The Ellul Forum — Issues #51–75

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

1988-Present

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The Sense of Incarnation in Ellul and Charbonneau

by Daniel Cerezuelle

Abstract: Bernard Charbonneau, a friend and an acknowledged inspiration of the Christian Jacques Ellul, was an agnostic, but they shared some fundamental values. Their understanding of freedom as incarnation was the common ground of their lifelong companionship in the criticism of technological society and in environmental activism.

Bio: Daniel Cerezuelle studied philosophy and the social sciences. As a philosopher, he has taught the philosophy of technology in France and the United States and, since 1991, served on the board of the *Societe pour la Philosophie de la Technique.* As a sociologist he is investigating the social importance of the non-monetary economy in modern society. He is currently scientific director of the *Programme Autoproduction et Developpement Social* (PADES).

In this essay I shall try to clarify the common existential and spiritual background of Ellul's and Charbonneau's critique of technological society. They met very young, became friends in their twenties, and their intellectual companionship lasted throughout their life. Ellul, as most of you already know, kept saying that he had an important intellectual debt towards Charbonneau. Although he was not a Christian, I think it is useful to take into account Charbonneau's thought, because it sheds some light on the orientations of Ellul's thought. The agnostic Charbonneau and the Christian Ellul had in common a same understanding of human freedom as incarnation. Ellul wrote for example that already in the 1930s they "insisted on the unity of the human being, on the incarnation, on one's commitment according to a personal decision."[1] Their common dissent with the evolution of modern society is rooted in this common spiritual experience. When they were young they had long discussions on this issue and understanding what one says about this issue helps understand what the other has to say.

On this fundamental issue of freedom as incarnation, the social writings of Ellul say very little. True, we can get some hints from his theological writings. But those hints are not always very explicit. For example in *Presence of the kingdom* he makes a connection between the issue of incarnation and the criticism of modern technology and of the modern State, but this connection is not very explicit.

I shall try here to make it more explicit and in order to do so, I must begin with a few remarks on the Judeo-Christian roots of incarnation.

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[1] Jacques Ellul, « Introduction a la pensee de Bernard Charbonneau ,» in *Ouvertures, Cahiers du Sud-Ouest,* n° 7 (1985), p. 41.

I. Two Models of Perfection.

Free like a bird: In most religions, perfection or sanctity can be achieved through a process of disincarnation: achieving immortality, getting rid of the individual body and its carnal needs, liberating the soul from gravity, flying, and so forth. Most mysticism aims at liberating the self from its condition captive to a living body. This self-deification by means of disincarnation is also the goal of many speculative philosophies. Thanks to the power of the concept, man's mind can liberate him from his finitude, which he experiences in his body. (The *soma = sema* theme of the ancient Gnostics exemplifies this trend). This longing for the post-human, or the trans-human, is also one of the powerful motives of the technological adventure.

Reaching a perfect state, obtaining freedom, is overcoming the bonds which attach the human mind to the laws of corporeal nature. Hence, the importance of ascensional symbolisms and of transparency in representations of human perfection.

This state of mind may encourage a fascination with technological power and an interpretation of all growth of human power over nature as one more step toward the ultimate liberation of the human mind from the constraints of a corporeal mode of existence which is experienced as an obstacle.

On earth as in heaven: Judeo-Christian revelation breaks with this aspiration towards a disincarnate perfection. To mankind obsessed with the desire for escape from its condition ("you will be like gods... "), the God of the Bible gives the example of an unheard of and scandalous perfection by means of his incarnation in the world. "The word (or 'verb') became flesh" says the Bible.

This e*nsarkosis logou*, incarnation of the word, lends itself to various interpretations. A sacrificial one would say that the sufferings which Jesus endured in his flesh are the price for the salvation of mankind. Another one would say that this incarnation does not amount to a diminishing of God but to the manifestation of a supreme perfection. Becoming sentient flesh, individual incarnated existence, active in space and time, the verb incarnate gives mankind the model of a *perfection in this world.* Before Christ, humans could believe that perfection, which realizes all the aspirations of the spirit, could exist only *beyond the natural world.* Now, Jesus, as God-made-human, gives the example of the full realization of the spirit in this world.

The example of Christ tells us that sanctity is no longer to be found in a flight from this world or in a rejection of our carnal condition, but in the act of incarnation. This is the new model for human freedom. And since this imperative of incarnation knows no limits, it is no longer during some special moments of their spiritual life that humans should realize this incarnation. From now on, invested with the "freedom of God's children," they must try to translate or put into practice their spiritual values in all the dimensions of their daily life, which thereby becomes sanctified. Therefore the value of human works should be evaluated and judged by taking into account the experience of all dimensions, including the carnal ones, of this daily life.

II. Technique and Incarnation in Jacques Ellul.

In his *Presence of the Kingdom*, Ellul explains what should be a Christian ethics in a world dominated by technology. And right at the beginning of this book he raises the issue of incarnation: "God has been incarnated, and we should not disincarnate him."[2] Therefore, it is important for each believer not to separate his material (carnal) condition from his spiritual condition. Our responsibility is to incarnate our spiritual values in this world "from which we should escape."[3] According to this imperative of incarnation, we should build "a civilization at human scale." But our technological civilization is not adapted to "carnal man" (*l'homme de chair*).

The accelerated growth of our technical, economic, and scientific means is grounded in a process of abstraction which neglects real man and considers only an ideal man. "Thus, living and real man is subordinated to the means which should guarantee the happiness of an abstract man. The man of philosophers and politicians, which does not exist, is the only goal of this prodigious adventure which results in the misery of the man of flesh and blood, and transforms it everywhere into a means."[4] If we seriously pay attention to the real condition of the man of flesh, we should not accept this dissociation. The incarnation of the verb in Christ gives mankind a model: in order to be good, an action must incorporate its end not only in its effects but also in the agent and the means he uses.

An efficient action realized by someone who does not know what he does and why, who is reduced to the status of mere irresponsible means, cannot be good. "What is important is not our tools and institutions, but ourselves."[5] Only a process of disincarnation can allow us to imagine that an action could be justified by its end. All our actions, and all their effects should embody our values.

Others have held similar ideas but what is original with Ellul is his willingness (and ability) to take seriously and radically these principles for identifying and evaluating the instances of depersonalization of daily life. This is the basis for his criticism of modern state and of technical civilization. He shows us how the real workings of the technical and institutional equipment of mankind tend towards autonomy, which is contradictory with the principle of the unity of means and ends associated with incarnation.

Thus, the emphasis on incarnation in Christ as well as in the life of a real individual man, which is at the core of Christianity, requires us to submit our techniques and our institutions to an evaluation (*jugement*) which determines their place in our lives as well as their limits.

Ellul insists on *three consequences* of this imperative of incarnation:

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[2] Jacques Ellul, *Presence au monde moderne* (Geneve: Roulet, 1948), p. 16.
[3] *Presence,* p.19.
[4] *Presence,* p.83.
[5] *Presence*, p.105.

First: this imperative of incarnation should be obeyed in all the dimensions of our lives. For example, concerning power relationships, we should pay attention not only to politically institutionalized forms of domination, but to non-political forms of domination. This requires that we pay a careful attention to the structures of daily life in order to identify hidden power relationships.

Second: personal autonomy is both the condition and the realization of freedom. Only through the responsible action of each one of us can the word of God incarnate itself in the world. Everyone, each of us, is called to act and to decide personally in a world which depersonalizes action. Everything which reduces our personal control on our daily life is bad.

Third: our spiritual and moral orientations must be put into action first in our daily life and express themselves through our way of life (*style de vie*). For changing the world, private life is as important as public and political action.

III. Freedom and Incarnation in Bernard Charbonneau

Throughout his entire life, Charbonneau was motivated by the idea that industrial civilization cannot answer two basic human needs: the need for nature and the need for personal action, or –said otherwise — the need for freedom. Hence, his works can be read as an invitation to invent a new civilization which could respond to these needs for nature and freedom. Because incarnation is a central feature of the human condition, the incapacity of our civilization to respond to these needs results in the depersonalizing of existence. In one of his books he writes that "uncontrolled development threatens this man whose mind is incarnated in a body."[6]

So why does Charbonneau think that incarnation is a central dimension of human existence? For him, to be free is to accept –and not to reject –the tension between a spiritual imperative and the difficulties to incarnate it in nature as well as in society. Only an individual can realize this incarnation in his life. "Between heaven and earth, between the ideal and the real, a mediator is necessary, and there is none for that, but a man; in order to achieve its incarnation, the spirit never used another device."[7] Accordingly, the dream of a total freedom is meaningless, since freedom cannot be a permanent mode of existing; it consists in an *effort for liberation* which succeeds more or less.

Charbonneau said again and again that a thought which is not put into practice in daily life is worthless, and — as a consequence — that every dimension of the individual's experience is important, since every circumstance of daily life is an occasion for putting our values into practice.

Besides, Charbonneau is convinced that thought has a vital need of expressing itself through an action which gives it in return material reality and ontological weight. Since

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[6] Bernard Charbonneau, *Le systeme et le chaos* (Paris: Economica, 1990), p.128.

[7] Bernard Charbonneau, *Je Fus* (Bordeaux: Opales, 2000), p.21.

he is especially aware of the global completeness of the person, he is reluctant to give more importance to certain material dimensions of life than to others.

For example, in order to evaluate the productive equipment of a society, we should take into account not only the level of consumption but also the sensuous (or sensorial) conditions of daily life. Whether we consider the progress of institutional organization or the progress of technological and industrial performance, beyond a certain threshold the growth of our tools may deprive all individuals of the possibility of incarnating their values through actual actions. Meditating about the fantastic increase of the power of mankind's tools, and especially of the state, he says "From my own thinking to this reality, the distance is such that I am condemned to a disincarnated thought, when thinking the state can be animated by an all-powerful imperative of incarnation."[8]

United by a Common Thought

This is the title of an article which Charbonneau wrote for an environmentalist journal after Ellul's death. Reflecting on their personalist youth and their split with the Esprit Movement of Emmanuel Mounier, Charbonneau wrote that, unlike Mounier, "we were not interested in saying 'amen' to progress, but in understanding the threat which it posed to nature and freedom ... Where for Mounier it was necessary to adapt to a society in transformation, for us it was necessary to judge it according to our values of democracy and freedom in order to change it."[9]

In the *personalist manifesto* written in 1937 by both Ellul and Charbonneau, they criticize the depersonalization of action which, in modern society, results from the normal working of administrative, economic, and technical institutions.[10] They call for an evaluation of institutions and technologies not from the point of view of efficiency but rather according to their consequences for each of our mastery of our own daily lives. What place remains in the technological society for our own decisions? For them the reduction of our control over our daily life is evil.

Reflecting on their early common commitments, Jacques Ellul wrote: "we felt the necessity of proclaiming certain values and of incarnating certain forces." But "when the personal problem consisted in examining if we could incarnate the necessity which we felt inside of us," in our normal social life, the question was no longer "to live according to one's thinking" but simply "to think and nothing else and to make a living and nothing else."[11]

Thus, it is their understanding of incarnation which led these two young thinkers to undertake a radical critique of a civilization which creates such a dramatic split between the spiritual and material dimensions of life.

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[8] Charbonneau, *Je Fus*, p.10.

[9] Bernard Charbonneau, « Unis par une pensee commune » in *Combat-Nature* n°107 (nov. 1994).

[10] Bernard Charbonneau et Jacques Ellul, *Directives pour un manifeste personnaliste.* Journal interieur des groupes personnalistes du Sud Ouest, 1935 ou 1936. Patrick Troude-Chastenet en a publie une edition annotee dans le *Revue frangaise d'histoire des ideespolitiques*, n° 9 (Paris,1999). pp.159–177.

[11] Jacques Ellul, « Introduction a la pensee de Bernard Charbonneau » p. 41.

The Problem of Health Care as Technique

by Raymond Downing

Abstract: Healthcare is a consummate example of the technological system that Ellul described. Yet popular commentary dwells on the problems that healthcare has — particularly financing in the USA — far more than the problem that it is. Through examining the Hebrew story of the Bronze Serpent, and considering the contemporary focus within healthcare of risk analysis, I will propose that modern healthcare as technique is a problem.

Bio: Raymond Downing (MD, New York) has spent about 1/3 of his professional career as a medical doctor in the USA and 2/3 in several countries in Africa, currently in the Department of Family Medicine at Moi University in Eldoret, Kenya. His fifth book on healthcare, *Biohealth*, was published in mid-2011.

The Bronze Serpent

Rustom Roy, co-founding editor with Jacques Ellul of *The Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society*, said about healthcare that it was "the world's most pervasive technology problem."[12] What is it about this healthy sector of our economies, this enterprise dedicated to healing, that makes it a problem? Is it that healthcare *has* problems, or that healthcare *is* a problem? Thirty-five years ago Ivan Illich declared that it *was* a problem: "The medical establishment has become a major threat to health" was the opening sentence in *Medical Nemesis.* Since then, most analysts have assumed only that it *had* problems. Ellul undoubtedly would have agreed with his disciple Illich.

So what is the problem with healthcare? Consider first the story of Moses and the bronze serpent, a very old story of healthcare, with tentacles that reach all the way to the Gospels.

The story itself is short and simple: the Israelites were suddenly confronted in their travels by a population of poisonous snakes. Enough people were bitten, envenomated, and died to warrant classification as a public health problem needing intervention from the government. Moses made a bronze model of one of the snakes and put it up on a pole. Those who had been bitten were instructed to look at the bronze serpent, and when they did, they survived.

The setting of this story is rich with epidemics. When the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, it was a series of Ten Plagues that eventually convinced the Egyptians to free them. However, when the Israelites started traveling on foot through the desert and began complaining about the trek, the tables were turned and they began to experience deadly epidemics: fire, a couple of unnamed plagues, an earthquake — and the snakes. In each case the epidemic was a direct consequence of their complaining or rebellion or

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[12] Roy, Rustom, "Introduction: The 'Alternative' Approach to Health: The Only Solution to the World's Most Pervasive Technology Problem", *Bulletin of Science Technology & Society* (2002) 22: 333.

greed or debauchery. These were not random plagues or meaningless slaughters. When people began corporately complaining about or ignoring the plan God had laid out for them (and in the process acting against their own interests), there were consequences to their own health. God had spelled it out right after they left Egypt (Ex 15:26): following God's plan would prevent all the diseases the Egyptians had experienced, because health is God's business.

In this serpent story we are considering, the people were again complaining — at least for the eighth recorded time since leaving Egypt. Most of the previous epidemics had been consequences of these public complaints. But the consequence this time was different. Now God sent "fiery serpents" — the word is *saraph*, the same word that is translated "seraphim" in Isaiah 6. Both meanings come from a root word meaning "to burn," and in fact the seraphim in Isaiah touched Isaiah's mouth with a burning coal to take his iniquity away. The Israelites, however, may not have gotten this connection between an angelic being and a deadly snake, and they asked Moses to do something to remove the snakes (*nachash* - an entirely different word; the one used for the Satan-snake in Genesis 2). So Moses prayed, and God told him to make a *saraph* and put it on a pole for all to see. Moses then made a snake (*nachash*) out of bronze (*nechosheth*), two words that are related to each other — more on this shortly. And it came about that all who had been bitten, if they looked at the bronze serpent, they lived.

This redemptive event apparently had a more profound effect on the people than the few sentences in Numbers 21 betray, for there are no more recorded episodes of *complaining* until after they entered Canaan. The did have a major run-in with debauchery and idolatry later at Peor resulting in their largest yet epidemic — 24,000 dead from a plague. But the problem of complaining, which had dogged them from the beginning of their wilderness trek, did not recur. They accepted Moses as their leader, and the next time they were without water they dug a well instead of complaining. Then they asked permission to pass through the land of the Amorites, but instead of being given permission, they were attacked. They fought back, won, and settled for a while in Amorite land. When they moved on again they had the same experience with the people of Bashan: Bashan attacked Israel, Israel fought back, and won. By this time their reputation had grown, and the next people in line, the Moabites, were worried. Their king Balak hired the prophet Baalam to curse Israel, and he tried. Four times he tried, but each time the only thing that came out of his mouth were blessings.

We don't know if the Israelites attributed this string of successes (prior to Peor) to the healing power of God during the snakebite outbreak. But we do know that they at least respected the bronze serpent because they saved it — for 500 years! And during that time they apparently did what any of us do with an object or method that in one situation was so remarkably effective: they began honoring the thing instead of what it represented. Maybe they even kept trying to use it for healing. They named it — Nechushtan, not Saraph — and offered sacrifices to it. One of the first things King Hezekiah did in his reforms was to smash it, just as he smashed the sacred pillars and

poles that honored other gods, because the people were treating Nechushtan the same way.

Once again, the words used in the brief narrative in Numbers 21 tell an interesting story. God simply told Moses to "make" a snake on a pole, and the word for "make" is a very common word, the one used in Genesis 1 for all that God created. It was the same word used when Adam and Eve made loincloths for themselves out of fig leaves, and when Noah made the ark. God is the creator, and we too make things: *homo faber*. And we often use metal to make these things.

Moses decided to make the snake out of bronze (*nechosheth*), a metal first mentioned in connection with Tubal-cain, only 7 generations down from Adam. The word is used frequently in the Pentateuch, and always refers there simply to the metal itself. However, beginning with the bronze chains that bound Samson after his hair was cut, there are several uses in the Old Testament where *nechosheth* is translated as chains or fetters. The connotation of the word had begun to change from the material (a common metal used for the furnishings of the tabernacle in Ex 25) to one of its apparently increasing uses: fetters. Eventually, in Ezekiel 16:36, there is a use of the same Hebrew word *nechosheth*, but by now the meaning is clearly different; no longer bronze itself, but idolatry (presumably another of the uses of bronze) and filth or harlotry. Could this hint at the link between *nachash* (which came to mean practicing divination as well as serpent) and *nechosheth* (bronze, which became idolatry)?

Perhaps it was this Ezekiel use of *nechosheth* that Hezekiah saw in the way the people were treating Nechushtan. But he could not smash what Nechushtan originally represented. Over 700 years later John raised that serpent again — or rather Jesus did — but this time more as Saraph than Nechushtan. Jesus was explaining to Nicodemus that the Son of Man who had *come down* from Heaven would be *lifted up* in the same way that Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. And the purpose was the same: so that everyone who saw and believed would live — eternally. It is interesting to speculate how Nicodemus — who surely knew the story of the bronze serpent, and knew of its destruction by Hezekiah — would have understood what Jesus just told him. It is even more poignant to wonder what Nicodemus was thinking as he and Joseph *lifted* Jesus *down* from the cross.

We too may be left with some questions, especially if we work backwards and ask the story of Jesus to throw light on the story of the bronze serpent. Why would people bitten by deadly snakes be asked to gaze at a model of one of those snakes in order to live? Why not focus their attention on something beautiful, or something more powerful than a snake? How could the word for fiery serpent be the same word for an angel? All these questions are related to the fundamental one: What could it mean that those who believe in a dying man end up with eternal life? These are indeed paradoxes, ones we are meant to wrestle with.

The Gospels are full of this sort of paradox, and we have even become used to them: the last shall be first, the one who loses life will find it, etc. We on some level understand that spiritual life is larger than physical life, and that losing or renouncing

some of the latter may enhance the former. It is that same grasp of paradox which allows us to glimpse the broader view of healing in the story of the bronze serpent. The snake epidemic, remember, was a consequence of the people's corporate behavior. God sent fiery serpents of the very same sort that he sent to Isaiah, *saraphs* to burn away iniquity. Isaiah saw his iniquity in the context of the holiness and glory of God: to him the *saraphs* were angels. The Israelites saw no glory or holiness, and only saw snakes.

But God did not leave them in their ignorance; he offered them, not a healing flower or eagles to eat the snakes, but a snake that did heal. The solution to the epidemic was not in battling it and eliminating the snakes, but in seeing and accepting where they came from. God had sent snakes that really were angels, snakes that did not need to kill. Embedded in the consequence of their complaining was a fiery bite that could burn away their iniquity. And more: the death-dealing snake, when transformed by Moses and raised on a standard, became the life-giving snake. It was, as in the Catholic mass, consecrated the way common bread and wine are consecrated "to become for us the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ." Indeed, the "violent" serpent-like Son of Man who came to bring not peace but a sword that would separate people, was lifted up to save the world. The same way, says John, that Moses lifted up the death-dealing snake to become a life-giving healer.

The essence of healing in this story, then, is in accepting the snake-angels that God sent, and in recognizing the deliverance from their fatal bite that God provided.[13] The essence is emphatically not in making visual contact with a bronze snake — yet it was precisely this contact that facilitated the healing. There was, in other words, a source of healing (God), and a technique to access that healing (looking at the bronze snake on the pole). The difference was clear to Hezekiah, but apparently not to the people: they had focused on the technique instead of the source.

This difference between technique and its source or goal provides us with an opportunity to review some of Jacques Ellul's fundamental assertions about technique, and then apply them to contemporary medicine. The first is the difference between technique ("the totality of methods...having absolute efficiency"[14]) and technology (the study or discourse of technique). His 3 major studies have the word "technology" in the English titles, but the first 2 are really about technique (*La Technique ou L'enjeu du Siecle* in 1954 and *La Systeme Technicien* in 1977) and only the third (*Le Bluff Tech-*

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[13] Ellul develops a concept like this in "Positions bibliques sur la medicine" in *Les deux cites: Cahiers des associations professionnelles protestantes*, vol. 4 (1947). For example, "the physical only seems like a sign of that which is spiritual"; "health isn't a combination of remedies, but a way of living according to the laws that God willed for our life. My medicine will be therefore above all hygiene, but not naturalistic: a hygiene of which the first act is repentance from sin—and conversion"; "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."

[14] Ellul, Jacques, *The Technological Society*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), "Note to the Reader" p.xxv.

nologique in 1988) is specifically about technology. In this last one he makes clear the difference. There is no technical bluff, he says; techniques deliver what they promise. However, there is a "gigantic technological bluff in which discourse on techniques envelops us, making us believe anything and, far worse, changing our whole attitude towards techniques."[15] The importance of this distinction will become clear shortly.

The second major assertion — not just about technique, but recurring throughout his writings — is the difference between means and ends. He made this clear in *The Presence of the Kingdom*: "everything has become 'means'; there is no longer an 'end'."[16] All techniques are means; the technological bluff is the proclamation that techniques are all that matter anymore. Now the bronze serpent was a technique, a means; a very effective means to deal with a snakebite epidemic. But the 'end', the purpose for both the snake angels and the bronze snake, was to confront the people with their iniquity, burn it away, and heal them. The entire means-and-end process, we saw, was quite effective.

However, the people saved the 'means', the bronze serpent, for 500 years — but without the 'end', the purpose or meaning, it became an idol. On the other hand, 1200 years after the bronze serpent incident, Jesus returned not to the technique (the means) but to the meaning (the end), and said that as Moses lifted up the serpent for the healing of his people, so the Son of Man must be lifted up for the healing of the world.

These fundamentals, together with the story of the bronze serpent, provide us with some tools to examine modern biomedical healthcare, and to approach the question of what is the problem with healthcare as technique. Ellul listed many other characteristics of technical systems — autonomy, selfaugmentation, universality, totalization, the lack of feedback — and all of these apply exactly to biomedical healthcare. But for this story, the ends-means point is sufficient to start us off making some observations. And to avoid too much abstraction, let us choose an example.

There is a group of non-communicable chronic diseases — especially cancer, diabetes, heart disease/ stroke, and chronic lung diseases — which are now quite common worldwide, and used to be called "diseases of civilization", though diseases of industrialization or technology is more accurate[17]. They are the "leading cause of death and disability in both the developed and developing world"[18], and account for 87% of the disease

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[15] Ellul, Jacques, *The Technological Bluff*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. xv-xvi.

[16] Ellul, Jacques, *The Presence of the Kingdom* (New York: Seabury Press, 1967), p.63.

[17] Oppenheimer, GM, "Profiling risk: the emergence of coronary heart disease epidemiology in the United States (1947–70)" *International Journal of Epidemiology* (2006) 35:720–730: "Heart disease could be perceived as... a discordance between a modern, industrialized way of life and a human body that evolved under very different conditions". p723. Trowell HC & Burkitt DP, *Western Diseases: Their Emergence and Prevention* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981) "These diseases are those which are characteristic of modern affluent Western technological communities" p xiii.

[18] "WMA Statement on the Global Burden of Chronic Disease" Adopted by the 62nd General Assembly, Montevideo, Uruguay, (October 2011).

burden in high income countries[19] like the US. That they have become the leading causes of death on almost all continents might be seen as an indicator of how widely industrialization — or more specifically the technological society — has spread.

Now the "risk factors" for these most common chronic conditions are well known and often interrelated: tobacco use, unhealthy diets, harmful use of alcohol, and physical inactivity.[20] Note that this is the way these diseases are discussed: not as consequences of technology or industrialization, but occurring more often in certain groups of people, those subject to the "risk factors" listed. This biomedical formula for discussing diseases — locating them in the context of risk factors — is a very effective way to highlight the immediate causes and indicate interventions. It is equally effective in masking the more proximal reasons for these risk factors. Inactivity and eating processed foods may be behaviors that lead to several of these diseases, and they are modifiable. But why do so many people eat processed foods? Why is so much processed food manufactured? Why are so many people inactive? Why do so many people use tobacco and alcohol? It is in asking these deeper questions that we begin to see the link between "risk factors" and the larger technological system that Ellul described so well.

Our technological system does things for us, things that throughout the rest of history we have had to do for ourselves. It prepares our food and propels us, both using complex machines that apparently get the job done better — *or at least more efficiently* - than when we cook and walk. But something is lost when we don't prepare our own food and use our own energy to go places. Furthermore, a system devoted to machine and task efficiency such as ours creates a great deal of stress for the people who live in that system; that stress is also unhealthy, whether on its own[21] or leading to the other two "risk factors": increased use of tobacco and alcohol.

So, we approach this "chronic disease" epidemic — even though it is caused ultimately by the technological system — with products of that same technological system: drugs and surgical procedures. And they do work to ameliorate the diseases. In addition, we make clear the need for people, each individual person, to take responsibility for changing how they eat and move. But we "preach" this in a society designed for automatic movement and processed food. We have a bronze snake that permits access to bio-medical curative power, but no snake-angel to burn away our corporate nutritional and transport "iniquity". We chip away at our epidemics, piece by piece, but peace — *shalom* — eludes us.

Shalom, besides meaning peace, also means completeness and soundness, and includes "health" — a word related to both "whole" and "holy". This in fact is the 'end' we are missing when we focus only on means. We cannot attain partial health (partial wholeness?); disease elimination is not enough: In the story of the bronze snake, Moses

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[19] Lopez AD et al, *Global Burden of Disease and Risk Factors* (World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2006), Table 1.1, p. 8.

[20] "NCD Alliance analysis of the draft Political Declaration, 12 August 2011"

[21] Stivers, Richard, *Shades ofLoneliness* (Rowan & Littlefield, 2004), Ch. 2 "Technology and Stress". [11] "Uncertainty" is Ellul's subtitle for Part 1 of *The Technological Bluff.*

forms the healing snake *after* the killing snakes become active. The killing snakes from God are angels, literally messengers to tell people of their iniquity and burn it away. They are part of, and must precede, the healing snake. The true healing, the return to shalom, was not just because people looked at the bronze snake. It was because their iniquity had been burned by snake-angels, burned enough so that if they had no bronze serpent to gaze at, they would die. The Israelites remembered this link in Hosea's time (6:1): "Come let us return to the Lord, for He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us." Their repentance then may have been short-lived and shallow, but they did understand on some level the link between God's wounding and God's healing.

Let us recapitulate:

1. The Bronze Serpent story demonstrates a continuum between the root cause, the symptoms, the consequence, the treatment, and the prevention. *This is a natural system at work.*

2. The contemporary chronic diseases epidemic demonstrates the rupturing of this continuum. The technological society is the root cause, which we ignore. We consider the "risk factors" to be the cause, and put the responsibility to avoid them on the patient, a form of victim-blaming. But when that patient does experience symptoms, we employ the methods and products of the same technological society to manage the symptoms. *This is an artificial system at work — the technological system that Ellul described.*

3. Focusing on health (as a healthcare system must) will never produce health, because ill health does not arise from lack of healthcare, but rather (in the case of the modern chronic diseases epidemic) from the technological society.

4. Yet since medical techniques are very effective in ameliorating symptoms and even halting some diseases, we maintain the illusion that we are dealing with the epidemic.

5. Thus healthcare, as a subsystem of the larger technological system, shares all of its characteristics. It is not only a microcosm of the larger system, it also provides a window into how that larger system deceives us by its very successes. Technique is the means by which modern empire maintains its power.

The Problem of Risk as Technique

Come back for a moment to *shalom. Shalom* could be our "end" for which medical techniques would be our "means". However, *shalom* is not our end. In fact, we do not have an overall end. Instead we have many small 'ends', ends derived directly from the means we have available to accomplish them: We have painkillers, so we reduce pain; we have antibiotics, so we eliminate some infections; we have drugs to lower blood pressure and blood sugar, so we lower them; we can perform surgery, so we remove tumors.

In this world of multitudinous means — or options, as they might be called today — but without an overarching end, we face a great deal of uncertainty[22]: which means do we use? how well do they work? for which goals? While there is a natural tendency to use all available means, we would still welcome guiding principles to help us make sense of them all. But the uncertainty is profound. We don't know fully why, or even how, some diseases happen, and we certainly don't know which individuals will get them. These uncertainties bother us, because we *want* to know how diseases happen, how to stop them — and even more, who will get them so we can intervene early and prevent them.

Nevertheless we are flooded with techniques, with means. And since many are quite effective, we end up acting as if our overall end was to predict and eliminate all disease and death. But the gap between that unstated end and what common sense tells us illustrates, and deepens, our uncertainty. We want to do what is impossible: eliminate death; we want to know what is unknowable: the future. Our techniques, our means, have led us to the brink of a chasm we cannot cross.

But we do not try to cross that chasm, at least not directly. Our profound uncertainty does not paralyze us. We confront the uncertainty head-on — we measure it. Measuring this uncertainty then becomes another technique, another means, a very attractive one. In fact it begins to have a unifying effect on all our means. We use this technique to help us develop and evaluate all our other biomedical techniques: this is called biostatistics, the principal tool of risk analysis.

Come back to the group of non-communicable diseases to illustrate this. With some of these diseases we have a very clear understanding of causes: essentially everyone who smokes two packs of cigarettes a day for 30 years will get some emphysema; everyone who drinks a bottle of whiskey a day for 30 years will get liver damage. Alcohol and tobacco in these situations are not *risks*, they are hazards. But what about a half a pack of cigarettes a day from age 15 to 21? What about three glasses of wine every night for only the last 10 years? We have entered uncertainty.

Likewise with heart disease and many cancers: as shown above, we know the "risk factors" people are exposed to, but we cannot predict with certainty which person will get which disease when, nor which exposed people will *not* get any of the diseases. So we move into the realm of probability: we determine relative and absolute *risk* for getting the diseases, we speak of *confidence intervals*, we calculate *likelihood* ratios and *odds* ratios, and then we perform cost-benefit analyses of the diagnostic processes.

Then we do the same with the treatments we develop. None of the treatments actually eliminate these diseases, but each has some small effect — on *some* of the affected people. So we are back to probability: we speak of the effectiveness of the treatments with likelihood and odds ratios, with calculations of the *Number Needed to Treat*: the number of patients we need to treat in order to prevent a single disease outcome in a population. These numbers can be quite high, sometimes over 100 —

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[22] Note: this is not technical bluff; the NNT is not a lie. This is technological bluff.

which means that 99 of the 100 people we treat do not benefit, yet we cannot predict the one that will.[23] And then, again, we do cost-benefit analyses, unabashedly assigning a monetary value to human life.

Now these statistical tools, and this whole concept of risk, have been particularly useful for these noncommunicable chronic diseases: trying to pin down exactly where they come from, what causes them, how to treat them, and how to prevent them. These diseases are more complicated than, for example, a simple pneumonia caused by a bacteria we can eliminate, or a ruptured appendix we can remove surgically. We are now confronting diseases that often do not kill immediately, but also do not go away despite our treatments; diseases that gradually destroy vital organs. Yet our treatments keep these people alive. We have created a whole new category of illness: people alive, but dependent on the medical system to stay alive.

We confront a different conundrum on travelling upstream to try to uncover where these diseases came from. We had become used to "the germ theory of disease", an approach to disease causation that looked for a single agent — germ, gene, toxin, injury, etc. — that caused a disease. But these single agents were very elusive in the 20th century's group of chronic diseases. Industrialization (the technological society) may have been the ultimate cause, but it did not kill immediately, like the Black Plague, and there was no single agent or toxin responsible. We had to conclude that many of these diseases had causes that were "multifactorial" — so we began looking for these multiple factors.

Initially, scientists still treated these many factors as part of a single "mass phenomenon, the result of a shift in 'ways of life'" — that is, the exponential growth of industrialization and the technological society. Consequently "individual responsibility or blame was almost entirely absent from their discussion of risk factors during the 1950s and 1960s."[24] To the epidemiologists then, it was obvious that some of these diseases grew out of that "mass phenomenon", and not from irresponsible individual choices.

However, as we fine-tuned our search, we began to forget about — or was it ignore? — this "mass phenomenon". By around 1980 we had entered a fundamentally new era. Socialism was dying, unfettered capitalism reigned — and our views toward the public's health began to follow suit. There was now a "New Public Health" which, among other things, focused on these chronic diseases and their prevention. In previous epochs, public health addressed community health problems such as sanitation and vector control with collective action. But now even public health was becoming individualized, seduced by the drive to identify and eliminate individual risk factors. Despite the "mass phenomenon" behind the chronic conditions which made up 87% of our disease burden,

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[23] Oppenheimer," Profiling risk" p. 725.
[24] Peterson A and Lupton D, *The New Public Health: Health and Self in the Age of Risk* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), p. ix.

our health had become our own responsibility[25]. Risk had become our pilot; life had become a crapshoot.

We still haven't pinned down exactly how these diseases come about, and we still can't we cure most of them. We still live with profound uncertainty. It becomes very clear why we have chosen risk and statistical analyses as our orienting science. There is no technical bluff here. Biostatistics do exactly what they claim — measure probability — and they do it well. Bit by bit (or byte by byte) they help us make incremental changes uncovering the details of how these diseases develop, and how we can live a little bit longer with them.

But is this shalom?

Generations Ellul: Soixante heritiers de la pensee de Jacques Ellul by Frederic Rognon

Geneva: Editions Labor et Fides, 2012, 390 pp.
Reviewed by Michel Hourcade
Michel Hourcade worked for the French government until his recent retirement
Translated by Joyce Hanks
Frederic Rognon is a professor of philosophy of religion in the Protestant Faculty of Theology at the University of Strasbourg. He authored an earlier book about Ellul (*Jacques Ellul: Une pensee en dialogue* [Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2007]). In this new work, published during the anniversary year of Ellul's birth, Rognon has given voice to those he calls the "heirs" of Ellul's thought: intellectuals who have previously spoken of their debt to Ellul. Rognon asked the same question of each one: "How has Jacques Ellul's thought affected your own intellectual journey and any actions you may have undertaken?"

Rognon's sixty interviewees have widely different intellectual interests (theology, philosophy, history, economics) and professions (teaching, the pastorate, social activism, etc.) But were the criteria for choosing these "heirs" perhaps too limited or even arbitrary? Rather than avoiding this question, Rognon compares in his introduction the wide variety of responses he has assembled. These responses constitute testimonies that enable us to focus on a question that concerns all of us: how does one become an "Ellulian"? Herein lies, I believe, the originality of this book.

Each time the author offers a microphone to someone, it triggers the memory of a chance encounter, of something read, or something learned. Some interviewees' intellectual or professional journeys involved unexpected forks in the road. In some cases, agreement with Ellul's thought was instantaneous and long-lasting; in others, more

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[25] I am paraphrasing Ellul's note to the American reader in *The Technological Society,* trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), XXV, hereinafter cited as *TS.*

gradual. After their initial acceptance, some subsequently distanced themselves from Ellul's ideas, and then found at a later time that they believed something different. Such dialectical thinking would surely have pleased Ellul. The frequent spontaneous association of Bernard Charbonneau's name with his would have given him additional pleasure.

Some of Rognon's interviewees' names will be readily recognized by *Ellul Forum* readers. Although most of the "heirs" (presented in alphabetical order) are French, the author has taken care to include North Americans and South Koreans, as well as "heirs" from other countries. Rognon has given a voice to men and women (only a few of these latter, however), both well-known and little-known, but all committed citizens, and all embodying in their own way the thought of Ellul. Their witness offers a concrete new perspective on the often unpredictable expansion of his work. In this way, Ellul's thought demonstrates its vitality and fecundity, as it comes to the surface in unexpected places.

Generations Ellul: Soixante heritiers de la pensee de Jacques Ellul by Frederic Rognon

Geneva: Editions Labor et Fides, 2012, 390 pp.
Reviews by Randal Marlin
Adjunct Professor of Philosophy, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

I stand in awe of the amazing dedication, labor and insight that Frederic Rognon has brought to bear in the production of this hugely valuable study of contemporary scholarship relating to the work of Jacques Ellul. When I purchased my copy at the Librarie Mollat in Bordeaux at the conference organized by Patrick Troude-Chastenet in June, 2012, I found it of immediate service in identifying and backgrounding the work of participants. But it is much more than a cast of characters: it works toward an area-by-area synthesis of the different positions taken by scholars and others regarding the work of Ellul, followed by a thoughtful appraisal of those positions. By "others" I mean to include those whose vocation in life has led them away from the world of academic scholarship either to some kind of active involvement in the affairs of the world, or to such things as church-based activities (including prayer) where the focus is on getting a right relation with God rather than sorting out the right relation of a text to other texts or the world that the text supposedly describes or implies. My reference to "such things as .." is meant to allow room for the atheist who pursues a kind of secular spirituality, no less concerned to get a right relation with one's self and the world, but unsatisfied with the historical baggage attached to the proper noun "God."

Rognon, professor of philosophy of religion in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Strasbourg, has already established his credentials as a leading Ellul scholar

with his book *Jacques Ellul, Un penseur en dialogue* (Labor et Fides, 2007). Perhaps only one with an established reputation could afford the vast commitment of time and energy that he has invested in this project. In any case, the world of Ellulian scholarship owes Rognon a great debt for this achievement.

Rognon traces the work of sixty selected writers, thinkers, activists and others who have clearly been inspired by, or have reacted against, the work of Jacques Ellul. He seems to have made a special effort to include some of the youngest enthusiasts, so that his studies are indeed cross-generational as the title would suggest. With each of his subjects there is a bibliography, often very extensive. Given the hundreds of items, including theses, to which he refers, he shows a remarkable grasp of details of their content, evidence of the assiduity of his enterprise. In the case of the majority he supplements his account of their work with direct interviews, giving the dates and locations where these took place. His questions are poignant, and the answers nearly always illuminating in a very special way. Among the things we find out are first, what attracted a given subject to Ellul; secondly, what the points of agreement and disagreement are; and thirdly, how Ellul has affected the subjects' lives and careers.

What this work shows, splendidly, is the variegated nature of Ellul's work, activity and influence. Along the way it shows that Ellul's legacy is in good hands, that the day is past when "no prophet is recognized in his own country" applied to Ellul. Rognon gives some credit to Jean-Luc Porquet for a "powerful" contribution to revival of interest in Ellul's work with his study *Jacques Ellul. L'homme qui a (presque) toutprevu* (Paris: Le Cherche Midi (coll. Documents) 2003, 2012), The reference in the title is to Ellul's foreseeing very contemporary problems such as Mad Cow disease, GMOs, nuclear catastrophes, propaganda, terrorism and the like.

We learn that more than a few academics have hidden their Ellulian light under a bushel simply because the name "Ellul" lacked, and perhaps still lacks, weight in academia (though I suspect to a decreasing extent as his work becomes better known through the current revival of interest). Reasons or causes for the neglect of Ellul's work are readily apparent in Rognon's study. One is the politicization of disciplines, and the difficulty for the acceptance of Ellul in either Left or Right political circles, when his commitment to morally right thought and action has him constantly challenging the fundamental unquestioned tenets of both.

Rognon's study is the opposite of hagiographical. He has the courage and honesty to combine a full measure of appreciation of Ellul's enormous influence as a thinker, guide and inspiration, with revelation of the stumbling blocks that have stood in the way of full acceptance of his ideas by those who acknowledge a great indebtedness to him.

Space allows for just one illustration of such a stumbling block. In my own experience, interviewing Ellul in 1979–80 on the subject of propaganda, I found that he was uninterested when I broached the matter of South African propaganda in defense of Apartheid. The selection on Daniel Compagnon claims (page 93) that he was misinformed about the overall situation there. Ellul has been especially concerned to defend

Israel, to the point of ignoring some of its own, what seems to me, deceptive propaganda. And he has been unusually uncompromising in his treatment of the Muslim religion as a threat to human freedom.

One of the most revealing statements in the whole book is reported by Jean-Claude Guillebaud on page 175. Guillebaud, responsible for publishing many of Ellul's books as Literary Editor of the publishing house Seuil, asked Ellul whether he did not think that his (Ellul's) uncompromising support of Israel served the Israeli Right and Israeli excesses at the time of the Yom Kippur war, and thereby did a disservice to Israel. Agreeing with Guillebaud's criticism Ellul's response was nevertheless that "We Christians have two thousand years of anti-Jewishness to expiate. Besides, every thinker necessarily has a point of incoherence, and that (uncompromising support for Israel) will be mine, which will be assumed." (I have translated from the French.)

I see this as an example of Ellul's Kierkegaardian frame of mind, which always takes into account the circumstances in which one says or does anything. Not just the objective truth of what one says, but the likely impact of what one says in a particular context must be taken into account for ethical communication. It is not incoherent to maintain that attempts to right one set of wrongs may be compromised when there is historical and sociological evidence that attention to such wrongs will provide fuel for even greater wrongs. While Ellul is poles apart from Sartre on many things, there is a curious parallel between the view expressed by Ellul's commitment to Israel and Sartre's commitment to the proletariat with the advice that the "true intellectual" (in the essay "A Plea for Intellectuals") should automatically side with the working person, whatever the given issue.

There are many other stumbling blocks, over such things as technological determinism, the relationship between Ellul's sociological, political, and theological writings. There is a real feast of different viewpoints nicely assembled and evaluated by Rognon's commentaries. There are also wonderful testimonies to his willingness to come to the aid of others in need, testifying on behalf of dissidents for example, his bible classes, his friendships, his activism with Bernard Charbonneau on ecological matters. The book shows in so many ways why Ellul will continue to be relevant and inspirational for many decades yet to come. Rognon concludes with a thematic overview classifying the materials into the typography of Ellul's reception, the paradoxes relating to that reception, and the existential dimension of his work. No sharp division can be drawn, because many of Ellul's followers or those influenced-and-inspired but yet non-followers fit more than one category.

The book is probably best treated as a reference work, linking the interested person very quickly to those with matching concerns. Rognon has organized the book very well for that purpose. It is not easy to read straight through, because of the difficulty of recalling the right names and associating them with the right ideas. But there is nothing comparable for getting a worldwide overview of Ellulian scholarship, whether in South Korea, North America, or Europe.

Technology and the Further Humiliation of the Word

by David Lovekin

Abstract: I continue to read Ellul philosophically without worrying about whether he is a philosopher or not. As David Gill has mentioned to me, he is what a philosopher should be. I continue to track his attack on the symbol by technique, which claims to be rational and all-encompassing. Technique is indeed a form of rationality in denial of what makes rationality possible—the imagination and the capacity to make and to learn from the symbol—the word and the Word–out of the encounter with otherness. Technique is a denial of otherness in a bad infinity that is clearly observed in the proliferation of cliches and in an advanced form of disregard for the true or the real in a discourse rooted in nothing but itself, in what Henry Frankfurt has termed "bullshit."

Bio: David Lovekin (PhD, University of Texas at Dallas) recently retired as Professor of Philosophy and Chair of Religion and Philosophy at Hastings College in Nebraska. He is the author of *Technique, Discourse and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1991) and co-editor of *Essay in Humanity and Technology*. He has published numerous essays on Ellul and Vico and problems in the Philosophy of Culture. He has currently completed a translation of Ellul's *The Empire of Nonsense* to appear in the Papadakis Press.

The question of technology as the accumulation of gadgets and tools perhaps considered as the outgrowth of science and as culminating in the machines of the industrial revolution, avoids a serious question: how did tools and machines and the societies that used them become obsessed with absolute efficiency and with the reduction of means to a mathematics-like exactness?[26] Technology currently determines scientific advance; machines—use itself–are made regardless of the usefulness that became independent of cultural values. Cultural values, instead, seem determined by the advances of technique. Jacques Ellul, in his 1954 *La Technique ou I'enjeu du siecle* broke with the tradition of seeing technology as present in every culture in any historical moment, in conflating it merely with material advance, and understood it as a specific mentality culminating around 1750, as a technical intention (*une intention technique*).[27] His social and theological analyses came together with the understanding that this intention privileged the image over the word, the concept over the process, and a reconfigured profane that became the new sacred; technique, in Ellul's sense, issued a return to a mythical dimension that belied technology's origins in reason and conceptual analysis. The technological order signaled a return to a sacred order. This return raises an essential mystery, which I do not pretend to solve but only to authenticate.

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[26] *La Technique ou I'enjeu du siecle* (Paris:Armand Colin, 1954), 44. Also note "La conscience technique," 49 and "l'etat d'esprit," 31.

[27] (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004), 225.

The mystery is confounded by the marvelous enlightenment claims of reason and the understanding that would enable progress and peace. We may invoke Spinoza's sensibility: do not hate or despise but understand. For him geometrical truths provided the most proximate relation to God's mind and body of which our minds and bodies were expressions. Thus, the otherness between ourselves and the Other disappeared in Spinoza's rational faith but reappeared as reason proved insufficient. Reason could © 2013 IJES www.ellul.org Ellul Forum #52 July 2013 Lovekin balance equations but also produce weapons of mass destruction to effect a *jihad* or a preemptive military strike. Flying planes into the twin towers, burning Jews, and bombing abortion clinics, technologically planned and executed, were, nonetheless, faith-based initiatives.

Nonetheless, the enlightenment faith in reason continues, typically finding fault with the non-scientific. In a *New York Times* best seller, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, Sam Harris applies philosophical and neuroscientific skills to the problems of faith operating without the leash of reason. He claims, "Nothing is more sacred than the facts."[28] To his credit, he is no naive realist who believes in the truly objective not subjectively known. Knowing involves consciousness, which mostly takes place with the duality of subject standing in relation to its object, although the "I" is never purely found; but he adds, "... it actually disappears when looked for in a rigorous way."[29] He does not explain for whom this disappearance would take place. Again undeterred, the self struggles with the various objects and contexts to discover and quantify the true, although the work would be hard. With this work, faith is brought to task. He states, "Where we have reasons for what we believe, we have no need of faith; where we have no reasons, we have lost our connections to the world and to one another."[30] Reason occupies a privileged place, which should raise questions. Are facts the new Sacred? Would this be held *a priori?* Is it a fact that facts are sacred? Would reason be able to deter the suicide bomber? If so, we should drop copies of *The Critique of Pure Reason* instead of smart bombs. Kant, however, required a qualified reason, tied to the categories and to the sensuous forms of intuition. Understanding forms of consciousness, I contend, involves more than an examination of reason, with which consciousness is often conflated.

A critique of reason requires a critique of culture. Since Descartes it has become the pattern to identify being with thinking and thinking with reason and rational reflection. Staying to this path would have excluded Descartes' own powerful personae, the Mauvais Genie, or the Evil Genius, which enabled Descartes to imagine the possibility that nothing made sense, which, in turn, led to his first clear and distinct idea—that the I appeared every time he thought/doubted. The I, however, did more than doubt as the history of philosophy after Descartes attempted to explain. The Cartesian philosophy as method was everywhere applied, as Ellul noted, going beyond philosophical

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[28] *Ibid.*, 214.
[29] *Ibid.,* 225.
[30] *TS.,* 43.

bounds, showing that technique was and is indeed a mentality, a Cartesian mentality infinitely applied and mandated.[31]

In his discussion of the historical and sociological dimensions of technique, Ellul does more than history and sociology.[32] Techniques appeared in primitive societies as magic in which, prior to technique, "Everything is of a piece ... nothing can be meddled with [or] ... modified without threat to the whole structure of beliefs and activities."[33] The world of the primitive was not without logic and understanding although it was devoid of the assumptions required for technique. Following anthropologist Leroi-Gourhan, "... technique is a cloak for man, a kind of cosmic vestment. In his conflict with matter, in his struggle to survive, man interposes an intermediary agency between himself and his environment ..."[34] With this agency humanity has protection and defense but also the ability to assimilate and transform.

Ellul offers similar words about the nature of the symbol: "Without mediating symbols, [humanity] ... would invariably be destroyed by raw physical contact alone. The 'other' is always the enemy, the menace. The 'other represents an invasion of the personal world, unless, or until, the relationship is normalized through symbolization. (...) to speak the same language is to recognize the 'other' has © 2013 IJES www.ellul.org Ellul Forum #52 July 2013 Lovekin entered into the common interpretive universe ... "[35] With this separation of subject and object in an imaginative act an "other world" is created.[36]

Thus, otherness and the imagination jump start this creation which takes place in and with language that is at first magical and religious, simultaneously. The wholeness of the world and its transcendent powers that kept technique in check were challenged. Greek rationality, Roman Law, and Christianity were further weights and balances placed on technique that had to be transformed[37] The world and the transcendent were still "Others." Tools and incantations extended human desire and understanding but Truth, Beauty, Goodness, Justice, and God's Word kept them in place. A long period of technical development, a growing population, the invention of economy—money became the medium of exchange and hence a world ordering symbol—and an apparent leveling of traditional social hierarchies helped technical intention and rationality to flower.[38] Technical mentality was more than mental and required otherness to work against to produce the technical phenomenon.

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[31] *TS.*, 23. He clearly states that the full history of technique was yet to be written.

[32] *Ibid.*, 26.

[33] *Ibid.*, 24–5.

[34] Jacques Ellul, "Symbolic Function, Technology, and Society," *Journal of Social and Biological Structures* 3 (July1978) 210.

[35] *Ibid.*, 209.

[36] *TS.*, 27–38.

[37] Ellul sums the sociological components of the 1750 breakout of technique, which, together with technical intention in *TS.*, 38–60.

[38] *TS.*, 21. The discussion of the technical operation and the technical phenomenon is found in *TS.*, 19

Human history is littered with technical operations that were means to accomplish ends, often characterized by tools extending from the body and the cultures from which they are variously adapted and that were equated with the techniques produced by reason. With the advent of technical consciousness, Ellul insists, "It is no longer the best relative means which counts The choice is less and less a subject one among several means ..... It is really a question of finding the best means in the absolute sense, on the basis of numerical calculation."[39] The product was the technical phenomenon, the embodiments of technical consciousness initially appearing as symbolic expressions. The otherness of the body and the world upon which and in which it operated was transformed by consciousness and framed conceptually. Technological culture could then be understood as concepts objectified as natural objects were conceptualized. Qualitative otherness becomes quantitative.

Ellul's notion of technological rationality is crucial in identifying technology in its social order as an altered symbolism. In the following quote I add in brackets a clause that was left out in Wilkinson'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.[40]

Technical reason requires discourse and method reduced to the schemas of logic. Logic would demand adherence to the principle of identity and non-contradiction. For something to be it must be what it is and not what it is not.

Bodies and other natural objects are often what they are not without the rational gaze. Descartes' burning candle, both gaseous and solid, both liquid and fire, became "extension" with his second clear and distinct idea; extension was what all physical bodies were in essence as a fact for science, although extension was © 2013 IJES www.ellul.org Ellul Forum #52 July 2013 Lovekin an abstraction for other eyes, for those trying to read from it. Extension is the object in concept, an identity eschewing difference. It has meaning in scientific and technical discourse. This concept is an identity eschewing all difference.

The logic of technique as Ellul explains in his characterology is to reduce all objects and processes to these essentials, with the resulting irony that this perfection is never

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[39] See my analysis of this in *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1991), 83–89, hereinafter cited as *TDC*.
[40] *TS.*, 78–79; *La Technique*, 73–73.

fully achieved, by definition. Soap is never fully soap, why grocery aisles are crammed with it; the object is never beautiful enough, useful enough, efficient enough. Absolute efficiency is the goal of the process perpetually unfulfilled. This is the opposite of the physicists' "efficiency" where a minimum of effort produces a maximum of effect. The result is what I have termed a series of bad infinities—the efficient becomes either not this one or not any of them; the former is an endless finitude, while the latter is an empty class. Here, the label or the image becomes the real thing in an attempt to cancel endless finitude or a bloodless category.[41] Recall that "Coke," not the drink, is the real thing. A consciousness examines each process, each object, seeking absolute efficiency it makes the technical phenomenon automatically in a geometric rather than arithmetic growth. No limitations are allowed; what can be done will be done, a mantra known to all cultures, a true universal. Oddly this process becomes unconscious; the object made is no longer known as made. The distinction between the subject and object collapses. Few remember that whipped cream used to come from cows. From Latin we can learn that "fact" comes from "factum," which means "made," something done or performed. We have forgotten this meaning and have reduced facts to truth, to a sacred. Like technical phenomena, they seem to pop directly from Zeus's head. The subject collapses into the object and technical autonomy reigns. Reason has disappeared, with no otherness to confront and to mediate, and so has the symbol.[42]

The language of the ancients, the language of myth, biblical language, comes alive in the symbol and metaphor; myths, for Ellul, are not false stories but instead aim at the true: "When I use the word (myth) I mean this: the addition of the theological significance to a fact which in itself ... has no such obvious meaning. Its role is therefore to make a fact "meaningful," to show it up as bearing the revelation of God "[43] God as the Wholly Other resists a mere presence in an image but appears only in the word that suggests his Word. Further, "myth is born of the revealed Word of God, but because it is figurative, it has no visible image. As the highest expression of the word, it reaches the edge and very limit of the expressible, the ineffable, and the unspeakable "[44] For example, Ellul notes: "The city is *'iyr* or else

'iyr re'em. Now this word has several meanings. It is not only the city, but also the Watching Angel, the Vengeance and Terror. A strange association of ideas."[45] In

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[41] See my discussion of this in *TDC*, 98–105.

[42] I have summarized Ch. II of *TS*. For my extended discussion of this "characterology" see my , *TDC, ch. 5.*

[43] *The Meaning of the City*, trans. Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 18, n. 3, hereinafter cited as *City.* Also note: "God speaks. Myth is born from this word, but rarely is it heard directly and never conveyed just as it is received, because humans cannot speak God's words. Myth is the analogy that enables us to grasp the meaning of what God has said. As discourse constructed to paraphrase the revelation, it is a metaphor that should lead the listener beyond what he has heard." See *Humiliation*, 106.

[44] *The Humiliation of the Word,* trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 106, hereinafter cited as *Humiliation.*

[45] *City*, 9.

the figurative identities are created with important differences, opposed meanings that are meaningful when they are put together. The city had not only material power but spiritual power, which was apprehended in this metaphorical grasp of the imagination in the face of the other.

Ellul reminds: "We forget all too easily that imagination is the basic characteristic of intelligence, so that a society in which people lose their capacity to conjure up symbols also loses its inventiveness and its ability to act."[46] The imagination is embodied speech, he notes, from which I conclude that as the body disappears in technique so it disappears in its bodily expression in metaphors and symbols. One could say that reason as language has its birth in myth and in the force of the imagination where the meaningful first appears as an image or presence that is at the same time more than it appears; in this way the image provides a path for the fact to become the sacred that give birth to religion, art, philosophy, and science, but which must also be transcended in meaning that goes beyond the moment. When technique becomes the sacred the other forms of knowing have no power. This presence of the technical sacred produces a loss of meaning, which may be why myth and primitive religions gain cultural weight. Ellul insists in this respect that true Christianity is not a religion but is an opposition to meanings that claim to be imminently absolute—a condition held only by God.

Ellul states that two forms of language exist in every state: the language of hearing and the language of seeing.[47] Language begins in the act of pointing to, or seeing what is in the space of the present, in the certainty of the image that inhabits the realm of the real (*le Reel*).[48] This image is certain. It bears no contradiction. It is what it is.[49] The word, a puff of wind at least, is the domain that surrounds. A strange sound produces anxious eyes.[50] The word is ambiguous, a moment of mystery and intrigue and reaches for the True (*le Vrai*).[51] "The image is nonparadoxical, since it is always in conformity with the *doxa* (opinion). [...] Only the word troubles the water."[52] And further, "Thus visual reality is noncontradictory. 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."[53] The philosophical laws of thought, Ellul notes, are visually based;[54] Plato's *eide* related to *eidelon* are cases in point, but as Plato insisted, their ordinary ties to the visual had to be broken. The *Eide* were seen only in a *noetic* reach that was not allowed by technical reason. Reason is confined strictly to the image that loses its purchase, ironically, as its presence as image dissipates.

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[46] *Humiliation*, 257.
[47] *Humiliation*, 43.
[48] *Ibid.*, 27–47.
[49] *Ibid.*, 5–26.
[50] *Ibid., 61.*
[51] *Ibid.*
[52] *Ibid.*, 26.
[53] *Ibid.*, 11, n. 3.
[54] *Ibid., 37.*

In the absence of the word and the symbol cliches abound. The cliche is the machine in its new suit. The word inhabits history and place; the image does not. The history of the word cliche is forgotten. According to the OED cliche 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 its modern sense, which is no longer the metaphor that was suggested. A worn out expression was left and the truth behind the word abandoned. The cliche appears to be the language of politics and the media and so it is, the fuel of propaganda, but the bad news is not over.

Henry Frankfurt in *On Bullshit* claims that lying and misrepresentation are out of fashion.[55] Politicians and pundits may in fact lie but the lie is not the issue. Truth or falsity are no longer concerns. Lying or telling the truth are both permitted as long as a favorable impression is achieved. The bullshitter wants to be believed and those susceptible want to believe regardless of the actual truth. Recently Rick Santorum claimed that the elderly in Holland had to wear bracelets to keep from being euthanized. Of course, there were no facts to back this up, and I doubt there was any concern for the truth of the statement. Romney made a statement that was challenged, and he allowed that he didn't recall what he said, but he was sure he would stand by it. I am certain that bullshit transcends party line. Nonetheless, Ellul was close to this with his view of current aesthetics where "*n'importe quoi*" held sway. Whatever! The appeals sometimes made to facts may in fact be bullshit.

Ellul would conclude that life cannot be conducted in the realm of the image that has no history, no place. Truth requires both, which in turn require memory and the imagination. Cliches and bullshit have neither, and I believe this is a fact. Place no longer has place. This is why Ellul finds the commonplace of the common place so important, why the notion of a true that surrounds is worth the reach; even reason comes to a halt in views that have no need or use for argument.

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[55] (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Issue #52 Jul 2013

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The Enduring Importance of Jacques Ellul for Business Ethics

by David W. Gill

Abstract: From at least three perspectives, Jacques Ellul's thought addresses today's business world and its ethics in a profound and essential way. First, he challenges the sacralization and worship of money which have come to dominate the thought and practice of today's business leaders. Second, he challenges us to critical thought and a rediscovery of the individual and the human in a domain enthusiastically and willingly enslaved to technique at every level. Third, he challenges in the name of freedom and vocation the necessity and meaninglessness which dominate today's workplace.

Bio: David Gill earned his PhD at the University of Southern California with a dissertation on "The Word of God in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul," subsequently published as the first of his seven books on theological or business ethics. He spent several summers and a full sabbatical year (1984–85; later also a six-month sabbatical in 2000) in Bordeaux, meeting with Ellul and many Ellul scholars (notably Patrick Chastenet, Daniel Cerezuelle, Jean-Francois Medard) , the Ellul family and friends. He is currently Mockler-Phillips Professor of Workplace Theology & Business Ethics and Director of the Mockler Center at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston. He is the founding president of the International Jacques Ellul Society *(*www.ellul.org*)* and (with President Patrick Chastenet) a founder of the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul. He has served many small and medium-sized enterprises as organizational ethics consultant and trainer *(*www.ethixbiz.com*)*.

The first image of Jacques Ellul that comes to mind is not that of someone sitting in the board room of some skyscraper advising the corporate chieftains of our day. No, our Ellul is the little man in his beret emerging from behind his desk in his home study to greet a friend —or the professor entering the lecture hall to read his latest notes on the successors of Marx.

But it is my contention that our teacher Jacques Ellul is very precisely a voice to which those corporate chieftains would do well to pay attention these days. While he thought and wrote in the second half of the 20th century, his message is only *more* appropriate and necessary in the first half of the 21st century. As a long-time teacher of ethics to business students and ethics consultant to actual business organizations, it is my conviction that there are three particular aspects to the enduring importance of Jacques Ellul for business ethics.

For the most part, business ethics, at least in the USA, is a toothless, dull, and irrelevant enterprise. If I may use one of Professor Ellul's images it is little more than "the colorful feather in the cap" of a tyrant who marches onward unimpeded. As cur-

rently practiced, business ethics is either wedded to the hopeless detached, rationalism of Modernity and the moral philosophy of Kant, Mill, and their kind —or it is drifting at sea in the Post-modern Nietzschean subjectivism of "everyone does what is right in his own eyes." Often giving up on both Modernity and Postmodernity today's business ethics attaches itself to the bureaucratic state and is reduced to little more than legal compliance. Contemporary business ethics communication and training methods typically place employees in front of personal computer screens and thus habituate their viewers to artificially simple scenarios with clear solutions, to be discovered by individuals interacting alone with their screens. To the extent that real problems are engaged from time to time, this approach amounts to little more than "damage control" of legal, financial, and reputational matters. The causes and conditions that initially give rise to such damage are never addressed. The process of mutual discernment and response goes unattempted.

Today's business ethics is, for the most part, a mess, a waste of time, and an illusion. As I see it, Jacques Ellul's work provides a critical warning and challenge to business ethics at three points: (1) the reduction of business purpose and mission to nothing but a worshipful, addictive quest for *money*; (2) the total subordination of business organization and practice to the ironclad rule of *technique* and (3) the resignation of business personnel to the *necessity* of work and the consequent absence of freedom and vocation. If business ethics would seriously consider these three points, it could re-acquire a critical and then constructive role in our era.

The Worship of Money

There is a strain of thought that argues that all business is ultimately and primarily motivated by a quest for profit in the form of money. Business is not charity; business is a *for-profit* commercial and economic activity. If you don't make a profit, or at least break even financially, you will go out of business. Actually this is true of non-profit charitable institutions as well —though they can be salvaged by donors rather than customers or investors. In any case, there is an essential and important financial, monetary aspect to running a business. It cannot be ignored. And no doubt the fear of financial failure as well as the dream of great success and wealth are highly motivating factors in business.

So a business is interested in acquiring your money but (in distinction from theft and begging) it must deliver some service or product in return for which customers are willing to pay it money. A successful business in a competitive economic environment (as opposed to a non-competitive monopoly environment, an unacknowledged reality in many industries and markets today) must keep its focus on delivering that product or service not only efficiently (minimizing waste of time, resources, etc.) but excellently. If the enterprise turns its primary attention to the monetary return, and loses focus on the excellence of the product or service, the money itself may well disappear. This is the simplified commonsense argument for money being very important –but not *all-important* –in business.

But in two decisive steps, money has swamped other considerations and become dominant in business purposes and focus today. First, the neo-capitalist "market fundamentalists" of recent decades have boldly proposed that "greed is good," in the famous words of the fictional Gordon Gecko in the American film "Wall Street" (1987). This philosophy is no longer the cartoonish extreme of a movie but the conventional wisdom of the business world: it is good for you, good for the economy, good for the world, for each of us to pursue as aggressively as possible our own self-interest, understood in terms of financial profit and wealth. Well before the movie popularized the notion, Milton Friedman, the Nobel laureate economist of the University of Chicago, famously wrote: "The social responsibility of business is to increase its profits."[56] Period. Today's business leadership seems determined to eliminate all regulation and all restraint on the naked, predatory pursuit of money. Of course there are important exceptions but the dominating spirit is the "love of money for me." The fact that in the 2012 presidential election financial tycoon Mitt Romney could win the support of almost half the American electorate, despite publically dismissing the interests of the poor and the middle class, indicates the extent to which the "winner-take-all" mentality has captured the masses.

Perhaps a business does deliver excellence in its service or product; perhaps they do treat their employees well; but for today's neo-capitalists such commitments and practices are strictly utilitarian and pragmatic. Excellence, quality, and fairness *only* matter if they can be shown to increase profits. And at the other end of the spectrum, marketing deception, product testing flaws, exploitive wages, dangerous working conditions, harm to the environment, negative social impacts —these all may be justified as part of the market's "invisible hand" as it eventually brings its bounty to those who deserve it. For business leaders (or workers), it's all about money ... money-for-me. Now.

The second step in this development is the rise of the financial services industry. The titans of business and industry today are no longer those who create and sell products or services of one kind or another. No, today's richest rewards go to bankers and investment fund managers who speculate on interest rates, debt, risk, investments, and insurance. In today's business world, manipulating piles of money is considered so important that it entitles one to reap vast personal profits, skimming off large portions of peoples' investments and savings. Even when banks and investment firms fail, as they have so miserably in the past several years, their leaders are considered so rare and so important, it seems, that no retention bonus or salary increase is too high to hand over to them. No doubt there is a legitimate role for bankers and investment managers. But many of today's most famous leaders in these fields seem very little more than thieves in well-tailored suits. Money has become everything.

Jacques Ellul's *L'Homme et l'Argent* was first published in 1954. Even then Ellul was predicting the triumph of money, east and west:

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[56] *New York Time Magazine*, September 13, 1970.

Beginning in the Middle Ages ... capitalism has progressively subordinated all of life –individual and collective —to money One of the results of capitalism that we see

developing throughout the 19th century is the subservience of being to having.... It is the inevitable consequence of capitalism, for there is no other possibility when making money becomes the purpose of life.[57]

Ellul goes on to argue that the differences between capitalism and socialism are shrinking and less and less consequential. Certainly it is hard to see any significant differences in attitude and behavior toward money in China by comparison to the USA or France.

Ellul points out that Jesus warned that money could function as the god "Mammon" in peoples' lives, receiving their awe, deference, and worship, occupying the center of their attention and desire, serving as the source of their meaning and value. Money acts as a spiritual "power" (*exousion*). Ellul points out that Mammon can play this central role for the poor, the "have-nots," as well as for the rich, the "haves." But beyond the "spiritual" problem and personal bondage, Mammon does certain things to its devotees.

This power of money establishes in the world a certain type of human relationship and a specific human behavior. It creates what could be broadly called a buying-selling relationship.

Everything in this world is paid for one way or another. Likewise, everything can, one way or another, be bought The world sees this behavior as normal... A related example of the way money corrupts the inner person is betrayal for money. It is not insignificant that Judas's act is represented as a purchased act.[58]

The point is that when "the love of money" (for my bosses and owners or for myself) drives business and careers it is a "root of all sorts of evil," to cite the famous statement of St. Paul (I Timothy 6:10). Monetizing and commoditizing all things, all relationships, and all transactions necessarily dehumanizes all concerned and blinds us to values and realities that simply cannot be measured by money. "Money reduces man to an abstraction. It reduces man himself to something quantitative."[59] It is a short and logical step to prostitution and even slavery as economic practices. Moreover, the single-minded quest for money leads to profound betrayal in relationships. Loyalty and betrayal are simply about a costbenefit calculation, nothing more or less.

The question is about the larger purpose of work and business. Do we yield to the propaganda of the Mammon-worshippers? or do we resist and make our own work decisions and our business management decisions in light of other criteria, other purposes? Of course, we do not always or fully get to choose the *telos* and purpose of our company or even of our career or our daily work. It may be that much of the time, for most of the people, simple survival forces us to play the work and business game

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[57] Jacques Ellul, *Money & Power* (ET InterVarsity Press1984), p. 20. *Reason for Being* (ET: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 86–93, has a further discussion by Ellul of the significance and vanity of money.

[58] *Money & Power*, pp. 78–79. See also Robert Kuttner, *Everything for Sale: The Virtues and Limits of Markets* (Alfred Knopf, 1997) which demonstrates this impact in great detail.

[59] Jacques Elul, *Ethics of Freedom* (ET Eerdmans, 1976), p. 24.

within the community and culture of Mammon worship. Our individual decisions and acts may appear utterly useless in the larger perspective.

But to the extent that we can find room to resist and to pursue another way, what might we propose? Remember how Ellul in *The New Demons* warns that casting out one demon may make room for seven demons worse than that first one![60] My own approach in working with companies is to focus the mission on innovation, i.e., on creating and inventing products and services that are useful and reliable for people, and even beautiful if that is possible. Or as a second business purpose I suggest the mission to help the hurting, heal the sick, protect the vulnerable, and repair the broken. This sounds terribly obvious: create something good or fix something bad. But I am convinced that it is precisely those two themes that capture the imagination and passion of the worker. Rather than serving Mammon, or still less the Nation, or Race, my recommendation is to serve our neighbors and friends by creating and redeeming the basic, important things in their lives. And by making these the driving purposes of business, money can return to its proper, subordinate place.

So the voice of Jacques Ellul on money is critical for our era. His assessment of its sociological functioning is important. But the fact that his viewpoint is couched in biblical and theological language and in the prophetic warnings again the worship of Mammon means that there may be some leverage to liberate some of today's deluded Religious Right cheerleaders for market fundamentalism to the detriment of all else. Money is an unworthy and savage god. The value system that spins out of a choice to make money our sole mission is not a pretty sight.

The Submission to Technique

There is secondly, an almost complete insensitivity in the business world to the actual role of technique and technology.[61] The standard viewpoint in business is that technology is a set of neutral tools serving our purposes and practices as we determine. Who better than Ellul to remind us of the dominance of technique: "the totality of methods, rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency for a given stage of development ..."[62] Technique and technology are in no way merely a set of tools serving business. The tools have coalesced into an ensemble that actually runs today's business practices. Ellul explains that technology is "not merely an instrument, a means. It is a criterion of good and evil. It gives meaning to life. It brings promise. It is a reason for acting and it demands a commitment."[63]

For best-selling authors such as Nicholas Negroponte (*Being Digital* (Vintage, 1996)), Michael Hammer (*Reengineering the Corporation* (HarperBusiness, 1993)), and Don Tapscott (*Paradigm Shift* (1993), *Digital Capital* (2000), *Wikinomics* (2006)),

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[60] Cf. Jesus' parable in Matthew 12:43–45; Luke 11:24–26.

[61] I will use "technique" and "technology" almost interchangeably here. But I mean submission to a way of thinking and acting —as well as to the machines and structures created and sustained by that spirit.

[62] *Technological* Society, (ET Alfred Knopf, 1964).

[63] *To Will & To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians* (ET Pilgrim, 1969)*,* pp. 190–91.

the embrace of technology by business should be complete and unreserved. They are among the countless cheerleaders for an unqualified subordination of business to the latest technology, to the maximum extent possible. In their world, technology is on the throne, not in the toolbox, of business. The pressure is irresistible: more technology, all the time, everywhere, no matter what the cost. We must keep up with our competitors and with technological change and innovation. Adopt, support, and upgrade, all the time. Jim Collins's best-selling management book *Good to Great* argues for a more qualified stance —that truly great companies use technology as an accelerator rather than as a primary driver or steering wheel.[64] But even in Collins's approach, the deep subordination of business to technology is not fully recognized.

Ellul has shown at great length how technique/technology is not a simple "add-on" to business and other human domains. Rather, it constitutes an environment and a milieu; it is self-augmenting and universalizing in its constant growth, extending everywhere and into everything. One technological problem leads to another problem which requires further technological interventions and solutions. The scale and scope of technology in business is remarkable in its own right. There seems to be nothing in the name of which the encroachment of technique should be resisted or refused. Everything, every operation, every person, every moment should be subjugated to technique (much as in the previous section it is monetized).

But beyond this challenge of scope and scale, Ellul calls our attention to the values that are embedded in technology.[65] Where technology dominates, its values dominate. Many companies articulate a list of "core values" to which they aspire. All too rarely do these organizations evaluate these lists or the degree to which their company cultures actually reflect these aspirations. The *actual* working values of any organization dominate by technique/technology were discussed in Ellul's chapter on "Technological Morality" in his introduction to ethics, *To Will and To Do.* What are the basic characteristics of this technological value system? Since technology is precise, exacting, and efficient—it demands of people that they be *efficient, precise* and *prepared.* It is a morality of *behavior, not of intentions*—it is solely interested in *external conduct* (older moralities often addressed intentions and attitudes as well). It is a morality that excludes questioning and rigorously commands the *one best way of acting* (older moralities countenanced the agony of moral quandaries and questioning).

What are the ethical values embedded in technology?

- *Normality.* We are not called upon to act *well* (as in other moralities) but to act *normally*, to be adjusted. To be maladjusted is a vice today. "The chief purpose of instruction and education today is to bring along a younger generation that is *adjusted* to this society" (192).

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[64] Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (HarperBusiness, 2001), Ch. 7.

[65] Ellul's chapter on "Technological Morality" in his *To Will and To Do,* pp. 185–198, is a brilliant account of technological values. My discussion here follows closely my recent article "Jacques Ellul and Technology's Trade-Off" in *Comment Magazine* (Toronto, Spring 2012), pp. 102–109.

- *Success.* "In the last analysis," Ellul says, "good and evil are synonyms for success and failure"

(193). Morality is based on success; the successful champion is the moral exemplar of the good; if crime is bad it is so because "it doesn't pay," i.e., it is unsuccessful.

- *Work.* With the overvaluation of work come self-control, loyalty and sacrifice to one's

occupation, and trustworthiness in one's work. The older virtues having to do with family, good fellowship, humor, and play are gradually suppressed unless they can be reinterpreted to serve the good of technique (e.g., rest and play are good if, and because, they prepare you for more effective, successful work).

- *Boundless growth* —in the sense of continuous, unlimited, quantifiable expansion. "More" is thus a term of positive value and moral approval, as are the "gigantic," the "biggest." "In the conviction that technology leads to the good" there is no time or purpose for saying "No" or for recognizing any limits or for impeding the forward advance of technology (197–98).

- *Artificiality* is valued over the natural; nature has only instrumental value. We do not hesitate to invade and manipulate nature—whether that is the space program, deforestation and industrial development, animal farming, water resource "management," genetic experimentation, or whatever. We have little respect for the givenness of nature in comparison to our valuing of the artificial.

- *Quantification and measurement.* Despite Einstein's nice comment that "everything that can be counted doesn't count and everything that counts cannot be counted" our technological society insists on quantifying and measuring intelligence (IQ), success (church attendance, salary levels), personality traits (Meyers-Briggs, etc.).

- *Effectiveness and efficiency.* The measurably ineffective or inefficient are replaced or despised. Frederick Taylor and scientific management.

- *Power and speed.* Weakness and slowness are only valued by eccentrics. In today's absolutely frantic society, it is hard to dispute that this has become a virtue and value.

- *Standardization and replicability* Technology demands that people adapt to machines. The universal impulse of technology privileges platforms that link the parts together. The eccentric is only of interest in a museum.

Technological moral values, in general, are instrumental rather than intrinsic. These values become our criteria for decision and action (replacing such maxims as "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," "Love your neighbor as yourself," and "Treat others always as ends, never as means"). They become our virtues of character so that the good person is one who is a normal, adjusted, hard-working, successful creator and manager of the artificial (replacing the "just, wise, courageous, and temperate" classical ideal and the "faithful, hopeful, loving" Christian ideal).

Without doubt, in many business operations and practices these technological values can have an important place. But when they are allowed in without a self-conscious and critical awareness, without any limits, their reign can become one of terror. What happens to the value of the eccentric, the mystery, the paradox, the immeasurable? How do we deal with the long-term and the subtle, the inefficient but beloved? What happens to wild creativity that thrives on openness, risk, conflict, and the lessons only failure can teach? Wisdom loses to knowledge, knowledge to information, information to data. People lose to systems and numbers.

So Ellul's powerful voice is needed more than ever to awaken business folk from their uncritical slumber in the face of technological imperialism. A legitimate human ethics must be asserted over technique, not coopted and tamed by it. The first duty is that of "awareness" Ellul argues.[66] If we proceed blindly in denial of the impact of technique/technology on our corporate culture and values we can and will do nothing to resist it. This awareness of the technological values embedded in all business practices today is a gift to business ethics that Ellul can make, better than almost anyone else.

Dominated by Necessity

The third area in which Ellul has a critical and enduring importance for business ethics is in consideration of the meaninglessness and necessity of work. Historically and sociologically, Ellul argues, work is a matter of toil and necessity for survival. For the vast majority of people through history and even today, it is survival and necessity that dictate whether one finds adequate work, what kind of work one finds, and the generally negative character it then has. It is historically false to view work as a means to freedom or self-expression and fulfillment. It is simply necessary. Ellul rejects the ideological glorification of work by both Marxists and capitalists as simply a tool to reinforce our conformity, subservience, and integration into an economic or political movement. Of course, just because work is necessary does not mean it should be despised or made worse than it is. We should accept our necessity to work and then do it well.[67]

Sociologically, Ellul has often argued that work is a matter of necessity rather than freedom. For the vast majority of the world's people work is about survival, not high meaning and freedom. But even for those privileged to choose their work, the phe-

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[66] *Presence of the Kingdom* (ET Seabury, 1967), pp. 118 ff..

