International Jacques Ellul Society.

Merton, T. (1993). Thoughts on solitude. [First printing, 1956] Boston: Shambhala.

Nie, N. H. & Erbring, L. (2000). Internet and society: A preliminary report. USA: Sanford Institute for the Quantitative Study of Society (SIQSS).

NPC "Good Neighbors Keep Noise to themselves." Noise Pollution Clearinghouse Retrieved January 20, 2006, from

http://www.nonoise.org/][http://www.nonoise.org/

Ong, W.J. (1972). The power and mystery of words. Saint Louis University Magazine 45 no. 5. MO: Saint Louis University Press.

Pew Internet and American Life Projects. (2005). A non-profit research center studying the social effects of the Internet on Americans. Reports: Technology & Media Use

Philips, S. U. (1995). Interaction structured through talk and interaction structured through silence. In Perspectives on Silence. D. Tannen & M. Saville-Troike (1995). 2nd printing.

Picard, M. (1952). The world of silence. Chicago: Henry Regevery

Postman, N. (2005). What is media ecology? MEA Website.

Retrieved Nov 21, 2005, from www.mediaecologyassociation.org

Scott, R .L. (2000, February). A Codicil to Dialectical Tensions of Speech and Silence. Quarterly Journal of Speech 79, (1) 1-18.

Scott, R. L. (1979). Dialectical Tension of Speech and Silence.

Quarterly Journal of Speech, 79, (1). pp 1-18.

Scott, S. (2002). Fierce conversations. In Stewart, J, (Ed.). Bridges not walls, (2006). (9th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill. pp 49-56

Strate, L. (2004). A Media Ecology Review. Communication Research Trends , 23, (2). Los Gatos, CA: The Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture.

Swaminathan, R. (2004, Autumn). Silence and solitude. Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice, 17, (3). Psychology Press.

Tannen, D. & Saville-Troike, M. (1995). Perspectives on silence. New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

The Guardian. (2005). Mobile phones are changing us and the world we live in Sunday, Jan 16, 2005, p. 12 LONDON [April 19, 2006]

UCLA Internet Report. (2003, February). Surveying the Digital Future: Year Three. UCLA Center for Communication Policy. Retrieved October 12, 2003, from http://www.ccp.uda.edu][www.ccp.uda.edu

United States Government 105th Congres. (1997). Quiet

Communities Act of 1997. Washington, DC: House of

Representatives. Retrieved May 21, 2006, from

http://www.nonoise.org/lawlib/proposed/fedleg/quietact/hr536.htm

U.S. Census Bureau. (2007). U.S. Department of Commerce,

Washington D.C. Retrieved May 21, 2007

http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/miscellaneous/003136.html

USC Center on Public Diplomacy. "Two ways of looking at propaganda." June 29, 2006. Retrieved July 4, 2006, from http://uscpublicdiplomacy.com/index.php/newsroom/pdblog][http://uscpublicdiplomacy.com/index.php/newsroom/pdblog

A Honduran Mayor's Experience of Ellul's Political Illusion

by Mark Baker

Mark Baker is a professor at the Mennonite Brethren Seminary in Fresno, California

In the midst of introducing me to his boss, and greeting my family, Jacobo Sanchez pulled me aside just long enough to say, "Ellul was right!" In a way that said it all. I knew what he meant. At the same time Jacobo's statement begged for further explanation and conversation. Questions immediately flooded my mind. This chance meeting in La Ceiba, Honduras, a city neither of us lived in, did not, however, allow for that conversation. I vowed to myself that on a future visit to Honduras I would visit Jacobo and follow-up on that comment.

In the early 1980's, fresh out of college, I taught at an evangelical bi-lingual school in Tegucigalpa. I met Jacobo, at that time a university student studying chemical engineering. He was charismatic, confident and fun to be with. We spent hours in wide ranging conversation. Many of my beliefs and assumptions were shaken by the poverty and injustices in Honduras and the revolutions in neighboring countries. Jacobo enthusiastically encouraged my critical thinking. (He, a Catholic, also challenged and transformed my conceptions of Catholics.) We became soul mates. We actively sought to convince others that working for justice for the poor and oppressed was central to the Christian faith, and we reflected on ways we could do that ourselves in the present and future.

I also first encountered Ellul's writing in that time period. Jacobo and I read and discussed a number of Ellul's books. Ellul added to our growing sense that a commitment to God called for commitment to radical change. Ellul also challenged us to think more critically about the means we might use to bring change-including the use of political power. I interpreted Ellul as warning us against the political option, yet it was easy for me to be negative about an option I did not realistically have. Jacobo, however, read *The Political Ilussion* and *The Politics of God,*

Politics of Man from a different setting than I did. He knew politicians. For him becoming an elected government leader, or a high level bureaucrat, was not an unrealistic idea. Jacobo took Ellul's warning seriously, but rather than ruling out participation in politics Jacobo entered the fray with the hope that because of what he had learned he could be a different type of politician.

In 1985 Jacobo's uncle, Oscar Mejˆa Arellano, became a candidate for President and Jacobo worked in his campaign. His uncle lost, and in January 1986 Jacobo shared the following reflections with me. (In June of 1983 I returned to the United States. I went to Honduras each summer, and while there visited Jacobo until he graduated and returned to his home city El Progreso. His words are excerpts from a transcription of a cassette recording he sent me in January 1986).

I had the chance to travel around the country and see hunger, sickness, and ignorance in my people. I saw a lot of problems that need to be solved. I was happy because I thought I would have some power, some power to solve these problems. That was the beginning of the process. . . As the days were passing by I was changing. I was thinking just about power, the sweet taste of power. . . I started seeing myself in a suit with a silk shirt in this big air conditioned office, with a big desk, in comfortable chair–sitting there having people coming asking me for favors. . . I am not saying I'd be a corrupt person. . . In the back of my mind, of course were big dreams, big concerns about the people, . . . but I lost perspective.

I was in the this boat and we were sailing in the water of politics and I had realized that the important thing was to keep yourself within the boat. You could see a lot of people swimming around, trying to get into the boat, and some people within the boat pushing them and drowning them. And I was there thinking, "that's good because then I won't have to fight anyone else for my share of power." I was thinking that, and I am a Christian! I love my neighbors, but I was becoming part of this, becoming selfish. . .

You have to be really careful because the gap between the powerful and the oppressed becomes wider all the time. In my speeches I was saying we'd seek justice, health, education and agrarian reform. When I was saying things like that I really meant them because I think it's what is best. But I was on a stage seven or eight feet above the ground and I didn't talk to my people. No, I was with the men on stage, and when we talked among ourselves we did not talk about the needs of the people. . . I remember we were developing a strategy so we could gain more power in the congress and the supreme court. We were just seeking power, power, power. . . And they were saying, "I'm going to buy this house," "this farm," "buy that car," "get this for my family." I never heard, "We have to do this for the people." I never said it. . .

I'm telling these things to you because I know you love me and will pray for me so that I can see the light and gain more wisdom. . . I know your ideals and your dreams and how much you love my people. I love my people too, and I am seeking justice for them. I know that this feeling that burns within me was set there by God. I failed.

Jacobo's first foray in politics confirmed many things he had read in Ellul. He continued to read Ellul, and still had a burning passion to rectify situations of injustice and to lessen the suffering of the poor. His experience in politics had left him feeling great disappointment and disillusionment. He had, however, learned that he could give speeches that moved people. He loved to see how people had reacted to his words, and the thought played in his mind: "why give speeches for others? Why not speak for myself?" Four years later he did. In 1989 he ran for mayor of El Progreso, the third largest city in Honduras. He won the election and became mayor in 1990.

In the summer of 1990 my wife and I, once again living in Honduras, ran a two-month program for some university students involved with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in New York state. On our way to the beach for their final debriefing we passed through El Progreso and I had arranged for us to visit Jacobo.. I had not seen him for a few years. He sat behind a large desk in an air conditioned office. Aides sat as his side.

604

While talking to our group various people interrupted the meeting to get his signature, ask a question, or to report someone was waiting for him. He dealt with each one quickly and returned to his animated description of the changes he was trying to bring about in the city; how he was using his power to help others. For instance, he explained how he helped the poor and landless to get land. I felt a mix of things-excited by what he was accomplishing, yet wondering if he was remembering the lessons he had learned in 1986.

I was even more confused when, two years later, I read in the Honduran newspapers that Jacobo was in Jail and accused of misusing public funds. He was forced out of office. In the end he was found innocent. The real story was that he had been betrayed by some in his own party who saw him as a threat to politics as usual. I left Honduras that year to begin my doctoral studies, and did not see Jacobo again for over ten years until, as noted above, we ran into each other by chance in another city.

Now two years had passed. I was once again visiting Honduras and Jacobo came to Tegucigalpa to spend the afternoon with me. He immediately began explaining the phrase he had mentioned to me two years earlier. "You know that book you gave me by Jacques Ellul, *'The Political Illusion,'* it's true." Yes, he had read it before he became mayor and acknowledged the reality of Ellul's insights, but he aimed to be different. Re-reading it four years after his time as mayor, however, he had read more realistically and honestly. It served as a helpful tool for reflection. True he had taken positive actions-things he is grateful he had the opportunity to do. He did not just give handouts, but began projects that people worked themselves to obtain the results. He grew in his speaking ability, but also became ever more enamored with the feeling of being able to move a crowd. He learned to say the things they wanted to hear. The longer he was in office the more absorbed he became in seeking power for himself, the more he was changed by the power he obtained, and the more he found himself using laudable goals to justify questionable means.

Looking back he can see how the power changed and corrupted him. He did not see it at the time. He thought he was avoiding what Ellul warned us about. While he was mayor, one aide, Sergio, told him, "you are changing." Jacobo ignored him, and listened to all the others that praised him. Ironically after Jacobo lost his position Sergio was the only one who continued to visit him. All the others disappeared.

We had a great discussion that afternoon. It fascinated me to hear his insights on politics today-global and Honduran. After two hours, however, I leaned forward and asked, "But where are you today? What about all our talk of justice 20 some years ago?" He looked at me and said, "I think about it every day when I wake up, and a plaque of Isaiah 58 hangs behind my desk at work."

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the

yoke, to let the oppressed go free....

Then he described changes he has made at the factory he runs, changes resisted by the owner, changes that have required him to confront other powers that Ellul has written about. That, however, is material for another article.

Selected Bibliography prepared by Joyce Hanks, University of Scranton

Spanish and Portuguese Writings on Jacques Ellul

Writings in English and French by Latin American and Spanish Authors

Writings in English and French Related to Jacques Ellul and Latin America

1972. "Tres preguntas a Jacques Ellul sobre el dinero" [Three questions to Jacques Ellul concerning money]. *Certeza*, vol. 12, no. 46, pp. 166-168. Interview.

1972. [Samuel Escobar]. "Jacques Ellul: Profeta de un cristianismo radical" [Jacques Ellul: Prophet of radical Christianity]. *Certeza*, vol. 12, no. 46, p. 182. Includes information on several of Ellul's books.

1972. Michael Woodruff. "Voces para nuestro tiempo: Jacques Ellul" [Voices for our time: Jacques Ellull.

Certeza, vol. 12, no. 46, pp. 184-186.

1975. Rene Padilla. "The Church and the Third World: An Interview with Rene Padilla." *Right On*, vol. 7, no.

3 (Oct.), pp. 5-6, 10-11. lnterview by Sharon Gallagher and Donald Virtue. Refers to Ellul.

1977. Alfredo Botero. "Algunos elementos de reflexion sobre el relativismo moral" [Some principles for thinking about moral relativism]. *Theologica Xavieriana* [Bogota], vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 125-162. Ellul and others on the use of words.

1979. Guillermo Blanco. "La eficacia de la paz" [The efficacy of peace]. In Guillermo Blanco, Beltran Villegas M., et al., *Eficacia de la paz: VII Semana Social de Chile.* Santiago, Chile: Instituto Chileno de Estudios Humamsticos, pp. 25-52. Ellul on violence.

1979. Louis J. Shein. "El hombre en una sociedad tecnologica: Una exploracion etica" [Man in a technological society: An ethical exploration]. *Folia humanistica*, vol. 17, no. 204 (Dec.), pp. 655-677. In the first part of this two-part article, Shein compares Ellul on Technique with Louis Mumford and R. A. Buchanan.

1981-1982. Rene Padilla. "Les mythes de I'homme face a la parole de Dieu" [Human myths confronted with the word of God]. *Gazette des GBU*, no. 2 (Dec. 1981), pp. 2-7, and no. 3 (April 1982), pp. 29-33. Ellul referred to in the second part of this article, in no. 3.

1983. Victor J. Griffiths. "Marketing y sociedad de lucro" [Marketing and the profit-oriented society]. *Mision: Revista internacional de orientation cristiana*, vol. 2, no. 2 (April-June), pp. 14-17.

1983. Tomas Hanks. "Jacques Ellul: ˆEl original 'teologo de la liberacion'?" [Jacques Ellul: The original 'liberation theologian'?]. *Boletm teologico*, no. 12 (0ct.-Dec.), pp. 1-31. Ellul as a precursor who surpasses liberation theologies. Later translated into English.

1985. Bob Ekblad. "Ellul and Development in Central America." *Cross Currents*, theme issue on "Jacques Ellul," ed. Carl Mitcham, vol. 35, no. 1 (Spring), pp. 65-71.

1985. Joyce Main Hanks. "El reino de Dios en el pensamiento de Jacques Ellul" [The Kingdom of God in the thought of Jacques Ellul]. *Vida y pensamiento*, vol. 5, no. 1 (Jan.-June), pp. 9-29.

1986. Albert Bressand and Catherine Distler. *El mundo de manana: Rediopolis* [Tomorrow's world: Networkopolis]. Barcelona: Planeta. ISBN 8432047635. Translated from the 1985 French edition.

1986. Aldo Etchegoyen. "La mision de la Iglesia en el centro de la ciudad" [The Church's mission in the inner city]. *Boletm CIEMAL*, no. 10 (Oct.-Dec.), pp. 7-8.

1986. Koen, Titia. "Une reponse a Jacques Ellul" [A response to Jacques Ellul]. *Cahiers de la reconciliation*, vol. 53, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb.), pp. 21-22. Accuses Ellul of misunderstanding liberation theologians.

1986. Enrique Vijver. "Teologos del siglo XX" [Twentieth-century theologians]. *Bibliografla teologica del area iberoamericana*, vol. 11 (for 1983), ISSN 0326-6680. Buenos Aires: Instituto Superior Evangelico de Estudios Teologicos, 1986, pp. 643-645.

1987. Langdon Winner. *La ballena y el reactor: Una busqueda de los limites en la era de la alta tecnologia.* Barcelona: Gedisa. ISBN 8474322804. Spanish version of *The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for Limits in on Age ofHigh Technology*, 1986.

1989. Roberto Mendez. "La filosofia de la tecnologia del siglo XX" [Twentieth-century philosophy of technology]. *Anthropos*, nos. 94-95, pp. 27-34. Ellul's criticism of Technique and his view of the ethics of non-power.

1989. Carl Mitcham. *ˆQue es la filosofia de la tecnologia'?* [What is the philosophy of technology?]. Translated by Cesar Cuello Nieto and Roberto Mendez Stingl. Barcelona: Anthropos. ISBN 8476581076.

1989. Eduardo Aibar Puentes. "Jacques Ellul: Introduccion" [Jacques Ellul: Introduction]. *Anthropos*, Suplemento 14 (April), pp. 138-139.

1990. Marcos Garcia de la Huerta. *Critica de la razon tecnocratica. ˆPor que la tecnica da que pensar?* [Critique of technocratic reasoning: Why does Technique set us thinking?]. Collection El Saber y La Cultura. Santiago, Chile: Editorial Universitaria. ISBN 956110242K.

1993. Marcos Garcia de la Huerta. "Sobre catastrofes y monstruos" [Concerning catastrophes and monsters]. *Technology and Ecology: The proceedings ofthe VII lnternational Conference ofthe Society for Philosophy and Technology.* Ed. Larry A. Hickman and Elizabeth F. Porter. Carbondale, Illinois: Society for Philosophy and Technology, pp. 316-331. Ellul on the technological system and its relation to ecology.

1993. Thomas D. Hanks. "Liberation Theology after Twenty-Five Years: Passe or Mainstream?" *Anvil*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 197-208.

1995. Lucien Sfez. *Critica de la comunicacion* [Critique of communication]. Translated by Anibal C. Leal. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu. ISBN 9505186436. Ellul's contribution to

communication theory, and his view of the technological system. Translated from *Critique de la communication*, 1988.

1999. Carlos Jorge Morgado Pereira. "O oitavo dia da criacao: Tecnica, utopia e liberdade na obra de Jacques Ellul" [The eighth day of creation: Technique, utopia and freedom in the work of Jacques Ellul]. Master's thesis in Sociology, Univ. of Coimbra, Brazil.

2001. Robert Ellsberg. *Todos los santos: Reflexiones diarias sobre santos, profetas y testigos de nuestro tiempo.* New York: Crossroad. ISBN 0824519116. Jan. 6, Ellul's birthday, devoted to Ellul. A translation of the 1998 *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time* (New York: Crossroad; ISBN 0824515994, 0824516796).

2003. Andres Felipe Peralta [Sanchez]. "La nocion de ambivalencia en Jacques Ellul" [The idea of ambivalence in Jacques Ellul]. *Revista de Filosofia de la Universidad de Costa Rica* (ISSN 0034-8252), vol. 41, no. 103 (Jan.-June), pp. 117-125.

2006. Daniel Cerezuelle. "La tecnica y la carne: De la *enzarkosis logou* a la critica de la sociedad tecnica en Charbonneau, Ellul e Illich" [Technique and the flesh: From the *ensarkosis logou* to the critique of the technological society in Charbonneau, Ellul, and Illich]. *Ixtus: Espiritu y cultura* (ISSN 1405-552X), 13th year, no. 55, pp. 58-86. From the French edition, published in 2005 in *Revue europeenne des sciences sociales.*

2006. Roelf Haan. *Vida plena para toda la creacion: Iglesia, globalizacion neoliberal y justicia economica* [A full life for the whole creation: Church, neo-liberal globalization, and economic justice]. Buenos Aires: AIPRAL/ISEDET. ISBN 9870511899, 9870511892.

Book Notes & Reviews

La pensee marxiste & Les successeurs de Marx
Reviewed by Joyce Hanks

La pensee marxiste: Cours professe a I'Institut d'etudes politiques de Bordeaux de 1947 a 1979

Jacques Ellul

Edited by Michel Hourcade, Jean-Pierre Jezequel and Gerard Paul.

Paris: La Table Ronde, 2003. 255 pages.

Jacques Ellul

Les successeurs de Marx: Cours professe a I'Institut d'etudes politiques de Bordeaux

Edited by Michel Hourcade, Jean-Pierre Jezequel and Gerard Paul

Paris: La Table Ronde, 2007. 218 pages.

Reviewed by Joyce Hanks

University of Scranton

Jacques Ellul's courses taught at the University of Bordeaux (including at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques, which he helped found) often broke new ground, influencing the thought of generations of French students and students from abroad. Until recently, our access to this material has been limited to Ellul's own adaptations of his course materials made available in book form (*The Technological Society*; *Propaganda*). Now, thanks to the herculean efforts of three dedicated Parisians (two of whom studied under Ellul), we have two additional Ellul courses available: Marxist Thought and Marx's Successors.

Like Ellul's previously published books based on his university lectures, these two new books are models of carefully organized and presented thought. Hourcade's, Jezequel's, and Paul's efforts have involved locating notes taken by several students, as well as tape recordings (made by Bill Vanderburg when he studied with Ellul), and molding them into a smoothly readable whole. The editors have tracked down references, explained allusions, and often cross referenced Ellul's lectures where they intersect with material in his published books and in interviews he gave. Additional footnotes compare Ellul with other writers, or show how he was ahead of his time, signaling trends that would become important much later. We owe a
considerable debt of thanks to all three editors, to the former students who gave permission to use their notes and recordings, and to Denis Tillinac of La Table Ronde for his willingness to publish Ellul's lectures.

The first of these volumes traces how Marx's ideas relate to those of Hegel and Feuerbach, and offers a broad outline of Marx's thought, including a presentation of his publications. Separate sections explain Marx on materialism, history, economics, and politics. Throughout the book, Ellul evaluates other scholars' understandings of Marx. Readers familiar with Ellul will expect to find references to Technique, but the editors have helpfully set these and other comments by Ellul apart from the rest of the text, using a symbol (^) and bold type to indicate that they involve Ellul's opinions, predictions, and updating of Marx's thought (this same system identifies Ellul's personal views in *Les successeurs de Marx*). Readers who already know Marx well may want to concentrate on these readily identifiable paragraphs to get a view of "Ellul on Marx." Others may want to begin with the final chapter, devoted to Marx on political and social issues: ideology, the State, democracy, religion, alienation, the proletariat, and class struggle. Ellul shines especially in this section, where the influence of Marx's thought on him makes him quite persuasive and exceptionally clear.

The section that closes the book explains the importance of Marx in Ellul's thinking and the reason he has chosen to teach a course on Marxist thought. For those who have felt perplexed by Ellul's frequent references to Marx, this book may answer a host of questions.

The second book, on Marx's followers, includes notes on two different courses in that category. The first follows the fate of Marx's thought in France (Jean Jaures, Georges Sorel), in Germany, especially as Marxists reacted to Lenin (Eduard Bernstein, Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg), and in Russia (Lenin and Plekhanov). The second course traces the development of Marxism in Czechoslovakia.

Ellul delineates the effects of certain contradictions, paradoxes, and predictions in Marx's thought as his early successors attempted to apply his principles to their country's situation. As Ellul sees it, conflicts among Marxists developed because of the incomplete state of Marx's published thought, its dialectical nature, and historical developments not foreseen by Marx. Marxist intellectuals battled communist parties, and followers attempted to define a "Marxist" so as to exclude those they considered heretics. Ellul describes the adaptations of

Marx's ideas to new developments in capitalism, the economic situation, and World War I.

Ellul's course on Marxism in Czechoslovakia concerns a much later period, after World War II, antiStalinism in the 1960's, and the effects of science and Technique on socialism, especially with respect to economics. Many of Radovan Richta's ideas (and to some degree, those of Ota Sik) bear a striking resemblance to Ellul's, especially as expressed in *Changer de revolution* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1982). Indeed, in the introduction to this course, Ellul makes it clear that he saw something new in these Czechoslovakian thinkers: a Marxist way of viewing technological society that made him hopeful for the first time in decades. Ellul also points out where he differs with the Czechs' views, so we get a balanced impression.

The editors have also prepared Ellul's lecture notes on Social Classes. This shorter work, privately published and circulated in 1998, was reviewed by Gabriel Vahanian in *Foi et Vie* (July 1999).

It is certainly to be hoped that these volumes will find their way into English, with added indexes, bibliographies, and probably some additional explanatory footnotes. They constitute concise, clear, and valuable introductions to Marx and his followers, as well as a slant on Ellul's thought we cannot find elsewhere in his published works.

Living in the Labyrinth of Technology

Willem Vanderburg
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005
Reviewed by Richard Stivers
Illinois State University

Bill Vanderburg brings a unique perspective to the study of technique even as he is greatly indebted to the work of Jacques Ellul. *Living in the Labyrinth of Technology* is the third volume in a trilogy on culture, nature, technique, and the individual (whom many of us in the social sciences have forgotten). A full understanding of this highly important book requires a reading of *The Growth of Minds and Cultures* and *The Labyrinth of Technology*. Yet the author has done an excellent job of incorporating key ideas from the previous volumes into this one; consequently, this volume can stand alone.

Vanderburg's work, this book in particular, is the necessary complement to Ellul's work. Let me explain. Ellul's theory of the technological society is not a universal and philosophical theory of society (such as that of Talcott Parsons) applied to modern societies; rather it is a theory of what society has become in a technological context. Nor did Ellul attempt to create a scientific sociology in which findings in the social sciences and history are integrated into a work of empirical generalizations. Instead he studied a number of important topics, such as propaganda, politics, and visual images, within the context of a technological society.

By contrast Vanderburg, as Ellul notes in the foreword to *The Growth of Minds and Cultures*, has created a work of scientific integration. His work is not merely interdisciplinary, but integrated into a cohesive, consistent whole. *The Growth of Minds and Cultures* contains a theory of culture, one that explains the so-called micro/macro problem. Social scientists have vainly attempted to explain the culture link between the individual and society. My reaction to Vanderburg's first book, as was Ellul's it turns out, was "He's explained the cultural link." In *the Labyrinth of Technology*, Vanderburg develops a concept of preventive engineering based on the best research on the biosphere, society, and technique. In this the third volume, he has brought together the main ideas of the previous works into a comprehensive theory of biosphere, society, and the individual under the dominion of technique.

For me as a social scientist, the issue of technique's impact on culture is central. I have been waiting for him to apply the concept of culture from the first book to a technological society. He has done this. I will spend the remainder of the review on this topic.

Vanderburg's theory of culture which resolved the issue of the individual and society, was based on a set of related concepts. One is the idea that culture is an open system, an organic whole, a social ecology, that is the result of human experience, most of which is at a metaconscious level of awareness. A central cultural dialectic is that of unity and diversity. All successful cultures provide for diversity, e.g., male and female, at the same time symbolically organizing the diversity into a unity. What sets apart Vanderburg's theory is the idea of metaconscious depth of experience. Experience runs from the personal to the societal. The former is about experiences unique to the individual, the latter about the common experiences of everyone in society. In between the micro and the macro are experiences common to those of the same sex, age, ethnicity, race, and class, on the one hand, and those of family and friendship groups, on the other hand. The brilliant insight is that each set of experiences is enfolded (made sense of) into the next higher level of experience. My personal experiences are set within my experiences in friendship groups and family, and these within those of my sex, age, and ethnic group, and those within my experiences as a member of society as a whole. The most profound level of metaconscious experience is that of the most common experience. *The more general the experience the greater the degree of depth.* We are less conscious of these metaconscious experiences and they are linked to the anchor of all cultures— the experience of the sacred. His theory explains both socialization and the inevitable tension between the individual and the group, and the group and society.

How does technique affect culture? First, technique supplants experience. In a technological society we learn less and less from custom and interpersonal experiences, both skills and ways of being, and more in an abstract, external, rationalized way. The culture begins to lose its ability to symbolize and thus integrate the differentiated experiences of the diversity of status groups in society. At best, metaconscious knowledge related to experience exists in a fragmented way, only within one's occupational group or perhaps a special interest group. Consequently, culture loses its essential unity—a symbolic unity in the form of a narrative about the past and future. The diversity of culture overcomes its unity. Technique can only integrate a society at the level of logic, not meaning. Furthermore, technique as the modern sacred is exclusively about power, our own power. Consequently, all our relationships to nature and to each other are transformed into power relationships. Meaning is ephemeral and political.

Using open systems theory in a highly creative way, Bill Vanderburg has provided an indispensable service—placing biosphere, society, and individual into a dialectical context that enables us to perceive at a single glance the tragedy of our actions driven by the technological will to power.

Religious No More: Building Communities of Grace & Freedom

Mark D. Baker

Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press 1999; Wipf & Stock, 2005. Spanish version: *[Basta de religion!: Como construir comunidades de graciay libertad* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairos, 2005)

Reviewed by Ken Morris

Boulder, Colorado

Mark Baker's book, *Religious No More: Building Communities of Grace & Freedom*, reluctantly offers a definition of evangelicalism as "a specific movement that sought to reform fundamentalism from within" (167 n.19). A similar characterization could also apply to Baker's book, which arose out of the author's years of missionary experience in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and his reflections on those experiences during MA and PhD studies at New College Berkeley and Duke University. Like evangelicals who sought to reform fundamentalism while preserving what they viewed as the positive theological and social aspects of the movement, Baker offers a thoughtful and timely critique of evangelicalism from within.

Baker knows about what he writes. As his book explains, Baker grew up solidly inside American evangelicalism, graduated from Wheaton College, and selfidentifies as an evangelical. He currently is associate professor of mission and theology at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California, and an IJES board member. Drawing on his experiences from an evangelical upbringing in the U.S., his decade of missionary work in evangelical contexts in Latin America, his close reading of Jacques Ellul's critique of religiosity vs. living faith, and his training in theology and biblical studies at New College Berkeley and Duke, Baker has important insights to offer.

Baker's book begins with the premise that North American evangelicals can detect fallacies in their proclamation of the Christian message by examining how it plays out under the challenges of poverty, injustice and entrenched legalism at churches born out of North American mission work in Honduras. In the first part of the book, Baker uses case studies from churches in Tegucigalpa to demonstrate how legalism in Latin American churches offers solidarity among evangelicals and other social benefits, but also acts as a barrier to deeper, more authentic Christian community.

Baker recounts how, when the Honduran congregation he was working with sought to address this concern, its members ended up studying the book of Galatians for a number of weeks, which spawned the central ideas of this book. Baker's critique of legalism among Honduran evangelicals led him to take a new look at parallel legalisms found in North American evangelicalism.

The second part of the book summarizes the key insights Baker gained as a result of that contextual study and his subsequent doctoral work with Richard Hays and Frederick Herzog at Duke University. Baker contrasts the traditional interpretation of

Galatians, which tends to reinforce the individualistic and overly spiritualized character of North American evangelicalism, with the interpretation being advanced by Hays and other New Testament scholars that the apostle Paul downplays concerns of individual guilt and salvation and focuses on the gospel's communal inclusiveness. This section is not a verse by verse exegesis of Galatians—although Baker is currently writing such a commentary in Spanish for the Comentairo Biblico Latinamericano series (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairos y La Fraternidad Teologica Latinoamericana). Rather, Baker takes the reader through Galatians section by section, summarizing key hermeneutical issues and the range of interpretations, and offering his own insightful conclusions.

In the book's concluding section, Baker briefly proposes how the insights he has gained from reflecting on his missionary experiences and contextual and scholarly studies could have an impact on North American evangelicals. He is not alone in his concern over the individualistic and legalistic tendencies in the evangelical church. The Emergent Church movement is also addressing these concerns and gaining a growing following among younger generations of evangelicals. See, for example, Brian McClaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (Jossey-Bass 2001). Nor is Baker the first to raise concerns about corrosive effect of religiosity on deeper Christian community. M. Scott Peck's work on community building has long noted an astonishing lack of interest in, and even resistance to, efforts to deepen community among Christians across the faith spectrum. See, for example, *A World Waiting to be Born: Civility Rediscovered* (Bantam Books 1993), pp. 351-353.

Interestingly, Dr. Peck's observations about the barriers to true community in church congregations parallel in significant ways Baker's conclusions. But to my knowledge, Baker is among the few evangelical scholars who are combining missions experience with solid biblical exegesis to produce the kind of practical theology that has real potential to contribute to reform within North American evangelicalism. For that, his work could not be more timely.

Beyond Paradise: Technology and the Kingdom of God

Jack Clayton Swearengen
Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007. 350 pages.
Reviewed by Jacob VanVleet
Diablo Valley College, Concord CA
Former Scientific Advisor for the Secretary of Defense and Founding Director of Engineering Programs at Washington State University, Jack Clayton Swearengen has produced a monumentally important work on the impacts of technology. By critically and cautiously analyzing the dominating role that technology plays in our everyday lives, Swearengen helps awaken us to our naive acceptance of the ever-new forms of

technology and their negative material and spiritual effects. More importantly, rather than simply criticizing technology, he provides practical responses to our current technological predicaments.

In his opening chapter, Swearengen provides historical examples of how technology has transformed socio-economic sectors as well as the Western psyche, resulting in such changes as automation, assembly lines, and a profound shift in human values. Efficiency, speed, and continuous progress became the goals and deciding factors in new forms of technological development. These motivating principles, of course, failed to consider possible negative outcomes, such as depletion of natural resources, health risks, and most importantly, spiritual consequences.

Swearengen goes on to argue, in chapter 2, that we have allowed technology to hypnotize us and to control our lives and decisions. This can clearly be seen in our utter dependency on the complex network of technology that directs our lives. We no longer question technology, but we uncritically trust it - even to the demise of ourselves and the earth. Swearengen provides several powerful illustrations of our optimistic and unrealistic trust in technology, including the development of missile defense programs, the surge in personal safety and security systems, and the installation of metal detectors in schools across the country. Swearengen maintains that we ought to seek out the root causes rather than look for quick "technological fixes" to the many dangers we are trying to avoid.

In chapters 3-4, Swearengen discusses at length various communication technologies, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and the latest nanotechnologies. He argues, with Jacques Ellul (whose influence is clear throughout the work), that technology is not morally neutral. Every new form of technology is value laden, and due to this fact, there are severe physical and spiritual impacts. These impacts are outlined in detail in chapters 5-7. Here, Swearengen carefully, and with much insight, details the environmental, aesthetic, social, and finally the spiritual impacts of technology.

In the following chapter, Swearengen surveys various attitudes and responses to technology since the Enlightenment, including utilitarianism, realism, Luddism and postmodernism. His overview provides a framework for the concluding chapters of *Beyond Paradise*, which are the most noteworthy of the work. In chapter 9, the author calls us to recognize our enslavement to personal mobility, and to work toward transportation systems that are truly sustainable. Subsequently, the author begins to develop a theology of technology in chapter 10.

Specifically, we need to respond to technology in a manner that is guided by various principles found in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. For example, Swearengen maintains that Christians should look to the example of Jesus to inform our values rather than to the technologically devoted "spirit of the age." Swearengen states: "Jesus taught that the highest good is God and His Kingdom" (288). Because of this, we must place our trust and hope in God and His kingdom, rather than in technological gadgets, devices and infrastructures. Swearengen then presents eight guiding principles for technological development guided by Scripture. Technology should: bring praise to

the Creator; stimulate humanity's thirst for God's kingdom; serve and promote justice; serve God, fellow humans and nature; enhance life without dominating it; respect, preserve, care for and utilize nature while meeting human needs; be culturally appropriate and protect cultural traditions that are not unbiblical; and be trustworthy (reliable and repairable) and transparent (full disclosure of impacts) (294). These guiding principles, Swearengen maintains, will help Christians deal effectively with their relationships to technology, whether they are developing new technologies or simply living with them.

In the work's final chapter, titled "What Then Should We Be Doing?", a practical and concrete methodology for "steering technology" is proposed. The concluding suggestions are quite persuasive and encouraging.

In the prologue of *Beyond Paradise: Technology and the Kingdom of God*, Jack Clayton Swearengen states that the book was written for the Church and its leaders. However, this work clearly goes well beyond that audience. It is a clearly written, passionately sustained argument for the limiting and redirecting of technology, using Scripture as a guide. Like Jacques Ellul, Swearengen's work will appeal to anyone who has thought critically and analytically about technology and its impacts.

News & Notes

—Vernard Eller (1927-2007)

Vernard Ellul died on June 18, 2007, after suffering from Alzheimer's disease in recent years. Vernard was a lifelong member of the Church of the Brethren, an Anabaptist, peace church tradition. He earned his B.A. at LaVerne College, a Brethren school (later "university") where he was professor of philosophy and religion for 34 years until his retirement. He also earned the M.Div at Bethany Seminary (IL), M.A. at Northwestern University, and the Th.D. at Pacific School of Religion.

Eller's dissertation evolved into his book *Kierkagaard and Radical Discipleship: A New Perspective* (Princeton, 1968). From his undergraduate studies onward, SK had a profound influence on Eller's thought (he even named one of his sons "Enten"; *enten/ eller* is Danish for *Either/Or*, one of SK's most important works).

Eller was drawn to Jacques Ellul's writings beginning in the late Sixties, not least because of Ellul's own deep appreciation of Kierkegaard. Eller wrote more than twenty articles on, and reviews of, Ellul's work in the *Ellul Forum, Christian Century, Katallagete*, and other publications. Perhaps his most explicitly Ellulian book (he wrote more than twenty) was *Christian Anarchy: Jesus' Primacy over the Powers* (Eerdmans, 1987) which he dedicated as follows: "In appreciation of Jacques Ellul who has led me not only into Christian Anarchy but into much more of God's truth as well. Merci mon ami!"

As a writer Eller sometimes came across in a more "prophetic" critical mode that "stirred the pot" (not unlike SK and JE) but in person he was always a great friend, classroom teacher, pastor, and community builder. He had a terrific wit and sense of

humor. We will miss him and be grateful for his legacy. Our condolences to Phyllis Eller, his wife of 52 years.

—ELLUL CONFERENCE NEWS

As many of you know, the international conference on Ellul's thought planned for September of this year in Ottawa had to be cancelled. The major funding source did not come through, despite the encouragement we initially received.

On a smaller scale, 18 people gathered in Berkeley on August 20 to hear Daniel Cerezuelle describe (en francais) the growth of the environmental movement in southwestern France, and the roles played by Jacques Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau.

Advert: International Jacques Ellul Society

Advert: Change of Address?

You don't want to miss out on The Ellul Forum. We don't want to lose touch with you.

E-mail your address change immediately to: IJES@ellul.org

Or write to: IJES, P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA

Resources for Ellul Studies

www.ellul.org & www.jacques-ellul.org The IJES web site at www.ellul.org contains (1) news about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, (4) a complete index of the contents of all *Ellul Forum* back issues; and (5) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The French AIJE web site at www.jacques-ellul.org is also a superb resource.

The Ellul Forum CD: 1988-2002

The first thirty issues of *The Ellul Forum*, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for US $15 (postage included). Send payment with your order to "IJES," P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

Back issues #31 - #39 of *The Ellul Forum* are available for $5 each (postage and shipping included).

Cahiers Jacques Ellul

Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne

An essential annual journal for students of Ellul is *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, edited by Patrick Chastenet, published by Editions L'Esprit du Temps, and distributed by Presses Universitaires de France Send orders to Editions L'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Postage and shipping is 5 euros for the first volume ordered; add 2 euros for each additional volume ordered.

Volume 1: "L'Annees personnalistes" (15 euros)

Volume 2: "La Technique" (15 euros)

Volume 3: "L'Economie" (21 euros).

Volume 4 (forthcoming): "La Propagande" (21 euros).

Librairie Mollat—new books in French

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux (www.mollat.com) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

Alibris—used books in English

The Alibris web site (www.alibris.com) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

Used books in French:

two web resources

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are www.chapitre.com and www.livre-rare-book.com.

Reprints of Nine Ellul Books

By arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of several Ellul books originally published by William B. Eerdmans can now be purchased. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: *The Ethics of Freedom* ($40), *The Humiliation of the Word* ($26), *The Judgment of Jonah* ($13), *The Meaning of the City* ($20), *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* ($19), *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* ($28), *The Subversion of Christianity* ($20), and *The Technological Bluff* ($35). *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul* translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

Have your bookstore (or on-line book dealer) "back order" the titles you want. Do not go as an individual customer to Eerdmans or Ingram/Spring Arbor. For more information visit "Books on Demand" at www.eerdmans.com.

Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. $87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit www.elsevier.com for ordering information.

Ellul on Video

French film maker Serge Steyer's film "Jacques Ellul: L'homme entier" (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site www.meromedia.com. Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul's ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired

Issue #41 Spring 2008 — Islam and Religion

- Click to view the original PDF

For the Critique of Technological Civilization
International Jacques Ellul Society
Berkeley, California, USA
www.ellul.org
"Let me make it clear that I have not been trying to excuse what the Europeans did. I have not been trying to shift the "blame," to say that the Muslims, not the Christians, were the guilty party. "
    -Jacques Ellul
    The Subversion of Christianity
    (1984; ET1986), p. 112.

Contents

Information on The Editorial Board & More

From the Editor

We are interested in this issue in presenting Ellul's perspectives on Islam. But our overall theme is broad: "Globalization: Religious and Technological Conflict." *The Ellul*

Forum is not limited to Ellul's thought in itself, but as the subtitle indicates, we are engaged in "The Critique of Technological Civilization." See *The Forum 's* mission statement in the journal column on the left, and this wider scope is obvious.

Thus we feature Darrell Fasching's article in this issue and take note of his double reference to Ellul in terms of the sacred and new demons. We follow it with sections from two of Ellul's major statements on Islam. For both, religious conflict as it turns to technological conflict through weapons and war, is a central theme.

Ellul's "Preface" to the Bat Ye'or volume and chapter 5 in his *Subversion of Christianity* are in books no longer in print. Though Ellul's thinking on Islam is hugely controversial and set in the 1980s, *The Forum* seeks to serve our readers by making it accessible in this form to help invigorate our discussion in the age of religious fundamentalism and the so-called war on terrorism.

Andrew Goddard has reminded us that Ellul's strong proIsrael view needs to be considered to help put his views on Islam in context, though Ellul's major books on the topic have never been translated: *Un chretien pour Israel* and *Ce dieu injuste*. And David Gill's comments on this topic are also very helpful: "Ellul visited Israel, had lots of Jewish and rabbi friends, and worked hard to save Jewish lives during the Resistance. But he also argued for France to get out of Algeria after WWII; they didn't and a horrible war followed. He was not absolutely against Muslims or Arabs. For example, his *New Demons* rips all religion, including the Christian version and the technological one."

For a more complete understanding of Ellul's thinking on religious conflict in general and Islam in particular, Joyce Hanks includes a comprehensive list of the original and secondary literature on "Islam" in her recent bibliography *The Reception of Jacques Ellul's Critique of Technology* (p. 495), reviewed in this issue.

Associate Editor David Gill invites all our IJES members to submit 100-500 word personal statements on "How Ellul has Affected My Approach to Politics" for the special Fall 2008 issue on "Ellul and Practical Politics." Deadline September 20. Email to IJES@ellul.org. Let your voice be heard.

Clifford G. Christians, **Editor**
Editor@ellul.org

Religious Postmodernism In An Age of Global Conflict by Darrell J. Fasching

Darrell J. Fasching is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of South Florida, Tampa. He was the founding editor of The Ellul Forum(1988-1998) and a founding member of the International Jacques Ellul Society. His book, The Thought of Jacques Ellul (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1981), was the first English-language monograph to focus on the work of Ellul.

Foreword from the author:

Is it plagiarism to quote oneself without quotation marks? I have never come to a satisfactory answer to that question. So here is my "confession:" The ideas expressed here are found in a variety of other things I have written (including an unpublished manuscript on Gandhi and bin Laden) but are taken here, almost verbatim, from the concluding chapter I wrote for Religion and Globalization, co-authored with John Esposito and Todd Lewis (Oxford University Press. 2008). That chapter is also used as the concluding chapter of World Religions Today (Oxford University Press, 2006) with the same co-authors. And the material I used in those concluding chapters began to be formulated in my book The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima (SUNY Press, 1993), the epilogue of my book The Coming of the Millennium (Trinity International Press, 1996) and further formulated in "Stories of War and Peace: Sacred, Secular and Holy" in War and Words (Lexington Books, 2004, edited by Sara Munson Deats, Lagretta Tallent Lenker, and Merry G. Perry).

Introduction

Technology globalizes human existence through mass communication, international travel and global reach of international corporations. In doing so it everywhere disrupts sacred ways of life that were once largely immune to outside incursion, precipitating a new era of violence. These sacred ways of life gave each culture its sacred center. Globalization, especially through the mass media, decenters and relativizes all such centers and therefore threatens every sacred way of life. Postmodernity is a product of globalization, for the postmodern world is an eclectic world that has no center. In the same way "new age religion" is a postmodern product of globalization, for it is eclectic religiosity that has no center of its own but borrows from everywhere. Globalization creates the pluralism and relativism that only a secular society will tolerate.

A sacred society, by definition, cannot tolerate this seemingly normless diversity. The sacred is that which matters most, and what matters most to people is their way of life. It is what people are willing to die for and, more ominously, what they are willing to kill for. For all traditional sacred societies, the modern West, seems like a disease that is trying to infect the whole world with its "secularism" –a secularism that creates a "pluralistic relativism" and brings with it "moral decadence."

Fundamentalism and terrorism are protective responses to this global invasion, responses that see the cure as a return to a sacred order now imagined as a global order. But how can humanity go from a diversity of sacred orders to one sacred order? Whose sacred order would this be? In a world of sacral conflicts, where compromise equals apostasy, violence seems like the only way to settle this issue.

In this essay I argue that this issue cannot have a secular solution, since secularism (itself, as Ellul would say, the new face of the sacred) evokes the violent response it seeks to undermine by preaching a totalistic form of pluralism and relativism in response

to every form of sacred absolutism and totalism. The only constructive alternative to religious fundamentalism's call to return to a sacred order, I argue, must itself be religious - a religious postmodernism. This religious postmodernism would give human beings a religious reason to abandon the totalitarian impulse to create a global sacred order by embracing what I would call Gandhi's "religious postmodernism," for Gandhi insists that all religion is political and must shape the public global order but do so by discovering religious reasons to embrace religious diversity.

Violence and the Sacred: Defending the Center

After the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001, on the very day the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan began, a tape of Osama bin Laden was broadcast to the world in which he declared, "These events have split the whole world into two camps. The camp of belief and the camp of disbelief. There is only one God, and I declare that there is no prophet but Muhammad." September 11th, 2001 was the most recent and dramatic battle in a war between two worlds. This "jihad" or "holy war" was declared by bin Laden in1998 from Afghanistan, announcing: "We, with Allah's help, call on every Muslim . . . to comply with Allah's order to kill the Americans... We also call on Muslim ulema, leaders, youths and soldiers to launch the raid on Satan's U.S. troops and the devil's supporters.."[1]

For bin Laden, the world is divided into two realms, that of sacred order (*dar al Islam*) and that of chaos and war (*dar al harb*). According to bin Laden, the West, with its secularism and unbelief, threatens and profanes the sacred realm of Islam. Muslims are authorized and urged to kill Americans and all unbelievers, even innocent women and children. According to news reports of a discovered terrorist manual, the *al Qaida* are clear about the goal - "overthow of the godless regimes and their replacement with an Islamic regime." For bin Laden, the very presence of American soldiers in Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War profaned the land that harbors the most sacred places of Islam (i.e., the sacred places that mark Muhammad's life and teachings in Mecca and Medina). "Holy war" is not the unique province of radical Muslims. Most wars qualify, especially the Christian "Crusades."

Bin Laden is intent upon protecting a sacred way of life against the invastion of the secular West. A people demonstrate what they truly hold sacred by what they are willing to die for, or more ominously, to kill for. Again and again, humans have demonstrated that it is their way of life, above all, that fills that category. What matters most to human beings everywhere is their living and dying. What is common to all human religiosity is not belief in God or the gods but the sacredness of a "way of life" that conquers the fear of death, holds chaos at bay, and makes life possible. Durkheim,

---

[1] February 1998 declaration of Jihad by Osama bin Laden, reprinted in *Responding to Terrorism: Challenges for Democracy* published by The Watson Institute for International Studies, Box 1948, Brown University, Providence, RI 02912. The other quotations are from widely disseminated newspaper reports following the events of 9-11.

(and Ellul following this French sociological tradition) was right: every society on the face of the earth has been held together by some sense of the sacred.

Moreover, if what is held sacred is ultimately *a way of life*, we need to realize that religion and politics are two sides of the same coin. Politics, no matter how secular it may appear, always has a religious function - -to protect a sacred way of life from the incursion of the profane forces of chaos and death. Sacred mythologies create their own cosmologies of space. They divide the world into two camps - the sacred realm of order that sustains life and the profane realm of chaos that threatens life. War becomes "holy war" whenever it is conducted to preserve sacred order against the cosmic forces of chaos.

The resort to violence and war is the sacred obligation of all who participate in a sacred way of life, whenever that way of life is thought to be threatened. In an age of globalization, religious terrorism itself becomes global because in such an age the threat of secularism and the "moral degeneracy" it is believed to bring, becomes a global threat that imperils every sacred way of life. It is postmodern global relativism that drives global terrorism.

The postmodern world is synonymous with globalization. Globalization is the product of the growing interdependence of cultures through emerging global techno-economic and socio-cultural networks. These networks transcend national boundaries and in the process tend to challenge previous forms of authority and identity. In a world of instant global communication and jet travel, time and space shrink and force a new awareness of diversity and interdependence upon all the inhabitants of the earth. The world of great independent civilizations normatively centered in the grand stories of their religious visions (Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Islamic, etc.) and great sacred cities like Benares, Lhasa, Rome, Jerusalem and Mecca, is giving way to a global village where those who were once strangers from the other side of the globe are now our neighbors.

Today our cities reflect our global diversity and have no single sacred center but rather many centers. The center, we could say, is found everywhere, reflecting the many religious stories and practices that diversity brings to urban life. Perhaps there is no more apt description of the postmodern world produced by globalization than "a circle whose circumference is nowhere and whose center is everywhere." This definition is borrowed from the Renaissance geometrician and mystic, Nicholas of Cusa (c. 14001450 CE), who used it to describe God. It is equally apt as a way of describing the diverse paths to God/the Holy that co-mingle in the postmodern global village.

This postmodern world without a normative center is in many ways a frightening and disorienting world, one aptly described by the Irish storyteller and poet, William Butler Yeats, in his poem "The Second Coming"*:*

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

626

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

The best lack all conviction, while the worst Are full of passionate intensity.[2]

Postmodernism, Jean Francois Lyotard has asserted, is marked by the collapse of all metanarratives—those grand narratives that give each civilization (whether, Christian or Muslim or Buddhist, or Secular Modernist, etc.) its center. These stories do not disappear. Instead of being the grand stories that center civilizations they survive as the "small" decentered stories of storytellers who are forced to share public space with the stories of others in the same global village.

More than anyone else, Augustine, by authoring *The City of God*, is responsible for the grand story or metanarrative that centered the Christian civilization of the West. Lyotard sees the decentering effect of postmodernism as a cure for the totalisms (or totalitarianisms) of a civilization bent on "compelling" strangers "to come in" (whether Christian, or Marxist-Stalinist or the imperialism of modern Scientism) even as Augustine wanted to so compel the Donatists. Lyotard's admonition is to "activate the differences" and so decenter or relativize all totalisms.[3]

It is just such a championing of secular relativism that makes radical religious fundamentalists express the desire to take up arms if necessary to preserve the sacredness of human identity in a rightly ordered society against what they perceive as the chaos of today's decadent, normless secular relativism. To restore the sacred normative order, therefore, they tend to affirm the desirability of achieving the premodern ideal of one society, one religion. They remain uncomfortable with the religious diversity that thrives in a secular society.

Religious modernism, by contrast, as it emerged in the West rejected the fundamentalist ideal, adopted from premodern societies, of identity between religion and society. Instead of dangerous absolutism, modernists looked for an accommodation between religion and modern secular society. They argued that it is possible to desacralize one's way of life and identity in a way that creates a new identity that preserves the essential values or norms of the past religious tradition, but in harmony with a new modern way of life. Modernists secularize society and privatize their religious practices, hoping by their encouragement of denominational forms of religion to ensure an environment that supports religious diversity.

What I would call religious postmodernism, like religious modernism, accepts secularization and religious pluralism. But religious postmodernism, like fundamentalism, rejects the modernist solution of privatization and seeks a public role for religion. It differs from fundamentalism, however, in that it rejects the domination of society by a single religion. Religious postmodernists insist that there is a way for religious commu-

---

[2] "The Second Coming" in *The Selected Poems and Two Plays of William Butler Yeats*, ed. M.L. Rosenthal (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 91.

[3] Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 82.

nities in all their diversity to shape the public order and so rescue society from secular relativism. The chief example of this option is the model established by Mohandas K. Gandhi. Because his disciples rejected the privatization of religion while affirming religious diversity, I would define Gandhi's movement is a postmodern "new age" religious movement rather than a modern one.

"Passing Over": A Postmodern Spiritual Adventure for a New Age of Globalization

All the great world religions date back a millennium or more, and each provided a grand metanarrative for the premodern civilization in which it emerged—in the Middle East, in India, and in China. In the past these world religions were relatively isolated from one another. There were many histories in the world, each shaped by a great metanarrative, but no global history.

The perspective of religious postmodernism arises from a dramatically different situation. We are at the beginning of a new millennium, which is marked by the development of a global civilization. The diverse spiritual heritages of the human race have become the common inheritance of all. Modern changes have ended the isolation of the past, and people following one great tradition are now very likely to live in proximity to adherents of other faiths. New age religion has tapped this condition of globalism, but in two different ways. In its modernist forms it has privatized the religious quest as a quest for the perfection of the self. In its postmodern forms, without rejecting selftransformation, it has turned that goal outward in forms of social organization committed to bettering society, with a balance between personal and social transformation.

The time when a new world religion could be founded has passed, argues John Dunne in his book, *The Way of All the Earth.* What is required today is not the conquest of the world by any one religion or culture but a meeting and sharing of religious and cultural insight. The postmodern spiritual adventure occurs when we engage in what Dunne calls "passing over" into another's religion and culture and come to see the world through another's eyes. When we do this, we "come back" to our own religion and culture enriched with new insight not only into the other's but also our own religion and culture—insight that builds bridges of understanding, a unity in diversity between people of diverse religions and cultures. The model for this spiritual adventure is found in the lives of Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948), and Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968).

Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. are the great champions of the fight for the dignity and rights of all human beings, from all religions and cultures. Moreover, they are models for a different kind of new age religious practice, one that absorbs the global wisdom of diverse religions, but does so without indiscriminately mixing elements to create a new religion, as is typical of the eclectic syncretism of

most new age religions. Yet clearly these religious leaders initiated a new way of being religious that could occur only in an age of globalization.

Martin Luther King Jr. often noted that his commitment to nonviolent civil disobedience as a strategy for protecting human dignity had its roots in two sources: Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and Gandhi's teachings of nonviolence derived from his interpretation of the *Bhagavad Gita* of Hinduism. Gandhi died when King was a teenager, but Dr. King did travel to India to study the effects of Gandhi's teachings of nonviolence on Indian society. In this he showed a remarkable openness to the insights of another religion and culture. In Gandhi and his spiritual heirs, King found kindred spirits, and he came back to his own religion and culture enriched by the new insights that came to him in the process of passing over and coming back. Martin Luther King Jr. never considered becoming a Hindu, but his Christianity was profoundly transformed by his encounter with Gandhi's Hinduism.

Just as important, however, is the spiritual passing over of Gandhi himself. As a young man, Gandhi went to England to study law. His journey led him not away from Hinduism but more deeply into it. For it was in England that Gandhi discovered the *Bhagavad Gita* and began to appreciate the spiritual and ethical power of Hinduism.

Having promised his mother that he would remain vegetarian, Gandhi took to eating his meals with British citizens who had developed similar commitments to vegetarianism through their fascination with India and its religions. It is in this context that Gandhi was brought into direct contact with the nineteenth-century theosophical roots of new age globalization. In these circles he met Madam Blavatsky and her disciple Annie Besant, both of whom had a profound influence upon him. His associates also included Christian followers of the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, who, after his midlife conversion, had embraced an ethic of nonviolence based on the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

At the invitation of his theosophist friends, Gandhi read the *Bhagavad Gita* for the first time in an English translation by Sir Edwin Arnold, entitled *The Song Celestial.* It was only much later that he took to a serious study of the Hindu text in Sanskrit. He was also deeply impressed by Arnold's *The Light of Asia,* recounting the life of the Buddha. Thus, through the eyes of Western friends, he was first moved to discover the spiritual riches of his own Hindu heritage. The seeds were planted in England, nourished by more serious study during his years in South Africa, and brought to fruition upon his return to India in 1915.

From his theosophist friends, Gandhi not only learned to appreciate his own religious tradition but came to see Christianity in a new way. For unlike the evangelical missionaries he had met in his childhood, the theosophists had a deeply allegorical way of reading the Christian scriptures. This approach to Bible study allowed people to find in the teachings of Jesus a universal path toward spiritual truth that was in harmony with the wisdom of Asia. The power of allegory lay in opening the literal stories of the scripture to reveal a deeper symbolic meaning based on what the theosophists believed was profound universal religious experience and wisdom. From the theosophists,

Gandhi took an interpretive principle that has its roots in the New Testament writings of St. Paul: "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Corinthians 3:6). This insight would enable him to read the *Bhagavad Gita* in the light of his own deep religious experience and find in it the justification for nonviolent civil disobedience.

Gandhi was likewise profoundly influenced by Tolstoy's understanding of the Sermon on the Mount. The message of nonviolence—love your enemy, turn the other cheek—took hold of Gandhi. And yet Gandhi did not become a Christian. Rather, he returned to his parents' religion and culture, finding parallels to Jesus' teachings in the Hindu tradition. And so he read Hindu scriptures with new insight, interpreting the *Bhagavad Gita* allegorically, as a call to resist evil by nonviolent means. And just as King would later use the ideas of Gandhi in the nonviolent struggle for the dignity of blacks in America, so Gandhi was inspired by Tolstoy as he led the fight for the dignity of the lower castes and outcasts within Hindu society, and for the liberation of India from British colonial rule.

Gandhi never seriously considered becoming a Christian any more than King ever seriously considered becoming a Hindu. Nevertheless, Gandhi's Hindu faith was profoundly transformed by his encounter with the Christianity of Tolstoy, just as King's Christian faith was profoundly transformed by his encounter with Gandhi's Hinduism. In the lives of these twentiethcentury religious activists we have examples of "passing over" as a transformative postmodern spiritual adventure.

Whereas in the secular forms of postmodernism all knowledge is relative, and therefore the choice between interpretations of any claim to truth is undecidable, Gandhi and King opened up an alternate path. While agreeing that in matters of religion, truth is undecidable, they showed that acceptance of diversity does not have to lead to the kind of ethical relativism that so deeply troubles fundamentalists. For in the cases of Gandhi and King, passing over led to a sharing of wisdom among traditions that gave birth to an ethical coalition in defense of human dignity across religions and cultures—a global ethic for a new age.

By their lives, Gandhi and King demonstrated that, contrary to the fears raised by fundamentalism, the sharing of a common ethic and of spiritual wisdom across traditions does not require any practitioners to abandon their religious identity. Instead, Gandhi and King offered a model of unity in diversity. Finally, both Gandhi and King rejected the privatization of religion, insisting that religion in all its diversity plays a decisive role in shaping the public order. And both were convinced that only a firm commitment to nonviolence on the part of religious communities would allow society to avoid a return to the kind of religious wars that accompanied the Protestant Reformation and the emergence of modernity.

The spiritual adventure initiated by Gandhi and King involves passing over (through imagination, through travel and cultural exchange, through a common commitment to social action to promote social justice, etc.) into the life and stories and traditions of others, sharing in them and, in the process, coming to see one's own tradition through them. Such encounters enlarge our sense of human identity to include the other. The

religious metanarratives of the world's civilizations may have become "smaller narratives" in an age of global diversity, but they have not lost their power. Indeed, in this Gandhian model, it is the sharing of the wisdom from another tradition's metanarratives that gives the stories of a seeker's own tradition their power. Each seeker remains on familiar religious and cultural ground, yet each is profoundly influenced by the other.

Tolstoy, Jesus, and "Saint Buddha": An Ancient Tale with a Thousand Faces

Although at first glance, the religious worlds of humankind seem to have grown up largely independent of one another, a closer look will reveal that hidden threads from different religions and cultures have for centuries been woven together to form a new tapestry, one that contributes to the sharing of religious insight in an age of globalization. In *Toward a World Theology,* Wilfred Cantwell Smith traces the threads of this new tapestry, and the story he tells is quite surprising.[4] Smith notes, for example, that to fully appreciate the influence on Gandhi of Tolstoy's understanding of the Sermon on the Mount, it is important to know that Tolstoy's own conversion to Christianity, which occurred in a period of midlife crisis, was deeply influenced not only by the Sermon on the Mount but also by the life of the Buddha.

Tolstoy was a member of the Russian nobility, rich and famous because of his novels, which included *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina.* Yet in his fifties, Tolstoy went through a period of great depression that resolved itself in a powerful religious conversion experience. Although, nominally a member of the (Russian) Orthodox Church, Tolstoy had not taken his faith seriously until he came to the point of making the Sermon on the Mount a blueprint for his life. After his conversion, Tolstoy freed his serfs, gave away all his wealth, and spent the rest of his life serving the poor.

As Wilfred Cantwell Smith tells it, a key factor in Tolstoy's conversion was his reading of a story from the lives of the saints. The story was that of Barlaam and Josaphat. It is the story of a wealthy young Indian prince by the name of Josaphat who gave up all his wealth and power, and abandoned his family, to embark on an urgent quest for an answer to the problems of old age, sickness, and death. During his search, the prince comes across a Christian monk by the name of Barlaam, who told him a story. It seems that once there was a man who fell into a very deep well and was hanging onto two vines for dear life. As he was trapped in this precarious situation, two mice, one white and one black, came along and began to chew on the vines. The man knew that in short order the vines would be severed and he would plunge to his death.

The story was a parable of the prince's spiritual situation. Barlaam points out that the two mice represent the cycle of day and night, the passing of time that brings us

---

[4] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Toward a World Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981),

ever closer to death. The paradox is that like the man in the well, Josaphat cannot save his life by clinging to it. He must let go of the vines, so to speak. He can save his life only by losing it. That is, if he lets go of his life now, no longer clinging to it but surrendering himself completely to the divine will, this spiritual death will lead to a new life that transcends death. This story and its parable touched the deeply depressed writer and led him to a spiritual surrender that brought about his rebirth. Out of this rebirth came a new Tolstoy, the author of *The Kingdom of God Is Within You,* which advocates a life of nonviolent resistance to evil based on the Sermon on the Mount.

The story of the Indian prince who abandons a life of wealth and power and responds to a parable of a man about to fall into an abyss is of course a thinly disguised version of the life story of the Buddha. Versions of the story and the parable can be found in almost all the world's great religions, recorded in a variety of languages (Greek, Latin, Czech, Polish, Italian, Spanish, French, German, Swedish, Norwegian, Arabic, Hebrew, Yiddish, Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese, Japanese, etc.). The Greek version came into Christianity from an Islamic Arabic version, which was passed on to Judaism as well. The Muslims apparently got it from members of a Gnostic cult in Persia, who got it from Buddhists in India. The Latinate name *Josaphat* is a translation of the Greek *Loasaf,* which is translated from the Arabic *Yudasaf,* which comes from the Persian *Bodisaf,* which is a translation of *Bodhisattva*, a Sanskrit title for the Buddha.

The parable of the man clinging to the vine may be even older than the story of the prince (Buddha) who renounces his wealth. It may well go back to early Indic sources at the beginnings of civilization. It is one of the oldest and most universal stories in the history of religions and civilizations. Tolstoy's conversion was brought about in large part by the story of a Christian saint, Josaphat, who was, so to speak, really the Buddha in disguise.

This history of the story of a great sage's first steps toward enlightenment suggests that the process leading to globalization goes back to the very beginnings of civilization.We can see that the practice of passing over and coming back, of being open to the stories of others, and of coming to understand one's own tradition through these stories is in fact very ancient. Therefore, when Martin Luther King Jr. embraced the teachings of Gandhi, he embraced not only Gandhi but also Tolstoy, and through Tolstoy two of the greatest religious teachers of nonviolence: Jesus of Nazareth, whose committed follower King already was, and Siddhartha the Buddha. Thus from the teachings of Gandhi, King actually assimilated important teachings from at least four religious traditions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity. This rich spiritual debt to other religions and cultures never in any way diminished Martin Luther King Jr.'s faith. On the contrary, the Baptist pastor's Christian beliefs were deeply enriched, in turn enriching the world in which we live. The same could be said about Gandhi and Hinduism.

Gandhi's transformation of the *Bhagavad Gita*—a Hindu story that literally advocates the duty of going to war and killing one's enemies—into a story of nonviolence

is instructive of the transforming power of the allegorical method that he learned from his theosophist friends. The *Bhagavad Gita* is a story about a warrior named Arjuna, who argues with his chariot driver, Krishna, over whether it is right to go to war if it means having to kill one's own relatives. Krishna's answer is Yes—Arjuna must do his duty as a warrior in the cause of justice, but he is morally obliged to do it selflessly, with no thought of personal loss or gain. Gandhi, however, transformed the story of Arjuna and Krishna from a story of war as physical violence into a story of war as active but nonviolent resistance to injustice through civil disobedience.

If the message of spiritual realization in the *Gita* is that all beings share the same self (as Brahman or Purusha), how could the *Gita* be literally advocating violence? For to do violence against another would be to do violence against oneself. The self-contradiction of a literal interpretation, in Gandhi's way of thinking, forces the mind into an allegorical mode, where it can grasp the Gita's true spiritual meaning. Reading the *Gita* allegorically, Gandhi insisted that the impending battle described in the Hindu classic is really about the battle between good and evil going on within every self.

Krishna's command to Arjuna to stand up and fight is thus a "spiritual" command. But for Gandhi this does not mean, as it usually does in "modern" terms, that the struggle is purely inner (private) and personal. On the contrary, the spiritual person will see the need to practice nonviolent civil disobedience: that is, to replace "body force" (i.e., violence) with "soul force." As the *Gita* suggests, there really is injustice in the world, and therefore there really is an obligation to fight, even to go to war, to reestablish justice. One must be prepared to exert Gandhian soul force, to put one's body on the line, but in a nonviolent way. In so doing, one leaves open the opportunity to gain the respect, understanding, and perhaps transformation of one's enemy.

The lesson Gandhi derived from the *Gita* is that the encounter with the other need not lead to conquest. It can lead, instead, to mutual understanding and mutual respect. King's relationship to Gandhi and Gandhi's relationship to Tolstoy are models of a postmodern spirituality and ethics that transform postmodern relativism and eclecticism into the opportunity to follow a new spiritual and ethical path— "the way of all the earth"—the sharing of spiritual insight and ethical wisdom across religions and cultures in an age of globalization.

On this path, people of diverse religions and cultures find themselves sharing an ethical commitment to protect human dignity beyond the postmodern interest in personal transformation fostered by the modernist ideal of privatization. Gandhi and King were not engaged in a private quest to perfect the self (although neither neglected the need for personal transformation). Rather, each man embarked on a public quest to transform human communities socially and politically by invoking a global ethical commitment to protect the dignity of all persons. The religious movements associated with both men fit the pattern of what Jacques Ellul defines as "the holy" - for only the holy truly secularizes by opening the door to hospitality and the path to religious pluralism.

Chap. 1.

Gandhi and King recovered the premodern ideal of religion shaping the public order but now in a postmodern mode, committed to religious pluralism.

The Children of Gandhi: An Experiment in Postmodern Global Ethics

In April 1968, Martin Luther King Jr., sometimes referred to as "the American Gandhi," went to Memphis to support black municipal workers in the midst of a strike. The Baptist minister was looking forward to spending the approaching Passover with Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Heschel, who had marched with King during the voter registration drive in Selma, Alabama, three years earlier, had become a close friend and supporter. Unfortunately, King was not able to keep that engagement. On April 4, 1968, like Gandhi before him, Martin Luther King Jr., a man of nonviolence, was shot to death by an assassin.

The Buddhist monk and anti-Vietnam War activist Thich Nhat Hanh, whom King had nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize, received the news of his friend's death while at an interreligious conference in New York City. Only the previous spring, King had expressed his opposition to the Vietnam War, largely at the urging of Thich Nhat Hanh and Rabbi Heschel. King spoke out at an event sponsored by Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam, a group founded by Heschel, Protestant cleric John Bennett, and Richard Neuhaus, then a Lutheran minister. Now another champion in the struggle against hatred, violence, and war was dead. But the spiritual and ethical vision he shared with his friends, across religions and cultures, has continued to inspire followers throughout the world.

These religious activists—a Baptist minister who for his leadership in the American civil rights movement won the Noble Peace Prize, a Hasidic rabbi and scholar who narrowly escaped the death camps of the Holocaust, and a Buddhist monk who had been targeted for death in Vietnam but survived to lead the Buddhist peace delegation to the Paris peace negotiations in 1973—are the spiritual children of Gandhi. By working together to protest racial injustice and the violence of war, they demonstrated that religious and cultural pluralism do not have to end in ethical relativism and, given a commitment to nonviolence, can play a role in shaping public life in an age of globalization. The goal, Martin Luther King Jr. insisted, is not to humiliate and defeat your enemy but to win him or her over, bringing about not only justice but also reconciliation. The goal, he said, was to attack the evil in systems, not to attack persons. The goal was to love one's enemy, not in the sense of sentimental affection, nor in the reciprocal sense of friendship, but in the constructive sense of seeking the opponent's well-being.

Nonviolence, King argued, is more than just a remedy for this or that social injustice. It is, he was convinced, essential to the survival of humanity in an age of nuclear

weapons. The choice, he said, was "no longer between violence and nonviolence. It is either nonviolence or nonexistence."

Truth is to be found in all religions, King said many times, and "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."[5] The scandal of our age, said Abraham Joshua Heschel, is that in a world of diplomacy "only religions are not on speaking terms." But, he also said, no religion is an island, and all must realize that "holiness is not the monopoly of any particular religion or tradition."[6]

"Buddhism today," writes Thich Nhat Hanh, "is made up of non-Buddhist elements, including Jewish and Christian ones." And likewise with every tradition. "We have to allow what is good, beautiful, and meaningful in the other's tradition to transform us," the Vietnamese monk continues. The purpose of such passing over into the other's tradition is to allow each to return to his or her own place transformed. What is astonishing, says Thich Nhat Hanh, is that we will find kindred spirits in other traditions with whom we share more than we do with many in our own tradition.[7]

The Story of Babel: A Postmodern Tale for an Age of Global Conflict

Will the global future of religion and civilization be shaped by this Gandhian model of a new age spiritual practice? It clearly offers an alternative to both traditional denominational religions that seek to privatize religion and keep it out of the secular public square and the more privatistict forms of new age religion that focus on perfecting the self. The Gandhian model offers a postmodern religious alternative to modern secularism. It is this secularism that radical fundamentalists and their terrorist extremes fear is leading the world into the moral decadence of ethical relativism. The terrorist extremes want to resacralize the world around their particular premodern grand narrative (each movement has its own conception of what that is). The only path they see to religion shaping public life is one of totalism and totalitarianism. The postmodern religious path of Gandhi and King, also calls for religion to shape public life but does so while embracing religious pluralism rather than a sacral totalism. It too rejects a shallow and decadent secularism in favor of a fervent religious commitment, but one defined by non-violence and religious pluralism in defense of the sanctity of the human. The emergence of religious postmodernism means that in the future, the

---

[5] Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in King, *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches That Changed the World,* James M. Washington, ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), p. 85.

[6] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays [of] Abraham Joshua Heschel,* Susannah Herschel, ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996), pp 241, 247.

[7] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, Riverhead Books, 1995), pp. 9, 11.

struggle among religions will most likely be not between fundamentalism and modernism, as a conflict between the sacred and the secular (public and private religion), but between the sacred and the holy— religious exclusivism and religious pluralism as alternative forms of public religion.

In a curious fashion all the spiritual children of Gandhi should be able to affirm the lesson of the biblical story of Babel that Jews, Christians and Muslims already have an affinity for. For the lesson of Babel is a global lesson with a curiously postmodern twist, suggesting where we can find God in a world that has no center, or rather in a world whose center is everywhere.

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.' And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.'

The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. And the LORD said, 'Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech.' So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. (Genesis 11:1-9)

The citizens of Babel, we might imagine, reveled in totalism—in a way of life where everyone shared the same language, identity and world-view. One can think of examples like the Inquisition of medieval Christendom or the Nazi pursuit of the purity of the Aryan race.

The usual exegesis of the Babel story suggests that God punished the citizens of Babel for their hubris by confusing their tongues so that no one spoke the same language and therefore they could not cooperate in finishing their building project. However, the story of Babel cannot be understood in isolation from its larger narrative context. Given the overwhelming emphasis on hospitality to the stranger in the Torah (a commandment that occurs more often than any other), we must understand this story differently. Human efforts to reach God were misguided and so God reoriented these efforts by creating a world of strangers where God is to be encountered in the midst of diversity. According to the biblical tradition to welcome the stranger is to welcome God, or God's Messiah or else an angel (messenger) of God.

The good news proclaimed by the story of Babel is that God is to be found neither in uniformity (totalism) on earth nor by scaling the heavens (through special privileged religious experiences or revelations) but rather in our encounter with the stranger. The good news is that God's holiness shatters sacral uniformity. God prefers the pluralism

of a world of strangers to the uniformity of a sacred society. God loves difference. God prefers to be discovered through difference rather than similarity. God enters our lives through the presence of the stranger.

If the devil's strategy is to divide the world and assert the totalism of sameness against all who are different, God's strategy is to invite diversity and welcome the stranger. God's strategy at Babel is "postmodern." It is, as Lyotard describes it, "to activate the differences." But it is not Lyotard secularism and relativism that follows from this but an ethic of holiness.

We are created in the image of a God (The Holy) without image. One of us is not more like God than another. To activate the differences is to decenter a civilizational story whose sacred authority resides in its claim that only those who are the same (in religion, in ethnicity, etc.) are human. To activate the differences in this context does not lead to secular relativism but the affirmation of the sanctity of every human being around the globe –for all stand within a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.

The ethical strategy suggested by Babel is an ethical strategy of alienation, of becoming a stranger to one's own tradition and seeing it through the eyes of those violated by it. This strategy opens the path to holiness and hospitality, embracing the God whose ways are not our ethno-religio-centric ways whenever we embrace the stranger. For God, Isaiah suggests, is the ultimate stranger "whose ways are not our ways and thoughts are not our thoughts." The long term cure for an age of global terrorism is a global religious ethic of hospitality that takes the wind out of secularism. For it is a sacral (totalistic) secularism that feeds religious terrorism. The more secular the world becomes the more urgent it seems to terrorists to defend their sacred way of life. An ethic of holiness and hospitality takes the wind out of the totalism and relativism of the secular by returning religion to the public square to affirm differences and so to realize the utopian promise of Babel.

Jacques Ellul: Islam & Non-Muslims

This essay, written in 1983, was Ellul's preface to The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians Under Islam by Bat Ye'or (Rutherford, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson Press, revised and enlarged edition, 1985; translated from the French by David Maisel and David Littman; reprinted here by permission). Bat Ye'or describes her own objective this way: "This study does not seek to investigate the legal status of the dhimmi peoples—that is, the non-Arab and non-Muslim nations and communities that were subjected to Muslim domination after the conquest of their territories by the Arabs. That has already been done Its aim is more modest.

It has grown out of an independent reflection on the relationship between conqueror and conquered, established as a result of a special code of warfare, the jihad, for in the drama acted out by humanity on the stage of history, it is clear that the dhimmi peoples bore the role of victim, vanquished by force" (p. 35).

This is a very important book, for it deals with one of the most sensitive problems of our time, sensitive owing to the difficulty of the subject—the reality of Islamic doctrine and practice with regard to non-Muslims, and sensitive owing to the topicality of the subject and the susceptibilities it now arouses throughout the world. Half a century ago the question of the condition of non-Muslims in the Islamic countries would not have excited anyone. It might have been the subject of a historical dissertation of interest to specialists, the subject of a juridical analysis (I am thinking of the work of M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes and of my old colleague G.-H. Bousquet, who wrote extensively on different aspects of Muslim law and history without their research giving rise to the smallest controversy), or the subject of a philosophical and theological discussion, but without passion. That which was related to Islam and the Muslim world was believed to belong to a past that, if not dead, was certainly no more alive than medieval Christianity. The Muslim peoples had no power; they were extraordinarily divided and many of them were subjected to European colonization. Those Europeans who were hostile to colonization showed some sympathy for the "Arabs," but that was as far as it went!

And then, suddenly, since 1950, everything changed completely.

I think that one can discern four stages in this development. The first was the attempt of the Islamic peoples to rid themselves of their conquerors. In this, the Muslims were by no means "original": the Algerian war and all that followed was only a consequence of the first war against the French in Vietnam. It was part of a general process of decolonization. This process, in turn, led the Islamic people to search for their own identity, to seek to be not only free of the Europeans but different, qualitatively different from them. This led to the second step: that which was specific to these peoples was not an ethnic or organizational peculiarity, but a religion. Accordingly, even in leftwing socialist or communist movements in the Muslim world there was a return to religion, so that the idea of a secular state such as Ataturk, for instance, had envisaged was completely rejected.

The explosion of Islamic religiosity is frequently considered specific to the Ayatollah Khomeini, but that is not correct. One ought not to forget that the terrible war of 1947 in India between the Muslims and Hindus was fought on a purely religious basis. More than one million people died, and since massacres had not taken place when the Muslims had lived within the Hindu-Buddhist orbit, one may presume that the war was caused by the attempt to set up an independent Islamic republic. Pakistan officially proclaimed itself an Islamic Republic in 1953, precisely at the time when other Muslim peoples were making their great effort to regain their identity.

Hardly a year has since passed without its marking some new stage in the religious revival of Islam (e.g., the resumption of the conversion of Black Africa to Islam, the return of alienated populations to religious practice, the obligation for Arab socialist regimes to proclaim that their states were "Muslim" republics, etc.), so that at the present day Islam can be said to be the most active religion in the world. The extremism of the Ayatollah Khomeini can be understood only in the light of this general tendency.

638

It is not something exceptional and extraordinary, but its logical continuation. But, together with this religious renewal, there arose an awareness of a certain unity of the Islamic world over and above its political and cultural diversity. This was the third stage in the Islamic revival.

Of course, one ought not to overlook all the conflicts between Muslim states, their divergences of interests and even wars, *but* these differences should not blind us to a more fundamental reality: their religious unity in opposition to the non-Muslim world. And here we have an interesting phenomenon: I am tempted to say that it is the "others," the "communist" and "Christian" countries, that reinforce the unity of the Muslim world, playing, as it were, the role of a "compressor" to bring about its unification. Finally, and this is obviously the last stage, there was the discovery of Islam's oil resources and economic power, which hardly needs elaboration.

Taken as a whole, this process follows a logical sequence: political independence, religious revival, and economic power. It has transformed the face of the world in less than half a century. And we are now witnessing a vast program to propagate Islam, involving the building of mosques everywhere, even in the USSR, the diffusion of Arab literature and culture, and the recovery of a history. Islam now boasts of having been the cradle of all civilizations at a time when Europe was sunk in barbarism and the Far East was torn asunder by divisions. Islam as the origin of all the sciences and arts is a theme that is constantly developed. This idea has perhaps been promoted more in France than in the English-speaking world (although one should not forget the Black Muslims in the United States). If I take the French situation as my yardstick, it is because I feel that it can serve as an example.

The moment one broaches a problem related to Islam, one touches upon a subject where strong feelings are easily aroused. In France it is no longer acceptable to criticize Islam or the Arab countries. There are several reasons for this: the French have a guilty conscience on account of their invasion and colonization of North Africa, doubly so after the Algerian War (which, by a backlash, has brought about a climate of sympathy for the adversary), and then there has also been the discovery of the fact, true enough, that for centuries Western culture has underestimated the value of the Muslim contribution to civilization (and, as a result, now goes to the other extreme). The flow of immigrant workers of Arab origin into France has established an important group that is generally wretched and despised (with racial overtones). This has led many intellectuals, Christians and others, to be favorably and uncritically disposed toward them.

A general rehabilitation of Islam has therefore taken place that has been expressed in two ways. On the intellectual level there is first of all an increasing number of works of an apparently scholarly nature whose declared purpose is to eradicate prejudices and false preconceptions about Islam, with regard to both its doctrines and its customs. Thus these works "demonstrate" that it is untrue that the Arabs were cruel conquerors and that they disseminated terror and massacred those peoples who would not submit to their rule. It is false that Islam is intolerant; on the contrary, it is held to be toler-

639

ance itself. It is false that women had an inferior status and that they were excluded from public life. It is false that the *jihad* (Holy War) was a war fought for material gain, and so on. In other words, everything that has been regarded as historically unquestionable about Islam is considered as propaganda, and a false picture of Islam has been implanted in the West, which, it is claimed, must be corrected by the truth. Reference is made to a very spiritual interpretation of the Koran, and the excellence of the manners and customs in Islamic countries is emphasized.

But this is not all. In some Western European countries, Islam exerts a special spiritual fascination. Inasmuch as Christianity no longer possesses the religious influence it once had and is strongly criticized, and communism has lost its prestige and is no longer regarded as being the bearer of a message of hope, the religious needs of Europeans require another form in which to find expression, and Islam has been rediscovered. It is no longer a matter of an exchange of ideas between intellectuals, but rather of an authentic religious adherence.

Several well-known French intellectuals have made a spectacular conversion to Islam. Islam is presented as a very great advance over Christianity, and reference is made to Muslim mystics. It is recalled that the three religions of the Book (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim) are all related. All of them claim Abraham as their ancestor, and the last one, the most recent, must obviously be the most advanced of the three. I am not exaggerating. Among Jews in France there are even serious intellectuals who hope, if not for a fusion, at least for a coming together of the three religions. If I have described what may be observed in Europe, it is because—whether one likes it or not—Islam regards itself as having a universal vocation and proclaims itself to be the only true religion to which everyone must adhere. We should have no illusions about the matter: no part of the world will be excluded. Now that Islam has national, military, and economic power, it will attempt to extend its religion everywhere, including the British Commonwealth and the United States.

In the face of this expansion (for the third time), one should not react by racism, nor by an orthodox dogmatism, nor by persecution or war. The reaction should be of a spiritual and psychological nature (one must avoid being carried away by a guilty conscience), and on a scholarly level. What really happened? What was the reality: the cruelties of the Muslim conquest, or the magnanimity and the beneficence of the Koran? What is correct as regards doctrine and its application to daily life in the Muslim world? And the search that is done must be intellectually serious, *relating to specific points.* It is impossible to judge the Islamic world in a general way: a hundred different cultures lave been absorbed by Islam. It is impossible to study all the doctrines, all the traditions, and all their applications together. Such a study can only be undertaken if one limits oneself to the study of specific questions, disentangling what is true from what is false.

It is within this context that Bat Ye'or's book *The Dhimmi* should be placed: and it is an exemplary contribution to this crucial discussion that concerns us all. Here I shall neither give an account of the book nor praise its merits, but shall simply indicate

its importance. The *dhimmi* is someone who lives in a Muslim society without being a Muslim (Jews, Christians, and occasionally "animists"). He has a particular social, political, and economic status, and it is essential for us to know how this "refractory" person has been treated. But first of all, one ought to realize the dimensions of this subject: it is much more than the study of one "social condition" among others.

The reader will see that in many ways the *dhimmi* was comparable to the European serf of the Middle Ages. The condition of serfdom, however, was the result of certain historical changes such as the transformation of slavery, the end of the State, the emergence of the feudal system, and the like, and thus, when these historical conditions altered, the situation of the serf also evolved until his status finally disappeared. The same, however, does not apply to the *dhimmi:* his status was not the product of historical accident but was that which *ought* to be from the religious point of view and according to the Muslim conception of the world. In other words, it was the expression of the absolute, unchanging, theologically grounded Muslim conception of the relationship between Islam and non-Islam. It is not a historical accident of retrospective interest, but a necessary condition of existence.

Consequently, it is both a subject for historical research (involving an examination of the historical sources and a study of their application in the past) and a contemporary subject, most topical in relation to the present-day expansion of Islam. Bat Ye'or's book ought to be read as a work of current interest. One must know as exactly as possible what the Muslims did with these unconverted conquered peoples, because that is what they will do in the future (and are doing right now). It is possible that my opinion on this question will not entirely convince the reader.

After all, ideas and concepts are known to change. The Christian concept of God or of Jesus Christ is no longer the same for the Christians today as it was in the Middle Ages, and one can multiply examples. But precisely what seems to me interesting and striking about Islam, one of its peculiarities, is the fixity of its concepts. It is clear enough that things change to a far greater extent when they are not set in a fixed ideological mold. The Roman imperial regime was far more susceptible to change than the Stalinist regime because there was no ideological framework to give it a continuity, a rigidity.

Wherever the social organization is based upon a system, it tends to reproduce itself far more exactly. Islam, even more than Christianity, is a religion that claims to give a definite form to the social order, to human relations, and claims to embrace each moment in the life of every person. Thus, it tends toward an inflexibility that most other forms of society have not had. Moreover, it is known that the whole of Islamic doctrine (including its religious thought) took on a juridical form. All the authoritative texts were subjected to a juridical type of interpretation and every application (even on spiritual matters) had a juridical imprint.

One should not forget that this legalism has a very definite orientation: to fix—to fix relationships, halt time, fix meanings (to give a word one single and indisputable significance), to fix interpretations. Everything of a juridical nature evolves only very

641

slowly and is not subject to any changes. Of course, there can be an evolution (in practical matters, in jurisprudence, etc.), but when there is a *text,* which is regarded in some way as an "authoritative" source, one has only to go back to that text and the recent innovations will collapse. And this is exactly what has happened in Islam. Legalism has everywhere produced a rigidity (not an absolute rigidity, which is impossible, but a maximal one) that makes historical investigation essential.

One should be aware that when one is dealing with some Islamic term or institution of the past, as long as the basic text—in this case, the Koran—remains unchanged, one can always return to the original principles and ideas whatever apparent transformations or developments have taken place, especially because Islam has achieved something that has always been very unusual: an integration of the religious, the political, the moral, the social, the juridical, and the intellectual, thus constituting a rigorous whole of which each element forms an integral part.

However, the *dhimmi* himself is a controversial subject. This word actually means "protege" or "protected person." This is one of the arguments of the modern defenders of Islam: the *dhimmi* has never been persecuted or maltreated (except accidentally); on the contrary, he was a protected person. What better example could illustrate Islam's liberalism. Here are people who do not accept Islam and, instead of being expelled, they are protected. I have read a great deal of literature attempting to prove that no society or religion has been so tolerant as Islam or has protected its minorities so well.

Naturally, this argument has been used to condemn medieval Christianity (which I have no intention of defending), on the ground that Islam never knew an Inquisition or "witch hunts." Even if this dubious argument is accepted, let us confine ourselves to an examination of the meaning of the term *protected person.* One must ask: "protected against whom?" When this "stranger" lives in Islamic countries, the answer can only be: against the Muslims themselves. The point that must be clearly understood is that the very term protege implies a latent hostility.

A similar institution existed in early Rome, where the *cliens,* the stranger, was always the enemy. He had to be treated as an enemy even if there was no situation of war. But if this stranger obtained the favor of the head of some great family, he became his protege *(cliens)* and was then able to reside in Rome: he was "protected" by his "patron" from the acts of aggression that any Roman citizen could commit against him. This also meant that in reality the protected person had *no genuine rights.* The reader of this book will see that the *dhimmi's* condition was defined by a treaty *(dhimma)* between him (or his group) and a Muslim group.

This treaty had a juridical aspect, but was what we would call an unequal contract: the *dhimma* was a "concessionary charter" (cf. C. Chehata on Muslim law), something that implies two consequences. The first is that the person who concedes the charter can equally well rescind it. It is not, in fact, a contract representing a "consensus" arrived at between the two sides. On the contrary, it is quite arbitrary. The person who grants the treaty is the only one who decides what he is prepared to concede (hence the great variety of conditions).

The second is that the resulting situation is the opposite of the one envisaged in the theory of the "rights of man" whereby, by the mere fact of being a human being, *one is endowed* automatically with certain rights and *those* who fail to respect them are at fault. In the case of the "concessionary charter," on the contrary, one enjoys rights only to the extent that they are recognized in the charter and only for as long as it remains valid. As a person, by the mere fact of one's "existence," one has no claim to any rights. And this, indeed, is the *dhimmi' s* condition. As I have explained above, this condition is unvarying throughout the course of history; it is not the result of social chance, but a rooted concept.

For the conquering Islam of today, those who do not claim to be Muslims do not have any human rights recognized as such. In an Islamic society, the non-Muslims would return to their former *dhimmi* status, which is why the idea of solving the Middle East conflicts by the creation of a federation including Israel within a group of Muslim peoples or states, or in a "Judeo-Islamic" state, is a fantasy and an illusion. From the Muslim point of view, such a thing would be unthinkable.

Thus the term *protected* can have two completely opposite meanings according to whether one takes it in its moral sense or in its juridical sense, and that is entirely characteristic of the controversies now taking place concerning the character of Islam. Unfortunately, this term has to be taken in its juridical sense. I am well aware that it will be objected that the *dhimmi* had his rights. Yes, indeed; but they were *conceded* rights. That is precisely the point.

In the Versailles Treaty of 1918, for example, Germany was granted a number of "rights" by the victors, and that was called a *Diktat.* This shows how hard it is to evaluate a problem of this kind, for one's conclusions will vary according to whether one is favorably or unfavorably predisposed toward Islam, and a truly scholarly, "objective" study becomes extremely difficult (though personally, I do not believe in objectivity in the humanities; at best, the scholar can be honest and take his own prejudices into account). And yet, precisely because, as has been said, passion is involved, studies of this kind are nevertheless indispensable in all questions concerning Islam.

So now it must be asked: is this book a serious, scholarly study? I reviewed *Le Dhimmi,* when it first appeared, in a major French newspaper* (the French edition was far less complete and rich than this one, especially with regard to the documents, notes, and appendixes, which are essential). In response to that review I received a very strong letter from a colleague, a well-known orientalist, informing me that the book was purely polemical and could not be regarded seriously. His criticisms, however, betrayed the fact that he had not read the book, and the interesting thing about his arguments (based on what I had written) was that they demonstrated, on the contrary, the serious nature of this work. First of all, he began with an appeal to authority, referring me to certain works whose scholarship he regarded as unquestionable (those of Professors S. D. Goitein, B. Lewis, and N. Stillman), that in his opinion adopt a positive attitude toward Islam and its tolerance toward non-Muslims.

I conveyed his opinion to Bat Ye'or, who assured me that she was personally acquainted with all three authors and had read their publications dealing with the subject. Given the scope of the author's researches, I would have been surprised if this was not the case. She maintained that an attentive reading of their writings would not justify such a restrictive interpretation.

One may now ask: what were the principal arguments that our critic advanced against Bat Ye'or's analysis? He claimed, first, that one cannot generalize about the *dhimmi's* condition, which varied considerably. But this is precisely the point that Bat Ye'or makes in her very skillfully constructed book: using common data, from an identical basis, the author has provided documents that permit us to gain an exact idea of these differences, in accordance with whether the *dhimmi* lived in the Maghreb, or in Persia, Arabia, and so on. And, although we perceive a very great diversity in the reality of the *dhimmi's* existence, this in no way changed the identical and profound reality of his condition.

The second argument put forward by our critic was that the "persecutions" to which the *dhimmi* was subjected had been greatly exaggerated. He spoke of "a few outbursts of popular anger," but, on the one hand, that is not something that the book is particularly concerned with, and, on the other hand, it was here, precisely, that our critic's bias clearly revealed itself. The "few" outbursts, in fact, were historically very numerous, and massacres of *dhimmis* were frequent.

Nowadays we ought not to overlook the considerable evidence (which was formerly overstressed) of the slaughter of Jews and Christians in all the countries occupied by the Arabs and Turks, which recurred often, without the intervention of the forces of order. The *dhimmi* did, perhaps, have recognized rights, but when popular hatred was aroused, sometimes for incomprehensible reasons, he found himself defenseless and without protection. This was the equivalent of pogroms. On this point it was my correspondent who was not "scholarly." Third, he claimed that the *dhimmis* had personal and communal rights, but, not being a jurist, he failed to see the difference between personal rights and conceded rights. This aspect has been stressed above and the argument is unfounded, as Bat Ye'or demonstrates by a careful and convincing examination of the rights in question.

Another point raised was that the Jews attained their highest level of culture in Muslim countries, and that they regarded the states in which they resided as *their own.* With regard to the first point, I would say that there was an enormous diversity. It is quite true that in certain Muslim countries at some periods, Jews—and Christians— did attain a high level of culture and affluence, but Bat Ye'or does not deny that. And, in any case, that was not anything extraordinary: in Rome, for instance, in the first century A.D., the slaves (who remained *slaves)* enjoyed a very remarkable position, being active in nearly all the intellectual professions (as teachers, doctors, engineers, etc.), directed enterprises, and could even be slave-owners themselves. Nonetheless, they were slaves!

The situation of the *dhimmis* was something comparable to this. They had an important economic role (as is clearly shown in this book) and could be "happy," but they were nevertheless inferiors whose very variable status rendered them narrowly dependent and bereft of "rights." As for the assertion that they considered as their own the states which ruled them, that was never true of the Christians. And, with regard to the Jews, they had been dispersed throughout the world for so long that they had no alternative. Yet we know that a real current of "assimilationism" came into existence only in the modern Western democracies.

Finally, Bat Ye'or's critic states that "a degradation of the condition of the Jews has taken place in recent times in Islamic countries, " but that the *dhimmis'* condition ought not to be evaluated by what happened to them in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I can only ask whether the author of these criticisms, like so many other historians, has not given way to the temptation to glamorize the past. It is enough to notice the remarkable concordance between the historical sources referring to events, and the basic, authoritative texts to realize that such an evolution was not so considerable.

If I have dealt with the criticisms at some length, it is because I feel that it is important in order to establish the "scholarly" nature of this book. For my part, I consider this study to be very honest, hardly polemical at all, and as objective as possible (always bearing in mind the fact that I belong to the school of historians for whom pure objectivity, in the absolute sense, cannot exist).

The Dhimmi contains a rich selection of source material, makes a correct use of documents, and displays a concern to place each situation in its proper historical context. Consequently, it satisfies a certain number of scholarly requirements for a work of this kind. And for that reason I regard it as exemplary and very significant. But also, within the "living context" of contemporary history, which I described earlier, this is a book that carries a clear warning. The Muslim world has not evolved in its manner of considering the non-Muslim, which is a reminder of the fate in store for those who may one day be submerged within it. It is a source of enlightenment for our time.

Jacques Ellul: The Influence of Islam On Christianity

Excerpted from Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, chapter 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986. Translated by trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley from the French edition, *La Subversion du Christianisme*, Editions du Seuil, 1984).

Editor's Introduction: In this chapter of The Subversion of Christianity, Ellul draws on his vast historical learning (remember that he was the author of a multi-volume Histoire des Institutions that was for decades a standard textbook in France) to show

that, contrary to the politically-correct thinking of the 80s in France, the influence of Islam on Christendom was not all positive. Ellul acknowledges the positive contributions in philosophy, science, mathematics, architecture, agriculture, astronomy and other fields—though perhaps with less enthusiasm than these deserve. And he is very clear in this chapter and still more in the rest of Subversion and in his many other writings that Christians themselves—and Westerners in general—are primarily to blame for their own deformation and betrayal of their faith, truth, and values. But Ellul insists that there are some fundamental conflicts between Islam and Christianity. He discusses various topics such as mysticism, the nature of the soul, views of God, Jesus, women, revelation, and piety. What follows are his discussions of law, political authority, war, slavery, and colonization. He sees radical differences and goes against the tide with his commentary. However, Ellul is also unmistakeably clear that what is called for is not more conflict, violence, and denunciation but more resolute adherence to the truth and freedom we should have been representing all along.

Stress has seldom been laid upon the influence of Islam on Christianity, that is, on the deformation and subversion to which God's revelation in Jesus Christ is subjected. Yet this influence was considerable between the ninth and eleventh centuries. We have been brought up on the image of a strong and stable Christianity that was attacked and besieged in some sense by Islam. Engaged in unlimited conquest, with a universal vocation similar to that claimed by Christianity, Islam was expanding its empire in three directions: to the south, especially along the coasts into black Africa, and reaching as far as Zanzibar by the twelfth century; to the northwest, with the conquest of Spain and the invasion of France up to Lyons on the one side and Poitiers on the other; and to the northeast into Asia Minor and as far as Constantinople. With the Turks Islam would then continue incessantly to threaten the Balkans, Austria, Hungary, etc. The picture is a Manichean and warlike one; as it is hard to conceive of profound contacts between warring enemies, how can Islam have influenced Christianity in this permanent state of war?

The fine book by H. Pirenne, *Mahomet et Charlemagne*, has admirably shown what were the economic and political consequences of this permanent military threat. But it has often been emphasized that we lack any study of relationships. This is the more surprising in that elsewhere, in the domain of philosophy, we know perfectly well that Aristotle's thought came into Europe thanks to the translations and commentaries of the Arab philosopher Averroes (twelfth century), and we can also point to the influence of Avicenna from the eleventh century. It is also recognized that Arab influence was great in scientific fields such as mathematics, medicine, agronomy, astronomy, and physics. All this is conceded and generally known.

A little later Arab influence may be seen incontestably in the black arts, in magic, the various "-mancies," alchemy, the search for the philosopher's stone, and also music (twelfth century). It is also well understood that the Arabs had considerable military influence (e.g., upon cavalry, etc.) and that some technical fields (irrigation) and architecture felt their impact. Finally, it is constantly stressed that through the Crusades

and the contacts of the Crusaders with the Arabs many changes came about in various areas, such as the bringing of certain fruit trees (cherries and apricots) into France. All this is very banal. But it does at least tell us beyond a doubt that even between enemies who are depicted as irreconcilable there were cultural and intellectual relations. Exchanges took place and knowledge circulated. In truth, knowledge seems to have circulated in only one direction, coming from Islam and the Arab world to the West, which was much more backward and "barbarian."

It is readily perceived that Christianity and Islam had certain obvious points in common or points of meeting. Both were monotheistic and both were based on a book. We should also note the importance that Islam accords to the poor. Certainly Christians reject Allah because of the denial that Jesus Christ is God's Son, and they do not allow that the Koran is divinely inspired. On the other hand, Muslims reject the Trinity in the name of the unity, and they make the whole Bible a mere preface or introduction to the Koran. At root, Muslims do with the whole Bible what Christians do with the Hebrew Bible. But on this common foundation there are necessarily encounters and debates and discussions, and hence a certain openness. Even where there is rejection and objection, there can be no evading the question that is put.

It seems that the Muslim intellectuals and theologians were much stronger than their Christian counterparts. It seems that Islam had an influence, but not Christianity. Our interest here is not in the philosophical problem or in theological formulations, which were necessarily restricted to a small intellectual circle, but in the way in which Islamic influences change practices, rites, beliefs, attitudes toward life, all that belongs to the domain of moral or social belief or conduct, all that constitutes Christendom. Here again, everyone knows that the Frankish kingdom of Jerusalem, the French knights installed in Palestine, rapidly adopted many manners and customs that originated in Islam. But the exceptional case is not important. What counts is what is imported into Europe. It is the fact of unwitting imitation. It is the fact of being situated on the chosen territory and being delimited by those whom one wants to combat.

Religion, Revelation, & Law

I believe that in every respect the spirit of Islam is contrary to that of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. It is so in the basic fact that the God of Islam cannot be incarnate. This God can be only the sovereign judge who ordains all things as he wills. Another point of antithesis lies in the absolute integration of religious and political law. The expression of God's will inevitably translates itself into law. No law is not religious, inspired by God. Reciprocally, all God's will must translate itself into legal terms. Islam pushed to an extreme a tendency that is virtual in the Hebrew Bible, but there it is symbolic of the spiritual and is then transcended by Jesus Christ; with Islam we come back to legal formulation as such.

I have shown elsewhere that the twofold formulation of "having a law" and of "objective law" is contrary to revelation. This can naturally be contested only by champions

647

of natural law and classical theology. My conviction is that this revelation of love, seeking to set up a relationship of love (alone) among us, and thus basing everything on grace and giving us a model of exclusively gracious relationships, is in fact the exact opposite of law, in which everything is measured by debits and credits (the opposite of grace) and duties (the opposite of love).

To the extent that we are not in the kingdom of God, we certainly cannot achieve this pure relation of love and grace, this completely transparent relation. Hence law has a necessary existence. Yet we have to view it merely as a matter of expediency (because we cannot do better) and a necessary evil (which is always an evil). This understanding has nothing in common with that which contrariwise greatly exalts law, making it the expression of God's will and the legal formulation of the "religious" world. On this view law is a preeminent value. In taking this approach Christians were greatly influenced by their Roman background. They could not exclude or minimize the value of Roman law, as we have seen. There then comes a great rebound with the Arabs. We now have an intimate union between law and the will of God.

The jurist is the theologian. Theology becomes no less legal than philosophical. Life is set in law no less and even more than in ethics. Everything religious becomes legal. Judges handle religious matters, and jurisprudence becomes theology. This gives an enormous boost to the juridicizing of Christendom. Canon law expands after the pattern found in Islam. If everything is not included in it, it is because the feudal lords and monarchs are very hostile to the growing power of the church and because (lay) customs put up firm opposition to this sanctification. But the legal spirit penetrates deeply into the church, and I maintain that this is both under the influence of Islam and in *response* to the religious law of Islam. The church had to follow suit.

Ecclesiastical and Political Authority

Furthermore, law set up ecclesiastical courts and gave them means of ruling. They would have liked to have seen everything referred to canon law and their courts, as in the Muslim world. The church would have liked sole power. But in Islam there was an indissoluble correlation between religious law and political power. In this field, too, what was introduced with Constanti-nianism, as we have seen, received a new impulse from Islam. Every political head in Islam is also the ruler of believers. There is no separation between the church and political power. The political head is the religious head. He is a representative of Allah. His political and military acts, etc., are inspired.

Now this is all familiar in Europe. The king or emperor does not merely claim to be the secular arm of the church bus, the one who has spiritual power. He wants it to be recognized that he personally is chosen by God, elected by the Almighty. He needs a prophetic word and the power to work miracles. His word and person have to be sacred.

Naturally some of this was already present prior to Islam. It was not for nothing, however, that this theology, liturgy, and imperial understanding developed first at

Byzantium on the first contact with Islam, and only later spread to the West. Royal power becomes religious not merely in an alliance with the church but under the influence of Islam, which was much more of a theocracy than the West ever was: a theocracy in which God is indeed the sole king, but the true representative of God on earth is the political head, so that we have what has rightly been called "lay theocracy" with no religious organization, no clergy, no ecclesiastical institution—a situation in which to rejoice, for it implies that only the political power is religious. Islam does not know the duality of church and state with its conflicts and also with the limitation that it entails for the political power.

We can thus understand perfectly the wish or desire or temptation of Western kings and emperors to be themselves the sole representatives of God on earth and thus to go much further than Constantine. The formula according to which the emperor is "the bishop on the outside" did not suffice for them. I am certain that the Islamic model acted in favor of the emancipation of kings and their attempt from the fourteenth century to create a church that would be wholly dependent on the political power. Certainly in the big debate they were not able to advance this argument. What an admission it would be to say that they were taking those terrible unbelievers as a model!

Holy War

In tandem with this great importance of the political power there is, of course, the importance and glorification of war as a means of spreading the faith. Such war is a duty for all Muslims. Islam has to become universal. The true faith, not the power, has to be taken to every people by every means, including by military force. This makes the political power important, for it is warlike by nature. The two things are closely related. The political head wages war on behalf of the faith. He is thus the religious head, and as the sole representative of God he must fight to extend Islam. This enormous importance of war has been totally obliterated today in intellectual circles that admire Islam and want to take it afresh as a model.

War is inherent in Islam. It is inscribed in its teaching. It is a fact of its civilization and also a religious fact; the two cannot be separated. It is coherent with its conception of the Dhar al ahrb, that the whole world is destined to become Muslim by Arab conquests. The proof of all this is not just theological; it is historical: hardly has the Islamic faith been preached when an immediate military conquest begins. From 632 to 651, in the twenty years after the death of the prophet, we have a lightning war of conquest with the invasion of Egypt and Cyrenaica to the west, Arabia in the center, Armenia, Syria, and Persia to the east. In the following century all North Africa and Spain are taken over, along with India and Turkey to the east. The conquests are not achieved by sanctity, but by war.

For three centuries Christianity spread by preaching, kindness, example, morality, and encouragement of the poor. When the empire became Christian, war was hardly

tolerated by the Christians. Even when waged by a Christian emperor it was a dubious business and was assessed unfavorably. It was often condemned. Christians were accused of undermining the political force and military might of the empire from within. In practice Christians would remain critical of war until the flamboyant image of the holy war came on the scene. In other words, no matter what atrocities have been committed in wars waged by so-called Christian nations, war has always been in essential contradiction to the gospel. Christians have always been more or less aware of this. They have judged war and questioned it.

In Islam, on the contrary, war was always just and constituted a sacred duty. The war that was meant to convert infidels was just and legitimate, for, as Muslim thinking repeats, Islam is the only religion that conforms perfectly to nature. In a natural state we would all be Muslims: If we are not, it is because we have been led astray and diverted from the true faith. In making war to force people to become Muslims the faithful are bringing them back to their true nature. Q.E.D. Furthermore, a war of this kind is a *jihad,* a holy war. Let us make no mistake, the word *jihad* has two complementary senses. It may denote a spiritual war that is moral and inward. Muslims have to wage this war within themselves in the fight against demons and evil forces, in the effort to achieve better obedience to God's will, in the struggle' for perfect submission. But at the same time and in a wholly consistent way the *jihad* is also the war against external demons. To spread the faith, it is necessary to destroy false religions. This war, then, is *always* a religious war, a *holy* war.

The famous story of Charlemagne forcing the Saxons to be converted on pain of death simply presents us with an imitation of what Islam had been doing for two centuries. But if war now has conversions to Christianity as its goal, we can see that very quickly it takes on the aspect of a holy war. It is a war waged against unbelievers and heretics (we know how pitiless was the war that Islam waged against heretics in its midst). But the idea of a holy war is a direct product of the Muslim *jihad.* If the latter is a holy war, then obviously the fight against Muslims to defend or save Christianity has *also* to be a holy war. The idea of a holy war is not of Christian origin. Emperors never advanced the idea prior to the appearance of Islam.

For half a century historians have been studying the Crusades to find explanations other than the silly theory that was previously held . . . that claims their intention was to secure the holy places. It has been shown that the Crusades had economic objectives, or that they were stirred up by the popes for various political motives such as that of securing papal preeminence by exhausting the kingdoms, or reforging the weakening unity of the church, or again that they were a means whereby the kings ruined the barons who were challenging their power, or again that the bankers of Genoa, Florence, and Barcelona instigated them so as to be able to lend money to the Crusaders and make fabulous profits, etc. One fact, however, is a radical one, namely, that the Crusade is an imitation of the *jihad.* Thus the Crusade includes a guarantee of salvation. The one who dies in a holy war goes straight to Paradise, and the same

applies to the one who takes part in a Crusade. This is no coincidence; it is an exact equivalent.

The Crusades, which were once admired as an expression of absolute faith, and which are now the subject of accusations against the church and Christianity, are of Muslim, not Christian, origin. We find here a terrible consequence and confirmation of a vice that was eating into Christianity already, namely, that of violence and the desire for power and domination. To fight against a wicked foe with the same means and arms is unavoidably to be identified with this foe. Evil means inevitably corrupt a just cause. The nonviolence of Jesus Christ changes into a war in conflict with that waged by the foe. Like that war, this is now a holy war. Here we have one of the chief perversions of faith in Jesus Christ and of the Christian life.