[67] Ellul discusses the concept of "necessity" in *Ethics of Freedom,* pp. 37–50, and *To Will and To Do,* pp. 59–72. In *Presence of the Kingdom* he urges that ordinary work and life must be done well pp. 16–19.

nomenon remains locked into necessity. "Work is an everyday affair. It is banal. It is done without hope. It is neither a value nor is it creative."[68]

Theologically, Ellul has an explanation for this based on his reading of the biblical creation story. He argues at some length that human work is rooted not in creation but in the fall.[69] Ellul will have no truck with theologians who want to ground the meaning of work in our being created in the image of God or commissioned to serve as co-creators with God. The commission to Adam and Eve to name the animals, till the garden, and be fruitful and multiply was nothing like what we call work, Ellul maintains, because it was an exercise of freedom before God in an unbroken, unified, perfected world. Human work is what is required in a broken world of alienation from God, from the earth, and from other people. Work is fundamentally toil. It is of "the order of necessity." So "calling" and "vocation" in biblical theology are not to be confused with work but are something very separate.

Here is how he explains it:

It is a very classical idea that work existed in the creation, but it was work in a very different sense there. That is, the work in Genesis 1 and 2 was non-utilitarian. All the trees gave their fruit spontaneously, and although Adam was commissioned to watch over the garden there were not any enemies there. Thus it was good work, a job, but one that was not in the domain of necessity. That is the great difference for me …

I don't think you can say that for God the creation was a job or work. The Greeks and Babylonians always considered creation an effort. But the Bible says that it was the *word* of creation rather than a *work.* It was something more simple. I agree with you that God's act was creative and that what responds in us is word and work. There is a work command but Adam and Eve were then in the presence of God rather than having merely a work or vocation. The idea of work and vocation is always confusing, but I believe that vocation or calling is always, and only, service of God.[70]

For Ellul the challenge is to find a *vocation* that is a kind of dialectical counterpart to our *work.* "We obviously have to discover a form of activity which will express our Christian vocation and thus will be an incarnation of our faith." This vocation is "free and an expression of grace" and yet it "is an equivalent of work." Ellul suggests that his own career as author and university professor was a species of work in the order of necessity. His *vocation,* on the other hand, was his volunteer activity working with the "Prevention Club" for street kids and juvenile delinquents. Ellul acknowledges that "To

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[68] *Ethics of Freedom,* p. 506.

[69] Ellul, "Work and Calling," *Katallagete* IV (Fall/Winter 1972): 8 — 16; reprinted in James Holloway & Will Campbell, eds., *Callings* (Paulist, 1974), pp. 18–44. See also "Freedom and Vocation" in Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, pp. 495–510, Ellul, "Technique and the Opening Chapters of Genesis," in Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote, *eds., Theology and Technology* (University Press of America, 1984), and the section on work in Ellul's commentary on Ecclesiastes *Reason for Being* (ET: Eerdmans, 1990), pp.93106.

[70] Interview of Jacques Ellul conducted by David Gill in July 1982 at Ellul's home in Pessac with the assistance of Joyce Hanks; subsequently translated by Lucia Gill and published as "Jacques Ellul on Vocation & the Ethics of the Workplace" in *Radix Magazine* 22.4 (Summer 1994), pp. 12–13.

direct an enterprise of this kind ... is real work. Yet it forms no part of the necessary work provided by society. It presupposes autonomy, inventiveness, and free choice."[71]

It is at this point that I have to take issue with Ellul's biblical interpretation and application — and his analysis of our actual work experience. In terms of our experience, in *both* the domain of ordinary work *and* that of volunteer vocational service, the experience of necessity, technique, toil, and trouble regularly appear. This is just as true in a church or environmental movement or volunteer youth athletic team as it is in a conventional business. And on the other hand, the opportunity for human kindness and care, for creativity, for meaning and even redemptive impact on others can present itself in business organizations, not just in the volunteer sector. Not all businesses, all the time, crush out human freedom, relationship, and creativity. In fact the best businesses promote such things. It is just not an either/or situation where work is all crushing necessity and external vocation is all freedom and meaning.

And theologically, I would argue that despite his brilliant insights, Ellul's interpretation of the biblical story is unconvincing. His rejection of any notion of work being rooted in creation, and of any survival of creational goodness and freedom after the fall, is unpersuasive. To stipulate that God's own creational activity was not work is unnecessary. To stipulate that the commission to Adam to name the animals and till and keep the garden were not work in any sense is also unnecessary. One reason not to follow Ellul here is The Decalogue —which is given in two forms. In the Deuteronomy (chapter 5) version both work and Sabbath are grounded, Ellul-style, in liberation from work as slavery in Egypt. But in the Exodus (chapter 20) version, Sabbath and work are grounded in God's example of both in creation. So taken as a whole, work and rest are *both* viewed within a dialectic of good creative work and fallen necessary work. Think also: the Hebrew word *avodah* is used for *both* work and worship, suggesting an affinity Ellul overlooks. Paul challenges Christians not just to carry out their worship and vocations to the glory of God but "whatever you do in word or deed" do it all in the name and to the glory of God. Of course, Jesus Christ called his disciples away from their work —just as he called them away from their family ties. But then he sent them back, though with a new set of priorities.

So the way Ellul draws the theological and sociological lines on this topic of necessity and freedom in work is unconvincing. But where Ellul is convincing beyond doubt is in his challenge that humans need freedom, meaning and significance and the workplace rarely provides these things. My conclusion is that we should not just acquiesce in this workplace necessity but carry the fight for freedom and dignity directly into the workplace. For me the challenge from Ellul for business ethics is to go beyond where he ends up and fight for reforms in the workplace so that work is meaningful and not alienated, so that there are opportunities for growth and creativity, so that non-technical values are affirmed, so that human relationships can occur in healthy ways.

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[71] *Ethics of Freedom,* pp. 507–508.

The reality is that some businesses do succeed more than others in pursuing and achieving these values (e.g., Southwest Airlines, Costco).

We must not let businesses and managers off the hook by saying that mindless and meaningless work is a simple necessity. No, managers must be challenged to provide space for meaning, for good communication, for creativity at work. Nothing will ever be perfect, but that must not prevent us from trying. All of Ellul's challenges to risk and contradiction, to freedom and vocation, should be initiated within the workplace as much as alongside of it.

The enduring importance of Ellul on the question of work, in my opinion, is first of all, to remain ruthlessly realistic and critical regarding the actual experience of work. He does describe the lot of most of the world's workers, most of the time, and we must have no illusions. But secondly, his challenge implies a confrontation of freedom and necessity, an introduction of the Wholly Other into the mundane world of work. Despite his own pessimism about the possibilities within the workplace, Ellul suggests that we should make efforts toward de-institutionalization, de-structuralization and "so acting in the sphere of work that this becomes a setting for human encounter."[72] Moreover, Ellul grants that "When human work produces joy or what seems to be outside the everyday, we have to realize that this is an exceptional event, a grace, a gift of God for which we must give thanks."[73]

So it is, after all, possible for grace to break into our work. And despite his apparent theory of an unbridgeable divide, Ellul himself actually promoted this integrative quest. In the 1982 interview I conducted with Ellul, he described his efforts to help Christians integrate their faith and work:

My friend Jean Bosc and I started the Associations of Protestant Professionals. We discussed professional problems, concretely, just as they are in life. The theologians would simply describe what the Bible says, without spelling out what the professional should do. That way they were challenged to figure out what to do, what sort of solution to bring to those problems. We had some very different experiences. It was easier for doctors and nurses than for business people. The groups that never went along very well were those composed of bankers and insurance agents.. Most of the associations lasted six years, from 1947 to 1953. Problems were

submitted by the participants. We tried to get them to reflect on practical problems. There were congresses, study courses, and consultations. A businessman, for example, might submit a business venture for study and discussion by the group. Two groups, doctors and teachers, continue on to the present day, but the others ended.[74]

Forward in Hope

In the end, it is a matter of hope and freedom. In *Hope in Time of Abandonment* Ellul wrote that authentic hope only begins when all seems lost, the walls are sealed

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[72] *Ethics of Freedom,* p. 481.
[73] *Ethics of Freedom*, p. 506.
[74] Gill Interview of Jacques Ellul (July 1982), pp. 11, 28.

off and there is no way out. So it is that in work and business, necessity seems to rule, technique determines our action, and money is the object of worship. But precisely at each of those points we must resist. In the end this resistance may be against "business as usual" —but it is for "business as it could be," an enterprise in which human freedom can be expressed, human values respected, and all pretender gods and idols dethroned.

On the Lookout for the Unexpected: Ellul as Combative Contemplative by Sue Fisher Wentworth

Abstract: In his analysis of *la technique*, Jacques Ellul brilliantly names what is going on in our world. His refusal to be prescriptive at the end of this analysis is well known; he does, however, urge his readers to create a new style of life. In the service of this creativity, this essay explores the character and contours of this life as he describes it: as the gift of the Holy; as rooted in prayer, the Spirit's own life within us, which calls for our absolute attentiveness; and as involving the willingness to wait in real darkness. It is a way of life offering an essential counterpoint to technological society's drive for autonomy and selfsufficiency, its absorption in frantic activity, and its demeaning alternatives of despair or false hope. It is also a way of life consonant with what the larger Christian tradition has long referred to as the "contemplative" way; the essay draws on this tradition to shed light on Ellul's thought, and explores the light he brings, as a modern man, Protestant, intellectual, and rabble rouser. Ellul invites us to be "on the lookout for the unexpected," open to the Wholly Other, for the end of human life is the mystery of presence: God's hidden presence ("I AM"), presence before God, presence in the world as leaven, salt, light.

Bio: Sue Wentworth (Ph.D., Religion, Emory University; M.T.S. Harvard Divinity School; B.A. Agnes Scott College) is a lay leader and liturgist for St. Mary's Church in Annapolis, Maryland, where she lives with her husband and two sons. A native of Atlanta, Georgia, she served as an adjunct professor at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, and as Manager of Public Affairs for Cox Enterprises.

In his analysis of *la technique*, Jacques Ellul brilliantly names what is going on in our world. When we look to him for guidance on how to move forward, however, we are thwarted. As he says, "At the end of my books, readers are called to take action and make their own decisions, and they surely say to themselves, "This is very annoying. I don't see which action I can take." They would prefer a last chapter in which someone would tell them, "Here is what you must think and do." This last chapter I will never write." (*In Season, Out of Season*, 197)

For many, it is just this refusal to be prescriptive which discredits Ellul. Yet it is exactly here — at the border of what may be called Ellul's silence — that our real

engagement may most fruitfully begin.[75] Ellul wants us to stand on Holy Ground, where real freedom and real change alone emerge. His silence is an invitation into Silence, into Real Presence. It is *presence* that is definitive, the "effectual, immediate presence of the Living One, of the Wholly Other, of the Transcendent (with all the reservations which those words call for when applied to the One whom nothing can define)" (*Prayer*, 148). *Presence* matters more than action or thought; it is the source of both.

Ellul *will* urge us to the creation of a new style of life, a new presence, a new way of being in the world. In his seminal book, *Presence au Monde Moderne* (which appeared in English as *The Presence of the Kingdom*), Ellul specifically addresses Christians who would act faithfully, lovingly, and hopefully in the world: "In order that Christianity today may have a point of contact with the world, it is less important to have theories about economic and political questions, or even to take up a definite political and economic position, than it is to create a new style of life This problem of the style of life is absolutely central" (*Presence* 119–121). For "true action ... is the testimony of a profound life What matters is to *live*, and not to act" (76).

The purpose of this paper is to attend to the contours and character of this profound life to which Ellul bears witness. As we shall see, it is a way of life that contrasts at every point with the way of life pressed upon us by technological society. First, this life is the gift of the Holy; it is a flowing life of exchange and generosity, the life of the Holy Spirit within, in a relationship which establishes selfhood and enables real freedom. Where technological civilization is founded on the drive to self-sufficiency, mastery, and control, this life emerges from the Wholly Other's refusal to be self-sufficient, self-contained, "in control."

Secondly, this life is rooted in prayer, but not prayer as we reflexively think of it. What is prayer for Ellul? What is it not? *This* prayer is powerful enough to be "the exact counterpoint of the rigorous mechanism of the technological society" (*Prayer* 174).

And finally, in a world captivated by a "will to death, a will to suicide," this life is capacious enough, trusting enough, to acknowledge, allow, and endure real darkness without veering off into any form of despair (*Presence*, 19). Only here can authentic Hope emerge.

Throughout this essay a theme is constant, that this way of life to which Ellul bears witness — which is our primary concern –is also what the larger Christian tradition has long referred to as the "contemplative" way. To make this association does not make this way manageable; it is not a way subject to domestication. It is illuminating to acknowledge, however, that it is an ancient way of the Body of Christ: the style of life we are creating, which remains ever new, has a long and rich history. What light does

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[75] Silence is not something usually associated with Ellul, a prodigiously productive writer and an ardent conversationalist. It is worth noting, however, that his poetry, in which he was conscious of having "bared his soul," as he said, and which he gave permission to publish only a few months before his death, was published in a little volume called *Silences*.

Ellul bring as a modern man, a Protestant, an intellectual, a rabble rouser? What light does the larger tradition itself shed on Ellul? Our culture, whether Christian culture or popular culture, has difficulties aplenty with the notion of "contemplation" – misunderstandings, prejudices, resistances. As we shall see, Ellul shared in these. At the same time, we find him urging in *Autopsy of Revolution*, "If you would be genuinely revolutionary *in our society* ..., be contemplative: that is the source of individual strength to break the system" (286).[76] He will not tell us what to think or do, but he will tell us what to *be*: "Be contemplative."

Ellul was not a "pious" man. He was not a "religious" man. He was a man willing to be before One Who Is, and he invites us to venture the same.

I.

"Ground of being, and granite of it; past all/ Grasp God"
-Gerard Manley Hopkins

It was August 1930, in Blanquefort, France, not far from Bordeaux. The young man, 18 years old, was on summer holiday, having just finished his secondary school exams. He was alone in a friend's house, busy translating Faust. Some seventy years later Ellul reluctantly described to an interviewer what happened next: "... [S]uddenly, and I have not doubts on this at all, I knew myself to be In the presence of a something so astounding, so overwhelming that had entered me to the very center of my being. That's all I can tell you. I was so moved that I left the room in a stunned state. In the courtyard there was a bicycle lying around. I jumped on it and fled. I have no idea whatsoever how many dozens of kilometers I must have covered. Afterwards I thought to myself: 'You have been in the presence of God.' And there you are" (Chastenet, 52).

Ellul refers to this event in another context and says that he doesn't wish to relate it, except to mention the violence of the encounter, and his response: he "realized that God had spoken," but because he didn't want God to have him, like Jonah, and multiple individuals before and since, he fled (*In Season* 14). This dramatic experience was for Ellul the self-revelation of the Holy –totally unexpected, completely unsought, utterly commanding. It was encounter with the Wholly Other. Ellul's reticence in speaking about this personal experience is fitting, a testimony to its authenticity. We stand at the border of Silence.

As Karth Barth frequently said, "God acts first." This "acting first" — whether it is experienced suddenly, dramatically, and violently, as with Ellul at his initial conversion, and/or over a lifetime of divine faithfulness — is the gift of the Holy. This is the Revelation: this incomprehensible Reality we call "God" wants to pour God's own life into us, not simply to command us to live in a certain way. The life to which we are called, we are given. Our life is I-Thou life, and we are not the "I" in the relation.

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[76] My thanks to Arthur Boers for first calling my attention to this text.

This encounter with Holiness is a "wild adventure"; it cannot be secured beforehand or possessed after, but only received (*Presence* 109).

Life, for Ellul, begins here for each one of us, with God's self-gift. It is not as if we are alive first, and then meet God, or not. Life is located *here*, in this very meeting, whether we are aware of it or not. We are because God is. Human aliveness is not mere physical aliveness, a beating heart and the fact of respiration; it is not identified with physical health or youth or beauty. Being alive is "above all a fact of spiritual life" (Ibid. 76). "To be alive means the total situation of man as he is confronted by God..." (Ibid., my emphasis). It is "presence," "*pre*" + "*esse,*" literally "being before," "being in front of": it is "being found" and living together with God in vital relation, being God-breathed.

This I-Thou relationality turns our normal self-centered, self-generated world upside down and inside out. In the work of God, as Ellul observes, the end and the means are "identical": the work of God manifests "a unity of end and means" (Ibid. 64–5). Jesus brought the Kingdom by *being* the presence of the Kingdom. According to Ellul, the "first consequence" of this identity for us is this: "that what actually matters, in practice, is 'to be' and not 'to act'" (PK 74).[77] It is for us

... to manifest the gift which has been given us, the gift of grace and of peace, of love and of the Holy Spirit: that is the very end pursued by God and miraculously present within us. Henceforth our human idea of means is absolutely overturned; its root of pride and of power has been cut away. The means is no longer called to 'achieve' anything. It is delivered from its uncertainty about the way to follow, and the success to be expected... [W]e must learn that it is not our

possibilities which control our action, but it is God's end, present within us" (67, my emphasis).

For Ellul, this creative Life, the Holy Spirit, "can transform our intelligence, in such a way that it will not be swallowed up by our systems, and that it will be sufficiently penetrating" (*Presence* 103). The Spirit "alone can give meaning, truth, and effectiveness to language" (Ibid.) It "alone can establish the link with one's neighbor" (Ibid. 106). It is the mystery of this divine life, alive in the person, that gives human work "its meaning, its value, its effectiveness, its weight, its truth, its justice — its life ... " (Ibid. 97).

God acts first, always and everywhere. It is striking, in this context, to hear Jesus' words to his disciples in the Gospel of John:

Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

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[77] We "do not have to strive and struggle in order that righteousness may reign upon the earth. We have to be 'just' or 'righteous' ourselves, bearers of righteousness ... Likewise.. we have not to force ourselves, with great effort and intelligence, to bring peace upon the earth — we have ourselves to *be* peaceful" (Ibid. 66–76).

As one commentator observes, "[T]he parable of the True Vine is, above all, a contemplative parable....

The verb *remain* is a verb of *being* ... It is used twice as many times as the verb *bear fruit*" (Cavalletti,

54). The same "sap," the same life, flows through the whole plant. This was the pattern and essence of Jesus' own relation with the one he called "Father": "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works" (John 14: 10).

We hear echoes from the larger Christian contemplative tradition. "God is the center of my soul," writes St. John of the Cross. Jean Pierre de Caussade says, "Divine activity floods the universe; it penetrates all creatures; it flows over them. Wherever they are, it is there; it precedes, accompanies and follows them. We have only to allow ourselves to be carried forward on the crest of its waves" (quoted in Squire, 217). Thomas Kelly, a more recent witness, writes in *A Testament of Devotion*:

Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto Itself... It is a dynamic center, a creative Life that presses to birth within us. Here is the slumbering Christ, stirring to be awakened, to become the soul we clothe in earthly form and action. And He is within us all. (3).

The new style of life to which Ellul calls us originates in a Life deeper than our powers of selfdetermination. It flows from the Creator Spirit; it is the gift of the Holy, capable of enlivening dust and resurrecting the dead.

II.

"True love and prayer are learned in the moment when prayer has become impossible and the heart has turned to stone."

- Thomas Merton

What is our relation to this Gift? We can affirm it; we can reject it. We can, like Ellul for a decade, flee from it, refuse it. In any case, we must decide. If we assent to the Gift, what then? For Ellul, the fruit of the Spirit's presence is *prayer*. This is a second dimension of the new style of life which Ellul sees must be discovered. "Prayer comes before all the rest in the life in Christ" (*Prayer* 116). It is "the sole necessary and sufficient action and practice, in a society that has lost its way" (Ibid. 175). The church "can only have recourse to God in prayer..." (*Presence* 126). "It is, above all, in prayer and meditation that intellectuals will rediscover the sources of an intelligent life rooted in the concrete" (Ibid. 112). "Prayer is the power which exorcises demons, by the Holy Spirit, and is thus the weapon of faith" (Ibid. 16). In the battle against

"death and nothingness," it is "the eschatological act of prayer" which enables us "to pick up once again the thread of life" (*Prayer*, 178). "The act of prayer ... resolves both the problematics of faith and all the impossibilities of human hope" (*Hope* 274).

This "prayer," however, is not what we reflexively assume. For Ellul, true prayer is not only neglected in the church today; it is indeed impossible: L *'impossible Priere* is the title of the French original of the English *Prayer and Modern Man.* Impossible from without, for us as modern people, for whom there is no spiritual dimension, nor is there time or space, but only distraction, being pulled from one thing to another — and impossible from within, for Christians in Christendom, who labor under "a whole set of misunderstandings, of obsolete images, of spurious identifications, [which] rob prayer of all further justification and being, except as a counterfeit" (*Prayer* 64). "It is prayer which should be decisive, but we no longer have any confidence in the extraordinary power of prayer" (*Presence* 16). And then, bluntly, "for man in our society prayer cannot be what it is" (*Prayer* 64).

What does Ellul mean by prayer? We can begin with what he doesn't mean, since the substitutes are legion. We come to prayer with hands bearing "offerings, presents, vows, good deeds," instead of our lives and ourselves (Ibid. 6–7). We want to deal with "the pleasant, the consoling, the sweet, the banal, the ordinary" in our prayer, instead of actually encountering God (Ibid. 8).[78] We approach prayer as a duty; our prayers are rote, or simply emotive. We pray, "Thy will be done" to disown the reality of our own will, not to seek alignment of that very real will with God's. Prayer for us is deformed by a false posture of servility and a false affect of piety.

Most fundamentally, Ellul argues that we labor under the false notion –one "undisputed, widespread, and habitual in all the churches" –that prayer consists of us talking to God, that it is a discourse, "a sort of pious language addressed to God" (Ibid. 63). If we think of what happens when someone says, "Let us pray," we see the truth in this: most of us bow our heads, close our eyes, and expect someone to start talking. Generally when we speak of prayer we assume that we will be the ones starting the conversation; that it will consists of words (we "say" our prayers), and that we will be the ones using them; that God is a long way off and must be hailed.

What is true prayer? True prayer is also "impossible," albeit in a more salutary sense of being outside the realm of the merely humanly possible. True prayer, for Ellul, is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is a "profound reality," "an "extraordinary explosive force," "outrageous, astonishing," a "miracle" (*Prayer*, 63, *Presence* 77, *Prayer* 26, 9). In this

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[78] As Thomas Merton says, in what could be a mini-version of *Prayer and Modern Man:* ... [C]ontemplation will not be given to those who willfully remain at a distance from God, who confine their interior life to a few routine exercises of piety and a few external acts of worship and service performed as a matter of duty. Such people are careful to avoid sin. They respect God as a Master. But their heart does not belong to him. They are not really interested in Him, except in order to insure themselves against losing heaven and going to hell. In actual practice, their minds and hearts are taken up with their own ambitions and troubles and comforts and pleasures and all their worldly interests and anxieties and fears. God is only invited to enter this charmed circle to smooth out difficulties and to dispense rewards. (12)

prayer God teaches us God's way, a way "truly impossible to find unless God reveals it, truly impossible to follow with our human power alone" (*Presence* 126). This prayer is first of all the prayer of Christ, the prayer of the Holy Spirit. *That* prayer is *our* life. It is wholly gift: "We are forced to the conclusion that prayer is a gift from God, and its reality depends upon him alone" (*Prayer* 62). This gift establishes relationship, IS relationship with God. It is "living with God," a "form of life, the life with God"; it is "the life which I receive from him, and which unfolds in a story with Him" (49, 60, 61). It is "real encounter with God"; it "rests on the lived and living contact with the Lord" (Ibid. 119, 100–101). "In prayer God invites us to live with him," as Karl Barth says and Ellul references (Ibid. 48). What matters is life with God.

Here again we note the resonance with the Christian contemplative tradition. As Thomas Merton says, "In prayer we discover what we already have Everything has been given to us in Christ. All we need is to experience what we already possess Let Jesus pray. Thank God Jesus is praying. Forget

yourself. Enter into the prayer of Jesus. Let him pray in you" (quoted in Pennington, 49–50). Dom John Main O.S.B. writes, "in the light of Christ, prayer is not talking-to but being-with" (*Essential Writings*, 67). "We are praying when we are awakening to the presence of the Spirit in our heart. If this is so, there can be no forms or methods of prayer. There is one prayer, the stream of love between the Spirit of the risen Christ and his Father, in which we are incorporated" (Ibid. 88). Brother Roger of Taize says, "...[I]n the depths of our being Christ is praying, far more than we imagine. Compared to the immensity of that hidden prayer of Christ in us, our explicit praying dwindles to almost nothing. That is why silence is so essential in discovering the heart of prayer" (*Songs and Prayers from Taize*, 17).

We do not know how to pray, but the Spirit does, interceding "with inexpressible groanings" (Romans 8:26b).[79] Our inability is the opening into the power of God. Prayer is never originally "ours." The content of prayer is given by God, in an encounter "which transcends all language," "an encounter between the living God and the living person" which "overflow[s]" into human speech as its "secondary expression" (*Prayer*, 60). Prayer does not begin with us; in prayer we are addressed by God. Ellul quotes Kierkegaard at length here:

The immediate person thinks and imagines that when he prays, the important thing, the thing he must concentrate upon, is that *God should hear* what HE *is praying for.* And yet in the true, eternal sense it is just the reverse: the true relation in prayer is not when God hears what is prayed for, but when *the person praying* continues to pray until he is *the one who hears,* who hears what God wills. The immediate person, therefore, uses many words and, therefore, makes demands in his prayer; the true man of prayer only *attends* (Ibid. 111).

This prayer is the presence of God, of God with us, "the only vital miracle" (*Jonah* 64). It frees us from a locked-up world. It is this presence, this being with, which Jonah

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[79] It was in reading Romans 8 that Ellul experienced what he called his "second conversion" (*In*

finally understood, according to Ellul, in the belly of the whale. It is God's "staying with man in death and hell (all forms of hell, including those we know on earth)," this fullness of love, which is the very heart of prayer (Ibid. 65).

As Ellul says, "So when prayer seems impossible that is no reason for panic or despair, for making a great effort, for attempting devices or techniques, for awaiting some mysterious and sovereign urge. It is enough to fall back on the most simple and childlike obedience asked of us, that of hearing the word" (*Prayer* 110–111). This is obedience (*obedire*), hearing (*audire*) —"a pure obedience without an end in sight" (*Hope* 274). It is for us to become hearers, to allow our deepest selves to become listening selves. We must renounce "human means," renounce "the possibilities of my own strength and initiative," renounce the use of power (*Prayer* 30, 6). Prayer for us is "a stripping bare, the abandonment of all human apparatus in order to place myself, without arms or equipment, into the hands of the Lord, who decides and fulfills" (Ibid. 30). We renounce thinking that we either must or even can act first.

Hearing the word, we both get out of the way and become able to respond. This primal attentiveness, I would suggest, is what Ellul means when he writes, in *Autopsy of Revolution*, that we are to "be contemplative." Here is the pertinent text in its entirety:

It would represent a vital breach in the technological society, a truly revolutionary attitude, if contemplation could replace frantic activity. Contemplation fills the void of our society of lonely men. 'The art of contemplation produces objects that it regards as signs instead of things — signs leading to the discovery of a different reality .... I write to discover,' Octavio Paz says,

'because contemplation is the art of discovering things that science and technology cannot reveal. Contemplation restores to man the spiritual breadth of which technology divests him, to objects their significance, and to work its functional presence. Contemplation is the key to individual survival today; an attitude of profound contemplation allows actions to redeem their significance and to be guided by something other than systems and objects.' That is the way man can recover himself *today*. If you would be genuinely revolutionary *in our society* (I repeat that I am not \ disclosing a permanent value or an eternal truth), be contemplative: that is the source of individual strength to break the system (285–6).

Fullness of presence, instead of "frantic activity"; depth and communion, instead of loneliness; signs instead of things; the discovery of spiritual breadth instead of the mere mapping of materiality; profundity; otherness. Contemplation involves openness to a depth dimension, a quieting, stopping, attending to, wondering at — everything technical civilization finds threatening and wishes to distract and hurry us away from. The contemplative makes space and takes time. Time and space –the very media which technological civilization seeks to annihilate –are the human media, after all.

Yet as many misunderstandings cluster around the word "contemplation" as around the word "prayer," as evidenced in Ellul's own treatment in *Prayer and Modern Man.*

Early in that book he urges the reader interested in a theology of prayer to have recourse to "Augustine or Teresa of Avila, to Luther or Pascal, to John of the Cross or to Barth, to Kierkegaard or to Calvin," many of whom are classically considered "contemplatives" (vii). Yet when he treats of "the experience of the great mystics" he speaks in the voice of a modern man (himself) who associates "mysticism" with extraordinary experiences, speaking in tongues, "a knowledge of inexpressible awarenesses, presences, truths," comparing these to what "the youth of today seek in drugs" (9–10). This is "encounter with God" which is "fusion with the great All," "the way of the dark night of the soul of John of the Cross, or of the ineffable presence disclosed to Teresa of Avila" (10). And he says, "But in the meeting with God, or in the fusion, there no longer is any prayer properly so called, since nothing in the realm of knowledge or cogency can any longer be said," a "tendency [that] is very foreign to the Protestant mentality, which is always more or less rational" (Ibid.) Later he refers to "the prayer of the mystics, the plunge into the vast silence, into the ineffable, into the incommunicable" (97). Clearly these are a source of discomfort.

He continues: "The mystic experience frightens us. We feel embarrassed to recognize it. We distrust it." "And yet," he says,

If prayer is indeed a speaking with God face to face, how could we remain

the forlorn inmates of the commonplace? Why does not this presence of God work a transformation within us? I am not saying, of course, that the mystical experience is the test of a truly profound prayer, but rather, that our prayer, which assuredly never takes us that far, is the test of an absence of prayer! (10)

He then rejects St. John of Damascus' description of prayer as a lifting of the mind to God, saying this transgresses what only God can accomplish, and he "dispose[s] of the mystical experience of prayer." But the disposal is not complete, for he concludes with this simple and touching observation: "*Perhaps* in that case we are missing a profound truth" (11). He had signaled his ambivalence from the beginning: "Confusedly, but movingly, the experience of the great mystics still attracts us" (9).

This combination of confusion and attraction is something we moderns know well. "Mysticism" seems strange, otherworldly, and "contemplation," rarefied, meant only for special people, "reserved for a small class of almost unnatural beings and prohibited to everyone else" (Merton 7). It suggests withdrawal, removal from the "real world," and is easy to dismiss as deluded or simply irrelevant. Perhaps we agree with Ellul when he flatly writes, "[T]he present-day world is not meant for contemplation," although he also acknowledges that insofar as that assumes silence, peace, and tranquility, neither was the Middle Ages (*Prayer* 171)! At the same time he expresses deep regret that "[t]he intelligence of modern man is no longer nourished at the source of contemplation, of awareness of reality..." (*Presence* 92).

Ellul makes a significant contribution here with his refusal to allow contemplation to fade into "tranquility," simply a state of being unruffled — a state which the larger

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Season, 15).

tradition has also registered, and dismissed, as "pernicious peace," "lethal sleep," "holy floating" (Main, 88). No one can mistake Ellul for a proponent of escapism. The contemplative life is at once attentive to the depths and alert, energized, *combative*. Ellul surveys the battlefield and delineates where the battle is joined: combat against the self, against "religion," against falsehood, against evil, with God, against death and nothingness. "Je combattrai, je combattrai " (*Silences* 15). It is disciplined, not dissipated. The revolution which is

served by contemplation needs "every spark of defiance and self-assertion we can muster" (Autopsy, 300).

Ellul reminds us that "being contemplative" is dialectical, dynamic, vital. It is at once impossible and essential. It involves us fundamentally with "a presence... whose margins are our margins; that calls us out over our own fathoms" (R. S. Thomas, quoted in Laird, 6).

III

"Wait without hope, for you are not ready for hope..." — T. S. Eliot

Being called out over our own fathoms can be terrifying. And when it is not terrifying, it is radically challenging in other ways to a self, an ego, accustomed to the "stability" of being its own center. In this context, Ellul urges us to "l'esperance oubliee," hope that is forgotten: the willingness to wait in real darkness, the willingness to stay present to the felt absence of God. Just as the Holy One acts first to love the world, forever liberating us from our projections of "God"; just as the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness in prayer, enfolding us into the Divine Life; so we do not "possess" that for which we hope. "Now hope that sees for itself is not hope. For who hopes for what one sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait with endurance" (Romans 8: 24–25).

Ellul sees "waiting" joined with "prayer" and "realism" in realizing the "effective fundamental attitude" (*Hope*, 258). This "waiting" is active, completely engaging, a decision made again and again; the "person of waiting" –"stubborn, firm, unassuming" –"rushes into the dark of God's silence and of the abandonment" (Hope 261). This waiting is her or his "field of battle"; it is totally focused on "the moment when all will have become possible again" (Ibid.). Here again we see two decisive energies of prayer –renunciation and combat — at work. The person of faith perseveres, remaining steadfast and constant in the face of absence, failure, contradiction, dullness, boredom. The renunciation of human means, referenced above, extends to a renunciation of attachment to experience. "We must not build on what happens to us personally" — whether positive or negative, consoling or depressing:

"We can indeed regard certain things in our lives as signs, miracles, God's particular and personal action on us. But we are then to move on to what is signified by them. We must not cling to the sign itself, even though it be the most beautiful mystical

experience [!]. We must leave behind what belongs to the past... [I]t is God who counts and not our experiences" (*Jonah* 85).

We must "leave [our] subjectivity" and "find [our] true and total center in the permanence and faithfulness of the love of God" (Ibid. 86).

Here again Ellul and the larger contemplative tradition shed light on each other, particularly in their shared witness to the spiritual reality of darkness. What Ellul calls "abandonment" others perhaps more trenchantly call "dark night," "desolation," "impasse." Constance Fitzgerald, a Carmelite sister and student of St. John of the Cross, describes "impasse" as the experience of no way out, of no escape; the person is immured in "disappointment, disenchantment, hopelessness, and loss of meaning" ("Impasse," 94). Thomas Merton speaks of "a terrible interior revolution":

Gone is the sweetness of prayer. Meditation becomes impossible, even hateful. Liturgical functions seem to be an insupportable burden. The mind cannot think. The will seems unable to love. The interior life is filled with darkness and dryness and pain. The soul is tempted to think that all is over and that, in punishment for its infidelities, all spiritual life has come to an end" (42).

What is needed now is endurance, perseverance, "revolutionary patience" (Soelle, quoted by Fitzgerald, "Impasse," 114). Only as this experience is faced, acknowledged, allowed, and mourned –"if the ego does not demand understanding in the name of control and predictability but is willing to admit the mystery of its own being and surrender itself to this mystery" — can the soul emerge into the wholeness which God alone can give (Ibid. 96–97). It is only out of this suffering, this dying, that authentic, Godgiven hope can emerge.

The soul one day begins to realize, in a manner completely unexpected and surprising, that in this darkness it has found the living God. It is overwhelmed with the sense that He is there and that His love is surrounding and absorbing it on all sides. At that instant, there is no other important reality but God, infinite Love. Nothing else matters. The darkness remains as dark as ever and yet, somehow, it seems to have become brighter than the brightest day. The soul has entered a new world (Merton, 52–3)

Ellul refers to a time in his own life of a "severe trial in which everything was once again called into question," which "involved not only my deepest personal attachments, and the significance of whatever I might undertake to do, but also that which constituted the very center of my person, or at least which I believe constitutes the center of my person All was called into question " (*Hope* v). It was only after this experience of the loss of everything that hope was born; before that, although he had written about hope, he "didn't know what he was saying" (Ibid. vi).

This awareness of the reality of the dark night and the hope which can emerge, "in a manner completely unexpected and surprising," is essential encouragement in our own dark night, whether experienced personally or societally. As Fitzgerald suggests, it would perhaps be helpful to understand our own time as a time of genuine impasse, instead of seeing the only alternatives as the denial of darkness or the succumbing to

it. "We are citizens of a dominant nation, and I think that as a nation we have come to an experience of deep impasse and profound limitation. On the other side of all our technology, we have come to poverty and to dark night. We can find no escape from the world we have built ..." ("Impasse," 105). It is just this impasse which must be brought to prayer. The larger contemplative tradition, with Ellul, bears witness to the radical new life which can emerge, unexpectedly, miraculously, from out of this darkness, for those "willing to be stretched beyond [them]selves toward a new epiphany of the Holy, incomprehensible Mystery" (Fitzgerald, "From Impasse to Prophetic Hope," 42).

IV.

Life with God is not complicated. A child can do it. It is we adults, in a technological society, who have become overburdened with our own capabilities, our own need for validation, our own powers. But the Holy knows no self-sufficiency, and will not leave us to ours. We find we have been given everything, and have nothing to hold on to; we are "out over 20,000 fathoms" (Kierkegaard). Art McGill calls it "receiving without having," "an open poverty that is always waiting to receive" (61, 56). Ellul describes it as "bewilderment":

In the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit we receive the answer to this work of God, and we are bewildered because we are no longer very sure about the way forward, which no longer depends upon us. The end, as well as the means, has been taken away from us, and we hesitate as we look at this way which lies open before us, whose end we cannot see: we have only one certainty, and that is the promise which has been made to us of a certain order, which God guarantees: 'Seek ye first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all things shall be added unto you' (Matt. 6:33). (*Presence* 78)

Here is the "breach which cannot be closed, [the] 'undermining' which cannot be avoided" (97), the "rupture." We do not "have" faith, in the sense of yet one more possession. We lean, instead, into a radicality of trust, of interior poverty, of being dispossessed. We — the I-Thou — slowly and convulsively discover what it means to *live*.

Ellul is a modern man, post-religious, post-Christian, bearing witness to the Gift of the Holy. He is a Protestant, standing firm with the largely Catholic contemplative tradition to protest any attempt to encompass and "unify" this Gift which can only unify us. He is an intellectual committed to questioning the prevailing assumptions about the meaning and end of human life and the meaning of human activity.

He is a rabble rouser riveted by the depths of Silence. To "be contemplative" is not to be serene and unruffled, but to be engaged, attentive to the depths, willing to wait. Each of us, with the community, must discover the "how" of this life, as the Holy lays hold of us in our practical situation (*Presence*, 115).

This way of life to which Ellul bears witness offers an essential counterpoint to the way of the world. Instead of the autonomy and self-sufficiency of technical man, bent on the control of the material world, it bears witness to the mystery of a living relationship between a loving God and a beloved creation. Instead of noise, distraction, hurry, multi-tasking — the drive to fill every space –it bears witness to the primacy of listening,

of attentiveness. Instead of glittering despair, it chooses trust in the darkness. Ellul invites us to be open to the Wholly Other, for the end of human life is the mystery of presence: God's hidden presence ("I AM"), presence before God, presence in the world as leaven, salt, light.

The time is ripe for the renewal and rediscovery of contemplative prayer, this presence, this hearing of the word for which we are made. It is ripe personally, communally, ecumenically. We are gifted with an incredibly rich tradition of witness to the power and presence of the Spirit. Let us learn from it.

The time is ripe among faith traditions. Christians are not alone in being encountered by God. There are genuinely contemplative dimensions in Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and other faith traditions. What can we learn from each other? In the being of prayer we become able to rediscover the other, to make space for the reality of the other. How can life with God be anything other than a school of humility? Those who genuinely bear witness to God are not self-righteous or self-justifying. We learn from Jonah that "the man chosen by God is far from having plumbed the full depths of God's mysteries.... The man

filled with the Holy Spirit knows only a small part of the mysteries and even of the action of God. The adventure of Jonah inclines us at every point to humility" (*Jonah*, 84).

When we read Ellul, unexpectedly, we find a contemplative, who invites us to a present life hidden with God, and enlivens and deepens our sense of what that might mean in today's world. This way of life is "on the lookout for the unexpected," much as Ellul and his childhood friend Pierre Farbos were as they roamed the quays of Bordeaux, willing to trust that Life is already there, about to unfold (Ellul and Chastenet, 45). It is a way of life rooted in absolute attention to the Mystery of God. "[T]he person who retires to his room to pray is the true radical. Everything will flow from that" (Ibid. 174).

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Issue #53 Nov 2013

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The Lure of *Technic* in Current "Leadership" Fascinations

by Arthur Boers

Arthur Boers (aboers@tyndale.ca) holds the RJ Bernardo Family Chair of Leadership at Tyndale Theological Seminary (Toronto, Canada). A priest in the Anglican Church of Canada, he is the author of over half a dozen books including: *Living into Focus: Choosing What Matters in an Age of Distractions* (Brazos 2012), *The Way is Made by Walking: A Pilgrimage Along the Camino de Santiago* (InterVarsity 2007), and *Never Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behavior* (Alban 1999).

Contemporary leadership discussions are everywhere. During a Toronto sanitation workers' strike, media complained about the mayor's missing leadership. Some years ago, nasty political ads suggested that our prime minister did not look like a leader because of a facial defect. When things go awry in congregations there is frequently talk about "failure of leadership."

Leadership obsesses us. Degree-oriented leadership programs are on the rise.[80] Barbara Kellerman, at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, writes of "the burgeoning of the leadership industry with its countless centers, institutes, programs, courses, seminars, workshops, experiences, teachers, trainers, books, blogs, articles, websites, webinars, videos, conferences, consultants and coaches, which all claim to teach people how to lead ..."[81]

There are usually leadership books on best-seller lists. Such literature often dwells on corporations, sports, and the military, mostly reinforcing status quo perspectives.[82] Many are the glowing accounts of Disney, Southwest, Shell. There is vastly more emphasis on methods, programs, and "best practices" than on moral formation or spiritual practices; seldom is character discussed.[83] Much literature emphasizes achievement, e.g. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.* Even Christian books use such terminology: *Effective Church Leadership.*[84] Yet Sarah Coakley cautions:

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[80] Dennis C. Roberts, *Deeper Learning in Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 16ff, 30ff. Scholars abroad tell me that leadership as n academic subject is a North American preoccupation.

[81] Barbara Kellerman, "Leadership: Learning to Lead the Old-Fashioned Way," *Strategy and Business*, Winter 2011, Issue 65, 71.

[82] Stephen Preskill and Stephen D. Brookfield , *Learning as a Way of Leading* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 2

[83] Two recent books offer a counterbalance but are anomalies. Michel Villette and Catherine Vuillermot, *From Predators to Icons: Exposing the Myth of the Business Hero*, trans. George Holoch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009). Nassir Ghaemi, *A First-Rate Madness: Uncovering the Links Between Leadership and Mental Illness* (New York: Penguin, 2011).

[84] Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989). Kennon L. Callahan, *Effective Church Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990).

business models . are usually presented in a packaged, pragmatic form that can be very efficacious. But there is little analysis of the secular presumptions that animated them. We should ask critically, and maybe also appreciatively, what vision of power, persons and community lies behind whatever business model we consider using.[85]

Evangelical Christians are preoccupied with leadership, even describing winning conversions as "*leading* people to Christ." Numerous parachurch ministries are named after founders. Books boast specific sure fire steps to success: *9 Things You Simply Must Do to Succeed in Love or Life* or *Practicing Greatness: 7 Disciplines of Extraordinary Spiritual Leaders*. The most famous is *21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*.[86] Yet one is reminded of Jacques Ellul's sober assertion "that the different methods of forecasting meet with almost constant failure."[87]

It is human nature to admire the famous and the powerful, to look for heroes and adulate "stars" up front and in the know, those who wield power.[88] Yet questions must be raised. It appears oddly difficult, for example, to settle on a leadership definition. Joseph Rost argues that most literature does not define the term.[89] Warren Bennis encountered 350 definitions![90] When I took on an endowed chair in *leadership*, I interviewed key people who dreamed up the position. I asked for a definition and heard: taking responsibility; facilitating the fulfillment of the purposes of persons, groups, or organizations; helping people see reality and inspiring them to move to possibility; discerning one's time and context; suggesting or setting a vision and moving a group to long term results and satisfaction; exercising authority in managing resources to accomplish common good; influencing people to do what is needed; stewarding influence.

These ideas posed by thoughtful, intelligent Christians did not indicate anything explicitly *Christian* but describe *any* commendable leadership. No one offered a Christian perspective without prompting. When I pressed subjects on what is uniquely *Christian* about leadership or whether there is a distinctive Christian form, there was hesitation. One person noted that we lead as Christ led. Another that Christian leaders "serve the

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[85] Jason Byassee, "Sarah Coakley: Living prayer and leadership," *Faith and Leadership*, 18 August 2009, www.faithandleadership.com.

[86] Henry Cloud, *9 Things You Simply Must Do to Succeed in Love or Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007); Reggie McNeal, *Practicing Greatness: 7 Disciplines of Extraordinary Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006); John C. Maxwell, *21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*: *Follow Them and People Will Follow You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998).

[87] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 80.

[88] See Mark Van Vugt and Anjana Ahuja. *Naturally Selected: The Evolutionary Science of Leadership* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2011) and Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[89] Joseph C. Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 7.

[90] Cited by Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, *Leadership from Inside Out* (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 128.

purposes of God for his people in time."[91] Do these ideas go deep enough, especially when leadership is so faddish?

Biblical Perspectives on Leadership

Scripturally speaking, there are problems in unduly emphasizing leaders. Luke recounts Jesus' birth and names leading luminaries of the day — Augustus, Herod, Quirinius. These are newsmakers, the ones in charge. But marginal folks — Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph — are God's unexpected channels, the *real* sphere of God's transformation, where *good news* is discerned, found, embodied. Ellul observes: "God chooses some men among others... Not the most qualified, the most informed, the most worthy, the most alert."[92]

When we adulate leaders, Ellul warns that in the Bible "good and faithful kings were regularly defeated and . glorious monarchs" acted wickedly.[93] Power, victory, effectiveness, are not the fruit of faithfulness. After all, the cross exemplifies not "a *powerful* political leader," but rather the weakness and humility of God.

Throughout the Old Testament we see God choosing what is weak and humble to represent him (the stammering Moses, the infant Samuel, Saul from an insignificant family, David confronting Goliath, etc.). Paul tells us that God chooses the weak things of the world to confound the mighty.[94]

God's reign prioritizes "humility, poverty, freely giving" not authority, spectacular conversions, breakthrough works, a strong organization of the church, miracles, or anything of this kind. The kingdom of heaven knows no efficient means, as we have seen in the parables. The kingdom grows differently from any power in the world, and certainly not by the way of efficiency[95]

Positive *leader* terminology is scant in the scriptures. Few office holders are regarded favorably. Official rulers usually look out for interests contrary to God's purposes; their characters are deficient. Good rulers are exceptions. When asked whether God intervenes in history, Ellul notes that God did so through faithful individuals but "not necessarily ... through political action. It can also be done through the preaching of the word of God."[96]

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[91] I define Christian leadership as: Inspiring, challenging, or empowering people and groups to join God's mission of redemption and healing.

[92] Jacques Ellul, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, trans. and ed. By Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 62.

[93] *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 140. See also Jacques Ellul, *Anarchism and Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 50.

[94] Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 123.

[95] Jacques Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, ed. and trans. Willem H. Vanderburg (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 205–6.

[96] Jacques Ellul, *In Season Out of Season*, trans. Lani K. Niles (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 92–3.

Scriptural leadership references are predominantly negative. Jesus' warns about "blind leaders" (Mt. 15.14, *KJV*) and disparages Gentile "rulers" (Mk. 9.42).[97] Old and New Testament counsel against wanting or emulating leaders "like other nations" (1 Sam. 8.5) or Gentile authorities who "lord it over" others (Mt. 20.25). Christian leadership programs aiming to be biblical, then, would focus proportionately more on avoiding leadership deformations, pitfalls, dangers, and temptations rather than on glorifying the possibilities and potentials of leadership.[98]

Jesus certainly had different priorities than having us *lead*. "Follow" comes up often in the gospel. Discipleship is about *following*. Never telling us all to be leaders Jesus says we are all to be servants.[99] Sarah Coakley cautions against blithely accepting leadership presumptions: "What Jesus has to say about authorities and power, and what he demonstrates in his own acts of witness and in his passion, are absolutely crucial."[100]

Reading Ellul to Interpret Leadership

Ellul's notion of *technic* is relevant to pondering leadership. Technic refers "to efficient methods applicable in all areas (monetary, economic, athletic, etc.);" its characteristics include "precision, rapidity, certainty, continuity, universality."[101] It prioritizes "immediate needs," shows "obsession with change" and "the myth of progress," and promotes "growth at all costs."[102] James Holloway notes that technic is evident in "the proliferation of *administration* in education, church, science, government, business, industry, etc., . so that administration is now *an* end itself."[103] Technics is "the determining element in the creation of . value."[104] Not that technic is evil yet it is deeply problematic when technic becomes "the *mediator of everything* … ."[105] I often hear complaints about how the CEO is now a primary model for pastors.

Leadership connection to technics is reflected in titles: Peter Drucker's *The Effective Executive* and *The Effective Executive in Action* and evangelical author Leith Ander-

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[97] Unless otherwise noted, scripture references are from the *New Revised Standard Version.*

[98] Narcissism and leadership are often intertwined. Thomas E Cronin and Michael A. Genovese, *Leadership Matters* (Boulder CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 55–6, 137, 138, 170–1, 173, 263.

[99] Siang-Yang Tan, "The Primacy of Servanthood," in *The Three Tasks of Leadership*, ed. Eric O. Jacobsen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 78.

[100] "Sarah Coakley: Living prayer and leadership," www.faithandleadership.com.

[101] Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 109. There are extensive debates about how to translate Ellul's French term: *technic, technique,* or *technology*. I opt for the unfamiliar, "technic." The usual English meanings of "technology" and "technique" are hard to overcome; the unfamiliarity of "technic" gives the reader pause and helps one remember Ellul's distinct emphasis.

[102] *The Technological Bluff*, 69, 223, 224.

[103] James Y. Holloway, "West of Eden," in *Introducing Jacques Ellul*, ed. James Y. Holloway (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 24. Italicization is Holloway's.

[104] Jacques Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work*, ed. William H. Vanderburg (Toronto: Anansi, 1981), 33.

[105] Jacques Ellul, *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1990), 92.

son's *Leadership that Works*.[106] We prioritize leaders as technicians.[107] With the right mayor there would be no strike; with a leaderly looking prime minister our nation would be affluent; with a good pastor there would be no church fights. Christians too fall for such longings.

Ellul counsels reticent humility about claiming to effect God's purposes: "man does not recognize in advance whether or not he is entering into God's plan."[108] He warns against predicting consequences of actions and against naive optimism about what humans can achieve. "There is no progress that is ever definitive, no progress that is only progress, no progress without a shadow."[109] We cannot effectively attain or achieve God's kingdom.[110]

When I ask seminarians to define leadership two terms consistently come up: *influence* and *followers*. (Think of the self-help classic, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.) Students hope to learn "hard skills" of running the show: manage people ("human resources"[111]), coordinate teams, oversee budgets, deal with conflict, lead change, build collaboration, raise funds. These obviously important tasks are all practically oriented and in the spirit of our times.

In reality, we are obsessed ... by the views of our age and century and technology. Everything has to serve some purpose. If it does not, it is not worth doing. And when we talk in this way we are not governed by a desire to serve but by visions of what is great and powerful and effective. We are driven by the utility of the world and the importance of results. What counts is what may be seen, achievement, victory, whether it be over hunger or a political foe or what have you. What matters is that it be useful.[112]

Ellul hopes rather that we be prophets. A prophet "announces and can bend or provoke, but there is no necessity or determination."[113] Effective influence is not assured. Prophets are often marginalized and isolated. Some are not heard until long after they die; some never at all.

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[106] Peter F. Drucker, *The Effective Executive* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2007); Drucker and Joseph A. Maciariello, *The Effective Executive in Action* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006); Leith Anderson, *Leadership that Works* (Grand Rapids: Bethany House Publishers, 2001).

[107] Ellul writes that "technocrats" now "constitute a new ruling class, and we are actually living under an aristocratic regime. Technocrats are the *aristoi*, the best people." These "*aristoi* have the greatest technical competence ..." *The Technological Bluff,* 25.

[108] *The Politics of God and the Politics ofMan*, 19.

[109] *The Technological Bluff*, 71.

[110] Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, trans. Olive Wyon (New York: Seabury, 1967), 48.

[111] Marguerite Shuster writes: "the very category 'human resources' gets it exactly wrong .. It places people made in the image of God right alongside two-by-fours, power generators, and textbooks as material needed to get the job done: human beings become more or less useful instruments in service of reaching a particular end. Their worth is not intrinsic but relative to the goal at hand." "Leadership as Interpreting Reality," in *The Three Tasks ofLeadership*, ed. Eric O. Jacobsen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 19.

[112] *The Politics of God and the Politics ofMan*, 197.

[113] *The Politics of God and the Politics ofMan*, 21.

A leader, in many students' opinions, influences others and wins followers. Yet I begin each class by reading a brief account of an exemplary Christian from history and offering a prayer in that person's memory. More often than not, that person was not famous in his or her day, had no followers, was rejected, or was martyred. His or her influence was negligible.

As the world sees it, action which is faithful to God will always fail, just as Jesus Christ necessarily went to the cross. Such action always leads to a dead end. It is always a fiasco from the standpoint of worldly power. But this should not worry us. It does not mean that our action is in truth ineffectual. Efficacy measured in terms of faithfulness cannot be compared at any point with efficacy measured in terms of success.[114]

Christian faith gives a counter-witness to believing that "Everything that succeeds is good, everything that fails is bad."[115] Ellul sounds much like Martin Buber who wrote: "The Bible knows nothing of this intrinsic value of success." Buber demonstrates that key Old Testament leaders had lives consisting "of one failure after another .," referring especially to Moses and David. This is, in short a "glorification of failure [that] culminates in the long line of prophets whose existence is failure through and through. They live in failure .."[116]

One modern failure was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He never completed his most important book, led a brief fledgling seminary, did not persuade many Christians to reject Nazism, was part of an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Hitler's, and was wastefully executed shortly before the war's end. In his lifetime, he had little influence and few followers. He was not surprised. He was clear that the Christian (like Jesus) does not just suffer and endure the cross, but experiences rejection, the opposite of influence just "Jesus is the Christ who was rejected in his suffering." When the "circle of disciples" try to "hinder" this rejection their hindrance was "satanic." Yet the church itself from the earliest of days also avoided this "kind of Lord."[117] In other words, even in the church Christ does not necessarily have influence! Was Bonhoeffer a leader? Does the answer matter? As I. F. Stone used to say: "If you expect to see the final results of your work, you have not asked a big enough question."[118] Ellul wrote a prayer that counsels against thinking too highly or confidently about our influence or our effective accomplishments:

All the acts which I have done expressly to serve thee, and also all the acts which I believe to be neutral and purely human, and also all the acts which I know to be disobedience and sin, I put in thy hands, O God, my Lord and Savior; take them now that they are finished; prove them thyself to see which enter into thy work and which

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[114] *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 140.

[115] *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 70.

[116] Martin Buber, "Biblical Leadership" in *Biblical Humanism*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (),142–3.

[117] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, eds. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 85.

[118] Cited in Jeff Gates, *Democracy At Risk* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 241.

deserve only judgment and death: use, cut, trim, reset, readjust, now that it is no longer I who can decide or know, now that what is done is done, what I have written I have written. It is thou that canst make a line true by taking it up into thy truth. It is thou that canst make an action right by using it to accomplish thy design, which is mysterious as I write now but bright in the eternity which thou has revealed to me in thy Son. Amen.[119]

Christ's power and sovereignty are "not of the order of means that are effective."[120] We act in hope and on the basis of God's promise but have no guaranteed outcomes or results. Ellul would make short shrift of the claim that the obligation to be responsible entails proper techniques.

The freedom of God finds expression also in the choice of the means he employs. Samaria will be saved, but to accomplish this God neither uses nor relies on the courage of the soldiers, the skill of the generals, the politics of the king, or the return of all the people to virtue and morality. God will save Samaria by ... the most ridiculous, empty, and illusory miracle, by a noise, a wind, an echo, by an illusion which makes a victorious army flee. This is an illustration of the fact that God chooses "things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are" (1 Corinthians 1:28). But it also shows how much noise and how little weight or worth or significance there is in what man does. I think that we who take our politics and bombs and elections so seriously should take this[121] seriously too.

Most famously, Ellul cautions against worshipping efficacy:

that which has its own high degree of efficiency should not become legitimate in our eyes for that reason. It is not enough that a means be effective for us to employ it. We must not subordinate the choice of means to intrinsic or specific efficacy.[122]

Scriptures caution against relying on technics. "How many times has God told and retold his people by the prophets that they should not rely on human means."[123] Ellul cites examples: manna which was not to be saved, rejecting large armies or strong weapons, Gideon's troop reduction, David battling Goliath without usual weapons, a widow relinquishing dwindling food. "In spite of every secular argument to justify money and the state and science and technology, to show that we are right to use these things, it is quite unbiblical to appeal to these agents of political power. To do so is defiance of God *par excellence*."[124]

Yet "man is much more controlled by . means than . ends. He is much more involved in a causal process."[125] We desire means that are "important, demanding and effica-

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[119] *The Politics of God and the Politics ofMan*, 72.
[120] *The Politics of God and the Politics ofMan*, 137.
[121] *The Politics of God and the Politics ofMan*, 61.
[122] *The Politics of God and the Politics ofMan*, 134.
[123] *The Politics of God and the Politics ofMan*, 147.
[124] *The Politics of God and the Politics ofMan*, 147.
[125] *The Politics of God and the Politics ofMan*, 135.

cious."[126] Our one end, however, must be "the coming kingdom of God" and all means subordinate to that priority.[127] Ellul laments the "penetration of Christianity by technology .."[128] This is not to dismiss appropriate means, but to make sure that they are in their proper place, not ends in themselves. He is not contending for incompetency.

If the efficacy of the man of God comes to a halt, all is lost. Jeroboam ruined the kingdom of David. If Apollos had not watered, what Paul had planted would never have grown. Every Christian, then, is strictly accountable... When a Christian quits, he annuls ... all that preceding Christians have been able to do. Efficacy is written in the history of the church as well as the world. It implies that everyone play his part in the life of the church and be prepared to carry on whether or not there is any tangible proof of results.[129]

None of this justifies inaction. "When we say 'since God does everything, he has no use for my puny efforts and my tiny works; so I will do nothing,' we show our hypocrisy and cowardice. The Bible never validates such an attitude, teaching rather that although God does everything, he chooses human beings to accomplish it!"[130]

Critiquing Institutional and Organizational Implications of Leadership and Technics

I frequently encounter a bias toward leadership understood primarily as running institutions. Ellul anticipated that technics would inform organizational administration.

Research on rational efficient methods . covers and has gradually come to encompass all human activities.

By this, I meant that there is now a precise knowledge of how a group or a society is constituted, evolves, and how one can organize to achieve a certain result. Sociology and psychology supply us with means to obtain the best returns from a work team, to "place" individuals in a given spot at a meeting in order to increase or decrease their influence, . and so on. These are simple examples of . the technologies of organization in a society. They have been widely applied in human relations, public relations, and the army.[131]

He claims: "A genuine revolution is called for today against increased and improved organization."[132] He warns and worries: "Once a movement becomes an institution, it is lost."[133] He is concerned when the church prioritizes "developing and strengthening itself institutionally" as if "Without administration, nothing works."[134] Christians are

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[126] *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 136.

[127] *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 136.

[128] *Perspectives On Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work*, 99.

[129] *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 139.

[130] *Reason for Being*, 136.

[131] *Perspectives on Our Age*, 37. See also Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980), 176

[132] Jacques Ellul, *Autopsy of Revolution*, trans. Patricia Wolf (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 273. While writing here about the nation state, the dynamics are just as true for other organizations, including corporations and churches.

[133] *Perspectives on Our Age*, 24.

[134] Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985),

now unduly interested in "worldly matters" such as "administration."[135] Institutions cannot offer ultimate security, protection, predictability, preservation; such aspirations are perilous and idolatrous.[136]

Ellul has little hope for reforming organizations.[137] Influenced by Ellul, Will Campbell used to say: "All institutions are after our souls" and "Institutions institute inhumanity."[138] Ellul cautions against embracing the "perversity of power."[139] He goes so far as to say that more dangerous than the nation state is the "omnipotence and omnipresence of administration."[140] Lest we not get the implication: "it is impossible for . an institution to be Christian."[141]

Ellul objects theologically whenever we "put . confidence elsewhere than in the Lord."[142] He is concerned when the church embraces "forms of security offered by human wisdom against the security of faith."[143] As for the hope of "improving the world," he dismisses this as purely "illusion" and "confusion."[144] This is not how the gospel advances.

The kingdom of heaven knows no efficient means, as we have seen in the parables. This kingdom grows differently from any power in the world, and certainly not by the way of efficiency. The only means to the kingdom of the poor in spirit and of those who are persecuted for justice is their lives as lived in communion with Jesus Christ.[145]

He approves Ecclesiastes' assertion that "*all* power is vanity, oppression, and foolishness — without reservation or shading!" He shares "Qohelet's utter pessimism concerning power."[146]

Agenda for Christians who would be Leaders

Our existence is more than technics. Edwin Luttwak says: "everything that we value in human life is within the realm of inefficiency — love, family, attachment,

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[135] *The Subversion of Christianity*, 21.

[136] "Cain will spend his life trying to find security, struggling against hostile forces, . taking guarantees that are within his reach, guarantees that *appear* to him to be genuine, but which in fact protect him from nothing." Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, trans. Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970).

[137] *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 71–2.

[138] Cited in Arthur Boers, "Will Campbell: In the Great Company of God's *Grace, The Other Side*, September, 1987, 43, 40.

[139] *Anarchism and Christianity,* 13 footnote 3. "What I really want to point out ... is not that Jesus was an enemy of power but that he treated it with disdain and did not accord it any authority. In every form he challenged it radically." *Anarchism and Christianity*, 56.

[140] *Anarchism and Christianity*, 16.

[141] *Anarchism and Christianity*, 28.

[142] *The Meaning of the City*, 32.

[143] *The Meaning of the City*, 34.

[144] *The Meaning of the City*, 37.

[145] *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, 206.

[146] *Reason for Being*, 84.

community, culture, old habits, comfortable old shoes."[147] Some leadership authors acknowledge this. Ronald Heifetz warns against the "myth of measurement" because: "Meaning cannot be measured." While useful, measurement "cannot tell us what makes life worth living." He cautions religious organizations that weigh success by "'reaching more people,' as if souls were a measurable commodity."[148]

We have rarely met a human being who, after years of professional life, has not bought into the myth of measurement and been debilitated by it. After all, there is powerful pressure in our culture to measure the fruits of our labors, and we feel enormous pride as we take on "greater" responsibility and gain "greater" authority, wealth, and prestige... You cannot measure the good that you do.[149]

Ellul agrees that human life is more than technics. "It has room for activities that are not rationally or systematically ordered." Such priorities are threatened; "the collision between spontaneous activities and technique is catastrophic for the spontaneous activities."[150]

Wallace Stegner wrote about losses that developed from damming a remote canyon river for accessible recreation: "In gaining the lovely and the usable, we have given up the incomparable."[151] Such tragic trade-offs echo Ellul's concerns that nothing "lovely" is gained in prioritizing technics: "everywhere technique creates ugliness."[152] The ugliness includes erosion of traditional societies.[153] "Technological activity . waters down all serious things.."[154] It suppresses and "destroys values and meaning"[155] and anything else viewed as "useless."[156]

Technic priorities become their own magical cult. "Facts" have a quasi-religious authority that cannot be questioned.[157] Yet Christian practices are relegated to irrelevance. Prayer is ridiculed and downplayed as unreliable, non-efficacious, unpredictable, ineffective.[158] (Allegedly effective prayer is celebrated; remember the best-seller, *The Prayer of Jabez*.)

[W]e can supply no demonstration of the necessity for prayer, or even of its usefulness. It is futile to pretend that prayer is indispensable to man. Today he gets along

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[147] Cited in Janice Gross Stein, *The Cult of Efficiency*, (Toronto: House of Anansi, 2001), 1.

[148] Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 212.

[149] Heifetz and Linsky, 213–4.

[150] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 82–3.

[151] Wallace Stegner, "Glen Canyon Submersus," in *Nature Writing*, eds. Robert Finch and John Elder (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002), 509.

[152] *The Technological Bluff*, 40.

[153] *Perspectives on Our Age*, 44–45.

[154] *The Technological System*, 10.

[155] *Perspectives on Our Age*, 50.

[156] *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 65.

[157] *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 38. Janice Gross Stein makes a similar point in her Massey Lectures, *The Cult of Efficiency* (Toronto: Anansi, 2001), 3–4.

[158] Jacques Ellul, *Prayer and Modern Man*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1970), 76–79.

very well without it. When he does not pray he lacks nothing, and when he prays it looks to him like a superfluous action reminiscent of former superstitions. He can live perfectly well without prayer.. No one can demonstrate to him that he really needs it although not realizing it, nor that he would be so much better off if he prayed. There is no reason, no proof, no motive to be invoked.[159]

By the relentless criteria of technic, prayer is downgraded even dismissed. Ellul hopes to redirect attention to "the meaning of life."[160] This is key agenda for Christian leadership.

According to Aldo Leopold's land ethic: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."[161] While "biotic" refers to the living parts of an ecosystem, this discerning principle could apply to other networks and communities too, not just biological ones. And Ellul would surely approve.

The most important things Christians do — worship, prayer, theology, service — are "useless," serving "no purpose." Yet they are "testimonies to grace and ... an expression of freedom."[162] They are promising and hopeful.

I cannot help thinking of the enormous number of useful actions that push us closer and closer to disaster. Then I remember those other gestures (made by hippies and nonpolitical pacifists, for example) which are considered futile: prayers and "useless" solitary self-sacrifice. These acts enable our world to survive.[163]

We must insist on God-given practices with no measurable worth. Prayer is "a renunciation of human means."[164] It reveals radical reliance on God and helps us escape our technic-dominated milieu; it gives other perspectives.[165] It promises deep change; it is a

radical break, a more fundamental protest.. All further radicalism, of behavior, of style of life and of action, can only have the prior rupture of prayer as its source. Precisely because . technological society is given over entirely to action, the person who retires to his room to pray is the true radical.[166]

In our age of "frantic activity," contemplation is "a truly revolutionary attitude .."[167] He continues: "If you would be genuinely revolutionary *in our society* ., be contemplative: that is the source of individual strength to break the system."[168]

Ellul worries about Christian leaders who prioritize technics; "the Church's responsible people (pastors, etc.), feel very much debased in a world of technique since they

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[159] *Prayer and Modern Man*, 99.
[160] *The Technological Bluff*, 358.
[161] Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford, 1989), 224–5.
[162] *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 197.
[163] *Reason for Being*, 191.
[164] *Prayer and Modern Man*, 30.
[165] *Prayer and Modern Man*, 172.
[166] *Prayer and Modern Man*, 174.
[167] *Autopsy of Revolution*, 285.
[168] *Autopsy of Revolution*, 286.

are not themselves specialists, and especially not technicians." Consequently, "embarrassed pastors also want to become technicians. They therefore practice psychoanalysis, group dynamics, social psychology, information theory, etc." Ellul insists on aspects of pastoring that are now often downplayed: "To obey a calling and then to preach, to direct a congregation, to take time for soul-searching — all this seems frivolous in a world of engineers and producers."[169]

Frivolous perhaps. But not as vain as all too many contemporary leadership emphases.

Theology and Economics: The Hermeneutical Case of Calvin Today by Roelf Haan

Wellington So. Africa: Bible Media, 2012. 181 pp; www.bybelmedia.co.za
ISBN: 978-0-86487-702-4; E-book: 978-0-86487-612-6;
Reviewed by David W. Gill
David Gill is Professor of Workplace Theology & Business Ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary near Boston MA.

Roelf Haan is a native of The Netherlands and has a PhD in economic sciences. He has worked for the Ministry of Finance in The Hague and the IMF in Washington DC. He is Professor of Economics at the Free University of Amsterdam and is the author of many books including *The Economics of Honor: Biblical Reflections on Money and Property.* He is a long time student of Jacques Ellul's thought and a member of the IJES.

John Calvin, argues Roelf Haan, has been wrongly blamed (or credited) with modern capitalism. In part because of Max Weber (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Calvinism*, 1905*)* and R. H. Tawney (*Religion and the Rise of Capitalism,* 1926*)* it has been assumed by many that modern capitalism has its roots in Calvin. Drawing on both the work of Calvin expert Andre Bieler, *The Social Humanism of John Calvin*, and on Calvin's own writings, Haan makes clear that contemporary capitalism has little or nothing in common with Calvin's economic thought. What we actually need is more of the real John Calvin's thought to counter the dysfunctions of our era.

We do, of course, have a hermeneutical challenge in reading Calvin five centuries later, in a very different context than his Geneva. Still there are some key contributions Calvin makes to economics. Here are some of the points Haan brings out of Calvin (with many quotations!):

1. Economics is not about personal gain or profits but about the common good
2. Markets are not "self-regulating" but need to be subordinated to the Word of God
3. History is dynamic not static and the Christian ethic gets worked out in life more than in theory

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[169] Jacques Ellul, "Work and Calling," trans. James S. Albritton, in *Callings!*, eds. James Y. Holloway

4. The natural environment must be cared for as God's stewards, not abused and exploited

5. Wealth is a blessing from God if it does not harm others or become idolatry for those who have it 6. Property is not a purely individual thing; all property belongs to God and should be stewarded responsibly

7. The poor should be cared for, not rejected or scorned

8. Work is or ought to be participation in the work of God in the world; the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 is a good example

9. Work is not determined or legitimized by having an income attached to it

10. Trade is good but must resist fraud, robbery, and deceit.

Haan devotes a whole chapter to Calvin's approach to usury (charging interest on loans) with comments on how mortgage practices and international debt plague our world today. There is, Haan argues, ample reason to return to this ancient debate. In short, Calvin does not suggest that all interest should be banned but that justice must prevail and no exploitation of the poor should be tolerated. It is a very different thing for the well off to borrow and pay interest for their investments or luxuries.

Haan reflects on the evolution of Reformed economic thought and practice over the succeeding centuries with figures like Abraham Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd, and Jacques Ellul appearing in his pages.

Ellul's chronicle and assessment of the technological revolution is largely affirmed by Haan. Haan closes with some comments on what theology (and Calvin) can bring to today's economics. He quotes Einstein's famous saying that the thinking that created a problem is unlikely to be able to solve it. Economics needs the input of theology.

Theology and Economics could have benefited from a copy editor and designer to get chapter and page numbers in place, eliminate Roman numerals in footnotes, etc.. But this is a welcome contribution from a fine thinker, well experienced in the trenches of economics and extremely literate in history and theology. This book is a much needed corrective to the mythology of today's Christian capitalists and a great companion piece to Ellul's writings on money and economics..

Jacques Ellul: L'esperance d'abord

by Stephane Lavignotte
Lyon: Editions Olivetan, 2012. 105 pp. pb. www.editions-olivetan.com
Reviewed by David W. Gill
David Gill is Professor of Workplace Theology & Business Ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary near Boston MA.

Stephane Lavignotte is pastor of Maison Verte, a Reformed Church of France congregation in the 18th arrondissement of Paris. Before becoming a pastor Vignotte was

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and Will D. Campbell, (Toronto: Paulist Press, 1974), 32.

a journalist on radio, television, and in print. He has been especially concerned and active in caring for the environment and assisting undocumented folk in Paris. This little volume subtitled "First of all, hope!" is not available in English —but just maybe it should and will be some day. It is part of a series of books "Figures protestantes" which includes Bonhoeffer, Calvin, Luther, Zinzendorf ... pretty famous company!

Lavignotte locates Ellul's work in its historical, biographical, ecclesiastical, and social/cultural context. He does a good job distilling down Ellul's thought into chapters on Technique/technology, Money/mammon, Propaganda/information, Hope/contradiction, and Ethics/life-style. Lavignotte probes and interacts with about twenty of Ellul's books and several articles and some important secondary sources by Jean-Luc Porquet and Patrick Chastenet. I did wish for some reference to Ellul's work on politics and his important books on the *Humiliation of the Word* and *The Ethics of Freedom* but otherwise this is a very nice introduction within the 100 page space limitation.

Lavignotte is deeply appreciative of Ellul's thought and sees him as a prophet and an iconoclast, challenging us to dethrone all idols and break with the closure of this technological world. What I also valued from Lavignotte was his refusal to elevate Ellul to untouchable sainthood but rather to question and disagree where he felt it necessary. Two examples of this were homosexuality and Islam. Lavignotte scolds Ellul for some rash comments about AIDS as the penalty for an obsession with sex by gays. So too, Ellul suggested the expulsion from France of immigrants promoting Islam (pp. 17, 73–74). These brief comments don't do full justice to Lavignotte's discussions. But I certainly agree with him that Ellul sometimes wrote too harshly and perhaps was not consistent in the application of his views. What we have here is an engaging, thoughtful introduction to Jacques Ellul by a caring friend.

21ˢᵗ Century Propaganda: Thoughts from an Ellulian Perspective

by Randal Marlin
Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada
Randal Marlin has taught in the Department of Philosophy at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, since 1966. In 1979–80 he won a Department of Defence Fellowship supporting a year at the University of Bordeaux where he studied under Jacques Ellul. In 1982 he translated and published *FLN Propaganda in France During the Algerian War* (By Books, Ottawa). His earlier career path took him from Princeton (B.A., 1959) to McGill (M.A., 1961) to Trinity College, Oxford, the University of Aix-Marseille, and Toronto (Ph.D, 1973). He is the author of *Propaganda and the Ethics of Persuasion* (Broadview Press, 2002; 2ⁿᵈ ed, 2013) and editor of *Propaganda and the Ethics of Rhetoric* (Ottawa: Carleton Centre for Rhetorical Studies, 1993). He served as Guest Editor of the on-line *Global Media Journal — Canadian Edition,* Vol. 3, No

2, December, 2010. His "Propaganda and the Ethics of WikiLeaks" appeared in the 2011 issue of *Global Media Journal — Australian Edition,* Vol 5 No 3. He continues to be active locally in community affairs and civil liberties issues.

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Just as Jacques Ellul presented himself in many different guises to the public, so also there are many different ways to be "Ellulian" in the 21st Century. One could do the work of a sociologist, theologian, historian, political scientist, newspaper columnist, local activist, and in each case adopt recognizable patterns of thought and action that hearken back to Ellul's own work and thought. "Ellulians" are attracted to his thought for different reasons. For some of us it is the breadth and scope of his vision of the world, integrating science with religion, law with morality, teaching with social work, while always preserving a concern for the individual, caught up in so many modern systems with their dizzying demands on our daily lives, snuffing out our spontaneity in the process.

There is no one thing identifiable as "Ellulian" unless it is, paradoxically, a resistance to any form of cookie-cutter identity, including that of slavishly conforming one's activity to some supposed model of behaviour or thinking identified with Ellul.[170] He has certainly provided us inspiration for the new century, and many of the problems he observed in his own time and predicted for the future are with us now, some of them more urgently than ever before. There are many different perceptions as to how one might be "Ellulian," but it would be a great mistake to think that one could reasonably regard oneself as "Ellulian" simply because one agrees with his diagnosis of what is wrong with the modern world. There is the further question of how to act, about which he had very definite things to say.

Take for example the case of Ted Kaczynski, the so-called "Unabomber," who killed people by letter bombs starting in 1978. Unquestionably, he echoed some of the ideas of Ellul concerning the technological society and he specifically mentions having read *The Technologcal Society.*[171] Had Kaczynski also read Ellul's *Violence*, he would have seen how, despite a large measure of agreement about how the technological imperative has shaped our modern consciousness and turned us into willing slaves, sending letter bombs to kill or maim those taking part in that imperative was not an appropriate response.[172] The main and simple reason is the Christian premise underlying all of Ellul's thought. But there was also Ellul the sociological and political analyst, who saw that such acts, far from damaging the technological system, only strengthen its worst aspects. Just as with the events of 9/11, the result is to induce fear and create

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[170] The paradox I refer to has been commented on many times, recently by Frederic Rognon, "Jacques Ellul: Une pensee en dialogue,"(Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2007) 19.

[171] From *The Atlantic online,* June, 2000: "After he graduated from Harvard, Kaczynski encountered a book by the French philosopher Jacques Ellul, The Technological Society (1954) ..." Kaczynski recalled: "Here is someone who is saying what I have already been thinking."

[172] Perhaps he did read "Violence" but disagreed with it. I have no knowledge, one way or the other.

support for new security initiatives, new technological devices to further reduce the scope of human freedom.

So we have one very clear idea of how *not* to be Ellulian in the 21ˢᵗ C. Kaczynski, though a brilliant mathematician, appears to have been short on sociological and moral perception. His killings were supposed to awaken a public consciousness that would turn against modernity and view favourably his own back-to-nature vision of how to live. But his actions showed little empathy for his victims, suggesting a defective moral awareness, and his aim of transforming society was not achieved. To the extent he thought his actions would succeed he demonstrated inadequate sociological understanding.

To be a true Ellulian, then, requires not just an understanding of his diagnosis of what is wrong with the world. It also demands at least a minimal respect for the constraints he places on morally acceptable action. Based on the teachings in *On Violence,* there is no justification for killing people as Kaczynski did. Where is the love shown to the victims of Kaczynski's bombings?

Whether one chooses to identify with institutionalized religion or not, the message of love, so central to Christianity, is essential to the message that Ellul has tried to impart, both through his writings and the example of his civic engagements. To be an Ellulian means to involve oneself in social action in a way appropriate to one's abilities, guided by a realistic assessment of the problems of one's time and the likely chances of succeeding with this or that well thought-out response. But this has to be combined with a love even for the perpetrators of the evils one sees around us. The American cartoonist Walt Kelly famously had one of his Pogo characters say "we have met the enemy and he is us," and it is true that in the course of raising a battle-cry against the perceived social villains of our time we may be contributing to the very evils that we see around us. We may decry the producers of waste products and climate warming gases, but if our habit-formed needs provide a market for such services we share the blame.

My own interest is primarily in Ellul's insights into the phenomenon of propaganda, and I will pursue here three themes. The first is how propaganda in the 21ˢᵗ Century shows few signs of slackening in kind or quantity compared with the previous century. The second is that despite all the tools available for combating corporate and political propaganda there is evidence of age-old human weaknesses working against the successful use of these tools for bringing about a better and more just world. The third is a question: how should a conscientious person act to counter harmful propaganda? Is it sufficient to educate people, to let them know about the forms of manipulation so they can resist their influence? What are some of the pitfalls that prevent or undermine effective social action?

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The word "propaganda" needs first to be defined. I use the term here in somewhat negative sense to refer to communications by an organized group designed to influence the thought, actions and attitudes of others in ways that suppress or bypass their ability to view what is conveyed from an adequately critical, rational standpoint. As a matter of usage, the word "propaganda" has a neutral as well as the somewhat pejorative meaning in the definition I have just given. In the neutral sense one simply talks about propaganda as getting messages across and influencing the public with nothing to suggest any kind of deception. But the word has come to take on sinister connotations, and I want to provide a definition that accounts for the negative perception of the word. Ellul captured an important strand of negativity by linking the word to communications aimed at gaining or maintaining power over others. This definition has its own valuable insights, but I want to emphasize the aspect of dupery as distinct from control, even though the two may go hand in hand.

The use of propaganda is no less evident in today's world than it was in the last century. Governments and corporations have numerous advisers to help with marketing of products and policies. The electoral appeal of a political candidate, party or policy is measured carefully by widespread use of polling techniques. All that Ellul noted in the way of government by imagery is no less true today. Currently in Canada there is outrage over the use of "robocalling" (automated telephone messages) to influence and in some cases suppress votes for given candidates on election day. Voter suppression works by determining which voters are likely to vote for a rival party, and then pretending to be calling from the rival party's headquarters with an insulting and annoying message, perhaps deliberately waking up the targeted person at night. It is a way of disaffecting such voters and getting them to decide not to vote for that rival party and perhaps not to vote at all. Another tactic is to pretend to be an elections officer informing all voters in a given area that the polling station has changed its location.

Analogous techniques were used to get Richard Nixon elected in the previous century, as Republican "dirty tricks" operatives such as Donald Segretti would discredit rival candidate Edward Muskie by sending out slanderous messages purporting to come from his office, so that he was viewed as the author of the slanders.

In today's world the computer-assisted knowledge about people's tastes and proclivities, derived from search engines and robotic recording of the sites visited through the use of a given computer allow for sophisticated profiling where a person and a given computer can be matched. Use of Facebook, Twitter and the like provide those with the appropriate technical knowledge the opportunity to build profiles of individuals that can be used for targeting them with messages designed to appeal to their profile for commercial or political purposes.

In 1980 Ellul lectured about the coming recording of human deeds and misdeeds in a way that would never be effaced, and how this might affect human behaviour. He saw a time coming when "happy forgetfulness" would be a thing of the past. Today

already some Facebook users have reason to worry about how some earlier indiscretions, recorded for amusement among friends, might be used by hostile groups to discredit them later should they seek political office. Politicians have had reason to regret some of their Twitter messages that later became public. Hostile propaganda can be expected to seize upon anything that will discredit individuals seen as a threat to powerful interests. Eventually the effect of such propaganda will be to reduce our ability to communicate spontaneously with our friends, especially so as the post 9/11 mood has allowed governments to practice unprecedented surveillance on ordinary citizens.

Not only governments, but unscrupulous private hacking of telephones and computers has given media owners great power to destroy the reputations of politicians or other individuals when they see it as in their interest to do so. The unfolding saga of Rupert Murdoch's power through his huge worldwide media holdings is providing insight into this, as the scandals associated with *News of the World* have come to light and an embarrassed Murdoch directed the paper to cease to exist.

There are other areas where age-old propaganda techniques reappear in a way adapted to the latest technology in the current century. Product placement, the practice of including products in a movie or television production so that viewers will unconsciously link the product to the setting, and presumably become favourably disposed to it, is widespread in North America today. The practice of government or corporations making videos that have the appearance of independently produced news reports but are actually tilted to favour the government department or corporation in question is another example of a surreptitious way of influencing the public. The Tea Party movement in the United States, very conservative-libertarian, may have the appearance of a spontaneous, grass-roots movement, but behind it is funding by the Koch brothers, David and Charles, who have energy and other interests that they would like to see protected from adverse government regulation or taxation. The general practice of using other organizations as a front for one's own interests began already in the 19th Century, but as the public relations industry has grown and prospered, so has the practice of disguising sources of information and persuasion.

The flip side of positive propaganda is the negative one of curtailing information that might adversely affect a corporation's fortunes or a governments ability to rule in ways that it sees fit. Currently in Canada the federal Conservative government led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper has clamped down on access of journalists to government scientists — so much so that recently it came to light that "minders" would be assigned to them when they attended conferences and the like where they might be interviewed by media. One may recall how during the Cold War I.F. Stone thwarted government attempts to persuade the U.S. public that a test ban treaty with the USSR couldn't work because too many listening posts would be required to detect an underground test. Stone interviewed a government seismologist who showed how one such test was in fact picked up by their own listening posts at over a thousand miles distance, completely discrediting the official story.

The force and techniques of propaganda are still around and evidently increasing since the last century, as many other examples could show. But so also are techniques for combating this propaganda. The question, to which we now turn, is whether the latter can and will be effectively employed. Once again, Ellul has some sobering thoughts to bear upon his question.

II

In the 20th C. much effort was expended among progressive groups to counter the trend toward monopoly or oligopoly of the major news media. These efforts largely failed and Rupert Murdoch has gained enormous influence in Britain and the United States with ownership of the high-end *Times* of London and the *Wall Street Journal,* as well as the low-brow but mass appeal media that include the *Sun* and the *News of the World* in Britain and Fox News in the U.S.

The arrival of the Internet has given a widespread opportunity for voices dissenting from mainstream media to be heard. Some impressive work has been done on sites like Truthout, Alternet, Consortium News, TomDispatch and by individual bloggers to counteract the pictures of reality supplied by the dominant media. As an example, one regularly sees in the mainstream press discussion of a pre-emptive Israeli attack on Iran, without serious questioning of the assumption that Iran is seeking to build a nuclear bomb. The assumption deserves to be questioned, as the International Atomic Energy Agency report of

November, 2011, stops well short of such a conclusion. The translation or mistranslation of one of Ahmadjinedad's statements, that Israel was destined to be "wiped off the map," is likewise misleading in sounding like a call to arms rather than a prediction of what fate has in store.

The hold of the major media on younger people of university age has decreased over the decades, as social media take up more of their attention. The power of independent communication methods made itself felt with the Occupy Wall Street movement that began in September 2011. Major media ignored the movement until sheer numbers and police arrests forced them to cover the actions. Protests were directed against an array of injustices, among them a system where banks and the investment community can get bailouts when they are financially over-extended as a result of gambling with fancy packages of mixed risk mortgage-backed securities. Ordinary investors were misled about the degree of risk, and pension funds suffered losses, whereas the financial industry in some cases profited from the collapse of poisonous mortgage securities by engaging in bets against them through a device known as "credit default swaps."

The problem, well recognized by Ellul, is in sustaining people's attention. The injustices of the financial system have been described but as Ellul noted in *The Political Illusion* the pure fact has no power on its own. It has to be "elaborated with symbols before it can emerge and be recognized as public opinion." As Ellul observed "Only

propaganda can make a fact arouse public opinion, only propaganda can force the crowd's wandering attention to stop and become fixed on some event... "[173]

Back in 1980, Ellul drew attention in his IEP lectures to the difficulty of sustaining the momentum of environmental concerns. As he pointed out public opinion comes and goes in waves, like fashion, and the petroleum shortage scare in the early 1970's did not prevent the arrival of gas-guzzling SUV's in the 1980s and 1990s.

It seems then that Ellul's diagnosis and prognosis of social action to bring about a more just and sustainable society has to involve the kind of image-making and dupery that those who profit from socially dysfunctional activities engage in. This conclusion is unwelcome, because it suggests an end-justifying-the-means approach that is ethically unsatisfactory. Several things need to be said about this:

1. Not all image-making is unacceptably and misleadingly simplistic. The Occupy movement's attention to the apparently different rules for the 1% as against the 99% is an effective attention retainer that has a reasonable basis in reality.

2. Abandonment of the high ground in the unequal battle by seekers of justice against exploiters is tactically inadvisable, because the privileged class will seize upon any moral deviousness and compromises to discredit the reformers. Sure, they may be much more devious themselves but who will tell the people about this? You may reach a few with your message, but your opponents will reach many more. The example of Julian Assange has shown how the messages of the WikiLeaks that he created can be drowned out in the media by attention to his own reported improprieties or worse in his private life. The ability of the dominant powers to repackage imagery of a given kind in ways that have an opposite impact should not be underestimated. The WikiLeaks revelations allegedly made by PFC Bradley Manning, dealing with U.S. actions in Iraq and Afghanistan gave viewers a glimpse of the sordid side of

such actions, as video footage (later dubbed "Collateral Murder") from an Apache helicopter showed the shooting and killing of civilians, including news reporters, a woman and two children, one of whom was to survive. The WikiLeaks commentary accompanying the sequence has been faulted on the ground that it did not give adequate attention to background context and to an exchange of gunfire that had taken place earlier and not far from the shown shootings. In this way the footage can be claimed, with some justification, to be propaganda (in not telling the full story). WikiLeaks has also been blamed for revealing the names of people working in secret to bring democracy in Zimbabwe, thereby putting their lives at risk and setting back the chances for democracy in that country. Manning and anyone following in his footsteps has then to face the branding of himself as a traitor to his country. Curiously, the public appears able to accept Daniel Ellsberg as a hero for leaking the Pentagon Papers revealing the deceptions about the prospects for victory in Vietnam, whereas that possibility for Manning and his similar revelations about Afghanistan and Iraq seems to have been thoroughly suppressed in mainstream media discussions.

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[173] Jacques Ellul, *The Political Illusion,* (New York: Random House Vintage Edition V-812, 1972),

3. There are alternative, clearly ethical strategies for combating unethical propaganda. One of these is education. Informing young people especially about the different ways in which people are duped and enslaved by the well-developed techniques of propaganda is an important step towards liberation. Propaganda unmasked is to a large extent propaganda that has been neutralized. A lot can be accomplished through education, but the educators will have to be alive to the latest techniques and strategies employed by the propagandists, and this will involve time and effort.

Another ethical strategy is the formation of educational groups. One person is less effective than a group at analyzing propaganda and communicating the results to wide audiences. Jacques Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau are good role models for this kind of organization as well as for their teachings and writings. The opportunities in today's world for communication through social media are enormous, and a perceptible change has taken place in the information and propaganda environment as a result. What the mainstream media may choose to ignore can be archived and re-accessed on one of the alternative Web sites.

But as people enter into a world of mass communication through their own networks it is important for them to learn some principles of ethical communication if their influence is to have lasting value. Ellul has very interesting things to say about this, couched in the language of what a good Christian should do, but non-believers should have little difficulty in adapting his insights to fit their own religious faith or lack of such.

III

Some remarks Ellul makes in *False Presence of the Kingdom*[174] are interesting for their bearing on ethics in propaganda wars. A central principle of persuasive rhetoric is to provide a credible source in support of one's claims. For this reason it has become fairly common practice for pharmaceutical companies, to take one example, to seek some reputable scientist sign his or her name to a scientific study endorsing a new drug, even though the scientist may have had minimal involvement in the study. Hence the rather scandalous reference to "author to be determined" in the case of some studies.[175] Naturally, anyone who can plausibly show that God endorses some plan or policy will have a lot of persuasive power among believers in God. Yet Ellul emphatically denounces the practice of bringing religion into politics in this way.

There are too many ways in which reasonable and good people can differ in their judgments about the best principles or policies to apply in governing a country. To present religion in a way that makes it seem to provide unequivocal support for one

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[174] Jacques Ellul, *False Presence of the Kingdom,* trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972).

[175] A Carleton University philosophy colleague, Rebecca Kukla, brought this issue to my attention in her 2007 Marston LaFrance lecture at Carleton.

and only one of a contested set of political choices would be to falsify religion. As Ellul remarks, "The Church, and Christians generally, have clearly no competence in economic and political problems properly so called."[176] The strategic move of enlisting Church authority may achieve some success at gaining followers for a cause, but it mixes up the proper roles of both religion and politics when this is done. Policies are disputable, but a commitment to the basic premises of a given faith is all or nothing. The effect of treating politics as one would religion is to demonize those with whom one disagrees. This prevents proper dialogue from taking place. How do you reason with the devil? Similarly, treating religion as one would politics turns the religious so-called commitment into something less than full commitment. It is of course important to have a dialogue about religion as well. But it is not the kind of thing that lends itself to continual reassessment in the light of changing fortunes, as we may infer from the case of Job.

A central passage where Ellul sets out his teaching on Christian duty in connection with the use of agitative propaganda for advancing a cause is the following:

The appeal to public opinion looks like a good tactic. As a matter of fact, it always results in the frightful entangling of political situations, for when public opinion is aroused by means which are nothing more than propaganda it is no longer capable of rendering political judgment. All it can do is follow the leaders.[177]

It is normal, he writes, for those who see the "struggle of interests and classes not only as a fact but as something to be desired, as something favourable, as an instrument of war" to want to stir up public opinion. But "for those who are exercising on earth the ministry of reconciliation [this tactic] is inadmissible."[178]

These are strong words, telling the Christian that propagandistic methods to advance a cause about which he or she may be passionate are not permissible. Ellul realizes that by denying his Christian audience the path of propaganda he will be interpreted as a defender of the status quo. His defence against such a charge is that there are other avenues for bringing about liberating political changes, or as he puts it "another mode of entry for Christians." Here it is important to recall the context of his writing, which was in the immediate aftermath of the bloody Algerian war of independence, in 1963. The passions set in motion by unrestrained propaganda by the different factions supporting or opposing French domination there became an obstacle to finding a solution with hope of a lasting peace. In that light the passion of his following statement becomes understandable: "That is where we should apply *all* the thought, all the charity, all the creativity, all the insight of which Christians are capable."[179]

As I understand Ellul, he is not saying that the Christian should eschew effective rhetoric for awakening public opinion to injustices. On the contrary, it is important

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[176] Ellul, *False Presence of the Kingdom,* 184.
[177] Ibid., 194.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid., 194–5.

to speak out against trends that may have disastrous outcomes, to warn people when they ignore dangerous looming threats to future wellbeing. All of this is a matter of enlightenment. The problem comes at the point where the public has become engaged and passions are taking over on a given issue. At that point the role of the Christian (and, I would say, decent people whether or not they happen to embrace the Christian faith) should be to preserve the openness and respect toward those one judges to be "the enemy" on a given social issue, with a view to ensuring that a full dialogue is preserved and an opponent's position is not misconstrued.[180]

The foregoing remarks are of a general nature, and it will be helpful to illustrate some of the problems of engaging in ethical persuasion, as against unethical propaganda, with reference to a particular example. I choose that of bottled water, a matter of considerable environmental concern, because of the difficulties posed by empty plastic bottles accumulating in landfill, producing chemicals than can leach into and contaminate a water supply. There are also costs of collection, transportation, and in the case of recycling the costs of transforming the plastic into the same or some other usable product. While there may well be occasions for legitimate need for bottled water, in most industrialized countries the water can be more efficiently delivered, and in a more environmentally friendly way, by a system of pipes from water source to treatment centre and from there to homes, schools, office buildings, etc.

With this very brief background, I want to turn to a recent exchange in a magazine and widely circulating newspaper in Canada in which the Roman Catholic faith and its post-2007 teachings were brought into play in controversy regarding the purchase of bottled water. It started with the perception by a philosophy professor at a British Columbia Catholic college that those opposed to the use of bottled water provided by private companies for profit were demonizing those who make and consume these products, and that this was not appropriate charitable behaviour for a Christian. Treating water consumption from plastic bottles as heinous and sinful as distinct from an unsound ecological choice was excessive, in his view. This seems like a good Ellulian move, but he took the further step of making some tendentious interpretations (to my mind, at least) of a passage in scripture to support his case. His argument was picked up by an executive in a water bottling company, Nestle Waters, in Toronto, where attempts were being made to ban bottled water from Catholic schools. He used those arguments in a letter to the Toronto *Globe and Mail* with the evident intention of promoting a more favourable view of his company's products. I then reacted to what I saw as propaganda supporting an environmentally unsound activity and had my own letter published the next day. This led to a direct response by the executive to me, in a letter delivered by snail mail, with a copy sent to the publisher of the *Globe and Mail.* I responded by e-mail to the executive and the newspaper publisher, citing

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[180] The 19th Century cleric and philosopher Richard Whately had similar views about the ethical conduct of controversial discourse. I describe his ideas in *Propaganda and the Ethics of Persuasion,* (Peterborough: Broadview, 2002), 164 ff.

information about the harms of plastic bottles in landfill, costs of recycling etc. The executive has promised information about how recycling in Canada is superior to that in other places, and I await that information before saying anything more about the substantial, underlying issue.

I use the example to illustrate Ellul's point that while strong moral suasion might be important and justifiable in a case such as this, the enlisting of the religious language of sin to demonize opponents crosses a line that should not be crossed as long as the issue is sufficiently confused in people's minds that they are unsure about the facts and rightly see their individual action as affecting the public good only in a very minor way. Quite apart from the matter of charity and simply from a practical point of view, one is likely to be a more effective persuader if one treats an opponent as a good, decent person who happens to be informationally challenged on a particular issue than if one treats the person as evil and sinful.

The passage from scripture that the professor, C.S. Morrissey, chose to cite was about Jesus accepting water from a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (Jn. 4–5, 15). He was breaking a Jewish taboo in doing this but in Morrissey's view if Jesus's request has any political implication, "it would be that Jesus respects private property."[181] In the same way that Jesus broke the taboo of his time, Morrissey says, "we should not endorse the bottled-water crusaders' misguided notion that to drink from a corporate bottle makes us despicable and ritually impure." As a check on the tendency of people to condemn others, this seems to me defensible.

But to quote Morrissey's remarks, as did John B. Challinor, Director of Corporate Affairs for Nestle Waters Canada, in the context of a policy decision by a local school board seems to me to go beyond the meaning and intention of those remarks.[182] He quoted Morrissey as referring to how the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church said that the provision of water may be justly "entrusted to the private sector." That says nothing about the specifics of bottled water delivery and the selective presentation of this one fact gives the impression that Church teaching is on Nestle's side, when a full appreciation of the ecological facts might well lead to the opposite conclusion.

Looking at this situation, and wanting to put readers straight on the matter of this distortion, what is an Ellulian to do? I believe Ellul himself was sufficiently concerned about the limited space and energy on our planet to want to encourage measures that would preserve and conserve our land for productive use, reduce air and water pollution, etc. So much so that, while combating religious zealotry on a policy matter such as anti-bottling, he might otherwise have favoured strong habit-cultivating measures such

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[181] C.S. Morrissey, "Confusing economic ideology and the Church's social witness," *B.C. Catholic*, December 11, 2010.

[182] John Challinor, "Water into whine," letter, *The Globe and Mail,* April 20, 2012. See also: Randal Marlin, "Bottled Sin," *The Globe and Mail,* April 21, 2012.

In response, John Challinor II sent a letter by regular post to Professor Randal Marlin, April 23, 2012, received April 30, 2012.

as the Toronto School Board was considering. For those who want to learn more about the specifics of this issue some information published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* should be interesting and useful.[183]

The lessons I want to draw from this exchange are the following. First, in today's highly propagandized environment, knowledgeable people may need to be careful how they argue, because their remarks may be seized upon by special interest groups to promote business or political activities that their arguments were not intended to promote.

Secondly, before challenging the spokesperson for a major corporation make sure that you don't misstate any facts or make false claims, because any such mistake will be seized on and you credibility will be destroyed. Fortunately, the Internet has provided the huge service of make a super-abundance of factual material available. How long this will last, I don't know, but while the Internet is as it is the ordinary citizen finally has an effective way of countering propaganda of many different kinds and from many different sources.

Thirdly, do not overstate the religious dimensions of a given issue. I believe that a good Christian should have as an ideal that of promoting the common good, and it does make sense to encourage others to make less use of plastic bottles, but turning users into subjects fit for ostracism strikes me as at odds with Christian charity and excessive. As in so many things the best approach is to create awareness of the facts pertaining to such use. Kierkegaard was very clear about this. You don't engage in effective persuasion by telling another person that they sin when they drink bottled water. Much better to talk about so-and-so who discovered certain environmental costs to bottled water and who as a result reduced his or her consumption of it.

Behind all this trend toward bottled water consumption is the propensity of propagandees to be mesmerized by brand names, like Nestle, that have become so much a part of their lives. The myth of progress colours their thinking to the point where they feel that somehow, science will find a solution to landfill problems, to pollution and contamination problems. Bottled water is indeed a convenience, so that there is a desire among users to believe that no harm is caused from its use, and statistics about recycling efforts give a further sense that science is solving whatever problems bottled water caused some time in the past or in some other country. Ellul knew all about the myths and preconceptions favouring the propagandee's acceptance of consumption practices that run counter to the public good. His views are helpful for counteracting propaganda in the 21st century no less, and possibly more than, the previous century.

I've chosen this example because provides an illustration of some of the pitfalls of engaging in public controversy on a matter where propaganda plays a role. Some of the lessons can usefully be applied to other issues of even greater moment, such as those of war and peace in the Middle East, injustices in Israel-Palestine relations, etc.

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[183] Jared Blumenfeld & Susan Leal, "The Real Cost of Bottled Water," *The San Francisco Chronicle,* February 18, 2007.

Here Ellul may be right to see the more fundamental question as one of the ability to avoid demonizing opponents as a way of coming to a measure of understanding and empathy, and from there to possible solutions. It helps, to do this, to reflect on how we would react to someone else demonizing us when we happen merely to lack some vital bit of information on an issue.

http://www.commondreams.org/views07/0218-05.htm

See also Ecology Center, Berkeley, "Seven Misconceptions about Plastic and Plastic Recycling." Downloaded May 2, 2012. Available at: http://www.ecologycenter.org/ptf/misconceptions.html.

A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Care for Animals.

Edited by Tripp York & Andy Alexis-Baker
Cascade Books, 2012. 183 pages, pb
Reviewed by Cristina Richie
Boston College

Cristina Richie is an ethicist and theologian in the Boston area. Her work primarily focuses on sexual ethics, ecology and bioethics. In 2013 her essay "Building a Framework for Green Bioethics: Integrating Ecology into the Medical Industry" won the Catholic Health Association (CHA) Annual Theology and Ethics Colloquium graduate student essay contest. Ms. Richie has been published in over half a dozen peer-reviewed journals and she regularly presents her work at conferences. She has previously worked as a lecturer in Bioethics at Tufts University (Medford, MA.) and is currently pursuing a PhD in theological ethics at Boston College.

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"Meat is murder, milk is rape" is the rallying cry of radical vegetarians and vegans in the developed world. Although the contributors to *A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Care for Animals* never use this phrase, it captures the overall sentiment of the second volume in The Peaceable Kingdom Series by editors Tripp York and Andy Alexis-Baker.

The premise of this book is laid out in the subtitle "addressing commonly asked questions about Christian care for animals." More specifically, the book focuses on common questions modern Christian vegetarians receive about their choice to not eat meat. The book does not cover issues of animal "care" relating to the living conditions of endangered animals or circus animals; creatures bred for pets or held in captivity; protocol surrounding animals kept for experimentation; or even the mass manufacturing process of dairy farms in the United States. Instead, attention to dietary choices

comes across passionately throughout the chapters. Authors are careful to delineate between factory farmed animals slaughtered and consumed and wild animals killed and consumed by indigenous populations who have no other means of survival (p. 68). The authors build their argument for moral, religious vegetarianism using Scriptural exegesis as the starting point.

The injunction to a plant-based diet in Genesis 1:29 is a staple of Christian vegetarian apologetics. Notably, all the authors who make use of this Genesis text take it as a literal record of what actually transpired at the beginning of the world. This is surprising considering the ramifications of interpreting other neighboring parts of Genesis literally, such as the possibility for rampant procreation and planetary domination (Gen. 1:28); male headship (Gen. 3:16) and, of course, the difficulty in reconciling Darwinian evolution with God's compartmentalized creation (Gen. 1). Building a case-for or against-vegetarianism based on select passages in the Bible is problematic because of a profound cultural distance between biblical times and our own world.

While trying to push a vegetarian ideology into Scripture has made some chapters into a sort of interpretive gymnastics (ch. 5), pushing a carnivorous agenda into Scripture is equally absurd. The latter is addressed in chapters refuting claims to meat eating based on the Hebrew sacrificial system (ch. 3), the maritime Galilean community (ch. 6) and St. Paul's words regarding weak faith (ch. 8).

It would seem that in terms of diet, both carnivores and herbivores come out scratch when looking to the Bible for justifications of their eating habits. On both counts Christian ethics cannot rest on Scripture alone when Scripture does not specifically address the complexities of modern food choices. The difference in the use of animals for sustenance occasionally and by a small number of people, who slaughtered their own livestock in the Bible, is not equivalent to the mass-produced animal bodies for food consumed by nearly the entirety of the developed world today. Nonetheless, Christians have very good moral, rational reasons for opposing the slaughter and consumption of animals aside from Scripture. These arguments emerge in the brightest chapter in the book and are especially appealing to vegetarians who most often are advocating and defending their pacifist food choices against secular society, not fellow Jesus-followers.

The most impactful chapter comes late in the book and should be read first in the collection of essays since it contextualizes the urgent situation in which vegetarians-Christian and non-are writing from today. Chapter 11 focuses on animal suffering and factory farming, guiding the reader through the grisly trek that a pig makes from factory farm to dinner plate. Using Catholic social thought to make an argument against cooperation with wrongdoing, John Berkman writes with a prophetic conviction, calling a spade a spade. After enumerating the conditions of animals in factory farm he plainly states, "There's simply no moral justification for continuing to buy and consume cruelty pig meat. Doing so is ignorance, laziness, or gluttony, or perhaps all three" (p. 136). In addition to Berkman's chapter, an essay on ascetic vegetarian practices (ch. 14) round out a Bible-heavy book. Utilizing Scripture, reason and tradition to build a case for vegetarianism balanced the book while also allowing Christians from

any denomination to identify with the overall objective of the collected essays. Yet the vegetarian who is already convinced of her position will be left with many questions.

Some topics that were missing in this edited volume included a serious interrogation of Christian vegetarians on points of the tension between "hospitality" (ch. 7) towards a carnivorous pet and the morally objectionable practice of purchasing pet food with meat in it; the line that each vegetarian draws between creatures we care for and those we kill (i.e. bugs or insects); the implications of a plant-based diet both for the environment, since rice is a major contributor to carbon emissions, and for the often unjust working conditions of other humans that harvest grain, vegetables and fruits to be exported to the developed world. Deep reflections are often beyond the questions Christian vegetarians field when defending their food choices and therefore this book cannot be culpable for what it did not set out to do, but vegetarians and vegans need to ask themselves further and more reflective questions. Moving beyond defense and towards offense would have been a boon to persuasive arguments for carnivores to become vegetarian and for the vegetarians reading the book-who are surely a majority of the audience-to re-evaluate their commitment to animal care. These perhaps could be addressed in another volume and have certainly been picked up in the various publications of the authors as a collective.

Overall, the book accomplished its goals on several fronts. Its short chapters were easy to read and the bibliography helpful; it covered a breadth of troublesome biblical passages and balanced biblical ethics with reason and tradition; and it had an impressive diversity of established and new scholars and intellectuals from a variety of racial and denomination backgrounds. This book is a step towards the difficult and emotional discussion of animal treatment in the developed world. Especially where Christians are concerned, a faith that looks first to the God-ordained meaning of each creature, rather than an anthropocentric (or even biocentric) view of creation is essential. The pilgrim journey to Christ cannot be strewn with the dead bodies of sentient beings consumed and discarded for human convenience. Instead, a gradualist or virtue ethics approach allows each disciple to move closer to moral betterment. It is time for Christians to reflect: "if we have been made 'in God's image,' may we not be expected to live by the law God gave us, rather than pursue the cannibalistic patterns loose in Nature?" (p. 147).

Understanding Jacques Ellul

by Jeffrey P. Greenman, Read Mercer Schuchardt, & Noah J. Toly
Cascade Books, 2012. 184 pp. pb.
Reviewed by Jacob Van Vleet
Jacob Van Vleet is Professor of Philosophy at Diablo Valley College in northern California. He earned his Ph.D. in Philosophy and Religion from the California Institute

of Integral Studies in San Francisco with a dissertation on Jacques Ellul's dialectical thinking (forthcoming in 2014 from Fortress Press). His primary academic interests include Asian and Western comparative philosophy, particularly ethics and the philosophy of technology. He is the author of Informal Logical Fallacies: A Brief Guide, *a critical thinking textbook used at various colleges and universities.*

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Three Wheaton College (Illinois) professors, have provided us with the latest contribution to Ellul scholarship, in their book, *Understanding Jacques Ellul.* This work is intended as an introduction to Ellul, written for those first encountering him. In a systematic and clear manner, Greenman, Schuchardt and Toly offer some of the most important themes weaving throughout Ellul's sociological and theological writings. The work is presented in eight chapters, each representing a key concept, theme, or cluster of ideas essential to understanding Ellul.

Chapter one gives a succinct overview of Ellul's life and thought, highlighting his conversion, political and ecclesiological involvement, and his academic career. There are two particular strengths of this chapter. First, the authors correctly present Ellul as one who was equally influenced by both Karl Marx and Karl Barth. This influence cannot be underestimated, and is absolutely vital when approaching Ellul. Second, the authors remind the reader that Ellul was and is considered an "outsider" to academic philosophers, sociologists, and theologians. His work, though scholarly and profoundly insightful, is unorthodox, idiosyncratic, and always challenges the status quo. For these reasons, the authors remind us, Ellul ever remains on the "margins" of institutional academia.

In the second and third chapters, Ellul's understanding of technique, media, and propaganda are introduced, along with their ethical and spiritual entailments. When explaining concepts such as these, it is necessary to provide updated examples and illustrations that clarify Ellul's arguments and worldview. The authors succeed brilliantly in this regard, showing us that Ellul's thought is more relevant now than ever.

Ellul's sociological and theological conclusions regarding the city, politics, and economics are presented in the fourth and fifth chapters. In their discussion of the city, the authors rely primarily on Ellul's *The Meaning of the City*, while utilizing a "miracle and martyrdom rubric" as well as an insightful distinction between "faithfulness and success" as explanatory tools. By employing these tools, Greenman, Schuchardt and Toly provide much needed clarity and insight into Ellul's understanding of the city. The authors also explore Ellul's analyses of political and economic systems, explicating his views on capitalism, socialism, and the relationship between the political and economic spheres. The high point of this section is found in the discussion of the relationship between money and necessity, a helpful but all too brief consideration.

In the sixth chapter, Ellul's view of scripture is examined. Here Ellul's idiosyncratic and unpredictable hermeneutical methodology is explained in the best of all possible ways: by using various examples from Ellul's own work. This gives the reader an illuminating glimpse into Ellul's understanding of the Word as *living* and *active*; as the

spoken and existentially encountered Word, which continues to transgress traditional hermeneutical boundaries.

Ellul's views on morality and ethics are the subjects of the seventh chapter. The strength herein is the discussion of Ellul's distinction between "technological morality" and "Christian ethics." The first is a moral system bound to quantification, instrumental human value, and ultimately, necessity; the latter is guided by faith, intrinsic human worth, and is motivated by an absolute freedom in Christ. The authors explain: "Following Barth's lead, Ellul affirms that genuine freedom is always freedom for God and is always oriented toward service of God" (135).

Understanding Jacques Ellul concludes with a discussion of "exotic involvement" as an explanatory descriptor for Ellul's unique life and work. For the authors, "exotic involvement" is comprised, on the one hand, of Ellul's outsider approach and reception in academia and activism. On the other, it suggests an unconventional posture toward the world, including a radical openness to the voice of God, "... allowing God, and not the world, to set the agenda for reflection and action" (160).

Greenman, Schuchardt, and Toly have provided the reader with a highly useful and insightful presentation of key themes, concepts, and arguments found in Ellul's work. The primary criticism of this engaging book is that it is too brief, often merely scratching the surface. The authors don't interact much if at all with Ellul's many essays and articles and their discussions do not acknowledge or build on the widely available work of Ellul scholars such as David Gill (Ellul views on Scripture, ethics), Carl Mitcham (technology), Cliff Christians and Randal Marlin (communications, propaganda), Darrell Fasching (religion, ethics), Bill Vanderburg (technology), David Lovekin (philosophy, technology, methodology), Daniel Clendenin (methodology), Andrew Goddard (ethics), Patrick Chastenet (politics), et al. Furthermore, the authors do not discuss Ellul's views of universal salvation, non-violence and they only superficially discuss Ellul's concept of dialectic — ideas I believe are fundamental to Ellul's work.

Criticisms notwithstanding, the authors succeed in leaving the reader wanting more discussion and explanation of Ellul's ideas and theories. And this was precisely the authors' intention: to encourage the reader to excitedly delve deeper into Ellul's inspiring activism and prophetic scholarship. Undoubtedly, *Understanding Jacques Ellul* accomplishes this important task.

Issue #54 Apr 2014

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The Sacred, the Secular and the Holy:

The Significance of Jacques Ellul's Post-Christian Theology for Global Ethics
by Darrell J. Fasching

Darrell Fasching is Professor Emeritus, University of South Florida, Tampa, Founding Editor of the *Ellul Forum* (1988–2000) and the author of *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Mellon, 1981) and many other works.

Technique, Globalization and Apocalypse

In the beginning was the word, and the word gave birth to technique, for through language humans are able to imagine new worlds and devise the means create them. Among the earliest techniques to be invented were the techniques of agriculture which gave birth to the city through the domestication of plants and animals. Technique gave birth to the city, and then, in turn, the city became the midwife of all further techniques of the human, making possible over the centuries the emergence of the technological phenomenon, the comparative selection of the most efficient techniques in every area of human development. And with the self augmenting autonomy of technique came globalization –a global totalism that, according to Ellul, threatens the disappearance of our very humanity. What drives this totalism is the sacralization of technique which domesticates us to its necessities by promising us utopia. Seduced by the utopian ideology of the technical society that promises to fulfill our every hope and dream we have surrendered our freedom and autonomy. So Ellul tells us: "The stains of human passion will be lost amid the chromium gleam" and we will have the luxury of a "useless revolt and of an acquiescent smile (*The Technological Society*, Vintage Books, Random House, 1964, pp.426–427)."

Globalization is the product of the growing interdependence of cultures through emerging global techno-economic and socio-cultural networks that the technological phenomenon requires. This process generates a generalized apocalyptic anxiety –an uneasy sense that the world as we have known it is coming to an end. In a world of instant global communication and jet travel, time and space shrink and force a new awareness upon all the inhabitants of the earth. For these networks transcend local and national boundaries, and in the process they decenter and so challenge all previous forms of authority and identity, both religious and non-religious.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
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

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Are full of passionate intensity.

("The Second Coming" p. 91, in *The Selected Poems and Two Plays of William Butler Yeats*, edited by M.L. Rosenthal (New York: Collier Books, 1962).

William Butler Yeats, in his poem *The Second Coming,* written in just after WWI, aptly captures the apocalyptic postmodern mood created by an emerging global civilization. Yeats' description became even more apt after WWII, for the appearance of the atomic bomb united the world in a common dread –the dread of an apocalyptic global nuclear annihilation. After two world wars, the apocalyptic anxieties of decentered civilizations, each seeking to shore up its sacred way of life against the further invasion by other sacred ways of life via global media, global corporations and global travel, gave birth to new age of global terrorism. The global terror of nuclear annihilation of the late 20th century driven by the standoff between the USA and the USSR gave way to new terrorist permutations. The most notorious of the new terrorists, Osama bin Laden, who sought to explain his 9–11 attack on the twin towers of New York city in terms of the sacred and the profane, arguing that his goal was a global campaign to put a stop to the violation of the sacred lands of Islam by the profane West.

Western colonialism and two world wars forced globalization on human consciousness. In his 1979 book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (University of Minnesota Press, translation 1984, French 1979) Jean-Francois Lyotard provided a vocabulary by which we could explain to ourselves what was happening. Decentering, he said was a mark of the collapse of the world's great metanarratives.

Even before we humans knew we lived on a globe we sought a global understanding of our humanity. As with the ancient philosophy of Stoicism's attempt to foster a global cosmopolitanism by asserting that to be human was to share a universal "logos" or "reason," the great religions also aspired to universality suggesting that what all humans have in common is God, or Brahman or Tao or Buddha nature (cosmic interdependent co-arising) etc. These religions offered what Lyotard called metanarratives (cosmic myths) that formed transcultural civilizations: Hindu civilization, Buddhist civilization, Jewish, Christian and Islamic civilizations. And then there is the most recent metanarrative — the utopian myth of scientific progress (whether in its Capitalist and Marxist versions) which came in the wake of the Enlightenment and secularization.

Each of these civilizational metanarratives provided a normative center defining what it means to be human. Globalization forces the clash of all such metanarratives and as a result, decenters all of them. Globalization and postmodern culture are two sides of the same coin in which apocalyptic rhetoric aptly catches the mood of the collapse of these metanarratives. The great cities of the world have become microcosms of the religious and cultural diversity of the globe. In the wake of WWII, the borders of civilizations interpenetrated as a result of mass media, global corporations and international travel and provoked and expressed this apocalyptic panic in anti-colonialist reactions to the totalism of dominant metanarratives, often turning poetic apocalyptic

angst into literal apocalyptic scenarios in places like Iraq, Afghanistan and New York City (Sept. 11, 2001).

Globalization created the postmodern city. Our great cities have become decentered or rather pluricentered. The collapse of a metanarratives does not mean they disappear but that they function differently. All the great metanarratives still exist but now they are typically found side by side in every great city. They do not provide a center for the life of the culture as a whole but for individuals and their subcultures. Consequently the public order of postmodern cities has no single sacred temple at their center, spinning a grand all-encompassing narrative which holds all things together. Rather, like Disneyworld and Epcot, different historical and cultural worlds exist side by side in postmodern cities without an integrating center. They are held together instead by technological networks operating behind the scenes. Ultrapostmodern cities like Las Vegas reveal most obviously the underlying reality of all great cities in a global civilization. The city has become eclectic and normless.

Nietzsche, in his vivid parable in *The Gay Science (1882)*, tells of a madman entering the city square to announce the "death of God," suggesting that this is like the earth being cut loose from its sun: "Whither are we moving now,? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? (*The Gay Science*, 1882 in *The Portable Nietzsche*, pp *95–96*, ed. Walter Kaufman, Viking Press, 1954 & 1968) Expressing the sense of a loss of center that came with the emerging global consciousness of the 19th century, nurtured by the invention of the social sciences, especially critical historiography and cross-cultural ethnography (anthropology), all metanarratives seem to him to have collapsed. Each culture had believed its metanarrative described the normative sacred order of the universe. Now, laid out side by side by the techniques of socio-historical consciousness, their very diversity showed each to be a relative human construct. The social sciences did not just report the death of God, they provided the knife with which God was murdered. In such an apocalyptic world, Nietzsche argued, norms would have to be replaced by the will to power and the transvaluation of all values.

Nietzsche said his madman/prophet came too soon but the reality he described was on its way. By 1965 that reality became manifest when the first human beings walked in space and for the first time viewed for themselves the truth of the world as a globe –sending back images from space for all the earth to share. Cut loose from the earth these astronauts experienced Nietzsche's vertigo. Free floating in space, tethered only to their spacecraft, which way was up? Which way was down? The integral links between technique, globalization and apocalypse are summed up in this image. The movement from the Book of Revelation's description of the order of the cosmos collapsing as the sky disappears "like a scroll rolling up" (Rev 6: 12–14) to the loss of horizon by the early spacewalkers breaking free of the earth's gravity and the postmodern sense of loss a center in our great cities around the world sums up the history of civilization in a nut shell.

Ellul's Post-Christian Ethics –Deconstructing the Sacred

Ellul's work can be understood as an exercise in postmodern, post-Christian theology. *As Lyotard explained, postmodern does not express an historical period so much as a style of thinking.* If postmodern represents a decentered style of thought, post-Christian, represents a decentered style of thinking about the role of Christianity in society. Its role is not to dominate from the center, creating a "Holy Roman Empire" but to subvert throughout the diaspora and transform from within through decentering strategies. Globalization tends to make decentered thinking a dominant trait of our time, nevertheless such thinking can be found here and there throughout history and is at least as ancient as the story of Babel. Indeed, biblical thought tends to be decentered from the very beginning of the Torah, in the book of Genesis, which offers us two alternative stories of creation. This decentering is repeated when Christianity offers us four competing gospels. Perhaps Origen was right when he said that it was the Holy Spirit that put contradictions in the stories of the Bible in order to force us beyond the most superficial literal meaning of the Bible to grasp the deepest level of spiritual meaning.

Tension, contradiction, deconstruction –these are the fruits of the Christian way of life. In the second century Tatian constructed the Diatessaron, the first attempt to harmonize the four gospels into one story. This attempt was rejected by the early church, preferring tension to synthesis. As in the Christian Gospels so in the Christian life, for Ellul the point is not to resolve the tensions but introduce tension and maladjustment as a limit on the totalism of the technicist way of life. Ellul's style of thinking is decentered through and through. His work as a sociologist and as a theologian seemed at first to be the product of dual personalities unrelated to each other. But gradually the two separate authorships were revealed to be part of a larger strategy not of synthesis but of deliberate tension and contradiction. Ellul describes his total critique of technological civilization as a "science of the city" that occurs at the disjunctive juncture of his sociology and his theology. Like Kierkegaard, his authorship offers a thesis and an antithesis but no synthesis. His "science of the city" interfaces a sociology of the sacred with a theology of the holy.

The key distinctions of this science –the sacred, the secular and the holy –were developed between 1946 and 1954. They evolved from the *Theological Foundation of Law* (1946) through *The Presence of the Kingdom* (1948) to the linking of the sacred and the demonic in *Man and Money* (1953 — dates for the original French editions). But it is only two decades later, in his 1973 book *The New Demons* (*Les Nouveaux Possedes*), that he maps out the terrain of the sacred and the holy in a way that decisively illuminates his strategy of juxtaposing the sacral necessities of technology with the desacralizing or sanctifying power of the scriptural Word of God theologically explicated. I consider *The New Demons* the Rosetta Stone of Ellul's authorship –for the first time bringing sociology and theology together in one book. Yet his purpose is not synthesis but the creating of a tension between the two by adding a "Coda for Christians" to his sociological analysis of the religiosity of the technological society.

All of this prepares the way for his crowning theological work, *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation* (*L'Apocalypse:architecture en mouvement*, 1976) where he tells us that the Greek word for judgment, *krisis,* means "to separate" which is the act by which God creates –separating light from darkness, the heavens from earth, land from water, etc. Separation decenters and deconstructs our worlds, the way God's judgment of Babel decentered and deconstructed the totalism of Babel's one language and singular technological project. The *New Demons* and *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation* show that Ellul's apocalyptic thought grasped the task of postmodern "deconstruction" in a unique brand of religious postmodernism.

In *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), Giovanna Borradori published 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 it into a new liberating configuration. This is an apt description of Ellul's science of the city as well. Steps one and two are what Ellul accomplishes when he analyzes the sacralization of technique sociologically, dividing the world into sacred and profane. Steps three and four are accomplished when he responds theologically and ethically and transgresses, and so sanctifies and secularizes the sacred in the name of the holy, introducing apocalyptic hope and the possibility of freedom and justice into the technicist society.

Justice is not a word that immediately comes to mind when I think of postmodernism. For years I dismissed deconstruction as irresponsible relativism. In the hands of many of its practitioners it probably is. But I 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, he said, 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 — they are, he argues, 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. Ellul is a religious postmodernist. His religious postmodernism is able to deconstruct the endless dialectic of absolutism and relativism (the totalist temptations that feed each other in a technicist civilization) that plagues secular postmodernism and so exorcise the "new demons" of the postmodern world. (See my book, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima:*

Apocalypse or Utopia? (SUNY, 1993) which argues that this dialectic of absolutism and relativism is the underlying dialectic generating the Janus faced bipolar sacral myth of apocalypse/utopia that feeds our embrace of technical necessities. See also, *Religion and Globalization,* Oxford University Press, 2008 –coauthored with John Esposito and Todd Lewis)

For Ellul, the sacred makes a virtue out of necessity in which our utopian hopes deliver us into some literal apocalyptic self-destructive destiny. Today, technique replaces nature as that new realm of necessity that surrounds and overwhelms us and on which we depend for our very existence. It takes the place of nature as the realm of the sacred –the object of our fascination and dread. So a technical society creates a morality that both requires our obedience (always choosing the most efficient solution) and helps us adjust to those requirements by fostering the political illusion of being in control, even as psychological techniques are used to enable us to be "well adjusted" to our society's requirements. The sacred promotes a morality of efficiency under the guise of a rational ethical system which demands our obedience in order to fulfill our wildest hopes and dreams for utopia.

Given the totalism of technicism in an age of globalization, we might wonder whether a Christian can (or even should) cooperate with others, religious and non-religious, in creating a global ethic? Ellul's understanding of Christian ethics opens up a clear path for such trans-cultural and even interreligious cooperation. Decentering goes to the heart of Ellul's view of Christian ethics. Ellul argues that ethics must never become a rational system to which we conform. Ethics does not require unquestioning obedience but the questioning of unquestioning obedience. For Ellul, there is no such thing as a Christian ethic. Christians, like other human beings on the face of the earth, do have a pragmatic need to create an ethic, but such an ethic is always provisional human invention. Christians have used many such human inventions, borrowing from Plato, Aristotle, Kant, etc. But the Christian life is rooted not in some rational system of calculation but in the spontaneous inventiveness of life in Christ, who works in us to will and to do (Philippians 2:13) That inventiveness is the result of the Spirit that blows were it will, so that when we act, it is "I , yet not I, but Christ in me" who acts (Galatians 2:20). Ellul would agree with Augustine -love and do what you will –and also Aquinas, who describes Christian virtue as God working in us without us. The good to be done is God's will as given to me in the moment, in the situation I am confronted with that forces me to invent a response.

Nechama Tec, a sociologist, in her book, *When Light Pierced the Darkness* (Oxford University Press, 1986) studied those who rescued Jews in Poland during the Holocaust. She gives us good insight into ethics as *invention in the moment.* She tried to find the common denominator among all the rescuers. Did they share a common economic status; perhaps a common educational background, or maybe they were all devout church-goers? As it turned out it was none of these things. In fact going to church was more likely to make one anti-Semitic, since "the Jews" were often portrayed as the "bad guys" in the Gospel stories and the sermons based on them. It turned out the

one thing she could find that rescuers held in common was a sense of "alienation" –of being a stranger among one's own. This was hard to isolate because for one person this alienation might be due to having a physical disability which made one feel different than others. For another it might be growing up feeling as if one were the least favored child in the family. And yet another might say he or she grew up feeling less adept at sports than their peers. -and so on.

What is common to all these experiences is "alienation" –the experience of not fitting in and so being an outsider or stranger. Consequently, when strangers showed up at their door looking for rescue these rescuers spontaneously identified with them and took them in without agonizing over the decision. Samuel and Pearl Oliner, in their book, *The Atruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (Free Press, Macmillan, 1988) conducted some 700 interviews trying to understand holocaust rescuers in comparison to their non-rescuing peers. They noted that 90% of the rescuers rescued one or more complete strangers, 76% said their motive was empathy or compassion, often described as an inner compulsion. They note that 70% acted within minutes of being asked for help, and 80% consulted no one.

The rescuers actions reflected the fundamental truth of biblical ethical insight – remember welcome the stranger and love the stranger for "you know how the stranger feels" for you too were once strangers –in the land of Egypt (Exodus 23:9, Deuteronomy 10:19). This call to remember what it is like to be a stranger illuminates the ethical insight essential for the invention of a global ethic.

In the biblical tradition, the most frequent commandment is to welcome the stranger, for by doing so one welcomes God, or God's messiah, or a messenger (angel) of God without knowing it (Genesis 18:1–5; Matt 25:35; Hebrews 13:2). The core of the command "to remember" creates an *empathic analogy*. In different ways we all experience being a stranger at some time in our life (often many times) and so we know what it is like to be a stranger. Jesus' restatement of the Pharisaic teaching, that we ought to do unto others as we would have them do to us, is grounded in this narrative tradition.

The call to remember that we were once strangers is a call that decenters us and our "religion" so that we can grasp the truth of the story of Babel. We do not find God at the center of our society in some sacred temple we have built to celebrate the idolatry of our own identity. That idolatry is built on the presupposition that all of us who share the same language and world view think we can annex God to bless the worship of our own self-image. Given the centrality of the biblical command to welcome the stranger (repeated more often than any other command in the Torah), the moral of the story of Babel is that we find God not through uniformity of thought, belief and technique but through our encounter with the stranger. God confuses the language of the citizens of Babel not to punish them but to redirect their quest. You find God not by building a tower to heaven but by turning to the stranger who does not speak your language and is not like you. God is not found in sameness but in difference. As Isaiah suggests, God is the ultimate stranger whose thoughts are not our thoughts and ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:89).

If we follow Ellul's sociological analysis, in a sacred society one expects to find God at the center, in the sacred temple that reinforces ethnocentric identity. In such a society, all who are the same are sacred and human, all others who are different are profane and less than human. Since we have moral obligations only to other human beings, the stranger can be excluded and dehumanized. But the biblical tradition of the holy is anti-ethnocentric. It decenters our expectations and insists that God cannot be found at the center of our society, or even at the center of our religion, but only outside of it –in the stranger, the one who is not like us. That is the message of the story of Babel that is reinforced at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descends upon the nascent church. When strangers from all over the Roman empire gather, each speaks his or her own language and yet each is understood by all (Acts 2:1–13). The Holy Spirit does not require that we all be the same but reveals God in difference and invites us to invent whatever action will honor that reality.

Hospitality is the direct embodiment of the holy. *Hospitality is the north star of global ethics. Any two or more religious and/or cultural traditions that emphasize hospitality to the stranger are able to work together synergistically to sanctify society, that is subvert and secularize the sacred order that would divide us.* By recognizing the humanity of the one who does not share our identity as the one who brings God into our lives, hospitality decenters us. Speaking as a Christian, we only bring Christ to the stranger when we go out seeking to meet Christ in the stranger. Whenever we welcome the stranger, we welcome God or God's messiah and God is all in all. (See my book on hospitality and universal salvation, *No One Left Behind: Is Universal Salvation Biblical?* (Authors Choice, 2011), an updated version of *The Coming of the Millennium: Good News for the Whole Human Race* (Trinity International Press, 1996). While the sacred sacralizes society and divides the world into the sacred and profane, the holy desacralizes or secularizes and so sanctifies society, rendering it secular and open to the diversity of the whole human race (1 Timothy 4:10). But contrary to Max Weber, secularization is not a permanent accomplishment. The world can remain secular only through the constant iconoclasm of the holy. Without that constant subversion of the sacred by the holy, the secular itself becomes a new sacred order –that is the main argument of Ellul's *The New Demons.*

When I wrote my dissertation on Ellul under Gabriel Vahanian's direction in 1978, I sought to do what Schleiermacher said was the task of the exegete –to understand the author better than he understands himself. I argued that Ellul advocated the rehabilitation of the sacred with respect to "revolution" but seemed inconsistent in regarding "utopianism" as beyond the pale of such rehabilitation. With the aid of Karl Mannheim's book *Ideology and Utopia* (1936; Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc.) I showed that apocalyptic thought can and often has been utopian, and that in fact Ellul's exegesis of the apocalyptic tradition and the ethics of apocalyptic hope can be interpreted, on his own premises, as leading to a rehabilitation of utopianism. For Ellul, the *Book of Revelation* is a mirror for understanding and acting in the world here and now. It is not about changing worlds but about changing the world.

When I sent Ellul my book, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (1981, Mellon Press – a revised version of my 500 page 1978 dissertation), Ellul wrote me to say "you are quite right on the subject of Apocalypse and Utopia." Moreover, he added that he was objecting to the popular use of the word "utopia" by "modern intellectuals" while, by contrast, he found Vahanian's use of "utopia/technique to be "very convincing" (personal letter to me, May 2, 1982) In Ellul's book, *The Humiliation of the Word* (1985; translation of *La parole humiliee*, 1981) we see evidence of this when he speaks for the first time about a positive meaning for the term "utopia." There Ellul argues that: "projects, utopias, intentions and doctrines –all these belong to the order of truth, and are known and created by the word (p. 230)." Given his past merciless critique of "utopianism" this was a startling statement.

As with his rehabilitation of "revolution" it seems one can say of "utopia" also, that "whoever receives the revelation of God should give heed to men's hope, not in order to tell them that they are deluded ... but to help them give birth to their hope" (*To Will and To Do*, p.81). As Ellul argues in *The Ethics of Freedom* (French two volume edition, 1973 & 1975, English translation 1976), Christian ethics does this in three ways that lead to global ethics: 1) dialogue and encounter, (2) realism and transgression, and (3) risk and contradiction. The first is not about getting together for some academic discussion of our similarities and differences (whether religious or political) but discovering these by joining together with all other human beings who are struggling to create a better world. Christians, oriented by an apocalyptic hope, do not place their hope in "this world" of politics and technique and so can work with others to transgress the sacred awe that conforms us to "this world." Such transgression opens the technicist society it to its utopian possibilities. So Christians can and should work together with others of diverse religious and political views to invent those actions which will enable all to contradict the present order, not so much to overturn it as to transform it, so that freedom and justice are possible within it. In my view, these are exactly the tactics created by Gandhi and embraced by Martin Luther King, Jr. in the civil rights Vietnam era that gave birth to one of the first movements in global ethics.

Ellul's apocalyptic critique turns out to be both deconstructive in Derrida's sense and utopian in Gabriel Vahanian's sense. And as such, it opens the door to the participation of Christians in the invention of a global ethic that might assist in helping human beings of all religions and cultures give birth to their utopian hopes.

Global Ethics as Subversion of the Sacred: From Ellul to Gandhi and King

In the age of Enlightenment, Kant adopted the Stoic strategy and sought to transcend the "irrational diversity" of the world's religions by appeal to the universality of reason. In the view of many, that experiment appears to impose a Western rationalistic totalism on the globe. An alternate strategy was explored in Chicago in 1993 when the one hundredth anniversary of the *Parliament of The Worlds Religion* was celebrated by holding a second parliament. The holding of these two Parliaments is itself an expression of the solidifying global consciousness of humanity in all its religious diversity. Unlike the first Parliament, which focused on sharing ideas, the second sought to for-

mulate a "global ethic" that all religions could agree to. The second Parliament sought to emulate the United Nations declaration of Human Rights created in

1948 in response to the atrocities of World War II, symbolized by the mass death produced at Auschwitz and Hiroshima. The U.N. did not explicitly base it declaration of rights on religious beliefs and practices. The Parliament, however, sought to do just that and, in the process, balance human rights with human responsibilities in a world of global interdependence.

Neither Kant's attempt nor the Parliament's attempt is entirely satisfactory. The first ends up imposing a new totalism and the second reduces ethics to whatever consensus we can agree on. Morality can be defined by consensus, ethics cannot. In Nazi Germany people agreed that killing Jews is good. However, something cannot be considered ethically good just because we agree that it is. Ellul would agree with Socrates, ethics is the questioning of what we commonly agree is good (the sacred), asking as Socrates did: Is what people say is good really good?

Ellul's understanding of ethics is faithful not only to the biblical tradition of the holy but also to the spirit of Socrates, for whom ethics is also a human response to the experience of the holy. To the degree that we can separate Socratic thought from the thought of Plato, it is clear that Socrates does not offer us an ethical theory but lives the ethical life by responding to his *daimon* –a guiding spirit sent by "the god" who never tells him what to do but only warns him when he is plunging off in the wrong direction. Otherwise Socrates is left to his own discretion to invent a way of life centered in the wisdom that comes from questioning all things. Socrates tells us that it is his *daimon* that compels him to question and sends him as a gadfly to Athens, asking the troubling question –is what we say is good, really good? Socrates describes this as his religious vocation and it is one that gets him arrested, tried and executed for (1.) impiety toward the gods who render the Athenian way of life sacred and (2.) corrupting the youth by teaching them to question the sacred authority of that way of life. Socrates is accused of being an atheist but says that cannot be since he is being compelled to question by a God other than the gods who sacralize the Athenian way of life. He comes, he suggests, not to destroy the Athenian way of life but to elevate it to meet the demands of justice. To put it in Ellul's terms, Socrates comes "to rehabilitate the sacred in the name of the holy" –where the holy is construed as the Unseen Measure (the infinite) by which our humanity is measured.

In a similar fashion Ellul says he questions the sacred way of life of technological society, not in order to destroy this society but secularize it and so rehabilitate the sacred in order to meet the demands of the holy. So he insists, the Christian serves alongside of others seeking a revolutionary transformation of the technical society not in order to tell them they are deluded but in order to desacralize and so sanctify the city, so as to help others realize their utopian dreams. Ellul's post-Christian or decentered approach to ethics opens a path from Christian ethics to a global ethics of dialogue, transgression and contradiction.

It is desirable for religious communities around the world to identify shared understandings of what constitutes a "good life" across religions and cultures and promote that vision globally. But given Ellul's distinction between the sacred and the holy, we would not call whatever consensus we reached a "global ethic" but rather a "global morality." By a contrast, a global ethic would be a critique of all global morality - asking the Socratic question that challenges all consensus: Is what we claim is good, really good? Ethics in the Socratic sense, rehabilitates morality by questioning it by the measure of an Unseen Measure. Or in the biblical sense, questioning our morality by understanding ourselves as created in the image of a God without image. For the sacred by definition defines some as profane and less than human because "they are not like us." But the holy, as Gabriel Vahanian would say, is "iconoclastic," –being created in the image of a God without image we are all equal. No one can claim to "look more like God" than another" whether because of race, religion or nationality, etc. God is not the answer to all our questions but the question to all our answers. Our answers are always finite while our question are infinite –there is always one more question to force us to maintain our integrity and follow the questions wherever they lead, and so remain open to the infinite and further eschatological transformation.

Ellul argued that those who read his theology should not turn it into dogma but rather build on his analysis, or even challenge it, by thinking for themselves and inventing their own response to our common circumstances. In that spirit, my proposal is that a global ethic can emerge whenever and wherever two or more traditions emphasize narratives of hospitality to the stranger. For to welcome the stranger is precisely to recognize the humanity of the one who is not like me and does not share my story and identity. In the sphere of religion, Mohandas K. Gandhi appears to have lead the first such global religious ethical movement and that movement had a decidedly postmodern orientation. Gandhi tapped the advances in technology that created first global media (radio, telephone, telegraph, film and the international press) to garner international support for his campaign against British colonialism as a form of Western domination. At the same time, he also used the media to promote global interdependence and interreligious harmony. Gandhi thought globally and acted locally, and his movement (both in South Africa and later in India) attracted followers from diverse religions and cultures, showing that religious action can be decentered or multicentered and still promote human dignity.

Most importantly, Gandhi's own ethic of non-violent civil disobedience was forged through an international dialogue (as we have suggested) with the likes of Tolstoy and Jesus' teachings of the sermon on the Mount, even as Martin Luther King, Jr. developed his ethic through an international dialogue with Gandhi and the Gita. Gandhi and King exemplify the strategy of dialogue, transgression and contradiction. The strategy of civil disobedience was built on inter-religious global dialogue and sought to insert tension into a sacred society in order to transgress and contradict its order and so rehabilitate its sacred order to reflect the holy, replacing divisions of sacred and profane with the oneness of humanity. (See my *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative*

Approach to Global Ethics (Wiley/Blackwell, 2011 –co-authored with two of my former students, Dell deChant and David Lantigua).

In response to the reach of Western colonialism around the world, a global ethic began to take shape with Gandhi's challenge to the British empire's hold on India.. Then, in the next generation the Gandhian model spread. This occurred during the Civil Rights-Vietnam era in America. with the forging of a common ethic among the spiritual children of Gandhi –Martin Luther King, Jr., Abraham Joshua Heschel, Thich Nhat Hanh and, in his own way, even Malcolm X. This generation, following Gandhi, showed that a global ethic does not have to erase diversity. Rather through passing over and coming back, this diversity can create a synergy in which a common ethical coalition can form to transform the world without its members having to sacrifice their distinctive narratives and traditions. Each speaks his own language yet each is understood by all, finding in each other's lives models of ethical inventiveness.

My understanding of global ethics is embodied in the process that John Dunne in *The Way of All the Earth* (1971) calls "passing over" to another's religion and culture and "coming back" to one's own, finding and sharing wisdom through a global dialogue among those struggling for social justice. That dialogue is not one of those embarrassing, overly self-conscious, abstract academic discussions about how we are different or similar. It is rather the unselfconscious sharing of insight (from our diverse traditions) while engaged in the common struggle to transform the world. It is a struggle that leads persons like Martin Luther King, Jr., (a black Baptist preacher) Abraham Joshua Heschel (a Hasidic Rabbi) and Thich Nhat Hanh (a Buddhist monk) to form ethical coalitions in the 1950s and 1960s for subversive actions that will desacralize and sanctify society.

For Gandhi, ethics is not about obedience to rules but disobedience –a civil disobedience that subverts all rules in order to protect the freedom and hopes of every individual around the world. As I have noted, Ellul argued, that it is not the job of Christians to tell others that they are deluded in their hopes for a better world but to work alongside all persons, whatever their religious or philosophical commitments, to help them realize their hopes. A Christian, on this understanding, is committed to dialogue with all persons and the subversion of all totalisms that imprison and dehumanize human beings everywhere. And Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Thich Nhat Hanh embody Ellul's model of the holy as the experience that calls into question and desacralizes all totalisms by desacralizing and subverting their sacred orders through civil disobedience.

In the case of Gandhi, having gone to England to study law as a young man, he was introduced to the writing of Leo Tolstoy and 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 he 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 Gandhi read Hindu scriptures with new insight, interpreting the *Bhagavad Gita* allegorically (citing Paul's saying, the letter killeth but the spirit gives

life) as a call to resist evil by nonviolent means. And just as 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, so Martin Luther King, Jr., would later use the ideas of Gandhi in the nonviolent struggle for the dignity of black citizens in North America.

Gandhi never became a Christian and King never became 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. What they shared was the invention of a secular ethic in response to their experiences of the holy. In the lives of these twentiethcentury religious social 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 in matters of religion, truth may be 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— creating a global ethic. For Gandhi and King, ethical actions arise spontaneously out of their experiences of the holy. For each, such experiences desacralize the divisions of sacred and profane produced by the sacralization of society. Civil disobedience contradicts these divisions and so sanctifies society rendering it secular and so hospitable to all strangers.

The spiritual adventure initiated by Gandhi and King involves passing over (through imagination, through travel and cultural exchange, and especially through a common commitment to social action to promote social justice) 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 are a form of hospitality that enlarges our sense of human identity by embracing the stranger. 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 person's own tradition a new synergistic power. Each person remains on familiar religious and cultural ground, yet each is profoundly influenced by the other to insert an element of tension into society in the name of justice for the stranger.

By their lives, Gandhi and King demonstrated that, contrary to the fears raised by fundamentalists, the sharing of a common ethic and of spiritual wisdom across traditions does not require any practitioners to abandon their religious identity even as it subverts the fears of "secularists" that religion must always lead to a new inquisition — an new totalism. Instead, Gandhi and King offered a model of unity in diversity.

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One of the ways Ellul's work furthers this global synergy is by arguing for a Christian understanding of salvation as universal. Ellul's vision of universal salvation operates to subvert the Christian impulse to turn global ethics into a new totalism. The Christian temptation to totalism plagues Christian history from Constantine to the Inquisition and the global missionizing of the colonial period. This temptation has consistently derived its power from the ideology of evangelism as the task of saving all of humanity by converting all to share the Christian worldview. That ideology is a form of the totalistic ideology of Babel before its fall into the diversity of language and worldview, a totalistic ideology that Christians have repeatedly fallen back into throughout history. But Jesus' command was for Christians to be the salt of the earth, not to turn the whole earth into salt. Evangelism is not about making the whole world Christian but spreading the Good News of God's hospitality to the whole human race, not just "believers" (I Timothy 4:10 –See my book, *No One Left Behind: Is Universal Salvation Biblical? 2011,* or its earlier version

The Coming of the Millennium: Good News for the Whole Human Race, 1996.)

Both Gandhi and King, like Ellul, rejected the privatization of religion, insisting that religion in all its diversity plays a decisive role in shaping the public order of society. And like Ellul, both were convinced that only a firm commitment to nonviolence on the part of religious communities would enable this without society returning to the kind of religious wars that accompanied the Protestant Reformation and the emergence of modernity. Following Ellul's perspective, I would argue that a global ethic would be human invention created in response to the experience of the holy to help us keep our world open to further eschatological development, an apocalyptic anticipation of a new creation in which all peoples of the earth gather into a city without a sacred temple at its center, a postmodern city where all strangers are welcome and so God is all in all.

In *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation,* Ellul can be read as suggesting that God's true intention for the human city is revealed. The narrative of Revelation deconstructs the sacral imagination of the cities of the earth, summed up in the city of Babylon, by describing the destruction of these cities centered on their sacred temples and sacred ways of life. But before they are destroyed all their citizens exit these cities and "stand at a safe distance." (Revelation, Chp. 18, especially vs. 9, 11, 15, 17). Then the demons of the religious imagination that sacralize each city (and seduce the citizens of each to attempt to totalize their way of life in conflict with every other) are then consigned to the lake of fire.

In *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation,* Ellul describes the New Jerusalem as the reverse image of the fallen global city. For while the cities of the earth seek to totalize their respective sacred ways of life by the will to power, in the New Jerusalem, which has no temple at its center, all the tribes of the earth in all their diversity are gathered in and God is all in all. On Ellul's reading, Apocalypse is not about changing worlds but about changing the world. *The Book of Revelation* is an iconoclastic mirror for the world in this present moment. Even the contemporary postmodern global technicist city, once desacralized, becomes open to its truly utopian destiny as the City of God,

in which (to paraphrase the story of Pentecost) each speaks his or her own language and yet each is understood by all.

Silences: Jacques Ellul's Lost Book

by Yannick Imbert

Abstract: In this article, I shall attempt to show how Ellul tried to go beyond the dialectical tension between his sociological and theological works. This thesis, however surprising as it may sound to many Ellulian readers, is supported by the power and importance of poetry for Ellul. To do so, this article will draw some insights from Ellul's poetical work *Silences*. We will consider a few brief examples of how Ellul integrated in a single creative movement two aspects of his works he always claimed to be separate. In this way, poetry demonstrates who Ellul really was: *un homme entier* (a complete and consistent human being)

Bio: Yannick Imbert is professor of apologetics at the Faculte Jean Calvin (Aix-en-Provence, France). http://www.facultej eancalvin.frHe holds a postgraduate degree in Intercultural Management and Religious Mediation from the Institute of Political Science (Aix-en-Provence, France), and completed his PhD in theology at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia PA) on the philosophical and theological background of J. R. R. Tolkien's theory of fantasy writing. He is interested in the interaction between literature and faith, including the importance of the "word" in Ellul's works.

Introduction

Ellul often maintained that his works were to be seen as dialectically connected, each sociological work being intimately connected to, and answering to, a theological one. This procedure has led some to believe that Ellul's works could be thought of apart from one another, especially that one area could be thought of apart from the other. Ellul himself gave this impression when making his theological statements and convictions sound like merely personal convictions.[184] In doing so, he allows for the disconnection of his sociology and theology.[185] This, in part, is the result of his almost radically

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[184] Ellul explained: "I have thus been led to work in two spheres, the one historical and sociological, the other, theological. This does not represent a dispersing of interest nor does it express a twofold curiosity. It is the fruit of what is essentially rigorous reflection. Each part of my work is of equal importance and each is as free as possible from contamination by the other. As a sociologist, I have to be realistic and scientific, using exact methods, though in this regard I have fought methodological battles and had to contest certain methods. As a theologian, I have to be equally intransigent, presenting an interpretation of revelation which is as strict as possible, and making no concession to the spirit of the age." Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 44. Cf. Also Darrell Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1942), 9.

[185] Throughout his writings, readers become aware of the structural importance of what may be properly called "dialectical hermeneutics," which is the ground for the distinction of sociology and theology. Regarding dialectics, Fasching explains: "This biblical dialectic pronounces both the NO and

consistent dialectics. However, this brief study wants to challenge this assumption in looking at Ellul's poetry.[186]

This article aims to do so through the study of a book that, to the best of the author's knowledge, has never been studied before, namely, *Silences,* one of the two volumes of Ellul's poetry. *Silences* has been chosen rather than *Oratorio*, the second volume of Ellul's collected poetry, the latter being a poetical commentary of the book of Revelation, as Lynch indicated: "These poems, divided into five chapters, form a unified whole narrating Ellul's vision of the Apocalypse."[187] However, this article will focus on *Silences*, since the main thesis of this study is that all the works of Jacques Ellul are integrated in *Silences*, making this work a holistic presentation of his sociological and theological studies. In fact, *Silences* is a more integrative collection of poetry than *Oratorio*, and has a "wholeness" that more clearly takes its inspiration from all of Ellul's works.[188]

Ellul and poetry: Hidden secret of *un homme entier*

Poetry was always for Ellul an eminently mystical experience as well as, and far more profoundly, a way of discovering meaning and expressing deeper experiences of the world.[189] As he commented: "Poetry is the art form which pleases me the most and in which I find deep meaning."[190] The meaning conveyed in poetry is therefore first and foremost a personal one expressed in symbols, and even emotions, making discovery of meaning difficult for those who are not writers of poetry. It is almost as if poetry is written by the writer and for the writer's sake. In fact for Ellul, it is through poetical language that one discovers and explores one's status as *subject*. In his *Humiliation of the Word*, Ellul explains that through "poetical naming," one truly becomes a subject:

A poet is lying when he throws off language: "I said 'Apple' to the apple, and it answered me 'Liar.' And 'Vulture' to the vulture, who did not respond." Human

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the YES of God's word over the world. It brings both God's judgment and his grace into a dialectic which finds its fullest expression in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ." Darrell Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1942), 7.

[186] There has been not yet been any significant study of Ellul's poetry apart from a partial translation of poems taken from *Oratorio* published in *The Ellul Forum* [James Lynch, "The Poetry of Jacques Ellul: An Essay-Review & Translation", *The Ellul Forum* 22 (January 1999), 11–14] .

[187] Lynch, "The Poetry of Jacques Ellul," 11.

[188] *Contra* Lynch, "The Poetry of Jacques Ellul," 12.

[189] Ellul's poetry contains many historical (Chagall, poem 8; Belgian painter James Ensor, poem 47), mythological and literary references, rendering the reading/interpretation rather difficult. At times, the reference is more obscure as with the "reve de Clarisse" of poem 8. The "dream of Clarisse" is most likely a reference to the *Geste de Doon de Mayence* ou *Geste des barons revoltes,* an Old French romance [Cf. E. M. Wilmot-Buxton, ed., *Stories from Old French Romance* (New York: Stokes, s. d.), 100–119] . At other times the reference is left unclear as with the reference to Medea, the famous mythological figure taken from classical Greek tragedy, but possibly taken from Jean Giraudoux's adaptation of the same play.

[190] Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Religion, Technology and Politics* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 49. Some of Ellul's comments are reminiscent of Owen Barfield's study of metaphor in *Poetic Diction* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), a work that had a profound influence on J.R.R. Tolkien.

sovereignty is due more to our language than to our technique and instruments of war. One can claim or believe oneself to be free because of language. Naming something means asserting oneself as subject and designating the other as object. It is the greatest spiritual and personal venture.[191]

Indeed, the "word" was for Ellul one of the most distinctive abilities of human nature, since poetical language conveys one's deepest identity revealed through images and metaphors. Poetry itself makes, more than any other human activity or ability, a person "subject," or even really human. In fact, Ellul commented that the true power of poetry was to present the human mind with the necessary ambiguity that makes up our daily world. Poetry is a gift enabling us to see the world without giving away its beauty and ambiguity. No caricature, no simplifying: just poetry. Ellul writes:

The poetic contains paradox within it. You believe poetic language to be insignificant, a side issue in comparison with political and scientific talk? You are right, but poetry continually brings the uncertainty of ambiguity to our attention, along with double meanings, manifold interpretations false bottoms, and multiple facets.[192]

Thus, at the very outset of this article, we must recognize that poetry is for Ellul a holistic endeavor, one that cannot be dialectically considered, or better, poetry is the literary manifestation of dialectics. This would further entail that only in poetry is dialectical thought dissolved. Let us, by way of example, turn to poem 10 in which death is the obvious thematic center of the ten verses:[193]

O rigueur de la mort qui deja nous sous-tend arcature profonde ou repose la vie et secrete illumine, inflexive distend le geste le plus simple et l'offrande accomplie. Je connais mon destin mais ne l'accepte pas s'il me reste plus dans la paralysie que l'oeil encor ouvert pour voir venir la mort la reste cependant la valeur de ma vie

Je vis pour te nier mais je ne te rencontre et ne pergois que l'acte et la main superflus

What first strikes the reader is how death is described in the first two verses of this poem. The first characteristic is the rigor of death, through and in which no incertitude or possibility for anything else is left. Death is the beginning and end of all: it encloses man in a "system" from which there is no escape. Death is a necessity, clearly expressed in the second part of verse 1, "O rigueur de la mort qui deja nous sous-tend." Here death is symbolically compared to something that supports the life of man; death is the foundation of life, the *only* thing which remains when the life of man has ended. Ellul thus affirms that neither technology, nor politics, nor economy can sustain man's life. Death is the core of life—without death there is no life, and life takes its meaning from the immediacy of death.[194] With this statement about death's ultimate reality over human life, Ellul summarizes both his sociological observation and his theological conviction.

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[191] Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 52.

[192] Idem., 25.

[193] Since Ellul's poems have no titles, we have to refer to their page number.

[194] One might be tempted to argue on the basis of God's sovereignty over human history, thus saying that providence, and not death, is ultimate in human actions. However, for Ellul, there is no such thing

We also notice two contrasts in verse 3. First, death, secretive, nonetheless illuminates every action (*geste*) and every human active meaning (*offrande*). All of man's actions, even the simplest ones, and even human secular rituals (*offrande*), are included in death's double contrast. Every action is thus both veiled and revealed by the ultimate nature of death. To begin with, death is in a way secret, for it is hidden in every action, every second. In every moment of human life, death waits for its revelation. In this sense, Ellul's presentation of "secret death" is reminiscent of the futile, ephemeral, and provisory nature of human actions. This triple reference to human actions is closely paralleled to his view of, among other things, political actions. When every human action is futile and ephemeral, only death remains.

In that, death also serves as *revelation* (illumine) of itself and of human deeds: indeed, death, at the last moment, reveals its secret, that there is nothing in human life which death cannot dissolve. Further, every human action takes its meaning when compared to death. In affirming this ultimacy of death, Ellul is most likely offering a radical negation of the myth of human progress:

Thus, according to Qohelet, the human race does not progress... We remain

trapped in our condition, by our time and space. People today are no more intelligent than five thousand years ago. Nor are they more just, or superior in any other way.[195]

It is not technologies, political systems nor any other human action, that can reveal the ultimate result of human action, but only death.

In poem 50, a poem dedicated to another major socio-theological theme in Ellul, the city, the same importance of the term "secret" is stressed.[196] Verses 1 and 12 are opposed in their common use of "secret."[197] However, if both verses use the same word, their meaning is quite different. In verse 1, "secret" refers to the city and to the fact that the city itself reveals, albeit unwillingly, its own secrets ("shadows", end of line 2) through the lights and "eyes" of its own streets (verses 1 and 2). Hence, in the first verse, "secret" is used in a negative sense, because of its relation to the city and to the subsequent estrangement of man ("opprobrium", line 8). The "secret" is here what makes the situation of man in the city, tragic. In verse 12, by contrast, "secret" refers to the life of man—that is, to what is hidden in man, and by extension, to what is hidden by God. Man is a stranger in his greatest work,[198] but in the middle of his loneliness, in this very city, salvation will rise again, and the city itself will one day find its redeemed place as the re-creation of the original Eden.[199] There is a grammatical difficulty in finding the relation between verse 1 and verse 2.

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as divine direction of human actions: "History is not a product of God's actions... Praying for God's

[195] *Reason for Being*, 64.
[196] Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, especially chapter 5
[197] Verse 1: "Secretes, repliees, lampes, incognitos"
[198] Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 154.
[199] See Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, chapter 5.iii.