But we must take this a step further. Once the king is the representative of God on earth and a war is holy, another question necessarily arises. If a war is not holy, what is it? It seems that the Christian emperors of Rome did not ask this question. They had to defend the empire. That was all. Naturally it did not arise in the period of the invasions and the Germanic kingdoms either. War was then a fact, a permanent state. No one tried to justify it. But with the Muslim idea of a holy war the idea is born that a war may be good even if it is not motivated by religious intentions so long as it is waged by a legitimate king. Gradually the view is accepted that political power has to engage in war, and if this power is Christian, then a ruler has to obey certain precepts, orientations, and criteria if he is to act as a Christian ruler and to wage a just war. We thus embark on an endless debate as to the conditions of a just war, from Gratian's decree to St. Thomas. All this derives from the first impulse toward a holy war, and it was the Muslim example that finally inspired this dreadful denial of which all Christendom becomes guilty.

* * *

Slavery

I have to admit that Christian history took an incredibly sad turn in two other areas. The first concerns slavery. Not all at once but progressively under Christian influence (and not because of technical improvements, as is often stated today), slavery disappeared in the Roman empire. It persisted, however, in remote corners of the Carolingian empire. We may note, meanwhile, two currents: the one from the North (the Slavs), the other from the Mediterranean. Yet the incidence of this is negligible and episodic. The general thesis that there was no more slavery in Christendom is true. Thus the proclamation that "everyone in the kingdom of France is free" was correct, and it was even allowed (although perhaps theoretically) that the moment slaves arrived in France, the mere fact of setting foot on French soil made them free. This was wholly in keeping with Christian thinking.

Nevertheless, from the fifteenth century, with the development of a knowledge of Africa, and then especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we have the

familiar and dreadful history of the enslaving of Africans, who were torn from their own country and transported to America.

What accusations have been made against "Christianity" and Western civilization! And rightly so! How lightly the revelation in Christ was taken, which would have totally and radically and unreservedly forbidden slavery. In the Middle Ages the traffic in slaves would undoubtedly have led to excommunication. It is a curious fact, however, that apart from some conscientious historians no one has put the elementary question how it was that a few Western navigators could round up thousands of slaves from among peoples who were by no means sheeplike. Could a hundred French sailors, even though armed with muskets, attack a tribe of several hundred hardy warriors and seize a cargo of slaves? Such an idea is pure fiction. For centuries the Muslims had regularly cropped the black continent for slaves. Seizing Africans as slaves was a Muslim practice from at least the tenth century. The African tribes were in this case attacked by considerable armies, in veritable invasions, of which we shall have to speak later.

The Muslims carried off to the East far more black slaves than the Westerners ever did. In the eleventh century fifteen great slave markets were set up by the Arabs in black Africa. In the east they extended as far as across from Madagascar [present-day Mozambique], and in the west as far as the Niger [present-day Guinea River]. Slaves were the main item in Muslim trade from the tenth century to the fifteenth. Furthermore, the Muslims began to use political methods by which the Western merchants profited. They played off the African chiefs against one another in such a way that a chief would take prisoners from neighboring tribes and then sell them to the Arab merchants. It was by following this practice, which had been established for many centuries, that the Western sailors obtained slaves so easily. Naturally, the reality itself is terrible and anti-Christian, but we see here the direct influence of Islam on the practice of Westerners who were Christian only in name. One should also remember, as the United Nations has pointed out, that trading in black slaves by Arab merchants still goes on in countries around the gulf of Oman.

Colonization

Finally, a last point: colonizing. Here again, for the last thirty years some have attacked Christianity for instigating colonialism. Christians are accused of invading the whole world and justifying the capitalist system. It has become a traditional belief that missionaries pioneered the way for merchants. Undoubtedly there is some truth in all this. Undoubtedly serious and conscientious Christians should never have acquiesced in the invasion of "Third World" peoples, in the seizing of their lands, in their reduction to semislavery (or their extermination), in the destruction of their cultures. The judgment against us is a crushing one. Las Casas is entirely right. But who invented colonizing? Islam. Incontestably so!

I will not discuss again the question of war or the establishment in Africa of kingdoms dominated by the Arabs. My theme is colonizing, the penetration by other than

military means, the reduction of subject peoples by a sort of treaty that makes them do exactly as the rulers want. In Islam we find two methods of penetration, commercial and religious. Things are exactly the same as they will be among the Westerners five centuries later. Muslim missionaries convert the Africans to Islam by every possible means. Nor can one deny that their intervention has just the same effects as that of Christian missionaries: the destruction of the independent religions and cultures of the African tribes and kingdoms. Nor must we back the stupid argument that it was an internal affair of the African world. The Muslims came into the north by conquest, and the Arabs are white. Muslim missionaries went as far as Zanzibar, and in Angola they brought within the Muslim orbit African peoples that had not been conquered or subjugated.

The other method is that of commerce. The Arab merchants go much further afield than the soldiers. They do much the same as the Westerners will do five centuries later. They set up trading posts and barter with the local tribes. It is not without interest that one of the commodities they were seeking in the tenth and eleventh centuries was gold. Trading in gold by the Arabs took place in Ghana, to the south of the Niger, and on the east coast down toward Zanzibar. When it is said that-the desire for gold prompted the Westerners in the fifteenth century, they were simply following in the footsteps of Islam. Thus the Arab mechanism of colonizing serves as a model for the Europeans.

In conclusion, let me make it clear that I have not been trying to excuse what the Europeans did. I have not been trying to shift the "blame," to say that the Muslims, not the Christians, were the guilty party. My purpose is to try to explain certain perversions in Christian conduct. I have found a model for them in Islam. Christians did not invent the holy war or the slave trade. Their great fault was to imitate Islam. Sometimes this was direct imitation by following the example of Islam. Sometimes it was inverse imitation by doing the same thing in order to combat Islam, as in the Crusades. Either way, the tragedy was that the church completely forgot the truth of the gospel. It turned Christian ethics upside down in favor of what seemed to be very obviously a much more effective mode of action, for in the twelfth century and later the Muslim world offered a dazzling example of civilization. The church forgot the authenticity of the revelation in Christ in order to launch out in pursuit of the same mirage.

Book Notes & Reviews

Le Destin d'Israel: Correspondances avec Jules Isaac, Jacques Ellul, Jacques Maritain et Marc Chagall

Entretiens avec Paul Claudel [Israel's Destiny: Correspondence with Jules Isaac, Jacques Ellul, Jacques Maritain and Marc Chagall; Interviews with Paul Claudel]. Ed. Bruno Charmet and Yves Chevalier. [Paris:] Parole et Silence, 2007. Pp. 265. ISBN 9782845733343.

Andre Chouraqui

Reviewed by Joyce Hanks

University of Scranton

Andre Chouraqui (1917-2007) seems to have written almost as many books as Jacques Ellul. The helpful bibliography at the end of this volume lists almost fifty books by him spanning the period 1948-2003, in addition to many articles and other publications. The editors also provide extensive notes to establish the historical context and explain events surrounding the letters they publish here.

Chouraqui met Ellul in 1940, and this volume reproduces some of their correspondence, beginning in 1942, when Ellul was still living in hiding in Martres (near Bordeaux), and continuing until 1992, barely two years before Ellul's death. Chouraqui, an Algerian-born Jew, had to flee the German occupation during World War II, and Ellul took him in, and then helped him and his wife escape. Some of the details surrounding these events can be found in Chouraqui's autobiography, *L'amour fort comme la mort* (Paris: Laffont, 1990). In addition to the twenty-eight letters preserved here, many exchanges between the two thinkers appear to have been lost, but perhaps not irretrievably.

The correspondence between Chouraqui and Ellul preserved in this volume deals with many facets of their relationship, including Ellul's advice as Chouraqui wrote his thesis, the political situation of Israel before and after the 1967 war, and family concerns. Ellul enthusiastically uses Chouraqui's translation of the Hebrew Bible in Bible study sessions, but disagrees flatly with Chouraqui over the possibility of dialogue with Islam, a possibility Ellul rejected. We observe Ellul's growing frustration with what he saw as the French government's failure to support Israel and with the French Protestant tendency to support the Palestinian cause rather than Israel's. Ellul's unflagging

654

support for Israel stemmed from his "faithfulness as a Christian towards the chosen people" (p. 104; see p. 120).

Most of Chouraqui's interviews with Paul Claudel were published in *Le Monde* in 1952, in summary form. Claudel (1868-1955), one of the prominent figures in French diplomacy and Catholic literature of the twentieth century, expresses fascination with the establishment of the state of Israel, and deep concern for Jewish people everywhere, as do Chouraqui's other correspondents in this volume.

Editors Bruno Charmet and Yves Chevalier offer us only one letter from Chouraqui to painter Marc Chagall (and none from Chagall). In this letter Chouraqui offers his advice to Chagall (1887-1985) following their conversation concerning the ethical question posed by the Jewish painter's decision whether to create biblical paintings for an unused Catholic chapel (in Vence, southern France; the paintings are now located in Nice).

Chouraqui and Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), famous French philosopher and Thomist theologian, corresponded mainly about their publications, but also concerning more personal family concerns, and about the Catholic Church's stance during World War II. Maritain was one of the early Catholic writers to make public statements about anti-Semitism.

After his wife and daughter were deported to Auschwitz, historian Jules Isaac (1877-1963) began to investigate the roots of anti-Semitism. He became convinced of the historical significance of mistaken Christian thinking regarding the Jews, and wrote extensively on the subject. He was received by Pope John XXIII, who agreed to put the relationship of the Church and the Jewish people on the agenda for the Second Vatican Council. Chouraqui played an important role in this effort, and in the relationship between the state of Israel and the Vatican generally, including the period when he served as deputy mayor of Jerusalem. He made a lifelong effort to promote dialogue between Jews and Christians, and often spoke of this matter in his letters to Ellul, who shared his concern and worked toward the same ends.

Although most of Chouraqui's other correspondents are better known than Ellul, the exchanges between these two give evidence of a special closeness, probably springing from their shared danger during World War II. Chouraqui addresses each of the other men as "vous," the formal "you" pronoun in French, reserving the familiar "tu" form for Ellul alone.

The Reception of Jacques Ellul's Critique of Technology: An Annotated Bibliography

Joyce Hanks
Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007.
Reviewed by Darrell J. Fasching

655

University of South Florida, Tampa

Even if you do not know who Jacques Ellul is, you would know from the title of this bibliography and the shear number of pages it contains (546) that he was an extraordinary thinker to have prompted such a diligent and comprehensive a bibliography of the scholarly responses to his work. Joyce Hanks's work as Jacques Ellul's bibliographer (e.g., *Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works* (206 pages), in *Research in Philosophy and Technology,* Supplement 5 (JAI Press, 2000) and now this work as the bibliographer of the scholarship on Ellul speaks eloquently of her love and respect for the work of Ellul. In turn she deserves the respect and admiration of the entire international community of Ellul scholars for making this thorough and astonishing contribution.

How does one write a review of a bibliography as comprehensive as this. There is no one who has a better command of this literature than Joyce Hanks. Certainly I do not. I can only say that I am astonished at its comprehensiveness. I can't imagine that anything of significance is missing here, unless it was written in the last few months. The bibliography is divided into three chapters. The first covers books, articles and interviews, the second dissertations and the third reviews of Ellul's work. These chapters are followed by an author index and a selected subject index. The book covers the scholarly response to Ellul over his entire career from its earliest stages in the 1930s until his death in 1994 and beyond (to 2007) as his influence continues to reverberate throughout the postmodern world. This astonishing 546 page volume is a treasure trove for Ellul scholars. All Ellul scholars need a copy of this volume on their desk and every university library should have a copy. I would urge every Ellul scholar to make sure both are true.

Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul

Lawrence Terlizzese
Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005.
Reviewed by Andy Alexis-Baker
Asociated Mennonite Seminaries, Elkhart IN

In this book, Lawrence Terlizzese argues that hope is a crucial concept in Ellul's thought. Hope provides the counterpoint to the world's despair and challenges a static world to change. Terlizzese convincingly offers new insights into Ellul's thought that other scholars have either missed or dismissed as utopian. Hope, according to Terlizzese, informs Ellul's view on eschatology, technique, politics and his vision for alternatives.

Terlizzese demonstrates that eschatology is central to understanding hope in Ellul's thought. Ellul agreed with classical apocalypticism in its "pessimistic view of politics, world-denial, hope for the next world and discontinuity between the kingdom of God and human history" (28). Yet Christians realize eschatology in the present through obedience. With secular apocalypticism he agreed that humans do not need God to

destroy the world—we can do that just fine on our own. God's most terrible judgment is allowing us to follow our own desires and to enslave ourselves to technique. With deconstructionism he agreed that there is no intrinsic meaning to history except in relation to Christ. Despite history's meaninglessness, history's devolution and classical eschatology's spiritualizing and pacifying of Christianity, which have allowed for technique to imprison the world, Ellul saw cracks in the prison walls. On the basis of the future, Christians can critique technique. Once they begin to say no on the basis of this eschatology, they can realize it in their lives and witness to a different future.

Technique encloses the world and offers abundant material comforts but denies meaning for life. Thus although technique's tomorrow will be better, it will not mean anything. This is false hope or optimism, which Terlizzese identifies as espoir in Ellul's works. Yet this false hope leads to people feeling trapped, unable to change things even as they see technology creating massive problems. However, Terlizzese shows that Ellul saw hope in this recognition. It is the beginning of consciousness which leads to action.

The most problematic parts of the book are when Terlizzese attempts to tame Ellul. For example, Terlizzese believes that Ellul did not ground his anarchism in a more philosophical basis, nor in any view the Bible had about "states." He also claims that Ellul wanted to dismantle the ideology behind the state without destroying the state. Yes and no. Prior to the modern state, anarchism did not exist. Thus anarchism is a response to the modern state and the rise of technique. So on one level all anarchism is a modern response to a specific political situation. However, Ellul reads the prophets and Jesus over against those who rule others. This suggests his anarchism is more than a timebound response to the nation-state and technique. Ellul suggests that all institutions, at all times and places, must be questioned because they represent a threat to human practices and our freedom to follow Christ. After all, Ellul argued against utopianism and for "permanent revolution" (Ellul, Presence of the Kingdom, 43, 48). Why do they always represent a threat? Because they represent power of all kinds: "money, personal authority, social status, economic structure, military force, politics, artifice, sentimental or material extortion, seduction, spiritual influence." These powers are in fact a type of good, a good that is external to the day-to-day activities that humans engage in to better our communities and lives. These external goods have set themselves up as the primary motivators to engage in any activity: political or otherwise. Since they have become ends in themselves, rather than the goods of freedom, we have no reason to attain them by becoming good human beings. Thus they are a permanent threat, and I would argue that Ellul sees them in this way. That does not make him anti-institution, but he recognizes the need to balance the institutions' power with other power, in all times. His anarchism is more than superficial, Terlizzese does not seem to recognize that.

Finally, should Terlizzese ever revise his book, I would suggest deleting the long, distracting footnotes that sometimes run for pages, dropping the male biased language from his prose (that is. "humanity" for "man"), and adding an index. The book contains several spelling and other typographical errors, e.g. page 90 "crowed" should be

"crowded" and page 101 "Brave New Word" should be "Brave New World"; on page 91 epidemic is partially italicized. Finally, Terlizzese's extended Ellul quotation on page 45 left out punctuation and left a sentence dangling; on page 69 Terlizzese left out "its" from "cannot curb growth"; on page 87 he added a list of atrocities to the Ellul quotation; and on page 91 Terlizzese added "must" to the quotation. I didn't check all the quotations, but these spot checks suggest that he and the editors needed to be more careful at times. Nevertheless, these flaws do not override the overall value of this book in correcting previous views of Ellul. Ellul may not let us sleep soundly, but not because he was hopeless; quite the contrary.

Shades of Loneliness: Pathologies of a Technological Society

Richard Stivers
Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004. 148 pages.
Reviewed by Jacob VanVleet
Diablo Valley College, Concord CA.

In *Shades of Loneliness*, social scientist Richard Stivers gives us a broad and insightful perspective on the phenomenon of loneliness as a symptom of technological civilization. Stivers persuasively argues that mental disorders - manifestations or "shades" of intense loneliness - have their origin in the structure of societies, specifically those that are dominated by technology.

Stivers begins by describing what he calls "the technological personality": the modern self that is conflicted, cold, and impersonal. The technological personality is emotionally conditioned by the mass media, lacking genuine individuality while compensating for and covering up the increasing fear and loneliness within.

Stivers points out that technology has created various types of stress: the tempo of society, forms of communication, overcrowding, noise, and the workplace. Living within these pressures, the technological personality is forced to become a "stimulus shield:" a combination of psychological traits - from emotional indifference to internalization of certain machines - which protects the individual from the harsh and chaotic realities of the technological society. However, Stivers maintains, the stimulus shield cannot protect one from his or her deep, inner loneliness.

In his chapter, "Psychological and Cultural Conflict," Stivers then draws from the work of J.H. van den Berg, Karen Horney, and Jacques Ellul. Here, Stivers argues that technological civilization fuels loneliness by creating intense contradiction and ambiguity in modern life. In this chapter, Stivers also begins to outline what he sees as four major contradictions produced by the technological society, each with its own subsequent chapter.

The first major contradiction is a result of the intermixed, confused values of the technological civilization, which emphasizes success, control, and winning on the one hand, yet also values affection on the other. Thus, modern neuroses often involve a compulsive need for both power and love simultaneously (75). Using Horney's terminology, Stivers argues that one's attempt to "move against others" is illustrated in one's need for power and control, while "moving towards others" is demonstrated in one's need for affection and love. Shrouded in the ambiguity and confusion of technological culture, love and power are often nearly indistinguishable as they co-exist in unhealthy tension.

The second contradiction of the technological society is between the rational and the irrational. This is illustrated in obsessive-compulsive symptoms on the one hand, and in impulsive symptoms on the other. Stivers states: "Like all forms of neurosis, the obsessive-compulsive style is an exaggeration and intensification of the sociological context: the obsessive-compulsive style reflects technological and bureaucratic rationality" (97). Mirroring technological rationality, this form of neurosis was identified by Karl Marx and Max Weber, who referred to "the bureaucratic mind," in which one's reality has become "a purely material reality of objects and power relations" (97). In contrast, impulsive ways of relating to the modern world are instinctual and not subject to reason. This neurosis, like the obsessive-compulsive, is a result of the technological society's manipulation of one's emotions and instincts. While the obsessive-compulsive obeys technical rules, the impulsive individual relies on reflex rather than reason, blindly led by the media and advertising.

The third contradiction is between power and meaning. According to Stivers, "Technological power has led to the erosion of common moral meaning and created a false meaning in its place" (72). The result of this contradiction can be seen in two psychological responses: narcissism and depression. The narcissist experiences powerlessness, and responds by wholeheartedly putting his or her faith in various techniques - often at the expense of others - in order to gain a sense of power and meaning. Conversely, the depressed person experiences meaninglessness and is overtaken by a sense of hopelessness and helplessness. According to Stivers, our society is one marked by a "dialectic of narcissism and depression" (121).

The final contradiction that arises from the technological civilization is between unity and fragmentation. This is demonstrated in two common symptoms: paranoia and schizophrenia. As a unity that controls, manipulates, and strips people of their freedom, the technological system creates paranoid individuals: those who recognize technology's omnipresence and feel a profound loss of autonomy (131). The technological system also leads to severe psychological fragmentation; namely, schizophrenia. The individual faces inner loneliness, anxiety, and depression, while wearing masks of pseudocheerfulness for employers, colleagues, and neighbors. Thus, "schizophrenia takes the technological personality to its logical conclusion" (143).

Stivers has provided us with a profoundly persuasive analysis of technological civilization. He has conclusively demonstrated that technology is the factor most respon-

sible for loneliness and forms of mental illness in our society today. It is my sincere hope that *Shades of Loneliness* will find its way into the hands of many readers.

News & Notes

—Charbonneau Collection

Daniel Cerezuelle has completed his own preliminary organization of some 35 boxes of papers and manuscripts of Bernard Charbonneau, Jacques Ellul's long time close friend, conversation partner, and collaborator on many projects over the years.

The Institute of Political Studies at the University of Bordeaux has agreed to catalog and house the Charbonneau collection alongside the Jacques Ellul collection and make it available to researchers. Cerezuelle continues to search for some rare Charbonneau documents and hopes to add these as well as a series of photos of Ellul and Charbonneau to the collection. .

— ELLUL oN-LINE DISCUSSIoN GRoUP

Rick Herder, IJES member at Georgia State University, tells us that a group of forty or so people have joined the Facebook group "People who Read Jacques Ellul and Still use Computers." The group is open to anyone wishing to discuss Ellul and his ideas concerning technology, theology, etc.

Advert: International Jacques Ellul Society

www.ellul.org

P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705, USA IJES@ellul.org Tel/Fax: 510-653-3334

The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

Membership

Anyone who supports the objectives of the IJES is invited to join the society for an annual dues payment of US$20.00. Membership includes a subscription to the Ellul Forum.

Board of Directors

Mark Baker, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno; Patrick Chastenet, University of Poitiers; Clifford Christians, University of Illinois; Dell DeChant, University of South Florida; Andrew Goddard, Oxford University; Darrell Fasching (Vice-President), University of South Florida; David Gill (President), Berkeley; Joyce Hanks,

University of Scranton; Virginia Landgraf, American Theological Library Association, Chicago, Randall Marlin, Carlton University, Ottawa, Ken Morris (Secretary-Treasurer), Boulder; Carl Mitcham, Colorado School of Mines; Langdon Winner, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

Issue #42 Fall 2008 — Practical Politics

- Click to view the original PDF

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

"All life today is in fact oriented to politics. . . politics has gradually invaded everything...

"It is a wrong question, then, to ask whether the Christian should take part in politics. He is fully doing so already. . . The only question is to know how to participate in such a way as to bring a certain freedom into this order of necessity... "

-Jacques Ellul

The Ethics of Freedom (1976), pp. 374-75.

Contents

Information on The Editorial Board & More

From the Editor

This has to be one of the most interesting issues in the twenty year history of the *Ellul Forum*. We invited our readers to submit brief reflective essays on "How Ellul Has Affected My Practical Politics." Twelve of our IJES members responded and we present them here in alphabetical order. Three of our contributions come from France, the Netherlands, and New Zealand. The other nine are from various parts of the USA. Some come at the topic from a Christian perspective, others not.

This fall the USA will hold its presidential election once again. Canada is also the scene of a national political campaign. Certainly there is great sound and fury, strong emotion, and bitter debate about the various candidates and political platforms. Is it all a grand "political illusion"—all of little importance or true consequence? Beneath the surface froth of personalities, current events, and today's "breaking news" is it really the bureaucracy of the state inexorably following Technique that decides and then implements its understanding of the "one best way" in every field it touches? (Would a President Gore have pursued the same foreign relations and domestic antiregulatory actions as a President Bush?). Are candidate differences (e.g., Obama vs. McCain) inconsequential ephemera? Is our best move to reject the nation-state and its political structures and activities? If voting amounts to an illusory "participation" in an illusory "politics," if it is utterly ineffective, does that suggest that we should boycott the electoral process? But then should "effectiveness" be the criterion by which we decide to vote (or do anything else)? Isn't that yielding to the spirit of Technique?

Ellul's insights on the political illusion, the state, propaganda and technique are as brilliantly insightful and challenging as ever. So are his emphases on presence in our neighborhoods, on introducing contradiction, on strategic anarchism, on representing the humanity of the opposition to our own party or movement, on resisting and questioning all powers, on looking at maincurrents beneath the surface instead of sound bites and isolated bits of information, on bringing hope to those around us.

As our readers demonstrate in this issue, there is no Ellulian orthodoxy in politics any more than theology. Remember his famous words: "I want only to provide my readers with the means to think out for themselves, the meaning of their existence."

David W. Gill
Associate Editor

666

Wild & Untamed

by Andy Alexis-Baker

Andy Alexis-Baker earned an M.A. in theology and ethics at the Associated Mennonite Seminary (Indiana). He has been a prime mover in the Jesus Radicals anarchist movement inspired by Jacques Ellul and other leaders.

As a life-long anarchist who converted to Christianity while bound to a prison cell, I came to a radical, orthodox Christianity in part by the writings of Jacques Ellul. Although I am indebted to Ellul's book *Anarchism and Christianity* for helping me connect my politics to my faith, it is his critique of the technological society that has recently had the biggest impact on my life and politics. In particular, his reading of Genesis 1-9, that has moved me away from an anarcho-syndicalist position towards a green anarchist standpoint.

According to Ellul, Genesis depicts a pre-civilized setting in which society as we know it did not yet exist. In this garden, Adam and Eve lived in communion with their Creator, with one another and with the natural world as they foraged for the plants God provided for food and lived among the creatures for whom they were called to care. However, they were tempted to use green things for more than they had been instructed and sought to change their social environment by transforming themselves and their relationship to God and the untamed world of which they were a part. In *What I Believe* (WB) Ellul expands and applies this Biblical exegesis in his view of human history. Rejecting Thomas Hobbes' view of pre-civilized society as one of poor, solitary individuals living short-lived and violent lives, Ellul emphasizes that before the dawn of agriculture and modern civilization people lived in relative harmony with each other and their environment and were quite well off.

Drawing on Marshall Sahlin's analysis of the "Original Affluent Society" (WB, 107), Ellul argues that it is the dawn of agriculture that created divisions of labor, hierarchy, patriarchy, wars and poverty (WB, 105-106, 118). He then outlines a history in which people who domesticate animals and plant life, eventually domesticate each other (WB, 120, 219) and create cities that extract resources from the surrounding countryside to survive. As their populations grew and strained the resources of the domesticated environment, they had to find new resources to continue, so they waged war on other cities (WB, 220). They also created laws in order to civilize each other and the natural world (WB, 121) because the natural world began to seem so threatening. They were completely alienated from their former life of affluence and leisure once they became civilized.

As I have become convinced of Ellul's assertion that that civilization and violence are interconnected, I have also come to favor deep ecology, radical environmentalism and anarcho-primitivism. This shift to a new form of anarchism has forced me to see that I had more hope and faith in the technological system than I realized and has moved me towards an even more Ellulian view of the technological society. Even a quick read of *The Technological Society* and *Propaganda* readily reveals that Ellul had no

hope in technique. Instead, he found hope in Jesus and in faithfulness to his way. This is why his critique of and solutions to the technological society were largely theological and eschatological at their core.

Reading and understanding Ellul during our present ecological crisis has made it possible to see both his work and the civilization in which we live with new eyes. The coming oil peak and the futility of the "green" alternatives to meet the gaping needs oil will leave behind is another sign that technology cannot save us. If anything, it reveals that our entire civilized way of life may well collapse (the politicians never tell us this truth). My initial reaction to this news was despair and hopelessness: surely it is the end of the world and Jesus would return before allowing such a catastrophe. But then I remember, our technological civilization is not "the world" nor is it "hopeful." The collapse of Western civilization would not mean the end of the world, that Jesus is coming back, or the end of hope. It would only mean the collapse of one way of living— a way of living that much of the world has survived without or has been betrayed by. The fact that I had placed my hope in technology and Western civilization without really knowing it challenged and perhaps even weakened my Christian faith.

One of Ellul's practices in response to the technological society and to Western civilization was to teach urban youth survival skills. From 1930 onwards he and his friend Charbonneau would take a group far from the city and into the wilderness and teach them basic survival skills in an effort to give them a taste of what liberty was really like (*Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology and Christianity*, 84). What might seem like an eccentric experiment on his part has increasingly become a meaningful act for me to imitate. To that end my wife and I grow most of our own food and I am learning to forage for the plant food that God had given us to eat. This is no attempt to get back to Eden or to attain a level of purity or perfection that cannot be achieved this side of the eschaton. It is however a way to take seriously the Biblical vision for human relationship to the Creator, to the natural world around us and to its inhabitants. It is a way to resist the onslaught of technology and the pressures of a civilized world that has brought itself to the brink through overconsumption. It is a way to put Ellul's thought into practice in my own small corner of the world. It is a "politics" that reveals the true violent nature of the "polis."

Prophets in Politics

by Cliff Christians

Clifford Christians is Editor of the Ellul Forum. *He recently retired from a long career as professor of communication studies at the University of Illinois-Urbana.*

Ellul's *Propaganda* and *The Technological Society* have always been more determinative for me than his *Political Illusion, Politics of God, Politics of Man*, and *Autopsy of Revolution*. I know that his work fits together as an organic whole, but it's not his

anarchism that inspires my politics as a citizen or during the relentless presidential campaign this fall in the United States.

The counterpoint to *Propaganda* in Ellul is *The Judgment of Jonah*, covert propaganda the problem in media-rich societies and prophecy the solution. Instead of weaving humans into the technological whole, the prophetic word announces freedom and transformation. Prophets speak the truth—they get it from knowing history or from a keen intelligence and righteous living or by revelation from the Divine being. Jonah demanded that Babylon repent of its evil ways, but as with all prophets it's with a constructive intent—they plead with people to come home, not send them to perdition.

In these terms, Ellul doesn't teach me anarchism, first of all, but to look for prophets in politics and resist propaganda tooth and nail.

For Ellul, the prophet sees beneath the surface to the fundamental issues underneath. Prophets cut through the idolatrous attitudes and desires that drive technology forward. Prophecy demythologizes–in Ellul's case, the Myth of Technique. It severs at its root any blind faith that technological prowess can lead from one achievement to another. Thus, the enemy in the prophet's mind is not technology per se but our sacralizing them. Prophetic resistance is not aimed at various technologies themselves, but intends to restructure the worldview undergirding them.

Over my lifetime, Ellul has been teaching me what being a prophet means. Ellul brought a prophetic critique up from the footnote and out of the epilogue to make it characteristic of one's thinking overall. In the prefaces to several of his books, he is called "prophetic." Dale Brown in a typical statement applauds his "Amos-like ministry to the technological society." True to the prophet's vision, Ellul raised fundamental issues about the technological society already in 1954 when new technology was largely considered the key to society's progress.

And so I emulate the prophetic Ellul, warts and all. While Rupert Hall's caustic criticism is not representative, it points to a weakness: "Ellul lives on black bread and spring water...The prophet whose cry is only, 'Woe, ye are dammed' walks unheeded." As Abraham Heschel makes clear, prophets bring the wayward home. Ellul overall does so too, but not always with the quality of the Hebrew tradition.

Even with some ambiguities about its meaning and execution, Ellul's prophecy lights my pathway into politics. And when I see it as the counterpoint to propaganda, prophecy becomes crystal clear. As propaganda, media information floods in from all areas of the globe and evaporates quickly. Underneath the rushing surface are deep currents, but spectacle captures our attention. Correctly gauging center and periphery becomes impossible. The citizen is not informed but inebriated, not enabled but drowned. Ellul's description of people obsessed with current events directly contradicts democracy's image of a public attentive and vitally involved. Citizens riveted to news avoid "the truly fundamental problems" and "lacking landmarks" draw no accurate relationship between events and truth. The information explosion produces not informed, but crystallized humans. Ellul compares that with a frog incessantly stimulated—its

muscles turn rigid. Decisions based on sociological propaganda are neither imaginative nor discerning.

Political campaigns are the epitome of propaganda. Schooled by Ellul, I have no interest in the endless news coverage of details and slogans and gaffes. Political advertising—30/60 second spots—I ignore totally. But "Meet the Press" is sometimes satisfactory with its dialogic format. The European model of short campaigns with longer speeches in concentrated blocks of time, provided as a public service and not for commercial gain, has possibilities. The New England town meeting in its various configurations is the opposite of electronic campaigns and an arena in which the prophetic word has a chance.

Ellul also makes it clear to me that politicians advocating the technological fix do not speak with prophetic insight. Exaggerated emphasis on magnitude, control, and uniformity—what Pacey calls the virtuosity values—I avoid like a plague. Technics augmenting itself, Ellul would call it. Moral purpose is sacrificed to technical excellence. Thus the answer to the energy crisis is more efficient engines or more available coal or biofuels. Restructuring bureaucracy will lead to savings that we can use elsewhere. The answer to a military threat is superior weapons.

Prophets focus on the problem, rather than shortterm, half-way answers. They are more concerned about getting the issues straight than surrendering to a utilitarian penchant for immediate results. Of course, an unending list of short-term crises demand our attention in a limited sense. But the prophet worries long term about our attenuated philosophy of life, the instrumentalist worldview invading our spirit, the mystique of technique that eats into our being.

Accordingly, in following Ellul, I look for action in the intermediate. For him, the revolutionary axis can only be at the interstices—at the cracks in the instrumentalism where some wiggle room is possible. The prophet's battle with philosophies of life must be nurtured in backyards, close to the ground, among voluntary associations, NGOs, families, churches and neighborhoods. Ellul urges us to promote pluralism. He seeks all kinds of subcultures "which diversify a society's fundamental tendencies" and present themselves "not as negations of the state, but as something else not under its tutelage." Together these subcultures can provide a new infrastructure, a fresh web of interlocking relationships. Depth, responsibility, vision within the intermediate domain—these describe for me how to live prophetically.

In politics, where are the prophets? Martin Luther King, Jr is an obvious example of speaking the truth to set us free. Vaclev Havel is another, president of the Czech Republic for a decade and playwright for his lifetime. Adlai Stevenson II, U.S. presidential candidate, spoke with the intelligence that electrified the public toward citizenship. South Africa's Nelson Mandela was a huge source of strength as the country was established in 1994. And the numerous politicians who live and speak prophetically on the local level are the primary saviors of democratic life. In ancient Greece, when Pericles spoke they admired his great oration; Socrates inspired them to greater achievement. Socrates is Ellul's prophet in ancient terms.

The Political Path & the Road to God

by Daniel Clendenin

Daniel Clendenin wrote and later published his Drew University Ph.D. dissertation on "Theological Methid in Jacques Ellul." He has served as a university professor in Russia and elsewhere and is now producing a highly regarded weekly e-zine on culture called Journey With Jesus, read by some 7000 subscribers on all the continents.

With America's presidential election just around the corner, my mind has turned toward one brave pastor, along with a distant memory of a conversation with Jacques Ellul as we stood at the end of his driveway in Bordeaux.

In April of 2004, pastor and scholar Greg Boyd preached a controversial series of six sermons called "The Cross and the Sword" at his 5,000 member Woodland Hills Church in Saint Paul, Minnesota. As he explained in his book that grew out of those sermons (*The Myth of a Christian Nation; How the Quest for Political Power is Destroying the Church*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), in those months preceding the national elections, Boyd wanted to warn his congregation about "nationalistic and political ideology," of identifying the Christian Gospel with any political point of view, of cherished but badly mistaken convictions like the belief that America is a Christian nation, or that believers should "take back the nation for God."

No, Boyd preached, "the path through politics is not the road to God." No, he would not endorse conservative candidates or announce anti-gay rallies from the pulpit. No, he would not distribute antiabortion literature, pass out voter guides, or fly a flag in the sanctuary. Many parishioners thanked Boyd for his wisdom and boldness, but others were not so enamored. About a thousand people left the congregation.

Boyd makes a sharp distinction between the kingdom(s) of this world that are characterized by what he calls "power over," and the kingdom of God that Jesus announced which is characterized by "power under" (cf. especially Luke 22:25-27 and Philippians 2:1-11). The former is the realm of domination, exploitation, violence, coercion, and self-interest, the latter one of love and self-sacrifice. Jesus calls his followers to do something the state must never do, which is to place the interests of others ahead of your own.

The kingdom that Jesus announced is a radical and counter-cultural alternative to every sort of worldly power, and not merely an attempt to upgrade government to a better level. Jesus, of course, insisted that his kingdom was "not of this world" (John 18:36). Most Christians until the baptism of Constantine lived this distinction, but in Boyd's view the developments after Constantine's conversion have constituted an unmitigated disaster: "The church of resident aliens became a horde of savage warlords. . . We have become intoxicated with the Constantinian, nationalistic, violent mind set of imperialistic Christendom."

With our national elections just a few weeks away, it seems to me that American Christians have not learned the lesson that Boyd has urged. For thirty years it was

671

easy to criticize conservative Christians like Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and James Dobson for pandering to the Republican Right.

Some of their kind saw the light and deconstructed what was really happening. In his book *Tempting Faith; An Inside Story of Political Seduction* (New York: Free Press, 2006), David Kuo, a former Bush staffer, tells how he resigned when he realized that –surprise!—the Bush administration had done "less than nothing" to fulfill its promises to evangelicals. It was all "a farce, a brazen deception, smear tactics, a mirage." The grant application for the faith-based initiative process was a sham and probably illegal and unconstitutional. Worst of all, Kuo saw how instead of using politics to further the Gospel, his Bush colleagues played right wing evangelicals like a cheap violin to further their political ends, and in private derided them as dupes, nuts, and crazies. Evangelicals, Kuo discovered, were used and abused as an incredibly gullible gold mine of voters (over 80% of them voted for Bush), nothing more and nothing less. And like in a very bad marriage, the victim still curries favor from its abuser.

Jim Wallis wrote a fine book called *God's Politics*, then hosted a presidential debate for candidates Obama, Edwards, and Clinton. He posed with the three candidates for the camera, smiling from ear to ear. He even pretended to be a neutral arbiter of a civic conversation. It reminded me of a comment by Will Willimon who once told Jerry Falwell, "Jerry, you conservatives are acting just like we liberals did, only the content of the propaganda is different."

Pastor Rick Warren, apparently as clueless as he was earnest and well-intended, then hosted *both* the Democrat Obama and the Republican McCain in his church (and charged $500 to $2000 a ticket to attend), as if it wasn't enough for Christians to be used and abused by one party at a time. And now we've come full circle with evangelicals thrilled with John McCain's selection of Sarah Palin, a gun-toting beauty queen who speaks in tongues and believes that America's war in Iraq is "God's task" for us.

Just once I'd love to see some sort of contemporary replay of the encounter between emperor Theodosius (347-395) and bishop Ambrose of Milan (340-397).

After Theodosius slaughtered 7,000 people in Thessalonika "most unjustly and tyrannically," Ambrose physically prevented him from entering his church. The Syrian bishop Theodoret (c.393-466) recorded the drama in his *Ecclesiastical History* (V.17-18): "You must not be dazzled by the splendor of the purple that you wear," thundered Ambrose to Theodosius. "How could you lift in prayer hands which are stained with the blood of such an unjust massacre? Go away, and do not add to your guilt by committing a second crime." Emperor Theodosius "submitted to the rebuke, and with many tears and groans returned to his palace." Ambrose later restored him after thirty days of public penance.

In 1987 I interviewed Jacques Ellul at his home, and when we finished we walked outside to the end of his driveway. There he recounted how in 1943 he thought that after the war genuine revolution was possible by starting from scratch with a clean slate. All they needed was the right people, he thought. "It was the biggest mistake of

672

my life. After that, I never thought that anything could be changed by politics. I often think of that conversation when I hear Christians of both the left and the right argue for the right person, as if changing the actors will alter the script. Twenty-five years ago Ellul pointed me in the direction that Boyd articulates: "The path of politics is not the road to God."

Beneath the Froth: Witnessing to the Powers by Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager has been Director of Quaker House www.quakerhouse.org *in Fayetteville NC since late 2001.*

Few if any thinkers have affected my "practical politics" as much as Jacques Ellul. Among the many of his books that could be listed in this connection, let me mention *Hope in Time of Abandonment, False Presence of the Kingdom, The New Demons,* and *The Meaning of the City.* As these indicate, the influence has come more from his religious works than his sociological writings. From these I've drawn two guiding propositions:

First, the most genuine and important "political" impact the church can have in society is to be the church. By "church" I mean the various bodies that have been somehow called into being by the divine spirit; among these, bringing up the rear, I would include my own Society of Friends, or Quakers. Each of these groups manifests a part of the larger Body, and its primary duty and usefulness is in doing that as authentically as it can.

Secondly, Ellul's identification of large social forces as "the new demons" helped me understand that much - -maybe most - -of the frothy daily political scene is just that: froth, with little impact on the deeper currents beneath. I should add here that I may differ from Ellul to some extent in regarding these "powers" as having more autonomy and even personality than he did, at least in later works.

To be more specific, my discernment is that the U.S. is firmly in the grip of several intertwined powers: first that of war, then lies, then greed, and not least a kind of blindness about these facts. These powers have brought us well over the edge of being a police state and a rapacious empire. In this situation, the tasks of serious people are above all those of survival and resistance. Survival is defined here primarily as the mandate to become and stay aware of this condition; resistance can take a myriad of forms, with non-violence being my own commitment.

This discernment was made possible to a large extent by what I learned from Ellul, as is my own response. I'm fortunate in that my day-to-day work largely reflects these two principles: I'm the Director of a Quaker peace project located next door to Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. This is not only one of the largest US military bases; it is also

the crossroads for several crucial pieces of the present American war efforts, including that monster I call the "Torture Industrial Complex."

My work here has made only too plain that American militarism is a great "power and principality," moving with great autonomy. It shapes America's more formal politics much more than our politics shapes militarism.

In the face of such power, which is spiritual as much as physical, our response has been to stay as focused on holding up what Quakers call our Peace Testimony. We do this in numerous, mostly mundane ways. It's evident that we've not stopped any wars; yet this feels to me like genuine spiritual combat. Moreover, the work here has been upheld for nearly forty years, and we are set to continue for another forty. Ellul's work helps me have hope that this witness is of value in the divine schema.

My political "strategy" then, is an extension of this experience, and the two principles: I'd like to see more such projects developed, not necessarily all Quaker, but doing parallel work, networked and mutually supportive. By so doing, our little church would be more itself, more a part of the larger Body, and would do its bit to name and unmask the powers. I've written in more detail about this in a piece called "A Quaker Declaration of war," which interested readers can find at our website.

As far as the conventions of "practical politics," I do vote, and have preferences among the available options. But I don't take an active part in partisan political work, and have limited expectations for the outcome; beneath the froth, the deep currents continue to run. Apropos of which, I would note that in the current presidential campaign, both leading candidates are promising Americans more war and a bigger military, though each says it in a distinctive voice.

These are promises that, alas, I expect the winner to keep. And thus with divine assistance, we will continue to be busy here for the foreseeable future.

What Divides Us & What Unites Us

by Joyce Hanks

Joyce Hanks is the author if several outstanding bibliographies of Jacques Ellul. She recently retired from the faculty of the University of Scranton (PA) and will soon be serving with the Peace Corps in Southeast Asia.

Grateful as I feel for a whole series of Jacques Ellul's theological insights, his political ideas may have penetrated my thinking even more deeply. They have significantly affected my choices and my everyday life. It all goes against the grain! We have thought of political stances as absolute, but Ellul shows again and again how, in the end, the right and the left have more in common than we ever suspected, so much so that they often become indistinguishable as ideologies. This observation seems especially relevant during a hard-fought election campaign, when I note how selectively we tend to judge what we hear, depending on whether it comes from "our side" or the "other

side." You would think that only one party or the other had any understanding of present circumstances, any contribution to make, or any intention of serving the public interest rather than selfish goals. Ellul has sharpened my listening and my judgment, but I have never felt inclined to abstain from voting, as he claimed to have done. On the contrary. I have learned through Ellul's recounting of his own experience how little power government officials can usually exercise, since technicians must make most of the decisions. But I still want to participate in choosing who exercises that limited power.

Ellul's relativism went very far indeed. He believed strongly that when we take up the cause of the oppressed, we need to understand that whenever the oppressed triumph (in a revolutionary situation, a war, etc.), they become the oppressors of those who previously oppressed them. If we really side with the oppressed because of their oppression, says Ellul, we will then change sides! Ellul saw this pattern play out when France emerged "on top" after World War II. Occupiers who had failed to escape quickly became scapegoats, regardless of what role they had played during the war. Ellul went to bat for simple German soldiers who stood to bear excessive punishment at a time when understandably strong feelings tended to overwhelm sound judgment, immediately after an oppressed people regained freedom and power. On a vastly different plane, I believe this principle can apply to winners and losers in politics, including university politics.

I have struggled most with Ellul's view of politics and the church. He believed that a proper understanding of the bonds that unite us as believers enables us to put our political differences into perspective, rather than to view each other as enemies when we espouse differing political and social views. In this community, the eternal beliefs and the life we have in common must take precedence over lesser beliefs, no matter how strongly held, Ellul maintained. In our present-day polarized society, I have found it nearly impossible to react calmly when believers I associate with use scathing words to put down my point of view and all people who espouse it, on the assumption that no true believer could possibly hold to such a stance. I have usually managed to hold my tongue, but not always! Then, in a few cases, I have found the strength to seek out the person whose words seemed so offensive, in order to try to talk about our differences. Usually this has turned into something extraordinarily difficult, but also, finally, unspeakably rewarding.

I don't know if I would have tried to follow Ellul in this matter if I had not become convinced that he had grasped a biblical teaching I had previously preferred to ignore. In any case, building a relationship on the basis of what we have in common rather than turning our backs on one another because of different points of view on lesser matters has far-reaching possibilities. Ellul pointed to the church as a place where we should find we can discuss important political and social differences without stigmatizing each other, since we can appreciate the relative character of such differences. This type of discussion can help us appreciate each others' points of view, and even occasionally encounter something in the other fellow's stance that strikes us as superior to our own.

Once this happens to us, we become almost useless as party stalwarts, according to Ellul. We will tend to temper strident statements, to take issue with extreme positions, and to point out the value in opposing viewpoints. None of this gets approval in political circles, Ellul says, but, if we speak carefully, we may serve to lower the level of anger and to blunt the spiral of misunderstandings. And politically monolithic folks may prefer to avoid our company!

In his commentary on the book of Exodus in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, vol. 1 [1994], p. 898), Walter Brueggemann comes to the same conclusion as Ellul about the importance of what unites us: "Worship can be an invitation and practice of an 'otherness' *beyond fearful utilitarianism*. Worship can be a place of overriding *belonging at home*, even in the face of our powerful and insistent homelessness. Worship can be a *post-rational embrace of oneness* in a world where we are so deeply and angrily divided."

Advert: Change of Address?

Desacralize & Act, Modestly

by Virginia Landgraf

Virginia Landgraf works for the American Theological Library Association in Chicago. She wrote her Ph.D. dissertation on Ellul at Princeton.

I confess a certain temperamental distaste for practical politics. I am more comfortable trying to live my life in a way that will benefit the community than trying to persuade others to choose leaders to enact the right policies. Yet as a teenager, I actively participated in a sacral universe of politics mediated by my family and structured by the Cold War. My family's party and the philosophies and ethos associated with it were "good guys"; the opposition, "bad guys." I covered up my introversion with exaggerated enthusiasm for my family's party and knee-jerk versions of certain philosophies.

After a crisis in my early twenties, for a while I could deal with politics only at a theoretical level. I took comfort in how serious Christian thinkers desacralized politics, neither absolutizing its claims nor denying its function. Political philosophies, when relativized by basic tenets of Christian theology (such as the universality of human

beings' creation in the image of God, fallenness, possible redemption, etc.) may be not absolute but complementary, depending on the needs of the political body. Should one put more emphasis on individual or community? Tradition or innovation? Harmony with nature as God created it or repair of fallen creation?

Yet I could not rest content with hypothetical neutrality as a complete expression of what Christians should want in the political realm. I had spent time in developing countries and with people who are marginally employable in a world which values speed and material success. Regardless of my conclusions about the effectiveness of particular political programs at helping the poor, I could see that the God of the Bible is concerned with liberating the oppressed, became incarnate as an ordinary laborer, and was crucified alongside common criminals.

Jacques Ellul's work entered into my deliberations as both support and challenge. He engaged opposing schools of thought as few thinkers dared. He provided more reasons to desacralize politics: the difficulty of finding accurate information about existing conditions or outcomes of policies; the difficulty politicians have in carrying through their programs, given the autonomy of technique; and the call of Christian freedom to go beyond the limited set of choices put forth by society. Although as an anarchist he refused to vote beyond local elections where he could personally know the candidates, in his environmental activities he engaged public policy in ways that went beyond an individualism or neutrality that throws up its hands at things supposedly beyond its control.

I have come to question Ellul's absolute disjunction between power/manipulation and love/freedom, both because of lacunae within Ellul's own work and the belief that the Bible has a more supple view of the nature of divine and human action. I find a refusal to vote in polities above a certain size overly rigid, because it rules out in advance the possibility that there may be significant differences between candidates. Thus I continue to vote and engage from time to time in other low-commitment activities commonly considered political, such as writing letters to representatives, signing petitions against torture, or attending antiwar rallies, more from the conviction that "someone ought to say something" than any belief in the purity or efficacy of either representative or direct democracy.

Perhaps the most high-commitment political thing I do - although some might not call it political - is avoiding car ownership, which I have done for over twenty years as an adult. (I would revise my decision if I were responsible for the care of an invalid or felt called to work in a sparsely populated area.) Although not without self-interest - it saves money and helps ensure that I will get exercise - the basic impetus behind this choice is the conviction that a transportation system based on "one adult, one car" is unwise, feeding a vicious circle of increasing traffic, consumerist desire, and environmental degradation. Public policy is one factor in this cycle. In that sense, limiting my car use is political. It helps me know whereof I speak when I write my representatives or talk to people about transportation alternatives. It provides a glimpse of what those who can't afford a car face in their daily lives. It is not the only choice a Christian

might make (especially given different family and vocational circumstances), nor is it some island of purity (we are all dependent on the transportation of supplies), but I do not regret having lived this portion of my life this way.

Teaching, Thinking, & Friendship

by David Lovekin

David Lovekin has been professor of philosophy at Hastings College in Nebraska for two decades—as well as an exhibited photographer, jazz bassist, and motorcycle guy. His Texas Ph.D. dissertation was revised and published as Technique, Discourse, & Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul *(1991).*

I read Ellul's *The Technological Society* in 1968 and have been occupied by this book ever since, by Ellul's vision and grace and by the disturbing accuracy of his prophecy, which is social criticism, true to the biblical tradition. However, his insights extended much further, concerned as I was (and still am) with a left wing interpretation of Hegel and with his great coconspirator Ernst Cassirer, the founder of a philosophy of culture. Cassirer believed that Hegel's dialectic did not go far enough, did not begin with knowledge grounded in myth and the imagination, and that knowledge seemed to stop with a domineering Absolute. Cassirer interpreted culture as a production of symbolic spirit (*Geist)* coming to know itself in what it made and always attempting a further reach, the philosophy of culture itself. Mind (*Geist)* could not leap over its own shadows, Cassirer concluded, but needed those shadows, nonetheless; Cassirer understood mind as a balance of opposition, necessary to the work of mind itself in its shadow dance.

Wilkinson, the translator of *L'enjeu du siecle,* allowed that the work reminded him of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind (Geist)* and thought that it was indeed a phenomenology of technical mind. Wilkinson also compared it to Plato's *Republic*, at which point I was thoroughly on board. I read Ellul as a philosopher of culture and saw technical consciousness in dialectical drift, pushed and pulled by the various objects it claimed for the real, objects that it had made, concepts made objective. Technology was another shadow show on the cave wall of human experience in its current evolution. Hegel reminded readers of the *Phenomenology* that society was a kind of spiritual zoo in need of transcendental spelunking and Ellul provided the shape of cage that was technique.

I was, in the early seventies, continuing my studies and teaching, playing jazz bass, and learning photography, learning the art of the machine and the lessons of improvisation. I was much against the Vietnam war but was never forced to put my political beliefs on the line. Instead, I came to care for teaching as the activity of leading students out from somewhere, a radical move understanding "radical" as a turn toward origins, to the "radix" of matters. I shunned the doctrinaire, agreeing with Ellul's belief

in elementary freedom, in the necessity of keeping necessity at bay. Technique had become the new necessity that needed to be recognized as such, recognized as provisional and as *made*. Few accounts are better than Ellul's in tracing the origins of technique as a radically new phenomenon.

I am still teaching, now at Hastings College, a Liberal Arts college committed to the base of Western tradition, to leading students through whatever we can still make of the *Trivium* and the *Quadrivium*. I argue that the liberal arts are the arts that make us free and interesting; I'm against turning knowledge into a machinelike rational pursuit of a means transformed into a method that scrapes for absolute efficiency in all things. The best things are often the things that are not done well but are done badly; a failed drawing or poem may lead to a greater success. Certainly, any Cartesian attempt at the clear and distinct–the base for technical consciousness in its turn toward the technical phenomenon–must be made out of the doubtful and ambiguous. This is Descartes' own path which he often conveniently ignores or denies in the detail of his *Discourse on Method.* Where would that method have gone without the over heated room in Germany that contributed to that fateful night of dreams, which took him to his goal of attempting to unite philosophy, religion, and science? When the question of ultimate objective meaning arises at the end of the "Second Meditation," Descartes goes to church and turns scholastic argument into a machine to prove the necessary working of God in his creation and in our understanding of it. He needs to be convinced that reason abides and that the Evil Genius has been defeated, or rather, has become an ally in furthering doubt to justify reason. In the *Discourse on Method*, he remarks of the need for using the *niveau de la raison*, well translated as the plumb line of reason. Descartes uses architectural metaphors throughout the *Discourse II*, although in this instance the metaphor attempts a concept. Technique has gone beyond the plumb line although it has roots there.

Ellul's critique of technical mind I read as a critique of rationality having become a bad infinity. He saw much biblical criticism as the transformation of the Bible into a machine. He reminded that the Bible was couched in an irony that dislodged human pride, hubris, certainly the deadliest of sins. He invoked the power of metaphor in his writing and reading of the past; he noted, for example, that in the technological society morality goes the way of the sunshade on McCormick's first reaper and that often attempts at freedom are but entries in technique's filing cabinet.

In my *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* I contend that Ellul's distinction between the image and the word has great epistemic force that reminds of the importance of tension between concepts and metaphors in a free understanding. The dialectic, the push and pull of consciousness, stops when communication and understanding are reduced to mere images, to a rigid logical necessity. I devote the last chapter on the cliche, the machine in its new suit, in attempt to further Ellul's critique. I noted, for example, that Thomas Kuhn's "paradigm shift" had become a cliche for academicians; the idea comes from *The Struc-*

ture of Scientific Revolution , published in 1962 but not much read until 1969 and after, likely because of the power of the word "revolution" at this cultural moment on American college campuses. In an appendix to the 1970 edition Kuhn allowed that he had used the term in twenty-two different ways that many of his readers missed in their attempts to clarify and conceptualize and hence trivialize the notion.

I teach *The Technological Society* nearly every year in my Contemporary Moral Issues class and marvel that it is still in print and that students can be engaged to read it. There may be signs that they are currently more engaged, but I hold my breath. Reality tv only makes sense when television becomes reality; many of my students claim they do not watch television although they admit that in their rooms it is usually on. Television has become just an other person, but a person with no insides.

More important, perhaps, is an increasing "vidiocy" as the "screen" proliferates–cell phone screens, game screens, etc. Also, more important may be the desire for increased visual stimulation with the decreasing signs of lack of judgment and the lack of analytic skills acquired by reading books and writing them or about them. Mark Bauerlein argues convincingly in *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future* that research data proves this decline and hastens the concerns that had been Ellul's from the late 1930's. He concludes that students under 30 lack the knowledge of history and cultural wisdom that make a true civility possible, and, moreover, lack the skills for attaining them. Worse, many do not realize that they are living in the dustbin of history.

One of my students found a copy of Harry G. Frankfurt's *On Bullshit* and found it most interesting. Frankfurt claims that much political discourse had become bullshit, an attitude grounded in utter unconcern for truth. Political claims are often made, he argues, simply to be believed. Thus, bullshit is not a lie; it is worse. It is utter disregard for truth or falsity. Its purpose is to unify belief and action. Ellul, of course, saw this years before in his understanding that *le politique* (ultimate values and concerns) had become *la politique* (technique, means and methods) and that the first illusion was in believing that politics was the supreme activity and then that all had become political. At that point the technical means become the ends and discourse disappears in the blather of sound bytes.

I mostly agree with Plato of the Republic who claimed that there were no just forms of government and that those who did not wish to govern should be the only ones so allowed. I have always avoided politics directly although each year I vote and make my voice heard on local and national issues. I was the president of our faculty senate for one term, and I believe contributed to some important decisions, but I have never felt the desire to further serve. As a teacher and thinker, both forms of committed action, I find fulfillment.

I agree also with Aristotle of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, who claimed that where there was friendship there was no need of justice but where there was justice there was need of friendship as well. Ellul too distrusted politics although he was engaged on many levels, but throughout his philosophical and political life he valued the friendship of Bernard

Charbonneau. Charbonneau, a teacher of geography, introduced him to the importance of technology as the decisive factor. The commitment to friends and loved ones is the force that flies in the face of the political; without that empathy the political is a shallow field. Friendship is the power that politics needs but cannot create or destroy. Ellul often remarked:"Think globally but act locally." This I regard as another affirmation of friendship. My entire academic life was never merely intellectual but dependent on many friends–Donald Phillip Verene, Steven L.Goldman, Max Buller, Carl Mitcham, Dudley Bailey, John O'Banion, W.R. Johnson–to name a few. My students past and present are a crucial part of the mix, and, my wife Terry, is my ground for good and common sense necessary for any intellect.

Plato sometimes referred to the members of his group as the "friends of the Forms", the philosophers. Cicero remarked in the *Tusculan Disputations* that Pythagoras coined the term "philosopher." Pythagoras explained that those who attended the Great Games at Olympia did so for three reasons. Some came for fame, some for money, and some to spectate. The spectators were philosophers. Cicero, further, in the *Disputations* urged that wisdom, the goal of philosophy, was the attempt to see into the divine and human and to discover the causes of each. The notions of the divine and human, the transcendent and the imminent, are two crucial dialectical poles that distinguish speculating and seeing from merely looking. There can be no search for answers if questions do not arise from spectators speculating. And actions issuing from ignorance are to be greatly feared, as Americans of 2008 should clearly understand.

I hope that Americans will take back their country from technical corporate interests, realize that corporations are not persons, and lean toward a true eloquence–the speech of the whole (*le pollitique*) and that politicians in their detest and inability with language come to be seen for what they are: cliches themselves, machines in not very new suits. I intend to support Obama and hope there is more there than "Yes, we can." Hopefully, to echo Gertrude Stein, there is much there there.

As the great Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico noted, providence enters history upside down giving moments their shape, their story, and the focus for speculation that is more than passive viewing. Philosophy, as Hegel's owl of Minerva, contributes to the business of the day by witnessing it and by reminding us all of the importance of both the dayside and the night side. All is not merely a stage but is also a topos for those making the stage, writing the discourse, selling and taking tickets. Ellul's vision of technique as a mentality and mode of being has been the proscenium arch from which I have framed my vision and understanding, which, in turn, supports my life in all directions, both in terms of what it is and what it is not. God does not speak to me but that is no reason not to listen and to know that God is not technique, although it is often so taken. Politicians still couch their visions of the good life in terms of technical development–alternative energy, green technology, and support of an infrastructure, and that is good as it goes. But none of these developments mean much without the friendship and love that move us beyond our Cartesian solipsism

buttressed by the adherence to method and to concepts made into objects which then become concepts.

Love and friendship involve the embrace of the other that is the nemesis of technique and the Cartesian clear and distinct. I attempt to live on the notion that philosophy is the love of the wisdom we desire but do not have and so struggle not to confuse love or friendship with desire or its objects. Ellul has been and is a guide in this struggle, a fulfilling labor with the negative that requires speculation and self development, the true goal of leisure, which is not simply the absence of work. My work stemming from that leisure is hunting and trapping in the spiritual zoo and attempting to clean the spiritual cage of technique, our current incarnation of the Augean stables. Unlike Hercules I expect no reward and know in the end that no king would give it. Speculation is its own reward, a seeing of the self seeing and witnessing the community of seers and doers in further witness.

Politics as Power over Others

by Didier Nordon

*Didier Nordon (*www.didiernordon.org*) served as professor of mathematics at the University of Bordeaux. A rich exchange of twelve letters between Nordon and Ellul during 1990-91 was published as* L'homme a lui-meme *(Paris:Editions du Felin, 1992)*

I came to Bordeaux in 1970. A mathematician, I intended to specialize in Number Theory and Bordeaux was a good place for that. By that time, I had never heard about Ellul. As soon as I settled in Bordeaux, I did hear about him. But I saw no reason why I should read his books. He was a Christian, I am not. He was a sociologist and a philosopher, I am not.

However, my activity as a mathematician went bad. I did not succeed in proving any interesting theorem. Moreover, I started wondering about the meaning and the value of such an attempt. Frantic specialization led my fellow mathematicians towards achievements. But each of them only mastered a tiny field. Specialization appeared to me as a poor way of thinking. I saw no meaning in writing papers which only a handful of specialists scattered all over the world would understand.

That was a time of dejection. And I started reading books which could enable me to consider the role scientists play in the shaping of our society. One of these books happened to be Jacques Ellul's *Le Systeme technicien.* The book does not deal with mathematics but it induced me to see scientific research as part of the more general technician system. And that was fantastic! I stopped feeling dominated by successful mathematicians. I started seeing them as mere cogs within the technician system. I was and still am very grateful to that book. It helped me to overcome my inferiority complex (not make it disappear, though!). My mathematical failure was no longer my own personal failure. It involved a political meaning. I could view it as a refusal to take

part in the technician system. Using Ellul's book, I then published papers to scrutinize the role of scientific research and to criticize it.

As Ellul's sociological work is based upon his religious faith, I was led to another question. How is it that I agree with most of Ellul's views on sociology though I don't share his faith? I started exchanging letters with Ellul dealing with that matter. Our letters eventually resulted in a book which was published in 1992 under the title *L 'Homme a lui-meme.*

Ellul helped me to choose the way I acted as a researcher. I stopped thinking about mathematical tricks and started thinking about social issues. Ellul thus shaped my professional behavior. In that respect, he has had a political influence on me.

He has had another one. His writings point out that one has to be very cautious when one reads a paper or listens to the radio, because propaganda lies everywhere, even in democratic countries. Ellul made me aware of that fact.

As for the question "To vote or not to vote", I feel uneasy. Like Ellul, I view elections as deceits. Still, I do vote quite often - 2 times out of 3, say. When a candidate seems too dangerous, I vote for the other one! But voting is an abdication. Whoever the elected candidate is, he/she will fail to keep his/her promises. I know that. I should not find myself constrained to express myself within the distorted frame of elections. I should be involved in some political or social action. But I am not! In my opinion, political action always amounts to an attempt to take some sort of power over other individuals. And I condemn any kind of power. As a result, I remain passive most of the time. That is why I vote, which I am not proud of.

Let me add a last remark. Not to vote is a necessary condition to be an anarchist, but it is not a sufficient one. All anarchists regard state as their worst enemy. So no one can be simultaneously an anarchist and a state servant. Ellul was a state servant (as I am). Thus he could not be a "real anarchist". Neither can I!

Affecting Culture, or Not

by T. Daniel Schotanus
Tjalling Daniel Schotanus is former senior university lecturer in water and geo-information management, now high school mathematics teacher and amateur theologian in Ede, the Netherlands

Recently, I thought I would be able to thwart a midlife crisis through the study of evangelical theology at the *Vrije Universiteit*, Amsterdam. It originally seemed less dangerous to me than taking up motorcycle riding, less tiring than spending my evenings at the local fitness center, less cumbersome than exchanging my wife for a younger (and possibly blonder) version, and more pragmatic than starting out on a potentially more fulfilling career.

Little did I suspect that ploughing through neatly organized rows of theological conventions, dogmas and other subtleties could be as exhilarating as riding a dirt bike through the bush. Thorny issues in abundance, treacherous heresies lurking as potholes beneath still waters, torrents of diverging opinions as a dry riverbed suddenly inundated by a theological storm. And clearly white elephants are nowhere near the brink of extinction. My evenings with the family were soon to be exchanged for long evenings with the books, occasionally boring, often tiring, but also surprisingly engaging. Evenings turned into nights with the wife being exchanged for Abraham Kuyper, Jacques Ellul and their subsequent stand-ins. Not very blond (mostly rather bald in fact), but otherwise quite colorful people who, as I might have expected, turned out to be not just unlikely, but rather contrary bedfellows. And yes, as a result in the end my career did suffer a significant change as well.

In the resulting thesis, I set out to demonstrate that as evangelical Christians we are unashamedly opportunistic about culture. Hardly anyone is able to distinguish our life and work from our non-Christian contemporaries. Our exuberant faith is often patently otherworldly. Our political involvement naive and self-serving under a cloak of sacrificial public service. For example, currently in the Netherlands we see that evangelicals, when they are politically active, tend to support a small party called the Christian Union (CU), a recent union of two earlier orthodox reformed/evangelical parties. (Recently, far removed from the daily political bustle, I was in fact invited to become a member of one of its advisory bodies on environmental sustainability). It has a somewhat green, left of center orientation, but also a demonstrably neo-calvinist agenda. Given the intricacies of Dutch coalition politics, it is since 2006 member of the Dutch government, together with the larger (and more nominal) Christian Democrat Alliance (CDA) and the secular Labor party (PvdA). As an interesting sideline, the realization that all three coalition leaders studied at the *Vrije Universiteit* inspired somewhat of a media-hype concerning a possible return of neo-calvinist (Kuyperian) politics.

Unfortunately Dutch evangelicals are rather naive about the neo-calvinist concept of culture. The so-called 'cultural mandate' can be traced back to the former Dutch statesman and theologian Abraham Kuyper. A century and a half ago he appreciated the modern pursuit and promise of progress by his liberal and secular contemporaries and bemoaned their rejection of the relevance of traditional biblical truths for contemporary culture. At the same time he struggled to overcome the unwillingness of the majority of orthodox Christians to participate in the political process.

Kuyper, Bavinck, Schilder, as reformed theologians, and Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven and Schuurman, as reformed philosophers, consider cultural development through the sciences, technology and politics a clear mandate based on the Genesis record. Comparably in the USA, the reformed Al Wolters (*Creation Regained*) insists that the cultural mandate is no less than the divinely instituted human complement to creation, while the evangelical Chuck Colson speaks of the cultural commission as the inseparable twin of the great commission.

In a few lesser known publications, Jacques Ellul attacks this interpretation (which he considers theologically liberal rather than orthodox) head on. See for example, "The Relationship Between Man and Creation in the Bible" (*Foi et Vie* 73, 1974, nos. 5-6) and "Technique and the Opening Chapters of Genesis" (*Foi et Vie* 59, 1960, no. 2), both reprinted in Mitcham, Carl and Jim Grote, eds., *Theology and Technology: Essays in Christian Analysis and Exegesis* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984). See also Ellul's *La Genese Aujourd'hui* (Toulouse: AREFPPI, 1987).

Ellul specifically argues, based on the Genesis record, and very much in line with his more commonly known publications, against the possibility of such a positive interpretation of culture. Culture is, of necessity, a consequence of the fall, which Ellul does not like to call *le chute* (the fall), but *la rupture*, the break with God. Culture is a mandate yes, for survival as a consequence of the rupture, but not to be confused with the divine purpose for liberation and reunion. (See also Andrew Goddard's book/PhD thesis on Ellul *Living the Word, Resisting the World*). As we know, Ellul posits his alternative with a typically dialectical approach to the unfortunate necessity of being immersed in culture, complementing it with liberation by prophetic and paradoxical engagement with and disengagement from culture.

So where does this leave me?

The three *Vrije Universiteit* theologians who assessed my thesis considered Ellul's Genesis exegesis far too speculative for reformed comfort and proceeded to bash me on my evangelical reading of Kuyper and consorts. This was probably to be expected (it was Kuyper who founded the *Vrije Universiteit*, while Bavinck, Vollenhoven, Dooyeweerd and Schuurman were all professors there; Wolters did his PhD there), but what struck me dumb was that they willfully ignored my proposed naive-radical-theological-political-pacifist-non-withdrawing-evangelical alternative to the cultural mandate based on Yoder, Hauerwas, and a bit of Milbank. Consequently, I am now struggling with the question whether it is too much of a cultural compromise to accept the Master of Theology degree they want to award me with (but then again, Ellul did accept an honorary doctorate from the *Vrije Universiteit*).

At least I am back in bed with my wife at night.

Libertarian with Soul & Conscience

by Lawrence Terlizzese

Lawrence Terlizzese's recent book Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul (2005) *was reviewed in the Spring 2008 issue of the* Ellul Forum.

Ellul has revolutionized my approach to politics. Prior to studying Ellul I voted Republican like most of my conservative and Christian friends. I thought this party best embodied a Christian view of politics on the basis of its cultural conservatism such

as prolife, lower taxes and individual responsibility as opposed to the welfare state of the Democratic Party.

But since my encounter with Ellul I have come to realize that Republicans largely only differ in rhetoric from Democrats. When they talk about freedom it is only economic freedom they mean and this means freedom only for the rich and freedom for the corporations, not personal freedoms for the individual. Therefore it is an elitist freedom. There is absolutely nothing Christian about their beliefs or political agendas. It is the love of money that drives the so-called "conservatives."

This is no glib interpretation from a disillusioned theologian. One needs only talk with conservatives, listen to their radio talk shows, spend time with them and watch them in church, especially in church, to realize that conservatives are about pursuing the American Dream rooted in avarice and greed. This hypocrisy seriously disaffected me from the political process since I could not possibly vote for a Democrat.

But Ellul has helped me to understand that Christians can have a profound influence on the world through by passing the political process altogether. In fact, this may be the only way we can impact the world. Even to get involved in the mechanism of the state necessarily causes us to compromise our convictions. I still hold to all my conservative beliefs but try to realize them differently through caring for the individual, valuing his or her individuality, avoiding political solutions, steering students to prayer and opposition to state control and involvement regardless of what party is in power. I stress the importance of rights and freedoms.

Ellul has made me more a Libertarian than a Republican. But not an American Libertarian such as is found in the Libertarian Party or in Ayn Rand's Objectivism since this type of libertarian has no soul, no social conscience. It cares only for itself. In stead I am a Christian Libertarian or Anarchist. Christian Anarchism that Ellul advocated embraced the Libertarian value for the individual but did not neglect social conscientiousness. It is individualism, but not selfishness, care for the greater whole, for others and the ecology are just as important as individual freedom. I attribute my newfound political philosophy directly to Jacques Ellul.

Moderation amidst Polarization

by Daryl Wennemann

Daryl Wennemann is professor of philosophy at Fontbonne University in St. Louis. He has written extensively on business and professional ethics.

As I reflect on the political culture in America at the beginning of the 21st century, what I find to be its most striking feature is the astounding irrationality that pervades the entire process. We have seen appeals to racism, xenophobia, homophobia, jingoism, and simple character assassination. A striking example of this is the way the Bush team attacked John McCain in the 2000 election by pointing to the fact that he has a non-

white daughter. Of course, he and his wife adopted a little girl from Bangladesh. But republican operatives used a very ugly attack in South Carolina playing the race card against George Bush's republican rival by suggesting that *McCain* had fathered a black child out of wedlock. Practical politics seems to me to be a very dirty business indeed.

Of course, the power of these tactics is magnified by the use of mass media. One thing we have seen clearly during the administration of George W. Bush is how the public can be manipulated, especially in a time of crisis. There is so much disinformation in the electronic environment that it is difficult to know what the reality is. But the electronic medium is itself a highly rationalized method of communication. So, there is a contradiction between the media that are highly rationalized and the content of the messages conveyed through the media which tend to be highly irrational.

It is also true, in my view, that irrational factors are not always problematic simply as irrational. Charisma is still an important element of our political culture and is not necessarily a bad thing. Although, I am a little disturbed that the charisma of Barack Obama has been translated into a sort of rock star fame.

With all of this, and much more, that suggests Jacques Ellul certainly gave an accurate account of modern politics as being thoroughly illusory, I find it difficult to ignore political developments. With me it almost rises to the point of being an obsession. Perhaps that is part of the political illusion.

Still, it seems to me it does make a concrete difference in peoples' lives as to who governs. Molly Ivins pointed out that some people would die during a Bush administration that otherwise would not. At a minimum, it seems to me that despite the grave reservations I have about mass movements and mass media, without touching on the general cultural problem of technique, I have the sense that there is a demand that we try to carry out a sort of rear guard action in our political efforts to prevent the extremes on the political spectrum taking power. To borrow a phrase, Je maintiendrai, I will maintain. The point of my meager political involvement in voting and some small efforts at supporting various candidates is to try to maintain a certain balance in the political culture. I would like to know where the moderates are in our political culture. It seems that the media tend to polarize the electorate, emphasizing the differences between the extremes and moving people with hot button issues when what is needed is moderation in the application of state power.

While I do not share Ellul's penchant for anarchism, which seems to have been a strategic alliance, my own communitarian outlook is quite compatible with the concern Ellul had to develop a counterweight to the modern state in what Robert Nisbet thought of as intermediate social groups that could stand as a buffer between the individual and the state (See Robert Nisbet, *The Quest for Community*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1977). That is why I am trying to promote an old idea in my business ethics course that Peter Drucker developed many years ago, the plant community. I think that it is now possible to bring about a democratization of the workplace along the lines of the plant community, whereas Drucker could not, because now we have an information economy which requires such a community setting to

687

promote the innovation possible in an information economy (I have developed this idea in *Free-Market Capitalism with a Soul: Capitalism and* Community in the Information Age, St. Louis, Parma House, 2006).

The American democratic political process has become technicized. The money of special interests has inordinate influence. Ideologues have recently thrown the country off course. And yet, the country tends to right itself slowly over time. The Supreme Court opposed Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus. The Japanese Americans that were detained during the Second World War received an apology and some compensation from the government. The Bush administration's policies regarding the right to legal representation of illegal combatants was rebuffed in the courts. Matters that would be buried in many other countries often come to light in time, like the truth about friendly fire killings in Iraq (See 'Friendly Fire' Cover-up, by Marjorie Cohn, Alternet.Posted June 22, 2006, at

http://www.alternet.org/waroniraq/37989/).

And there are times when we see political courage as when Hubert Humphrey convinced the Democratic Party to promote civil rights in the 1948 platform. Now we have the first black presidential candidate of a major party and a woman running in the vice president's slot of the opposing party. I see slow uneven progress in the country. I suppose that is why I cannot just give up on the political process.

Live, Talk, Work, Play

by Bryan Winters
Bryan Winters is one of a dozen or so IJES members "down under" in Australia and New Zealand

This is an interesting exercise for me. I look forward to the *Ellul Forum* when it appears, at the same time knowing I am the sole subscriber in these far flung islands of New Zealand, in the balmy Pacific Ocean, far away from anything of political importance. I live in a sport mad country, littered with beautiful beaches, a minority displaced native people who are being given their land back, and where the major TV channel runs stories on pets for lack of other news.

Do I live in an unusual country? Out of the 238 available, I guess at least 180 are similar. Small populations, small businesses, a handful of universities at most (don't be tempted to add "small minds"). So perhaps the bigger news creating nations are actually the oddity. How can the works of a Professor grappling with emerging social trends affect my practical politics? Especially one that wrote *The Political Illusion.* To put it into a perspective that would gel with my countrymen, that's something to ponder on as I paddle out to my surf break.

But it is my country. Despite its appearing to be a gigantic movie set to the rest of the world, (oh yes, it was the Lord of the Rings films that doubled our tourist trade),

I am familiar with it. I know its roads, its lakes, its humour and its lack of history. My friends, in the main, are not writers, or academics. They are business people, sporting enthusiasts and church or non church going Christians. I talk about how the writings of this obscure French writer have influenced my thinking - but not my practical politics.

I started reading Ellul when I was 22. Mixed with our propensity to travel, and a love of surfing, at an early age I wanted to experience the world, the world as it was available to me. I loved Ellul's opportunity to be involved in the resistance movement, and his start at rebuilding Bordeaux, but those weren't my chances. Mine were getting beyond our idyllic shores, and mixing with mankind elsewhere, in what we, from our seemingly benign islands, term the real world. So my life became quite existential, seeking the experience, not the wealth, or the career, or the power.

In my thirties, I read *Reason for Being,* quickly followed by Milan Kunderas's *The unbearable lightness of being,* that Ellul refers to. This crystallized, intellectually, for me, the reality of the lived life, rather than the purpose driven one. After living through various overseas and local conditions of poverty e.g. missionary West Africa, then wealth e.g. expatriate Singapore, we returned to New Zealand. My life thereafter was taken apart, and most of the power, wealth and influence removed. This crystallized, internally this time for me, the reality of the lived life, of having and losing, of starting to look at Kiplings success and failure, and treating those two imposters just the same.

So on the one hand, I could say there has been little affect on my politics, living in a basically two party state that celebrates in small differences. The same billboard humour, affectation with native and green causes, promises to look after the increasing aged, and attendance at football games, is practiced by both.

But that is not the question. The question was practical politics, and this is where Ellul gels with me. I realize I love being both a participant, yet an observer of life. To catch a glimmer of what is coming, to see around the corner without embracing cynicism. To accept that life is uncertain, and strong men will rule over us with the agenda they must have, while living now, today, experiencing the trials of family, work, and finance.

My practical politics in this country, in the life I have been given, is the freedom to engage in what we term D & Ms (deep and meaningful conversations) in church, non church, and coffee shop settings. It is the choice to live outside the three boxes of life, to give up careers and show my children Europe even though we couldn't really afford it. Practical politics for me is how I will live, and talk, and work, and play in the environment I have been placed in. A young friend talks about success, and I tell him for me it will still be riding a short board when I turn 60. Yet strangely, or perhaps not so strangely, despite being the least wealthy of my peer group, and I admit this realizing it could be misunderstood, people reflect that I lead an interesting enviable life.

My practical politics has little to do with debate in the political arena. Indeed I am sure I will vote in this election year, but I don't yet know who for. Instead my practical

politics has been my welcoming of who I am, a relationship that in my opinion must parallel any claim to knowing the Almighty.

I like to think this hard to read Frenchman would appreciate that an ordinary westerner can live, seemingly carelessly, observing, but not heeding the illusory calls to power, wealth and influence that surround us all.

After all, he did live near some of the best surfing beaches in the world.

Advert: Make Payments to IJES Electronically?

Book Notes & Reviews

Secularization & Cultural Criticism: Religion, Nation, & Modernity

University of Chicago Press, 2006. 208 pp.
Vincent Pecora
Reviewed by Don Surrency
University of South Florida, Tampa

Vincent Pecora's *Secularization and Cultural Criticism* is the latest work published in the University of Chicago Press' *Religion and Postmodernism* series. It provides readers with an insightful analysis of how the "paradoxes and ambivalences" of secularization should be treated as an "intractable problem for culture and cultural criticism." It is not imperative for readers to be well-versed in the available literature because Pecora offers a satisfactory review of literature on secularization and postmodern theory—although it leans towards philosophical literature and away from sociological work. However, the text is certainly intended for scholars because it is permeated with jargon that would leave the average reader mystified.

Pecora clearly states that his objective is to trace out the dialectic character of secularization, its "overcoming but also [its] distortion and reemergence of received religious concepts and patterns of thought," in the introduction. Pecora argues that there is a deeper, more substantial link between Western intellectuals who value the "semantic resonances" of religious thought, such as Jurgen Habermas, and the oppositional perspectives of various other intellectuals, such as Talal Asad. To support this argument, Pecora reviews many thinkers including, but not limited to: Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, Alasdair MacIntyre, Matthew Arnold, Siegried Kracauer, and Emile Durkheim to demonstrate that, despite the vast differences in theories, all of these theorists have a "semantic resonance" of religion in their writings, despite their commitment to secular ideals.

It should come as no surprise, being that Pecora is a Professor of British Literature and Culture, that he chose the illustrious Virginia Woolf as the prime example of this *verwindung*, the term Pecora borrowed from Heidegger to describe the dialectic character of secularization. Pecora illustrates that while Woolf's literature was often hostile and satirical in its presentation of religion, many ideals reminiscent of those found in the Evangelical Christianity in Woolf's family heritage were present, albeit in secular versions, throughout her work. Pecora finds it compelling that despite Woolf's

well-known membership in the Bloomsbury Set, an overtly secular group of intellectual humanists, she still could not shake the religious resonance that shaped both her family history and Britain on the whole. He writes that Woolf's novels are an example of how "religious thought and practice are inextricably embedded in the secular social and literary forms that would transcend them."

While Pecora's line of reasoning is certainly provocative, one could argue that this *verwindung* that is indicative of secularization could be interpreted in another way. In fact, it appears Jacques Ellul may have postulated this himself. Rather than there being a mere "semantic resonance" of religion, as Pecora asserts, perhaps, as Ellul writes in *New Demons*, the sacred "is proliferating around us." Because of this understanding, Ellul does not view society as secular, as Pecora does; rather, he finds it to be profoundly sacred. Furthermore, by providing specific forms and functions of the sacred, Ellul establishes an important groundwork for analyzing seemingly secular phenomena using religious categories.

If one understands the postmodern culture as being cosmological, and not transcendental, as it was since the 4th century CE when Christianity became the dominant religion of the Roman Empire, one could deduce that rather than the secular containing religious resonance, what is being labeled secular, actually is religious. Just as there was no institutional differentiation of religion from the rest of society in cosmological cultures, if postmodern society is viewed as cosmological, what Pecora terms "religious resonance" actually may not be resonance at all; it may be indeed be religious. Thus, rather than redefining secularization to accommodate for the apparent resonance of religion in postmodernity, one could conclude that the secularization thesis may not accurately apply to postmodern culture as it did to modernity.

Despite Pecora's failure to address interpretations of the secularization thesis that employ understandings of 'implicit' religion, this work is still a tremendous addition to the field of religious studies and cultural criticism. It provides a remarkable review of literature, and offers an astute argument. Pecora's observations of the relationship between secularization, religion, culture, and cultural criticism are clever and beneficial for anyone interested in socio-cultural analysis, especially those interested in Ellul's scholarship. Ellul's understanding of the sacred provides the necessary groundwork for studying cultural phenomena as functional equivalents to religion; however, his work on secularization may not be quite as helpful as Pecora's. While Ellul is another example of a dismissive critic of secularization, Pecora provides a middle ground between the proponents and critics.

Ted Lewis, editor

Electing Not to Vote: Christian Reflections on Reasons for Not Voting

Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008.
Reviewed by David W. Gill
St. Mary's College, Moraga CA

Ted Lewis is acquisitions editor for Wipf & Stock Publishers in Eugene, Oregon (and incidentally, the main driver of our IJES dream project to bring Ellul's books back into print). He is also an attorney and the leader of a conciliation service. Lewis argues that Christians (and for that matter, all citizens) ought to reflect on the nature, meaning, and impact of participating in voting and electoral politics (the focus is on the USA).

Lewis acknowledges that there are no simple or easy answers to the questions about voting. And he acknowledges that many have fought, suffered, and even died for the right to vote —so it is not something to be rejected or neglected out of laziness, irresponsibility, or for light reasons.

Lewis and his other eight contributors all urge a faithful political presence —it's just that voting may not be the best way of such presence, for a Christian at any rate. Of course the authors must want to convince their readers. But editor Lewis is surely right in saying that these perspectives ought at least to be seriously discussed by a much broader audience.

Goshen College history professor, John Roth, offers five possible reasons for Mennonite Christians not to vote: (1) as pacifists, how can they support any military commander in chief, (2) political party platforms and leaders conflict with core Christian values—party differences are illusory, (3) Christians are called to a prophetic and servant stance, not to reinforce the apparatus of the state (cf. the Constantinian fall of the church), (4) the individualism of voting violates the communal orientation of the faith, and (5) not voting can have a symbolic value - especially when accompanied by vigorous action to help the poor, suffering, et al.

Like Roth, Andy Alexis-Baker is most certainly not calling for passivity. He and his Ellul-inspired "Jesus Radicals" anarchists put most others to shame with their sacrificial efforts to help the hurting, illuminate the darkness, etc.. But Alexis-Baker asks "what is there to vote for?" Drawing on the work of John Howard Yoder, Alexis-Baker argues that voting is often enough a ritual confession of the state-as-savior that substitutes for real authentic protest and activism. Getting people involved in campaigns and voting deflects people from more effective activism and simply chooses which elite will rule over the people.

Nekeisha Alexis-Baker acknowledges that as a black, immigrant, woman her choice not to vote may puzzle or offend other blacks, immigrants, and women to whom the franchise was long denied. But she argues that ballots confine the expression of conviction, values, and choices. She provides a great argument that the civil rights movement

outside of electoral politics had a much greater impact on American life than what was achieved through voting and elections.

G. Scott Becker's chapter on Karl Barth explores some rather esoteric theological terrain for those interested. Michael Degan reflects on how the electoral process brought out the worst in him, violates basic biblical teaching about citizenship in the kingdom of God, and is corrupted by money and power. His discussion of how political districting serves those in power is insightful.

Notre Dame theology and ethics professor Todd David Whitmore argues that "the lesser evil is not good enough" as he carefully evaluates George Bush and John Kerry on matters of the Iraq war, tax policy, and abortion. Pentecostal professor and pastor Paul Alexander urges his community to reject the nationalism and militarism of typical politics and behave as a transnational, alternative people of God. House church pastor Tato Sumantri makes a similar case for Christian investment in kingdom of God identity and recalls his disappointment with Jimmy Carter. Ted Lewis closes with a thoughtful argument for the "presidentialdom" of God, discussing his own migration from voter to non-voter, imagining how Jesus might have responded to the opportunity to vote way back then, and challenging Christians to replace voting with active, faithful, sacrificial responses to the social and political challenges so imperfectly and ineffectively addressed by electoral politics.

These are excellent, thought-provoking essays, especially for thoughtful Christians eager to "do something" and prone to electoral hype. Personally, I am sympathetic but not convinced. While I totally agree with the kingdom of God political identity themes (1) I hear our king calling us to "salt" the earth, not remake it or wait for it to be perfect; I see my voting as one aspect of modestly salting my world the best I can, but I have no illusions that this is as important as the alternative community activism I do in my urban neighborhod, etc.; (2) Christians are "ambassadors" from that other kingdom to their earthly nation of residence; if our earthly nation offers us the electoral franchise and invites us to vote—as it has—I think I'll go ahead and try to do some salting; (3) while many of the electoral choices we have are pretty pathetic, and there is no "salvation" from any candidate, and my pathetic little vote may not count for much, I simply don't believe that it was inconsequential for Bush to take the election from Gore in 2000; nor is the choice between McCain/Palin and Obama/Biden inconsequential for the world and the church.

Ellul on Politics

The idea that the citizen should control the state rests on the assumption that, within the state, parliament effectively directs the political body, the administrative organs, and the technicians. But this is pure illusion. . . A modern state is *not* primarily a centralized organ of decision, a set of political organs. It is primarily an enormous

machinery of bureaus. It is composed of two contradictory elements—on the one hand, political personnel, assemblies, and councils, and, on the other, administrative personnel in the bureaus—whose distinction, incidentally, is becoming less and less clear.

The Political Illusion (1965; ET 1967), pp. 138-41.

I have long affirmed the anarchist position as the only acceptable stance in the modern world. This in no way means that I believe in the possibility of the realization and existence of an anarchist society. All my position means is that the present center of conflict is the state, so that we must adopt a radical position with respect to this unfeeling monster.

Jesus and Marx (1979; ET 1988), p. 156n.

Christians allow themselves to be taken in by the prevailing vogue. They see everybody expressing their own ideas, so why shouldn't they do the same? That's all right, as far as I am concerned, only let them be less pretentious about it, less authoritative, less inclined to expect everyone to follow in their wake. And let them not claim to be representing Jesus Christ! . . .

[I]ncompetence, evident in writings and proclamations, is even more apparent in encounters with the Christian who is actively involved in a party or union. His beginner's training is usually very deficient, both from the point of view of biblical theology and from the point of view of politics and economics. But once he is involved the situation becomes worse, for participation in politics is very fascinating and absorbing.

False Presence of the Kingdom (1963; ET 1972), pp. 155-7.

Naturally it is better to run a city well than badly. If a Christian has a hand in this and is a good administrator, that is all to the good. But any person can be a good administrator. Being a Christian is no absolute guarantee that one will be a better politician or administrator. Seeking the good of a city is not a specifically Christian thing

Christians are needed in all parties and movements. All opinions should have Christian representatives. . . If . . . Christians take up different positions knowing that these are only human, and having it as their primary goal to bear witness to Jesus Christ wherever they are, their splitting up into various movements, far from manifesting the incompetence of Christian thought or the inconsistency of faith, will be a striking expression of Christian freedom.

Ethics of Freedom (1973; ET 1976), p. 379.

News & Notes

—Walt Reiner (1923 - 2006)

On December 6, 2006, one of the greatest Jacques Ellul students and promoters in North America died, just three weeks before what would have been his 83$^{\text{rd}}$ birthday. Walt Reiner may be best known for his accomplishments as a courageous member of the US Navy in the Normandy invasion —or as football coach at Valparaiso University

in Indiana —or as a beloved community activist fighting for health care, housing, education, and building community in Chicago as well as Valparaiso —or as a faithful, prophetic presence in the Lutheran Church.

Many of us in the IJES, however, knew him as the passionate, enthusiastic guy at our meetings who *loved* the writings and ideas of Jacques Ellul. It was always a joy and inspiration to be around Walt and we mourn his passing as we send our condolences to his wife Lois and the whole Reiner family.

Advert: Call for Papers

International Association for Science, Technology & Society 24th Annual Meeting, April 2 to 4, 2009

RIT Inn and Conference Center, Rochester, NY

Paper proposals are invited on: Jacques Ellul - A Retrospective. This will be a major subtheme at the 24th Annual Meeting of IASTS, to be co-chaired by Richard Stivers and Willem Vanderburg.

Paper proposals of no more than 450 words should describe the subject matter in sufficient detail for referees to make an informed decision. Please send these proposals as rich-text files to Prof Pamela Mack: pammack@clemson.edu.

Please indicate IASTS in your subject line. We encourage early submissions, and will provide notice of acceptance, acceptance with suggested modifications, or rejection, within one month. The last date for receiving proposals is December 1, 2008. Papers may also be submitted to the *Bulletin of Science, Technology and Society* for possible inclusion in a special conference issue or a regular issue. For instructions to authors, see http://bst.sagepub.com/. For general information about IASTS, see www.iasts.org.

Advert: International Jacques Ellul Society

www.ellul.org

P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705, USA

The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

Membership

Anyone who supports the objectives of the IJES is invited to join the society for an annual dues payment of US$20.00. Membership includes a subscription to the Ellul Forum.

Board of Directors

Mark Baker, *Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno;* Patrick Chastenet, *University of Poitiers;* Clifford Christians*, University of Illinois;* Dell DeChant, *University of South Florida;* Andrew Goddard, *Oxford University*; Darrell Fasching (Vice-President), *University of South Florida;* David Gill (President), *Berkeley;* Joyce Hanks, *University of Scranton;* Virginia Landgraf, *American Theological Library Association, Chicago*, Randall Marlin, *Carlton University, Ottawa*, Ken Morris (Secretary-Treasurer), *Boulder;* Carl Mitcham, *Colorado School of Mines*; Langdon Winner, *Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.*

Resources for Ellul Studies

www.ellul.org & www.jacques-ellul.org The IJES web site at www.ellul.org contains (1) news about IJES activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, (4) a complete index of the contents of all *Ellul Forum* back issues; and (5) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The French AIJE web site at www.jacques-ellul.org is also a superb resource.

The Ellul Forum CD: 1988-2002

The first thirty issues of *The Ellul Forum*, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for US $15 (postage included). Send payment with your order to "IJES," P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

Back issues #31 - #41 of *The Ellul Forum* are available for $5 each (postage and shipping included).

Cahiers Jacques Ellul

Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne

An essential annual journal for students of Ellul is *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, edited by Patrick Chastenet, published by Editions L'Esprit du Temps, and distributed by Presses Universitaires de France Send orders to Editions L'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Postage and shipping is 5 euros for the first volume ordered; add 2 euros for each additional volume ordered.

Volume 1: "L'Annees personnalistes" (15 euros)

Volume 2: "La Technique" (15 euros)

Volume 3: "L'Economie" (21 euros).

Volume 4 (forthcoming): "La Propagande" (21 euros).

Volume 5: "La Politique" (21 euros)

Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. $87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit www.elsevier.com for ordering information.

Librairie Mollat—new books in French

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux (www.mollat.com) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

Alibris—used books in English

The Alibris web site (www.alibris.com) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

Used books in French:

two web resources

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are www.chapitre.com and www.livre-rare-book.com.

Reprints of Nine Ellul Books

By arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of several Ellul books originally published by William B. Eerdmans can now be purchased. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: *The Ethics of Freedom* ($40), *The Humiliation of the Word* ($26), *The Judgment of Jonah* ($13), *The Meaning of the City* ($20), *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* ($19), *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* ($28), *The Subversion of Christianity* ($20), and *The Technological Bluff* ($35). *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul* translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

Have your bookstore (or on-line book dealer) "back order" the titles you want. Do not go as an individual customer to Eerdmans or Ingram/Spring Arbor. For more information visit "Books on Demand" at www.eerdmans.com.

Ellul on Video

French film maker Serge Steyer's film "Jacques Ellul: L'homme entier" (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site www.meromedia.com. Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul's ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.

Issue #43 Spring 2009 — Ellul in Scandinavia

- Click to view the original PDF

International Jacques Ellul Society

Berkeley, California, USA www.ellul.org

"Our hope lies in starting from the individual—from total subjectivity. . . This radical subjectivity will inform . . . the three human passions... to create, to love, to play. But these mighty drives of the human heart must find a particular expression in each person . . . in the building of a new daily life. . . Kierkegaard, it seems to me, alone can show us how to start. "

-Jacques Ellul

"Between Chaos and Paralysis,"

Christian Century 85 (3 June 1968), p. 749

Contents

Erik Pearson

The Survival of Culture

Monica Papazu

Information on The Editorial Board & More

The Ellul Forum
For the Critique of Technological Civilization
Founded 1988
The Ellul Forum is published twice per year, in the Spring and Fall. Its purpose is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.
Editor
Clifford G. Christians, Univ. of Illinois, Urbana Associate Editor
David W. Gill, Berkeley, California
Contributing Editors
Patrick Chastenet, University of Poitiers, France Dan Clendenin, Stanford, California

Peter F. W. Davies, Buckinghamshire College, UK Marva Dawn, Vancouver, Washington

Darrell J. Fasching, University of South Florida Andrew Goddard, Oxford University, UK Joyce Hanks, Univ. of Scranton, Pennsylvania David Lovekin, Hastings College, Nebraska Carl Mitcham, Colorado School of Mines Pieter Tijmes, University of Twente, Netherlands Gabriel Vahanian, Strasbourg University, France Willem Vanderburg, Univ. of Toronto, Canada
Publisher
The International Jacques Ellul Society www.ellul.org Tel: 510-653-3334
P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA

Dues, Subscriptions, & Payment Options The Ellul Forum is sent twice per year to all members of the IJES. An annual membership/ subscription, anywhere in the world, costs US $20. Please send check or money order (e.g., international postal money order) drawn in US funds for $20 to "IJES", P.O.Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA—or make payment to "IJES@ellul.org" electronically at www.paypal.com. Be sure to note your address and the purpose of your payment.
Change of Address

Please notify IJES of any change in your address. Our mailings are infrequent and postal forwarding orders expire.

Manuscript Submissions

For Ellul Forum writers' guidelines, visit www.ellul.org—or e-mail: Editor@ellul.org— or write Cliff Christians, EF Editor, Institute of Communications Research, University of Illinois, 810 S. Wright St., # 228, Urbana IL 61801 USA We welcome your proposals.

Books, Reviews, News

Send books for review, book reviews, and news to David Gill, EF Assoc. Editor, P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705. E-mail: IJES@ellul.org

Back Issues

Visit www.ellul.org for a complete index of back issues. Issues #1-30 are available (only) as a complete collection on a compact disc for US $15. Issues #31 onward are available for $5 per copy.

© 2009 International Jacques Ellul Society Contact IJES for permission to copy EF material.

Editorial

Our front cover quotation reminds us of how important the Danish philosopher S0ren Kierkegaard was to Jacques Ellul. This issue introduces recent work on Ellul in Scandinavia. Two active Ellul scholars are featured—Erik Persson of Lund University (Sweden) and Monica Papazu of the Loegum Kloster Theological Institute (Denmark). They give an account of Ellul's books translated into Swedish and Danish. Christian Braw is a well-known Swedish author with an interest in Ellul and one of his essays is included. Ellul is an active presence in Scandinavia as the Nordic countries deal with technological innovation, globalization and political change. As additional scholarship on Ellul in Scandinavia becomes available, the *Forum* will introduce that information to our readers.

Previous issues of the *Forum* have been geography-specific. Ellul scholarship in Latin America was featured in Issue #40. Ivan Illich called Ellul "a master who decisively affected my pilgrimage" and we went with Illich from Mexico to Germany in Issue #31. Issue #30 featured Myung Su Yang's book-length work on Ellul published in Korean.

Ellul's influence in England, the United States and Canada is well-documented. The *Forum* has included articles from the Netherlands and New Zealand. Joyce Hanks' *Reception of Jacques Ellul's Critique of Technology* shows the global reach of Ellul studies. But *Forum* issues such as this one featuring Scandinavia, enable those of us interested in Ellul to learn from each other, both in theory and application.

Virginia Landgraf, Board of Directors, International Jacques Ellul Society, is editing an issue of the *Forum* on economics/economic ideologies. She welcomes your ideas and contributions [kaencat@sbcglobal.net]. Manuscripts you wish to have considered

on any Ellul-related topics are invited by the editor. Material for "News and Notes," "Ellul Resources" and queries about book reviews should be sent to David Gill.

The Ellul Forum and the International Jacques Ellul Society are all-volunteer activities, funded entirely by membership dues and small donations. We appreciate your solidarity and support.

Clifford G. Christians, Editor editor@ellul.org

Cybergnosticism Triumphant?

Towards an Ellulian Analysis of Cyberspace and Cybergaming
by Erik Persson

Professor Erik Persson is a faculty member in the Department of Informatics, Lund University, Sweden. His Ph.D. is in Computer Science.

Abstract. In order to penetrate behind the commonplace views of the current attempts to bring to fruition the vision of cyberspace, i.e. a shared, computer-generated, internet-based 3-D "virtual world," and to arrive at a proper understanding of the driving forces behind the ongoing cyberspace revolution, its historical, ideohistorical, and mythistorical roots as well as the motive backgrounds of the key personages involved in bringing it about must be explored. In particular, the question as to how "worldviews" and various extra-scientific motivations and pursuits, such as gnostic-utopian ideas and schemes - possibly disseminated through, for example, science fiction literature and films - impinge on and direct research and development in and about these topics and how they relate to the neglected ethical issues of the field needs to be attended to. In order to put the ongoing cyberspace revolution into some kind of macrohistorical context, we may take our cue from, inter alia, Marshall McLuhan's media theory, Jacques Ellul's notions of "la Technique" and "le bluff technologique," Paul Virilio's observations on "extreme science," Eric Voegelin's insights about the gnostic character of modernism, and various theories and approaches formed within the field of the philosophy of technology as well as from an ideohistorical scrutiny of the seminal notions and thought structures involved.

The Brave New World of Virtual Entertainment

Recently, there has been a great uproar around the phenomenon of computer gaming in the daily press and other media. Brash headlines call attention to a quickly growing addiction problem amongst the young, and reports proliferate about youngsters who have lost their youth to the machine, sacrificing friends, family, their education, and most ingredients of a normal youth to a life-style of persistent gaming.

Interviewed parents bitterly regret the day they provided their child with a computer, telling distressing stories about children who stay up all night playing games, neglecting or even dropping out of school because of their all-consuming interest in videogame playing, and react violently to any attempt to mitigate or stop their addic-

703

tive gaming habits. For instance, one Swedish teenager deprived of his computer by his parents is reported to have smashed the furnishings of his and the parents' home and a 16-year-old Maryland videogame enthusiast tried to hire a hit-man to have his mother and stepfather killed, when his mother confiscated his PlayStation.

Just like alcoholics and drug addicts, game-addicted children are now regularly treated by psychologists and psychiatrists in order to get rid of their addictive behaviour, and there are even specialized clinics and treatment programmes available for the more serious cases. A steady stream of new books, such as [GD99], [Winn02], [Stey03], and [Brun05], offers advice to the troubled parents of the victims of the new videogame obsession, while "videogame addiction" and "Internet addiction disorder" are currently being considered for inclusion amongst the officially recognized medical diagnoses of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). A poll made in 2004 in Sweden by Fair Play, an organisation formed by concerned parents and researchers, indicated that as many as 40.000 (about 6%) of all Swedish children between 11 and 16 years of age exhibit addictive gaming behaviour, spending more than 35 hours per week on video gaming (see [Fair04]; cf. also [Fair05]), and the results of these and similar polls from all over the world have been the subject of much debate and altercation. In at least three highly-publicized cases, inveterate gamers have died from exhaustion due to excessively extended spells of computer gaming. The lure of virtual reality (VR) environments has been discussed in terms of "electronic LSD" and "virtual delirium" since the early 90s, and some researchers have taken advantage of concepts from research on altered states of consciousness, such as notably Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow, in order to describe the mesmerizing effects of computer gaming and their shrewdly thought-out reward systems (see [Csik90]; cf. also [Bart07]).

The phenomenon of massive multiplayer online games (MMOGs or MMOs), the iconic examples of which will be the immensely popular World of Warcraft and Second Life, has added an economic dimension to the problem picture, since on-line gamers usually pay for access to the game worlds as well as for various related services and virtual paraphernalia, such as virtual weapons or territory, sometimes spending huge amounts on virtual "investments" (cf. [Cast05]). MMOGs have grown big business, becoming extremely popular during the last few years with millions, or in some cases even tens of millions, of players all over the world; in South Korea there are even two television channels devoted to broadcasting events in the MMOG "worlds". A growing number of people spend most of their waking hours in these gaming worlds, occasionally even trying to make a living out of on-line gaming, and skilled third-world gamers offer the service of increasing the valuable properties of rich Westerners' avatars by persistent gaming.

That the younger generations' fascination with the thrill-laden world of electronic media - TV, video, computer games - in lieu of the staid world of books, studies, and erudition is a major culprit in the decline in educational skills widely observed amongst university students, seems to be the common opinion in academe. Amongst the effects of video game playing vindicated by researchers into the field are, besides addiction ten-

dencies and reduced cognitive brain function and educational performance, an increase in aggressive and violent thoughts, emotions, and behaviour, a corresponding decrease in social behaviours, and various health problems, such as obesity and depression (see [Gent03], [Ande03], [GA05] and [Spit06]). In particular, there has been a heated discussion going on as to the relationship between various forms of violent criminality, such as the school shootings in Columbine, Heath High School, Dawson College and elsewhere, and violent computer games and other forms of media violence. Sadistic or hyperviolent games, such as Doom, Mortal Kombat, Manhunt, Postal[2], Duke Nukem 3D, or Grand Theft Auto, have been part of the picture in several brutal murder cases and school shootings, although their precise significance in these cases is the subject of dispute. According to [GD99] and others, many videogames take advantage of techniques similar to those used by the military to harden people emotionally against their natural repugnance against killing or violently attacking other people, in effect being nothing but "murder simulators". In fact, in military training such "first-person shooter" videogames are used to teach soldiers how to shoot and kill. Notably, the user interfaces of modern remote-controlled weapon systems tend to be indistinguishable from typical videogame or virtual reality user interfaces, subtly blurring the border between killing in fantasy and in real life.

Some researchers (notably [Gunt98], [Free02], [EH03], and [LB05]) have criticised the trend to paint computer gaming in black only, questioning the above results on methodological and other grounds and citing positive effects in, for example, spatial capabilities and reaction time. However, their rather off-handed dismissal of a very large body of research certainly is not beyond criticism (see, for example, [Ande03a-b], [HT03], [Spit06], and [AGB07]), and the positive effects cited seem vague and of questionable significance when compared to the negative ones claimed by their opponents and confirmed by common sense. In addition, it has been noted that the entertainment and media industry is apt to guard its vested interests by funding and promoting such critical researchers, bringing to the fore the sore issue of these researchers' impartiality (see, for example, [Ande03a-b] and [Spit06] p. 255). In any case, researchers and others developing and making a business of the new technology generally take little interest in the dangers inherent in it, but rather tend to entertain a discourse of fantastic expectations and grandiose predictions, typical of what I have called "cybernetic joachimism" (see [Pers02] p. 484 et seqq.). Arguably, their and their scholarly defenders' neglect of or facile rebuff of the, to common sense at least, rather obvious negative consequences and conspicuous dangers of these technologies. This seems to confirm Jacques Ellul's famous thesis of the fundamental deceitfulness of technological discourse, "le bluff technologique" (see [Ellu90]), whereby all negative aspects of technological "progress" are swept under the rug or made light of in the interest of the "wager" ("l'enjeu du siecle") that we shall be able to control technology to our own advantage, the unspoken premise of which being "after us the deluge".

For, indeed, these developments will raise many disturbing questions: Will a gradual "exodus" of mankind into cyberspace, as [Cast07] proclaims, take place by our giving

up our allegedly dull natural lifeworld for a more "fun" virtual dream world, where various cunningly calculated thrills and kicks, the refined scientific technologies of an ever-growing "experience industry", will make us captive to a permanent state of virtual coma or psychosis? What will the development towards increasingly realistic 3-D graphics environments entail, in particular when enhanced by the widespread use of immersive virtual reality equipment such as head-mounted displays, data gloves, or 3-D audio and force feedback devices? If today's fairly primitive electronic media are capable of spellbinding people and propagating, undermining, and homogenising beliefs, morals, and attitudes in ways that many will find disquieting or unpalatable, their immersive VR counterparts have the potential of becoming immensely more impressive, powerful, and addictive; hence also the talk about virtual reality as "electronic LSD" (see [Rhei91] p. 353 et seqq. and [Zett96] p. 91 et seqq.). If people start spending large portions of their spare time (and perhaps working time as well) in "synthetic worlds" (so [Cast05]), thereby taking part in, as it were, an exodus from reality as well as the much less intrusive alternative realities provided by literature, theatre, art, and the like, this will indubitably have consequences for mankind and society that give at least some of us pause.

Certainly, tomorrow's VR entertainment will offer all the brutality, decadence, obscenity, and vulgarity of today's video games, telecasts, docusoaps, and video films, but writ large, potentially at least, being capable of producing so much more of obtrusiveness and realism than ever will be possible on today's coarse CRT and TFT displays. By offering a highly lifelike, but imaginary "room of one's own", where no normal moral responsibilities and restrictions any longer obtain and where "telepathological" influences from all the world will be directly accessible at everyone's fingertips, will not cyberspace present insuperable evil temptations to many people, not a few of whom will be children or adolescents, nay the intrusion of the deepest recesses of Hell into everyone's sitting room and nurseries? If it is true that today's electronic media, such as television and video games in particular, are highly addictive, what are we to expect from a virtual reality already dubbed "electronic LSD"? If today's electronic media have been highly conducive to the escalation of violence in society and the dissolution of family and community life, as hardly can be denied, what can we expect from those growing up with a daily dose of hyperrealistic virtual carnage and carnality? What will the person be like who will appear from long-time immersion in all kinds of "ultraviolent" (see [Ande03]), more or less corrupt and perverted, virtual realities and repeatedly exposed to the ego-dissolving allures of "identity tourism" (so [Naka00])? Can we hope that man will be able to cope with such an assault on his own essence in any reasonable way? These and many similar questions are closely connected to the wider question as to how media in general and electronic media in particular affect man and society.