The second contrast, in verse 3b of poem 10, begins with the inflexible nature of death, that yet stretches (*distend*) out the meaning of all things.[200] Even though this verse establishes a second contrast, it is also likely that this second one is a parallel, a repetition of the first "illuminated secret" of verse 3a. The contrasts here are meant to stress the ultimacy of death and the order of *necessity*. The direct effect of death, then, is that through it every gesture, every ordinary action, is *illuminated*, and the true meaning and importance of ordinary things is *revealed*. But even more importantly, even the offerings brought to the modern gods are revealed by death as being vain, futile. Death brings all things to the prospect of the end of life. This no doubt has parallels in Ellul's commentary on Ecclesiastes, *Reason for Being.*[201]

In the second stanza, man comes to the forefront with his doubts and struggles. The tragedy of human life is well expressed in verse 5: "Je connais mon destin mais ne l'accepte pas" ("I know my fate, but do not accept it"). Here Ellul expresses that man, or he himself, knows his destiny, that is, death. But if death is man's destiny, resignation is no part of what Ellul shows human life to be. There is a deep opposition between what man knows and how he reacts to this *certainty*. Man is almost dead for sure; he is like a man, paralyzed, who can do nothing but see and wait for his fate to fall upon him. His passivity is his only possession.

But even in this paralysis, man does not fall into despair, for to be able to see death *coming* is the real value of man's life. The point here is difficult to see, but it seems clear first that verse 8 refers to verse 7 and not to verse 9 and 10. The value of life lies then precisely in the fact that man, if he cannot do anything else, can at least see death coming; that is, he can become conscious of the value and the destiny of his life. Here it may be useful to quote what seems for Ellul an important aspect of man's life, a sentence that Ellul himself quotes at the beginning of his study on Ecclesiastes, after his introduction: "In order to be prepared to hope in what does not deceive, we must first lose hope in everything that deceives."[202] Thus the death of everything *human* must be affirmed, if hope is to be kindled.

In this poem, Ellul gives a view of life that integrates freedom in God within the basis of his theology. Everything in human life loses its meaning and importance in the light of death, for death is the herald of vanity, especially that of man's life lived without God's freedom. This contrast, the opposition of freedom and necessity, is recurrent in Ellul's work and is present here again. That verse 5 describes the efforts of man to control his life with the term *destin* (fate) is no coincidence. *Destin* bears in its etymology the very idea of necessity imposed on man by the council of the gods,

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[200] One could even argue that death is a giver of meaning for Ellul, even in the social sphere. In fact, he went as far as to argue that "the greatest good that could happen to society today is an increasing disorder." Jacques Ellul, *In Season, Out of Season: An Introduction to the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 195.

[201] Jacques Ellul, *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990).

[202] Ellul, *Reason for Being*, 46 f.

as it was in ancient Greece or Rome. This Ellul rejects, and he proclaims the freedom of man from the constraints of necessity. He always denied such a mechanical view of the relation between God and man, and rejected some traditional Reformed teaching on predestination, which he took, however wrongly, to be of the same kind of divine imposition and slavery imposed over mankind.

This "necessity," which man considers his fate, has one consequence, that of freezing every instant, every act and every thought, not lived through God (verse 6). Necessity paralyzes man, whose actions thus have no meaning and no importance on the course of his life. In verses 9 and 10, Ellul states that man lives to deny God, for man is estranged from God. But, in this very estrangement, the hand of God in the life of man appears, as we can see in the use of the pronoun *te*, second person of the singular, referring without much doubt to the divine other, the "you" of man's most vital relation, i.e. with God.

God is "act and hand superfluous," says Ellul here in verse 10, but we should not think that Ellul is saying that God is not important and can easily be ruled out of human life. Rather, we have to consider this as an example of the opposition between freedom and necessity in Ellul's thought. It is known that one of the main features of Ellul's thought is dialectic, and one of his favorite themes is freedom. This is expressed throughout his books on the relation between freedom and necessity. Here the key theme of freedom and necessity is to be seen again. If death encloses human life in a circle of necessity, God's presence is freedom itself. Therefore, the superfluous aspect of the act and the hand of "you" is the act of freedom. It is "superfluous" because there is no necessity. Necessity does not lie in God, in whom and by whom is freedom alone. The act of God is a free act, a divine gift of freedom to man. As Ellul affirmed in *What I Believe*:

We must come back unceasingly to grace. Receiving grace is not a matter of good works or of being justified by one's words. Once again we recall that Jesus did not come to seek the righteous but sinners Thus God's grace has

an unparalleled dimension and is universal as the concrete expression of his love.[203]

Conclusion: *Silences*, Jacques Ellul's "grand narrative"

In closing this brief study, it is necessary to summarize the main point, namely that Ellul's complete *corpus* is integrated into *Silences* and falls under one main conclusion. By this we mean that Ellul's main point in *Silences* can be applied to his diagnosis of all previous elements, whether it be technique, propaganda, money, or even his theological writings. This assertion would need to be better supported by quotations from Ellul's works and by a global analysis of all the poems of *Silences*. However, we can maintain this conclusion because, if we read *Silences* in the complete setting of Ellul's writing, every aspect is considered in the light of one necessity, that is, death. Human finitude —the vanity of this life and the ultimate event of death— seems to be at the center of

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[203] Ellul, *What I Believe*, 198–199.

Silences and encompasses all other aspects of life. In this respect, death is indeed the "great leveler."

With respect to technique, efficiency and usefulness are considered finally to lead to no end, for what would be the usefulness of a technique that irremediably ends in death? In a way, Poem 57 is an example of such an aim of technique. Of course, technique is not mentioned here, but industrialization is, in verse 2, in which the characteristic of the "people" is to be industrious. Industry is then the only element of human life, the all-inclusive explanation and reason of human life. If we read *Silences* with all the other works of Ellul open next to it, and here particularly *The Technological Society,* we can see that the people described here are concerned by the quest for the progress of their technology, a quest that is inextinguishable and devouring, leading man only to final exhaustion (verse 2). It is primarily, as stated in *The Technological Society,* a quest for usefulness and especially for efficiency.[204] Efficiency is then idealized as a means to produce more "free time," more "freedom."

But this so-called quest for freedom by way of efficiency is an illusion, because the quest for efficiency devours time itself. Man does not even have enough time for his quest for efficiency. It is to be noted that this poem contains no reference to death. However, the poem seems to call for a look to the past. We do not think this past would have been idealized by Ellul. Moreover, for him, there is no turning back on the road of history. The past cannot be regained. But this poem calls for meditation on what was at the time when the industrious land was only a solitary wasteland. This is what man has in his soul, "deep in his eyes" (verse 6). This absence of something unknown is nonetheless present in the very heart of man (verse 5). It is the absence of the conscience of what will finally happen to every man, who will return to a place of silence and solitude, when his last breath has left his body.

Poem 49 makes clear that man's desires for power and glory (verse 1), or youth (verse 5), or wealth (or the absence of wealth, "poverty" in verse 11) are recapitulated in the "deathly secret" of man, death itself. This secret, if we consider *Silences* as a unity, is the necessity of death itself. This poem links the theme of death to the theme of time, "l'instant." In a short time, glory will be no more, nor youth, nor wealth, nor riches. All these will vanish because at the end, all is vanity. Here we have a precise reference to Ellul's commentary on Ecclesiastes, a careful study of which will prove highly beneficial for the interpretation of *Silences.* But the secret of man, if it is the necessity of death, is more than death alone. If man's ultimate secret were that death is necessary, there would be no hope, and Ellul is certainly not a proponent of such a pessimistic view of life. If death is the "ultimate leveler," the great materialistic judge, it is because, through it, the effect of the judgment of God is dramatically symbolized and this does not condemn, but has as its only goal salvation and God's manifestation of love. Of course, this may seem contradictory, but Ellul states in several books that God's curse and judgment are not made against man but for him, for his salvation and

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[204] Ellul, *Reason for Being*, op. cit.

his reconciliation with God's love. Thus, if death is the most visible end, God's love makes life with God the real ultimate end of life. We could continue this exploration throughout all Ellul's themes, such as propaganda and revolution, youth (Poem 49 mentions this also), the word, and ethics.

Death, then, enlightens the reality of existence; it brings the lies of society—illusions of material power, eternal youth, and even political power—under the light of the necessity of death and the freedom of God. Under its light and curse, man can see what he really is—man can decipher his secret, that he is a creature of God and that God loves him. This is a radical subversion of the modern view of death, as the end of all things, but Jacques Ellul is almost a master of such subversions. Death then is the window to God. This is the story of man, the story Ellul had deeply engraved in his soul, and which came to life in his poetry. His *grand "poetical" narrative*, then, is that all of man's desires and wishes will be judged by the curse of death, only to lead to final reconciliation with God in his love.

I have tried in this article to show how *Silences* can be seen as the "missing book" of Ellul, the one in which Ellul integrates all his work. Of course, this study is only preliminary; it is too brief and has passed over some poems that, due to their theme and their place in *Silences,* are most intriguing. But time and space do not allow for a complete study of *Silences;* they allow only for a preliminary consideration of *Silences* as encompassing all of Ellul's thought. In that, Ellul reveals that for him, poetry functions as a fusion of sociology and theology, as the disintegration of dialectics in personal experience.

The author is well aware that this conclusion stands at odds with Ellul's claim that his work is *essentially* dialectic. Indeed, Ellul himself explained: "Dialectic is so much a part of my way of thinking and being that I am talking about myself and my studies rather than about an academic mode of exposition or a philosophy outside myself."[205] This would argue for the necessity of dialectics in *Silences* as with any other work by Ellul. However, given Ellul's conviction about the poetic nature of man, and given the nature of poetry itself, this appears difficult. Indeed, *Silences* is neither a sociological nor a theological work. It is broader and deeper than any other part of Ellul's work because it unifies it all. In fact, Didier Schillinger, director of Opales (the publisher of *Silences*), remembers: "[Ellul] told me that it was, for him, the most important part of his work."[206]

We do not, however, pretend to have given the right explanation of Ellul's *Silences.* It is merely an exploration of a land nobody to my knowledge has yet entered. This is, then, a preliminary study in two respects, first because of its brevity, and secondly because further study of Ellul's poetry should be undertaken. In *Silences,* Ellul tells us that the relation between man and God is the place in which the recapitulation and unity of man's wholeness are found, after death has revealed the secret of man's life,

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[205] Ellul, *What I Believe*, 29.
[206] Didier Schillinger, personal correspondence with Yannick Imbert, 16 March 2006.

his finitude and the value of his life by God's love and freedom. This poetry is also a "silence," an expression of the silence that is before God. For Ellul, the absence of words is a mystery that leads to God: "The Word is a mystery. Silence, the absence of the word, is also a mystery."[207]

Thus the title of his book: the poetry of Ellul is *Silences,* in the plural, because it reveals the mystery of the relations of men with each other, and of man with God. It is "silent poetry," because when confronted with death, man awaits God in faith, for nothing remains as his security—no wealth or power, no vanity of human realization. In *Silences*, we see the mystery of man before God and in the world. The mystery of all-terminating death, and the mystery of God's freedom in bringing all men back to him. This is man's true relationship with the Creator: all of man's works being one under God's freedom.

kingdom and will shows that there is no such thing as providence." [Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 155–156] This points to the notion of Christian responsibility and action in Ellul's thought, as well as his conception of morality and moral action. Ellul continues saying: "In other words, death comes according to natural laws, but God lets nothing in his creation die without being there, without being the comfort and strength and hope and support of that which dies. *At issue is the presence of God, not his will.*" Italics ours.

Verse 2: "pendant que se discourt le secret de ma vie."

Theologie et Technique: Pour une ethique de la non-puissance

by Jacques Ellul
Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2014
Review Notes by Carl Mitcham
Professor at Colorado School of Mines, author or editor of many works on Jacques Ellul and on the philosophy of technology

Somewhat unexpectedly Jacques Ellul's *Theologie et Technique: Pour une ethique de la non-puissance* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2014) was featured on a display table at the Librairie Mollat in Bordeaux when I walked in. Ellul at least has some popularity in his home town.

What follows is simply a brief note calling attention to this new publication, posthumously edited and prepared for publication by Ellul's son Yves with the assistance of his wife Danielle and Jean Ellul's wife Sivorn and Ellul scholar Frederic Rognon. In the preface, Yves Ellul describes the previously unpublished manuscript as "generally dated to the year 1975." Some passages were previously published as articles during

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[207] *The Humiliation of the Word*, end of chapter 2.

Ellul's lifetime. "There remains a 'body' of six chapters unique to this manuscript and a plan for the book as a whole."

At the same time, the book admittedly has a "rough, unfinished character: the intended plan is not fully respected [and] many repetitions, sometimes with small variations in viewpoint, give a clumsy character to the published text" (p. 7). Despite such weaknesses, "this book [is] both stimulating and challenging [and provides some perspective on] the evolution of mentalities over the last forty years, both in sociology and in theology" (p. 8).

Here in summary are the six core chapters (and their lengths) with brief comments:

1. The Challenges of Theological Production in a Technical Society (23 pages)

It is noted that the chapter and section titles here "have been proposed by the [Ellul] family." (The same is true in multiple other instances in the book). The three sections comment on traditional attitudes of theology toward technology (referencing especially the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Emmanuel Mounier); diverse responses to technology with theological implications (such as the Club of Rome and Lewis Mumford); and a reflection on "Technique and transcendence."

2. Situating Theological Reflection on Technique (49 pages)

Three sections deal with "humans, nature, and the artificial"; "Technique according to the Bible"; and "the status of theology in the technical society." The second section was previously published in *Foi et Vie* (1960); an English translation was included in Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote, eds., *Theology and Technology: Essays in Christian Analysis and Exegesis* (1984). [See also Ellul's "The Relationship between Man and Creation in the Bible" in Mitcham and Grote.]

3. Limits (56 pages)

This longest chapter and deals with what Ellul clearly sees as a fundamental issue. To quote from Ellul's own first paragraphs:

Fundamental question: Can human beings do everything or are they limited?

The question needs to be expanded:

— "Everything" means anything, indifferently, or the maximum possible?

— "Can" means what is possible or what is permitted?

— Are some domains forbidden? Forbidden because humans cannot get in (although science and Technique argue "not get in yet but tomorrow ...") or forbidden because there is an absolute bar, impassable, established by God.

— Is the limit fixed by humans, in which case they may move it, or is from nature (in which case it is neutral), or is it from God? (p. 179)

Subsequent sections deal nature and creation, and the Judaism and Christianity as negation of limits.

4. Technique and Eschatology (25 pages)

Includes comments on the thought of Hans Jonas, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Cornelius Castoriadis, Jean Ladriere, and others.

5. Ethical Mediation (46 pages)

6. Ethical Extensions (46 pages)

Chapters five and six revisit issues dealt with at length in Ellul's more extended works on ethics (such as *To Will and To Do* [French1964] and *On Freedom, Love and Power*, compiled, edited, and translated by Willem Vanderburg[208]), but this time especially focused on relationships between ethics and Technique.

These six chapters are further complemented with five "Preliminary Works," the first three of which have previously appeared in print. The first, "Intermezzo instinctive and unscientific" (10 pages) is an

engagement with the thought of Rene Girard. The second is another commentary on the situation of theology in the technical society (14 pages). The third is titled "Search for an Ethics in a technical society" (18 pages). This is followed by a bibliographical essay on theology and Technique (13 pages). The final fifth preliminary work is on The Theological Status of Technique according Gabriel Vahanian" (17 pages).

Finally the volume is further enhanced by Rognon's 17-page introduction placing this book in the larger context of Ellul's work. Rognon has added as well a useful bibliography.

The volume is clearly an important addition to Ellul's body of work and one that deserves translation.

Technique, Language and the Divided Brain: Can recent insights from neuropsychology give new life to Jacques Ellul's technology criticism?

by Matthew Prior

Matthew Prior is a minister in the Church of England and graduate student in theology at Trinity College, University of Bristol, UK

Introduction: the word humiliated?

In the aftermath of the well publicised British riots of August 2011, I found myself thinking of Jacques Ellul. In the Clapham Junction area of South London, whilst stores selling high-end technology were being looted, *Waterstones*, the biggest bookseller in the UK, reported that its shop had been completely untouched. This only became a story with a tweeted invitation from a *Waterstones* staff member to the rioters to take some of their books. 'They might actually learn something', he sighed.[209] All over London, in areas well known to me from six years of Christian ministry in the capital, similar events took place, leading to a process of political and social soulsearching and reflection ongoing to this day.[210] And yet, the analyses suggested and the solutions

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[208] *McCarthy on Trademarks* 3:4.A (emphasis added).
[209] http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2011/aug/12/reading-riots-waterstones-looted-books
[210] A little about my background. I am an ordained minister in the Church of England, and know

put forward have seemed at least to me to be somewhat trite and hollow, on the one hand narrowly focussed on the analysis of 'twitter traffic' and the role of social media, and on the other trading in political generalities about urban poverty and the failure of urban education.[211] I have wondered, what greater depth might Ellul's work offer to the Christian minister seeking to make sense of this potent mix of issues: urban dysfunction and violence, language and literacy, and the image-based technologies of a consumer society? In particular, what perspectives might emerge from a book I take to be one of Ellul's most enduring and significant contributions, *La parole humiliee* (1981; ET *The Humiliation of the Word*), a remarkable and still pertinent discussion of what happens to language in a technological society?

In *La parole humiliee* Ellul embarks on a sociological exploration of word and image within the framework of his central theological dialectic of truth and reality.[212] Indeed, although this is listed as a sociological work, Ellul states explicitly: we are made in the image of a speaking God, and therefore we listen and we speak in response.[213] In brief summary, the word pertains to what Ellul calls 'the order of truth', whereas the image pertains to 'the order of reality'. Disastrously separated in the 'rupture' from God's purposes, word and image are reunited for a time in the incarnation of the divine Word, Jesus Christ. Yet we still await the fulfilment of the promise when word and image are finally reconciled in a new creation.[214] However, Ellul's concern is with an alternative modern eschatology: the victory of the image over the word, which eclipses the true horizon of future hope, offering either the hope of instant and constant satisfaction, or the despair of apocalypse now.[215]

The French commentator on Ellul, Frederic Rognon, has referred to Ellul's 'thresholds of radicality'[216], and I for one confess I do not share the entirety of Ellul's analysis of what he called the 'audiovisual war machine'. However, I still believe *La parole humiliee* has much to offer to a theological © 2014 IJESwww.ellul.orgEllul Forum #54 April 2014 Matthew Prior understanding of our image-saturated communication culture today, principally because here a rich dialogue between theology and sociology

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well the areas South London affected by the rioting. My interest in Ellul was first kindled during my training for ministry, for here I found insights lacking in other elements of my training.

[211] For example,http://www. guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/aug/16/riots-poverty-map-suspects.

[212] As Rognon notes, the Truth-reality dialectic is a golden thread in Ellul's corpus (Rognon 2007, 83).

[213] 'L'homme cree par Dieu est parlant. Peut-etre que c'est un des sens de I'image de Dieu: le repondant, le responsable, le semblable qui va dialoguer...Spccificitc humaine comme specificite de ce Dieu parmi tous les autres'. Ellul 1981, 71

[214] See Ibid, chapter 7, Reconciliation, passim.

[215] 'Ces deux tendances: l'exigence de tout tout de suite, et la terreur de la fin du monde, issues de la multiplication infinie des images, se conjuguent pour provoquer partout des courants apocalyptiques et messianiques'. Ellul, 1981, 231.

[216] On *Parole,* he notes three such thresholds: the absolute separation of sight and faith, the resulting denial that the image can lead to faith, and the claim that the church's current decline can be linked to its capitulation to the 'audiovisual machine' (Rognon: 365–366).

takes place *within a single text*.[217] In this paper, I make the bold claim that Ellul's best insights can be recollected and weaknesses offset by a dialogue with recent research into communication and the brain in the developing field of neuropsychology. Let me make a brief disclaimer at this point. I come at this dialogue theologically, and not as a neuropsychologist! What I offer is a tentative step forward for theological reflection on language, as well as, I hope, a tribute to Jacques Ellul from a British perspective.

A dialogue between Jacques Ellul and neuropsychology

Over the past thirty years, there has been an increasing *academic and popular* scientific interest in the study of communication, with the two meeting in the bestselling book by Steven Pinker *The Language Instinct*.[218] Over this time, much Christian writing has focussed, perhaps naively, on questions of how to use new communication technologies; few have delved into properly *theological* questions about the nature of language itself. However, one exception to that is a remarkable recent book called *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* by Dr Iain McGilchrist, a British psychiatrist and literary scholar.[219]

McGilchrist offers a distinctive narrative of the origins of human language, and at times on reading him, one has the impression of reading a scientific mapping of a landscape previously navigated by Ellul. What can account for this apparent overlap? As I have confirmed with McGilchrist, Ellul exercises no direct influence on him. Indeed, at the outset, one is also struck by a key difference between them, particularly in relation to *the status of the scientific method.*

In *La parole humiliee,* Ellul disavows any scientific or technical apparatus and advances instead the primacy of the feeling, listening and looking subject, an experimental method indebted to S0ren Kierkegaard. In contrast, for McGilchrist, it is precisely neuro-scientific evidence that suggests that a dialectic of word and image is simplistic. For those who like me are interlopers in this area, let me briefly remind you that the brain is divided into two hemispheres, each exercising motor-sensory control of the opposite side of the body. There has long been evidence also to suggest that a degree of lateralisation of functions exists, for example, with regard to language, although it has become increasingly clear that almost every human activity is served at some level by both hemispheres. It is therefore no longer respectable for a neuroscientist to

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[217] Whilst this narrative about the demise of the word and the rise of the image has precedence in Ellul's early theological work (See for example chapter 4 of Presence au Monde Moderne, on 'La communication'), the form of *La parole humiliee* is regarded as a sociological work. In fact, it does not easily fit into the dialectical division of the Ellul corpus[.] Joyce Main Hanks raises in the preface to her translation the question of Ellul's intention: 'the author has preferred to integrate sociology and theology into a single whole, for reasons he has not yet explained in print' (Hanks' preface in Eng. Tr. Ellul 1985, xii-xiii).

[218] E.g. Steven Pinker's *The Language Instinct* and Michael Corballis' *From Hand to Mouth.*

[219] The book has rightly been acknowledged as a valuable and largely irenic contribution to a debate that raged through the first decade of this century in the UK, initiated by a more aggressive form of public atheism in British public life, labelled 'new atheism'.

hypothesise on the key to hemispheric differences, partly because the topic has been hijacked.

At a popular level, there exists the notion of a 'right-brain' or 'left-brain' person. McGilchrist regards this popularised dichotomy as rooted in the ancient Greek association of the right hemisphere with subjective perception (pictures) and the left hemisphere with objective understanding (words).[220] He describes this view as interesting, but deeply flawed, moreover a symptom of the left hemisphere's dominance in Western culture. With a minutely detailed survey of recent research, he suggests that if the brain displays a fundamental asymmetry, it is a question not of *what functions*, as if the brain were a machine, but of how, *or the manner in which*, the hemispheres operate, as if the brain were part of a living person, which it is. Drawing on a parable of Nietzsche, he suggests that the right hemisphere is the Master and the left hemisphere is its Emissary, or interpreter.

But note that for McGilchrist, all neuroscience works, sometimes unawares, from a prior philosophical position. As he puts it, '*Not to be aware* is to adopt the default standpoint of scientific materialism'; this again is a symptom of left-hemisphere bias. Indeed, he describes the essential difference between the hemispheres *in terms of the awareness or attention they bring to bear.* To simplify vastly, the right hemisphere serves whole, sustained attention, concerned with *living in the present*, and living in the body. The left hemisphere serves focussed attention, concerned with *abstracting and re-presenting* a part of the lived world. He aligns his own attention to the world with phenomenology, drawing in particular upon Martin Heidegger. Indeed, McGilchrist regards Heidegger as having anticipated, before neuropsychology, this central importance of attention, particularly in Heidegger's concept of truth as 'unconcealing' over against the mindset of 'enframing'.[221]

Is this not then a familiar story: Heidegger's influence and Ellul's neglect? In part, yes. Of course, given that Ellul and Heidegger share a heritage in Kierkegaard, the influence of Kierkegaard in key passages of *La parole humiliee* leads to statements that resonate with Heidegger, and therefore with McGilchrist.[222] Yet I suggest that Ellul's theology has more to offer than Heidegger's. Indeed, I *have suggested* to McGilchrist that Ellul's understanding of the human word can enrich the tentative theological conclusions he offers in concluding his neuropsychological account of language.[223] I will return to that in closing, but let us first turn to a brief summary of *The Master and his Emissary*.

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[220] See chapter 1, *Asymmetry and the Brain*.

[221] ibid 143

[222] In a section drawing on Kierkegaard, Ellul pointedly corrects the priority of *appearances* within phenomenology. 'La phenomenologie ne doit pas seulement faire apparaitre les choses telles qu'elles sont mais les faire sonner comme elles sont! La philosophie classique ne sait pas ecouter, entendre la vcritc... le philosophe qui refuse d'ecouter refuse en meme temps la verite et la realite' (Ellul 1981, 44). This priority of listening is the subject of Ellul's second chapter on *l'Idole et la Parole*.

[223] This has been confirmed in correspondence with the author. Although McGilchrist does not write

Language and the brain: what's right and what's left?

McGilchrist begins with the early consensus that speech production and comprehension was subserved by the left hemisphere, in Broca's area and Wernike's area respectively.[224] From there developed an explanation for the fundamental asymmetry of the human brain known as Yaklovlevian torque (see below)[225]: that the drive to language necessitated an expansion of the posterior left hemisphere, to house such a complex set of skills. Given that the dominant use of the right hand in tool manipulation is also housed in the left hemisphere, indeed in areas very close to those dealing with words, there appeared an evident connection between language and the hand. The idea took hold that the left hemisphere expanded to support both tool-making and also, in the closest possible connection, the development of the master tool, instrumental language.[226] On this account, language is grasp, providing fixity by firming up and clarity by dividing up. It is a means to power, for by it we can manipulate the world, and indeed, other people.

McGilchrist celebrates what he calls 'referential language' as a vastly precious gift, yet he contends that this narrative is partial, and again biased towards the left hemisphere.[227] He questions it with three pieces of evidence.

Firstly, engaging with recent palaeontology, he notes that early fossil records show that primitive humans, *long before it is believed that language developed*, had a similar brain asymmetry to us today, an asymmetry shared moreover by the great apes, *who, he says, clearly have no language.* So whatever caused the expansion of the left hemisphere, it was not the drive to speak, but something more primitive.[228]

Secondly, more sophisticated recent accounts of brain functions now show that *language functions are lateralised across both hemispheres.* Yet McGilchrist goes further to assert the fundamental superiority of the right hemisphere, for what he calls the 'higher linguistic functions' of understanding meaning in context, tone, emotion, along with any humour, irony or metaphor, now appear to be housed in the right hemisphere. In simple terms, if language can be compared to painting a picture, it is the left that contains the paintbox, but the right hemisphere that paints.[229] With examples from studies of tribal peoples, child development and the experience of patients with aphasia (or the loss of speech), he argues that thought exists prior to and without language.[230] *In an image drawn from Michael Gazzaniga, he suggests that the left hemisphere is the right hemisphere's interpreter.*

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as a theologian, his work has been eagerly received in theological circles in the UK.

[224] McGilchrist 2009, 23.

[225] McGilchrist, 2009, 23–24.

[226] See the discussion of Language and the Hand, ibid, 111ff.

[227] Ibid, 24.

[228] ibid, 99.

[229] McGilchrist 2009, 99.

[230] McGilchrist 2009, 105–110. [22] With clear echos of Ellul's concerns (See Ellul, 1981, 22ff) McGilchrist refutes 'structuralist' communication theories, asserting that meaning does indeed exist prior to and outside of the structures of language, in our prior apprehension of the world.
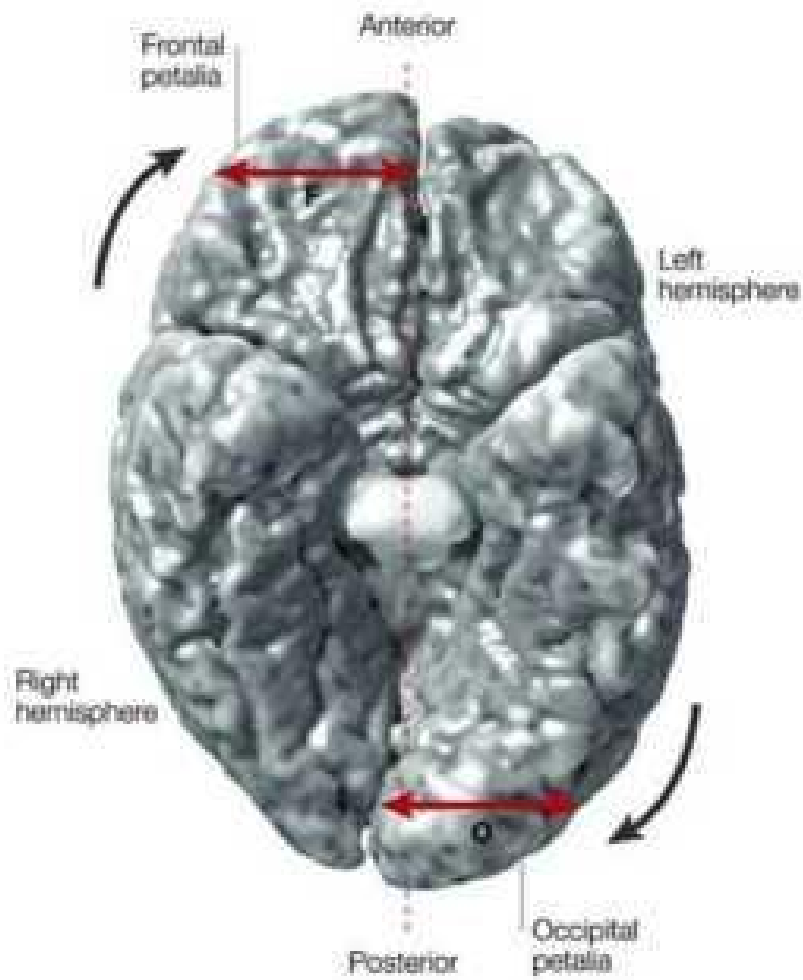
Figure 1: The brain viewed from above

Thirdly, he highlights a fascinating recent discovery of handedness, suggesting that *even in left-handers* tool-use is associated with the left hemisphere, not the right hemisphere, which one would expect to be controlling the left hand side of the body. What seems crucial here is not the side of the body involved, but *the nature of the gesture.*[231] That is to say, it is the very concept of grasping that activates in the left hemisphere, not the control of the hand itself. By contrast, there is new evidence to suggest that gestures which are exploratory and empathic in nature originate in the right hemisphere, as indeed do other non-purposive gestures such as dance, a significant point, as we shall see.

Which came first: grasp or music?

This combination of factors leads McGilchrist to a fuller account of language. Clearly, the left hemisphere has specialised in the interpretive powers of syntax and vocabulary. But the left hemisphere's expansion was not caused by the simple desire to communicate, but by the more primitive desire to manipulate. McGilchrist cites with approval Michael Coballis' suggestion that *referential language* may indeed have evolved, *not from sounds at all, but from hand gesture, in particular, motions to do with grasping*[232].

But language is more than grasp. Even our most basic intuitions tell us much human language is connotative, social, without a clear purpose beyond communication itself. What then of this language that McGilchirst calls 'I-Thou' language, in contrast to 'I-it' language? On the conventional account, the apparently 'useless' 'I-Thou' language must have evolved from 'I-It' language to serve a broader utility, to enable the group to survive and to thrive. But does that fit the evidence? Anthropologists suggest that for long periods *before any evidence of symbol manipulation,* our ancestors clearly managed to live in social groups. Moreover, recent work on the fossil record suggests that the earliest human skeletons possessed the same highly developed vocal apparatus for articulating sounds that we have.[233] What was this apparatus used for, if anything? The answer put forward is likely to be a surprise, McGilchrist suggests, but what else could a non-verbal language of communication be but © 2014 IJESwww.ellul.orgEllul Forum #54 April 2014 Matthew Prior music? Drawing on the recent book by the archaeologist Steven Mithen *The Singing Neanderthals*[234] he argues for a common ancestor for both language and music: so-called *musilanguage.* It is predominantly the right hemisphere that mediates our experience of music and dance, and therefore the musical and bodily aspects of language are subserved there also.[235]

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[231] ibid, 113.

[232] ibid 111.

[233] Ibid.101.

[234] He also draws on and the work of the linguist Daniel Everett, who undertook a controversial recent study of the Piraha tribe in the Amazon basin, concluding that they communicate by a form of musi-language (ibid. 2009,106).

[235] Ibid,102.

Granted that this account may seem implausible, what further evidence can be advanced in its favour? The idea that musilanguage preceded referential language easily fits with the fact of cultural history that poetry clearly precedes prose.[236] More significantly, metaphor precedes literal language, as the well known study by Lackoff and Johnson argues. Metaphor is, according to McGilchrist, closely linked to gesture, subserved by the right hemisphere. He argues that when we bring two things together, it is because they are felt as sharing a live connection in our embodied experience, not because they fit an abstract concept in our minds.[237] The example he gives is of a clash of cymbals and a clash of arguments, which do not depend on a notion of clash, just the uncomfortable experience of it. For McGilchrist, Metaphor therefore 'carries us over' the gap or abstraction from bodily life that literal language entails.

In the highly complex fifth chapter on the Master right hemisphere attention to our embodied experience of the world, McGilchrist draws on pioneering research into gesture by David McNeill, arguing that gesture slightly anticipates speech. On this account, gesture reveals utterances in their primitive form, derived from the right hemisphere. Bodily gestures do not therefore reflect thought — they help to constitute thought.[238]

Attentive to the body

The significance of the body for McGilchrist cannot be overstated, and language is rooted in our bodily experience, the domain of the right hemisphere. At a popular level, body language is now recognised as a key component of communication,[239] but the hypothesis of 'musilanguage' goes further. If it is correct, then anthropological speaking, language originates not in the competitive technique of the hand, but in the social gesture of the body. It is worth citing him at length to summarise the cumulative effect of his argument.

To the extent that the origins of language lie in music, they lie in a certain sort of gesture, that of dance: social, non-purposive ('useless'). When language began to shift

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[236] Ibid, 105

[237] The implicit comparison we make between one thing and another cannot be 'translated' into another set of words by the interpreting left hemisphere without losing its power and novelty. McGilchrist argues that we do not first assume there is an abstract concept to which the two things both conform — rather, that our simple *experience* of their similarity, as processed by the master right hemisphere, comes first. In an interesting twist which seems to confirm this, some studies show that cliched, familiar metaphors are understood by the left hemisphere, suggesting that they have lost their original connection with lived experience. McGilchrist, 2009, 116.

[238] Ibid, 119. Whilst he offers support for McGilchrist's project, the prominent British philosopher A.C. Grayling registers his dissent by noting that 'the findings of brain science are nowhere near fine-grained enough yet to support the large psychological and cultural conclusions Iain McGilchrist draws'. InGrayling, A.C.(December 2009)."In Two Minds".*Literary Review.*

[239] McGilchrist agrees that the left hemisphere's ability with words can be an attempt to hide what gesture reveals (Ibid, 81, 195ff).

hemispheres, and separate itself from music, to become the referential, verbal medium that we recognise by the term, it aligned itself with a different kind of gesture, that of grasp, which is, by contrast, individualistic and purposive[240]

We glimpse here also his concern: what he calls a 'hijack' of language from the Master right hemisphere by the usurping left hemisphere. This entire project then, depends on becoming more aware of, attending to the origins of language in the body, served by the right hemisphere. He advances a final key piece of neuroscientific evidence. In the discussions of the dominant left hemisphere, it is often neglected that the human brain exhibits a fundamental asymmetry not only on the left side, *but also on the right frontal side.*[241] Why should this be the case? For McGilchrist, it is the expansion of the right frontal lobes in humans that gives us the capacity for whole attention, a certain distance, enabling us to stand back from our experience and to differentiate ourselves from others. This, uniquely, enables to exercise *empathy towards the other*, whom we can recognise as *somebody like us.* This attentive capacity of the right frontal lobe differentiates us from any other creature. Ultimately, what makes our language human is rooted in this standing back, the distance from the other that produces the desire to reach out, and indeed to reach beyond to the divine Other. Animals may possess reason and a form of language:

But [he writes] there are many things of which they show no evidence whatsoever: for instance, imagination, creativity, the capacity for religious awe, music, dance, poetry, art, love of nature, a moral sense, a sense of humour and the ability to change their minds.[242]

McGilchrist in dialogue with and defence of Ellul: the Word as Master

I hope the fruits of this dialogue will already be visible, despite the obvious limits. Of course, there are sparse references to the brain in *La Parole humiliee*[243] and no proto-historical narrative of the origins of language. Yet my overall contention in the paper, to repeat, is that Ellul's work anticipates the developing insights of neuropsychology, and can indeed enrich them. Let me give a few examples in closing.

In a remarkably attentive account of the spoken word, Ellul speaks of the word as a *living presence, requiring two persons in relationship in time.*[244] For Ellul also, it is in

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[240] Ibid, 119. The fact that 'musilanguage' would yield little competitive advantage in evolutionary terms has led some to reject the idea of 'musilanguage 'as implausible (ibid 104, citing Pinker). McGilchrist defends his view by arguing *ad hominem* from utility: 'If language began in music, it began in (right-hemisphere) functions which are related to empathy and common life, not competition and division' (123).

[241] Ibid, 126.

[242] Ibid, 127.

[243] Ellul notes the misinterpretation of an early neuropsychology experiment undertaken by British scientists (Ibid, 185 n1). He also takes issue with the work of Michel Thevoz in 'Le Langage de la rupture', a study of the language of the mentally ill (198).

[244] 'La parole est essentiellement presence. Elle est du vivant. Jamais objet'. Ellul 1981, 20. Only when written does it become an object, requiring focussed attention, rather than the 'coup d'oeil global' that spoken language enables. Ellul's treatment alludes, often in disagreement, to the seminal work of

dialogue and distance that we discover 'le meme-autre et... l'autre-meme'.[245] Moreover, he argues theologically from the first creation, with reference to Adam's naming of the woman. 'La semblable dissemblable... Le discours recommence toujours parce que la distance subsiste'.[246]

In this distance between speaker and listener, between speech and reception metaphor is born.[247] Almost each time Ellul speaks of *metaphor*, there is a trace of its etymology — 'carrying beyond'.[248] An extended metaphor that serves as a leitmotif for Ellul's account of the word is the musical image of a symphony.[249] Harmony is the achievement of the word as music. By a *polyphony* of *overtones*, a *symphony of shared echoes* is established, which creates a *concordance*, never static but a movement in time.[250] This richly poetic understanding of the word is clearly concordant with the notion of 'musilanguage' as outlined by McGilchrist. For Ellul, if the word has a power, it is a musical, metaphoric power to reach beyond words, beyond reality, to create another universe, what he calls 'the order of truth'.[251]

In the second theological chapter, Ellul goes further. Since we are created in the image of God, the human word is ultimately a reflection of and response to the word God speaks. In a discussion of the biblical creation accounts, Ellul suggests that it is only the word, and not technique, that offers the power of new creation.[252] Yet this does not mean that technique has no place when restricted to the order of reality. However, in the fourth chapter from which *La parole humiliee* takes its title, Ellul's presents a sombre picture: whereas the word should give us the power to master technique, now the situation is reversed.[253]

On the conventional narrative of language as manipulation, this opposition of word and technique appears absurd.[254] However, the alternative narrative of 'musilanguage' offers support for Ellul against his critics. Indeed, on my tentative reading, what Ellul means by 'word' maps well onto McGilchrist's account of the right hemisphere, but equally what he means by 'technique' maps well onto McGilchrist's account of the left hemisphere. Both have their role, as McGilchrist states: 'it would [not] be a good

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Marshall McLuhan (see, e.g. 31 n1).

[245] Ibid,21.

[246] Ibid, 22.

[247] 'La prennent naissance le symbole, la metaphore et l'analogie'.Ellul 1981, 24.

[248] See for example 26–27,37, 77–78 (in brief dialogue with Paul Ricoeur), 119, 181.

[249] 'Connotations et harmoniques. Et la parole se situe au cmur d'une toile d'araignee d'une finesse infinie'. Ibid, 22

[250] Ibid, 24–25

[251] 'La parole n'est pas liee au reel mais a sa capacite de creation de cet univers autre, sur-reel si on veut, metareel, metaphysique, que par commodite on peut nommer l'ordre du vrai'. Ellul 1981, 27.

[252] Ibid, 76.

[253] Ellul, 1981:177.

[254] The French critic of Ellul, Dominique Bourg, suggests this in his book, *L'Homme-Artifice*, repeating the common anthropological account of language's origins.

thing if the entire population had a left hemisphere stroke'.[255] Yet with a wealth of experimental data, McGilchrist offers the model of Right-Left-Right processing as a kind of healthy norm.[256] In his terms, the left hemisphere, as Emissary, merely *re-presents* what is first *presenced* to the Master right hemisphere. Moreover, it must then submit its representations back to the right hemisphere to be fleshed out in real life, in the musical aspects of communication and meaning. In Ellulian terms, this means a 'both-and' embodied, dialectical reasoning, in place of an 'either-or' abstract rationality.

Engaging in a similarly sweeping cultural history, McGilchrist considers that the abstract accounts of language in structuralism, universal grammar and in popular neurolinguistics form part of a general trend... 'in favour of an abstracted, cerebralised, machine-like version of ourselves... '[257] There is hope, however, and McGilchrist writes in part with an apologetic purpose: to re-ground us and our language in the embodied world. With a rising interest in neuroscience, he detects an opportunity to 'move away from the outworn mode of scientific materialism with its reductive language.'[258] In strikingly Ellulian terms, McGilchrist suggests to the reader the lost 'mythos' of the Christian tradition, for here a transcendent, divine Other, meets us as engaged, vulnerable, and incarnate, offering the hope of the flesh and spirit united in resurrection.[259] This is a hope beyond images of apocalyptic despair or images of the latest must-have product, a hope that keeps us waiting in time, for the end of time, attending to the voice of God in the present, rooted in the real world.

But do I have any policy proposals on how to stop riots and save the inner city? Sadly, no. But I do offer a closing thought. Perhaps a Christian perspective on literacy and education in a technological society might focus more on the renewal of whole attention and empathy that disciplined study might enable, and less on the value of one kind of rationality, and its role in fitting us to be economically productive citizens? The current UK government wants to expand the national management and ICT cadres, ostensibly to keep pace with the UK's global competitors, and yet there are also moves to put resources back into the neglected humanities, with a particular focus on urban schools. And yet perhaps rather than turn to government policy for the funding of empathy, might the church not first seek to discover how to be and to speak God's embodied word in a technological society? Might we not first be challenged to a renewed listening to God, and listening to others, a renewed attentiveness to the actual physical world around us? After all, as British theologian Sarah Coakley has

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[255] ibid. 93.

[256] Ibid. 195–203. In a very brief metaphor, he suggests that the relationship between the hemispheres is a little like the way books relate to life. Life goes into books, and books go into life. But the relationship between them is not equal, and yet books add to life, and transform it.

[257] McGilchrist, 2009,119–120

[258] McGilchrist, 2009, 459

[259] Ibid. 441

recently put it, 'When you are working with people in a situation of grave distress and despair, it is the quality of your attention which is what ministry is about'.[260]

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Endnotes

An Unjust God? A Christian Theology of Israel in Light of Romans 9–11

by Jacques Ellul
Trans. by Anne-Marie Andreasson-Hogg. Forward by David W. Gill.
Eugene, OR: Cascade Books. 2012, xxi + 111 pp, ISBN 13: 978-1-62032-361-8

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[260] Stephen Wilson, ' Sarah Coakley discusses waiting on God', CAM Magazine, Issue 65, Easter 2012, 43.

Reviewed by Andrew Trotter

PhD (New Testament), Cambridge University; Director of the Consortium of Christian Study Centers

Jacques Ellul was many things—law professor, sociologist, philosopher, et al.—but he was not a formally-trained biblical studies expert. So why does he write a book based in a particular biblical text? We will discuss his reasons to some degree below, but let me say now: I am glad he did.

An Unjust God? is simply structured. After a brief preface outlining the argument of the book in good Barthian fashion by stating a number of apparent contradictions Paul solves in the selected text, in five chapters Ellul divides the text of Romans 9–11 into five sections: "The Unique People," "This Unjust God," "How Will They Believe?," "The Grafted Olive Tree," and "Mystery and Renewal." The book then concludes with an Epilogue, an appendix on the suffering servant surveying the work of Armand Abecassis and a brief bibliography.

An Unjust God? makes no claims to precise biblical exegesis; it is a work of biblical theology, not of historical/grammatical criticism. New Testament exegesis, for example, is generally filled with discussion of words and phrases, how they are used in the grammatical and literary context of the passage, and how they are used in other relevant contexts in other ancient writings. Ellul rarely refers to the underlying Greek text; even when he does, he discusses it in general terms that are secondary to his more theological concerns.

When he does refer to a term, he depends on the exegesis of others and can get himself in trouble. So, for instance, when apparently referring to the phrase "zwh\ e'k nekrw^n" (zoe ek nekron) in Romans 11:15 he states "This word 'vivification' (which Maillot translates as 'life surging out of death') is not quite identical with resurrection" (p. 71), he betrays the fact that he is unaware the underlying Greek is actually in a phrase, not a word. More importantly, he goes on to build a case for the meaning of the phrase, as if its interpretation is relatively stable, when in fact it is one of the most controversial phrases in the whole of the exegesis of Romans 9–11.

Deeper problems result from his lack of insight into the processes of biblical interpretation at the level he seeks with this book. For instance he castigates other interpreters of the role of the Jewish people in Christian thought for eschewing what he calls "the only indisputable and *comprehensive* [italics his] source" for "what a Christian theology of the people of Israel should be," going on to ignore the Gospels because they give us "indications, but only concerning individuals or certain groups belonging to the Jewish people, not anything about the people as a whole... we have an exact and precise answer to that question ['understanding where the Jewish people are to be situated in a Christian perspective or what is continued existence means'] in these three chapters of the Epistle to the Romans—there, and nowhere else in the new Testament" (pp. 2–3).

Yet every Gospels researcher knows that the crowds serve just that function in Matthew's and John's Gospels particularly and that the whole Old Testament is filled with prophetic and other material important to the theologian for understanding the

Jews in the present day. This is not to argue with the centrality of Romans 9–11 for this question; it is only to say that Ellul should not have looked exclusively to this text in such an absolute fashion.

No, this little book is not a study in the detailed exegesis of Romans 9–11. So has Ellul gotten into waters over his head and given us a book of little worth? And does Ellul's lack of exegetical training mean that he has regularly misused the biblical text for his own purposes? Paul himself might say, "By no means!" What he has done is enter into the world of biblical theology, and there his legal experience and skills serve him in good stead. Biblical theology, or surmising from the text what it has to say to a question relevant both to the text and the reader, is much more an exercise in logic and argument than it is one of translation.

In what Ellul has attempted to do, he shines. I should point out that he claims no creative stance in this book. From the start Ellul makes it quite clear that he is attempting to get people to take seriously work from the past that he believes has gotten the question right, particularly some articles by Wilhelm Vischer, and, to a lesser extent, the famous *The Epistle to the Romans* by Karl Barth. He refers often to Vischer and his work, but differs from Barth on his focus on the church in his interpretation of Romans 9–11, when Ellul firmly believes the chapters have much more to do with the Jews.

So what is the great accomplishment of *An Unjust God?* Simply put, Ellul puts forth a case for the continued importance of the Jews in God's salvation history of humankind that is rigorously argued, clearly enough written, and presented with a passion. At the same time, he proclaims a word of judgment upon the largely Gentile church for not living and acting in accord with the place and privilege bestowed upon it since the "temporary" rejection of the Jews. One could argue with his lack of reference to the history of these chapters, a source rich and replete with both counters to, and support for, many of his positions, but he has given us a simple, straightforward argument for a Christian rapprochement with the Jews, and that is a welcome text to have in these angry, adversative times.

Issue #55 Sep 2014

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Sham Universe: Field Notes on the Disappearance of Reality in a World of Hallucinations by Doug Hill

Doug Hill (doug.hill25@gmail.com) is a journalist and independent scholar who has studied the history and philosophy of technology for more than twenty years. He earned a masters degree in theological studies in 2009 with a thesis on technology and spirit, focusing on the work of Jacques Ellul. Last October he self-published Not So Fast: Thinking Twice About Technology, *which David Gill has called "one of the five best books on technology I've read over the past decade."* Not So Fast *is currently available as an ebook on Amazon and the other major ebook retailers. This paper was presented at the Jacques Ellul conference held in Ottawa, Canada, in July 2014.*

Let me begin by stating clearly where I'm coming from regarding Jacques Ellul: I'm among those who consider him a genius. I suppose that's a safer statement to make here than it might be in some other venues.

I'd like to recall today some of the things Ellul said more than fifty years ago about technology and propaganda in order to assess how his observations on those subjects might apply today. I think Ellul would be saddened by the degree to which technology and propaganda have come to dominate politics and culture in these early decades of the 21st century. I don't think he would be surprised.

My observations will concern what's happening in the United States because that's the only locality I feel qualified to assess. Obviously much of what is happening in the States is happening at the same time and in roughly the same fashion in other countries.

Allow me to set the table, so to speak, with two comments of Ellul's, one from *The Technological Society*, the other from *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*.

In *The Technological Society* he wrote that the distortion of news represents the first step toward "a sham universe," a step that leads progressively and inevitably to "the disappearance of reality in a world of hallucinations." In *Propaganda* he wrote that "Nothing is worse in times of danger than to live in a dream world."

I think it's clear that we've moved significantly closer to the realization of a "sham universe" today than we were when Ellul published *The Technological Society* in 1954. I think it's also clear that it's become very easy today to live in a dream world, and that many people do. Both developments have been brought to you courtesy of the inexorable expansion of technology.

This is decidedly *not* the view shared by many technological enthusiasts. They believe that the access we have today to virtually unlimited amounts of information has made it easier than it ever has been for the average citizen to ascertain the

truth while at the same time making it more difficult for politicians and others in positions of power to obscure it.

In some circumstances it's true that the Internet and other media can expose us to enlightening, empowering information. However, it's also true that the Internet and other media can expose us to vast amounts of *mis*information, thereby encouraging us to base our opinions and behaviors on distorted perceptions of reality. This has profound implications for the future of governance and society.

Ellul stressed repeatedly that the pejorative connotation attached to the word "propaganda" obscures how we really feel about it. We think we don't like propaganda —that we don't want to be subjected to it. To the contrary, Ellul said, propaganda has achieved the power it has precisely because we so desperately need it.

Why do we need it? Simply put, because propaganda helps us survive. Another thing Ellul stressed repeatedly is that human beings are not cut out for the pressures imposed by life in the technological society. Technique helpfully offers us various means of coping with those stressful conditions. It does so because, at this point at least, human beings are still needed to help keep the gears of the machines turning, and we can't do that if we crack under the strain. Propaganda is a prop deployed to keep us at our stations.

"There is not just a wicked propagandist at work who sets up means to ensnare the innocent citizen," Ellul wrote. "Rather, there is a citizen who craves propaganda from the bottom of his being and a propagandist who responds to this craving."

What exactly does propaganda offer the harried citizen of the technological society? Many things.

Most practically, it provides a sorting tool. Propaganda tells us what's worth paying attention to. This is a key reason why propaganda has become steadily more important in the era of the Internet. Information is power, we're told, but for most of us wading through the volume of information available today is an overwhelming challenge, one that at some point we simply decline to take on.

"It is a fact," Ellul wrote in 1962, "that excessive data do not enlighten the reader or the listener; they drown him. He cannot remember them all, or coordinate them, or understand them; if he does not want to risk losing his mind, he will merely draw a general picture from them. And the more facts supplied, the more simplistic the image."

Propaganda takes advantage of this situation by giving us pre-digested packages of pre-selected information. It may not be comprehensive or balanced information, but it's all we have time for. What matters is that it's manageable. It's a life raft to cling to in an information tsunami.

As pressing as our need for information manageability might be, there's a far deeper need that propaganda satisfies: the need of individuals living in the technological society for reassurance of their value as human beings.

The technological society is a society of depersonalization, an ongoing assault on individual identity. Our daily experience is corrosive. In a thousand ways we're made to feel anxious, lonely, ignored. We become, Ellul said, "diminished."

Propaganda offers us an antidote to our diminishment. It tells us that we know things and that what we know matters. That we matter. As Ellul put it, propaganda "justifies" us. Bolstered by propaganda, he said, the individual can look down from the heights upon daily trifles, secure in the knowledge that his opinion, once ignored or actively scorned, has become "important and decisive."

The implications of this for democracy are profound. If what we seek from the news is existential reassurance rather than accurate information on which to base our opinions and decisions, we have a problem.

Obviously human beings have always been prone to confirmation bias—as Paul Simon put it, a man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest. But even though we have access in contemporary culture to a far more diverse range of influences and experiences than ever before, technology allows us to shut much of that diversity out, immersing ourselves in an all-encompassing confirmatory environment much as we immerse ourselves in a warm bath. It also gives us the motivation to immerse ourselves as often and as thoroughly as possible.

At the same time propaganda offers opportunities to find others who feel the same way we do, and opportunities to join with them in mutually-reinforcing groups. In a technological environment of alienation and isolation, propaganda can bind us to a community. But these are highly selective rather than diverse communities. They are actively, aggressively disinterested in sharing discussion and views with members of other communities. The point is affirmation, not an exchange of ideas. This leads, Ellul said (again, in 1962), to "an increasingly stringent partitioning of our society." The more propaganda there is, he added, "the more partitioning there is."

So it is that we live in a time when, despite the availability of unprecedented amounts of information, massive public delusions—climate change denial, the missing Obama birth certificate, the fear that vaccinations can promote autism in children, the belief that Saddam Hussein of Iraq was involved in the 9/11 terrorists attacks, to name a few examples—can flourish and successfully resist any attempt at refutation, no matter how well documented.

"Effective propaganda needs to give man an all-embracing view of the world," Ellul said. "The point is to show that one travels in the direction of history and progress." This all-embracing view of the world, he added, "allows the individual to give the proper classification to all the news items he receives; to exercise a critical judgment, to sharply accentuate certain facts and suppress others, depending on how well they fit into the framework."

In my day job as a journalist, I had the opportunity last year to interview a political scientist who studies deception and distortion in public affairs. His name is Brendan Nyhan and he's an assistant professor at Dartmouth College. One case he examined

was the "death panels" controversy that arose in connection with the Obama Administration's Affordable Care Act in 2009.

The controversy stemmed from claims made repeatedly by former Alaska Governor and former Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin that under the Affordable Care Act, bureaucrats would decide which senior citizens are "worthy" of receiving medical care. Her remarks to that effect received extensive news coverage despite being widely debunked.

To determine if more aggressive media fact-checking could correct the death panels myth, Nyhan and two colleagues conducted an experiment in which two groups were asked to read fictitious but realistic-looking news articles about the death panel claims. The article read by one group contained a paragraph at the end that explained why "nonpartisan health care experts" had concluded that the death panel story was wrong. The corrective paragraph was omitted from the article read by the control group.

Reading the version of the article with the correction successfully reduced belief in the death panel myth among two types of reader: Those who already held an unfavorable opinion of Palin, and those who viewed her favorably but had relatively little knowledge of politics. Opposition to the Affordable Care Act also declined among those readers.

Among readers who were both Palin supporters and relatively knowledgeable about political affairs, the opposite occurred. After reading the corrected article they were *more* likely to believe the death panel myth and more likely to oppose the Affordable Care Act.

Nyhan calls this tendency to cling more tightly to beliefs when they're challenged "the backfire effect."

"We have an intuition," he said, "that political knowledge should be good, that people who know more have more accurate beliefs. In some cases that's true, but in other cases, when we have a motive to preserve an existing belief or attitude, political knowledge can actually equip us to better defend that attitude or belief. It gives us more tools to fend off information we don't like and convince ourselves that we're right."

In the age of the Internet, the tools we have at our disposal for fending off information are as plentiful as the tools we have at our disposal for gathering information. Often as not they're the same tools.

Observing how readily our hunger for reinforcement trumps our hunger for truth caused Ellul to issue one of those statements that has earned him his reputation for pessimism.

"Democracy is based on the concept that man is rational and capable of seeing clearly what is in his own interest," he wrote in *Propaganda*, "but the study of public opinion suggests this is a highly doubtful proposition."

There is one more of Ellul's points on propaganda I'd like to discuss today, and that is what he called "sociological propaganda."

In contrast to propaganda aimed at convincing people on a specific issue, sociological propaganda articulates a much more general collection of beliefs and assumptions that define for an entire society what is considered normal, acceptable, desirable, and beyond question.

Sociological propaganda is promulgated by television and radio programs, newspapers and magazines (the advertising as well as the articles), by Sunday sermons, by bumper stickers on cars, and by the kinds of cars that carry the bumper stickers. It speaks out from the products on the shelves of supermarkets and department stores and from the mouths of the people we pass on the street as well as from the style of their clothes and the style of their haircuts.

Ellul called sociological propaganda "propaganda as integration" and "a propaganda of conformity." It seeks to stabilize, unify and reinforce the status quo, and to provide a plausible rationale for the status quo. It helps create, he said, "a general climate, an atmosphere that influences people imperceptibly without having the appearance of propaganda; it gets to man through his customs, through his most unconscious habits...it is a sort of persuasion from within."

This description reminds me of one of my favorite Ellul-isms from *The Technological Society*: "Technique doesn't terrorize. It acclimates."

Sociological propaganda in our current state of hyper-capitalism is where we see the power of technology come fully into its own. Technology enables an unprecedented degree of immersion in the fundamental message that everything that matters is defined by what you own and what you consume. Indeed, the entire technological society can be viewed as a form of propaganda promoting the absolute normalcy of— you guessed it—the technological society. Thus anyone who doesn't own a car, a television set, a computer, or a smartphone is viewed as an oddball and a loser. A Luddite.

When I first sent [conference organizer] Randal Marlin a summary of what I intended to talk about today, he suggested I might want to include some "prescriptive" remarks, some suggestions on how the deleterious trends the paper as a whole describes might be countered. Those who have read *The Technological Society* are aware that Ellul specifically declined in that book to offer remedies for the deleterious trends he so powerfully described. Those who have read Ellul's theological works know that he looked to miracle for hope and the possibility of redemption.

I no longer consider myself a religious person, and among those who know me I've earned my own reputation as a pessimist. Thus I'll limit my prescriptive remarks to a couple of very simple, very obvious suggestions.

Tell the truth to power, as often and as convincingly as you can. Don't buy the myth that there isn't any truth, and don't be afraid to decline propaganda's invitations to integration and passivity.

One contemporary myth I find especially annoying is the self-congratulatory mantra of aspiring tech billionaires in Silicon Valley who vow that the new platform or new app they're developing will be truly "disruptive." All they're really setting out to disrupt, of course, is a business model whose profits they hope to appropriate for

themselves. They're bravely disrupting one product—one form of self-indulgent consumerism, usually—with another. That's not what I call a revolution.

So, my prescriptive advice is this: Be truly disruptive. Make some noise. Cause some trouble. Do whatever you can to free yourself and those around you from the web of dreams and lies the technological society so relentlessly spins.

As I said, I'm no longer religious, but I'll close with a story from the Bible. Jesus has gone to pray in the garden of Gethsemane. The disciples are supposed to keep watch, but they can't keep their eyes open. They fall asleep. Soldiers enter the garden, arrest Jesus, and take him away.

The message is clear. This is no time to be caught napping.

"Nothing is worse in times of danger than to live in a dream world."

A Being *On* Facebook but not *Of* Facebook: Using New Social Media Technologies to Promote the Virtues of Jacques Ellul

by Brian Lightbody
Brian Lightbody is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Brock University in Ontario, Canada. His areas of specialization are 19th & 20th century Continental Philosophy, Philosophical Genealogy, Nietzsche, Foucault and Epistemology. This paper was presented at the Ellul Conference in Ottawa in July 2014.

In this paper, I wish to show how new technologies come to alter one's initial enjoyment and comportment towards a hobby. What I show is that new technologies serve to transform leisurely activities into a technique, in the Ellulian sense of the term. I begin from the outside in, as it were, by first articulating what I take a hobby to be. Secondly, I then examine the time-honoured pastime of fishing to show that new technologies, if utilized, either cause the hobby to take on aspects of traditional work or in other cases, causes the hobbyist to quit the activity because the hobby is now deemed undesirable; the technological advancement makes the hobby too easy. Thirdly and finally, I turn my attention to another kind of hobby or leisurely activity, which some have called "Facebooking." Looking at Facebook through an Ellulian lens, there are, to be sure, some rather unsettling aspects of the activity, but despite this, all is not lost; Facebook may be used as a tool to practice the Ellulian virtue of non-selectivity.

Ellul uses the term "Technicality" to refer to the increasing encroachment of technologies on all aspects of life.[261] New technologies are developed with one purpose in mind: to make work, in all forms, more efficient. More production, more efficiency, less time seems to be the battle cry of both technocrats and the average person on the

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[261] For a succinct analysis of Ellul's view on technology, see Darrel Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981) chapter 2.

street. Efficiency is no longer attached to some goal, but indeed becomes a goal in itself.

At times, Ellul thinks of "Technicality" as an autonomous yet dynamic entity. It is self-propelled and selfregulating as it is always geared towards maximal efficiency. Human beings cannot help but get caught up in this system as a technical improvement in one area leads to an improvement in another and so on. As a result, all members within modern societies are increasingly controlled and limited by a web-like system of interconnected technologies, practices and policies.

Ellul was not the first thinker to have noted the progression and detrimental effects of what the Frankfurt school called "instrumental rationality" in all sectors of society. But what I think is most interesting about Ellul's work, is that technicality doesn't simply dominate work life, but indeed comes to exercise control over every aspect of leisure time. The traditional contrary form of activity to that of work, as affirmed by most scholars in the Leftist tradition, has been that of leisure, but not idleness. It is fair to say that a traditional conception of leisurely pursuits is where one is free to pursue a hobby. Indeed some Frankfurt philosophers, such as Marcuse, believed that technology was a god-send as it allowed us to further control nature so that we could pursue activities that were enjoyable in themselves.[262] A hobby provides one with the means to while away time without being bored; one derives pleasure from engaging in one's chosen hobby and as one's skill level increases, more pleasure is derived. Fishing is a perfect example of such an activity. It is an activity that is pleasurable, requires skill and has a definite aim—progress may be tracked © 2014 IJESwww.ellul.org*Ellul Forum #55* September 2014 Brian Lightbody by the number and size of fish caught, but one usually is not required to catch anything. The time spent engaged in the activity is pleasurable in itself.

Minimally construed here, a hobby is an activity that one enjoys doing, but where one is not reduced to or identified with the activity itself. In *The German Ideology*, Marx confirms this idea, namely that a hobby is very different from work provided that it is freely engaged in for its own sake, and that the one who engages in the hobby is not identified with it. Marx writes: "In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity... society regulates production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic."[263] What is key here is that one does not become a fisherman: one is not identified with his or her job. One is free to pursue other activities as he or she sees fit. Secondly, it is important that fishing does not become work. In other words, in order for a hobby to remain a hobby, it is

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[262] For a succinct overview of Marcuse's position on technology, see Brian Lightbody, "Can We Truly Love That Which Is Fleeting? The Problem of Time in Marcuse's Eros and Civilization" in *The Florida Philosophical Review*, Summer Vol. X Issue 1, 2010 25–42.

[263] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, in *Karl Marx Friedrich Engels Collected Works* (Vol .5) (New York: International Publishers, 1976,) 47.

crucial that a hobbyist is not expected to produce x number of fish in a given day; for such requirements turn one's hobby into work: one's production output is measured over time.[264]

However, there is something missing in Marx's analysis so Ellul would argue. What Marx perhaps only implicitly realized, but was fully demonstrated and understood by Ellul is the following: technological advancements turn such traditional leisurely activities into productive practices and what's more, these practices, when enframed in terms of production output, are shot through with measures of efficiency. What turns such hobbies into technical activities? New advances in technology. Again look at fishing as an example. Gone are the days of loading up a rowboat with fishing gear, rowing to one's favourite fishing hole and hoping for the best. Now one uses sonar. Sonar provides anglers with a simulated underwater representation of the water they are fishing — one can determine the depth of the body of water and indeed know both the number and size of fish in one's fishing hole. And, when sonar is combined with GPS, anglers are at a further advantage: one can mark the most productive spots in a lake, for example, and navigate to the exact location in the future. Indeed the very notion of a finding a good fishing hole is exploded with these new technologies. A hole denotes both presence and absence: one cannot measure the precise circumference of a hole as the very boundaries that mark the hole are themselves not strictly part of 'it,' whatever this 'it' may be.[265] Likewise, a fishing hole is by its nature inexact; it is its very approximation that makes it a magical, sacred place. Indeed, a fishing hole is often passed on from father to son or mother to daughter as sacred knowledge.

This idea of passing on sacred knowledge to those deemed worthy, however, is completely undermined with the advent of GPS technology. The device does all the work: all one has to do is link up with another person's unit, receive the precise coordinates and the gates of the kingdom as it were, are opened. Ellul's insight is that these so-called 'technological advancements' turn what was once a hobby or a skill into a technique. The hobby is increasingly desacralized: the hobby is now caught up in a productive circle. In spending money on these devices, an angler expects them to work and this work is measured in terms of production. What's more, new devices are measured against the only metric the angler has available, namely, the size and number of fish caught. The technological advancements themselves force one to take a technical approach to the hobby he or she once loved and, in so doing, the freedom one experienced from practicing the craft now feels more like an exercise in production.

Peter Ludlow, a philosopher of technology and cyberspace, explores the desacralization of leisure activity in a recent article in *The Atlantic* magazine. Using Ellulian insights, he produces some rather disturbing if interesting conclusions from his analy-

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[264] For a more detailed analysis of the activity of fishing as a hobby, see William James Booth, "Gone Fishing with Marx: Making Sense of Marx's Communism", *Political Theory*, Vol. 17, 2 May 1989. 205–222.

[265] For more on the ontology of holes, see David Lewis and Stephanie Lewis, 'Holes' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 48, 2, 1970, 206–212.

sis regarding how the internet has made some hobbies too efficient such that the joy that once was found in the hobby simply vanishes. He shows that the idea of producing, what economists call "frictionless areas of consumption," has infiltrated all aspects of modern living from stamp collecting to dating. The Internet has, single handily, radically transformed these areas of activity.

In the article "The Many Problems of Online Dating's Radical Efficiency" Ludlow persuasively argues that all aspects of human behaviour are continually and consistently viewed from the standpoint of economics where the goal is to decrease "friction" that is, to bring consumers and producers together as efficiently as possible.[266] The goal of this frictionless model of consumer interaction is to remove pesky middlemen who stand in the way of consumers and the items they wish to consume. MOOCS or Massive Open Online Courses, for example, are another technological godsend according to such economists because universities, as physical institutions, are nothing more than an obstacle to learning or so it is argued. One may agree or disagree with this assessment, but in any case, Ludlow demonstrates how the application of this type of thinking to other areas has some rather surprising and depressing results. He shows that when this penchant for "radical efficiency" is applied to hobbies like stamp collecting and more interestingly to dating, that the frictionless method breaks down—the best means to the end, leads to the dissolution of the end itself. The end, in other words, is no longer deemed worth pursuing. He writes:

Let me illustrate this point with an example that has nothing to do with dating. It is a deep dark secret of mine that I used to be a philatelist—yes, you can denigrate that fine hobby by calling it stamp collecting if you wish. I collected certain kinds of 19th-century postal history (mailed envelopes) and I used to enjoy travelling from dealer to dealer digging through bins of musty postal history looking for the items that I collected. And then the Internet happened.

Collecting postal history has gone from a labor of seeking out interesting shops and sales and digging through musty boxes to one of logging on to eBay, typing in a search request (19th-century postal history), and clicking on whatever envelope covers catch my eye. The search process has for all practical purposes become frictionless, and the net result is that it just isn't fun anymore. My collection has been placed in a storage locker. I'm done with it.[267]

Why is Ludlow "done" with stamp-collecting or more accurately, envelope collecting? The answer is that radical efficiency has snuffed out the flame of desire. In a perplexing move, the technology used to make stamp collecting more efficient eventually foreclosed on the hobby itself. The internet rendered the entire hobby undesirable because the aims of the hobby were too efficiently arrived at. I suppose the same result would occur

[266] Peter Ludlow, "The Many Problems with Online Dating's Radical Efficiency", *The Atlantic*, Jan. 2013

[267] Peter Ludlow, "The Many Problems with Online Dating's Radical Efficiency"

if any activity was made too easy: no adult, after all, wants to play the fish pond game at a carnival because the end result is "a winner every time."

Ludlow then applies this lesson to another fishing hole as it were: online dating. Frictionless methods of maximal efficiency, Ludlow argues, are taking all the fun out of this sphere, too. E-harmony, for example, virtually guarantees match-making success by subjecting users to a thorough and intimate questionnaire developed by a stable of psychologists. Another popular dating website, aptly called Plenty of Fish, allows users to input a wide array of filters to ensure that one is connected with the perfect person or, at least, the perfect 'hookup.' But again what Ludlow shows is that the fun of dating has evaporated with these more efficient means of meeting like-minded individuals. In a sense, Ludlow complains that the entire activity has become all too easy: the service finds 20, 30 or maybe 40 perfect matches each of whom have the same interests and hobbies as I do. What's more, introductions are already made by the program—a ranked list of the newest and most compatible profiles is emailed to your account on a daily basis.[268]

The most intriguing and illuminating content in the article in my opinion, however, was found in the comment section. The comment section to this article overwhelmingly substantiates Ellul's insight that technology not only desacralizes in the name of efficiency, but that once the activity has been viewed in terms of maximal efficiency, there is in some sense no going back: new technologies will be developed that will make the hobby even more efficient until, I suppose, there is some kind of "efficiency death" a la stamp collecting. Some commentators pointed out that that they would go on two or three dates a night, all with individuals who shared common interests and hobbies. One user remarked that he would give a date 45 minutes to entertain him; if after 45 minutes he found he was bored, he would end the date, go back online and arrange for another date within a few hours. What I find interesting, (although deeply disturbing) is that the above commentator's reasoning is perfectly sound if unforgiving: 'Why waste any more time with an individual who does not interest you?' 'Surely it is easier to find someone new who is more attractive, more entertaining, and who shares more of my interests and hobbies?'

I now want to turn to a final source of leisurely activity, namely, that of "Facebooking." Facebook is interesting from an Ellulian analysis for two reasons: first, a user is responsible for enframing herself. What is interesting about this phenomenon, is that it is usually the Other (with a capital O) who is enframed—I view the stranger as a means to my end. Sartre, for example, discusses this tendency in terms of his notion of the "instrumental complex"—I cannot help but view the world, including the people within it, as objects of use for me.[269] I absorb them as part of my totality of narrative as Levinas might say. Of course there is a dialectical dimension to this relationship

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[268] Peter Ludlow, "The Many Problems with Online Dating's Radical Efficiency"

[269] Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness.* trans. Hazel Barnes. New York: Philosophical Library, 1956

between self and Other as Sartre well-understood: "Hell is Other people", Sartre wrote because they enframe us as well.[270]

Ellul, too, is of course interested in establishing communities whereby we treat each other as neighbours and not as useful strangers who simply do things for us within the system. Facebook, I think Ellul would argue, does nothing in removing my perceived strangeness to others. If anything it acts as a powerful reductive agent in that I am become best known according to the pictures and comments I have made online. And certainly many corporations agree: scanning a job candidate's Facebook profile has become a better interview tool than the interview itself.

A second interesting aspect of Facebook and the hobby of "Facebooking" itself, is that text is clearly subordinate to the images contained within a person's profile. Most profiles simply consist of pictures with brief comments. Facebook, I would argue, is carving out new and mostly icon driven forms of subjectivity for 21st century persons. One presents one's totality as it were as an avatar—an artificial character created through uploaded images, comments, as well as 'likes' and 'dislikes' which is then interpreted and judged by others, namely, 'friends.' But the consequence of this technology, I am sure Ellul would argue, violates the sacredness of the word. Pictures are substituted for description. And acronyms like lol, omg etc. are nothing more than canned expressions that are substitutes for real dialogue. Facebook, as a technology, would appear to be a form of social media that Ellul would abhor.

So what is to be done? Should one simply turn off and tune out from all forms of social media? Are we to retreat into some Luddian silent utopia?

I would suggest that "Facebooking" does have one advantage: it accelerates Ellul's call to practice nonselectivity. Non-selectivity is the act of seeking out others, very different from oneself and engaging these others in dialogue. In *The Ethics of Freedom*, Ellul writes: "We always meet those who resemble us, but the commandment ...to love even enemies deconditions us. If we become capable of encountering and receiving all sorts and conditions of men, if we become capable of taking the initiative with all sorts and conditions of men, this can happen only if we are free enough not to select whom we will meet, not to pass prior judgment on whom we can meet and not to decide in advance whom we cannot meet.[271]

Depending on the security settings for a profile, Facebook may be used to peer into very different worldviews. Indeed such behaviour, of looking at some stranger's profile has its own name. It is called "creeping." I think it is fair to say that most creeping is simply an exercise in idle curiosity. The intention, in most cases I would suspect, is to peer into the 'world' of some other being. To have in a sense a God's eye view of a fellow person. We turn such a person into the Other. And the word, "creeping" corroborates this sense of otherness: I can see what you are up to, but you cannot see my profile

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[270] See Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit*

[271] Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom,* Translated and Edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976, 326.

and you do not know that I am spying on you. But notice the following phenomenon: the term reinforces the behaviour. If I am viewing someone's else's profile then I am aware I am "creeping" this person and therefore whatever pleasure I derive is derived once again from this taboo pleasure I receive from seeing while remaining unseen. I objectify the Other, just as I objectify the other by staring at someone getting dressed from the Sartrean keyhole.[272]

With all that said, an important question remains: is it not possible to creep without engaging in creepy behaviour? If I am using Facebook to peer into life-worlds very different from my own, not for the sake of puerile entertainment, but for the sake of really trying to understand someone I normally would not associate with, then am I not, in some minimal way, practicing non-selectivity? Furthermore does not this activity allow me to establish a closer tie with this person? Is it not the case that I am seeing that this person too has his or her ups and downs, her personal struggles, her triumphs? And while this idea, namely that others are like me, they too are struggling in this world and have the same fears as I do, is known, it is known very often in an abstract way. Viewing someone's profile in the above manner, however, somehow concretizes their identity and mine as well. I am drawn closer to my fellow human being. Such creepy behaviour allows me to bond with others whether they be friends or strangers insofar as I can see myself in their struggles and triumphs. The anonymous mass of individuals that Ellul greatly and rightly feared can be disassembled by "Facebooking" in this way, or so I suggest. And although this practice does not transform this mass into a community, still the world becomes a little less Other a little less strange for it is slowly transformed into a world of known strangers who are just like me.

http://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2013/01/the-many-problems-with-online-datings-radical-efficiency/266796/

Notes on Recent Books by and about Jacques Ellul

The Ellul Forum welcomes critical reviews of these and other books addressing issues of the interplay of technology, culture, politics, theology, communication and other topics. Feel free to submit your proposals, essays, and reviews toIJES@ellul.org

Jacques Ellul, The Empire of Non-Sense: Art in the Technological Society

(Papadakis Publisher, 2014) 168 pp.www.papadakis.net

Translated by Michael Johnson & David Lovekin from *L'Empir du non-sens* (Presses universitaires de France, 1980)

At long last (34 years after its original publication in French!) we have an English translation of Ellul's study of art in the technological society. Introductory essays by Samir Younes (Professor of Architecture, Notre Dame) and David Lovekin (Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Hastings College in Nebraska and author of *Technique,*

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[272] See Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 259.

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Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul, 1991) add greatly to the value of this major work. The work begs for serious reading and discussion.

Jacques Ellul, *If You Are the Son of God: The Suffering and Temptations of Jesus* (Eugene OR: Cascade Books, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2014) 95 pp.www.wipfandstock.com Translated by Anne-Marie Andreasson-Hogg from *Si tu es le fils de Dieu: souffrances et tentations de Jesus* (Editions Centurion, 1991)

This is a remarkable little book. Ellul begins by reflecting on the meaning of temptation and on the biblical ideas of Jesus' simultaneous divinity and humanity. In the first half of the book he explores many different aspects of the "suffering servant." In the second half he focuses on many aspects of the temptations of Jesus, exploring especially the famous threefold temptation at the beginning of his public career. This (like all of Ellul's work) will not be your usual seminary or religious professional study! Great, provocative, illuminating insights.

Jacques Ellul, On Being Rich & Poor: Christianity in a Time of Economic Globalization

(University of Toronto Press, 2014) xxii, 273 pp.www.utppublishing.com

Compiled, edited, and translated by Willem Vanderburg.

As he did in *Jacques Ellul: On Freedom, Love, and Power* (2010) with tape recordings of Ellul's studies of parts of Genesis, Job, Matthew, and John, Bill Vanderburg (Emeritus Professor and Director of the Centre for Technology and Social Development at the University of Toronto) does now in *On Being Rich and Poor* with tape recordings of Ellul's studies of the biblical books of Amos and James. Both of these volumes are major contributions to lovers of Ellul's brilliant if idiosyncratic (that is a compliment!) engagements with the biblical text. We are continually amazed and challenged by his unusual but well-grounded interpretations. Yes, it is too bad there was not first created a French text from these recordings but for those interested it is possible to listen to the original French recordings which are catalogued in the special Jacques Ellul Collection at Wheaton College (IL). Any who have ever worked from a recording of a live interview or event to a publishable manuscript know that a wise and sometimes strong editorial hand is essential and certainly Bill Vanderburg provides that. Bill was present at many of these studies 1973 — 1978 in Bordeaux. (I was privileged to sit in on Ellul's studies of Ecclesiastes in 1984–85 in Bordeaux which Ellul himself turned into his book *Reason for Being* (1987; ET 1990) so I can well imagine the profound experience to which he refers). Both of these volumes are major contributions for which we are indebted to Bill Vanderburg —and which deserve a wide reading and a deep review.