From the Global Village to Discarnate Man

Marshall McLuhan is best known as the founding father of modern media theory and the cheerful prophet of the Internet era, but he was in fact a stunningly erudite scholar and a metahistorian of some standing as well. In McLuhan's construal of the past, the main caesurae of history are marked by the shifts in media, as epitomised by the famous quip "the medium is the message" (see [McLu64] p. 7 et seqq.; cf. also [Chan94]). By this catch phrase, so typical of McLuhan, were spotlighted "the structuring powers of media to impose their assumptions subliminally" ([McLu62] p. 216), amputating and extending man's being and senses in subtle ways and, thus, changing "the ratio of the senses". McLuhan also made a distinction between two types of media, "cold" and "hot", which can be illustrated by the difference between a photograph and a cartoon (see [McLu64] p. 22 et seqq.). Cold media, such as the cartoon, speech, the telephone, and television are "low definition", insofar as they, containing little data and detail, provide but an outline that makes it necessary for the recipient to fill in and "participate" in order to understand, whereas hot media, such as a photograph, a page of print, a lecture, movie pictures, or the radio, being rich in data and detail, extend a single sense in "high definition" and demand little mental participation.

According to McLuhan, the introduction of phonetic literacy made for a major shift of emphasis between the human senses, "the ratio of the senses", from the original predominance of "acoustic space" in preliterate, tribal life to that of the "visual space" of literate society, as reflected in the change from primitive, non-representative art to the representative plasticity of, for instance, classical Greek art. Thus, the art of writing changed man's very modus essendi in various subtle ways, from tribal man's impulsive, emotional, weakly defined ego to the controlled, goal-oriented, rationalistic individuality of literate man (see [McLu62] p. 51 et seqq.). Likewise, the Reformation, the centralised national state, the formation of "the public", the modern self-conscious, alienated individuals and groups of individuals, ideologies, mass man, the desacralisation of the cosmos, and modern science together with its worldview, specialism, incessant technological change, industrialism, mass production, and market economy would hardly be conceivable without the printing press, which, thus, strongly amplifies the rationalist bias inherent already in manuscript literacy.

More recently introduced electric-electronic media, such as the telegraph, the telephone, radio, film, television, and, of course, the networked computer, have changed or are about to change man's being once again. But what will the outcome of this shift be? According to McLuhan, electronic media inaugurate the third age of "the global village", an epoch of a "post-literate" second orality, which will give us back the participatory collectivity, a kind of holistic, integral, right brain-hemisphere awareness, and the "buzzing" and chattering audile-tactile space that used to surround the tribal village, but amplified to a global scale, supplanting the predominance of the visual space characteristic of the age of phonetic literacy with its proclivity for linearity, logic, causal reasoning, sequentiality, fragmentation, homogenisation, and left hemisphere mental-

ity. Sometimes he referred to this resurgent mode of being as "robot-ism", in contrast to the "angelism" of Western literary man, enslaved by the domination of the left hemisphere of his brain (see [MP89]). To bring mankind together into "the global village" united by electronics will thus be the most significant implication of the computerised information networks. In the end, McLuhan thus arrives at a tripartite interpretation of history, where the "cool" preliterate, participatory culture of primitive happiness is followed by the "hot", rationalist literate culture - the temperature being considerably raised by the introduction of the printing press -, which he prophetically pronounces to be about to be ensued by the "cool", once again participatory "post-literate" age of electric and electronic media, when man will finally be restored to his primordial acoustic happiness.

McLuhan, however, also recognised that every new technology not only provides benefits to man, but also implies a loss, as the balance between the human senses is implicitly changed by the new technology. In a letter to the Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain from May 6, 1969, he famously wrote ([McLu87] p. 370, [McLu99] p. 72; cf. also [Angl05] p. 15 for some similar reflections):

Electric information environments being utterly ethereal fosters the illusion of the world as a spiritual substance. It is now a reasonable facsimile of the mystical body, a blatant manifestation of the AntiChrist. After all, the Prince of this World is a very great electrical engineer.

During the 70s, McLuhan in fact changed his mind fundamentally on the electronic media revolution, forming a much more gloomy view of its consequences (see [McLu78]; cf. also [Marc98] p. 248 et seqq., [Tayl96], and [McDo97]). Step by step, he developed the idea of "discarnate man", who, liberated from the physical limitations of corporeality through various kinds of electronic equipment, no longer identifies his self with his body, but with a shadowy, gnostic pattern of information and, swamped by the deluge of incoming information and images, tends to live in a hypnotic state between fantasy and reality, where he will suffer a breakdown between the conscious and unconscious parts of his psyche and, having lost identity, civility, literacy, discipline, purpose in life, and the sense of natural law, will become a brute prone to acts of violence and crude amorality. The relevance of this conception of "discarnate man" when trying to make sense of the effects of the developments in cyberspace and cybergaming technologies as described above will be obvious.

Discarnate Man, La Technique, and Extreme Science—Technocalypse Now!

McLuhan's insights about "discarnate man" can be compared and combined with Jacques Ellul's conclusions in his great trilogy on modern technology, the three volumes of which were published 1954-1987 as La Technique, Le systeme technicien, and Le bluff technologique (see [Ellu64], [Ellu80], and [Ellu90]). According to Ellul, "the

technical phenomenon" (la Technique), being the most decisive power of our time, can by no means be controlled or supervised (the famous "autonomy thesis") and is continually and relentlessly expanding into every nook and cranny of our life-world. At the same time, it eliminates everything else, gradually replacing nature and society with a more and more technical-artificial environment. Apparently, cyberspace will be the ultimate upshot of this unstoppable self-augmentation of la Technique, substituting an electronically generated virtual world for physical space and our entire natural life-world (cf. [Eber07]).

As the driving force of la Technique is, according to Ellul, the crave for absolute efficiency in all human endeavours, we are led towards an interpretation of cyberspace as primarily a mediator of efficiency, whereby, for one thing, the inefficient obstacles of geographical distance are overcome, and of cybergaming as a hyperefficient form of amusement, where Pavlovian physiology, modern psychology, and cybernetics are cross-bred and brought to bear on man's mind with an efficiency that makes the anxieties about "electronic LSD", VR-based brainwashing, and "amusing ourselves to death" seem almost like understatements or platitudes (cf. [Post86]). That virtual reality and cyberspace would become the ideal medium for brainwashing and propaganda has been foreseen at least since the publication of Huxley's Brave New World, confirming C.S. Lewis' observation that man's much-praised dominion over nature is a kind of magician's bargain, which repeatedly has turned out to end up in the dominion of a few over the many through nature, thus in effect bringing about the paradoxical "abolition of man" rather than the desired "empowerment of man" (see [Lewi96]). To take advantage of Ellul's brilliant analysis of propaganda [Ellu65] as a prime, defining force of the modern world parallel to la Technique also in the study of the brave new cyberworld, however, remains a task to be carried out.

Nor should cyberspace and virtual reality be treated in isolation from other recent technological and scientific developments. On the contrary they will be part of the much wider postmodern phenomenon of "extreme science" described by another Christian French thinker, Paul Virilio, in [Viri00]. According to Virilio, science is currently going through a process of violent escalation, through which a new kind, or phase, of science, "extreme science", has appeared. Firstly, science currently tends to become more and more cybernetic, which is to say that science and technology now are quickly amalgamating into "techno-science" (so [Lato93]), the overriding obsession of which is control and management of all aspects of reality. Secondly, there is a strong tendency in today's science towards the transcendence of all limits and the rejection of all ethical restraints, making science into a most dangerous game for mankind, where what is now at stake is nothing less than the very principle of life. Nay, behind this "post-scientific extremism" Virilio discerns a kind of almost demonic "Lust am Untergang". This Faustian extremism comes to the fore in all kinds of "limit performances" through which the scientists vie for fame just like artists who try to gain publicity by overtrumping each other in the breaking of taboos or athletes who set out to transcend the physical limits of man's body by preparing themselves with steroids that they know will ruin

their health and mental stability. This is of course the very opposite of Ellul's proposal of an "ethics of non-power", according to which we should not do everything we can do ("the technological imperative") and limits must be set for technological development.

At the same time, much of what is going on and is claimed in contemporary science seems to be unrealistic, unverifiable, strange or simply untrue, thus creating a kind of "science of the implausible" (cf. also [Horg96] where similar observations are made about the coming of "ironic science"). The pathologies of "extreme science" and "the science of the implausible" show up almost everywhere in today's scientific world, most spectacularly, perhaps, in fields such as genetic engineering, embryonic stem cell research, cloning, nanotechnology, artificial intelligence (AI), and robotics with their outlandish discourses on such topics as the transformation of all living matter into "gray goo" through an out-of-control self-replicating nanoprocess ("the accident to end all accidents"), the selective killing of enemy populations through genetically engineered "nanoviruses", the cure of all illnesses through nanomedicaments or stem cell broths made on aborted foetuses, the cloning of human beings and the "uploading" of their minds into a computer's memory, or the future overshadowing and replacement of man by artificially hyperintelligent robots, just to mention a few popular themes of this kind. Evidently, also virtual reality and cyberspace must be included amongst the manifestations of "extreme science", exuding the typical odour of unrestrained technolatry and pneumapathology. In the end, the technological assault on reality leads, according to Virilio, into a kind of "generalized

virtualization", through which the real is overshadowed by the virtual and everything becomes artificial, the brave new world of "globalitarian" technutopianism. Virilio concludes apocalyptically ([Viri00] p. 139):

Ultimately, this so-called postmodern period is not so much the age in which industrial modernity has been surpassed, as the era of the sudden industrialization of the end, the all-out globalization of the havoc wreaked by progress.

Cyberspace—A Gnostic Project?

McLuhan's shrewd observations about the quasispiritual character of the electronic media environment and the new kind of gnostic personality, "discarnate man", who will appear from long-time exposure to this environment, lead us to the thought of Eric Voegelin, the great investigator and critic of the 'gnostic' character of modernism. It was Eric Voegelin's intriguing and much-debated thesis, that there is a deep-seated disorder in our civilisation rooted in a 'gnostic' sentiment of alienation and discontent with reality perceived as evil, in the consequential 'gnostic' turn away from this reality and its Ground (the "Demiurge"), and in the crowning and pre-eminently 'gnostic' claim to self-salvation and liberation from the prison of reality through absolute knowledge (gnosis), coming clearly into sight for the first time in the gnostic heresies, which emerged as a gloomy shadow of Christianity during its earliest years, and which from that time have reasserted themselves ever and anon during the course of history (see

[Voeg87]). Having gone through a process of what Voegelin calls 'immanentization', by which the original hopes for a transcendental escape from this world, were, as it were, brought down to earth and turned into utopian projects, the gnostic thought structures gave birth to the virulent impulse of a flight not from, but to this world, or rather to a reconstructed, transfigured, utopian version of it - in short the "revolt against reality" so typical of modern Western culture. Cyberspace can be construed as the ultimate consequence of this "revolt against reality" and the concomitant desire for man's dominion over being, providing an electronic, quasi-spiritual otherworld totally under man's control as the replacement, in the gnostic's view, of the imperfect, unjust, and evil order of the present world (see

[Davi98] and [Pers02] p. 492 et seq.; cf. also [Wert99] p 276 et seqq., although her description of the nature of gnosticism is somewhat misleading). The last century's research into the history of science and ideas has provided an entirely new picture of the emergence of modern science. One of the more intriguing aspects of this picture is the crucial role of theology, mysticism, and esotericism for early science, which seems to be connected not primarily with a rationalistic-scientific tradition with its roots in Greek rationalism as is often more or less implicitly taken for granted, but rather with a gnostic-esoteric cultural undertow that had its roots in the religious-philosophical reactions against Christianity during late antiquity (see, for example, [Eamo94], [Funk86], and [Thor23]).

Unfortunately, the bearings of mystical-esoteric and, more generally, religious-philosophical ideas on contemporary science and the interest in such issues taken by many latter-day scientists have as yet only been spottily and unsatisfactorily explored, being in conspicuous need of more systematic study (see, however, [Nobl99] and [Duse99] for promising bird's-eye views). Nevertheless, as far as cyberspace and virtual reality are concerned a few more or less relevant studies exist, such as [Heim93], [Heim98], [Davi98], [Wert99], and [Cohe66]. Arguably, we cannot get at the real motives and ideas behind the computer phenomenon in general, and the cyberspace and virtual reality sub-phenomena in particular, nor arrive at a proper understanding of their roots and future direction of growth, unless we take into account these mighty metaphysical driving forces and motivations, as I also attempted to show in [Pers02], notably by charting and analysing:

(1) the role of various esoteric-mystic themes in computing, including i) the Golem myth and similar stories about artificially created life, such as the alchemists' homunculus, ii) the quest for the primordial, perfect language as in the tradition of Lullism, Leibnizian-Fregian logicism, and logical positivism, iii) traces of number mysticism, as in Leibniz' binary calculus, which originally was devised in a (mistaken) attempt to comprehend the Chinese divinatory system I Ching, iv) the notion of the World Soul seemingly reflected in the connectionist mystique rampant in the discourse about the Internet, ubiquitous computing, "the noosphere", and similar topics, v) astral worlds and travel as prototypical for virtual reality, cyberspace, etc.

(2) different varieties of "cybernetic Joachimism", i.e. the widespread idea that electronic media, the computer, cyberspace, or some future breakthrough, development, or 'singularity' in computing will in due time inaugurate a new era of cybernetic delights

(3) the role of computing in more pessimistic or apocalyptic scenarios of science and technology and the future that they supposedly will bring about, such as Virilio's "extreme science", McLuhan's "discarnate man", Heidegger's "Ge-stell", Gibson's dystopian "cyberspace", Ellul's "la Technique" and "le bluff technologique", etc.

(4) the debate about the metaphysical implications and lessons learnt by the computing experience, which, I contended, in many ways call into question the naturalist presuppositions of the computer pioneers and most present-day AI and VR researchers, cognitive scientists, and philosophers of computing and the mind

(5) the different attitudes toward the ethics of computing and, in particular, of such potentially momentous developments in computing as "virtual reality" and "cyberspace", which I ventured to discuss in the more general context of the ethical assessment of technological-scientific innovation at large, the historical development of the attitudes to new technology, some major types of worldviews and ethical theories, and the debates pursued in the field of "the philosophy of technology"

Extensive references to the literature on the discussed topics can be found in my thesis [Pers02].

Although the personae of the leading figures behind the cyberspace and cybergaming revolutions have been interestingly portrayed in such works as [Rhei91] and [CR05], the portraits given tend to be somewhat shallow, focusing rather heavily on careers, technical and scientific ideas, and suchlike, rather than on the drivers and motives behind these careers and ideas. It is my thesis that the roots of cyberspace and cybergaming must be investigated in a much wider context than is done in these and other similar works so as to clarify and make comprehensible the motive background and worldviews of the key personages of the field. For the kind of investigations I have in mind the scrutiny of the written, published and unpublished, output of the leading figures and interviews with them, their relatives and collaborators may indeed be necessary preparations. But during this undertaking much more attention to their philosophical, metaphysical-ethical, ideological-political, religious-theological (or antireligious-secular), and mystical-esoteric leanings and interests and their bearings on their scientific-technical accomplishments and ideas should be paid as well as to the possible sources and the actual development of these ideas and attitudes. Needless to say, such an analysis will have to be much concerned with the backdrop provided by ideohistorical derivation and contextualization and by a study of any pertinent thought currents, issues, and debates in the discourse of the field of study as well as in society and modern culture at large. For example, it can be gathered from such en passant observations as those made by [Bran87] p. 224 et seqq. or [Davi98] p. 279 et seqq. that one major source of inspiration for these pursuits as well as a mediator of gnostic attitudes and thought structures will be science fiction literature and film -

indeed, the very concept of "cyberspace" derives from the writings of William Gibson, the father of the pre-eminently neo-gnostic literature of the cyberpunk.

The true significance of such an attempt lies in its goal of a deepened appreciation of the phenomena of cyberspace and cybergaming and their relations to and background in various extrascientific agendas and pursuits. Considering the highly problematic spiritual, social, ethical, educational, and other consequences of the current fascination with cyberspace and cybergaming as outlined above and implied by such concepts as "electronic LSD" and "discarnate man", the need for a comprehensive understanding of these phenomena and their historical roots should be obvious.

Referenced Literature

[AGB07]	C. A. Anderson, D. A. Gentile, K. E. Buckley: Violent Video Game Effects on Children and Adolescents. Theory, Research, and Public Policy, Oxford University Press, 2007
[Ande03a]	C. A. Anderson: FAQs on violent video games and other media violence: Part I, Small Screen, No. 179, September 2002, pp. 1-2, 7-8, see also http://www.psychology.iastate.edu/faculty/caa/Video_Game_FAQs.html
[Ande03b]	C. A. Anderson: FAQs on violent video games and other media violence: Part II, Small Screen, No. 180, October 2002, pp. 1, 7-8, see also http://www.psychology.iastate.edu/faculty/caa/Video_Game_FAQs.html
[Ande03]	C. A. Anderson: Violent Video Games: Myths, Facts, and Unanswered Questions, Psychological Science Agenda, Volume 16, No. 5, October 2003
[Angl05]	K. Anglet: Das Ende der Zeit - die Zeit des Endes, Echter Verlag, 2005
[Bart07]	R. Bartle: Presence and Flow: Ill-Fitting Clothes for Virtual Worlds, Techne, Vol. 10, No. 3, 2007, pp. 39-54, see also *http://scholar. lib .vt. edu/ej ournals/SPT/v 10n3/pdf/bar tle.pdf*
[Bran87]	S. Brand: The Media Lab. Inventing the Future at MIT, Viking, 1987
[Brun05]	M. Brun: Nar livet blir ett spel och andra utmaningar for den digitala generationens foraldrar, Bokforlaget Langenskiold, 2005
[Cast05]	E. Castronova: Synthetic Worlds. The Business and Culture of Online Games, University of Chicago Press, 2005
[Cast07]	E. Castronova: Exodus to the Virtual World. How Online Fun Is Changing Reality, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007
[Chan94]	D. Chandler: Biases of the Ear and Eye. 'Great Divide' Theories, Phonocentrism, Graphocentrism & Logocentrism, 1994, see http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/litoral/litoral.html
[Cohe66]	J. Cohen: Human Robots in Myth and Science, George Allen & Unwin, 1966
[CR05]	H. Chapling, A. Ruby: Smartbomb. The

The Survival of Culture: "The Kindred Points of Heaven and Home"

by Monica Papazu

Dr. Monica Papazu is a Professor in the Loegum Kloster Theological Institute in Denmark. This paper was presented to the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade, conference on "Language, Literature, Culture, Identity," September 11-12, 2008, and is used by permission of the author. In her book, Det hvilel0se hjerte: Essays (Restless Heart: Essays), *Professor Papazu includes a major section on Ellul ["Jacques Ellul: The Word of Freedom in the History of Unfreedom"/"Jacques Ellul: Frihedens Ord I ufrihedens historie", pp. 245-291]. It was published in 2004 in Skanderborg (Denmark): Re-formatio's Forlag.*

In her correspondence with the editor, she notes these items of interest to Forum *readers: "Ellul means very much to me. Ever since I left Romania (in 1980) and got the possibility to read him, Ellul has been a permanent source of inspiration, a fountain of wisdom to me." "One of my best friends in France is Xavier Martin. He is a professor of history and of law history. Ellul was one of his teachers, and each time I visit him he tells me how wonderful it was to attend Ellul's lectures and to study under his guidance." "The only book of Ellul which has been translated into Danish is* La subversion du christianisme/Kristendommens Forvanskning. *The translation was made by one of my friends who was very impressed by a conference I gave on Ellul and began reading his works, and I wrote the Preface, "Forord" (pp. 5-9). Translated by Chr. Truelsen, Skaerbaek (Denmark): Tidehvervs Forlag, 2005. This was a posthumous publication. Chr. Truelsen used the last years of his life to translate Ellul (he was in his nineties, yet he continued to work). Ellul was a spiritual nourishment to him. He has also translated* L 'esperance oubliee *into Danish. I gave it to him as a Christmas gift and he loved it enormously. His widow has the manuscript and we hope that it will be published one day."*

Abstract

In his Nobel speech, Solzhenitsyn rejected the idea of "the disappearance of peoples in the melting-pot of modern civilisation," and expressed his belief that "Nations are the wealth of mankind.. .the smallest of them.. .embodies a particular facet of God's design." Solzhenitsyn's words suggest the connection between time and eternity (or, to quote G. K. Chesterton, "heaven and home"), and point to the cultural role that national communities play. What we call "world civilization" does not consist in a unique culture, but on the contrary in a multitude of very different cultures (Levi-Strauss, Kilakowski). The only way in which something becomes universal is by being at first local, limited, an expression of a nation's historical experience and particular *Weltanschauung.* (The inspiration that *The Lay of Kosovo* brought to Western culture

in the 19th and early 20th centuries proves this reality.) At the present moment nations face two challenges. One is ideological, and stems from the abstract and utopian ideas of the Enlightenment, which assimilated "boundaries," and national differences with "prejudice." The other is connected with "the technical system." The technical system, whose raison d'etre is its own uninterrupted development, runs counter to spiritual culture, which is based on individual reflection, the slow passage of time which is necessary for thought and cultural creation, and continuity with the past (Ellul). The present forms of conditioning raise urgent questions about the survival of spiritual culture, which constitutes the essence of man.

In his Nobel Speech of 1970 Solzhenitsyn wrote: "Nations are the wealth of mankind, they are its generalised personalities: the smallest of them has its own particular colours, and embodies a particular facet of God's design" (15-16).

As he addressed the Western world that honoured him for his works, Solzhenitsyn viewed himself as the representative of millions of people who shared the experience of Gulag (he felt himself "accompanied ... by the shadows of the fallen"), and as the representative of his national culture: he was the voice of "[a] whole national literature [that] has been left there, buried without a coffin," and an heir to the great tradition of Russian literature (8). He embodied indeed what for him stood as "the quintessence of the writer's position: . to give expression to the national language, which is the main clamp that binds a nation; to give expression to the very land occupied by his people . [and] to the national soul," and to create works that are the nation's "living memory" (25, 15).

Confronted with the terrible assault on memory, tradition, and the national soul, which Communism stood for, Solzhenitsyn rose in defence of the reality of life, in defence of his own people's life and spirit. At the same time, his words were meant as a protest against the Western idea, akin to the communist ideology, of "the levelling of nations and of the disappearance of peoples in the melting-pot of modern civilisation" (15).

Solzhenitsyn's protest was the protest of a Christian conscience. In the eyes of the Christian faith, nations are referred to as God's creation. Nations are "not made by human hands" ("acheiropoetos" in Greek); they are not "reducible" to the will and actions of man, says Solzhenitsyn ("Du repentir" 114-5). Their existence is a mystery as unfathomable as the existence of the human person, and their destination lies beyond the temporal horizon.

That is why Solzhenitsyn applies the moral and spiritual imperatives that hold for the individual to nations in general, and to his own nation in particular. A community that is "mystically bound together by sin," as all communities are, is called to "repent," to ask God's and the other nations' forgiveness ("Du repentir" 118). Repentance is the miracle through which a people can begin a new life within the community itself as well as a new life together with other nations, for nations are bound together by historical fate.

Heaven and Home

A nation is by definition a limited community - limited by geography, by a particular *Weltanschauung*, and usually by language. How can this limited reality with its characteristic borders then be related to the eternal "unity from above," to the "ultimate end," when "God will be all in all" (1 Co 15:28) (Schmemann 151)?

The English writer G.K. Chesterton, who (I only mention it in passing) wrote about Serbia, close to the First World War, and drew inspiration in his poetry from *The Lay of Kosovo*, and who was one of the first to address the question of "cosmopolitan civilisation," answered this question in his novel *Manalive* (1912): ". God has given us the love of special places, of a hearth and of a native land, for a good reason. . Because otherwise . we might worship . [e]ternity . the largest of the idols - the mightiest of the rivals of God. . God bade me love one spot and serve it, and do all things however wild in praise of it, so that this one spot might be a witness against all the infinities and the sophistries, that Paradise is somewhere and not anywhere, is something and not anything" (190-1).

Chesterton explains here that the love for what is entirely local, unique, and unrepeatable is a prerequisite for understanding God's eternal kingdom. Community is woven in the very texture of existence. The earthly community is a metaphor of the heavenly community. Loving and sharing, one is brought to understand the reality of the personal, triune God's all-encompassing love, and the intensity of life in the Kingdom of God, true community as opposed to the abstract idea of eternity. Human life is thus, in Chesterton's words, a bridge between two "kindred points" which mirror each other: "the kindred points of heaven and home" (*New Jerusalem* 21).

The Fact of Natality

Solzhenitsyn and Chesterton's vision reflects their faith. Their perception is nonetheless rooted in an existential awareness that amounts to a universal truth. The German philosopher Hannah Arendt called this truth "the fact of natality" (61, 174, 196). It means that in order to think clearly about man one has to begin with "that which is given," with the objective, unalterable facts of human existence. What is objective and therefore determines all the rest is the fact that man does not owe his existence to himself, nor is he born into a void but into "the world": "a pre-existing world, constructed by the living and the dead" (174, 177). This world has an objective existence: a land; parents, ancestors; the vast expanse of history and historical experience; a common language; common assumptions and values. Growing up means making this world one's own, because it is one's own, not through choice but as "something given." The "denial of everything given," characteristic of modernity, is, in the words of Hannah Arendt, a token of "radical nihilism" (34). To be born is a bond. And this bond is what culture and the transmission of culture is about.

Culture is, by definition, the legacy of the past. Knowledge is simply knowledge of the past, for the world into which human beings are born and which they have to learn about is an "old" world, a world that is "always older than they themselves," writes Hannah Arendt (195).

Learning about the world in which the previous generations have lived, men gain "depth," which, says Hannah Arendt, is "the same" as "memory", and a bond with both mankind and the world (94). For what makes the world human is the *meaning* one learns to discover in it - in other words, *tradition* is what makes the world human: "without tradition - which selects and names, which hands down and preserves, which indicates where the treasures are and what their worth is - there seems to be no willed continuity in time and hence ... neither past nor future, only sempiternal change of the world and the biological cycle of living creatures in it" (Arendt 5). Man's world is fundamentally a cultural world that "comprehends, and gives testimony to, the entire recorded past of countries, nations, and ultimately mankind" (Arendt 202).

Particular cultures - world culture

"[C]ountries, nations, and ultimately mankind": Hannah Arendt's words suggest a connection between the particular cultures of the world and a universal heritage. There is indeed a common human nature, a common human condition, and a common quest for meaning and beauty. Taking a bird's eye view, there appears to be a "world culture." The question is what "world culture" really means.

Speaking of the great literature nourished by a particular people's tradition and historical destiny, and permeated with truth, beauty, and goodness, Solzhenitsyn expressed his belief that art can convey "life experience from one whole nation to another," reveal "the timeless essence of human nature," and contribute to the "spiritual unity of mankind" ("One Word" 15, 19, 24). Solzhenitsyn does embrace a belief in universality, but his words indicate that it is what is most particular, unique, that acquires a universal dimension.

There is no way in which *limited* man - for man is not "universal" but limited, he belongs "to a place," he is marked by "a past," a specific tradition, and the weight of a particular historical experience (Ellul, *Bluff* 275) - can reach a certain degree of universality other than by being authentically what he is. This paradox is the condition of culture and the condition of mankind: what is universal can only hope to reveal itself through what is most particular.

Culture does express, as the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss puts it, "the generality of human aspirations," universal questions and experiences, but it does that in "peculiar," not universal, forms (*Race and History* 44). The richness of meaning stems from what is most particular in a certain culture: "there is not, and can never be," writes Levi-Strauss, "a world civilization in the absolute sense in which that term is often used, since civilization implies, and indeed consists in, the coexistence of cultures exhibiting the maximum possible diversities" (*Race and History* 45).

In order to protect culture, underlines Levi-Strauss, one has to understand the condition of culture, that is to say the existence of communities with their specific cultures, cultures that can only preserve their identity through a partial lack of "sensitivity" towards each other's "values" (*Regard* 15). Identity can only be maintained by refusing to be someone else: "one cannot at the same time merge into the spirit of another, identify with another and still maintain one's own identity" (*Regard* 47).

It is a fatal mistake to think of humanity in the abstract, to embrace the idea of "world culture" as "a harmonious whole," and to promote this illusion in the form of a political project that can only result in the atrophy of creativity and culture (*Regard* 47, *Race and History* 48-9). Because this ideological project is at work, the technical system contributing largely to it, Levi-Strauss stresses the urgency of a clear understanding of the condition of culture, based on the reality of facts: "if mankind is not to resign itself to becoming a sterile consumer of the values it created in the past and of those values alone ... it will have to relearn the fact that all true creation implies a certain deafness to outside values, even to the extent of rejecting or, in given cases, denying them" (*Regard* 47).

The Lures of Nowhere

The idea of a totally unified world, unified in values, norms, manners, that Levi-Strauss opposed, belongs, as the Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski insists, to the realm of utopia, which is a *denial of reality*. Utopias can be implemented, as the totalitarian experiences of the 20th century have shown. If the present trend continues, writes Kolakowski, "the world's cultural variety" will be annihilated "in the name of a so-called world civilisation," and "this will probably entail such a break in traditions that not only each and every particular civilisation but the human civilisation in its entirety will be put in mortal danger" (113).

Such a world will not be a unified world, but a world that is no longer human, indeed a relapse into "barbarism." The project itself signals, in Kolakowski's eyes, the growing barbarism of the West, that is to say the indifference towards one's own culture. What characterizes the West today is a "suicidal mentality in which the indifference towards our own particular tradition ... or even the selfdestructive frenzy disguise themselves as generous universalism" (Kolakowski 102).

The "multicultural" utopia is only a new expression of the chimera of a society "without evil, without sin, and without conflicts: such ideals," writes Kolakowski, "are the aberrations of a spirit that believes in its own omnipotence, they are the fruits of pride" (121-2).

Today's "universalism" is without doubt an heir to the utopian thinking of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. The Enlightenment thought in general terms (concepts are, by nature, abstract and universal) and envisaged creating a new mankind and a new man (even in the biological sense). In the utopia of the reign of reason there was no room for the real human beings such as they are, anchored in the traditions

and the values of their particular community. Suffice it to mention here the abolition of Christianity and the extermination of the population in the province of Vendee in 1793-1794.

In order to bring forth "the new man," man had to be liberated from the shackles of "prejudice," that is to say *the existing culture*. The principle that held for the individuals constituting one community also held for humankind as a whole. Prejudices were considered "mental barriers separating human beings," while state-borders were viewed as the "embodiment" of prejudices. The project of the Enlightenment was, as the French philosopher Pierre-Andre Taguieff writes, two-sided: it consisted in both "the abolition of prejudices" and of the concrete "borders" between states, which should result in "the inception of the reign of reason" and the advent of a "universal brotherhood society" (190-191).

Seen in this utopian light, differences seem outrageous, because they contradict the abstractness of the concepts. Pure reason discards the so-called prejudices ("the prejudice against prejudice," as Hans-Georg Gadamer calls it) and thus the entire tradition, without realizing its significance - even the exercise of reason, logic and intellectual rules are "prejudices," since they represent a legacy, the result of the intellectual work of previous generations in a given civilisation (Gadamer 255).

To discard prejudices in this fashion is to estrange oneself from mankind and to cut oneself off from indispensable knowledge. As Hannah Arendt puts it: "[t]he disappearance of prejudices simply means that we have lost the answers on which we ordinarily rely without even realising they were originally answers to questions" (174).

The modern concept of "multiculturalism" is a postscript to the Enlightenment, which ignored history, and failed to understand the meaning of culture. Its near roots are to be found, however, in the vestiges of Marxist and Communistic ideology in the West, in the utopia of a new mankind where classes as well as fatherlands will have disappeared. The present civilisational universalism appears as "the substitution of one utopia for another" (Yonnet 11127).

The West's diminishing understanding of its own culture (and therefore of the sense of culture altogether), the breakdown of tradition and "the crisis in education" represent undoubtedly a serious spiritual crisis (Arendt 173-96). This does not mean that European civilisation is doomed - the proximity of other cultures in Western Europe due to immigration seems even to contribute to a rediscovery of the foundations of European culture and thus to reversing the process. Up until now history has shown, as in the case of the Communist experiment, that utopian projects finally break against the rock of reality. What makes the present crisis particularly threatening, though, is the fact that it is associated with the impact of the technical system.

The Technological Society

When we look at "technology" from the limited point of view of subjective experience, its negative aspects can be hard to grasp. As scholars we use the possibilities created

by the Internet. Many of the classical writers' works are online, and research papers, magazines, and newspapers can be reached in the blink of an eye. An immense library is at our disposal. The essence and the discipline of our work appears to be unaltered by the advent of technology.

To grasp the critique of technique, as formulated for example in the pioneering work of the French thinker Jacques Ellul (1912-1994), technique must be put in a much broader, objective frame of reference. The core of the problem is the relationship between technique and culture.

Throughout most of the history of mankind, highlights Ellul, "*technique belonged to a civilization* and was merely a single element among a host of nontechnical activities." Technical development was slow, and it was absorbed into the general texture of life. Culture remained the axis around which human activities rotated, in other words it remained the determinant factor (*Technological Society* 128, author's italics).

The unprecedented technical development, in the 20th century especially, has broken this pattern. Not only did machines develop which have changed the natural perception of time and space, technique has evolved into an integrated system, totally emancipated from culture. Technique has become the decisive factor by "*tak[ing] over*," as Ellul puts it, "*the whole of civilization*": "*Technical civilization* means that our civilization is constructed *by* technique (makes a part of civilization only what belongs to technique), *for* technique (in that everything in this civilization must serve a technical end), and *is* exclusively technique (in that it excludes whatever is not technique or reduces it to a technical form)" (*Technological Society* 128, author's italics).

Technique cannot stop, as Hannah Arendt also remarked, at the border where human life begins: after the conquest of nature, man is being conquered, and technique invades the "world of human relations and human affairs" (Arendt 89, 59). This does not mean that machines run the world, but that *technical thinking* does, reducing man in all his aspects to a technical problem, in other words assimilating him "to the machine" (Ellul, *Technological Society* 12). The technical system has spilled over into all human activities, giving in the first place rise to "the technical state" which by "the accumulation of techniques" in all fields (from economy to propaganda), and not by intention or doctrine, has, as Ellul defines it, a "totalitarian" propensity. Technique has a tendency to evacuate political life and make the "differences from state to state ... fade progressively away." The contemporary technical state rests upon universal techniques of administration, and does not depend on political thinking or on the nation as "a human, geographic, and historical entity" (*Technological Society* 268, 265, 284).

Technique, as opposed to culture, cannot be national. It can only be universal, due to its abstract nature. As an object of technique, man has no more reality than the quantities combined in an algebraic equation. There is no bridge between technical thinking, in which technique is "an end-in-itself," and culture, for culture is, by its own nature, "humanistic." That is to say, culture is "centered on man," on the question of "the meaning of life" and of good and evil, in a word, on man's moral and spiritual values (Ellul, *Bluff* 2812). From the point of view of technique, guided solely by the

principle of efficiency, what constitutes human life (man as a cultural being) appears as a hindrance or "grit in the machine."

There is thus an obvious connection between the utopian ideas of the Enlightenment and technical thinking, which as a rule is not aware of its philosophical presuppositions. Technical thinking is an heir to utopian thinking in that it neither respects nor reflects upon "that which is given" but wills a new, ideal mankind. The connection between technique and the discourse of cultural universalism is just as obvious: multiculturalism can be considered as an ideology that serves the implementation of the technical system, since it endeavours to remove the hindrances represented by the vestiges of nation, community, and culture.

By taking over "the whole of civilisation," technique creates a new environment. It gives rise to a new pattern of ideas that are an obedient adaptation to the technical system, and it imposes its own time. Technique (from machines to administrative techniques) pushes forward at high speed, while it effaces its own traces - today makes yesterday obsolete, as tomorrow's models will cancel today's. The past has no value any more.

For culture, the reverse is true. Cultural time is slow. It is characterized, as Ellul rightly underlines, by "reflection" and not by efficiency. It takes time to reflect; human experience is slow in bearing the fruits of understanding; the generations succeed one another, as they hand down the meaning they have extracted from their experiences. Meaning arises from the past and through the continuity with the past (Ellul, *Bluff* 276-7).

To remember is what characterizes the human spirit. Without remembrance we are strangers to the world and to our life. Without remembrance we have no means to evaluate the present - we are prisoners of the present. That is why anti-totalitarian literature puts so much weight on memory, as we can see in Solzhenitsyn's works (his Nobel Speech, for example), in Orwell's *1984* (27, 29-33, 192-209), or in Kundera's axiom: "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting" (14). Spiritual culture is, in its essence, memory. By considering Mnemosyne (Memory) as the mother of the muses, the Greeks showed that memory is the foundation as well as the meaning of culture (Hesiod 915-7).

The opposition between cultural time and technical time is the struggle between Mnemosyne and Chronos, the "devouring time" (Ovid xv.234-6). For man, time only exists because he has the "remembrance of things past," but memory is also man's victory over time. Without memory, the sense of time disappears, but the power of time (and ultimately of death) becomes absolute. Human life is reduced to a biological process, not different from the mermaids' life in Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale, where a hedonistic existence is brought to a painless end, as the mermaids, whose memory is never preserved (there are no graves on the bottom of the sea), become "foam on the ocean" ("The Little Mermaid" 66).

Globalisation is then not the spreading of culture, but the spreading of technique, which produces the collapse of traditional structures, modes of living and cultures, and,

in the final analysis, threatens to destroy the conditions necessary for the existence of culture. What the technical civilisation gives rise to is a global mass-society, consisting of atomised individuals, caught in the alternate rhythm of work and entertainment, and deprived of memory, tradition, and bonds.

Contrary to the assumption that globalisation brings people and peoples together, creating a "world community," the universal technical system tends to bring about, as both Arendt and Ellul write, "a radical world-alienation" (Arendt 89; Ellul, *Ethique* 256-7), for technique eradicates both nature and culture, the two milieus that hitherto have constituted man's universe and mankind's common world. What is left behind is "a society of men ... without a common world which would at once relate and separate them

. For a mass-society is," as Hannah Arendt expresses it, "nothing more than that kind of organized living which automatically establishes itself among human beings who . have lost the world once common to all of them" (89-90).

(The misinformation carried out in the West with regards to the dismemberment of Yugoslavia can be partially understood as a consequence of the technical civilisation: the loss of the sense of community and tradition, and even of the mere interest in knowing history, associated with the propaganda apparatus and the power of the media.)

Alienation, as Arendt and Ellul understand it, means that man becomes a stranger to the reality of his life and to his very nature. A world reduced to the fleeting present moment, a world that can no longer be put into words and thus shared with others, and where one neither receives the legacy of the past nor hands down a story to be told (Hamlet's last words in Shakespeare's play are: "tell my story" [V.iii.354]), a world to which one is no longer bound by the bonds of birth, loyalty, and love; and *logos* is not a home for man anymore.

The Rebirth of Community

And yet, it is possible that man will rebel once more against utopia, as he did against the totalitarian projects in the 20th century, and that there will be a rebirth of community and culture. That was the belief of Chesterton, who in his novel *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* of 1904 prophetically described the technical civilisation and the return to what he calls "normality" and "sanity" (100).

All the characteristics of the technical civilisation evidenced above are, artistically expressed, present in his novel: it was a "well-ordered" universe, a "terribly quiet" world, where one felt "the hell of blank existence" (78-9, 97). Political life had disappeared: "Democracy was dead; for no one minded the governing class governing" (12). The ideology in power was "cosmopolitanism": "We moderns believe in a great cosmopolitan civilisation," "we are rid of superstitions," especially "the superstition of small nationalities," and, as a consequence, all national symbols and customs have been "relegated ... to the Museums" (23, 24, 17). Freedom in all its forms was gone from the world:

"Freedom of speech means practically in our modern civilisation that we must only talk of unimportant things" (79). World peace had finally become a reality through the monopolisation of power: "The big Powers of the world, having swallowed up all the small ones, came to . [an] agreement, and there was no more war" (84). What was left was "this strange indifference . this strange loneliness of millions in a crowd" (79).

All this lasts until the day when a child, symbolically called Adam, that is to say *man*, rediscovers the meaning of "that which is given": the near universe consisting of nine streets in Notting Hill, where "men have built houses to live, in which they are born, fall in love, pray, marry, and die," streets where they bring out their "dead." In the centre of this small universe lies Pump Street, that is to say the human "heart" (62-3, 73). And the old truth that the earth is a home for man, and that "[f]or every tiny town and place / God made the stars especially" spreads throughout the world and eventually sets everybody free (3).

Chesterton gives no explanation here. This is exactly the point, for no explanation is needed for a statement of facts: the fact of the human nature, as we do know it from mankind's history and culture. He states a fact and gives, at the same time, expression to his faith in both "heaven and home."

Our duty today is to transmit the culture handed down to us, to transmit the enduring works that, as Solzhenitsyn puts it, bring a "word of truth" and clothe it in beauty, to maintain the continuity between generations and the bridge between peoples, for the great culture of the world with its very particularities reaches beyond borders, communicates itself from one people and to another, and makes the world a home for man.

Works Cited

Andersen, Hans Christian. *The Complete Fairy Tales and Stories.* Trans. Erik Christian Haugaard. 4th ed. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1977.

Arendt, Hannah. *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought.* London: Faber and Faber, 1961.

Chesterton, G.K. *Manalive.* 3rd ed. London: Arrowsmith, 1926.

- −*The New Jerusalem.* 1920. USA: Quiet Vision Publishing, 2004.

- −*The Napoleon of Notting Hill.* 1904. Bernard Bergonzi, ed. Oxford: Oxford U P, 1994.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzuge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik.* 1960. 2nd ed. Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1965.

Hesiod. *Theogony.* Trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White. Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1914.

Jacques Ellul. *Le bluff technologique.* Paris: Hachette, 1988.

- *Ethique de la liberte.* 3 vols. Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1973, 1975, 1984.

- −*The Technological Society.* Trans. John Wilkinson. 1964. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.

Kolakowski, Leszek. "Ou sont les barbares? Les illusions de l'universalisme culturel." *Le Village introuvable.* Trans. Jacques Dewitte. Paris: Editions Complexe, 1986. 101-22.

Kundera, Milan. *Le livre du rire et de l'oubli.* Trans. Francois Kerel. Paris: Gallimard, 1985.

Levi-Strauss, Claude. *Race and History.* Paris: Unesco, 1952.

- −*Le regard eloigne.* Paris: Plon, 1983.

Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* 1949. London: Martin Secker & Warburg, Penguin Books, 1981

Ovid. *Metamorphoses.* Trans. John Dryden et al. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1998.

Schmemann, Alexander. *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom.* New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988.

Shakespeare. *Hamlet.* Harold Jenkins, ed. London: Methuen, 1982.

Solzhenitsyn, Alexander. *"One Word of Truth … ": The Nobel Speech on Literature. 1970.* 4th ed. London: The Bodley Head, 1972.

−(Soljenitsyne, Alexandre). "Du repentir et de la moderation comme categories de la vie des nations." *Des voix sous les decombres.* Melik Agoursky, Igor Chafarevitch, Alexandre Soljenitsyne, et al. Paris: Seuil, 1975. 100-48.

Taguieff, Pierre-Andre. *La force du prejuge: Essai sur le racisme et ses doubles.* Paris: Editions La Decouverte, 1988.

Yonnet, Paul. *Voyage au centre du malaise francais: L'antiracisme et le roman national.* Paris: Gallimard, 1993.

Archivists Note: The text body footnotes are missing from the PDF, so I'll just include them here until this can be error corrected.[1][2][3][4][5][6][7][8]

---

[1] G.K. Chesterton, "The Thing Called a Nation: The Spiritual Issue of the War" (*The Daily News*, June 18, 1916; *The Law of Kosovo: Serbia's Past and Present (1389-1917),* London: The British Kosovo Day Committee, 1917, 32-5. In Chesterton's masterpiece *The Ballad of the White Horse* (1911) the Kosovo-motive of the letter of the Mother of God plays a crucial role.

[2] This theme is to be found in the great Danish writers Hans Christian Andersen's and N.F.S. Grundtvig's poetry as well as in the last pages of C.S. Lewis' *The Last Battle.*

[3] Unless otherwise mentioned, the translation of the French and the German quotations belongs to me.

[4] Xavier Martin, *Regenerer l 'espece humaine: Utopie medicale et Lumieres (1750-1850)* (France: DMM, 2008).

[5] Reynald Secher, *Le genocide franco-frangais: Le Vendee-Venge* (Paris: PUF, 1986).

[6] As "technology" etymologically means "discourse on technique," the term "technical" is more accurate than "technological."

[7] See also Lewis' critique of technique: C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1943), and *That Hideous Strength* (London: The Bodley Head, 1945).

[8] Vladimir Volkoff, *Petite historie de la disinformation: Du cheval de Troie 'a Internet* (Paris: Ed.

The Islamization of the West

by Christian Braw

Christian Braw is a prolific Swedish author on culture, literature, theology, and the history of ideas. Published in Swedish as "Vaterlandets islamisering" Used by permission. Translated by Frederick Schwink.

In today's world the West is acutely dependent on the Muslim world for its energy supply. A large number of Muslim immigrants confronts Europe with complicated questions. Capital investments from the Muslim world dominate significant sectors of the western economy. Muslim fundamentalists hold the West in terror.

Given this situation, it is easy to forget that the West's rationalism has a Muslim background. In simple terms, this rationalism contains within itself the belief that mankind has reason, a *ratio*, with whose help one can comprehend, control, and exploit existence. The central instrument is the *concept*, through which one encaptures the essence of being. A Westerner becomes a "Begriffenfeldt"—to use Ibsen's apt label [Transl: this is a German character in Ibsen's Peer Gynt play, the name means "conceptual field"]—with this there also went lost a considerable portion of symbolic thinking, i.e. the abillity to translate existence into powerful signs which bring about what they express. Man steps out of the universe to observe it from the outside, as Tage Lindblom used to say.

Where does this manner of comprehending existence come from? It is a manner of thinking, as it was first developed in ancient Greek, above all by Plato and his disciple Aristotle. It survived the cultural catastrophe of the migration period only in fragments. That's what the situation was in the West. In the Orient the development was different. There the Greek philosophers were translated and annotated by Syrian speaking scholars. The Orient never experienced a migration period. The Arab storm was for the most part a taking over of power by an elite military force in country after country. In the track of military units followed administrative and intellectual elites that quickly took over for themselves the higher culture of the conquered lands. There thus arose a synthesis between Islam and the Greek-Syrian philosophical tradition. In the West by way of contrast there was to be found only a fragment left of the spread of Greek philosophy.

The Arab storm brought Islam to Spain and southern Italy, and once the Arab military, administrative, and intellectual elite had established itself there, cultural contact with the West was introduced. In this manner western researchers uncovered an extremely rich world of Greek thought, integrated into a Muslim religiosity. Its intellectual rigor and breadth caused most of what was thought and written about this in the West seem primitive. From the Arabic translations of Greek philosophers Latin translations were now made. In some cases thus the Greek ideas had undergone three metamorphoses in the process of becoming accessible to western thinkers: from Greek

---

du Rocher, 1999), especially the pages 217-43.

to Syrian, from Syrian to Arabic, from Arabic to Latin. What happened to the Greek idea during this long detour is an interesting and partially unresearched history.

The West that took on this intellectual invasion was consciously and expressly Christian. How did people react? Some were enthusiastic, for example, Siger of Brabant (1240-1284) and his Nordic disciple Boethius de Dacia. Others were strongly critical, among them the Archbishop Estienne Tempier, who in a writing of 1271 condemned 219 of the new thinking's theses. Others, on the other hand, tried to come to terms and mediate between traditional Christian ideas and the newly received Greek philosophy, filtered through Islam. The foremost among the last group was Thomas Aquinas (12251274). It was to be Thomas—and thus synthesis— that would win out.

Which were the Muslim philosophers who aroused such a varied reaction? There are three names that stand out especially. The first came to be called Averroes in the West. His Arabic name is Ibn Rushd (1126-1198). His commentary of Aristotle's writings was pathbreaking in western debates. He emphasized—like Aristotle—that the individual soul dies with the body. Only mankind's collective soul, i.e. Idea, survives. Avicenna Ibn Sina (980-1037) developed the conceptualization of being's essence and existence. Being is what something is, existence is what exists. With God being and existence converge. This is His essence to exist. Everything else can in contrast both exist and not exist.

Therefore it is not necessary for something to exist. Mankind, for example, is a thinking being. That is its essence. But it is not necessary for it to exist. It can also not exist. This idea about that which exists necessarily or unnecessarily comes to aquire a major significance for Thomas and his followers. The third Muslim philosopher who came to influence the West is Algazel—Abu Hamid Mohammed Ghazali (10381111), a strong critic of Avicenna.

What is it that happened in the West when the dominant intellectual streams became a synthesis between Biblical faith and Greek thinking, transmitted by Muslims? One person who considered this is Jacques Ellul (1912-1994), French sociologist, legal historian, and theologian. Monica Papazu discusses him in her book *Det hvilel0se hjerte* [*The Restless Heart*] (2004). One of his most important works, *La subversion du christianisme* (1984) has been available since 2005 in a Danish translation with the title *Kristendommens forvanskning* (Tidehvervs Publishing House). Jacques Ellul's initial thesis is that there is a fundamental difference between Islam and Christianity: "I believe that the spirit of Islam in all respects is in conflict with the spirit of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. This juxtaposition suffices to explain: God cannot be incarnate, God cannot be anything but a sovereign judge, who determines everything according to his will. From this follows the complete integration of religion, politics, and law. God's will assumes inescapably the form of law." This is the conflict between the person Jesus Christ and the religiously motivated collection of laws. What happens then when one creates a synthesis between these conflicts? Ellul answers, "all things religious become legality...legality becomes theology."

There is found in Islam a close connection between religion, politics, and power, and Ellul believes that the Constantine state church of the 1200s received a new impetus from Islam. It is a fact that the greatest ideological battle of the Middle Ages, that between the church and the state, is about this very thing—the state or the political power that wants to protect the church, and against which the church defends itself with the battle-cry *Libertas ecclesiae! Freedom of the Church!* A further point where Ellul sees how conflicting tendencies receive a new impetus from Islam concerning the reason for war. The Germanic people's warrior ideal gradually receded from prominence in the West under the influence of Christianity. In Byzantium the soldier was a necessary evil more than an ideal. By contrast, in Islam military force is a part of the religious ideal. This was the Arab military elite, which spread Islam over the Orient and North Africa. Ellul writes concerning Muslim war that it is always justified and a holy duty. This implies the conclusion that war isn't only necessary in some situations. War is good. When George W. Bush described the American military deployment to the Middle East as a "crusade", this was taken very negatively in Muslim circles. In Elluls interpretation this stands out, in contrast, as an example of Christendom's Islamization.

The most important point in the meantime has to do with the heart of theology, the appearance of God. Ellul writes, "...God's omnipotence is allowed to rule over love, his transcendence over the incarnation..." With this comes also history's pattern of appearing as predestined and irrevocable. God is destroyed—or Providence, as the rationalists of the 1700s would say. In their belief in *ratio*, Greek rationality as transmitted by Muslim philosophers come to full expression.

In his treatise, *Shadows of Cavernous Shades* (2002) Erik Persson deals with, among many other things, the question of the Islamization of the West. This is one of the most unusual treatises to see the light of day for a long time in Scandinavia. The topic is data science and for 285 pages the author investigates *realistic computing*. Suddenly, it's as if he is befallen by an afterthought, and then he fills 240 pages with a reckoning with the Western rationality that is the basis of the development of computers. In other words, it is fundamentally a presentation on the history of ideas. For the most part, it is an analysis of the roots of Modernism in Arabic philosophy. Erik Persson expands our perspective. It is not just a question of an Islamicized Aristotle. In the intellectual baggage that was transported to the West were also mysticism, hermeneutics, astrology, and magic. In the case of hermeneutics one may exclude the esotericism that appeals to Hermes Trismegistos. It can be interpreted as if these influences pull in different directions, but there is to be found a common basic essential. This is the ambition to dominate being with knowledge. This knowledge can then become rational, esoteric, or magical. Goethe created the Faust figure as a symbolic figure. Erik Persson likewise pinpoints the Muslim impact. He points out namely that Averroes as well as Avicenna had associations with Ismaelite groups within Islam, a direction that combined the Platonic-Aristotelian idea with esotericism, i.e. a secret knowledge, reserved for a select few and transmitted in strict secrecy.

In the "Festschrift for Staffan Fogelmark," Erik Persson offers a creative investigation of the possible roots in Islam of western utopianism. That both the Bible's prophets and Jesus Christ looked forward to a perfect kingdom of God is obvious. What happens in utopianism is that this perfect condition is placed into time and space. Eschatology—the study of the final judgment—becomes immanent, becomes present in the world. The important figure here is Joachim of Fiore, born 1130. His greatest significance lies in his philosophy of history. From him come the concepts "the third Reich" and "the leader" [transl. presumably Fuhrer]. The Third Reich is a secularized state; the leader is the *novus dux de Babylone*—Babylon's new leader. Erik Persson can show in point after point that Joachim's philosophy of history has parallels in contemporary Islam, especially in Ismaelism, and he was active in southern Italy, one of the Middle Ages' meeting points between Christian belief and Islam.

The parallels do not of necessity imply that there was an influence. Similiarity is not the same as relatedness. Erik Persson's contribution can be seen as an attempt, a proposal for later researchers to prove. It is a pressing task to prove, since utopianism is such a mighty force in the West: the idea of the perfect society. In this concept can also be found the dream of being able to "create" a new society, which is something completely different from advancing an existing society's renewal and growth. If one is successful with this, one can also proceed forwards, with both continuity and change. Western utopianism has had catastrophic results, above all in the 1900s: Gulag, Katyn, Ausschwitz, Pol Pot, The Great Leap Forward. How could such things happen? Following Erik Persson's idea, the West's Islamization is an important contributing factor.

Jacques Ellul and Erik Persson present bold interpretive models. How far the implications reach can only be determined by someone who has very fundamentally detailed knowledge and a comprehensive overview. One thing is incontrovertible, it can be shown that Islam is not only a challenge today. It has been one already since the 1100s. Its intellectual rigor and breadth, its visionary imagination and strict logic make it in no way easy to confront or respond to. At that time the West's greatest talents joined Thomas Aquinas in taking up the challenge. Jacques Ellul questions this intellectual achievement—in order to converse with Rolf Lindborg. But even if Ellul has judged the matter rightly, there remains a second and more heated question: What will the West's greatest talents adopt today?

Advert: Change of Address?

Book Notes & Reviews

Green Politics Is Utopian by Paul Gilk

Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008 Reviewed by Jacob VanVleet Diablo Valley College, Concord CA

In *Green Politics is Eutopian*, independent scholar Paul Gilk presents twenty-eight insightful essays exploring various facets of Green politics and culture. Among a wide array of topics, Gilk discusses modern industrial-technological society, the distinction between utopia and eutopia, and the necessity of smallscale agriculture.

A central theme throughout Gilk's writings is the recognition that mainstream Green politics/culture is utopian. According to Gilk, utopian thought strives for permanence, however, permanence is precisely the erroneous assumption of the industrial-technological system (i.e., "civilization"). Drawing from the work of Lewis Mumford and others, Gilk persuasively argues that "civilization in its essence is a utopian undertaking." The industrial-technological realm, as well as utopian thought, both imagine that there is some sort of permanent solution to various political and ecological problems. However, as Gilk points out, a permanent answer contradicts the dynamic nature of reality. The earth, humans, and political systems are always in a state of flux; there can be no single, overarching solution.

In contrast to mainstream utopian thought, Gilk advocates an alternative Green political vision: one that is *e*utopian. Eutopian thinkers seek a solution of stability and wholeness, embracing *im*permanence in its many complex forms. Eutopian thought also aims to sustain an authentic dialogue with the changing processes of the organic world, recognizing the need for a variety of solutions to the array of ecological problems we face.

In addition, Gilk maintains that in order to restore the earth we need to embrace two "tools" or guiding principles. First, we should look to the "ethical core of all true spiritual traditions: compassion, forgiveness, sharing, moderation, simplicity, modesty, selflessness, and love." By practicing these culture-transcending virtues, we will not only limit our ecological footprint, but we can also begin to dialogue with other traditions which acknowledge the merit of these virtues. Second, we need to adopt the "slow, somewhat bumbling, but steady congealing of the Green political vision." Here, Gilk acknowledges the shortcomings of Green politics while recognizing the absolute necessity of keeping the well-being of the earth at the heart of politics. (This need has been made frighteningly clear by global warming/climate change, depletion of fossil

fuels, and massive waste disposal at sea, to name a few.) Clearly, Gilk's two guiding principles –the ethical core of true spiritual traditions and the Green political vision –can lead us toward healing, wholeness, and stability.

Among its many good qualities, two primary strengths of *Green Politics is Eutopian* stand out. First, Gilk does not dogmatically assert quick fixes to complex problems. With sincerity, Gilk acknowledges that he does not have all of the answers, and he makes it clear that, "These essays, written in the excitement of discovery and the anxiety of distress, are a small nudge in the direction of eutopia." This humility adds to the persuasiveness already found throughout Gilk's work. The second strength is Gilk's recognition of the need for spiritual transformation. It is not enough to simply embrace the Green political vision; we also need to commit ourselves to an authentic and continual spiritual renewal. Indeed, only by committing ourselves politically *and* spiritually will we make any concrete changes in the world.

Overall, Gilk's book insightfully calls us to question our notions of "civilization"; it reminds us that the healing of the earth is our obligation in *many* ways; and it offers a refreshing corrective to today's mainstream, narrow, utopian solutions. Timely and thoughtful, *Green Politics is Eutopian* is a passionate, convicting, and much needed work.

Advert: Make Payments to IJES Electronically?

The IJES office can accept payments only in US dollars because of the huge collection fees otherwise charged by US banks.

IJES subscribers outside the USA can go to www.paypal.com and use a credit card to make a payment to "IJES@ellul.org."

News & Notes

— Russell Heddendorf (1930 - 2008)
On December 24, 2008, Russell Heddendorf died suddenly at age 78 in Philadelphia. Heddendorf had a long and distinguished career as professor of sociology, with appointments at Dickinson College, Geneva College, and Covenant College. He was a long time student of Elul's sociology and of the interface between Christianity and sociology. He was the author of eight articles and reviews of Ellul.

Heddendorf's latest book, *From Faith to Fun: The Secularization of Humor* (Wipf & Stock, 2008) "takes its lead from Ellul's *Subversion of Christianity*" he wrote in personal correspondence last year. *The Ellul Forum* will review this book in the Fall 2009 issue. A great man and a friend to the Ellul fraternity, Russell Heddendorf will be missed.

— **W**IPF **&** s**TOCK**: **P**ROGRE**ss** ON **E**LLUL **B**OO**K**s Despite some special challenges to surmount, editor Ted Lewis and Wipf & Stock Publishers are making progress on securing rights to reprint Ellul's out-ofprint works in English. *Money & Power* will reappear very soon, *Living Faith* and *Hope in Time of Abandonment* will come next. Others to follow.

— JOYCE HANKs TO PEACE CORP

Our IJES co-founder and certainly the leading bibliographer of Jacques Ellul in the world, Joyce Hanks, has retired from her faculty post at the University of Scranton and also taken leave from the IJES to serve in the peace corp in a rather remote southeast Asia location. We wish our amazing colleague well and will eagerly welcome her back.

— ANDY ALEXIs-BAKER AND DAVID LOVEKIN Join IJEs Board

At its annual meeting, the IJES Board welcomed two new members. Andy Alexis-Baker recently graduated from the Mennonite Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. He is a long time leader of the Jesus Radicals, an anarchist group largely inspired by Ellul. Andy has been an indefatigable, generous, and courageous promoter of Jacques Ellul's ideas and writings. David Lovekin is professor of philosophy at Hastings College in Nebraska. David was author of one of the first published monographs on Ellul's thought: *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Lehigh Univ, 1991).

Advert: International Jacques Ellul Society

www.ellul.org

P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705, USA

The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

Membership

Anyone who supports the objectives of the IJES is invited to join the society for an annual dues payment of US$20.00. Membership includes a subscription to the Ellul Forum.

Board of Directors

Andy Alexis-Baker, *Associated Mennonite Seminaries, Elhart IN;* Mark Baker, *Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno;* Patrick Chastenet, *University of Poitiers;* Clifford Christians, *University of Illinois;* Dell DeChant, *University of South Florida;* Andrew Goddard, *Oxford University;* Darrell Fasching (VicePresident), *University of South Florida;* David Gill (President), *St. Mary's College, Moraga;* Virginia Landgraf,

American Theological Library Association, Chicago, David Lovekin, *Hastings College, Nebraska;* Randall Marlin, *Carlton University, Ottawa*, Ken Morris (SecretaryTreasurer), *Boulder;* Carl Mitcham, *Colorado School of Mines*; Langdon Winner, *Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.*

Resources for Ellul Studies

www.ellul.org & www.jacques-ellul.org The IJES web site at www.ellul.org contains (1) news about IJES activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, (4) a complete index of the contents of all *Ellul Forum* back issues; and (5) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The French AIJE web site at www.jacques-ellul.org is also a superb resource.

The Ellul Forum CD: 1988-2002

The first thirty issues of *The Ellul Forum*, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for US $15 (postage included). Send payment with your order to "IJES," P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

Back issues #31 - #42 of *The Ellul Forum* are available for $5 each (postage and shipping included).

Cahiers Jacques Ellul

Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne

An essential annual journal for students of Ellul is *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, edited by Patrick Chastenet, published by Editions L'Esprit du Temps, and distributed by Presses Universitaires de France Send orders to Editions L'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Postage and shipping is 5 euros for the first volume ordered; add 2 euros for each additional volume ordered.

Volume 1: "L'Annees personnalistes" (15 euros)

Volume 2: "La Technique" (15 euros)

Volume 3: "L'Economie" (21 euros).

Volume 4 (forthcoming): "La Propagande" (21 euros).

Volume 5: "La Politique" (21 euros)

Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. Visit www.elsevier.com for ordering information.

The Reception of Jacques Ellul's Critique of Technology: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings on His Life and Thought by Joyce Main Hanks (Edwin

Mellen Press, 2007). 546 pp. This volume is an amazing, iundispensable resource for studying Jacques Ellul. All the books, articles, reviews, and published symposia on Ellul's ideas and writings are here.

Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul by Andrew Goddard. (Paternoster Press, 2002). 378 pp. Seven years after being published, Professor Goddard's study remains the best English language introduction to Ellul's life and thought.

Librairie Mollat—new books in French

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux (www.mollat.com) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

Alibris—used books in English

The Alibris web site (www.alibris.com) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

Used books in French:

two web resources

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are www.chapitre.com and www.livre-rare-book.com.

Ellul on DVD/Video

French film maker Serge Steyer's film "Jacques Ellul: L'homme entier" (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site www.meromedia.com. Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul's ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.

Issue #44 Fall 2009 — Ellul, Capitalism, and the Workplace

- Click to view the original PDF

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

"One of the results of capitalism... is the subservience of being to having. This result makes allegiance to capitalism virtually impossible for a Christian. For it is not a by-product... To the contrary, it is the inevitable consequence of capitalism, for there is no other possibility when making money becomes the purpose of life."

-Jacques Ellul
Money and Power
(1954; ET 1984), p. 20
From the Guest Editor

Contents

Information on The Editorial Board & More

payment to "IJES@ellul.org" electronically at www.paypal.com. Be sure to note your address and the purpose of your payment.

Change of Address

Please notify IJES of any change in your address. Our mailings are infrequent and postal forwarding orders expire.

Manuscript Submissions

For Ellul Forum writers' guidelines, visit www.ellul.org—or e-mail: Editor@ellul.org— or write Cliff Christians, EF Editor, Institute of Communications Research, University of Illinois, 810 S. Wright St., # 228, Urbana IL 61801 USA We welcome your proposals.

Books, Reviews, News

Send books for review, book reviews, and news to David Gill, EF Assoc. Editor, P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705. E-mail: IJES@ellul.org

Back Issues

Visit www.ellul.org for a complete index of back issues. Issues #1-30 are available (only) as a complete collection on a compact disc for US $15. Issues #31 onward are available for $5 per copy.

From the Guest Editor

Over the past fourteen months, capitalism has been in the news. Failures and re-structurings of banks, significant drops in stock indexes, and the reshaping of the U.S. automobile industry have put workers and investors on edge. Some readers may have lost jobs in the past year, and most of us know people who have become unemployed or fear that they will be soon. Many people's retirement funds have diminished considerably.

Institutions that we have counted on as being part of the fabric of our lives may have been forced to reduce services or even close. Despite recent declarations of recovery, it has not seemed like "business as usual" for those whose lives are intertwined with global capitalism.

Yet, from the point of view of certain schools of social thought, capitalism promotes this kind of convulsion. Different types of Marxism offer variants on the doctrine that the productive capacity of capitalism is based on the impoverishment of workers, sooner or later causing supply to outstrip demand and precipitating a business crisis. Even those who think that Marx got many things wrong may wonder what sort of guidance is in place to cause lenders to extend credit to projects which are trustworthy in a deeper sense - not just able to repay their loans, but promoting the long-term well-being of people and the planet.

This issue of *The Ellul Forum* looks at capitalism and life in the business world from various points of view, recognizing that it is a continuing and sometimes controversial part of our technological civilization. First, I examine Jacques Ellul's views of capitalism from the angle of the theological doctrines and social analysis behind them, showing some places where I think he leaves questions open. Next, Nekeisha Alexis-Baker's essay, edited from a presentation she has given to church groups, seeks to raise consciousness of the religious dimensions of the rhetoric and realities around investing, work, and consumerism. Finally, Bryan Winters speaks from the point of view of one who has worked in software marketing and is becoming distressed at the difficulty of rational communication in an environment where image-based spectacles are expected. Together, they show the continuing relevance of Ellul's thought on many issues - from money itself to secular religions to the properties of word and image - for economic life.

Virginia W. Landgraf
American Theological Library Association, Chicago, Illinois

Capitalism in the Thought of Jacques Ellul: Eight Theses

by Virginia W. Landgraf
Virginia W. Landgraf is a lay theologian in the Reformed tradition who works as an indexer-analyst at the American Theological Library Association in Chicago. Her theological education was at the Graduate Theological Union (M.A., systematic theology, 1995) and Princeton Theological Seminary (Ph.D., Christian ethics, 2003). Her dissertation focused on the role of institutions in Jacques Ellul's theology and sociology.

The purpose of the following theses is to outline how capitalism fits into the overall schema of Jacques Ellul's thought. They are intended to serve as a springboard to further work in theology and social analysis.[1] The first three are about Ellul's thought in general and serve as background for those more specific to economic life.[2] They are included because our judgments about whether he is right or wrong there affect how we evaluate his views of capitalism.

---

[1] In another project, I was struck by the contrast, over many different areas, between what apologists for and opponents of capitalism believed about what is fixed and what is changeable about human life (Virginia W. Landgraf, "Competing Narratives of Property Rights and Justice for the Poor: Toward a Nonannihilationist Approach to Scarcity and Efficiency," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 27 (1) Spr/Sum 2007: 57-75). I find both sides to be too triumphalist in what they affirm and too demonizing in what they oppose. Ellul's thought is an interesting starting point because he wants to avoid triumphalism and because he is willing to acknowledge both good intentions and bad results on both sides.

[2] The first three theses are condensed from portions of Virginia W. Landgraf, *Abstract Power and the God of Love: A Critical Assessment of the Place of Institutions in Jacques Ellul's Anthropology of Dialectical Relationships* (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2003).

Thesis 1: The problematic that runs through all of Ellul's theological and sociological work can be expressed as follows: "How can truth break into a world in which the realm of reality is becoming more and more closed in upon itself?"

Ellul defines the order of truth as having to do with "the final or ultimate destination of the human being," as well as debates over meanings, purposes, values, and decisions with ultimate significance. The order of reality has to do with "that which is seen, counted, quantified, and situated in space." It also includes abstractions from particulars that can be depicted visually or manipulated quantitatively. Ellul believes that each of these orders has its characteristic mode and sense by which our mind receives it. Questions or judgments about truth are primarily communicated by the spoken word and received by hearing; realities are transmitted by visible objects or images, perceived by seeing. Each order also has its own characteristic logic. Arriving at truth requires time and includes a dimension of mystery, and words allow multiple interpretations. Reality requires space, definability, and unequivocity. Claims within the realm of truth are backed by the personal word of a committed witness; within the realm of reality, they are backed by impersonal evidence. The position of the self with respect to the world is different within the two orders: waiting for the other and giving the other freedom when it is a question of truth, but grasping at the world outside oneself and manipulating the other when it is a question of reality. The former is a stance of love, the latter of power.[3]

Given this distinction, Ellul's sociological works depict the realm of reality closing in upon itself and increasingly drawing human beings into its machinations: the contemporary technical phenomenon as a matter of the absolutization of quantitative knowledge and effects;[4] propaganda as a phenomenon whereby words are detached from a committed subject and used to manipulate behavior (reality);[5] politics as impervious to values because it is driven behind the scenes by the technical phenomenon;[6] the growth in the power of the bureaucratic state, abstracted from any personal ruler, to manipulate a similarly abstract citizenry;[7] etc. His theological works express hope that Truth, the Word of God, may break into such closed systems[8] and disappoint-

---

[3] Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 5-42.

[4] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 7985.

[5] Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 25-32.

[6] Jacques Ellul, *The Political Illusion*, trans. Konrad Kellen (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 6895.

[7] One of the subsections of Ellul's *Histoire des institutions* is entitled, "Mainmise de l'etat sur la nation" (Takeover of the nation by the state). Jacques Ellul, *Histoire des institutions*, vol. 4, *XVI-XVIII siecle*, 6th ed. (Paris: PUF, 1969), 79. For how revolutions against centralized power ended up reinforcing it, see Jacques Ellul, *Autopsy of Revolution*, trans. Patricia Wolf (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 160-163.

[8] For instance, from various angles, Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation*, trans.

ment that Christians have grasped at visible structures within the realm of reality (moral and legal codes, institutions, political accomplishments)[9] instead of being open to where God might be calling us next. Occasionally Ellul's sociological works include hypotheses about how vicious circles may be reversed or descriptions of characteristics societies should have to meet the challenges that they encounter. Examples include his call for contemplation in *Autopsy of Revolution*[10] and the argument from information theory in *The Political Illusion* that resilient societies must include a diversity of components and room for dialogue among them.[11] Both of these examples presume the idea that the realm of reality needs transcendent input to avoid becoming a vicious cycle that consumes human beings.

Thesis 2: Ellul's statements about the absoluteness of quantitative judgments gain their force not from the inner logic of mathematics but from Ellul's belief that a desire to grasp at reality is intrinsic to fallen human beings.

Ellul states that because the difference in size of two numbers cannot be changed by anyone, methods which are based on quantitative results are similarly indisputable.[12] This inference ignores the fact that many mathematical equations have more than one solution. Another factor of decision must be introduced to narrow down the results to a single number or point. These decisions may be forced not by the calculations of technicians but by the mass psychology of the technical phenomenon: "the larger one" (or, as the trend became later, "the smaller one") or "the faster one."

Ellul believes that the inner structure of our minds as we encounter the realm of reality drives such decisions. All human beings, he thinks, have in our minds an image of us as possessing and manipulating reality. This image intervenes with our immediate experience of the visual, quantitative, abstracted realm to make our relationship with our environment into one in which we are the subjects and the environment is the object. Eventually, we construct a world surrounding ourselves in which everything is made by people. Yet, as we realize our dependence upon this environment, we are struck with horror.[13] Further attempts to master this environment perpetuate this vicious circle.

Because multiple solutions exist for many quantitative problems, the belief that people have this image in our minds seems to function as a proxy for original sin in Ellul's sociological work. It intervenes between temptation to manipulation (seeing

George C. Schreiner (New York: Seabury, 1977), 144-170;

Jacques Ellul, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 198-199; Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 60-66.

[9] This is the theme of Jacques Ellul, *False Presence of the Kingdom*, trans.C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1972), and Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

[10] Ellul, *Autopsy of Revolution*, 285-286.

[11] Ellul, *The Political Illusion*, 206-223, 236-238.

[12] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 80.

[13] Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 11-12.

reality) and the manipulation itself (grasping at it). Its presence helps explain why Ellul sees societal trends based on the manipulation of quantitative or abstract data as so impervious to claims from the realm of truth.

Thesis 3: Ellul's absolute disjunction between love and power and his doctrine that God characteristically works through love rather than power make it hard to conceive divine action as working directly through mechanical sociological or economic processes to create positive goods.

Ellul believes that the Truth who can ultimately break into closed systems of reality is the God who created the world, chose Israel, became incarnate in Jesus Christ who died for humanity's sins on the cross, and will ultimately purge the world of evil in the last judgment. The ultimate purpose of human life is to be in relationship with this God and obey this God's commandments.[14] Among these commandments are "Thou shalt not kill"[15] and commandments to love one's neighbor and enemy. One caught in a cycle of grasping after reality risks drowning out the word of God with concerns over finite things and crushing other members of creation by the desire to possess them.

Ellul thinks that both divine action and the interaction with creation that God wants from human beings are expressible in terms of love, not power. In Ellul's doctrine of divine action, God does not pre-ordain the future but takes human decisions into account when intervening in history and when building the new Jerusalem.[16] God knows what is best for human beings and intervenes in blocked historical situations, using natural and historical forces and human decisions to upset the existing imbalance.[17] When Ellul links blind historical forces to God's activity, he is usually talking about God's judgment, not God's continuous maintenance of the world as in a more conventional doctrine of providence. God may turn aside and be silent,[18] and then the workings out of mechanical processes (e.g., violence begetting more violence) are a way that God's judgment falls on those who choose means which are unfitting for creatures created in the image of a God of love.[19] God suffers when creatures experience these punishments,[20] but God does not indefinitely wallow in the fallen creature's condition. In Jesus Christ God has taken on the condemnation that creatures deserved, showing that God's will is for pardon beyond the temporary chastisements and for the ultimate redemption of creation. This process of bringing human beings to account, which might

---

[14] Jacques Ellul, *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 295-299.

[15] Cf. Ellul's statement that what differentiates human beings from animals is the commandment "Thou shalt not kill." Jacques Ellul, *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective*, trans. Cecelia Gaul Kings (New York: Seabury, 1969), 146.

[16] Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; London: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1989), 218-223.

[17] Ellul, *What I Believe*, 158-161.

[18] Jacques Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1973), 114117.

[19] Ellul, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 111-118.

[20] Ellul, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 110.

be termed "benevolent coercion" (although Ellul never uses this term), is consummated in the last judgment, in which every human being is stripped of works which are opposed to God's will. Ellul believes that God has the power to damn creatures but has renounced it.[21] He thinks that instances that look like manipulative or crushing power in the Bible - such as the Flood or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah - are recorded precisely because they are abnormal.[22] Ellul sees the character of God's love revealed and accomplished not by such acts but by a stance of "non-power," e.g., Jesus' decision not to use power to defend himself (Matt. 26:52-54).[23]

This disjunction between power and love - with benevolent coercion hovering implicitly in the background but not thematized by Ellul - raises a fundamental question relevant to economic life. Does God ever work through mechanical sociological processes *non-paradoxically* (i.e., not as the "judgment" term in the sequence bad direction - judgment - redirection) to create positive goods? Doctrines of providence that include such a component have been common among Christian apologists for or opponents of capitalism, whether they point to Adam Smith's doctrine of the "invisible hand" or believe that God is working through class struggle described along Marxist lines. Yet Ellul does not take that route. He refuses to call his doctrine of divine action "providence" because he thinks such a term implies mechanical or totalitarian determinism.[24] Furthermore, as the following theses will show, what many of his predecessors and contemporaries call "progress" Ellul sees as trends wherein God seems increasingly silent.

Thesis 4: Ellul thinks that neither work nor progress are worth the trust that modern ideologies (capitalist or socialist) have placed in them, either on the basis of biblical revelation or concrete results.

Ellul does not accept the myth that work brings abundant life. From a material point of view he finds its track record poor. He accepts the findings of Georges Hubert de Radkowski and others that poverty was not widespread in primitive societies, but when work for hire available in a society increased, poverty increased also.[25] He thinks that the modern exaltation of work dates only to the eighteenth century and is associated with a certain ideology of happiness (*bonheur*) associated with material comfort.[26] Ellul sees this increased standard of living as more of a temptation or a curse than a boon. Even were this level of material wellbeing available to all, the same problems of grasping for it and being horrified at it apply as with any other element in the realm of

---

[21] Ellul, *What I Believe*, 190-192, 210-213, 196.

[22] Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 33.

[23] Jacques Ellul, *Si tu es le Fils de Dieu: Souffrances et tentations de Jesus* (Zurich: R. Brockhaus Verlag; Paris: Centurion, 1991), 99-100.

[24] Ellul, *What I Believe*, 156.

[25] Jacques Ellul, "From the Bible to a History of Non-Work," *Cross Currents* 35 (1) Spring 1985: 45.

[26] Jacques Ellul, *Metamorphose du bourgeois* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1967), 67-88; Jacques Ellul, *A Critique of the New Commonplaces*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 151.

reality. (Here they are expressed as a preoccupation with achieving or maintaining one's material security.) Moreover, Ellul sees the industrial production methods that have brought increased levels of material comfort as leading inevitably to the proletarization of some (see thesis #5).

Ellul thinks that the Bible justifies no ideology of work as virtue or freedom, contrary to modern ideologies promoted by capitalistic bourgeois, socialist or fascist governments, or even the church. Before the fall, human beings' interactions with creation resembled play more than work. Our relation with creation became toilsome as a result of the fall, and we aggravate our burden by trying to save ourselves through our work. Work is simply one of the necessities of life and should not be sacralized. The occasional warnings in the Bible that spendthrifts or idlers will lack material sustenance are recognitions of how the fallen world works, not exaltations of work as heroism.[27]

Similarly, Ellul finds no justification in either concrete results or the Bible for a belief in progress: that the course of history is such that conditions of life will continually improve. Looking at history over the last several centuries, he sees a growth in technical power and a growth in the power of the abstract, bureaucratic state, to the point where alternative ways of being are increasingly being squeezed out of social currency. The state and technique do not counterbalance each other but act synergistically; technique increases the power of the state over its citizens, and the state gives a sanction to the demand for technical "progress."[28] Such a growth in technical power is at best morally ambiguous, because of the increased danger to life from maleficent uses, accidents, and systemic unpredictability,[29] and the fact that beneficent uses entail a whole series of prior technical inventions, some of which may have maleficent uses tempting to fallen human beings.[30]

Furthermore, Ellul thinks that Christians who read history as progressing incrementally towards the kingdom of God, especially through our works, are misinterpreting the Bible. The new creation is a gift of God and comes only after judgment. Although God takes some of our works into the new Jerusalem, we cannot know which of them they will be.[31]

Thesis 5: Ellul takes over Karl Marx's thesis that capitalization entails the proletarization of those without capital and widens it to include labor camps perpetrated by statist Marxist regimes and the replacement of traditional human contacts with technical work and entertainment among workers in societies dominated by technique.

In his account of original capitalization and proletarization Ellul hews closely to Marx. The process depends on a labor theory of value and the existence of some kind of "primitive capitalization," where some have capital (and hence the ability to hire others

---

[27] Ellul, "From the Bible to a History of NonWork," 43-45.

[28] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 228.

[29] Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 77-99.

[30] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 98-99.

[31] Ellul, *What I Believe*, 217-218.

and benefit from their services), and others have nothing to sell but their labor. Because labor is the measure of value, if capitalists do not pay workers the entire difference between the price of the finished product and the cost of the raw materials, they are in effect stealing from the workers (the "alienation" of labor). The workers' labors under capitalism increase the capitalists' power at the expense of their own power. The cycle thus continues, with capitalists becoming more powerful and workers not able to command wages beyond what is necessary for their reproduction as a laboring class. Workers in such a situation constitute a proletariat, bearing within themselves the alienating side of all the characteristics of capitalism: the need to conform themselves to means of industrial production; the lack of roots in a particular place and the difficulty of sustaining culture in general (because of the need to move where the work is and the lack of time to spend in a place apart from work); and the lack of family life apart from mere biological reproduction (and the early co-optation of any children into the industrial system).[32]

Ellul believes that such a process of proletarization occurs during *any* process of industrialization, whether undertaken by private actors or governments. Besides the proletarization during the Industrial Revolution described by Marx, he sees the process as having happened under Communist regimes in the USSR, China, Vietnam, and Cambodia. In each case, the government mandated some kind of industrialization; in each case, people sent to forced labor camps constituted a new proletariat: people deprived of all but the most basic material sustenance and cut off from roots and family. Marxist regimes extolled the value of work and developed bureaucratic structures to keep those who questioned this ideology in line. The ostensible purpose of the labor camps was to "re-educate" recalcitrants into believing in work. Ellul does not see the massive deurbanization undertaken by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia as a romantic return to the countryside or to pure Khmer culture but as an attempt to build irrigation works industrially.[33]

A third type of proletariat Ellul sees might be termed the "technical proletariat." These are people who, though not materially miserable, are alienated from roots, family, and culture because they are too caught up in technical work methods and entertainments to want anything else. Their leisure activities do not cause them to question demands for technical progress but serve to better integrate them into these demands.[34]

Thesis 6: Ellul thinks that money is a power that has its own force and direction, setting itself up in opposition to God, and that component practices of economic systems based on monetary transactions involve manipulative power and/or trust in money rather than the God of grace.

Ellul believes that Jesus' designation of money by a personal term ("Mammon") expresses a spiritual reality: that money has power over us that cannot be explained

---

[32] Jacques Ellul, *Changer de revolution: L'ineluctableproletariat* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982), 7-14.

[33] Ellul, *Changer de revolution*, 48-147, 184196.

[34] Ellul, *Changer de revolution*, 197-220.

by its rational function in society as a means of exchange. This power is shown by the fact that money is one of contemporary human beings' sacred things: impolite to discuss among the bourgeois and presumed to solve all problems by the working class. It sets itself up as being our personal master and savior, and Jesus demands that we choose between it and God. Ellul's warnings about money go beyond its purely quantitative nature and role in facilitating abstractions. Monetization implies not only preoccupation with the realm of reality but also serving a power that inhabits realities and claims ultimacy (a false "answer" in the realm of truth).[35]

Ellul thus thinks that it is very difficult to use money rather than being used by it. He sees savings or insurance as expressions of trust in money rather than God, although he does not condemn savings for nearterm, concrete purposes such as buying a house or gift, to tide oneself over during slow periods in lines of work with irregular income, or to meet the costs of continuing one's business (e.g., retaining seed corn or replacing worn-out equipment). He considers any act of selling an attempt to gain power over another, not a service to another. His logic is based on the nature of God. The God who becomes incarnate in Jesus Christ and dies for humanity's sins is a God of grace; monetary transactions, by their very nature, involve not giving something away but rather asking a price for it, and hence they are not grace. Jesus Christ already paid the price for our sins, so we should not pay that price to a false god.[36]

Thesis 7: Ellul believes that choosing God rather than Mammon means siding with human life against money, which puts some basic practices of capitalism in question, but also implies liberation from worry and from the enslaving power of money.

Ellul believes that loving God rather than Mammon is not merely a matter of internal direction but should be expressed in concrete ways, which can be characterized as personalization and desacralization. Personalization means siding with human life against money: recognizing those with whom one has financial relationships as whole people rather than reducing them to their economic function. Relationships where there can be grace and freedom should take precedence over the desire for personal advantage or the need to follow the letter of contracts. Ellul believes that the biblical legislation against lending at interest to neighbors or members of one's community (Ex. 22:25, Lev. 25:35-38), against taking pledges overnight or taking anything necessary for livelihood as a pledge (Ex. 22:26, Deut. 24:6-13), and against holding back wages (Jas. 5:4) are primarily a matter of choosing human life over Mammon and only secondarily a matter of justice for one group of people over another. Choosing Mammon brings accursedness and enslavement on all sides, both of the less powerful who are immediately crushed and of the more powerful (who nevertheless bear responsibility for their deeds) who are worried about maintaining their position. Choosing life against money also implies

---

[35] Jacques Ellul, *Money and Power*, trans. LaVonne Neff (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 75-85.

[36] Ellul, *Money and Power*, 104-106, 77-79, 8688.

refusing to treat money as sacred, giving money away and eschewing indeterminate savings.[37]

Ellul's beliefs about how Christians should personalize economic relationships and desacralize money put basic practices of capitalism in question. Although he acknowledges that the Old Testament allowed lending at interest to distant Gentiles, he does not seem to believe that Christians should treat anyone as less than a neighbor. He does not say that Christians are forbidden from charging interest, but he implies that a Christian entering into a non-neighborly financial relationship should personalize it (presumably no longer caring about receiving interest). Ellul explicitly states that profit is ruled out by the call not to hold back wages;[38] as in thesis #5, he holds to a labor theory of value inherited from Marx. Ellul's call for Christians to refrain from saving except for near-term purposes implies the curtailment of lending from fractional reserves. Lending at interest, profit, and lending from fractional reserves are three pillars of the expansion of economic activity brought on by capitalism. Ellul seems to imply that all of these occur because people are trusting in Mammon rather than God. When combined with his belief that industrialization brings proletarization (thesis #5) and that work has a poor track record in providing what human beings really need (thesis #4), one is led to the conclusion that Ellul thinks that capitalistic economic expansion is a huge mistake.

Ellul's calls for Christians to live contrary to capitalistic expectations should not be seen as legalistic restrictions but as ways to live out liberation. He wants to free people from enslavement to money. He believes that living according to God's grace means freedom from financial worry.[39] If we trust that God knows that we need the means of material sustenance, we will be free to adopt the counter-cultural practices he recommends.

Thesis 8: Ellul's call for Christians to incarnate God's love where they are rather than withdraw from the world presents ambiguities for Christians in capitalistic societies, because any economic act can have multiple meanings and consequences.

Ellul does not counsel escape from monetary entanglements as a strategy for Christians to avoid being enslaved by money but believes that Christians should personalize economic relationships and desacralize money where they are.[40] Christians are thus placed in situations of ambiguity. One ambiguity comes from the fact that the normal condition of human beings at the end of life is inability to provide for one's basic needs. Saving for old age could then be seen as rational planning for a particular purpose or as balancing out the irregular income that all of us have if our life is seen as a whole. Ellul would probably find this interpretation a rationalization on the slippery slope to trust in Mammon. (Our expenses during retirement are an unknown quantity and unnecessary if we die suddenly while still working.) But the possibility of framing

---

[37] Ellul, *Money and Power*, 99-103, 109-116.

[38] Ellul, *Money and Power*, 102-103.

[39] Ellul, *Money and Power*, 106-109.

[40] Ellul, *Money and Power*, 96-97.

retirement savings this way exemplifies Ellul's refusal to provide hard-and-fast rules about where one must desacralize money and where one may follow procedures which those who trust in Mammon would find prudent.

* * *

Taken as a whole, these theses show why Ellul does not recommend capitalistic activity as a strategy to help transcendent input break into vicious circles of reality. The methods of capitalism are based on preoccupation with the realm of reality and/ or a power which inhabits reality and sets itself up as a false god, and they lead to consequences deleterious to human life. The fact that Ellul says all these things about statist Marxist regimes as well does not erase his negative judgment of capitalism. At the height of the Cold War, he was saying, "A pox on both your houses!"

At various points people concerned with Ellul's problematic might draw different conclusions. Is his account of vicious cycles of reality, based on the belief that fallen human beings grasp at reality, watertight? Does his doctrine of divine action adequately account for how God relates with nonhuman realities? Is his account of the impoverishment attendant upon work for hire an accurate reading of economic history? Is Marx's labor theory of value correct, or can just wages coexist with just profits? Are all buying-selling relationships expressions of the desire of one party to have power over another, or can monetary transactions exist where both parties benefit?

One might answer several of these questions differently by questioning Ellul's absolute disjunction between love and power. Are the categories of love-as-dialogue and power-as-manipulation adequate to describe the raising of children, care for the mentally disabled, or the tending of plants or animals? It seems that a third category, analogous to artistic creation respectful of one's materials, would help fill the gaps. There are biblical precedents for seeing some of God's activity in this way (e.g., God as the potter in Jer. 18:6-10). Such a category could help make the concept of benevolent coercion explicit, depict non-manipulative relations with realities, and form part of a doctrine of providence that could imagine God's positive action through mechanical sociological processes. Specifying how to formulate such a doctrine so as to avoid the triumphalism of previous descriptions of economic or political providence (whether of left or right) goes beyond the scope of this essay.

Mea Culpa

Because of editorial mistakes, a number of errors were introduced in Erik Persson's Cybergnosticism Triumphant? in Ellul Forum issue #43 (Spring 2009).

- Erik Persson's credentials were not correctly stated in the article. Whereas he worked as an assistant professor at the Department of Informatics at Lund University during 2003-2006, he is currently at LDC (Lund Computer Centre) at Lund University, working with software development.

- p. 4, second column, near the end of the page: "Arguably ... technology. This seems ..." does not make sense. The text should read: "Arguably, their and their scholarly defenders' neglect or facile rebuff of the, to the common sense at least, rather obvious negative consequences and conspicuous dangers of these technologies seems to confirm Jacques Ellul's famous thesis of the fundamental deceitfulness of technological discourse, "le bluff technologique" (see [Ellul90]), whereby all negative aspects of technological "progress" are swept under the rug or made light of in the interest of the "wager" ("l'enjeu du siecle") lain that we shall be able to control technology to our own advantage, the unspoken premise of which being "after us the deluge"."

- p. 8, first column, last sentence: Instead of "as the replacement, in the gnostic's view, of the imperfect unjust, and evil order of the present world" the text should read, "as the replacement of the in the gnostic's view imperfect, unjust, and evil order of the present world."

The Ellul Forum Editors apologize to both the author and the readers for these oversights and errors.

Market Capitalism: The Religion of the Market & its Challenge to the Church

by Nekeisha Alexis-Baker
Nekeisha Alexis-Baker is a native of Trinidad with a degree in Africana Studies from NYU and a master's in theology from Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. Her work includes creation care, racism, and the intersection of politics and Christian faith

My assertion in this essay is that Christians concerned with economic justice should not understand market capitalism as merely an economic system nor see our participation within it as being "responsible consumers." Rather market capitalism is a religion with the market as its god. Therefore, resisting the effects of market capitalism is to resist participation in idolatry. Many people have discussed market capitalism as a religion. I will present their arguments and bring in some of my own reflections. After examining several definitions of religion, I came up with a working definition that includes the following elements: a narrative of a transcendent being or beings that relates to history (myth); truth statements on the way the world works and the role of the created order (doctrine); and a set of practices (social institutions, rituals, experiences) and values (ethics) that form persons to participate in that world. As I will show below, the market has a myth, doctrines, and practices that form a religious system. I hope to enable readers to reflect on the ways Christianity is weakened in the face of market capitalism and how the church might regain its potency.

The myth of the market and doctrines of its transcendence

In investing journalism and websites the market tends to be discussed as three different but interconnected beings: the bull market, in which prices of securities are expected to rise; the bear market, in which such prices are expected to fall; and the market as a whole. The bull and bear markets may be named for the attack postures of the respective animals: the upward thrusting motion of the horns of an attacking bull and the downward motion of a bear paw when it strikes. The warring animals of the market have particular characteristics: growth and optimism in a bull market, and decline and recession in a bear market. Yet bull markets can limp and even die, giving birth to the bear market. The bear market is responsible for the bull's demise until the market is able to roar, surge, and resurrect itself once again[41].

The seriousness with which people take the inner battle of the market is one indicator of its transcendence. In a bull market all is well with the world. Profits are high, wealth overflows, investors and shareholders are confident, the economic system is in good shape, and consumers can shop without restriction. In a bear market, the very foundation of our society is threatened. Bear markets are blamed on declines in the economy and in the corporate arena, poor government policies, and bank failures that can "paralyze the financial system, causing a persistent slump."[42] Investopedia's first piece of advice to investors in a bear market is, "Don't despair." The article goes on to say, "[T]he best thing to do during a bear market is to play dead - just like you should if you met a real grizzly in the woods By staying calm and not making any sudden

moves, you'll save yourself from becoming a bear's lunch."[43] The market's performance then is figuratively a matter of life, death and resurrection. It can affect everything from employment to the value of our homes to the way we act as consumers and investors.

A key indicator of the market's transcendence is that its proponents refuse to intervene with it. Economists tend to believe that the market is a natural phenomenon that has been in existence at least as long as human beings. A striking example of this belief can be found in a 1999 *Wall Street Journal* article called, "A New Model for the Nature of Business: It's Alive!" Author Thomas Petzinger Jr. quotes from and reflects on the words of anthropologist and economist William C. Frederick:

"All living things...harbor an impulse to economize, to accomplish more with less. This is life's bulwark against the universal propensity toward the loss of energy and form, the unstoppable force called entropy. 'This economizing process is the only way to survive, grow, develop, and flourish,' says Dr. Frederick. 'Overall, life on earth has

---

[41] Floyd Norris, "As Bull Market Nears a Birthday, Few Seem Ready to Celebrate," *The New York Times*, 24 Sep 2004; Investopedia, Terms, Bull Market, <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/bullmarket.asp>; Investopedia, Terms, Bear Market,
        <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/bearmarket.asp>.
[42] Michael Sivy and Erica Garcia, "Forecast 2003," *Money* Jan 2003, p 58-64.
[43] Investopedia, "Digging Deeper into Bull and Bear Markets," 3 Oct 2003:
        <http://www.investopedia.com/articles/basics/03/100303.a sp>

been a roaring economizing success story' ... The genes that create us humans have programmed us for business, 'the main economizing vehicle on which organized human life depends,' Dr. Frederick says. Trade, technology and the division of labor, the three foundations of business, all predate agriculture, government, religion, law, symbolic communication and probably every other organizing social force, except the nurturing of progeny."[44]

In other words, business and economics are natural and life-giving, explain the way all life is organized, and are a permanent part of our history. David Loy explores this rationale: "In this calculus...intervention in the ongoing economic system is a threat to the natural order of things, and hence to future human welfare."[45] This view conveys that we who are controlled by a fundamental "impulse" to do business cannot control the movements of the market. We who do not have arms like God cannot contend with the Almighty (cf. Job 40: 2, 9).

Since the market is natural it follows that it is also objective, if not just. If economics is related to genetics, then economic inequality is simply a matter of natural selection. As a lion can't be blamed for eating a gazelle, the market can't be blamed if some become poor and others rich. Loy explains: "If market capitalism does operate according to economic laws as natural as those of physics or chemistry...its consequences seem unavoidable, despite the fact that they have led to extreme social inequality and are leading to environmental catastrophe."[46] The advice of the market to the poor is simply to have faith in its workings. Often, none of the models of development offered to poor countries provide an alternative to capitalism. Advocates of globalization have even suggested that poverty-stricken nations should "let the free market do the work of deciding a) What goods and services to produce...b) How to produce them...and c) How to distribute them."[47] These theories propose that if the market is allowed to exist without intervention then development will naturally occur.

Another truth statement in market capitalism is that the market is all-knowing. Harvey Cox writes, "The market, we are taught, is able to determine what human needs are, what copper and capital should cost, how much barbers and CEOs should be paid, and how much jet planes, running shoes and hysterectomies should sell for." Cox notes that this wisdom may not last long. When the article was written in 1999, there was already the language of a "total market" and the emergence of an economic trend to "apply market calculations to areas that once seemed exempt such as dating, family life, marital relations and child rearing."[48] The market cannot be omniscient

---

[44] Thomas Petzinger, Jr., "A New Model for the Nature of Business: It's Alive!" *The Wall Street Journal*, 26 Feb 1999.

[45] David Loy, "The Religion of the Market," New Theology Working Group, 1997.
  <http://www.religiousconsultation.org/loy.htm>

[46] Loy, "The Religion of the Market," 2.

[47] Richard A. Yoder, Calvin W. Redekop, and Vernon E. Jantzi, *Development to a Different Drummer: Anabaptist/Mennonite Experiences and Perspectives* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2004), 30.

[48] Harvey Cox, "The Market as God," *Atlantic Monthly* Mar 1999, 6.

without assistance from trend-spotters, motivational researchers, marketing specialists, and psychologists. These intermediaries work to understand and exploit people's wants, needs, fears, and insecurities in order to offer them solutions for the right price, increasing people's dependence on the market and ensuring that it continues to expand.

Note how in the above truth claims several properties that Christian theology traditionally attributes to God are applied to the market: killing and making alive, omnipotence, righteousness, and omniscience.

Doctrines of the market: cosmology, anthropology, and salvation

Market capitalism not only has truth claims about the market but also statements about the role of nature in the world, human beings as workers and consumers, and salvation through accumulation of possessions.

In the cosmology of the market, land, animals, and creation as a whole are worth only as much as the price they will sell for and the products they can be used to create. Everything is for sale. This approach to creation is vastly different from traditional religious understandings of nature. Christians are increasingly beginning to understand creation as signs of God's blessing, glory, and care, and are viewing humanity's role as partner with and caretaker of the earth. Historically other belief systems have worshipped parts of creation as gods: the sun, earth, trees, and other natural elements. The market has no room for such sentimentalities. Cox refers to market capitalism's doctrine on creation as a process of reversed transubstantiation. Instead of the belief that bread and wine become the sacred body and blood of Christ in communion, "in the mass of the Market... things that have been held sacred transmute into interchangeable items for sale."[49] Land provides a good example of this process. All the complex meanings land has held for people over millennia dissolve into the single criterion of what is advantageous for its function as real estate. If an acre of trees must be removed to build one suburban home,[50] real estate takes precedence over trees. If drilling in Alaska is needed to unearth oil, then let the oil rigs roll. In market capitalism, everything has a price tag, and creation as a whole is an exploitable natural resource.

In market capitalism people are workers and consumers and can function as either at any given time. This doctrine is based on the belief that we are primarily individuals interested in self-preservation and self-fulfillment. We work to earn enough money to fulfill our ever increasing and expanding needs. As John Mizzoni puts it: "*Homo economicus* is an economic being who toils in order to satisfy material needs and desires. In this capitalist economic approach, work is conceived as an activity one

---

<http://www.econ.ubc.ca/evans/cox99.pdf>

[49] Cox, "The Market as God," 3.

[50] John De Graaf, David Wann and Thomas H. Naylor, *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2001), 85.

engages in order to maximize utility... all that counts is the consequences an action will have for his [or her] interests and desires on each particular occasion." He further discusses how "a social environment thoroughly infused with capitalism encourages people to see their lives in purely economic terms," citing studies that involved face-to-face interviews with workers in various kinds of jobs. In the first study, most workers described themselves as "mules, machines, objects, robots, and tools." In the second, workers expressed similar sentiments in their interviews, but their personal journal entries indicated that they were satisfied with their jobs. The workers' reluctance to admit publicly that their work was challenging and engaging seemed to come from the fact that "when it comes to work, people do not heed the evidence of their senses... and base their motivation instead on the strongly rooted cultural stereotype of what work is supposed to be like." In market capitalist faith, work is not meant to be enjoyable but to secure a paycheck. I think that workers are discouraged from recognizing the joy they may get from their jobs because if we consciously made joy one of the main criteria for employment we would stop working when it became drudgery. Instead, "economic rationality, a chief attribute of *Homo economicus*, encourages people to look at work in purely economic terms of a costbenefit analysis: what is the least amount of effort one can discharge for the most amount of monetary return... How can I maximize utility?"[51]

Mizzoni believes that the best way to combat this rationale is to see work as a calling. However, Max Weber sees the language of calling as essential to the capitalist spirit. In the capitalist system, "labor must be performed as if it were an absolute end in itself, a calling."[52] A calling to a particular kind of work may imply that the work in and of itself is worthwhile to do, particularly for the fulfillment of the person doing it and, in some cases with the added benefit of helping other people. However, whether work is understood in economic terms or as a calling, the focus remains on the self-fulfillment of the individual. Both of these approaches also sustain the market through the continued production of goods for sale and accumulation. Mass volunteering is probably a bigger threat to the market capitalist doctrine of work than describing employment as a calling.

In the anthropology of market capitalism the consumer is an economic being that compliments the worker. While *homo economicus* works to gain buying power, *homo consumens* exercises that power through the purchase and accumulation of goods. The market communicates that "Our lives can only be lived well (or lived at all) through the purchase of particular commodities. Thus our major existential interest consists of

---

[51] John Mizzoni, "Perspectives on Work in American Culture," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 2004: 97-101.

[52] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 2d Roxbury ed. (Los Angeles: Roxbury, 1998), 62.

maneuvering for eligibility to buy such commodities."[53] As James B. Twitchell puts it, "[H]uman beings, throughout history, have sought material luxury."[54]

The consumer is essential to the survival of the market as a whole and the bull market in particular. According to an article in *Money* magazine, "consumer spending is the main engine of the US economy, accounting for approximately two-thirds of the gross domestic product."[55] Consumption is so crucial to the market's survival that when the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001 threatened its stability, US Congressional members not only encouraged people to return to work but to "shop, go to the stores - get ready for Thanksgiving, get ready for Christmas."[56] It didn't matter what people bought as long as they bought something.

The consumer is also concerned with personal survival. People are encouraged to purchase the latest products to keep up with society. This sentiment is most clear in the realms of technology and fashion. Always, some new gadget assures us that it is necessary if we are to survive in today's changing world, society, or business. Richard H. Robbins says that fashion generates "anxiety and restlessness over the possession of things that [are] not 'new' or 'up to date.' Fashion [pressures] people not to buy out of need but for 'style'–from a desire to conform." Consumerism helps people fit in and feel relevant. The consumer is driven by fear of obsolescence. Greed, happiness, appeasement of "free-floating desire," fear of suffering, and the quest for luxury are other motivators.[57]

Loy takes this idea of survival one step further. He identifies market capitalism as a "salvation religion" and suggests that the consumer is ultimately engaged in the pursuit of salvation. "Salvation religions are often revolutionary due to the prophecy and charisma that motivate them and missionary because they inject a new message or promise into everyday life... Market capitalism not only began as, but may still be understood as a type of salvation religion: dissatisfied with the world as it is and compelled to inject a new promise into it."[58]

Market capitalism promises that the accumulation of material possessions can bring new life and hope in the present, through the gracious bounty of the market. As Jon Pahl puts it, "[P]eople seek to 'save' themselves - whether from disease, failure or death does not much matter - through economically driven projects... the hopes and dreams people once sought to realize through traditional religious symbols and the institutions associated with them, are now sought through economic accumulation, status display,

---

[53] This quote from Stephen Fjellman's book *Vinyl Leaves* can be found at the start of Richard H. Robbins, *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*, 3d ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2005).

[54] Quoted in Robbins, *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*, 38.

[55] Sivy and Garcia, "Forecast 2003," 68.

[56] CNN.com, "Congress Looks to Shield Economy," 15Sep01. <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/15/rec.congress. terror/>

[57] Robbins, *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*, 16, 37.

[58] Loy, "The Religion of the Market," 4.

and shopping at the most fashionable malls."[59] Consumers work and buy more because of this promise of deliverance.

Market practices and institutions: advertising as evangelism and malls as sacred spaces

In 1923 an advertising promoter said to Philadelphia businessmen: "Sell them dreams - dreams of country clubs and proms and visions of what might happen if only. After all, people don't buy things to have things. They buy hope - hope of what your merchandise will do for them. Sell them this hope and you won't have to worry about selling them goods."[60] Advertising is market capitalism's vehicle for injecting new promises and hope into everyday life. It spreads the market's gospel of consumption as a means of salvation, and those who accept this message experience conversion and are formed into consumers. According to Robbins, "[T]he goal of advertisers was to aggressively shape consumer desires and create value in commodities by imbuing them with the power to transform the consumer into a more desirable person... [Advertisers] began to emphasize the alleged effects of the products and its promise of a richer, fuller life."[61] Advertising forms people to participate in the world according to market capitalism.

One of the biggest indicators of the importance and effectiveness of market evangelism, aside from overconsumption in capitalist societies, is the increased spending on advertising. In 1880 a mere thirty million dollars was invested in advertising in the US.[62] In 1998 national, local and private spending on advertising in the US totaled over 201 billion dollars. A mere five years later that figure had risen 15% to 237 billion dollars.[63] In 1998 the only national spending greater than advertising was spending on the military.

Just as advertising converts and forms people into consumers, malls are sacred spaces in which the consumer finds community, engages in the formative practice of shopping, and embodies the spirit of the market. Pahl's work is a useful starting point here.[64] Malls serve the function that congregations and church buildings serve for Christianity. They are gathering spaces for believers in the promise of salvation in market capitalism. Two important thoughts to keep in mind are that malls are *planned* and *constructed* spaces - nothing about a mall's exterior or interior is created by accident - and that most of the indicators of the mall's sacredness are widespread, transcending geographic differences.

---

[59] Jon Pahl, *Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Spaces: Putting God in Place* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003), 66.

[60] De Graaf, Wann and Naylor, *Affluenza*, 138.

[61] Robbins, *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*, 17.

[62] Robbins, *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*, 17.

[63] Coen/McCann-Erickson, <http://www.adage.com/page.cms?pageId=60>

[64] Pahl, *Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Spaces*.

The mall is a communal space for consumers. The Mall of America, for example, boasts between more than 520 stores with 35-40 million visitors annually.[65] James Rouse, one of the most famous and earliest architects of the mall, said this about its function: "[I]t is in the marketplace that all people come together - rich and poor, old and young, black and white. It is the democratic, unifying, universal place which gives spirit and personality to the city."[66] Malls are taking over where religious institutions left off. They are open seven days a week, providing a space for people to gather. Personnel treat visitors with patience and care, striking up conversations as they offer advice on what the consumer should purchase. People who go to the mall will likely run into someone they know or meet someone new. In short, "malls have become sacred places because traditional churches, synagogues, temples and mosques have failed." While churches remain closed several days out of the week and are perceived as places of exclusion and judgment, the mall welcomes those who want to spend as well as those who seek to be in a place where they feel connected. Forty percent of visitors to the mall go there without intending to purchase anything.[67]

Malls are filled with religious symbolism. Most malls include popular religious symbols in their interior and exterior design. Their architecture usually provides for some kind of non-utilitarian water (e.g., fountains or reflecting pools); natural lighting (skylights, especially placed as central drawing points); and vegetation (artificial or evergreen, but never dying). Water, light, and vegetation are important religious symbols in many faiths. Ever-flowing water conveys to the visitor that the space and the activities that take place there are life-giving, soothing, refreshing, and purifying. Ira G. Zepp notes that malls usually have "a huge skylight or a colorful and often circular series of lamps shedding such bright light...that you know you are in a space set apart...malls, at their centers, strive to be places of vitality and energy." Lighting is not solely utilitarian; it is used to highlight the ways the market promises to make us happy and invite consumers to spend. (Although forty percent of mall visitors do not intend to buy anything, only ten percent leave without actually having done so.) There are usually lush trees, flowers, and plants throughout a mall's interior. Regardless of the season outside, the plants in the mall are in full bloom. Vegetation in a mall makes sense when water and light are also present. Altogether they give a message of "life - abundant, even eternal... Malls thus play upon the human desire to experience growth and new life," reinforcing the idea that consumerism is natural. The undying vegetation in a mall connotes a message of "the Garden of Eden without the fall, the resurrection without the cross, spring and summer without fall and winter... that entices us to imagine that we're inhabiting a garden of free delight."[68]

Although Pahl identifies several other indicators of the mall as sacred space, such as pilgrimage and the display of bodies, this is the point that I find most interesting.

---

[65] Mall of America, <http://www.mallofamerica.com/>
[66] Quoted in Pahl, *Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Spaces*, 70.
[67] Pahl, *Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Spaces*, 75, 71.
[68] Pahl, *Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Spaces*, 71-73, 143.

One can get married, plan a birthday party, and shop to one's heart's content in a mall. But it seems unlikely that malls have divorce lawyer offices, funeral planning supplies, or debt counseling services. There are no signs of pain, suffering or death there. Rather, the mall is a manifestation of market capitalism's promise that there is only happiness, devotion, love, abundance, and growth in the lives of those who are willing to consume. Shopping can assuage hurts or make one feel alive. All of these messages form consumers into persons that are willing to appease their desires and ease their troubles without a thought for tomorrow or the consequences that may arise.

Ultimately the mall is a place where consumers can not only be in the presence of the market but breathe life into it. It is a mechanism of support for a god that depends on the confidence and participation of people for its survival. This is made even clearer when one considers the transformation of the mall into open-air "lifestyle centers." As consumers have outgrown traditional, boxed-in, temperature-controlled malls, the market has been quick to respond, creating a new sacred space that looks a lot like urban centers the old malls replaced.[69]

A challenge to the church

"When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, 'Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' Aaron said to them, 'Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.' So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. He took the gold from them, formed it in a mold, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"'" (Ex. 32:1-4, NRSV)

Market capitalism's religious function, while masked by the assertion that it is valueless and secular, is evident in the reverence of its mythology, doctrine, missionary zeal and sacred institution. Yet the market, like the golden calf, is created by human beings and is dependent on humans for its survival. This fact reveals claims of the market's transcendence, omnipotence, and omnipresence to be false. Still the church as a whole has not been able to name it as a false god, in large part because the church doesn't acknowledge its claims of holiness. The end result has been that the church has either attempted to peacefully co-exist with market capitalism, relegating our Christian beliefs to Sunday morning, while we invest in Wal-Mart, shop at the Mall of America, and work on Wall Street the rest of the week. Or the church has emulated the market's evangelical success, building "megachurches" with roller rinks and fast-food restaurants, proclaiming a health and wealth gospel, and churning out widgets in

---

[69] Andrew Blum, "The Mall Goes Undercover," *Slate Magazine* 6 Apr 2005, 1.
    <http://www.slate.msn.com/id/2116246>

the name of Christ. Both responses cause the church to lose its focus and its message of salvation. There is a reason why malls can contain Christian bookstores, chapels, and designated prayer rooms, and Francois and Marithe Girbaud feel free to portray Jesus' Last Supper with female models in expensive designer clothes: Christianity in its current form is not a threat to the market's growing reign. Cox writes, "I am beginning to think that for all the religions of the world, however they may differ from one another, the religion of the market has become the most formidable rival."[70] Loy concurs, saying "The major religions... have been unable to offer what is most needed, a meaningful challenge to the aggressive proselytizing of market capitalism, which has already become the most successful religion of all time."[71]

Reflecting on this challenge leads me to ask several questions: how can the church faithfully counter the proselytizing of the market without succumbing to its recruitment tactics? Has the church made peace with the market in an unhelpful or detrimental way? If consumerism is idolatry, how can we resist it? What can we offer to the hungry and hurting people trying to shop their way into spiritual well-being? These questions must be asked if Christians are going to move from trying to participate responsibly in the market to not being participants in it at all.

The Triumph of the Image Over Reasoning

Thoughts On the World of Computing
by Bryan Winters

Bryan Winters lives in New Zealand. His career in Market Development for IT Companies runs alongside his lifelong interest in the writings of Jacques Ellul.

The move from text-based software to graphical applications was as agenda-based as any other race for "progress." It was heralded as bringing computing from the ivory towers of government and multinational corporations to the people. We saw the rise of upstart companies, complete with illustrations of the throwing off of chains, of liberation of information power, of triumphing over the "Big Brothers" of the industry. A now-legendary Super Bowl commercial by Apple promised, "1984 won't be like 1984."[72]

My interest here is in the effects of the media shift on the computing world. I will give a ringside view of the move from text to graphics in the I.T. world and associated shifts in business relationships and work practices. To those familiar with Jacques Ellul, especially *The Humiliation of the Word*, this may seem curious. Ellul wrote the work in 1979 conceding little to computers. "Computers are sometimes useful in their narrow

---

[70] Cox, "The Market as God," 6.
[71] Loy, "The Religion of the Market," 1.
[72] Search www.youtube.com using "Apple 1984 superbowl advert" key words.

domain (very narrow despite their many possible applications) ... pretentious devices that arrogantly substitute themselves for the word and for reason."[73]

I don't think Ellul saw how far-reaching computers' impact would be. Sometimes he speaks of audiovisuals and graphics in the same paragraph as a reference to computers, but not in the sense we understand today. In 1979, computers were mainframes, running banking and government applications, not colorful personal computers downloading movies and chirping to us when email arrives. In this essay I am going to "drill down" into this industry, within the text to graphics shift in the I.T. world itself. I believe that Ellul's concepts shed light on how that transition and changing work practices are weaved together.

Throughout the period I discuss I was employed in marketing by IBM in both New Zealand and Southeast Asia as well as by other smaller I.T. companies. Any viewpoints or opinions expressed here are from the perspective, say, of campaigning in the PC operating system wars, being present at the famous competing launch of Microsoft Windows 3.1 and IBM's OS/2 at the same huge hotel in Singapore, on the same day, on the same floor. I refer mainly to these direct experiences rather than the literature. Some reference to technology is unavoidable, and the writer expresses empathy with any who struggle with the terms.

The triumph of the image

At the beginning of the 1980s, IBM, the I.T. industry leader, was six times larger than its nearest rival, a dominance based on scalable mainframes. Software applications were textual, requiring the user to enter data in a set order into open fields. Any computer games were text-based, quiz-like affairs.

Application development was a strict discipline. User analysis was followed by specification, then design confirmation. If one had to wait months or years for software, there was always a technical justification. The great banking and legacy applications appeared during this era, many of which still silently operate today in secure premises far from the public eye. They were robustly designed, perhaps missing a couple of digits to save space - hence the Y2K scare - but they worked nevertheless.

Cost and skill availability limited computing to large organizations, particularly financial and government entities. Operating systems and databases matured via version releases, not complete renewals. Hardware sales were far more profitable than software, so suppliers focused on moving iron. This fact enabled mainframe suppliers to build their operating systems up over many years, fixing field-discovered errors painstakingly. One did not throw out an operating system lightly, as it had tens of thousands of person-hours invested in it.

At this time, none of the big companies had a vested interest in personal computing, so it fell to Apple-and Commodore-sized firms to start that now global industry

---

[73] Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

in backyard garages. Start it they did, easily gaining press as the new arbiters of information freedom. IBM's hand was forced. In the early 1980s it commissioned its first personal computer, legitimizing the very term "PC." Short of both microcomputer chips and a PC-sized operating system, IBM contracted two then unknown firms, Intel and Microsoft, for supply. Both were clever enough to negotiate non-exclusivity agreements.

Growing under IBM's wing, the personal computer industry expanded throughout the 1980s, albeit still using the text-based DOS, or Disk Operating System, that every programmer understands to this day. On left stage, the maverick Apple, sticking with its own hardware design and operating system, launched the world's first graphical user interface. IBM and Microsoft together promised that they would deliver one as well.

When powerful enough, Microsoft chose to go it alone. Pushing their graphical Windows PC operating system, an inferior offering still running on DOS, they cut ties with IBM. The latter concentrated on its own Operating System 2, or OS/2, a technically superior platform by most analysts' assessments.

But IBM had the lost the battle for hearts and minds, and the world saw a chance to be free of the Big Brother that charged millions for mainframes and had been party to the perceived delays in application development. Watching Asian customers walk back and forth between IBM and Microsoft on that jubilant day of the launch in adjacent hotel conference rooms, one gained the sense of excitement and camaraderie that pervaded Microsoft, versus the easy confidence of IBM, smugly content with their better system.

Microsoft threw its weight behind those independent programming houses who were deciding whom to hitch their horses to. IBM, on the other hand, simply assumed that the independents would follow. The result was predictable and swift. Right from the start, the earliest graphical applications followed Microsoft's lead. Within a few years, OS/2 was silently dumped.

Beguiled by the colors and charts of graphical user interface software, senior management in companies worldwide made the decision to move. Compared to lines of green text, a multicolored panel with buttons one could visibly press was irresistible. Halfcompleted, untried applications lined up for multimillion-dollar deals. Once, in Malaysia, we became the key part of a thirty-million-dollar consortium after a five-minute exposure of a new Windows product to the decision maker, whom I had not met before. It didn't matter that the software was functionally slower - it was the graphical future. I also recall sitting with test users for a major Singaporean government entity who were upgrading a counter-front system in the mid 1990s. As they realized that moving between fields on the new graphics-based screen necessitated using the mouse, rather than the "enter" key as in the old text-based systems, their jaws dropped. Everyone could see that the older text system actually permitted faster data

1985), 258.

entry. Blame was assigned to the new application, but it belonged to the operating system, the framework within which the end-user application was developed.

Frequently, companies didn't know what they were looking at. I have sat in countless software demonstrations and recall several, over two continents, where the entire system crashed in front of the customer executive team. Without a hiccup, a cool presenter would act as if nothing was the matter and chat away on a related topic while the software team, present in the very same room, keyboarded the system back up again. The executive teams were completely unaware that anything bad had happened. They simply never saw it. Later we would discuss this almost with disbelief. It dawned on me that purchasing decisions were based not on a methodical walk-through of the product but on the settings in the room, our professional demeanor, and the distracting colors and shapes being presented to them on the screen. At times I felt as if we were selling not applications to fulfill business functions but artwork. It is legendary that in the mid to late 1990s, commercial, off-the-shelf software packages (not just custom software) were sold to huge corporations before they were even written, such were the sleight-of-hand skills of software presenters. Hence the term "vaporware."

By far the greatest impetus to the revolution was the explosion of public computing. Those of us in the industry have always found it interesting to hear householders tell us about when computers "first came out." By this, they mean personal computing, mostly graphical user interface Windows-based applications. The public marketplace had its own impacts:

1. Every programmer dreamed of writing his or her own consumer application and becoming a millionaire. This drew away talent from the pool maintaining dull legacy text-based mainframe applications. Only shrewd old baby-boomer programmers, who knew they couldn't compete with graphical user interface whiz kids, would do that. This shrinking of skill for industrial-strength applications acted as another pressure to change.

2. It became publicly accepted that bug-ridden software was the norm. In its bid for information freedom, the world had opted for a firm that relied on the sale of operating system software. Microsoft must sell new operating systems to survive. Thus all PC users are confronted with a new Windows version every two or three years. This turnover foists bug-ridden operating systems on the public, as they have not had enough time to be hardened with many fixes generated from field discovery of errors before they are replaced with a new one. To this day, home PCs stop, seemingly of their own accord, from time to time. The phenomenon has been likened to cars suddenly stopping on the highway and requiring installation of a new engine to keep running. Most users are already content with the functionality provided by their existing version and now display the opposite reaction to that of thirty years ago - they want to stay on the same platform, not move. The same is true for the core Office applications, as the public furor over accepting both Vista and Office 2007 illustrates.

3. But the biggest demand was for games. In order to market to families, I.T. firms took to giving away software encyclopedias so that one could justify the purchase as

educational for the children. As soon as the home computer was installed, on went the games. Consumers may say they buy PCs for Internet access or to write letters and emails, but mainly they load games and movies or spend time on social networking sites, perhaps another form of gaming. The term "infotainment" is quite valid.

The 1990s also saw the emergence of the Internet, originally a library information research system. Its popularity surprised even Microsoft. Internet programming has spawned a huge industry of its own as every company, small or large, "needs" a website. Broadband is also seen as an essential part of economic progress, enabling visual applications to be brought into every home. The Internet has added further to the demand for advanced graphical applications. Early Windows software displayed colorful panels with fields for the user to fill in by means of mouse and keyboard. Graphical applications today are replete with imagery about nearly everything. A clothing company may have hardly any words on its home page. Visitors may be greeted by pictures of Greek horsemen whose colors and coats change when the mouse floats over them. One may go several pages deep, roaming through a visual store of images, needing to read text or enter data only when selecting something to buy. This process is meant to simulate the real shopping experience, which is visual, exotic, and emotive.

Technological divergence also affects the PC graphical sphere. Historically, the media told us that technologies will converge, enabling us to do such things as run the Internet on our TV screens. This once hyped commitment has not materialized. Many commentators now hold that technologies diverge.[74] Instead of mere cellphones, we have phones that specialize in camera technology, Internet connectivity, or diary functions. TV screens have diverged into LCD, plasma, wide-screen, and HDTV-compatible or not. In the programming world, divergence means that different companies splinter and develop different pieces of the graphical puzzle. Conflicts arise between hardware, operating system, screen drivers, and data compression algorithms, and much fingerpointing about others' lack of compliance takes place. Consultants market skilled services to organizations to enable them to stay on a converged technology track. Without skilled effort, an entire organization may end up hostage to technological divergence.

Considering technological divergence and the overall thrust to graphical solutions, we find a number of factors leading to less functional software than many text-based mainframe applications several decades ago:

1. Graphical mouse-stimulated imagery takes time to download, which requires skill investment into picture quality and data compression.

2. It also requires "plug-ins" to work. As applications grow more graphical, more extras are required, such as Adobe Flash, screen software drivers, and new browser releases. Making a highly graphical application work is a challenging and changing skill set in its own right.

3. Therefore programmers find themselves diverted from application function into making the graphical system robust. It becomes difficult to separate application func-

---

[74] See e.g. http://www.technologyreview. com/business/12434/.

tion out from graphical skill. In an earlier generation of text-based applications, little or no thought had to be put into whether the application could actually be seen on the screen in all its glory, because there was no glory. It was simply functional text, and the programming team could concentrate on function. Today, programmers have to concentrate on the ever-shifting world of graphics, and function comes in second place.

4. In many cases the old disciplined rules of analysis and development have disappeared. In a technology cycle too short to reintroduce discipline, programmers simply try different things until something works. This way of working also wreaks havoc with the concept of programming person-hours.

5. The most obvious result is the phenomenon of highly visual websites with spelling mistakes and grammatical errors in what sparse text remains within them.

The computer press predicted the mainframe's demise years ago. Contrary to such expectations, IBM had a banner year for mainframes in 2008. I suggest this resurgence is in part related to the failure of the modern graphical computing environment to provide solid backbone industrial applications, so the old ones remain. To put it bluntly: would you like your bank accounts to be run on a computer like the one you operate?

Finally, we note the incorporation of gaming into modern business computing. The boundary between games, advertising and software programs has blurred. Games are now part of the workplace. In previous eras, software products were launched complete with training programs. Assigned personnel attended classroom courses or sequenced computer training about the new application. Now new education techniques are emerging. Training courses can be constructed as online games, complete with all the graphics, thrills and competition of home computer gaming. Employees are encouraged to play these during work time to learn the firm's new application. Even online retail applications come with built-in games. A small but growing international pizza chain, Hell Pizza, leads the world in percentage of orders placed online. As the consumer decides what to order or awaits confirmation of credit card billing, he or she can fill in time playing with little demons running around the screen.

There will be no immediate end to this. The next generation of touchscreen technology is about to sweep through the marketplace. The futuristic computer workers in the Tom Cruise film *Minority Report* are a reality.[75] To watch it is beguiling. It is the triumph of the image.

Work in the new paradigm

We westerners are subjected to 3400 marketing messages a day, if we simply swivel around in our chairs and start counting the logos in our living room, let alone our billboard-infested highways, websites, sidewalks and newspapers. Everyone seems to be wearing two or three brands as a "personal statement." This proliferation of imagery

---

[75] For examples search www.youtube.com using "Microsoft Surface Demo" key words.

is largely due to the growing power of computer graphics, which has spilled into every other audiovisual medium now.

We are all more wary of marketing. I consult to companies selling complicated, high-value, high-technology products and services. We teach them how to sensitively use multiple forms of media to begin positive relationships with prospective customers. Such a concept or means of employment would have been meaningless thirty years ago. Then one simply phoned up prospective clients and arranged an appointment. That is almost impossible today. Businesspeople have barricaded themselves against the 3400 daily messages, including restricting salespeople from calling them. Therefore we employ short, targeted, business benefit statements using subtle combinations of media. These are psychological steps along the path to gaining face-to-face meetings.

This situation itself illustrates a shift in personal relationships. I give the following comparison as a trend I have noticed in business dealings:

1. Thirty years ago, in a sparser media environment, one could arrange a business meeting more readily, as outlined above. One needed a reasonable marketing pretext, but it was easier than today. At that meeting, the marketing company was given a chance to present its case. The prospective purchaser would listen to the pitch and watch the other party. Then a reasoned discussion would take place and judgments made about proceeding further, perhaps to another more detailed meeting, or perhaps to go no further.

2. Today, the prospective client may be subjected to a campaign using a variety of media, including emails, letters, CD or online video, brochures, webinars, newspaper or periodical branding, etc. Eventually a face-to-face meeting is arranged, but I have noticed by that time, the prospective client has often come to the conclusion in his own mind that he is buying. Simply agreeing to a meeting after the media campaign signifies a much higher percentage chance of a sale. But the media campaign was necessary in order to get the meeting.

An article recently appeared in New Zealand's major newspaper about new human relations methods. A young human resources manager at one of the country's leading companies revealed that he investigates new job applicants' profiles on Facebook before deciding whom to shortlist.[76] Presumably he assesses how competent they are at digital relationships, since that part of their job may be more important than face-to-face interaction.

Has the digital media explosion weakened abilities to handle personal relationships and decision making? Let me side with Ellul on this one. "We are not sure we can understand thoroughly what really has happened to each of us, but I believe one of the decisive factors in the mutation is that we live continually in a world of images."[77]

---

[76] *New Zealand Herald*, April 25, 2009.
[77] Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 208.

Further, "A person must believe in language if he is to be open to the meaning of a reasoned argument."[78]

I welcome research into this field.

Reasoning and the image

We turn here to Ellul's comparison between the word and the image. Even if it does not aspire to theological truth, a basic property of word-based communication is that even a single sentence has a beginning, and it must be listened to or read over a period of time in order to gain its full import. On the other hand, an image, as we open our eyes, is instantly there. Images fit into what Ellul calls "reality."

I will make an analogy between a book and a computer program. A program is also a story. It has a beginning, a sequence of events, and concludes with an output of data. It has both a writer (most likely writers) and "readers," or users. Marshall McLuhan's concept of hot and cool media[79] is useful in this context. Text-based computing could be termed a "cool" medium, one that is low-definition in terms of data. There are written instructions and fields to fill in. The user can concentrate on these, because there is less distraction than in a graphical media environment. An earlier world of "cool" software applications required concentration and training on the part of both programmer and user. The programmer put a lot of thought and effort into logical functioning and sequential events. He or she was trained for this task. The user also needed to concentrate carefully to fill in the correct sequence of data, of menu choices, etc., and was accordingly trained.

Now we find a different set of expectations. Software has become a hot medium, rich with imagery, not portrayed as a story but as an adventure, game, experience, or simulation of real life. The user does not expect to have to learn anything to deal with representations of "reality." Just as one does not need training to browse through a shop, one does not require it to use a computer program or website. Or training can take place by a computer game, played because it is thrilling. Users also expect to deal with applications quickly, as if examining a picture. So they blunder rapidly on. This is a two-edged sword for programmers, who know that this will take place. They have tried their best to account for it by placing signs like "invalid choice" or "incomplete entry," hoping for user success. In a modern application, up to 70% of the software code simply stops users from doing wrong actions. But if users run into too many walls, they give up and inform management that the software is too difficult to use.

Or do programmers really try their best? They live in the same world of instant expectations as users. Faced with programming issues we have alluded to earlier, they simply try things out, hoping that something will work. One theory of programming

---

[78] Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 215.
[79] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 22-23.

teams is that if a team encounters too large a problem in writing a given function, they do not add more brains to solve it but instead abandon the module and reassign the team elsewhere. This form of "agile development" assumes from the start that programmers will encounter issues that they cannot handle.[80] Perhaps this assumption helps explain why up to 53% of software computing projects fail to deliver on time, or budget, or function. Therefore programmers are equal to users in their responses. Have both been infected by their orientation to the image? Both seem to be losing an earlier generation's capacity for reasoning and reflection.

Ellul entitles a chapter in *The Humiliation of the Word* "The Image-Oriented Person." There he says, "Experience tends to show that a person who thinks by images becomes less and less capable of thinking by reasoning, and vice versa. The intellectual process based on images is contradictory to the intellectual process of reasoning that is related to the word."[81] Does this also shed light on the phenomenon of businesspeople who are less able to reason and reflect through personal conversational discourse and instead make their decisions based on images presented to them? Like Ellul, I cannot state confidently how far the digital image revolution has affected us, or what quarters of society are particularly influenced. However, he speculated, prophetically in my opinion, on the emotional intuition of the image-driven mind. "A sort of sympathetic vibration of knowledge is established between those who are indwelt by the same images. Sometimes they would have enormous difficulty expressing in words what this means."[82]

In an almost eerie fulfillment of this statement, Leonard Sweet, a Christian writer who claims to be postmodern, speaks of showing his son a website that interested him.

"Dad, this is not a website."

He clicked onto another and made the same pronouncement I insisted he tell me in words I could understand why these web sites weren't web sites. After some struggle, he said, "Because nothing moves." "So what?"

"Dad, I can't see it if it doesn't move."[83]

Advert: Change of Address?

Don't forget to notify IJES if your address changes. Postal forwarding orders expire after a period of time. Forwarding practices are sometimes unreliable. You don't want to miss out on *The Ellul Forum.* We don't want to lose touch with you.

---

[80] Cf. Luke 14:28-30: "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish'" (NIV).

[81] Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 214.

[82] Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 212.

[83] Leonard Sweet, *Soul Tsunami* (Grand *Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 219.*

E-mail your address change immediately to: IJES@ellul.org Or write to: IJES, P.O. Box 5365, *Berkeley CA 94705 USA*

Book Review

From Faith to Fun: the Secularization of Humor by Russell Heddendorf

Reviewed by Anthony Petrotta
Rector, St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Church, Wilsonville OR

Books on humor are seldom humorous and often are not taken seriously. *From Faith to Fun* is not terribly humorous, but it should be taken seriously. Professor Heddendorf writes on the way that traditional religious values of culture have been replaced by secular ones and the role that humor plays in that change: "This book is an attempt to come to grips with the problem of a fragmentated and often dissolute culture."

Heddendorf draws upon Jacques Ellul's description of ancient Israel's use of humor as they adjusted to life in a foreign culture where, particularly, wordplay subverted the culture by turning one word into another, thus undercutting the force of the original word. The ancient Hebrews did not cut themselves off from the dominant culture; they simply made it say "other things." This, says Ellul, is the "subversion of culture."

Many books have been written on the "curative" effects of humor; Heddendorf, however, focuses on the *erosive* effects. Humor is a "powerful cultural force" and, since the eighteenth century, has increasingly become a substitute for faith.

In the chapter "Secular Fun," Heddendorf makes his claim on this shift to fun *as faith*. Fun "balances" the paradox in our lives of the "real" and "unreal" by illusion. In our postmodern world (post-therapeutic; post-faith), fun has become both "fundamental" and "functional." In a "religious worldview", humor looks at the world as God does, whereas in a "cultural worldview," humor looks at the world as fun does.

Fun is typified by finding chaos, focusing on the imminent; it denies the tension of paradox, masks rather than reveals, provides a misapprehension of good will among others, and subverts moral boundaries.

In the chapter, "Sacred Fun", Heddendorf argues that even those aligned with "orthodox" faith settle for an "uncritical" reconciliation of the divergent worldviews of the religious and cultural. The "high value" of personal and social well-being is co-opted by the cultural. He further argues, though, that fun can also lead to faith.

In a study of the Southside Gospel Church, Heddendorf finds an instance of fun leading to faith. The Southside community understands paradox as "divine incongruity"

and, through faith, leaves the solution to God. "Unbelievers" are more likely to "trivialize" immediate incongruities with fun and laughter. Discernment, he concludes, allows us to a proper use of both the humor and the seriousness of our world. "Indeed, one can often laugh at a culture of fun while also laughing with it."

Heddendorf again quotes Ellul in the conclusion: "When God enters the picture, He destroys man's sacred." Heddendorf reiterates the value of humor and fun as we attempt to balance work, relationships, and so forth. He also warns the reader, "Humor may become a ubiquitous commodity that suffocates us with its banality."

Heddendorf then addresses the obvious question, "How," then, "can humor be rewarding without being reckless?"

Reckless humor lacks "accountability." It ignores logic, morality, and meaning. It holds no responsibility to "the other." Fun without faith, "wears a halo of its own making." "Rewarding humor," on the other hand, recognizes the "mystery of God's penetration into our world"; it joins the transcendent with the terrestrial.

From Faith to Fun is a complex book, as is befitting of a book on humor, that most protean and gratuitous of all human responses to the complexity of our lives. I wanted to hear more; I had many questions and points to argue, but in the end Heddendorf has done his job well, pushing me to consider the paradox of faith and fun.

Money and Power

by Jacques Ellul
L'Homme et L'Argent (1954)
ET: InterVarsity Press, 1984;Wipf and Stock, 2009.
From the introduction to the new edition by David W. Gill (St. Mary's College, Moraga)

Money and Power was one of Jacques Ellul's earliest theological/ethical. The title "Money and Power," is not misleading, but it should be noted that Ellul's title was more broadly "Man and Money" ("Humanity and Money"? "Money and Human Existence"? Even simple phrases can be hard to translate in a way that captures the nuance).

Money and Power has a wealth of information that will take your education to the next level. It is also full of typically Ellulian provocative opinions and challenges. If you want a mild, sanitized, middle-of-the-road essay, look elsewhere. Ellul's approach will throw down a challenge to you or your book study group. You will be exposed to biblical teaching you may not have previously known; and some old scripture will be read in new ways. But as Ellul often said, he is not seeking disciples; he just wants to give us resources to work out our own understanding in faithfulness to our Lord.

Money and Power is delivered in five chapters. First, Ellul surveys the ways our culture, our economic thinkers, and our church traditions have thought about money. One of the takeaways is that the answer to the problem of money cannot be left to economic systems and structures; there always remains centrally, "how are we personally

going to relate to money?" The second chapter is an exhilarating tour of biblical, especially OT, teaching and stories about wealth, money, and poverty. We meet Abraham, Job, Solomon and company, along with Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

The third chapter is a marvelous series of studies, drawing in Jesus and the Apostolic teaching and practice, about how money can become a "principality and power" (very much as we saw that technique can become a god) —"Mammon." Ellul comments on interest and usury, saving and hoarding, wages and inheritance, on Jesus' parables about money and his relations both to the poor and the rich. He points out that the best way to "profane" a god is to treat it with disrespect and in a cavalier fashion. What better way to profane and reject Mammon, Ellul says, than to be recklessly generous in giving it away. Brilliant lesson! Ellul concludes with some advice on teaching our children about money (chapter four) and with a strong call to understand the cry of the poor as God's challenge to us (chapter five).

Too often Christian reflections on politics, economics, and other life topics feel as though the author's socio-cultural location really drove their point of view, and the scriptures were just cherry-picked to support and justify the position they started with. *Money and Power* and Ellul's other books never leave us so comfortable or reassured. This is a prophet worth listening to.

Advert: International Jacques Ellul Society

www.ellul.org

P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705, USA

The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

Membership

Anyone who supports the objectives of the IJES is invited to join the society for an annual dues payment of US$20.00. Membership includes a subscription to the Ellul Forum.

Board of Directors

Andy Alexis-Baker, *Associated Mennonite Seminaries, Elhart IN;* Mark Baker, *Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno;* Patrick Chastenet, *University of Bordeaux;* Clifford Christians, *University of Illinois;* Dell DeChant, *University of South Florida;* Andrew Goddard, *Oxford University;* Darrell Fasching (VicePresident), *University of South Florida;* David Gill (President), *St. Mary's College, Moraga;* Virginia Landgraf, *American Theological Library Association, Chicago*, David Lovekin, *Hastings College,*

Nebraska; Randall Marlin, *Carlton University, Ottawa,* Ken Morris (SecretaryTreasurer), *Boulder;* Carl Mitcham, *Colorado School of Mines*; Langdon Winner, *Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.*

Advert: Make Payments to IJES Electronically?

Resources for Ellul Studies

www.ellul.org & www.jacques-ellul.org The IJES web site at www.ellul.org contains (1) news about IJES activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, (4) a complete index of the contents of all *Ellul Forum* back issues; and (5) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The French AIJE web site at www.jacques-ellul.org is also a superb resource.

The Ellul Forum CD: 1988-2002
The first thirty issues of *The Ellul Forum*, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for US $15 (postage included). Send payment with your order to "IJES," P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

Back issues #31 - #42 of *The Ellul Forum* are available for $5 each (postage and shipping included).

Cahiers Jacques Ellul
Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne
An essential annual journal for students of Ellul is *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, edited by Patrick Chastenet, published by Editions L'Esprit du Temps, and distributed by Presses Universitaires de France Send orders to Editions L'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Postage and shipping is 5 euros for the first volume ordered; add 2 euros for each additional volume ordered.
Volume 1: "L'Annees personnalistes" (15 euros)
Volume 2: "La Technique" (15 euros)
Volume 3: "L'Economie" (21 euros).
Volume 4 (forthcoming): "La Propagande" (21 euros).
Volume 5: "La Politique" (21 euros)
Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works

by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. Visit www.elsevier.com for ordering information.

The Reception of Jacques Ellul's Critique of Technology: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings on His Life and Thought by Joyce Main Hanks (Edwin Mellen Press, 2007). 546 pp. This volume is an amazing, iundispensable resource for studying Jacques Ellul. All the books, articles, reviews, and published symposia on Ellul's ideas and writings are here.

Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul by Andrew Goddard. (Paternoster Press, 2002). 378 pp. Seven years after being published, Professor Goddard's study remains the best English language introduction to Ellul's life and thought.

Librairie Mollat—new books in French

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux (www.mollat.com) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

Alibris—used books in English

The Alibris web site (www.alibris.com) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

Used books in French:

two web resources

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are www.chapitre.com and www.livre-rare-book.com.

Ellul on DVD/Video

French film maker Serge Steyer's film "Jacques Ellul: L'homme entier" (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site www.meromedia.com. Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul's ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.

Issue #45 Spring 2012 — Ellul in the Undergraduate Classroom

- Click to view the original PDF

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

"At the beginning I couldn't see myself in a professor's robe speaking to 150 students. And then, fairly soon, I came to love it, less for what I taught than for the students."
   -Jacques Ellul *In Season, Out of Season* (1981; ET 1982), p. 159

Contents

Information on The Editorial Board & More

The Ellul Forum
For the Critique of Technological Civilization
Founded 1988
The Ellul Forum is published twice per year, in the Spring and Fall. Its purpose is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

Editor
Clifford G. Christians, Univ. of Illinois, Urbana Associate Editor

David W. Gill, Berkeley, California

Contributing Editors
Patrick Chastenet, University of Bordeaux, France Dan Clendenin, Stanford, California

Peter F. W. Davies, Buckinghamshire College, UK Marva Dawn, Vancouver, Washington

Darrell J. Fasching, University of South Florida Andrew Goddard, Oxford University, UK Joyce Hanks, Univ. of Scranton, Pennsylvania David Lovekin, Hastings College, Nebraska Carl Mitcham, Colorado School of Mines Pieter Tijmes, Univer-

From the Editor

Typically *The Ellul Forum* is scholar-to-scholar. *Academics* who study the technological society explore issues for those of us who think and write about technology, often in reference to Ellul. The *public* is also the *Forum 's* focus on occasion — citizens, government workers, non-profit personnel, youth workers, and media professionals who deal with the meaning of this technological era in their everyday experience.

This issue makes *students* central. How can the scholarship on technology be taught? Where do Ellul studies fit into the curriculum? How can the liberal arts orientation of Ellul's work be taught in liberal arts terms, rather than as a module in science and engineering? *The Ellul Forum* regularly reviews Ph.D. dissertations on Ellul written around the world. This time the focus is undergraduates.

Rather than a survey and overview of education generally, Issue #45 is an in-depth case study of an interdisciplinary course taught recently at Wheaton College (Illinois) entitled, "Jacques Ellul: Technology, Politics and Ethics." Team-taught by professors in theological studies, urban politics and communication, it demonstrates how much serious learning can be accomplished in a semester. The materials indicate the positive spin-off efforts for the campus, and suggest ways to establish courses on Ellul and technology in the curriculum longer term.

Members of the International Jacques Ellul Society are guest editing the future issues of the *Forum*:

Fall 2010: Mark Baker, editor, "Technique, Ellul and the Food Industry" (*mbaker@mbseminary.edu*);

Spring 2011: Dell DeChant and Darrell Fasching, editors, "Religion and Popular Culture" (*ddechant@tampabay.rr.com*);

Fall 2011: Andy Alexis-Baker and John Zerzan, editors, "Anarchism" *(j esusradicals@j esusradicals.com).*

They welcome your suggestions and proposals.

2012 is the centenary of Ellul's birth. Special issues of the *Forum* will be published and commemorative events are being planned. Please feel free to send us your ideas and suggestions and let us know of any other celebrations you know of.

Clifford G. Christians
editor@ellul.org

Encountering Jacques Ellul on His Own Terms

by Jeffrey P. Greenman, Read Mercer Schuchardt, & Noah Toly

This article discusses a successful experimental course on Jacques Ellul developed at Wheaton College (IL), a Christian liberal arts institution in the evangelical Protestant tradition. Offered in 2009, the interdisciplinary course was co-taught by Dr. Jeffrey P. Greenman (Christian ethics), Dr. Read Schuchardt (media ecology) and Dr. Noah Toly (urban politics). The professors describe the aims of the course, discuss their approach to teaching, and offer reflections about lessons learned about teaching Ellul's thought.

"No one is using my studies in correlation with one another, so as to get at the heart of our crisis in a conscious manner, based on a Christian understanding of it..."[1]

Background

The idea for a course on Jacques Ellul arose during a conversation that took place at the Black Dog Tavern in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts in July 2008. During a dinner break from the workshop on experiential education they were attending, Noah

---

[1] Jacques Ellul, "On Dialectic," in C. G. Christians and J. M. Van Hook, eds., *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1981): 307.

Toly asked Jeff Greenman a few questions about the theology of Karl Barth, and soon the discussion turned to the connections between Barth and Ellul. Toly and Greenman discovered their mutual interest in Ellul, and Toly added that their colleague, Read Schuchardt, was highly indebted to Ellul. Eventually someone said: "Maybe someday we should do a course on Ellul. After all, we've got the Ellul Papers on campus." The course that eventually took place at Wheaton College during fall semester 2009 was the result of an integrative academic vision, fruitful collaboration among colleagues, and significant institutional support.

The academic vision for the course took shape based on the contributions of all three of us, each of whom brought to the table a unique experience with the study of Ellul. Toly first encountered the work of Jacques Ellul at the University of Delaware. He read *Technological Society* for a doctoral proseminar on Technology, Environment, and Society and found Ellul's analysis trenchant. Introducing Ellul, the course instructor made passing mention of Ellul as a "Huguenot," but did not acknowledge Ellul's theological work. Following the Ellul trail in the library, Toly encountered the rich resources of Ellul's explicitly Christian writing. Though his dissertation committee chair would later discourage him from pursuing that angle, saying he was sure that Toly could not connect Ellul's theological arguments to environmental justice, Toly investigated the link more carefully, publishing an article on Ellul and climate change while still a Ph.D. student and beginning an encounter with the broader range of Ellul's works. Still, he hoped for an opportunity to explore more deeply the connections between the sociological and theological halves of Ellul's corpus.

For Greenman, his journey with Ellul's thinking began with reading *Presence of the Kingdom* as a seminary student about 25 years ago. The opening chapter's picture of the Christian in the world strongly captured his imagination, and played an important role in setting his personal and scholarly trajectory toward theological engagement with issues of public life. Ellul's vision of the critical place of the layperson as the channel through which the Gospel reaches the world, and of the Christian way of life as fundamentally "agonistic," was especially captivating. As a scholar of theological ethics, Greenman had engaged Ellul's arguments about the nature of Christian ethics and the possibility of natural law as well as his withering critique of moralism. He had read *Technological Society* and some of Ellul on politics, but not much else of the Ellulian corpus.

Meanwhile, Schuchardt was interested in Jacques Ellul from his study in Neil Postman's Media Ecology program at New York University. There he read *The Technological Society* and *Propaganda*; digging deeper on his own for dissertation research, Schuchardt also encountered *The Presence of the Kingdom*, *Sources and Trajectories*, and *The Humiliation of the Word*. It was not through the NYU courses that Schuchardt learned of Ellul's deep Christian faith, however, but through his own research, which was both a thrilling and disconcerting discovery. Thrilling because here was a thinker who analyzed and understood the world around him through the lens of, or at least

alongside his understanding of, Christianity. Ellul sums this approach up most succinctly in his Introduction of *The Humiliation of the Word*:

Rather, I try to do here the same thing I do in all my books: face, alone, this world I live in, try to understand it, and confront it with another reality I live, but which is utterly unverifiable.

"Here is a man in whom there is no guile!" Schuchardt thought, for even if they differed on their interpretations of Christian theology, at least the cards were on the table. The pure intellectual honesty and academic integrity of this approach, no matter what one's theological commitments, inspired Schuchardt greatly. But as a Christian himself, the disconcerting thing was the discovery that Ellul's faith played almost no part of the discussion at the graduate level reading of his key works. This was especially troubling for him during the reading of *Propaganda*, in which Ellul's discussion on propaganda's effects on the church struck Schuchardt as both historically and philosophically profound - *but only if one took the possibility of divine authority seriously.* Schuchardt supposes he found, in retrospect, Ellul's assessment of modern society as further evidence, on the positive side of the ledger, for the reasonableness of the faith.

So we knew that the idea we had hit upon while at Martha's Vineyard was a very special one, promising as it did the opportunity for significant academic innovation: the in-depth study of a thinker whose interests ranged broadly enough that three different academic divisions could rightfully claim him as their own, conducted at a school whose heritage and purpose centers on engagement with the entire spectrum of the liberal arts within a Christian context. In short, we could offer a course on Ellul that honestly took stock of all of his claims and allegiances, one that looked at him and his work holistically. In fact, once back on campus, we were somewhat surprised to discover that Wheaton appeared to have never offered a full course on Ellul. So, in early fall 2008, Toly, Greenman and Schuchardt met to explore the idea of a semester-long, team-taught, interdisciplinary course: "Jacques Ellul: Technology, Politics & Ethics." We will provide a detailed description of the aims, strategies and requirements for this course later in this essay. A clear picture of the administrative logistics necessary for us to mount the course comes first.

It is important to understand that we intended that the course be offered as a cross-listed course between three departments: Political Science, Communication, and Biblical & Theological Studies. For now, it is relevant to know that Wheaton allows new courses such as ours to be offered under the category of "Experimental Courses." Approval for such a course is a matter of the department head's signature and the Registrar's endorsement. Department approval for an "Experimental Course" does not involve putting a detailed proposal before an entire department; this step is needed only after such a course is taught twice, at which point the department must vote to add the course to the official College Catalog. This policy encourages faculty innovation in the classroom and allows timely courses to go into action more quickly. Therefore in our case, all that was required was a simple one-page form, with a short summary of the course (akin to the eventual course description on the syllabus), that

was acceptable to the three department chairs. Since Greenman serves in this capacity for Bible & Theology, that meant we only needed the support of the chairs of the other two departments. Fortunately, both chairs were enthusiastic about this venture. That was the first hurdle cleared: the course could be tri-listed in the next year's course offering schedule, allowing students to receive credit for the course in one of three departments. Most students eventually registered with the department of their major.

The next steps required broader administrative support beyond the three departments. Our plan was for a four-credit hour course, with the goal that all three professors would be attributed with four hours toward their required teaching load, allowing all three to be in the classroom for the entire semester. A major part of our goal for the course was interdisciplinary discourse, a feature that seemed unlikely unless all three could interact with each other and with the students during each class period. Wheaton makes available each year a small amount of funding through its "Faith and Learning" program that operates out of the Provost's office. The program has several facets, mostly designed around faculty development in the area of practicing thoughtfully Christian scholarship and thinking through one's academic discipline from the standpoint of Christian faith. One aspect of the program offers funding for co-taught courses that cross disciplinary boundaries (e.g., a course on theology and art is shared by a theologian and an art historian). Since interdisciplinary thinking is a key feature of the liberal arts tradition, we felt we had a strong case. The endorsement of the Provost enabled Toly and Schuchardt to receive four hours of teaching load credit for their involvement, while their respective departments received additional funding to hire an adjunct professor to cover two hours of teaching. Thus, the department did not lose two hours of teaching, and the professors were able to participate in the entire class. (Greenman's teaching load is variable on account of his primarily administrative assignment, so that was not a factor for the Bible & Theology department.)

Without these specific forms of substantial institutional support for the course, the course probably would not have happened at all. We are grateful that it did not prove difficult to make the case that such a course would be a valuable addition to the course offerings at Wheaton. Ellul's stature as an eminent Christian thinker who engages the social, political, economic and technological dimensions of modern and contemporary culture made him an appealing subject for a course. Moreover, the presence of the Jacques Ellul Papers in Wheaton's Archives gave us a clear rationale and allowed us to offer undergraduates a rare opportunity to conduct archival research.

A final piece of financial background is also worth noting. We enlisted the help of a master's degree student in systematic and historical theology, Kirsten Guidero, to serve as a teaching assistant for the course. She participated in each class session, assisted the professors with course preparation and with course mechanics such as taking attendance and recording grades, and provided encouragement and guidance for students as they worked on their research papers. Elsewhere in this issue of the *Forum*, Kirsten describes her experience in this role. In financial terms, she was paid

an hourly wage for her involvement in the course through an account under Toly's auspices within the Urban Studies program.

Course Aims & Organization

There were 14 students enrolled in the course, including one graduate student in theology. We also had an undergraduate auditor, as well as an auditor who was an American missionary to France. This proved to be an ideal size for a discussion-based, seminar course. We had hoped for some students in the class who were French majors or highly capable of reading French, but in the end, none of our students had strong French skills.

Here is the course description we used on the syllabus:

Jacques Ellul (1912-1994), a French Protestant polymath, was one of the most fascinating and provocative Christian thinkers of the 20th century. This interdisciplinary, team-taught class explores his contributions to the fields of sociology, communication, political science, urban studies, and theology by focusing primarily on his work related to technology, politics and ethics. Special attention is given to the theme of freedom and necessity in his work. The course also aims to put Ellul into dialogue with key interlocutors in these various disciplines. The class operates as a seminar that assumes high levels of student interaction and discussion. In addition, the class emphasizes independent research on Ellul making use of a unique resource at Wheaton College: an expansive archive of Ellul materials (second largest such collection in the world).

For our purposes in this article, we should highlight our two most important learning objectives. Our goal was that students would be able to (1) "describe and evaluate the main themes in the writings of Jacques Ellul as a major Christian thinker" and (2) "interact critically and reflectively with Ellul's ideas in order to formulate deeper understandings of their implications for contemporary Christian engagement with the realms of technology, politics and ethics." From these two items it can be seen that we wanted to enable our students to get to the heart of Ellul's ideas. Also, it should be clear that teaching such a course at a Christian liberal arts college allowed us complete freedom to engage Ellul's Christianity without any sense of embarrassment. Our students were interested in Ellul precisely because he was a Christian, albeit one whose theology differed in several respects from their own.

The course met twice a week for a two-hour class period for an entire semester. We found that there were a number of clear educational advantages in a full semester course, rather than a half-semester course (which is a popular format for electives at Wheaton). These included:

1) It takes several weeks for students to begin to figure out how Ellul's mind works and to become comfortable with his unusual writing style. The full semester gave them enough time to become familiar with Ellul's way of operating.

2) A full semester allowed us to assign a significant amount of reading from Ellul (as well as other thinkers) so that students could encounter Ellul's thought across a range of topics.

3) Gradually as the semester unfolded, students were increasingly able to make connections between the readings they had been doing and among the key themes of the course.

4) This format also gave us the opportunity to have students present the findings of their own research at the end of the semester.

Getting Started

To begin the semester, Greenman provided a detailed lecture to introduce Ellul's life and thought. The lecture put Ellul in his French context, sketched some of the life experiences that so significantly influenced his thinking, and set the stage for Ellul's interaction with key thinkers such as Karl Marx, Karl Barth and Soren Kierkegaard. Next, the class watched the 1992 film "Betrayal by Technology" that features extensive interviews with Ellul. Then we received a tour and orientation to the Jacques Ellul Papers in the Wheaton Archives from David Malone, Head of Archives and Special Collections. The introductory section of our course concluded with a session led by Schuchardt that discussed Ellul's "76 Questions Concerning Technology." Using the iPhone as a case study, we engaged many of these questions to orient students to key concerns of Ellul and to his characteristic mode of thinking. In this context we also highlighted Ellul's characteristic emphasis on the primacy of posing the right problems while resisting premature answers. These components enabled our students to get their bearings. We were ready to start.

We began by spending three class periods discussing *The Presence of the Kingdom*, led by Greenman. Ellul himself stated that he felt this book was the best introduction to his thought. Since it is more accessible than many of Ellul's works, it was a relatively easy entree into a strange new world. But we were also keenly aware that Ellul was French, that none of our students (except for one graduate student who audited) spoke much, if any, of the language, and that given the 3060 year gap between the works we were reading and our own cultural context, we would need to do a lot of bridgebuilding and gap-jumping for the students.

So next, Schuchardt offered seven class periods devoted to discussions on the dense *The Technological Society* in which he gave a close reading of the text and tried to contextualize and illustrate its insights with current examples, one method of which was to show film clips from *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, *They Live*, and Mark Osborne's brilliant 6-minute film *More*, among others. As we reached the middle of the semester, students made class presentations based on an Ellul book that was not assigned reading for the course, a book of their choice designed to be used in their research paper due at the end of term. Then, Toly led six class sessions devoted to *The Meaning of the City*, followed by four days led by Greenman on Part 4 of *The Ethics of Freedom*. The course

concluded with a guest lecture by Dr. Cliff Christians, then four class presentations by students about their research papers.

Within the first week of the semester, uncertainty over who was "leading" the class was resolved by Dr. Greenman's wonderful analogy, and we quickly became known to the students as "the three-headed dog." They addressed each of us this way in conversation and often via e-mail. On the one hand this lent itself to all sorts of humor, from discussions of puppy-ness to rabies, to metaphors of being pulled in three directions at once, to one student creating a digital illustration of a Japanese manga dog with three heads, upon which he superimposed our three faces. But on the other hand, and most concretely, it gave students a way of addressing in the singular the plurality of our leadership, and so instead of saying, "I'm not sure which one of you I should address this question to..." they could simply say, "Three-headed dog, what do you think of.?" This metaphor also summarizes nicely how we each felt about our Ellul scholarship. No one of us had read all of Ellul, and none of us feels like we see the whole picture well enough to teach the course on our own, so one of the nicer aspects for the professors was the ability to enjoy their humility by recognizing that together we comprised a fairly decent comprehensive Ellul scholar.

Before we discuss in detail the pedagogical strategy we used, in summary the course requirements emphasized reading the Ellul texts, making class presentations, and writing a 20-25 page research paper using the Ellul material in our archives. Students prepared questions from their readings for each day of class. They wrote a short review essay on a supplementary Ellul text, made a total of four class presentations, and wrote a major essay on a topic of their choice.

Pedagogy

Collectively teaching Jacques Ellul to Christian undergraduates is a unique pleasure, a bit like training goslings to fly. You know they're going to take to it naturally once they get pushed out of their comfort zone, and you simply try to push them as gently and confidently as you can while downplaying the laws of gravity. Beyond the integration of faith and learning as a matter of harmony with Ellul's own vision for his work, our course pedagogy was arranged around three further points of emphasis: interdisciplinarity, interlocutors, and inquiry.

From the beginning, the course was conceived as an interdisciplinary endeavor, one that would include instructors and students from multiple departments or programs at the College. The first thing to be agreed with regard to this course was that someone at the College should teach a course on Ellul, helping students to gain from his thoughtfulness, exploring his model of integrating faith and learning, and putting to use the material in Wheaton's special collection. The second thing to be agreed, however, was that no one person would have the range of expertise required to do justice to Ellul's thought. From our perspective, the course had to be interdisciplinary, and this would mean interdisciplinary instruction, with faculty from Biblical & Theological Studies,

Communication, and Politics & International Relations. This range represented every academic division at the College.

Interdisciplinarity would also mean reaching out to a broad range of students. Beyond our own majors, we had hoped to see students from many others. As the course was to be discussion-oriented, we intended for students from diverse majors to bring a wide variety of experience and expertise to bear upon Ellul's writing and anticipated that we would all benefit from the distinct student voices. In the end, we enrolled undergraduate students from a dozen different majors along with two graduate students. Their diverse interests and experiences made the seminar both more challenging and more enriching for its exchanges between students who would not normally participate in the same upper division course.

In this way, students served each other as interlocutors in a 15-week discussion of Ellul's work and its implications for our own lives. Importantly, though, students also engaged with several of Ellul's own interlocutors. In each "part" of our course— technology, politics, and ethics—Ellul's writing was put into conversation with three types of interlocutors: Ellul's influences, Ellul's contemporaries, and our own contemporaries. These interlocutors included film directors, guest speakers, and authors. All played important roles in realizing course goals.

In addition to their required readings, students were invited to spend an evening at each faculty member's home, enjoying dinner and a movie together. We took three extracurricular Sunday nights to watch full versions of feature length films taken from the range of film history in order to help students "see" and interact with some of Ellul's major themes. For the students these film screenings were not mandatory, but by offering dinner and a movie on Sunday nights (when Wheaton students are "on their own" for meals) it was gratifying to see the majority of the class show up each time. And the film discussions frequently carried back over into the classroom conversation, inspiring students who had not seen the films to rent them and watch them on their own. We watched *Koyaanisqatsi*, *Metropolis*, and *Brazil*, each movie roughly corresponding to a specific "part" of the course— *Koyaanisqatsi* to technology, *Metropolis* to politics, and *Brazil* to ethics. The Greenman, Schuchardt, and Toly families rotated hosting responsibilities and the three faculty alternated in facilitating discussion of the films. The movies gave students access to another mode of engagement with the themes and issues around which the course was organized. Dining together in faculty homes served to humanize our endeavor toward both a right understanding of and right living in technological society.

The humanization of our work was also aided by the two guest speakers who helped bridge the gap between Ellul's context and the students' lived experience. Schuchardt invited Eric Brende and Cliff Christians, having known about Eric Brende from his book *Better Off: Flipping the Switch on Technology* and knowing Dr. Christians through his membership and participation in the Media Ecology Association. Both guests spoke in class. Both also gave an evening lecture on campus in order to bring more of the College community into our project. Brende even joined students for dinner

and the showing of *Koyaanisqatsi* at the Schuchardt home. Both visitors put a human face on Ellul's interlocutors, personalizing the task at hand and making it easier to imagine and understand our "conversation partners" as real people, even when we may only have had access to their writings. Their contributions added wonderfully to the discussion in class, and also brought great attention to a) the Jacques Ellul archive and special collection; b) the course we were teaching; and of course, c) the individual authors themselves.

Eric Brende came first, during the part of the semester where we were discussing *The Technological Society*, and he came not as an Ellul scholar, but as an example of a plausible response to taking the problems of a Technological Society seriously on the individual level. Despite being a genuine neo-Luddite in many respects himself, Schuchardt felt it was important that we not end *TS* with the pre-emptive despair of the rhetorical question, "What can *possibly* be done about it?" Since turning back the clock was not an option in most students minds, Schuchardt wanted to gently remind them, in living form, of G.K. Chesterton's comment that in fact, you could: all you had to do was reach behind it and turn it back. The students enjoyed the opportunity to interact with a living author, to get a signed copy of his book, and to ask detailed questions about he makes a living selling homemade soap and driving a pedal-cab rickshaw in St. Louis to support a wife and three children. To many students, just discovering that this guy "was for real" was a valuable education in our estimation. Brende was very insightful about the current world situation and living with an active resistance to the technological imperative, but he did not speak too much about these efforts in relation to his Catholic faith, nor did he address any specific aspect or element of Ellul's work.

For these purposes we had, at the end of the semester, Dr. Clifford Christians, Research Professor of Communications at University of Illinois, co-editor of *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays*[2] and General Editor of the Ellul Forum. Christians also joined us in Wheaton, offering the perspective of someone who has spent decades studying the work of Ellul. He gave a wonderful collegewide lecture with slides and video on truth-telling in a technological age, and offered examples from Al-Jazeera, the film *Elephant Man*, and the documentary *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. In both lecturers' cases, there was heavy attendance from students in the class, even though the events were not mandatory, and college interest trebled or quadrupled from class interest. On a personal level, it was a treat to spend time with and eat meals with Eric and Cliff, and in both cases we agreed that future events of this type were well warranted.

As students soon learned, some of our interlocutors agreed with Ellul, while others did not. Those that disagreed were sometimes more, sometimes less, sympathetic toward Ellul's own positions. In assigning critical interlocutors, we assured ourselves that

---

[2] Clifford G. Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, eds., *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1981).

students would attempt to hold Ellul to account as much as Ellul held us to account. We also hoped to honor Ellul's commitment to dialectical reasoning as a means of advancing understanding. He was committed to "the no" not only as a way to advance human history in a dialectical fashion, but also as an epistemology[3]. Hopefully the observation and practice of this approach has increased student capacities for critical negation of arguments both within and beyond the classroom.

Requiring students to read Ellul's detractors as well as his supporters also put students on more equal footing in the classroom, tempering any sense of the class as an Ellul fan club. Those who, more often than not, agreed with Ellul were in good company, joined as they were by Postman and others. But so were those who disagreed, accompanied by Moltmann and Mumford. In this way, students came to own both our assigned authors and each other as their own interlocutors. It was our hope that, by the end of the semester, students would have become accustomed to sharpening each other through this kind of intellectual accountability.

And they came to discover further interlocutors in their research, enriching the dialogue inside and outside of class. In the final weeks of the course, each student was required to present a research paper to the class—a not unusual requirement for a course of mixed upper division undergraduates and graduate students. The paper required students to discern a theme in Ellul's work, to trace that theme through a number of Ellul's works, including some from the special collection, and to write about how that theme intersected with a contemporary issue or controversy. In this way, students would become Ellul's interlocutors, themselves. One student, Daniel Saunders, discovered the work of Gabriel Vahanian in the Ellul Special Collection and wrote his research paper on the differences between Ellul and Vahanian. In a very real way, Daniel came to know Vahanian as his own interlocutor when he sent his paper to Vahanian, who graciously took the time and effort to respond.

Each research paper was also assigned a respondent, a student who would read the paper in advance and prepare a 10-minute presentation in response. The response was meant to be critical, affirming the research paper where appropriate, negating it where appropriate, and provoking thoughtful discussion during the ensuing time of question and answer. Just as Brende, Christians, and the authors whose work we read had done for the whole semester, spurring more careful consideration of Ellul and more thoughtful dialogue about his work, our students were expected to do at the end of our time together. So they came to discover themselves as interlocutors, and we enjoined them to accept the responsibility that came along with that role.

Given that this was a discussion-based course, student responsibility was a key to learning outcomes. Because we wanted students to be prepared for each class session's discussion, we needed some manner by which we could help to ensure not only their reading, but their active and critical engagement with Ellul and others. We needed an assignment that would not only provide accountability, but also promote classroom

---

[3] Jacques Ellul, "On Dialectic," in *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays*: 291-308.

engagement through active engagement with readings. We were not only interested in ensuring that students could comprehend and recite main points, but also in encouraging students to ask significant questions of their interlocutors, in spurring them on toward inquiry.

We decided to require every student to submit three types of questions about each day's readings. The question types corresponded to three of the four tasks of New Testament ethics, according to Richard Hays' argument in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*.[4] For each set of readings, students were required to submit descriptive, synthetic, and pragmatic questions. The first were supposed to interrogate the propositions, logic, and evidence of the arguments read for that day. That is, students were to submit a descriptive question concerning what the author might have meant. The second type of question, the synthetic question, was meant to help students to situate a reading within the context of the other readings assigned for that day or within the context of the course readings and discussion so far for the semester. And the third question type, the pragmatic, required students to inquire into the real world origins or implications of a given author's argument. By this means, all students were supposed to come to class prepared for discussion, having already explored the meaning of their readings and contextualized them in both immediate and broader senses—both within the class session and semester and according to their observations of and participation in the "real world."

Perhaps this approach to the course afforded a fit between the ends and the means of our experience. If, indeed, this aspect of the course has been formative, then we believe it is consistent with Ellul's concern for articulating questions and problems before answers and solutions. Ellul regarded as perverse our inclination to answer what has not yet been rightly posed as a question, to solve what has not yet been properly problematized. In his essay, "Needed: A New Karl Marx," he writes,

"This is the folly of our time: we claim to give solutions without even looking at the problems. We cast a superficial glance over the world and pretend to organize it for a thousand years. It is not one of the least contradictory traits of our epoch that we demand answers before we are capable of formulating clearly the questions... Solutions to what? That is one of the most suggestive surprises there might be... Nobody is concerned to know the problem. One begins with the very general and vague idea: 'it's not working.' What? Everything: the economic, the political, and social. More precisely? Unimportant. Vain analyses, mind games. What is needed is a remedy, and that right away.. Now these problems are all, without exception, wrongly posed because they are conceived as causes when they are only effects.. The problem is posed well enough in reality, in the practical life, but it is not formulated, it is not intellectually, analytically conceived. Now it is impossible to answer a question when the question is not thus posed."[5]

---

[4] Richard Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperOne, 1996).

[5] Jacques Ellul, "Needed: A New Karl Marx (Problems of Civilization II)," in M. Dawn, ed. *Sources*

We can only hope that our students have come to appreciate the interdisciplinarity, interlocution, and inquiry that we sought to model in the course. For the three of us, what were in some senses capricious choices at the beginning of the semester have become to greater extent pedagogical commitments. While we set out to provide an opportunity for Ellul to shape the ideas and dispositions of our students, in the end and as with most teaching experiences, we found ourselves shaped by the opportunity, as well.

Takeaways

All of us—not just the students—learned from the course. Clearly, it provided an opportunity for the faculty to learn more about Ellul. But we also learned from each other. As Schuchardt's approach was the media ecology angle, Greenman's was theology, and Toly's was environmental studies/political science, the course really did offer a tripartite dissection of Ellul's work. If you borrowed Teilhard de Chardin's concept of the Cosmosphere, Noosphere, and Biosphere, there was a rough parallel to our approach through theology, media, and environment. And this worked exceptionally well for the students, who themselves were coming from multiple different major areas of concentration, but who were (mostly) all strong enough students to benefit from a multilayered approach. Now that the course is over, however, each of us would feel much more confident in teaching an Ellul class on his own. It was a course we would have each liked to take, and by teaching it we did get to learn quite a bit from each other, not just on disciplinary approach, but on teaching methods as well.

Toly learned from Greenman to appreciate and communicate to students the context of an author's work. Greenman's hard work situating Ellul paid off with students and Toly was reminded of the importance of such work to student motivation and understanding. Toly also watched Schuchardt personalize the content of the course and connect with students in a way that modeled passionate inquiry.

Given Greenman's background as a theologian, what was most illuminating about the course for him was discussing Ellul's more non-theological works in the wider context of Ellul as a Christian thinker. This approach enabled him to gain a more comprehensive picture of Ellul's entire project. Also, the courses' "interlocutors" in media studies and urban politics were almost entirely new to him, and through our interaction with these figures he was better able to see the distinctiveness of Ellul's thinking and to begin to trace the logic of how Ellulian "instincts" might operate with regard to current questions of media, technology and urban life.

Schuchardt came to the task of team-teaching a course on Ellul with a palpable joy. Of the three of us, Schuchardt was perhaps the least "objective" in his approach, as he was so enthusiastic and gung-ho about teaching Ellul from what he considered to

and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul that Set the Stage (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

be "his own" approach, that he probably was more of a cheerleader for the Ellul team than a dispassionate scholar considering his arguments. Schuchardt greatly valued the ability of Drs.

Greenman and Toly to teach from a more detached position, even as he recognized he was not there yet.

In short, teaching Ellul as a Christian thinker to a classroom of Christian students felt like teaching Ellul the way it was meant to be taught, and this to a very captivated audience. It was the class each of us looked forward to teaching (or participating in) the most each week, and several students said the same about their experience.

Overall, what did students think about our experiment? The personal reflections included in this issue of the *Forum* by four students should give a flavor of the class response. In addition, we used our standard course evaluation process. The student feedback was honest and constructive. A few themes emerged: students would have appreciated more variety in our use of classroom time, particularly more lecturing from the professors to go alongside the discussions of texts. They also recommended greater variety in our assignments. The submission of three questions related to the readings for each class period became monotonous in the eyes of a number of students. We were also interested to see that some students noted their appreciation that the three professors offered differing interpretations of Ellul's thought, while others were somewhat frustrated since they felt that the three professors appeared to disagree too often. Some felt us too critical of Ellul, others saw us as not critical enough.

What will we change, or not change, when we offer this course again? We would continue to use three films, but perhaps change the films offered. It seemed that *Metropolis* worked the best, but the other two potentially could be replaced. We should work to integrate the films into the class discussions more directly and deeply, and perhaps even require a short written response to the films.

The class presentations of student research, with peer respondents, would definitely be continued. We would give clear, blunt instructions about what to do and what must be avoided in making an effective presentation.

Given what we affirmed in the course description about the importance of the theme of freedom and necessity as our chosen framework for reading Ellul, we agree that we did not stick closely enough to that strand. We touched on it often, and on occasion went into a good amount of detail regarding what Ellul was thinking about freedom and necessity. But this theme did not emerge clearly enough as the organizing thread of the course. Some students struggled to locate any strand to pull together a fascinating series of readings and conversations. "All this is interesting, but how does it hang together?" is the question we need to address more directly and concretely when we offer it again. An introductory lecture to frame this theme at the outset of the semester would probably be very helpful.

We would continue the use of "interlocutors" but consider engaging fewer figures so that we could interact more deeply with those chosen. For instance, we could focus on Lewis Mumford as the prime dialogue partner for our politics section, and work more

with Soren Kierkegaard as the chief interlocutor for the ethics material. It seems to have been overly ambitious to address both one of Ellul's contemporaries and one of our contemporaries. Perhaps we need to choose just one interlocutor for each major section of the course.

With regard to our assigned readings, we were generally pleased with our choices. We found *Technological Society* to be the most challenging text to teach, and would probably experiment with different approaches to handling that book when we teach it again. We agree that this book, as well as *Presence of the Kingdom*, is utterly essential reading for a course like ours. But *TS* is a peculiar and repetitive work that sometimes develops arguments in a decidedly non-linear fashion. It makes difficult plowing for newcomers to Ellul's work, and perhaps a more thematic approach to teaching it would yield deeper analysis and discussion. We also would like to somehow rearrange the semester's flow of reading to allow a few additional class periods to discuss *The Ethics of Freedom* toward the end of the semester. We discovered that this text was valuable in pulling together various threads of the course, and in helping students see better how Ellul's thought works itself out in more practical or concrete spheres of life.

Although we liked the assignment to require students to submit three types of written questions for each segment of reading, we realize that we did not take full advantage of these questions. We should use them more strategically as a mechanism for generating discussion, and if we did so, it would help students bridge the various teaching styles and personalities of the three professors. In addition, we understand why some students found the assignment monotonous or boring. We are inclined to periodically require a 1-page paper to a set question as an alternative to writing questions.

If we metaphorically trained our student goslings to fly by pushing them out of their nest, then we should also add that a lot of falling and flapping takes place before flight, and we did have a few broken, or at least injured wi¬¬¬ngs. One student dropped out mid-semester due to the difficulties of trying to add the class to a schedule and workload that was already overladen; another nearly dropped but pulled it through at the last moment, though the work showed the strain of trying to digest too much too soon. So while, statistically speaking, the class was an overwhelming success, we would be remiss to not acknowledge that we set a fairly ambitious course and really did stick to it, which presented some challenges for some students. However, one of the nicest aspects was to team-grade student papers, and this was especially pleasant during the final grade assessment, where we really could discuss each students strengths and weaknesses, could offer insights into aspects of student growth that others might have missed or not been aware of, and this we would say had the overall effect of boosting the grades of the weakest students by rewarding them for mid-course corrections or for simply having the stamina to not quit. The educational value of a C or a D is something undervalued in these days of grade inflation, but we continue to believe that even those students for whom the class presented their toughest academic challenge will benefit in the long run from their participation in this most unique experience. We learned along the way that Ellul had one of the highest drop-out rates among graduate students of

his in France; we felt like our experience was just the opposite. We had a high retention rate and, as a former advertising, marketing, and PR man, Schuchardt would say we would have no trouble filling the class to capacity if we offered it again.

Further experience bears out this observation. After the fall semester was over, some students gathered in northern Wisconsin for Wheaton's January one-week intensive classes, where the Ellul course was a significant part of their discussion. Two students came up to Greenman asking, "Can we talk some more about what Ellul means by desacralization?" Even now, mid-way through the next semester, there is still a lot of "buzz" on campus. As the director of Wheaton's "Media, Reformation, and Modernity" trip to Germany and Switzerland in summer 2010, then the fall 2009 Jacques Ellul class, combined with his pseudo-fluency in French, now has Schuchardt thinking that an academic travel to Bordeaux is not beyond reasonable consideration. If we three could make that a reality, then Schuchardt thinks both students and professors would eat it up.

Ellul & Gojira

Technique, King of the Monsters
by Lee Ketch
Lee Ketch (Class of 2011, Wheaton College) is working toward his degree in Communications: Film and Media Studies.

Jacques Ellul's doubts concerning popular cinema are well established. The industrialization and popularization of cinema has made it a mass medium. According to Ellul, the mass media is first and foremost a technique of propaganda, therefore popular cinema as part of the mass media is "only a game" (1979 p. 2) and not to be taken seriously. Even if we agree with Ellul on the dangers of popular cinema, is it possible that a film could still speak the truth? Ellul never used his self-contained theoretical model to analyze an actual film. If we apply his dialectical reasoning to an example, it becomes evident that popular cinema can in some cases be a conduit for truth, regardless of technological conditions. Ishiro Honda's 1954 horror classic *Gojira* is one such film in that it achieved cultural popularity while also addressing themes antithetical to the technological society.

Technique of Popular Cinema

Ellul's opinion of modern art as a whole appears rather grim. For Ellul, the messages of modern art are all too often submitted to technique's rational frameworks and efficacious modes of distribution. Though he does not disdain rationale and efficiency in and of themselves, problems arise when rationality and efficiency become lifestyles and overextend their reach. This devotion to efficiency has produced the defining business

of the popular film industry: distribution. Whether a film is considered a "popular film" or an "art film" is entirely contingent upon how it is moved through the distribution machine. The content or the message of a film aids its popularity depending on the way the distribution industry interprets and packages that message. As Ellul says, "The great transformation of this century is that the utility of art is regarded as its function." (1979 p. 26) Organizations with a totalizing economic outlook like film distribution can industrialize and therefore devalue artistic vision, making it a "mechanized mirage" (Wang, 2009 p. 462). This is simply one of the compromises of the popular film industry.

Ellul and Gojira

But just how totalizing is this system? Even though it single-handedly established Japan's popular cinema industry and launched the longest running franchise of all time, *Gojira* avoids the irresponsibility that Ellul feared. *Gojira* is a horror-monster film that is centered on the giant atomically-charged lizard Godzilla and its attack on Tokyo. The film does not boast an intricate or nuanced narrative, but its theme does speak to a complex issue: atomic power has disastrous consequences. Producer Tanaka Tomoyuki wanted a topic that would appeal to a skittish post-WWII Japan: "The theme of the film, from the beginning, was the terror of the Bomb ...mankind had created the Bomb, and now nature was going to take revenge on mankind" (Kalat, 1997 p. 129). There were two goals for the film: to appeal to a wide audience and to address a delicate topic artistically. As evident by its financial success, the filmmakers met their first goal. In order to determine whether they succeeded in their second, we should see if they meet Ellul's standards.

For Ellul, nuclear development goes back to the fall of man, the moment when we "had taken over a realm reserved for God" (1982 p. 115). He asks, "are we not precisely at the limit beyond which we make ourselves equal to God, where we do what God does - and can we enter into this competition" (1982 p. 116)? When it comes to nuclear development, there "isn't any respect either for the Creator or for the creation"; it is simply "research for power" (1982 p. 116). Man attempts to create using the basic building blocks of life, but his ends are only ever those of power and, ultimately, destruction. When man has given birth to a technology that disrespects the foundational authority of God, how can he expect anything less than a monster?

Honda's film engages directly with this concept. Author William Tsutsui writes: "To Honda, Godzilla was a means of 'making radiation visible'.. *Gojira* challenged the morality of the atomic age and rendered terrifyingly real the destructive power of radiation..Radiation is not something mysterious, antiseptic, or theoretical in *Gojira*, but is an unrelenting lethal force unleashed against nature and humankind alike" (2004, pg. 33).

Honda does not attempt either to explain away or to capitalize on the aftermath of WWII; rather he directly confronts the audience by visualizing a truth in a way only cinema can. Cinema offers aesthetic advantages that are exclusive to the medium.

Godzilla truly becomes "terrifyingly real" when it is larger than life, accompanied by a bombastic score, and put on display in a room full of hundreds of gaping audience members. The cinema is where Godzilla as a symbol truly finds efficacy.

Ellul also states that the first atomic bomb came about "because everything which is a technique is necessarily used as soon as it is available, without distinction of good or evil" (1965 p. 100). He bemoans that we "have neither the criterion nor the motivation *not* to pursue to the nth degree everything that can satisfy our power" (1982 p. 116). For Ellul, this inability to say "no" leads us to one of two points: either we finally attain the illusion that we can create without God, or we destroy ourselves in the process. Godzilla is the personification of the latter. It is not a force of nature inexplicably wreaking havoc on humanity; it is nature in revolt. The nuclear subtext, historically and symbolically, makes clear for us the primary personification of Godzilla: the destruction that nuclear power leaves in its wake.

Conclusion

When Ellul says that popular cinema is "nothing but a game," he does not mean that it is deterministically a dead medium. As both creators and watchers of media, we are to be "renewed men [and women] whose reordered consciousness opposes *la technique's* tutelage." (Christians & Real, 1979 p. 5) The avenue for truth begins at this foundation of renewal. Ellul only offers us a start; the specifics are up for evaluation. We must be dialecticians in our media consumption, affirming both the "yes" and the "no," distinguishing truth from pure amusement, but recognizing that they may be present together.

References

Christians, C.G. & Real, M.R. (1979). Jacques Ellul's Contributions to Critical Media Theory.
Journal of Communication 29 (1), 83-93.

Ellul, J. (1982). A Theological Reflection on Nuclear Developments: The Limits of Science, Technology and Power. *Waging Peace: a handbook for the struggle to abolish nuclear weapons.* San Francisco: Harper and Row. 114120.

Ellul, J. (1979). Remarks on Technology and Art.
Social Research 46 (4), 805-833.

Ellul, J. (1965). *The Technological Society.* New York: Vintage.

Kalat, D. (1997). *A Critical History and Filmography of Toho's Godzilla Series.* Jefferson, NC: MacFarland.

Tsutsui, W. (2004). *Godzilla on My Mind.* New York: Palgrave McMillan.

Wang, D. (2009). Ellul on New Urbanism. *Christian Scholar's Review* 38 (4), 457-470.

Advert: Change of Address?

Dialoguing Ellul & Vahanian

Technique: Dehumanizing Totalitarianism or Utopian Hope
by Daniel Saunders

Daniel Saunders *(Class of 2011, Wheaton College) is working toward his degree in Communications: Media Studies.*

After spending an entire semester embedded in the context of Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society*, stumbling across Gabriel Vahanian's *God and Utopia* was eye-opening, if not completely transformative in my reading of Ellul and other "theologies of technology." My struggle to synthesize the dehumanizing totalitarianism of Ellul's technological society—a society in which the practical technological tool becomes the imperative technological system of *la technique*, a system that is all means and no ends—with Vahanian's utopian (but more emphatically, *eschatic*) hope led to a consideration of the fundamental nature of technique. For Vahanian, technique is not the quasi-Gnostic phenomenon Ellul derides when he writes that "technology reduces Christianity to the inner life, to spirituality, to salvation of the soul" (1981 p. 98). Rather, Vahanian expounds technology as the restorer of the eschatological dimension of faith—for changing the world is more incarnation-minded than removing oneself from the world. Thus one asks, in spite of Ellul's critiques, could technology be neutral? What does it mean for technology to properly situate humankind to its environment, enabling the existence of a truly incarnational presence of the church on earth? Where does our hope lie—in Ellul's apocalyptic or Vahanian's utopian understanding?

Christianity and Technique

The relationship between Christianity and technique remains essential to the dialogic synthesis of Ellul and Vahanian. In exploring the history and progression of technology, one cannot fail to see the (A) indelible impact wrought by the Christian church. Up to the sixteenth century the sacred and profane distinctions of medieval Christianity limited the use of technology to the practical tool, mediated by the sacred; however, the Reformers' "desacralization" of Christian thought based on a new self-awareness laid the foundation for technique as all-encompassing method. It is from

this point that Ellul traces the advent of the absolute technological system wherein "the technique of the present has no common measure with that of the past" (1964 p. xxv), aided by a (B) church (captivated by the sacred) that has accepted the substitution of technique for the truest desacralizer—the presence of Christ. For Ellul, the Christian church has been subverted by various outside sources and has been transformed into a vacuous religion. Nevertheless, subverted as it was and still is, the church and the Christian faith (C) will continue to be faithful through the Holy Spirit. The phrase Ellul leaves with us at the end of the seemingly hopeless *The Subversion of Christianity* is the Italian *eppur si muove*—yet it moves. It follows that A+B=C; in other words, the history of the church is a history of sin and multiple failings and an existence marked by the "unlivable paradox" of remaining in the "point of contact" between this world and the *other-world* of Christ's Kingdom. Yet for Ellul, this viewpoint looks *back* to humankind's prelapsarian condition for its example of such a life "free" from technique and in full, unmediated communion with God, as it then looks to the *end* when God will reveal all.

From the Mythological Milieu to the Technological Milieu

For Vahanian, technique seems to be an integral part of our humanity: "Man is and always has been technological man, if only because technique exists from the moment that man invents himself, realizes himself" (1977 p. 96). According to Vahanian, technique gears us toward a shift in milieus—from the mythological to the technological. In the mythological milieu, redemption is understood as soteriological, based on otherworldly moralism and the changing of worlds in a life after death. In the technological milieu, redemption is understood as eschatic-utopian, based on an incarnational transformation of the world here and now. It is concerned with bringing the true incarnation of the Kingdom of God to His people, of truly humanizing that which is alien to humankind— simply understood as the fulfillment of God's redemption of humanity:

The human is the "event of God," though God is the ever-present other by which humans become what they are not ...Technological civilization gives humans an earthly dimension heretofore neglected in favor of the soul and its heavenly aspirations. Body language brings the utopian reality of the human and God into the realizable present and thereby makes the human body and the social structure the instrument of the kingdom and the incarnation of God! (Kliever, 1990, p. 9).

Apocalypse and Utopia

Ellul's admitted problem with the semantics of *utopia* leads him to mistrust theories like Vahanian's. Although he attempts to be as incarnation-minded as Vahanian, Ellul's dialectic leads him to advocate an "active pessimism" of apocalyptic hope—as such, the Christian is to be a *sign* of hope, always *pointing* to the end of time when God will reveal and consummate all, a literal 'apocalypse' or revelation. But Ellul does not go far enough. The vision of the New Jerusalem Ellul gives us in *The Meaning of the City* (even if he does not admit it) is in the same utopian vein as Vahanian, predicating as it does the Garden of Eden (which although existing as myth is still technical and utopian—do gardens naturally occur in nature?). Ellul fails to take note of the fact

795

that (D) technique seems to play some vital role in God's plan for human redemption and that his New Jerusalem actually offers us the utopia of Vahanian's technological milieu. Ellul reminds us that our spiritual security cannot abide in any object *per se*, even technological utopianism. God alone grants the freedom to be spiritually secure, rooted in

Godself. However, a faith truly oriented towards the *eschaton*, in the already and not yet, must be a truly incarnational faith. And this means that the church may use technology as it becomes a body concerned with "wording the world and worlding the word" (Vahanian 2001)—an *iconoclastic* rather than a desacralizing entity. Only then will the Kingdom of God begin to be truly realized.

References

Ellul, J. (1981). *Perspectives on our age.* New York: Seabury.

Ellul, J. (1964). *The Technological Society.* New York: Vintage.

Kliever, L. D. (1990). [Review of the book *God and utopia: The church in a technological civilization*]. *The Ellul Forum,* 5: 3-12.

Vahanian, G. (2001). *Anonymous god.* New York: Davies Group.

Vahanian, G. (1977). *God and utopia.* New York: Seabury.

Putting Technology in Place

Ellul & the Environment

by Kari Amick

Kari Amick *(Class of 2010, Wheaton College) is working toward a degree in Environmental Studies*

This essay was written in twenty-first century America. It springs out of the work of a French intellectual writing in the latter half of the 20th century, yet it is rooted in a distinctly American and western place and in a uniquely American understanding of land. This understanding of land is complicated by the technology used to manage and understand land, and can result in degradation and disconnection from place. Jacques Ellul provides a paradigm for understanding technology, but fails to fully delineate its impact on relationships with the natural environment.

Jacques Ellul (1964) defines technique as "the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency" (p. xxvi). Examples proliferate in the modern world, and appear in every area of life: education, politics, laundry, transportation. For Ellul, as described in "Technique in the Opening Chapters of Genesis", technique appeared as a result of the fall and its attendant curses (Ellul, 1984, p. 129). Prior to the fall, relationships required no intermediary: relationships between mankind, God and

nature were all immediate. The result of the fall was a series of ruptured relationships for humanity: they could no longer relate directly with God, and they could only eat of the ground through painful toil. Technique then appeared as a necessary buffer between man and his environments—physical, social and spiritual—and eventually progressed into Ellul's technological society.

The technological society's attempt to remove itself from its environment through technique has created alternative milieus, resulting in a multitude of troubles. At the core is the fact that "technique worships nothing, respects nothing. It has a single role: to strip off externals, to bring everything to light, and by rational use to transform everything into means" (Ellul, 1962, p. 142). The technological society offers a life full of means, but utterly meaningless. This consumes all aspects of human life, "our technological society stands ready to offer our neighbors, children, grandchildren, and God's good creation as burnt sacrifices to Mammon" (Toly, 2005, p. 75). Technological means demand constant sacrifice of material resources, and result in environmental degradation as well.

The mechanisms of physical technique are derived from natural resources. Machines require metal of all sorts: cell phones require coltan, copper is used in wiring, aluminum is demanded for cans (McPhee, 1971, p. 49). Energy, in its various permutations, goes into producing the trappings of technique. Food energy for humans is derived from the land as well. To ensure these resources are produced efficiently, production processes are themselves technicized, acerbating degradation. Efficient food production often results in thoughtless land management, simply because the health and long-term viability of the land is not a factor in short-term productivity (Pollan, 2008, p. 1). And while food and other resources are certainly necessary, degradation results when informed land management succumbs to the efficiency of technique.

Three aspects of technique make land degradation permissible. Firstly, technique creates the situation Garrett Hardin (1968) describes in "The Tragedy of the Commons": the environment is seen only as a means of economic gain, and so this gain is given an inherent value which places it above the environment (p. 1207). Ellul (1978) rightly noted that "if man possessed land, he was in a position to command" (p. 85). Modern landowners transform this power into material wealth as quickly as possible, rather than understanding their land thoroughly and maintaining it well.

Second, most attempts to stem the tide of technique by setting apart land that should remain unused or 'wild' actually end up simply furthering the role of technique in society. While functional land should be limited and certainly should not be enmeshed with the land, it remained an unquestioned necessity. Thus, even the concept of wilderness—a place Ellul (1970) commends for the spiritual fulfillment Christ found there (p. 131)— becomes a means to various removed ends. Land is thus divided and defined, with different techniques allotted for the management of each type, while land itself remains merely a means to achieving one end or the other, fulfillment spiritual or physical.

Finally, as technique becomes our environment, the natural environment loses its value. This not only creates environmental problems, but spiritual ones as well: "What was once abnormal has become the usual, standard condition of things. Even so, the human being is ill at ease in this strange new environment, and the tension demanded of him weighs heavily on his life and being" (Ellul, 1964, p. 321). Technique has become our environment and god, yet fails to fully replace either of these, and thus humanity remains unsatisfied. Technique is not sufficient for us, and nothing is sufficient for it.

The technical relationship to land was questioned when Aldo Leopold (1966) proposed a novel treatment of the land to combat "a system of conservation based solely on economic self-interest" (p. 251). He suggested a "land ethic" which "enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land" (p. 239). The land ethic does not place the land above humanity, but simply expands the community of both, making the fields of the neighbor as valuable as the neighbor himself. While Leopold's solution remains visionary, it is a vision crippled by its inability to reach fruition. As Leopold writes, "we shall never achieve complete harmony with land, any more than we shall achieve absolute justice or liberty for people. In these higher aspirations the important thing is not to achieve, but to strive" (p. 210). The technological society is what shackles Leopold's vision. Yet Ellul saw a way to escape technique: Christ.

Christ changes what was wrought in Eden, and in so doing changes the Christian's approach to the world. Simply put, Christ frees humanity, and "freedom in Christ means living in the real world and not a utopian world" or a world "fixed" by technological means (Ellul, 1976, p. 368). The Christian can acknowledge the extent to which solution is impossible: yet the Christian is the only one who can even begin to approach a solution. Christ has given us a gift so vast we can never repay it and can do nothing to deserve it: our salvation is an outpouring of his grace. This vitality of this grace allows us to "reciprocate by abandoning attachment to worldly things, that is, by directing [our] lives back toward God" and finally create the sort of community Leopold envisaged (Hyde, 2007, p. 69). This freedom, found only in Christ, allows the Christian to evade the demands of technology and live rightly on the land. While our work will remain incomplete until Christ's return, we can begin to move forward, with "no legacy to fall back on; everything must be initiated" (Ellul, 1971, p. 300).

References

Ellul, Jacques. (1964). *The technological society*. (John
Wilkinson, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books.

Ellul, Jacques (1970). *The meaning of the city*. (Dennis Pardee, Trans.). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans

Ellul, Jacques. (1971). *Autopsy of revolution*. (Patricia Wolf, Trans.). New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Ellul, Jacques. (1976). *The Ethics of Freedom*. (Geoffrey Bromiley, Trans.). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans

Ellul, Jacques (1978). *The Betrayal of the West.* (Matthew O'Connell, Trans.). New York: Seabury Press.

Ellul, Jacques. (1984) "Technique in the Opening Chapters of Genesis." *Theology and Technology* Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote, (Eds.). New York, NY: University Press of America.

Hardin, Garrett. (1968). "The Tragedy of the Commons." *Science,* 162, 1243-1248.

Hyde, Lewis. (2007). *The Gift.* New York: Vintage Books. Leopold, Aldo (1966). *A Sand County Almanac.* New

York, NY: Ballantine Books.

Toly, Noah (2005). "Climate Change and Climate Change Policy as Human Sacrifice: Artifice, Idolatry and Environment in a Technological Society." *Christian Scholar's Review*, 35, 63-78.

Economy & Ecclesia

Ellul on Capitalism, Church, & Individual
by Jake Rollison

Jake Rollison *(Class of 2010, Wheaton College) is working toward a degree in Economics.*

The reader of Jacques Ellul needs only a basic familiarity with his works to recognize that his combination of indiscriminate criticism of social phenomena and applied theology leads him to some practical conclusions which are somewhat unorthodox, at least, and quite radical, at most. This paper attempts to synthesize critiques of modern capitalist political economy (and the Christian church's relation to it) from Ellul's works and then to distill practical implications of Ellul's ideas for the life of the individual Christian. In doing so, we find that a serious consideration of Ellul leads the Christian to similarly unorthodox or radical practical conclusions.

Consideration of the modern political economy in Ellulian terms makes an already 'dismal science' even more dismal. The conditions of a society mired in technique leave little to no room for individual freedom, a situation so constricting that the human becomes a mere cog in a self-determining, totalitarian machine (Ellul, 1964, p.162; Ellul, 1984, p.11.). Ellul describes economics as absorbing all social activities to the extent that "Man *is* capital, and he must become perfectly adapted to this role" (Ellul, 1964, p.224, p.158, p. 239). The modern economy is abstract and impersonal, and money and political power are in fact powers themselves apart from any instrumental use (Ellul, 1979, p.2.; North, 1994 p.363). An emphasis on abstracted models and quantifiable data necessarily precludes "consideration of those dimensions of life unsuitable for quantification and measurement" (Clark, 1998, p.310-311; Ellul, 1984, p.13). The Ellulian view stands in direct opposition to the foundational premises of neo-liberal

economics, which view money as instrumentally neutral and see individual freedom as supreme, immutable, and unaltered by material conditions.

The modern economy is more than impersonal— it is *anti*personal. The progression of the technological society and its economy create a milieu in which humanity is changed and adapted to detrimental conditions. The consideration of humanity in scientific, quantifiable terms shapes them in the form of the *homo economicus*—the abstracted, quantified humanoid of their models (Ellul, 1964, p.219). Moral reasoning is replaced with economic assumptions and spiritual life is replaced by economic life (Ellul, 1964, p.286; Ellul, 1968, p.2; Ellul, 1993, p.155). Thus human nature is in danger of spiritual retardation by the economic milieu in which it finds itself and the individual is devalued in light of the greater needs of an efficiency-oriented society (Ellul, 1967, p.5; Frank, 2006, ch.17). In fact, Ellul entirely rejects the efficacy of economic systems to create better static conditions for humanity at all (Ellul, 1984, p.15, 17; Ellul, 1991, p.14).

It would seem from this study that there is no hope for humanity—that we are caught in a web of techniques which end up controlling themselves and us. Personal agency is rendered ineffective, freedom is ruled out, and we are left to either aid the machine or to be removed from it. The reader who fails to incorporate Ellul's theology is largely stuck here in quite a depressing and desperate state. An examination of Ellul's theology, however, finds hope for humanity in one source-the work of Jesus Christ.

(Note: Because economics was not a separate subject before 1500 (and even then, it was only studied under the larger umbrella of 'political economy') (Landreth & Colander, 2002, p.15), we will consider earlier church-economy relations first in terms of centralized authority and then in terms of the problem of money.)

While the church is the bearer of this one hope, it has (in Ellul's perspective) often failed to fulfill its unique role. What is its proper role? Ellul interprets the Bible as consistently critical of all mechanisms of political authority, pointing out that God's 'mouthpiece' (the prophets) always spoke in opposition of the king and the state (Ellul, 1991, p.51-52). Christ continues and amplifies this tradition (Ellul, p.71). The church, then, should be an entity entirely separate from the state with no power, authority, or hierarchy (Ellul, p.62, Ellul, 1948, p.9). For Ellul, the church cannot build the kingdom of God through political action—despite its acting to the contrary for nearly 2,000 years (Ellul, 1968, p.4). Historically, it has tended either to isolate itself from secular politico-economic systems or be absorbed into them without distinction.

The church behaved in the proper (Ellulian) manner for roughly the first 300 years of its existence (Ellul, 1991, p.91-95), until the conversion of the emperor Constantine (Ellul, p.28). This resulted in the clericization of the church (adoption of a power structure) and a mentality of a 'christianized' state. Whether in terms of medieval Christendom or contemporary 'Christian patriotism,' these changes have persisted in some form until the present day (Ellul, p.28; Moltmann, 1968, p.58). In relation to

structures of power, then, the church has conformed instead of maintaining its unique situation.

In terms of the problem of money, the church has done a similarly poor job. The writings of Thomas Aquinas on just price theory and natural law represent a step away from the previously dominant Aristotelian view of money (in which profit-making was unnatural and dishonorable) and a break with Christ's radical warnings against serving Mammon (Aristotle, in *Source Readings* (1954), p.6). While not explicitly condoning profits (material gain above what was required for subsistence), Aquinas had a softer view towards them and implied that a positive instrumental use of profits legitimizes them, making arguments from practicality and efficiency (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part II, Question 77, Art. 2). Writers during the Protestant Reformation continued the trend of moving away from ecclesial rejection of power structures and money and toward a view of them as inherently neutral and only valued instrumentally. Protestantism provided the common ethical beliefs which value theory and early classical economics were built. (Kauder, 1953, p.138-139; Witte, 2009; Hill, 2009; Pierotti, accessed 11/22/09). Thus, rather than rejecting money's power, the church effectively legitimized private property and changed social norms in *favor* of profit (through Thomistic natural law and the Protestant work-ethic). From here, academics such as Adam Smith built capitalism on the church's foundations.

Today, the church maintains a wide spectrum of beliefs about money and the state, ranging from newer (if revised) forms of Christendom to the 'prosperity-gospel' and everywhere in between. The vast majority of these are insufficient to Ellul.

In our ongoing attempt to strike the proper balance between complete withdrawal from the world and total assimilation, is there an Ellulian answer? Yes, but not an easy one. The freedom given to Christians through Christ's work causes serious difficulties in attempting to pin down practical admonitions (Ellul, 1976, p. 300, 309; Barth, 1960, p. 85). Freedom through Christ represents the only possible liberation from the necessity and determinism of the modern economic apparatus, and is the only force which can counter the economy's totalitarian nature. It is this Christian freedom which simultaneously protects Christians from corruption by the means of the world and rejects distillation into an easy, universal ethic. It is only there, in the tension between freedom and necessity that the Christian church can fulfill its unique role.

References

Barth, Karl (1960). The Gift of Freedom: Foundation of Evangelical Ethics. In *The Humanity of God* (pp. 69-96). Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press.

Clark, Barry (1998). *Political Economy,* 2nd edition. Westport, Conn.: Praeger.

Ellul, Jacques (1991). *Anarchy and Christianity.* Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Ellul, Jacques (1968). Between Chaos and Paralysis. Folder 28, box II-5, Special Collection 16-"Jacques Ellul Papers," Wheaton College (IL).

Ellul, Jacques (1949). The Church and the Disorder of Society. In *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Amsterdam, Aug. 22-Sept. 4, 1948.* Edited by Willem Adolph Visser't Hooft, 35-48. New York, New York: World Council of Churches, 1949.

Ellul, Jacques (1976). *The Ethics of Freedom.* Translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Ellul, Jacques (1984). *Money and Power.* Translated by LaVonne Neff. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

Ellul, Jacques (1979). Lust for Power. In *Katallegete: Be Reconciled.* Folder 21, box II-8, Special Collection No. 16-"Jacques Ellul Papers," Wheaton College (IL).

Ellul, Jacques (1993). *The Meaning of the City.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Ellul, Jacques (1964). *The Technological Society.* Trans. by John Wilkinson. New York: Vintage Books.

Frank, Robert H (2006). *Microeconomics and Behavior, Sixth Edition.* New York: McGraw-Hill Irwin, pp. 613-645.

Hill, P.J.(2009). Connecting the Dots: Economics, Christianity, and Human Rights. Paper presented at the J. Dennis Hastert Center Market Capitalism Conference, September 23 & 24, 2009.

Kauder, Emil (1953). The Retarded Acceptance of the Marginal Utility Theory. In *The Quarterly Journal of Economics,* Vol. LXVII: pp. 564-575.

Landreth, Harry Colander, David C (2002). *History of Economic Thought.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin

Moltmann, Jurgen (1968). The Revolution of Freedom: The Christian and Marxist Struggle. Translated by M. Douglas Meeks. In *Openings for Marxist-Christian Dialogue.* Edited by Thomas W. Ogletree, 47-71. New York: Abingdon Press.

North, Douglass (1994). Economic Performance Through Time. *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 84, No. 3 (June 1994), 359-368.

Pierotti, Sandra (2003). The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: Criticisms of Weber's Thesis. California State University, Dominguez Hills.
www.csudh.edu/dearhabermas/weberrelbkO 1.htm

Witte, John (2009). Christian Protestant Foundations of Liberty, Equality, Basic Rights, and Democracy. Paper presented at the J. Dennis Hastert Center Market Capitalism Conference, September 23 & 24, 2009.

A True Solidarity: Christian Community in the Thought of Jacques Ellul

by Ben Robertson

Ben Robertson *(Class of 2011, Wheaton College) is working toward his degree in Media Studies.*

One of Ellul's most compelling arguments is his analysis of the social alienation experienced by the individual within the technological society. In reading Ellul, I wanted to uncover his thought regarding a possible Christian response to this alienation. Clifford Christians' article "Ellul on Solution" (1981), in which Dr. Christians discusses the frustrating nature of Ellul's "heavy individualism," was a great starting point and gave me a filter for reading Ellul on community. The three-pronged approach Dr. Christians identifies within Ellul's writing— awareness, transformation, and the concrete action based on these two—is most clear when it is understood in the context of Ellul's Christianity as a response to alienation, and we will approach his thought in this order (p. 154).

Awareness

As Ellul (1967b) says, "The first duty of a Christian intellectual today is the duty of awareness" (p. 98). Thus, we begin with an exploration of the sociological conditions of our technological society as described by Ellul. Ellul's concept of the individualist *and* mass society is integral to understanding the shift away from traditional sociological organization (1965 p. 90). For Ellul, alienation arises out of the sociological reorganization along technical values which accompanies the individualist trend in 19th century Europe (p. 93). The rising value given to the individual eclipses the value of any group affiliation (p. 20). Thus, when "the small groups that are an organic fact of the entire society"—such as the family, village, or parish—are broken up, the individual does not become a free, self-made man, but is made defenseless against propaganda and social currents, resulting in "direct integration into mass society" (pp. 90-92). Western, technological society is a society of alienated individuals organized in an unstructured mass.

Ellul reveals the spiritual significance of the sociology of the mass in his *Meaning of the City* (1970). Here, Ellul describes the mass as a constant force and source of alienation; a "sheet of glass" between every individual that is invisible but completely isolating (p. 125). For Ellul, the mass society is a dangerous spiritual reality. Freedom comes only in the awareness brought by the presence of Jesus (p. 129). The Christian convert has a radically new framework for approaching the mass, the city, and technological society, granting him true awareness of his circumstances and the freedom change them. His spiritual freedom enables him to work as an acid, decomposing the bonds and structure of alienation within technological society (p. 133).

Transformation

What kind of sociological transformation does this spiritual freedom entail? Ellul treats this question in several books under different terms. In *The Technological Society* (1964), he discusses "real community," which is necessarily anti-technical because of its particularism (pp. 207-208). He develops this idea further in *Propaganda* (1965), with the depiction of "local, organic groups," which are able to resist psychological technique (propaganda) and to be well off materially, spiritually, and emotionally (p.

91). Furthermore, in *The Political Illusion* (1967a), Ellul advocates for the creation of "positions in which we reject and struggle with the state," which take the form of "social, political, intellectual, or artistic bodies, associations, interest groups, or economic or Christian groups totally independent of the state, yet capable of opposing it, able to reject its pressures as well as its controls, and even its gifts" (p. 221). These associations must be intellectually, materially, and morally independent of the state in order to be truly confrontational and anti-technical, and their existence as such re-introduces value systems that are not technical in nature (p. 222). Nevertheless, what is it that allows the real community present within local, organic, independent groups to be *truly* independent and anti-technical?

The answer for Ellul is, of course, that they must be Christian. In *The Presence of the Kingdom* (1967b), we find a similar discussion regarding the role of the church in the technological society. For Ellul, Christians ought to create a new style of life that "permits them to escape from the stifling pressure of our present form of civilization" (p. 46). Most importantly, this endeavor is "a work that is both collective and individual," and "necessarily a corporate act" (pp. 122-3). In fact, an essential condition for this new style of life is "the substitution of a true solidarity among Christians (a solidarity—voluntarily created by obedience to the will of God) for the sociological solidarity, purely mechanical in character, which is being dinned into our ears, and which people want to make the basis of the new world" (p. 124).

Concrete Action

Undoubtedly, there is overlap between Ellul's ideas of real community, organic groups, independent associations, and true solidarity among Christians. Furthermore, there is an inherent opposition in his writing between the sociological forms of our society and the responsibilities of Christians. We would misunderstand Ellul, however, if we took him to be advocating a return to an idyllic past. Ellul's ideas regarding dialectic and the ecological effects of technique prevent him from valuing any historical situation over any other; there is no dialectical progress, and regression is impossible. There is only change. Thus, Ellul is hesitant to advocate any concrete plan of action.

This is often what people find most frustrating about Ellul, yet he is simply attempting to avoid creating a group of his own followers, leaving the reader with great responsibility. It is difficult to find any concrete solution in Ellul's writing, but this is only because Ellul knows that problems must be addressed at the level of the real man (1967b p. 82). What then is the significance of community in all this? Ellul (1976) answers in his typically overstated fashion: "the particularity of the individual makes no sense and has no value unless it finds expression in a community" (p. 296). Accordingly, we are to understand that Christ calls his followers out of technological alienation into communion with the Church, as a body that may prophetically point to the ever-imminent Kingdom of God.

References

Christians, C. G. (1981). Ellul on Solution: An Alternative but No Prophecy. In C. G. Christians and J. M. Van Hook (Eds.), *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (pp.147-165). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Ellul, J. (1964). *The Technological Society*. New York: Vintage Books.

_____ . (1965). *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*. New York: Vintage Books.

_____ . (1967a). *The Political Illusion*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

_____ . (1967b). *The Presence of the Kingdom*. Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard.

_____ . (1970). *The Meaning of the City*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing.

_____ . (1976). *The Ethics of Freedom*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing.

Student Reflections on Ellul

Living the Dialectical Tension

by Graham Smith, Ashleigh Lamb, & Juliana Wilhoit

Following are responses from three students in the Wheaton College Jacques Ellul seminar discussing what each gleaned from the course's format and content. We have chosen to adopt as the title for this entire piece the phrase Juliana Wilhoit used for her reflection because each student's contribution demonstrates a unique response to Ellul's challenge towards forming a lived ethic in any number of academic or vocational fields. Graham Smith is an Economics major, Class of 2012. Ashleigh Lam is a Biblical and Theological Studies major, Class of 2010. Juliana Wilhoit is a Political Science and Interdisciplinary Studies, Class of 2011.

Graham Smith

The course on Ellul challenged my interpretations and theories of the world by opening it up to paradox and tension, particularly as I encountered Ellul's critique of both the growth of scientific consciousness and the doctrine of progress in a world of improving technology. Ellul's method of analyzing the milieus that humans actually inhabit, instead of stripped down, abstract or theoretical ones, challenged my Enlightenment assumptions. I became convinced that Ellul is the necessary foil to the confidence in universal conceptualizations and abstractions of the human being and human societies.

Ellul's method is a dialectical one, which gets us beyond reductionistic accounts of what it means to be human. Based on the lived reality he observes, his thought contains two poles that cannot be considered autonomously or neatly reconciled. Ellul's dialectic translated to the 21st century revolves around the aporia of the "One" and the "Many" and the seemingly endless permutations of this aporia: authority vs. libertinism, power vs. freedom, transcendence vs. immanence, multiculturalism vs. cultural conformity. Dialectic permits Ellul to address the full range of human meanings and purposes. He

offers a more robust understanding that extends beyond the purely rational, quantified, and abstract being.

I was further challenged by Ellul's critique of nominal Christianity, which in his view has conformed to the ethos of the world. Ellul's Christianity is a totalizing and substantive calling, not a cheap substitute like that described in Money and Power: "To try to respond [to the poor] by joining a party, by accepting a program, by working at an institution, is to refuse responsibility, to escape into the crowds when confronted with God's question" (159). Yet Ellul also says that Christians should

be involved: it is Christians alone who "can contend against the powers that are at the root of the problem.. .It is the heart of the problem that must be attacked. And Christians alone can do that—because the others know nothing of this" (Violence 164).

Studying Jacques Ellul for a semester deeply influenced my thoughts about the world around me. Throughout the course readings, it became increasingly clear that Ellul is relevant for today. I think that Ellul can be used as the basis for a renewed discourse on power, technology, money, corporate-led globalization, neoliberalism, western civilization, and human nature with as much ethico-political urgency and aplomb as other contemporary voices emerging on these topics. As Ellul's thought questions the genetics of the "globalizing village" and critiques the West's conceptions of "progress" and "development," he challenges technological assumptions about the purpose of human life and calls us to work towards a different reality indeed.

Ashleigh Lamb

Sometimes the things in life that you do grudgingly, out of obligation, end up being some of the most rewarding. Thus it was with me and the class I took last semester on Jacques Ellul. Prior to taking this class, I had no knowledge of Jacques Ellul or any of his writings or ideas. I was simply taking the class to meet a graduation requirement and was less than enthusiastic about it after I saw how much reading the class would involve.

I am a Biblical and Theological Studies major, with a concentration in Biblical Studies. Thus, I have spent more time studying the text of the Bible and its cultural context and history than I have studying theologians and their thoughts. I have become especially interested in studying issues of sexuality, gender, and marriage in the Bible and how they relate to modern Christian living. I did not expect those interests to be addressed in a class about ethics, technology, and politics. However, I found myself pleasantly surprised.

Throughout my reading of the works of Jacques Ellul and our class discussions, I was constantly struck by how applicable his works were to issues that I have developed an interest in, especially his ideas on technique and dehumanization. Though I did not at all expect to make connections between ideas learned in this class and my interest in sexuality, I found so many connections that I ended up writing my final paper for the class on how technique and propaganda influence modern adolescent romantic relationships.

Not only was reading the works of Ellul beneficial to my understanding of sexuality and romance, but I have constantly found links to Ellul in other classes, readings, and topics I have studied since. I find myself constantly thinking in a dialectical fashion and being rather skeptical of technology. I have also been greatly impacted by Ellul's ideas on the meaning and method of Christian living. His dialectical and tension-filled ideas on the Christian life may be difficult to live out, but I feel they are also more realistic and true to the gospel than other methods I have encountered.

So though I may have learned about Jacques Ellul out of obligation, his work and thought have positively shaped the way I think and will continue to do so.

Juliana Wilhoit

Dr. Toly encouraged me to enroll in the Ellul class because it would "help me answer some of the questions I was asking." These questions revolved around how to live in the world, and how to be a social critic without becoming cynical. Even with this encouragement, I doubted that anyone could help me figure out how to live, let alone a dead French man. The class looked interesting and was taught by an all-star cast, so I signed up for it anyway. Little did I know that not only would Ellul answer my questions but he also took my life, turned it upside down, shook it, and then set me off on a new trajectory.

Reading the *Technological Society* and *Technological System* paralyzed me; I found Ellul's critiques shockingly relevant and accurate. I was faced with the fact that I live in a society that is continuing down a path of destruction through its use of technology and technique. Instead of answering my questions, these works compounded them: "How can I live in a way that does not continue the totalizing nature of technique? Is it even possible for me to do anything?" While Ellul raised these questions, he also provided an answer through his use of dialectics and his clear articulation of the need to live within the tensions inherent to our lives. His dialectic called me to action, but to action injected with humor and a refusal to take myself too seriously, because, as Ellul stresses, I cannot do anything; only the Christian God enables true revolt from technique (*Meaning of the City*, ch. 5).

Ellul also impacted my understanding of how to be an academic. As a political science and interdisciplinary studies major, I am interested in issues of geography and place that transcend many disciplines. I have found few academics who are as interdisciplinary as Ellul, who weaves history, philosophy, sociology, and theology together. Reading dozens of articles and books by Ellul over the semester allowed me to interact with him broadly, letting me see the consistency of his framework between works. Works like the *Technological Society* may not be explicitly Christian and works like the *Presence of the Kingdom* may not be sociological, but his framework remains consistent throughout. Ellul encouraged me to continue to do interdisciplinary work and showed me an appropriate framework of doing it.

Jacques Ellul's impact on me has been permanent. I can no longer view the world in my black and white framework. Rather, I recognize the "both/and" quality and nature of the world in which I live. While this tension is difficult, it is also liberating because

no choice is inherently worse than another. I am no longer crippled by the world, but invigorated by the possibilities. Ellul has been an intellectual mentor as well, carefully showing me how to construct a comprehensive and interdisciplinary social critique. I will always be grateful for my semester with Ellul and the professors who walked me through his work. *Thank you, Jacques Ellul, for showing me what it means to live and be a scholar.*

Advancing the Dialectic

T.A.-ing Ellul

by Kirsten Laurel Guidero

Kirsten Laurel Guidero (*MA, Historical & Systematic Theology, Wheaton College, 2010) served as the teaching assistant in the interdisciplinary Ellul course at Wheaton College.*

Sex. Guns. Prayer. Water privatization. Urban gardening. Nuclear power. Godzilla. The ethics of stop signs. Turtles, buffalo, geysers, clocks, and Disney dollars.

During Wheaton College's fall 2009 course on the thought of Jacques Ellul, all these and more became subjects in a discussion that progressively unfolded a bit further each Tuesday and Thursday. Sometimes talk grew heated and intense, sometimes it remained quieter, and sometimes participants were so overwhelmed with the magnitude of what was being encountered that the faces around the table depicted bewilderment, plain and simple. But the seminar was always provocative, and its effects remain considerable, as evidenced by the ongoing conversations generated by students, the buzz on campus over Ellulian themes, and in faculty discussions of what comes next.

TAing for the course was one of the highlights of my academic year. Having read a bit of Marva Dawn, a theologian who retrieves and builds off Ellulian themes in considering biblical criticism and spirituality, I was somewhat familiar with Ellul's thought and intrigued by what I had seen. When I heard the preceding summer that the course would be offered and would be team-taught in an interdisciplinary manner, I jumped at the chance to be involved. Having allotted most of my time at Wheaton to more specialized theology courses but having greatly enjoyed a previous interdisciplinary course on theology and hermeneutics, I was eager to re-enter a multi-faceted learning environment. Furthermore, I had spent much of my undergraduate years examining the thought of great philosophers and writers in a seminar setting, each student investigating the texts from a particular perspective and with an eye toward his or her specific research questions— courses handled in much the same manner as the Ellul seminar was to be run. So the course was right up my methodological alley, and I twisted Dr. Jeff Greenman's arm to be allowed to assist. I might even have begged, for I was keen to witness, support, and partake of the kinds of conversations I enjoy so much.