Jeffrey M. Shaw, Illusions of Freedom: Thomas Merton & Jacques Ellul on Technology and the Human Condition

(Eugene OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014). 193 pp.www.wipfandstock.com

Jeff Shaw recently completed his doctorate with a thesis that is now edited and presented in this book. Sometimes one of the best ways to understand better a thinker or author is to do a side-by-side comparison with another thinker, distinctive but with several touch points that invite comparison. Shaw puts the American Catholic monk alongside the French Protestant sociologist to helpful effect in terms of their views of technology, theology, sociology, and politics. Brothers for sure, reinforcing many of the same perspectives, but with interesting distinctives. To receive a fuller critical review in a future *Ellul Forum.*

Issue #56 2015

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On Terrorism, Violence, and War: Looking Back at 9/11 and Its Aftermath

By Patrick Troude-Chastenet

Patrick Troude-Chastenet is full professor, agrege in political science, Centre Montesquieu de Recherches Politiques de l'Universite de Bordeaux, and Director of *Cahiers Jacques-Ellul*

"I am not given to hasty conflations, and I am therefore weighing my words when I say terrorists are Nazis."[273]

At a time when Salafist attacks in Europe and Africa are being perpetrated in the name of the Prophet, when the beheading of American journalists is put online by Jihadists at war with the West, when social networks and Fox News have no compunction about showing the unbearable images of the death throes of a Jordanian pilot being burned alive in front of a cheering crowd—thereby spreading ISIS propaganda, we ought to keep in mind that if its forms have changed somewhat over the last fifteen years, terrorist violence is still intent on striking the imagination as much as on destroying bodies.

In hindsight, we can now say those who dated the start of the twenty-first century from September 11, 2001 were correct. A "sequence" was opened that day, and no one can tell when and how it will end. It is now a truism that there was a pre-9/11 time and that we live in a post-9/11 era, when things will never again be as before. And indeed, to paraphrase a famous formula, since that day, a specter is haunting the West, the specter of Islam, and vice versa, it might be added.[274] Be that as it may, if the terrorist attack, and especially the military retaliation against it, have lent themselves to the most contradictory interpretations, no one has dared to deny the importance of this unheard-of event, one that is "radically new" for Claude Lanzmann,[275] a pure event, "the absolute event," as French philosopher Jean Baudrillard put it.[276]

The magnitude of this drama should not however prevent us from considering modern terrorism as a particular form of political propaganda whose deep meaning is inseparable from the technological nature of contemporary societies. This hyperterrorism functions at once as evidence of the level of vulnerability of technological societies and as an indicator of the inherent fragility of pluralistic democracies. By virtue of its

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[273] Jacques Ellul, *Les combats de la liberte, Ethique de la liberte,* vol. 3, 1984, p. 166.

[274] Claude Liauzu, *Empire du mal contre Grand Satan. Treize siecles de cultures de guerre entre l'islam et l'Occident*, Armand Colin, 2005.

[275] Director of *Shoah*, Jean-Paul Sartre's sometime secretary and director of the review *Les Temps Modernes.*

[276] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism,* (Verso, 2003), http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jean-baudrillard/articles/lesprit-du-terrorisme/

spectacular brutality, it has also acted as a reminder that force, not to say violence, is always and everywhere political action's specific means as *ultima ratio.*

The armed challenge against the modern state's claim to the monopoly of legitimate physical violence partially renews the theme of the yoking of politics and war. Finally, if terrorism is "intrinsically bad" in Jacques Ellul's words, it is not—in itself—a new form of totalitarianism but only a weapon in the hands of various totalitarian groups or regimes. The solutions used to fight it raise in turn the classic question of means and ends. From this angle, and so as to throw some light on our present situation, we may wonder about the lessons to be drawn from the tragedy of 9/11, first by coming back to the sequence of events as we experienced them at the time, then to examining its consequences, that is, war in its many guises as it ensued, and the questions, both moral and political, it raises on both sides of the Atlantic.

What happened that day? If we try to mentally go back in time, how did we receive and perceive this unprecedented event at the time?

Images of power and the power of images

Beyond what was immediately presented as a declaration of war to America and/or the Western world, or even as the beginning of the first war of the twenty-first century, the first puzzle had to with the choice of the targets. Their nature. Which came down to asking a series of basic questions: who did what, how, and with what results? And the persistent puzzle of the identity of the perpetrator(s) —the question of who—has tended to eclipse the question of what. The question of how has been literally absorbed by the image—broadcast in a loop—of the Boeings smashing into the towers.

We will come back to the targets' symbolic dimension, but no one could fail to notice that they happened to be sites of power—representations, images of Power. Economic and financial power: the World Trade Center. Military power: the Pentagon. Political power: the abortive attack on the White House. The visual dimension is essential, in the sense that the whole affair was shot through with spectacle—tragic to be sure, but still spectacle, and what is more, televised spectacle ... viewed live. September 11 marked the comeback, amid fanfare, of CNN time and image.[277] A comeback that proved very temporary, as it turned out, though not that of Ted Turner's network as such, but of a genre that has been so criticized, in France at least, during and after the Gulf War (1991). The universal spread of images issuing from a single broadcaster, the risk of manipulation and censorship, biased information, the omnipresence of retired generals and security experts in television studios, the muffling of any dissenting voice ...

For about forty-eight hours, aeronautics, counter-espionage, and international terrorism experts followed each other on our screens, giving the event a feeling of deja-vu, without however proving able to be up to its magnitude. That very evening, the question was no longer to know whether, but when, the Americans would retaliate. By

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[277] In symptomatic fashion, the 24-hour Qatari news network Al-Jazeera would promptly be termed "the Arab world's CNN" by French news media.

way of the 24-hour information channel CNN, were we about to relive that obscene spectacularization of war: the sky of Baghdad lit up by bombs that seem like fireworks, air raids shot from the angle of innocent video games?

But let us return to the attacks. What did we see on September 11? *America under attack*, live on all TVs on the planet. The first strike (north tower) took place at 8:45 AM in New York. (2:45 PM in Paris). Nobody saw it.[278] The second strike (south tower) took place at 9:06, that is, 21 minutes later, as though the first strike's function had been not only to start making victims, but above all to draw the attention of television networks and viewers to the real

carnage that was to follow. And indeed, the attack of the second Boeing could be filmed live by one of CNN's automatic cameras and seen live in the afternoon in Europe and in the evening in the Near East and Asia. "That moment was the apotheosis of the postmodern era," as novelist Martin Amis would later note. But what were, at the time, the effects on us, the unwilling captive audience of the catastrophe unfolding live under our very eyes? Dare we speak, about this predicament, of collateral damage?

Facing death live on television, we do not think, or we cease to, our brain no longer breathing, glued to the spectacular presentness of the images shown in a loop on our screens. The very enormity of the event prevents us from taking our eyes off the set. We become powerless witnesses to the bracketing of some of our "vital" functions, including the critical function. How do we escape the tyranny of the image that hypnotizes our minds? Shocking images leave us in a state of shock ... We are submerged by images of the catastrophe that are being played and replayed on all stations. The "we" being all the *heavy viewers*[279] we have become on this occasion.

There is suddenly an impossibility of getting away from such a telegenic drama. After catalepsy, addiction? We are oscillating between two ills: the risk of overdose and a state of withdrawal. The repeated broadcast of those images all witnesses called incredible, unthinkable, unimaginable, ends up creating an extra need for images, as though to authenticate a spectacle deemed "unbelievable," "unreal." Conditioning, addiction, dependency. The sight of these Boeings crushing the towers has generated in the viewer, indignant at so much cruelty, a new need, impossible to admit, a kind of unconscious expectation: that of images of preparations for military retaliation, of planes taking off, of young American military, White and Black, united one and all in the same yearning to avenge their country. In other words, heroic images worthy of the best (or worst) Hollywood fare.

In 1998 already, Edward Zwick's *The Siege* depicted a series of Islamic fundamentalist attacks aimed at New York. Actually, for over thirty years, Hollywood has been flooding screens the world over with disaster movies. From *Airport* (1969) to *The Siege* (1998), through *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972), *Towering Inferno* (1974), *Die Hard*

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[278] The scene was however filmed by a French amateur filmmaker, whose images were broadcast by CNN only around midnight local time..

[279] In English in the original.

(1988), *Independence Day* (1996), and *Mars Attacks!* (1997), the US film industry has been churning out an uninterrupted stream of such spectacular productions. The genre has its rules. The disaster's function is both to reveal and to redeem. It usually allows the timid to act as fearless adventurers, the avowed bad guys to redeem their crimes, while the falsely brave are unmasked and seemingly respectable people behave like total bastards.

By a kind of irony at which History seems to excel, terrorists have turned this ideological weapon or cultural message against its sender. Originally meant as entertainment fiction, the disaster screenplay has been brutally translated to the real world by America's enemies, in a bloody "return to sender"! "It may have been no accident that they chose the language of American movies. They were creating not just terror; they were creating images."[280] *This time, the scene was real.*[281] Consequently, CIA experts seek the counsel of Hollywood screenwriters to anticipate the form new attacks will take. At the movies, disaster also reveals the hero dormant in the *regular guy.*[282] Many Americans actually believe the White House was saved from United Airlines flight 93, the plane that crashed near Pittsburgh, by a handful of amateur sportsmen.[283]

Symbols of power and the power of symbols

It wasn't buildings that were attacked but above all a metaphor, or symbols, if one prefers. And not just any symbols, but those of US hyperpower, symbols of economic power, of military power and political power. Journalistic cliches always hold their share of truth. "We were aiming at the heart of America." "America hit in the heart." The Twin Towers were indeed the symbolic high place of US economic and financial power. Since it was located a few steps away from the Wall Street Stock Exchange, the press sometimes referred to the World Trade Center as the "Temple of Commerce." The religious connotation also applies to the Pentagon when it is called the *Shrine of War.* As for the White House, it obviously symbolized the seat of power of the head of the most powerful state on Earth. In other words, a sacred place *par excellence.*

In all three cases, attacking those loci of power bearing a high symbolic charge amounts to a sacrilege. By their gigantic nature alone, the twins did indeed look like cathedrals. Besides, even if a confession does not necessarily prove guilt, it will be noted that the presumed mastermind behind these attacks (the "message"'s sender) did confirm, a month after the events, what was still one interpretation among other possible ones. "The true targets were icons of US military and economic power."

By using the term "icons," Osama Bin Laden seems to want to prove Jean Baudrillard right, though he likely never heard of him. "This terrorist violence is not '*real.*' It is worse in a sense: it is symbolic."[284] According to Baudrillard, we were all secretly

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[280] Neal Gabler, "This Time, the Scene Was Real." *New York Times*, September 16, 2001.

[281] In English in the original.

[282] In English in the original.

[283] The very title of the French documentary by Thomas Johnson: *Vol 93, les nouveaux heros de l'Amerique*, reflects this viewpoint very well.

[284] Jean Baudrillard, "L'esprit du terrorisme." *Le Monde*, November 3, 2001.

dreaming such a thing would happen, and in their strategy, terrorists know "they can count on our unspeakable complicity." By deliberately positioning himself on the field of the collective unconscious, the French philosopher thus eludes all discussion, but by the same token he cannot make any scientific claim. Al-Qaeda's founder justifies the slaughter of innocents by a politicalreligious rhetoric that tends to erase the physical reality of the victims to better underline the symbolic power of the targets. Thus, the victims were not targeted as such, but were only guilty of being at the wrong place at the wrong time. This is what killed them. And in a way, Bin Laden kills them symbolically a second time, by denying them their status as genuine targets. What does he care if the destruction of these so-called icons involved the death of thousands of very real flesh-and-blood people?

The day after the drama, on the first page of the French daily *Le Monde*, one could see Uncle Sam as a giant, striding amidst New York skyscrapers, his legs wounded by the first plane's impact. The image was reminiscent of some famous scenes of the movie *King Kong* (1933), especially since the Twin Towers had replaced the Empire State Building in John Guillermin's remake. But it is also impossible not to think of a giant with feet of clay or even of the Colossus of Rhodes in the peplums of yore. To be precise, if we want to have a measure of the target's symbolic power, we have to remember that the Greek colossus was only 32 meters high, that the Mesopotamian ziggurats that inspired the biblical parable of the tower of Babel were 40 to 100 meters high, whereas the Twin Towers were 420 meters high.

For a religious fundamentalist, isn't the American skyscraper the modern equivalent of the tower of Babel? "A tower that reaches to the heavens" (Genesis 11). A kind of challenge made by Promethean man against God to assert his power. The skyscraper as Godscraper? The Biblical episode of the tower of Babel does refer to the offence of hubris. Besides, for ultraconservative Christians as for some fundamentalist Muslims, New York is Babylon or Sodom and Gomorrah: a cosmopolitan city of decadent mores deserving destruction and divine punishment. Would it be a slight to psychoanalysis to involve it in a commonplace? The towers as a representation of sexual potency, the skyscraper as phallic symbol? From this standpoint, the attack would be tantamount to a kind of architectural and urban castration. America struck in its manhood, emasculated live by a still-unknown but clearly savage enemy.

On the first page of *Le Monde* on September 13, on the left third of the picture, one could only see the Statue of Liberty and, in the background, a thick black smoke. As though the collapse of the World Trade Center's Twin Towers caused the very symbol of liberty to reemerge. For its part, the special issue of *Time* magazine on the tragedy showed on its front cover the two towers in flames, and on its back cover the Statue of Liberty in front, her arm held high, in dazzling profile against a backdrop of thick black smoke. The image of this unharmed statue unflinchingly overlooking a genuine field of ruin made a strange impression.

Right after the events, there were at least two possible readings of this new skyline. In the absence of any immediate claim, the famous statue appeared in the New

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York sky as a kind of signature. An attack committed in the name of the right to independence? The liberation of occupied territories, the liberation of the Holy Places, the discontinuation of US bombings in Iraq, the liberation of all the oppressed in the world! This was proof of the need to destroy the temple of Western commerce to put back on the horizon the very symbol of freedom. Or then again, quite the contrary, it could be seen as an illustration of the very failure of the terrorists, who had destroyed buildings and killed innocent people without being able to dent the main, immaterial thing: the spirit of America, her principle, her values, symbolized by this world-famous statue. Besides, if liberty appears as the national religion of the United States—aside from the worship of money, then Francois Bartholdi's sculpture was its first icon, that is a "symbolic-hypostatic representation," a mere image leading to the origin and as such, ever at risk of lending itself to idolatry.

From this perspective, the Statue of Liberty would have made a much more symbolic target than the Twin Towers or the Pentagon. The target was without a doubt harder to reach, and the message was liable to becoming muddled. For if we take Osama Bin Laden's discourse seriously, the term "icon" may lead us to believe that the target of the attacks was not

America as such but the implicit model she embodies for a handful of corrupt leaders in the Middle East, starting with those of his native country, Saudi Arabia.

Finally, a parallel could be made between the astonishment of Western public opinion upon the discovery of US citizens among Taliban fighters and the current reaction of Europeans as they realize the importance of Jihadist networks leading volunteers to Syria, and especially of French people after the bloody attack aimed at the editorial board of the satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo*. Just as the terrorist billionaire and expert in financial circuits could be termed "America's family secret" or "the president's evil twin," according to Arundhati Roy, we may wonder if the kamikaze air pirates who had been living in the United States long enough to blend in were not after all Americans in a sense, by virtue of their lifestyle, and especially, their technological culture?

Communication technologies and the communication of technology

Who could deny that the United States represents the archetype, or even the matrix, of technological societies? In the era of cyberterrorism, the September 11 terrorist attack gives us the opportunity to raise the more general question of the role of technology in modern societies.

The Internet is supposed to have been invented by American engineers and originally used by the army and later by academics who wanted a faster way to exchange information with colleagues abroad. The police investigation seems to prove that the operation's organizers favored this communication technology to coordinate the attacks. More discreet than the telephone, electronic mail is said to make it possible to hide messages by a combination of cryptography and steganography. The messages would first be coded, and then concealed (in the grey area not visible to the human eye) in the middle of seemingly innocuous photographs (in particular, the most commonplace images on the Web, namely, pornography) and transmitted under the guise

of an attachment. According to Ron Dick, Deputy Director of the FBI, not only did the pirates use Internet, but they "used it well."

As for money, the crux of any war, it will suffice to recall two elements too well-known to be dwelt upon. While the Taliban regime did persecute poppy growers, a sizable part of al-Qaeda's fortune came from opium trafficking: how to get rich by poisoning infidels! The heroine consumed by US junkies mostly comes from Afghanistan, even as the Bush administration finances the war against drugs in that country. Talk about selling capitalists the rope that will be used to hang them! Second paradox: the ambiguous role, to say the least, played by US banks regularly working on behalf of filthy-rich businessmen from the Arab Peninsula or the Persian Gulf. With a little more curiosity about the precise identity of its clients, Citibank might have refrained from financing the kamikaze pilots based in Florida. At least since the attacks against US embassies in East Africa and the last one to date aimed at the *USS Cole*, a modicum of vigilance was to be expected. Yet Mustafa Ahmad, al-Qaeda's treasurer, apparently had no trouble transferring funds to the head of the commandos, the Egyptian Mohammed Atta, by way of Citibank's New York head office.

The terrorist attack against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon is to be set within the global context of technological societies. Over half a century ago, Jacques Ellul showed that the phenomenon of technology was characterized among other things by unity and by totalization.[285] Technology functions as a network of complex ramifications that wreak havoc with traditional distinctions opposing form and content, or civilian and military. Who, for instance, can guarantee the peaceful use of the nuclear, pharmaceutical, or chemical industry? Aside from the color of its tarpaulin cover, what sets apart a military truck from a civilian truck?

If terrorists now use school supplies (such as box cutters) as part of their arsenal, they also know how to turn an airliner into a weapon of war. We also find this unity of a system made up of interdependent elements in the phenomenon of the chain reactions generated by the September 11 attacks: financial crash, airline company bankruptcies, lay-offs in the aeronautics industry and the tourism sector, cuts in communications budgets, drop in consumption, economic recession. Furthermore, specialization entails totalization. Each one of the parts counts less than the system of connections binding them together. What makes the strength of the technological system is also its weakness. The network structure increases the fragility of technological societies that have become vulnerable by the very fact of their high degree of sophistication.

For modern terrorists, there is no shortage of targets. We may think of Internet viruses, mail-transmitted diseases (anthrax), the poisoning of a city's waterworks or of a major hotel's or hospital's air-conditioning system, not to mention *communications hubs*: airports, train stations, power plants, or nuclear plants. The giant towers in which a midsized city's population is concentrated are the perfect illustration of the

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

fragility of what sociologist Alain Gras has called technological macrosystems.[286] The perpetrators of the attacks on the World Trade Center were well aware of this, as they secured the privilege of appearing to be part of international opinion as the new David striking down the US Goliath.

In our modern societies, technology is ambivalent, since it liberates as much as it alienates. It creates new problems as soon as it resolves them and increases itself through the— technological—solutions it brings. New equipment is already being developed to reinforce air safety. Sooner or later, it is going to be circumvented by a new generation of terrorists, which will in turn give rise to new countermeasures. But technological progress has a price that is not just financial. Its negative effects are inseparable from its positive effects, and this progress always entails a great many unpredictable consequences. To be sure, it is our leaders' duty to try to think of everything in advance. It is no less certain that caution dictates we keep in mind the share of risks inherent in any society based on technological power. It is also wise to be wary of all talk of a neat harmony of security and freedom within the State, as of all those who would combine war and justice abroad. In this respect, the military retaliation's code names, *Infinite Justice* and then *Enduring Freedom*, may be interpreted as the titles of a propaganda film projected by the US government on the world's big screen.

Is war, as Clausewitz stated, "the continuation of politics by other means," or, on the contrary, is Michel Foucault right to reverse that dictum by making politics the continuation of war? In this particular instance, it has been said—not without justification—that it was "the absence of politics by other means."[287] But from the afternoon of September 11, the war of images and words had begun. Later on, George W. Bush would term the military action launched in Afghanistan a "battle for civilization."

The war of words and the words of war

Communication is no doubt to propaganda what publicity is to advertising, but if the outer trappings change, the aim remains the same. Jacques Ellul has shown that, contrary to received wisdom, information (the realm of the Good and of Truth) cannot be so neatly set apart from propaganda (the instrument of Evil and lies). Far from being exclusive of one another, information is the precondition for the very existence of propaganda. Furthermore, propaganda is a necessity for those who govern as well as for the governed. It is a response to a desire for political participation, and it reassures by simplifying a reality made more complex by the mushrooming of information. President Bush's political discourse is a fine illustration of his ideas.

"Freedom itself was attacked this morning by a faceless coward. And freedom will be defended. I want to reassure the American people," George W. Bush declared on Tuesday the 11th, "... that the United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts." Beyond the resort to the classic rhetorical trope of person-

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[286] Alain Gras, *Grandeur et dependance, Sociologie des macro-systemes techniques*, Presses universitaires de France, 1993.

[287] Jean Baudrillard, art. cit.

ification, the president's speech immediately situates itself on the moral plane—the better to shunt away the political dimension: (terrorist) cowardice gets opposed to (American) virtue. It is not a state, it is not a superpower, nor even what some call a hyperpower, which has been attacked, nor even a country, but a value, the fairest and noblest of all: Freedom (embodied by America). The "gaps" left in this discourse are at least as significant here as the ideas expressed. The president does not utter a single word about the foreign policy of "the most powerful Empire in history" (Arno J. Mayer), on its strategic interests in the world, or on its alliances in the Middle East.

The same evening, live from the Oval Office, he continues to omit key aspects: "These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed; our country is strong. A great people has been moved to defend a great nation." Speaking of murder is again a way to depoliticize by criminalizing the opponent. This is again a way to reassure the population by stirring up patriotic feelings. Great people, great nation. The variations are meant to hammer home the same idea. Redundancy is intended. Bush again uses personification: America has been moved, unanimous to a man! In this context of major crisis, the president is trying to boost the sense of national unity.

"Today, our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature. And we responded with the best of America—with the daring of our rescue workers, with the caring for strangers and neighbors who came to give blood and help in any way they could." George W. Bush is still playing on personification: seeing Evil. As though it was absolute evil, and as though it was wholly contained in the images of the attack. The country has seen evil as one would say "it has seen the devil." To the worst, we answered with the best. The president is expressing here a Manichean view of the world. The blackness of the human soul as opposed to a concentrate of American virtues. This symmetry is bogus insofar as helping victims is an obligation within the framework of modern societies (Welfare State and/or Zorro State) and the actual answer will come later, in the guise of military retaliation.

"Freedom and democracy are under attack," he states on Wednesday. "This will be a monumental struggle of good versus evil, but good will prevail." George Bush, Sr., used to compare Saddam Hussein to Adolf Hitler. His president son revives the Reagan-era terminology of the *Evil Empire*, which had referred to the USSR, and which now (perhaps unconsciously) reflects his own simplistic—not to say childish—worldview, as though he was announcing a new *Star Wars* episode! Finally, on September 13, he utters the word "crusade" at the very moment when Samuel Huntington's ideas are being rediscovered[288]: a particularly unfortunate choice of words for someone who wanted to avoid conflating Islam and terrorism.

There is an endless supply of such declarations, fraught with simplistically Manichean binaries: good versus evil, democracy versus archaism, civilization versus barbarism, light versus darkness, good guys versus bad guys ... Osama Bin Laden was

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[288] Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, 72.3 (Summer 1993): 22–49.

perfect in the part of the bogeyman, an evil genius heading a radical Islamic version of the Spectre international crime syndicate in the James Bond franchise.

As though echoing the president's Freudian slip (?), on the same Manichean mode opposing the Umma (the Muslim nation or the community of believers) to the rest of the world, al-Qaeda's leaders would answer him on Sunday, October 7, less than two hours after the beginning of US-UK strikes on Afghan soil. "The crusade war promised by Bush has effectively started," said the spokesman of the political-religious sect. After having called to jihad, he referred to those "thousands of young people who want to die as much as Americans want to live." The authentic Muslim was described by those "madmen of God" as the one who cares about respecting his faith more than his own life (here below). This is a recurrent theme in the discourse of radical Islam: the cause is worth sacrificing one's life for it, and the mujahedeen are not afraid of dying. Bin Laden's words belong to this logic.

"America has been hit by Allah at its most vulnerable point, destroying, thank God, its most prestigious buildings." "There is America, full of fear from its north to its south, from its west to its east. Thank God for that." Throughout his statement, Bin Laden refers to America and not to a specific country, the United States; America not as a continent, but as an evil entity. Aside from omnipresent references to God, it deals with the "most vulnerable point" (the Achilles' heel or the giant's feet of clay) and "prestigious" buildings (prestige, honor, humiliation: this confirms that the targets were primarily symbolic in nature). "There is America, full of fear" —of God, of course!

"What America is tasting now is something insignificant compared to what we [Muslims] have tasted for scores of years." The rhetorical device of legitimization consists in presenting the bloody attack of September 11 as a fair turning of the tables, or better yet, as the suffering inflicted was supposedly far less than the suffering endured. It is all about having the victim appear as the executioner, and justifying to public opinion—especially but not exclusively among Muslims—an operation consisting in making anonymous office clerks, ordinary people, including Muslims, pay for the consequences of the US government's foreign policy. Hence the importance of the resort to the generic term America. Personification makes this sleight of hand possible. It is not thousands of US citizens who have been killed, wounded, bereaved, or simply traumatized ... but **America**, an abstract and evil being along the lines of the "Great Satan" trope once used by Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran.

"Our nation [the Islamic world] has been tasting this humiliation and this degradation for more than 80 years. Its sons are killed, its blood is shed, its sanctuaries are attacked, and no one hears and no one heeds." Bin Laden is addressing this still-imaginary nation that it is the point to build. He speaks in its name. He speaks about it, to it, and to its enemies. In doing so, he starts to make it exist for real ... in hearts and minds or in mental representations. This is how you "do things with words."[289] It is all about getting from the potential nation (at the time, over 1.2 billion Muslims

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[289] John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Oxford University Press, 1962.

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spread around the world) to the actual nation. If one agrees to define nationalism as society's self-worship, let us not forget that it is not nations that beget nationalisms, but nationalism that creates nations.[290]

"And when God has guided a bunch of Muslims to be at the forefront and destroyed America, a big destruction, I wish God would lift their position." In accordance with al-Qaeda's usual strategy, the attack was not overtly claimed. Bin Laden rejoices at the operation's success, without however suggesting he was involved in its inception. He feeds doubt by denying the enemy any detailed admission. We may see this as abiding by the line followed from the beginning of the struggle between the Taliban regime and the US government: invoking the lack of evidence to justify refusing to give over Bin Laden. This argument would become a shibboleth in Islamic countries: "If Osama is indeed responsible for the September 11 attacks, why doesn't America provide the evidence?" But the trope of admission and definite evidence is mostly aimed at Western public opinion, and it makes sense within the framework of human justice. But the message has a second addressee: Muslim public opinion, at which the main message is aimed, namely, that the real instigator of the September 11 attack is none other than God Himself! Bin Laden only happened to be His humble spokesman or His modest interpreter.

"And when those people have defended and retaliated to what their brothers and sisters have suffered in Palestine and Lebanon, the whole world has been shouting, as the unbelievers and hypocrites have done."[291] The word "retaliate" is meant to legitimize the attack. It was, after all, an act of self-defense. Muslims are oppressed by Americans; it is normal that they defend themselves. The reference to Palestine belatedly appeared in Bin Laden's discourse so as to increase his potential for sympathy. Anti-Zionism constituted a powerful vector for the unification of Muslim public opinion, well beyond the Near East and Middle East. This aim was reached if we recall how his popularity rating shot up in Arab streets and among part of African youth. In the context of the second Intifada (the *Aqsa intifadeh*), Bin Laden instrumentalized the Palestinian cause. He was careful not to say that the PLO had condemned the attack and that Yasser Arafat got himself filmed in the midst of giving his blood as a sign of solidarity with American victims.

"They (Americans) are debauchees who supported the executioner against the victim and the unjust against the innocent child. God gave them what they deserve." This transparent allusion to US support for Israeli policies refers to a TV report[292] that had deeply troubled international public opinion, showing the death of Mohammed al-Durah (12 years old) during exchanges of fire between Tsahal and Palestinian Security Forces on September 30, 2000. Bin Laden hammers in the notion that terrorists have done nothing but execute Allah's will.

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[290] Ernst Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism,* Oxford, 1983.

[291] On this concept, see http://www.cultures-et-croyances.com/etude-le-concept-de-lhypocrisie-dans-la-morale-islamique/

[292] http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x5qhp7_la-mort-de-mohammed-al-dura_news

"These events have split the whole world into two camps: the camps of belief and the camps of disbelief!" This simplistic discourse contrasts with the complexity of the real. Bin Laden's message constitutes the reverse mirror image of George W. Bush's message: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." But if the former claims to be fighting **injustice** (in the name of Islam), and the latter to claims to be defending ("enduring") **freedom**, their discourses are partly interchangeable. Bin Laden claims freedom for all oppressed Muslims, and Bush leads his war of reprisals to enact justice.

The oath of al-Qaeda's founder will be met a month later by that of the US president in front of the UN General Assembly: "[...] *their hour of justice will come.* [...] I make this promise to all the victims of that regime: the Taliban's days of harboring terrorists, and dealing in heroin, and brutalizing women are drawing to a close. [...] We have a chance to write the story of our times—a story of courage defeating cruelty, and of light overcoming darkness." The two speakers share the same Manichean view of the world. We are dealing with a genuine instance of mimetic rivalry as per Rene Girard's theory.[293] The similarity can even be found in unexpected areas such as health. President Bush publically swears he has not caught anthrax, while Bin Laden explains to the Pakistani press that his "kidneys are working fine."

"Every Muslim should **arise** in support of his religion, and now the wind of change has blown up to destroy injustice on the Arabian Peninsula." Americans who rise are thus met by Muslims who arise. The Arabian Peninsula is a holy land, because the Prophet was born and lived in Mecca. Bin Laden criticizes Saudi leaders for tolerating the presence of infidels (US military stationed since the Gulf War) near the holy places of Islam. "And to Americans, I say to it and its people this: I swear by God the Great, America will never ... taste security unless we feel security and safety in our land and in Palestine." We have here a sort of mutual figure for constructing the monster. In the hours following the terrorist attack, it was only the name of Osama Bin Laden that was fed to the press and world opinion. Presidential and media rhetoric focused on this scarecrow. Bin Laden did his best to stick to this part, not without talent, it must be said. As an inspired prophet of Allah, he reveled in striking the pose of the lone champion of justice challenging the Empire by himself.

War of images and images of war

Beyond the threats uttered against America, on Sunday, October 7, 2001, the success of the PR operation consisted first in the contrast between our snowy screens, on which we saw nothing of the US and UK air strikes in Afghanistan but a few green dots in the pitch dark night, and the sudden appearance in broad daylight of Public Enemy No. 1, having finished his diatribe and sipping tea in front of his cave with a prophet's serenity. If we may dwell a moment on non-verbal communication, the audiovisual staging of this discourse could only cause dismay in the Western viewer used to other codes. It

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[293] Rene Girard, *Achever Clausewitz*, Flammarion [2007] .

aroused in him a sense of fascination/repulsion, or at least, of troubling otherness. By contrast, in Islamic lands, it helped reinforce the aura of the charismatic leader.

A cave in the desert as sole backdrop. Muslims the world over know that Mohammed hid for three days and three nights in a cave near Mecca, to escape from his enemies who had sworn to kill him. In his time, the Prophet harangued the people to ask it to renounce the cult of images and worship the One God. His clan (the Hashemites) was then undergoing persecution. As the target of the hostility of oligarchies and polytheistic religious leaders, Mohammed then had to flee Mecca, and was forced to go in exile first in Abyssinia, then, during a second emigration (the Hijra), to the oasis that would become Medina. Bin Laden today, like the Prophet long ago, has also been expelled from his country of Saudi Arabia (1991), and then from the Sudan (1996), before finding refuge in Kandahar, among the Taliban. Mohammed also had to hide before his cause triumphed through force of arms: in 630, at the head of 10,000 troops, he had returned to Mecca as a victorious warlord.

Hands folded, eyes half-shut, in a meditative pose, Bin Laden is quietly seated on his heels in the midst of the other cross-legged bearded men. The bodily position is in conformity with the Muslim rites codifying the five daily prayers. He assumes the posture of both sage and warrior. Just like the Prophet! A religious man's beard. Military fatigues and white turban. A kerosene lamp is set on a rock, at the back, aligned with the Egyptian Ayman Al-Zawahiri, former leader of Islamic Jihad, Bin Laden's physician and counsellor. His favorite weapon, a Kalakov (AK-74), taken from a Russian soldier in combat, leaning against the cave wall, is visible, but only in the background during much of his talk. It is there as a reminder of Jihad, and perhaps also of the fact that Islam in its heyday triumphed by the sword. In his previous propaganda tapes, the al-Qaeda leader maintained his reputation as an intrepid horseman and a sharpshooter. The Kalakov also calls to mind the victorious war against the Red Army. Message: Muslims are going to defeat the US "paper tiger" as they have defeated the Soviet Great Satan.

But Osama Bin Laden could not have played Spectre's Blofeld without the complicity of the 24-hour news channel Al-Jazeera, and especially without the herd mentality of Western TV networks, converted to the one religion of profit and thus to the competition for ratings. In the name of national defense, from the very next day, the executives of the main US networks were brought to heel by the government after a moment of aberration. Under the fallacious pretext that al-Qaeda videos could contain coded messages aimed at triggering new terrorist attacks, the White House asked the big US networks to screen all images provided by Qatari television before broadcasting them. The result no doubt exceeded the expectations of the national security advisers, since images of Bin Laden disappeared from the screens for all intents and purposes. Self-censorship was also a factor in the print media. Whereas in its October 1 issue, the cover of *Time* magazine showed only Bin Laden with the caption "Target," over the following weeks one had to carefully scrutinize the pages inside to find paltry excerpts of his declaration of war on America.

Philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy expressed the opinion of many Frenchmen when he called Al-Jazeera "Bin Laden's network." From a Western standpoint, the accusation was not without grounds, but it needs to be qualified. It is a fact that until Kabul fell to the Northern Alliance, "the CNN of the Arab world" enjoyed a monopoly position that forced the whole world's TV networks to rebroadcast its images strapped with a wide strip indicating their origins. But it is just that Al-Jazeera found itself in Afghanistan in a position comparable to that of CNN during the Gulf War. Whereas CNN is still viewed by international public opinion as a purely "made in USA" cultural product like Coca-Cola, its correspondent had been the only one allowed to remain in Baghdad. The Iraqi regime had thus given exceptional means to Peter Arnett, who enjoyed exclusivity as a trade-off with censorship. But because CNN showed the whole world the damage caused by US bombings among the civilian population, it was accused of playing into Saddam Hussein's hands.

The same thing happened to Tayssir Allouni, the only reporter allowed to remain in the Afghan capital before the military balance of power was reversed. Dwelling on misdirected strikes and civilian victims, lingeringly showing corpses in the villages bombed by the US Air Force, only relaying the words of Kabulis denouncing this war against Islam, making a display of Bin Laden's own children armed to the teeth and singing the praises of the "emir of believers," Mullah Omar, against a backdrop of the wrecks of helicopters and planes supposedly downed by the Taliban, the reporter made Al-Jazeera very unpopular with Washington. Accused by US authorities of broadcasting al-Qaeda propaganda, the Arabic network responded with a retrospective shown in a loop, featuring mutilated faces on hospital beds, crippled children and disfigured babies, all maimed in the name of this so-called "battle for civilization." For its part, CNN's executives forced employees to tag every image of civilian victims of US bombings with this ritualistic reminder: "The Taliban are protecting terrorists who are responsible for the death of 5,000 innocent people."

If Al-Jazeera has not managed to convince Westerners of its neutrality by refusing to decide between "the war on terror, as America says" and "the war against the infidels, as al-Qaeda says," the land of press freedom and the First Amendment has beaten all records when it comes to controlling images. In the name of its soldiers' safety, the Pentagon has even extended its grip to photographic documents. During half of the conflict, due to a lack of independent journalists on location, any media wanting to illustrate the US presence on the ground had to be content with only the images of US commandos taken and selected by the Defense Department.

The patriotic fervor unleashed right after the attacks was not limited to the boom in sales of the Star-Spangled Banner. While, in contrast with the Vietnam conflict, the American press has, if anything, been given to self-censorship, journalists have been accused of endangering the lives of "our boys" by providing the enemy with exceedingly accurate information. A petty, slanderous accusation when one knows that said information came from briefings or the website of the Pentagon's PR department, but this type of delusion says a lot about the expectations of much of the public. The

newspapers that dared publish pictures of Afghan babies killed by US bombs were pelted with insults. The concept of "collateral damages" is acceptable, but just as long as it remains at the level of a disembodied abstraction!

Jacques Ellul was right when he described the complicitous relationship uniting the propagandist and the propagandized. The average citizen has no taste for seeing photographs of slaughtered infants when President Bush himself has spoken of the struggle of Good against Evil, led by a nation that is decidedly good and peace-loving, but that is hated because it is misunderstood. Announcing military strikes on the same day that Bin Laden made his threats on TV, Bush had promised: "At the same time, the oppressed people of Afghanistan will know the generosity of America and our allies. As we strike military targets, we will also drop food, medicine, and supplies to the starving and suffering men and women and children of Afghanistan." But since the small yellow containers holdings food rations were the same color as the explosives scattered by cluster bombs, the latter were easy to mistake for the former. How many additional victims were there compared to how many lives saved? The "humanitarian" balance sheet of these very telegenic drops might have turned out to be a cruel exercise for its sponsor, but was the aim to persuade the whole world of American goodness or to maintain the good conscience of the supporters of this war, already a vast majority in the country?

"The word is only relative to Truth. The image is only relative to reality."[294] Jacques Ellul reminds the image consumers we are, rendered bulimic since September 11, that it would be wrong to mistake the real for the true. While the word has to do with truth—and thus also with lies—the image can completely stick to reality without being true. Sight makes us see the obvious, while the word, ever uncertain, excludes it.

War against democracy and democracy at war

War compels each of us to choose sides. It orients our gaze, conditions our visual memory, makes us see what we want to see, and forget the images that do not fit our interpretive framework. Propaganda reassures, because it filters, orders, and simplifies. But it would be the height of intellectual presumption to believe that (deceptive) propaganda is reserved for ordinary folks and (genuine) information to the elite. It would likewise be very naive or cynical to believe in the discourse of *just war*. As Ellul reminds us, there is no such thing as just wars, only necessary wars!

The US counter-attack was not the war of *Freedom* against *Terrorism*, but that of a Western state legitimately defending its power interests in the name of values that have a claim to universality. First of all, freedom cannot wage war, even when one goes to war in its name. Violence is always the province of necessity, that is, freedom's antithesis. Secondly, terrorism is a highly subjective notion, which can refer to very different realities. We may recall that the Nazis used it to discredit the Resistance during their Occupation of France.[295]

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[294] Jacques Ellul, *La parole humiliee,* La Table Ronde, 2014, p. 44, [1981]

[295] Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations.* Basic

Not being able to prevent wars, international organizations have had to fall back on codifying wars. The member states of the European Union have defined as terrorist "any act ... intended to cause death or serious bodily injury to certain persons, and provided its purpose is to intimidate a population, or to compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing something." Who could swear that this definition does not include the bombings and embargo undergone by the populations of Iraq, Iran, and Syria? As is his wont, Noam Chomsky offers a critique that is even more merciless to the powerful: "In practice, terrorism is violence committed against the United States—regardless of the perpetrators. One would be hard-pressed to find an exception to this rule in history."[296]

Article 51 of the United Nations Charter recognizes an inherent right to legitimate defense in case of armed aggression. This right then raises the issue of the *proportionality* of the response. The Geneva Conventions make a distinction between civilian and military objectives and tend to proscribe the disproportionate use of force. The problem with proportionality is not limited to its legal dimension and obviously raises issues of a moral nature. Carpet-bombing strategies have generated deep discomfort even among those best-disposed toward the United States. The means used in Afghanistan in December have given rise to remorse among the very people who, in a burst of legitimate emotionalism, had claimed themselves to be "all Americans now" in September. Was it necessary to burn down the haystack to find the needle? Under the pretext that Bin Laden was as difficult to look for as a needle in a haystack, did one have the right to burn down the whole haystack and part of the field too? With all-out bombings of a country already ravaged by war and famine, all that was achieved was adding more victims to the victims. The tons of bombs dropped around Tora Bora have caused the death of numerous civilians.

President Bush pretended to have just discovered the appalling plight of Afghan women. By a neat historical irony, he was thereby unwittingly using as justification for his war the arguments invoked in 1979 by Georges Marchais, leader of the French Communist Party, to greet the Soviet intervention: putting an end to a feudal regime that demeaned women. And yet, the violation of human rights in general, and of women's rights in particular, not to mention the scandalous destruction of the giant Buddha statues of Bamyan, had not prevented the US administration from negotiating with the Taliban until July 2001, holding out international recognition of the regime against the handover of Bin Laden. In the background for this was the oil lobby, so dear to the Bush clan, and its interest in Central Asian oilfields. From a strict *Realpolitik* standpoint, future events were to show it would have been more judicious to help the Taliban's main adversary: Commander Massoud.

Still at the level of realism, suffice it to recall that the main instigator of the September 11 attacks was long a valued helper of the United States, armed and trained by

Books, 1977.

[296] Noam Chomsky, "Cette Amerique qui n'apprend rien." *Le Monde*, 22/11/2001

the CIA, ready to do anything in the struggle against international Communism. By equipping his troops, e.g. with Stinger missiles, the Americans made him a victorious hero of the struggle against the Soviets in Afghanistan. For reasons of his own, the creature turned against his creator after the Gulf War. Our enemies' enemies are not always our friends after all!

Along these lines, the partnership of mutual convenience tying Washington to Islamabad has led the US to close their eyes to human rights violations in Pakistan and the illegal production of a nuclear weapon, symbolically termed "the Islamic bomb" by President Ali Bhutto himself. Without the help of the Pakistani government as subcontractor of US interests in the region, without the help of its "volunteers" and secret service, the Taliban could never have taken Kabul. Because they were still thinking in Cold War terms, the United States supported the Pakistani military that put in power the Taliban, who then protected Bin Laden's networks. The idea was British, the financing was Saudi, the execution was Pakistani, but the design of this time bomb can be laid at the doorstep of the US government. There can be no question here of using a historical explanation as a kind of underhand justification. No actual or supposed crime of the US government can pretend to excuse the horror of the attacks. There is no need to invoke Dilthey or Weber to make clear analytical distinction between explaining, understanding, and justifying. The best propaganda, which is to say the most technically efficient one, is not built upon lies, but using incomplete or partial data.

In the name of anti-imperialism, a number of intellectuals were quick to disclaim any solidarity with American reprisals by invoking the United States' iniquitous policies in the Near East and their cruelty to the Iraqi people. But the Israel-Palestine conflict does not explain the September 11 attacks any more than the Great Depression explains the Holocaust. Besides, one would be hard-pressed to cite the name of a single European statesman who did more than Carter and Clinton to try to bring back peace to this part of the world. As for Iraq, those who speak of the children who died as a result of the embargo—by outrageously inflating already frightful figures: 600,000 according to UNICEF, from 1 to 1.5 million according to their own statistics—never mention the fate of 150,000 Kurds who were exposed to chemical and biological weapons at Saddam Hussein's will. In a single day, March 17, 1988, his army gassed a city of Iraqi Kurdistan, causing the death of 5,000 civilians in the throes of atrocious agony. You cannot criticize the Americans for not having a policy and at the same time make them responsible for all the evils of this world. If, as bleeding hearts believe, terrorism is the symptom and not the disease, if the economic hardships arising from neoliberal—and hence American! —globalization is its sole source, then one would have to explain why Bin Laden was a Saudi billionaire and not a Sahelian peasant.

Terrorism presents a terrible dilemma to democracies, by condemning them either to betray their basic principles or to disappear at the enemy's hands. To resist as political regimes here and now, they have no other choice than to make a mockery of the values

that found them as a normative ideal. Curtailment of civil liberties, witch hunts in the press and pressures on the media, arbitrary arrests, extension of police custody for foreigners, establishment of exceptional justice and military tribunals, searches of vehicles and people, large-scale development of phone tapping (including of "friendly countries"), and e-mail monitoring. Even within a legal framework (US Patriot Act, security law in France) and with the assent of a public opinion all too eager to trade in its freedom against a return to order, the drift to a security state at home contradicts the democratic spirit just as much as violations of the laws of war abroad. This war was no doubt inevitable even if it was not likeable, but it was in no way a just war; for if there are just causes, there cannot be just wars. "The noblest ends assigned to war are rotten by war," as we are reminded by Jacques Ellul, for whom not only the end does not justify the means, but the means corrupt the ends. The nobler the ends are said to be, the crueler the methods to reach them will be. The whole discourse of the US government consisted precisely in justifying the use of inhumane means in Afghanistan as retaliation for an "aggression against all mankind." As we know all too well, politics is not an industry based on morals. Machiavelli taught us that in politics, force is just when it is necessary. In the same sense, Weber taught us that in politics, we do not always get the Good through the Good. Ellul, who emphasizes the catalytic function of Christians, this peculiar role of sheep among wolves, and who advocates not only non-violence, but non-power, could never have shared Weber's admiration for that character in Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories* who declared that those who preferred the greatness of their City to the salvation of their soul ought to be congratulated. Ellul for his part never tired of proclaiming that a just world could not be founded by unjust means, nor a free society by the means of slaves.[297]

The Prophet of Cuernavaca: Ivan Illich and the Crisis of the West

By Todd Hartch, Oxford University Press, 2015
Reviewed by Peter Escalante
Peter Escalante teaches at New Saint Andrews College. He is the editor of the *Calvinist International* journal and co-editor of *For the Healing of the Nations: Essays on Creation, Redemption, and Neo-Calvinism.*
Ivan Illich, idiosyncratic Catholic priest, dissident theologian, and philosopher, is known primarily for his series of short phenomenological essays illuminating some aspect of modern life. Like Agamben's archaeology, his method in these aims to reveal the deep imaginal underpinnings of modern life. It is easy to get the impression from

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[297] Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology and Christianity*, Wipf and Stock, 2005.

the essays that he was a calmly panoptic intellectual, though a passion for justice obviously warms his writing.

His life was tempestuous and often frustrated but always self-directed, perhaps even self-willed, and by no means merely incidental to his intellectual work. Even his death was a gesture of a piece with his life-work; he died of an extremely painful and disfiguring facial cancer. Illich in fact wrote his sophisticated essays in much the same way, and for much the same sort of purpose, as Subcomandante Marcos writes his communiques, as Las Casas wrote his remonstrances. Thus this well-written and very attentive biography is long overdue and a welcome arrival.

And it is relentlessly biographical, steadily eschewing the temptation to become merely a chronology of his life or an exegesis of the essays, or to take too forward a position of its own regarding Illich's remarkable itinerary. This is very helpful, because, as Hartch makes very clear, Illich is not so much difficult to understand in his writing as, rather, extremely difficult to recognize in his role, and only close attention will reveal the motive idea of the man.

The key thing Hartch notes, and rightly, is that Illich was a Christian priest and a missionary of the Catholic Church. The great and perhaps insuperable difficulty of Illich's mission was that the Catholic Church as he conceived it was dramatically different from the institution that goes under that name, and thus he was not a missionary of the ordinary sort and was in fact perhaps wholly unrecognizable as one.

The book is an extended consideration of this project and this predicament. Hartch traces throughout all of Illich's moves his willingness to position himself outside the hierarchical bureaucracy but still within not only charism but even office of minister and missionary (despite his radical critique of institution and mission as actually existing forms), his cultivation of convivial associations, and his teaching, a single missionary and reforming motive.

Hartch very helpfully explicates Illich's critique of the modern West and of the clerical bureaucracy which he regarded as its matrix and exemplar, as not simply a cry of protest but also a prophetic call toward convivial communion. In Illich's own eyes, he was a missionary not "from" the West, but rather to the West, and sent from the Catholic Church that he distinguished sharply from the organization that holds the name as a trademark. This is a really remarkable insight into Illich and illuminatingly unifies his life and works. Although the book is very responsibly and consistently biographical, for this reason I think it can also serve as a very fine introduction to the Illich's thought.

The book ends by recounting his many failures and frustrations, many of which were due to the unrecognizability of both his mission as mission and his church as church. In the extremity of the near-unrecognizability of his mission, and in the radicalism of both his analysis and his personal risk, Hartch sees Illich as assuming the mantle of prophet. As is often the case with prophets, his short-term failures seem to be spectacular. In particular, the reformed convivial and conciliar church, whose way Illich hoped to make clear through his ferocious critique of Roman Catholic missions, never appeared;

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what grew in the field he cleared were seeds planted by Protestant missionaries, whose churches, although plural and more populist, were nevertheless as institutionalist in their way as the Roman Church. And within Rome itself, those inspired by more hopeful readings of the texts of Vatican II were immediately re-circumscribed within the official institutions. Most painfully, perhaps, Illich ends up with fewer and fewer interlocutors, finding himself largely alone. But Hartch sees Illich's mission as leaving lasting testimony for those who wish to hear it.

Ellul, Machiavelli and Autonomous Technique

by Richard Kirkpatrick[298]

Richard L Kirkpatrick attended Connecticut College and Johns Hopkins University. He studied Ellul and Machiavelli under the guidance of Professor F. Edward Cranz, author of *Nicholas of Cusa and the Renaissance*, and other works. This piece is dedicated to him.

"In spite of the frequent mention of Machiavelli's *Prince*, the truth is that until the beginning of the twentieth century no one ever drew the technical consequences of that work."[299] Jacques Ellul thus remarks without elaboration in *The Technological Society*, although he had more elsewhere to say about Niccolo Machiavelli (1469–1527), as appears below. While many have noted a "technical" dimension to Machiavelli's thought,[300] none has considered it specifically in light of Ellul's conception of "autonomous technique"—deterministic technique that is "self-directing." Ellul's main study was the "technical system" as a civilizational phenomenon, the historical origins of

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[298] My thanks to David Lovekin and Jeffrey Shaw for help shaping this paper.

[299] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*. Translated by John Wilkerson (New York: Vintage, 1964)*,* 232.

[300] An early twentieth-century example, perhaps one Ellul had in mind, was Carl Schmitt, *Dictatorship, 6*7, cited in J. McCormick, *Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 129–130 (finding in Machiavelli "purely technical interests ... technicity"). S. Ruffo-Fiore, in *Niccolo Macchiavelli: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood, 1990) collects many articles and books touching on Machiavelli's "technical" approach and "technique." Some interpreters of Machiavelli have equated or conflated the terms "technical" and "scientific" (e.g., Hughes in "The Science of Machiavelli"). Also see Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946), 153, under the caption "The Technique of Politics," for a comparison of Machiavelli with Galileo. The interpretation of "Machiavelli the Scientist," which flowered mid-twentieth century (see C. Singleton, "The Perspective of Art," *Kenyon Review* 15 (1953)), was widely criticized. See also Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958), 20 as well as his "Three Waves of Modernity," *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays,* edited by Hilail Gildin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 86–87. In nuanced passages, Ellul considered "science" and "technique" to be related, but he regarded technique as a separate phenomenon, and, in its modern stages of extreme acceleration, to have precedence over science. My observations on Machiavelli in this piece are strictly limited to the terms of Ellul's conception of "autonomous technique."

which he found in the eighteenth century CE[301]. Thus, Machiavelli—two hundred years before then—was unquestionably far from the fully realized "technical system" in its modern maturity, and extreme contemporary acceleration. Ellul, however, glimpsed in his thought early characteristics or symptoms of the phenomenon of technique applied to humans—"a lightning flash," as one scholar put it, "long before the main storm."[302] This chapter presents Machiavelli's pertinent line of thought and brief extracts from the *Prince*, the *Discourses*, and his letters,[303] then draws the technical consequences in Ellul's terms.

Niccolo Machiavelli

"On many occasions," Machiavelli wrote,[304] he considered a dilemma, in sum: You consistently do your will and reach your intended ends when you adapt yourself and match your "modes of proceeding" (*modi del procedere*)[305] to changes of fortune and of the times. Everyone, however, has a given nature, so you are *unable* to adapt as needed. Fortune and the times change, but you, stuck in your nature, do not—to your ruin. When Machiavelli counsels you "to use" the lion and to use the fox,[306] he knows it is impossible—the fox is no more leonine than the lion is vulpine; the same inflexibility is to be found in humans, whose stubborn natures obstruct their wills.[307] We get in the way of our own goals.

In this as in all his observation and reading, Machiavelli presents examples of "the actions of great men."[308] Two of his favorite ancient exemplars of modes of proceeding were Hannibal the Carthaginian and Scipio the Roman—opposites: Scipio used the mode of "love" with "piety, fidelity, and religion," Hannibal, the mode of fear, with

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[301] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System.* Translated by Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980), 79 and Jacques Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work.* Edited by Willem H. Vanderburg (New York: House of Anansi, 2011), 29–30.

[302] F. Edward Cranz, *Technology and Western Reason* (New London, CT: De Litteris, 1980), 24.

[303] Citations to the *Prince* are by chapter numbers, and to the *Discourses* by book and chapter numbers, which are standard in all editions.

[304] J. & P. Bondanella, *Niccolo Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 281 (*Discourses* 3.9: "Io ho considerate piu volte"). See also R. Ridolfi, "*I Ghiribizzi al Soderini*," *La Bibliofilia* 72 (1970), 53, a critical edition of the text at Nicolo Machiavelli *Opere.* Edited by M. Martelli (Florence: Sansoni, 1971), 1082–83; see also the tercets on Fortuna at *Opere,* 978, lines 103–05, 112, 112, 114, 126; G. Inglese, *Machiavelli Capitoli* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1981), 122–23; M. McCanles, *The Discourse of Il Principe* (Malibu, CA: Udena, 1985), chapter 25; *Opere*, 1136–39, 1252–56 (April 29, 1513 letter to Vettori); *Opere*, 295–96 (*Prince* 25); 211–14 (*Discourses* 3.8–9); 226–27 (*Discourses* 3.21).

[305] As translated by H. Mansfield in *Machiavelli: Discourses on Livy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) and in Mansfield's *Machiavelli: The Prince* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[306] For the composite man-beast, the centaur, see E. Raimondi, "The Centaur and the Politician," in Ascoli & Kahn, *Machiavelli and the Discourse of Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 14560.

[307] Richard Greenwood, "Machiavelli and the Problem of Human Inflexibility," in *The Cultural Heritage of the Italian Renaissance: Essays in Honor of T. G. Griffith,* edited by C. Griffiths & R. Hastings (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1993), 196.

[308] The quoted passage is from Machiavelli's dedication of the *Prince*.

"cruelty, perfidy, and irreligion."[309] Both were successful, but changing times and fortunes might have required reversal: Hannibal to adopt the mode of love, and Scipio, fear, or yet other modes. These men, however, being unable to adapt themselves and their modes, would have failed. As Professor Ferroni summarizes:

The guarantee of happiness and success can be offered, in Machiavelli's anthropology, only by the individual's capacity for adapting his particular nature to the variations of Fortune, and thus of repeatedly "transforming" the modes of proceeding, according to the directions of these variations. If Fortune moves continuously between extreme and opposite poles, we will be able to match her only if we also know equally well how to shuttle between extremes, only if we are always ready to reverse our own mode of proceeding (if, in sum, we succeed in "transforming into the contrary").[310]

One of Machiavelli's well-known attempted answers to the problem is *virtue*,[311] a force of nature to match capricious Fortuna, by "beating her and holding her down."[312] *Virtu* is a personal gift— ancient, atavistic, and, as Machiavelli knows, rarely to be found. *Virtu* is extraordinary, personal, natural—the "modes of proceeding" are abstract, universal, impersonal. "Modes" do not much matter to those having "great *virtu*" or "extraordinary *virtu*,"[313] but few have *virtu* at all, and fewer still have it in abundance. "The operations of greatest *virtu*" are things of the past.[314] If *virtu* is not in your given nature, you cannot hope to acquire it. Besides, a savage who possesses *virtu* may flex it without consulting Machiavelli. *Virtu*, the natural force, does not answer Machiavelli's procedural problem—to find modes accessible to those who understand (*intende*) and who "know" fortune and the times,[315] so that they always (*sempre*) reach their ends successfully.[316]

Another of Machiavelli's responses to the problem is pretense, but only to disguise personal qualities in yourself you cannot change or to simulate qualities you do not have. As to morals, you need not "have them in fact" but only "appear to have them," and it may be advantageous sometimes even "to be" so. "But the mind must be framed in a way that, needing not to be, you can know how to change to the contrary."[317] When, as here, *seeming* and *being* elide, the old dilemma recurs.

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[309] Ridolfi, "*I Ghiribizzi al Soderini*," note 6. Book 3, chapter 21 of the *Discourses* is titled "Whence It Arises that with a Different Mode of Proceeding Hannibal Produced Those Same Effects in Italy as Scipio Did in Spain." *Discourses* 3.21.

[310] G. Ferroni. "'Transformation' and 'Adaptation' in Machiavelli's *Mandragola*." In *Machiavelli and the Discourse of Literature*, A. Ascoli & V. Khan (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 19.

[311] For a start on the enormous bibliography of *virtu*, see Mansfield, *Machiavelli: Discourses on Livy*, 31516.

[312] *Prince* 25.

[313] *Discourses* 3.21.

[314] *Discourses*, preface to book 1.

[315] Ridolfi, "*I Ghiribizzi al Soderini*," note 6. "Et veramente chi fussi tanto *savio* che *conoscess*i e tempi e l'ordine delle cose et adcomodassisi ad quelle." Martelli, *Machiavelli Opere* 1083a (emphasis added).

[316] *Prince* 15; *Discourses* 3.21.

[317] *Prince* 18 (emphasis added).

As Professor Najemy explains:

Particularly thorny for Machiavelli was the philosophical conundrum of agency and contingency ... The unpredictability of events, the irrationality of history, and people's inability to deviate from their inborn nature and inclinations (all of which flow into what he meant by fortune) caused him to wonder where and how agency, or free will, could determine or influence the outcome of events (which is at least one important sense of Machiavellian *virtu*) ... If, in theory, random variation and

unpredictability can be tamed either by prudence or impetuosity, in practice *both methods are rendered inefficacious by the prison of unchanging individual natures that occludes the required flexibility.* In his poetry and letters Machiavelli recasts the problem by relocating the "variation" of fortune in both nature and human nature, and thus no longer only in external randomness ... [T]his theoretical dilemma ... never ceased to trouble him.[318] (emphasis added)

Machiavelli scholar Professor Atkinson adds, "The question would continue to haunt him."[319]

Culminating his long search for accessible and consistently effective modes of proceeding, Machiavelli was led in a radically new direction—"dans d'etranges domaines," as Ellul calls the realm of the technical bluff.[320] In Machiavelli's letter dated April 29, 1513, the main subject is the latest in political news, the truce between the king of France and Ferdinand, king of Spain. Machiavelli exhaustively argues both sides of the case—that Ferdinand was wise in his modes, then, with equal facility, the reverse: that he was unwise. Machiavelli ventures a third alternative:

One of the modes (*modi*) for holding on to new territories and for either stabilizing equivocal *minds* or keeping them hanging and irresolute is to arouse great expectations of oneself, always keeping men's *minds* busy with trying to figure out the end (*fine*) of one's decisions and one's new ventures. The king has recognized the need for this and has employed it to advantage ... He has not tried to foresee the end (*fine*): for his end *(fine)* is not so much this, that, or the other victory, as to win prestige among his various peoples and to keep them hanging with his multifarious activities. Therefore he has always been a spirited maker of beginnings, later giving them that end (*fine*) which chance places before him or which necessity teaches him.[321]

The reader may well wonder if the theory makes "any coherent sense" and consider it, as Machiavelli himself allowed, a stingray "sold with its tail lopped off," that is, a

[318] John M. Najemy, *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 11.

[319] James B. Atkinson, *Niccolo Macchiavelli: A Portrait*, in Najemy, *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, 18–19.

[320] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), xvi.

[321] James B. Atkinson & David Sices, *The Sweetness of Power: Machiavelli's Discourses & Guicciardini's Considerations.* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), 235 (emphasis added).

"fish without head or tail"—in the vernacular, "without rhyme or reason"[322] or "higgledy-piggledy."[323] We have however two versions of the letter, one draft, one final; the great epistolographer says what he wishes, how he wishes.

Ferdinand reappears as an exemplar in the *Prince,* in which Machiavelli promises to deliver the "effectual truth" (*verita effettuale*).[324] By attacking Granada, Machiavelli writes, Ferdinand

kept the minds of the barons of Castile preoccupied; while thinking of that war, they did not think of [political] innovations.[325] By this means (*mezzo*), without their realizing it, he acquired great prestige and authority over them ... Thus he consistently planned and executed great projects which have always kept the minds of his subjects in suspense and wonder—concentrated on the outcome (*evento*) of

events. His moves have followed so closely one upon the other that he has never given men an ample enough interval between his exploits to work quietly against him.[326]

A hypothetical figure comparable to Ferdinand appears in Machiavelli's *Discourses.* Machiavelli notes that "men are desirous of new things."[327]

This desire, therefore, opens the doors to anyone in a province who makes himself the leader of an innovation: if he is a foreigner, they run after him; if he is from the province, they gather around him, augmenting and favoring him so that however he proceeds he succeeds in making great strides in those places.[328]

This "Innovator" may be a reformer, seditionist, or busy politician. His innovations are much like Ferdinand's "beginnings" and "great enterprises." Ferdinand makes up his nominal "ends" as he goes along; Machiavelli's Innovator has no identified ends at all. He has no name. Machiavelli gives no exemplar among men past or present. In neither the Innovator nor Ferdinand does Machiavelli identify *virtu*; they do not need it. Nor do they need to dissemble to succeed. Constant action itself blinds people, or, as spectacle, fascinates them. The success, "needing not to be" anybody, is, literally—nobody. In sum, this idea is a perfect example of "autonomous technique" in the thought of Jacques Ellul.

Jacques Ellul

Ellul's conception of "autonomous technique" illuminates Machiavelli's novel thoughts on Ferdinand and the Innovator. Technique becomes autonomous, Ellul explains, when one "method [*methode*] is manifestly the most efficient *[plus efficiente]*

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[322] John M. Najemy, *Between Friends: Discourses of Power and Desire in the Machiavelli-Vettori Letters of 1513–1515* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 126.

[323] James B. Atkinson & David Sices, *Machiavelli and His Friends: Their Personal Correspondence* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), 236, 506.

[324] *Prince* 15.

[325] Rinaldi, *Machiavelli, Opere*, volume 1, 345, note 17, explains the political connotations of "*innovazione.*"

[326] *Prince* 21 (emphasis added).

[327] *Discourses* 3.21: "*gli uomini sono desiderosi di cose nuove.*" (Martelli, *Machiavelli Opere* 227a); *Discourses* 1.37: "*gli uomini sogliono affliggersi nel male e stuccarsi nel bene.*" (Id., 119a)

[328] *Discourses* 3.21.

of all the other means [*moyens*]," —at that crux— "the technical movement becomes self-directing ... The human being is no longer in any sense the agent of choice ... He does not make a choice of complex, and, in some way, human motives. He can decide only in favor of the technique that gives maximum efficiency [*le maximum d'efficience*]."[329] Autonomous technique "is an end in itself ... Technique obeys its own determinations, it realizes itself [*elle se realize elle-meme*]"[330] Ellul teaches that, from "the moment efficacy [*l'efficacite*] becomes the criterion of political action," no one can choose [*ne pourrait choisir*] by any other criterion. Ellul writes that Machiavelli "does in fact conclude that politics is autonomous. Doctrine enters only when he tries to establish general rules [*une politique generale*] and formulate the political courses that he considers the most efficient, having first established efficiency as a value ... Machiavelli really demonstrated the Prince's role, above all, is to be effective [*efficace*]. By doing so, he introduced a new perspective, revolutionized his time, introduced efficiency [*l'efficacite*] as a value."[331]

When discussing Machiavelli's "theory of prestige and of diversion," Ellul cites the passage of the *Prince*, quoted above, on Ferdinand and adds:

The prince must first ensure his prestige by psychological means, and secondly he must divert the attention of his opponents and of his subjects on questions that impassion them while he himself acts in another domain ... Although Machiavelli did not devote a special chapter to propaganda, one can say that it is everywhere in his work, that he is the premier theoretician of propaganda (*le premier theoricien de la propagande*), and that his theory is famously encapsulated: "to govern is to make believe (*gouverner, c'est faire croire*)."[332]

After a long, frustrating effort to mediate possibility and necessity, ends and means, Machiavelli's "philosophical conundrum" is not solved but erased. Machiavelli's Ferdinand and Innovator are entrained in modes of proceeding that are autonomous, self-directing. Ferdinand circles endlessly:

- His means are to keep people guessing about his end, so

- He takes actions without seeing their end, because

- His end is to keep people guessing.

The stingray with its tail lopped off is circular, and circles have no "end."[333] Ferdinand undertakes ceaseless actions without seeing their ends as the means to hold

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[329] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 80 ("les autres moyens" appears in the original French).

[330] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*. Translated by Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980), 125,141. See also Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, 243.

[331] Jacques Ellul, *The Political Illusion*. Translated by Konrad Kellen (New York: Knopf, 1967), 69–70.

[332] Jacques Ellul, *Histoire de la Propagande* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), 47–48.

[333] F. Montanari, *La Poesia del Machiavelli* (Rome: Studium, 1968), 70 ("circolo della necessita ...

people in "suspense and wonder" about his ends; nobody can make "head or tail" of him. Ferdinand's "ends" are whatever happens. In the *Discourses*, the Innovator has no stated ends whatsoever; he does nothing but innovate—*what* is unspecified. "However he proceeds he succeeds" —*to what purpose* is unspecified. He fascinates people—*why* is unspecified. Spectacle and fascination are technically related,[334] and both support Ferdinand's dominion of everyone's minds.

For both Ferdinand's "great enterprises" and the Innovator's "great strides," unnamed ends have disappeared into technique, which is its own end. To adapt Ellul, Ferdinand and the Innovator have set out "at tremendous speed—to go *nowhere* [*vers nulle part*]."[335] Machiavelli's technical "modes" in the political world are what Ellul calls "make believe" or "*Le Bluff Technologique.*"[336] Ellul scholar David Lovekin explains that Ellul's technique "is always artificial ... and abstractive."[337] Machiavelli anticipates our own technically abstract vocabulary as applied to humans: modes, procedures, operations,[338] managing.[339]

The solution to the means-ends problem that so vexed Machiavelli, in the revolutionary terms of autonomous technique, is technically "sweet." For Ferdinand and the Innovator, the "effectual truth" (Machiavelli) and the "means absolutely most efficient" (Ellul) have no ends. Says Ellul: "the ends have disappeared, or they seem to have no connection with means ... The means no longer has any need of the end ... [Technique] goes where every step leads it, an implacable monster which nothing can stop."[340] Paradoxically, Machiavelli intended the modes of proceeding as a way to preserve "our free will"[341] (*el nostro libero arbitrio*),[342] but autonomous technique is deterministic: Ellul's technical man (*l'homme technicien*) is "absolutely no longer an agent of choice [*n'est absolument plus l'agent du choix*]."

If the technical solution seems irrational—autonomous technique inverts reason and creates a rationality of its own, which Ellul names "unreason." As he explains: "The desire ... to rationalize human behavior will *always* lead to a point of reversal and an explosion of the irrational ... We have here a kind of monster. Each piece is rational

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la legge fondamentale della tecnica").

[334] Ellul, *The Technological Bluff,* xvi, 323ff. See also Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word.* Translated by Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), for a discourse on the primacy of spectacle in the technical system.

[335] Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom.* 2d ed. (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989), 56 (emphasis in the translation).

[336] Ellul, *The Technological Bluff,* xvi.

[337] David Lovekin, *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1991), 160. See also, F. Chiapelli, *Studi sul Linguaggio del Machiavelli* (Florence:: F. Le Monnier, 1969), 45–46 for an explanation of the comparably abstract character of Machiavelli's prose.

[338] *Discourses* 1 preface; the Ghiribizzi of 1506, supra n 5.

[339] *Prince* 9; *Discourses* 3.40.

[340] Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 54, 59, 60.

[341] *Prince* 25.

[342] For the crucial importance of the will in Machiavelli, see Singleton, "The Perspectives of Art," 176.

but the whole and its functioning are masterpieces of irrationality ... There is a process which leads on from apparently sane and acceptable premises to irrational conduct and plans."[343]

In Ferdinand and the Innovator, the apparent absurdity and irrationality of Machiavelli's modes of proceeding are irrelevant to technique, which for Ellul is "the triumph of the absurd," culminating in "ultimate idiocies [*ultimes sottises*]."[344] Just as autonomous technique subverts free will, the engine of Machiavelli's modes, it also subverts reason, one of the few standards usually observed by the otherwise infamously subversive Machiavelli.[345] To adapt Benedetto Croce's famous observation by substituting "technique" for "politics": "Machiavelli discovers the necessity and autonomy of *technique*, of *technique* that is beyond, or, rather, below, moral good and evil, that has its own laws against which it is useless to rebel."[346]

Ellul explains that "the system presupposes a more and more thorough interrogation of each element, including man, as an object ... a manageable object [*d'objet maniable*] ... in this inhuman universe [*univers inhumain*] ... Modern man, having been dehumanized by means, [has] himself become a means."[347] Ellul approvingly quotes a commentator: "Technique has nothing to do with inner life except to abolish it [*l'abolir*]."[348]

Scholars have observed the phenomenon in Machiavelli's actors, subjects, and objects. They are "raw material."[349] "Have not all readers of Machiavelli felt how his heroes have no inside?" "The image is all, the reality nothing." The prince "must make himself a person with no qualities whatsoever ... a cipher, possessing no qualities, either bestial or human, as his own ... The prince never *is* this or that, he *uses* this or that quality ... A void at the center of the *Prince* marks the absence of the prince himself." Humans are, in a word, "zero."[350] These are "the technical consequences," in Ellul's terms, to be drawn from Machiavelli's *Prince*.

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[343] Ellul, *The Technological Bluff,* 108, 169, 221 (emphasis in the original).

[344] Ellul, *The Technological Bluff,* 197, 381.

[345] While variations on *ragione* in Italian have a number of different connotations, Machiavelli's uses emphatically include *ragione*'s noetic sense. See the glossaries in Mansfield, *Machiavelli, The Prince,* 134 and Mansfield, *Machiavelli: Discourses on Livy,* 339–40. See also April 29, 1513, letter, supra, n. 6: "I do not want to be prompted by any authority but reason (*ragione*)," and, from Mansfield, *Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy,* 1.58: "I do not and I never shall judge the defense of any opinion by reasons (*ragioni*) without recourse to either authority or force to be a flaw." Atkinson & Sices, *Machiavelli and His Friends,* 233.

[346] B. Croce, *Politics and Morals* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1945), 59. "*Machiavelli scopre la necessita e l'autonomia della politica, della politica che e di la, o piuttosto di qua, dal bene e dal male morale, che ha le sue leggi a cui e vano ribellarsi.*" The essay "*Machiavelli e Vico*" was first published in 1924.

[347] Ellul, *The Technological System,* 12, 46, 112, and Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom,* 55.

[348] Ellul, *The Technological System,* 119.

[349] Schmitt, *Dictatorship,* 6; McCormick, *Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism,* 131.

[350] Singleton, "The Perspective of Art," 180; McCanles *The Discourse of Il Principe,* 105–06 (emphasis original); J. Barish *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 97–98; Montanari , *La Poesia del Macchiavelli,* 69; see Jeffrey Shaw, *Illusions of Freedom: Thomas Merton*

Digital Vertigo: How Today's Online Social Revolution Is Dividing, Diminishing, and Disorienting Us

By Andrew Keen, St. Martin's Press, 2012

Reviewed by David Lovekin

David Lovekin is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Hastings College. He is the author of *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* and is co-translator of Jacques Ellul's *The Empire of Non-Sense: Art in The Technological Society.*

Keen begins with a reference to Alfred Hitchcock's remark, "... that behind every good picture lay a great corpse" (1). Keen notes that Hitchcock's *Vertigo* is a film about a man in love with a corpse. Keen then moves to the corpse of Jeremy Bentham, British philosopher, founder of utilitarianism, and visionary of the prison—the Panopticon— who died 1832 and whose body ended up in London's University College. The body is in a mahogany case with folding glass doors and is seated in a chair with a walking stick across its lap. The head is made of sculpted wax. The construction is labeled an "AutoIcon." Bentham, it seems, had made an image of himself. Keen writes that the idea for his book came to him as he stared at the cabinet in the university building on Gower Street, with a Blackberry in one hand and a Canon digital camera in the other (2). He had come to London from Oxford, where he had been at a conference titled, "Silicon Valley Comes to Oxford," with Reid Hoffman, Biz Stone, Mike Malone, Chris Sacca, and Phillip Rosedale, social media experts and entrepreneurs. Against prevailing views, Keen argued that social media like Facebook, LinkedIn, Zynga, etc., have not brought us together, have not made us wiser, and have left us in a place devoid of history and a clear sense or a present, or at least that's my read on it.

The thesis of Keen's book is that social media have made us images of ourselves, absolutely real fakes in the realm of the *Hypervisible,* to cite Umberto Eco (14). We are imprisoned in the image (with a nod to Foucault's treatise, *Discipline and Punish*, on Bentham's prison and to Debord's *Society of the Spectacle.* In fact, we nod to many citations—37 pages of endnotes in a 232-page book. I do not mean this as a criticism but as an observation; much social criticism has become journalism. To know is to be loaded with information, although, as Keen maintains, information is not necessarily knowledge. Facts require wisdom for interpretation. He tentatively writes, "I UPDATE, THEREFORE I AM" (12). Thinking better of it, he adds, "I UPDATE, THEREFORE I AM NOT" (15). What is and what is not are often conjoined.

The strength of the book lies in the metaphor between the prison—the house of inspection—and the movie house. Finding all come together in the entombed body of

Jeremy Bentham is ingenious, though not without problems. Keen states that Bentham willed his body to University College, and then put himself on display, an exemplar of utilitarian greed at his death, in 1832. A website for University College, however, attempts to dispel several myths about Bentham. Bentham had no real connection—other than as a spiritual father—to the university. Further, he had willed his body to his friend Thomas South Smith. The body was to be dissected in the interests of public health and the greater good, the goal of utilitarianism. Bentham's motives, thus, were not clearly selfish. Finally, the body was then moved to University College in 1850. Warning: some of this information was found on a website. Providence may enter in failure. History dogs most claims. Keen's facts may be wrong while being nonetheless on track. There are no facts, finally, without a story.

His over-riding contention is that the image has come to control, and that pleasure, as it was for Bentham, is the greatest good that is now found in the image. The image is like Narcissus's mirror—a presence without depth, the locus of society's current pleasure that obscures the importance of history and speculation. Beneath surfaces lie more facts. The true, I believe, is the whole, to invoke Hegel and Jacques Ellul, neither of whom are in Keen's entourage. The box of our auto-iconhood is larger and more complex than Bentham's. Again, *what is* often resides in *what is not.*

We suffer, Keen claims, from digital vertigo, not unlike Scottie Ferguson, the detective in Hitchcock's *Vertigo,* who has been hired by industrialist Gavin Elster to shadow his wife, Madeleine, who is acting strangely and distant. Elster's mistress, Judy Barton, has been hired to impersonate Madeleine. Elster knows of Scottie's malaise that he will use in a plan to murder his real wife in a faked suicide. Elster tells Scotty that his wife feels she is possessed by a great grandmother—Carlotta Valdez, who did commit suicide—and Gavin wants to know what she does with her day. We see Judy, the fake Madeleine, buying flowers, traveling to Valdez's tomb, and then sitting in a gallery before a painting of Carlotta. The flowers and her hair are a near perfect match. She appears captivated by the image, but it is Scottie who is transfixed.

She travels to the home, now a hotel, where Carlotta lived, and then goes to the Golden Gate Bridge and jumps in the water. Scottie rescues her, takes her home and dries her out, and falls in love—in love with her image, it turns out. They spend time together, go to a forest and wax on about history and nature, and end up in a small church in San Juan Bautista. Judy appears possessed. She runs into the church, with Scottie following, up a winding staircase. He suffers vertigo, as does the viewer, and is unable to get to the roof, where Elster and Judy are hiding with the real Madeleine, who has been killed. Scottie sees her body fall by a window; he is traumatized and then institutionalized. He suffers, the doctor says, from acute melancholia and is unable to speak.

Apparently cured, he returns to San Francisco where he finds Judy, abandoned by Elster. He begins to date Judy and forces her to dress and to look like Madeleine. Clearly he is in love with an image. Judy asks him what he wants—confused, guilty,

and frightened—and he says, "We could just see a lot of each other." I have here fleshed out a bit more than Keen, but his analysis is useful and sharp.