As we together uncovered layers of Ellulian thought, the value I place on such conversations only expanded. For in Ellul, we encountered a consistent emphasis on the importance of conversing on and living out the complexities of daily existence. Such an emphasis clearly motivates Ellul's critiques of technology and propaganda, his sketches of 20th-century Christianity, and his ethics. The critiques of technique I had already encountered within writers such as Wendell Berry and Kathleen Dean Moore, and the confrontation of limp Christianity I had seen in the writers from whom Ellul drew, particularly Kierkegaard and Barth. But it was my exposure to Ellul's ethics that added some missing pieces for my own theological and philosophical pursuits. I was utterly refreshed as well as challenged by coming across an ethics that focuses on *not being an ethical system*—a stance with which many practitioners of varied faith traditions remain uncomfortable, and a stance that often rubs against the grain of much reflection within my own Christian tradition. Ellul uncovers the long-armed reach of the 'system' from the arena of politics to the sanctuary of the church to the fields of agriculture to the circles of communication and family, and in this act of exposure also lies the act of overcoming such systems. In short, Ellul's ethic is one that champions a return to living day by day based on the full recognition of human weakness, including the insufficiency of all human constructs—one sees clearly the Christian Reformed roots from which Ellul draws. Yet this is not an ethic of self-flagellation or human degradation; rather, it points with joy to the consummation of humanity in the person of the Christ—one sees here Ellul's post-WWII understanding that even in the midst of chaos and destruction, hope may return.

Reading Ellul then reinvigorated my own research into Christology and into the Christian doctrine of deification, a doctrine that emphasizes the capacity of humanity to access divine life through Christ while remaining fully human. I saw deep connections between my research into deification and the kind of ethical life Ellul envisions—a life that challenges systems of means that isolate people from the end of truth and goodness, whether those systems be political, social, economic, or religious. And one of the primary ways to challenge the systems of our technological age is to engage in the kinds of conversations we embarked upon around that long seminar table, each student bringing a set of concerns and questions that enlivened the rest of the group. From environmental justice to the question of water access in South America, from the complexities of prayer to the formation of community, from modern practices of sexuality to the ideal of anarchy, the discussions ranged widely, doubled back, and informed each other. I left the class with more to chew on than I had expected as well as more clarity on the direction and importance of my own work, which will hopefully continue at the doctoral level next fall.

But life as a TA does not just consist of the joys of good discussions, although those moments are certainly some of the key elements that motivate such work. Working as part of the Ellul seminar team meant that I also juggled more mundane tasks such as attendance-taking, reflection-grading, and paper-consulting. The fact that the course was taught by a trio of professors rendered some of those responsibilities more complex:

we had to figure out together along the way what the grading standards should be and how that translated into each project. Three very different teaching styles also kept the class on its toes as we moved back and forth between the professors' areas of expertise and discussion-leading. Finally, learning how to help students move forward in their widely varied areas of interest was also a challenging exercise for me as I consulted with many on their paper topics, offered research resources, and helped organize their thoughts. In each of these sectors, we had the opportunity to practice what Ellul preaches by focusing on the particular needs at hand and by engaging in careful dialogue to find the best solution. The challenges of the course, both content-wise and in terms of structure and mechanics, represented the opportunity for me to learn more about the craft of teaching and to further form myself as an academic within a community that continues to surprise many with its meaningful contributions towards engaging the issues of the day.

The Jacques Ellul Special Collection at Wheaton College by David Malone

David Malone is Director of the Wheaton College Archives & Special Collections

The Jacques Ellul Papers, housed in the Wheaton College Archives & Special Collections, are based upon a three-reel microfilm set donated by Dr. Joyce Main Hanks, an alumna of Wheaton's graduate school. Through the facilitation of Wheaton faculty, Hanks began transferring materials to the Special Collections in 1986. Dr. Hanks created the microfilm from Ellul's papers as she created "Jacques Ellul: A Comprehensive Bibliography," published in *Research on Philosophy and Technology*, supplement 1, 1984, prepared with the assistance of Rolf Asal. The comprehensive

bibliography was followed by an update in 1991 with "Jacques Ellul: A Comprehensive Bibliographic Update," in *Research in Philosophy and Technology*, vol. 11.

Upon receipt of the sixteen-millimeter microfilm, the staff of the Special Collections began to create a hardcopy print of each frame in the film. The prints from the microfilm, numbering over 6,000, comprise the bulk of the collection and measure over 7/2 linear feet. These prints are of Ellul's writings, dissertations, books, and articles on his writings and reviews of his books with dates ranging from 1936 to 1983, while the secondary material ranges in date from 1939-1984. The microfilm prints are followed by holographic and xerographic Ellul manuscripts totaling eight (8) inches. These are manuscripts for his books, lectures and addresses, and notes. Following the manuscripts are articles and reviews by Ellul, both xerographic and microfilm prints. The microfilm contains many of the hard-to-find Ellul essays, speeches and lectures. Within the collection, his writings are arranged chronologically. The prints follow the order found in the comprehensive bibliography and can serve well as a print finding aid. An on-

line finding aid can be found at: http://archon.wheaton.edu/index.php?p=collections/
control card&id=13

In addition to the manuscript material, the collection also contains secondary material (works on Ellul, critical reviews, correspondence concerning Ellul, and serials on Ellul studies).

In the time that the papers have been at Wheaton College, the collection has served the research needs of several doctoral students from around the globe as they pursued their studies. One of the earliest individuals to make significant use of the collection was Andrew Goddard's Oxford dissertation, eventually published as *Living the Word, Resisting the World* by Paternoster (2002). More recent dissertations have come from Lawrence Terlizzese's "Hope in the thought of Jacques Ellul" (2003) and Kunihide Matsutani's "Social philosophy of Jacques Ellul" (2005). Whereas earlier students traveled to Wheaton's campus, these latter students were able to utilize copies of the original microfilm via Interlibrary Loan and engage Ellul's papers at a distance. Two copies of the microfilm are available for short loans and consideration is being given to digitizing elements of the papers for access via Wheaton's online archival database.

Even though the vast majority of the collection is available at a distance by film, the physical collection at Wheaton presents the fullest and most complete collection of Ellul materials available for scholars and students. The fullness and breadth come in many forms. In addition to the traditional manuscript materials mentioned earlier, the collection seeks to obtain any and all published material with a direct tie to Ellul (rather than the many dissertations that may use Ellul as an interpretive model for an area of study). The collection included print materials (books, monographs and dissertations); however work still needs to be done to draw in the vast journal literature that exists. The collection also houses hundreds of audio materials ranging from interviews with Ellul by Hanks to his Bible studies. The nearly two hundred studies were duplicated in 2002 with the assistance of David Gill from the personal collection of Franck Brugerolle, a friend of Ellul's. These may serve as a trove of material for future researchers, but await transcription and translation.

The goal of the Wheaton College Archives & Special Collections is to create the most extensive collection on Jacques Ellul possible. It is our desire to pull together Ellul's writings in their original form, as well as published editions and their translations into English and other languages. Along with this core we seek to surround the collection with associated resources and collections that can help inform the Ellul Papers.

If the reader would like to pursue access to the collection or to add to its resources he or she is encouraged to contact the Wheaton College Archives & Special Collections at the address below.

Wheaton College
501 College Ave.,Wheaton IL 60187-5593
Tel: 630.752.5707 Fax: 630.752.5987
E-mail: special.collections@wheaton.edu
Web site: http://library.wheaton.edu

Book Review

Death & Life in America:

Biblical Healing and Biomedicine
by Raymond Downing
Scottdale PA: Herald Press, 2008. 159 pp.
Reviewed by David W. Gill
Professor of Business Ethics, St. Mary's College
President, International Jacques Ellul Society

Raymond Downing and his wife, Dr. Janice Armstrong, both work for the Department of Family Medicine, Moi University School of Medicine, Eldoret, Kenya. Since finishing medical school at the University of Tennessee in 1978, Downing has practiced medicine among the Appalachian poor, on a Navajo Indian Reservation, and in Sudan, Tanzania, and Kenya.

Trained in Western scientific biomedicine —but with a long clinical experience delivering healing and care outside of the West —and with a deep immersion in biblical thinking about these topics —Downing has written a truly outstanding, challenging, thought-provoking work. Western biomedicine is very powerful and Downing says "we need language that enables us to think and write about power." Biblical language provides great tools and perspectives. Downing's book sets up a dialogue between modern biomedicine and biblical healing.

Downing draws a lot on the insights of Jacques Ellul and two others who were profoundly influenced by Ellul: Ivan Illich and William Stringfellow. He was able to access some of Ellul's difficult to find writings on medicine and health care. Illich's *Medical Nemesis* (1976) and Stringfellow's *A Second Birthday* (1970) —and each of their long personal struggles with serious disease and health issues —also play large in Downing's book.

Downing sees 1980 as a true "watershed" year when modern biomedicine yielded, or began yielding to, four trends. First is the dominance of the market, especially after a 1982 FTC decision prohibited the AMA from restricting advertising. Medicine and medical care has since been commodified and hustled for profits and lost its traditional professional ethos. Second, Downing describes how "medicalized prevention" has increased rapidly after 1980. By this he refers to statistical studies of risk factors, increased testing, and precautionary treatments which, while well-intended, disembody the patient.

The third change is the dominance of "systems thinking" —biotechnology and medicine become a system of which we are a part, instead of thinking of medical "tools" which are used by physicians as appropriate. We become "tools of our tools." And fourth is the rise of bioethics as a discipline under the simultaneous influence of western moral philosophy and a reductionist view of life as mere biological existence.

With biomedicine outlined in its historical context, Downing then turns to a reading of the healing stories of the Bible . . . from the frequent association of healing with the demonic and exorcism, to Jesus' admonition to "tell no one" after he healed them, to the raising of Lazarus, to the meaning of spitting on the ground to create some healing mud, to repairing Malchus's severed ear, to the wounded Beast that is healed in Revelation, to the relationship of forgiveness and sin to healing, to Jesus' own death and resurrection. It is flat out exciting, challenging, and illuminating to read and reflect on Dr. Downing's understanding of these amazing texts . . . all the time alongside the work and thinking of modern biomedicine.

In the end, we are not told to abandon all of western scientific biomedicine but rather to dethrone it and restore it to a more humble and appropriate role within a larger frame of reference that is shaped by the revelation and insight of Jesus and Scripture.

Buy this book not just for yourself but for all the health care practitioners and professionals you know. It is without doubt one of the top ten books I've read over the past couple years.

Book Notes

—Wipf & Stock Publishers, based in Eugene, Oregon, continues to delight and impress Ellul readers by their single-minded effort to publish or re-publish the works of Jacques Ellul. Wipf & Stock has already brought us Patrick Chastenet's wonderful interviews with Ellul, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity* (2005), Marva Dawn's collection and translation of eight Ellul articles, *Sources and Trajectories* (2003), Lawrence Terlizzese's dissertation, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (2005) and Ellul's *Money and Power* (2009). Next up will be new editions of Ellul's *Hope in Time of Abandonment* and *Living Faith.* Wipf & Stock is also pursuing a couple exciting Ellul translations, books that have only been available in French up to now.

—In 2008, a collection of Ellul's articles on Israel was published in French, *Israel: Chance de civilization* (Editions premiere partie, 2008; www.premierepartie.com; 411 pages). Volunteers to review or translate it? Write to the publisher for a review copy.

—Dr. Roelf Haan of the Netherlands published *Teologia y economia en la era de la globalizacion: Un aporte al dialogo con la teologia latinoamericana* (Buenos Aires: La Aurora/Institutio Universitario ISEDET, 2007; 426 pp.). This work draws heavily on Jacques Ellul and cites Matthew Pattillo's article on Ellul & Rene Girard in the Spring 2005 *Ellul Forum.* Reviewers and translators step up: we need to have a careful look at this impressive study.

Advert: International Jacques Ellul Society

Advert: Make Payments to IJES Electronically?

Resources for Ellul Studies

www.ellul.org & www.jacques-ellul.org The IJES web site at www.ellul.org contains (1) news about IJES activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, (4) a complete index of the contents of all *Ellul Forum* back issues; and (5) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The French AIJE web site at www.jacques-ellul.org is also a superb resource.

The Ellul Forum CD: 1988-2002

The first thirty issues of *The Ellul Forum*, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for US $15 (postage included). Send payment with your order to "IJES," P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

Back issues #31 - #44 of *The Ellul Forum* are available for $5 each (postage and shipping included).

Cahiers Jacques Ellul

Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne

An essential annual journal for students of Ellul is *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, edited by Patrick Chastenet, published by Editions L'Esprit du Temps, and distributed by Presses Universitaires de France Send orders to Editions L'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Postage and shipping is 5 euros for the first volume ordered; add 2 euros for each additional volume ordered.

Volume 1: "L'Annees personnalistes" (15 euros)

Volume 2: "La Technique" (15 euros)

Volume 3: "L'Economie" (21 euros).

Volume 4 (forthcoming): "La Propagande" (21 euros).

Volume 5: "La Politique" (21 euros)

Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. Visit www.elsevier.com for ordering information.

The Reception of Jacques Ellul's Critique of Technology: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings on His Life and Thought by Joyce Main Hanks (Edwin Mellen Press, 2007). 546 pp. This volume is an amazing, iundispensable resource for studying Jacques Ellul. All the books, articles, reviews, and published symposia on Ellul's ideas and writings are here.

Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul by Andrew Goddard. (Paternoster Press, 2002). 378 pp. Eight years after being published, Professor Goddard's study remains the best English language introduction to Ellul's life and thought.

Librairie Mollat—new books in French

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux (www.mollat.com) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

Alibris—used books in English

The Alibris web site (www.alibris.com) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

Used books in French:
two web resources

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are www.chapitre.com and www.livre-rare-book.com.

Ellul on DVD/Video

French film maker Serge Steyer's film "Jacques Ellul: L'homme entier" (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site www.meromedia.com. Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul's ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.

Issue #46 Fall 2012 — Technique, Ellul, and the Food Industry

- Click to view the original PDF

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Contents

Information on The Editorial Board & More

Dues, Subscriptions, & Payment Options The Ellul Forum is sent twice per year to all members of the IJES. An annual membership/ subscription, anywhere in the world, costs US $20. Please send check or money order (e.g., international postal money order) drawn in US funds for $20 to "IJES", 130 Essex St., Box 219, So. Hamilton MA 01982 USA—or make payment to "IJES@ellul.org" electronically at www.paypal.com. Be sure to note your address and the purpose of your payment.

Change of Address

Please notify IJES of any change in your address. Our mailings are infrequent and postal forwarding orders expire.

Manuscript Submissions

For Ellul Forum writers' guidelines, visit www.ellul.org—or e-mail: Editor@ellul.org— or write Cliff Christians, EF Editor, Institute of Communications Research, University of Illinois, 810 S. Wright St., # 228, Urbana IL 61801 USA We welcome your proposals.

Books, Reviews, News

Send books for review, book reviews, and news to David Gill, EF Assoc. Editor, 130 Essex St., Box 219, So. Hamilton MA 01982 USA

Back Issues

Visit www.ellul.org for a complete index of back issues and information on how to access them.

ⓒ **2010 International Jacques Ellul Society**

Contact IJES for permission to copy EF material.

From the Editor

Jacques Ellul was dismissed from his university position by the Vichy government during World War II. He fled to the countryside with his wife Yvette and out of necessity became a farmer for four years. His neighbors graciously taught him the basics. He raised sheep and grew potatoes and corn. His wife raised chickens and rabbits; and they had a vegetable garden. Many farms that resembled Ellul's 70 years ago are today one crop or one animal agricultural factories. In Ellul's lifetime there was increasing industrialization of farming and he occasionally used agricultural examples in his writings on technique. If he were alive today it is hard to imagine him not having much more to say about the pervasive role of technique in the food industry. In this issue of the *Ellul Forum* we seek to do that sort of reflection. I have asked three practitioners to look at the food industry today through the lens of Ellul's writing on technique.

Each author stands in a different place and thus reports different things to us on his view through this lens. Robb Davis writes from the perspective of having worked internationally in community development -specifically in the areas of public health and nutrition. He challenges us to reflect on what the goal of the food industry should

be and how technique's focus on means undermines that goal. Randy Ataide worked in the fresh tree fruit business for twenty years. He has been involved across the spectrum of this agribusiness including, growing, packing, storing, selling and distributing fruit. He recounts for us what he saw and learned by bringing Ellul into conversation with his experience in the food industry, and how Ellul influenced his business practices. After completing college and a master's degree in New Testament Matt Regier and his wife Tia bought a 20 acre farm in Kansas. Unlike the other two authors he had read little of Ellul's work, but was very familiar with the works of Wendell Berry. I asked Matt to read Ellul as he worked the land and cared for animals this summer, and in his essay bring Ellul into conversation with Berry.

The three articles, through echoing some of the same themes and through applying Ellul's thought in distinctly different ways, point to the great importance and rich possibilities of taking a critical look at our food industry through the lens of Ellul's writing.

We are also grateful to have Dr. Raymond Downing's brief essay on "Ellul and Medicine" in this issue. Ray is a physician working in Kenya. Ray's book *Life & Death in America* was reviewed in a recent issue of the *Ellul Forum*. Food and health care are not unrelated topics!

Mark D. Baker, Guest Editor

Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary at Fresno Pacific University, Fresno, California

Our Food System Equation

by Robb Davis

Our Food System Equation:

Inattention to Ends + The Imperative of Technique

Prodigious Food Producing Capacity *and* Food Insecurity for Hundreds of Millions

by Robb Davis

Robb Davis has over 20 years of experience in international development in the field of maternal and child health and nutrition. He has worked for World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, and Freedom from Hunger. He was the executive director of the Mennonite Central Committee. He currently lives in Davis, California and directs support services at a local nonprofit working with churches to face the challenges of homelessness. He also works two days per week at a local organic farm. Robb holds a Master's degree in Public Health and a Ph.D. in Population Dynamics from the Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health.

Inattention to Ends:

The first enormous fact that springs from our civilization is that today everything has become means. There are no more ends. We no longer know towards what we are

heading. We have forgotten our collective goals. We have enormous means and we put into place prodigious machines in order to arrive nowhere . ..[1]

.

The Imperative of Technique:

[Reason] . . . takes account of the fixed end of technique–efficiency. It notes what every means devised is capable of accomplishing and selects the ones that are the most efficient... Thus the multiplicity of means is reduced to one: the most efficient[2]

Prodigious Food Producing Capacity:

Earl "Rusty" Butz, Richard Nixon's second secretary of agriculture . . . revolutionized American agriculture, helping to shift the food chain onto the foundation of cheap corn. Butz made no secret of his agenda: He

exhorted farmers to plant their fields "fencerow to fencerow" and advised them to "get big or get out . . ." [He] began replacing the New Deal system of supporting prices through loans, government grain purchases, and land idling with a new system of direct payments to farmers

[T]he new subsidies encouraged farmers to sell their corn at any price, since the government would make up the difference . . . Instead of supporting farmers, the government was now subsidizing every bushel of corn a farmer could grow–and American farmers pushed to go flat out could grow a hell of a lot of corn[3].

Food Insecurity for Hundreds of Millions:

Progress was made in reducing chronic hunger in the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s. For the past decade hunger has been on the rise[4].

FAO estimates that 1.02 billion people are undernourished worldwide in 2009. This represents more hungry people than at any time since 1970 and a worsening of the unsatisfactory trends that were present even before the economic crisis. The increase in food insecurity is not a result of poor crop harvest . .[5].

Our Food System: What Ends?

As the foregoing quotes reveal, we live in a world that simultaneously produces an extraordinary amount of food and sees a billion human beings facing food insecurity (which is not equivalent, but related, to the concept of chronic hunger). The reasons for this level of food insecurity are complex but an understanding of the pillars of food security reveals how it can exist in a world in which enough food is produced. Food security, according to the World Health Organization, is a function of food being

---

[1] Ellul, J. (1948). *Presence au monde moderne.*
Geneva, Editions Roulet. P. 62–author's translation

[2] Ellul, J. (1967). *The technological society.* New York, Vintage. p. 21

[3] Pollan, M. (2006). *The omnivore's dilemma: a natural history of four meals.* New York, Penguin Press. pp. 51-53

[4] Grebmer, K. v. (2009). *2009 Global hunger index: the challenge of hunger, focus on financial crisis and gender inequality.* Bonn; Washington, D.C.; Dublin, Ireland: Welthungerhilfe ; International Food Policy Research Institute ; Concern Worldwide.

[5] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United,. (2009). *The state of food insecurity in the world 2009: economic crises - impacts and lessons learned.* Rome, FAO.

physically *available* where people live, of people having sufficient financial resources to *access* food and of their ability to actually *utilize* the food they consume. This last point concerns whether a person's body can adequately absorb the nutrition from food s/he eats if that person has parasites or other diseases that impede absorption.

Increasing food security, then, requires that a complex set of factors be present within communities and households of which increasing food quantity (globally) is only one. This points to an initial problem in our current global food system: it is largely focused on the "end" of producing more food. In itself this end is not bad but is not really an "end" at all. Rather it is a means to another end–food security.

The theme of "ends" runs through much of Jacques Ellul's writing and he summarized its relation to *technique* in a series of interviews with William Vanderburg of the Canadian Broadcasting Network:

Technology[6] *is the extreme development of means. Everything in the technological world is a means and only a means, while the ends have practically disappeared. Technology does not develop toward attaining something. It develops because the world of means has developed, and we are witnessing an extremely rapid causal growth. At the same time, there is a suppression of meaning, the meaning of existence, the meaning of "why I am alive," as technology so vastly develops its power. (1981, p. 50)*

The fact that our industrial food system is not oriented towards the "end" of increasing human food security, leads to a number of pernicious effects, one of which is the use of food for other "ends" besides enabling human flourishing. The commodification of food is a simple fact of our industrial food system and places food at the mercy of global trade and markets. So a natural question might be "what are the 'ends' to which markets are oriented?"

William Cavanaugh (2008) suggests this response:

In the ideology of the free market . . . [t]here are no common ends to which our desires are directed. In the absence of such ends, all that remains is the sheer arbitrary power of one will against another. Freedom thus gives way to the aggrandizement of power and the manipulation of will and desire by the greater power . . .

Where there are no objectively desirable ends, and the individual is told to choose his or her own ends, then choice itself becomes the only thing that is inherently good. When there is a recession, we are told to buy things to get the economy moving; what we buy makes no difference. All desires, good and bad, melt into the one overriding imperative to consume, and we all stand under the one sacred canopy of consumption for its own sake.

That the market does not provide a sense of the ends to which our desires should be directed comes as no surprise, but what Cavanaugh argues is that many economists–and others–consider even questioning the ends of market exchanges as meaningless. However, if markets cannot assure a reasonable allocation of a commodity necessary

---

[6] Technology is the translation here though Ellul would have preferred *technique* which I will attempt to use throughout.

for human survival (as the quotes at the beginning of this article suggest they do not) then the question of ends in relation to those markets would seem very relevant indeed.

In the 2009 documentary film *Food, Inc.,* which critiques the industrial food system, Richard Lobb of the US National Chicken Council says this about our industrial food system and its highly concentrated and intensive production approach: "What these systems of intensive production accomplish is to produce a lot of food, on a small amount of land at a very affordable price. Somebody explain to me, what's wrong with that?"

Presumably, what is wrong is the confusion of means and ends implied in his argument. Is the end of our food system to produce more–more cheaply (note: Loob has a very narrow definition of the true cost of our food system which we examine below concerning sustainability)? Or, is the end of our food system to assure that everyone has sufficient food of sufficient quality to lead a healthy life? The *Economist* (2009), in an article concerning the prospects for increased food prices and future food crises, would seem to argue along the same lines as Loob:

It may be too late to avoid another bout of price rises. Despite a global recession and the largest grain harvest on record in 2008, food prices are heading up again. Still, countries have a brief window of opportunity in which to set long-term policy goals without being distracted by panic measures. They need to do two things: invest in the productive capacity of agriculture and improve the operation of food markets. . . Boosting world food production without gobbling up land and water will also require technology to play a larger role in the next 40 years than it has in the past 40, when people have been more or less living off the gains of the Green Revolution. Technology means a lot of things: drip irrigation, no-till farming, more efficient ways to use fertilisers and kill pests. But one way of raising yields stands out: developing genetically modified (GM) crops that, for example, use less water. (p. 14)

While the writer raises two critical elements concerning food insecurity, dealing with both the question of availability (boosting production) and access (improving markets), nowhere in the article is the question of the ultimate ends of the food system discussed. It is really all about "means": more food and better distribution.

The Economist article also takes us back to Ellul–the belief that technique will enable us to solve the problems that led to the 2008 food crisis so that it will not be repeated. Our fixation on technique and means are two sides of the same coin. For newspapers like the Economist this faith in technique is unquestioned. Mennonite economist Henry Rempel (2003) summarizes the two sides of our technique-and-means-focused economic system this way:

Our economic incentive system promotes continued technological change, but it does not encourage or welcome questions about its purpose.

We are working longer and rushing onward without deciding where we want to go... We have tried to avoid the issue by elevating progress to a matter of faith. (pp. 92 and 262).

Ellul says much the same thing in the short film *The Betrayal by Technology: A Portrait of Jacques Ellul,*

Technique does not accept to be judged. In other words, technicians cannot accept that someone articulates an ethical or moral judgment concerning what they do. And yet, to ethically, morally, and spiritually judge something is the highest human freedom. (Author's translation, emphasis added)

And so we are left with a food system that is capable of producing large quantities of food but incapable of focusing on the true ends for which it exists. And, because we focus on the technological means of producing and distributing, rather than on the ends, to question whether our technique–our prodigious means-are good or useful becomes a meaningless question—or, rather, a question that simply cannot be asked.

Joel Salatin, a self-proclaimed "grass farmer" in Virginia summarizes our modern food system's inattention to ends this way in *Food Inc.*

You know, we've become a culture of technicians. We're all into . . . we're all into the how of it. And nobody's stepping back and saying . . . "But why?"

So, what is the result of our modern food production system? If it is not focused on ends what do all these prodigious means actually produce? We have already seen what they do not produce: increased food security. But what are the results? I would like to briefly suggest four results of our industrial food system: the output of the system is unsustainable; the system produces commodities rather than food; the system produces great wastage and obesity in the industrial world–even as people struggle to eat elsewhere; and the system neglects critical elements that make for a truly *human* system.

Result: An Unsustainable System

Space does not permit a full analysis of the sustainability challenges of the industrial food system.

In general, one can argue that the logic of *technique* has led to a system that solves every problem that comes its way, but in the process lays the groundwork for even more unforeseen problems. Ellul (1967, p. 105) addresses this reality, interestingly, in talking about modern "capitalistic" agriculture and Michael Pollen articulates it eloquently in the film *Food, Inc.* Notice how he returns to the theme of efficiency and links it to the problem of unpredictable and unsustainable systems that follow in the wake of the search for (as Ellul has put it) "the one best way:"

The industrial food system is always looking for greater efficiency but each new step in efficiency leads to problems. . . The industry's approach when it has a systematic problem . . . is not to go back and see what is wrong with the system, it's to come up with some high tech fixes to allow the system to survive. . . We've had a food system that is dedicated to the single virtue of efficiency. So, we grow a very small number of crops, a very small number of varieties, a very small number of companies. And even though you achieve efficiencies, the system gets more and more precarious.

And so technique is piled upon technique to maintain efficiency and find solutions to the inevitable emerging problems. The solutions applied then create their own prob-

lems. In the 2009 documentary film *Fresh* corn and soybean farmer George Naylor says this:

I'm a conventional farmer. Most of the chemicals and the technology that conventional agriculture uses is aimed at eliminating risk so you can produce the most "efficiently." It's not necessarily good for the environment, it's not good for the farmers, it's not good for our rural communities or consumers. But that's the way the system works. You produce the most to survive.

Notice that the challenge farmers face–the only way to survive is to produce "the most." We return, therefore, to the theme of "ends." The only end in sight is to increase production, even though that end is not sustainable for the land, for the farmer or for farming communities.

Result: Food as Commodity

I have already alluded to the problems that arise when food becomes merely another traded commodity. When food is a commodity not only does its price depend on markets–which, despite all the rhetoric are not "free" in any real sense (this is the point of *The Economist* article sited previously)–but it also becomes seen more and more merely as an input used to produce other consumer goods. This is the case for corn in the US, which is used to feed cattle that have evolved not to eat corn but to eat grass. In itself using food crops to produce other forms of food may not be a problem (despite the real problem of feeding corn to beef cows), but when crops destined, even indirectly, for food are transformed into non-food products the ends of human food security are completely lost.

Mark W. Rosegrant, the Director of Environment and Production Technology Division at the International Food Policy Research Institute in testimony for the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (May 7, 2008) stated that nearly 40% of the increase in the price of corn and 20% of the price of wheat and soy during the 2008 food crisis was due to corn being shifted into biofuel production.[7] Indeed, even the price of rice in Asia was influenced by corn's shift away from food to biofuel because dry season rice in places like Thailand was replaced by corn which fetched higher prices on world markets. This non-food use of a food product led to higher prices for the basic staple of the world's poorest people and was promoted by the US government.

In addition, since World War II industrially produced food has become a commodity of a very different type as well. In their book *Food Aid After Fifty Years: Recasting its Role*, Christopher Barrett and Daniel Maxwell describe how excess food commodities (primarily corn and soy) have become a major element of the US government's contribution to international "food aid." And while the relative quantities going into food aid are small in comparison to the total amount of food produced, the authors show that this system has benefitted grain producers, grain processors, grain transporters

---

[7] See
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRY5Klj8R9w accessed 23 September, 2010

and non-governmental humanitarian organizations much more than it has benefitted food insecure people around the world.

Again, the picture here is quite complex but official US assistance policy, which requires nearly all food aid to be grown and processed by US interests, shipped on US flag carriers and distributed by US-based NGOs, has created perverse incentives for all those concerned to keep the system in place despite its questionable impact on food insecurity. Barrett and Maxwell conclude a series of chapters in which they describe the development of food aid policy in the US and beyond over the past generation by saying this:

[I]n many ways, the global food aid regime remains tied to objectives that are often only tangentially related to the needs or rights of food-insecure people. (p. 192)

If the true ends of food production are not identified, food becomes a commodity like any other. This means that something produced to feed humanity can, if the prices are right, be diverted into the production of nonfood consumables and be used as a political pawn in a global "humanitarian aid" system. In addition, if food is merely a commodity, its price determined in global markets, then those with financial resources can afford it–and do what they like with it–even as those without those resources go without. We turn to the implications of this in the next section.

Result: Wastage/Obesity

During the 2008 food crisis Homi Kharas a food policy analyst at the Brookings Institution summarized succinctly the reality of the crisis on the PBS Newshour (23 April 2008):

[T]his is not a problem of a global food shortage. This is really a problem of distribution. This is a problem of people who don't have enough money to buy food.

When food is a commodity those who have no money cannot get it. And what of those who *do* have the money? In the USA and other wealthy nations (and even among the wealthy in poorer nations) we see two realities that stem from cheap (relative to income) and plentiful food (keep in mind that the 2008 crisis occurred in the face of plentiful food): obesity and massive food wastage.

Summarizing data from the Centers for Disease Control a publication by the non-profit Trust for America's Health (2010) notes the following:

Nationally, two-thirds of adults and nearly one-third of children and teens are currently obese or overweight. Since 1980, the number of obese adults has doubled. Since 1970, the number of obese children ages 6-11 has quadrupled, and the number of obese adolescents ages 12-19 has tripled.

While it is true that obesity is due to many factors including lack of adequate physical exercise, the availability of inexpensive and highly processed food with its high quantities of fat, salt and sugar is also a contributor. When a limited variety of food (such as corn in the US) is overproduced, means are deployed to transform it for use in many ways, such as extracting its sugars for inexpensive sweeteners. These sweeteners then show up in a variety of cheap processed foods, fueling the obesity crisis.

A second result of cheap, plentiful food is food wastage that occurs during production, processing, and shipping, and in what is thrown out by consumers. A recent study by Hall, Guo, Dore and Chow (2009) estimated the following:

In 1974 approximately 900 kcal per person per day was wasted whereas in 2003 Americans wasted approximately 1400 kcal per person per day or about 150 trillion kcal per year. . . [F]ood waste has progressively increased from about 30% of the available food supply in 1974 to almost 40% in recent years . . .

Our industrial food system produces large quantities of food and for those who can afford it this means wastage and overconsumption–even as one billion people remain food insecure.

Result: Neglect of Critical Elements of a Truly "Human" Food System

One other, rarely assessed, result of our industrial food system is that it neglects important elements of what make for a truly *human* system–one that honors humans in their roles as producers, preparers and consumers of food. We see this neglect in things such as consumers no longer being in contact with producers, the loss of fellowship during food preparation and eating, disconnect from the land, the loss of family farms and the devaluation of the role of farmers.

We will look at just one specific example of this neglect that concerns one of the most critical parts of our food system that serves the most vulnerable members of our global community. I am referring to the role of breastfeeding in the first two years of life.

In a landmark study of childhood mortality published in the *Lancet* (2008) researchers estimated that suboptimum breastfeeding is responsible for 1.4 million child deaths each year around the world. (p. 243)

Our industrial food system has no place for encouraging "optimal breastfeeding" because breastfeeding cannot be commodified. Indeed, food companies such as Nestle have spent a great deal of money convincing mothers to abandon this critical element of the human food system in favor of breast milk substitutes which *are* produced by the industrial food system.

If the ends of our food system were human food security we would take a more holistic look at all elements of the system to determine how best to achieve this end. In such a case we would be compelled to consider how to best support mothers to breastfeed their children given the critical place of this practice for the health and development of children. This is but one example of how our industrial food system neglects a critical element of a truly human approach to food.

Reorienting our Ends: Understanding our Food System as a "Power"

The foregoing argues that our industrial food system is a "technique-dominated" system that is focused on deploying prodigious means but pays scant attention to the ends of human food security. Ellul understood that such systems–indeed *technique* itself—was a "power." He described it as an "objectifying power" (1981, p. 49). Space does not permit an analysis of the concept of principalities and powers in the writing of Ellul, but we live in a time when theologians have begun to recapture a broader

828

understanding of the concept from the writings of St Paul.[8] Included in this broader understanding is the idea that institutions and systems which God has created for good act as dehumanizing forces; essentially trading their true role in maintaining the conditions for human flourishing for other ends, including their own survival. In this way they reveal their "fallenness."

Our industrial food system has the potential to do great good. It is capable of producing food efficiently and in great variety. The markets that are part of the system have the potential to move food to places where it is in deficit. Governments have the potential to use the excess to meet acute suffering in the face of disaster or conflict. Despite this we find a system that is not focused on the ends of human food security. This, I have argued, has led to outcomes that do not honor human flourishing. In this sense one could argue that the system acts as a fallen power.

If indeed our "technique-dominated" food system is a fallen power the question then becomes, what should our response be? Ellul (1981) provided one way for Christians to think about how to face the power of technique (his words are echoed by others such as Stringfellow, Barth and Wink):

[O]ur attitude will be what may be called iconoclastic Iconoclasm means the destruction of

religious images, but what does it mean here? It simply means that we must destroy the deified religious character of technique. . . If we see technique as nothing but objects that can be useful (and we need to check whether they are indeed useful); and if we stop believing in technique for its own sake or that of society; and if we stop fearing technique and treat it as one thing among many others, then we destroy the basis for the power of technique over humanity (pp. 108-109).

Applied to our modern food system, Ellul's words present both a way forward and a challenge to the received wisdom of what it will take to "feed the world." Technique does not focus on ends. However what we desperately need at this time is to focus on the true ends of our food system. Perhaps initially this means raising the simple question of what, exactly, the end of our food system should be. Joel Salatin, in *Food, Inc.*, does just that.

Imagine what it would be if, as a national policy, we said we would only be successful if we had fewer people going to the hospital next year than last year? How about that for success? The idea would be to have such nutritionally dense, unadulterated food that people who ate it actually felt better, had more energy and weren't sick as much? Now you see that's a noble goal.

In addition to focusing on ends we need to challenge the idea that our industrial food system is the only way to "feed the world" as many would argue. There is a deep

---

[8] Some critical writings include: Berkhof, H. (1962, 1977). *Christ and the Powers*. Scottsdale, PA, Herald Press. Wink, W. (1992). *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*. Minneapolis, MN, Augsburg Fortress. Dawn, M. (2001). *Powers, Weakness and the Tabernacling of God*. Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans. Yoder, J. H. (1994). *The politics of Jesus: vicit Agnus noster*. Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans / Paternoster Press (esp Chapter 13). Stringfellow, W.

faith that the "means" we have deployed are the best way forward (if only we can continue to apply better *technique* to improve them). It would thus seem that as we focus more on the ends of our food system we must also be willing to challenge the belief that it is necessary to maintain the current industrial food system as the "one best way." This is a complex task that will require time and the creation of alternatives to what we have. Such alternatives are being created in many places around the world and this provides hope that we can faithfully challenge the "religious" commitment to the "essentialness" of our industrialized food system.

References

Barrett, C. B., & Maxwell, D. G. (2005). *Food aid after fifty years: Recasting its role.* London ; New York: Routledge.

Black, R. E., Allen, L. H., Bhutto, Z. A., Caulfield, L. E., de Onis, M., Ezzati, M., et al. (2008). Maternal and child undernutrition: global and regional exposures and health consequences. (Cover story). *Lancet, 371*(9608), 243-260.

Cavanaugh, W. T. (2008). *Being consumed: Economics and Christian desire.* Grand Rapids, Mich., William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.–accessed in ebook format

Ellul, J. (1948). *Presence au monde moderne.* Geneva: Editions Roulet.

Ellul, J. (1967). *The technological society.* New York: Vintage.

Ellul, J., & Vanderburg, W. H. (1981). *Perspectives on our age: Jacques Ellul speaks on his life and work.* New York: Seabury Press.

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

(2009). *The state of food insecurity in the world 2009: economic crises - impacts and lessons learned.* Rome: FAO.

Grebmer, K. v. (2009). *2009 Global hunger index: The challenge of hunger, focus on financial crisis and gender inequality.* Bonn; Washington, D.C.; Dublin, Ireland: Welthungerhilfe ; International Food Policy Research Institute ; Concern Worldwide.

Hall, K. D., Guo, J., Dore, M., & Chow, C. C. (2009). The progressive increase of food waste in America and its environmental impact. *PloS one, 4*(11).

How to feed the world. (2009). *Economist,* p. 14 joanes, ana Sofia. (Director). (2009). Fresh. USA Kenner, Robert. (Director) (2009). Food, Inc. USA:

Magnolia Productions

PBS. (2008). As Food Prices Soar, U.N. Calls for International Help.

Pollan, M. (2006). *The omnivore's dilemma: A natural history of four meals.* New York, Penguin Press.

Rempel, H. (2003). A high price for abundant living: the story of capitalism. Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press.

Boeckel, J. von. (Director). (1992). The Betrayal by Technology: A Portrait of Jacques Ellul. The Netherlands: ReRun Produkties.

(1973). *An ethic for Christians and other aliens in a strange land.* Waco, Tex.,, Word Books. Gingerich, R. and T. Grimsrud, Eds. (2006). *Transforming the Powers: Peace, Justice and the Domination System.* Minneapolis, MN, Augsburg Fortress.

Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (2010) *F as in fat: How obesity threatens America's future.*

IF WE SERVE THE GOD OF PRODUCTIVITY IS THERE ROOM FOR JESUS?

ELLUL'S TECHNIQUE, SACREDNESS AND DISTORTION IN THE MODERN FARM ECONOMY

by Randy Ataide

Randy Ataide is professor of entrepreneurship and executive director of the Fermanian Business & Economic Institute at Point Loma Nazarene University. He previously worked in agribusiness for 20 years. He completed a M.A. in Theology at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary and a J.D. at San Joaquin College of Law. He has also completed the Owners/Presidents Program, at Harvard Business School and the Executive Management Program at Stanford Graduate School of Business.

I. Introduction

In the opening years of the new millennium, aficionados of global economic and technological systems were in full bloom. The harnessing of the amazing power of supercomputers allowed the global banking system to consolidate and ever-more sophisticated financial products rapidly came to market, proffered by multinational trading platforms, replacing once and for all the genteel and conservative tools and methods of the traditional banking industry. While the all powerful economic engines of the U.S., German, U.K. and other highly developed economies roared on, we concurrently observed previously moribund economies enter the 21st century; Spain undertook residential housing construction at record levels producing approximately 200,000+ new units per year while tiny Iceland and Ireland became bastions of global capitalism with powerful banks loaning billions of dollars and euros. China emerged as an economic superpower and with its astounding annual growth in the 10+% range underscored the era of the "new economy."

These powerful and seemingly positive economic forces that took root in global economy in the 1980's had taken hold in the farm economy long before. Since the advent of the Industrial Revolution, farmers had freely embraced all sorts and forms of technological innovations to spur productivity. No less a figure than Alan Greenspan, the U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman from 1987-2006 stated in 1999 that "Over the past thirty years, farm value-added per hour worked has grown at an average rate of more than 4.5%, roughly three times the rate of increase in output per hour in the nonfarm

business sector of our economy."[9] The use of computers and modern technology was fully embraced by the global farming industry, most notably the U.S. and Western Europe, and most pundits and politicians were quick to point to the farm economy as a significant part of the "productivity revolution." Even small farmers had access to global positioning satellite (GPS) technology; genetically modified seed reduced the use of pesticides and increased profits and production; water-monitoring and management systems allowed crops to be planted in areas and on soil types that were unthinkable just a generation ago. It was a heady time, perhaps reminiscent of the late 1920's.

In contrast to Greenspan's exuberance about the global economy generally and the farm economy specifically, I ventured into the conversation with my Master's Thesis titled *If We Serve A God of Productivity Is There Room For Jesus? An Analysis and Application of Jacques Ellul's Thesis of Technique In The AgriBusiness World* in fulfillment of my M.A. in Theology from the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno[10]. Returning to complete a long dormant graduate degree in theology, I was encouraged by the faculty to attempt an integration of some of Ellul's work into the everyday agri-business world that I had inhabited for over 20 years—Ellul was provocative indeed, but how did he look in the "real world" and could one draw any practical conclusions from this analysis? I was spurred on in from a variety of sources and experiences to this inquiry into Ellul. One example was the jarring headline from a agricultural trade journal with the following banner headline on the front page— *"Raisin Growers Look to Machines for Salvation."* The article went on to profile the newest generation of mechanical raisin harvesters, and the owner of the machines featured confidently stated "By using some modern technology...we have got things down to where it is almost a perfect system for the times we are in."[11] Such overt statements that farmers frequently make towards the benefits of technology for farming only serve to underscore a troubling and harmful underlying philosophy towards the land: it has too often become a means to an end, just another asset to exploit.

I concluded that there were indeed significant and generally negative impacts upon farmers and agriculture through "the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency for every field of human activity" which Ellul identified as the *Thesis of Technique.* My conclusions, of significant concern for the farmer and perhaps even more importantly, the consumer, held that this efficient aggregation of methods when applied to farming will inevitably lead to a profound distortion of the authentic relationship between farm and farmer. What has occurred I viewed as a violation of the sacred trust between those who are "on the land" and principles of land ownership and stewardship found in the ancient Hebrew Scriptures. But what

---

[9] Greenspan, Alan. *The farm economy* At the Annual Convention of the Independent Bankers Association of America, San Francisco, California March 16, 1999.

[10] The thesis is available from Hiebert Library at Fresno Pacific University or from the author, RandyAtaide@pointloma.edu .

[11] Terry Kibler, "Raisin Growers Look to Machines for Salvation," *Fresh Fruit & Raisin News,* 1 Jan. 2003, Vol. 19, Number 1, 1.

were the practical implications of this violation that we could find in modern farming? These included:

- Unreasonable expectations and demands of farm employee & land productivity.

- Domination and subordination by the employer over the farm employee.

- The inevitable demand and drive for larger and larger farms, leading to huge corporate operations.

- The loss of personal identity and self-worth for those caught in the productivity demands of modern farming.

- A pervasive attitude of domination and subjection of the environment.

- The rise of modern government farm policy and the widespread use of farm commodity subsidies.

Each of these are developed at great length within the thesis, but they are best understood within the context of a long and systemic decline in farm product prices, in numerous commodities, sectors and products across all farming regions. I was alarmed, and remain so to this day, at how the rise of modern farming productivity practices has paralleled widespread decline in prices to farmers, farm bankruptcies, massive cycles of under and over-production and depression in the farm economy. My research utilized my experience as the co-founder and President of a diversified tree fruit company (peaches, plums and nectarines), which by the time that I wrote the thesis in 2002 had grown to a company that provided fresh fruit to many of the leading grocery retailers throughout North America, a large cold storage, shipping and sales facility, ten packing sheds and an alliance with other competitors to provide retail customers with ready to eat fruit. As is typical in our industry, our fruit was sourced from dozens of small and mid-size independent farmers, for whom we acted as their exclusive sales, marketing and storage agent. What was not so typical was that from our 1994 start, we attempted to have a greater level of openness and communication between our company and these independent farmers than was customary in our industry, most specifically by seeking our input from them on key strategic decisions of the company, an area that was normally reserved for owners of similar situated companies. The operational model that we had built was considerably different than competitors, and yet in a very difficult economic environment we were successful and to this day the company and most of these growers have thrived. In my original thesis, I attempted to analyze this farming and agricultural business experience, to dig into the motivations and principles as to how and why we had built a viable company when most others had failed.[12]

---

[12] Indeed, industry statistics show that tree fruit growers and packers have consolidated a great deal

What emerged in my study of farming through the lens of Ellul was a far clearer theological framework than I had previously had, one from which to evaluate the application of technology to the farmer so that I could offer some practical counsel to the farmer. This analysis ultimately led me to an in-depth study on the word *augment* and drew from its Latin and Sankskrit etymology to show that it included vitality, luster, splendor and energy, and that to augment something meant "to furnish abundantly with something, to heap upon, give to, enrich, endow, bless and load with."[13] This is not mere kindness but rather a realization that the individual, firm or venture and its products and services exist not merely for productivity and profitability, but rather for deeper and generally unexplored or unconsidered purposes. The unbridled power and influence and distraction of technology is checked, indeed confounded, when collaboration is a vital and active part of the business model and I offered some key choices and examples of collaboration over competition that our companies had introduced that had led to not only a healthier view of technology but actually enhanced business viability for ourselves and our many fruit growers and community.

Since the completion of my thesis, much has changed in my personal life as well. In 2006, I left the day-to-day business operations of my agricultural and farming company to take a position in the faculty of the Fermanian School of Business at Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU) in San Diego, moving from the Fresno region where I had spent most of my life. I now teach entrepreneurship and management at both the undergraduate and graduate level and also am currently the Executive Director of the Fermanian Business & Economic Institute of PLNU, and with my skilled colleagues generate business and economic forecasts, studies and reports for both clients and PLNU. However, for the first time since 1986, I am no longer an executive of a California-based agricultural company for in late 2009 I completed the sale of my business interests to the co-founder of our firm. But I remain close to many within the industry and retain ownership of a large tree fruit farm (now leased to a local farmer who lives near the property) and while my interests and research has broadened to the larger economy, agriculture will always be of great interest to me both personally and professionally.

The present article will offer a brief review and address selected questions from the original thesis in 2002. Much has changed since that time: It has been noted by leading economists that we are in an era of an "economic reset" with little present clarity as to what the future may hold. What is clear however is that individuals, institutions, organizations, companies and even entire nations or economic zones are under enormous strain, reorganization and restructure and the global food industry remains in great turmoil. Having a clearer understanding of what may have caused (or

---

over the past twenty years, with approximately 75% of all going out of business and leaving farming.

[13] Charlton T. Lewis, and Charles Short, *A New Latin Dictionary,* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1898), s.v. "augeo." Also, John Grimes, *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy—Sanskrit Terms Defined in English,* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), s.v. "ojah."

continues to cause) this economic reset should be important to all of us, farmer and non-farmer, American and non-American, and Christian and non-Christian alike.

II. Does Technology Provide Freedom for the Farmer?

In my original Master's Thesis, I summarized selected Ellul writings, drawing primarily from *The Technological Society* and *Money and Power*, and affirmed his assertion that technology was an act of subordination: regions, countries, economic and political systems, regional and local cultures and communities and finally even the most fundamental human decisions were continually subject to the power of subordination that technological superiority demanded. For example, Ellul pointed to the influence of technique into areas of scientific research and energy, as a way to illustrate the large scale power of technique. But he also believed that "Death, procreation, birth, habitat: all must submit to technical efficiency and systematization, the end point of the industrial assembly line. What seems to be most personal in the life of man is now technical" and "The essence of civilization is thus absorbed."[14]

With such provocative statements, Ellul has been roundly criticized by technological advocates and apologists; however, a closer reading of Ellul reveals that his hostility was not towards technology *per se* but rather the unbridled power of "technocrats" who appeared to be no different than other oppressors exercising any form of excess power and influence.[15] In my view, the more interesting question is the inquiry as to the *neutrality* of technology, for this is the bedrock of technology apologists, claiming that in the final analysis technology has improved the majority of people's lives, and that additional emphasis needs to be placed on technology to solve our remaining problems. But is technology's value and benefit actually *neutral*? Is it devoid of values and the imposition of these values upon those around it? Is it only of negative value when negatively used?

In the ordinary usage as an abstract noun, value means goodness, desirability or worth. In other words, value is that property of a thing that makes it worthy of realizing or embracing or by extension to the negative, something worth avoiding, minimizing or eliminating. But for the farmer, my evaluation and conclusions drawn of technology's positive and negative value needed an additional consideration, one that Ellul brought us to in many settings: *does it create freedom for the user(s)?* My analysis of technology in the farm economy demonstrates that it frequently, if not inevitably, reduces rather than enhances individual as well as collective freedom. How could this be when the technological prowess of the farmer is held up as an ideal user of technology?

I concluded that unbridled reliance on technology— such as "the almost perfect system" for raisin farmers previously cited–distracts us from the authentic, spiritual

---

[14] Jacques Ellul. *The Technological Society.* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1964), 128-129.

[15] See for example
http://www.tentmaker.org/biographies/ellul.htm

and universal nature and blessing of food production, distribution and consumption. It in effect destroys any consideration of a philosophy of food and for the Christian, the more important loss of a theology of the land. And while technology cannot be severed from farming, it must be viewed and used with caution and discernment. Equipment, chemicals, computers, mechanization and many other technological manifestations all would point to the need for discernment. It distracts the farmer from the true purposes of farming, food production, food consumption and all ancillary issues, which Scripture points us to on many occasions. The farmer finds him or herself far less free than supposed.

For the modern farmer and consumer the wide diversity of products available is often validation of technology's value and that having more products is proof of having freedom. But Ellul disagreed: "First of all, freedom is not necessarily having lots of consumer goods to choose from. A person can be utterly free and yet never have anything to eat but rice. And he can be utterly alienated in a restaurant where he has his pick of a thousand different dishes. In reality, all that exists is kinds of choices, which are not of the same nature (choosing the man or woman to build one's life with is different from choosing an electric coffee grinder), and zones of choices."[16]

For the Christian, freedom is a topic that the Apostles returned to time and time again in their counsel to the churches. (See for example Gal. 5:13-16; 1 Cor. 5:1-8; 7:17-24; 8:1-18; 1 Pet. 2:16). The Christian of any strata, setting or time should as well maintain the position that technological processes must be subordinate to human processes, or more precisely, human relationships are always superior to technical relationships. In the final analysis the Christian, and indeed many other world religions, places the personal relationship with God at the highest level, followed closely by the community relationship. By introducing freedom as a critical component of our hierarchy of value, I believe we avoid the frequent entanglement of most discussions of technology, for freedom within human, community and spiritual relationships is a clearer and superior analysis to simply "keeping score" between technology aficionados and critics alike as to the various benefits and drawbacks of technology. As Ellul urged, we must seek ways in which we may *transcend* technique, and freedom is a primary example and standard in which we can do so.

III. Violation of the Sacredness of Land through the Distraction of Technology

Turning to food production, in my original thesis I articulated a *theology of the land* and argued that what had developed was a distorted view of the land entrusted to us. The starting point for this can certainly be the Scriptures, as the word rendered as 'land' appears over 2,500 times in the Hebrew Bible, leading to the remarkable statement by a renowned scholar that "Statistically, land is a more dominant theme

---

[16] Ellul, *The Technological Society,* 320.

than covenant."[17] Christian theologian John Calvin referred to the natural world as "the theater for his glory"[18] while C.S. Lewis noted that "God and nature have come into a certain relation. They have, at the very least, a relation—almost, in one sense, a common frontier—in every human mind."[19]

Ellul was also not silent on the topic of nature and the human relationship to land. "The novelty of our era is that man's deepest experience is no longer with nature. For most practical purposes it no longer relates to it. From the moment of his birth, man lives knowing only an artificial world (and)...nature is now subdued, subjugated, framed, and utilized. No longer is it the threat and the source, the mystery, and the intrusion, the face and the darkness of the world—either for the individual or the group. Hence it is no longer the inciter and the place of the sacred."[20] This is a rich and powerful commentary by Ellul, and gives opportunity for formidable personal and communal reflection. My own reflection and study of the possibility that nature is subdued and subjugated led me to the analysis and conclusion that there were at least six substantive examples of the violation of the sacred within the modern farm economy, which were noted in the introductory section of this paper.

What all of these six points have in common is the theme of distraction: what is real and authentic is supplanted by the unbending ritual of larger, bigger, more and faster. I concluded that technology in food production was not neutral, and that what has occurred is that many in food production have lost the sense of the sacred: the land and all that it offers to the wise steward is instead supplanted by a factory approach with a dullness and automatic view of land as something to be exploited. And while I did not develop it in my original thesis, I came to conclusion long before the 2006 film "Fast Food Nation" that most consumers had long since lost any sense of the sacred in consumption of food. It was disposable, cheap, standardized and of little enduring value other than satisfying basic hunger impulses, and if 1,000 calories was what was needed to satisfy hunger, 2,000 or more calories, even in single food items, was even better. Food as having any sense of sacredness was long lost by most of us. No wonder that the entire industry of food production, harvesting, distribution, economics, policies and consumption is so easily distracted: it has been commoditized and reduced to its lowest common denominator.

Many of us who are 50 years of age or older can recall the uniqueness of the seasonality of fresh fruits and vegetables: strawberries in spring and early summer, peaches in mid-summer, sweet white corn and watermelon in late summer, pumpkins in fall. Our families adjusted our diets, and more importantly our expectations, as the year unfolded. But this farming reality is lost on most modern consumers—the nexus be-

---

[17] Elmer A. Martens, *God's Design-A Focus on Old Testament Theology,* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 97-98.

[18] William A. Dyrness, *The Earth is God's—A Theology of American Culture.* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1997), 116.

[19] C.S. Lewis, *Miracles,* (New York: MacMillan, 1960), 31.

[20] Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom,* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989), 109.

tween consumers and stores is such that farm products of incredible diversity are in effect demanded throughout the year. This has caused huge, yet widely ignored and unchronicled, damage to the farmer. Ellul predicted this modern reality and ignorance— what he called the advent of the "technological environment"–with "This means that man has stopped existing primarily in his 'natural' environment (made up by what is vulgarly called 'nature': countryside, forests, mountains, ocean, etc.) He now is situated in a new, artificial environment. He no longer lives in touch with the realities of the earth and the water, but with the realities of the instruments and objects forming the *totality* of his environment. He is now in an environment made of asphalt, iron, cement, glass, plastic and so on."[21]

Consider the indictment by Victor Davis Hansen of the modern consumer: "The ultimate enemies of agriculture are more insidious and imperceptible. They, like you, are actually rather nice to see and meet. They are ourselves: 'good people.' But they, who work so hard and so long at hospital, plant and office, have become— have had to become—accustomed to cheap food, to the economy of scale at all costs. They want food pretty, cheap and now! Always. And from very far away! Whatever the cost, damn the consequences...tliey must expect—and can always get—food at the only price they are willing or able to pay. It is true of all of us. Because our food is so inexpensive, so attractive, safe, and plentiful, they have a margin to put our money elsewhere."[22]

Thus, the obligation and opportunity to develop a healthy theology of the land rests not upon the shoulders of the farmer alone. And the Hebrew Scriptures provide to all of us in the community—not just the farmer but the non-farmer as well–two specific regulations that ensured that the land holder remained fully aware of the ultimate owner of the land: Sabbath and Jubilee. These practices imputed to the Israelites a community oriented life-style, based upon clear theological instruction, that developed a mindset of consideration, mutual aid, and concern. Additional agricultural festivals only served to reinforce the Sabbath and Jubilee mindset, through joyous communal thanksgiving celebrations.[23] We need to be aware that the underlying principles of these two land regulations have been so ignored by the distraction of the technique of modern farming that I believe that we are facing a stern warning: "But if blessing follows obedience, curse within the land and even deportation from it will result from disobedience."[24] Accordingly, it is a communal obligation to renew the importance of the sacredness of the land.

---

[21] Ellul , *The Technological Society,* 38-39.

[22] Victor Davis Hansen, *The Land Was Everything— Letters from an American Farmer,* (New York: Free Press, 2000), 110-111.

[23] See Ex. 23:34; Lev. 23; Num. 28; Deut. 16.

[24] Martens, *God's Design,* 110.

IV. An Alternative Business Model for Farmers

The demise of the modern family farm has been widely chronicled, and the reasons for the decline are many, and beyond the scope of the original thesis and this update to fully address. However, there is significant uncertainty as to the future of farming in the U.S. None other than US Agricultural Secretary Tom Vilnick summarized in Congressional testimony the state of the American Farmer in 2010, specifically noting that the farm economy has been in recession for more than 20 years and that "In the past 40 years, the United States lost more than 1 million farmers and ranchers. During that period, income from farming operations, as a percentage of total farm household income, plunged to half of the previous level. Today, only 11 percent of family farm income comes from farming. These factors have changed the face of rural America.We need to develop new strategies to bring prosperity back to rural America in a sustainable and significant way."[25]

In my thesis I rejected the assertion by many farm advocates and politicians that the answers to restoring viability to the farm would come from farm policy, subsidies and political action. Rather, I concluded that these actions often led to the destruction of farms and only furthered the negative impact of the distraction of technology upon the farm. In its place, I offered advice from my own farming and farm business experience, all of which can be best understood by embodying the spirit of collaboration, communication and cooperation over unbridled productivity and competition. Some examples from my own business experience served to provide practical counsel as to how farmers could both be both theologically astute and operationally viable.

For the first five years of our business, specifically 1994-1999, our company utilized a business model that is fairly standard for most businesses: we would compete in the marketplace head to head vs. other similarly situated tree fruit producers. While we had some success with this strategy, it wasn't until a fortuitous business meeting with a competitor that the business took a significant and lasting positive turn. In 1999, after developing a new product of ripe and ready to eat peaches and nectarines called Summeripe®, we were asked to a meeting by a company who had suffered some loss of customers due to our new product line. During this meeting, the owners of the other company floated the idea of their purchasing our company and my partner and I going to work for their company.

While selling our company was not a tantalizing idea for either my partner or I, it did lead to an interesting opportunity, one which to our knowledge had never been used in the tree fruit industry: while our companies would remain independent, we would create a strategic alliance based upon mutual company support of Summeripe® and customers and prospects would be pursued for the benefit of both companies.[26] In

---

[25] USDA News Release No. 0198.10. Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Makes Case for Stronger Rural America. April 21, 2010.

[26] Note that this alliance is different than traditional agricultural cooperatives, which are federally chartered and require a common ownership process. Ours was an alliance of independently owned

time, what developed was an alliance among six different independent companies, all supporting Summeripe and common standards that included a code of ethics, grower practices, customer solicitation procedures and other practices intended to bring a higher level of communication, trust and respect to the production side of the tree fruit industry. The model was embraced by some in our industry and scorned by others, and while not perfect in design or in execution, it was a significant breakthrough from the traditional practices of the industry that has had lasting effect. We shifted the focus away from volume and onto quality. We determined that we would not attempt to be the largest tree fruit company but rather be the one that was singularly focused upon providing the consumer the best tasting fruit possible.

The dedicated growers, employees and customers of the "Summeripe Alliance" permeated into other areas of our company. Growers now found their own fruit loaded on the same truck with fruit from former competitors for a common customer; regular meetings and sharing of technical information was enhanced among growers and packers for the common good not only within our own company but among the entire Alliance. In our own firm, we worked hard at creating a less hierarchal organization, one where all departments and employees were united around the common purpose of promoting our premium product. Within just a few years, Summeripe® branded premium tree fruit was securing a price premium of $2-$3 a box over our regular fruit, creating a significant incentive for our growers and providing what was likely the critical amount of increase in their income to remain in tree fruit farming. I am convinced that what we successfully did was to confound technique.

I am pleased to report that despite continued negative economic forces in the fresh fruit market through the 2010 season, the company I co-founded in 1994 is thriving and many of its growers remain viable family farms. By many accounts, the foundational principles of the company and its relationships of collaboration, communication and cooperation remain intact, albeit now under different leadership than my own.

V. Conclusion

I remain convinced, and in fact I believe that current experience is even more compelling than in 2002, that unbridled competition in not only the farm economy but in all elements of life does not in the final analysis serve more than just a few who master its tools and techniques. One should not conclude that I am anticompetition or anti-technology (which I am not), but rather what I am for is collaboration as a balance to competition, as a powerful force that confounds the distraction of technique. This is at its core a movement towards not only reimagining the sacred in areas far beyond the rites and rituals of the contemporary Christian, but for the non-Christian

---

companies with no intention of changing the ownership of our companies, but rather for the mutual goal of supporting a common premium brand of fruit. Participation was wholly voluntary and as companies joined the alliance they paid a per box charge for the use of the brand and support services.

as well. How our food is grown and how we consume it, but even more importantly how we conceive of it is something that affects us all. This reimagining and rediscovery of the sacred will in the final analysis lead to a better farming, consumer and theological experience for all of us.

Jacques Ellul & Wendell Berry on an Agrarian Resistance by Matthew Regier

Matthew Regier and his wife Tia Regier live outside of Peabody, Kansas where they are slowly working to restore a neglected farm that sits on twenty acres. They sell eggs and vegetables at the local farmers markets. He completed a M.A. in New Testament at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary.

In his books on technique, Jacques Ellul describes a world that is *of necessity* plunging towards death. Perhaps, his popularity as a writer would have blossomed had he not said that the "technical system has *definitively* escaped from control by the human will."[27] The world does not like to be told that it is not in control. Or, for that matter, that the "worst has become much more probable" or that we must "give up thinking we can improve the world."[28] Reading an Ellul book on technique is a bit like being in an instructional pamphlet for school children during the cold-war nuclear scare. We can follow the authorities' directions to duck under our chairs, but it won't save us from the coming destruction.

And yet other works (namely his theological ones) show that he believes passionately in freedom and hope. Is this a contradiction? Well, yes . . . and no. It is not with confusion or ambivalence that Ellul embraces this dialectic of hope and fatalism. Nor does Ellul think that his proclamation of hope in any way undoes what he has said about the inevitability of technique enslavement of humanity. Perhaps the best word to describe Ellul's dialectic is *apocalyptic*. The destruction of the world[29] is at our doorstep and Ellul is prophesying in the streets.

What then is the source of Ellul's unlikely hope? He himself says that it is only God's action which gives any him any hope.[30] Does this mean that humans can do nothing but passively wait for God's action? Not at all. Rather, Ellul is holding out

---

[27] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 101, my emphasis.

[28] Jacques Ellul, *Presence of the Kingdom*, 2nd ed. (New York: Seabury, 1967), p. 7.

[29] I use this phrase in the way that the biblical apocalypticists often do, describing events of such singularity and significance that only "end-of-the-world language" will do. And yet, the literal destruction of the world is not out of sight for Ellul, both in the sense that technique signals the end of human civilization (and the beginning of Technical civilization) and in the more material sense of nuclear threat and ecological ruin.

[30] Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), p. 22.

hope for a *true* revolution.[31] In his interview with Patrick Troude-Chastenet, he says (paraphrasing Marx) that "when man realizes that he no longer has the means of influencing the situation he begins to revolt."[32] For Ellul such a revolt or revolution will not occur at the national level but rather at a communal (and individual) level. The community Ellul envisions would "question unceasingly all that man calls progress, discovery, facts, established results, reality."[33] It would be an other-(material) worldly community living in the reality of the eschaton.[34]

But what, concretely, might such a community look like? Moreover, is such a community possible? How does such a community resist in the midst of the technical environment? I would like to propose that the most effective community of resistance would be an agrarian community. And I can think of no better spokesman for an agrarian resistance than the novelist, poet, essayist and farmer, Wendell Berry.

A French Sociology professor and a Kentucky farmer might seem strange candidates for a comparison or even a conversation. Berry gives no indication of ever having read Ellul, nor does he speak of a great technological phenomenon such as Ellul describes. Berry does not speak of a "technical" society, nor does he generally speak of an autonomous technological force behind political and economic realities. He is more likely to speak about the "modern world" or the global economy. However, he sometimes comes close to describing the same kind of autonomous phenomenon as Ellul:

Without that willingness [to limit our desires] there is no choice; we must simply abandon ourselves to whatever the technologists may discover to be possible.[35]

Technology can grow to a size that is first undemocratic and then inhuman. It can grow beyond the control of individual human beings—and so, perhaps, beyond the control of human institutions. How large can a machine be before it ceases to serve people and begins to subjugate them?[36]

Both Ellul and Berry have developed a reputation of going "against the tide" and have been rejected by both sides of the political spectrum for being either impractical radicals or reactionary technophobes. Both decry specialization in thought as well as in practice, as both have written in many disciplines (with the consequence of sometimes being ignored by "serious" scholarship). Each has created over decades a corpus of work marked by remarkable thematic continuity, exploring the same phenomena from multiple disciplinary postures. Both saw the magnitude of the current ecological crisis with considerable prescience[37] and connected it to the rise of modern agriculture and the consequent rural depopulation and the general contempt for rural people and rural

---

[31] See esp. *The Presence of the Kingdom.*

[32] *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity*, p.26.

[33] *Presence of the Kingdom,* p. 37.

[34] *Presence of the Kingdom*, pp. 38-40.

[35] Wendell Berry, "Horse Drawn Tools and the Doctrine of Labor Saving," pp. 104-112 in *The Gift of Good Land*, (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1981), p. 112.

[36] "Agricultural Solutions for Agricultural Problems" pp. 113-124 in *The Gift of Good Land*, p. 121.

[37] Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau were "advocating for the country people" and addressing the

places.[38] Both explicitly decried the polarization between the "conservationists" who view all human intervention in nature as bad, and the conquistadors who see the world as infinitely exploitable.[39]

Both men quote with no small amount of bewilderment from the utopian futurologists. Both see the technical world as creating a new kind of slavery, more comprehensive than anything the world has seen before.[40] Accordingly, both authors see the only possibility of freedom existing outside this system. And while they speak of freedom in different ways, both insist that it must be found *within* the acceptance of limits, rather than in "liberation" from restrictions of any kind.

The absence of limits is not simply an economic problem (where the idea of limitless growth has caused much devastation), but a wider cultural one.[41] In an essay on modern poetry, Berry critiques the modern poet's rejection of form and narrative.[42] If an "anything goes" approach is good for writing poetry, it will also be good for how we treat each other (evident in modern views on sexuality) and how we treat the earth (be it removing mountains or topsoil). "When the self is one's exclusive subject and limit, reference and measure, one has no choice but to make a world of words.[43] And this gives to one's own suffering and death the force of cataclysm." Where Berry speaks of a "world of words," Ellul speaks of a "verbal universe." For Ellul, a philosophy without limits (where the self dissolves into an endless sprawl of linguistic modifiers) is no philosophy at all,[44] but rather a rabbit trail leading to absurdity.[45]

Knowledge too must be limited (a scandal to the modern intelligence); "some things must not be learned."[46] This is what Berry means when he says that, "In ignorance is our hope,"[47] and, I think, what Ellul means by rediscovering "the limits of the Holy."[48]

"economic consequences of emptying the countryside" in an ecological context back when they were both active in the *Espirit* in the 1930s, see *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity*, p. 64; Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1977), pp. 27-38.

[38] Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 155 and *The Technological Bluff*, p. 229, 252; Wendell Berry, "What Are People For?" pp. 123-125 in *What are People For?* (New York: North Point, 1990).

[39] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, 229; Berry exposes the errors of both sides in many essays, see esp. "Getting Along with Nature" pp. 6-20 in *Home Economics* (San Francisco: North Point, 1987).

[40] Berry makes the point memorably in *The Unsettling of America*, p. 12; cf. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, (New York: Vintage, 1964), p.117;

[41] Ellul insists that technique will accept no limitations, *The Technological Society*, pp. 134, 180.

[42] See esp. "The Specialization of Poetry" pp. 3-23 in *Standing by Words* (San Francisco: North Point, 1983).

[43] "The Specialization of Poetry," p. 8.

[44] *The Technological Bluff*, p. 216.

[45] *The Technological Bluff*, p. 201.

[46] Wendell Berry, "People, Land and Community," pp. 64-69 in *Standing by Words*, p. 68; see also "The Way of Ignorance" pp. 53-67 in *The Way of Ignorance* (Shoemaker & Hoard, 2005).

[47] Wendell Berry, "Healing," pp. 9-13 in *What are People For?*, p. 13.

[48] The Presence of the Kingdom, p. 110.

Both authors condemn simple or fast solutions that rest on an "ends-justify-the-means" doctrine (where the advocates of such solutions assume far more knowledge than they actually have or is even available).[49] Berry sees such an approach as a failure to recognize the connectedness and patterns of life itself, where Ellul has shown that technique actually creates a situation where the means *become* the ends. This is because technique cannot recognize humanistic ends but only aims at efficiency, speed and quantity of production.[50]

Ellul's insight is particularly apt to understanding the situation of modern agriculture. The primary goals of any agriculture must be something like (A) to feed humans, (B) to maintain the fertility of the land, and (C) to earn a wage for the farmer. This is hardly controversial. Yet, modern agriculture fails miserably in meeting these needs. Most obvious is the rapid degradation of the land and the loss of its soil. The economic stability of farmers and farm families has been almost as equally a failure, with massive numbers of farms being dissolved or absorbed in the last sixty years or more. Finally, although a great deal of food is certainly being produced, much of it fails to nourish humans. Some of it must be discarded to ensure a good price, some of it is stored indefinitely because of overproduction, some is converted to fuel, and large amounts of grain are fed to cattle and other ruminants for which a grain diet is neither natural nor healthy. Likewise, much of our food is processed, pasteurized, hydrogenated, transported and stored to such an extent that it loses its ostensible nutritional value. The ends are not met (and remarkably seldom even discussed) because the means (efficiency, speed, production) have become the ends.

Of course, when this happens, absurdity entails. There can be no doubt that modern agriculture is driven by organization, rationality, and efficiency. But the actual results are more often disorder, unreasonableness and remarkable inefficiency. When a calorie of food requires at least three calories of petroleum energy (or up to 35 calories for grain-fed beef), how can we say the present system is reasonable or efficient?

There are other themes and ideas which are crucial to both authors: waste, the creation of new needs to ensure technological progress, the uselessness of technological gadgets, the replacement of physical work with sport or exercise, the dangers of escapism, the problem of "experts," the myth of objectivity and the actual partiality of a science in service to the technical economy, collective culpability, the ugliness of the modern technical world (aesthetics are not a mean and hence not a technical end), the necessity of a local culture and the destructiveness and actual impossibility of a universal or technical culture, and many others.

Of course, Ellul and Berry are not without their differences, and it would be interesting to explore these if space permitted. But I believe by exploring their points of

---

[49] See esp. Berry's exposure of the Sierra Club's investments in Exxon, General Motors, Tenneco, steel companies "having the worst pollution records in the industry" and others, *The Unsettling of America*, p. 17. Remarkably enough, the Sierra Club nevertheless published the book.

[50] This is because technique itself is a use, *Technological Society*, p. 98.

contact we can begin to trace the contours of a community that is in position to resist the powers of destruction that surround it.

I suggest that a community of resistance must be agrarian, because only a community dependant on agriculture can have any true independence. To live in recognition of our dependence on the land is an act of gratitude as well as sanity; as Berry observes, "To the extent that we must eat and drink, and be clothed, sheltered, and warmed . . . the idea that we have now progressed from a land-based economy to an economy based on information is fantasy"[51] It is a fantasy, nevertheless, that forms the narrative of the global economy.

With the term "agrarian" I aim to evoke a world in which technique is held in check by moral, religious, and aesthetic customs. An agrarian community will be marked by face-to-face relationships developed over generations, rootedness in place, attention to context, reliance on each other, and the development of a truly local culture. People in such a community will cultivate the skills necessary for careful living (rural skills), they will pursue knowledge rather than information, they will know the land as they know each other, and their knowledge of the land and each other will teach them how to care for *that* place.

Inherent in all of this, is the recognition and appreciation of limits. Such a recognition is the necessary prerequisite to personal humility, but it is also the first step to understanding a place. Good agriculture mimics nature.[52] A "global culture" assumes to a large extent that any*thing* may be inserted into any*place*, be it a retail store, a tree, or a bean field. A local culture rather grows out of a place by observing it for generations and passing on those observations to posterity. These "observations" are not so much recorded data, but shared stories and experiences that form the collective memory of a people on the land. It should by now be apparent that such a community cannot be created *ex nihilo*, but is a long time in the making. This alone is a scandal in an age of the instantaneous. Even so, it will not be enough for a community to resist the modern obsession with mobility. Members (to use Berry's word) of the community become at least as knowledgeable about local plant and animal species as they are of local sports teams. Moreover, the task of understanding and managing a local ecosystem is made more difficult by the preponderance of invasive species. But there is also pleasure to be had—the pleasure of naming birds or wildflowers, planting a garden, or gathering eggs. These are pleasures more promising (if more taxing) than those proffered by the entertainment experts who can only give us the desire for a life that is not our own.

It will be objected that such a community can only be conceived in rural areas. One response would be to immigrate back to the country. It is a painful irony that while the world anguishes about over-population, the countryside (where watchers and

---

[51] Wendell Berry, "Local Knowledge in the Age of Information," pp. 113-125 in *The Way of Ignorance* (Shoemaker & Hoard, 2005).

[52] This, in a nutshell, is the thesis of Sir Albert Howard, whose work Berry acknowledges over and over.

stewards of the land are desperately needed) continues to be emptied. (Ellul after all has said that dispersing the city would mean the end of the machine, the end of modern technology.)[53] Another response is that our cities must also become more agricultural, which is to say less parasitic, which is to say less like cities.[54] This will not happen without resistance. There is a great deal of fertility and water in cities given over to the growth of "ornamentals" which could support the production of surprising amounts of food given adequate care and skill. Animal husbandry is an important compliment to horticulture, and so we must also introduce livestock into our cities. It need not be said that urban and suburban communities which outlaw clotheslines, will not look kindly on backyard goats or pigs. And yet, these same neighborhoods assume that the same backyard is a perfectly sane place to house a man-eating dog.

Moreover, rural places are not necessarily at an advantage for an agrarian revolution. Much of the land has been urbanized or abandoned (to disuse or absentee farming). Just as rural places have not been able to keep their land, so also they have not been able to keep their "best" people. The mark of success in a small rural town is (upon graduation from school) to never be seen there again. The education system conspires with the urban-technical "culture" to enforce (and finance) this idea of success. What remains of the town after decades of faithfully sending off the "successful?" The two small towns closest to our own farm are paradigmatic: unemployment, high crime rates, sometimes dismal living conditions, homelessness (despite an abundance of abandoned homes), obesity and substance abuse, failing literacy, and other typical incarnations of despair. What is the possibility of inciting a revolution in such a place?

While Berry does paint a somewhat less fatalistic picture than Ellul, he never advocates for a kind of optimism. The lure of false optimism is as strong as ever with the recent (in America) rise of the "green" movement. While this very admirable movement has already produced much that is good, there are still great dangers in its becoming fashionable. "Organic" has already become a label under which modern agriculture can continue without fundamental change. Meanwhile, the "ecological crisis" is often reduced to the issue of greenhouse gases and carbon emissions which the world hopes can be "solved" with non-petroleum energy sources. But there is no technology that will replace our topsoil or revive the many dead-zones in our world. Moreover, the reduction of our ecological problems to energy conservation, will drive people (who are unwilling to limit their desires) to find solace in a technically simulated reality (what Albert Borgman calls hypermodernism or hyperreality[55]). The recent explosion of communicational gadgetry confirms that what Ellul twenty years ago called the

---

[53] *The Meaning of the City*, p. 155.

[54] See *The Meaning of the City*. In this book, Ellul would seem to suggest that a sustainable city is simply impossible, or contrary to the nature of a city. He nevertheless, advocates for a kind of resistance in the "heart of the city."

[55] *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

"erotico-communicational world of science fiction"[56] was then only in its beginning stages.

Berry does not promise that any course of action will solve the problems our world faces. For Berry, as for Ellul, hope is something profoundly different than optimism, something that would persist even in the certainty of destruction. In this sense Berry, too, is something of an apocalyptic voice:

It is presumptuous, personally and historically, to assume that one is part of a "saving remnant." One had better doubt that one deserves such a distinction, and had better understand that there may, after all, be nothing left to save. Even so, if one wishes to save anything not protected by the present economy—topsoil, groves of trees, the possibility of goodness or health of anything, even the economic relevance of the biblical tradition—one is part of a remnant, and a dwindling remnant too, though not without hope, and not without the necessary instructions, the most pertinent of which, perhaps, is this, also from Revelation: "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die."[57]

Ellul & Medicine

by Raymond Downing
Raymond Downing is a physician working in Kenya.

Four years ago, as part of the research for *Death and Life in America: Biblical Healing and Biomedicine*, I wrote to Joyce Hanks requesting help with finding Jacques Ellul's writings on health and medicine. She kindly sent me an entire envelope of articles, clippings, and book chapters, most of them in French. The earliest was his "Positions bibliques sur la medicine" from *Les deux cites: Cahiers des associations professionnelles protestantes*, vol. 4 (1947). Finding no published English translation, I asked a friend to translate it, and found that my thinking and writing were essentially following the outline he had roughed out in that early article.

His thesis was straightforward, and at core neither surprising nor unique. People, he said, have "two parts: soul-body and spirit, [which are] closely linked, interpenetrated one by the other, to such an extent that no one can distinguish them and separate that which is natural from that which is supernatural in man." But more than just this link, "the physical only seems like a sign of that which is spiritual... The true drama, the true action has a place in a theatre where we haven't our ticket, where we aren't at ease." That sign is often an illness for which we seek medical help, but biomedical doctors usually don't have a ticket for the spiritual theatre, the ultimate source of the illness. They therefore focus on the physical, which Ellul calls "only a consequence, only a secondary phenomenon" - only a symptom.

---

[56] *The Technological Bluff*, p. 264
[57] Wendell Berry, "God and Country" pp. 95-102 in *What are People For?*, p. 102.

I have considerably condensed his argument. He takes pains to point out that "this link between illness and sin must not be understood in a simplistic sense," such as "it's the worst sinner who is the most ill - or that illness is a sign of a bigger sin." Not at all. However, "to cure illness without the forgiveness of sins is only an adjournment, a whitewash, a fleeting crack of the whip: it isn't health. This deliverance from illness isn't of value in itself: it could mean being better only temporarily."

"Illness," he says, "possesses a profound meaning... and the doctor must evidently be attentive to not divorce illness from its meaning." Unfortunately, biomedicine cannot tell us what that meaning is, and thirty years later Susan Sontag wrote a polemic against the cultural meanings of illness she saw - still present, perhaps, because of the remnant of understanding in our culture that illness *does* have meaning. In her writing, however, she wanted "not to confer meaning. but to deprive something of meaning." She was troubled by the inappropriate and damaging metaphors of illness she confronted, and wrote to demonstrate "that illness is *not* a metaphor"[58]. Ironically, she was left with only biomedicine, and betrayed a confidence and faith in it far beyond my own.

It is this difficulty we have with meanings, and the temptation to deny them altogether, where Ellul's 1947 argument begins to anticipate so much of what he later wrote about technology. He suggests that biomedical treatment is not only incomplete, but could also be counterproductive. Denying meaning that is there is certainly counterproductive, because it leads us away from healing. There is a similar dynamic when biomedicine (successful productive biomedicine) "generates hope and provokes faith." In doing so "it clothes itself in things that do not belong to it: it wears praise and the recognition which belongs only to God." This is "when medicine becomes an idol, when it becomes a power which addresses itself independently to God." Any idol, whether secular or spiritual, is counterproductive precisely because it is false.

But there are other more direct forms of counterproductivity that Ellul mentions. For example: "We note that man succeeds in part to suppress pain but not to defeat or to make illness subside. Because if an illness ends, how many other forms reappear or crop up for the first time?" The question was speculative, but half a century later research seemed to show that Ellul was on the right track. In the last decade of the 20th century there was a study of treatment methods for newly diagnosed early prostate cancers: half received surgery, and the other half didn't. Those with surgery were less likely to die of prostate cancer, but 6 years after diagnosis overall death rates in both groups were the same. In other words, "prostatectomy does not change the date of death; all it changes is the likelihood that prostate cancer will be the direct cause."[59]

Ellul goes on: "If acute illness is arrested, to what extent are such things as general health, racial resistance weakened? If microbial illnesses seem defeated, to what extent are mental and emotional illnesses increased?" Again, recent research confirms Ellul's

---

[58] Sontag, Susan, *Illness as Metaphor* and *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (Picador USA, 2001), p. 3, 93, 102.

[59] Hadler, Nortin, *The Last Well Person: How to Stay Well Despite the Health-Care System* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2004) p. 96.

insight. Considering cancer survivors, those people with a diagnosis of cancer who have been treated and are still living, studies in the last decade have shown the following: "Compared with their peers, cancer survivors experience significantly decreased quality of health; increased incidence of chronic health conditions; increased levels of psychological disability; and other physical, emotional, and financial challenges."[60] We may have defeated the cancer, but we clearly did not defeat ill health.

And finally, Ellul says, because of our individualistic and materialistic approach to remedies, we are left with "only one aim: to suppress suffering." In doing so, "we have lost the sense of the relativity of life and the insertion of the individual in the communities and real generations. All this distorts the idea of remedies. The true remedy is one which reaches illness in its roots, and one which acts more or less in the long term, which likewise can only take effect in our descendants." To 21st century ears, this sounds like gene therapy, but gene therapy does nothing to situate us in our communities and with our ancestors and descendants. Symptom relief remedies, which do not "reach illness in its roots," are ultimately counterproductive because they draw attention away from the true nature of the illness. True healing, as Ayi Kwei Armah demonstrates in his novel *The Healers*[61], is healing not just of disease, but of entire communities.

In light of this very early interest that Ellul had in medicine, and the increasing relevance of all of his technology studies to biomedicine, I find it interesting - well, troubling actually - that there is so little "Ellulian" analysis of biomedicine today. I reviewed all the issues of the *Ellul Forum* since its inception, and found only 2 articles devoted specifically to health or medicine (in Issue #8 on Illich). Even followers of Illich focus elsewhere: the new *International Journal of Illich Studies*[62] - a welcome addition to these conversations - is led mostly by educators. If *Medical Nemesis* was his most successful book, where are the doctors, nurses, pharmacists, therapists and counselors in this discourse?

Admittedly, doctors, nurses, and the lot are practitioners, busy practical people, not always given to reflection on what we do. Fair enough, but where are the medical sociologists? Actually, the problem here is not their silence, but the inaccessibility of what they write. In continuing research following *Death and Life in America*, I encountered a lot of their ideas and analyses of my own profession that were quite new to me - and discovered in the process how little overlap there is between our conversation and theirs. Of course our writings are as inaccessible to them as theirs are to us. I wonder what Illich or Ellul would say about this "expert" writing that only other experts in the same field can understand? Yet even the sociologists, when they mention Illich, refer mostly to *Medical Nemesis* - certainly a fine work, but only

---

[60] Sunga, Annette, et al, *Care of Cancer Survivors*. FP Essentials, Edition No 352, AAFP Home Study, Leawood, Kansas, American Academy of Family Physicians, September, 2008.

[61] Armah, Ayi Kewi, *The Healers* (Per Ankh, Popenguine, Senegal, 1978).

[62] http://ivan-illich.org/journal/index.php/IJIS

the first of his many other even more cogent reflections on biomedicine. Why have we gotten stuck on *Medical Nemesis*?

Of course there are those who seem to have never heard of *Nemesis*, and most public debates in healthcare focus elsewhere. The biggest concern today, especially in the US, is finance reform, not healthcare reform: how can we finance the system we have? That introduces a slightly more important issue, the nature of that system. But again, we get derailed: instead of looking honestly at that system to see what it really accomplishes, we concentrate mostly on making it more efficient (Ellul would not be surprised). Our concern is not "illness in its roots" but our system in its roots.

One reason we get away with emphasizing these superficial debates is that healthcare is such a huge industry in the West - some 16% of the GNP in the US. Of course we don't want to reduce this; it is a significant part of our economy's growth. We simply need to make it more efficient so that we can offer this same healthcare package to those who now can't afford it. Besides, the products of this system - technologies of symptom relief - are remarkably effective. When we choose to ignore the roots of illness, we get away with becoming triumphalist because our offerings "generate hope and provoke faith" - and of course "wear praise and the recognition which belong only to God."

Such triumphalism itself then becomes a debate. On the one side are those who are impressed with such technological wizardry, and who delight in predicting 21ˢᵗ century "biofutures". On the other are bioethicists who analyze each new electronic or genetic advance, and walk us through an "on the one hand this, on the other hand that" analysis, often concluding with a warning about being too hasty in adopting the latest - while being careful not to reject it out of hand. Illich, on the other hand, just 8 years before his death, called it all a Brave New Biocracy[63]-the end result of unchallenged medicalization we saw in *Medical Nemesis*.

I understand this hesitance to confront and criticize biomedicine. I first read *Medical Nemesis* in 1976 or 77, around the time I started reading Ellul. I was troubled, but did not know what to do with the critique; I was a newly graduated doctor, and apparently could not practice in the presence of such dissonance. I put *Nemesis* aside and focused on Ellul's theology. Over 20 years later I reread *Nemesis* (by then, it did not seem all that radical) and began reading Ellul's studies on technology. Perhaps by then I was more aware of the limitations of my own profession. A decade after that I was entranced by Illich's subsequent writings on medicine, and now more aware of the influence of Ellul on Illich.

Intellectually, I had moved - but what then could I do about biomedicine itself? I had gone into medicine because (like so many others) I liked science and wanted to help people. I had also assumed (like so many others) that healthcare was neither as dangerous as the military (or fast food) industry, nor as useless as the celebrity (or fast food) industry; healthcare, I had assumed, *helped* people. I understand the reluctance to

---

[63] Illich, Ivan, "Brave New Biocracy: Health Care from Womb to Tomb", *NPQ: New Perspectives Quarterly,* Winter94, Vol. 11 Issue 1

put healthcare in these same categories. Of course, there are things about biomedicine that I still think are good; I wouldn't be working in an academic department of Family Medicine if I felt otherwise. In fact, it is precisely that environment which encourages, or rather *requires*, that we ask very serious questions about what it is that we are teaching.

So how can we do this? For a start, Ellul's "Biblical Positions on Medicine" needs to be made available to an English-speaking audience. It is more relevant today than it was 63 years ago. But it needs contemporary comment; it needs to be built on. At the same time, the academic Ellul and Illich communities need to actively recruit those interested in biomedicine - and vice versa. There is a dynamic community of social scientists with a profound critique of biomedicine, but it is little known outside their academic community. And - far more difficult - medical practitioners need to be aware of these discourses. We, after all, are the ones who "practice" medicine; we need to think more deeply on *what* it is that we are practicing.

Finally, public debates on healthcare need substantial redirection - how, I don't know. The US needs to get beyond the insurance question and look more directly at what that insurance is buying. Europe and the US need to confront the elephant in their medical room: the massive exodus of patients from biomedicine to alternative healing approaches, which bespeaks profound dissatisfaction with what we offer. And in this light, we all need to stop assuming that the poor countries in the world always need what we have developed, whether family planning or ARV drug treatment for AIDS or legal abortions or kidney transplants.

In fact, maybe it's time to start learning something about healing from them.

Advert: Change of Address?

Don't forget to notify IJES if your address changes. Postal forwarding orders expire after a period of time. Forwarding practices are sometimes unreliable. You don't want to miss out on The Ellul Forum. We don't want to lose touch with you.

E-mail your address change immediately to:

IJES@ellul.org

And please note

NEW IJES MAILING ADDRESS

IJES/Ellul Forum,

130 Essex Street, Box 219

South Hamilton MA 01982 USA

Book Review

The Omnivore's Dilemma & In Defense of Food
Reviewed by Mark D. Baker

The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals
By Michael Pollan
New York: Penguin Book, 2006. 450 pp.
In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto
By Michael Pollan
New York: Penguin Book, 2008. 244 pp.
Reviewed by Mark D. Baker
Associate Professor of Mission and Theology, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary

In *The Omnivore's Dilemma* Michael Pollan presents the history of four meals from their source to his plate. He follows the path corn takes from Iowa to his fast-food meal; he compares the journey of two organic meals, one purchased at Whole Foods and the other from a single farm; and he describes the hunting, gathering and growing he did to produce the fourth meal. His book, *In Defense of Food*, explores the origins and ill effects of what he calls the "age of nutritionism" and "the Western diet" and proposes guidelines for escaping those ill effects.

The books provide a wealth of opportunities for reflecting on Ellulian themes. I recommend reading the books with questions like: what do I see when I read this work through the lens of Ellul's *Political Illusion* or *Money and Power*? Where do I see evidence of Ellul's theory of technique or description of the powers? How does Pollan's work illustrate Ellul's thought and how do Ellul's ideas illuminate Pollan's work?

Rather than giving an overview and evaluation of Pollan's books I will share a few examples of my responses to the above questions. Technique is a dominant theme in the books. Often it is explicitly on the surface. How could one not think of Ellul and technique when reading sentences like: "There are a great many reasons American cattle came off the grass and into the feedlot, and yet all of them finally come down to the same one: Our civilization and, increasingly, our food system are strictly organized on industrial lines. They prize consistency, mechanization, predictability, interchangeability, and economies of scale" (2006, p. 201). Many topics in Pollan's books illustrate characteristics of technique described by Ellul and are also illuminated by Ellul's insightful analysis of technique. For instance the move from stone-ground wheat to roller-ground, highly refined wheat illustrates that in our technological age tech-

nique marches on without external impetus. If it is more efficient we adopt it. Steel rollers made it possible to remove the germ, and thus the oil, from wheat and grind the remaining endosperm into a fine white powder. This increased the shelf life of flour by many months. As a result each town did not have to have its own mill; the flour could travel great distances. Milling operations were centralized in big cities. "The problem was that this gorgeous white powder was nutritionally worthless, or nearly so" (2008, p. 108). Wherever these refining technologies flourished epidemics of pellagra and beriberi soon followed. Ellul tells us that when encountering problems caused by technique, rather than going back to the source of the problem the default approach is to use more technique to solve the problem. What was done? Nutritional science discovered vitamins and millers begin enriching flour with vitamins that had been removed or destroyed in the refining process. Pollan goes below the surface in an Ellulian manner and observes that we have been overconfident in thinking we know all the nutrients in a particular food and have failed to recognize that food is more than a collection of nutrient pieces. Technique's solution of adding vitamins to flour does not equal whole wheat flour. Pollan writes, "Deficiency diseases are much easier to trace and treat . . . than chronic diseases, and it turns out that the practice of refining carbohydrates is implicated in several of these chronic diseases as well— diabetes, heart disease, and certain cancers" (2008, p. 109).

Technique bashing is not Pollan's primary aim. In fact, Joel Salatin, the farmer most praised in the *Omnivore's Dilemma*, uses a lot of technique in doing sustainable agriculture. Here are just two examples. The schedule of what happens on a particular section of pasture is carefully controlled. Chickens follow cattle, and neither are allowed to graze too long; Salatin seeks optimum yield by allowing the grass to grow for a specific amount of time before bringing the cattle back. A superlightweight portable electronic fence is a vital element in the whole operation. Many frequently misunderstand Ellul as being against all technology.

Contrasting case studies in Pollan offer the opportunity to ask the question: what is the difference between the role of technique at an industrialized cattle feedlot operation and at Joel Salatin's farm? How does Ellul's thought illuminate the difference? In one we see what concerned Ellul, the rule of the spirit of technique and its focus on absolute efficiency driving every decision. In the other we see individual techniques and technologies used. Yet at times the most efficient approach is intentionally not taken because it conflicts with the overall goal of seeking to farm in a way that follows nature and leads to good relationships between the farmer and his neighbors and to health for all involved.

Sadly the books overflow with examples of diverse and widespread alienation brought about by unquestioningly following the spirit of technique. Pollan does an excellent job of not demonizing individual actors in the industrial food system. Although he does not present a conspiracy theory the alienating elements are so strong and effective that at one point I thought: it is as if you asked a commission to make changes to our agricultural food system so that it would ruin our health, make

us more oil dependent, damage the environment, and stress farmers in a myriad of ways including economic. There was, of course, no commission, but we do see these results. As I read Pollan's books I increasingly found myself reflecting on Ellul's writing about the biblical theme of the powers. In *Ethics of Freedom* he writes "the powers seem to be able to transform a natural, social, intellectual, or economic reality into a force which man has no ability to resist or control" (p. 152). What then does an ethic OF freedom look like in relation to the food system today? Pollan provides information, concrete examples of alienation and freedom and he offers guidelines for consumers. Bringing Ellul into conversation with Pollan will lead to an even richer ethic of freedom.

Advert: Make Payments to IJES Electronically?

The IJES office can accept payments only in US dollars because of the huge collection fees otherwise charged by US banks.

IJES subscribers outside the USA can go to www.paypal.com and use a credit card to make a payment to "IJES@ellul.org."

Advert: International Jacques Ellul Society

www.ellul.org

130 Essex Street, Box 219 South Hamilton MA 01982

The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

Membership

Anyone who supports the objectives of the IJES is invited to join the society for an annual dues payment of US$20.00. Membership includes a subscription to the Ellul Forum.

Board of Directors

Andy Alexis-Baker, *Associated Mennonite Seminaries, Elhart IN;* Mark Baker, *Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno;* Patrick Chastenet, *University of Bordeaux;* Clifford Christians, *University of Illinois;* Dell DeChant, *University of South Florida;* Andrew Goddard, *Oxford University*; Darrell Fasching (VicePresident), *University of South Florida;* David Gill (President), *St. Mary's College, Moraga;* Virginia Landgraf, *American Theological Library Association, Chicago*, David Lovekin, *Hastings College,*

Nebraska; Randall Marlin, *Carlton University, Ottawa*, Ken Morris (SecretaryTreasurer), *Boulder;* Carl Mitcham, *Colorado School of Mines*; Langdon Winner, *Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.*

Resources for Ellul Studies

www.ellul.org & www.jacques-ellul.org

The IJES web site at www.ellul.org contains (1) news about IJES activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, (4) a complete index of the contents of all *Ellul Forum* back issues; and (5) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The French AIJE web site at www.jacques-ellul.org is also a superb resource.

Cahiers Jacques Ellul

Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne

An essential annual journal for students of Ellul is *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, edited by Patrick Chastenet, published by Editions L'Esprit du Temps, and distributed by Presses Universitaires de France Send orders to Editions L'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Postage and shipping is 5 euros for the first volume ordered; add 2 euros for each additional volume ordered.

Volume 1: "L'Annees personnalistes" (15 euros)

Volume 2: "La Technique" (15 euros)

Volume 3: "L'Economie" (21 euros).

Volume 4 (forthcoming): "La Propagande" (21 euros).

Volume 5: "La Politique" (21 euros)

Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works

by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. Visit www.elsevier.com for ordering information.

The Reception of Jacques Ellul's Critique of Technology: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings on His Life and Thought by Joyce Main Hanks (Edwin Mellen Press, 2007). 546 pp. This volume is an amazing, iundispensable resource for studying Jacques Ellul. All the books, articles, reviews, and published symposia on Ellul's ideas and writings are here.

Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul by Andrew Goddard. (Paternoster Press, 2002). 378 pp. Eight years after being published, Professor Goddard's study remains the best English language introduction to Ellul's life and thought.

Librairie Mollat—new books in French

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux (www.mollat.com) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

Alibris—used books in English

The Alibris web site (www.alibris.com) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

Used books in French:

two web resources

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are www.chapitre.com and www.livre-rare-book.com.

Ellul on DVD/Video

French film maker Serge Steyer's film "Jacques Ellul: L'homme entier" (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site www.meromedia.com. Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul's ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.

Issue #47 Spring 2011 — Pop Culture, Jacques Ellul, and Thomas Merton

- Click to view the original PDF

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Contents

© 2011 International Jacques Ellul Society www.ellul.org
Pop Culture,
Jacques Ellul, & Thomas Merton

Information on The Editorial Board & More

From the Editor

Readers of The Ellul Forum over the years have seen its content expand to countries around the world. The North Atlantic axis has welcomed such issues as Ellul in Korea, Mexico, and Denmark. Also, scholarship on Ellul and technology continues to deepen; it's become more intellectually sophisticated over the life of the Forum.

With this issue we take note of another development—the multiplying of topics for Ellul studies. Popular culture is the topic here. Through Ellul's theory and method the authors develop a critical assessment of popular culture. Ellul's work on Propaganda, his analysis of media technologies in Humiliation of the Word and The Technological Bluff, are the stepping stones to a popular culture critique. But here the media arts are addressed directly, and it contributes to the expanding scholarship on religion and contemporary popular culture.

One topic of longstanding interest to Ellul Forum readers is the Jacques Ellul - Thomas Merton relationship. Jeffrey Shaw's article is included in this issue as a re-

view of the Ellul-Merton critique of technological civilization. Of special interest, it gives an account of their mutual relationship to Kierkegaard and it provides a helpful bibliography of the Merton literature.

Our thanks to Dell DeChant a member of the International Jacques Ellul Society, Board of Directors, for guest editing this issue. The next two issues of the Ellul Forum will focus on "Anarchism" (Fall 2011, guest editor Andy Alexis-Baker) and "Ellul and the Arts" (Spring 2012, guest editor David Lovekin).

We celebrate the centenary of Ellul's birth in 2012 with an international conference July 8-10 at Wheaton College –chosen for its central location near Chicago, its investment in developing the best archive of Ellul books, papers, tapes, and letters west of Bordeaux, and the indefatigable promotion of Ellul studies by Prof. Jeff Greenman. Call for papers on back cover - more registration info in the fall Ellul Forum. Let's gather all the Ellul students, novice to veteran, for a great time of celebration and serious reflection together. Plan now!

Clifford G. Christians, Editor
[[mailto:cchrstns@illinois.edu][cchrstns@illinois.edu

The Emerging Field of Religion and Popular Culture

by Dell DeChant
Dell DeChant is Senior Instructor and Associate Chair in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of South Florida.

Aside from their scholarly merit as critical inquiries into specific topics at the intersection of religion and contemporary culture, the articles in this issue are of particular interest in two important ways. First, they suggest a greater range of application for Ellul's project, and second, they contribute to the theoretical enrichment of the emerging field of Religion and Popular Culture.

In the first area, these two studies clearly show the relevance of Ellul's general theories and specific categories of analysis to formulating questions and developing critical assessments related to popular culture. In this regard, they remind us that Ellul's theory and method are as pertinent and as applicable today (and in the most immediate moment of the present) as they were in the 60s and70s. In short, and to use a sports analogy, these studies give Ellul "fresh legs."

In the second area, the studies may make a greater contribution by expanding and deepening the theoretic options available to scholars working in the field of Religion and Popular Culture. The

development of Ellul-derived questions and deployment of Ellul-derived categories of analysis not only significantly expand the theoretic horizons of this field, they also add new problematics otherwise absent in the literature.

Ferreri and Bennett are, thus, in dialogue not only with Ellul specialists, but also the broader (and growing) scholarly community concerned with the religious dimensions of contemporary popular culture. For readers unfamiliar with the field of Religion and Popular Culture, and to briefly contextualize the articles, Ferreri's examination of the Obama presidency exemplifies the category of "Popular Culture as Religion." Questions in this category focus on the ways in which popular culture phenomena function as religion. The relevancy of Ellul's work to this area should be quite apparent. Ferreri's particular interest is the richly nuanced intersection of Civil Religion and popular culture in the person and symbol of Barack Obama. For Ferreri, Ellul serves as a bridge between Robert Bellah's conception of American Civil Religion and the sacred of contemporary popular culture, which yields "the technology of consumption" as the manifestation of the sacred and Obama as "the longitudinal extension of JFK."

Bennett's analysis of contemporary Christian religious communities is located in the category of "Popular Culture in Religion." Inquiries in this area are concerned with the impact of popular culture on religious communities and ritual practices. Again, as with the previous category, Ellul's relevance is selfevident. Using a number of Ellul's texts, most importantly, *The Meaning of the City*, Bennett isolates and critiques the "rippling effects and unforeseen consequences" that are inevitable when churches become enamored of popular culture elements and artifacts, appropriating them without reflection. In this treatment, the world of popular culture is analogous to the Ellulian *city*; and as Bennett observes, following Ellul, "the values of the city are in direct juxtaposition to the values of the Kingdom of God."

It is hoped that these articles will be followed by other studies by our featured contributors, and that others may find merit in the deployment of Ellul's theories and methods as modeled here.

Should this occur, it will benefit not only the theoretic development of the field of Religion and Popular Culture, but also promote the continued evolution of the theories of Jacques Ellul. Ultimately, then, I commend these articles to you with the observation that Ferreri and Bennett are teaching us that Jacques Ellul's inquiry into religion and culture is as relevant today as it ever was, and perhaps even more relevant today in the world of Barack Obama and the mega-church.

Pop Culture's "New Demons" Obama, the Sacred, and Civil Religion"

by Frank Ferreri
Frank Ferreri, M.A. and J.D., is a legal editor at LRP Publications and an adjunct instructor at University of South Florida Polytechnic. He earned his B.A. and M.A. from the University of South Florida and J.D. from the University of Florida.

Since Barack Obama arrived in the public eye commentators have compared him to John F. Kennedy, a hallmark figure of American civil religion. Naturally, Obama's campaign for and election to the U.S. presidency further amplified such comparisons.[1] Likewise, in much the same way that JFK became an enduring figure in American popular culture, Obama's time in the White House has played out voluminously in the consumer-oriented carriers of popular culture.[2] Thus, a question arises: what is the link in the American popular consciousness connecting Obama to tropes of the American civil religious tradition and how does that manifest itself in American popular culture? In exploring this question, this article considers whether and how, from the view of American popular culture, Obama fulfills civil religious ideals for American society and the degree to which this has implications for the religious dimensions of contemporary American culture.

To conduct this analysis, this article examines the Obama presidency in the context of Jacques Ellul's concept of political religion, as developed in *The New Demons*, and in light of Robert Bellah's understanding of American civil religion, which he first expounded in the wake of JFK's presidency and assassination.[3] Viewing Obama through the intersection of pop culture and civil religion in the context of Ellul yields an understanding of civil religion that goes beyond Bellah's initial confines. Namely, this type of exploration suggests the possibility that the civil religious sense of the sacred has an embodied, immanent presence in contemporary American culture that combines with its idealistic strands to instruct Americans about their identities, an instruction that comes almost exclusively from the carriers of popular culture.

Bellah's Civil Religion

For Bellah, civil religion is a "collection of beliefs, symbols, and rituals with respect to sacred things and institutionalized in a collectivity" that is "at its best a genuine apprehension of universal and transcendent religious reality as seen in or, one could almost say, as revealed through the experience of the American people."[4] Bellah goes on to explain that though American civil religion is seeped in biblical archetypes, "it is also genuinely American and genuinely new. It has its own prophets and its own martyrs, its own sacred events and sacred places, its own solemn rituals and symbols."[5] It also seeks, in Bellah's view, a God-accorded society that is an example to the rest of the world. Intentionally or not, Obama presented a rendition of this theme in his

---

[1] A Lexis search returned 1,000 results for " 'Barack Obama' + 'John F. Kennedy' " and a Google search produced more than 10,000.

[2] For purposes of this article, "carriers" are those vehicles or institutions that bring popular culture to individuals in contemporary American culture. Such carriers include, most notably, television, Internet, radio, and print media, all of which, in contemporary American culture, are dominated by consumer capitalism.

[3] See Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons*, trans. C Edward Hopkin (NY: Seabury, 1975 [1973]).

[4] Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96 (1967): 8, 12.

[5] Ibid., 18.

inauguration address when he announced, "Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations."[6]

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that Bellah publicly supported Obama for the 2008 election.[7] In his endorsement, Bellah is especially drawn to Obama's deployment of "the language of Martin Luther King Jr. and William Sloane Coffin –that is, a language that expresses the dominant biblical concern for those most in need, a language that reminds us of our solidarity with all human beings."[8] Bespeaking the nature of Obama's political rise and testifying to the nature of information-spreading in contemporary American culture, Bellah first learned of Obama because of his speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, something millions watched on television and read about in papers, magazines, and online.

Viewing Obama through the lens of American civil religion aids in a fuller understanding of how civil religion continues to function in American culture and the relatively central place it still holds in American political life. From a communitarian perspective, Obama's demonstration of civil religious ideals and deployment of civil religious language show that this new phase of history argues in favor of Bellah's understanding. Obama himself has employed it, at times, such as when, prior to his run for president, he wrote of "the need to think in terms of 'thou' and not just 'I'" that "resonates in religious congregations all across the country" and his belief that "democracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values."[9] Such thoughts are at home with Bellah's supposition that American civil religion is "an understanding of the American experience in the light of ultimate and universal reality."[10]

An important part of Obama's place in American civil religion is his relationship to the African-American church tradition. R. Stephen Warner has asserted that Obama's public disagreement with the Rev. Jeremiah Wright in 2008 was a teachable moment in understanding African-American Christianity,

American civil religion, and Obama's ongoing religious pilgrimage.[11] Tellingly, the Wright-Obama episode played out in the media, with Wright drawing intense media attention for a brief time. One could barely turn on any of the major media outlets without encountering some kind of reference to what Obama's relationship to Wright meant for his presidential bid. However, few (with the possible exception of Bill Moy-

---

[6] Barack Obama, "President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address," January. 20, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/inaugural-address/

[7] See Bellah, "Yes He Can: The Case for Obama," *Commonweal*, March 14, 2008, 8-9.

[8] Ibid., 9.

[9] Obama, "One Nation . . . Under God?" *Sojourners,* November 26, 2006, 43-47.

[10] Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," 18.