Judy seems to give in to Scottie's obsession, but then absentmindedly wears a necklace that Carlotta wore in her portrait. They race back to the church, with Scottie saying, "There's one last thing I have to do, and then I'll be free of the past." Of course, his past is a fake past: a past he has helped fabricate, and from which he is a victim. He forces the truth on Judy while pushing her back up the staircase, the scene of the crime. As the tension builds, and as Judy recoils from Scottie's accusations, a nun appears from the shadows and frightens Judy, who falls from the roof. "I heard voices," and "God have mercy," the nun says. Keen notes that Scottie has been in love with a corpse who is an image. I add that Judy is both image and woman who cannot come together, and she dies for it. Scottie is finally in possession with a past that he cannot possess. Such is a present without a past.

Of course, we, the audience of spectacle, like Scottie, are in love with movies, with real fakes who often guide and direct our desires and our lives. We have become detectives in the mazes and mansions of advertising, hoping to solve the crimes of embodiment, of appearing and being less than perfect; we wish to become American Idols on stage, to be worshipped in a Being that is to be seen, the essence of techno-being.

Between the discussion of Bentham's prison and auto-icon and the film *Vertigo,* Keen explains social media further. Web 3, a development of Web 2, provides the ultimate prison in which we willingly wear the shackles of *being seen.* The Facebook of Mark Zuckerberg—where everyone will be united in frictionless sharing, where what we read, think, do, hope, and dream—will be our auto-icon (63). We will all share together in the once mythical global village forecast by Marshal McLuhan, in a nostalgia for the future (112–113). We become images far and wide. Our cell phones, our computers, our navigation devices, which are no longer separate, give away our locations, our buying preferences, and even our political proclivities (40). Sherry Turkle, one of Keen's favorite sources, writes, "We have so many ways of communication, yet we are so alone" (58).

Attempts at political rebellion, Keen contends, are often co-opted. The much-touted Arab Spring failed in lack of leadership and direction (72). Many had their "say," their 15 minutes of fame, but the movement went away, like the changing of channels. The same appears to have happened with Occupy Wall Street (71). The police have now come to peruse Facebook accounts.

Aware that modern viewers' lack a sense of history, Keen shows how the development of the transistor led to Silicon Valley and to the monopolies of hardware, which also led to the hegemonies of software, to the gods of social media (41–45). In all cases, Keen contends, the masses do not financially benefit (74–76). Instead, they become more efficient shoppers. Communication leads to the largesse of the few, who promulgate the myths of sharing and togetherness. Zuckerberg's Law is that in each year twice as many people will begin to share (58). This law is echoed in Gordon Moore's law that the number of transistors on a computer chip would double every two years (96).

In turn, architecture takes a turn toward transparency, visibility. The 1851 Crystal Palace, together with Bentham's prison house, the space of inspection, embody these concerns (136). Much more is connected and inferred. Keen is a genius of analogy. For example, he connects Elster's mahogany desk with Bentham's mahogany cabinet. All serve to show the universality of the move to visibility, which leads to separation and ultimately to enslavement (85).

Strangely, Keen holds individual and social character to be at fault (107). Technology is off the hook, regarded simply as a collection of tools, machines, and devices (106–107). He does invoke the problem of genesis: is it character that influences practice, or does practice—like tool using—influence character? Ellul could have helped. As Ellul explains throughout his works, technique is a mentality brought to bear on multiple elements of western civilization after 1750. The symptoms of this mentality are the reduction of all to images and to the silencing of the word. That is, the logic of identity trumps the logic of metaphor and contradiction. One cannot be both something and another opposing thing at the same time. Judy Barton cannot be a salesperson from Kansas, the mistress of Elster, and Madeleine at the same time, and yet she is. Keen is what he uploads (his social being), and yet he is also his privacy, his silence, and his words that invoke a dimension like history that surrounds and gives meaning to a present. This is the domain of the word, what he is not, that has been eclipsed by the image. The photograph, we can remember, is a *slice* of life, no matter how much it moves, to continue the corpse metaphor. But like any concept, it will be an abstraction. For Ellul, concepts are embodied and then forgotten, are technical phenomena parading automatically, geometrically, and endlessly in a manufactured and false paradise where what can be done will be done.[351] Bentham's cabinet and prison would make sense in this spread of technology, where the body is disciplined, contained, and constrained.

Vertigo begins with a mouth trying to speak filling the screen; then in an upward pan we see two eyes looking left and then right; and then one eye fills the screen, widens, and then the film unfolds in a spiral that ultimately explains Scottie's vertigo—he is unbalanced bodily, gravitationally, linguistically, and socially. He simply wants to look at Judy and to revisit a fake history that was his undoing. His world collapsed into the images of Madeleine that define and ultimately kill Judy Barton, who, tragically, is what she is not. A nun has the last word.

Technology disembodies, as Ellul has shown, and turns them into Facebook images and virtual friends with no substance beyond fascination, as Keen understands. Born in North London and educated both in England and America, Keen did his stint as an entrepreneur in Silicon Valley; his venture Audiocafe.com failed, but his interests in the impact of internet activity have not. His insights could be strengthened if joined to

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[351] For a more detailed account of Ellul's logic of technique, see my *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1991).

those of Ellul and moved beyond a journalist's collection of data. A larger history of technology is needed to go beyond Bentham's box and even beyond Foucault's prison (Foucault, of course, does visit the asylum and the clinic in *The History of Madness* and in the *Birth of the Clinic*.). The metaphor of a digital vertigo then can be more fully fleshed out.

Issue #57 June 2016

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On Terrorism, Violence and War: Looking Back at 9/11 and its Aftermath

By Patrick Troude-Chastenet

Patrick Troude-Chastenet Full professor, agrege in Political Science, Centre Montesquieu de Recherches Politiques de 1'Universite de Bordeaux, Director of *Cahiers Jacques-Ellul*

"I am not given to hasty conflations, and I am therefore weighing my words when I say terrorists are Nazis."[352]

At a time when Salafist attacks in Europe and Africa are being perpetrated in the name of the Prophet, when the beheading of American journalists is put online by Jihadists at war with the West, when social networks and Fox News have no compunction about showing the unbearable images of the death throes of a Jordanian pilot being burned alive in front of a cheering crowd -thereby spreading ISIS propaganda, we ought to keep in mind that if its forms have changed somewhat over the last fifteen years, terrorist violence is still intent on striking the imagination as much as on destroying bodies.

In hindsight, we can now say those who dated the start of the XXIst century from September 11, 2001 were correct. A "sequence" was opened that day and no one can tell when and how it will end. It is now a truism that there was a pre-9/11 time and that we live in a post-9/11 era, when things will never again be as before. And indeed, to paraphrase a famous formula, since that day, a specter is haunting the West, the specter of Islam, and vice versa, it might be added[353]. Be that as it may, if the terrorist attack, and especially the military retaliation against it, have lent themselves to the most contradictory interpretations, no one has dared to deny the importance of this unheard-of event, one that is "radically new" for Claude Lanzmann[354], a pure event, "the absolute event," as French philosopher Jean Baudrillard put it[355].

The magnitude of this drama should not however prevent us from considering modern terrorism as a particular form of political propaganda whose deep meaning is inseparable from the technological nature of contemporary societies. This hyperterrorism functions at once as evidence of the level of vulnerability of technological societies and as an indicator of the inherent fragility of pluralistic democracies. By virtue of its

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[352] Jacques Ellul, *Les combats de la liberte, Ethique de la liberte,* vol. 3, (1984), 166.

[353] Claude Liauzu, *Empire du mal contre Grand Satan. Treize siecles de cultures de guerre entre l'islam et l'Occident* (Armand Colin, 2005).

[354] Director of *Shoah*, Jean-Paul Sartre's sometime secretary and director of the review *Les Temps Modernes*.

[355] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism* (Verso, 2003), http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jean-baudrillard/articles/lesprit-du-terrorisme/

spectacular brutality, it has also acted as a reminder that force, not to say violence, is always and everywhere political action's specific means as *ultima ratio.*

The armed challenge against the modern state's claim to the monopoly of legitimate physical violence partially renews the theme of the yoking of politics and war. Finally, if terrorism is "intrinsically bad" in Jacques Ellul's words, it is not — in itself — a new form of totalitarianism, but only a weapon in the hands of various totalitarian groups or regimes. The solutions used to fight it raise in turn the classic question of means and ends. From this angle, and so as to throw some light on our present situation, we may wonder about the lessons to be

drawn from the tragedy of 9/11, by first coming back to the sequence of events as we experienced them at the time, to then examine its consequences, that is, war in its many guises as it ensued, and the questions, both moral and political, it raises on both sides of the Atlantic?

What happened that day? If we try to mentally go back in time, how did we receive and perceive this unprecedented event at the time?

Images of Power and the Power of Images

Beyond what was immediately presented as a declaration of war to America and/or the Western world, or even as the beginning of the first war of the XXIst century, the first puzzle had to with the choice of the targets. Their nature. Which came down to asking a series of basic questions: who did what, how, and with what results? And the persistent puzzle of the identity of the perpetrator(s) — the question of who — has tended to eclipse the question of what. The question of how being literally absorbed by the image — broadcast in a loop — of the Boeings smashing into the towers.

We will come back to the targets' symbolic dimension, but no one could fail to notice that they happened to be sites of power -representations, images of Power. Economic and financial power: the World Trade Center. Military power: the Pentagon. Political power: the abortive attack on the White House. The visual dimension is essential in the sense that the whole affair was shot through with spectacle — tragic to be sure, but still spectacle, and what is more, televised spectacle... viewed live. September 11 marked the comeback, amid fanfare, of CNN time and image[356]. A comeback that proved very temporary, as it turned out, though not that of Ted Turner's network as such, but of a genre that has been so criticized, in France at least, during and after the Gulf War (1991). The universal spread of images issuing from a single broadcaster, the risk of manipulation and censorship, biased information, the omnipresence of retired generals and security experts in television studios, the muffling of any dissenting voice.

For about forty-eight hours, aeronautics, counter-espionage and international terrorism experts followed each other on our screens, giving the event a feeling of deja-vu, without however proving able to be up to its magnitude. That very evening, the question was no longer to know whether, but when the Americans would retaliate. By way

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[356] In symptomatic fashion, the 24-hour Qatari news network Al-Jazeera would promptly be termed "the Arab world's CNN" by French news media.

of the 24-hour information channel CNN, were we about to relive that obscene spectacularization of war: the sky of Baghdad lit up by bombs that seem like fireworks, air raids shot from the angle of innocent video games?

But let us return to the attacks. What did we see on September 11? *America under attack*, live on all TVs on the planet. The first strike (North tower) took place at 8:45 AM in New York. (2:45 PM in Paris). Nobody saw it[357]. The second strike (South tower) took place at 9:06, that is, 21 minutes later, as though the first strike's function had been not only to start making victims, but above all to draw the attention of television networks and viewers to the real carnage that was to follow. And indeed, the attack of the second Boeing could be filmed live by one of CNN's automatic cameras, and seen live in the afternoon in Europe and in the evening in the Near East and Asia. "That moment was the apotheosis of the postmodern era," as novelist Martin Amis would later note. But what were, at the time, the effects on us, the unwilling captive audience of the catastrophe unfolding live under our very eyes? Dare we speak, about this predicament, of collateral damages?

Facing death live on television, we do not think or we cease to, our brain no longer breathing, glued to the spectacular presentness of the images shown in a loop on our screens. The very enormity of the event prevents us from taking our eyes off the set. We become powerless witnesses to the bracketing of some of our "vital" functions, including the critical function. How do we escape the tyranny of the image that hypnotizes our minds? Shocking images leave us in a state of shock... We are submerged by images of the catastrophe that are being played and replayed on all stations. The "we" being all the *heavy viewers*[358] we have become on this occasion.

There is suddenly an impossibility of getting away from such a telegenic drama. After catalepsy, addiction? We are oscillating between two ills: the risk of overdose and a state of withdrawal. The repeated broadcast of those images all witnesses called incredible, unthinkable, unimaginable, ends up creating an extra need for images, as though to authenticate a spectacle deemed "unbelievable", "unreal". Conditioning, addiction, dependency. The sight of these Boeings crushing the towers has generated in the viewer, indignant at so much cruelty, a new need, impossible to admit, a kind of unconscious expectation: that of images of preparations for military retaliation, of planes taking off, of young American military, White and Black, united one and all in the same yearning to avenge their country. In other words, heroic images worthy of the best (or worst) Hollywood fare.

In 1998 already, Edward Zwick's *The Siege* depicted a series of Islamic fundamentalist attacks aimed at New York. Actually, for over thirty years, Hollywood has been flooding screens the world over with disaster movies. From *Airport* (1969) to *The Siege* (1998) through *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972), *Towering Inferno* (1974), *Die Hard*

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[357] The scene was however filmed by a French amateur filmmaker whose images were broadcast by CNN only around midnight local time. The scene was nevertheless filmed by a French amateur filmmaker whose images were broadcast by CNN only around midnight local time.

[358] In English in the original.

(1988), *Independence Day* (1996) and *Mars attacks !* (1997), the US film industry has been churning out an uninterrupted stream of such spectacular productions. The genre has its rules. The disaster's function is both to reveal and to redeem. It usually allows the timid to act as fearless adventurers, the avowed bad guys to redeem their crimes, while the falsely brave are unmasked and seemingly respectable people behave like total bastards.

By a kind of irony at which History seems to excel, terrorists have turned this ideological weapon or cultural message against its sender. Originally meant as entertainment fiction, the disaster screenplay has been brutally translated to the real world by America's enemies, in a bloody "return to sender"! "[...] it may have been no accident that they chose the language of American movies. They were creating not just terror; they were creating images.[359]" *This time, the scene was real.*[360] Consequently, CIA experts seek the counsel of Hollywood screenwriters to anticipate the form new attacks will take. At the movies, disaster also reveals the hero dormant in the *regular guy.*[361] Many Americans actually believe the White House was saved from United Airlines flight 93, the plane that crashed near Pittsburgh, by a handful of amateur sportsmen[362].

Symbols of Power and the Power of Symbols

It wasn't buildings that were attacked, but above all a metaphor, or symbols if one prefers. And not just any symbols, but those of US hyperpower, symbols of economic power, of military power and political power. Journalistic cliches always hold their share of truth. "We were aiming at the heart of America." "America hit in the heart." The Twin Towers were indeed the symbolic high place of US economic and financial power. Since it was located a few steps away from the Wall Street Stock Exchange, the press sometimes referred to the World Trade Center as the "Temple of Commerce". The religious connotation also applies to the Pentagon when it is called the *Shrine of War.* As for the White House, it obviously symbolized the seat of power of the head of the most powerful state on Earth. In other words, a sacred place *par excellence.*

In all three cases, attacking those loci of power bearing a high symbolic charge amounts to a sacrilege. By their gigantic nature alone, the twins did indeed look like cathedrals. Besides, even if a confession does not necessarily prove guilt, it will be noted that the presumed mastermind behind these attacks (the "message's" sender) did confirm, a month after the events, what was still one interpretation among other possible ones. "The true targets were icons of US military and economic power."

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[359] Neal Gabler, "This Time, the Scene Was Real", *New York Times*, September 16, 2001.

[360] In English in the original.

[361] In English in the original.

[362] The very title of the French documentary by Thomas Johnson: *Vol 93, les nouveaux heros de l'Amerique*, reflects this viewpoint very well.

By using the term "icons", Osama Ben Laden seems to want to prove Jean Baudrillard right, though he likely never heard of the latter. "This terrorist violence is not '*real*'. It is worse in a sense: it is symbolic.[363]" According to the latter, we were all secretly dreaming such a thing would happen and in their strategy, terrorists know "they can count on our unspeakable complicity." By deliberately positioning himself on the field of the collective unconscious, the French philosopher thus eludes all discussion, but by the same token he cannot make any scientific claim. Al-Qaeda's founder justifies the slaughter of innocents by a politicalreligious rhetoric that tends to erase the physical reality of the victims to better underline the symbolic power of the targets. Thus, the victims were not targeted as such, but were only guilty of being at the wrong place at the wrong time. This is what killed them. And in a way, Ben Laden kills them symbolically a second time by denying them their status as genuine targets. What does he care if the destruction of these so-called icons involved the death of thousands of very real flesh-and-blood people?

The day after the drama, on the first page of the French daily *Le Monde*, one could see Uncle Sam as a giant, striding amidst New York skyscrapers, his legs wounded by the first plane's impact. The image was reminiscent of some famous scenes of the movie *King Kong* (1933), especially since the Twin Towers had replaced the Empire State Building in John

Guillermin's remake. But it is also impossible not to think of a giant with feet of clay or even of the Colossus of Rhodes in the peplums of yore. To be precise, if we want to have a measure of the target's symbolic power, we have to remember that the Greek colossus was only 32 m high, that the Mesopotamian ziggurats that inspired the Biblical parable of the tower of Babel were 40 to 100 m high, whereas the Twin Towers were 420 m high.

For a religious fundamentalist, isn't the American skyscraper the modern equivalent of the tower of Babel? "A tower that reaches to the heavens" (Genesis 11). A kind of challenge made by Promethean man against God to assert his power. The skyscraper as Godscraper? The Biblical episode of the tower of Babel does refer to the offence of hubris. Besides, for ultraconservative Christians as for some fundamentalist Muslims, New York is Babylon or Sodom and Gomora: a cosmopolitan city of decadent mores deserving destruction and divine punishment. Would it be a slight to psychoanalysis to involve it in a commonplace? The towers as a representation of sexual potency, the skyscraper as phallic symbol? From this standpoint, the attack would be tantamount to a kind of architectural and urban castration. America struck in its manhood, emasculated live by a still unknown but clearly savage enemy.

On the first page of September 13's *Le Monde*, on the left third of the picture, one could only see the Statue of Liberty and, in the background, a thick black smoke. As though the collapse of the World Trade Center's Twin Towers caused the very symbol of liberty to reemerge. For its part, the special issue of *Time* magazine on the tragedy

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[363] Jean Baudrillard, "L'esprit du terrorisme," *Le Monde*, November 3, 2001.

showed on its front cover the two towers in flame, and on its back cover the Statue of Liberty in front, her arm held high, in dazzling profile against a backdrop of thick black smoke. The image of this unharmed statue unflinchingly overlooking a genuine field of ruins made a strange impression.

Right after the events, there were at least two possible readings of this new skyline. In the absence of any immediate claim, the famous statue appeared in the New York sky as a kind of signature. An attack committed in the name of the right to independence? The liberation of occupied territories, the liberation of the Holy Places, the discontinuation of US bombings in Iraq, the liberation of all the oppressed in the world! This was proof of the need to destroy the temple of Western commerce to put back on the horizon the very symbol of freedom. Or then again, quite the contrary, it could be seen as an illustration of the very failure of the terrorists, who had destroyed buildings and killed innocent people without being able to dent the main, immaterial thing: the spirit of America, her principle, her values, symbolized by this world-famous statue. Besides, if liberty appears as the national religion of the United States -aside from the worship of money, then Francois Bartholdi's sculpture was its first icon, that is a "symbolic-hypostatic representation", a mere image leading to the origin and as such, ever at risk of lending itself to idolatry.

From this perspective, the Statue of Liberty would have made a much more symbolic target than the Twin Towers or the Pentagon. The target was without a doubt harder to reach and the message was liable to becoming muddled. For if we take Osama Ben Laden's discourse seriously, the term "icon" may lead us to believe that the target of the attacks was not

America as such, but the implicit model she embodies for a handful of corrupt leaders in the Middle East, starting with those of his native country Saudi Arabia.

Finally, a parallel could be made between the astonishment of Western public opinion upon the discovery of US citizens among Taliban fighters and the current reaction of Europeans as they realize the importance of Jihadist networks leading volunteers to Syria, and especially of French people after the bloody attack aimed at the editorial board of the satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo*. Just as the terrorist billionaire and expert in financial circuits could be termed "America's family secret" or "the president's evil twin" according to Arundhati Roy, we may wonder if the kamikaze air pirates who had been living in the United States long enough to blend in were not after all Americans in a sense, by virtue of their lifestyle, and especially their technological culture?

Communication Technologies and the Communication of Technology

Who could deny that the United States represent the archetype, or even the matrix, of technological societies? In the era of cyberterrorism, the September 11 terrorist attack gives us the opportunity to raise the more general question of the role of technology in modern societies.

The Internet is supposed to have been invented by American engineers and originally used by the army and later by academics who wanted a faster way to exchange information with colleagues abroad. The police investigation seems to prove that the

operation's organizers favored this communication technology to coordinate the attacks. More discreet that the telephone, electronic mail is said to make it possible to hide messages by a combination of cryptography and steganography. The messages would first be coded, and then concealed (in the grey area not visible to the human eye) in the middle of seemingly innocuous photographs (in particular the most commonplace images on the Web, namely porn pictures) and transmitted under the guise of an attachment. According to Ron Dick, Deputy Director of the FBI, not only did the pirates use Internet, but they "used it well".

As for money, the crux of any war, it will suffice to recall two elements too well-known to be dwelt upon. While the Taliban regime did persecute poppy growers, a sizable part of al-Qaeda's fortune came from opium trafficking: how to get rich by poisoning infidels! The heroine consumed by US junkies mostly comes from Afghanistan, even as the Bush administration finances the war against drugs in that country. Talk about selling capitalists the rope that is going to be used to hang them! Second paradox: the ambiguous role, to say the least, played by US banks regularly working on behalf of filthy rich businessmen from the Arab Peninsula or the Persian Gulf. With a little more curiosity about the precise identity of its clients, Citibank might have refrained from financing the kamikaze pilots based in Florida. At least since the attacks against US embassies in East Africa and the last one to date aimed at the *USS Cole*, a modicum of vigilance was to be expected. Yet Mustafa Ahmad, al-Qaeda's treasurer, apparently had no trouble transferring funds to the head of the commandos, the Egyptian Mohammed Atta, by way of Citibank's New York head office.

The terrorist attack against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon is to be set within the global context of technological societies. Over half a century ago, Jacques Ellul showed that the phenomenon of technology was characterized among other things by unity and by totalization[364]. Technology functions as a network of complex ramifications that wreaks havoc with traditional distinctions opposing form and content, or civilian and military. Who, for instance, can guarantee the peaceful use of the nuclear, pharmaceutical or chemical industry? Aside from the color of its tarpaulin cover, what sets apart a military truck from a civilian truck?

If terrorists now use school supplies (such as box cutters) as part of their arsenal, they also know how to turn an airliner into a weapon of war. We also find this unity of a system made up of interdependent elements in the phenomenon of the chain reactions generated by the September 11 attacks: financial crash, airline company bankruptcies, lay-offs in the aeronautics industry and the tourism sector, cuts in communications budgets, drop in consumption, economic recession. Furthermore, specialization entails totalization. Each one of the parts counts less than the system of connections binding them together. What makes the strength of the technological system is also its weakness. The network structure increases the fragility of technological societies that have become vulnerable by the very fact of their high degree of sophistication.

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[364] Jacques Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siecle* (Armand Colin, 1954).

For modern terrorists, there is no shortage of targets. We may think of Internet viruses, mail-transmitted diseases (anthrax), the poisoning of a city's waterworks or of a major hotel's or hospital's air conditioning system, not to mention *communications hubs*: airports, train stations, power plants or nuclear plants. The giant towers in which a mid-sized city's population is concentrated are the perfect illustration of the fragility of what sociologist Alain Gras[365] has called technological macrosystems. The perpetrators of the attacks on the World Trade Center were well aware of this, as they secured the privilege of appearing to part of international opinion as the new David striking down the US Goliath.

In our modern societies, technology is ambivalent, since it liberates as much as it alienates. It creates new problems as soon as it resolves them and increases itself through the — technological — solutions it brings. New equipment is already being developed to reinforce air safety. Sooner or later, it is going to be circumvented by a new generation of terrorists, which will in turn give rise to new countermeasures. But technological progress has a price that is not just financial. Its negative effects are inseparable from its positive effects and this progress always entails a great many unpredictable consequences. To be sure, it is our leaders' duty to try to think of everything in advance. It is no less certain that caution dictates we keep in mind the share of risks inherent in any society based on technological power. It is also wise to be wary of all talk of a neat harmony of security and freedom within the State, as of all those who would combine war and justice abroad. In this respect, the military retaliation's code names, *Infinite Justice* and then *Enduring Freedom*, may be interpreted as the titles of a propaganda film projected by the US government on the world's big screen.

Is war "the continuation of politics by other means" or on the contrary, is Michel Foucault right to reverse Clausewitz's dictum by making politics the continuation of war? In this particular instance, it has been said — not without justification — that it was "the absence of politics by other means"[366]. But from the afternoon of September 11, the war of images and words had begun. Later on, George W. Bush would term the military action launched in Afghanistan a "battle for civilization".

The War of Words and the Words of War

Communication is no doubt to propaganda what publicity is to advertising, but if the outer trappings change, the aim remains the same. Jacques Ellul has shown that, contrary to received wisdom, information (the realm of the Good and of Truth) cannot be so neatly set apart from propaganda (the instrument of Evil and lies). Far from being exclusive of one another, information is the precondition for the very existence of propaganda. Furthermore, propaganda is a necessity for those who govern as well as for the governed. It is a response to a desire for political participation and it reassures by

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[365] Alain Gras, *Grandeur et dependance, Sociologie des macro-systemes techniques*, Presses universitaires de France, 1993.

[366] Jean Baudrillard, art. cit.

simplifying a reality made more complex by the mushrooming of information. President Bush's political discourse is a fine illustration of his ideas.

"Freedom itself was attacked this morning by a faceless coward. And freedom will be defended. I want to reassure the American people", George W. Bush declared on Tuesday the 11th, "... that the United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts." Beyond the resort to the classic rhetorical trope of personification, the President's speech immediately situates itself on the moral plane —the better to shunt away the political dimension: (terrorist) cowardice gets opposed to (American) virtue. It is not a state, it is not a superpower, nor even what some call a hyperpower, which has been attacked, nor even a country, but a value, the fairest and noblest of all: Freedom (embodied by America). The "gaps" left in this discourse are at least as significant here as the ideas expressed. The President does not utter a single word about the foreign policy of "the most powerful Empire in history" (Arno J. Mayer), on its strategic interests in the world, or on its alliances in the Middle East.

The same evening, live from the Oval Office, he continues to omit key aspects: "These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed; our country is strong. A great people has been moved to defend a great nation." Speaking of murder is again a way to depoliticize by criminalizing the opponent. This is again a way to reassure the population by stirring up patriotic feelings. Great people, great nation. The variations are meant to hammer home the same idea. Redundancy is intended. Bush again uses personification: America has been moved, unanimous to a man! In this context of major crisis, the President is trying to boost the sense of national unity.

"Today, our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature. And we responded with the best of America — with the daring of our rescue workers, with the caring for strangers and neighbors who came to give blood and help in any way they could." George W. Bush is still playing on personification: seeing Evil. As though it was absolute evil, and as though it was wholly contained in the images of the attack. The country has seen evil as one would say "it has seen the devil". To the worst, we answered with the best. The President is expressing here a Manichean view of the world. The blackness of the human soul as opposed to a concentrate of American virtues. This symmetry is bogus insofar as helping victims is an obligation within the framework of modern societies (Welfare State and/or Zorro State) and the actual answer will come later, in the guise of military retaliation.

"Freedom and democracy are under attack", he states on Wednesday. "This will be a monumental struggle of good versus evil, but good will prevail." George Bush Sr. used to compare Saddam Hussein to Adolf Hitler. His president son revives the Reagan-era terminology of the *Evil Empire*, which had referred to the USSR, and which now (perhaps unconsciously) reflects his own simplistic — not to say childish-worldview, as though he was announcing a new *Star Wars* episode! Finally, on September 13, he utters the word "crusade" at the very moment when Samuel Huntington's ideas

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are being rediscovered[367]: a particularly unfortunate choice of words for someone who wanted to avoid conflating Islam and terrorism.

There is an endless supply of such declarations, fraught with simplistically Manichean binaries: Good versus Evil, Democracy versus archaism, Civilization versus Barbarism, light versus darkness, good guys versus bad guys... Osama Ben Laden was perfect in the part of the bogeyman, an evil genius heading a radical Islamic version of the Spectre international crime syndicate in the James Bond franchise.

As though echoing the President's Freudian slip (?), on the same Manichean mode opposing the Umma (the Muslim nation or the community of believers) to the rest of the world, al-Qaeda's leaders would answer him on Sunday, October 7, less than two hours after the beginning of US-UK strikes on Afghan soil. "The crusade war promised by Bush has effectively started", said the spokesman of the political-religious sect. After having called to jihad, he referred to those "thousands of young people who want to die as much as Americans want to live". The authentic Muslim was described by those "madmen of God" as the one who cares about respecting his faith more than his own life (here below). This is a recurrent theme in the discourse of radical Islam: the cause is worth sacrificing one's life for it and the mujahedeen are not afraid of dying. Ben Laden's words belong to this logic.

"America has been hit by Allah at its most vulnerable point, destroying, thank God, its most prestigious buildings." "There is America, full of fear from its north to its south, from its west to its east. Thank God for that." Throughout his statement, Ben Laden refers to America and not to a specific country, the United States; America not as a continent, but as an evil entity. Aside from omnipresent references to God, it deals with the "most vulnerable point" (the Achilles' heel or the giant's feet of clay) and "prestigious" buildings (prestige, honor, humiliation: this confirms that the targets were primarily symbolic in nature). "There is America, full of fear" -of God, of course!

"What America is tasting now is something insignificant compared to what we [Muslims] have tasted for scores of years." The rhetorical device of legitimization consists in presenting the bloody attack of September 11 as a fair turning of the tables, or better yet, as the suffering inflicted was supposedly far lesser than the suffering endured. It is all about having the victim appear as the executioner, and justifying to public opinion — especially but not exclusively among Muslims — an operation consisting in making anonymous office clerks, ordinary people — including Muslims, pay for the consequences of the US government's foreign policy. Hence the importance of the resort to the generic term America. Personification makes this sleight of hand possible. It is not thousands of US citizens who have been killed, wounded, bereaved, or simply traumatized... but **America**, an abstract and evil being along the lines of the "Great Satan" trope once used by Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran.

"Our nation [the Islamic world] has been tasting this humiliation and this degradation for more than 80 years. Its sons are killed, its blood is shed, its sanctuaries

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[367] Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72(3) (Summer 1993): 22–49.

are attacked, and no one hears and no one heeds." Ben Laden is addressing this still imaginary nation that it is the point to build. He speaks in its name. He speaks about it, to it, and to its enemies. In doing so, he starts to make it exist for real. in hearts and minds or in mental representations. This is how you "do things with words."[368] It is all about getting from the potential nation (at the time, over 1.2 billion Muslims spread around the world) to the actual nation. If one agrees to define nationalism as society's self-worship, let us not forget that it is not nations that beget nationalisms, but nationalism that creates nations[369].

"And when God has guided a bunch of Muslims to be at the forefront and destroyed America, a big destruction, I wish God would lift their position." In accordance with al-Qaeda's usual strategy, the attack was not overtly claimed. Ben Laden rejoices at the operation's success, without however suggesting he was involved in its inception. He feeds doubt by denying the enemy any detailed admission. We may see this as abiding by the line followed from the beginning of the struggle between the Taliban regime and the US government: invoking the lack of evidence to justify refusing to give over Ben Laden. This argument would become a shibboleth in Islamic countries: "If Osama is indeed responsible for the September 11 attacks, why doesn't America provide the evidence?" But the trope of admission and definite evidence is mostly aimed at Western public opinion, and it makes sense within the framework of human justice. But the message has a second addressee: Muslim public opinion, at which the main message is aimed, namely, that the real instigator of the September 11 attack is none other than God Himself! Ben Laden only happened to be His humble spokesman or His modest interpreter.

"And when those people have defended and retaliated to what their brothers and sisters have suffered in Palestine and Lebanon, the whole world has been shouting, as the unbelievers and hypocrites have done[370]." The word "retaliate" is meant to legitimize the attack. It was after all an act of self-defense. Muslims are oppressed by Americans, it is normal that they defend themselves. The reference to Palestine belatedly appeared in Ben Laden's discourse so as to increase his potential for sympathy. Anti-Zionism constituted a powerful vector for the unification of Muslim public opinion, well beyond the Near East and Middle East. This aim was reached if we recall how his popularity rating shot up in Arab streets and among part of African youth. In the context of the second Intifada (the *Aqsa intifadeh*), Ben Laden instrumentalized the Palestinian cause. He was careful not to say that the PLO had condemned the attack and that Yasser Arafat got himself filmed in the midst of giving his blood as a sign of solidarity with American victims.

"They (Americans) are debauchees who supported the executioner against the victim and the unjust against the innocent child. God gave them what they deserve." This

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[368] John L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1962).

[369] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1983).

[370] On this concept, see http://www.cultures-et-croyances.com/etude-le-concept-de-lhypocrisie-dans-la-morale-islamique/

transparent allusion to US support for Israeli policies refers to a TV report[371] that had deeply troubled international public opinion, showing the death of Mohammed al-Durah (12 years old) during exchanges of fire between Tsahal and Palestinian Security Forces on September 30, 2000. Ben Laden hammers in the notion that terrorists have done nothing but execute Allah's will.

"These events have split the whole world into two camps: the camps of belief and the camps of disbelief!" This simplistic discourse contrasts with the complexity of the real. Ben Laden's message constitutes the reverse mirror image of George W. Bush's message: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." But if the former claims to be fighting **injustice** (in the name of Islam) and the latter to claims to be defending ("enduring") **freedom**, their discourses are partly interchangeable. Ben Laden claims freedom for all oppressed Muslims and Bush leads his war of reprisals to enact justice.

The oath of al-Qaeda's founder will be met a month later by that of the US president in front of the UN General Assembly: "(...) *their hour of justice will come.* (.) I make this promise to all the victims of that regime: the Taliban's days of harboring terrorists, and dealing in heroin, and brutalizing women are drawing to a close. (.)We have a chance to write the story of our times — a story of courage defeating cruelty, and of light overcoming darkness." The two speakers share the same Manichean view of the world. We are dealing with a genuine instance of mimetic rivalry as per Rene Girard's theory."[372] The similarity can even be found in unexpected areas such as health. President Bush publically swears he has not caught anthrax, while Ben Laden explains to the Pakistani press that his "kidneys are working fine."

"Every Muslim should **arise** in support of his religion and now the wind of change has blown up to destroy injustice on the Arabian Peninsula." Americans who rise are thus met by Muslims who arise. The Arabian Peninsula is a holy land because the Prophet was born and lived in Mecca. Ben Laden criticizes Saudi leaders for tolerating the presence of infidels (US military stationed since the Gulf War) near the holy places of Islam. "And to Americans, I say to it and its people this: I swear by God the Great, America will never... taste security unless we feel security and safety in our land and in Palestine." We have here a sort of mutual figure for constructing the monster. In the hours following the terrorist attack, it was only the name of Osama Ben Laden that was fed to the press and world opinion. Presidential and media rhetoric focused on this scarecrow. Ben Laden did his best to stick to this part, not without talent, it must be said. As an inspired prophet of Allah, he reveled in striking the pose of the lone champion of justice challenging the Empire by himself.

War of Images and Images of War

Beyond the threats uttered against America, on Sunday October 7 2001, the success of the PR operation consisted first in the contrast between our snowy screens, on which

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[371] http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x5qhp7_la-mort-de-mohammed-al-dura_news
[372] Rene Girard, *Achever Clausewitz,* Flammarion, 2007.

we saw nothing of the US and UK air strikes in Afghanistan —but a few green dots in the pitch dark night— and the sudden appearance in broad daylight of Public Enemy No. 1, having finished his diatribe and sipping tea in front of his cave with a prophet's serenity. If we may dwell a moment on non-verbal communication, the audiovisual staging of this discourse could only cause dismay in the Western viewer used to other codes. It aroused in him a sense of fascination/repulsion, or at least, of troubling otherness. By contrast, in Islamic lands, it helped reinforce the aura of the charismatic leader.

A cave in the desert as sole backdrop. Muslims the world over know that Mohammed hid for three days and three nights in a cave near Mecca, to escape from his enemies who had sworn to kill him. In his time, the Prophet harangued the people to ask it to renounce the cult of images and worship the One God. His clan (the Hashemites) was then undergoing persecutions. As the target of the hostility of oligarchies and polytheistic religious leaders, Mohammed then had to flee Mecca, and was forced to go in exile first in Abyssinia, then, during a second emigration (the Hijra), to the oasis that would become Medina. Ben Laden today, like the Prophet long ago, has also been expelled from his country of Saudi Arabia (1991), and then from the Sudan (1996), before finding refuge in Kandahar, among the Taliban. Mohammed also had to hide before his cause triumphed through force of arms: in 630, at the head of 10,000 troops, he had returned to Mecca as a victorious warlord.

Hands folded, eyes half-shut, in a meditative pose, Ben Laden is quietly seated on his heels in the midst of the other cross-legged bearded men. The bodily position is in conformity with the Muslim rites codifying the five daily prayers. He assumes the posture of both sage and warrior. Just like the Prophet! A religious man's beard. Military fatigues and white turban. A kerosene lamp is set on a rock, at the back, aligned with the Egyptian Ayman Al-Zawahiri, former leader of Islamic Jihad, Ben Laden's physician and counsellor. His favorite weapon, a Kalashnikov (AK-74), taken from a Russian soldier in combat, leaning against the cave wall, is visible, but only in the background during much of his talk. It is there as a reminder of Jihad, and perhaps also of the fact that Islam in its heyday triumphed by the sword. In his previous propaganda tapes, the al-Qaeda leader maintained his reputation as an intrepid horseman and a sharpshooter. The Kalashnikov also calls to mind the victorious war against the Red Army. Message: Muslims are going to defeat the US "paper tiger" as they have defeated the Soviet Great Satan.

But Osama Ben Laden could not have played Spectre's Blofeld without the complicity of the 24-hour news channel Al-Jazeera, and especially without the herd mentality of Western TV networks converted to the one religion of profit, and thus to the competition for ratings. In the name of national defense, from the very next day, the executives of the main US networks were brought to heel by the government after a moment of aberration. Under the fallacious pretext that al-Qaeda videos could contain coded messages aimed at triggering new terrorist attacks, the White House asked the big US networks to screen all images provided by Qatari television before broadcasting

them. The result no doubt exceeded the expectations of the national security advisers, since images of Ben Laden disappeared from the screens for all intents and purposes. Self-censorship was also a factor in the print media. Whereas in its October 1 issue, the cover of *Time* magazine showed only Ben Laden with the caption: "Target", over the following weeks, one had to carefully scrutinize the pages inside to find paltry excerpts of his declaration of war on America.

Philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy expressed the opinion of many Frenchmen when he called Al-Jazeera "Ben Laden's network". From a Western standpoint, the accusation was not without grounds, but it needs to be qualified. It is a fact that until Kabul fell to the Northern Alliance, "the CNN of the Arab world" enjoyed a monopoly position that forced the whole world's TV networks to rebroadcast its images strapped with a wide strip indicating their origins. But it is just that Al-Jazeera found itself in Afghanistan in a position comparable to that of CNN during the Gulf War. Whereas CNN is still viewed by international public opinion as a purely "made in USA" cultural product like Coca-Cola, its correspondent had been the only one allowed to remain in Baghdad. The Iraqi regime had thus given exceptional means to Peter Arnett, who enjoyed exclusivity as a trade-off with censorship. But because CNN showed the whole world the damage caused by US bombings among the civilian population, it was accused of playing into Saddam Hussein's hands.

The same thing happened to Tayssir Allouni, the only reporter allowed to remain in the Afghan capital before the military balance of power was reversed. Dwelling on misdirected strikes and civilian victims, lingeringly showing corpses in the villages bombed by the US Air Force, only relaying the words of Kabulis denouncing this war against Islam, making a display of Ben Laden's own children armed to the teeth and singing the praises of the "emir of believers", Mullah Omar, against a backdrop of the wrecks of helicopters and planes supposedly downed by the Taliban, the reporter made Al-Jazeera very unpopular with Washington. Accused by US authorities of broadcasting al-Qaeda propaganda, the Arabic network responded with a retrospective shown in a loop, featuring mutilated faces on hospital beds, crippled children and disfigured babies, all maimed in the name of this so-called "battle for civilization". For its part, CNN's executives forced employees to tag every image of civilian victims of US bombings with this ritualistic reminder: "the Taliban are protecting terrorists who are responsible for the death of 5,000 innocent people".

If Al-Jazeera has not managed to convince Westerners of its neutrality by refusing to decide between "the war on terror, as America says" and "the war against the infidels, as al-Qaeda says", the land of press freedom and the First Amendment has beaten all records when it comes to controlling images. In the name of its soldiers' safety, the Pentagon has even extended its grip to photographic documents. During half of the conflict, due to a lack of independent journalists on location, any media wanting to illustrate the US presence on the ground had to be content with only the images of US commandos taken and selected by the Defense Department.

The patriotic fervor unleashed right after the attacks was not limited to the boom in sales of the Star-Spangled Banner. While, in contrast with the Vietnam conflict, the American press has, if anything, been given to self-censorship, journalists have been accused of endangering the lives of "our boys" by providing the enemy with exceedingly accurate information. A petty, slanderous accusation when one knows that said information came from briefings or the website of the Pentagon's PR department, but this type of delusion says a lot about the expectations of much of the public. The newspapers that dared publish pictures of Afghan babies killed by US bombs were pelted with insults. The concept of "collateral damages' is acceptable, but just as long as it remains at the level of a disembodied abstraction!

Jacques Ellul was right when he described the complicitous relationship uniting the propagandist and the propagandized. The average citizen has no taste for seeing photographs of slaughtered infants when President Bush himself has spoken of the struggle of Good against Evil, led by a nation that is decidedly good and peace-loving, but that is hated because it is misunderstood. Announcing military strikes on the same day that Ben Laden made his threats on TV, Bush had promised: "At the same time, the oppressed people of Afghanistan will know the generosity of America and our allies. As we strike military targets, we will also drop food, medicine and supplies to the starving and suffering men and women and children of Afghanistan." But since the small yellow containers holdings food rations were the same color as the explosives scattered by cluster bombs, the latter were easy to mistake for the former. How many additional victims were there compared to how many lives saved? The "humanitarian" balance sheet of these very telegenic drops might have turned out to be a cruel exercise for its sponsor, but was the aim to persuade the whole world of American goodness or to maintain the good conscience of the supporters of this war, already a vast majority in the country?

"The word is only relative to Truth. The image is only relative to reality[373]." Jacques Ellul reminds the image consumers we are, rendered bulimic since September 11, that it would be wrong to mistake the real for the true. While the word has to do with truth —and thus also with lies—, the image can completely stick to reality without being true. Sight makes us see the obvious, while the word, ever uncertain, excludes it.

War against Democracy and Democracy at War

War compels each of us to choose sides. It orients our gaze, conditions our visual memory makes us see wat we want to see and forget the images that do not fit our interpretive framework. Propaganda reassures, because it filters, orders and simplifies. But it would be the height of intellectual presumption to believe that (deceptive) propaganda is reserved for ordinary folks and (genuine) information to the elite. It would likewise be very naive or cynical to believe in the discourse of *just war*. As Ellul reminds us, there is no such thing as just wars, only necessary wars!

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[373] Jacques Ellul, *La parole humiliee* (La Table Ronde, 2014), 44, [1981] .

The US counter-attack was not the war of *Freedom* against *Terrorism*, but that of a Western state legitimately defending its power interests in the name of values that have a claim to universality. First of all, freedom cannot wage war, even when one goes to war in its name. Violence is always the province of necessity, that is, freedom's antithesis. Secondly, terrorism is a highly subjective notion, which can refer to very different realities. We may recall that the Nazis used it to discredit the Resistance during their Occupation of France[374].

Not being able to prevent wars, international organizations have had to fall back on codifying wars. The member-states of the European Union have defined as terrorist "any act … intended to cause death or serious bodily injury to certain persons, and provided its purpose is to intimidate a population, or to compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing something." Who could swear that this definition does not include the bombings and embargo undergone by the populations of Iraq, Iran and Syria? As is his wont, Noam Chomsky offers a critique that is even more merciless to the powerful: "In practice, terrorism is violence committed against the United States — regardless of the 24 perpetrators. One would be hard-pressed to find an exception to this rule in history[375]".

Article 51 of the United Nations Charter recognizes an inherent right to legitimate defense in case of armed aggression. This right then raises the issue of the *proportionality* of the response. The Geneva Conventions make a distinction between civilian and military objectives and tend to proscribe the disproportionate use of force. The problem with proportionality is not limited to its legal dimension and obviously raises issues of a moral nature. Carpet-bombing strategies have generated deep discomfort even among those best-disposed toward the United States. The means used in Afghanistan in December have given rise to remorse among the very people who, in a burst of legitimate emotionalism, had claimed themselves to be "all Americans now" in September. Was it necessary to burn down the haystack to find the needle? Under the pretext that Ben Laden was as difficult to look for as a needle in a haystack, did one have the right to burn down the whole haystack, and part of the field too? With all-out bombings of a country already ravaged by war and famine, all that was achieved was adding more victims to the victims. The tons of bombs dropped around Tora Bora have caused the death of numerous civilians.

President Bush pretended having just discovered the appalling plight of Afghan women. By a neat historical irony, he was thereby unwittingly using as justification for his war the arguments invoked in 1979 by Georges Marchais, leader of the French Communist Party, to greet the Soviet intervention: putting an end to a feudal regime that demeaned women. And yet, the violation of human rights in general, and of

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[374] Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

[375] Noam Chomsky, "Cette Amerique qui n'apprend rien.", *Le Monde*, November 22, 2001.

women's rights in particular, not to mention the scandalous destruction of the giant Buddha statues of Bamyan, had not prevented the US administration from negotiating with the Taliban until July 2001, holding out international recognition of the regime against the handover of Ben Laden. In the background for this was the oil lobby, so dear to the Bush clan, and its interest in Central Asian oilfields. From a strict *Realpolitik* standpoint, future events were to show it would have been more judicious to help the Taliban's main adversary: Commander Massoud.

Still at the level of realism, suffice it to recall that the main instigator of the September 11 attacks was long a valued helper of the United States, armed and trained by the CIA, ready to do anything in the struggle against international Communism. By equipping his troops, e.g. with Stinger missiles, the Americans made him a victorious hero of the struggle against the Soviets in Afghanistan. For reasons of his own, the creature turned against his creator after the Gulf War. Our enemies' enemies are not always our friends after all!

Along these lines, the partnership of mutual convenience tying Washington to Islamabad has led the US to close their eyes on human rights violations in Pakistan and on the illegal production of a nuclear weapon, symbolically termed "the Islamic bomb" by President Ali Bhutto himself. Without the help of the Pakistani government as subcontractor of US interests in the region, without the help of its "volunteers" and secret service, the Taliban could never have taken Kabul. Because they were still thinking in Cold War terms, the United States supported the Pakistani military that put in power the Taliban, who then protected Ben Laden's networks. The idea was British, the financing was Saudi, the execution was Pakistani, but the design of this time bomb can be laid at the doorstep of the US government. There can be no question here of using a historical explanation as a kind of underhand justification. No actual or supposed crime of the US government can pretend to excuse the horror of the attacks. There is no need to invoke Dilthey or Weber to make clear analytical distinction between explaining, understanding, and justifying. The best propaganda, which is to say the most technically efficient one, is not built upon lies, but using incomplete or partial data.

In the name of anti-imperialism, a number of intellectuals were quick to disclaim any solidarity with American reprisals by invoking the United States' iniquitous policies in the Near East and their cruelty to the Iraqi people. But the Israel-Palestine conflict does not explain the September 11 attacks any more than the Great Depression explains the Holocaust. Besides, one would be hard-pressed to cite he name of a single European statesman who did more than Carter and Clinton to try to bring back peace to this part of the world. As for Iraq, those who speak of the children who died as a result of the embargo — by outrageously inflating already frightful figures: 600,000 according to UNICEF, from 1 to 1.5 million according to their own statistics — never mention the fate of 150,000 Kurds who were exposed to chemical and biological weapons at Saddam Hussein's will. In a single day, March 17 1988, his army gassed a city of Iraqi Kurdistan, causing the death of 5,000 civilians in the throes of atrocious

agony. You cannot criticize the Americans for not having a policy and at the same time make them responsible for all the evils of this world. If, as bleeding hearts believe, terrorism is the symptom and not the disease, if the economic hardships arising from neoliberal — and hence American! — globalization is its sole source, then one would have to explain why Ben Laden was a Saudi billionaire, and not a Sahelian peasant.

Terrorism presents a terrible dilemma to democracies by condemning them either to betray their basic principles or to disappear at the enemy's hands. To resist as political regimes here and how, they have no other choice than to make a mockery of the values that found them as a normative ideal. Curtailment of civil liberties, witch hunts in the press and pressures on the media, arbitrary arrests, extension of police custody for foreigners, establishment of exceptional justice and military tribunals, searches of vehicles and people, large-scale development of phone tapping (including of "friendly countries") and e-mail monitoring. Even within a legal framework (US Patriot Act, security law in France) and with the assent of a public opinion all too eager to trade in its freedom against a return to order, the drift to a security state at home contradicts the democratic spirit just as much as violations of the laws of war abroad. This war was no doubt inevitable even if it was not likeable, but it was in no way a just war; for if there are just causes, there cannot be just wars. "The noblest ends assigned to war are rotten by war", as we are reminded by Jacques Ellul, for whom not only the end does not justify the means, but the means corrupt the ends. The nobler the ends are said to be, the crueler the methods to reach them will be. The whole discourse of the US government consisted precisely in justifying the use of inhumane means in Afghanistan as retaliation for an "aggression against all mankind". As we know all too well, politics is not an industry based on morals. Machiavelli taught us that in politics, force is just when it is necessary. In the same sense, Weber taught us that in politics, we do not always get the Good through the Good. Ellul, who emphasizes the catalytic function of Christians, this peculiar role of sheep among the wolves, and who advocates not only non-violence, but non-power, could never have shared Weber's admiration for that character in Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories* who declared that those who preferred the greatness of their City to the salvation of their soul ought to be congratulated. Ellul for his part never tired of proclaiming a just world could not be founded by unjust means, nor a free society by the means of slaves[376].

On the Symbol in the Technical Environment: Some Reflections

By David Lovekin

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[376] Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology and Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005).

David Lovekin is Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at Hastings College, Nebraska. He is the author of *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* and editor with Donald Phillip Verene of *Essays in Humanity and Technology.* He is co-translator of Jacques Ellul's *The Empire of Non-Sense.* He has published numerous essays on Ellul and Giambattista Vico that deal with technology as a problem for the philosophy of culture in the spirit of Ernst Cassirer with the idea of technology as a symbolic form.

In "Will the Gospel Survive? Proclamation and Faith in the Technical Milieu," the Reverend Dr. Gregory Wagenfuhr considers whether the messages of the Gospel in which God is revealed can survive in the technical environment that is all-encompassing. He concludes: "The gospel will survive by God's grace and power alone. It is the responsibility of Christians to recognize the fundamentally different milieu in which we live and the problems it poses for the understanding and transmission of the gospel."[377] Christians have always faced problems justifying the gospel in any environment because the gospel is not an environment (milieu), it "... is not fundamentally social, natural, or technical."[378] Only the individual can be reconciled with God and only

... through the mediation of the love of God can one love one's neighbor. Thus, the gospel is, in actuality, radically destructive to a human society whose unity lies outside God, to natural religions and to the technical milieu. The gospel must, therefore, always be Wholly Other, even as it is translated into each new world. The good news is reconciliation to God mediated only by the person of Christ.[379]

Thus, God's message, news from the Wholly Other, would in most societies, by definition, be disruptive if heard at all. Christ, God's incarnation, was viewed as a criminal and as a troublemaker to be tortured and executed; his message challenges any society not "unified" in relation to God, Wagenfuhr contends. Christ insisted on a radical love, even for one's enemies, with an absolute freedom often in opposition to conventional restraints in an embrace of the power of the powerless. Convention typically urges hate for enemies and allows strength only in power and wealth made possible by a freedom flowing from political rules and regulations. Could a message be more ironic? Irony is symbolic—one is saying what one doesn't mean and meaning it— and overturns a literal use of language, which is the staple of technique. Symbol and metaphor, however, are the backbones of the biblical texts that plague the language and the mentality of a technological society. Why is symbolic language threatening to technique?

Wagenfuhr briefly traces the movement of language, which he takes to be essentially social (he uses Aristotle's theory of four causes to make this point), as it progresses from the natural milieu to the social milieu to the technical milieu. Language and society transform together forming three environments (milieus). An environment pro-

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[377] Gregory Wagenfuhr, "Will the Gospel Survive? Proclamation and Faith in the Technical Milieu," *Ellul Forum* 57 (2016), 11.

[378] Wagenfuhr, 11.

[379] Wagenfuhr, 12.

vides, Wagenfuhr states, "the primary source of life, the primary source of death, and therefore also, the primary experience through which all other experience is mediated. The milieu is all-encompassing, but it is this third point, that of mediation, that is most essential. For in mediating experience, the milieu provides symbol and thus the possibility of language and creativity."[380] In the environment of nature, both threatening and beneficent, he adds, "Nature mediated experience and thus gave rise to natural society and natural techniques."[381] He claims that nature and various techniques were "mediated through society,"[382] creating the social. The social and the natural environments are then eclipsed and mediated by technique, which becomes the all-encompassing and a new immediacy deaf to the symbolic message of the gospel. How does this take place? To consider this question I will pursue my claim that technology is a mentality that does not know itself as one, and I will take my own path, which may or may not agree with Wagenfuhr. My emphasis will clearly differ. I am concerned with the nature of the symbol from an epistemological standpoint. I will stand the symbol as word against the image as fact, following Ellul's advice. The true appears from the contexts of the word as it reaches for a whole; the image as a certainty gestures for the real, which is part of the true. These are dialectical tensions that devolve with the mentality of technique.[383]

The tensions between mind/body, image/word, and technical operation/technical phenomenon are the grounds for this dialectic for which separation and distance enable true knowledge.[384] The natural world, for the Greeks, was full of gods. Nature as a collection of merely physical forces obeying disinterested laws of necessity is the result of symbolic labor. This labor is the background for the technological society becoming a system and perhaps losing any real sense of society. An environment is an expression of symbolic action, which, then, offers further symbolic interaction as it can become an "other" to itself. Water, for fish, is not an environment in this sense. An environment provides a sense of immediacy and protection but provides grounds for change, for transcendence. The natural world can become the social world, as the natural world takes on the character of "other." Animals are to be tamed. Housing is to adjust to climate and topography. Laws will appear to allow for the distribution of property.

Technique, however, is not an environment, Wagenfuhr notes, but is an immediacy that it does not know itself as an environment having transcended the social. Technology, I will claim, does not know itself as making, as facing an "other." The "other"

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[380] Wagenfuhr, 12.

[381] Wagenfuhr, 12.

[382] Wagenfuhr, 12.

[383] I first developed the notion of a technical mentality in David Lovekin "Jacques Ellul and the Logic of Technology," *Man and World* 10 (1978): 251–272. More fully, this examination continues in David Lovekin, *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Bethlehem, PA and London and Toronto: Lehigh University Press, 1991), 82–116, hereinafter cited as *TDC.*

[384] I discuss more fully the technical operation and the technical phenomena in *TDC,* 152–187.

becomes the made. What technology makes becomes the real thing. The "other" for technique becomes a problem for conceptual control and manipulation according to mathematics-like methods. It becomes the real by becoming rational, and thus produces in whatever case, the thing-in-itself, the absolutely perfect, efficient, object. The distance between subject and object collapses. The implications for religion, art, or philosophy, purveyors of symbolic labor, are dire. They require a sense of an "other" that is a value beyond technical production and understanding, which have become coterminous.

For example, with Marshal McLuhan's famous Global Village we have a "space" where no one moves about, talking to one another and interacting. Involvement in this village takes place on the couch with remote in hand and with the eye assembling pixels or some electronic *ephemerata*. This environment is a screen of false immediacy that many do not take as "false." The possibility of "Reality TV" waited upon TV becoming reality. "Globalization" does allow making money and wealth, transformed by technique, for those up the technological food chain. No amount of talking to this screen in words and gestures has any effect. Interaction has become symbolic, at best, although the symbols are pre-made, cliches that express what Ellul calls the technical phenomena that are now the technological system. These *ephemerata* are the ghosts of the society that still haunt sensibility and provide a useful nostalgia of a "village." This needs further development.

I

Fundamentally, as a mentality, I stand before some object of which I am aware. Then, I become aware that I am aware, and my experience is divided in two. A goal for knowledge and meaning, then, is to mediate these two dimensions. I want to know the object before me and I want that knowledge to be true. Language and gesture are basic aids in this process. Language, for Ellul, flows in basically two directions: toward the image as a sensual and visual presence and toward the word as an aural invocation. Both aspects become conflated for technique and then combined such that all meaning is reduced to the visual. The aural, initially, gives us a sense of the "around," of a context of meaning beyond that which is before the eye. As Ellul states, a sound behind necessitates a turn of the head. Sound seeks clarification and clarity becomes increasingly determined by the visual, by that which is a certainty before which we stand. Of course, experience commonly shows that the two dimensions never coincide. As much as we write, as much as we televise, etc., meaning, if carefully considered, is always beyond the outstretched hand or magnified gaze.

In *The Humiliation of the Word,* from which I have been drawing, Ellul maintains that language stemming from the image proceeds according to the ways of logic that posit identities and deny contradictions.[385] From the standpoint of sight I see that a

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[385] Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word,* trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerd-

red apple is not both red and not red at the same time. But to read the apple from the perspective of the word, red apple may also be the apple of temptation. The tempting apple then suggests other aspects, particularly with the understanding that most really red apples in super markets are the results of chemicals and additives. Words, then, may become symbols and open to dimensions that invite contradiction and dispute. There is no contradiction in seeing the red inviting apple as also not inviting, as dangerous to my health. Thus, for Ellul, the symbol opens us to a dialectic between viewer and object such that the object as object is questioned. Its "reality" may demand more "truth." In the technological society logic is used to provide means for manufacture, commerce, and life committed to the image that is not known as mediation. Symbols remind us of what the image lacks. The symbols of the Gospel are cases in point. The Hebrews understood that God could not be reduced to an image and that even His name was not to be pronounced. God was the Wholly Other against which all "others" stood. Symbolic language and sign language—the language of the image—are both representations given the awareness of being aware that one is aware. The "other" enables this awareness. Thus, ignorance is important for knowledge, allowing it to grow. Even though God cannot be known except through scriptures embedded with contradiction, knowing this is a step toward knowing the limits of knowledge: knowing what one does not know, as Socrates would remind. As such, the technological society does not know what it does not know, having reduced knowledge to what is before it, to that which it has made without allowing such making takes place. How does this happen?

To recapitulate, for Ellul, the mediation that produces an environment involves the encounter of an 'other' by a subject, a mentality that evokes a symbol or silence, submission, or avoidance. An environment or milieu is produced through such an encounter with symbolic energy and weight. Ellul states:

Man cannot have a relationship with another save by the intermediary of *Symbolization.* Without mediating symbols, he would invariably be destroyed by raw physical contact alone. The 'other' is always the enemy, the menace. The 'other' represents an invasion of the personal world, unless, or until, the relationship is normalized through symbolization. Very concretely, to speak the same language is to recognize the 'other' has entered into the common interpretive universe; to display recognizable or identical tattoos, for example, is an expression of the same universe of discourse.[386]

Thunder and lightning in nature say nothing until they issue the voices of the gods, which in turn lead to social and institutional instantiations directed or observed by the gods. How, then, does a social or natural environment mediate without first being mediated? How does a milieu provide a symbol when it is the result of symbolization? Of course, any aspect of experience can become an 'other.' Perhaps this is a matter of

mans, 1985), hereinafter cited as *Humiliation.* I discuss the problem of the image and the word more fully in *TDC,* 188–220.

[386] Jacques Ellul, "Symbolic Function, Technology, and Society," *Journal of Social and Biological Structures* (3) (July 1978), 210, hereinafter cited as "Symbolic."

definition or perhaps it is a matter of perspective and priority. I believe it is at least an epistemological issue, as I will explain. For example, what is it for something to call out to be noticed and named? How is significance established?

The human appears in a world that is separate from view, from understanding. Another world apart from the world that appears requires the ability, "… to imagine a dimension other than that of the immediately sensible—a universe of which he is the constituent and where he continues to reinterpret and to institute new things—he becomes also the master of the real world."[387] We can then reconfigure Wagenfuhr's three environmental conditions: life, death, mediation. We have awareness and a sense of being, and then a sense of non-being or threat, or Otherness, and then perhaps a mediation with possible symbolization. The imagination and memory are crucial in Ellul's account, making an historical interpretation and reinterpretation possible. Mediation obviously requires separation that, in turn, provides a history and narrative beyond mere fact, the domain of the image. Facts are made and not simply given. Indeed, *Factum* means making.

Ellul states: "I have demonstrated that the aristocracy in primitive Rome could not have emerged except by the process of symbolization."[388] Against the materialistic claim that money, physical courage, and power established hierarchy for patrician families, Ellul contends that hierarchy was tied to "some primordial ancestral hero celebrated for his excellence."[389] Further:

his great deeds were collected, transformed into an epic *account,* and then reconstructed in such a fashion as to become symbolic. At this moment, a double movement is produced: one moves towards the heights, further from the origins, as the eponymous ancestor becomes the concentration point of symbols and is attached to a higher symbolic origin. This results in a god—goddess or demigod who is established symbolically as the true origin and as the explanation of the progenitive power of the ancestor.[390]

Thus, a double movement produces a present that is connected to a past that constructed it. The Roman present was constructed by the symbol, which surrounded their present. Materialistic explanations of the past beg the question of meaning and environment that is established by technique where the true is reduced to fact, a present with no meaningful past, no transcendental ground of explanation, a bad infinity, which I will later develop.

Roman society, Ellul observed in his *L'Histoire des Institutions,* was built upon a "sacral ground" where all was of an undifferentiated piece: "The Roman sacred is at the same time both religious and magical. It is religious in that it worships the transcendental powers and it is magical in that it utilizes these powers which are immanent."[391] The gods were not true others but were located in nature that was,

[387] Lovekin, *TDC,* 97.
[388] Ellul, "Symbolic Function, Technology, and Society," 212.
[389] Ellul, "Symbolic," 212.
[390] Ellul, "Symbolic," 212.
[391] Jacques Ellul, *L'Histoires des Institutions,* vol. I, Lovekin translation. (Paris: Presses Universi-

nonetheless, transformed to give a symbolic meaning that opened up the social world with formative and creative language beyond the merely representational. The strong man or woman attained strength through ancestral myths and stories. These stories are not true because they are factual but are true because they involve the making of the fact and the recollecting of that making. The true has not become a simple narrative but is a part of it like the fact.[392] In this way a whole precedes a part but is then part of a larger whole, and so it goes. The notions are in some degree relative but not wholly so.

The triad of Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus provided a locus for Roman institutions and values. These gods and goddesses were found in nature as well. Jupiter was the god of light and the god of trees, as well as the god of Roman law. Mars was the god of war and strife who established the military. Quirinus was the god of fecundity, the god of earth, water, and plants who established agriculture. These gods are true symbols in the above sense, having double and triple significance. They help to provide the true inclusive of facts of Roman civilization.[393] Jupiter was not merely the god of mere lightning—a flashing in the sky. Ellul writes:

It is not because there is thunder and lightning that man invents the sacred. Man made the thunder the source of meaning and of limitation because the world has to have an order, because action has to be justified. With a spontaneity, an "instinct," as inescapable as those he could have for hunting and fishing, man "knew" that he could not justify himself, that he could not tell himself that he was right ... neither can he say to himself 18 that it is he who establishes an order in the world whereby he can locate himself.[394]

The true is made by the human out of parts, of certainties given in experience without meaning and direction. The symbol makes these meanings and quests for meaning possible. It is no surprise, but is ironic, that materialistic accounts arise in a technological culture in denial of the symbol that made technology possible. The sacral world where all is of a piece and rife with symbolic making involves an imaginative separation and account of that unity that produces irrevocably a diversity. And this suggests that an environment is never simply a given. Or rather, a given is, by definition, that which is yet to be named, to be represented.

The myths that established past societies are taken as falsehoods. The dictates of "reason" and efficient methodology take precedence with the transformation of objects, means, methods in the production of technical phenomena, which, like cliches, suspend and obviate the symbol and its crucial labors while leaving a vacuum, a great absence, in their wake. The technical phenomenon is the result of reducing objects, means, makers, and made to the schemas of logic and method that destroy the possibility of true critique, analysis, or creation. The possible is replaced with the necessity of

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taires de France, 1955), 220–221.

[392] *Humiliation of the Word,* 123.

[393] *L' Histoires des Institutions,* 220–221.

[394] Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons,* trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1975), 55.

progress achieved only by the accumulation of moments trapped in a vicious immediacy. The maker no longer stands before the made. The true becomes the made, only to flounder in the immediate, a present with no past, no context, and thus no true meaning. In brief, and metaphorically speaking, Coke becomes the real thing, as those with memory know; reality is what technology makes.

Technique is a mentality that pursues absolute efficiency with a mathematics-like method. It becomes an absolute in the denial of absolutes. Ellul states:

This rationality, best exemplified in 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 or logic.[395]

The technical mind stands before a technical operation like cutting a tree, like paddling a boat, and asks: how can this action be perfected? First, the tension between mind and body is cancelled. Too many variables intervene. The strong can cut faster and deeper, can row faster and harder. A mathematics-like method produces the way of subverting difference in all ways. A cannot be both A and not A. Perfection will require producing identities. A language of logical discourse intervenes grounded in Aristotelian logic. A motor will undermine bodily difference to fell the tree and to power the boat. With the use of such techniques the distance between mind and body lessens. No longer are the objects of nature directly at hand. Attention 20

is now shifted to the device, and a sense of body is co-opted.[396]

Soon, the distinction between the natural and artificial disappears. Coke becomes the real thing. Choices are made automatically on the basis of quantity become quality. More is always greater. Devices proliferate as operations and objects are subjected to "perfection." A trip down a soap aisle in a supermarket shows how many ways emulsification can be made more efficient by the laboratory and by advertising. In one sense all are identical with the difference that some are newer and in different packages. Cliches announcing such perfection and progress abound. Moral and ethical judgments are summarized simply: that which can be done will be done. Cultural difference like bodily difference goes the way of all other forms of symbolization. Zen temples are as strange and disorienting to Japanese citizens as they are to visitors from other countries. At this point of technical development, Ellul states, technique becomes the sacred. It can no longer distinguish what it has made from what it has not made.

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[395] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society,* trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1965), 78–79. I have amended Wilkinson's translation with a phrase in brackets that he left out.

[396] See Lovekin discussion of the characteristics of technique discussed here and following in *TDC*, 152–187.

As objects become concepts, concepts become objects with no limit. The technical society embodies what Hegel called the bad infinity.[397] Perfection, an absolute, and an infinity, requires members. But how is membership determined? If perfection is the absolutely efficient, which is defined by mathematical method, then new methodologies and products are required: the value of "the one best way" prevails. But, the one best way is always a step away. Either efficiency is a term with no content—never achievable—or an abstraction that always requires a new member. There is no criterion for membership that stands apart from the series. This problem besets most attempts at conceptualizing any infinity. The idea of the counting numbers must go beyond one more counting number, for example. N + 1 reaches for that understanding. An infinite series of counting numbers cannot be just one more number. Further, the infinity or the absolute must not merely exist outside the group as an empty class concept. Number could not mean a class of no number at all. This would explain nothing of the particulars it pretends to group. The notion of number must include any number without being exhausted by it. As Kurt Godel showed, a mathematical system cannot be complete and consistent at the same time. Once determined, a member of an infinite series cannot define the series because some member will always be left out. This problem infects concept formation of all kinds. Consider the well-worn theological problem of how a God can be an infinite Wholly Other who is a creator of that which is and a being who provides the creation meaning and yet be totally outside of that creation. If God is simply what his creation is not, He is meaningless to that creation beyond being an absolute negative, an empty class concept. For Ellul, God's meaning and message is ongoing and is one that invites human participation, but how is this possible given the above framework? If God is Wholly Other, how is this otherness even "other" as meaningful beyond being merely negative. An account or theory is meaningful in terms of what it includes and does not exclude (apologies to Leibniz).

Ellul understands that his God, albeit unknowable, has to be known to be so. The contradictions of biblical literature provide symbols being symbolic. They require constant interpretation. Neither God nor the truth change but our views of them do. Wagenfuhr's question of whether the Christian gospel survives begs the question of which gospel we have in mind. Ellul indicated the need for the gospel to be interpreted continually, but he also insisted that this occur individually with a belief continually seeking faith. The Gospel, or any holy text, invites reduction to the sacred. The Bible is not a machine, Ellul insists. Faith, for Ellul, indicates a totality surrounding any belief that can swerve, correct, and amend errors of elisions. Belief remains alone until it seeks substance, context, and coherence. The whole, or a totality, precedes the parts in logic, in experience, in theology, and certainly, in philosophy. Analysis of any kind is always separation.

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[397] I discuss this at great length in *TDC,* 98–105.

II

The important dialectic between image and word, fact, and meaning, collapses. Meaning considered above involves a tension between members of a continuum and the notion that defines it. If the notion becomes just one more member, it loses meaning. The symbol, however, absorbs the space between the meaning and meant as a presence of absence. The absent is the concern for the symbol.[398] The image, a totality before the viewer, supports the Aristotelian logic that empowers the technological rationality of logical self-identities. God could not be both imminent and transcendent from this strictly logical point of view reinforced by the visual world, a strict logic of exclusion. Inclusion will be made up in a bad infinity where a meaning is produced by adding members. Repetition is not imitation, which suggests a transcendent, a type and form, a meaning outside the meant.[399] The creation of the technical system involves the linking of techniques such that no one technique is the cause of any other. The system predominates making a social reality impossible.

As I stated earlier, technique cannot be symbolized because it cannot know itself as other. As Ellul states in *The Empire of Non-Sense: Art in the Technological Society,*

Technique cannot be symbolized for three principle reasons. First, it has become the universal mediator, and because it is itself a means ... it is not the object of symbolization but rather it is also, by its power, outside of all other systems of mediation. It is, in the second place, a producer of a communal sense. The communal act today no longer relies on the support of the symbolic but rather on a technical support (the play of media, for example). Simply technique establishes a non-mediated—an immediate-relation with man, who, in the past felt a strong need to distance himself from nature, but technique seems not to require such a distance. It seems to be the direct extension of the body. Who has not heard it said that the tool is merely an extension of the hand? Thus, we pass from an organic world, where symbolization was an adequate and coherent function in relation to the milieu, to a technical system where the creation of symbols has neither place nor sense. What symbols are necessary are produced out of technique itself.

Television or advertising offer abundant symbols of technique but those come from the very working of technique itself. Therefore, the technical milieu is never understood because symbolization is excluded. And, from this fact, art, the foremost minion of symbolization, finds itself chaotic and torn between its "vocation" and that to which it can no longer aspire: an environment made up of discrete pieces belongs to structuralism but not to symbolization.[400]

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[398] See *TDC,* 97–98.

[399] See Samir Younes, "Jacques Elllul and the Eclipse of Artistic Symbolism," in *The Empire of Non-Sense: Art in the Technological Society,* trans. Michael Johnson and David Lovekin, with Introductory Essays by Samir Younes and David Lovekin (Winterbourne, Berkshire, UK: Papadakis Press, 2014), 7–19, hereinafter cited as *Empire.*

[400] *Ibid.,* 66. Also see my discussion of technology, art, and the symbol in "Looking and Seeing: The

Technique, then, is self-mediating, which is no mediation. Meaning reduced to structure renders meaning meaningless. Change becomes mere change, repetition. The time of the digital clock, a series of nows. In ten minutes I can drive to the market, I can brush my teeth, comb my hair, and lotion my body; in ten minutes I could get a civil service wedding, and I could wish, while dying, friends and lovers goodbye. All mean the same by the clock in the space of technique.

III

We cannot step into the same river twice, as Heralitus said, until we named the river and understood it to be a metaphor for time and experience as flux (*panta rhei*).[401] We could step and run and step and run until we ran into the Aegean Sea and drowned. With the notion of *panta rhei,* everything flows. Ellul commends Heraclitus with this phrase for being near the truth.[402] Instead of claiming the truth to be relative as the flux metaphor might seem, Heraclitus inserts the power of the *Logos*, the word, a meaning that conjoins opposites. Ellul states, "If truth is truth even beyond the limits of our grasp and our approximations, it *exists. And that settles it. In observing vanishing reality, Heraclitus says something that does not vanish, and his statement falls within the scope of truth."[403] Thus, before the symbol a presence is portended, a finite to be woven from symbolic cloth, to be conceptual about it. To be more existential, a river extends over rocks, that in Norman Maclean's hands, become words:

Then in the Arctic half-light of the canyon, all existence fades to a being with my soul and memories and the sounds of the Big Blackfoot River and a four-count rhythm and the hope that a fish will rise.

Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it.

The river was cut by the world's great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time. On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops. Under the rocks are the words, and some of the words are theirs.

I am haunted by waters.[404]

On the river, soul and body are one in a two count rhythm of loading and unloading the fly rod; this count is not clock time but the time of becoming one with mind, body, water, and sky, all the elements. In the pre-Socratic world in which Heraclitus lived, nature and the elements were spiritual, embodying *physis,* far removed from our ideas of physics and the physical. Heraclitus's nature as *physis* also expressed *Moira,* destiny and fate. The gods were still in all 29 things, as Thales proclaimed. Nature was not the

Play of Image and Word—The Wager of Art in the Technological Society: A Revision," *Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society* 32 (4) Fall, 2012, 273–286.

[401] *Humiliation,* 39.

[402] *Humiliation,* 40.

[403] *Humiliation,* 40.

[404] Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 104.

field of dreary natural law and necessity.[405] Maclean evokes this sense of nature where words and rocks correspond and evoke the great flood, a tragic retribution. Maclean's beloved brother Paul, an artist with the fly rod, was beaten to death, perhaps over a gambling debt. His brother could not appreciate his value as an artist, and Norman realizes that he could not understand him, not understand his father, not understand the many people he lived with and loved. And then he understands that this is why he wrote this story with words reaching out to the beyond.

Words are God's gifts, Ellul stated:

God speaks. Myth is born from this word, but rarely is it heard directly and never conveyed just as it is received, because human beings cannot speak God's words. Myth is the analogy that enables us to grasp the meaning of what God has said. As discourse constructed to paraphrase the revelation, it is a metaphor that should lead the listener 30 beyond what he has heard.[406]

With our words we try to say what we mean; if we knew fully what we meant, we would neither speak nor write. Because we do not know we use the symbolic language best suited toward that purpose. We try to understand what we can barely understand hoping that others will hear, will read, and will help us. And, in so doing, we embrace the divine as it is, to us, available.

Security, Technology and Global Politics: Thinking With Virilio

By Mark Lacy. Routledge, 2015. 168 pp. pb.

Reviewed by Jacob Rollison

Jacob Rollison is PhD candidate at the University of Aberdeen. He is the author of *Revolution of Necessity: Language, Technique, and Freedom in the Writings of Jacques Ellul and Slavoj Zizek,* forthcoming from Atropos Press.

It has been said that a significant challenge for those introducing Ellul for the first time is "to persuade sensible people not to throw it down before they have negotiated even the first ten pag-es."[407] This challenge applies equally, if not more so, to the Italian-born French theorist Paul Viril-io, and it is a challenge which Mark Lacy has constructively navigated in this concise volume.

Lacy is a Lecturer in Politics and International Relations (IR hereafter) at Lancaster University, UK, who has published variously on intersections of security, IR, politics, and art. This book is intended for an academic readership, primarily in the English-

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[405] See F. M. Cornford's marvelous *From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965).

[406] *Humiliation,* 106.

[407] John Wilkinson in his introduction to Ellul's *The Meaning of the City.* Ellul, Jacques. *The Meaning of the City* (Vancouver: Eerdmans, reprinted by Regent College Bookstore, 1993), xii.

speaking world, who are not familiar with Virilio (or the terrain of continental critical thought to which he more or less 'belongs') or who are likely to misread and dismiss him (as they might Ellul) as an outlying, pessimistic, rhetorician so insistent on questioning that he doesn't give many 'satisfying' answers. Lacy's stated audience of technology, politics, and IR students will likely find it especially worthwhile.

Lacy begins with a short biographical introduction to Virilio and his works. For Ellul Forum readers not familiar with Virilio, a short word of introduction:[408] the son of an Italian immigrant to France, a ten-year old Virilio was profoundly shaped by witnessing the bombing of his hometown of Nantes in occupied France during WWII—rendering him a self-named "child of total warfare." A radical leftist (but against Marx), a practicing Catholic, a student of architecture, media, war, aesthetics, philosophy, and 'dromology' (his term referring to studying the increase of *speed,* his most constant theme), an activist, artist, and teacher with a large body of work from the 1960s to the present—one can both understand why he requires an introduction for the average reader, and recognize some Ellulian similarities.

Lacy follows this with a section on how to read Virilio, warning readers that Virilio's *style* might be the biggest difficulty in reading him. "Virilio writes like a French Science Fiction Existentialist," Lacy remarks, and he's not wrong.[409] Readers who enjoy the rhetorical jabs occasionally landed in Ellul will likely find the heightened pace and pithy power of such punches in Virilio's hyperbolic style an exhilarating force, though sometimes exhausting and perhaps excessive.