[11] R. Stephen Warner, "Civil Religious Revival," *Religion in the News* 11, no. 1 (2008), http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/csrpl/RINVol11No1/Ci vilreligiousrevival.htm.

ers), asked what the relationship meant for Americans' understanding of themselves. However, Ellul's concept of the sacred supplies an appropriate category for which to conduct this line of inquiry. For Ellul, in the post-Christian world, the sacred, among other things, is embodied in a person and is, therefore, incarnate.[12] Moreover, the incarnate one "is not in himself the point of reference of the entire world order, but he is the point of reference for all the people, to show them how they should act, how they should appear, and how they should behave toward the sacred."[13] In other words, the incarnate one is the chief repository of all that is sacred and the prime human example of it. The furor over the Wright episode shows that, when it comes to American politics, something of a sacred nature is at play in the American popular consciousness and arrives at its status through the consumption of mass media.

Ellul's Political Religion

Such a notion of the sacred takes on special significance in Ellul's analysis of political religion. For Ellul, simply, "Politics has become a religion."[14] And it is the kind of religion that produces a "sacred" hero who is the "complete model" and "consecrated by a god."[15] In Ellul's assessment, the pantheon of heroes in political religion throughout history serve, among other things, "as examples of the life approved by God."[16] This has remained the case in the modern age because "there is . . . unquestionably the need for moral examples to which to refer."[17] Implicit in this is an arrangement by which the examples set themselves out to a public eager to grasp them as such.

Addressing the nature of public figures, Ellul hints that the exploration of political religion is at home in the context of popular culture. In a somewhat tangential analysis, Ellul considers the way celebrities delve into political religion to become part of the heroization that pop culture attaches to political figures. He explains, "Thanks to political religion, the stars are finding their place. They are at last having a part in serious worship."[18] The early stages of the 21st century make it appear that Ellul was on to something. As the carriers of the cultural myths are ever-commodified, the amalgamation of celebrity, politics, and the sacred increasingly shapes what it means to be an American. Perhaps this is why it is par for the course when Obama makes an appearance on the *Tonight Show* or *The View*. Maybe he is concerned about poll numbers and the seemingly endless cycles of elections; however, he also may be living out how the sacred expresses itself through pop culture to reach people in a contemporary milieu.

---

[12] Ellul, 55-56.
[13] Ibid., 56.
[14] Ibid., 170.
[15] Ibid., 173.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 175.

Obama and Pop Culture

With Obama, it can be argued that celebrity and political religious heroism collide. His election made global headlines, prompting Americans of various political persuasions to proclaim him as some version of the American dream and representative of numerous American ideals. If Ellul is right about the sacred, then Obama's pop culture presence argues in favor for Bellah's original interpretation of civil religion. After all, "hope" and "change that we can believe in," traditional civil religious ideals, became not just rallying cries but fashion statements festooned on clothing, plastered on bumpers, and made trendy by Shepard Fairey's artwork. As the campaign commodified ideals, Obama supporters responded, "Yes we can."

Further, looking to Obama's demonstration of American civil religion in the age of "2.0," one cannot ignore Ellul's thoughts on technology, particularly in examining Obama's inkling toward JFK-like policies promoting America's technological innovation and global leadership. For Ellul, technology supplies modernity with a utopian narrative that supports "faith in man, in history, and in science."[19] Such a narrative naturally has implications for political religion in Ellul's analysis, particularly where, by narrative, "the technological effort is in perfect conformity with the will of God."[20] From there, technology comes to sacralize the society, becoming "the center of the new sacred"[21] just as it becomes the hope-giving, faithdeserving force of liberation one would expect from the "god who saves."[22]

Thus, building on Ellul, it stands to reason that what is sacred in contemporary American culture relates to its technology. And the technology that features so prominently in the lives of so many contemporary Americans, and so is a means by which the sacred is carried to them, is the technology of consumption. The mass-oriented nature of the various devices that increasingly define Americans' existence has not been lost on Obama. To be sure, Obama takes technology seriously, particularly forms of technology that resonate most emphatically in popular culture. His campaign and administration have made use of social media, e-mail, online videos, and other such instruments like no previous U.S. president. In turn, this has spawned a pop culture take on Obama's technophilia.[23] During the 2008 campaign, this presented a contrast that seemed to resonate in contemporary America, particularly in pop culture: the younger, tech-savvy Obama versus the older, laggardly McCain, who reputedly did not know how to use e-mail.[24]

To cite some examples: in late 2008, the pop culture world was all atwitter about whether Obama would keep his BlackBerry once he became president; a Facebook ap-

---

[19] Ibid., 117.

[20] Ibid., 37.

[21] Ibid., 64.

[22] Ibid., 73.

[23] See, e.g. Jeff Zeleny, "Lose the BlackBerry? Yes He Can, Maybe," *New York Times*, sec A, November 16, 2008.

[24] See, e.g. Richard Sisk, "Mac that can't Email?" *New York Daily News*, 18, September 13, 2008.

plication lets users "Obamaize" their profile photos to look like Fairey's "Hope" posters and stickers; and Obama's weekly address appears on the Web in high definition video with links for viewers to easily share with others through various electronic channels. These are also examples of technology as mass-produced consumer commodities: BlackBerry-like devices are

ubiquitous; the Facebook application allows for personalized customization (including replacing the word "Hope" with any word the user desires); and the White House's online videos are intended and encouraged to be widely distributed and consumed (watched). Other examples abound as well and further point to Obama as the mass-market technology politician *par excellence.* However, in many ways, he is the longitudinal extension of JFK, who used television to his advantage and was filmed and photographed frequently for a land of eager media consumers. In Ellul's words it would seem that, much like with JFK's command of America's mass media, Obama's utilization of numerous carriers of pop culture shows a familiarity with "the liturgy of the cult of consumer goods."[25]

Technology in Civil Religion

It would seem, too, that the current place of American civil religion is shaped by the contours of how technology shapes what is sacred and how that, in turn, focuses the narrative of American exemplariness at home and on the world stage. No doubt Obama's use of and affinity for personal and consumer-oriented technology demonstrates his confident foray into sacred pop culture territory, but his 2010 State of the Union address demonstrates his concern for America's international technological prowess, once again resonating with Ellul's consideration of how the sacred functions in the seemingly secular realm of politics. During the address, Obama makes reference to America as the world's technological power and to the threat America's position faces from burgeoning technological powers across the globe. In doing so, he employs civil religious language to sacralize a technology-as-savior narrative about America's financial crisis and future viability of superpower status. For example, the address contends that America needs to re-establish itself as an economic and technological superpower because countries like China, India, and Germany "aren't playing for second place. They're putting more emphasis on math and science. They're rebuilding their infrastructure. They are making serious investments in clean energy because they want those jobs."[26] Obama goes on to explain, "I do not accept second place for the United States of America" before extolling the virtues of American innovation and high-tech education.[27]

---

[25] Ellul, 195.

[26] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President in State of the Union Address," January 27, 2010, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-
office/remarks-president-state-union-address

[27] Ibid.

Obama's 2011 address strikes similar themes, calling for national investment in education, infrastructure, and clean energy through metaphorical reference to the gold standard of technological competitiveness, Sputnik.[28] What this shows is that, from Obama's perspective, technology carries ideals worthy of national moral concern, the kind of which is at home in an American civil religious context.

Yet, anyone moderately interested in American popular culture, or at least its middle-brow elements, will note that *New York Times* columnist Thomas L. Friedman has been making those same arguments for years in newspapers, books, on the Web, and on television talk shows. And, interestingly enough, where Friedman makes a case for American investment in green technological innovation, he often makes reference to JFK's civil religious crusade to put a human on the moon before the Soviets. For example, in a 2006 column, Friedman refers to energy independence as this generation's "moon shot."[29] And just as JFK's moon shot changed the face of pop culture in the 1960s, with NASA regularly coming into homes through television, so too, Obama's efforts to reach the public through various electronic media daily put his presidency on Americans' laptops and mobile devices. The important point with all of this is that it appears in mass-consumed form through mass-distributed channels of popular culture and, thereby, mass-oriented carriers of contemporary American culture's beliefs and values.[30]

Such mass-oriented politics is consistent with Ellul's analysis of political religion's call for absoluteness in which "everything is political" and "politics is the only serious activity."[31] It is arguable as to how far Ellul's take extends into the analysis of Obama, civil religion, popular culture, but what makes it worthy of attention is that it plays out and reaches Americans through media channels, most notably television, talk radio, and the Web. As with other aspects of Obama's candidacy and presidency, what distinguishes him from his political opponents is fodder for media distribution and Americans' consumption. Arguably, that has been true for every U.S. president, with developments in radio then television then the Internet amplifying the reality as the populace gets more and more "wired" (or "wi-fied," as it were). Yet, Obama presents a different case. For one thing, his election, for obvious reasons, remains historic. Importantly, it was the kind of history-making event that is at home in the civil religious

---

[28] Obama, "Remarks by the President in the State of the Union Address," January 25, 2011, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-state-union-address. It is worth noting that, with the 2011 address, the White House rolled out an interactive, social media-esque website for the occassion.

[29] See, e.g. Friedman, "Bush's Waterlogged Halo," *New York Times*, sec. A, September 21, 2005; "A Green Dream in Texas," *New York Times*, sec. A, January 18, 2006; "Will Pigs Fly?" *New York Times*, sec. A, February 3, 2006.

[30] Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that during composition of this article, the White House Twitter page featured the following "tweet": "Obama: 'we can't... let China race ahead to create the clean energy jobs & industries of the future.'"

[31] Ellul, 199.

context, with Obama supporters and critics alike drawing on "shining city on a hill" language to characterize its meaning for America's position in the world.[32]

Of course, Obama's election is also the kind of history that is at home in the narrative of JFK's social vision, arguably because of its civil religious dimensions. But what makes this all the more powerful is that it is also at home in Ellul's understanding that what a culture holds sacred always has an embodied, tangible persona that lends itself to some form of tactile, consumptive apprehension. In contemporary American culture, that embodiment cannot happen without pop culture, which not only tells the passive observer about a culture's beliefs and values but also tells the culture what is believable and what is valuable. Ultimately, no matter how deep and abstract the meaning of Obama to American civil religion gets, the basic pattern reaches and teaches Americans through popular culture.

Obama's political rise and pop culture status demonstrate at least two things relative to the study of religion, particularly as it relates to contemporary American culture: a) Ellul's concept of political religion has continued to present helpful analytical tools despite major changes in global politics since he published *The New Demons*, and b) Bellah's civil religion thesis has wide applicability in grasping the religious nature of American culture. However, what makes all of this come into view is understanding how studying religion and pop culture yields a deeper, more thoroughgoing understanding of culture. Applying Ellul's analysis of the sacred and political religion to Obama's still-developing place in American civil religious history shows that, potentially, the civil religion thesis needs to include an understanding that the sacred in contemporary American culture has an imminent, embodied presence to go along with its more transcendentally abstract ideals. No where is that more apparent than in popular culture, where Obama, like so many others in the public spotlight, is part of the mass-distributed media package the American public continuously consumes.

Conclusion

Perhaps it is fitting, then, that Obama's presence in pop culture is the window through which to explore these civil religious possibilities. After all, part of what makes him an embodiment of the sacred in an Ellul-like sense is that he is a living example of the transcendental ideals Bellah isolated in his original piece. In other words, a study of Bellah's work helps to make sense of why so many Americans rallied around Obama in the 2008 election. Yet there is another sense in which there exists a "something else" at play with Obama's overall status in the popular American consciousness, and that something else comes into focus in how Obama's persona enters the realm of pop culture through mass-consumed media avenues. If it does not seem identifiably religious to the average American (and it most likely does not), it only stresses how

---

[32] See Kevin Rafferty, "Audacious Dream No Other Nation can Offer," *South China Morning Post*, 13, November 7, 2008.

the sacred moves and functions implicitly in contemporary American culture. As Ellul puts it, "The pomp and exaltation are gone. Everything turns horizontal, direct and human, but no less religious."[33] Though it may seem just a part of the way things are, the "no less religious" is where the study of religion explores the way people learn about reality and their place in it. So too, at the intersection of pop culture, civil religion, and the American sacred, one begins to make sense of Ellul's claim that national socialism, Marxism, and American democracy all play the same roles.[34] A culture's narratives and what it holds sacred have a mutually reinforcing relationship with another, a relationship that shapes and guides the culture regardless of who is cognizant of it.

References

Bellah, Robert N. "Civil Religion in America." *Daedalus* 96 (1967): 1-21.

- –. "Yes He Can: The Case for Obama." *Commonweal*, March 14, 2008, 8-9.

Ellul, Jacques. *The New Demons.* Trans. C. Edward Hopkin. New York: Seabury, 1975 [1973].

Friedman, Thomas, L. "Bush's Waterlogged Halo," *New York Times*, September 21, 2005, sec. A.

- –. "A Green Dream in Texas," *New York Times*, January 18, 2006, sec. A.

- –. "Will Pigs Fly?" *New York Times*, February 3, 2006, sec. A.

Obama, Barack. "One Nation . . . Under God?" *Sojourners,* November 26, 2006, 43-47.

- –. "President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address," January 20, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/inaugural-address/.

- –. "Remarks by the President in the State of the Union Address," January 27, 2010, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-state-union-address.

- –. "Remarks by the President in the State of the Union Address," January 25, 2011, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-state-union-address.

Rafferty, Kevin. "Audacious Dream No Other Nation can Offer," *South China Morning Post*, November 7, 2008, 13.

Sisk, Richard. "Mac that can't E-mail?" *New York Daily News*, September 13, 2008, 18.

---

[33] Ellul, 195.

[34] Ibid., 202.

Warner, Stephen R. "Civil Religious Revival." *Religion in the News* 11, no. 1 (2008), http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/csrpl/RINVol11No1/Ci vilreligiousrevival.htm.

Zeleny, Jeff. "Lose the BlackBerry? Yes He Can, Maybe," *New York Times*, Nov 16, 2008, sec. A.

Snap, Crackle, Pop Christianity: Discerning the Church in the Age of Entertainment by Stephanie Bennett

Stephanie Bennett is Associate Professor of Communication and Media Studies at Palm Beach Atlantic University in West Palm Beach, Florida. Her doctoral dissertation from Regent University was framed by Ellul, "The Disappearance of Silence: A Dialectical Exploration of the Interpersonal Implications of Personal Mobile Media as Viewed through the Lens of Jacques Ellul's La Technique."

Glitz, glamour, and the unmistakable air of celebrity - -the room is thick with it. The air is electric, pulsing with expectancy. Blue lights stream from behind the stage setting the tone for what is to come. Supersized screens descend from each corner and the crowd quiets as the gentle swell of an electric guitar rises to meet its match in a reverberating bass. Then, with the sizzle of a swish cymbal and a sudden crack of the snare drum it all begins.

Welcome to Church 2.0, the 21st century version of what was once humbly known as the Body of Christ. No longer broken, battered, bathed in blood and the robes of righteousness, this version is brimming with promises of financial prosperity, a seamless transition from darkness to light, and all of the wonders of technology that will take us from boredom to bedlam and back again. Just click and you're sure to find an edifying sermon pod cast, a small group of believers exchanging text online to discuss eschatology, or a twitter feed that offers scripture-of-the-day. It's all there in whatever mobile computing network one might choose. Only one problem: *the community of faith is absent.* All of these popular technological experiences remove congregants from the actual presence of other human beings.

In many ways popular techno-culture is paving the way for a virtual church. Online churches and longdistance prayer groups are making up increasingly greater portions of those who practice their faith each day.[35] Some examples of this are websites that

---

[35] Hundreds - even thousands - of websites offering "online church" are available to "join" or visit. Clicking into prayer, sermons, and the sacraments is now becoming commonplace. One example is the CBN.com Prayer and Counseling Center. 2010. [Retrieved June 19, 2010]

http: //www .cbn.com/SpiritualLife/prayerandcounseli ng/.Another is the Alpha Church, where one may get baptized or receive holy communion. For more details, click on this link:

http://www.alphachurch.org/. To "participate" in worship, click here:

http: //www .alphachurch.org/worshipmusic 10.htm [retrieved June 24, 2010].

allow believers to choose an avatar so they may simulate the experience of receiving the Eucharist.[36] Other instances involve the online presence of traditional churches where members may pay a tithe or offering through a secured web portal.

Music, long a mainstay of worshippers in every expression of the church throughout its 2000 year history, has taken a decisive leap into the world of entertainment. Since the inception of the Gospel Music Association (GMA) in 1964, the place of popular music has moved from the peripheral purview of a concert-going youth culture to a primary focus of activity in a growing number of contemporary church settings.[37] Still many other expressions of the local church blend with cultural goods to include the use of media and technology for ministerial purposes such as evangelism and teaching. Powerpoint, YouTube, celebrity speakers, television commercials, streaming video, the simulcasting of sermons to satellite congregations -even interacting in virtual worlds such as Second Life - all these are finding a place in churches throughout the West.[38] Even within the walls of more traditional churches –Evangelical, Protestant, and Roman Catholic, alike –such artifacts of popular culture are becoming the norm. These are the crossroads - a junction on the highway to heaven where religion and popular culture meet –the Christian version, that is, power-packed with all that is relevant, slick, and efficient. *This* is the Church in the Age of Entertainment.

Before we advance any further, let my bias be clear: It is completely unfair to say that edgy music and a light show cancel the core meaning of the church. It is equally unacceptable to dismiss the need to share the Gospel message in the vernacular of the day, or to disparage well-intentioned means. Yet, what exactly do these elements accomplish aside from providing the *relevance* that is regaled in so many churches throughout America today? This is an important question to ask, for although the blending of popular culture and religion has significant historical precedence, the contemporary melding of the two is creating an entirely new environment in which Christians throughout the globe meet, transmogrifying Christianity, both in the way it is perceived by those outside the church, and altering the behavior, perception, –even the very definition of the church - for those within its walls. Although the Church is largely defined today as an institution, for the purposes of clarity we will interchange-

---

[36] See Savior.org for details. Managed by the Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters, Philadelphia, PA. 1916. [Retrieved June 19, 2010]http://www.savior.org/devotions.htm.This group cites papal authority in going to the Net to function in an ongoing virtual adoration of the Eucharist.

[37] The Gospel Music Association (GMA) recognizes a wide variety of genres: urban. pop, rock, Rap/Hip Hop, bluegrass, alternative, and traditional Gospel music. All of these genres have found their way into contemporary church settings.

[38] Developed by Linden Research Inc. Second Life is the trade name for a virtual environment for social interaction.

http://secondlife.com/. LifeChurch.tv wss one of the first organizations to set up virtual church in the popular game site, Second Life. [retrieved June 19, 2010]

http://swerve.lifechurch.tv/2007/03/12/lifechurchtv- has-a-second-life-church-campus/.

ably describe the church with several biblical terms: Family of God, Body of Christ, and *Ekklesia*, or community of faith.[39]

Jacques Ellul, twentieth century philosopher, social theorist, and professor of law and the history of institutions, wrote much that pertained to the intersection of religion and popular culture. Although his area of scholarly focus was primarily the political and religious climate of the 14th and 15th centuries, Ellul advanced a connection between the various modes of propaganda and the encroachment of a technological society into the church in the 20th century. He saw the same forces of propaganda and power at work in the Church as are evident within the wider context of societal institutions. It is this threat of technological tyranny that Ellul explicates in *The Technological Society* along with many of his books in his theological track such as *The Presence of the Kingdom, The Subversion of Christianity*, and *The Meaning of the City*, each of which serve to inform this article, a work that seeks to uncover implications of the blending of popular culture and the church. To do so, we will explore Ellul's understanding of the place –or mission –of the church in the earth. Then, addressing the emergence of popular culture in the church we will briefly discuss the metaphorical meaning of "the city" and ponder several questions pertaining to popular culture in the church, namely: 1) how might such a blending serve to advance or detract from the mission of the church, and, 2) what (if any) significance does the blurring of popular culture with the church have to do with the furtherance of socio-spiritual interaction among those in the church?

Presence of the Kingdom

What follows is not a comprehensive assessment of the place of popular culture in the church, nor a complete treatment of Ellulian thought on the matter, but a preliminary exposition that is offered in the spirit of exploration and investigation. It is my fervent hope that these ideas would invite dialogue and help to advance the important questions that need to be asked. Let us begin, then, by engaging with perhaps the most ecclesiastically-focused work in Ellul's corpus, *The Presence of the Kingdom.*

This is Ellul's self-described, "little book, short and easy on the presence of the Christian in the world" (1989, ix). Here, he offers a description of the church and its role in society, stating that "a Christian is a 'sign' of the reality of God's action, [. . .] a sheep in the midst of wolves, [...which is] why it is essential that Christians should be very careful not to be wolves in the spiritual sense - that is, people who try to dominate others." (pp 4-5). As a gathered people, the church functions as a living witness of sacrifice, - -the sacrifice of Christ and its outworking in the midst of life together. Herein, the church occupies a very important place in the world, one

---

[39] *Ekklesia* is the Greek term used by Paul of Tarsus to describe those gathering to worship. Literally, "gathering" or "assembly," it refers to those called out of a larger body to assembly together for a specific purpose. In the case of the New Testament, this purpose was to gather to declare the message of Jesus Christ, worship together, and share in the *koinonia. Kononia* is the Greek word used to express kinship and close, shared, life together.

that does not strive to live a life informed by "rules, principles, or slogans," but lives by a distinctly Christian ethic that is rooted *in Christ, himself* (1989, p.12). The ability to walk in this ethic as a people is beyond the efforts and strivings of human beings; it necessitates living rather by the *life* and redemptive work of Jesus Christ (p. 5). In fact, this life is decidedly agonistic, that is, it is informed by sacrifice and decisive conflict. It is a life that makes a complete departure from the "will of death" and "suicidal tendencies" of the world (1989, p. 19). Thus, we begin to see the fine line that appears between using (or refusing) the propagandistic means of media saturation and consumer-driven techniques that are embedded in popular culture to advance the message of the Gospel.

Although he does not consider the book theology, *The Presence of the Kingdom* is one of the most accessible among his theological works, the essence of which involves what Ellul calls "the situation of the Christian in the world," an ongoing conundrum that finds its application in numerous ways throughout the centuries. What is this conundrum?

To start, it involves individual recognition that the Christian is actually living in two worlds; one, the world of means and techniques, a world in which capitulation to structures of power and organizational efficiency is mandatory if one wants to survive, and the other, a spiritual life of transcendence in the midst of the material world. This is an existence in which the Christian fully engages in life but recognizes its temporal nature. Pursuit of this life "in Christ" involves wrangling with this tension rather than acquiescing to a universe of means. This tension is dialectical, one that necessitates the ability (and willingness) to deal with the challenges one must face as an active participant in this world while simultaneously understanding that Christians "are not of this world, but belong to the Kingdom of Heaven. This quandary also involves the ability to mitigate the institutional challenges and the responsibility and freedom of individual believers. By no means does this infer that the church is to remove itself from the everyday affairs of society, rather:

Christians are not meant to live together in closed groups, refusing to mix with other people. The Christian community must never be a closed body. Thus if the Christian is necessarily *in* the world, he is not *of* it. This means that his thought, his life, and his heart are not controlled by the world, and do not depend upon the world, for they belong to another Master. Thus, since he belongs to another Master, the Christian has been sent into this world by this Master, and his communion with his Master remains unbroken, in spite of the world in which he has to live. (1989, p 2).

Essentially, this is what Ellul terms the situation of the Christian in the world. Although he approaches "the situation" from several angles, we will deal primarily his thoughts regarding the need for a "revolutionary Christianity."

Revolutionary Christianity

For Ellul, "revolutionary Christianity" represents a type of faith and presence in the world that does not get swept up into alliance with politics, religion, or any other human system or institution. Rather, it is a Christianity that is distinctively embedded

in the community of faith, thoughtful, and serious about its identification with Jesus Christ as Head, Shepherd, and Master. It is clear that by using the term "revolutionary Christianity," Ellul does not intend to stir a physical revolt or war against the government, nor does he imply that the situation of the Christian in the world necessitates becoming a "culture warrior" or warrior of any sort.[40] Instead, he likens the place of both Christians and the church in the world to what he terms the "revolutionist position" in history suggesting that this position is vastly different from conformists in the past or in the present. To be a revolutionary, Ellul claims, is not the normal course of history. It involves an individual deciding not to follow the beaten path, but to exercise free will in such a way that "he pits against all the constraints and conventions which surround him." (p. 30). For the Christian, this position is an act of "superhuman effort for the sake of a hope which is beyond himself," a position that confronts tacit religious thought with the reality of a living, indwelling God who is active in the world (1989, p. 29).

Contrary to what it might appear at first blush, Ellul's revolutionary Christianity is not wholly anarchistic, but a type of faith that has a peculiar flavor –a faith that is situated in presence rather than tradition. Much more than an idea or a metaphor, revolutionary Christianity is a daily reality; it is a way of being in the world without succumbing to its ways. Citing Paul's Letter to the Romans (12:2-4), Ellul describes the relationship of the Christian to society thusly: "Be not conformed to this world," writes the apostle, "but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. . . ." The importance of these two ideas - 'be not conformed' but 'be transformed' occupy much Ellulian thought. In fact, in terms of the church's presence in the earth, they are two sides to the same coin –ideas that carry over into every aspect of life in the church, from its mode of operation, methods of evangelism and very idea of ministry to its infrastructure, the way it is perceived by others, and its primary function as witness or sign of the reality of God. How this manifests itself in contemporary ecclesial praxis is a major part of the dialectical conundrum embedded in the subject of popular culture and the church.

A prominent example of this problematic is the rash of business model materials, marketing strategies, and church growth consultants used in churches throughout the United States.[41] From Rick Warren and C. Peter Wagner to Jack Hayford and Robert Schuller, the implementation of marketing strategies for church growth and revenue

---

[40] Some 21st century pundits use this term as a means to express the need to return to more clear-cut traditional values. Others, theologians and opinion leaders such as Andy Crouch, Charles Colson, and others have framed the need for such a return as a fight or war to redeem culture. See details at: http://www.culture-making.com/about/andy crouch/ and "About us" at http://www.breakpoint.org/about-bp.

[41] Among the many examples of this trend is the following church growth consultancy business that promises to increase revenue and numbers. Earl B. Hall, professional coach and internet marketing. "How to Grow Your Ministry - church growth that works." June 7, 2010. [retrieved June 30, 2010]http://www. earlhall.net/internet-marketing/how-to -grow-your-ministry-church-growth-that-works/ For more examples, see also Ken Godevenos, Accord Resolution Services; 2010. [retrieved June 30, 2010]http://accordconsulting.com/?page id= 158. Also of note are the following websites:

increase is nothing new, but using language and methods that combine marketing models with church life is a trend that has found much traction and seems to becoming the norm in the 21st century. An outgrowth of utilizing these techniques is that the church is distracted from its primary function as *a sign* of the active presence of Christ in the world to something that more closely resembles a business venture, social club, or nonprofit charity.

Another example is the traditional role of a single pastor/parish priest whose primary duties are preparation and dissemination of a sermon or homily every Sunday morning. Without detracting from the other valuable socio-spiritual duties taken on by clergy it must be noted that this monologic model diminishes the laity's responsibility. Because of the long tradition of this model, many churches have become comfortable with a type of pastoral care that values institutional organization over mutuality. The result may be unintended, but adopting organizational models of the business world indubitably fosters hierarchical leadership with "top-down" authority structures rather than a mode of operation that functions even remotely like a family. As it continues, Christians are faced each Sunday with the false idea that the pastor and the building are the most significant aspects of the church. For Ellul, this makes the role of the layman particularly significant and more difficult than the clergy's role, for, unlike the paid clergy member, the lay person:

[. . .] in particular, cannot be separated from the world, [. . .] for the Christian is not free to lead his life as he would like to do, so also the Christian layman has to submit to a mechanical solidarity which hinders him from playing the drama of his faith. He is part of the whole body of humankind . . . (1989, p 6).

Implications of the layman's role in the Body of Christ are many; it is a subject about which Ellul has much to say. However, the layman's role in the church is beyond the scope of this essay. Instead, we come to the idea of the City. Just what *does* Ellul mean by "the city?"

The City

For Ellul, the city is symbolic of all that is amiss in the world, from the looming evils of war, organized crime, prostitution, economic injustice, and violence of every ilk, to the mundane repetitiveness of traffic snarls, listlessness, avarice, greed and just plain, old, human boredom. In Ellulian thought, all of this corruption begins with "the city's curse," which stems from man's distinctive step outside of fellowship with God in the Garden, in the Genesis narrative.[42] Writing about this in one of his most riveting works, *The Meaning of the City,* Ellul sought to bring insight to the cyclical struggles of the Church. In contradistinction to the Garden's representation of a life

---

http://doubleyourchurchattendance.com/?gclid=CIvO kf2WyKICFQHGsgodkhBk5w, and

http://www. churchcentral. com/article/T ranslating- Church-Growth-theory-into-action

[42] To understand his concept of the city in greater depth Ellul draws readers' attention to the beginning of recorded history to locate one of the earliest examples of this curse. Here, in the book of Genesis we see Cain, son of Adam and Eve, who built the first city, a place that he named after his son, Enoch . Cain was cast out of God's presence because he murdered his brother, Abel, and instead of

of organic splendor and vitality, the city is symbolic of a life dependent upon the tools of humanity's own making, and life outside of fellowship with God.

Strategies and plans associated with the city's curse carry over into the church. In particular, when the church mimics the administrative necessities of the city it sets itself up for weaknesses and decline. For Ellul, the city is always a place that is subject to "the sociological claws governing administration," a situation he describes as having dominance in the city.[43] When these "claws" embed themselves into the church the result is disastrous. One ongoing example of this disaster is when the church mimics the administrative necessities of the city and treats parishioners as constituents or clients rather than family members. Rather than nurturing a life-giving communion with God and each other this often leads to dehumanizing effects on personhood. Instead of functioning as the "light of the world" pointing the way to wholeness and salvation, the church reduces itself to a mere religious organization incapable of nourishing the "life abundant" Jesus promised his disciples..

In positing "the city" as the symbolic "construction of man," Ellul describes it as a place where people attempt to divest themselves of the quandaries and uncertainties of the human condition - of all that has resulted from separation from God in the Garden. Rather than flowing in the fecundity of human relationships, life in the city foists the values of the world on its inhabitants. Like Cain, people are drawn to the city in hopes of finding greater freedom and comfort –a place to call home, a place where life outside the presence of God might be tolerable.

Similar to the association with popular culture, the blending of politics with religion has also been highly influential in reaping a disastrous return. In fact, the infusion of politics into the *ekklesia* represents a defining moment of change for the Church, establishing a means by which the Gospel was no longer primarily spread by the witness of a community of people caring for each other in Jesus' Name, rather this same community coming together by governmental edict. This change did not occur slowly, over many centuries. Rather, once Constantine was converted to Christianity it became not only safer for Christians to express themselves in public, but politically correct. When, in 323 A.D. the Emperor Constantine mandated that the pagan temples become houses of Christian worship, the newly converted believers were expected to meet each Sunday in a centralized location. Ellul speaks directly to this transformation of the faith when it morphed from a practice that centered in a living, active community of participation and "word" to a sacralized building:

It is evident that when temples dedicated to the gods of Greece and Rome were confiscated and baptized as Christian churches, the very architectural structure would

---

humbling himself and acknowledging his evil deed, the son of Eve determined to find a way to survive on his own. Cain, therefore, continued the separation from his creator which began in the Garden, and relying on his own natural resources continued - in a sense –to eat of the fruit of his own knowledge of "what is good."

[43] An interesting correlation with Ellul's view is found in the New Testament in Hebrews 13:12-14, which reads: "Jesus also suffered and died outside the city's gate in order that He might purify and

remind people forcibly of the ancient religion, for example, by the division into a sacred place and a "profane' place (*profanum*, 'before the sanctuary') (1989, 61).

This seemingly small change in venue created sweeping changes in early church praxis, moving the "place" of worship to a specific locale rather than a mobile, life-sharing people. The change created a new environment for church life, redefining it as place instead of "a people" or "a family" gathering around the living Word (i.e., Jesus Christ). The church now became "a building," and the gathering of believers became an event rather than "a life" shared together.[44] Over time, what was deemed holy or pious came to be associated with what could be seen, was separate, distinct from culture, and objectified.[45]

The significance of this architectural change must not be minimized. Prior to Constantine and the external and often propitiously convenient conversions to Christianity, early believers gathered house-to-house. Ellul refers to this period of Church history as "primitive Christianity" and explains that:

The first Christians had no particular reverence for the places where believers met and where they heard God's word and celebrated the sacraments. But once such places became splendid imperial buildings and the theory of the sacraments changes, these places, now radically different from others, were invested with the beliefs that appertained to pagan temples. God was *especially* present in such places (1989, p. 61).

Now, instead of the mystery of the Gospel, which was, as Paul described to the local believers gathering in Colossae as "Christ in you"[46] the living, organic expression of the community of faith, the church became demystified, formalized.[47] Whereas, the faith of those who followed Jesus as the Christ was initially based on Christ as person and *topos,* now, new elements of paganism emerged as the place of worship shifted from the "living temple" embodied by each believer to a particular building, or what soon became known as the "house of God."[48] This occurrence Ellul refers to as part of "the mutation." As it takes place in the church "[t]he sense of the sacred thus reappears. What is more,

---

consecrate the people through the shedding of His own blood, and set them apart as holy - for God. Let us go forth, from all that would prevent us, to Him outside the camp . . . For here we have no permanent city, but we are looking for the one which is to come."

[44] As Winston Churchill wrote: "We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us," so the structural organization of the city shapes the church as it takes root. Winston Churchill, British House of Commons, Oct. 28, 1943.

[45] Ellul explains this exchange further when writing about the way the visible indemnifies the sacred. "the visible that characterizes the sacred makes a massive entry into the church, and in this way believers unwittingly take the path of paganism. The visual object is typical of the sacral world and very quickly becomes sacred itself" (SOC p. 65).

[46] The "you" here is plural. Paul was writing to a gathering of believers in Collosae, not an individual reader.

[47] Colossians 1: 20-27 Paul, the itinerant apostle/preacher is speaking to the church in Colossae. The "you" is plural, but often interpreted by those reading the Bible as indicative of the individual. When read in the correct context it is clear that Paul was directing his greetings and admonitions to the church as a people - a community - not a place.

[48] *Topos,* a Greek word meaning "place."

the church is now divided into two parts, like pagan temples. The more profane the other part, where there religious ceremony takes place, is for the priests"(1989, p. 61). And so we see, even from the beginnings of ecclesial history, there was the tendency to bifurcate the Church and the wider culture, separating God's presence –what is holy - from his involvement in every aspect of life. A further exploration of this shift is called for if we are to gain insight to the subject of the church and its relation to popular culture.

In the early centuries of Christianity the Church functioned as vibrant community; after Constantine the move toward entrenched institutionalism became more apparent. For some historians this change is recorded as helpful to the expansion of the Christianity, but it so deeply changed the essence and concept of the church that it may more significantly be perceived as a near-fatal gash in the Body of Christ, for as Ellul explains, the "Christian God is a hidden God. Nor can any image of Jesus be preserved or imagined. We have here a religion of the Word alone, and Jesus is himself the totality of the Word, living and not ritualized." (1986, p. 59) This is not to say that ritual or pagan syncretism did not exist prior to the 4th century, rather that the movement away from meeting informally in individual domiciles represents one of the most significant changes, one that not only ushered in many changes in church praxis but also paved the way for the message of Jesus Christ to be presented in a skewed way. Religious acts of worship became increasingly associated with the building rather than with the message or the community. As Ellul describes, "To mark the fact that the church is a sacred place, people had to make certain gestures on entering, such as covering themselves, genuflecting, or sprinkling themselves with holy water. In such gestures we again see belief in the sacred" (1986, p. 62).

How this change in form and environment restructured church practice is a matter of history, but the way it reformulated thinking about the nature of the church and its definition is a matter that has been less noted. In the meantime, most *everything* changed. Whereas in primitive Christianity the Good News centered on the redemption of Christ and his central place in the midst of believers who gathered as his "body" and community of faith (Acts 2 - 4), in the fourth century the emphasis began to switch from redemption and *koinonia* to organization and place.[49] The church morphed from "a people" to "an event." The practice of allowing political influence to set the tone for the church in the fourth century was central to the change in the church's course. All of this is inextricably linked to a devastating mutation of the actual faith, not of the sort that Ellul finds necessary to becoming the sign or witness of the church. Today, popular culture is in a similar position as it is situated to set the tone for contemporary church praxis.

---

[49] *Kononia,* shared life together, was practiced throughout the first century as a way of life. This "shared life" was not always communal as it appeared to be in the early chapters of the book of Acts, but it did involve the *communion*, or coming together of the young Christians over shared meals and shared responsibility for the vibrancy of the church.

Popular Culture and the Church

Along with secular marketing strategies, business models, and corporate power structures of organizational management, popular culture has played an increasingly significant role in the church, one that often sets the tone and style for services and agenda. This has been evident in previous generations to some degree, but today –because media are pervasive and ubiquitous –the artifacts of popular culture have become more akin to a new language than merely tools to help disseminate the Gospel message. The language of popular culture creates an environment in which everything else is understood - including what it means to be a Christian. Media ecologist Peter Fallon discusses this inherent bias, explaining that "[. . .] different media impose upon the societies that make use of them different specific and identifiable - though frequently invisible - metaphysical 'frameworks' through which we understand ourselves, our lives, our societies, and our world." (2009. p. 24) Thus, in many ways, popular culture becomes the message itself.

The various rhetorics of popular culture present in church music, architecture, worship style, and leadership paradigms have long been aspects that influence church functioning, but are especially curious today because of the exponential way they are disseminated through mass media. The reach and influence of popular culture on people and institutions is magnified by an environment of digital media, and thusly require a good deal more critical analysis when considering their use in the church.

We can begin to see this as we look a bit more closely at the relatively recent trend of the melding of popular music with Christianity as the introduction of "Jesus music" in the 1960s.[50] Whereas "Jesus Music," and then contemporary Christian music (CCM), began as indigenous expressions of newfound faith associated with youth culture, the rock style soon found its way into the local churches and eventually morphed into what is currently called "contemporary worship."[51] Today, for many congregations "the music" is now synonymous with worship, the words being used interchangeably.[52] William Romanowski paints a vivid picture of this evolution, pointing to the way the popular music found entree into the church. "In the absence of a critical faith perspective that

---

[50] In the 1960s music became an influential force in the church and has since been known as CCM (Contemporary Christian Music) or CCW (Contemporary Christian Worship).

[51] The "CCM" term was apparently coined by the founder of *CCM Magazine*, a holy version of *Rolling Stone* just for Christians.

[52] Throughout civilization, music has served many communicational purposes, carrying the stories of families and tribes from generation to generation through whatever popular medium of the day. "Whether it is spoken, written, or sung, reiteration of the meta-narrative or "the story" of God's intervention with humanity plays a primary role in the formation of one's faith. When the message is embedded in as powerful a medium as popular music as it is in other expressions of popular culture such as film, television, radio, and literature and drama, the persuasive influence of the message is magnified. It may even be said that music becomes a language through which the Spirit can speak and a means by which tribes can communicate the sacred truths of their history with each other. Excerpted in part from: Bennett, Stephanie. "Contemporary Christian Music Goes Digital,." *Understanding Evangelical Media.* Eds. Q. Schultze and R. Woods. Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press.

shapes aesthetic and commercial ventures, CCM adopted the goals and strategies of the secular mainstream commercial market - the culture of celebrity and hyperbole, sensation, consumption, mass identification - and ultimately equated these with doing ministry"(p. 11). Popular music is but one example, but as the artifacts of popular culture appear in the church with increasing force increasing changes appear, ultimately in the framework through which the church understands itself.

Another example of this trend to adopt popular culture as a means to an end appears in the emergence of personal mobile computing. As digital devices become increasingly ubiquitous many local churches have adopted the programs and practices of digital culture But, just as architecture and music have altered the identity, mission, and perception of the church, the aforementioned expansion of the online church is creating an entirely new understanding of what it means *to be the church*. In one way, this expansion online may seem to disseminate the message with greater expediency and efficiency, but it also completely changes the meaning of the church as actual community of faith/family/body of Christ. Proponents of the online church point to the many ways the message of the Gospel can reach into the lives of those who might never step into a church building, but experiencing the church virtually also helps people avoid the messiness of human relationships. As much as this may seem desirable, without local interpersonal relationships the church becomes little more than another means to express one's individuality. A highly personal spirituality, something akin to a faith du jour, begins to emerge rather than presence and participation in a local community of faith. It may allow those who are physically disabled to enjoy sermons, prayer connection, and "discussion" from a distance but simultaneously relieves the responsibility for a local congregation to reach out to those in need of transport.

On the face of it, the infusion of popular culture into the church has some merit if the accepted view of the church is as an agent of societal change whose primary mission is evangelism. However, when that prevailing view is confronted by a more biblical view of the church as Body/Family/Community, popular culture does more than provide a persuasive draw or relevance. Essentially, the blending transforms the experience of the church into something that is far removed from its mission as faithful witness or sign.

Certainly, the changes that transformed the primitive Church into an institutionalized entity occurred over time, but the propensity to substitute form for function has notoriously been a part of every era in the ecclesiastical age. As well, the drive for rank, certainty, and structure has rarely been missing from the church. The desire for centralized, visible power among the people of God has been oppositional to the notion of divine leadership - even in the church -and this has been so since the beginning of recorded time. How does this relate to the infusion of popular culture in the church? Precisely in that the values of "the city" are in direct juxtaposition to the values of the Kingdom of God, and as the church continues to opt for efficiency, power, and relevance, it will have them, along with all the other ills that are attached to survival in the city. And so, as consumer-driven values grow in prominence within the walls of the

church more people may be drawn to visit, and even declare that they are Christians, but what they are receiving is often far removed from the pure Gospel.

Understanding Ellul's stance on the Kingdom of God and applying his metaphor of the city one might see that being part of the *ekklesia* of God has more to do with presenting an alternative way of life than being relevant or approachable to the wider culture. Rather than living in the chains of "the city," Christians are called to live differently. How so? Simply, the church is called to "love one another" and in that love and mutuality, walk in freedom from the powers and structures that produce institutionalized mentalities in the world.[53] Key to understanding this radical call is the importance of grappling with the fact that all the violence, corruption, and oppression that has been ever-present in 'the city' has no place *in* the church, that is, as a part of the church's government or organizational structure. The church, as totally separate from the world, exists to function in a way that is distinctively different from the competitive, money-seeking, power-tripping corruption of the world's systems, whether these values are ensconced in politics, a consumer economy, or the popular culture of the day. Yet, in understanding the decisive conflict associated with the "city's" moral and deathladen weight Ellul emphasizes the utter importance of the church's mission in the world to be fully present. He writes: "... it is by placing themselves at this point of contact that Christian can be truly 'present' in the world and can carry on effective social or political work, by the grace of God."(1989, p. 20). Essentially then, the church's form is not consistent with its primary function.

Summary

In dealing with the perplexities of our time many church leaders look to popular culture as the great equalizer - an aspect of life that is common to all, namely, a means of equalizing or leveling the field of engagement among Christians of such diverse background and belief. Seen as a means to engage those who are not believers and draw them into the community of faith, these leaders seem to have placed hope in the idea that because it is a commonplace, pop culture will have a harmonizing, coalescing effect. Using popular music, film, television programming, YouTube clips, and social media, the hope is that it will simply make the church relevant to a new generation. This may make much sense except for one thing: the artifacts of popular culture become so entwined with the message that they soon become the ground upon which Christians meet - that which they have in common instead of the true ground of the church, which is Christ. This is no small thing, for the centrality of Christ in the church is the key differentiator between social clubs, community organizations, and every other human association that is not the church.

---

[53] 1 John 4: 7-8 is one among many of the teachings of Christ that focuses the attention in the church to a call to love - not just "the world," but each other. In fact there are over fifty mentions of "one another" in the New Testament alone, each nudging the new believers in the first century to relate to one another in kindness, generosity and as a family. "Love one another, deeply from the heart..."

To be clear, my aim in this explication is not intended to thwart the church's engagement with the wider society through popular culture or deny its possible usefulness. Nor is this the tact taken by Ellul in his critical examination of the church as it intersects with the wider world. Rather, it is to uncover the rippling effects and unforeseen consequences of this approach; to create awareness that these techniques work like yeast to dislodge and distract the church from its core mission, which is primarily *to be* that family/body/community -sharing life together in the *ekklesia* - a gathering that is free from the demands of the city–free to be a sign and a witness to the wider society.

In these pages I have made no pretense to supply the reader with a comprehensive treatment of Ellulian thought regarding the church. Instead, grappling with several key Ellulian concepts I have aspired to "stir the pot" of contemporary ecclesial thinking about the relevance of popular culture, for the proponents of popular culture in the church fail to realize that as the music, film, poetry and the rest of popular culture make their way into normal church practice, these things become a new language, shaping, reforming, restructuring reality. This new reality is often antithetical to the organic nature of the church, placing focus on "fitting in" with the many media-driven cultural expectations rather than proclaiming a solution to the dullness and vanity of worldly pursuits. Ultimately, then, not only is popular culture mostly irrelevant to the church's mission, but its blurring with the church ultimately makes it even more difficult to discern the church in the midst of the world. Why? Because it is embedded in the structure of power that mimics that of corporate America, celebrity, entertainment, and the market (in general) that makes the church about "being relevant" rather than "being family." Without the family/body/community foundation of the church all else built upon it is doomed to crumble. The church, like salt "loses its savor" and ceases to be that faithful witness to a different quality of life, the life "in Christ" that Ellul so avidly proposes.

Escape from the city is no small task. As the overlap between religion and pop culture becomes more entrenched, the differences between the two become increasingly indiscernible. If the church is truly all about the number of bodies in the pews, expansion of the property, the size of the sanctuary, and the "reach" of the pastor's voice, then using the artifacts of popular culture as a mechanism to attain these goals may work. But, if the mission of the church is to remain more closely aligned with the biblical metaphors of body, family, a community of faith, the artifacts of popular culture will not - cannot - serve as the glue that holds the church together in cultural relevance.

References

Bennett, Stephanie (2008). "Contemporary Christian Music Goes Digital," in Quentin J. Schultze and Robert H. Woods, Jr., eds., *Understanding evangelical media: The Changing Face of Christian Communication* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

Christians, Clifford. (2005) "Ellul as Theologian in Counterpoint," in Lum, C. (2005). *Perspectives in Culture, Technology, and Communication;* _ p. 127

Dawn, Marva J. (2006). *The Sense of the call.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmann's.

_____ . (2003). *Unfettered Hope.* Louisville, KY: John Knox Press.

Ellul, Jacques. "On the Cultural and Social Factors Influencing Church Division." *Ecumenical Review.* Vol. 24: 3, April 1952, pp. 269-75.

_____. (1994). Seeing and Hearing: Prolegomena, pp. 120-125. In Anderson, R., Cissna, K. & Arnett, R., (Eds.) *The reach of dialogue.* NJ: Hampton Press.

_____. (1989). *The presence of the kingdom.* Helmers & Howard Publishing; 2nd edition. March 19, 1989.

_____. (1986). The *subversion of Christianity* Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

_____. (1985). *The humiliation of the word.* (Trans. Hanks, J. M.) Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

_____. (1981). *Perspectives on our age. Jacques Ellul speaks on his life and work.* Willem H. Vanderburg, (ed.) Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

_____ . (1981). "On Dialogue," in Christians, C.G. & Van Hook, J. (Eds.), *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, pp. 291-308.

_____. (1972). *The politics of God and the politics of man.* (Trans. Bromiley, G. W.) Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.

_____. (1970). *The meaning of the city.* (Trans. Hopkin, E. C.) Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.

_____. (1964) *The technological society.* (Trans. Wilkinson, J.) New York: Knopf.

Fallon, Peter K. (2009). *The Metphysics of Media.* Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press.

Hock, Ronald F. (2007). *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Illustrated Davis Dictionary of the Bible. (1973). Nashville: Royal Publishers.

Romanowski, William. (2002) "Rock Apostles and Pop Apostasy." Jan. 2002, *Perspectives,* p. 11

Illusions of Freedom: Thomas Merton and Jacques Ellul on Propaganda by Jeffrey Shaw

Jeffrey Shaw is a graduate student and adjunct professor at Salve Regina University in Newport, RI, and an instructor in the Strategy and Policy Department at the Naval War College. This paper will be expanded upon in a doctoral dissertation on the impact

of technology on the human condition in the thinking of Thomas Merton and Jacques Ellul.

"Reading Jacques Ellul's book *The Technological Society*. Great, full of firecrackers. A fine provocative book and one that really makes sense. . . I wonder if all the Fathers [currently convened in Rome] are aware of all the implications of a technological society."[54]

What would Thomas Merton, a Roman Catholic monk, find so interesting in the writings of a French Protestant philosopher? What would compel Merton to mention Ellul's thoughts on the technological society in his journal? It turns out that Merton and Ellul actually have a great deal in common. Their respective views on the condition of society in the middle of the twentieth century are remarkably similar. This paper examines Merton's and Ellul's views on propaganda, some intellectual antecedents to their thinking, as well as the connections between Ellul's view of the concept of technique and Merton's view of the "mass man."

While some Americans are familiar with Thomas Merton's writing, few are familiar with Jacques Ellul. A French philosopher of the mid twentieth century, Ellul has been described as both a scholar and a lay ecclesiastic.[55] Ellul's style is often considered verbose and dense, and his work should be approached as a whole rather than trying to figure out his worldview through reading only one or two of his major works. While it is not the intent in this paper to examine his worldview and his extensive writing on Christian faith, there is one topic that will need elaboration, and that is his concept of *technique*. This fundamental idea is central to most of Ellul's writing on modern society and on the condition of the modern world and man's place in it. In order to understand Ellul's central thesis, and also to understand the similarities between Merton's and Ellul's points of view regarding the condition of man in the modern world, it is first necessary to address the concept of technique.

Ellul's *La Technique*

Ellul defines *la technique* as "the totality of methods, rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency in every field of human activity"[56] It is important to distinguish the idea of *technique* from technology itself. The products that result from advanced technology should be seen as only the most visible manifestation of technique. As Ellul clearly states, *la technique* pervades every field of human endeavor, whether it be politics, medicine, or education. Propaganda is a phenomenon which is also subject to the demands of *technique*, but there is a symbiotic relationship between technique and

---

[54] Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life.* Edited by Robert Daggy (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1997): 159-160.

[55] David Menninger, "Jacques Ellul: A Tempered Profile." *The Review of Politics* 37 no. 2 (April 1975): 235.

[56] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society.* Translated by John Wilkerson (New York: Vintage Books, 1964): xxv.

propaganda. Ellul states, "I want to emphasize that the study of propaganda must be conducted within the context of the technological society. Propaganda, which is defined as information presented to compel individuals to act in a certain, preconceived manner, is called upon to solve problems created by technology, to play on maladjustments, and to integrate the individual into a technological world. In the midst of increasing mechanization and technological organization, propaganda is simply the means used to persuade man to submit with good grace."[57] It is along this line of thinking that we see the first comparisons between Ellul's thoughts on propaganda as contrasted to Merton.

Merton's "Mass Man"

Thomas Merton is a well known Catholic author and monk. He is the author of *The Seven Storey Mountain* as well as numerous other books and stories. Like Ellul, Merton was concerned with the moral and spiritual state of the world and sought to not only explain how man had come to such a state, but how to transcend the situation as well.

While Merton never met Ellul or corresponded with him directly, there are citations in Merton's journals that reference the idea of technique, as well as numerous topics in Merton's writing that correlate quite well with the concept of technique in general. Merton's views on propaganda—its nature and its effect on modern society–are quite similar to Ellul's.

While Ellul presents his idea of technique as the primary obstacle to human fulfillment, Merton presents the idea of the "mass man" in many of his works. The mass man is essentially one that has surrendered the autonomy of a thinking individual for the comforts and conveniences of the modern world. In other words, mass man can be seen as the man or woman unknowingly cast into an allotted position in society based on the unseen and all powerful demands of technique. Merton says of this person "The inner life of the mass man, alienated and leveled in the existential sense, is a dull, collective routine of popular fantasies maintained in existence by the collective dream that goes on, without interruption, in the mass media."[58]

What role does Merton ascribe to propaganda? Much like Ellul, he sees propaganda as conditioning man to accept the reality of his condition as mass man. Merton believes that "action is not governed by moral reason but by political expediency and the demands of technology—translated into simple abstract forms of propaganda".[59] He goes on to say that this propaganda conditions the mass of men and women to react in a certain way to various stimuli.

---

[57] Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda.* Translated by Konrad Keller & Jean Lerner (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965): xvii-xviii.

[58] Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Noonday Press, 1961): 268.

[59] Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Image Books, 1965): 65.

Merton mentions Ellul specifically in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. Referring to propaganda, Merton states that "Jacques Ellul shows that a mass of factual and correct information can, even if not illogically presented, have the same effect as completely false and irrational propaganda."[60] While Ellul and Merton both spend some time in their respective writing dealing with particular forms of propaganda, such as Communist and Capitalist propaganda, not to mention Nazi propaganda, it is in a general, all encompassing propaganda that is found in the mass media, such as the press, television, and through advertising that the similarities between Ellul and Merton on the topic of propaganda are most pronounced.

Both Ellul and Merton share the idea that man cannot choose to disregard the message that is continually broadcast through propaganda. According to Merton, one of the primary reasons for this is that in the West, it is customary to assume that technological progress is seen only as something inherently good, as well as *inevitable*.[61] The idea that technological progress is inevitable is congruent with Ellul's explanation of automatism as a defining characteristic of technique. Ellul explains that technique is self-augmenting, as he writes in *The Technological Society*, "let no one say that man is the agent of technical progress . . . and that it is he who chooses among possible techniques. He can decide *only* in favor of the technique that gives maximum efficiency. But this is not choice."[62]

Merton shares a similar observation concerning freedom and choice when he states, "Because we live in a womb of collective illusion, our freedom remains abortive. They can never be used. We are prisoners of a process, a dialectic of false promises and real deceptions ending in futility."[63] Merton's view that technical progress is inevitable is similar to Ellul's view that technique determines its own path, irrespective of man's choices. Regarding choice, "Merton saw the effect of the secular myth of progress as a surrendering of human freedom and spontaneity to an unseen yet pervasive principle of efficiency that promises to fulfill our desires if we accept our roles as cogs in the machine."[64] Here we see similarities to not only the role of technique as defined by Ellul, but also the notion that our desires are fulfilled for us, and that it is through propaganda that these desires are both manufactured and made known to us.

Merton hoped for some degree of control over technology. He recorded in his diary that "those who foresee and work for a social order—a transformation of the world—[must work] according to these principles: primacy of the person . . . control of technology . . . etc.[65] Control of technology can be seen in this light as either the freedom

---

[60] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander,* 236.

[61] Thomas Merton, *Turning Towards the World.* Edited by Victor A. Collins (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996): 4.

[62] Ellul, *Technological Society,* 80.

[63] Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable* (Abbey of Gethsemani: New Directions, 1961): 14.

[64] Christopher J. Kelly, "Thomas Merton's Critique of Technological Civilization," *The Ellul Forum* no. 21 (July 1998): 5.

[65] Merton, *Turning Towards the World,* 10.

from the demands of technique, or a refusal to continue to participate in the mindless consumption so prevalent in American society as Merton goes on to say in the same diary entry, "primacy of wisdom and love, against materialism, hedonism, etc."[66]

Merton's reading of Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* influenced his thinking on the relationship between man and technology. While it is sometimes difficult, as we have seen, to distinguish in Merton's writing between his opposition to the products of technology and the process of technological "progress," it is clear in his reflection on Arendt that his opposition is to the process itself. This line of thinking more clearly parallels Ellul. Merton notes in his journal that Arendt believes that "Being has been replaced by process. The process is everything. Modern man sees only how to fit without friction into productive processes and in this he finds 'happiness.'"[67] This thought is remarkably congruent with Ellul's observation on the effects of technique although there is one major difference. Merton seems to imply that man has chosen to fit himself into the process whereas Ellul would argue that technique molds man into the process unknowingly. For Ellul, technique determines its own path, whereas Merton, in his reflection on *The Human Condition,* seems to imply that man has chosen to go along with process willingly, yet without adequately reflecting on the price he has paid.

Soren Kierkegaard's writing is an antecedent to the thought of both Ellul and Merton. In *The Present Age,* Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher of the midnineteenth century, presents the concept of leveling. Examining this idea will lead us to conclude that both Ellul and Merton have incorporated some of its basic tenets into their own thinking on the condition of man and society in their age, which is about a century after Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard as Antecedent

Soren Kierkegaard refers to leveling as an "abstract power."[68] He also refers to his times as an "age of advertisement and publicity."[69] The notion of advertising is important to the process of leveling, through which man is forced into a herd-like existence, devoid of passion and individuality. Describing the forces responsible for the process of leveling and its results, Kierkegaard states that "the Press is an abstraction . . . which in conjunction with the passionless and reflective character of the age produces that abstract phantom: a public which in turn is really the leveling power."[70] Merton picks up on this theme in his own writing when he states, as we have already seen from his quote in *Mystics and Zen Masters*, that "the inner life of the mass man, alienated

---

[66] Ibid., 10.

[67] Ibid., 11.

[68] Soren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age.* Translated by Alexander Dru (New York: Harper & Row, 1962): 52.

[69] Ibid., 35.

[70] Ibid., 64.

and leveled in the existential sense, is a dull, collective routine of popular fantasies maintained in existence by the collective dream that goes on, without interruption, in the mass media."[71]

Kierkegaard makes a point to stress that his age is lacking in passion. Both Ellul and Merton also make reference to their societies lacking passion. Merton says that Western society is in the grip of pseudopassion, "fabricated in the imagination and centered on fantasies."[72] Ellul claims that in his view, technique "attacks man, impairs the source of his vitality, and takes away his mystery."[73] In presenting an idea that corresponds to both Kierkegaard's leveling process and to the idea of technique as a force which will act on all men, Merton states that "the abstract leveling process, that self-combustion of the human race produced by the friction which arises when an individual ceases to exist as singled out by religion, is bound to continue like a trade wind until it consumes everything."[74] Ellul does not specifically reference any of Kierkegaard's philosophy or his ideas in general in *Propaganda*, but he does make reference to him in *The Technological Society.* He states that "In the middle of the nineteenth century, when technique had hardly begun to develop, another voice was raised in prophetic warning against it. The voice was Kierkegaard's. But his warnings . . . were not heeded. They were too close to the truth."[75]

Conclusion

We can see that examining Jacques Ellul's and Thomas Merton's writing on propaganda, it would appear that we have little hope of recapturing anything resembling an authentic human life outside of the bonds of the mass. However, at least one of the two writers offers us hope. Thomas Merton believes that through *kenosis* and *metanoia*, one can begin to escape from the bonds imposed on society by the twin pillars of spiritual malaise and the increasing demands of modernization, secularization, and "progress." *Kenosis,* or the selfemptying that one finds in the mystical traditions, is one of the great lessons that the West can learn from the East. Kenosis is an ego-shattering practice.[76] *Metanoia* is a Greek word for the concept of total personal transformation.[77] Emphasizing either of these practices and focusing on spiritual renewal through contemplation, one can transcend the mass. However, Ellul offers us no way out of our predicament. His assessment of technique is more of an autopsy of modern society than any kind of remedy for escaping the grip that technique holds on us all. Concerning

---

[71] Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters,* 268.

[72] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander,* p. 32.

[73] Ellul, *Technological Society,* 415.

[74] Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters,* 264.

[75] Ellul, *Technological Society,* 55.

[76] Henri Nouwen, *Thomas Merton: Contemplative Critic* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1975): 83.

[77] Paul Dekar, "What the Machine Produces and What the Machine Destroys: Thomas Merton on Technology." *The Merton Annual* 17 (2004): 219.

the completion of the edifice of technical society, he says that "it will not be a universal concentration camp, because it will be guilty of no atrocity. It will not be insane, because everything will be ordered.we shall have nothing more to lose, and nothing to win.we shall be rewarded with everything our hearts ever desired.. .and the supreme luxury of the society of technical necessity will be to grant the bonus of useless revolt and of an acquiescent smile."[78]

Jacques Ellul and Thomas Merton share many similarities when it comes to their views on the nature of propaganda. They both see propaganda as a force that compels man to accept his position in a technological society, as in Ellul, or as the mass man, as per Merton. They can both be seen to have intellectual antecedents in the philosophy of Soren Kierkegaard. While Ellul offers us no hope of liberating ourselves from the clutches of propaganda, Merton offers us at least some consolation in the form of ascetic withdrawal and moral renewal.

References

Dekar, Paul. "What the Machine Produces and What the Machine Destroys: Thomas Merton on Technology," *The Merton Annual* 17 (2004): 216-234.

Ellul, Jacques. *Propaganda.* Translated by Konrad Kellen & Jean Lerner. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965.

Ellul, Jacques. *The Technological Society.* Translated by John Wilkerson. New York: Vintage Books, 1964.

Kelly, Christopher J. "Thomas Merton's Critique of Technological Civilization." *The Ellul Forum* no. 21 (July 1998): 3-13.

Kierkegaard, Soren. *The Present Age.* Translated by Alexander Dru. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.

Menninger, David C. "Jacques Ellul: A Tempered Profile." *The Review of Politics* 37 no. 2 (April 1975): 235-246.

Merton, Thomas. *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966.

Merton, Thomas. *Dancing in the Waters of Life.* Edied by Robert E. Daggy. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1967.

Merton, Thomas. *Mystics and Zen Masters.* New York: Noonday Press, 1961.

Merton, Thomas. *Seeds of Destruction.* New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1961.

Merton, Thomas. *Turning Towards the World.* Edited by Victor A. Kramer. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996.

Nouwen Henri M. *Thomas Merton: Contemplative Critic.* San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1972.

---

[78] Ellul, *Technological Society,* 427.

Book Notes

Jacques Ellul On Freedom, Love, and Power

Compiled, edited, and translated by
Willem H. Vanderburg
University of Toronto Press, 2010. 247 pp.

Willem Vanderburg is the long-time Director of the Centre for Technology and Social Development at the University of Toronto. He is the author of *The Growth of Minds and Cultures: A Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Experience (1985), The Labyrinth of Technology* (2000) and *Living in the Labyrinth of Technology* (2005) a massive attempt to analyze, understand, and explain in depth our contemporary civilization. Vanderburg's 1981 interviews with Jacques Ellul were edited and published as *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and* Work first in 1981, and recently in an expanded edition (2004).

Vanderburg was a postdoctoral fellow in Bordeaux, studying with Ellul, from 1973 to 1978, He has been a tireless, impassioned promoter, organizer, and interpreter of the legacy of Jacques Ellul. *Jacques Ellul On Freedom, Love, and Power* may be Vanderburg's most interesting contribution yet. A fuller review of Ellul's work here as edited and presented by Vanderburg will have to await another time but here is an introductory note.

This volume is Vanderburg's edited translation of audio tapes of some of Ellul's Bible studies (over 200 of which are archived in the Ellul Collection at Wheaton College). Part One is Ellul's Bible studies on Genesis 1 - 3, taped by Vanderburg. Part Two is Ellul's studies of Job 32 - 42, taped by Dr. Franck Brugerolle. Part Three is Ellul's studies of the parables of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel, taped by Vanderburg. Part Four is a brief study by Ellul of the opening of John's Gospel. Vanderburg concludes the book with his own summary of Ellul's amazing exposition of the Book of Revelation.

-David W. Gill

Advert: Change of Address?

Don't forget to notify IJES if your address changes. Postal forwarding orders expire after a period of time. Forwarding practices are sometimes unreliable. You don't want to miss out on The Ellul Forum. We don't want to lose touch with you.

E-mail your address change to: IJES@ellul.org

please note

NEW IJES MAILING ADDRESS

IJES/Ellul Forum, 130 Essex Street, Box 219 South Hamilton MA 01982 USA

Make Payments to IJES Electronically

The IJES office can accept payments only in US dollars because of the huge collection fees otherwise charged by US banks.

IJES subscribers outside the USA can go to www.paypal.com and use a credit card to make a payment to "JES@ellul.org."

Advert: Call for Papers

PROPHET IN THE TECHNOLOGICAL WILDERNESS

A CENTENARY CELEBRATION & CRITICAL REVIEW OF JACQUES ELLUL (1912 - 1994)

An international conference to be held at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois, USA

July 8-10, 2012

Sponsored by:

International Jacques Ellul Society

Wheaton College Department of Biblical & Theological Studies Wheaton College Special Collections

The Ellul Centenary Conference in July 2012 will explore the legacy, meaning, and implications of the thought of Jacques Ellul. The conference is accepting proposals for papers to be presented at the conference. We welcome papers that consider any aspect of Ellul's thought, particularly under one of the following headings: Technology, Politics, Media, Religion, Theology, Ethics. Those interested in presenting a paper are invited to submit a one-page abstract of their presentation, and updated curriculum vitae, by November 1, 2011 to the Ellul Centenary Program Committee

c/oJeffrey.P.Greenman@wheaton.edu

Advert: International Jacques Ellul Society

www.ellul.org

130 Essex Street, Box 219 South Hamilton MA 01982

The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social

critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

Anyone who supports the objectives of the IJES is invited to join the society for an annual dues payment of US$20.00. *EF s*ubscription included.

Board of Directors

Andy Alexis-Baker, *Associated Mennonite Seminaries;* Mark Baker, *Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno;* Patrick Chastenet, *University of Bordeaux;* Clifford Christians, *University of Illinois;* Dell DeChant, *University of South Florida;* Darrell Fasching (Vice-President), *University of South Florida;* David Gill (President), *Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary;* Andrew Goddard, *London*; Jeff Greenman, *Wheaton*; Virginia Landgraf, *American Theological Library Association, Chicago*, David Lovekin, *Hastings College, Nebraska;* Randall Marlin, *Carlton University, Ottawa*, Ken Morris (SecretaryTreasurer), *Boulder;* Carl Mitcham, *Colorado School of Mines*; Langdon Winner, *Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.*

Issue #48 Fall 2011 — Anarchism and Jacques Ellul

- Click to view the original PDF

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Contents

Information on The Editorial Board & More

The Ellul Forum
For the Critique of Technological Civilization
Founded 1988
The Ellul Forum is published twice per year, in the Spring and Fall. Its purpose is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

Editor
Clifford G. Christians, Univ. of Illinois, Urbana IL Associate Editor
David W. Gill, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, So. Hamilton MA

Contributing Editors
Patrick Chastenet, University of Bordeaux, France Dan Clendenin, Stanford, California

Peter F. W. Davies, Buckinghamshire College, UK Marva Dawn, Vancouver, Washington

Darrell J. Fasching, University of South Florida Andrew Goddard, Oxford University, UK Joyce Hanks, Univ. of Scranton, Pennsylvania David Lovekin, Hastings

College, Nebraska Carl Mitcham, Colorado School of Mines Pieter Tijmes, University of Twente, Netherlands Gabriel Vahanian, Strasbourg University, France Willem Vanderburg, Univ. of Toronto, Canada

From the Editor

This issue of the *Ellul Forum* deals broadly with Ellul and Anarchism. The first two essays look at various aspects of Ellul's biblical interpretation with regard to anarchism. Thomas Bridges examines how Ellul uses the rise of kingship in 1 Samuel 8, arguing that a close examination of the Deuteronomistic History very much supports Ellul's reading in *Anarchy and Christianity*. Wes Howard-Brook takes a different approach, and draws from Ellul's ideas in *Meaning of the City*. The very idea of civilization—a way of life based on cities—according to the Bible is at the root of much violence and domination in human history. Wes Howard-Brook tries to advance Ellul's analysis further by asking whether the origin stories in Genesis "challenge the agriculture-based imperial assumptions of the Babylonian creation epic" and then asks how this potential

challenge relates the holy city of Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation. Ellul's critique of the city and agriculture have not been the focus of much scholarly attention. Howard-Brook thus carries the conversation forward and points in helpful directions.

My own contribution to this volume leaves the biblical studies realm and asks what Ellul thought of the police and how this thought relates to recent work in Christian ethics on "just policing"—the idea that an international police force could replace the system of war and make the world a less violent place. I don't think Ellul would support this, and would have a number of pointed observations. Thus my article is more "Ellulian" than analysis of Ellul's work *per se*.

Finally, Brenna Cussen Anglada — a Catholic anarchist from Dubuque, Iowa — takes up some of Wes Howard-Brook's themes as she examines her own use of the personal computer. She draws on Ellul's analysis of technique, arguing that for her, giving up the use of a personal computer is one small step toward recovering a life focused on things that matter, in ways that matter. Computer manufacturers have exploited the earth, oppressed laborers, and for an anarchist like Cussen Anglada, these are deeply troubling things to be implicated in.

Ellul's thought on anarchism hasn't really received the due attention it deserves. Sometimes *Ellul Forum* readers have dismissed his anarchist claims as naive and things he really didn't mean. In this issue, we take him seriously and look at what it means for a number of areas. I hope further explorations of this type can be done in the future.

Andy Alexis-Baker, Guest Editor

Yahweh is Still King: Engaging 1 Samuel 8 and Jacques Ellul by Thomas Bridges

Thomas Bridges is a Ph.D. Candidate in Systematic Theology at Marquette University.

Introduction: Ellul's Anti-Monarchic Deuteronomist

In attempting to show how the Bible has an "orientation to a certain anarchism" in *Anarchy and Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991; p. 3), Jacques Ellul places significant weight on the account of the institution of kingship in ancient Israel. In his reading of Judges and 1 Samuel, Yahweh resists the institution of Israelite kingship, so that Yahweh is presented as "an enemy of royal power and the state" (p. 50). Judges narrates pre-monarchic Israelite history, when God was the "supreme authority" and not represented by a human leader (it was not technically a "theocracy" because of this). This "flexible system," which Ellul treats as somewhat of an ideal (Ellul is actually ambiguous on this point, never praising this time period, yet lamenting its demise), ended with the beginning of centralized royal power in 1 Samuel 8, and the warnings from God through the judge Samuel on the dangers of kingship were fulfilled

in Israel's subsequent history (pp. 46-55). Ellul argues for a biblical current toward anarchy by way of a "naive" reading (p. 45)—something of hermeneutical value, for sure—but will Ellul's case hold when a sustained scholarly reading is applied to 1 Samuel 8? It is the goal of this paper to answer that question indirectly, by reading 1 Samuel 8 within its context in the "Deuteronomistic History" (DH).

As Vernard Eller explains ("How Jacques Ellul Reads the Bible," *Christian Century* 89 no. 43 (1972): 1212-1215), Ellul employs a "wide angle" hermeneutic—meaning he tries not to lose the forest by only seeing individual trees. Ellul also utilizes a "continuous reading" of scripture, by reading each scriptural text within the context of all canonical books. In the spirit of Ellul—agreeing that the current of Christian scripture flows in an an-archic direction—I offer a narrower angled reading of the origins of Israel's monarchy. I argue that despite the establishment of human kingship in 1 Samuel. 8, Yahweh is still considered king, and I will conclude with some insights my analyses have unveiled regarding kingship in the DH, relating them to Ellul's *Anarchy and Christianity*. I will (1) be assuming that the Samuel and Kings books are the work of the same single author/redactor (Dtr), and (2) I will be only concerned with the received ("Masoretic") form of the text.

The Kingship of Yahweh

Before delving into 1 Samuel, I must clarify that the kingship of Yahweh was not a prominent pre-exilic theme for Israel. The work of Anne Moore has shown that—regardless of pre-exilic sources redacted by later editors, which are surely included in the MT— the only clearly pre-exilic reference to the metaphor "God is king" is in Isaiah 6:1-11 (Anne Moore, *Moving Beyond Symbol and Myth: Understanding the Kingship of God of the Hebrew Bible Through Metaphor* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 87-89). This makes 1 Samuel 8 and 12 some of the earliest developments of the metaphor, alongside Exodus 15:1b-18 and 19:3-6 (Moore, pp. 106-109). The latter are exilic texts establishing that Yahweh became king over Israel, and as such is the divine lawmaker who offers protection, and in return has the right to Israel's praise and obedience to the laws of the covenant. It was not until Israel's and Judah's monarchies had failed that they devoted much intellectual rigor or reflecting on the metaphor of divine kingship (pp. 93-105). Many scholars have mistakenly followed the timelines of the history of religions school, rather than actual dating of Hebrew bible texts, to discern the development of Hebrew thought, and therefore many scholars state that the Israelite view of divine kingship originated from a common stock ancient near eastern myth in which a deity who combats chaos or the forces of evil with victory, with the result that humans build the deity a house or abode and declare the eternal kingship of the deity with annual enthronement festivals (pp. 44-45).

Correcting this error has two important implications for my project. First, the late development of the metaphor of divine kingship, as well as the fact that it arose in response to failed human monarchy, should prevent over-determining the identity of

Yahweh under the category of kingship; as Walter Brueggemann has labored to make clear, there are other metaphor's of Yahweh's governance present in the Hebrew Bible, including judge, father, and warrior (Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 233-39). None of these images of Yahweh's sovereignty adequately represent Israel's Lord, and no human pattern of governance ought to be projected on to Yahweh. Moreover, Ellul argues (*Anarchy and Christianity*, 32-33) that the image of God as king is subverted by images of God creating through mere words, speaking softly in the wind, and self-limits unlike human kings of the time. Second, the kingship of Yahweh is to be seen as originating in the Exodus and the covenant, rather than primarily as a focus on Yahweh as a divine warrior. Yahweh's sovereignty is the result of liberation and protection of Israel as a Suzerain. 1 Sam contains an early appearance of Yahweh's sovereignty in relation to the metaphor of kingship.

1 Samuel 8: The Crisis of Yahweh's Kingship

1 Samuel 8 contains a riddle: it describes the people's request for a king as rejecting Yahweh, yet Yahweh grants the request and even chooses Israel's first king. Some scholars resolve this tension by positing that a redactor pieced together the text from disparate pro-and anti-monarchic sources (See V. Philips Long, "How Did Saul Become King?," in *Faith, Tradition and History*, edited by A.R. Millard, J.K. Hoffmeier and D.W. Baker (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994): 271-84). But rather than a collection of ill-fitted sources, I read 1 Samuel 8-12 as a rich and complex narrative (regardless of the origins of Dtr's sources): Yahweh does not really surrender kingship, but uses human kingship as an office subordinate to divine kingship. Here Yahweh is not a "flat" character but a "round" one, graciously subverting Israel's rejection of divine kingship by giving them a king subservient to Yahweh. Thus, we can understand the claim that Israel rejected Yahweh and Yahweh's response in the following manner: although the people should not have requested a human king, Yahweh maintains the covenant and Israel's elect status while granting them a gift they were wrong to demand.

Here is the context: 1 Samuel 4:1-22 narrates a battle in which the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant, which was in Eli's sons care. Though not stated explicitly, the captured Ark is a consequence of the corruption of Eli's sons (David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 185). After the Philistines return the Ark to Israel (6:1-21), and Israel defeats the Philistines (7:3-14), chapter 8 informs us of Samuel's old age and his sons' unjust ways (8:1-3). Then the people state that they want a king because (1) Samuel's sons are unlike Samuel (8:4-5), and (2) they want to be like other nations and have a king to govern them and fight their battles (8:20). That they single out Samuel's corrupt sons shortly after suffering a defeat (which is partly blamed on Eli's corrupt sons), suggests the people feared that military defeats would continue if Samuel's sons held leadership positions. Corrupt leadership would surely result in the same consequences, for Yahweh

had previously punished Israel for her leaders' sins (1 Sam 4:21. Thus, the request for kingship arises in a context when the Ammonite king Nahash is an imminent danger (12:12 states this retrospectively). This makes sense if we understand defense from oppressors as an integral duty of Israelite leadership, and see that the people had good reason to lack confidence in the leadership of Samuel's sons. Also, Israel's elders were right in their uneasiness about Samuel placing leadership in his son's hands, for, as Ellul notes, the judges had no permanent power, but were roused to the occasion by the Spirit of God—judgeship was not a hereditary role, but a Spirit-guided one (As Ellul mentions, the judges had no permanent power, but were roused to the occasion by the Spirit of God. Cf. *Christianity and Anarchy*, 46-7).

Though we understand Israel's request to relate to her overall safekeeping—a reasonable desire—another reason must be behind this request, for Yahweh interprets it as rejecting Yahweh's Kingship. To understand this rejection, we must remember that Israel viewed Yahweh as their covenantal sovereign. In this regard, two sub-themes of Yahweh's sovereignty are important. First, the Mosaic covenant made the Israelites into Yahweh's subjects—in Deuteronomy 33:2-5, 26-29. If Yahweh ruled as the Suzerain, then any leaders Yahweh established would by definition be vassals (Anne Moore, *Moving Beyond Symbol and Myth,* 163-9). Earlier in the DH, when Israel sought to institute a dynasty of judges with Gideon and his family, Gideon insists that only Yahweh must rule over Israel (Judges 8:22-23). All political authority was subservient to Yahweh, regardless of the title. Second, although "king" was not a title used early and frequently by Israel to designate Yahweh's role, Yahweh was seated on the cherubim of the Ark, similar to a king seated upon a throne (1 Samuel 4:4) (See also Tryggve N.D. Mettinger, "YHWH SABOATH—The Heavenly King on the Cherubim Throne," in *Studies in The Period of David and Solomon*, ed. Tomoo Ishida (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1982)). If Yahweh is their king and they ask for a king, then they reject Yahweh's kingship—as Yahweh explicitly states in 1 Samuel 8:7.

Therefore, most scholars agree that in requesting a king "like other nations" (8:5) Israel rejected her elect status as Yahweh's covenant people (Lyle Eslinger, *The Kingship of God in Crisis: A Close Reading of 1 Samuel 1-12* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 257; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 76-79; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 249. Cf. Exodus 19. All quotations are from the NRSV, unless otherwise indicated). In Lyle Eslinger's words, "The request of Yahweh's people to become like the nations in political structure is, therefore, not only a rejection of the theocracy and its judges, but even more it is a rejection of the covenant" (Eslinger, *God's Kingship*, 257). Thus, although the elders are concerned about the Ammonites at their door and about Samuel's sons placing them in peril, the people neither ask for Samuel's intercession (as they had in 7:8, when the Philistines were a threat), nor cry to Yahweh for help. Furthermore, they could have asked for different judges than Samuel's corrupt sons, since judgeship was not a hereditary role. Instead of choosing one of these options, they reject the whole covenantal system, discarding their status as a holy nation. The shift from Yahweh's battles (Judges 4:14, 2 Sam. 5:24) to Israel's battles shows that they rejected Yahweh as their defender,

and hence as their king (8:19) (As Ellul points out, the people thought a king would be a better military leader (*Anarchy and Christianity*, 48). Cf. Klein, *1 Samuel*, 78; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 261). Israel's request for a king was a request for a replacement of this covenantal relationship.

Yahweh tells Samuel that it is not he who is being rejected, but Yahweh (8:7). The people should have cried to Yahweh for safety from Nahash, based on Yahweh's previous faithfulness in rescuing the people through judges (cf. 12:12), therefore Israel sinned in rejecting Yahweh, which Israel later confessed (12:10, 19). However, Yahweh grants their request, which brings us to our antinomy (i.e., Yahweh says yes to a sinful demand). But if we look closely we can discern how Yahweh undermines their demand and maintains kingship over Israel.

The discrepancy is only apparent because Yahweh delimits kingship. Eslinger puts it this way: "Yahweh, though not liking the request, does not deny it; instead, he [sic] simply subverts it" (Eslinger, *God's Kingship*, 259). The first thing the Lord tells Samuel is to "protest [ha'ed] solemnly unto them" (8:9, AV), and secondly to show them the mishpat ("ways," NRSV) of the king, which are determined by Yahweh. Eslinger notes that this "king will not be like other kings, but under the stipulation (ha'ed) of Yahweh" (p.268). Samuel takes this stipulation as a bad thing, and adds content to the mishpat—the king will usurp Israel's sons and daughters for military purposes and various forms of conscripted labor, and take Israel's first fruits in agriculture, livestock, and so on (8:11-18)—although Samuel's warning includes words not explicitly attributed to Yahweh in the text. Samuel seems to have added a negative prediction of what would happen with actual kings (p.p. 260, 270). The people reject Samuel's warning: "No! But we are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like the other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles" (8:19b-20). But Yahweh is still in charge, as the Hiphil verbs in verse 22 demonstrate: "stipulate the stipulation" (ha'ed taid), "declare the manner of the king," and "make them a king" (p. 281). Yahweh has maintained authority over Israel, yet allowed room for a certain amount of freedom in the covenantal relationship.

The account of Saul's anointing solidifies my reading that Yahweh retains rule when Yahweh commands Samuel to anoint Saul as *nagid* over Israel (10:1). Two things support my reading. First, Yahweh appoints Saul *nagid* to save Israel from the Philistines. Seeing their need, Yahweh interprets their request for a king as a cry for deliverance from their enemies (p. 307). They make a sinful demand—but a demand for help, and Yahweh offers deliverance. Second, the term *nagid* does not mean king, but vicariate. The people want a *king* (*mlk*), but God gives them a "regent" (*nagid*), *mlk* signifying when the power originates in the people, *nagid* when God is preeminent (M. Tsevet, "The Biblical Account of the Foundation of the Monarchy in Israel," in *The Meaning of the Book of Job and Other Biblical Studies: Essays on the Literature and Religion of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Ktav, 1980), p. 93). Although Saul is later called *mlk* (10:24; 11:15), what institutes the "kingship" is the occasion for a human to act on

Yahweh's behalf. Thus far in the narrative Yahweh is still king and still responds to the cries of the oppressed.

Next, Saul's kingship is fully consummated as Yahweh empowers him to rout the Ammonites (11:1-11), and Samuel invites the people to Gilgal to "renew the kingship" (11:14-12:25). Samuel gives a speech, and in recounting the recent events he reminds them of how the kingship came about: "But when you saw that King Nahash of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' though the Lord your God was your king" (12:12). He adds that the "wickedness you have done in the sight of the Lord is great in demanding a king" (12:17). But we may observe that as they recognize their sin, Samuel assures them that if they follow Yahweh's command, then Yahweh will not cast them away, but if they act wickedly Yahweh will oppose them and their king (12:19-25). Once again, there is room for play in this covenantal relationship between Yahweh and Israel: Yahweh has given them the monarchy, but the human king will be only a vassal, and whether Yahweh will stand behind the king and the people depends on whether they "will follow the Lord" (12:14). It is conceded that all will go well with the people if the people will serve the Lord (12:14). But this is conditional, based on four requirements: they must fear, serve, listen to, not rebel against Yahweh, or the Lord will "be against" the people and their king (12:15) (Cf. Klein, 1 Samuel, 113). We may deduce that the people will have misplaced their trust if they do not perceive that Yahweh is still king, and the covenant is still intact.

Within one chapter the demise of the first human king begins, and Yahweh initiates a search for "a man after his own heart [sic]" (13:14). Saul performs an unlawful sacrifice, which prompts this search, implying that Israel's human kings are interchangeable, but the Lord is the indispensable ruler over Israel. If the king is only as good as the extent to which Yahweh is behind him, then is it not the case the Yahweh is still the king of Israel? Yahweh appointed the first king, and then searches for a new one, therefore the answer is a resounding "yes."

I have attempted to show that the account of the rise of kingship in Israel need not be seen as an ill-fitted composite of pro-and anti-monarchic sources. The apparent contradiction between the request for a king being wicked, and the fact that Yahweh responds to this request, ought to be uncovered: Yahweh answers this request by generously subverting it, accommodating the demand without sacrificing the divine kingship, or the covenant. Yahweh selects a nagid, who is subservient to king Yahweh. As the philosopher Martin Buber concludes concerning this passage, this political solution means, "that, nevertheless, it will not be a monarchy such as all the nations have, but rather might style itself as a vicariate of God, not simply reporting to heaven, but really a government held accountable to the higher authority and so replaceable by it" (Martin Buber, "Der Gesalbte," *Werke* II (Munchen: Kosel; Heidelberg: Lambert, 1964), 738; quoted in Eslinger God's Kingship, 268). Yahweh responds to their demand without annulling the covenant.

Some Further Issues with Kingship in the Deuteronomistic History

Thus far in this essay I have tried to show how Yahweh graciously subverted Israel's request for a king, and now I will take a brief look at the final Deuteronomic assessment of human kingship.

The DH ends with Judah in exile and the last Davidic heir in prison; whatever Dtr's view is of kingship, the following claim from Brueggemann seems irrefutable: "One defining mark of Israel's life is that the royal system was not finally effective in sustaining Israel" (Buber, 614). However, the hope for Davidic kingship did not die out, even with the ambiguous ending to 2 Kings. As we saw in 1 Samuel 12, it will only go well for a king if he meets certain conditions, and as we saw from analyzing the meaning of nagid, the purpose of an Israelite king is to serve the higher king. David's line is guilty of sin in the DH, and this results in political disaster for Israel: Solomon's heart turns from Yahweh, therefore all the tribes but one will be torn from his son (1 Kgs. 11:9-13); Rehoboam intensifies his father and grandfather's forced labor policy and the northern tribes secede (1 Kgs. 12:1-19); and a final blow comes with Manasseh, who causes all Judah to sin, drawing Yahweh's judgment (2 Kgs. 21:10). Amon did evil in the sight of Yahweh, (21:20), as did Jehoahaz (23:32) and Jehoiakim (23:37). The reign of Josiah was a high point in the DH sandwiched between the evil kings, but, as Brueggemann puts it, "it was too little too late" (Brueggemann, "Ancient Israel on Political Leadership: Between the Book Ends," *Political Theology* 8.4 (2007), 464). Because of the sins of Manasseh, Nebuchadnezzar razes Judah (24:4), and Judah enters exile (25:21). Dtr makes it clear that certain conditions have not been met (proper worship, monotheism, and so on), and exile is the proper consequence.

2 Kings 25 is intentionally ambiguous regarding whether there is hope for Israel to return from exile, and whether the monarchy will be restored (Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 606; David Janzen, "An Ambiguous Ending: Dynastic Punishment in Kings and the Fate of the Davidides in 2 Kings 25.27-30," *JSOT* 33.1 (2008): 39-58). The northern dynasties are said to be permanently deposed for causing the people to sin, and this could also be the case with Judah's kingship, but, on the other hand, Yahweh never explicitly annuls the promise made to David in 2 Samuel 7:13—to "establish the throne of his kingdom forever." David Janzen's verdict is worth quoting at length (Janzen, "Ambiguous Ending" 58):

In the light of the earlier specificity of dynastic punishment, Dtr seems intentionally to create ambiguity at the end of Kings in regard to the future of the Davidides. Writing in the exile—or possibly in the early postexilic period—Dtr simply wishes to hedge his or her bets. The ambiguous fate of the Davidides suits a time frame when it was impossible to tell what the fate of the Davidide would be. This intentional ambiguity does not commit Dtr to any one outcome for the Davidides, and provides the Historian with flexibility to cover various possible eventualities.

I also find helpful Brueggemann's suggestion that there is a hint of hope in Evil-merodach's kind treatment of Jehoiachin in 2 Kgs. 25:27-30 (Brueggemann, *1&2 Kings*, 606-7). What is not said is important here—there *may* be hope. But whatever the case, surely Hans Walter Wolff is right in saying that the people are to *turn back* (*shubu*) from their evil ways (Hans Walter Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Deuteronomistic Historical Work," in *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History*, ed. Gary N. Knoppers and J. Gordon McConville (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), p. 71). Solomon prayed that if the people go into exile, that they would repent and be forgiven, and that their captors have compassion on them (1 Kgs. 8:46-53). The Dtr may be daring Judah and Israel to hope, but, once again the royal system was unable to sustain Israel, and Dtr gives no reason for the reader to believe that another royal system would do better.

Some Conclusions

What I believe my analyses have made possible are the following conclusions, which I will relate to Ellul's work:

(1) Yahweh never renounced kingship, but installed vicariates to act on Yahweh's behalf, for the good of the people. This is the generous subversion of the Israelites rejection of their identity as Yahweh's covenant people (Cf. Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History*, who sees the people's sin residing in asking for a king *like the other nations* (109). In his view Dtr is pro-monarchic, but against kingship in the manner of the gentiles). Ellul is justified in reading 1 Samuel in a way that maintains that Yahweh is still the supreme authority over Israel after the institution of monarchy. The monarchy in Israel was really a dynasty of vassals who led Israel into idolatry and betrayal of the true king, but Yahweh faithfully did what was best for Israel, which ultimately meant the end of the monarchy. Ellul is right—at least in relation to the DH—to interpret scripture as not dictating a certain political system. Ellul merely advocates that people "not rule out anarchism in advance, for in my view this seems to be the position which in this area is closest to biblical thinking" among all of the political options (Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 4). When Yahweh is the ultimate authority, any political system will have an anarchic leavening from the Spirit of God within it, whether this authority is acknowledged or not (Babylon is the perfect example of a human *arche* that does not acknowledge Yahweh, yet is still under Yahweh's control in the view of Dtr). There simply is no human *arche* able to maintain rule outside the providential permissiveness of Yahweh.

(2) Though kingship was sometimes a good, such as when David executed justice (2 Sam. 8:15), or when Josiah turned Judah from idolatry, for the most part the kings led the people into sin. The kings are responsible for the exile of Yahweh's people. This would seem like an obvious point, if there were not other possible and actual explanations for the exile (Brueggemann (*Old Testament Theology*, 587) notes that exile could have been explained in many ways, but was not for Dtr. Also, the

Chronicler does not blame the kings as much as Dtr does, placing responsibility on the people, whereas Dtr blames the kings). Also, David Janzen notes that Dtr distinguishes between the sin of kings and of people, because kings *cause* people to sin, lead them into it (Janzen, "Ambiguous Ending," 44). Dtr's cumulative view of kingship is that they are subordinate to Yahweh. Kings are faithful, unfaithful, or some mixture, but are never just "a king." And when they are unfaithful, Yahweh would rather the people be in exile than be led astray by kings into idolatry. This is a harsh pronouncement, but I do not see any other conclusion to the DH concerning kingship.

(3) The following question must be entertained: would a reinstatement of the Davidic dynasty bring Judah and Israel back to Yahweh? David's heir is alive at the end of the DH, but we must remember that he too had a history of evil in the eyes of Yahweh (2 Kgs. 24:9). It is the sin of kings that has brought catastrophe about, so why should the kingship of Israel or Judah be restored? I think the human run at kingship was not so good for Yahweh's people. If the return of a king could reinstate centralized worship, I imagine Dtr would find this an act of Yahweh's good grace. Otherwise, it seems to me that the DH has demonstrated the risk of the Exodus people losing their identity when led by kings. Yahweh's vicariates failed to serve Yahweh and the good of the people, and were rightly deposed. Yahweh is still king, for Yahweh brought about these destructive events. The question remains unanswered as to why this line of kings ought to be restored, and the goodness of monarchy stands in serious question from the perspective of the DH.

(4) At the end of the DH, with the future of Israel's monarchy seemingly over, the future is nevertheless open: hope for a good king persisted, and as we know it developed into messianism, and, eventually, Christology. Although the promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 surely did not have Jesus of Nazareth in mind, this passage would later be interpreted as the seeds of messianic hope (Brueggemann, 1&2 Kings, 608-10). Surely this is not the view of Dtr on kingship, but the open-ended nature of the DH allowed for such flexible reinterpretations. Whatever the case, if my analyses are sound, the people at least were given reason by Dtr to trust that Yahweh was still king, exile could be a perfect opportunity to learn once again what it might mean to live with only one king—Yahweh.

With such an open-endedness to the DH concerning political structures (aside from the certainty that Yahweh is Lord of all nations), all political systems are placed in a tentative position. Ellul is overstating the case in claiming that the dominant thinking in Israel from the 8th to 4th centuries was primarily antimonarchic (Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 51); what would be more accurate is to say that from an exilic or post-exilic perspective the monarchs were blamed for leading Israel into sin and its political consequences, and yet Judah still hoped for a true Davidic king. Resistance to monarchy paved the way to Christology. Yahweh graciously subverted Israel's sinful demand for a king, but—at least from a Christian perspective—sent the true king in human flesh to judge and transform the standards of monarchy. A "continuous reading" of scripture must then see Yahweh as playfully responsive to the chosen people,

taking an often oppressive structure (monarchy), giving it a chance, and, when it failed, demonstrating in the Christ how Yahweh's sovereignty differs from all other authority by centering on Servanthood, rather than domination (See John Howard Yoder's reading of the book of Luke in *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), especially 36-39). But it must also be remembered that kingship is only one of the many metaphors used in the Hebrew Bible to portray Yahweh, so it should not surprise us if Yahweh turns out to be a different kind of king.

Once again, Ellul employs a "wide angle" hermeneutic, reading the Hebrew Bible continuously in his Anarchy and Christianity, without pausing to make specific claims about 1 Samuel or the institution of kingship—he merely comments that 1 Samuel 8 marks the rise of royal power and the rejection of Yahweh the liberator. What I have attempted to do is look at the patch of trees surrounding 1 Samuel 8 to make sure Ellul has the forest right, and I conclude that he has. The DH makes clear that Yahweh is Lord, not kings and their chariots, and any political system stands under the gracious judgment and Lordship of Yahweh.

"Come Out, My People!" Rethinking the Bible's Ambivalence About Civilization

by Wes Howard-Brook

Wes Howard-Brook teaches at Seattle University and is an author of numerous books, including "Come Out, My People!" God's Call Out of Empire in the Bible and Beyond *(Orbis, 2010).*

Few books have been more formative of my understanding of God's relationship to human social structures than Jacques Ellul's *The Meaning of the City.* He shows like no one before him and few after how clearly Genesis roots the origin of the city in human violence and domination. It is part, of course, of Ellul's larger critique of technique: the human attempt to take control of what God has provided as gift.

Ellul continues in *Meaning* to trace the Bible's attitude toward the "holy city," Jerusalem. He powerfully explores how Jerusalem is portrayed as both "holy" and of no inherent importance. "Her only meaning is to testify of a new Jerusalem" (p. 110). The reality of Jesus Christ replaces Jerusalem as the locus of encounter with God.

In the forty years since *Meaning*, biblical and other scholarship has discovered many important elements of the ancient world and of the Bible's composition. The source criticism that developed in the eighteenth century has been challenged on all sides, and new ways of understanding the original contexts of the Bible are being actively explored. Further, developments in political, anthropological, and language theory have led to radical reconsideration of the relationship between texts and historical contexts.

One trajectory arising from these recent discoveries has been the expansion of Ellul's concern with "the city" to that of "empire." Throughout biblical history, God's people were surrounded by and embedded within the great empires of Babylon, Persia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome. In our own time, we are increasingly able and willing to name "empire" as our own context, whether one thinks of that in terms of American Empire or global corporate empire. How do ancient texts such as Genesis and the narrative of Israel's monarchy sound different when considered from within the framework of acceptance of or resistance to empire?

This is, of course, a huge topic, one which I have addressed at length in my book, *"Come Out, My People!:" God's Call Out of Empire In the Bible and Beyond* (Orbis, 2010). In this brief essay, I can only offer some suggestive lines of inquiry. First, how do Genesis' narratives of origin challenge the agriculture-based imperial assumptions of the Babylonian creation epic, Enuma Elish? Second, how might we hear the stories of origin of Israel's relationship with the "holy city," Jerusalem, not as "scripture" but as political propaganda aimed to coopt the Name of YHWH for an imperial act of city and nation building?

Cursing agriculture

Ellul begins *Meaning* with the story of Cain, the first city builder. However, Genesis' antiurban narrative begins earlier, with the first verses of Genesis 1. Traditional source criticism—which Ellul eschwed in any event—saw Genesis as presenting two creation stories: Genesis 1, part of the so-called "Priestly" strand of the Pentateuch, and Genesis 2, part of the "Yahwist" strand. The Priestly narrative is understood to be post-exilic, focused on establishing order via genealogical lists and other apparatus deemed the provenance of an urban priestly elite. The supposed purpose is to substitute ritual order for monarchical order. The Yahwist narrative, on the other hand, is usually understood to be older, often associated with the supposed "Solomonic enlightenment" in which "wisdom" flourished amid the prosperity and security of imperial Jerusalem.

As noted, recent discoveries have increasingly discredited this two source theory. Instead, interpreters are frequently reading Genesis 1-11 (if not the entire book) against the background of the Babylonian exile of Jerusalem's elite in the early 6th century BCE. The experience of exile was akin to the experience of German scientists brought to the US after World War II. The place was "foreign," but overflowing with wealth, culture and technology. The source of such splendor, according to the Babylonian Enuma Elish, was an urban divine order established in primordial time. That is, the city of Babylon was not a human building project, but a gift of the gods. The hierarchical social structure was similarly a "given," established as part of the order of creation. Humans—that is, other than the royal elite—were designated by the gods to serve Babylon by working the irrigated agricultural fields that surrounded the city, as well as conducting the necessary tasks of urban maintenance. To serve the human king was to serve the divine king, the god Marduk.

Ellul, of course, correctly read Genesis' Tower of Babel story as a caricature of this pretension to divine legitimation. In "Technique and the Opening Chapters of Genesis,"

he read the Garden and Expulsion stories as expressive of the beginning of "technique," focusing his discussion on the question of "work" before and after "the Fall." Ellul accepted the common translation of the divine command in Gen 2:15 as "to cultivate it and keep it." However, recent Genesis scholarship notes that the Hebrew 'bd translated "cultivate" or "till" more often means "serve." Thus, the question of "cultivation" in the sense of working the earth does not actually arise in the Garden, but only with the Expulsion In the "curse" proclamation in Genesis 3, the voice of YHWH undermines the root of the imperial claim that generating surplus agriculture is part of the divine command to humanity. Rather than receiving the divine gift of food from trees, people are "sentenced" to agriculture, as we hear in this passage:

And to the human ['adam] God said, *"Because you have listened to the voice of your woman, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the topsoil ['adamah] because of you; in painful work ['itstsavon] you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the topsoil, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Gen. 3:16-19)*

Several specific words underscore the point. The previously sacred relationship between the 'adam and the 'adamah is now "cursed," a technical biblical term expressing the inability to bring forth life. Instead, the human will experience pain in wresting "bread" from the ground. Of course, "bread" is not a product of creation, but of human technological manipulation. "Plants of the field" specifically refers throughout the Bible to domesticated crops. "Thorns and thistles" refers to inedible species that arise when soil has been disturbed and eroded by plowing (Carol Newsom, "Common Ground," in *Earth Story in Genesis*, ed. Normal C. Habel et al. (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 73-86). The divine speech-act ends with the expulsion of the humans from the garden to live "in the east," which for Israelites, signified the Tigris-Euphrates river valleys upon which Babylonian and Assyrian empires were built.

Agriculture is the basis for what we call "civilization." Surplus agriculture allows for division of labor, social stratification, and military-based security that undergirds "empire" throughout history. Key here is that Genesis presents this state of affairs as a divine curse. It valorizes instead human life experienced in direct contact with the Creator God who provides all that humans need as gift. More concretely, it presents the original state of divine blessing as food gathering. The other half of the usual pair, "hunter-gatherer," comes only after the Flood narrative as a divine concession to the persistence of human violence against creation and one another (Gen 9.1-6).

Throughout Genesis (and Exodus), the question of food is a central test of trust in YHWH. Immediately after Abram's unconditional response to YHWH's call to leave empire behind, he experiences "hunger" (Hebrew, ra'av, usually translated as "famine"). This designates not a "natural" condition, but a function of urban empire controlling access to agricultural surplus. Abram is willing to sacrifice his wife to the king of Egypt in order to gain access to Egyptian food (Gen 12.11-20). But the clearest expression

of this relationship between "bread" and "empire" is in the Joseph story at the close of the Genesis narrative. The background here is likely no longer exile and Babylon's Enuma Elish, but the experience several centuries later of Ptolemaic Egyptian control of

Jerusalem and environs. Joseph, like Jerusalem's elite, has not only collaborated with Egypt's imperial establishment, but has claimed that it is the will of God for Jacob's family to come to Egypt for food and to "settle" there (Gen 45.7-10). But once the family of Israel has left the Promised Land for Egypt, we hear the true nature of Joseph's imperial authority (Gen 47.13-26). With further "hunger," the people come to Joseph seeking "grain." They receive it, but not before they have surrendered money, animals, land and freedom to the imperial representative.

Thus, from beginning to end, Genesis not only condemns "the city," but reveals the unholy mechanism by which the city is possible. The human yearning to take control of the food supply, "from the beginning," leads to enormous pain and suffering.

Solomon's "wisdom"

Ellul's critique of Jerusalem, as noted, accepts its vocation as "holy city," even if its ultimate purpose is to be transcended in and through Jesus Christ. Ellul largely takes the monarchical narrative as given, including that God has "chosen" Jerusalem in ratification of David's taking of the city from the Jebusites, and that Temple and ark make the city "holy" (Meaning, pp. 95-96).

Closer study of the David-Solomon narrative, however, can lead one to radical questioning of these premises. Biblical historical Baruch Halpern has shown in great detail that the narrative is likely an attempt to legitimize the reign of David and his son (See Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). As such, we must be highly suspicious of what otherwise sound like standard claims that echo across imperial history: that the "high" God lives in his temple in the capital city, and the human king is his representative. What might these suspicions lead us to discover behind the "official" viewpoint?

David, as encountered on the surface of the biblical narrative, is not what anyone would call "holy." He is a extortioner, adulterer, murderer and gang leader, who is willing to battle Israelites on behalf to the dreaded Philistines (1 Sam 27). As king, he brutally puts down popular rebellion, including one led by his own beloved son, Absalom. On his death bed, he instructs his successor, Solomon, to execute those whom the old king thinks had been unfaithful to him. Solomon's willingness to carry out these orders is attributed to his "wisdom" (1 Kg 2.6, 9).

Indeed, the subsequent narrative attributes divinely-given "wisdom" to Solomon via a dream, a wisdom which will exceed that of "all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt" (1 Kg 4.30). But shouldn't we be suspicious of an all-too-familiar "wisdom" that includes strategic assassination?

Whatever Solomon's wisdom was, immediately upon his death, "all the assembly of Israel" go to his son-successor, Rehoboam, to complain that "Your father made our yoke heavy..." (1 Kg 12.3). Behind the royal propaganda machine's portrayal of Judah and

Israel "happy.sitting in security.under their vines and fig trees" (1 Kg 4.20, 25) is another story which manages to reach the surface of the narrative. Yes, the monarchy can provide military security (maintained by Solomon's forty thousand horses and chariots), but at the usual great cost: imperially enforced taxation that provides enormous wealth and luxury for the elite but slave labor for the ordinary folk. Is this what YHWH-provided "wisdom" is supposed to look like?

The textual evidence for Solomon's God-given wisdom is the report of a royal dream. Of course, there is no way, then or now, to challenge directly the authenticity of such a claim. But the narrative provides a clear, if subtle, clue, as to both the truth and nature of this supposed "wisdom" in an oft-overlooked story. Immediately upon waking from the dream, we are told of the only public act of Solomon's entire reign: the resolution of a maternity dispute between two street prostitutes (1 Kg 3.16-28). Was this the reason for wanting a king "like other nations" (1 Sam 8.5)? The entire episode practically shouts to be interpreted allegorically rather than literally, not least because the wider David-Solomon narrative has already presented two blatantly allegorical stories about royal behavior (2 Sam 12, 14).

Studying the details of this story reveals plainly what Solomon's "wisdom" was: holding together by imperial control the two otherwise separate peoples, Israel and Judah. The moment Solomon was dead, Israel rebelled from Jerusalem-centered control to form its own, decentralized identity. Although Israel eventually succumbed to the same kind of urbanbased empire from which it had escaped, there are strong hints that the original vision was for something radically different. As I explain in more detail in *Come Out, My People*, the core Exodus narrative may well have been composed to legitimate and support both the rebellion and the alternative vision of a wilderness-based covenant relationship directly between YHWH and the people.

Thus, "from the beginning," Jerusalem was an imperial project, hardly different from that of Babylon or Egypt. Throughout the remainder of biblical history, prophets and apocalyptic visionaries proclaimed judgment on Jerusalem for its participation in empire, both "at home" and "abroad." The collection of apocalyptic texts gathered as 1 Enoch express such a radical critique of this imperial participation that the Jerusalem-centered scribes and priests who established the scope of "scripture" excluded the texts from the eventual canon. Of course, it was Jesus' own harsh critique and rejection of Jerusalem that led Jerusalem's defenders to provide him an imperial execution.

Space does not permit exploration of how consistently the core texts of what we know as the New Testament continue this rejection of Jerusalem's claim to embody the divine will even as it collaborates with the Roman Empire. Ellul anticipated this in his groundbreaking interpretation of Jesus' relationship with Jerusalem, both in the gospels and in the book of Revelation. However, as we know, a few centuries later, the unthinkable became reality: the claim of the Roman Empire to be "Christian." Constantine's audacious act of imperial authority is in many ways a perfect analog for Solomon's own claim for a YHWH-authorized empire.

But Christians should have no basis for accepting such propaganda, given how radically it conflicts with the Good News of God's kingdom of love-based peace. Imperial propaganda, as Ellul so cogently noted throughout his career, has an amazing capacity to convince people of what they otherwise know to be false. The revelation in Jesus Christ of God's true purpose for human life continues to be the most powerful means of defeating empire and its propaganda. We should all continue to be grateful to Ellul for opening doors that allow the Light to shine in the darkness.

Just Policing: An Ellulian Critique

by Andy Alexis-Baker

Andy Alexis-Baker is a Ph.D. candidate in Systematic Theology and Theological Ethics at Marquette University

Since the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, many pacifist-minded Christians have began to explore differences between policing and warfare with the noble hope of limiting or even abolishing war as we know it. For example, Catholic theologian Gerald Schlabach has developed a theory he calls "just policing." Schlabach argues that the differences between policing and war are significant enough to merit a wholesale realignment of just war and pacifist thinking. Rather than justify war according to abstract criteria, just policing would draw upon international law to pursue suspected criminals, which should limit civilian casualties and demonizing of individuals and groups (Gerald Schlabach, ed. *Just Policing, Not War* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2007), p. 4). If just war theorists would honestly explore these distinctions, they would recognize policing is more appropriate to Christian duty than war. If pacifists would "support, participate, or at least not object to operations with recourse to limited but potentially lethal force," then a *rapprochement* might occur between just war theorists and pacifists through policing (Schlabach, p.3).

In *God's Politics*, Jim Wallis claims that since 9/11 many Christians have re-read Jacques Ellul, "who explained his decision to support the resistance movement against Nazism by appealing to the 'necessity of violence' but wasn't willing to call such recourse 'Christian'" (Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 166). Similarly, Christian pacifists might respond to terrorism, Wallis claimed, by advocating that the international community create a global police force to deal with violations of international law and human rights (Wallis, 164-67). Such a force, Wallis wrote, is "much more constrained, controlled, and circumscribed by the rule of law than is the violence of war, which knows few real boundaries" (p. 166).