Here (and throughout the work) Lacy carefully introduces Virilio interestedly but fairly, arguing for his relevance for contemporary political/IR thinkers while cataloguing critiques of Virilio along the way. Lacy focuses on the political dimension of Virilio's thought, a focus which sets his apart from other introductory volumes.[410] A central value which Lacy finds in reading Virilio is the critical questioning which he performs and to which he drives his readers; as such, Lacy's volume is in part the charting of his personal journey reading Virilio and his resulting path. But he also aims for a synthetic course through Virilio's works, "a body of work that is often difficult to 'access' simply by reading one or two books."[411] The majority of the work follows these two paths alternately and links them together, including contemporary political and pop-cultural references along the way (and situating Virilio against other continental thinkers like Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Agamben, and Baudrillard).

He splits the body of the text into two parts, corresponding to overriding themes of Virilio's corpus. Part I addresses "The endo-colonization of society," a term signifying

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[408] Some of this paragraph, and its quote, come from this *Vice* interview with Virilio: "Paul Virilio". Interview by Caroline Dumoucel. Available at https://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/paul-virilio-506-v17n9, accessed Jan. 13, 2016.

[409] Mark Lacy, *Security, Technology and Global Politics: Thinking With Virilio* (London: Routledge, 2015), 6.

[410] See footnote 66 on page 24.

[411] *Security, Technology and Global Politics*, 19.

both the end of nation-state expansion through colonization of external geographic territories, and what Virilio views as its replacement, the turning-inward of the 'military class' on its own population, driven by ideologies of health, security and consumerism, presupposing a "degraded political culture."[412] Part II focuses on the "Integral Accident," Virilio's term for destruction which emerges by virtue of the networks of our society. Virilio's focus on the accident—on the form of destruction created by the inevitable eventual breakdown of every new invention—lends to his perceived pessimism. Virilio's conceptual vocabulary receives proper elucidation throughout; Lacy focuses on terms such as 'chronopolitics'—the post-geographical politics of 'real-time' surveillance, 'democracy of emotion'—a 'synchronization' of emotions which "reduces the world to fear, panic, and insecurity," 'siege psychosis'—a fearful obsession with security and fear of 'dangerous otherness', and others.[413] These terms function (similarly to Ellul's *la technique*) as "a vocabulary or set of concepts to help us make sense of the world around us."[414] Lacy also highlights how, despite the apparent political despair Virilio drives us towards, he ultimately considers himself a 'revela-tionary'—he is interested in looking at the world through "an unfamiliar gaze," looking at problems head on in order to move past them.[415] We might say that Virilio aims to enact a shift in perception, creating awareness of the ways we are shaped by the world around us; Lacy finds and critiques these things in his own life.

Lacy's work admirably provides a 'sensible' entry to Virilio's work for many readers who might never encounter it. Virilio's works (and thus Lacy's book) should be of interest to Ellul Forum readers not least for common themes too substantial and numerous to detail here. In making Virilio more widely palatable, Lacy necessarily dulls some of the stylistic edge which makes Virilio so incisive. This is understandable: he's trying to bridge a gap between the apocalyptic critique of a French radical and a more tame, academic, and institutionalized readership, between Virilio and the fearful, anxious, integrated, and security-obsessed society he describes.

In his conclusion, Lacy suggests that Virilio's "profound hope" "comes from his 'method', his commitment to our capacity to keep asking questions..."[416] In light of the similarities between Ellul and Virilio, and Ellul's insistence that his sociology would have driven him to suicide without the hope his theology offered, Lacy's attribution of Virilio's hope only to a method of questioning—and not to something as subversive to modern categories as the "hope against hope" of his theology—comes off as going beyond the rhetorical 'dulling of an edge' and borders on taming Virilio's radical position.[417]

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[412] *Security, Technology and Global Politics*, 27.
[413] *Security, Technology and Global Politics*, 40.
[414] *Security, Technology and Global Politics*, 145.
[415] *Security, Technology and Global Politics*, 150.
[416] *Security, Technology and Global Politics*, 150.
[417] Virilio mentions this theological 'hope against hope' in the interview listed above. To be fair to Lacy here, Virilio mentions his faith, but rarely discusses its relation to the rest of his thought at length.

Dialectical Theology and Jacques Ellul: An Introductory Exposition

by Jacob E. Van Vleet, Fortress Press, 2014. 239 pp. pb.

Reviewed by Paul Tyson

Paul Tyson is an honorary assistant professor in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Nottingham. He is the author of Returning to Reality: Christian Platonism for Our Times (Cascade Books, 2014).

Ellul is a seminal figure in 20th century philosophy of technology scholarship. Two of Ellul's books — "The Technological Society" and "Propaganda" — are recognized classics in the field. Even so, Ellul's work tends to be treated in a rather piecemeal manner and not considered as a whole. To Van Vleet, this tendency to cherry pick a few key ideas from Ellul's work, and only from his recognized philosophy of technology classics, profoundly distorts a fair appreciation of Ellul's work. Most noticeably, those who only read Ellul's above classics readily tend towards the entirely erroneous view that Ellul was a technological determinist.

There is no excuse for failing to notice the centrality of dialectical theology to Ellul's understanding of technique and propagandes. In his preface to "Propaganda" Ellul notes that whilst he sees propaganda as a necessary feature of modern technological society, he does not "worship facts and power"; indeed, he maintains that because a "phenomenon is necessary means, for me, that it denies man: its necessity is proof of its power, not proof of its excellence." Here, the unstated dialectical partner to determinist material necessity is indeterminate spiritual freedom.

Because he studies necessity from a place 'above' necessity, key features of Ellul's conceptual outlook are simply invisible to those who do "worship facts and power", to those who approach the study of society without any theological appreciation of freedom. Yet it is here, in his dialectical theology, that Ellul is most keenly differentiated from Marx, Durkheim and Weber. Because of his theology Ellul's careful analysis of the necessities of modern technological society transcends what it is possible to think of within classical sociology.

Van Vleet has given us an accessible and solid introductory synthesis of the key ideas in the major works in Ellul's expansive corpus using dialectical theology as the hermeneutic key unlocking its unity. If one is already acquainted with Kierkegaardian dialectical theology, this key itself is not

novel. What is still bracing to the conceptual categories of our times, though, is reading Ellul's sociology as grounded in theology. This approach is entirely within the ambit of both Ellul and Kierkegaard, and contemporary scholars such as John Milbank. Indeed, sociology itself, as influenced by 19th century counter-enlightenment thinkers and 20th French theorists, is increasingly open to theology. Van Vleet's text will be

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In general, Virilio certainly isn't at pains to explain himself in detail—his style addresses the reader more as an enigmatic provocation.

particularly valuable to those sociologically interested in Ellul, but not familiar with dialectical theology.

There are, of course, some serious perils involved in seeking to write a clear and systematic synthesis of an inherently dialectical, even paradoxical, thinker's work. Van Vleet performs this tricky dance with real grace and stylistic ease, maintaining a lightness of accessibility undergirded by solid scholarship. This is a beautiful example of what a fine introductory exposition can achieve. But one does not 'master' Ellul by this means, and nor is a mastery of Ellul Van Vleet's intention.

Van Vleet offers us a conceptual entree gently acquainting the intellectual palate of the non-dialectical and the non-theological with the exotic flavours of Ellul's outlook, and a basic appreciation of how his theological flavours should — and should not — be combined for satisfying intellectual digestion. But the point of the entree is, of course, the main meal to follow. After reading Van Vleet, I do think that the social scientist, or the thinker interested in contemporary French scholars influenced by Ellul, will far better understand Ellul's classic texts. This sort of appreciation will open up those interested in the philosophy of technology to the importance of dialectical theology in the work of Ellul and in the work of thinkers like Henry, Virilio etc., who also have a profound theological sensitivity grounded in the 'phenomena' of the mystery of humanly experienced reality, at the same time that they see the disturbing necessities of our technological situation.

In sum, Van Vleet's book has everything a good introductory exposition of Ellul needs — solid scholarship of the entire major corpus, clarity and accuracy in presenting a synthesized overview of core insights and ideas, and a clear exposition of the key interpretive dynamics of Ellul's dialectical theology.

Note: This review is a substantially revised version by the author, originally published in *Cultural Politics*, Volume 11, Issue 2, Duke University Press.

Will the Gospel Survive? Proclamation and Faith in the Technical Milieu

By Gregory Wagenfuhr

Rev Dr G.P. Wagenfuhr is a Presbyterian minister currently serving as transitional pastor of the United Presbyterian Church of Canon City, Colorado. He is author of *Plundering Egypt: A Subversive Christian Ethic of Economy* (Cascade, 2016), a book that offers a critique of any and all possible economic relationships from the perspective of a biblical Christian faith. It looks at the history of economic relations in different times and how these economic perspectives have influenced human world-construction, juxtaposing a robust theological engagement to show where economic reasoning has influenced Christian theology, and how a gospel of reconciliation can truly subvert economics. He earned his PhD in Theology and Religious Studies at the University of

Bristol (2013). His thesis was entitled, "The Revelation of God in Christ as Desacralising Reorientation to Milieu in and beyond Jacques Ellul." He received his M.Div. from Westminster Theological Seminary in 2009 and his B.A. in Philosophy and Ancient Languages from Wheaton College in 2005. His website is gpwagenfuhr.com.

Abstract

Ellul's concept of technique grows throughout his writing, to the point that he begins to see technique as the milieu in which modern people live. Because experience is mediated through technique, technique gives content to symbol and it alters language in all its aspects: its form, its content, and its purpose. If God's revelation is in his Word and language itself is fundamentally altered, can the gospel survive translation into the technical milieu? Is the gospel subverted by the very means used to communicate it? This paper briefly examines the alteration of language in the technical milieu and the social milieu in which the Word of God was revealed in Scripture. It is then argued that the technical milieu subverts communication of the gospel, but... no more than the social milieu in which it was delivered.

Presented to the International Jacques Ellul Society conference, 2012 at Wheaton College

Ellul's concept of technique grows throughout his writing, to the point that he begins to see technique as the milieu in which modern people live. Because experience is mediated through technique, technique gives content to symbol and it alters language in all its aspects: its form, its content, and its purpose. If God's revelation is in his Word and language itself is fundamentally altered, can the gospel survive translation into the technical milieu? Is the gospel subverted by the very means used to communicate it? This paper briefly examines the alteration of language in the technical milieu and the social milieu in which the Word of God was revealed in Scripture. It is then argued that the technical milieu subverts communication of the gospel, but ... no more than the social milieu in which it was delivered.

Introduction: The Progression of Technique

Jacques Ellul is perhaps best known for his critique of technology. Barring the problem with the translation of 'technology' for *la technique*, that Ellul himself addressed,[418] there is the further issue that his conception of the role and character of *la technique* grows throughout his career. Unfortunately, many of his readers tread not beyond the confines of a select few books and thus fail to understand this progression of thought. Nor has this progression been well documented in summaries of Ellul. The phenomenon of *la technique* is, at times, understood by Ellul to be the dominant force in society in the 20th century. Thus, around the time of *La technique ou I'enjeu de siecle* (1954) / *The Technological Society* (1964), Ellul considers his understanding of technique to be analogous with Karl Marx's conception of capital as the dominant so-

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[418] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System,* trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980)*,* 24.

cial force or factor in the 19th century.[419] Later in Ellul's thought, however, technique becomes something larger than a social phenomenon akin to capital.

Ellul introduces his sequel to *The Technological Society, Le system technicien* (1977) / *The Technological System* (1980) in this way:

Technology is not content with *being*, or in our world with being the *principal or determining factor*. Technology has become a system ... Twenty-five years ago, I arrived at the notion of the "technological society"; but now, that stage is passed.[420]

Thus, Ellul begins to see that technique is a whole system, something larger than a dominant factor within a social system. Chapter two of *The Technological System* explains how technique is the milieu in which people now live. It is a decade later near the end of his writing career when Ellul finally pieces it all together. In *Ce que je crois* (1987) / *What I Believe* (1989), Ellul devotes four chapters to an all-encompassing metanarrative of human history in which technique features as one of three milieux in which humanity has lived. Technique, then, is not just one phenomenon amongst many, a system governing social life, but is the world in which humanity lives.

Whereas the generally accepted metanarrative of philosophy in the West proceeds through the premodern, modern, and postmodern, I have argued elsewhere that Ellul's metanarrative of three milieux provides a better account of history than a rational-centric narrative.[421] This account of "the human adventure" is the most important interpretative lens through which one must read Ellul's works; most important because it integrates the totality of his idea of *la technique* in its material and spiritual realities and explains its development on a grand scale.

2. Three Milieux

For Ellul, a milieu is characterised by three things: it is the primary source of life, the primary source of death, and therefore also, the primary experience through which all other experience is mediated.[422] The milieu is all-encompassing, but it is this third point, that of mediation, that is most essential. For, in mediating experience, the milieu provides symbol and thus the possibility of language and creativity. These three milieux of Ellul correspond to the three epochs of prehistory, history, and post-history.[423] In the natural milieu, human beings were most benefited and threatened by natural causes. Nature mediated experience and thus gave rise to natural society and natural techniques. To oversimplify, human relations existed in highly naturalistic ways—for the purpose of survival and biological thriving. With the dawn of history

[419] Jacques Ellul & Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange. *In Season, Out of Season: An Introduction to the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 176. cf. also "On Demande Un Nouveau Karl Marx." *Foi et Vie* 45, 3 (1947).

[420] Ellul, *The Technological System*, 1.

[421] Wagenfuhr, Gregory. "Postmodernity, the Phenomenal Mistake: Sacred, Myth and Environment." In *Jacques Ellul and the Technological Society in the 21st Century*, ed. Helena M. Jeronimo, Jose Lws Garcia & Carl Mitcham (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013).

[422] Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 99ff.

[423] Ellul, *What I Believe,*, Part II.

and the development of the city, society itself begins to be the totality of experience. Nature and technique are mediated through society and are thus social. Nature exists for the purpose of the social groups. Technique is social and is utilised for social ends. Finally, with the end of history comes the technical milieu. Ellul's most famous book *The Technological Society* was an expression of the transition between the social and technical milieux. In the technical milieu, nature and society exist for the purpose of technical development and all experience will increasingly be mediated through technique. Thus, *la technique* is not an isolated set of phenomena that can be identified as 'alien' and eradicated. *La technique* is the interpretative framework of human life.

This is increasingly evident in the details of life. The separation of the food consumer from the production of food is increasingly broad. Even basic food preparation is highly mediated through technology. Food consumption was not so long ago a highly social affair, in the technical milieu, food consumption is technical—fast, efficient, oriented more around data on how much of what to eat in a day to be healthy than on a display of personal wealth and taste to garner social status. Nature is utilised for technical progress. To even experience untouched nature requires the use of technological transportation and in many countries is completely impossible. We have to experience a 'transport' in the spiritual sense; we have to exit the world in order to experience nature. Indeed, our very conception of the world as 'ecosystem' demonstrates that we conceive of the natural world in technical terms.

Society is also mediated through technique and technology. It is increasingly impossible to participate in society without Internet access. Communication with other human beings is increasingly mediated through techniques that alter the form and content of conversation. This helps form a technical people, a people who have no time for small talk, no time for pleasantries and politeness, but who have time only for the almighty *Fact*.[424] Pragmatism is the philosophy of technique. The technical person, the human resource, uses language to communicate information and data.

The mediation of nature and society through technique raises a plethora of important questions. What implications does the technical milieu hold for the revelation of God in Scripture and the proclamation of the gospel? Will the gospel survive translation into the technical world? What is theology without knowledge of God and how can that knowledge of God be knowable except through revelation? Thus, the problem of revelation in the technical milieu must be raised prior to any moral or practical questions. If the gospel is modified by the transition of milieux, if it cannot survive this translation, nothing remains but the remnants of an outdated religion that no longer serves a vital social function.

3. Revelation as Social

The revelation of God, in Ellul's account of history, falls clearly within the social milieu. That this is the case is evident from a number of points. First of all, both the

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[424] Jacques Ellul, *A Critique of the New Commonplaces*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Knopf, 1968), 202ff.

Old Testament and the New Testament lie within the social milieu. Their respective and evolving situations are almost entirely social. That is, their primary institutions are social institutions, e.g. marriage, tribe, family, nation. Their concerns for justice are social, relating to the widow, the orphan, the outcast, the poor. In the technical milieu justice and morality are mediated through technical concerns, such as efficiency, utilitarian ideas, maximisation of productivity with minimum of effort.[425]

The Bible, taken as a grand narrative, is a concern of God and his reconciliation with an ever expanding group of people. It is relational and therefore it seems that the application of 'social' to this message is fitting. Ellul prefers the term *la rupture* instead of the Fall precisely because he sees the gospel as concerned with rupture and reconciliation of relationship.[426]

Ellul argues, for example, that Jesus is the rider on the white horse of the book of John's Apocalypse. Jesus, on his reading, exists within history as that which gives history meaning. Only Jesus has the power to open the book of history and make it meaningful.[427] Because Jesus is the meaning of history, for Ellul, and the social milieu is the period of history, it seems that Jesus was incarnate within the social milieu. If Jesus is the meaning of history, and the technical milieu abandons history,[428] it follows that Jesus has no real meaning in the technical milieu. Jesus, and God for that matter, is at best irrelevant to the technical mindset.

Ellul argues such a point in *Humiliation of the Word.* The Word of God is humiliated by the *de facto* triumph of the image, especially in the contemporary technical world. And, to devalue the word is to devalue the incarnation, as Ellul explains:

Since all Christianity depends on the incarnate Word, the Word made flesh, we must say that there is no Christian faith outside the Word; our description of the God who speaks points to what is specific and particular in Christian revelation ... If we devalue the Word even a little, we are rejecting all of Christianity and the Incarnation.[429]

Clearly, Jesus belongs in the social milieu and has little possibility of communicating to us in the technical milieu. After all, as we continually separate ourselves from our physical bodies by the creation of 'avatars' on the Internet, why should we want an incarnate God?

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[425] Ellul notes that there is a kind of technical anti-morality present in the technical milieu. Technique tolerates no morality, but has an order of its own that creates a 'morality' of its own. See Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society,* trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964), 134.

[426] Andrew Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 62ff. Goddard succinctly summarizes Ellul's theology as one of rupture and communion.

[427] cf. Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), 177ff., chapter 5.

[428] Ellul titles his chapter on the technical milieu "The Posthistorical Period and the Technological Environment." See Ellul, *What I Believe,* 133.

[429] Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word,* trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 51–52.

One final point to make to demonstrate the seemingly social nature of the gospel is to simply point out that key concepts of Scripture seem to be social. God is love.[430] How can we understand the love of God, its patience, kindness, selflessness, when 'love' to us is a technical action that we make happen by the gratification of the flesh? Sex, as Ellul notes in *New Demons* is treated as a sacred of transgression of technique, but in the process is itself transformed into technique.[431] Ellul also explains the seeming liberation of sex and the love relationship by technique as slavery to technique in *Ethics of Freedom*.[432] In this situation, the love of God must be understood from a functional perspective, i.e., what can it do for me, for humanity? What purpose does the love of God play for the furthering of the technical milieu?

Community is an evergreen term used in Christian circles. The church is seen as God's community to be active in the human community. What most contemporary writers have failed to see is that neither community nor individualism are fitting descriptions of any alternatives in the technical milieu. What does the church mean to a massified humanity?[433] The meaning of 'church' is evident by its *de facto* division along socioeconomic or professional lines. The church may be viewed as a functional entity rather than a social identity, as such it risks becoming a social *resource* rather than the living body of Christ.

Prayer is a further concept that Ellul noted was modified in the technical milieu. *L'impossible priere* or *Prayer and Modern Man* is a look into the possibility of prayer in this world. Ellul observes that the foundations of prayer are fragile, that the reasons for it seem lacking in a secular world of "man come of age."[434] Prayer is empirically inefficient and ineffective. It may provide some psychological benefit, some psychosomatic healing, but technology and advanced technique is mainly responsible for the provision of daily bread, for healing, for the means of life and the source of death. Technique is the benefactor and malefactor, that which may bless or curse. Prayer to a God outside this milieu seems irrelevant and is demonstrably ineffective. Prayer, thus, becomes seen as a technique. Prayer is a function, a means to some further end.[435] Ellul combats this by celebrating the death of the former naturalistic and religious reasons for prayer because he believes prayer can be recovered for the Christian for what it truly is–an expression of freedom.[436]

Thus it is seen that certain concepts intrinsic to Christian revelation have been modified such that, though words remain, the symbolic world through which they are

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[430] 1 John 4:8, 16.

[431] Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons,* trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 75ff.

[432] Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom,* trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 482ff.

[433] For Ellul on the massification of humanity cf. Ellul, *The Technological Society,* 333–34.

[434] A favorite critique by Ellul of Bonhoeffer. cf. e.g. Ellul, *A Critique of the New Commonplaces,* 67–81. Ellul, *The New Demons,* 20.

[435] Popular Christian teaching and campaigns bear this out, e.g. "PUSH: Pray Until Something Happens." Prayer is thus seen as a means to any end, but that it is effective in bringing something about.

[436] Jacques Ellul, *Prayer and Modern Man* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970), 99ff.

mediated has changed. But if specific words have changed, how has language changed from the social milieu to the technical? For, if symbol and language themselves have been modified, how might a message delivered in social terms to a social milieu be translated into the technical milieu? And can this be done successfully without a subversion of its message?

4. Symbol—Language in the Technical Milieu

As a milieu, technique is immediate. This means that experience of the natural and social worlds are mediated through technique. The linguistic consequences of this mediation are profound. Language is essentially a social entity. It exists for social ends. If truth is always and everywhere only expressible by language, and language is social, truth is social. The mediation of truth through technique leads to the submission of truth to the purposes of 'fact.' For Ellul, there is a categorical difference between truth and fact that corresponds to the difference in word and image, or language and reality.[437] Truth, we might say, is existentially relevant, it is interpretation and application. Fact is objective and meaningless.[438] In the technical milieu truth becomes quantitative and subjected to fact.[439] In this way language itself is modified by its integration into the technical milieu. Ellul writes:

Linguistic studies (and not just structuralism) tend more and more to reduce human language to a certain number of structures, functions, and mechanisms giving us the impression that we now understand this strange and mysterious phenomenon better than before. But what modern linguistics really does is to reduce language in such a way as to make it fit neatly into this technological universe, trimmed down as an indispensable communication for the creation of the system. Language is losing its mystery, its magic, its incomprehensibility.[440]

Language, if it loses its incomprehensibility and mystery, leads to non-symbolic communication, communication that is efficient but dull. In Orwell's famous *1984*, he introduced a similar concept that he called 'newspeak.' Though Orwell's vision remains unfulfilled in a great number of ways, he did understand the importance of language on the pattern of thought of people. 'Thoughtcrime' could become impossible by the elimination of difference and distinction in the definition of words. What Orwell missed, which is the reason Ellul preferred Huxley's *Brave New World*,[441] is that this reduction process is not conscious, violent, anti-sexual, or eliminating of the semblance

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[437] Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word.*

[438] Ellul, *A Critique of the New Commonplaces,* 202–206. In *Commonplaces*, Ellul criticises an attitude of submission to fact by noting that bowing to fact is a justification of fate and a denial of the unique human capacity to reject the sovereignty of fact.

[439] Ellul, *A Critique of the New Commonplaces,* 240–49. Ellul critiques the proposal that all science is quantitative or mathematical by observing that taking only one side of the division between numerical and non-numerical, or quantitative and qualitative, will necessarily exclude the possibility of the qualitative in order to use the method. Thus, the method simply reproduces its presuppositions.

[440] Ellul, *The Technological System,* 49.

[441] Ellul, *What I Believe,* 137. Though Ellul is also skeptical about many features of this work. See also Jacques Ellul & William Vanderburg, *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His*

of freedom. Rather, as with Huxley's account, people are trained in a language that corresponds to and integrates one into a particular milieu from birth. The technical milieu alters the formal, material, instrumental and final 'causes' (to use Aristotle's terms) of language, as I will now explain.

4.1. Transition from Social Language to Technical Language

Formal Cause of Language

Language is social. The form of language, as it has been known throughout human history, is social. The form language has taken, its grammatical structure, its symbols, have corresponded to the needs of society. As Ellul noted, milieu is that which gives language its symbolic content and thus makes language possible. Symbol can be classified into Ellul's three milieux: the natural, social and technical. The non-human world gives innumerable symbols. But these symbols acquire meaning, not by the natural features themselves, but by the meaning superimposed by a social group. Claude Levi-Strauss, for example, points out how colour symbolism is ambiguous.[442] The ancient Jews associated the sea and deep waters with chaos and fear, whereas seafaring people tend to use its symbols positively, as lifegiving and fertile. The point is, even though symbol exists within the milieu, its meaning is fixed by usage within a group, rather than within the milieu itself.

In the technical milieu, however, the form of language is no longer social. Instead of usage providing meaning, meaning becomes more and more objective, resting more in a lexicon and set syntax than in usage. Language in the technical world becomes increasingly standardised, objective and technical, with meaning increasingly lying within the word itself, rather than in the intention of the subject or in the relationship of speaker and audience. Rather than a form of social interaction between subjects, language becomes a form of information transfer. Language is taken to be equivalent to reality, insofar as it is a transmission of data, rather than a communication of truth and value. That is, the qualitative and evaluative component of language so prevalent in social discourse is supplanted by quantitative fact. Indeed, it may be fitting to suggest that the postmodern call to remember subjectivity inherent in language and communication comes at precisely the time when it is in most danger of disappearance.

Material Cause of Language

The material cause of language is social. The matter, substance or essence of language is social. Communication between subjects is, in itself, a representation of the subject itself. One's word is one's bond. *Communi*cation is about the coming together of individuals in a type of community. The very act of communication requires the loss of difference, requires common ground to be formed, common experience to be shared.

In the technical milieu, however, the matter, or substance of language is technique itself. Ellul says of communication, "Technology is the support of inter-human com-

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Life and Work. 2ⁿᵈ revised ed. (Toronto: House of Anansi, 2004), 54–56. See also Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff,* trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 337.

[442] Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 6465.

munion. But this communion, no longer symbolic, has turned into sheer technological communication."[443] The mediation of the technical milieu sterilises language, demonstrating that the essence of language becomes technical itself. Technology, in contrast to older forms of mediation, is univocal, superficial, but stable. It involves clear and orderly mediation, but without playing or evoking, without remembering or projecting. It is a truly efficient medium, and it has imposed itself in lieu of poetic mediations. It sterilizes all around itself anything that could 27

disturb that rigor.[444]

Thus, the material cause of language is itself no longer social. The form and content of language is increasingly technique itself in a universal self-augmenting way. Again, this does not mean that language loses its social aspects, but that the social aspects are heavily modified by mediation through technique.

Instrumental Cause of Language

The instrumental cause of language is society. That is to say, society itself is the instrument by which language exists. Language comes by means of society. It develops through common usage in distinct social and geographical groups. Language is delivered via society. Society provides the means by which speaking, listening and comprehensibility is possible. Through a process of socialisation a child or foreigner is integrated into the group by means of learning the language.

In the technical milieu, however, language becomes an instrument of technique. Technique is the means by which language acts are constructed. Communication is increasingly only possible mediated through communication technologies. To be integrated into the world, one need learn fewer social rules, fewer shibboleths, and more universal forms of expression via information technology. Learning basic computer and Internet skills is more socially important than learning the subtleties of formal conversation. Language, therefore, becomes an expression of technique rather than an expression of society.

Final Cause of Language

The final cause, or purpose, of language is social. Language exists so that people might communicate with each other, might move interaction beyond the purely physical to the emotional and intellectual. Without language, human civilisation is impossible. It is not without accident that tower of Babel narrative expresses the disempowerment of humanity by confusion of language.[445] This narrative is not to be understood as an aetiological myth for the presence of different languages, but is a statement on the confusion of language. It is less about the speaking, more about the power that mutual comprehensibility and human unity brings.[446] Language exists for the purpose of building human community and society. In order for communication

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[443] Ellul, *The Technological System,* 36.
[444] Ellul, *The Technological System,* 37.
[445] Genesis 11:1–9
[446] cf. Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City,* trans. Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 19.

to be a possibility there must be common ground. In order for there to be common ground, there must be a willingness on the part of individuals to assume positions and identities otherwise alien. Agreement, community, communion, are made possible by language.

In the technical milieu, however, with a biological-functional definition of human ontology, the growing uniform and global human identity makes the social functions of language increasingly superfluous. Language increasingly exists for the purpose of functionperformance. Jargon and computer programming language are only two obvious examples of this. A more subtle example is the moralisation of language often called 'political correctness'. Just as blasphemy was formerly a serious crime, so now the use of socially divisive terminology is sometimes criminal. This is not for the purpose of social cohesion, but because language exists for the purpose of technique. By the use of technical language former controlling social identities such as race or nationality are systematically eliminated. Tolerance is always and everywhere a devaluation of formerly held values by submission to a higher value. Thus, instead of creating a social identity through language, language works to minimise social identity by the prioritisation of technical function. Technique necessarily devalues identities deemed irrelevant to function.[447]

Language—that means by which people may come together as one—has, in many ways, reached its zenith in our own time. Global human unity has never been more a reality than it is today. As the number of distinct social groups and cultures die away in the face of monolithic technical anti-culture,[448] traditional forms of language have been and will become irrelevant. Language is thus fundamentally altered in its form, its essence, its instrumentality, and its purpose.

4.2. Spiritual Dimensions

This transition from social to technical language is not simply a material fact without spiritual value. Language is bound to spirituality and the fundamental change in milieu is also spiritual. As, Ellul says in *The Humiliation of the Word*:

Human sovereignty is due more to our language than to our techniques or instruments of war ... Naming something means asserting oneself as subject and designating the other as object. It is the greatest spiritual and personal venture.[449]

Language is humanity's greatest spiritual venture, and when this venture is turned toward technique, technique becomes endowed with sacral qualities that make technique all-pervasive. This is the dialectic of milieu that is so essential to understand.

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[447] Whether one is black or white, male or female, homosexual or heterosexual, Christian or Muslim, is completely irrelevant for the vast majority of technical functions. What becomes essential now is a functional human ontology that views people as 'human resources.'

[448] "Culture exists only if it raises the question of meaning and values. In the last analysis one might say that this is the central object of all culture. But here we are at the opposite pole from all technique. Technique is not at all concerned about the meaning of life, and it rejects any relation to values." Ellul, *The Technological Bluff,* 148.

[449] Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word,* 52.

The milieu is dialectically dependent upon humanity as well as being external to and above people. That technique is a human creation is obvious. That it has become a milieu is perhaps less obvious. But, if it is truly an all-pervasive milieu then it must be our responsibility, is indisputable. Of vital importance is what Ellul says in *New Demons*, "It is not technique itself which enslaves us, but the transfer of the sacred into technique."[450] Technique is not the enemy, our spirituality conditioned by *la rupture* is. And, if language represents this spiritual power, as Ellul has said, the fact of the technical milieu seems to be deadly to the Word of God. The adoption of this milieu means that the significance of the incarnation has been undone by humanity. The Word of God that came to dwell among us in a relationship for the purpose of reconciliation has been robbed of its symbolic relationship to ourselves. By removing from ourselves that last possibility of communication with God, we systematically deny his Word a presence in our world.

It is not as though the technical milieu removes speech or relationships. Rather, the technical milieu mediates all aspects of life through technique. This means that the gospel is conceived in technical terms. Evangelism occurs for results. Jesus becomes a means to an end, whether that be social justice, psychological well being, divine moral approbation, a prayer-answerer, the giver of the Holy Spirit who works miracles of healing and wealth-creation, etc. Ellul well speaks of faith as meaningless in *Living Faith*.[451] Following Dietrich Bonhoeffer,[452] he thinks that faith in Jesus Christ must always be ultimate,[453] which means that it can never exist for any reason other than itself.

But, if faith is truly meaningless, purposeless, and therefore always only an end in itself, such a thing is inconceivable in the technical milieu wherein ends do not exist, but only means and means become their own ends.[454] *The Word of God turned into means ceases to be the Word of God.* The Word of God as means makes the 'God' of this phrase to be ourselves deified. For if the revelation of God truly is self-revelation in Jesus Christ, our possession of it, our ownership, our *use* of it makes us to be masters of it. This leads us to the main question–can the gospel survive translation into technical language in the technical milieu? To attempt an answer, it is expedient to observe what the technical gospel looks like.

4.3. The Technical Gospel

The gospel is viewed through the lens of technique, which is little more than means and an ensemble of means.[455] A technical gospel delivers quantitative and measurable

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[450] Ellul, *The New Demons,* 206.

[451] Jacques Ellul, *Living Faith: Belief and Doubt in a Perilous World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 157ff.

[452] See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics,* ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

[453] Ellul, *Living Faith: Belief and Doubt in a Perilous World,* 116ff.

[454] cf. Ellul, *The Technological Society.*

[455] Ellul, *The Technological Society,* 19.

results. The gospel or the Word of God becomes a resource for life, for social justice, for ideological justification, for spiritual revitalisation. Religion becomes another means to maintaining the efficiency of the human resource by the semblance of freedom. The gospel *via* technique, then, is very different from the gospel *via* society insofar as the Word of God is used to encourage and justify human technique. The technical gospel is one in which the content of Christian proclamation becomes about technique itself. Not just religious technique, though the recent revival of "spiritual disciplines" is telling, but in technical religion as well. This is a gospel of human progress, of humanity working with God for the redemption of the world. This notion of stewardship is resource-oriented and it asks questions of efficiency and progress. It is a gospel oriented to answering the questions of the day, e.g. ecological concerns and economic distributive justice, questions the gospel itself is not *primarily* addressing.

One brief example of the technical gospel is useful. Stewardship, though once the domain of economics in theology, has spread to ecology and personal ability. In this way the natural world and the individual human are seen as resources that must be utilised in a managed and efficient fashion. The focus on vocation or calling further views the individual as a functional unit that must be utilised in the one best way for the kingdom of God. Stewardship often fails to ask the question that must come prior to its standard question of how to act responsibly with the resources at hand, that is the question, "How did we get the resources we have?"[456] Furthermore, stewardship tends to economise or resource the non-economic and thus devalue the human individual or the natural world itself. The question must be asked, "Is this properly a resource?" before it is asked what might be done with it. True management of 'capital' must always question what rightly qualifies as 'capital.'

5. Conclusion—Will the Gospel Survive?

Will the gospel survive the technical milieu? Does it need radical new translations? In actuality, such translations have long been underway. Faith in Jesus Christ has always been subverted in human reality. In the natural milieu, the revelation of God said that nothing had spiritual value unless given to it by God, that the sun, moon and stars were not gods and had only natural impact on human affairs. In the social milieu Jesus was the one who came declaring that he came not to bring peace, which is what religion so earnestly desires, but a sword of division.[457] He came to cast a fire on the earth, to divide social groups down to even the family unit.[458] In the technical milieu, Jesus is the one who claims that he is the way himself, not that he is the way to somewhere, but that he is himself a unity of means and ends. Jesus is the way to the Father, but is also one with the Father.[459] As such, the gospel to the technical world must be a dual proclamation. On the one hand, we proclaim that Christ does

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[456] Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Money & Power,* trans. LaVonne Neff (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press), 1984, 30.

[457] Matthew 10:34.

[458] Luke 12:49–53.

[459] John 14:6–9.

not provide the means to any further end, e.g. justice, peace, material prosperity, etc. On the other hand, we proclaim that Christ is the one and only means to liberation from the sacralisation of technique that has so modified human relationships.

Thus, the Ellulian conclusion: the gospel has been de-incarnated and militated against for as long as it has been revealed. The social form of Christianity was not a golden age, rather, the social milieu had its own very pernicious forms of subversion, many of which Ellul well documents.[460] The attempt at the subversion of Christian faith is a fact rooted in the notion of incarnation itself. God is revealed in weakness, in the Word. The Word is terribly alterable, its meaning difficult to solidify. The world to which symbols refer changes dramatically.

Thus, though the incarnation was an historical event, the world to which Jesus came is different from our own in ways more radical than many are prepared to consider.

The gospel will survive by God's grace and power alone. It is the responsibility of Christians to recognise the fundamentally different milieu in which we live and the problems it poses for the understanding and transmission of the gospel. Can the gospel be translated into the technical world? It already has been and yes, it is a radical subversion of the gospel. But this is not necessarily a new situation insofar as the gospel has been subverted throughout its history by the social milieu in which it was revealed. The solution, therefore, can in no way be a re-socialisation of the gospel. To attempt such is not only quixotic, but creates a utopian golden-age vision of the past that is radically naive.

The gospel is not the milieu; it is not the transmission of the milieu. The gospel is not fundamentally social, natural, or technical. The good news of God in Christ is reconciliation, but this is not social insofar as reconciliation to God cannot be mediated through human societies. This reconciliation has at its root the relationship between the individual and God. It is by means of this individual and unique relationship that the church is formed. That is, only through the mediation of the love of God can one love one's neighbour. Thus, the gospel is, in actuality, radically destructive to a human society whose unity lies outside God, to natural religions and to the technical milieu. The gospel must, therefore, always be Wholly Other, even as it is translated into each new world. The good news is reconciliation to God mediated only by the person of Christ. Thus, we cannot approach the technical world with a technical gospel, the social world with a social gospel, the natural world with a natural gospel. Neither can we approach the technical world with a social gospel, as is being done currently. Rather, we approach the world with the person of Christ as the one who interrupts the technical world by his incarnation.

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[460] Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity,* trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

Issue #58 Fall 2016

"Bringing Ellul to the City Council: A Council Member Reflects on How Ellul Has Guided His Work"

Interview of Robb Davis by Mark D. Baker

Robb Davis holds a master's degree in public health and a Ph.D. in population dynamics from Johns Hopkins University. He has over twenty years' experience in international development in the field of maternal and child health and nutrition. He was the executive director of the Mennonite Central Committee. He contributed an article to the *Ellul Forum* (#46). He is fluent in French and reads Ellul in French. He was elected to the Davis, California, city council in June, 2014 and began serving as mayor of Davis in July 2016. In addition to his role in city government he also dedicates a significant amount of time to work on issues related to homelessness and restorative justice in relation to youth crime.

Mark D. Baker, professor of theology and mission at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, interviewed Robb on July 7, 2016 as part of the conference of the International Jacques Ellul Society. What follows is an edited version of excerpts of that session, including two of the questions from the audience.

Mark: It would be surprising to many that an enthusiastic reader of Jacques Ellul would run for political office. How did Ellul's work factor into your decision to run for city council?

Robb: I'll start by that saying Ellul arguably is the reason I became involved in city politics. Maybe even more surprising than my claiming to have run for office on the basis of something Ellul said, which many might consider to be paradoxical, is that I am also a Mennonite. I wasn't just trying to break some molds. I had spent about 25 years travelling the world. I was a technician, dispensing wisdom to many villages and communities all over the planet—45 different countries. I started reading Ellul, and Patrick Deneen, and they started challenging me about living and acting locally. I realized that I didn't know anything about my hometown Davis, California. So about 7 years ago, I stopped travelling. I decided not to get in an airplane anymore. And that changed everything, and not always in a good way. Because when you make a decision like that, all of a sudden everything that your identity is tied up in is no longer there. People in my hometown didn't know me. When I started digging into my hometown I realized that the brokenness that I had experienced other places was actually more profound in Davis, California. We had a veneer of privilege and beauty, and not too far below the surface we had serious problems of addiction and homelessness and racism and exclusion. And the more I got involved, the more I realized that acting locally is really not fun. I didn't really want to look at it. I wanted to leave, actually, but

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I stuck it out. While staffing an overnight shelter I saw firsthand how we fail as a society to treat mental health, how we fail as a society to deal with addiction, and how these things are syndromes that leave people broken, and our solutions are to toss the problems over to the nonprofits to try to figure out a solution. So what I want to say about that experience, and where I really drew from Ellul quite a bit, was the idea of the flourishing of intermediating entities outside the state. The state was incapable, even at a local level, of really effectively dealing with these problems. Into the interstices into the breach, came these small organizations. My commitment at that time was to try to work with them to make them stronger, to help them plan, to try to take some things I'd learned in my trips around the world, and to try to bring them into the community. And of course in a situation like that sometimes you do that for a while, and you're asked to be on a commission, you're asked to be on a task force, and then somebody knocks on your door one day and says, "Maybe it would be useful for you to run for office." I didn't believe that I should or could do it. And my main concern was some things that were raised today at this conference about power. Could I go into politics and authentically bring some solutions? The thing that pushed me towards the decision was the idea that perhaps in that role, and this gets back to power, I could encourage the flourishing of these intermediating agencies in the community. I could encourage them. Because one reality of being a political leader is, when you pick up the phone and say to someone, "Come to a meeting," they'll come. They will. I thought, "Maybe I can bring people around the table who aren't talking to each other, maybe I can bring the school district together with the police department, together with the city, to do a restorative justice program."

Another key factor that led me to run was born out of something I read in Ellul: "A key fact of this civilization is that more and more, sin has become collective and that the individual is constrained to participate in it." (Ellul, *Presence au monde modern,* 1948, p. 19—Robb's translation*).* I was talking to a friend of mine, and we realized that if we had someone in office who was engaging in regular confession about our participation in that collective sin, maybe that would be helpful to a community. And so I've tried to make it my practice to be confessional.

Mark: How did Ellul influence your campaign, how you ran?

Robb: In *The Technological Society* Ellul*,* commenting about propaganda, states: "Whether technique acts to the advantage of the dictator or the democracy it makes use of the same weapons, acts on the individual, manipulates his subconscious in identical ways, and in the end leads to the formation of exactly the same type of human being" (375). What I saw is that people running for office even locally were using propaganda for very, very specific ends, which is the building of allegiance toward themselves. They have around them people using propaganda to do one basic thing: build allegiance toward that figurehead. Why? Because it's a lot easier to raise money when you can invite someone to pay $300 a plate at a table around a leader than it is to give it to some disembodied political party or university. So right out of the gate, I was being told, "You've got to sell yourself. This is about you, Robb. This is about your image;

this is about what you've done in the community." And I knew I couldn't do that. I mean, I could have done that, but I felt like that was idolatry. That the real problem with propaganda is that it creates allegiance towards something that's not God. And I am a follower of Jesus. So I struggled with that.

When I was discerning whether to run or not, through a long series of conversations others helped me understand that it came down to two things. Could I run a campaign where I could be honest about my limits? And the limits of political power? I brought that commitment into the campaign, but my campaign team said, "Do not ever talk about that." I wrote an essay that I put out on a local news blog, without telling my campaign team, and it was entitled, "I'm going to disappoint you." What I was trying to say is, "you are projecting on me many, many hopes. You are projecting on me your desires. I'm going to disappoint you. Because there's no way I can fulfill those needs." So that decision to not listen to my campaign team, and to actually get them upset, was an intentional act to try to communicate that I did not have solutions to these problems. That all I offered was the ability to try to bring people together, to try to work together to solve some of the issues.

Mark: With the campaign team, was it one time you did this, and they said, "Robb that's stupid," and then it was over, or was it ongoing conflict with them?

Robb: It was ongoing conflict, but not about everything. For instance, I made a commitment during the campaign that my political career begins and ends in Davis. So I am committed to localism. I'm committed to this bioregion. I'm committed to naming the giftedness of the people in this town and drawing on that giftedness to solve our problems. I'm committed to understanding the natural resources, to solving conflict locally. So I laid that out and I said, "This is my commitment, that I will not seek higher office." My campaign team was okay with that.

I think the reason I won, even though I did not always follow the counsel of my campaign team, is that we knocked on every single door in the community and I held almost 40 face-to-face meetings around tables in neighborhoods where we sat and listened to people. And, oh my goodness the fear and the trauma I encountered in a privileged community like Davis; you would be shocked by what people were afraid of. And all they wanted was someone to listen.

Mark: Let's return to your comment about confession for collective sin. Can you give an example of how you do that?

Robb: I am asked to speak frequently at different events. Recently I spoke at a demonstration against Bakken crude oil coming through our town by rail. It is very volatile and there have been railroad accidents and explosions in other places, killing many people and causing significant environmental destruction. What I mean by public confession is standing in front of a group of environmental activists and saying, "You know the oil company is not going to the Bakken formation to make our lives miserable. The oil-producing company is not going to the Bakken shale to give us heartache, or to challenge our goal of local control of land use. They're going to the Bakken shale because we're telling them too. We're asking them, we're begging them, our society,

our lifestyles are drenched in oil. That's why they're going." Now, that's my public confession of my participation in systemic sin. We're raping Canada's timber to build houses in California. We've despoiled the Ecuadorian rainforests to drive our cars. We need to say that; we need to acknowledge that. And I've felt like I could make a commitment to do that. And in the end to be confessional to acknowledge my role in the systemic.

Mark: Ellul wrote: "The first great fact which emerges from our civilization is that today everything has become 'means.' There is no longer an 'end;' we do not know whither we are going. We have forgotten our collective ends, and we possess great means: we set huge machines in motion in order to arrive nowhere" (Jacques Ellul, *Presence of the Kingdom*, p. 63). How have you observed this?

Robb: Two months after I was elected an MRAP, Mine-Resistant Armored Personnel Carrier, arrived in our town. It looks like a tank without a turret. It was surplus military equipment sent by the U.S. Government at the request of our police department.

Mark: Sent to your town and many others...

Robb: Many others. Hundreds of towns across the United States. I asked, "We need a tank?" And the police said, "Yes. We need it for lone shooter events were somebody's hiding and shooting. We need it in case of a disaster. We need it in case there's a riot."

Means and ends. The day it arrived, the first thing that came into my mind was, "Means and ends." What did Ellul say about means and ends? Now let's think about this vehicle, the MRAP. It has an end. It was developed for a reason. It was developed for one very specific reason. It can carry large numbers of soldiers down a flat Iraqi road, have an explosive device go off underneath it, and preserve the lives of the people inside. It was created because of a lie. If you disagree with me that the Iraq war was a lie we can discuss it later. The end to which it was set was based on a lie. It achieved the end of keeping people alive, but when the war was over, the U.S. Government needed to do something with it, and so it committed to sending these MRAP's to every community that wanted one in the United States, no strings attached. A vehicle worth $750,000 each.

And our police are saying to me, "We need it. We need it." So I challenged them, and I said, "What's the concern? Security, right? We need it for our security." And we did Town Hall meetings, and people came and said, "We need it for our security." That's the end that we're trying to achieve, security.

So I asked the police in public meetings, "What's the security threat?" They said two things, which are very telling in this world. And think of this through the lens of Ellul. Everything is becoming means. We've forgotten the ends. So we have a machine that's created for certain ends, which are based on a lie, now this machine, this means, is coming to a community and what we're trying to do is find an end that justifies this means so that we can keep it. We "create" ends to justify its continued use. But it's an instrument of power and control.

And so, the police said, "Well, we have drug deals going down in our town, and the drug dealers are stealing each other's stashes, and they get into gun battles with each other, and we need it in case we're going in to arrest the drug dealers because they're heavily armed."

Okay, now think about that in terms of ends. The first question was, "Who's buying the drugs?" And the police turned to me and said, "Our largest problem is drug sales–a heroin problem among our young people and a methamphetamine problem among our middle-aged population." This is a real problem in our community. The demand for drugs is not dropping out of the sky; again, these guys are not cultivating drugs and selling them just to make our lives hell, they're doing it because there is a demand. So how do we respond to this problem? We're going to address addiction with an MRAP. We are trying to achieve certain ends (reduction in drug sales) by focusing on the wrong means. We should be looking at the causes of addiction, not stopping drug sales caused by it with an MRAP

The second one is even more telling. It gave me chills and I hope it gives you chills too. The assistant chief of police came to me separately, and said, "Robb, we have legitimate concerns. There are people in this community who are tactically trained. They're trained in police tactics, and they know how to counter us, and by the way Robb—some of these folks have PTSD. If they get guns in their hands, it's very difficult for us to deal with them." And I said, "We have people in our community who are tactically trained, who have PTSD, and access to weapons?" He said, "Yeah. Former military."

Means and ends, right? We go off to Iraq. We wage war. Men come back with PTSD, tactically trained. And the way we deal with them is an MRAP so that we can take them out? And the government is not paying anything to deal with the PTSD? This is the way we're dealing with the problems in our community? With an MRAP? So we voted to get rid of it. It felt significant, but the Department of Defense sent it 10 miles north to the city of Woodland. We were the laughingstock of the neighborhood. The big blowback came a few weeks later though and relates to another insight from Ellul. In the film, "The Betrayal of Technology" he said, "Technique will not tolerate (or accept) any judgment passed on it. In other words, technicians do not easily tolerate people expressing an ethical or moral judgment on what they do."

"Technique does not accept judgment." Moral Judgment. And then Ellul wrote, "in other words, the technician." I find it very interesting that he started by saying, "*la technique,*" which shows me that technique is a spiritual power. In addition to the technicians, there is *la technique,* there is technique, which is the Power. The blowback we got, which was severe, and I almost thought I was going to be recalled, was that we were accused of compromising the security of our city. We were accused. I sat with the police and the police said, "*We* are the experts. *We* understand security. *You* are a politician, you do not know about security, you've taken a tool of security out of our hands." I said to them in a public meeting, "The problem I have with the MRAP

is that it is a symbol." It is a symbol of the most destructive military force that the world has ever known, and we're bringing that into our community."

Most politicians don't want to talk about ends, because a lot of times the ends that they're working towards are hidden. They're not the ends that they say publically. Push them on ends. Push them. Push them. The other thing is that we do have, in every bureaucracy, we have people who are enamored with means who will look for ends to which the means can be applied. It is means in search of ends.

Mark: In what ways have you personally felt challenged in relation to these themes we have been talking about, and what have you done in response?

Robb: People don't corrupt you overtly. They do it this way: "Man, you're amazing. You know if you—I know we have a weak mayor form of government Robb but, if you push this, it'll pass, because people respect you. And so, could you push it?" So it's subtle. It's people projecting their hopes on you and convincing you, or trying to convince you that you are the solution to the problem, and if you take the lead—and that' s every single day. Every single day there is the temptation to use power in a way that looks good, but here's what happens. For instance, I want to work on restorative justice with youth. So one day I pick up the newspaper and it says, "Robb Davis led the initiative on restorative justice." I read it and think, "Actually, no I didn't. There were like 10 of us in the room." So I have a choice at that point. Am I going to go correct the paper and say, "Actually there were 10 of us in the room, and I didn't lead anything." Or am I going to let that go.

And most people would say, "Let it go. Let it go." Because if you let it go, you can move that initiative forward so much more quickly. People will follow you. And you'll be able to move much more quickly."

Here's what happens: The goal is restorative justice. That is the end that you want to achieve. What happens when you start listening to those voices, or when you don't correct those errors, or when you accept you know that praise? You actually start going doing that path. And you start saying, "You know what's most important is that I am able to bring change." And so what I need to do is I need to accumulate a little more of that status and power so that I can be better at bringing change.

Two things can occur. First, I can use the positive end, restorative justice, to justify means inconsistent with restorative justice itself and, for me, importantly, inconsistent with the way of Jesus. Second, with increased emphasis on the means to achieve power, eventually the original end of implementing the practice of restorative justice can get lost. Achieving power becomes the true end—even if not the acknowledged one.

Therefore, I must re-orient regularly. I so easily get pulled off track. As part of that reorientation I have had to do things like go before people and say, "You know what, I should've spoken up earlier, I had nothing to do with that. I didn't do anything about that. I can't take any credit for that."

Mark: As you point out, to make effectiveness the supreme goal can become problematic, yet you do seek to be effective, correct? As you state, you desire to see an increased practice of restorative justice. You want to be effective in that.

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Robb: Yes, we can't live without some commitment to effectiveness. The problem is making effectiveness or efficiency the supreme goal that drives and determines everything. I have found it is of utmost importance to have made premediated commitments. For instance, like Ellul I am committed to not use violence. Without that commitment, if violence appeared to be required to achieve a goal I might too easily succumb to the ends justifying that means—the means of violence. Ellul has certainly been a key influence in helping me, as a follower of Jesus, determine what my pre-commitments are—things I will not do in spite of what efficiency may demand or promise. This is not to say I am always faithful. As I just said, re-orientation is a constant necessity.

David Lovekin: If I were an average citizen in Davis I would probably have the idea that you are a thoughtful politician, more thoughtful than most, but would I know you are a Christian?

Robb: I made a decision to bring some explicit Christian theological language into my day-today political work. One explicit way I bring in faith language, and I think an authentic way, is to say what I'm actually doing as a leader in the community is I'm looking out for giftedness. I'm looking for gifts that can be brought to bear on dealing with the challenges of our community. So I use concepts like that, that we are given gifts. I don't say God gives us gifts, I say we are given gifts, and they're for the good of the community. That's Paul. I also say, to my colleagues, "What we need to be modeling as a council is grace and forgiveness." I talk explicitly about needing to reconcile the broken relationships in our community. And I do that by encouraging factions, whether it's in the business community or whatever, to go through mediated processes. And these are things that have never happened before in Davis, but we're starting them, and we're having some success. And I talk about reconciliation and forgiveness. Grace, reconciliation, forgiveness, giftedness. Confession. I encourage people to confess when they hurt someone else. So I bring those terms in because they're meaningful to me. I think they're meaningful to the discourse. People definitely pursue me afterwards on certain things and say, "Where did you get that from? Like giftedness. What do you mean by that, Robb?" I haven't had any pushback, and part of it is I'm not saying, "Paul said," "Jesus taught."

David Gill: As an ethics professor I always say to my students something like this: "Ethics is a team sport, not a solo sport. So you're not going to do well living or discerning what's right all by yourself. So you need some people around you." So my question is, do you have some people around you who will help keep you sane, keep you in check so you don't get arrogant about good things that happen?

Robb: In the spirit of confession, I think I'm doing that rather poorly. Leadership of this kind is isolating. And there are real trust issues. So the people who I trust are not engaged in city politics. And people engaged in city politics have some trust issues. Can I just acknowledge that? So I'm not doing a very good job at that. And it's lonely and it's not healthy.

Mark: But you do have people that you get together with who pray for you?

Robb: Yes, every two months we have a small group of people who come together on a Saturday afternoon and they put their hands on me and they pray for grace and patience and wisdom. You know, that's important. But it's not easy to get a group of people around who can simultaneously entertain deep conversation on policy and really be trustworthy–that they don't have an interest that they're trying to push. And I haven't found that group yet. And I'm despairing that I will. And so, maybe I'll just leave it at that.

Book Reviews

The Empire of Non-Sense: Art in the Technological Society

By Jacques Ellul; translated by David Lovekin and Michael Johnson, edited by Samir Younes.

Papadakis, 2014. 168pp.

Reviewed by Zachary Lloyd

Zachary Lloyd studied with David Lovekin at Hastings College before going on to complete an MA in philosophy at the New School for Social Research. Currently he is a PhD student in comparative literature at the City University of New York.

Nearly forty years after its publication in French, Jacques Ellul's seminal work *The Empire of Non-Sense* has been made available to the English speaking world. This beautiful, hardbound edition also contains two introductory essays by David Lovekin and Samir Younes, both of which constructively engage with the text and with Ellul's broader philosophical perspective. As the subtitle of the work ("Art in the Technological Society") indicates, Ellul's subject is art and those who create it—and indeed, a dizzying array of contemporary artists, architects, critics, and cultural movements are given due consideration. However, the pivot of these analyses lie in their relation to a complex set of phenomena that Ellul calls *la technique*: basically, the totality of methods of and for achieving absolute efficiency in every field of human knowledge. We moderns, as Ellul has it, are so beguiled by machine productivity that we reconstruct, almost unconsciously, all of our cultural and social institutions on this paradigm—namely, on the pursuit of unrelenting efficiency. In effect, technique surreptitiously predisposes a certain manner of operating not merely for our interaction with machines, but also with each other; it becomes as if our very substance, a mentality and an environment fully in and of itself. It is no coincidence, for example, that cognitive science draws heavily from computational models; today the line between brains and processors is nothing if not muddled. In the technical society as Ellul perceives it, human action is re-envisioned as function, something that may be tweaked and fine-tuned; the individual—the site of eccentricity and spontaneity—is increasingly unneeded, and, indeed, is nothing now but a potential source of error. Subsequently, this mentality subtends not only our desiccated assemblages of bureaucracy and economic productivity, but even the vaunted, ironically detached freedom of the artist. In a so-

ciety where creativity has been co-opted by hyper-rational methods, the official art of the age is inevitably artificial.

The modern artist, consuming and consumed by the technical society, is placed in a position the likes of which human history offers no counterpart. Ellul, in his rich, slightly polemical, and overtly sarcastic style of writing (very faithfully captured by the translators), spends the bulk of *Empire* problematizing the theories and practices of the artist's position by dialectically revealing the contradictions that underlie it. Beginning with the notion that the Modernist art movement had purportedly freed itself from the shackles of tradition and authorial control, Ellul goes on to show that this supposed liberation has only amounted to a deepening technical captivity. In other words, artistic practices have become increasingly infatuated with their technical procedures or methods rather than with whatever it is they actually create. For example: An empty canvas hangs on a gallery wall. I am standing before it; sensuously, symbolically, there is nothing there but this blank object. Slightly confused, I glance down to the little placard next to it which enables me fill in the void with some appropriately elaborate theory (e.g., "This is a painting that is not yet a painting"). What is emphasized here is not the painting, but the technical procedure of painting; theory and the generative procedure of the artwork have become the work's very claim to art. The work, subsequently, no longer speaks for itself—the placard, or the art critic (which amount to the same), speaks for it and guarantees its place in the newly minted technical discourse of value. In other words, we are confronted with a situation wherein the meaning of the work is, like a sticky note, "tacked on" from the outside. But this need for the "tacking on" of meaning does, in fact, accomplish the very opposite of what it intends: it only reveals the vacuity and actual meaninglessness of the (non)painting itself. This veneration and overvaluation of artworks that are inherently devoid of sense or meaning is precisely what Ellul considers to be the sense of nonsense.

Once again: modern art professes to have been freed—free from tradition, free from material constraints, free from the godhead. Yet once art has refused the communication of meaning, it has refused itself; in keeping with its nihilistic trope art becomes anti-art. Ellul contends that in such a situation—when art obliterates meaning—all that is left is the bare process by which the artwork is created, along with an absurdly opaque technical discourse that attempts to veil the work's own vacuity. What was once believed to be a revolution or a freeing has only become an emptying and a stripping of sense. Now the only value of art is in its ability to "question," precisely because technological rationality and the homogenizing principles of technique throw into question the very value of the individual. In short, this is where Ellul locates the fundamental contradiction: art, as it attempts to revolt against the oppression and subjugation of the individual to technical ideology, profitably uses and proliferates this ideology even as it appears to denounce its value. Accordingly, modern artistic freedom has amounted only to one more capitulation: an enslavement to the technical mentality; an endorsement to a world in which technique is the absolute benefactor of value; a genuflection before the pervasive Empire of Non-Sense.

In the final analysis, *Empire* is a proleptic work, a kind of promise. It is reasonable to ask, after nearly forty years of sweeping technological advancement that would have surely surprised even Ellul, whether the situation looks more hopeful now; whether art has remained on the level of technique and ignored fundamental human issues or whether its particular capacity for immanent critique (i.e., for using oppressive methods in order to lend awareness to their very oppressiveness) can be successful in bringing to light the reality we are facing. In any case, the issues Ellul has presented are, no doubt, all the more pressing today—the meaninglessness of art he has described only mirroring the meaninglessness permeating our everywhere and everything—and to ignore these issues is as if to give in; to declare as a bitter necessity that which we have only chosen.

Liberalism and the State in French and Canadian Technocritical Discourses

Intersections and Contrasts between George Grant and the Bordeaux School[1]

By Christian Roy

Christian Roy is an independent scholar of intellectual and cultural history (PhD McGill 1993), an art and cinema critic, and a translator from several European languages. A specialist of the French Personalist tradition (having for instance identified its Bordeaux "school" around Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul as fount of the critique of technology), he has published his thesis and many articles on the subject, as well as on George Grant (e.g.

www.revuergument.ca/article/2002-03-01/207-george-grant-lidentite-canadienne-face-a-lempire-de-la-technique.html), and is on the editorial committee of the Ellul Forum (ellul.org). He is also the author of Traditional Festivals: A Multicultural Encyclopedia (ABC-Clio, 2005).

ABSTRACT

In English translation (1964), Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society* framed the definition of its topic in North America and elsewhere, expressing a key insight that remained marginal in France, where it first arose in the 1930s in a Southwestern faction of the Personalist movement led by Ellul's lesser-known mentor Bernard Charbonneau, pioneer of the Green movement. Ellul's analysis was taken up by political philosopher George Parkin Grant, buttressing his defense of Canadian nationhood against US hegemony as the vortex of technology's drive toward a "universal homogeneous State"(Kojeve/Strauss). Grant was first noticed in France in a review of his *Technology and Empire* (1969) by Daniel Cerezuelle, founder of the Societe pour la

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[1] This article was originally a paper given at the Sorbonne in Paris on September 21 2013 at the 6th Tensions of Europe Plenary Conference "Democracy and Technology. Europe in Tension from the

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Philosophie de la Technique as a second-generation member of the Bordeaux School. Beyond such cross-fertilization, some differences with Grant remain about the role of the State, despite related understandings of liberalism as the matrix and chief vector of technology.

In its 1964 English translation, Jacques Ellul's book on *The Technological Society* framed the definition of its topic in North America and beyond, even though its impact remained marginal in France, where it was first published in 1954. It was a belated fruit of over twenty years of critical reflection and activism in a Southwestern faction of the French Personalist movement, driven by Ellul's lesser-known mentor Bernard Charbonneau, who invented political ecology in that prewar context.[2] Charbonneau (1910–1996) and Ellul (1912–1994) formed a tandem of thinkers who were so close that it almost did not matter which one of them discussed what topic; so much so that each devoted his first major book to the other's main concern. Having first originated the concept of Technique as the distinctive, overarching organizing principle of modern society, Charbonneau entrusted it to Ellul, so that he, rather than this Christian anarchist, could dwell on the State in his own book *L 'Kail*, which would only find a publisher forty years later, in 1987. It was around that time that the Societe pour la Philosophie de la Technique was launched at the initiative of disciples of Charbonneau and Ellul, the second generation of what may be seen as the Bordeaux School, by analogy with the Frankfurt School of critical theory.[3]

Not coincidentally, Daniel Cerezuelle, a pillar of the Societe pour la Philosophie de la Technique, coming back from studying with Hans Jonas at New York's New School for Social Research, was the first scholar in France to discuss, alongside the latter, the Canadian philosopher George Parkin Grant (1918–1988) in a 1976 article for an early issue on Technique of the journal *Les Etudesphilosophiques* published by the Presses universitaires de France. Cerezuelle highlighted among the philosophical investigations of "the meaning and implications of technological progress" that had appeared in North America over the previous decade those that "tend to undermine the prevalent notion of the universality and axiological neutrality of the technological phenomenon"[4], as the Bordeaux School had been doing since the early 1930s. The parallel was left unmentioned in that text, but I want to explore it by following the thread of a line of argument Cerezuelle highlighted in Grant that can be traced back

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19th to the 21st Century."

[2] Christian Roy, "Aux sources de l'ecologie politique: Le personnalisme gascon de Bernard Charbonneau et Jacques Ellul," in *Canadian Journal of History/ Annales canadiennes d'histoire*, Vol. 27, No.1, April 1992, 67–100.

[3] Christian Roy, "Ecological Personalism: The Bordeaux School of Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul," in *Ethical Perspectives* (quarterly review of the European Ethics Network), Vol. VI, No. 1, April 1999, 33–44 (summarized as document no. 698481 in Vol. 36 of *The Philosopher's Index*, 2003), downloadable at http://www.ethical-

[4] English abstract of D. Cerezuelle, "La philosophie de la technique en Amerique," in *Les Etudes philosophiques*, No. 2, April-June 1976, 209.

to Ellul, beyond the direct influence his book on *The Technological Society* admittedly had on the Canadian philosopher.

In his own *Technology and Empire*, George Grant had maintained in 1968 that progressive narratives of emancipation were not really in a position to sustain a coherent challenge to the enfolding of all aspects of life within technology, which he defined as something more than technique, understood by Ellul as the whole complex of rational methods for absolute efficiency, since it entailed a "belief in the mastering knowledge of human and non-human beings." As both a practice and an ideology, Grant wrote in passages quoted by Cerezuelle, technology "arose together with the very way we conceive our humanity as an Archimedean freedom outside nature, so that we can creatively will to shape the world to our values." The problem is then that "the moral discourse of 'values' and 'freedom' is not independent of the will to technology, but a language fashioned in the same forge together with the will to technology."[5] As a result, "our liberal horizons fade in the winter of nihilism" before "the pure will to technology (whether personal or public);" for if, "within the practical liberalism of our past, techniques could be set within some context other than themselves —even if that context was shallow," "we now move towards the position where technological progress becomes itself the sole context within which all that is other to it must attempt to be present."[6]

Before Grant, the Bordeaux School viewed liberalism as the ideological seedbed of technology's threat to the values of freedom and equality claimed by that ideology. Ellul could describe "Fascism as Liberalism's Child" (1937) in the Personalist review *Esprit*, for as Charbonneau had maintained earlier in the newsletter of its Bordeaux group of followers, both, like communism, have quantifiable production as their final argument. Fascism and communism, being but "spectacular reformisms," share in this the assumptions of the liberalism they aim to replace, and thus cannot change an increasingly alienated daily life.[7] Grant also saw these three rival ideologies as the modern political systems consonant with the dominance of technology, which had replaced Christianity in Western man's assumptions about reality.[8] Asked about Ellul in a 1978 interview, Grant voiced his distaste "of the liberal and Marxist ideologists and their accounts of technology as a means at the disposal of human freedom. When they speak that way they forget that both capitalism and communism are but predicates of the subject, technology.

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[5] George Grant, "In Defence of North America" (1968), in *Technology and Empire. Perspectives on North America* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969), 32.

[6] *Ibid.*, 40.

[7] Bernard Charbonneau, "*Les actes necessaires,* " in *Bulletin du groupe de Bordeaux des Amis d'*Esprit, No. 2, *s.d.*

[8] George Grant, "Religion and the State" (*Queen's Quarterly* 1963), in *Technology and Empire. Perspectives on North America* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969), 41–60.

Ellul's description of technology was quite outside such a shallow account, and he faced what was actually happening with his lucid French and Christian common sense."[9]

Ellul thus ascribed the emergence of a "pre-fascist mentality" to the fact that, "*by proclaiming freedom of thought, liberal society had freed itself from thought,*" since "*any thought is equivalent to any other,*" and need not be matched by corresponding action to be validated. Subjective opinion and arbitrary imagination go unchecked, but remain powerless, while "*the material world tends to organize itself on bases that are absolutely independent of any effort of thought*"[10]; until, that is, they are imposed as public dogma through advertising and propaganda, forming "abstract masses" of individuals whose psychological reactions are gauged and manipulated by the statistical methods of the social sciences. By its ability to go a step further and concretely mobilize these abstract masses, "fascism appears, from a social standpoint, as a better designed, more willful amorphism than the other, liberal state, but of the same nature, belonging to the same type of society."[11] Even "*fascism's lack of theory is a liberal characteristic.*"[12] Fascism is thus the worthy heir of liberalism: "it keeps all of its father's features —only with the addition of those of its mother, technique,"[13] just as for Grant modernity itself, as "the dream of liberalism and its scientific mistress —'neutral' technology"[14], seems destined to gut freedom and equality of substantive content. Ellul concludes with the description of fascism he claims to find in Alexis de Tocqueville, when this nineteenth-century liberal thinker, who remained a touchstone for Charbonneau and him, writes of "democratic societies that are not free though they may be rich, refined, ornate, magnificent even, powerful by the weight of their homogeneous mass," where private virtues may still flourish even in the absence of civic spirit, once this mass quietly embraces absolute rule.[15]

In a 1968 collection of "candid Canadian opinions" of the United States, Grant used their example to likewise "assert the ancient and forgotten doctrine that evil is, not the opposite, but the absence of good,"[16] fostered by liberalism's "value-freedom" as

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[9] Larry Schmidt (ed.), *George Grant in Process: Essays and Conversations* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1978), 146.

[10] Jacques Ellul, "Le fascisme, fils du liberalisme," first published in *Bulletin du groupe de Bordeaux des Amis d'*Esprit, No. 4, *s.d.*, then in *Esprit*, No. 53, February 1 1937, 761–797, and cited here from the reissue in *Cahiers Jacques Ellul. Pour une critique de la societe technicienne*, No. 1 ("Les annees personnalistes"), 2003, 118–119.

[11] Jacques Ellul, "Le fascisme, fils du liberalisme," 136.

[12] Jacques Ellul, "Le fascisme, fils du liberalisme," 118.

[13] Jacques Ellul, "Le fascisme, fils du liberalisme," 136.

[14] Frank N. Flinn, "George Parkin Grant: a Bibliographical Introduction," in L. Schmidt (ed.), *George Grant in Process: Essays and Conversations* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1978), 199.

[15] Jacques Ellul, "Le fascisme, fils du liberalisme," *Cahiers Jacques Ellul. Pour une critique de la societe technicienne*, No. 1, 2003, 137.

[16] George Grant, "From Roosevelt to LBJ," in Al Purdy (ed.), *The New Romans. Candid Canadian Opinions of the U.S.* (Edmonton: M. G. Hurtig Ltd., 1968), 41.

theorized by John Rawls, of whose *Theory of Justice* he was thus an early critic, long before the communitarians.[17] "The emptiness of a moral tradition that puts its trust in affluence and technology results in using any means necessary to force others to conform to its banal will," "when deemed necessary to comfortable self-preservation," in a "use of power" "which perpetrates evil from its very banality."[18] For "'the 'good life' to which it is proper to aspire in technological society is not a life constrained by moral judgments; [...]. This quest for freedom divorced from virtue entails the desire to dominate necessity, hence leads to tyranny."[19] Charbonneau already saw the banality of evil as an issue going far beyond the specific "Responsibilities of the German People" he discussed in a November 1945 article for one of the Protestant publications his friend Ellul gave him access to, agnostic though he was: for "if we can only imagine a mechanical civilization where personal responsibility is lost," then "we will have to manufacture good Germans the same way Hitler manufactured bad Germans. But let us remember that it is when we start from those neutral techniques that can be used for anything indifferently, when we start especially from this neutral being that gets formed and deformed, that everything is possible,"[20] even when it is a liberal regime that proposes to "win hearts and minds" —or else.Thus, in 1967, Grant is not surprised that "what is being done in Vietnam is being done by the English-speaking empire and in the name of liberal democracy," and not by what "could be seen as the perverse products of western ideology —National Socialism or communism."[21]

Charbonneau presciently picked up on a tell-tale early sign of that shift within liberalism in a 1952 article on this "Heart-Rending Revision" for the Protestant weekly *Reforme.* He argued that Western societies, "particularly Anglo-Saxon ones, were founded on the myth of Progress that confused material progress and spiritual progress, that of collective power: of science and technology, with that of individual freedoms. There wasn't a problem: it is understood that that the societies that are technically most advanced are also the freest, as shown by the case of America." "Having long confused Progress with Freedom and Democracy, America is now mulling over their contradiction, but I fear it won't be for long," for "today, it is becoming perfectly natural to sacrifice the latter to the former, since the facts have demonstrated that Freedom is an

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[17] George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice* (first published by Mount Allison University, Sackville, New Brunswick, as the Josiah Woods Lectures, 1974), intr. Robin Lathangue, Toronto, House of Anansi, 1998.

[18] George Grant, "From Roosevelt to LBJ," in Al Purdy (ed.), *The New Romans. Candid Canadian Opinions of the U.S.* (Edmonton: M. G. Hurtig Ltd., 1968), 41.

[19] John Badertscher, summarizing Grant's essay "Tyranny and Wisdom" (*Social Research* 1964) from *Technology and Empire*, 79–109, in "George P. Grant and Jacques Ellul on Freedom in Technological Society," in Larry Schmidt (ed.), *George Grant in Process: Essays and Conversations* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1978), 84.

[20] Bernard Charbonneau, "Responsabilites du peuple allemand," in *Le Semeur* (organ of the French Federation of Christian Student Associations), Second (post-war) Year, No. 1, November 1945, 85–86.

[21] George Grant, "Canadian Fate and Imperialism" (*Canadian Dimension* 1967), in *Technology and Empire. Perspectives on North America*, 65.

obstacle to Progress," in the guise of "totalitarian successes." Identifying their values with their national power, when forced to choose, "liberal democracies will brutally suppress their political freedoms, equality in education or salaries, leading to a regime where the dictatorship of the central power would underwrite a policy of massive investments," surviving freedoms having first been emptied of content by the cult of efficiency: "while Human Rights are on display on the first floor, torture is being practiced in the basement." —be it in Algeria at that time or in Guantanamo in ours. For whether it be H-bombs or drones, "what is the use of changing your weapons system without also updating your principles," as Charbonneau had first asked upon introducing the musings of "an American journalist" on which this text was a commentary, to the effect that "we have to wake up from our illusions of easy technical and material superiority;" Soviet life is based on force rather than consent, but "are we so sure that our social aims, derived from the individual's right to free will, are stable, constructive and based on lasting values?"[22]

The author of this quote, identified as Lester Pearson, was actually neither American, nor a journalist, but Charbonneau still could not have chosen a better specimen of the contradiction at the core of Anglo-Saxon liberalism than this Canadian minister of Foreign Affairs who would win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957 for his invention of UN peace-keeping troops during the Suez Crisis, and would go on to become leader of the Liberal Party in 1958 and Prime Minister from 1963 to 1968. The policy of military, even nuclear cooperation with the United States that brought Pearson to power was the pretext for the book that made Grant famous in his own country in 1965, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism.* As Grant explained in introducing its 1970 reissue, behind the specific political decisions arising from Canada's ambiguous status within the American empire was "the deeper question of the fate of any particularity in the technological age. What happens to nationalist strivings when the societies in question are given over, at the very level of faith, to the realisation of the technological dream? At the core of that faith is service to the process of universalization and homogenisation" in the name of technology's "one best means." Hence a Canadian sensitivity to this issue, exemplified by Grant among others,[23] since any "distinction will surely be minimal between two nations which share a continent and a language especially when the smaller of the two has welcomed with open arms the chief instrument of its stronger brother —the corporations." Viewing the United States as "the only society which has no history (truly its own) prior to the age of progress," and as a result, no horizon beyond the one defined by technology, Grant lamented the passing of a British North America that drew from its acknowledged roots in the older

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[22] Bernard Charbonneau, "Revision dechirante," in *Reforme*, from a clipping dated December 1952 without further identifying data that was shown to this writer by the author's widow around the turn of the century. Charbonneau would go on to publish numerous essays in this periodical over the following decade.

[23] Arthur Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind. Innis/McLuhan/Grant* (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1985).

European cultures of France and the United Kingdom the "belief that on the northern half of this continent we could build a community which had a stronger sense of the common good and of public order than was possible under the individualism of the American capitalist dream"[24] unleashed by the Revolution his Loyalist ancestors had fled.

Grant sympathized with French Canadian nationalism for keeping a similar hope alive, despite its current modernizing wager to have it both ways, a typically Canadian position he thought "had been put most absurdly by the Liberal leader in Quebec, M. [Robert] Bourassa: 'American technology, French culture' —as if technology were something external (e.g. machines) and not itself a spirit which excludes all that is alien to itself. As Heidegger has said, technique is the metaphysic of the age."[25] Feeling that a strong national State was the only thing that might defend Canada's identity and communitarian ethos against the encroachments of American corporate liberalism, Grant admired Charles De Gaulle for taking such a stance for France, and giving his country a measure of independence from the dictates of the United States as the hegemonic center of the liberal version of the "universal homogeneous State" devoted to neutralizing "politically relevant natural differences among men" "by progressing scientific technology," "thanks to the conquest of nature and to the completely unabashed substitution of suspicion and terror for law," in the terms drawn from Leo Strauss's debate with Alexandre Kojeve[26] that Grant applied to America.

Charbonneau, on the other hand, could never forgive General De Gaulle for making France into a nuclear power, and presiding over the planned modernization of the country justified by the bid to retain some status on the world stage. For in the name of "a certain idea of France," the reality of the country, and whatever was worth preserving about it, was being readily sacrificed, from the age-old nature-culture synthesis of the countryside down to its very existence and that of all mankind as a likely result of nuclear proliferation and the increasing risk of worldwide conflict. This for him exemplified the logic of the modern State as it has developed in the West since the eleventh century as the centralizing vortex of the converging control processes culminating in technology.[27] Ellul also underlined that "the increasing interrelationship of state and technique affects political life on a global level. The ultimate product is a

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[24] George Grant, "In Defence of North America," in *Technology and Empire. Perspectives on North America*, 17. On this much-debated "Red Tory" paradigm of Canadian identity, often associated with George Grant, see Gad Horowitz, "Conservatism, Liberalism, and Socialism in Canada: An Interpretation," *Canadian Journal ofEconomics and Political Science*, Vol. XXXII, No. 2, May 1966, 143–171.

[25] George Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, "The Carleton Library," 1970), ix.

[26] Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1959), 132–133, cited in G. Grant, "Tyranny and Wisdom," in *Technology and Empire. Perspectives on North America*, 96.