Wallis' suggestion that Ellul's works may help to formulate a response to terrorism, and that such a response ought to be "policing" raises the question of what an Ellulian

analysis of policing might look like. Ellul was after all an anarchist and viewed the police as a technique. In fact, his most famous text, *The Technological Society*, by my count uses police as an example of technique over thirty times. In what follows, I will use Ellul—rather than summarize his views—to critique just policing. Those who advocate for just policing have not adequately tested whether police are less violent because of the rule of law, and they make ahistorical arguments that do not countenance the possibility that policing may in fact sustain or even worsen violence, not lessen it.

The importance of history

At the outset of his book *The Technological Society*, Ellul decries the scholarly tendency to reduce technique to machines, stating that this "is an example of the habit of intellectuals of regarding forms of the present as identical with that of the past" (Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 3). But the caveman's tool differs qualitatively from modern technology. This same bad habit applies to current reflections on police. Police have not always existed; they are a modern invention.

Greco-Roman cities did not employ officials to prevent or detect common criminal activity; citizens themselves performed these tasks. (For more on law enforcement in ancient Athens and Rome see David Cohen, *Law, Violence, and Community in Classical Athens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and Wilfried Nippel, *Public Order in Ancient Rome* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995)). Athenian law centered on private prosecution, which meant that the victim or her family prosecuted the perpetrator in Athenian courts. For public crime like stealing city property, any citizen could prosecute and would do the necessary detective work and witness solicitation (Virginia Hunter, *Policing Athens: Social Control in the Attic Lawsuits, 420-320 B.C.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 125). Athenians usually settled disputes through negotiation, mediation and arbitration with minimal formal structures or authorities and stressed keeping peace over blame. To Athenians, democracy meant "consensus rather than coercion, participation rather than delegation. At the judicial level, the principle of voluntary prosecution . . . was fundamental" (Hunter, p. 88) Far from pandemonium, the Athenian system worked well. A state police would have been unthinkable.

Roman society worked in a similar way. If a person witnessed a crime, they cried out for those nearby to help aid in capturing the perpetrator and in aiding the victim. The Roman military never involved itself in such acts unless a riot or rebellion was about to ensue that would disrupt the flow of goods to Rome. Classicist Wilfried Nippel even claims, "We do not even know to what degree (if at all) the Roman authorities undertook prosecution of murder" (Nippel, *Public Order in Ancient Rome*, 2).

This informal "hue and cry" system prevailed through the Middle Ages as see in Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale. As Chaucer described it, the hue and cry involved shouting to draw attention to a crime. Those nearby gathered to witness, to help, to investigate and even to right the wrong. They might form a *posse comitatis*, led by

914

the shire reeve (later called "sheriff") who was an estate manager, to hunt for a fleeing felon. The entire process was a community activity, not the responsibility of a professional police. This description is confirmed in legal codes throughout Europe. For instance, the municipal code of Cuenca, Spain, published around 1190 C.E., describes city employees such as judges, an inspector of market weights, a bailiff to guard incarcerated individuals, a town crier and guards for agriculture (The English translation is published as *The Code of Cuenca: Municipal Law on the TwelfthCentury Castilian Frontier*, trans. James Powers (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000)). But the code does not mention any officials to detect or prevent crime. At most medieval cities had night watchmen, who were not police but firemen who might also warn of other danger.

The American colonies used the hue and cry and night watch system, memorialized in Paul Revere's night-time warning, "The British are coming!" The English-speaking world developed professionalized preventative policing during the nineteenth-century. In America, these police forces evolved along two paths.

Southern police forces evolved from state-mandated slave patrols, which monitored every aspect of slave life to prevent revolts. These armed patrols morphed into southern police forces before and after the Civil War. Despite occasional white protests, the police carried firearms because, they claimed, the shadowy fear of slave revolts and the mythical physical prowess of a revolting slave necessitated well-armed police (See Bryan Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power after Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009)). Most southern police departments, however, formed postbellum, simply taking over slave patrol disciplinary methods and applying them to the newly freed back populations through arrests on disorderly conduct, public intoxication, loitering, arrest "on suspicion," "on warrant," larceny and prostitution. Born in 1868, W.E.B. DuBois later said (*Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 124, 25):

The police system of the South was originally designed to keep track of all Negroes, not simply of criminals; and when the Negroes were freed and the whole South was convinced of the impossibility of free Negro labor, the first and almost universal device was to use the courts as a means of reenslaving the blacks. It was not then a question of crime, but rather one of color, that settled a man's conviction on almost any charge. Thus Negroes came to look upon courts as instruments of injustice and oppression, and upon those convicted in them as martyrs and victims.

In the North, police departments emerged in the nineteenth century to suppress the "dangerous class." In city after city police departments combated working class vices such as drinking and vagrancy, not violent crime. For instance, from 1873 to 1915 police superintendents in Buffalo, New York crime consistently requested increased funding to hire more police, citing as a reason not a rise in violent crime, but labor strikes (Sidney Harring, "The Buffalo Police—1872-1915: Industrialization, Social Unrest, and the Development of the Police Institution" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1976), 43). Arrest records confirm this focus. The 1894 records from Buffalo—

then a city of 300,000— show that police arrested 6,824 people for drunkenness, 4,014 for disorderly conduct, 4,764 for vagrancy, 1,116 for being tramps (p. 201). Yet they arrested only 98 people for felonious violence (murder, robbery and rape) (p. 192). The superintendents—invariably tied to big businesses— used "public order" arrests alongside more violent methods to break strikes and control unions.

Besides maintaining class order, northern police also helped consolidate political power. The police controlled elections by promoting turnout, monitoring voting stations, and harassing electoral opposition to the current administration since new regimes usually replaced existing police with loyalists. This happened following elections in Los Angeles (1889), Kansas City (1895), Chicago (1897) and Baltimore (1897) (See Robert Fogelson, *Big-City Police* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 30).

Understanding this history of policing is important. Do the police represent a natural desire for security that is central to all societies, dismissals of which reveal a profound naivete? Or is modern policing a technique that represents a profound shift in western history as Ellul sees it? My contention is that instead of promoting the common good or protecting the weak, police have historically promoted particular interests, siding with their employers and with dominant racial and economic groups. Police technique is applicable to many areas, as Ellul claimed. The police did not result from inevitable historical forces but from calculated moves to maintain social stratification that continue into the present.

The rule of law is an illusion

Besides mistakenly making the police into an ancient and natural institution, the notion that the rule of law restrains police violence unlike the military remains untested. For Ellul, the rule of law is a pure illusion: "We must unmask the ideological falsehoods of many powers, and especially we must show that the famous theory of the rule of law which lulls the democracies is a lie from beginning to end" (Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's, 1991), 16). Taking this statement seriously, rule of law as it functions in just policing should be challenged at two levels. First, when the U.S. military charges a soldier with a felony, such as abusing prisoners or killing civilians, 90% are convicted and most are incarcerated. (According to the 2009 "Annual Report of the Code Committee on Military Justice" 1098 soldiers across all military branches were charged with the equivalent of a serious felony under military law. Of those 972 were convicted. See http://www.armfor.uscourts.gov/annual/FY09AnnualReport.pdfaccessed July 21, 2010). By comparison, in 2009 only 33% of American police officers charged were convicted—even if they killed unarmed, innocent people—and only 64% of those convicted were incarcerated. (The statistics on police misconduct are created by an NGO called The National Police Misconduct Statistics and Reporting Project and are "low-end estimates" based on news reports across the United States. See http://www.injusticeeverywhere.com/?page id=1588 accessed July 21, 2010). These statistics contradict the assumption that law operates more on the police than the military.

More fundamentally, however, policing advocates have missed that police operate as a sovereign power that stands above the law through their discretionary powers whereby they determine when, where and upon whom they will implement law. This discretionary power conflicts with western democratic theory, which gives pride of place to the rule of law. John Locke, for example, argued that "settled and standing rules" should circumscribe discretionary authority; due process should prioritize individual rights over coercive police powers; and the rule of law should protect citizens from arbitrary arrest and ensure their fair treatment while in custody. For "wherever law ends," Locke proclaimed, "tyranny begins" (John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government, and a Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 189, 90; Bk 2, §202). Locke prohibited discretion as tyrannical except in emergencies where "the safety of the people . . . could not bear a steady fixed route" (169; Bk 2, §56). At that point the executive could "act according to discretion for the public good, without the prescription of the law, and sometimes even against it." (Locke, 172; Bk 2, §60. For a discussion of Locke's notion of prerogative see Pasquino Pasquale, "Locke on King's Prerogative," *Political Theory* 26, no. 2 (1998): 198-208). Locke thus pushed discretion—a decision outside the law—to edge of government, denying its necessity in quotidian governance.

Echoing Locke, Jeffrey Reiman argues that "police discretion begins where the rule of law ends: police discretion is precisely the subjection of law to a human decision beyond the law" (Jeffrey Reiman, "Is Police Discretion Justified in a Free Society?," in *Handled with Discretion: Ethical Issues in Police Decision Making*, ed. John Kleinig (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996), 74). Because police operate in "low visibility" conditions, the only people likely to know that the police officer decided not to invoke the law are the police officer and the suspect. Thus discretionary decisions are unreviewable and risk becoming arbitrary and prejudiced, particularly in cases of racial profiling, police brutality and class bias. In using discretion, police act as sovereigns in a state of emergency and can disregard law. Thus the assumption that police operate under the rule of law ignores routine discretion that transforms the police from an institution that enforces law, into a sovereign institution that can act without lawful authority and even against the law. In the fictional HBO series, *The Wire*, which is a hard-hitting critique of not only current American policing, but other institutions as well, one of the seasoned police officers named McNulty tells his fellow officer: "Let me let you in on a little secret. The patrolling officer on his beat is the one true dictatorship in America. We can lock a guy up on the humble, lock him up for real, or say fuck it and drink ourselves to death under the expressway and our side partners will cover us. No one, I mean no one, tells us how to waste our shift!" (*The Wire*, Season 4, episode 10). The police are thus an autonomous technique.

In states of emergencies, sovereigns suspend law and use their monopoly on violence most often in police actions both externally and internally. Internally, the Holocaust was a police action within a state of emergency that Hitler had declared soon after taking office. In the Holocaust, the police did not violate German law; the entire operation

was legal, which the legally police carried out. Other scholars have also noted that the Holocaust was legal and a police action. See Michael Berenbaum, "The Impact of the Holocaust on Contemporary Ethics," in *Ethics in the Shadow of the Holocaust: Christian and Jewish Perspectives*, ed. Judith Herschcopf Banki et al. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2008), 256. Quoting a Nazi official Hannah Arendt writes, "only the police 'possessed the experiences and the technical facilities to execute an evacuation of Jews *en masse* and to guarantee the supervision of the evacuees.' The 'Jewish State' was to have a police governor under the jurisdiction of Himmler." (Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), 76). These states of emergencies are not confined to totalitarian states. The United States, for instance, has experienced nearly uninterrupted states of emergencies since the 1800's, using them to suppress labor disputes, deport "communists," and to execute people in the Civil War. Police actions are characteristic of sovereign power in times of national emergency, and this power has often been of the most brutal kind. These powers have been routine and are not exceptional at all, as Ellul argues (*Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1970), 86):

But so long as it faces crisis or encounters obstacles, the state does what it considers necessary, and following the Nuremberg procedure it enacts special laws to justify action which in itself is pure violence. These are the 'emergency laws,' applicable while the 'emergency' lasts. Every one of the so-called civilized countries knows this game.

Community, policing and order

With discretionary powers, police primarily maintain order rather than enforce law. But, Ellul would remind us (*The Technological Society*, 103):

This order has nothing spontaneous in it. It is rather a patient accretion of a thousand details. And each of us derives a feeling of security from every one of the improvements which make this order more efficient and the future safer. Order receives our complete approval; even when we are hostile to the police, we are by a strange contradiction, partisans of order.

The trick for police is to make people "partisans of order," and since the police represent order itself, we must see the police as indispensible. This is how community policing theory works.

Community policing theorists have long recognized the distinction between law and order and therefore promote broader discretionary police power, not less. According to Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, "'Community policing' combines greater police/community cooperation with increased police discretion" (See Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers in the Editors preface to Tracey Meares and Dan Kahan, *Urgent Times: Policing and Rights in Inner-City Communities* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), xv). For them, procedural rules and laws inordinately restrict the police to observing an individual's legal rights over the community's well-being. Thus ostensibly minor issues such as panhandling, loitering and vagrancy remain unchecked but grow into larger problems as they signal lack of communal welfare to criminally-prone outsiders who subsequently invade the neighborhood. Community policing argues that police should

have discretionary power to "clean up" these initial "disorders" even if their actions are not "easily reconciled with any conception of due process or fair treatment" and would probably "not withstand a legal challenge" (James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, "Broken Windows," *Atlantic Monthly* 249, no. 3 (1982): 35, 31).

The underlying premise of community policing bifurcates and simplifies community into "orderly" people (the community) and "disorderly" people (outsiders). It strips some people of rights and constructs a simplified community whose sole problems tend to be deviant outsiders and those inside who neglect quality of life issues like "broken windows." The very word "community" connotes positive images, and masks the contested and complex nature of real communities. Furthermore, community policing deploys the word *against* some people and advocates that police be permitted to use any means necessary to rid a "community" of these "disorders." By putting cops back on the beat and giving them a seemingly friendly face in the creation and maintaining of white bourgeois order, police do exactly as Ellul describes them in *The Technological Society*. They appear to protect "good citizens," relieving the citizenry of any fear and by patrolling openly lose their secretive aura, and therefore are not felt to be oppressive. Thus most citizens do not seek to oppose or escape police technique because the police have removed any desire to escape. That is the ideal of technique: to make itself invisible and internalized in its object (*The Technological Society*, 413).

But to do this it has to exclude some people from the notion of community. Anybody who might cause "orderly" people to feel uncomfortable must be stripped of liberal rights and chased out. They do not have to be violent, but in the words of prominent community policing theorists merely "disorderly people. Not violent people, nor, necessarily, criminals, but disreputable or obstreperous or unpredictable people: panhandlers, drunks, addicts, rowdy teenagers, prostitutes, loiterers, the mentally disturbed" (James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, "Broken Windows," *Atlantic Monthly* 249, no. 3 (1982): 30). These are "broken windows" who if left unchecked will cause a spiral of crime and urban decay, indeed, they are the first signs of decay and must be eradicated with "zero tolerance" policies. This scapegoating mechanism has caused police to become much more violent toward these mere objects of police power (See Andy Alexis-Baker, "Community, Policing and Violence," *Conrad Grebel Review 26,* no. 2 (Spring, 2008): 104-5).

The criminal abstraction of the technological society

This scapegoating mechanism also reveals another problem in policing. From his experience working with gangs, Ellul argued that preventing youth from sliding into a life of violence "could not consist in adapting young people to society" (*In Season, Out of Season* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 120). For Ellul, these youth were part of those "who do not conform to the level of efficiency society demands [and] are pushed aside" (129). Thus instead of helping them become professional bureaucrats, Ellul took "a stand against the technological society" and helped them become rightly "maladjusted" themselves. He saw that society's labeling of them as criminals and delinquents was simply part and parcel of the technological society.

More deeply, I think, the technological society must redefine such people not as criminals and delinquents rather than enemies because criminality creates a permanent class of misfits to justify the state and its police. In just war thought—which, as a Christian pacifist, I am also against—enemies rightly construed have a political agenda that obligates the other side to treat them with a certain degree of equality and fairness. At war's end, people go home. And war ends eventually through some kind of negotiation. But once that enemy is redefined as criminal, terrorist or delinquent, they are depoliticized. Instead of legitimate political claims, such people act out of insanity and hatred. One only needs to remember how those who planned the attacks on 9/11 were described and how no thought to negotiation was countenanced to see that this relabeling serves to create a permanent conflict and justify the state, including its police technique. The technique becomes much further entrenched and the violence more intractable with this shift in identity.

International war in police garb

A global police force will only quicken the march of the technological society and is really only a technical solution to technological problems. Ellul himself saw modern policing as a technique designed "to put . . . useless consumers to work" (*The Technological Society*, 111). Techniques intertwine into a system so that a technique applies across disciplines. So policing naturally carries over into economics. When the emerging capitalist system called for more laborers, the police were created to put nonproducers to work, outlawing loitering, gathering firewood and other necessities from the commons, all of which made it harder for nonproducers to stay outside the emerging economic order. Thus technique expands. The police are no exception. It seems naive to suggest that the police would not expand into economic techniques, for example, on the international order. What would a broken window look like on the international scene? Who are the "panhandlers, drunks, addicts, rowdy teenagers, prostitutes, loiterers, the mentally disturbed" that are the human embodiments of broken when one's community is the whole world? If international broken windows must be addressed so that they do not invite a spiral of unrest and violence, who is to notice and fix these windows? In community policing theory it is an outside police force that aggressively drives out undesirable elements, often violating their rights in the name of community. It seems unfathomable that an international police force would not be used to expand global capital markets.

Looking outside the system

As one example of a non-technical way of thinking about security we might look to the Paez tribe in Colombia, 100,000 people strong, who have completely disarmed their indigenous guard. This guard is not a professional force, but is made up of all volunteers and includes over 7,000 men, women and youth. They carry a three foot long baton decorated with various colors as a symbol of their authority, not as a weapon. When there is encroachment on their territory they communicate via radios and many of them gather together to confront the intrusion and try to persuade them to leave (a hue and cry). This does not mean that such a decentralized, democratic,

920

and nonviolent practice is always effective in warding off outside aggression: currently the tribe is facing increased pressure from both the government and FARC rebels with encroachment from both sides. However at times they have been able to persuade the rebels to back off and to release hostages. They provide security at great personal risk to themselves and their communities. This is not really "policing," in the normal sense of this word, but a communal practice of care and concern for communal wellbeing through resolving conflicts nonviolently.

Conclusion

Just policing advocates distinguish between war and policing in such a way that policing must necessarily be less violent than war. They have historically maintained social stratification and expanded into new areas to justify their existence and operate not under the rule of law, but under the assumption that they should create order, a subjective concept that looks different to a radical anarchist than to a police officer. I have tried to demonstrate the flaws in this argument. In the end, Ellul's statement on these distinctions holds true (*The Political Illusion*, trans. Konrad Kellen (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 74-75):

We hardly need to point out how simple-minded the distinction made by one of our philosophers is between "police" (internal), which would be legitimate as a means of constraint, and an 'army,' which would be on the order of force. In the realm of politics these two elements are identical.

Going Offline

by Brenna Cussen Anglada

Brenna Cussen Anglada lives at the New Hope Catholic Worker Farm in Dubuque Iowa where she and others try to live out Peter Maurin's vision of a "worker-scholar" by combining farming and education

"There are almost seven billion people in the world. Since it is not ecologically sustainable for each one of those people to use a computer, *why you*?"

This question, posed by Ethan Hughes to a small group of us visiting the Possibility Alliance, an intentional community in Northeast Missouri living without the use of fossil fuel, has made a lasting impression on me. Ethan's challenge, pointed at the privilege that I take for granted, and backed by the weight of sobering statistics about the destructive effects computers have on God's creation, has triggered my decision to give up the personal use of computers by the end of 2011.

I say I will give up the personal use of computers, because I realize it is currently beyond my ability and imagination right now to stop using the computers that are involved in my daily activities like using public transportation, banks, or telephones, or purchase anything. One exception I *may* make to the personal computer ban is if I travel to Occupied Palestine or another area where extreme oppression is taking place.

Then I may use a computer as a means to communicate such injustices. However, I have not yet made this decision

My decision did not come in a vacuum. Already, I live in a Catholic Worker farm community that is trying in multiple ways to simplify, and care for, our own basic needs. Eight adults and five children use one washer (no dryer), share three cars, heat our homes with wood, compost our human waste, and raise the bulk of our food. While we still use refrigeration, cook with propane, and depend on electricity (with some solar) for lights and appliances, we hope to implement alternatives for these conveniences in the near future. Part of the reason I live this way is because, in recognizing the immense privilege I inherited as an educated white American, I no longer want to assume that somebody poorer (or browner) than me will perform the daily tasks that keep me alive in order that I can pursue more "intellectual" or "spiritual" interests. And though I don't own a computer, the fact that I still borrow friends' laptops or use the library desktop - the very creation of which wreaks havoc on the environment and the lives of the poor - is yet another way I capitalize on another's misery.

Admittedly, for some, computers are amazingly helpful tools. On a personal scale, computers have served as a convenient way for me to stay in touch with my family and friends across large geographical distances. I have used them to edit and publish my ideas on issues of justice and faith, about which I am passionate. More generally, computers assist communities of people from across the world to exchange ideas, and have served as a means through which activists can promote awareness about important causes. The recent nonviolent, democratic revolution in Egypt owes much to the computer for its efficient means of communication (though the actual extent of its valued role has been debated.) Computers can be used in modern medicine to prevent death and promote healing. Often, computers can help us save lives.

According to Jacques Ellul, such advantages of "technique" (as he refers to what is more familiarly called "technology") are usually concrete and obvious to the common person. My readers can probably come up with an even longer list on the benefits of computers than I have already presented. However, as Ellul posits in his book *The Technological Bluff*, the disadvantages of technique (which are of a different type than and usually cannot be compared to the advantages) are very real, though generally more abstract than the advantages, and often only come to light after long arguments. Ellul offers as an example the invention of artificial light, the benefits of which are plain to see. A major, though less obvious, disadvantage, as he points out, is the fact that such artificial light has enabled human beings to work and live as much at night as during the day, "breaking one of life's most basic rhythms," and leading to the expectation of industrialized society that people work as machines work (Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman, 1990), 43). Ellul asserts that, contrary to common assumption, and unlike many other inanimate objects (i.e. a knife being used either to slice bread or to kill a neighbor) technique is *not* neutral. He says, rather, that no matter how technique is used, it carries with it a number of both positive and negative consequences (p. 35).

If this is true, then it would behoove our society to begin a serious argument over the effects of the computer, weighing the positive against the negative. Below I have listed a sampling, by no means exhaustive list, of the negative environmental impacts alone (please take into account that since the computer industry is such a rapidly changing field, it is difficult to get the most up-to-date statistics). I hope for this short essay to contribute to a larger, much more comprehensive, discussion.

- The manufacturing of a typical desktop and monitor takes 500 pounds of fossil fuels, 47 pounds of chemicals, and 1.5 tons of water in a world where one third of the human population does not have access to clean drinking water (Worldwatch Institute, "Behind the Scenes: Computers," *State of the World* (New York: Worldwatch Institute, 2004), 44

  http: //www. rohan. sdsu. edu/faculty/ dunnweb/ StateofWorld2004.dat.pdf).

- Each year, between five and seven million *tons* of e-waste (trashed toxic components of computers that are impossible to recycle) is created (Annie Leonard, *The Story of Stuff* (Free Press of Simon and Schuster, 2010), 58). The majority of this is sent to China, India, South Asia, and Pakistan, as it is cheaper to send trash abroad than it is to deal with it domestically.

- An investigation by the Basel Action Network and Greenpeace China in December 2001 found that most computers in Guiyu, an ewaste processing center in China, are from North America and, to a lesser degree, Japan, South Korea, and Europe. The study found that computers in these "recycling" facilities are dismantled using hammers, chisels, screwdrivers, and even bare hands. Workers crack CRT monitors to remove the copper yoke, while the rest of the CRT is dumped on open land or pushed into rivers. Local residents say the water now tastes foul from lead and other contaminants (Worldwatch Institute, 45).

- A single 320-megabyte microchip requires at least 72 grams of chemicals, 700 grams of elemental gasses, 32,000 grams of water, and 1200 grams of fossil fuels. Another 440 grams of fossil fuels are used to operate the chip during its typical life span - four years of operation for three hours a day (Worldwatch Institute, 44).

- More than two thousand materials are used in the production of just one microchip (smaller than a pinky fingernail), a single component of one machine: given this, it is next to impossible for human rights watchdog groups to track the origin of all the materials that go into making an entire computer. It can be safely assumed, though, that all of the same problematic mining practices of environmental contamination, health problems, and human rights violations (for the gold, tantalum, copper, aluminum, lead, zinc, nickel, tin, silver, iron,

mercury, cobalt, arsenic, cadmium, and chromium that are used in computer manufacturing) are involved (Leonard, 58).

Knowing all of this, if I neither want to mine the parts for, nor build, a computer myself, nor want any member of my family to do so, then why would I ask somebody else to do it for me?

There exist other persuasive arguments - social, psychological, physical, and spiritual - against the use of the computer. I'm sure you are familiar with many of them, so I will only touch on a few: the average American child spends 30 hours a week in front of a screen, no doubt contributing to the worrying rise in obesity, diabetes, and other related diseases. This also exposes children to more violence and pornography than with which they would otherwise come into contact. Since 90% of human communication is nonverbal, the pervasiveness of email, Facebook, iPhones, and other forms of electronic interaction have led to the loss of much authentic communication in relationships. And as both spiritual and physical beings, created by God to be in the material world, such mediated access to our environment disrupts a more direct access to the divine.

As a Christian and an anarchist trying to live an authentic life, the most compelling reason for me to give up computer use is that *computers make me reliant on an unjust system I claim to resist.* Both the manufacturing and the running of computers require strip mining and the extraction of fossil fuels. Most of the funding for computer science research comes from the military. Worse, it is due to the military's occupation of foreign lands that we have easy access to resources like oil and other materials we need to run our high-tech lifestyles. If I believe in a world where military and corporate domination do not exist, then I need to start practicing for that world. And, as far as I can see, such a world cannot have computers. The farmer-writer Wendell Berry, in his well-known essay "Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer," says, "I would hate to think that my work as a writer could not be done without a direct dependence on strip-mined coal. How could I write conscientiously against the

rape of nature if I were, in the act of writing, implicated in the rape?" (Wendell Berry, "Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer," published in *New England Review* and *Bread Loaf Quarterly* in 1987 and reprinted in *Harper's.*

http://www.jesusradicals.com/wp-content/uploads/computer.pdf).

Again, the computer is not the only culprit here. My refrigerator, the gas I put in the car I drive, the stove on which I cook meals for my family - all of these were likely manufactured or obtained in unethical ways. Thankfully, there exist alternatives to the gas or electric stove, to electric refrigeration, and to petroleum-powered transportation. I encourage us all to seek out such alternatives and begin to experiment with them, as our community is currently doing. But the computer has no such alternative. As Ellul says, "There is no choice. The computer brings a whole system with it ...offices, means of distribution, personnel, and production all have to be adapted to it" (*The Technological Bluff*, 9).

In such an enormous system, you may ask whether my action as one person opting to discontinue computer use will even matter. Ellul would not think so. Rather, he laments, "Whom should we hold responsible? The scientists who were there at the beginning? But they do only theoretical studies. [T]he experts who examine the plans? But they only give advice." Ellul places the majority of the blame—curiously, considering he's an anarchist—on politicians, whom he says "decide in favor of useless and wasteful projects" and who must "lose their mandate and be refused the possibility of reelection." (p. 301). Ellul says we, the people, "must take seriously our citizenship" and hold the politicians accountable. But if we seek to create a world free of computers and the State, why would we bother with a state-based solution? I find Wendell Berry, in this regard, more compelling. Berry is critical of those who only point fingers at the elite: "The consumption that supports the production is rarely acknowledged to be at fault. To the extent that we consume, in our present circumstances, we are guilty. To the extent that we guilty consumers are [environmentalists], we are absurd. But what can we do? Must we go on writing letters to politicians and donating to conservation organizations until the majority of our fellow citizens agree with us? Or can we do something directly to solve our share of the problem?"

I assume that most people who are reading this article, are most likely one of a privileged few in the world who owns a computer. In fact, to put computer usage into perspective, Americans own 40% of all of the computers in the world. If we want to begin to unfetter ourselves from the disastrous consequences of a technological society, the abandonment of personal computer use, which seems to be possible for the majority of the world, is one very simple step in that direction. For ultimately, if we cannot find more creative ways to transform society, ways that do not depend on oppressive means, then we will only bolster, lend credence to, and finance the very injustice we seek to eliminate.

In Review

Christian Anarchism: *A Political Commentary on the Gospel*

by Alexandre J. M. E. Christoyannopoulos Imprint Academic, 2010
Reviewed by Tripp York

Tripp York has taught religion at Western Kentucky University and has authored several books including his latest, The Devil Wears Nada: Satan Exposed.

The subtitle of Christoyannopoulos' book, *A Political Commentary on the Gospel*, may give some readers the impression that there exists an apolitical "Gospel" in need of political commentary. It is as if there exists some reality beyond the gospel called the "political" that can offer objective observations on what political import, if any, the gospel contains. This would hardly be innovative as theologians, especially in the past few centuries, have often made just such an assumption. The life and teachings of Jesus appear to have nothing to say about "real life" until someone fills the gaps by aligning it with a secular political theory of their own predilection.

This is not, however, the intention of Christoyannopoulos' book. Instead, his purpose is to offer a "detailed and comprehensive synthesis of the main themes of Christian anarchist thought " (p. 1).

In order to do this, Christoyannopoulos attempts the incredibly arduous task of weaving together the various thoughts, meanderings, and arguments offered to us by numerous Christian anarchists. By doing so, he not only hopes to provide both a broad and succinct account of Christian anarchism (by delineating the cardinal tenets of their shared agreements and disagreements), but to contribute to the growing arena of political theology (p. 4). (Note 1)

Christoyannopoulos divides his book into six chapters and a concluding word on the prophetic role of Christian anarchism. His introduction outlines and discusses numerous Christian anarchists and how their work can be located amidst current political theologies. The introduction provides a hint as to how his entire manuscript will read: this is not so much a book making a specific argument as much as it is an encyclopedic account of the arguments made by Christian anarchists. To his credit, Christoyannopoulos is exhaustingly exhaustive. The introduction contains almost 200 footnotes, while some of the chapters include more than 400 footnotes. I do not point this out as a criticism. My point is quite the opposite. In order for him to achieve

his objective, Christoyannopoulos, it seems, incorporates everything ever discussed by Christian anarchists in regards to the kind of things Christian anarchists like to discuss.

For instance, chapter one is a sustained reflection on the Sermon on the Mount. The author examines how various Christian anarchists have exegeted, for example, the text "do not resist evil" in order to display commonalities of approach from thinkers such as Tolstoy, Ellul, Eller, Myers, Ballou, Wink, Andrews, Hennacy, Day, Bartley, Penner, Berdyaev, and Yoder (among many others). This is, for the most part, how the entire book runs. Christoyannopoulos breaks his chapters into sections and sub-sections that comprise a range of topics including, but not limited to, Romans 13, taxes, nonviolence, the state, revolution, exorcism, economics, the swearing of oaths, conscription, the beatitudes, institutional religion, and civil disobedience. He then provides a thorough juxtaposition of what many Christian anarchists have said about each of these topics, therein providing an indispensable commentary on key biblical passages. For some, such a read could be tedious, while for others, this could replace their bible.

Perhaps, in some ways, such a format is both the book's greatest strength and its greatest weakness. It is a dissertation, and it reads like one. The author goes to great lengths to be as comprehensive as possible— something not always possible when you are trying to sell a book to a publisher. Such comprehensiveness can often make for a slower read, yet, given the nature of his task, it is necessary. Christoyannopoulos' goal is that of synthesizing the main themes of Christian anarchist thought, and, to this end, he succeeds. This is the book to examine when the situation dictates knowing what Ellul, Tolstoy, Cavanaugh, etc., have to say about Christian life in, under, and outside of governmental authorities.

Christian Anarchism is certainly an important part of the Christian anarchist canon. Actually, it may be the canon *of* the canon. There is simply no other book I am aware of that brings together so many Christian anarchist voices on so many key theological issues. In this manner, it functions as an essential guide to everything a Christian anarchist may ever want to read. In a book with more than 2,000 footnotes, it provides you with all the resources your little anti-capitalist heart can afford (assuming you are not one of those strange anomalies known as an anarcho-capitalist). Speaking of affordability, this book will, ironically, make the most ardent defender of capitalism shout with joy. It is expensive. It is eighty dollars expensive. Perhaps it should have included a preface similar to the one found in Wendell Berry's *Sex, Economy, Community and Freedom* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1993): "If you have bought it, dear reader, I thank you. If you have borrowed it, I honor your frugality. If you have stolen it, may it add to your confusion" (p. 18). Regardless, the author promises that within the next year, a shorter, revised, and a "foot-note freer" version will be released (vii). I am assuming (or at least hoping—as I am sure the author is as well) it will also be less expensive. If you are inclined, however, to have a version that functions as a guide to everything that combines a cross with a circled 'A', then this may be your best bet.

My only word of warning is the same word I offer to any person compelled to adopt the label of Christian anarchism: Avoid labels that tend to be both novel and reactionary (note, I say "tend to be" as opposed to "are"). The best Christian anarchists I have ever read never considered themselves to be Christian anarchists. Fortunately, Christoyannopoulos shows us that many so-called Christian anarchists have far higher aspirations than some of the reactionary postures we all tend to embrace. This book offers an excellent manual for how to not only live like a Christian anarchist, but, and more importantly, how to live like a disciple of Jesus. Hopefully, at its best, Christian Anarchism will serve to remind us that Christianity is about living the kind of life that may best be called anarchistic, while remaining well aware that Christianity was lived faithfully, by many others, for seventeen-hundred years prior to the creation of words like anarchistic.

Note 1: The very existence of something called "political theology" may assume the kind of posture I was critical of in the first paragraph. It, inherently, suggests the existence of a different kind of theology that is somehow apolitical—which very well may be the reality given North American Christianity's overwhelming tendency toward Gnosticism. Nevertheless, the idea of a political theology seems to posit, and reinforce, the notion that there can be some sort of reflection on God that lacks any bearing on how creation interacts with itself. Granted, I imagine the real reason such terminology exists is, in part, due to the heretical bifurcations created and perpetuated by modern theologians, as well as the need for such theologians to garner interest in their increasingly irrelevant field of study.

Adverts

New IJES E-mail List

After twelve years the www.ellul.org web site is undergoing a significant and long overdue upgrade. All back issues of the Ellul Forum will soon be readily and freely available along with other study resources.

It is time for the IJES to host a more accessible and lively "forum" for those interested.

Please send your preferred e-mail address to IJES@ellul.org if you wish to receive IJES news and resources via that medium.

International Jacques Ellul Society

www.ellul.org
130 Essex Street, Box 219 South Hamilton MA 01982
The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, back-

grounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

Anyone who supports the objectives of the IJES is invited to join the society for an annual dues payment of US$20.00. EF s ubscription included.

Board of Directors

Andy Alexis-Baker, *Associated Mennonite Seminaries;* Mark Baker, *Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno;* Patrick Chastenet, *University of Bordeaux;* Clifford Christians, *University of Illinois;* Dell DeChant, *University of South Florida;* Darrell Fasching (VicePresident), *University of South Florida;* David Gill (President), *Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary;* Andrew Goddard, *London*; Jeff Greenman, *Wheaton*; Virginia Landgraf, *American Theological Library Association, Chicago*, David Lovekin, *Hastings College, Nebraska;* Randall Marlin, *Carlton University, Ottawa*, Ken Morris (Secretary-Treasurer), *Boulder;* Carl Mitcham, *Colorado School of Mines*; Langdon Winner, *Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.*

Postal Address Changes

Don't forget to notify IJES if your address changes. Postal forwarding orders expire after a period of time. Forwarding practices are sometimes unreliable. You don't want to miss out on The Ellul Forum. We don't want to lose touch with you.

E-mail your postal address change to IJES@ellul.org

or mail to

IJES/Ellul Forum

130 Essex Street, Box 219 South Hamilton MA 01982 USA

Make Payments to IJES Electronically

The IJES office can accept payments only in US dollars because of the huge collection fees otherwise charged by US banks.

IJES subscribers outside the USA can go to www.paypal.com and use a credit or debit card to make a payment to "JES@ellul.org."

Prophet in the Technological Wilderness

A Centenary Celebration & Critical Review of Jacques Ellul

Speakers include:

Andy Alexis-Baker Mark Baker Stephanie Bennett Arthur Boers Daniel Cerezuelle Patrick Chastenet Cliff Christians Raymond Downing Darrell Fasching David W. Gill Jeffrey P. Greenman Randolph Haluza-DeLay Virginia Landgraf Ted Lewis David Lovekin Randal Marlin Paul Tyson Jacob Van Vleet Gregory Wagenfuhr Sue Wentworth Langdon Winner

July 8-10, 2012

Wheaton College

Prophet in the Technological Wilderness

A Centenary Celebration & Critical Review of Jacques Ellul

JULY 8-10, 2012

WHEATON COLLEGE
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

REGISTER TODAY

www.wheaton.edu/Academics/Departments/Theology/Conferences-and-Lectures/Ellul

General Registration - $120 (includes dinners)
Student/Unemployed Registration - $50 (includes dinners)
Meal Ticket: Lunches & Breakfasts - $35
Meal Ticket: Lunches only - $20
Discounted Hotel Rates or On-Campus Housing Available

Co-Sponsored by the International Jacques Ellul Society, the Wheaton College Biblical and Theological Studies Department, and the Wheaton College Archives.

SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

Andy Alexis-Baker
Mark Baker
Stephanie Bennett
Arthur Boers
Daniel Cerezuelle
Patrick Chastenet
Cliff Christians
Raymond Downing
Darrell Fasching
David W. Gill
Jeffrey P. Greenman
Randolph Haluza-DeLay
Virginia Landgraf
Ted Lewis
David Lovekin
Randal Marlin
Paul Tyson
Jacob Van Vleet
Gregory Wagenfuhr
Sue Wentworth
Langdon Winner

Jacques Ellul
(1912 – 1994)

Exister, c'est résister

For more information, contact Kristina Satern at (630)752-5197 or Kristina.Satern@wheaton.edu.

Wheaton, illinois

Register Today

http://www.wheaton.edu/Academics/Departments/Theology/Conferences-and-Lectures/Ellul][www.wheaton.edu/Academics/Departments/Theology/Conferences-and-Lectures/Ellul

General Registration - $120 (includes dinners)

Student/Unemployed Registration - $50 (includes dinners)

Meal Ticket: Lunches & Breakfasts - $35

Meal Ticket: Lunches only - $20

Discounted Hotel Rates or On-Campus Housing Available

Co-Sponsored by the International Jacques Ellul Society, the Wheaton College Biblical and Theological Studies Department, and the Wheaton College Archives.

Jacques Ellul (912 -1994)

For more information, contact Kristina Satern at (630)752-5197 or Kristina.Satern@wheaton.edu.

Issue #49 Spring 2012 — Art, Technique, and Meaning in Jacques Ellul

- Click to view the original PDF

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Contents

933

Our War on Ourselves:

Rethinking Science, Technology, and Economic Growth by Willem Vanderburg

Richard Stivers 22

Call to Meeting

Jacques Ellul Centenary

Conference: July 8-10, 2012 24

"A major section of modern art and poetry unconsciously guides us in the direction of madness . . . only madness is inaccessible to the machine. Every other "art" form can be reduced to technique."

-Jacques Ellul,

Technological Society, page 404

Information on The Editorial Board & More

The Ellul Forum

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Founded 1988

The Ellul Forum is published twice per year, in the Spring and Fall. Its purpose is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

Editor

Clifford G. Christians, Univ. of Illinois, Urbana IL Associate Editor

David W. Gill, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, So. Hamilton MA

Contributing Editors

Patrick Chastenet, University of Bordeaux, France Dan Clendenin, Stanford, California

Peter F. W. Davies, Buckinghamshire College, UK Marva Dawn, Vancouver, Washington

Darrell J. Fasching, University of South Florida Andrew Goddard, Oxford University, UK Joyce Hanks, Univ. of Scranton, Pennsylvania David Lovekin, Hastings College, Nebraska Carl Mitcham, Colorado School of Mines Pieter Tijmes, University of Twente, Netherlands Gabriel Vahanian, Strasbourg University, France Willem Vanderburg, Univ. of Toronto, Canada

Publisher

The International Jacques Ellul Society www.ellul.org

130 Essex Street, Box 219 South Hamilton MA 01982 USA

Dues, Subscriptions, & Payment Options

The Ellul Forum is sent twice per year to all members of the IJES. An annual membership/ subscription, anywhere in the world, costs US $20. Please send check or money order (e.g., international postal money order) drawn in US funds for $20 to "IJES", 130 Essex St., Box 219, So. Hamilton MA 01982 USA—or make payment to

"IJES@ellul.org" electronically at www.paypal.com. Be sure to note your address and the purpose of your payment.

Change of Address

Please notify IJES of any change in your address. Our mailings are infrequent and postal forwarding orders expire.

Manuscript Submissions

For Ellul Forum writers' guidelines, visit http://www.ellul.org—or][www.ellul.org—or e-mail: Editor@ellul.org—or write Cliff Christians, EF Editor, Institute of Communications Research, University of Illinois, 810 S. Wright St., # 228, Urbana IL 61801 USA We welcome your proposals.

Books, Reviews, News

Send books for review, book reviews, and news to David Gill, EF Assoc. Editor, 130 Essex St., Box 219, So. Hamilton MA 01982 USA

Back Issues

Visit www.ellul.org for a complete index of back issues and information on how to access them.

From the Editor

In this 49th issue of the Ellul Forum our long-time friend and Contributing Editor, David Lovekin, not only probes the meaning of art in our technological society, with the aide of Jacques Ellul, Andy Warhol, and others — he sets a record for the longest article we have ever published.

Far be it from us to quench the musings of our motorcycle-riding, bass-playing, philosophy professor. Ellul's big book on art L'Empire du non-sens (1980) has never been translated. Ellul's mother was a painter - I recall vividly a beautiful portrait of Jacques Ellul as a young boy which hung in their living room.

Professor Lovekin has just retired from active teaching, paper-grading, and academic bureaucracy at his longtime academic home, Hastings College in Nebraska. His doctoral dissertation Technique, Discourse and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul was published in 1991.

Lovekin's friend and colleague Samir Younes, Professor of Architecture at the University of Notre Dame, contributes a companion article on "Technique and the Collapse of Symbolic Thought." Younes's latest book is The Imperfect City: On Architectural Judgment (2012).

Richard Stivers reviews Bill Vanderburg's latest book, as always, delivering important Ellulian insights to our intellectually and spiritually often-impoverished world.

We are closing in on 25 years of publishing the Ellul Forum. We will always do some paper but we must also connect with those who rummage through cyberspace so watch for an increased Ellul Forum presence on the internet.

But for sure: do not miss our historic gathering in Wheaton/Chicago July 8-10 to celebrate and review Ellul's legacy. See back cover. We want you there!

David W. Gill, Associate Editor

Looking and Seeing: The Play of Image and Art

The Wager of Art in the Technological Society
by David Lovekin

David Lovekin is Professor of Philosophy at Hastings College in Hastings Nebraska. He is the author of one of the first published dissertations on Jacques Ellul, Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness (1991)

Prologue

This study began with a fascination for the enigma of American artist Andy Warhol (1928-1987). I began to collect his words. I had been intrigued by German philosopher, literary critic, essayist Walter Benjamin's (1892) philosophical snapshots and with the notion of an aura that could be pealed from objects by photography. And I was taken by French philosopher, professor of law, and theologian Jacques Ellul's (1912-1994) claim that religion, philosophy, and aesthetics were mere ornaments that had gone the way of the ruffled sunshade on McCormick's first reaper. Aura, the capacity of the object to look back and to direct the viewer in search for origins, fleshed out Ellul's claim. The symbol had lost its symbolic dimension in the technical process where words became images and images became concepts; this insight informed my reading of Warhol and Benjamin with Ellul.

The Image and the Celebrity

"The Look" is everywhere. Everywhere people look there are people looking back, hoping to see and to be seen. To be is to be seen. Bishop Berkeley's catch-phrase is the logic of celebrity washed America, Andy Warhol's America, and the current America as well. Warhol's America does not go away. Reality TV became possible when TV became reality, when the celebrity became a primary archetype in some fifteen minutes of fame, and when art and celebrity became interchangeable.

Riding across the country in 1963 to his second show—the Liz-Elvis Show at the Ferus Gallery in L A.—Warhol realized that the countryside was *Pop* and had become a sign, a label. It was there to be seen and consumed. He wrote:

The moment you label something you take a step—I mean, you can never go back to seeing it unlabeled. We were seeing the future and we knew it for sure. I saw people walking around in it without knowing it, because they were still thinking in the past.

But all you had to do was know you were in the future, and that's what put you there. The mystery was gone, but the amazement was just starting.[1]

Warhol saw what America stood for. Past, present, and future coincided in the label, the power of the image that was an eternal present, digitized time. The image substantiates being in two directions. It both offers the product and it reveals the celebrity. Before the images, the mystery was gone. Warhol was amazed.

Warhol's last book, *America*, was a chronicle of that amazement. Composed of photographs taken over the last ten years, Warhol revealed the many paradoxes and mysteries that had become America. These mysteries were resolved in the image. In America there was so much wealth and so much poverty. The solution was style. Warhol observed:

One of the great things in American cities today is not having all that much money but having so much style that you can get into any place for free. Free parties, free drinks, free food—you just need the right attitude, the right clothes, and being clean.[2]

Style was a function of right attitude, right appearance, and proper hygiene. Style was a discipline of mind and body. Poverty and death challenged this discipline, Warhol revealed. He was concerned.

Mystery denied was mystery regained. What was the right dress, the proper hygiene and attitude, when anything goes (Ellul would call it *N'importe quoi*)? Granted, it must be seen, but by and for whom? Moreover, was this propriety not tied to commodity, to consumption? First, the very people needing the free meal, the free drink, the shelter and warmth, were those too poor to purchase it. Second, there was so much to purchase in so many places. Style was the resolution, the knack to intuit the proper look. Style was what the look was about. Warhol advised:

You need one kind of look to get into the clubs that the kids go to, you need another to freeload at the Broadway opening night parities, and You need another for the sports parties. It takes a lot of work to figure out how to look so good they'll want you; it's easier to get a good job and buy your way in, which is what most people do. But that's never been the chic way and, in reality, the clubs have more respect for those with style and they treat them much better than those who pay.[3]

Style was beyond commodity and yet what commodity addressed. Behind the seeming clarity of the image was another dimension, a place of rest within the flow of products. Americans were offered a blinding choice between this product, this occupation, this style of life, this form of entertainment. Choice, as Warhol saw it, was no longer a matter of traditional wealth and social status, although wealth was likely included. Style involved purchases, the proper purchases.

On the one hand, mass production democratized choice. Warhol said:

---

[1] Andy Warhol, *America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 112.

[2] *Ibid.*, 14.

[3] *Ibid.*, 199

Buying things in America today is just unbelievable. Let's say you're thirsty. Do you want Coke, Diet Coke, Tab, Caffeine-Free Coke, Caffeine-Fee Diet Coke, Caffeine-Fee Tab, New Improved Tab, Pepsi, diet Pepsi, Pepsi Light, Pepsi Fee, Root Beer, Royal Crown Cola, C&C Cola, Diet Royal Crown Cola, Caffeine-Fee Pepsi, Caffeine-Fee Diet Pepsi, Caffeine-Free Royal Crown Cola, Like, Dr. Pepper, Sugar-Fee Dr. Pepper, Fresca, Mr. Pibb, Seven-Up, Diet Seven-Up, orange, grape, apple Orelia, Perrier, Poland, ginger ale, tonic, seltzer, Yoo-Hoo or cream soda?

And not only are there all these choices, but it's all democratic. You can see a billboard for Tab and think: Nancy Reagan drinks Tab, Gloria Vanderbilt drinks Tab, Jackie Onassis drinks Tab, Katherine Hepburn drinks Tab, and, just think, you can drink Tab too. Tab is tab and No matter how rich you are, you can't get a better one than the one the homeless woman on the corner is drinking. All the Tabs are just the Same. And all the Tabs are good. Nancy Reagan knows it, Gloriam Vanderbilt knows it, the baglady knows it, and you know it.[4]

There seems so much choice, so much freedom, which appears in the hands of the consumer that are truly in the hands of the corporation and the technical system. To consume, however, is to appear to be free, which, in turn, seems to flow from the technical system; joblessness and poverty seem the unfortunate results as well. Even in the pressure of poverty, however, the celebrity may appear as guide for the wisdom of consumption, which is a function of being seen.

The celebrity, then, has become the guide for recovering the many fragmentations and disjunctions that are modern life. The celebrity's visibility illuminates. To be visible, however, is to risk reduction and fragmentation, a fate the ordinary as well as the Platonic Forms might suffer. To be dressed punk one night and to be at the opera in tie and tails is to dare dissolution and that dare is style. To be able to do both is to have style. The celebrity is both moments, knowing that what matters is what happens "now" perpetually. The celebrity is this or that appearance at every moment. To seek coherence and consistency beyond the moment is to not understand the logic of the celebrity, something understood by contemporary politicians as they attempt to become all to nobody and everybody. The celebrity is this peculiar unity, imminently transcendent as a master of the art of the ephemeral. Warhol would agree, having had in mind this specific type:

I've always thought politicians and actors really summed up the American Way. They can look at the various pieces of themselves, and they can pick out one piece and say, "Now I'm only going to be this one thing." And the piece may be smaller and less interesting than the whole person-ality, but it's the piece that everyone wants to see.[5]

The politician and actor are inevitable identities. Each presents the real as now with no continuity beyond appearance.

---

[4] *Ibid.,* 21-22

[5] *Ibid.,* 152.

In 1968 at Andy Warhol Enterprises, known as The Factory, Warhol was shot by Valarie Solanis, one of his celebrities. Warhol thought about death, about a possible epitaph. He concluded: "I always thought I'd like my own tombstone to be blank. No epitaph, and no name. Well, actually, I'd like it to say 'figment.'"[6] Death provided a marvelous focus, a question of what was beyond the here and now? Warhol concluded with celebrity style:

Dying is the most embarrassing thing that can ever happen to you, be-cause some-one's got to take care of the body, make the funeral arrangements, pick out the casket and the service and the cemetery and the clothes for you to wear and get someone to style you and do the makeup. You'd like to help them, and most of all you'd like to do the whole thing your-self, but you're dead and so you can't. Here you've spent your whole life trying to make enough money to take care of yourself so you won't bother anybody else with your problems, and then you wind up dumping the biggest problem ever in somebody else's lap anyway. It's a shame.[7]

Here we have the major celebrity problems of modern life: detail, appearance, and efficiency. What surrounds the concerns of the here and now is problematic, embarrassing. Death is embarrassing, a nuisance and an annoyance, and, finally, shame. The shame is that this moment style is ultimately called to question.

Warhol had the look, but his words seem tinged with irony, although of this we are not sure. Are his assembly line portraits of products and celebrities mere replications of consumer-producer products or are they sardonic commentaries on the superficialities of his age? Are they what I will later call bad infinities?

Warhol's style was a concern from the moment he entered the art scene. Irving Sandler in his review of Warhol's work in the 1962 *New Realists* exhibition at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York wrote: "In aping commercial art does Warhol . . . satirize its vulgarity or does he accept its value complacently?"[8] Sandler assumed that art was not commercial, that art adopted a transcendent perspective. Sandler betrayed his hope in Warhol to suggest that Warhol only "apes" commercial style. Presumably, the sin of painting commercially was absolved in ironic intention. Irony is a transcendent pose, but Warhol's irony was uncertain. Did his words and his art match up and for what purpose: did they reflect, question, or abdicate? Or did they mean anything at all beyond their expression and style?

Warhol was an enigma, studied or not. In interviews, for example, Warhol avoided facts and said, "I never give my background, and anyhow I make it all up different anytime I'm asked."[9] And then, the famous quote: "The reason I'm painting this way is that I want to be a machine."[10] Since the Renaissance it was a commonplace to see

---

[6] *Ibid.,* 129

[7] *Ibid.,* 126.

[8] As quoted in Claude Marks, *World Artists: An H. W. Wilson Biographical Dictionary* (New York: The H. W. Wilson Co. 1984), 880.

[9] *Ibid.,* 879.

[10] Andy Warhol, "What is Pop Art?," interview with Gene Swensen, *Art News* (62) (1963), 26.

the artist as visionary, divinely inspired, rising above time and place, leading society to greater sensibility and awareness. The artist might also appear as a rogue and a charlatan, as long as the artist was clearly astride the social order. Sometimes the artist was both hero and rascal. Erwin Panofsky noted a Venetian forger, who, in his reproduction of a fourth or fifth century BCE Greek coin, could not resist adding a variation of Michelangelo's *David* and the *Risen Christ*.[11] Sartre, more recently, recommended the authenticity of Jean Genet as both poet and thief, a true and admirable outsider. The artist as outsider must be clever and not a dupe. Warhol must not be a dupe. But, where does the celebrity as artist stand? The answer, in part, resides in a relation of the artist to the artistic process that is, at the same time, a social process.

The Reproducibility of Art; the Art of Reproducibility

Walter Benjamin, in his 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," argued that the photographic means of reproduction appearing in the nineteenth century required a rethinking of the reality and the place of art. Most notably, the art object as a conveyer of "aura" was diminished. In traditional cultures the art object possessed aura in its uniqueness, in its capacity to unite its audience in a ritual pose, and in its representation of a tradition, which it at once founded and furthered. The gods were named and sacred images produced and rituals could be followed. The gods were often eaten or celebrated through sacrifice. The "aura" of an art object, like totemic and cave art, projected that object beyond its time and place to engage other traditions that encountered the object's uniqueness, though not necessarily in the same way. Benjamin explained that the stature of Venus for the Greeks was an object of veneration, while for Medieval society, it was ominously regarded as pagan idolatry, but, nonetheless both perspectives revealed "aura."[12] For both societies the aura-laden object extended the powers of uniqueness and permanence. The artist, anonymous or not, shared in those powers. In traditional societies the artist appeared as shaman or hero.

The photographic process changed the notion of the art object and the natural object, both in the photograph's power to copy an "original" art object or a natural object, and in the photograph's capacity to become an "original" art object. In both cases the notion of "original" was transformed. A photograph that reproduced the Eiffel Tower was a copy like a painting or drawing and yet fundamentally different. The photographic process introduced transitoriness and reproducibility that seemed to parallel the worker's condition. In this relationship, the artist and viewer were separated from

---

[11] Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York: Icon Editions/Harper and Row, 1972), 41.

[12] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproductions," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn and edited and introduced by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 223-224. There were three editions of this work and I am using the third edition, which Benjamin understood as a work in progress.

the "object" like the laborer in the factory. The device did the work, while the artist guided, focused, and snapped the picture. Of course the camera could become a tool like a pencil and brush, (and was more like one with analogue photography mastered in a dark room) and thus separate the photographer from the process, but that is not how the photograph or camera was typically understood and used. The camera took pictures apparently any one could take with the result that the photographer and the viewer became "anyone." This would seem, however, a further alienation. Traditionally, art required an awareness and intention beyond a "technical intention," whereas in the past technique served and became intention. Those relations had been inverted, Benjamin understood.

Benjamin understood that photography had changed the nature and perception of daily life, changes which he understood in political and aesthetic terms. The newsreel served to co-opt the image formed by the unaided eye. He wrote:

To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose "sense of the universal equality of things" has in-creased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction. Thus is manifested in the field of perception what in the theoretical sphere is noticeable in the increasing importance of statistics. The adjustment of reality is to the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope, as much for thinking as for perception.[13]

Thus, film could bring a level of unprecedented objectivity. In "The Work" Benjamin made two claims worthy of note: (1) The camera, with the aid of cutting, a variety of camera angles, and other sophisticated techniques, moved the viewer through and beyond the media that supplied the image that made the immediate seem more immediate. As the presence of the camera faded from the viewer's attention, the way the proscenium arch in a theatre never does, the immediate itself appeared: "The equipment-free aspect of reality here has become the height of artiface; the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology."[14] That is, as the hitherto invisible was viewed, the miracles of the camera were transferred to the eye itself. The viewer became the miracle. (2) The viewer became an expert, privy to what was only apparent from an otherwise impossible perspective. "It is inherent in the technique of the film as well as that of sports that everybody who witnesses its accomplishments is somewhat of an expert."[15]

"The Work" was a work in process going through three editions that differed more in emphasis than in substance. The second edition emphasized the need to free the worker from bourgeois tradition and the cult power of aura through photography and populist art media to help further the cultural revolution. He wrote of two technologies: the first that sought mastery over nature, an aggressive technology, and the second that invited creativity and play: "The origin of the second technology lies at the point

---

[13] *Ibid.*, 223.

[14] *Illuminations*, 233.

[15] *Ibid.*, 234.

where, by an unconscious ruse, human beings first began to distance themselves from nature. It lies. . . in play."[16] The primary goal of second technology was benign and to reintroduce the human to nature. He wrote optimistically:

The primary social function of art today is to rehearse that interplay [between man and nature]. This applies especially to film. The function of film is to train human beings in the apperceptions and reaction needed to deal with a vast apparatus whose role in their lives is expanding almost daily. Dealing with this apparatus also teaches them that technology will release them from their enslavement to the powers of the apparatus only when humanity's whole constitution has adapted itself to the new productive forces which the second technology has set free.[17]

Benjamin was not naive and understood as well that as long as technology was in the control of an imperialistic and facist state great evil was possible. He noted:

Imperialist war is an uprising on the part of technology, which demands repayment in "human material" for the natural material society has denied it. Instead of deploying power stations across the land, society deploys manpower in the form of armies. Instead of promoting air traffic, it promotes traffic in shells. And in gas warfare it has found a new means of abolishing the aura.[18]

Benjamin was quite aware of Facist and imperialist propaganda that employed technology to aestheticize war and violence. He wrote "The Work" in exile from Nazi Germany.

The senses of aura were becoming complicated: from ritual to poison gas. Benjamin further observed. The film responds to the shriveling of the aura with an artificial build-up of the "personality" outside the studio. The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the "spell of the personality," the phony spell of a commodity. So long as the movie-makers' capital sets the fashion, as a rule no other revolutionary merit can be accredited to today's film than the pro-motion of a revolutionary criticism of traditional concepts of art. We do not deny that in some cases today's films can also promote revolution-ary criticism of social conditions, even of the distribution of property.[19]

The "movie star," like the celebrity mentioned above, reclaimed aura paradoxically, only to make the film even more of a commodity. The movie star became the commodity itself. Adorno had criticized Benjamin's sometimes non-dialectical embrace of reproductions that tended to become commodities and fetishes, objects of phony aura.[20]

---

[16] "The Work of Art in the Age of its Reproducibility," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, trans. Emund Jephcott, Howard Eiland, and Others, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), vol III, 107, hereineafter cited as *SW.*

[17] *Ibid.*, 107-108.

[18] *Ibid.*, 121-122.

[19] *Ibid., 231.*

[20] Theodor Adorno, "Exchange with Thodore H. Adorno, in *SW.*, vol. III,55-60.

By 1939, in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Benjamin had expanded his representation of aura that would complicate his cultural critique. Experience of the aura thus rests on the transposition of a response com-mon in human relationships to the relationship between inanimate or natural object and man. The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in turn. To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return. This experience corresponds to the data of the *memoire involontaire* (These data . . . are unique; they are lost to the memory that seeks to retain them.) Thus they lend support to a concept of the aura that comprises the "unique mani-festation at a distance." This designation has the advantage of clarifying the ceremonial character of the phenomenon. The essentially distant is the inapproachable: inapproachability is in fact a primary quality of the ceremonial image.[21]

In this essay Benjamin moved back and forth between kinds of art—painting photography, poetry and literature still wondering about a sense of "authenticity" and an "original" that powered artistic expression. Voluntary memory responded to the will and to a present seeking a past, but to which past: a nearby past, a conscious past, or a deeper past? Involuntary memory, credited to Proust, was a past we did not quite see but one that we felt, one that revealed aura. Benjamin, quoting Proust, said, the past is "somewhere beyond the reach of the intellect, and unmistakably present in some material object (or in the sensation which such an object arouses in us), although we have no idea which one it is."[22] We are in the presence of the famous "madeleine" and in the power of the word to invoke what was only present as semblance, seeming. Looking and seeing were in tension.

Benjamin will suppose, however, that photography typically plays in the realm of voluntary memory, which, though visual is different from painting. "The painting invites the spectator to contemplation; before it the spectator can abandon himself to his associations. Before the movie frame he cannot do so. No sooner has his eye grasped a scene than it has already changed. It cannot be arrested."[23] Apparently, the photographic image does not return the gaze, Benjamin concluded, and remains thinglike on the view of Valery.

. . . a painting we look at reflects back at us that of which our eyes will never have their fill. [. . .] What distinguishes photography from painting is therefore clear . . .: to the eyes that will never have their fill of a paint-ing, photography is rather like food for the hungry or drink for the thirsty.[24]

"Aura" now becomes an epistemological notion in a metaphysical undertow. The object of the look is not merely seen but is seen and looks back; the viewer's gaze is returned to provide a sense of an original. We look for and then see the object that exceeds the grasp as both near and far. Aura appears as the object and the viewer meet

---

[21] *Illuminations*, 188.
[22] *Ibid.*, 158.
[23] *Ibid.*, 238.
[24] *Ibid.*, 187.

and confront one another and complete one another provisionally, with the otherness of each intact. The art object with aura presents a totality that overflows the reduction of it to one sense, say to the sense of sight, which tends to distance and abstract. Aura rejects reification and the reduction of even things to things.

The photographic image appears as the complete and real as a painting will not, and yet it does not satisfy. As an extension of voluntary memory, photography " . . . reduces the scope for the play of the imagination."[25] For Valery and Proust, aura. imagination, and involuntary memory connected in depth. The involuntary memory finds what is not expected and not merely repeated. From these insights the value to the worker and the ordinary person remained unclear beyond the photograph's capacity to bring the exotic and the inapproachable into the home and marketplace beyond the proliferation of commodities. Nonetheless, Benjamin would try to find a dialectical place for the mechanical image.

In his "Little History of Photography," in 1931, Benjamin was looking at the photography of Atget's that advanced art beyond the "stifling atmosphere generated by conventional portrait photography in the age of decline. He cleanses this atmosphere . . . he initiates the emancipation of object from aura.... [. . .] He looked for what was unremarked, forgotten, cast adrift. And thus such pictures, too, work against the exotic, romantically sonorous names of the cities; they suck the aura out of reality like water from a sinking ship."[26] But, what is sucking? By conventional portrait photography Benjamin understood that the prestige of the poser held aura. Atget's pictures showed what tourists did not want to see. Atget's pictures worked against the "sonorous names" of cities, and here we could understand these as the bearer's of bourgeois aura. Does Benjamin mean that Atget's photos leave some measure of aura—good aura, non bourgeois order, if there is such a thing–intact? Or is he taking the side that photography was simply the death of aura, period? Conventional portraits and romantic picturesque landscapes could be seen as sucking the aura out of nature that had been denaturalized by a first technology. Does Atget's work reinstate aura as the aspect of surprise working against voluntary merely repetitive memory? Later in the essay Benjamin states: "It is no accident that Atget's photographs have been likened to those of a crime scene. But isn't every square inch of our cities a crime scene?"[27]

In the "Little History" Benjamin asks:

What is aura, actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be. While at rest on a summer's noon, to trace a range of mountains on the horizon, or a branch that throws its shadow on the observer, until the moment or the hour become part of their appearance—this is what it means to breathe the aura of those mountains, that branch. Now to bring

---

[25] *Ibid.*, 186.

[26] *SW*, Vol. II, 518. A very complete and far reaching discussion of aura can be found in Mirriam Bratu Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura," *Critical Inquiry* 34 (Winter 2008). Particularly note page 356 where she entertains something like the notion of a false aura.

[27] *Ibid.*, 527.

those things closer to us, or rather to the masses, is just as passionate an inclination in our day as the overcoming of whatever is unique in every situation by means of its reproduction. Every day the need to possess the object in closeup in the form of a picture, or rather a copy, becomes more imperative. And the difference between the copy, which illustrated papers and newsreels keep in readiness, and the original picture is unmistakable Uniqueness and duration are as intimately intertwined in the latter as are transcience and reproducibility in the former.[28]

Aura meant breath in Greek. In this understanding of natural aura we are in two distances—the distance before the eye on an horizon and the distance between word and origin, with which Benjamin played. The eye moves—not the lens—and shadows further the distance and open to a source of illumination where the received is also the made. This is what is seen in a bodily moment that is named. Aura is the experience, the name, and the breath. The name is a copy too, just as the act of perceiving produces a copy. The photograph would be a further copy. Nonetheless, aura provides in a space an opening in time beyond reproducibility. Here we both look and see. This could be called the aura in perception seeking an aura in the object, although I think this is a false dichotomy. Aura seems to require the inseparability of subject and object at and in that moment when the near and the far combined. Landscape painting and photography would attest to this original power of view that furthers endless reproductions. The photos of Atget, Benjamin continued, furthered the work of the crime scene investigator with the suspicion that:

Every passer-by [is] a culprit? Isn't it the task of the photographer—descendant of the augurs and haruspices—to reveal guilt and to point out the guilty in his pictures? "The illiteracy of the future," someone has said, "will be ignorance not of reading or writing, but of photography." But shouldn't a photographer who cannot read his own pictures be no less accounted an illiterate? Won't inscription become the most important part of the photography? Such are the question in which the interval of ninety years that separate us from the age of the daguerreotype discharges its historical tension. It is in the illumination of these sparks that the first photographs emerge, beautiful and unapproachable, from the darkness of our grandfathers' day.[29]

Here, Benjamin appears to suggest that these images— photographs—could return aura with the power of the word although that aura would be of a different order. Adorno had noted in *The Jargon of Authenticity* that Benjamin's aura labored against an already cliched status tainted by theosophy and by the neo-classicism of Stefan George[30] The notion of aura was beginning to promote a cottage industry that is still productive today. We could see this notion of an altered order or aura as a response to this problem.

---

[28] *Ibid.,* 518. These words are nearly reproduced in the second edition of "The Work,"in *SW*, vol III, 104-105.

[29] *Ibid.,* 527.

[30] Trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 3-13.

Two deep concerns were in tension for Benjamin—a sense of authenticity and meaning. Atget's photos were suggestive of the surrealist's attempts to call inauthentic society—bourgeois society–to question. They sought the mystery amid the commonplace: "We penetrate the mystery only to the degree that we recognize it in the everyday world by virtue of a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday."[31] Benjamin understood Proust, Baudelaire, and Valery on such a mission. They were to find and to show that the beautiful was ugly and that the ugly—the transformed object—was sublime as it was called to question.

Baudelaire considered the traditional virtue of heroism. What was heroism, if not modernity itself, like? He wrote:

Regarding the attire, the covering of the modern hero, . . . does it not have a beauty and a charm of its own? Is this not an attire that is needed

by our age, which is suffering, and dressed up to its thin black narrow shoulders in the symbol of constant mourning? The black suit and the frock coat not only have their political beauty as an expression of general equality but also their poetic beauty as an expression of the public mentality: an immense cortege of undertakers— political undertakers, amorous undertakers, bourgeois undertakers. We are all attendants at some kind of funeral.—The unvarying livery of hopelessness testifies to equality And don't

the folds in the material—those folds that make grimaces and drape themselves around mortified flesh like snakes—have their own secret charm?[32] The old aura of heroism was gone. The modern hero was not unique in beauty or courage but suffered a commonality—what masqueraded as political equality—in funereal dress without hope. Even the folds of material offered no pleasure or warmth; perhaps the funeral was for the death of hope and courage and, likely, beauty past. The new beauty—ugliness—ironically framed, iconically repeated the oppressions of the past. Only the old was again new, albeit de-auratized, which, on the other side was the "ever-same." To contend the old and the traditional was new until it was not; then it became tradition in a new guise. This was modernity's fate and its problem, revealed in Nietzsche's notion of the eternal return.[33] This backs up to the notion of the authentic. The authentic had to be re-established by the dialectical optic to look and to further see. Benjamin hoped to learn to read the city like Baudelaire.

Benjamin presesnted a remarkable series of analogies that linked the striking of a match, invented by the middle of the nineteenth century, to the lifting and replacing of a phone receiver, to the snapping of a photograph, and to other types of ". . . switching, inserting, and pressing

[...] Haptic experiences of this kind were joined by optic ones, such as are supplied by the advertising pages of a newspaper and the traffic of a big city."[34] He further

[31] *SW.,* vol. II, 216.
[32] *SW.,* vol IV, 46.
[33] "The Influence of *Les Fleurs du mal,*" *SW*, vol. IV, 97.
[34] "Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, 174-175

considered amusement park rides with cars jolting into one another as training for being in and out of work. Play and work coincided as Benjamin hypothesized in his second technology but it is not clear that the worker was being returned to nature or that the play was anything but distracted habit.[35]

Benjamin's description of gambling was crucial and remarkable.

Gambling even contains the workman's gesture that is produced by the automatic operation, for there can be no game without the quick movement of the hand by which the stake is put down or a card is picked up. The jolt in the movement of a machine is like the so-called coup in a game of chance. The manipulation of the worker at the machine has no connection with the preceding operation for the very reason that it is its exact repetition. {. . .] The work of both is equally devoid of substance.[36]

The worker and the gambler were devoid of substance. Did Benjamin think this observation would reinstate an alienated condition?

The crime scene was being investigated and thefts of bodily integrity, grace, and balance were in progress. Citizens lived the fragments that Benjamin translated, finding the true among the ephemeral. The true was then revealed as more oppression and enslavement, freely accepted and pursued in "leisure time." The means of enslavement had become more efficient and over-reaching because less detectable, but it is not clear that aura of any kind was being returned, unless the true would reinstate the beautiful. But what kind of true, what kind of beauty would this be?

Begun in 1927, but never finished, Benjamin worked on his *Arcades Project* to show how the reifying forces of technology, politics, and economy developed in the nineteenth century and had produced new forms of behavior and new human types—the flaneur, the collector, and the gambler—who were subsumed by the ". . . phantasmagoria of the market place."[37] They were consumers of and consumed by the "new." Baudelaire had considered himself a *flaneur*, a leisurely walker, and had made many of his observations of the new in the past's demise. Benjamin remarked that Baudelaire in his later years was pursued by his creditors and his illness and had had little time for a stroll.[38] The "new" was nothing to be taken lightly. Benjamin stated:

Newness is a quality independent of the use value of the commodity. It is the origin of the illusory appearance that belongs inalienably to images produced by the collective unconscious. It is the quintessence of that false consciousness whose indefatigable agent is fashion. This semblance of the new is reflected, like one mirror in another, in the semblance of the ever recurrent.[39]

---

[35] *Ibid.,* 176.

[36] *Ibid.*, 177.

[37] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin and Prepared on the Basis of the German Volume Edited by Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge and London: The Belknam Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 14.

[38] *SW,* vol. IV, 41.

[39] *Arcades Project*, 11.

The phantasmagoria were semblances of the true but not true or beautiful semblances if I understand Benjamin correctly, which would be for anyone a difficult task. Much of what he left behind were fragments, which he may have considered essential to his style. Nonetheless, I join the many in taking a stab at a Benjamin, whom some regard as a Jewish atheist, a mystic driven by the *Kabbalah,* a luddite, a Marxist, a de-constructionist.[40] Etc. would be meaningful.

What was the purpose of art? is the first question to ask. He hoped that it could "redeem" the alienated human condition. Technology one had provided one level of alienation but what was the original world of the human? In *On the Mimetic Faculty* he wrote:

"To read what was never written." Such reading is the most ancient: reading prior to all languages, from entrails, the stars, or dances. Later the mediating link of a new kind of reading, of runes and hieroglyphs, came into use. It seems fair to suppose that these were the stages by which the mimetic gift, formerly the foundation of occult practices, gained admittance to writing and language. In this way, language may be seen as the highest level of mimetic behavior and the most complete archive of nonsenuous similarity: a medium into which the earlier powers of mimetic production and comprehension have passed without residue, to the point where they have liquidated those of magic.[41]

The mimetic faculty was the drive to turn experience into language, to name what was not named.How would art then be connected to aura, which would be tied to the mimetic drive to imitate and to express the unique that would return the gaze? In "On Semblance" he wrote:

In every work and every genre of art, the beautiful semblance is present; everything beautiful in art can be ascribed to the realm of beautiful semblance. This beautiful semblance should be clearly distinguished from other kinds of semblance. Not only is it to be found in art, but all true beauty in art must be assigned to it.[42]

Art is an appearance of what was original and true in that sense but was not the true or even the beautiful. Art would provide semblances of these things. Thus, things should not be reified of fetishized. This would be not appropriate for true or beautiful semblances. The new in commodity form would not be new, as above, but would only be repetitions and mere copies, aping phony aura. This kind of "new" or phony aura is what I will refer to as products of a bad infinity.

In his *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (May 1924-April 1925),which failed to earn him his *Habilitation*, he prophetically said: "The authentic—the hallmark of origin in phenomena—is the object of discovery, a discovery which is connected in a unique

---

40 See Esther Leslie's *Walter Benjamin:Overpowering Conformism*, (London, Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2000) for a well reasoned Marxist interpretation and well placed criticism of opposing views. Rachard Wolin's *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) takes the mystical/religious stand. Both have excellent bibliographies. I was helped by both.

41 *SW.,* vol. II, 722.

42 *Ibid.,* vol. I, 224.

way with the process of recognition."[43] And then, "For in the science of philosophy the concept of being is not satisfied by the phenomenon until it has absorbed all its history."[44] The result was what Benjamin called a monad that was an idea that revealed the image of the world—the internal logic manifest in appearance.[45] Aura then pointed to that place of origins and art provided the symbols, the Ariadnean threads. The symbol was the great key:

For language is in every case not only communication of the communicable but also, at the same time, a symbol for the noncommunicable. This symbolic side of language is connected to its relation to signs, but extends more widely—for example, in certain respects to name and judgment. These have not only a communication function, but most probably also a closely connected symbolic function, to which at least explicitly no reference has here been made.[46]

That symbolic function I believe was the mimetic function that had been either limited or transformed. Benjamin was hard pressed to consistently say. He mourned the apparent demise of the storyteller where truth and meaning was reduced to information and where mystery was denied: mystery inhabits the nature of the word as symbol.[47] In "On Some Motifs to Baudelaire," he noted:

It is not the object of the story to convey a happening per se, which is the purpose of information; rather it embeds it in the life of the storyteller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening. It thus bears the marks of the storyteller much as the earthen vessel bears the marks of the potter's hand.[48]

The object of Benjamin was to tell a story of mystery that was aura.

Art in the Technological Society

Benjamin committed suicide on the Franco-Spanish border on September 27, 1940. His body was likely dumped into a mass grave. He had been working on "On the Concept of History," from February until May. It contained his views on the task of the historical materialist who must stay above and yet within the class struggle. He wrote:

The true image of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again. "The truth will not run away from us": this statement by Gottfried Keller indicates exactly that point in historicism's image of history where the images is pierced by historical materialism. For it is an irretrievable image of the past which threatens to disappear in any present that does not recognize itself as intended in that image.[49]

---

[43] Trans. John Osborne with an Introduction by George Steiner (London: NLB, 1977), 46.

[44] *Ibid.,* 48.

[45] *Ibid.,* 48.

[46] *SW.,* vol I, 74.

[47] "Riddle and Mystery," *Ibid.,* 267-268.

[48] *Illuminations.,* 159.

[49] *SW.,* vol. IV, 391.

Sometimes Benjamin wrote as if art should serve no master but at other times he thought it should serve politics.[50] He viewed art as making and thus saw it as similar in principle to technology although he viewed the making of words on a higher order. He had hoped that art would be able to jump start the people's revolution but was never clear how such a consciousness could be raised, awash in the ephemeral and the phatasmagoric, which Benjamin could decipher but history would indicate he was alone. Nonetheless he plumbed the depth of aura, the mystery beneath and yet informing the commonplace.

He had hoped that the artist's heroism could allow for an auratic return, but for which aura?

Warhol, the modern artist, too, was concerned with aura. In *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* he wrote:

I think "aura" is something that only somebody else can see, and they only see as much of it as they want to. It's all in the other person's eyes . . . . When you just see somebody on the street, they can really have an aura. But then when they open their mouth, there goes the aura. "Aura" must be until you open your mouth.[51]

Warhol stood Benjamin's notion of aura on its head. "Aura" was reduced to the look, to the viewer's intention, to an object that did not look back. Aura was relative and ephemeral, not likely the beautiful semblance. Most importantly the viewer lost all control while seeming to be in control, the worst form of enslavement.

Many of Warhol's images were machine images and his words glorified the process. In 1963 he wrote:

That's probably one reason I'm using silkscreens now. I think somebody should be able to do all my paintings for me. I haven't been able to make every image clear and simple and the same as the first one. I think it would be great if more people took up silkscreens so that no one would know whether my picture was mine or somebody else's.[52]

Reproducibility became a virtue while canceling the meaning of reproduce, which demanded some sense of an original. Was Warhol fooling with us? Were his words ironic? What would irony even mean in this context: saying what you don't mean and meaning it?

For the appearance of an answer, consider critic and biographer Ranier Crone, who wrote:

Warhol, on the other hand, uses the silkscreen, to the exclusion of all other methods, to transfer photographs to canvas, thus adapting as far as possible, to the technical limitations of the easel painting, which is at best outdated communications medium. Through a morally based self-negation, he has suppressed his individuality to such an extent that he has attained a qualitatively new understanding of self and behavior, which

---

[50] See "The Author as Producer,"*Reflections*, 220-238

[51] (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 77.

[52] As quoted in Rainer Crone, *Andy Warhol* (New York and Washington: Praeger Books, 1970), 10.

is political, or at least, politically relevant. He has transmuted quantity (namely, the exclusive use of one technique) into quality. Warhol's use of silkscreen represents the most rational way of reproducing a photograph on a scale too large for phototechnical means alone. Reproduction robs the artwork of its uniqueness and authority, imparting significance instead to the image reproduced. In this way, the painting becomes a document—like the photograph—and its political effectiveness increases accordingly: this is "documentary realism" which is subject to other aesthetic criteria than those relevant in the development of easel painting.[53]

Crone's assumptions are of great importance for the mission of Warhol's art: New mediums are better than older mediums; the mediums of art should be rational and sacrifice originality for reproducibility in which quantity becomes quality. Uniqueness and authority are enemies and not politically relevant. Art should deal with the now as it became then, its documentary feature. It is moral to suppress one's individuality and selfhood. This, on the one hand, seems totally absurd and certainly outside the pale of art traditionally conceived, but on the other hand it would seem a vindication of Benjamin's notion of power to the collective. This is unfair to Benjamin who likely would not have been in favor if self-negation or the reduction of meaning to being-there; the important historical dimension would be left out. Nonetheless, from Crone's perspective, the art object assumed secondary importance in a process that was primary. Warhol's art objects became technological objects, finding theoretical sanction. The object became a concept and a theory.

Consider Lawrence Weiner's typed instructions that appeared in the April, 1970 edition of *Arts Magazine* as a work of art:

1. The artist may construct the piece
2. The piece may be fabricated
3. The piece need not be built
Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist the decision as to the condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership.[54]

Now the artist, like the viewer, need not construct. Only a theoretical intention wss needed. Weiner's work was in the words that are not words, words that signaled sheer thereness. Weiner's "words" were procedures and abstract counterfactuals, commands of expertise and legalese.

Tom Wolfe in *The Painted Word* remarked on the unique flatness of modern art, citing Frank Stella as a paradigm example. Stella claimed: "My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen there *is* there. It really is an object . . . what you see is what you see."[55] The canvas was the object and the painting was that specific presence— sheer thereness. To ask what it was beyond that it was there would be to not understand it. Wolfe also noticed that it was the tendency of modern art since cubism

---

[53] *Ibid.*
[54] As quoted in Tom Wolfe's *The Painted Word* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), 108.
[55] *Ibid.*, 9.

to leave the realm of the representation of natural or cultural objects to laboratories of theory. The viewer, not a professional or a critic, stands before the line drawn on a museum floor and asks what it means. The museum-goer thus needs a guide and instructions, the expertise of an authority. In this sense the modern art object is not clearly a part of the viewer's bodily or cultural domain. And yet this "seeming" was not exactly being. A new examination of technology and its role in culture would be needed.

Art and the Empire of Non-sense

French critic Jacques Ellul understood that art completely reflected the technological life world that embraced images and symbols that did not transcend that world, which was the result of technology becoming a mentality. Thus art could not redeem culture, the worker, or the human condition, all of which had become technological. The technical world was/is a world of wall-to-wall media, charts and graphs, power points, blather, and all manner of visual configurations. Technological means—the manipulation of images–had become the ends. As we saw above, modern art extruded semblances with width but no depth. He wrote:

It is obvious that painting traditionally has been spatial, but it has also undergone a modification, rejection all optical illusion, so as to become only "something that is there." The painting is nothing more than itself—the real space it occupies. The discovery of space by painters and sculptors has been endlessly stressed for good reasons: the objects produced or reproduced matter less that the space between them, the meaning, the concentration of forces, the distribution of the space. The play of light and color serves only to heighten the value of the space.[56]

An image portending depth in the technological society bordered on the insignificant. These images meant other images but not other things, objects with independent meaning. The meaning of an advertisement was another advertisement or a command to buy. The image was the object's transformation and to some degree denigration. Benjamin understood this sense of image as an object robbed of aura, over which he troubled but did not explore like Ellul. Benjamin suffered what Ellul would call the political illusion that held that politics was anything other than appearance. Ellul had claimed that *le politique* had become *la politique*, that the techniques of politics had eclipsed the goals and values that had concerned politics with debates over the meaning of the good life.[57] Art, as all elements of culture, suffered similar change. This change in attitude was reflected or participated in a symbolic language, in words beyond images. A technical mentality denuded language, the symbol, and the corresponding mentality. The image replaced the object by the concept, an appearance with no history, certainly no aura, and no symbolic or dialectical content. Above all else the image was "disembodied" in a process of objectifying concepts.

---

[56] *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), 223, hereinafter cited as *Humiliation.*

[57] Jacques Ellul, *The Political Illusion,* trans. Konrad Kellen (New York: Knopf, 1972), n. 4.

Warhol had sensed that art had become style, that aura had disappeared with an open mouth, perhaps with the word. Style was more like consumption than creation. As we saw above, an art object need not be made to have art. Apparently, only viewing was important, what I have called looking without seeing. Warhol's words remind us that the traditional art object was subsumed by a technical and rational process that, as Ellul observed in *L'Empire du non-sense*, moved the art object closer to life.[58] With style, life became art. The rule for this style was "*n'importe quoi,* or whatever.[59]

Considering the origins of the word "style," the *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that style is likely a "meaningless variant" of "stile," in Latin meaning stake, pale, or pointed instrument in writing, or a style of speaking or writing. "Stilus'" was likely also confused with the Greek word for "column." Thus, "style," perhaps appearing in error and/or caprice, points in two directions—toward an object, appearing as an image, and toward a word. As early as the fourteenth century, style referred to a writing instrument and to a rod or pin, to a fixed point, in any case. From the fourteenth century to the present it referred to a mode of action, to technique in art, in dress, in architecture, and in life. Austen, Dickens, and Ruskin were all recommended as great observers of "style of life." Warhol's "style" became an image, a flattened concept or cliche, as the history of the word revealed. In Benjamin's sense it was a sensuous semblance that illuminated a non-sensuous dimension. Seen from the right angle words suggested the aura beneath and to a sense that returned the gaze that forced the viewer to look back. "Style" was both an image of an object and a word in contest from the beginning. Perhaps it even appeared by happenstance. "Style" was a unity in opposition and hence not a concept but a metaphor, a writing instrument and architectural column, perhaps granting meaning to life. The life of the word however devolved to fashion and to one more manifestation of life. The metaphor revealed a narrative that still applied however much narrative was denied. The word "cliche" according to the *OED* appeared in 1832 and referred to a stereotype block, a printer's cast or "dab." It began in a visual dimension, but the word was also a variant of *cliquer*, meaning "to click," likely referring to the sound of the lead pieces as they were struck. This auditory dimension is lost in it's modern sense, which is no longer the metaphor that was suggested. A worn out expression was left.

Ellul understood that in the human world apart from the technical dimension there was a play between two domains—the domain of sight and sound, the image and the word, an understanding that would have appealed to Benjamin in his quest for aura. The visual domain was essentially perspectival where the viewer was situated over and against an object, a here and now and where a landscape was established. The visual was before the viewer as a kind of certainty, an immediate presence, a fundamental awareness, a kind of totality, but a limited one.[60] The certainty ceased as I turned

---

[58] *L'Empire du non-sense*: *L'Art et la societe technicienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980), 34, hereinafter cited as *L'Empire*.

[59] *Ibid.*, 59

[60] *L'Empire*, 59.

my head, as my attention wandered, as the light changed, or as it moved away. Its uncertainty arose from the embodied condition. My condition of embodiment, once made aware, framed the object, separating my ideas and feelings from it.

The word, on the other hand, points away from the certain, although it seeks a location. It is always mine. A sound requires with a peculiar necessity a turn of the head, a gaze directed. A strange sound is always accompanied by anxious eyes.[61] Sound is as ambiguous as sight is certain, and the word shares this characteristic, even though the printed word seems to question this. Sound, and by implication, the word provides an all-around being and not a being—there, the province of sight. The sound and the word are naturally transcendental, as Benjamin also knew, when he claimed that human language represented knowledge and judgment unlike Divine knowledge that produced the true. Ellul, too, claimed that the reel, *le Reel*, of the world of Babel, babble, shadowed the true, *le Vrai*.[62]

Sound, because of its uncertainty was dialectical in Ellul's sense, while sight was non-dialectical, merely logical.

Thus visual reality is clearly non-contradictory. You can say that a piece of paper is both red and blue. But you cannot see it as both red and blue at the same time. It is either one or the other. The famous principle of non-contradiction is based on the visual experience of the world, just as the principle of identity is. Declaring that two opinions cannot both be true, when one denies what the other affirms, has to do with vision, which involves instantaneousness. But language involves duration. Consequently what is visual cannot be dialectical. Knowledge based on sight is of necessity linear and logical. Only thought based on language can be dialectical, taking into account contradictory aspects of reality, which are possible because they are located in time.[63]

The rational was the linear that inevitably moved to the image or something image -like, to the level of the concept. The word, the sense of a beyond in time and space, a sense of history with a hint of aura, challenged the primacy of the image. What is before me is what is now and not then. "Then" takes me back to the search for an original. Origins abided in language and history, in the domains of both sights and sounds. In the technological world sound collapsed into sight, the word into the image, and all of these into a rational process. Critics would complete art and artists would become critics, and all of which would become as meaningful as one more moment of technological life. The sense of art from Plato to the Renaissance that the art object had been a harbinger of the True and the Good was either lost or denied. Ironically "rationality" from Plato forward helped to bring on this transformation, although I would deny that Plato's sense of rationality would now apply.

In *La Technique ou l'enjeu du siecle (The Technological Society)* Ellul claimed that technical mentality involved a game, a wager.[64] This notion of *l'enjeu* echoed

---

[61] *Humiliation*, 36.

[62] *Ibid.,* 22-26. See my discussions of this in *TDS.*, 49-68.

[63] *Ibid., 13-16.*

[64] (Paris: Armand Colin, 1954); English trans: *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkenson

Pascal's famous wager that takes place with the realization that, although he cannot rationally prove God's existence, he must, nonetheless, choose between the infinity of the natural world or God's infinity, between a false and a true infinity; he chose God. Ellul found himself in a similar bind: either choose the false infinities of technique or the true infinity of God. Technique had moved beyond industrialization and beyond the Marxist critique that Ellul knew well and for a time acknowledged. Ellul defined technique as the totality of means rationally determined and seeking absolute efficiency in all areas.[65] His notion of technological rationality was crucial in this regard. In the following quote I add in brackets a clause that was left out in Wilkenson's translation:

In technique, whatever its aspect of the domain in which it is applied, a rational process is present which tends to bring mechanics to bear on all that is spontaneous or irrational. This rationality, best exemplified in systematization, division of labor, creation of standards, production norms, and the like, involves two distinct phases: first, the use of "discourse" in every operation [under the two aspects this term can take (on the one hand, the intervention of intentional reflection, and, on the other hand, the intervention of means from one term to the other.)]; this excludes spontaneity and personal creativity. Second, there is the reduction of method to its logical dimension alone. Every intervention of technique is, in effect, a reduction of facts, forces, phenomena, means, and instruments to the schema of logic.[66]

Rationality then referred to the application of a method employing the principles of logic—something was what it was and was not not what it was. Identity ruled. All was to be *thought and expressed* in a propositional language where something either was or was not. Thinking and language were to produce concepts and then to produce technical phenomena. Concepts were identities created by eschewing differences. From the standpoint of photosynthesis, two plants are identical regardless of leaf shape or number. All manner of concepts leave the differences in objects behind, as is clearly noticed in opinion surveys. As will be clear, in this regard concepts are not symbols, notably metaphors, where differences count. From the barometer and thermometer readings T. S. Eliot's sky "like an etherized patient" will never appear, whereas what does appear in human feelings and imagination registers deeply with Eliot. Homer's winedark sea was possibly like no other; now modern readers tire of the refrain, perhaps a metaphor that became a cliche. Cliches now pass for metaphors in the technological mind; they are the symptoms of the loss of the symbol.[67]

Industrialization was the mirror of what took place between words and images discussed above. Rational concepts methodically applied transformed technical operations, the use of tools, by technical consciousness. Tools extended from the body;

(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), hereinafter sited *TS.*

[65] *TS.*, XXV.

[66] *TS.*, 78-79; *La Technique*, 73-73.

[67] See ch. 6 of *Technique, Discourse, and Consiousness: An Introduction fo the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press,1991) for a full discussion of the cliche for technical consciousness.

technical phenomena extended from *d'une intention* technique, from a technical intention.[68] For instance, traditionally, the painter ground pigment in oil each day before painting. Painters had to apprentice to learn the art of making paint, clearly inefficient by modern standards. By the nineteenth century painters could buy oils in metal tubes that altered painting forever by allowing uniform colors, ease of storage, and convenience on all levels. Rembrandt had made his own paint, and his canvases were unique from the first stroke; his genius, imagination, and perspective added the rest. Modern painters have to struggle with mass production before applying a brush. This is one mere detail that cannot begin to catalogue the incursions of various techniques entering the realm of painting; one can paint now in pixels without lifting a brush. Metal tubes, of course, revealed the continual applied conceptual advances of mathematics and all levels of science. Perhaps not noticed as operations became phenomena, the body was co-opted in the processes. Grinding pigment, traveling to find a master to whom one would apprentice, etc. all appeared in the metal tube, just as the chainsaw reifies the actions of chopping wood with an axe. The technical phenomenon subsumes bodily relations, direct or indirect, to objects. In the process of reification beyond Marxist critique was the transformation of things into processes. Mathematics and science from the nineteenth century on left no operations behind.[69] The goal of technical consciousness was to produce identical workers who were efficient in making identical products that were good by being a part of the system by being identical to it. Otherness was not welcomed. The Otherness of spontaneity was permitted as long as it did not disrupt the "one best way." Appearance of differences were allowed—the appearance of free choice–and even encouraged: the hundreds of labels for soap in the grocery store hide the fact that emulsifiers are emulsifiers. American jazz musicians in the 1950s were routinely harassed or abandoned by college music departments until it was discovered that improvisation could be taught. Currently all manner of apparent spontaneity is tolerated in academic halls as long as course numbers can be found.

The system is the result of a technical consciousness in which the machine is only one aspect. All that was technique was machine-like Ellul would say. The system proceeded from technical rationality when the object as Other was co-opted by the technical phenomenon which produced other technical phenomena artificially, automatically, monistically, universally, and autonomously. What could be done would be done, regardless of religious, artistic, or philosophical criticism, which became the justifications of technique and only, *n'import quoi*, anything goes applied. Technique took place regardless of any cultural differences. In this summation of Ellul's discussion of the characteristics of technique of note was the self-augmenting character such that one advance yielded a geometrical progression that in principle was unpredictable. Who could have foreseen that metal paint tubes together with train travel would produce impressionist painting that would yield digital photography, and yet all elements, Ellul

---

[68] *La Technique,* 44.
[69] See *TDC,* ch. 3.

would contend, were inextricably bound.?[70] The final stage of technical advance was autonomy where technique provided the new sacred. Here the object fully collapsed into the subject. What the technical mind produced was what it no longer knew, becoming knowledge itself divorced from the process of knowing. Technology proceeded with no sense of its own history, which became irrelevant, with no need of a transcendent religion, what with the objects of imminent worship and with no truths beyond the laws of identity, contradiction, and exclusion. A profound sense of forgetting, what Ellul called *Lethotechny,* settled in.[71] The sacred of technique was not the true holy of the Wholly Other, the goal of the word, in the Word of the Wholly Other. Thus, technical consciousness is confronted with an irony: No manner of ordering can exist without some form of absolute, a notion of infinity in some measure. All is technique is such an example, emphasizing the ALL. For technique, however, nothing stands outside of it, thus making the problem of meaning problematic. If the meaningful is just one element of entities ordered, meaning collapses into one more element. And, importantly the laws of logic determining the rationality of technique are not logically justifiable. A sidetrack into Hegel is useful.

In considering the problem of an infinite series or the idea of infinity itself Hegel offered profound advice. One sense of an infinity was derived by moving from one particular, and then another, and then another, and saying that infinity was not this particular, or not this one, or, again, not this one, *ad* infinitum. Thus an infinity was defined simply in terms of the next particular which the infinite wasn't, which illustrated Ellul's understanding of technological self-augmentation. Absolute efficiency was merely the next moment, by definition, why technical production was endless in the sense of Warhol's drinks and of soap in the grocery store or in Benjamin's notion of the *ever-same.* And the other sense of the infinite was in the claim that infinity was not the totality of what was finite. The infinite was the Nothing of the finite. On this view the infinite was an empty class, a sense of a whole that in the past suggested God, the True, the Beautiful. These notions either become endless strings of finitudes or merely an empty class concept, another version of *n'importe quoi.*[72]

In *L'Empire* Ellul concluded that formalism or neoformalism and "art with a message," were the hot and cold taps of the technological society from which flowed the above spurious infinities.[73] "Art for Art's sake" encouraged "anti-art," artistic expressions with no object or subject; art had died but in its death throes produced more art objects and/or concepts in the object's denial. Propaganda of all kinds was met with a denial of art's political nature. The more complex or formalistic the art the more challenges embracing "*Kitsch*" *arose.* Narcissim in all forms reigned. And thus the principle of *unicite* was followed: what could be done would be done employing

---

[70] See *TS.,* ch. II and *TDC.,* ch.5.

[71] *Living Faith: Belief and Doubt in a Perilous World,* trans. Peter Heinegg (San Francisco: Aarper and Row, 1983, 277.

[72] See my *TDC*, 98-105.

[73] *L'Empire*, 50.

technique or some other manner of rational ordering, no matter how chaotic or passionate. Unreason fueled reason beyond measure. Art was what artists did and all had become artists. And yet there is still a word for art, however strangely employed. If all was art, why would there be a word for it? Perhaps there was no longer a word for it.

Ellul noted the claim that art had become a game, *un jeu*, and that it no longer had to be taken seriously, which he understood as a serious claim. He wrote: [Modern] Art opts for illusion over reality and gives reality to the illusory."[74] The symbolic world of which art is a part requires imagination and otherness. He further stated:

In the technological system, there is no more possibility of symbolizing First of all, this

possibility is not present because the reality is produced by man, who does not feel mystery and strangeness. He still claims to be the direct master. Furthermore, it is not present because, if symbolizing is a process of distanciation, then the whole technological process is, on the contrary, a mechanism for integrating man; and finally, because now, it is no longer man who symbolizes nature, but technology which symbolizes itself. The mechanism of symbolization is technology, the means of this symbolization are the mass media of communication. The object to be consumed is an offered symbol.[75]

The dialectic link between the individual and the world and between that subjectivity and what is expressed enables this "other world" to be achieved; it is both the condition of symbolic consciousness and its result. The problem of technical consciousness is that it is nondialogical and nonsymbolic and thus not a viable form of consciousness. It is a form of non-sense. We require the symbol and language to inhabit the world as best we can and need the symbol to navigate what is an essential mystery. Ellul wrote:

The most explicit and best-explained word still brings me inevitably back to mystery. This mystery has to do with the other person, whom I cannot fathom, and whose word provides me with an echo of his person, but only an echo. I perceive this echo, knowing that there is something more. This is the mystery I feel as I recognize spontaneously that I do not understand well or completely what the other person says. There is a mystery for me in my own lack of comprehension, as I become aware of it. How am I going to react? How can I respond? I sense a whole area of mystery in the fact that I am not very sure I understand correctly. I am not very sure about answering. I am not sure what I am saying.[76]

We communicate and understand in symbols in which we say what we mean and do not mean, in signs that mean and do not mean, and in these gaps meaning takes place; this is not a nonsensuous meaning but a meaning that makes sense of sense. The echo of the word shatters Narcissism, as it did on Ovid's account. We have art so that we do not die without truth, to invert Nietzsche, but we have a truth that anticipates and

---

[74] My translation, *L'Empire.,274.*
[75] *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980), 177.
[76] *Humiliation*, 25.

responds to whatever reality we can imagine in what ever sense of aura we can express. Benjamin's aura became the conceptualized and disembodied object bereft of otherness from Ellul's perspective. Meaning and symbol require the otherness that appears in a word's history, its circumstance, its possibility, and limitation. The play and tension between image and word "infold" in the work of memory and the imagination but which are co-opted in what passes for art in the technological society.

Hereinafter referred to as *TDC*

Technique and the Collapse of Symbolic Thought

by Samir Younes
NAMEABLE OBJECT 5
Samir Younes is Professor of Architecture at the University of Notre Dame where he was Director of Rome Studies. His latest book is titled *The Imperfect City: On Architectural Judgment*, Ashgate, U.K., 2012.

"*Art has become one of the major functions used to integrate humankind into the technicist complex.*"[77]

Jacques Ellul.

The drawing is by Leon Krier, titled Nameable Objects.

In a poignant analogy Jacques Ellul once remarked that if one were travelling on a train then one could not see the direction that the train is taking. One must disembark from the train of *technique* in order to gain a perspective on its direction, and affect decisions from outside its empire. Such a task is truly formidable considering that *technique* as a system (*le systeme technicien*) plays a determining role inside society, a role that participates in steering the major forces of this society toward a technological direction, a direction that always appears inevitable to the technologically-formed mind.[78] One of the salient characteristics of J. Ellul's *L'empire du non sens* (*The Empire of No Sense*) is that his critique of modernist art was based more on the texts that justified modernism and less on modernist art itself. He is less concerned with the clusters of positions elaborated by several artistic and architectural movements that include Constructivism, Futurism, Cubism, De Stijl, Expressionism, the Bauhaus, Functionalism, the International Style, or the declarations of C.I.A.M. congresses, and more with the fact that they were all informed by *technique*, and that they in turn validated the technological milieu. In keeping to his train analogy, he engages modernist art from the 'outside', using his concept of *technique* as a focusing lens. And while he

---

[77] "L'art est devenu l'une des fonctions majeures integratrices de l'homme dans le complexe technicien." *L'empire du non sens*, Jacques Ellul, Presses Universitaires de France, 1980, pp. 277. My translation.
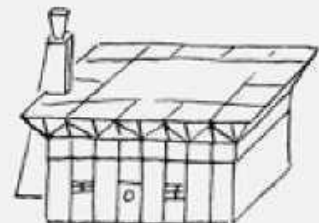
[78] For Ellul's discussion of the technological system as an autonomous and totalizing system qualified by an absence of finality see his *Le systeme technicien*, Calmann-Levy, 1977.
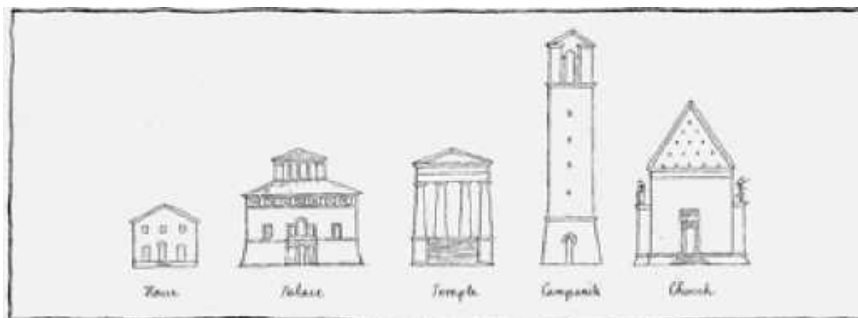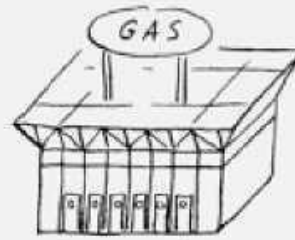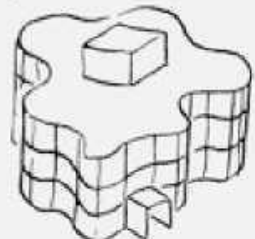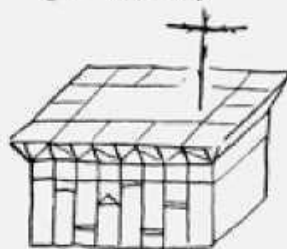
FORM versus UNIFORM

SO~CALLED "OBJECTS"

also offers a genuine critique of modernist art, he is unwavering in his judgment that modernist art and its theory are justifications for the integration of "humankind into the technicist complex". This characteristic sets him apart from others who opposed modernism from the 'inside', that is, on the grounds of art theory and architectural theory. Opponents of modernism usually assailed its fundamental bases in historicism, in the cult of the zeitgeist, in industrialized mass production, abstraction and its remoteness, or the profound alienation felt in urban contexts where modernism dominates. Appropriate though these oppositions are, they could find further justification by incorporating Ellul's concept of *technique*. But unfortunately, Ellul's work is almost unknown among artists and architects in general, and *L'empire du non sens*, which has yet to be translated into English, is virtually unknown even among French-speaking artists and architects.

Artists, architects, and their critics, apprehend and make the world imagistically, and they apprehend and make modernity imagistically. Put differently, their understanding of the world is strongly mediated by images -the images that inhabit the world and the images that inhabit their minds. Ellul, by contrast, is a man of the word whose sensibilities are more inclined toward symbolic content, to the meaning that should underlie artistic form and justify it. Much of his understanding of the world is mediated by the word, and less so by the image. In fact Ellul was quite alarmed by the invasive proliferation of images in the technological society. His strong Protestant aesthetics played a significant role in this distress which he expressed as a religious conflict between the image and the word[79]. But Ellul is not an indiscriminate enemy of visual culture. He was most concerned about a particular kind of image, a triumphalist image whose empire humiliated the word, namely: the technicist image that frames the minds of citizens in the consumer society. Citizens of the technological society were consumers of technicist images, images that were justified by an ideology that glorified presentness as the leading edge of modernity. "With the ideology of instantaneity in art, with immediacy, with spontaneous creativity (the happening, etc..), we are in the presence of a pure assimilation into the technological processes, and a total negation of all that has been considered art since the beginning."[80] Space and visuality in modernist art, architecture, and also music, were expressions of technological operations.

Artists and architects, we said, apprehended the world with images and made the world with images. This, however, is not to say that artists and architects are not concerned with meaning or with symbolism. Indeed they are acutely concerned with meaning. Only, as makers of visual culture they place a higher value on the image, the form. Artists and architects desire form differently than others. They desire form from their standpoint as makers of forms, and these forms have a dialectical meaning that takes multiple directions. Artistic work is aimed toward society and society returns meaning toward the artist. This condition obtains especially in a traditional society

---

[79] See his *La parole humiliee*, Seuil, 1981, pp. 202-224.
[80] *Ibid*, pp. 249-250. My translation.

before *technique* became a system. Yet, in a predominantly modernist culture, the overriding purpose for which artists and architects produce forms has more to do with selfexpression than a contribution to the public realm, the sense-in-common, or the general good. This phenomenon takes particular importance with respect to the idea of meaning in art and architecture because modernism inherited and amplified the Romantic belief in the artist or architect as a solitary genius who walks in no one's shadow and who produces forms that have not been seen before. The modernist rupture and transgression, in Ellul's terms, of previous traditions assured a tabula rasa where artists and architects can begin anew, while at the same time exponentially exalting their personae by putting at their disposal all the massive means of technology. The theoretical justification of modernism shifted the artistic intent of elaborating a tradition -ever a collective endeavor-toward a deepening interest in the artist's personal life which itself became an object of art. Here we have a replacement of art by the artist, as the artist became a sacralized figure whose genius must always be valued and whose decisions are almost beyond judgment. Even the empty canvas became an object of art -itself a mute comment on a painting that could have been.

And yet, the act of withholding a painting from manifesting came to be endowed with the aura of art, as if its intensely private meaning was precisely the reason why it should matter for culture at large -a condition of no sense. This gesture must have given its author a certain emotional pleasure for having achieved something new by the very absence of artistic gesture. In exasperation Ellul protested that "To apply exactly the mentality of Epicurus is no aesthetic creation."[81] With positions such a these, the frenetic pursuit to distinguish oneself, especially when undertaken by a considerable number of artists and architects over several decades, amounted to an exclusion of the sense-in-common in favor of the self-referential sign. Sense-in-common here is distinguished from common-sense because common-sense could be applied by simple habit. By contrast, sense-in-common designates sets of artistic conventions whose justification derives from the continual reflection, agreement and disagreement between many free minds contemplating the same artistic concerns, and enriched by the wisdom of experience. This condition has been violently reversed in modernism, particularly among architects who frequently put selfexpression over an above the idea that architecture as a public art is called to serve the City, the *res publica*.

Ellul was little affected by the sophistries of modernist art theory because he saw modernist art forms as technological forms situated within and explained by a society that is meant to be technologically determined in the first place. Modernist art and architecture and their theory sought to form and conform the mind in a technological direction -literally a technological *weltanschauung*. This theory claimed to be the only form of modernity possible. Indeed, it claimed to be the only reality possible for art and architecture as they were given the task to mold the physical forms of society accordingly. Previous forms and traditions that have been painstakingly elaborated

---

[81] *Empire*, pp.34. My translation.

and layered over centuries within a cultural sense-in-common could therefore be icono-clastically discarded. Modernism had become a monistic force that was justified by art and architectural historians and critics as if it were a historical necessity, a panacea toward which all previous artistic production was unalterably led and from which it definitely separated. Classicism's old belief in an unsurpassable past artistic ideal was replaced with the belief in a future ideal that will somehow arise from a historical contingency determined by *technique*. Apologists of modernism ardently argued for this belief, and some of them, like several Futurists, argued with shocking violence. In so doing, they produced conflations with far-reaching consequences, among which is the conflation of teleology with progress, as various historians of art and architecture wrote this conflation into their narratives.[82]

Progress differs from teleology in the sense that teleology does not necessarily imply improvement. A *telos* (Greek: goal, end) might very well lead a chain of events toward undesirable conclusions. Such, for instance, is the difference between promise and progress. In their good aspirations early modernists in art and architecture sought to wed their preferred artistic and architectural forms to progressive social ideals and their beliefs in the redemptive role of technology with the full expectation that historical events will gradually unfold in the direction of their goals. Yet, the decades that followed showed that modernist art and architecture became a tool of daily market forces having little to do with earlier stated ideals, while the unrestrained belief in technology led to catastrophic environmental consequences and a long-standing unwillingness to admit these consequences. Progress is a particular way to represent historical time that differs from the simple notion of development in that progress advances toward a certain finality. Progress implies that history moves according to a unified direction, and that historical periods constitute the various steps of that progress in which a principle gradually realizes itself and justifies all the changes. For Jacques-Benigne Bossuet, this principle is God governing history; for Voltaire and Nicolas de Condorcet it is Reason accompanying history; whereas for Hegel, Reason systematically justifies the progressive movement of historical periods on their way the realization of the Concept. Historical events or periods gain their significance depending on the place they occupy within a unified and progressive chronological development. Consequently, progress implies the merging of meaning with direction.

---

[82] For example the work of historians: Emil Kaufmann, *Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier*, (1934), (French translation 1994). Sigfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command*, (Oxford University Press, 1948); *The Eternal Present: a contribution on constancy and change*, (1962), (Princeton University Press, 1981); Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture*, (1948), (Penguin Books, 1968); *Pioneers of Modern Design: from William Morris to Walter Gropius*, (1949), (Yale University Press, 2005); *The Sources of Modern Architecture and Design*, (Oxford University Press, 1968); Henry-Russell Hitchcock *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, (Penguin, 1958); Leonardo Benevolo, *The Origins of Modern Town Planning*, (Routledge & K. Paul, 1967); *History of Modern Architecture*, (Routledge & K. Paul 1971); *The History of the City*, (MIT Press, 1980); Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, *Modern Architecture*, (1976), (Harry Abrams, N.Y., 1979); Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: a critical history*, (1980), (Thames & Hudson, 2007).

Yet, progress for artists, and especially architects, has been deeply entangled in means, and when the technological means proliferated, Ellul reminds, the ends for which the means were developed disappeared from sight. But the post-modernist self-conscious reaction against the modernist justification of progress was not embraced in all cultural spheres. In fact, progress has now become such a routine belief that it passes unreflectively for a historical given. Yet, when some thinkers saw the weakening of the Enlightenment certainty regarding the progressive direction of history, they concluded that this was the dissolution of history itself.[83] Others went further, arguing that the acceleration of events has proceeded so exponentially that it is now beyond our capacity to see them as history. Others still, went as far as to propose that the immense network of self-referential signs within the consumer society makes it such that we can no longer distinguish historical reality from the myriad consumer images that occupy the reality of experience.[84] The multitude of images that now inhabit the technological consumer society have the power to condition contemporary understanding to such a point that they already frame the intellectual assessment within this society becoming a kind of lens through which historians look both at the past and the present. Accordingly, the mind is strongly affected if its grasp of the present-as-history is enclosed within this context. Paradoxically, although modernists championed their work as a decisive rupture from historical precedents, they nonetheless cherished the idea that they were carried by inexorable historical forces to the point they presently wish to occupy. For reasons such as these, many artists and architects rebelled after decades of proscriptive modernist control on artistic forms, on their history and their explanation. One of the first rebellions, since the late 1970s, rose to oppose modernist determinism by calling for a cultural milieu that accepted plural artistic expressions, a milieu that was characterized by its openness to the lessons of previous artistic traditions, a milieu that is generally known as postmodernism.

It is no surprise that L'*empire du non sens* was not well received in societies where modernism reigns supreme as a monistic force that outweighs, encircles, and invades all other cultural forces. It is difficult for the mind that has been formed inside the technological system to evaluate modernity separately from *technique.* It is also difficult for this same mind to differentiate between modernity as a reference to time and modernism as an artistic ideology. It is even more difficult for this mind to understand some of the most enduring paradigms that influenced artistic production in the past such as the idea of imitation, or rather, the inseparable couple: imitation and invention. The enduring concept of imitation allowed artists and architects to imitate nature and imitate established traditions. Imitating nature concerned Nature understood in her laws (*natura naturans*), and nature understood in her products (*natura naturata*). Art and architecture could imitate Nature in her laws by transposing ideas of order, of unity through variety, symmetry, harmony, solidity, and so forth, into work of human

---

[83] See Gianni Vattimo, *La fine della modernita*, Garzanti, Milano, 1985.
[84] See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et simulations*, Galilee, 1981.

making -the Greek *poeisis*: to make. Art could imitate nature in her products as in landscape painting or in sculpting the human body. Contrary to art, however, architecture does not have a *direct* model in nature, with the exception of the cave as an original shelter, or the forest as an origin to hypostyle columns (e.g. the hypostyle as a forest of columns as in the Temple of Karnak in Egypt, the Porticus Margaritaria in Rome, the Great Mosque of Cordoba in Spain, or the mediaeval tradition of the Italian broletto market hall with a city hall on the upper floor). As great theorists like Marc-Antoine Laugier (1713-1769) and Antoine Chrysostome Quatremere de Quincy (1755-1849) lucidly clarified, architecture had to invent paradigms that could be

considered as "natural" models, as for example the idea of the primitive wooden hut that could be considered an origin to both the house and the temple. Imitation in art and in architecture provided the intellectual discipline, the theoretical foundations that enabled the painter, sculptor, or architect, to judicially select and unify the best aspects of precedents from traditions with the expressions of personal invention.

Central to Quatremere de Quincy's thought is that imitation produces the resemblance of an object in another object that becomes its image. The imitation reveals one object within another. This imitative representation implies a distance between a general type and a particular object or building. It affords us the kind of intellectual pleasure that precisely derives from recognizing and understanding this distance. Examples from sculpture are Antonio Canova's statue of Napoleon Bonaparte as Mars, and his George Washington as Caesar. An example from architecture is Thomas Jefferson's indebtedness in the Virginia Capitol at Richmond to the Roman temple known as the Maison Carree in Nimes. The imitation is a resemblance, but it is an incomplete resemblance. It is rather a choice of qualities inherent to one object to be transposed and into another object. Transposition is also transformation where the qualities of one object are recognized within another object. Transposition and transformation operate on the notion of the fictive which serves another kind of truth: artistic truth. Between the artistically true and the artistically factual stands the artistically fictive. Thus Washington could be analogically assimilated to a Caesar, and a state Capitol could be analogically expressed through a temple. Such an imitation is categorically distinguished from the copy which repeats the reality of an object. The copy implies repetition, sameness, counterfeit; it is an object's double. In a very influential essay *De l'imitation*, Quatremere elaborated on the vital distinction between the copy and the imitation, between "similarity by means of identity" and "resemblance by means of an image."[85] The copy, Quatremere concluded, applied to the mechanical arts, while imitation applied to the fine arts. This prescient distinction, made at a time when industrialization was beginning to displace objects of art, was to obtain in full force with the industrial production in series, with the collapse of types into the standard, and finally with the collapse of the imitation into the copy. That is why, having rejected imitation, modernist theorists speak of simulacra. But there is always the persistent

---

[85] *De l'imitation*, (1823), Archives d'architecture moderne, Bruxelles, 1980, pp. 21-28.

belief that art reflects society -a distant and enfeebled echo of the idea of art imitating cultural paradigms that in turn serve as external justifications of art. In many pages of *L'empire du non sens*, Ellul displays impatience with overused and banal justifications of art as a reflection of the society in which it exists.[86] This banality, one must add, is erroneously used as a justification of art whereas in reality it is only describing the conditions for this art's emergence in a particular societal context.

Prior to modernism, imitation meant that objects are made out of combinations of other objects, cities and buildings out of combinations of other cities and buildings, while invention sought to improve the rational choice made from exemplary precedents. Whereas skepticism regarding the practice of imitation as part of a historical continuity began to be voiced in the eighteenth century, it is important to note that imitation and invention, in general, were considered as two facets of the same coin well into the nineteenth century and increasingly again since the nineteen eighties on the part of modern traditional artists and architects. With modernism, however, invention became an end in itself. The different facets of the same coin: imitation and invention, now became two identical facets: invention and invention. This separation was given currency and legitimacy by modernist art historians who wrote histories of art as histories of ruptures. The sequential passage from Mediaeval to Renaissance, to Baroque, to Neo-classical art, to Eclecticism, to Modernism, was assured by rupture, and invention was the cause of this rupture. Thus, the coupling of rupture with invention came at the expense of uncoupling imitation and invention. Moreover, rupture and invention in the arts and architecture came to be associated with the conflated idea of progress that we mentioned above. Artistic and architectural production was now considered to be *all invention* at the same time that imitation and invention came to be understood as antagonistic rather than complementary concepts. To be inventive meant that artists and architects were to practice *creatio ex nihilo*, the making of objects out of nothing, following their individualistic expressionism. Only, artists and architects do not create in the elementary sense of creation from nothing as their forms are invariably based on older forms even if they are the inversions or abstractions of previous forms. Instead modernist forms have been made, situated, evaluated, and judged with respect to *technique* as the value of all values. The big contradiction resided in the modernist claims to freeing the imagination and invention while wholeheartedly accepting technological determinism. Moreover, despite their fervent wish to be unique and produce the previously unseen, and despite their determination to separate imitation from invention, modernist artists and architects still learned, appropriated, and practiced their preferred forms through undeniable imitative acts for two important reasons. First, any collective construction of artistic or architectural qualities and forms and their transmission over several generations means that a tradition is being elaborated. Second, artistic and personal identities are inextricably connected to those of other architects who share the same world-view. For these reasons modernism itself became a tradition.

---

[86] For example, pp.9.

At one point, even a renewed avant-gardist urge toward continual change passes from being a transitory phenomenon to becoming an established practice, even if only for the duration of a few decades. Those who denied tradition themselves developed into a tradition.

The idea of technologically remaking the world, the complex sets of phenomena that Ellul called *la technique,* was conflated by modernist architects with the uncertain belief in architecture as a scientific discipline. This idea operated on the assumption that science (understood as technology), architecture and art, were linked by the *same* idea of progress. Whether it is cities, buildings, ocean liners, automobiles, aircraft, furniture, or kitchen utensils, the technological society was to be made with technological products and be represented by these same products. Every product must be qualified by a technological character. This unassailable belief exerted some far-reaching influences on symbolic thought, on artistic expression, on architectural character, and on the art-language and architecture-language analogy. Because technology was both the symbol and the product, the true and the real, the signifier and the signified, the artistic idea and its representation converged or rather collapsed into each other. If imitation and invention implied a certain transparency between an exemplar and a work of art, *technique* as a mentality presented an opacity to meanings outside of itself. Because meaning was internal to *technique*, it becomes enclosed within a self-organizing and self-referential system that accepts no external feedback. It becomes non-dialectical, a presentational immanence -a spurious infinity as David Lovekin affirms in his use of the Hegelian expression.[87] In the technological system that permeates society, the idea of making always resembles itself and replicates itself. It became its own ends. For this reason *technique* became monistic. It also eclipsed the symbolic ends, forms, meanings, and cultural conventions that previously allowed architecture to express a civic character or a private one. And yet, although modernist architects enthusiastically embraced the non-dialectical modes of the technological system, they still wished their forms to symbolically represent the technological order because they still retained the traditional idea that any object acquires a symbolic function simply because it was made. They justified their architecture as a *reference* to technology, while in reality *it was* technology. So the problem was not that there was a lack of correspondence between "image and substance", as Robert Venturi suggested,[88] but rather that the image and content were equal. Thus, what is usually considered to be one of modernism's strongest points, that is, the view that art and architecture symbolized the technological society and its informing zeitgeist, is actually its weakest. A symbol that recoils onto itself is a vicious circularity. A symbol that symbolizes itself is a condition of no sense.

The symbolic function received another setback with modernism's attempts to eliminate the difference between the imitation and the copy while producing numerous iden-

---

[87] See Lovekin's *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness*, Lehigh University Press, 1991, pp.98-105
[88] Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Steven Izenour,

tical repetitions of technological buildings and products in every continent irrespective of the character of place. The exorbitantly anti-ecological glass and steel skyscrapers that dot the planet as one of the sacred images of modernist progress bear little belonging to any place. They are built in every continent while belonging nowhere. Eliminating the difference between imitation and the copy also meant eradicating the distinction between the type and the model. Architectural types collapsed into technological standards, e.g. the skeletal structure of the *maison domino* was meant to be the standard underlying the very idea of every modern building. Because any architectural character can be attached to this skeletal structure, structural form can be dissociated from architectural character and meaning which in turn become removable attributes. In such a way artistic truth is displaced. If any architectural character can be attached to a mute skeletal structure then the result is kitsch -one of the most abundant phenomena of the technological society as Leon Krier has tirelessly repeated for several decades.[89] This phenomenon is most evident in the confusion of genres that abound in the technological society where a warehouse with a cross on its roof conveys that it is a church, where an amorphous and sinusoidal vase might also be the shape of a theatre, a library, or a museum. Thus, when ordinary citizens engage in caricatural naming of buildings, architects ought to listen because naming calls forth an object's nature, its character. Naming lays bare a object's artistic truth. Thus, designating the Centre Pompidou in Beaubourg in Paris as an "oil refinery", or the new museum for the Ara Pacis in Rome as a "petrol station" shows an indelible sense of what architectural character "ought" to be even if the general public may not necessarily know the exact form this character may take. When artistic shapes and architectural shapes are exchanged and dissolved inside a technologically determined reality a crisis of meaning is precipitated -a condition of no sense.

L'empire du non sens can be considered *un cri de peur* on the part of a man who laid bare his fears and disquieted concerns about a society so utterly permeated by *technique* and so docilely accepting of this invasion. Artistic creativity, or invention, were not only "radically and totally integrated into the technicist system"[90], but this integration passes almost unnoticed because modernist art affirms and confirms *technique,* and because the compensation for the problems caused by *technique* are themselves technologically mediated. In many ways the empire of *technique*, an empire of means, exploded the limits or boundaries between the arts. Architecture could become sculpture and vice versa, while architects transformed cubist paintings into the plans, sections, and elevations of buildings following the example of modernist prophets such as Le Corbusier. The keyboard of an electric organ produces the sound of drums and cymbals. An artist who produces 'art work' through a collage of unrelated photocopied images with varied colors is evaluated on the same level as the painter who composes and proportions a painting with the painstakingly judicious use of the brush following

---

[89] See Leon Krier, *The Architecture of Community,* Island Press, 2010.
[90] *Empire*, pp.30. My translation.

968

years of assiduous training and introspection. To a technicist mind, the photocopier and the brush are both means that are equally received irrespective of artistic skill; and the technicist mind, Ellul reminds, considers the proliferation of means to be a necessary condition of artistic freedom. Only, with this triumph of means any combination of forms becomes possible irrespective of the natural boundaries between the arts, of artistic genres, or established modes of composition. All considered obstacles in the emancipatory role seductively offered by *technique*. Yet, contrary to prevalent belief, *technique* did not necessarily facilitate the expansion of artistic freedom, nor the quality of art. If the manifestation of artistic form previously depended on a symbolic thought that instantiated expression and representation through manual skill, this manifestation has now been replaced by technical processes and operations and the near elimination of what has hitherto been known as symbolism, whether it is art imitating nature, or symbolizing religious themes, or social mores. It is important to note that the *augmentation* of technical means has been accompanied with a diminution in symbolic form and meaning. It is important to note that the *proliferation* of technical means has brushed aside symbolic form and meaning with an intolerant sleight of hand. Thus the distinction between an object of art wrought with skill and the multiplication of technological processes and products has been blurred. Here we encounter one of the greatest paradoxes of the technological society: on the one hand, the proliferation of objects imply the triumph of the object, on the other, this very proliferation also means the obsolescence of the object -a condition of no sense.

L'empire du non sens was published in 1980, and although opposition to modernism in art and architecture was beginning to be expressed in the 1970s, Ellul could not therefore account for the solid alternatives to modernism that developed since then. Even if the teaching and the practice of art and architecture today remains predominantly influenced by modernistic forms (the technicist image) there are glimmers of hope that one discerns in academies and in professions. Several art schools and ateliers around the world (e.g. The Florence Academy of Art, and the Angel Academy of Art, also in Florence) have now emerged where the study of nature, the human figure, beauty and proportions, landscape painting, historical subjects, realism, form the core of their curriculum. A handful of architectural schools and private institutions dedicated to traditional architecture (e.g. the University of Notre Dame, The University of Miami, The Prince of Wales' Foundation, the Institute for Classical Architecture) are now established. They teach traditional architecture and urbanism in view of constructing an enduring world where nature is seen as the enclosure, where the city is built inside of nature, and where architecture is built inside the city, in that hierarchical order. Paralleling these academic developments, painters, sculptors, architects, musicians, poets, are now practicing the humane art of dwelling wisely on this planet based on the successful lessons of past experience and on the avoidance of past disasters. Both art and architecture are ontologically linked to the human character, but the architecture of the city forms the very milieu where we all move and have our being, and traditional architecture across cultures has provided enduring examples of how to

build wisely with nature. This is not to say that all traditional cities have achieved a successful balance with nature, only to affirm that successful solutions that have been achieved in the past have a direct instrumentality in our use. It would be irrational to discard them, especially based on so unstable and fleeting a concept as modernity and its conflation with modernism. But the word tradition needs to be qualified. The soundness of tradition derives from the soundness of reason -the sense-in-common that we defined as a continual reflection on the part of many free minds enriched by the wisdom of experience. Continuity is judiciously approved where architectural production has rationally been proven successful, and change is carefully approved where and when there is a rational need to depart from a practice that has failed. Such is the rationality of tradition as a modern practice. Following the hard-earned lessons since the Enlightenment, the practice of tradition will benefit by avoiding a blind faith in an unsurpassable and idealized past, and a blind faith in an unknown idealized future that will somehow emerge from a technologically determined reality. As Ellul himself acknowledged, there is much in human nature that refuses to be integrated into a technological system that frames the true, the factual, and the possible.

Learning from Las Vegas, (MIT Press, 1972), pp. 137.

In Review

Our War on Ourselves: Rethinking Science, Technology, and Economic Growth

by Willem Vanderburg
University of Toronto Press, 2011
Reviewed by Richard Stivers
Richard Stivers has authored a number of books on technology, including his latest, The Illusion ofFreedom and Equality.

In *The Growth of Minds and Cultures* (1985), Bill Vanderburg articulated what some of us (including Jacques Ellul) regard as the best extant theory of culture. In *Our War on Ourselves*, Vanderburg applies this theory to the technological life-milieu. This book is required reading for students of Ellul and everyone who is seriously concerned about the decline of meaning in modern societies.

In applying his theory of culture to the technological society, he extends and refines a number of Ellul's insights, some of which were not developed in detail:

1. Technique supplants practical knowledge derived from experience; consequently, more and more activities have to be learned as technique.

2. Technique destroys the need for tradition (shared symbolic experience of the past).

3. Technique destroys "true" meaning and creates "false" meaning in its stead.

4. Humans do not perceive the need to symbolize their technological life-milieu because it is their own creation. Until the 19th century, nature and society were understood to have an independent existence.

As a result culture lacks a symbolic unity and becomes fragmented. In its place, the technological system creates a logical external unity by coordinating the knowledge and practices of the various specialized techniques. Desymbolization—the loss of metaconscious knowledge and meaning—follows from scientific and technological specialization.

No one has made a better analysis of specialization than Vanderburg. He brilliantly explains how specialization has destroyed the meaning (desymbolization) embedded in our institutions and practices. He discusses in great detail the global economy, law, management, engineering, and education to reveal how devoid of meaning they have become. Finally, he suggests how we might begin to resymbolize these same institutions and practices.

Perhaps there are no more readily-contested concepts than those of meaning and symbol. Vanderburg avoids turning his book into a belabored rehash of the literature on the subjects of meaning and symbol. He assumes we have an intuitive sense of these concepts.

Meaning possesses "weak" and "strong" senses. The latter refers to the meaning of life, the meaning of time, absolute or final meaning. The weak sense of meaning has to do with the meaning of all words, events, activities, and objects that are only indirectly related to final meaning. The sacred (central myth in his terminology) provides the anchor points of a culture by creating a hierarchy of values. The central myths of a traditional society allow societal members to understand at a metaconscious level the meaning of their past and present experiences. The most important myths are creation myths, which provide a theory of the perfection that we can return to or reach in the future.

In traditional societies, practical knowledge was organized by the metaconscious, which provided a context for the individual and community to both differentiate and integrate their experiences and perceptions. Consequently, experience, and the knowledge embedded in it, was holistic. By contrast, experience and knowledge in technological societies becomes atomistic and specialized. The metaconscious is reduced to activities in everyday life and in work that are not fully technicized. Practical knowledge still exists, but is shrinking. This is why so many of us complain about people lacking common sense.

As Vanderburg observes, a technological culture reduces truth to reality. The genius of language, according to Ellul, is to express our search for truth, meaning, and value, which can never be reduced to empirical reality. The sacred or central myth of a technological civilization concerns technique (the most powerful means of manipulating reality). Meaning and value thereby are reduced to power and consumption, which is false meaning, because power and consumption are insufficient to provide individuals with an answer to the hopelessness of inevitable suffering and death. Hence, we have turned power into a value and do not experience an urgency to symbolize our technological lifemilieu and thus provide it with true meaning.

In chapter 5, Vanderburg suggests ways in which we can begin to resymbolize our technological life-milieu, but this of course means not only developing a holistic perspective on the biosphere, but also reintroducing values other than those of power and efficiency.

All who are critical of our technological civilization should use *Our War on Ourselves* as the basis for clarifying their experiences and thinking through the first steps of resistance.

Adverts

Postal Address Changes

Don't forget to notify IJES if your address changes. Postal forwarding orders expire after a period of time. Forwarding practices are sometimes unreliable. You don't want to miss out on The Ellul Forum. *We don't want to lose touch with you.*

E-mail your postal address change to
IJES@ellul.org
or mail to
IJES/Ellul Forum
130 Essex Street, Box 219
South Hamilton MA 01982 USA
USA

New IJES E-mail List

After twelve years the www.ellul.org web site is undergoing a significant and long overdue upgrade. All back issues of the Ellul Forum *will soon be readily and freely available along with other study resources.*

It is time for the IJES to host a more accessible and lively "forum" for those interested.

Please send your preferred e-mail address to IJES@ellul.org

if you wish to receive IJES news and resources via that medium.

International Jacques Ellul Society

www.ellul.org
130 Essex Street, Box 219 South Hamilton MA 01982
The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

Anyone who supports the objectives of the IJES is invited to join the society for an annual dues payment of US$20.00. EF s ubscription included.

Board of Directors

Andy Alexis-Baker, *Associated Mennonite Seminaries;* Mark Baker, *Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno;* Patrick Chastenet, *University of Bordeaux;* Clifford Christians, *University of Illinois;* Dell DeChant, *University of South*

Florida; Darrell Fasching (VicePresident), *University of South Florida;* David Gill (President), *Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary;* Andrew Goddard, *London*; Jeff Greenman, *Wheaton*; Virginia Landgraf, *American Theological Library Association, Chicago*, David Lovekin, *Hastings College, Nebraska;* Randall Marlin, *Carlton University, Ottawa*, Ken Morris (Secretary-Treasurer), *Boulder;* Carl Mitcham, *Colorado School of Mines*; Langdon Winner, *Rensselaer* Polytechnic Institute._ _

Prophet in the Technological Wilderness

A Centenary Celebration & Critical Review of Jacques Ellul

Speakers include:

Andy Alexis-Baker Randy M. Ataide Mark Baker Stephanie Bennett Arthur Boers Daniel Cerezuelle Patrick Chastenet Cliff Christians Raymond Downing Darrell Fasching Scott Francisco David W. Gill Jeffrey P. Greenman Randolph Haluza-DeLay Paul Heidebrecht Virginia Landgraf Ted Lewis David Lovekin Randal Marlin Sebastien Morrillon Nick Ogle

Read Mercer Schuchardt Noah Toly Gabriel Vahanian Jacob Van Vleet Gregory Wagenfuhr Sue Wentworth Langdon Winner

July 8-10, 2012

Wheaton College Wheaton, illinois

Register Today

http://www.wheaton.edu/Academics/Departments/Theology/Conferences-and-Lectures/Ellul][www.wheaton.edu/Academics/Departments/Theology/Conferences-and-Lectures/Ellul

General Registration - $120 (includes dinners)

Student/Unemployed Registration - $50 (includes dinners)

Meal Ticket: Lunches & Breakfasts - $35

Meal Ticket: Lunches only - $20

Discounted Hotel Rates or On-Campus Housing Available

Co-Sponsored by the International Jacques Ellul Society, the Wheaton College Biblical and Theological Studies Department, and the Wheaton College Archives.

Jacques Ellul (912 -1994)

For more information, contact Kristina Satern at (630)752-5197 or Kristina.Satern@wheaton.edu.

Prophet in the Technological Wilderness

A Centenary Celebration & Critical Review of Jacques Ellul

SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

Andy Alexis-Baker
Mark Baker
Stephanie Bennett
Arthur Boers
Daniel Cerezuelle
Patrick Chastenet
Cliff Christians
Raymond Downing
Darrell Fasching
David W. Gill
Jeffrey P. Greenman
Randolph Haluza-DeLay
Virginia Landgraf
Ted Lewis
David Lovekin
Randal Marlin
Paul Tyson
Jacob Van Vleet
Gregory Wagenfuhr
Sue Wentworth
Langdon Winner

JULY 8-10, 2012

WHEATON COLLEGE
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

REGISTER TODAY

www.wheaton.edu/Academics/Departments/Theology/Conferences-and-Lectures/Ellul

General Registration - $120 (includes dinners)
Student/Unemployed Registration - $50 (includes dinners)
Meal Ticket: Lunches & Breakfasts - $35
Meal Ticket: Lunches only - $20
Discounted Hotel Rates or On-Campus Housing Available

Co-Sponsored by the International Jacques Ellul Society, the Wheaton College Biblical and Theological Studies Department, and the Wheaton College Archives.

Jacques Ellul
(1912 - 1994)

Exister, c'est résister

For more information, contact Kristina Satern at (630)752-5197 or Kristina.Satern@wheaton.edu.

Issue #50 Fall 2012

- Click to view the original PDF

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Contents

977

Information on The Editorial Board & More

From the Editor

Two thousand twelve (2012) is the centenary year of Ellul's birth (6 January 1912) and by chance also the 25 th year of publication of *The Ellul Forum* (1988 - 2012).

Darrell Fasching, just now retired from the faculty of the University of South Florida, brought together a small team of writers and reviewers, including many of us still involved, and launched the publication in 1988 and pretty much single-handedly kept it going for the first 25 issues (12-1/2 years). I agreed to succeed Darrell in 2000 and have served as its Editor for issues #26 - #50. At the time of that editorial changeover, David Gill was organizing the International Jacques Ellul Society which (who!) became the publisher and enabled us to expand and improve our journal. The three of us have been a team for 25 years and want to express our deep gratitude to all of our contributing editors, writers, reviewers, subscribers, and donors.

To mark the centenary of Jacques Ellul and the 25th anniversary of *The Ellul Forum* we managed to persuade seventeen veteran Ellul scholars and writers to reflect on Ellul, his legacy, and their personal interaction with him and his ideas. The good thinkers represented here show us the stunning range and depth of Ellul's influence. Several have written doctoral dissertations on him, many teach courses on technology that are primarily Ellulian, and everyone attests to essays or books of Ellul as an

intellectual turning point. Those involved in public service are inspired for a lifetime by Ellul's thinking and activities, and celebrate his teamwork with Charbonneau and other activists, on environmental protection, youth delinquency prevention, and educational reform.

Ellul's own faith commitment was transparent, but he is unusual in his appeal across the religious spectrum. The prophetic character of his ideas attracted the secular mind because they rang true and were grounded in prodigious scholarship. But the reminiscences that follow from religious thinkers carry a double appreciation, with their faith renewed and deepened by him while their mind was enriched. Ellul's biblical and theological repertoire are an extraordinary achievement for a historian and sociologist of institutions, and several writers call for this generation and the next to pay explicit attention to them.

Gabriel Vahanian of the University of Strasbourg passed away as this issue was being born. A personal remembrance by Darrell Fasching, on behalf of the IJES, begins on p. 20. Vahanian was a Contributing Editor to the *Forum*, a member of the IJES, and an active contributor to the Centenary Celebration of Jacques Ellul at Wheaton College in July. His friendship and debates with Ellul sharpened them both.

IJES President David Gill provides some perspective looking back and looking forward on p. 23.

Clifford G. Christians, Editor

Ellul Challenges & Illuminates

Mark Baker
*Mark D. Baker, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Mission and Theology, Fresno Biblical Seminary, Fresno, California.*mark.baker@fresno.edu

I lived in Honduras in the early 1980's. During a visit to a refugee camp in August 1982 El Salvadorans told me stories of civilian massacres, suffering and destruction. I came face to face with the horror of war. At a gut level I became a pacifist, but in my head I had questions: how could I expect a nation to not, at times, use force? I thought it was necessary to affirm one side as better, but I felt both wrong. Previously I would have shown no interest in Ellul's book *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective.* A few days out of the refugee camp the title grabbed my attention and I eagerly borrowed the book. My experience of war-torn El Salvador had converted my "guts;" Ellul's *Violence* converted my head and challenged my life.

A year later I participated in the Oregon Extension study program. Doug Frank gave a lecture, based on Ellul and Peter Berger, contrasting religion and faith. He described religion as a human construction, a nest of security, and faith as a condition of restlessness. It rang true, and shook me to the core. It also excited me with new possibilities. I left the lecture consumed by the question, what does this mean for ministry, for doing church?

I read Berger and devoured the Ellul book Frank referred to, *Living Faith.* Excited, challenged and grasping to understand I also read *Perspectives on Our Age* and *In Season, Out of* Season. I wrote a paper on the topic, but I had only begun to answer my question. Ellul and the contrast between enslaving religiosity and the liberating gospel of Jesus was a central element in my doctoral dissertation in theology at Duke University (1996). It was published in 1999 as *Religious No More: Building Communities of Grace and Freedom.* I continue to ponder the question, write and teach about it.

I first brought specific questions to Ellul, but as I read those few Ellul books in the fall of 1983 the tables turned. Ellul started asking me questions, and on a wide variety of things. A few years earlier I would have either not understood or dismissed his dialectical approach, but the complexity of life in impoverished and war-torn Central America left my linear thinking and neatly packaged answers in a shambles.

Ellul's dialectic not only helped me make sense of the world, it also helped me live in the midst of these complexities. I began reading any Ellul book I could get my hands on. My interest in Ellul led me and my wife to become students at New College Berkeley in 1987. It was a rich time of reading and discussing Ellul with Prof. David Gill and other students, and taking road trips to southern California to discuss Ellul with Vernard Eller.

Some Ellul books were long and dense. Yet I continued reading Ellul because at some point in every book, and often more than once, he would grab me and shake me up in a way that demanded reorientation, a different way of living or led me to experience God's grace afresh in a deeper way. Ellul has stimulated me intellectually, but what I value most is the way his writing has interacted with my daily life.

Ellul was part of the discussion as I reflected on how to do evangelism through a campus ministry at Syracuse University or begin an alcoholic rehab program in Honduras. Ellul influenced how I did fund raising as a missionary, and continues to influence how I use and relate to money. I could list many more. Perhaps most significant today is in relation to the theme of technique and efficiency. Introducing students to Ellul's work on this theme leads me, with the students, to evaluate the pervasive role of technique in our lives, and not just to evaluate, but take steps of resistance.

Although the context has changed and many of the examples in Ellul's books are dated, the themes that grabbed me are still pertinent today: violence, religiosity, an ethics of freedom, Mammon, the political illusion, and technique. Ellul continues to illuminate and challenge.

Encountering Ellul

Stephanie Bennett

Stephanie Bennett, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Communication and Media Studies, Palm Beach Atlantic University, West Palm Beach, Florida Stephanie_Bennett@pba.edu

The first time the name Jacques Ellul came into my view was as a small footnote in one of Neil Postman's books while working on my master's thesis at Monmouth University. Postman's mention was so compelling that it pushed me to dig deeper into Ellul's corpus. As I did, I realized that his critique of mid-20th century mass-mediated culture confirmed my own concerns about the way digital media were beginning to shape the communication landscape of the new century.

The following year I attended an NCA convention and heard a presentation about Ellul's work. The speaker was Clifford Christians; I was hooked. Dr. Christians graciously directed my attention to the Ellulian texts that might best advance my thinking. For the next two years I carried a paperback copy of *The Technological Society* in my oversized purse, reading and re-reading it several times. Concurrently, I imbibed *The Humiliation of the Word* and *The Subversion of Christianity*, both of which helped me see a parallel between the forces that drive the church and other societal institutions.

When I came upon *The Presence of the Kingdom*, it was the clincher. Never before had I read a treatment of the place of the church in society that comported so well with Biblical accounts of its first century roots. Ellul presented an alternative approach, one that attended to the ways that communication culture helps shape the perception and practice of one's faith and values.

For students newly embarking on Ellulian study, one of the most significant areas of encounter with him is likely to involve his ideas about the unforeseen consequences associated with technology. When viewed through the prism of history the many unforeseen consequences linked to technological advance typically do not become evident until after a major shift in societal norms has already taken place. By then, it is usually too late to reel back the line and make necessary adjustments for the good of humanity.

Ellul teaches that media include a built-in bias, independent of content. Over time, these media of communication engender as much (or more) influence on the way society is structured than what they make possible by way of convenience, comfort, or other immediate benefits. That is, the technological changes do much more than add something new to our lives; they become part of the ecological framework of society. Ellul deftly points this out through historical and critical analysis, providing fodder for reflection and hope for those seeking to preserve those cultural goods that are worth preserving - community, family, dialogue, and so forth..

Delving more deeply into Ellul during my dissertation, I applied his ideas concerning technique to the emergence and proliferation of mobile media. Instead of enriching the art of conversation, the continuous tethering of one person to another through a digital devices works to shape the way conversation, hence, relationship is perceived and valued.

One example of this is that mere talk is no longer a precursor to deep conversation, but has in many ways become a substitute for it through social media and texting.

Another example is the current thinking about online education. Whereas distance education has been with us for centuries in different forms, the rhetoric surrounding online education today promotes it as a necessity. In fact, if educators are not thinking about online education or practicing it, they are considered anachronistic and out of touch.

Part of Ellul's richness is that he offers no easy answers but pose important questions - questions that few are asking. My hope is that today's generation will discover Ellul anew and apply his thinking to the quandaries and challenges faced by living in a world where unprecedented speed and acquiescence of technological progress easily usurp human values and ethics. My dream is to one day teach a course on the history and philosophy of Jacques Ellul, helping students investigate more thoroughly the ramifications and ethics of dialogue. My joy is to live at such a time as this, when there yet remains an opportunity to preserve some of the precious human behaviors and values that have long made civilization possible.

Reading & Re-reading Ellul

Arthur Boers
Arthur Boers holds the R. J. Bernardo Cahir of Leadership at Tyndale Seminary, Toronto, Canada aboers@tyndale.ca

As a nerdy young man, I never paid attention to the cover of *Rolling Stone*. But *Sojourners*? Ah, that was another matter; my early theological education mostly came from that periodical. When it featured unfamiliar Jacques Ellul in 1977, I took notice. I went to the university bookstore, bought a copy of *The Presence of the Kingdom* for $2.50, and was electrified by it. (I am unsure how many times I've read it since then - now battered, highlighted, marked up throughout). In following years, other authors that influenced me - Will Campbell, William Stringfellow - also noted their indebtedness to Ellul.

I have read and re-read Ellul all my adult life - as a social activist, pastor in inner-city and rural settings, seminary professor. He is always significant, whatever my context or situation. Three themes in particular are never far from my mind and ministry.

First, Ellul demonstrated that Paul's notion of powers and principalities is not abstract and spooky. The demonic is related to so-called mundane realities, including money, *technic*, government, the city, and so forth. Ellul helps us understand the intransigence and intractability of many issues and problems. It prevents us from putting too much faith in technological solutions or indeed any solutions at all. Even electing people of character and virtue offers little hope of substantial change.

These implications tempered anger and frustration when I worked as an activist and ministered as a pastor, witnessing few results and the elusiveness of progress. Or saw good initiatives that went awry. Or marveled at how tightly people cling to priorities that caused great pain or damage. Or wondered why "Christian" institutions

employ unchristian means and serve unchristian ends. Or seen that every organization ultimately serves its own survival and promulgation, no matter the cost to others. The powers are always active in the world and we can only resist what we know how to name. But they are always beyond our reach or control. Thus prayer and worship are crucial to the Christian life because ultimately, as Paul says, we struggle "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

Second, Ellul convinced me that *technic* is our age's prevailing principality. As the decades have passed the conviction grows deeper, reinforced by what I saw around me as a pastor and professor. My latest book, *Living into Focus: Choosing What Matters in an Age of Distractions* (Brazos, 2012), makes an Ellul-influenced move: I want to help people explore the obvious ways that our interaction with technology harms us. Something's not working. "Labor saving" devices make us busier. The faster computers go, the more time we give to them. As highways and cars improve, we drive farther and vehicles become increasingly expensive. Email speeds communications but eats up greater amounts of time.

Even as we learn about environmental issues, our destructive ecological impact mounts. With the ongoing invention of "essential" devices (even energy efficient ones), our homes consume growing quantities of power. When I teach along these lines, many people automatically react and say that I must be "against technology" and thus suspiciously "Amish" or a "Luddite." People are baffled by questions about such givens as the effects of TV, cars, or smart phones. It is hard to conceive of doing things differently. *Technic* is our principality, idol, sacred cow.

Third, Ellul argued that reading reality is eminently hopeful not pessimistic. Knowing and naming truth frees us to act. He bolsters our courage to speak truth - even to and about the powers. Here I am also somewhat ambivalent about him. His writing was often too dense, complex, and, at first glance dark, to share with others, even graduate students. As a pastor, I found congregants incapable of taking in his devastating critiques and analyses. Ellul informs my thinking, but I often keep him in the background.

I doubt he would mind. He did not set out to start a movement or have his ideas institutionalized. Still, it was good to meet him on that magazine cover all these decades ago.

My Encounters with Jacques Ellul

Daniel Cerezuelle
Daniel Cerezuelle, Ph.D., is a social scientist, researcher, and author based in Bordeaux, France.
daniel.cerezuelle@free.fr

Becoming an "Ellulian" happened to me more by fate than by choice. It is the consequence of a family story. My father Henri Cerezuelle had befriended Ellul since 1936 and had participated in most of the camps which Ellul and Charbonneau organized from the late thirties to the sixties.

During the Second World War my aunt Edith Cerezuelle had participated with Ellul in a resistance network which helped save the lives of many Jews. Ellul was one of the rare men whose authority my mother would not challenge. And I remember very clearly, I was then fourteen or fifteen, when Jacques Ellul, his wife Yvette and their daughter Dominique came for lunch to our home one Sunday. He explained to my mother which part of a leg of mutton should be cut lengthwise or sidewise, and how to do it properly. I was very impressed.

Later, during the summer 1966, I was then 17 years old, I read *La technique ou I'enjeu du siecle (*ET: *The Technological Society*) which was on my parents' bookshelves, since Ellul used to send them an author's copy of most of his books. Reading this book was a turning point in my intellectual life. It helped me put into words my uneasiness with many aspects of the world I was discovering. During those years I would often ride my bike to Pessac in order to attend the informal "cineclub" which Ellul ran for the youngsters of his parish. His skills for interpreting a movie were so overwhelming that often further discussion with him seemed pointless.

By that time I had decided to study philosophy at Bordeaux University, and I would often visit Ellul's home, and very often I would return home with books which he let me borrow from his library. In 1970 I did my master's dissertation on the philosophy of technology, and I followed at the Institute of Political Sciences Ellul's courses on technology in contemporary society and on the history of political ideas. We had many discussions and he introduced me to the works of the French philosopher Jean Brun, whom he appreciated very much.

Then I decided that the issue of modern technology was too neglected by young French philosophers and that I should do my PhD dissertation on this topic. Jean Brun, who was teaching at Dijon University, agreed to be my advisor. Since this issue was not considered as legitimate in French departments of philosophy it was difficult to get the necessary financial support, and I was advised to do my research in the United States. Ellul suggested that I should get in touch with a young American philosopher, Carl Mitcham. Carl gave me v aluable advice and we became friends. In 1972 I obtained a Fulbright grant which allowed me to spend two years in New York to study at the New School for Social research under Hans Jonas. When I returned from the States, Ellul hired me as his teaching assistant, and he was on the jury when I defended my PhD dissertation at Dijon University.

In 1973, Charbonneau and Ellul had created the Comite de Defense de la Cote Aquitaine for opposing at the local level the French State's policy of large scale touristic development. Charbonneau was the first president and my father was the secretary of this Comite which met for several years in our house, rue Saint Joseph, where I live today. A few years later Ellul became president and I took over the role of secretary.

At that time, the regional "establishment" was in favor of the policy carried by the French administration, and opposing it required courage and determination. I could see that Ellul and Charbonneau had plenty of both and took very seriously action at the grass roots level. A few years later, Charbonneau and Ellul launched the Groupe du Chene, an unsuccessful attempt at creating a think tank for the French ecological movement. Again, I served for several years as secretary of this group and had many occasions to collaborate with Ellul and Charbonneau.

Since the eighties, I have tried to develop Ellul's legacy in two directions. In the field of social studies, Ellul had been very much concerned with the problem of deviant youth in the new urban environment. I have spend a lot of time studying how new forms of poverty and cultural disorganization result from the technologization of life. (See Daniel Cerezuelle, *Pour un autre developpement social* (Paris: Editions Desclee, 1996) and Daniel Cerezuelle & Guy Roustang, *L'autoproduction accompagnee, un levier de changement* (Toulouse: Edition Eres, 2010)).

In the philosophy of technology I have especially focused my research on the subjective dimensions of the autonomisation of technique and the study of the "technological spirit" which underlies technological acceleration (See Daniel Cerezuelle, *La technique et la chair, esais de philosophie de l technique* (Lyon: Editions Parangon , 2011).

Ellul from 1973 to the Future

Patrick Troude-Chastenet
Patrick Troude-Chastenet is Professor of Political Science, University of Bordeaux, Agrege des universites, founding President of the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul, and Editor of Cahiers Jacques-Ellul patrick.troude-chastenet@u-bordeaux4.fr

Like many things in life, my meeting with Jacques Ellul owes much to chance. Living in La Rochelle, I wanted to be a journalist and I had been advised to first study political science in Bordeaux. That was in 1973, and at the time, I figured I would only remain in that city for three years. I knew nothing of the author of *La Technique ou l'enjeu du siecle,* published in France in 1954, when I first saw, making their appearance in the hallways of the Institut d'etudes politiques, the American students who had come all this way just to be able to hear him. This made me think that, if his fame had reached the universities of California and Colorado, surely this professor must have had something special going for him, which the others lacked.

I had to wait until the following year to attend his courses, and from the first one, "The Philosophy and Thought of Karl Marx", I was not disappointed. At the same time, I had registered at the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences and I had discovered the first volumes of his monumental *Histoire des institutions.* Shortly after getting my degree, the director of the IEP asked me to do the orals for the students who followed Ellul's courses and to also be his tutor (*repetiteur*) for the American students. Which I

did for several years, and did the same for another three courses of his: "Propaganda", "Technological Society", "Successors of Marx".

I believe I read *Trahison de l'Occident* in 1976 and the reissue of *L'Illusion politique* in 1977. But is was only after I completed my doctorate in 1981 that I started systematically reading his work, writing reviews of it and doing interviews with Ellul, some of which would be published in the national press before they were gathered in a book that came out a few months after his death. I had the good fortune of living less than 10 kilometers from him and he was happy to receive me. He had written me a very flattering letter after the publication of a long interview that had made the first page of the Sunday supplement of *Le Monde*: " Jacques Ellul: avec Dieu sans maitre" (13/9/1981), for which he gave me all the credit, explaining that the quality of the answers was due to the judiciousness of the questions. According to his wife, he wrote me, it was his best interview.

It was at that time that I made Ellul's thought my new research topic. I had devoted my thesis to a neo-Poujadist movement whose discourse would be called populist today, being reminiscent of that of the Tea Party. Ellul then became, for better of for worse, an essential part of my life. For better, inasmuch as I could use him as a reference in my teaching and he provided me with a fantastic interpretive framework that allows me to this day to make sense of the contemporary world. For worse, since he —inadvertently— harmed my academic career, given the fact that French political scientists can be divided into two categories: the first one, more numerous, does not even know he exists, or is pretending not to, while the second has a very bad opinion of him as a person or of his work, when not of both.

He has no doubt also contributed to a pessimism that did not come naturally to me and that is more a function of what I would call frustrated optimism. These two aspects can be found in my action within associations. My old friend Sylvain Dujancourt and I wanted to launch a review of Ellul studies. David Gill came to Bordeaux and he was able to convince us to begin by organizing together twin associations: IJES and AIJE. Our collaboration since 2000 has been most fruitful and we have both fulfilled our mission of spreading Ellul's thought among our respective publics. As for the *Cahiers Jacques-Ellul*, they were born in 2003 and are still available in bookstores. Since 2007, the University of Bordeaux has allowed me to devote an entire course to Ellul's thought, to organize a big international conference in June 2012, and to go abroad for courses or conferences about Ellul.

I hope that, in an era characterized by the sacralization of technique and fascination for the latest technological gadgets, there will always be a fringe of people who resist this potentially totalitarian hold. Ellul has underscored the basic ambivalence of technique. His discourse cannot be reduced to that of Luddites. Young generations should therefore avoid the two dead ends of technophilia and technophobia.

Secondly, while he did denounce *the political illusion*, he did not call on us to desert the public square, but to think globally in order to act locally. Although he is not the author of this formula, he has embodied it all his life and I am glad to see it being

taken up here and there in today's world. With the exception of future apparatchiks, young people no longer expect much from traditional parties. Ellul's thought is making its way among the alterglobalist, ecological, degrowth movements and is unfortunately even recuperated by the *Nouvelle Droite*. If I still have a soft spot for *Anarchie et christianisme*, it seems to me that current generations have more to fear from "liberal" globalization, from the uncontrolled power of banks and agencies, of multinational corporations, than from the State that was his main target. (*Translated by Christian Roy*)

Translator's note: The *Nouvelle Droit* is not to be confused with the populist, xenophobic National Front party nonFrench readers may be more familar with, the *Nouvelle Droite* Patrick Chastenet has in mind is an intellectual movement centered on Alain de Benoist's GRECE that arose in the 1970s, and whose eclectic antiliberal critique of Western modernity gravitates around a rejection of Judaeo-Christian heritage and a celebration of every culture's pagan roots. This French New Right, emulated throughout Europe, has also been in close dialogue with the American New Left review *Telos*.

Jacques Ellul on the Campus

Clifford Christians
Clifford G. Christians is Research Professor of Communications and Professor of Media Studies, Emeritus, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. cchrstns@illinois.edu

During my doctoral study at the University of Illinois, one of my professors in Communications introduced me to Jacques Ellul. He assigned *Propaganda* and it captured my attention immediately. At that point in the Ph.D. program, Ellul was the only Christian scholar to be assigned— the only one considered intellectually strong enough to be indispensable to the curriculum. From those days until now, I have not been a literary critic of Ellul's work exclusively. Here was a Christian academic with a worldwide reputation who had not cheapened his faith commitment. His career as a professor at a secular university has served for me as a model of Christian scholarship to emulate.

Of the Old Testament prophets, Amos fascinated me particularly, called away as he was from farming to preach against the wealth and indifference of Israel. However, it has never been obvious in my mind how these examples can be translated into the modern university setting. Ellul opened the prophetic door for me through his own Amos-like ministry to contemporary culture. Given my interests in media technology, I had longed to see the Christian mind dominate the discussion about technology today in the same manner Karl Marx dominated the 19th century agenda over industrialism.

From *Propaganda* to *The Technological Society*, and then *Humiliation of the Word* and *The Technological Bluff* Ellul unfolded for me a prophetic statement on communication technology that could dominate my field's agenda. In the face of novel and

dangerous circumstances of unprecedented magnitude, Ellul's prophetic witness encouraged me to believe that we need not stand by immobilized. He stretches us beyond religious homilies to a bold vision coextensive with technology's abundant power.

For those of us in an academic world, Ellul makes it clear that the important battles are fought over content. Certainly a life of integrity is critical. Keeping one's promises, honesty with the data, respect for students, and other such virtues are necessary givens for a Christian teacher and researcher. Certainly active involvement in social causes, and freedom from the demons of careerism are sine qua non. Christian institutions warrant support also, as Ellul showed with his support of Reformed seminaries in France; time devoted to them sometimes indicates that the university does not own my soul. But Ellul made it clear to me that all these are insufficient.

The issue in the secular arena is whether a biblical foundation makes any difference in the way we think or shape our disciplines. If, in other words, scholars of faith and the non-religious end up with the same conclusions on crucial issues, and if economic and political beliefs seem finally to carry the greatest weight, then, Ellul showed me, Christianity is unnecessary baggage. He proved to me that on issues that matter, Christianity is a paradigm that warrants allegiance in higher education.

Ellul brought the revolutionary idea up from a footnote for me, developing as he did an approach that is radical enough to make major transformations in the status quo. Ellul made the urgency of revolt and resistance compelling, not just a final chapter or an afterthought after all the other intellectual work has been accounted for. He is too uncritically Barthian at this point for my own taste, presuming Barth's dualism between *Historie* and *Geschichte* and its dialectic between secular and sacred histories. On this view, the latter culminates in an eschatological climax at the final judgment. And given this construct, the apocalyptic end-time moment anchors both freedom and revelation for Ellul.

However, despite the limitations of this formulation, Ellul challenged me with an analysis that confronts our technological era without a hint of compromise, while simultaneously protecting the clear otherness of the solution. His achievement was to eradicate all middle-level compromises within the historical process. He eschewed clinical appeals to reason, demonstrating for me a relentless yearning for justice and meaning that has marked prophetic agents over the centuries. Ellul continues to show the world of scholarship that our thinking about the technological era can be freed from its anti-normative direction.

From Jacques Ellul to Global Ethics

Darrell J. Fasching
Darrell J. Fasching, Ph.D., is Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at the University of South Florida, Tampa. He served as founding editor of The Ellul Forum *(issues l-25).* darrellfasching@aol.com

A little over a decade after publishing a version of my doctoral dissertation on Jacques Ellul under the title *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Mellen Press, 1981), I published my two-volume work on ethics and public policy after Auschwitz and Hiroshima: *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics* (Fortress Press, 1992), and *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* (SUNY, 1993). Then, in 2001, I published the first edition of *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach to Global Ethics* (2nd edition, 2011). These texts form the core of my life's work and grow directly out of my work on Ellul, and my attempt to resolve the dispute between Jacques Ellul and Gabriel Vahanian on the significance of the rhetoric of "apocalypse" and "utopia" in a technological civilization.

The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia? was my most ambitious work. The first chapter analyzes the dialectics of the Janus-faced myth of apocalypse and utopia in a technological civilization, in which the very promise of utopia seems to lead to Auschwitz, Hiroshima and nuclear "MADness" (Mutually Assured Destruction). All three volumes have a common core –the analysis and critique of the role of religion (East and West) in encouraging unquestioning obedience to higher authority, and how this role fed into the techno-bureaucratic moralities that led to Auschwitz and Hiroshima.

This unquestioning obedience is interpreted through Ellul's understanding of the sacred and is contrasted with his characterization of the experience of the holy as requiring the questioning of the sacred. Ellul enables us to understand how "religion" can function both to promote demonic ruptures like Auschwitz and Hiroshima, as well as undermine such trajectories toward the demonic by having the *audacity* to call into question the sacred patterns of techno-bureaucratic rationality.

The basis of an ethics of audacity is the experience of the holy (that which can neither be named or imaged) as it can be found in a number of religious traditions around the globe. An ethical coalition for a global ethic can form (and has formed) among those traditions that emphasize hospitality to the stranger. Important biblical traditions of the encounter with the Holy One insist that when we welcome the stranger we welcome God or God's messiah.

To do so is to recognize the humanity of the one who is not "like us" in race, culture or religion. "Human dignity" is a modern name for the experience of the holy, expressed through the mystical language of the *via negativa*. We cannot say what dignity is any more than we can define the holy. We can only say what it is not. We say that our dignity is what we have in common despite all our differences. Dignity does not reside in our gender, or race or social status, or economic status, etc.

These things do not define our humanity. Rather, what we all have in common is our "undefinability." All violations of human dignity begin by defining the other and confining them to that definition (as part of the sacred order of society). That is the basis of all sexism, racism, religious prejudice, etc. But what we all have in common is being created in the image of a God without image, or as Buddhists would say –all selves are empty.

For me, my life's work was set when Gabriel Vahanian convinced me to write my doctoral dissertation on Jacques Ellul instead of Lewis Mumford. Ellul's book, *The New Demons*, is for me the single most important book he wrote, for it opened up a functionalist model for recognizing the work of the holy across religions and cultures, in the lives of figures like Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. Their work represents the audacity and hospitality that Ellul associates with the work of the holy –its power to desacralize the sacred orders of societies and their various ethics of obedience in order to protect human dignity.

Ellul as a Model of Christian Scholarship

Geri Forsberg
Geri Forsberg, Ph.D., is a senior instructor in the English Department at Western Washington University. She is active with Faculty Commons, a Christian association of university professors. Geri.Forsberg@wwu.edu

I was introduced to the work of Jacques Ellul as a doctoral student in the media ecology program at New York University in the late 1980s. As a student, studying under Neil Postman, I was asked to read *The Technological Society* and *Propaganda.* I found Ellul's thinking to be profoundly deep and complex. I admired his ability to analyze the affects of the technological milieu and I was curious about this author. After some hunting, I came across his book, *Perspectives on our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work.* As I read it, I excitedly discovered that Ellul was a believer in Jesus. As a Christian student, knowing that Ellul was a scholar who believed encouraged me all the more to consider how faith relates to media studies.

Ellul's work provided a foundational perspective for my doctoral dissertation—*Critical Thinking in an Image World.* His book, *The Humiliation of the Word*, gave me insight into the significance and qualities of critical thinking. Ellul believed that critical thinking in our technological culture was immensely important, though taking a critical stance in our image-dominated culture is very difficult.

According to Ellul, the world of images: advertising, photographs, video, television, film, move us toward an emotional stage of thinking. Reasoning, logic, analysis, critique, requires words. But, words, Ellul explained, are taking a back seat role to images. In his analysis, there are two irreconcilable modes of thinking—word-based thought and image-based thought. Ellul makes a plea for us to uphold language which enables abstract critical thought and reasoning. He believed that only language could help us communicate the Word—Jesus Christ.

Communicating the Word was very important to Ellul. As a protestant lay theologian, as well as a sociologist, Ellul wanted more than anything else to honor Jesus Christ with his life and scholarship. I believe today's generation of Christian students and professors are looking for help in understanding how to critique, research, write, and live from a faith perspective. Christian professors are asking such questions as:

How does faith relate to scholarship? How can one synthesize, or integrate, Biblical perspectives with academic studies? How can one critique prevailing theories from a Biblical worldview? How can we communicate the Word in our, sometimes hostile, academic environments?

Ellul, I believe, provides us with an outstanding role model. His cultural critiques have influenced the thinking of intellectuals around the world. However, many scholars who are aware of his sociological analyses are totally unfamiliar with his Biblical works. Unfortunately, many Christian professors and students are completely unaware of Ellul and his writings.

It is my hope that we can make Ellul's writings known to 21st century professors and students. Currently, I am working on an article to introduce Ellul to English education. I would also like to introduce him to Christian professors and students. I would encourage Christians who have never read Ellul to start with *The Presence of the Kingdom.* This book is a wonderful introduction to Ellul. It is here he discusses the role of the Christian in the world; the need for revolutionary Christianity; the main problems associated with our technological society; and, the need for a distinctly Christian way of life.

I would also suggest that Christian professors and students read Ellul's *Perspectives on our Age.* In this book, Ellul shares how he came to know Jesus. He shows that if we are going to be "salt and light" in contemporary culture, we must understand the times in which we live. He believed that our hope is ultimately in Jesus. Jesus allows us to critique our technological system from a unique vantage point outside the system. This, in turn, allows us freedom from enslavement to our technological environment.

Finally, I would recommend his book, *Hope in Time of Abandonment.* Some scholars discount Ellul because they think he is a technological determinist who pessimistically believes technology governs everything. Ellul, however, is most optimistic. He ultimately believes there is freedom, hope, and purpose for our lives in the midst of a technological society.

The Best Kind of Mentor

David W. Gill
David W. Gill is the Founding President of the International Jacques Ellul Society (2000), a cofounder of the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul (2000) and of the Ellul Forum *(1988), currently Mockler-Phillips Professor of Workplace Theology & Ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.* dgill@gordonconwell.edu

I have often referred to Jacques Ellul as "my mentor" –which can be defined as "a wise and trusted, usually senior, teacher, counselor, supporter, and guide." Certainly he was, and in many ways still is, the person who has most fully played those roles in my career for the past forty-plus years. My father and three or four others were also

wonderful mentors but in terms of my thought and action, the trajectory of my life and work, Ellul has first place.

As a Berkeley undergraduate in the late Sixties I had heard of Jacques Ellul but it was in Fall 1971 that the journey really began when I reviewed *Meaning of the City* for a small Berkeley radical Christian tabloid. The next summer I published a piece on politics that drew deeply on *Political Illusion, Politics of God Politics of Man, Presence of the Kingdom,* and *False Presence of the Kingdom.* I was totally hooked and rapidly acquired and devoured everything I could find by Ellul.

In fall 1972 I decided on a whim to send my reviews and essays to "Prof. Jacques Ellul, University of Bordeaux, France." Two months later I was shocked to get a hand-written, encouraging letter from Ellul himself. From 1972 to 1982 I exchanged numerous letters with him, read everything I could find, learned to read French, and wrote a PhD dissertation on *The Word of God in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul* at the University of Southern California. What fascinated me was his dialectic of sociological criticism and theological-ethical reflection. Life between the two has been my passion and calling ever since.

In summer 1982 I made my first visit to Bordeaux and published my interviews with him. He welcomed me back for a whole sabbatical year in 1984 - 85 when I finally got my French to a serviceable level and met with him at his home for a couple hours at least twice a month. I returned for periods of two to four weeks during several subsequent summers. On the day he died, May 19, 1994, I truly felt the ache of losing a father in my life.

There is almost nothing I have taught or written over the past forty years that is not influenced by Ellul. My biblical studies, such as *Peter the Rock: Extraordinary Insights from an Ordinary Man* (1986; Ellul read my manuscript and gave me encouraging feedback in 1985 while I was meeting with him), are in my view "Ellul-style" commentaries. His ethical works such as *To Will and To Do* and *The Ethics of Freedom* have, of course, been huge influences. My *Becoming Good: Building Moral Character* (2000) interacts a good deal with Ellul on faith and hope.

The reality is that I disagree(d) regularly with Ellul -for example, concerning work and vocation, Satan and the Devil, ethics and morality, and kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven. But this is where he stands out as a mentor: he welcomed disagreement so long as it was thoughtful. He loved stimulating his students to renewed thinking, to pushing farther down the line. He often said that he didn't want (mindless) acolytes and followers. He welcomed difference and healthy intellectual combat. He was the most learned, brilliant person I have ever known, always with layers of knowledge deeper than I had visited —but he humbly, gently, joyfully welcomed disagreement and argument.

There is not one book that Ellul wrote that didn't challenge me and push me to think better and research more deeply the matter at hand. To me, that is one of his greatest legacies. This is why I can't identify just one book or idea to preserve and pass on: we need it all.

And, secondly, I love the diversity we have in our community of Ellul scholars. It is a tribute to Ellul himself that we consist of atheists alongside believers, anarchists alongside socialists, all ages, races, both genders, all nations, academics, craftsmen, artists, and laborers. At our recent colloquia in both Bordeaux and Wheaton both the radical diversity and the mutual respect and even love were palpable. Like Ellul we want to be fearlessly committed to the search for truth and reality, for hope and freedom in a world closing in on itself. And we want to respect and enjoy each other along the journey.

Ellul in Text & Textbook

Jeffrey P. Greenman

Jeffrey P. Greenman, Ph.D., is Associate Dean of Biblical and Theological Studies and Professor of Christian Ethics at Wheaton College (Il.). jeffrey.greenman@wheaton.edu

During seminary one of my professors suggested that some of us taking a course on "Christ and Culture" might be interested in reading Jacques Ellul's *The Presence of the Kingdom.* I am not sure if many of my classmates took his advice, but I am grateful that I did. I had never even heard of Ellul before. That book became a deeply formative influence which continues to inform my work as a theologian and Christian ethicist. I consider it a minor classic of 20th century theology, eminently worthy of being read and re-read. The opening chapter, "The Christian in the World" captivated me then and still inspires me today. In particular, I have been shaped by Ellul's central conviction in that chapter that Christians have a distinctive mission which expresses their divinely appointed "function" as God's representatives, which inevitably involves "living in tension" with the world. His description of an "agonistic" way of life struck a nerve as a fresh and powerful description of the biblical call to discipleship.

He articulated how and why mission is at the heart of the Christian life, an insight that has become a fundamental conviction for me. *The Presence of the Kingdom* set me on a lifelong engagement with the question of the role of lay people in the church and in society, a core question of ecclesiology. Ellul's ability to express a theological vision for the centrality of the laity in God's purposes has strongly influenced my teaching and writing as an educator.. It was from Ellul that I first understood that the Church is the whole people of God, sent by the Holy Spirit into the world on behalf of Christ and his Kingdom. Later readings in Hendrik Kraemer, Lesslie Newbigin, David Bosch and Karl Barth confirmed and deepened the insights that I had first discovered in Ellul.

During my doctoral studies I encountered more of Ellul's writings, especially his theological and ethical works, most notably *The Ethics of Freedom*, which I consider one of the most significant Protestant texts ever written on the subject. Next I worked through his books of biblical interpretation, and then studied his sociological

works. This is pretty certainly not the sequence of most Ellul readers, especially most nonChristian readers. But encountering Ellul via his theology prevented me from ever thinking that Ellul was just some sort of a grumpy, pessimistic philosopher of technology. No, I always knew that he was a deeply Christian and seriously biblical thinker, working out the implications of his fundamental confidence that Jesus Christ is God's Son, the Lord and Savior of the world.

I never had considered teaching a course on Ellul until a delightful conversation in a pub on Martha's Vineyard on a relaxed summer evening. There with my colleague at Wheaton College, Noah Toly, we discovered our common interest in, and great (though qualified) appreciation for, Ellul's thought. We joined up with another colleague, Read Schuchardt, to offer a multidisciplinary, team-taught course on Ellul, which we described in *The Ellul Form* (issue 45). While teaching that course, we realized that there was no suitable textbook to introduce Ellul's thought, and so we decided to write it, not realizing just how tricky it could be to present his ideas fairly and concisely to those with no previous exposure to his thought. Our book, *Understanding Jacques Ellul*, appears in 2012, published by Cascade Books. It serves as a companion to that publisher's valuable reprints of Ellul's works, and their new translations of his works. We hope that our book serves to make Ellul accessible and appealing to a new readership and helps Ellul to be represented well in college and seminary classrooms.

One area where the next generation of students, pastors and scholars would benefit is by taking seriously Ellul's work as a biblical interpreter. This dimension of his thought has been almost totally neglected. In my view, by far his best biblical work is *Reason for Being*, his "meditation" on Ecclesiastes, which was the book of Scripture that most deeply shaped his entire outlook. I would venture to say that no one can understand Ellul's corpus without reading Ecclesiastes, and without reading what Ellul says about Ecclesiastes.

After discovering this work, I thought, "Ah! Now I see why he thinks the way he does. I wish I'd read this earlier." Ellul's voice should be welcomed into the conversation about recovering what is being called the "theological interpretation" of Scripture. His critique of the rationalism and reductionism of much contemporary biblical scholarship is incisive if sometimes overstated, but his positive vision of a humble, Christocentric reading of the entire Bible as one cohesive book is an approach that can only help equip to the church for its "agonistic" life as God's people in the world.

Jacques Ellul Today

Joyce Hanks
Joyce Hanks, Ph.D., is Professor Emeritus, University of Scranton (Pennsylvania) and is the author of the primary bibliographies of works by and about Jacques Ellul. jmh381@gmail.com

Having read several books by Jacques Ellul, sometime in the 1960's or 1970's, I began to collect whatever I could find that he had written, including his published articles. His ideas seemed terribly important to me, as indeed they still do. At the time, I was teaching French in Costa Rica, and working on a dissertation in sixteenth-century French poetry. Eventually, I decided to spend all the time I could spare working on Ellul bibliography and translation. The relevance of his thought for contemporary society and for Christian thinking made my other academic work seem insignificant.

Ellul graciously accepted my proposal for a series of in-person interviews to take place during the 1981-82 academic year, at his home outside Bordeaux. He had recently retired, and spent most of his time writing. He welcomed me regularly, answering my bibliographical and theological questions with considerable patience, and enabling me to track down many of his articles published in poorly-circulated journals. His kindness extended to inviting my family to dinner at his house, frequent tea breaks with him and his wife, and the suggestion that I attend the Bible study sessions he led in the church he had established, next door to his house.

Although he clearly found it tedious to do so, Ellul continued to respond faithfully to my bibliographical inquiries after my return to Costa Rica. His filling in the blanks enabled me to publish in 1984 the first of several Ellul bibliographies. Once I began translating his books, he also answered my letters requesting clarification of his meaning here and there. Usually I traveled to France annually for the purpose of questioning him at length about translation and bibliography issues. After his death, I sorely missed this regular contact with him, including the opportunity to hear him interpret his writings and share new areas of his thinking.

Encountering Ellul has forced me to think more broadly than I naturally do, considering far-reaching consequences. His views on matters like money and my generation's headlong rush into technology have challenged my personal practice at many points, and have factored into my decisions. His personal concern for students and colleagues offered me a model that I have attempted to emulate. Almost daily, I note an idea or a comment in my reading that connects with Ellul's thinking in some way, often responding directly to his published thought. I feel truly privileged to have had meaningful contact over the years with such a seminal thinker.

As we go forward, I trust that we will apply and adapt Ellul's thought rigorously and sharply, without watering down his principles in order to gain ready acceptance. Ellul did not seek so much to find agreement as to stimulate thinking and consequent bold action. We emulate him best when we think beyond our narrow field of specialization and far from our comfort zone. Like him, we can risk exposing our thoughts to those who think differently from us, and then do our best to understand them and to build something new together.

In our era of increasing specialization and polarization, I believe Ellul's views on violence have special relevance. He wrote that we have unusual opportunities to learn from those who differ widely from us as we have contact with them, especially in the church. In that atmosphere, Ellul believed that we can listen carefully to each other,

because what unites us matters so much more than what would divide us. Ideally, he could imagine ecclesiastical contexts—and presumably other contexts—where wildly differing points of view had their proponents not just rubbing shoulders, but talking with each other about their differences, working together in spite of important disagreements.

Ellul believed that, particularly in the church, we have the opportunity to consider difficult situations with utter realism, refusing to kid ourselves or tone down any disaster our world may seem headed for. Then, realizing that we do not know everything and cannot accurately predict the future, he encourages us to abandon despair and forge ahead in hope. We honor Ellul best when we do this with courage.

My First Encounter with Ellul

David Lovekin

David Lovekin, Ph.D., is Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at Hastings College, Nebraska lovekin@inebraska.com

I came to Ellul (or perhaps he came to me) in the late sixties, when all was in revolutionary bloom. I had majored in Philosophy and Literature at Northern Illinois University as an undergraduate. My early training in philosophy was in the grim and humorless wrangling of analytic philosophy, with a few lighthearted moments allowed for "puzzling." I was lured from this miasma by the study of Whitehead, Bergson, Ernst Cassirer, and Hegel. My master's thesis, also at NIU, was entitled: "Ernst Cassirer's Concept of Man," directed by Donald Phillip Verene. I specifically recall one afternoon when Verene asked me if I had read Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society*. I hadn't, and he suggested I should. I did, and my intellectual life changed.

John Wilkinson's introduction likened Ellul's study to Plato's *Republic* and Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*. I proceeded to read *The Technological Society* as the examination of the technological mind that was *writ large* in the state by the end of the nineteenth century. I had understood Hegel's phenomenology to be inherently dualistic with a synthesis between subject and object only as apparent and provisional, not the usual read. The Absolute was manifest along the way as appearance, which connected with Ellul's notion that the technical mind attempts to overcome difference (e.g. the gap between my awareness and the object of that awareness) with the "technical phenomenon," a concept virtually embodied in the technical system devoid of true embodiment.

The technical phenomenon became the false absolute, the false sacred–certainly not the Wholly Other. Technical intention was Cartesian and rationalistic in this regard. This abided with Cassirer's use of Hegel's phenomenology as a mapping of spiritual energy as it created symbols in the tensions between subject and object. The symbols of myth, language, and science were just such attempts; the Absolute appeared as

Jove in the Greek epics before a science they anticipated. The gods allowed the first appearances of cause in narratives of fortune and fate.

Cassirer had indicated the possibility of technology as a symbolic form, but beyond a brief essay—*Form und Technik*—did not advance the project. I believed that with Ellul's help, with his high regard for the symbol, a project was possible that would bring Hegel and Cassirer along. I later added Giambattista Vico to the mix with his study of the imagination in its cultural work as literature and law, also of interest to Ellul. Vico had anticipated the technical phenomenon with his notion of the "intelligible universal."

My first article for *Man and World* (1978), "Jacques Ellul and the Logic of Technology," and was followed by essays applying this logic to matters like mystery, science fiction, homelessness, the sacred, etc. My connection of Ellul to Vico was in *Man and World* (1982), "Giambattista Vico and Jacques Ellul: The Intelligible Universal and the Technical Phenomenon," a paper that was also read in Venice at the international Vico/Venezia conference (1978).

My book *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul*, Lehigh University Press, 1981, pulled together much of this research and ended with an emphasis on the notion of the cliche as the latest manifestation of the technical phenomenon. Here I also argue the importance of reading Ellul philosophically without concluding that he was a philosopher, at least as the term is usually taken. I believe he is a part of the critique of culture that needs greater elaboration and serious speculation above the current blather of deconstructionism and post-modernism, which at present takes the place of such a critique and is instead a manifestation of the problem.

I am currently working through the problem of Ellul's aesthetics, translating *L'Empire du non-sens.* Aspects of this appear in my recent "Looking and Seeing" for the *Ellul Forum*, Spring 2012 which is being reprinted with corrections and additions in the *Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society*, vol X, Fall 2012.

We are surrounded by cliches, blather, and bullshit that deafens all meaningful discourse and further humiliations of the word that Ellul challenged, and in his memory we should continue the good fight.

Ellul on Truth & Propaganda

Randal Marlin
Randal Marlin, Ph.D., is Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at Carleton University, Ottawa. For a complete version of this tribute and a bibliography of his writings on Ellul contact marlin@ncf.ca.

A philosophy graduate student first drew my attention to Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society* some time in the early 1970s, when I was teaching in the philosophy department at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. I saw Ellul's ideas as fitting

well with concerns about preserving individual autonomy in the modern world, something I explored in a course on phenomenology and existentialism. Ellul brought the added dimension of how human technique compounds the problems. I first instituted a new course, "Society, Value and Technology," using Ellul's book as the main text.

After a few years of teaching this I became sensitized to the question of propaganda. I was attracted to Ellul's *Propaganda* and became more and more interested in developing my thoughts in this area. As an undergraduate I had spent a lot of time on the Princeton student newspaper and I saw how people's words could be twisted and manipulated.

Upon graduation I worked for a metropolitan newspaper in Montreal while pursuing an M.A. degree focused on the philosophy of language. At Oxford I came across work by H.L.A. Hart and P.J. Fitzgerald and developed a new interest in the philosophy of law, later doing a Ph.D. in that area at the University of Toronto. With this background I conceived the idea of a course on Truth and Propaganda, in which I would look at historical, analytical, ethical and jurisprudential aspects of propaganda, but I saw a need to develop more expertise in the historical and factual dimensions of the subject.

Then came a strange opportunity. With a sabbatical coming up, I cast around for ways of supplementing a half-salary to enable me to study abroad. I saw that the Department of Defence advertised yearly Fellowships, one of them very substantial. I hit on the idea of competing for the big one so that I could work with Jacques Ellul in France.

The competition for this Fellowship would be fierce, and the idea that a philosopher might get it seemed very remote. I read Carl von Clausewitz and saw that his emphasis on morale in winning or losing wars gave me what I needed to impress the military with the need for attending to propaganda. Ellul posed the problem starkly when he said that democracies had to engage in propaganda or risk defeat from external enemies or subversion from within.

But Ellul noted that if they engaged in propaganda they would become the reverse of a democracy. I proposed in my submission that the way out of the dilemma would be by educating people to see through propaganda, thus undermining its power. I would give a course, "Truth and Propaganda" on my return, after getting a first hand view of Ellul's thinking and his reaction to possible solutions of his dilemma.

To my delight I won the Fellowship. In the course of interviewing Ellul during the Fellowship year, he kindly gave me an addendum he had intended to include in a second edition of *Propaganda* that never came to pass. He gave me permission to publish a translation of this, which I did. I also summarized some important ideas from the lectures I attended and had them published, with his permission, in *Futures Research Quarterly.*

I am constantly learning new things from Ellul's writings, more recently his theological studies, and have noticed how features of his writing fit in with a broader communicative purpose. Sometimes his writings are fiercely dogmatic in tone. But

his meaning is clear and usually founded on an impressive study of relevant factual material. What they certainly don't lack is the ability to stimulate.

Ellul resembles Kierkegaard in keeping in proper perspective not only the need to communicate objective truth, but also to gauge the ability of an audience at a particular time and in particular circumstances to receive such truth in the right way, with the right effect. I have been delighted to discover that my own involvement in civic affairs has its counterpart in Ellul's, and I look forward to reading more about his activity with Bernard Charbonneau.

Connecting With Ellul: An Episodic Engagement

Carl P. Mitcham

Carl Mitcham is Professor of Liberal Arts and International Studies, Colorado School of Mines, and faculty affiliate of the Center for Science and Technology Policy Research (University of Colorado) and the European Graduate School (Saas Fee, Switzerland). **cmitcham@mines.edu**

Getting to know the work and life of Jacques Ellul was a significant part of my intellectual formation. The 1960s were a chaotic time. After finding analytic philosophy wanting and dropping out from Stanford University in Spring 1962 (which was to become the year of Rachel Carson's Silent Spring and the Cuban Missile Crisis), I crashed in Big Sur for a while, then worked vegetables with a short-handled hoe alongside migrant laborers in the fields around Salinas, California. From there I floated back to the University of Colorado, where I'd been enrolled before Stanford, and became involved with early-stage 1960s student activism. Then dropped out again, hitch-hiked and road rails across the United States, winding up back in San Francisco sometime in early 1964. The Vietnam War was growing larger, and I refused draft induction, expecting to go to jail — but then was not arrested (until five years later, another story). Got married in 1965 and was offered a job as a forest ranger in the Sequoia National Forest.

It was in the context of this typical 1960s itinerary that, wandering through the San Francisco Public Library in 1965, I stumbled on Ellul's The Technological Society. After standing and reading only a few pages, I decided I had to have the book and stole it (years later sending the library money to pay for my theft). I took it to the summer mountains of southern California, where I read it by kerosene light in a forest ranger cabin 50 miles from the nearest highway. When the snows came that fall I was still reading and re-reading. It was among the first things that began to make sense of the complex and confusing world in which I was struggling to find myself.

Two years later in appreciation, I reviewed Propaganda (1965) for the liberal Catholic quarterly Cross Currents, and then in the next decade my first serious scholarly publication — "Jacques Ellul and the Technological Society" (Philosophy Today, Summer 1971) — was an analysis of Ellul's argument, especially in relation

to the thought of Max Weber and the challenge of instrumental rationality. The effort in this regard also involved trying to understand connections between Ellul, classical political philosophy (as mediated by the work of Leo Strauss), and medieval philosophy (as mediated by Etienine Gilson).

Somewhere along the line the seminal analyses of Jose Ortega y Gasset and Martin Heidegger also got thrown into the mix. And in an effort to justify my philosophical interest in technology when the American philosophical scene strongly rejected technology as of any philosophically interesting importance, I discovered a tradition of engineering philosophical discourse that arose most prominently in Germany during the first third of the 20th century.

The dialectical tensions between Ellul, Strauss, Gilson, Ortega, Heidegger, and each of their traditions, drove me to read more of Ellul, whose voluminous if sometimes inaccurate footnotes introduced a wealth of literature on technology that influenced both the edited collection, Philosophy and Technology: Readings in the Philosophical Problems of Technology (1972), and Bibliography of the Philosophy of Technology (1973). (I should add that all of these initial three publications were undertaken with Robert Mackey, a philosophical colleague from Stanford, who remains a dialectical foil from the realm of analytic philosophy.)

Early in the 1970s, when teaching at Berea College, Kentucky (where, after eventually being arrested for draft resistance, I had been sentenced to alternative service), I met Jim Holloway, cofounder of the Committee of Southern Churchmen. As editor of the radical Christian journal Katallagete: Be Reconciled (19651991), Jim tutored me in Ellul's Barthian theology. In appreciation I did another review for Cross Currents, this time of Holloway's Introducing Jacques Ellul (1970). The two Cross Currents reviews led to guest editing a special theme issue of the journal on "Jacques Ellul" (Spring 1985), although not before also working (with Kassie Temple, Catholic Worker transplant from Canada who had done a dissertation directed by George Grant on Ellul) to translate and publish some of Ellul's work in Research in Philosophy and Technology (1980 and 1984) and in another co-edited volume (with Jim Grote) on Theology and Technology: Essays in Christian Analysis and Exegesis (1984).

It was Holloway, who encouraged me to write Ellul, which led to the translating and publishing in English some of his more philosophical work. And in the mid-1970s Ellul introduced me to his student, Daniel Cerezuelle, who has become a life-long colleague and friend. I helped Daniel arrange to study with Hans Jonas at the New School for Social Research, and Daniel, with his wife, Anita, visited me and my wife and family where, again partly through the instigation of Jim Holloway, I had become involved in a small intentional family religious community loosely associated with the Abby of Gethsemani in Kentucky. (Holloway had known Thomas Merton, Gethsemani's famous monk, who also found The Technological Society worthy of notice.) It was Daniel who organized the June 1989 biannual meeting of the Society for Philosophy and Technology to take place in Bordeaux, with Ellul as a plenary speaker.

Since the late 1990s my attention has shifted away from Ellul. He was one of my original entrees into the philosophy of technology and a stimulus for reflection on opportunities for Christian alternatives to the technological way of being in the world. But as I have progressively come to see Christian theology responsible for technology and violence, and not just in Lynn White's form as a dual-use historical stimulus or through Illich's "corruption of Christianity," my own religious affiliation has departed Catholicism and gravitated toward Pure Land Buddhism. Ellul's approach to the world has become increasingly foreign. Yet, in what is probably a final homage to his work and influence, at the invitation of colleagues Helena Jeronimo and Jose Lms Garcia in Portugal, I helped organize a reflection that has resulted in a book on Jacques Ellul and the Technological Society in the 21st Century as a contribution to celebrating the 100th anniversary of Ellul's birth.

From Ellul to Charbonneau

Christian Roy
Christian Roy (Ph.D. McGill 1993) is an independent scholar of intellectual and cultural history, an art and cinema critic, and a translator from several European languages. A specialist of the French Personalist tradition, he has published his thesis and numerous articles on the subject, as well as Traditional Festivals: A Multicultural Encylopedia_ *in 2 volumes (ABC-Clio 2005).*
christianroy2003@yahoo.com.

Around 1985, I became engrossed in the thought of Canadian philosopher George Grant, whose critique of Technique draws from Jacques Ellul's; that is when I read *The Technological Society*, during my graduate work on the origins of French Personalism. Days before flying to Europe to research my history dissertation, Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle, the authority on such pre-war "non-conformist" movements in France, pointed out to me that Ellul came from that scene. Delighted to learn of this direct connection between my Grantian concerns and French research interests, I resolved to include Ellul among the Personalist veterans I would interview.

That single meeting in Pessac on July 6, 1988 proved a turning point in my life, as Ellul told me how to make my way off the grid and the beaten path to the Beam barnhouse of his friend Bernard Charbonneau, whose own work I had just discovered as that of the great unknown prophet of our time —unassuming as he turned out to be in person. I came unannounced, but we instantly became close.

His papers and memories allowed me to reconstruct how, with Ellul's assistance, he invented political ecology as a distinct revolutionary orientation in Southwestern France from the 1930s onward. I first made that case in an environment-themed issue of a Montreal magazine with which I was involved ("Nature et liberte. Le Combat solitaire de Bernard Charbonneau", *Vice Versa*, No. 30, Sept.-Oct. 1990, pp. 12-14), and to which Charbonneau would contribute several original articles at my entreaty, while I

also published excerpts of my interview with Ellul (No. 33, May-July 1991, available online at www.viceversamag.com/jacques-ellul-a-propos-de- leducation-transmission-de-la-culture-ou-bluff- technologique).

Making the case for Charbonneau and Ellul as the true pioneers of Green activism has been a scholarly priority of mine since its fullest, now canonical statement won the Best Essay by a Graduate Student Award for 1991 in the *Canadian Journal of History* (XXVII, April 1992, pp. 67-100): "Aux sources de l'ecologie politique: le personnalisme 'gascon' de Bernard Charbonneau et Jacques Ellul." I gave the paper "Entre pensee et nature: le personnalisme gascon" at the first conference on Bernard Charbonneau at the University of Toulouse weeks after his death in 1996 (Jacques Prades, ed. *Bernard Charbonneau: une vie entiere a denoncer la grande imposture.* Eres, 1997, pp. 35-49), and "Ecological Personalism: The Bordeaux School of Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul", appeared in *Ethical Perspectives* (Vol. VI, No. 1, April 1999, pp. 33-44); it was summarized as document no. 698481 in Vol. 36 (2003) of *The Philosopher's Index*, and is

downloadable atwww.ethical-perspectives.be. I wrote the entries on Charbonneau and Ellul in the *Enciclopedia della persona nel XX secolo (Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane,* (2008), and more recently, online texts on Charbonneau in *Global Media Journal, PhaenEx,* and agora.qc.ca.

Following a conference at EHESS in Paris in 2011 on dissident voices amidst the long-assumed post-war consensus on France's modernization, a mainstream book on this topic in the works (Bonneuil, Pessis & Topgu, eds.) for La Decouverte that will include my account of Charbonneau and Ellul from 1945 to their part in the fledgling ecological movement of the 1970s. My paper for the Ellul centenary conference at the University of Bordeaux covered some of the same material, while the one I gave at its counterpart in Wheaton College presented Charbonneau and Ellul as a tandem of activists and thinkers I like to call the Bordeaux School.

The point I wanted to put across to Ellul's Englishspeaking admirers on both occasions was that their hero's intellectual mentor can no longer be left in relative obscurity; Charbonneau represents a vast continent of closely related, even more original thought waiting to be discovered in Ellulian circles and well beyond them, as Ellul himself always hoped. As a result, discussions are underway that could lead to my translating Charbonneau as well as Ellul in English.

Ellul's Books and Mine

Richard Stivers
Richard Stivers, Ph.D., is Emeritus Professor of Sociology at Illinois State University.
restive@ilstu.edu

In a graduate sociology program in the late 1960s, I followed up on a reference to *The Technological Society*. I subsequently read *Propaganda* and *The Political Illusion*. I was then convinced that Ellul's sociological analysis was more or less correct, despite the fact that my teachers seemed oblivious to his work.

One day in the library's card catalogue, I discovered under *Ellul, Jacques* books with surprising (to me) titles such as *The Presence of the Kingdom* and *Prayer and Modern Man*. As a lapsed Catholic I read his Christian books with interest but puzzlement and began to rethink my understanding of Christianity. Ellul's writings on Christianity became the motivation for me to attempt to become a Christian.

Like Kierkegaard Ellul gave the reader an existential kick in the butt: knowledge without practice is

worthless. So Ellul had wormed his way into two parts of my life: as a fledgling Christian and a young sociologist. I was taken by his view that Christian intellectuals had an obligation to expose the ideologies and myths that leave us culturally enslaved.

I decided to follow his advice by concentrating on sociological topics that Ellul had not studied in great detail. Ellul discussed technological morality in *To Will and To Do* and elsewhere, but never devoted a book to the topic.

In *The Culture of Cynicism* (1994), I analyzed how the new "lived morality" was an ersatz morality comprised of technical and bureaucratic rules, public opinion, and visual images in the media. I used Ellul's terms the "necessary" and the "ephemeral" to relate technical rules on the one hand to public opinion and to images on the other hand.

In *Technology as Magic* (1999), I attempted to resolve a conundrum about technique. In *The Technological Society*, Ellul mentioned that nonmaterial technique depended on the subjective factor (belief) to be effective, whereas material techniques functioned whether we believed in them or not. I argued that non-material technique works as magic, that is, as placebo or self-fulfilling prophecy. I concluded that we have magical expectations for material technology and have created imitation technologies (non-material) that are based on magic. In this way, as Ellul observes, everything becomes an imitation of technology or a compensation for its impact.

Shades of Loneliness (2004) is a study of the psychological impact of technique. The book includes a theory of the technological personality. In the second half of the book I demonstrate how various neuroses and psychosis (schizophrenia) reflect the contradictions of a technological society. For instance, obsessive-compulsive and impulsive disorders reflect the contradiction between the rational and irrational. The more rational society becomes, the greater the need for irrational release (ch. 5, *The Technological Society*).

The Illusion of Freedom and Equality (2008) looks at the transformation of meaning in freedom and equality from the 18th century to the present. Today freedom is ideologically defined as consumer choice, individual right, and technological possibility; equality as plural equality and cultural and communicative equality. The reality of each of these ideological images is the exact reverse. The reality of freedom is forced

consumerism, legal process, and technological necessity; the reality of equality is group conformity and competition on the one hand and uniformity on the other. Ideology, as Marx argued, transforms reality into its opposite.

Ellul argued that from the perspective of freedom, propaganda was the worst technique. This technique destroys awareness of our servitude to the technological system and magically transforms servitude into freedom (consumerism). Over the years my students liked *Propaganda* better than any of Ellul's other books. I surmise that it resonates with their experiences and that there still remains a small part of each of us that has not been convinced of our unlimited freedom. Everything we do to allow society to be livable and to minimize harm to the environment depends on our rejection of propaganda.

Our Civilization's Wager on Technique

Willem H. Vanderburg
Willem H. Vanderburg is Director, Centre for Technology and Social Development, Department of Civil Engineering, University of Toronto bill.vanderburg@utoronto.ca

When completing a doctorate in Mechanical Engineering during the early 1970s, I came to the conclusion that the world did not need another "regular" engineering professor, but someone who understood how our professional practice contributed to the "production" of our social and environmental crises and who could apply this understanding to make urgently required modifications.

In 1973, I was looking for a postdoctoral mentor; and after reading one and a half chapters of Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society*, I knew I had found him. Implicit in his description of technique was a completely accurate characterization of how my mindset worked. I needed to work out this intuition with him. Ellul accepted me on the promise that I would not ask for more than eight hours of his time per year. By 1978, I had completed what would later be published as *The Growth of Minds and Cultures*, to which he wrote the Foreword. Together we decided that my description of culture was implicit in his work as the way human beings made sense of the world and lived in it prior to technique.

Since much of a culture is implicitly transmitted from one generation to the next, I now had a tool to examine the values, beliefs and myths embedded in "engineering culture" and how this is transmitted through professional education. My research showed that future engineers learn almost nothing about how technology influences human life, society and the biosphere and even less about how to use this understanding to adjust their design and decisionmaking to achieve the desired results but simultaneously prevent or significantly reduce harmful effects. I had identified the need to transform technique by introducing some negative feedback into it. This led to what I call preventive approaches, set out in my book *The Labyrinth of Technology*.

I also tackled the task of understanding how human lives and societies greatly reduced their reliance on culture as a consequence of the emergence of technique. This was published in *Living in the Labyrinth of Technology*.

Most recently, I explained how the principal characteristics of technique, as well as the brilliant successes of our civilization and its equally spectacular failures, can largely be attributed to the fact that our knowing and doing are organized on the basis of disciplines. It amounts to a fundamental desymbolization of human life and society raising what I believe constitutes the "wager of the 21st century" (Jacques Ellul called technique the wager of the 20th century). How far can this desymbolization proceed, since it progressively weakens what has made us human until now? The findings were published in *Our War on Ourselves*, which also includes a prescription of how to resymbolize technique in order to loosen its grip on the modern university.

I would place Jacques Ellul among a handful of the most important Christian thinkers of all times. During a critical mutation in humanity's journey, he discerned the implications, and his predictions have come true with a greater speed than I ever believed possible. Secular myths and the accompanying new religious forms continue to steer humanity in a direction of self-destruction, with one important difference.

The massive desymbolization under the pressure of technique raises the question of whether this will be the century when human life as we have known it thus far will come to an end and an entirely new kind of "existence" of our species will begin.

Worse, the Christian community is so deeply committed to the idols of our time that it has largely been unable to hear Jacques Ellul's warnings. Will faith endure or will it all be turned into religion? Here also, the voice of Jacques Ellul may well turn out to be critically important for the continuation of a faithful remnant.

This brings me to the last component of my work. The year before he died, Ellul gave me permission to publish his Bible studies. The first volume, entitled *On Freedom, Love and Power*, will soon be joined by a second, *On Being Rich and Poor*.

Gabriel Vahanian: 1927-2012

A Personal Remembrance
by
Darrell J. Faschning, Vice President, IJES
The International Jacques Ellul Society

I first found out that my teacher, mentor and friend, Gabriel Vahanian, had died when David Gill, President of the International Jacques Ellul Society, emailed me a few days ago. Knowing Gabriel Vahanian's age, I knew this day would come, and yet the news stuns me. I want to share a few thoughts on this great scholar and dear friend.

Gabriel Vahanian was born and educated in France and received his baccalaureate from the *Lycee de Valence*. He then came to the United States in 1948 on a fellowship to Princeton Theological Seminary where he earned his M.A. and then completed his

Ph.D. in 1958. In that year he joined the religion faculty at Syracuse University. Gabriel Vahanian's rising star was lit when, in 1965, *Time* magazine published an issue on *The Death of God.* The article featured his book by that title, published in 1961, and offered it as a prime example of a new theological movement that included others like William Hamilton and Thomas Altizer. When *The Death of God* first came out, the great New Testament scholar, Rudolf Bultmann, compared it to Karl Barth's *Commentary on Romans* in its revolutionary significance for contemporary theology. It was a masterful cultural analysis of what Vahanian described as "the cultural incapacity for God of our post-Christian era." It led him to suggest that we *Wait Without Idols* (1964) and have *No Other God* (1966) until we could find an authentic language with which to speak of God again.

Gabriel Vahanian began to explore such a new language in his 1976 book *Dieu et L'Utopie* translated in 1977 as *God and Utopia, The Church in a Technological Civilization.* It launched his experiment in a new poetics of the word that was continued in *L'utopie Chretienne* and *Dieu Anonyme*; also his Kierkegaardian meditations *La foi,une fois pour toutes* and his book on *Tillich and the New Religious Paradigm.* Most recently, in 2008, *Praise of the Secular* appeared. Moreover, there is at least one more book to be released with the working title: *Figures of Christ: From Incarnation to Cloning.*

In addition to being a prolific author who lectured throughout Europe, Asia and America, Gabriel Vahanian was a member of the founding board of the American Academy of Religion (1964). The Academy inaugurated the promotion and professionalization of the academic study of religion in private secular and public state universities in the United States. Then in 1968 he became the founding Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Religion at Syracuse University in Syracuse, New York. During his tenure at Syracuse University (1958-1983), he held the Eliphalet Remington Chair and then the Jeanette KittridgeWatson Chair. In 1983 he accepted an invitation from the Protestant faculty of the University of Strasbourg and returned to France for the remainder of his career.

Rudolf Bultmann, who so glowingly praised *The Death of God*, was no doubt a major influence in persuading Gabriel Vahanian of the need for such a book. For in *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (1958) Bultmann argued that the Gospel had become irrelevant to modern persons because it was couched in a three-storied mythological worldview that had no relation to a world in which one lighted one's dwelling by flipping the switch on an electric light bulb. Hence, he said, the Gospel needs to be demythologized by being translated into a more contemporary language. Bultmann chose existentialism as that language and argued the Gospel called us to a new self-understanding. The argument was persuasive to many, but it succeeded at the cost of shrinking the cosmic-societal dimensions of the Gospel down to the individual transformation of consciousness. There was the potential for an almost Gnostic disengagement from the larger world in which the human drama is lived out.

Between the publication of *The Death of God* in 1961 and *God and Utopia* in 1976/ 77, there occurred a major incubation period which gave birth to Gabriel Vahanian's utopian poetics of faith. This poetics addressed the Bultmannian call for a new language of faith, but in a way that was more adequate to the cosmic-societal dimension of human life than existentialism.

I came to Syracuse University in 1969, the second year of its new graduate program and witnessed that poetics being formed in the seminars I took with Gabriel Vahanian over the next few years. In that period I saw Vahanian's interest in Bultmann's reflectons about light bulbs and faith transformed into a poetics of technique as the linguistic essence of a technological society. In his seminars on technology and theology, especially, it became clear that Jacques Ellul's sociology and theology of the technological society were becoming a major influence on Gabriel Vahanian's thinking. Following Ellul, he came to see the language of technique as creating a new, all-encompassing environment that replaced the ancient world's language and poetics of nature. Technique as the linguistic expression of our capacity to imagine and create new worlds offers a new and more adequate selfunderstanding, one that could take one beyond the limits of existentialism into the biblical-eschatological language of new creation –a language that embraces societal and cosmic transformation.

For Vahanian, if the ideological language of the technological civilization was utopian, as Ellul argued, this was so only because of the Gospel's transformation of Western civilization through an eschatological poetics of new creation –a "worlding of the word" as Vahanian later called it. Existentialism still suggested the dilemma of the classical world in which nature is one's fate. Each person is a "useless passion" in rebellion against his or her natural facticity. Jacques Ellul came to understand technological society as our "new nature" promising us liberation from the classical understanding nature as the realm of fate. Yet this "new nature" too became our fate, he argued, imposing efficiency as a necessity upon us. In Ellul's view, it was the utopian promise of technological society to fulfill all our desires through the use of efficient techniques (in all areas of human endeavor) that induced us to treat technology with a sacred awe, and so surrender to the necessity of efficiency.

Gabriel Vahanian agreed with this analysis, but argued that this utopian ideology was itself possible only because of the eschatological poetics of new creation unleashed by the Gospel. For the Stoics, nature was man's fate but for Paul, all of creation is groaning and giving birth to a new creation, the transformative body of Christ in the world. In Vahanian's view, Ellul saw the negative side of utopianism as ideology but he failed to see, at first, that desacralizing this ideological utopianism was the equivalent of releasing the Gospel's genuine utopianism of new creation.

A post-Christian civilization, Vahanian argued, is closer to the Gospel than classical civilization ever was. Utopian hope is possible because a technological civilization is no longer shaped by classic presuppositions of nature as our fate but by the eschatological utopianism of the Gospel. The poetics of the Gospel can redeem the language of utopia and the utopianism of language. The poetics of the holy can redeem the poetics of the

sacred to create a world that is rendered secular by the iconoclastic ecclesiology of the church as the body of Christ; a church whose task of continuing desacralization or secularization makes the continual renewal of the world possible. The Gospel is not about changing worlds but about changing the world, utopia is not a destination but an "eschatic" source of continuing renewal. For Gabriel Vahanian, the Gospel is not about taking us out of the world but taking us into the world to be its "salt." It is significant that Vahanian's book, *Anonymous God,* is dedicated to Rudolph Bultmann and devoted to a trinitarian reflection on God and the utopian iconoclasm of language.

Although Vahanian and Ellul were known for their occasional theological sparing, I know from my conversations with both that they were very good friends. Both subscribed to Ellul's distinction of the sacred and the holy. In most of Ellul's work, he tended to see utopianism as an expression of the sacred, an ideology that justifies the world as it is –making it impossible to change it. In most of Vahanian's work, he tended to see apocalyptic language as an expression of the sacred, inviting escape from this world rather than commitment to changing it. But both of these terms, "apocalypse" and "utopia," can be desacralized and so understood alternatively as expressions of the holy, and when they are, the two terms - "apocalypse" and "utopia" - converge. Ellul's book *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation,* for instance, turns out not to be about changing worlds but changing the world. Ellul views the language of the *Book of Revelation* as a poetic mirror reflecting on the present situation, calling the church to introduce an apocalyptic

transformation into this time and place. In his book, *Ideology and Utopia* (1929, revised in 1936) Karl Mannheim argued that apocalyptic language can be either ideological or utopian. In the first case, it justifies the *status quo*, in the second case it initiates a social

transformation of society by breaking with the

conventional view of society. It is the second where Ellul and Vahanian's views converge and apocalypse becomes utopian.

A Personal Reflection

Gabriel Vahanian entered my life in 1967 when I was on the student undergraduate committee that invited him to speak on "The Death of God" at the University of Minnesota. I was so taken with him as a person and a scholar that I ended up entering the Syracuse University Department of Religion graduate program in the Fall of 1969. Over the next several years I eagerly took every one of his seminars, struggling at first to understand what he was doing and then when the light finally came on, I was astonished and exhilarated. Those lectures were a dazzling, transforming experience. As my doctoral advisor, he became the midwife of my doctoral dissertation on Jacques Ellul which I defended in 1978 (later published as *The Thought of Jacques Ellul, 1981*). Gabriel Vahanian convinced me to do my dissertation on Jacques Ellul, by telling me that in doing so I would be standing on the shoulders of a giant. Ellul laughed when I told him this (being not much over five feet tall) and said "a small giant." Gabriel Vahanian was about the same height. By the time I published my book on Ellul, I

realized I was standing on the shoulders of two giants. That book opened doors for me and in 1982 I accepted an offer to join the Religious Studies Faculty at The University of South Florida in Tampa. A decade later, I dedicated my most ambitious work to Gabriel Vahanian – *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?*(1993) –saying in the Preface that my book was possible because "I learned that which can only be absorbed by studying with a master. I learned to think theologically."

The bond I formed with Gabriel Vahanian while I was writing my doctoral dissertation under his direction turned into a lifelong friendship. I had Gaby speak at the University of South Florida many times and he who would usually come to visit me and my wife a couple of times a year in Tampa, only an hour and a half from Winter Haven, Florida, where he had a second home he used when he flew in from France. Indeed, I just had a visit from him this Spring and we talked of seeing each other again at the Ellul Centennial Conference in Weaton Illinois this July. In the intervening time I was hospitalized in intensive care for internal bleeding that almost led to my own demise. Upon release, I ended up emailing him that death was stalking me and was making me too weak to travel. We never had that "last" planned meeting. The unfolding events since then remind me that death stalks us all.

Typically, when Gaby came for a visit he would make it a point to arrive on a Thursday in order to be able to join "the breakfast club" for discussion on Friday morning. The club is a group of five –scholars, ministers, even a lawyer. We meet every Friday to discuss the events of the week, the events of our lives, and, yes, even theology. Gaby loved this forum and reveled in the discussion. He always looked forward to it when he came. He had astonishing energy and would keep me up until midnight on Thursday discussing theology and then be fresh to begin again in the morning. By the time he left to return to Winter Haven on Friday afternoon, I would be both exhilarated and exhausted. He was 17 years my senior and I couldn't keep up with him. I will miss his visits but he will always be a presence in my life.

A Meditation on Language, Time and Eternity from *The Confessions* of Augustine:

Suppose, I am about to recite a psalm which I know. Before I begin my expectation … is extended over the whole psalm. But once I have begun, whatever I pluck off from it and let fall into the past enters the province of my memory

As I proceed further and further with my recitation, so the expectation grows shorter and the memory grows longer, until all the expectation is finished at the point when the whole of this action is over and has passed into memory. And what is true of the whole psalm is also true of every part of the psalm and of every syllable in it. The same holds good for any longer action, of which the psalm may be only a part. It is true also of the whole of a man's life, of which all of his actions are parts. And it is true of the whole of the history of humanity, of which the lives of all men are parts. (*The Confessions of Augustine*, XI,28,282, Rex Warner translation, New American Library, 1963)

May God remember his faithful servant, Gabriel

Vahanian, whose life is whole and complete.

Four Final Notes

1. Gabriel Vahanian is survived by his wife Barbara, his son Paul Michel and his daughter Noelle. Noelle Vahanian, holds a Ph.D. from Syracuse University and teaches at Lebanon Valley College, 101 N. College Ave., Annville, PA 17003-1400. Her email is:

Vahanian@lvc.edu

2. An extensive bibliography of Gabriel Vahanian's work can be found at:

http://gabrielvahanian.blogspot.com/p/ouvrages-de-gabriel-vahanian.html

3. Those wishing to donate to honor Gabriel Vahanian's memory might consider a donation to the *Gabriel Vahanian Endowed Graduate Support Fund*, Department of Religion, Syracuse University, Syracuse New York, 13244

4. A memorial service was held for Gabriel Vahanian on Friday, September 7, 2012 at Saint Paul's Reformed Church in Strasbourg.

Advert: International Jacques Ellul Society

IJES Ellul Forum Transition Time

David Gill, IJES President

For many of us on the masthead of *The Ellul Forum* this has been a forty-year (plus or minus) journey with Jacques Ellul —and a thirty-year (plus or minus) journey with each other. We old-timers are very grateful for the younger scholars and activists who are stepping up toward leadership in the Ellul studies guild.

After years of discussion and study of the alternatives, we have decided to cease the *regular, twice-yearly* publication of the *Ellul Forum* with this Issue #50. We still prefer reading print material ourselves —but the growing costs of print and postage and the labor involved, alongside the far greater population coming to ourwww.ellul.orgweb site, have made it clear that we need to build a truer "Ellul Forum" on line.

Online we can post articles without worrying about length. We don't need to exclude good articles for lack of space in our 24-page journal; everything fits online. We don't have to wait six months to publish; we can post articles as soon as they are ready. And online our readers can add their comments and perspectives to the document and interact with the author —a true "forum."

Online we can build up a truly valuable storehouse of information and material from and about Jacques Ellul. We hope to become a better clearinghouse for Ellul-related ideas, projects, meetings, research projects, and study/teaching resources.

We have a distribution list of about 350 for online IJES newsletters and announcements. Please register yourself at www.ellul.org— or send your preferred e-address to IJES@ellul.org. Please note that *we will not be maintaining a traditional mailing list* any longer. You must access our material on your computer —or use one at your public library or school —or ask a friend to connect you. Worst case: ask a friend to print out anything of interest and give or mail it to you. The good news it is now all free! And all accessible to a huge potential audience that never saw our print material.

Now hear this: we are still and forever pushing hard to get more of Ellul's books translated and published or reprinted. Ted Lewis and Wipf & Stock Publishers have done an

amazing job on this with many Ellul works now in print for the first time. Visit their online catalog at www.wipfandstock.com— where you will find at least *seventeen* Ellul titles with more on the way.

We dream of publishing an "Ellul Forum Annual" volume of the best of our online articles. These projects depend more on leadership and personnel than anything else. But do not give up on "Ellul in print."

* * * *

In June in Bordeaux about 150 scholars and friends gathered for a three day colloquium on Ellul's legacy for the 21 st century. AIJE President Patrick Chastenet did an

extraordinary job organizing and leading this meeting. Since 2000 Patrick has led the remarkable development of our sister fellowship L'Association Internationale Jacques

Ellul. You must visit their great web site atwww.jacques-ellul.org. Patrick's leadership along with his multiple books about Ellul have made him the unrivaled world expert on Ellul. We are so grateful for his ceaseless labors.

Daniel Cerezuelle, also of Bordeaux, has also done extraordinary work to make available and understandable the works of Ellul's intellectual partner, Bernard Charbonneau. Other developments: some of Ellul's old friends and students are in process of turning his Bible study lecture tapes into books (sounds similar to what Bill Vanderburg is doing in Toronto). We have to tip our hat to Dominique Ellul (daughter of Jacques & Yvette) for her efforts to get Ellul's works reprinted in France. And now to grandson Jerome (son of Jean Ellul) for his efforts to create photography and film related to his grandfather.

* * * *

In July in Wheaton, just west of Chicago, about 75 scholars and friends gathered for a three-day centenary colloquium on Ellul. Gabriel Vahanian and Daniel Cerezuelle came over from France. It was a great reunion for us old-timers and a first-time in-the-flesh encounter for many others. The papers and discussions were lively.

Many of the attendees insisted it was "the best conference" they ever attended. I couldn't disagree! Jacques Ellul continues to draw together the most amazing, diverse, creative, community of scholars and activists imaginable. I am bold to think the world, the academy, and the church, badly need a merry and rambunctious band like this. Let's keep it going on line - and meet again (in five years?).

Resources for Ellul Studies

www.ellul.org & www.jacques-ellul.org

The IJES web site at www.ellul.org contains (1) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (2) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, (3) a complete index of the contents of all *Ellul Forum* back issues; and (4) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The French AIJE web site at www.jacques-ellul.org is also a superb resource.

Cahiers Jacques Ellul

Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne

An essential annual journal for students of Ellul is *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, edited by Patrick Chastenet, published by Editions L'Esprit du Temps, and distributed by Presses Universitaires de France Send orders to Editions L'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Postage and shipping is 5 euros for the first volume

ordered; add 2 euros for each additional volume ordered.

Volume 1: "L'Annees personnalistes" (15 euros)

Volume 2: "La Technique" (15 euros)

Volume 3: "L'Economie" (21 euros).

Volume 4 (forthcoming): "La Propagande" (21 euros).

Volume 5: "La Politique" (21 euros)

Librairie Mollat—new books in French

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux (www.mollat.com) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

Used books in French:

two web resources

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are www.chapitre.comandwww.livre-rare-book.com.

Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. Visit www.elsevier.com for ordering information.

The Reception of Jacques Ellul's Critique of Technology: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings on His Life and Thought by Joyce Main Hanks (Edwin Mellen Press, 2007). 546 pp. This volume is an amazing, indispensable resource for studying Jacques Ellul. All the books, articles, reviews, and published symposia on Ellul's ideas and writings are here.

Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and THought of Jacques Ellul

by Andrew Goddard. (Paternoster Press, 2002). 378 pp. Ten years after being published, Professor Goddard's study remains the best English language introduction to Ellul's life and thought.

Ellul on DVD/Video

French film maker Serge Steyer's film "Jacques Ellul: L'homme entier" (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web sitewww.meromedia.com. Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul's ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.

The Ted K Archive

The Ellul Forum - Issues #26-50
For the Critique of Technological Civilization
1988-Present

<ellulforum.weebly.com/back-issues.html>
This document is still a work in progress formatting. Essay title headings are all
marked, but it could do with having more sub-headings marked. Quote indents are
fully marked up to issue #11, but then only intermittently marked after that point.

www.thetedkarchive.com