[27] Christian Roy, "Charbonneau et Ellul, dissidents du 'Progres'. Critiquer la technique face a un milieu chretien gagne a la modernite," in Christophe Bonneuil, Celine Pessis & Sezin Topen (eds.), *Une autre histoire des "Trente Glorieuses."Modernisation, contestations etpollutions dans la France d'apresguerre* (Paris: La Decouverte, 2013), 291.

total world civilization."[28] Grant would have agreed that "protecting romantic hopes of Canadian nationalism is a secondary responsibility" "in an age when the alternatives often seem to be between planetary destruction and planetary tyranny [...],"[29] feeding the dialectic of system and chaos that Charbonneau, in a book written between 1951 and 1967, described as the driving force of exponential development, in a vicious cycle calling on ever more technological control to counter the latter's increasingly disruptive environmental and social effects.[30]

For Charbonneau and Ellul, any nation-state, including such smaller-scale ones as might result from the breakup of larger units, was bound to be a vector in that world-wide process of technological homogenization, whatever claims of cultural particularity might be invoked to justify building a State apparatus so as to be politically and economically competitive. That is why, shunning the draw of Paris and faithful to their provincial roots, they took aim at the hold of the centralized State in France as the oldest modern nation, in a defence of local life against planned modernization and untrammeled development that happened to be rooted in the same Southwestern region as the Girondin party of federalists crushed by the Jacobins in the French Revolution.[31] Faced with a French centralism whose claim to embody the common good went unchallenged, Charbonneau appreciated what remained of individualism in Anglo-Saxon cultures, as it was this Protestant element that had allowed them to discover nature as an ally for individuals who resisted the encroachments of industrial society and the technocratic State.[32] Conversely, Grant liked to turn to France for a sense of the common good such as he was hoping to maintain through Canadian statehood, in the face of American corporate domination built on liberal assumptions about the innocence of technology and the possessive individualism it

enabled. Yet it seems no coincidence that the powerful critiques of technique's alleged neutrality mounted first by the Bordeaux School and later by George Grant arose on the marches of France and the United States respectively as the historic centers of progressivism in the Old and New Worlds, motivated by concern for the fate of both local particularity and genuine personal freedom in the Brave New World remade as one by technology. For they all saw in Technique the underlying dynamics shared with overtly State-worshipping ideological competitors by the liberal consensus, until the latter prevailed as both its matrix and its most potent vector.

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[28] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, tr. John Wilkinson, intr. Robert K. Merton (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 318.

[29] George Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, ix-x.

[30] Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Systeme et le chaos: ou va notre societe?* intr. D. Cerezuelle (Paris: Le Sang de la Terre, "La pensee ecologique," 2012; originally published as *Le Systeme et le chaos: Critique du developpement exponentiel*, Paris: Anthropos, Paris, 1973 ; 2nd edition: Paris: Economica, 1990).

[31] Bernard Charbonneau, *Sauver nos regions. Ecologie, regionalisme et societes locales*, intr. Pierre Samuel (Paris: Le Sang de la Terre, "Les Dossiers de l'ecologie," 1991).

[32] Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Feu vert. Autocritique du mouvement ecologique*, intr. D. Cerezuelle (Parangon/Vs, « L'Apres-developpement », 2009; original edition: Paris: Karthala, 1980; English translation by C. Roy as *The Green Light* in progress for Bloomsbury, due to appear in 2017).

Illusions of Freedom: Thomas Merton and Jacques Ellul on Technology and the Human Condition

By Jeffrey M. Shaw. Pickwick Publications, 2014. 193pp.
Reviewed by Jacob Van Vleet

Jacob Van Vleet is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Diablo Valley College. He is the author of *Dialectical Theology and Jacques Ellul* (Fortress Press) and editor of *Jacques Ellul: Essential Spiritual Writings* (Orbis Books).

Many readers of Jacques Ellul and Thomas Merton have long recognized the similarities in thought between both prophetic thinkers. Jeffrey Shaw is the first to bring both into dialogue in book length form, in his *Illusions of Freedom: Thomas Merton and Jacques Ellul on Technology and the Human Condition.* The work is divided into seven clearly written and engaging chapters. By presenting and working through the arguments and ideas found in Merton and Ellul, Shaw awakens readers to the profound limiting and restrictive effects modern technology has on individual freedom and agency, and also on the political, the ethical, the religious, and various other sectors of society.

The first chapter introduces the reader to both Merton's and Ellul's definitions of technology and freedom, pointing out their striking resemblances. Chapter two details the early influences on Merton's and Ellul's religious thought and how this would go on to influence their respective views on technology and their social criticism. The third chapter presents a fascinating and indepth discussion of the influence of theologian Karl Barth on both Merton and Ellul. It also discusses how each thinker appropriated particular Barthian ideas in their work. Chapter four examines the philosophical and sociological influences on Merton and Ellul, with an emphasis on how the ideas of Soren Kierkegaard and Aldous Huxley guided the worldviews of both men. Chapter five delves into the influence of Karl Marx on Merton and Ellul, and how Marx's thought is developed, changed, and extended in their views on technological development and freedom. This insightful chapter also provides a discussion of how Merton and Ellul, in their own ways, criticized contemporary capitalist and communist societies from a theological vantage point, instead arguing for a "third way" which would escape the propaganda and the technological fetishism found in modern industrial societies. In chapter six, Shaw returns to another similarity between Merton and Ellul: their respective analyses of human language. For both thinkers, the Revealed Word is the ultimate source of freedom, and it provides a counterbalance to the enslavement of our present era (an entailment of the unfettered dominance of technology). The seventh and final chapter concludes and summarizes the previous chapters.

Of the many strengths of *Illusions of Freedom*, four stand out. First, Shaw is a clear and coherent writer. This makes the book a pleasure to read. Second, Shaw demonstrates an indepth knowledge of the many writings of both Thomas Merton and Jacques Ellul (in French and English), leaving the reader with a sense of confidence in Shaw's analysis and conclusions regarding their work. Third, Shaw thoughtfully appropriates insightful and illuminating key quotations from Merton's and Ellul's work which illustrate his arguments and explanations in a quite helpful way. Finally, Shaw is persuasively and doggedly convincing that the prophetic sociological, philosophical, and theological insights of Merton and Ellul are more relevant today than ever before — and that we owe it to ourselves to listen.

Overall, *Illusions of Freedom* is an insightful work, and one which will hopefully stimulate readers of Ellul to read Merton, and readers of Merton to read Ellul. A deeply interesting book which is highly recommended.

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For the Critique of Technological Civilization

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Editorial

Jeff Shaw

Welcome to the spring 2017 issue of the *Ellul Forum*. Longtime readers will instantly recognize the return of the classic *Forum* look, and for this I would like to thank Lisa Richmond for initiating the reformatting of our journal and for bringing this issue together and providing the translation for the French articles herein. As guest editor, she has provided our readers with an opportunity to engage with Ellul's thought on medicine. Lisa's administrative assistant at Wheaton College, Eli Nupanga, contributed the actual layout. Special thanks are also due to Raymond Downing for suggesting an issue focused on Ellul's essay on medicine, and to Raymond, Frederic Rognon, and Richard Stivers for their contributions.

I would like to invite our readers to contribute to the *Forum* or to step forward and volunteer ideas for special issues like this one, focusing on a particular topic. We were privileged to hear a number of emerging scholars speak at the conference last July in Berkeley, and many of these presentations would fit nicely into future issues. Perhaps some of our veteran Ellul scholars would also like to follow Lisa's lead and either present ideas for the next few issues or be willing to run through the editing and formatting process as she has done. Either way, the *Forum* will benefit tremendously, as will we all, from our collaborative input.

Please enjoy the spring issue of the *Ellul Forum*, and keep in mind as well that the Vancouver conference is only a little over a year away. We hope to see you there!

Biblical Positions on Medicine

Jacques Ellul

IT may seem strange to go to the bible for enlightenment in a field as technical and modern as medicine. The bible can apparently give us only an archaic conception of medicine, primitive and of mere historical interest. But if, in truth, medicine means the care of man, the preservation of health, it is obvious that we need to know something about man in order to care for him. How can we know something about man? This is the whole question. We can inquire by a rational inventory of experiments and observations. We can also receive what God gives us in a revelation on this subject. The two methods can go together. They can also be contradictory. But we can easily posit, on the basis of faith, that because God created man and inspired the bible, what he tells us in the bible about man is most true. For God knows more about man than man does himself. And when God reveals man's reality to us, it is indeed this reality and not some other that is ultimate, that holds sway over all the rest. Thus the bible enlightens medicine about these ultimate realities that shape man's life, and as a result it can inspire a particular development in medicine.

THE IDEA OF MAN

What does the bible tell us about man? Many things that we will pass over, because they would be without immediate relevance or are well known:

1. Man is a creature. He is not an autonomous being who possesses life by himself or who holds anything on his own. He is wholly dependent on the creator.

2. Man is created in the image of God. But may we say that man is this image today? No—but it is always expressly testified to us that we have known what this true image of God was: it is Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:6). It is thus Jesus Christ who, being the true image of God, represents man to us such as God desired and created him to be. He is the one who—although God—is more truly man than any one of us. And as a result, in order for us to find out what man is and ought to be, truly, we need to look to Jesus. It is he who provides the key to this ultimate reality of man.

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3. Man is not delivered over to destiny. He does not live in a world that is the plaything of blind forces or calculated fate. He does not live by a fate that dominates man's development. There is no blind good luck or bad luck. The life of man is completely known, guided, and used by God. God is the one who combines in it the good and the bad, happiness and unhappiness—taking into account Satan's activity, which God uses, and the presence of sin.

4. For man is radically sinful, in his essence and not only in his actions. He is oriented toward evil. He pursues evil, and ultimately death, because, despite his conscious horror of death, his profound tendencies compel him to seek death as well as sin.

5. We will spend more time on the idea that man is presented to us in the bible as a unity. Contrary to current thinking, the bible does not separate out two elements in man, the soul and the body.

Man is considered a unity in which we can identify three elements that are distinct but not separate: the body, the soul (the ensemble of mental and psychological qualities), and the spirit, which is the particular place of encounter between God and man. This spirit opposes the soul-body complex in the sense that the soul-body is purely natural and wholly perishable. The spirit, by contrast, is the gift of God, supernatural. From a biblical point of view, therefore, the soul has no particular value. There is no such thing as the immortality of the soul. In themselves, none of the elements that compose man are immortal; he receives this capacity only through grace, as a result of judgment. The bible therefore is not spiritualistic: even the spirit does not exist apart from God, the personal God who is the God of Jesus Christ.

As for the two parts, soul-body and spirit, they are as we have said closely linked, completely intertwined, to such an extent that no man can differentiate them and separate what is natural in man from what is supernatural. God alone can separate them (Heb. 4:12). So no one has any right to disregard one of the elements in order to say that only the others are interesting. No one has the right either, even for convenience, to isolate one of the elements that make up man. When man is considered, he must be taken in his to-tality—because he must be taken such as God desired him and with the appearance that God gave him. This shows already that the doctor cannot limit himself to caring only for the body, without engaging precisely in this kind of isolation.

Ellul, Jacques. "Biblical Positions on Medicine." *Ellul Forum 59* (2017): 3–7. Translation © Lisa Richmond, CC BY-NC-SA. The translator is grateful to Daniel Cerezuelle and Frederic Rognon for their comments.

And, besides, on another point relative to man, the bible has to do with medicine: the body, which up to this point has been the object of essentially medical preoccupations, is not foreign to the bible's preoccupations. First and essentially, it is in the body that our attitude toward God is manifested (Rom. 12:1). The body is thus an element that gives materiality to our "inner life," and as such it must take part in this inner life. It can be neither disregarded nor separated from the spiritual life, particularly since it is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). It is thus not negligible: not because it has an independent value of beauty, power, or joy, but because it was created by

God to be his temple. Receiving this eminent dignity from God, it cannot be held in contempt by man. And finally, it is this body (taking part in the flesh) that is promised to resurrection. No more or less than the rest of man, it is placed under judgment and promised to resurrection. The bible therefore does not consider one part of man as noble, high, divine in itself, immortal, and another part as vile, corrupt, and destined for death. All is corrupted by sin, and all is promised to salvation.

Thus the body, this primary concern of medicine, also has much to do with faith. The body is not a domain external to faith. It is the very presupposition of ethics—and since nothing that happens to the body is indifferent to faith, since all action upon the body has its reaction upon the spiritual life (because of their fundamental unity), for this reason the bible has something to tell us about medicine.

SPIRITUAL AND CORPOREAL

It is generally assumed today that the corporeal influences the spiritual. And in fact the bible assumes this, as we will see. But much more often, the bible presents the opposite idea: the influence of the spiritual on the corporeal. Most often, the relation between the two is presented to us in such a way that the corporeal appears only as a sign of what the spiritual is, and as a result it experiences only the repercussions of what happens on the spiritual level. The real drama, the real action, takes place on a stage to which we don't have access, where we do not feel comfortable. And what we see and observe naturally is only the end point of the drama, the leftover part of the action, that shows through on the level that we can perceive and that takes shape for us there.

But again, it must be understood that when we speak of the spiritual, we do not mean a mystical outpouring, or the "unknown region," or the capital of the human spirit, or the realm of the feelings or the irrational. It is precisely the relation between man and the God of Jesus Christ, that is, the action of this God upon man and the attitude that this man take up in response to this action.

The fear of the Lord is health for the muscles and refreshment to the body (Prov. 3:7–8). That is, between the creature and the Creator there can be a right order of relation, and this is what can promote health best. What weakens the body is the will to live for oneself, as an independent creature. It is the act of breaking the bond with the creator. When this right bond is established, this attitude of fear (which concerns the life of every man) is expressed as a moral life, stability of heart, a certain purity, and here we have one of the essential elements for the establishment of health (Prov. 4:20–24). But then we arrive at this simplification: it is the good (with a meaning as yet undetermined) that preserves man from illness—and the reverse: evil brings illness upon the sinner. This is not false, to the extent that sin gives birth to death, and this idea in simplified form inspires in part the disturbing questions of Job, who does not understand that the just may be afflicted with illness. But the thing becomes too simplistic when it tends to precisely equate the good with health and when it forms a necessary link between ideas of the good, evil, sickness, and health.

For the moment, what is important to hold is that what dominates man's life is not the relationship of man and his body with the things and the world around him. That is only a repercussion, only a secondary phenomenon. The primary phenomenon, what determines man's life, is the relation of his spirit with the Spirit of God—with Wisdom—and this relation is also what influences (among other things) health and sickness.

IDEAS OF LIFE AND OF DEATH

Some words in the bible have a double meaning, but not two meanings: corporeal life, corporeal death, spiritual life, spiritual death. There are not some "instances" involving the one sense and others involving the other sense. Throughout, even when one meaning seems very clear, "life" signifies both corporeal and spiritual life. "Death" signifies corporeal and spiritual death. The modes are various, but the two phenomena are always tied together. We cannot separate the two aspects from each other. Bodily life and death are not thinkable from the biblical point of view except in relation to spiritual life and death.

In what way are they presented together? Bodily life and death are, first, signs of what is happening on the spiritual level. They are, in addition, proximate examples of it (we would have no fear of spiritual death if by approximation we did not know what physical death was). They are pledges of the promise of spiritual life and death, a beginning of its fulfillment, to the extent that man is an inseparable unity. Finally, they are its consequences, and we are back again to the idea of the primacy of the spiritual.

Thus, after the fall, God lets man live, physically. This is a promise of eternal life— this fallen state is already the sign of the covenant, and that God does not abandon this man in this state that he is not made for.

—God condemns man to death. The sign of this death is the physical death that we can experience.

—If man lives physically, it is because God gives him a certain spiritual life. It is because all of the bonds are not broken between this man and his Creator. He continually receives this new gift of life, and he receives it from God. It is this relation therefore that produces physical life.

—If man dies physically, it is because he is one condemned to death, a sinner whose sin leads to the break with God. And because of this, he cannot survive on his own. Here again it is because he dies spiritually that he dies physically.

Now, in all this, "spiritual life" means union with God, through the grace received in faith, by means of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. "Spiritual death" means separation from God.

Once again, this is not a spiritualism: the spirit does not exist if it is not the spirit of God, and union with God does not exist if it is not established by a free act of God that reaches across all transcendences, and by means of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that brings peace between man and God. And if we say that life as a whole depends on the spiritual life, this does not mean that it is more important. It is simply based

on the following fact: God, as his name indicates in Hebrew, is the Living One, the One who has life in himself and who has it exclusively [Ex. 3:4]. Nothing lives apart from God. God is first the One who exists eternally. Thus, life comes necessarily from union with God. Everything that is separated from God dies: it cannot be otherwise, for apart from God is nothingness. It is therefore this spiritual life, this union with God, that alone can give life.

This life has a meaning: to give glory to God (Is. 38:18). Death also has a meaning: to show forth the justice of God.[33]

All this does not mean that faith or a correct theology are an insurance policy for good health. We will see that sickness can have very diverse meanings, and that faith is not a cure. But it teaches us to consider that there can be no life, with the health that this implies, without spiritual life, that health is not a combination of treatments but a way of living in obedience to the laws that God desired for our life. My medicine would be thus above all a hygienics, but not a naturalistic one: a hygienics in which the first act is repentance for sin—and conversion.

THE IDEA OF ILLNESS

Thus we come to the essential problem of medicine, the one that is so often doctors' only preoccupation: the state of crisis that is called illness. Now, what we have to say here about illness cannot be a collection of isolated thoughts but only an outcome of what we have said to this point.

Illness essentially appears in the bible as an action of Satan, who is left free within certain limits fixed by God. This is what the prologue of Job teaches. God therefore relinquishes his creatures into Satan's hands so that Satan may exercise his power, but he can do so only up to a certain point. Satan would like to go further, to the point where he would be certain of attaining victory, but God has made the promise: "You will not be tempted beyond your strength" [1 Cor. 10:13]. As a result, the limit to Satan's action is the human strength that God knows for each one of us. This is especially how it is for sickness and suffering, which cannot go beyond our strength.

But if God lets Satan act, this is not a game, nor is it to leave to the evil one a legitimate exercise. It is because illness possesses a profound meaning. It is either to the glory of God—or else it is a sickness unto death.

In the first case, it is not unto death (John 11:4), and it can have many purposes that all lead in the end to God's glorification. In this case, its purpose may be to test and strengthen faith (Job) and thus to cause man to become decisively aware of the fact that help is in the Lord alone. Or sickness may be there only to be overcome, to bring about a miracle and lead to conversion. In this case, sickness is the means that God uses to manifest to man his sin and his deliverance (John 9:3). Or it may be the sign that spiritual sickness is healed, having no other reason than this deliverance, good news brought to man (Matt. 9:1). Or sickness may announce the coming of the Kingdom of God in a negative way, this kingdom in which sickness will be no more.

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[33] The French noun *justice* may be translated into English as *justice* or as *righteousness*.

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The annunciation of its coming is that sickness is put in the same category as the death that has been vanquished (Matt. 11:15). Finally, sickness may be a way of affirming God's sovereignty over death and the world; thus it ought to lead to the glorification of the Lord (John 11:14). It thus enters into God's plan, as always happens. It is a means of causing God's action and mercy to burst forth in the world. And the doctor obviously should be careful to not deflect sickness from its meaning, to not keep the sick person from becoming aware of this purpose that sickness has.

But the texts offer us another hypothesis: Sickness unto death. On this subject, we must note that the idea of the suffering or sickness that purifies is completely absent from the bible. Pain in the bible is not a means of removing sin or of purifying our life. This is not the case even for Christ: it is not Christ's suffering that brought about redemption, but his death. Christ's suffering is the inevitable result of sin. "The wages of sin is death" [Rom. 6:23]—this death enters by way of sickness. In this sense, sickness is unto death. It is not a punishment, in the sense in which sin and penalty could be held in a fair balance.[34] It is a sanction, in the sense of an unavoidable and just consequence. As a result, sickness unto death appears to us first as one of the tangible signs of our state of sin; it is our normal condition to be sick, as it is our normal condition to be sinners. This is why the healings that Jesus Christ performed are both corporeal and spiritual. It is why the one who receives health receives at the same time pardon for sin. The healing of sickness without the forgiveness of sins is only an adjournment, a patching up, a little boost: it is not health. This deliverance from sickness has no value in itself. It can be a temporary betterment, but sickness unto death is still present and must reappear in one form or another. This remission of disease has meaning only as a sign of forgiveness—and thus it has worth only to the extent that the heart is willing to receive forgiveness at the same time (James 5:15).

As a consequence of sin, sickness is presented to us from two principal angles. It can be a sanction, or a means that God uses to turn us from sin.

—A sanction. It thus becomes an outward sign of sin, the physical mark of our impurity. This is the meaning of all the Mosaic legislation concerning leprosy (Lev. 13). Leprosy here is the type of all sickness. The one who is affected by it is characterized as impure. The remedy is a purification. But this leprosy, a sign of sin, involves as a consequence the leper's separation from others. He is, in brief, consecrated to God, confined within his disease, and his exclusion from the camp clearly marks man's powerlessness to heal this disease. Only the fulfilling of God's will is what heals it.

—A constraint that God uses to incline man's will and draw him from the path of sin. An example is the diseases that Moses released upon Egypt (Ex. 7), which were concerned with breaking the rebellious will of Pharaoh. But in fact, even a miraculous sign, even an extreme suffering, cannot break the sinful will. In such a case, sickness is then the warning of the punishment that will overtake the sinner. It is a time for

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[34] The image here is of a weigh scale, with sin in one pan and penalty in the other, equally balanced in weight.

reflection, in which the punishment has begun but is still uncertain, and during which a man can "turn from his evil way" [Ez. 3:18, Zach. 1:4]. The same goes for the diseases that were sent upon the Church of Corinth because they were treating the Lord's Supper unworthily (1 Cor. 11:30). It is a case of striking the spirit of man so that he may be converted. But in reality, this conversion is what is first needed. Only afterward can the providential meaning of the disease be perceived.

Conversion is needed first ... and this is why these two kinds of sickness are both unto death: because in both cases we begin from there, with the final condemnation that is borne upon man and his sin. It is a means of warning man about this condemnation, but a warning that will be grasped only in faith. In this case, sickness ceases to be unto death and becomes unto the glory of God. If not, it finishes out its work.

But this link between sickness and sin must not be understood in a simplistic sense. It does not mean that he who is the greatest sinner is the one who is most sick—or that sickness is the sign of a greater sin, or even of a specific, particular sin. Not at all. All are equally sinners before God—all equally deserve condemnation, death—and, as a result, sickness. All men are sick, Jesus tells us (Matt. 9:12), when he says that it is the sick who need doctors. He says this to those who *think* they are well but who actually are not. But some know that they are sick and accept healing—others consider themselves healthy and do not seek a cure.

As a result, acute sickness, what we generally call disease, is only the illustration of what ought to be our normal and permanent condition (as sinners), by virtue of condemnation (Luke 13:1ff). Thus it is by God's grace that it is kept from us, and when it comes it should be considered as being directed not only to the one who suffers it but to everyone: as a call addressed to all, so that they may turn from their sin (Ex. 15:26).

But then, this leads to a different understanding of health; it turns what we believe upside down. We learn that the normal state is sickness, and that the exceptional, abnormal state, not inherent to our nature, is health. Left to ourselves, we will go immediately to death by the way of sickness. It is God's hand that restores us continually to a state of relative health, which we do not deserve. Healing is thus nothing other, in every situation, than God's merciful intervention in the course of nature. And this is why we do not know what health is.

We know how difficult it is to distinguish, medically, between health and sickness. There are only imprecise boundaries between the two, and it is extremely difficult to say where health or sickness begins. This affirmation is clearly confirmed by what the bible teaches us: what we know by the name of health is only the absence of illness. Our health is always only a preparation for death. We do not actually know what true health is, that of Adam's before the fall. Thus, there is no man who is truly well, for even in forgiveness we live with a body of sin, a body of death promised to corruption. Whereas health, in the absolute sense, is promised only to the incorruptible body.

REMEDIES

We are accustomed to a medicine that focuses directly on the pain that is manifested and wants to heal this pain in its physical aspect. Such a medicine is necessarily symptomatic: that is, it observes certain physical deficiencies and focuses on them. But we have seen that these physical deficiencies are in reality only the signs of other, more profound injuries, spiritual injuries. Thus medicine focuses only on symptoms when it attempts to treat the exclusively physical aspect of the sickness. It does not go to the root, and this is what explains the judgments that the bible brings to bear against medicine.

On the one hand, we observe the powerlessness of medicine: man is not capable by himself of healing sickness (Jer. 46:11, Hos. 5:13, etc.). He can at the very most reduce its effects, but his skill can never go far. Sometimes medicine is even presented to us as completely contrary, opposed to God's will, a sign of man's revolt against God (2 Ch. 16:12, Jer. 17:5). This happens when medicine becomes an idol, a power that we petition independently of God. In this case, medicine dresses itself up in what is not its own. It draws forth the praise and gratitude that are due only to God—it raises hope and stimulates faith. It truly takes the place of God and is for this very reason condemned. Before this idol, we hope that it will act on its own, that is, we hope that life and death belong to it, are in our hands. But this lying god has not kept its promises. The biblical affirmation that medicine is powerless without God's help is striking. We observe that man succeeds somewhat in removing suffering, but not in overcoming or reversing sickness. For if a sickness recedes, how many other forms reappear or arise for the first time? If acute illness is arrested, how much more does health in general, racial resistance, weaken? If microbial diseases seem to be conquered, how much more do nervous diseases arise, and so forth? We have placed our confidence so much in medicine, and we receive a denial: there is confidence only in God.

Does this mean that medicine should be exclusively spiritualistic? Without refuting the exaggerations of Christian Science, it is enough to note that Christian medicine cannot be spiritualistic, because man is not a pure spirit. The primary problem to pose is a spiritual problem, in general, and particular to the specific illness. But this does not exclude the material cure and physical healing. Man is a unity, let us remember.

The healing that has a spiritual effect, the forgiveness of sin, must bring among other results man's adherence to the order of nature as God desired it. In the same way that this leads the Christian to accept obedience to the laws of the State, he must know how to obey the laws of nature for his body and agree to reform his life in a way that avoids what is bad for him. God created for man a setting, some needs, and the means of fully satisfying these needs. Hygienics is thus nothing other than accepting the life that God desired man to lead, from the physical point of view as well. Thus the healing of sin attains the cause of the illness, which is always a disobedience to this natural order that God established. Of course, the symptoms of the disease, its material consequences, are not ended thereby, but the disease is attained in its reality because Satan no longer has a hold from this angle. Thus the Christian idea of sickness indeed entails a material healing and activity as well.

But our materialistic concept, most commonly, has accustomed us to thinking of treatment in materialistic and immediately utilitarian terms. Most often, treatment has only one goal: to end suffering, and this is reinforced by the conception that each individual person's importance comes from his deeds and actions. All of the extreme phenomena of each of us appear incredibly important, because we are individualistic to the extreme. We have lost the sense of life's relativity and of the individual person's integration within real communities and generations. All of this falsifies the idea of treatment. The true cure is the one that attains the roots of the illness and that acts over a more or less extended period of time, that may even act only in our descendants. The bible does not in fact do away with treatment; it teaches us first that treatment is given to the doctor by God, that it is indeed a dedicated means of caring for the body (the supreme virtue of the plant is its curative power [Ez. 47:12, Rev. 22:2]), and that treatment changes through time (James 5:15). Here we must simply admit that the bible gives humanity a role.

The bible also teaches us that certain men have a gift of healing. We will leave unresolved the question of whether the gift of healing has to do with miraculous healings or with the doctor's having a true medical gift.

And this idea of treatment is linked to the following two affirmations: that Jesus Christ is the only cure for the reality of our illnesses, that he bore our illnesses (Matt. 8:17), and that resurrection is the only real healing from this point forward (Hos. 6:1).

This therefore entails a certain attitude with regard to treatments. If they are in submission to the order of God, we need to know if the treatments that we use are consistent with the order of nature that God desired—if, for example, they do not tend to treat man as [mere] material, if they do not interfere with his nature, if they are not an attempt to encroach upon God's domain. So, when the doctor considers the treatment to apply, he must ask himself a twofold question: that of the treatment's technical value and also that of its validity before God.

Translator's Notes

Positions bibliques sur la medecine

Jacques Ellul

Il peut sembler etrange que 1'on aille rechercher la bible pour nous eclairer dans un domaine aussi technique que la medecine, aussi moderne. La bible ne peut nous donner, apparemment, qu'une conception archaique sur la medecine, primitive et sans autre interet qu'historique. Mais si, a la verite, la medecine est le soin de l'homme, la preservation de la sante, il faut de toute evidence savoir quelque chose sur l'homme pour le soigner. Comment saurons-nous quelque chose sur l'homme? Toute la question est la. Nous pouvons decouvrir par un inventaire rationnel d'experiences et d'observations. Nous pouvons aussi recevoir ce que Dieu nous donne dans une revelation a ce sujet.

Les deux methodes peuvent concorder. Elles peuvent aussi etre contradictoires. Mais nous pouvons facilement poser, a partir de la foi, que Dieu ayant cree l'homme et ayant inspire la bible, ce qu'Il nous dit dans la bible sur l'homme est le plus vrai. Car Dieu en sait plus sur l'homme que l'homme lui-meme. Et lorsque Dieu nous revele la realite de l'homme, c'est bien cette realite-la, et non une autre, qui est derniere, qui commande toutes les autres. Donc la bible eclaire la medecine sur ces realites dernieres de ce qui forme la vie de l'homme, et peut en consequence inspirer un developpement particulier a la medecine.

LA NOTION DE L'HOMME

Que nous dit la bible sur l'homme? Beaucoup de choses que nous laisserons de cote parce qu'elles seraient sans interet immediat, ou qu'elles sont bien connues:

1. L'homme est une creature: il n'est pas un etre autonome qui possede la vie par lui-meme ou qui a quoi que ce soit par lui-meme: il est dependant dans sa totalite du createur.

2. L'homme est cree a l'image de Dieu. Mais peut-on dire que l'homme soit actuellement cette image? Non—mais il nous est toujours temoigne expressement que nous avons connu qui etait cette veritable image de Dieu: c'est Jesus-Christ (Phil. 2,6). C'est donc Jesus-Christ qui, etant la veritable image de Dieu, nous represente l'homme tel que Dieu l'a voulu et cree. C'est lui qui—quoique Dieu—est plus vraiment homme que quiconque d'entre nous. Et par consequent pour nous renseigner sur ce qu'est, et ce que doit etre l'homme, veritablement, il nous faut regarder a Jesus. C'est Lui qui donne la clef de cette realite derniere de l'homme.

3. L'homme n'est pas livre au Destin: il ne vit pas dans un monde jouet de forces aveugles, d'une mathematique du sort ; il ne vit pas de Fatalite qui domine l'evolution de l'hom-me, il n'y a pas de chance ou de malchance aveugle, de Fortune. La vie de l'homme est tout entiere connue, conduite et utilisee par Dieu. C'est Dieu qui y mele le bien et le mal, le bonheur et le malheur, compte tenu de l'action de Satan dont Dieu se sert et de la presence du peche.

4. Car l'homme est radicalement pecheur: dans son essence et non seulement dans ses actes. Il est tourne vers le mal. Il recherche le mal, et en definitive la mort, car malgre son horreur consciente de la mort, ses tendances profondes le poussent a rechercher la mort, comme le peche.

5. Nous nous arreterons plus longuement sur l'idee que l'homme nous est represente dans la bible comme une unite: contrairement a la pensee courante, la bible ne separe pas en l'homme deux elements: l'ame et le corps.

L'homme est considere comme une unite dans laquelle on peut deceler trois elements distincts mais non separes: le corps, l'ame (ensemble des qualites mentales et psychologiques) et l'esprit qui est, plus particulierement, le lieu de rencontre entre Dieu et l'homme. Cet esprit s'op-pose au complexe ame-corps, en ce que celui-ci est purement naturel et entierement perissable. L'esprit au contraire est le don de Dieu, surnaturel. L'ame est donc, du point de vue biblique, sans valeur particuliere. L'immortalite de l'ame n'existe pas. En soi, aucun des elements constitutifs de l'hom-me n'est immortel.

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Il ne re^oit cette vertu que par grace, en consequence du jugement. La bible n'est donc pas spiritual-iste: l'esprit lui-meme n'existe pas en dehors de Dieu, et du Dieu personnel qui est celui de Jesus-Christ.

Quant aux deux parties, ame-corps et esprit, elles sont, avons-nous dit, etroitement unies, totalement penetrees l'une dans l'autre, a un tel point qu'aucun homme ne peut faire de distinction, et separer ce qui est naturel et ce qui est surnaturel en l'homme. Dieu seul peut les separer (Heb. 4,12). Ainsi, l'on n'a absolument pas le droit de negliger l'un des elements pour dire que les autres seuls sont interessants. L'on n'a pas le droit non plus, meme pour la commodite, de faire abstraction de 1'un des elements constitutifs de 1'homme. Lorsque 1'on envisage celui-ci, il faut le prendre dans sa totalite—parce qu'il faut le prendre tel que Dieu l'a voulu et avec l'aspect que Dieu lui a donne. Ceci montre deja que le medecin ne peut pas se borner a soigner seulement le corps, sans quoi il fait precisement cette abstraction. Et, d'autre part, sur un autre point relatif a l'homme, la bible concerne la medecine: c'est que le corps, jusqu'ici objet des preoccupations medicales essentielles, n'est pas etranger aux preoccupations de la bible. Tout d'abord, et essentiellement, c'est dans le corps que se manifeste notre attitude a l'egard de Dieu (Rom. 13,1). Le corps est donc un element de materialisation de notre « vie interieure » et, a ce titre, il doit participer a cette vie interieure. Il ne peut etre ni neglige, ni separe de la vie spirituelle. Cela d'autant plus qu'il est le temple du Saint Esprit (1. Cor. 6,19). Il n'est donc pas negligeable: point parce qu'il aurait une valeur autonome de beaute, de force ou de joie, mais parce qu'il a ete cree par Dieu pour etre son temple. Recevant de Dieu cette dignite eminente, il ne peut etre meprise par 1'homme. Et c'est enfin ce corps (participant a la chair) qui est promis a la resurrection. Ni plus, ni moins que tout le reste de l'homme, il est soumis au jugement et promis a la resurrection. Il n'y a donc pas, pour la bible, une partie de l'homme noble, elevee, divine en soi, immortelle et une autre vile, cor-rompue et promise a la mort: tout est corrompu par le peche, et tout est promis au salut.

Ellul, Jacques. "Positions bibliques sur la medecine." *Ellul Forum* 59 (2017): 8–12. Originally published in *Les Deux Cites: Cahiers des Associations Professionnelles Protestantes. Etudes Medicales* 4 (1947).

Donc, le corps ce domaine eminent de la medecine in-teresse aussi—et combien—la foi. Il n'est pas un domaine ex-terieur. Il est la presupposition meme de l'ethique—et parce que rien de ce qui arrive au corps n'est indifferent a la foi— parce que toute action sur le corps a sa reaction sur la vie spirituelle (en raison de leur unite fondamentale), pour cela la Bible a quelque chose a nous dire sur la medecine.

SPIRITUEL ET CORPOREL

L'on admet de fa?on tres generale actuellement que le cor-porel influence le spirituel. Et, de fait la bible l'admet comme nous le verrons. Mais beaucoup plus souvent, elle pose l'idee inverse: l'influence du spirituel sur le corporel. Le plus sou-vent le rapport entre les deux nous est presente de fa?on que le corporel n'apparait que comme un signe de ce qu'est le spirituel, et des lors il ne supporte que le contre coup de ce qui arrive sur le plan spirituel. Le vrai drame, la vraie action ont lieu sur un theatre ou

nous n'avons pas nos entrees, ou nous ne sommes pas a notre aise. Et ce que nous voyons, consta-tons naturellement, n'est que la pointe terminale du drame, la partie residuelle de l'action qui affleure a nos sens et prend forme pour nous, la.

Mais encore faut-il s'entendre lorsque l'on parle de spi-rituel: c'est, non pas une effusion mystique, non pas le « do-maine inconnu », non pas l'apport de l'esprit humain, non pas l'ordre des sentiments et de l'irrationnel: c'est de fa?on tres precise le rapport entre l'homme et le Dieu de Jesus-Christ, a savoir: l'action de ce Dieu sur l'homme et l'attitude que cet homme prend en face de cette action.

La crainte de l'Eternel est la sante pour les muscles et la joie du corps (Prov. 3,7.8): c'est-a-dire que le fait qu'il y ait entre la creature et le Createur un ordre de rapport normal est ce qui peut le mieux favoriser la sante. Ce qui affaiblit le corps, c'est la volonte de vivre pour soi, en creature autonome, c'est le fait de rompre le lien avec le createur. Et ce lien normal etabli, cette attitude de crainte (il s'agit de la vie de tout homme) se traduit par une vie morale, l'equilibre du coeur, une certaine purete et c'est la un des elements essenti-els de l'etablissement de la sante (Prov. 4,20.24). Mais l'on en arrive alors a cette simplification: c'est le bien (avec un sens encore indetermine) qui preserve l'homme de la maladie—et a l'inverse: le mal attire sur le pecheur la maladie. Ce n'est pas faux, dans la mesure ou le peche engendre la mort, et cette idee simplifie inspire en partie les questions inquietes de Job qui ne comprend pas que le juste soit accable de maladies. Mais ou la chose est trop simple, c'est qu'elle tend a devenir une balance exacte du bien et de la sante ; c'est aussi de faire un lien necessaire entre les notions bien, mal, maladie, sante.

Pour le moment, ce qu'il importe de retenir, c'est que ce qui domine la vie de l'homme, ce n'est pas le rapport de l'homme et de son corps avec les choses et le monde environnant, cela n'est qu'une consequence, qu'un phenomene second ; ce qui est le phenomene premier, ce qui determine la vie de l'homme, c'est le rapport de son esprit avec l'Esprit de Dieu—avec la Sagesse—et c'est ce rapport qui conditionne aussi (entre autres choses) la sante et la maladie.

NOTION DE VIE ET DE MORT

Des mots ont un double sens dans la bible, mais non pas deux sens—Vie corporelle—mort corporelle—Vie spiri-tuelle—mort spirituelle. Il n'y a pas des « cas » ou il s'agit d'un sens et d'autres ou il s'agit de l'autre sens. Partout, meme lorsque la chose semble tres claire en sens contraire, partout *vie* signifie a la fois corporelle et spirituelle. *Mort*: mort corpo-relle et spirituelle. Les modalites sont diverses, mais les deux phenomenes sont toujours lies l'un a l'autre. On ne peut separer l'un de l'autre les deux aspects. La vie et la mort corporelle ne sont pensables au point de vue biblique que par rapport a la vie et la mort spirituelle.

Dans quel ordre se presentent-ils mutuellement? La vie et la mort corporelle sont d'abord des signes de ce qui se passe dans l'ordre spirituel. En outre, elles en sont des exemples ap-proximatifs (nous n'aurions aucune crainte de la mort spiri-tuelle si par approximation nous ne savions ce qu'est la mort physique), elles en sont des gages de promesse ; un commencement de realisation dans la mesure ou l'homme est une unite

inseparable. Enfin, elles en sont des consequences: et c'est encore l'idee de primat du spirituel qui revient ici.

Ainsi: apres la chute, Dieu laisse l'homme vivre, phy-siquement: c'est la une promesse de la vie eternelle—cet etat dechu est deja le signe de l'alliance et que Dieu n'abandonne pas cet homme dans cet etat pour lequel il n'est pas fait.

—Dieu condamne l'homme a mort: le signe de cette mort, c'est la mort physique que nous pouvons connaitre.

—Si l'homme vit physiquement, c'est parce que Dieu lui laisse une certaine vie spirituelle: c'est parce que tous les liens ne sont pas rompus entre cet homme et son Createur. Il re^oit sans cesse ce nouveau don de la vie, et il le re^oit de Dieu: c'est donc ce rapport qui provoque la vie physique.

—Si l'homme meurt physiquement, c'est qu'il est un condamne a mort ; un pecheur dont le peche entraine la rupture avec Dieu. Et de ce fait, il ne peut rien subsister de lui. Ici encore, c'est parce qu'il meurt spirituellement, qu'il meurt physiquement.

Or, en tout cela, *vie spirituelle* cela veut dire: union avec Dieu, par la grace re?ue dans la foi, au moyen du sacrifice de Jesus-Christ. *Mort spirituelle*: c'est la separation d'avec Dieu.

Une fois encore, il ne s'agit pas d'un spiritualisme: l'es-prit n'existe pas s'il n'est l'esprit de Dieu et l'union avec Dieu n'existe pas si elle n'est etablie par un acte gratuit de Dieu qui enjambe toutes les transcendances, et au moyen du sacrifice de Jesus-Christ qui ramene la paix entre 1'homme et Dieu. Et si nous disons que la vie tout entiere depend de la vie spirituelle, cela ne veut pas dire qu'elle est plus importante: c'est simplement fonde sur le fait suivant: Dieu, comme son nom l'indique en hebreu, est le Vivant, Celui qui a la vie en soi et qui l'a exclusivement. Rien n'est vivant hors Dieu. Dieu est d'abord Celui qui existe eternellement. Donc, la vie provient necessairement de l'union avec Dieu: Tout ce qui se separe de lui, meurt: il ne peut en etre autrement, car hors de Dieu est le neant. C'est donc cette vie spirituelle, cette union avec Dieu qui seule peut donner la vie.

Cette vie a un sens: rendre gloire a Dieu (Esaie 38,18). La mort aussi a un sens: manifester la justice de Dieu.

Tout cela ne veut pas dire que la foi ou une theologie correcte sont une assurance pour une bonne sante. Nous ver-rons que la maladie peut avoir des sens tres divers et que la foi n'est pas un remede. Mais cela nous apprend a considerer qu'il ne peut pas y avoir de vie, avec la sante que cela com-porte, sans vie spirituelle, que la sante n'est pas une combinai-son de remedes, mais une maniere de vivre selon l'obeissance aux lois que Dieu a voulues pour notre vie. Ma medecine serait donc surtout une hygiene, mais non pas naturaliste: une hygiene dont le premier acte est la repentance du peche—et la conversion.

NOTION DE LA MALADIE

Nous arrivons ainsi au probleme essentiel de la mede-cine, celui qui est trop souvent la seule preoccupation des medecins: l'etat de crise appele maladie. Or, ce que nous

avons a dire ici de la maladie ne peut etre un ensemble de reflexions isolees, mais seulement une consequence de ce que nous venons de dire jusqu'ici.

La maladie apparait essentiellement dans la bible comme une action de Satan, qui est laisse libre dans cer-taines limites fixees par Dieu ; c'est ce qu'enseigne le prologue de Job. Dieu abandonne donc ses creatures aux mains de Satan pour que celui-ci exerce sa puissance, mais il ne peut le faire que jusqu'a un certain point. Satan voudrait aller plus loin, jusqu'au point ou il serait certain de remporter la victoire, mais Dieu a fait la promesse: « Vous ne serez pas tentes au-dela de vos forces ». Par consequent, la limite de l'action de Satan, ce sont les forces humaines que Dieu connait pour chacun de nous. Il en est ainsi en particulier pour la maladie et la souffrance qui ne peuvent exceder nos forces.

Mais si Dieu laisse faire Satan, ce n'est pas par jeu, ce n'est pas non plus pour laisser au malin un exercice legitime, c'est parce que la maladie possede un sens profond: ou bien la mal-adie est a la gloire de Dieu—ou bien la maladie est a la mort.

Dans le premier cas, elle n'est pas a la mort (Jean 11,4) et elle peut avoir des raisons d'etre nombreuses qui toutes se ramenent en definitive a la glorification de Dieu. Dans ce cas, elle peut avoir pour but d'eprouver et d'affermir la foi (Job) et de contraindre ainsi l'homme a prendre conscience de fa?on decisive du fait que le secours est en l'Eternel seul, ou bien la maladie peut n'etre la que pour etre vaincue: pour provoquer le miracle, et afin d'entrainer la conversion: la maladie est alors le moyen dont Dieu se sert pour manifester a l'homme son peche et sa delivrance (Jean 9,3). Elle sera alors le signe de la maladie spirituelle qui est guerie ; elle n'a pas d'autre raison que cette delivrance, bonne nouvelle apportee a l'homme (Matth. 9,1). La maladie alors annonce la venue du Royaume de Dieu de fa?on negative: ce royau-me ou il n'y aura plus de maladie. Et l'annonce de sa venue, c'est la maladie classee comme la mort vaincue (Matth. 11,5). Enfin, toujours dans cet ordre d'idees, la maladie est un mode d'affirmation de la souverainete de Dieu sur la mort et sur le monde: elle doit ainsi entrainer la glorification du Seigneur (Jean 11,4). Elle entre alors dans le plan de Dieu, comme il lui arrive toujours. Elle est un moyen pour faire eclater l'action et la misericorde de Dieu dans le monde. Et le medecin doit evidemment etre attentif a ne pas detourner la maladie de son sens, a ne pas empecher le malade de prendre conscience de cette finalite de la maladie.

Mais les textes nous apportent une autre hypothese: La maladie a la mort. A ce sujet, nous devons noter que la bible ignore completement la notion de la souffrance ou de la mala-die purificatrices. La douleur dans la bible n'est pas un moyen d'effacer les peches, ou un moyen de purifier notre vie. Il n'en est pas ainsi meme pour le Christ. Ce n'est pas la souffrance du Christ qui a eu une consequence de rachat, mais sa mort. La souffrance du Christ est la consequence fatale du peche. « Le salaire du peche c'est la mort » —cette mort intervi-ent par le chemin de la maladie. En ce sens, la maladie est a la mort. Elle n'est pas une punition, au sens ou une balance equitable serait tenue du peche et de la penalite. Elle est une sanction, au sens de consequence ineluctable et juste. Par consequent la maladie a la mort nous apparait d'abord comme l'un des

signes tangibles de notre etat de peche ; c'est notre condition normale d'etre malade, comme c'est notre condition normale d'etre pecheurs. C'est pourquoi les guerisons faites par Jesus-Christ sont a la fois corporelles et spirituelles. Que celui qui reçoit la sante reçoit en meme temps le pardon des peches.

La guerison de la maladie sans le pardon des peches n'est qu'un ajournement, un replatrage, un coup de fouet: il n'est pas la sante. Cette delivrance de la maladie n'a pas de valeur par elle-meme: ce peut etre un mieux temporaire: la maladie a la mort est neanmoins presente et doit reparaitre sous une forme ou une autre. Cette remission de la maladie n'a de sens que comme signe du pardon—et elle ne prend alors sa val-eur que dans la mesure ou le coeur est dispose a recevoir le pardon en meme temps (Jac. 5,15).

Comme consequence du peche, la maladie se presente a nous sous deux aspects principaux: elle peut etre une sanction—ou un moyen que Dieu emploie pour detourner du peche.

—Une sanction: elle devient alors un signe exterieur du peche—elle est la marque physique de notre impurete: c'est le sens de toute la legislation mosaique sur la lepre (Lev. 13). La lepre ici est le type de toute maladie—et ce qui caracterise celui qui en est atteint, c'est qu'il est impur—et le remede c'est une purification: mais cette lepre, signe du peche, entraine pour consequence une separation du lepreux et des autres: il est en somme consacre a Dieu, enferme dans sa maladie et son exclusion du camp marque bien l'impuis-sance de l'homme a guerir cette maladie ; c'est seulement l'accomplissement de la volonte de Dieu qui la guerit.

—Une contrainte dont Dieu se sert pour plier la volonte de l'homme et l'amener a s'ecarter du peche: ainsi les maladies declenchees par Moise sur l'Egypte (Ex. 7): il s'agit de briser la volonte rebelle de Pharaon. Mais en fait un signe meme miraculeux, une souffrance meme extreme ne peuvent pas briser la volonte pecheresse: la maladie est alors l'avertisse-ment du chatiment que va encourir le pecheur, le temps de reflexion ou le chatiment est commence mais encore en suspens, et pendant lequel l'homme peut « se detourner de sa mauvaise voie ». Il en est de meme pour les maladies envoyees dans l'Eglise de Corinthe parce qu'on usait indigne-ment de la Cene (1 Cor. 11,30): il s'agit par la de frapper l'esprit de l'homme pour qu'il se convertisse. Mais en realite, il faut d'abord cette conversion. Et c'est seulement apres que l'on aperçoit le sens providentiel de la maladie.

Il faut d'abord la conversion ... et c'est pourquoi ces deux types de maladies sont egalement a la mort: c'est que dans les deux cas, on commence par la, la condamnation derniere portee sur l'homme et son peche. C'est un moyen d'avertir l'homme de cette condamnation, mais avertissement qui ne sera saisi que dans la foi: dans ce cas, la maladie cesse d'etre a la mort et devient a la gloire de Dieu ; sinon, elle accomplit son oeuvre.

Mais ce lien entre maladie et peche ne doit pas etre com-pris dans un sens simpliste. Cela ne veut pas dire que c'est le plus pecheur qui est le plus malade—ou que la maladie est signe d'un plus grand peche, ou bien d'un peche determine, particulier.

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Point du tout: tous sont egalement pecheurs devant Dieu—tous meritent egalement la condamnation, la mort—et en consequence la maladie. Tous les hommes sont malades, nous affirme Jesus (Matth. 9,12) lorsqu'Il dit que ce sont les malades qui ont besoin de medecins: et Il dit cela, a ceux qui se croient bien portants, mais ne le sont pas reellement. Mai les uns se savent malades et acceptent une guerison—les autres se considerent comme sains et ne recherchent pas de remede.

Par consequent, la maladie aigue, ce que nous appelons en general maladie n'est que l'exemple de ce qui devrait etre notre condition normale, permanente (en tant que pecheurs) en vertu de la condamnation (Luc 13,1 sq.) c'est par la grace de Dieu qu'elle est ecartee ainsi de nous et lorsqu'elle arrive, elle doit etre consideree comme adressee, non pas seulement a celui qui la supporte, mais a tous: comme un appel adresse a tous pour qu'ils se detournent de leur peche (Ex. 15,26).

Mais alors cela conduit a avoir une conception differente de la sante: c'est un renversement de ce que nous croyons: nous apprenons que l'etat normal, c'est la maladie, que l'etat exceptionnel, anormal, non inherent a notre nature, c'est la sante. Laisses a nous-memes, nous irons de suite a la mort par la voie de la maladie. C'est la main de Dieu qui nous restitue sans cesse dans un etat de sante relative, qui ne nous est pas du. La guerison n'est donc pas autre chose, en toute circonstance, que l'intervention misericordieuse de Dieu dans le cours de la nature. Et c'est pourquoi nous ne savons pas ce qu'est la sante.

L'on sait combien il est difficile de faire le depart, medical, entre la sante et la maladie. Il n'y a que des frontieres imprecises entre les deux et il est extremement difficile de dire ou commence la sante et ou la maladie. Cette affirmation est nettement confirmee par ce que nous apprend la bible: ce que nous connaissons sous le nom de sante, c'est seulement l'absence de maladie. Notre sante n'est toujours qu'une preparation a la mort: nous ignorons en fait ce qu'est la veritable sante, celle d'Adam avant la chute. Ainsi, il n'y a pas d'homme reellement bien portant car meme dans le pardon, nous vivons avec un corps de peche, corps de mort promis a la corruption ; alors que la sante, au sens absolu, n'est promise qu'au corps incorruptible.

LES REMEDES

Nous avons l'habitude d'une medecine qui s'attache di-rectement au mal qui se manifeste et veut guerir ce mal dans son aspect physique. Une telle medecine est necessairement symptomatique: c'est-a-dire qu'elle constate certaines deficiences physiques et qu'elle s'y attache. Mais nous avons vu que ces deficiences physiques ne sont en realite que des signes de lesions autrement profondes, de lesions spiritu-elles. Des lors, la medecine ne s'attache qu'aux symptomes lorsqu'elle cherche a soigner l'aspect exclusivement physique de la maladie. Elle ne va pas a la racine, et c'est ce qui explique les jugements portes sur la medecine par la bible.

D'une part, nous constatons l'impuissance de la mede-cine: l'homme n'est pas capable par lui-meme de guerir la maladie (Jer. 46,11, Osee 5,13, etc.). Il peut tout au plus en attenuer les consequences mais il ne va jamais loin avec son art. Parfois meme la medecine nous est presentee comme tout a fait perverse, opposee a la volonte de

Dieu, signe de la revolte de 1'homme contre Dieu (2 Ch. 16,12, Jer.17,5). Il en est ainsi lorsque la medecine devient une idole, lorsqu'elle devient une puissance a qui l'on s'adresse independamment de Dieu: a ce moment la medecine se pare de ce qui n'est pas a elle ; elle attire la louange et la reconnaissance qui ne sont dues qu'a Dieu— elle suscite l'esperance et provoque la foi: elle prend reellement la place de Dieu et se trouve par la meme condamnee. Nous esperons en face de cette idole qu'elle agira par elle-meme, c'est-a-dire en fait que la vie et la mort lui appartiennent: sont entre nos mains. Or, ce dieu mensonger n'a pas tenu ses promesses: l'affirmation bib-lique que la medecine est impuissante sans le secours de Dieu eclate a nos yeux. Nous constatons que l'homme reussit en partie a supprimer la douleur mais non a vaincre ou a faire reculer la maladie. Car si une maladie cede, combien d'autres formes reapparaissent ou surgissent pour la premiere fois? Si la maladie aigue est enrayee, combien la sante generale, la resistance raciale s'affaiblissent? Si les maladies micro-biennes paraissent vaincues, combien se developpent les maladies nerveuses, etc. Nous avons mis notre confiance sur un point dans la medecine, et nous recevons un dementi: il n'y a de confiance qu'en Dieu.

Cela veut-il dire que la medecine doive etre exclusive-ment spiritualiste? Sans meme refuter les exagerations de la Christian Science, il suffit de noter que la medecine chreti-enne ne peut pas etre spiritualiste puisque l'homme n'est pas un pur esprit. Le premier probleme a poser est un probleme spirituel: general—et particulier au malade determine. Mais cela n'exclut pas le remede materiel et la guerison physique. L'homme est une unite, rappelons-le.

La guerison spirituelle en effet, le pardon du peche, doit emporter entre autres consequences une adhesion de l'homme a l'ordre de la nature tel qu'il a ete voulu par Dieu—de meme que cela conduit a accepter l'obeissance aux lois de l'Etat, de meme le chretien doit savoir obeir aux lois de la nature pour son corps et accepter de reformer sa vie de fa?on a eviter ce qui est mauvais pour lui. Dieu a cree un milieu pour l'hom-me, des besoins et le moyen de les satisfaire pleinement. L'hygiene n'est donc pas autre chose que l'acceptation d'une vie telle que Dieu a voulu que l'homme la mene, au point de vue physique egalement. Ainsi la guerison du peche atteint aussi la cause de la maladie qui est toujours une desobeis-sance a cet ordre naturel etabli par Dieu. Bien entendu, il reste que les symptomes de la maladie, ses consequences materi-elles, ne sont pas supprimes pour cela: mais la maladie est alors atteinte dans sa realite parce que Satan n'a plus de prise par ce cote. Donc la notion chretienne de la maladie comporte bien une guerison et une action materielles aussi.

Mais notre concept materialiste, le plus habituel, nous a habitues a une conception materialiste et immediatement util-itaire du remede: le plus souvent le remede n'a qu'un but: supprimer la souffrance, et ceci est renforce par la conception que chaque individu a de l'importance de ses faits et gestes: tous les phenomenes extremes de chacun de nous apparaissent invraisemblablement importants, parce que nous sommes individualistes a l'extreme, que nous avons perdu le sens de la relativite de la vie et de l'insertion de l'individu dans des communautes et generations reelles. Tout cela fausse

l'idee de remede. Le vrai remede est celui qui atteint la maladie dans ses racines, et qui agit a plus ou moins longue echeance, qui meme peut n'agir que dans nos descendants. La bible ne supprime pas le remede en effet, elle nous enseigne d'abord que le remede est donne au medecin par Dieu, et qu'il est bien un moyen consacre au soin du corps (la vertu supreme de la plante est la vertu curative (Ez. 47,22,[35] Apoc. 22,2), que le remede evolue selon les epoques (Jac. 5,15), ici nous devons simplement admettre que la Bible est tributaire de l'humanite.

La bible nous enseigne en outre que certains hommes ont un don de guerison: nous laissons pendant la question de savoir si le don de guerison concerne les guerisons miracule-uses, ou s'il s'agit du medecin ayant un veritable don medical.

Et cette idee de remede est liee aux deux affirmations suiv-antes: que Jesus-Christ est le seul remede de la realite de nos maladies, qu'Il s'est charge de nos maladies (Matth. 8,17)—que la resurrection est la seule guerison reelle des maintenant (Osee 6,1).

Donc ceci entraine une certaine attitude a l'egard des remedes: s'ils sont subordonnes a l'ordre de Dieu, il faut savoir si les remedes que l'on emploie sont coherents a l'or-dre de la nature voulu par Dieu ; si par exemple, ils ne tendent pas a materialiser l'homme, s'ils ne sont pas une perturbation de sa nature, s'ils ne sont pas une tentative pour empieter dans le domaine de Dieu. Ainsi le medecin au sujet du remede a employer doit se poser une double question: celle de sa valeur technique et aussi celle de sa validite devant Dieu.

Notes editoriales

Commentary

Raymond Downing

A convenient and accurate way to understand medicine today is as technique, technique as Ellul defined it in 1963: "*Technique is the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency ...* in every field of human activi-ty."[36] Ivan Illich was the first of Ellul's followers to spell out this understanding of medicine as technique and in so doing found medicine dangerous: "The medical establishment has become a major threat to health,"[37] his *Medical Nemesis*, published in 1976, begins. Eight years later, Arney and Bergen showed how we responded to this threat: instead of pushing back on medicine, we reinforced medical technique as a system, embracing all of its offerings as a "tyranny of harmony.[38]

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[35] Erreur dans le texte ; le citation serait plutot Ez. 47,12.

[36] Jacques Ellul, "Note to the Reader," in *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage, 1963): xxv. Emphasis in the original.

[37] Ivan Illich, *Medical Nemesis* (New York: Pantheon, 1976): 3.

[38] William Ray Arney and Bernard J. Bergen, *Medicine and the Management of Living* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984): 161.

Ellul would likely have agreed with all of these analyses of medicine as technique, though he produced no complete analysis of medicine comparable to his studies of law, politics, economics, propaganda, and revolution—to say nothing of his three major books on technology itself. Instead, we have brief references to medicine in several of his books, and a few articles. The first was "Biblical Positions on Medicine," (published here for the first time in English translation), which he published even before the blueprint for all of his subsequent writings in *Presence in the Modern World*.[39]

On careful reading, this article seems more of "biblical positions on illness" than on medicine. There is no positioning of medicine within a technological society, no exposure of its politics and propaganda, and no warnings of the dangers of medicine. Though all that came thirty years later with Il-lich, Ellul had a different goal in 1947. He wanted to establish the relationship that creatures have with their Creator. Illich returned to this same biblical foundation in his later writings.

This foundation is pivotal for understanding medicine itself: The human, Ellul writes, "is not an autonomous being" but rather "wholly dependent on the creator."[40] And again: "Between the creature and the Creator there can be a right order of relation, and this is what can promote health best."[41] Later, he expands a bit: "Left to ourselves, we will go immediately to death by the way of sickness. It is God's hand that restores us continually to a state of relative health, which we do not deserve. Healing is thus nothing other, in every situation, than God's merciful intervention in the course of nature."[42]

It was this latter concept that Illich developed in his post-*Nemesis* writings. Referring to the medieval view that all of nature was alive, Illich says that between the fourth and fourteenth centuries, people believed that the "birthing power of nature was rooted in the world's being contingent on the incessant creative will of God."[43] (In the words of the old Spiritual, "He's got the whole world in His hands.") However, when people began no longer to believe in the incessant sustaining will of God, they developed tools to sustain the life and health they had previously believed was God's realm.[44] Ellul calls this use of tools idolatry: "Sometimes medicine is even presented to us as completely contrary, opposed to God's will, a sign of man's revolt against God (2 Chr. 16:12, Jer. 17:5). This happens when medicine becomes an idol, a power that we petition independently of God. In this case, medicine ... draws forth the praise and gratitude that are due only to God—it raises hope and stimulates faith. It truly takes the place of God and is for this very reason condemned."[45]

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39 Jacques Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016).
40 Ellul, "Biblical Positions on Medicine."
41 *Ibid.*
42 *Ibid.*
43 Ivan Illich, "Brave New Biocracy." *New Perspectives Quarterly* 11.1 (Winter 1994): 4.
44 Ivan Illich and David Cayley, *The Rivers North of the Future* (Toronto: Anansi, 2005): 64–79.
45 Ellul, "Biblical Positions on Medicine."

As this attributing supernatural powers to medicine was true in Jeremiah's time, it has been repeated throughout history. The title of a 1987 book on medicine and surgery in the nineteenth century was *The Age of Miracles*.[46] In 2003, announcing his $15 billion for AIDS care in Africa and the Caribbean, President George Bush called this an "age of miraculous medicines"[47]; half of that money would pay for those "miraculous" drugs. These miracles "raise hope and stimulate faith"; they often end up "taking the place of God." The more effective and efficient medicine becomes, the more likely we are to treat it as god.

Nevertheless, the bulk of Ellul's article is not about medicine itself: the section titled "Remedies" is less than one quarter of the article. The largest sections are extended meditations on "Ideas of Life and Death" and "The Idea of Illness." There is much to reflect on here; hopefully other commentators will. I will comment briefly only on a single aspect of this argument.

Using the story of Job, and Jesus' phrase "This sickness is not unto death" (John 11:4), Ellul considers five meanings that sickness could have if it is "not unto death" and two meanings for when it is "unto death." He is very clear that illness does have meaning. Thirty years later, in a long essay titled "Illness as Metaphor," Susan Sontag determined to strip illness of meaning. She proclaimed that "illness is *not* a metaphor," using the phrase "just a disease" throughout.[48] A decade later she wrote a second essay, "AIDS and Its Metaphors," proclaiming again that her purpose was "not to proclaim meaning ... but to deprive something of meaning."[49] Ellul assumed meaning because he believed in the incessant creative will of God. Sontag did not.

Near the end of the article, Ellul addresses one of the many questions that might arise about how to make practical use of his analysis. He mentions, almost in passing, the "exaggerations of Christian Science." Here he is referring to the contention in Christian Science that "disease is symptomatic not of physical disorder but of underlying spiritual inadequacy [T]reatment ... consists 'entirely of heartfelt yet disciplined prayer.'"[50]Ellul's view is that "Christian medicine cannot be spiritualistic, because man is not a pure spirit. The primary problem to pose is a spiritual problem, in general, and particular to the specific illness. But this does not exclude the material cure and physical healing."[51]

Ellul, then, affirms attention to both the physical and the spiritual, but it can be difficult to get the balance right. We may be tempted to view a patient's spiritual condition mechanistically: as the patient incrementally repairs the creature-Creator

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[46] Guy Williams, *The Age of Miracles: Medicine and Surgery in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1987).

[47] George W. Bush, "State of the Union Address," 2003.

[48] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York, Picador, 2001): 3.

[49] Sontag, 102.

[50] Peggy DesAutels, Margaret Battin, and Larry May, *Praying for a Cure: When Medical and Religious Practices Conflict* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).

[51] Ellul, "Biblical Positions on Medicine."

relationship, we hope for a corresponding improvement in the physical symptoms. But our physical and spiritual lives are not linked like gears, with movement in one causing immediate movement in the other.

Or, we can delink the gears and try to treat each part separately. We rely on the motto "We treat, Jesus heals," but we actually imply that our treatment will catalyze Jesus' healing. And while doctors may tell some stories that illustrate this, there are plenty of stories that show the opposite, the first of which is Job's. We, like Job and his friends, have trouble getting it right.

Ellul, far from resolving this dilemma, simply affirms it: "Thus the healing of sin attains the cause of the illness, which is always a disobedience to this natural order that God established. Of course, the symptoms of the disease, its material consequences, are not ended thereby..... Thus the Christian notion of sickness indeed entails a material healing and activity as well."[52]

As with most of Ellul's writings, there is no agenda here, no program to follow, no principles that translate easily to the construction of a "Christian healthcare system." He does not dramatically eschew the secular technologies of medicine but tells us only that "treatment is given to the doctor by God, that it is indeed a dedicated means of caring for the body."[53] His task is not to eliminate medical technology but to help us see it in perspective.

Many scholars, Illich among them, view the period beginning with the close of World War II as marking a major development in medicine.[54] Ellul, at the dawn of this new period of medical progress, reminded us of the foundations not just of medicine but of illness itself. He must have foreseen that as medicine became more effective, we would increasingly use it without addressing "the primary problem ... a spiritual problem." Seventy years later, our international idolatry of medicine has proven him correct.

About the Author

Raymond Downing, MD, is Senior Lecturer (retired), Department of Family Medicine, Moi University School of Medicine, Eldoret, Kenya.

"Biblical Positions on Medicine" in Theological Perspective

Frederic Rognon

In his article titled "Biblical Positions on Medicine," Jacques Ellul nowhere cites S0ren Kierkegaard (or any other author, except of course the biblical authors). And yet Kierkegaard is present "incognito" (a term dear to Kierkegaard) from the beginning

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[52] *Ibid.*

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 1–9; Arnold Relman, "The Future of Medical Practice," http://content.healthaffairs.org/ cgi/reprint/2/2/5.pdf); and Adele Clarke

to the end of Ellul's text, and particularly at the point where Ellul brings his argument to a decisive close. The primary implicit references to the Danish philosopher and theologian concern the distinction between "the sickness that is not unto death" and "the sickness unto death." These make tacit reference to Kierkegaard's book *The Sickness unto Death.* A summary of this book will therefore be helpful for clarifying Ellul's approach.

JACQUES ELLUL AND S0REN KIERKEGAARD

It is beneficial to keep in mind the very definite relationship between Kierkegaard and Ellul. As we know, this relationship passes by way of Karl Barth, but when Barth moves apart from Kierkegaard, Jacques Ellul moves apart from Barth and stays close to Kierkegaard. In other words, Ellul is Barthian only when Karl Barth is Kierkegaardian. If Ellul allows himself some criticism toward Barth on the theological level (as he does with Marx on the sociological level), it is also true that Ellul is never critical toward Kierkegaard. He describes it in this way:

Normally, in my reading, the critical mechanism of thought arises right away, and I am prompted to respond, "Yes, but ..." The authors who have had the greatest influence on me have made me think reac-tively. I have never followed a system. With regard to Barth himself, I always held a critical distance. There is nothing like this in my relation to Kierkegaard. With him, I just listen. I do not try to imitate, or to the apply methods or concepts. I am brought back to myself in a mirror that illuminates thoughts, contradictions, exigencies, presence toward life, and presence toward death. Brought back to myself, but not at all the same as I was before reading such or such a text. Questioned. With my back to the wall, by a singular relationship that denies me any escape. I listen. I do not contest

Kierkegaard's thought, but I feel obligated to respond, to respond to another than to Kierkegaard himself.[55] This long citation demonstrates Ellul's intellectual and spiritual debt to Kierkegaard, which exceeded any other. This point only confirms the interest that a detour through the work of Kierkegaard can offer us.

THE SICKNESS UNTO DEATH: AVOIDING MISUNDERSTANDINGS

To read *The Sickness unto Death* requires some care, however, due to a certain number of persistent misunderstandings that have affected the book's reception in France from the time of its first appearance.[56] The first misunderstanding, and the most dam-

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et al., "Bio-medicalization: Technoscientific Transformations of Health, Illness, and U.S. Biomedicine," *American Sociological Review* 68 (April 2003): 161–194.

[55] Jacques Ellul, "Preface." In Nelly Viallaneix, *Ecoute, Kierkegaard. Essai sur la communication de la parole.* 2 vols. Paris: Editions du Cerf (col. Cogitatio Fidei), 1979, v. 1, ii-iii.

[56] See Helene Politis, *Kierkegaard en France au XXe sie-cle: Archeologie d'une reception.* Paris:

aging, is that the book was first translated under the title *Traite du desespoir* [Treatise on Despair]. This faulty title (faulty because the original Danish title, *Sygdommen til Doden*, literally means "the sickness unto death") contributed in no small way to the diffusion of a particularly gloomy image of the thinker of Copenhagen. When Jacques Ellul wrote "Biblical Positions on Medicine" in 1947, only this first French translation was available to him; it was not until 1971, when volume XVI of Kierkegaard's *Complete Works* was published in French translation in a scholarly edition,[57] that the correct title began to take precedence (even if the *Traite du desespoir* continues to be cited today).

These publication details must be mentioned in order to underline Ellul's rigor, for he reads *The Sickness unto Death* carefully and describes it judiciously without being concerned with Kierkegaard's negative reputation. For if the book indeed has to do with despair, it is described only in order to better proclaim, by contrast, the Christian hope. The title says it well, for it refers to Jesus' words in the Gospel of John: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."[58] Those who know the bible as well as Ellul did will immediately make the connection. In everyday French, one would instead use the phrase "maladie mortelle" [terminal illness]. The unusual expression "sickness unto death" is surprising to those for whom the bible is unfamiliar, that is, the great majority of French persons in 1947 and today. Thus it opens the door to all the misunderstanding. In reality, *The Sickness unto Death* (with its subtitle *A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*) is a treatise and a meditation upon Christian hope.

THE SICKNESS UNTO DEATH: FROM DESPAIR TO HOPE

The Sickness unto Death appears under a pseudonym, An-ti-Climacus. *The Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (1846)[59] is signed by Johannes Climacus; he expresses the rationalist conceit, with Hegelian undertones, of rising from earth to heaven by a ladder ("climax" in Greek means "ladder") and of accounting for the entirety of the real as a totalizing system. Anti-Climacus, who signs *The Sickness*

Editions Kime, 2005; Florian Forestier, Jacques Message and Anna Svenbrok, *Kierkegaard en France. Incidences et reson-nances.* Paris: Editions Bibliotheque nationale de France, 2016.

[57] See S0ren Kierkegaard, *('Eiivres Completes.* Paris: Editions de l'Orante, 1966–1986, vv. I-XX.

[58] John 11:4.

[59] See Kierkegaard, "Post Scriptum definitif et non scien-tifique aux Miettes philosophiques," *('Eves Completes*, 1977, vv. X-XI.

unto Death (1849),[60] but also *Training in Christianity* (1850),[61] is Climacus' opposite; he is the witness to Christian truth, which is revealed to men by a downward movement, contrary to the upward movement of human presumption. Anti-Climacus is the one who welcomes the God of Jesus

Christ, who is himself made known through his Word.

From the outset, he states, "The sickness unto death is despair."[62] And he pursues the chain of identification in these terms: "Despair is sin."[63] But there are two kinds of despair and thus two kinds of sin: despair-weakness and despair-defiance. Despair-weakness consists in not wanting to be oneself, in fleeing from oneself into all the diversions that the world offers. Despair-defiance consists in wanting to be oneself, but all alone, without otherness, and especially without the divine otherness. Thus, paradoxically, "When we are before God or have the idea of God, and we are found to be in the state of despair, sin consists in not wanting to be oneself, or in wanting to be."[64] We understand from this that sin must not be understood on a moral level: "The opposite of sin is not virtue [...], it is faith."[65]

But if the opposite of sin is faith, and if despair consists in not wanting to be oneself, or in wanting to be, how can we conceive of despair's opposite, that is, hope? According to Kierkegaard, hope consists "in the self, being itself and wanting to be, becoming transparent and grounding itself in God."[66] In other words, here is the "state in which all despair is banished: the self that relates itself to itself and wants to be itself becomes transparent and grounds itself in the power that placed him there."[67] Thus Christian hope, the antidote for every kind of despair, amounts to making a leap of faith, falling into God who welcomes us with open arms, renouncing oneself, in order to find oneself again in the end, but by way of a detour through the divine otherness.

The primary quality that differentiates hope from despair is otherness: whether one flees from oneself or wants to be oneself, one denies the otherness of God. By contrast, if I enter into a living and trusting relationship with the God who lives and gives life, then I become truly myself and am healed of despair. For then my sickness is not "unto death"; it has as its end the glorification of God.

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[60] See Kierkegaard, "La maladie a la mort," *('Eves Completes*, 1971, v. XVI.

[61] See Kierkegaard "L'ecole du christianisme," *('Eves Completes*, 1982, v. XVII.

[62] Kierkegaard, "La maladie a la mort," *op. cit.*, 169.

[63] *Ibid.*, 231.

[64] *Ibid*, 233.

[65] *Ibid.*, 238.

[66] *Ibid.*

[67] *Ibid.*, 285.

BIBLICAL POSITIONS ON MEDICINE: TOWARD A SPIRITUAL APPROACH TO ILLNESS

Such then is the philosophical and theological direction that S0ren Kierkegaard advocates in 1849 and that is found in the background, implicitly, a century later in the text of his spiritual heir, Jacques Ellul, titled "Biblical Positions on Medicine." How might we discern the effect that this work by the Copenhagen thinker had on this work by the Bordeaux professor, on the subject of illness?

Just as, with Kierkegaard, sin must not be understood in a moral but rather a spiritual sense, so also despair must not be reduced to a psychological mode but grasped in its spiritual dimension. Thus, from the Kierkegaardian perspective, a desperate man (spiritually speaking) may very well not know it (psychologically speaking): the flight from himself, or the frenzied affirmation of himself, hides from his own eyes his real condition as a desperate man, that is, as one who is independent of God. The sickness unto death is that which separates from God.

Jacques Ellul applies the same reasoning to illness itself. In the usual sense of the word, sickness may be "unto death" or not "unto death," depending on whether the sick person does or does not turn toward God. This signifies that a terminal illness, that is, an illness that leads to physiological death, may very well not be "unto death" if the patient gives himself over to God during his illness. Conversely, an illness that can be cured, and from which in the end the patient is healed on the physiological level, can very well be a sickness "unto death" if this patient turns away from God during the healing process.

In his work *The Sickness unto Death*, S0ren Kierkegaard rarely speaks of sickness in the physiological sense and concentrates on the question of the spiritual sickness that is despair. Yet he concentrates the two pages of the "Pre-amble,"[68] right after the "Foreword," on the distinction between physiological sickness and spiritual sickness. It is in this way that he recalls the words of Jesus, in which Lazarus' sickness "is not unto death," even though Lazarus does die a short while afterward and Jesus then openly informs his disciples, "Lazarus has died."[69] This death may very well be the result of a sickness that is "not unto death." The sickness and death of Lazarus, as we know, will be the occasion for the glorification of God, by means of the sign of his resurrection that Jesus performs. This is why his sickness was not "unto death," although it was fatal.

It is this decisive point that enables Jacques Ellul to pose the question of meaning: whether a sickness is or is not fatal, the essential point is that it may not be "unto death." That is, it may be lived with God, and this may be the living and trusting bond with the God who lives and gives life, who gives it a meaning.

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[68] *Ibid.*, 167–168.
[69] John 11:14.

This fundamental distinction, inspired by Kierkegaard, between the sickness "unto death" and fatal illness, sheds light on Jacques Ellul's reflections on the problem of treatment: the therapies of the materialistic type, which treat man as material and reduce him to his physiological dimension, to a collection of atoms, may heal a curable illness, or may push back the final defeat of an incurable illness, but in both cases they may not keep it from being "unto death." Such an orientation may lead to a therapeutic determination to succeed, or to medical exploits, but in all cases to stay alive without the spiritual orientation strips this life of all true meaning, reducing it to a physico-chemical process.

This is why Jacques Ellul ends his text by questioning the validity of this or that treatment "before God." The only real healing, he affirms, is the resurrection, and he is careful to clarify, in order to remove every ambiguity or to avoid all misinterpretation, that this resurrection does not concern only the end of time, the judgment and salvation, but it takes place "starting now," *hic et nunc*. We may be raised from the dead during our life if we place this life firmly within God's care. Then hope overcomes despair, and no sickness that we undergo, not even terminal illness, is "unto death."

CONCLUSION

In a bible study on 1 Corinthians 15, dated 1988 and recently published,[70] Jacques Ellul offers a highly suggestive idea. Just as in Jewish tradition the day begins at sunset and ends with sunrise, so also death precedes life: "We begin by a life that is an actual death, and we end our life with the resurrec-tion."[71] Thus we pass from death to life when, through a new birth, we enter straightaway, during our earthly pilgrimage, into eternal life. As a result, all of the illnesses that can assail us, affect us, diminish us, and make us suffer terribly, may be seen to bestow a meaning. They may no longer be, in the strict sense, sicknesses "unto death"; they may even become, like all things in our life, signs of God's glory.[72] Such is the rich Kierkegaardian heritage passed down to Jacques Ellul; such is the existential and spiritual spring that irrigates his thought.

About the Author

Frederic Rognon is Professor of Philosophy at the Faculte de theologie protestante of the University of Strasbourg, publications director of the journal *Foi & Vie*, and author of *Jacques Ellul, Une pensee en dialogue* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2007, 2nd ed. 2013) and *Generations Ellul. Soixante heritiers de la pensee de Jacques Ellul* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2012).

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[70] See Jacques Ellul, *Mort et esperance de la resurrection. Conferences inedites de Jacques Ellul.* Lyon: Editions Olivetan, 2016.

[71] *Ibid.*, 124.

[72] See 1 Cor. 10:31: "Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God."

"Positions bibliques sur la medecine": Mise en perspective theologique

Frederic Rognon

Dans son article intitule: *Positions bibliques sur la medecine* , Jacques Ellul ne cite a aucun moment S0ren Kierkegaard (ni aucun autre auteur d'ailleurs, mis a part les auteurs bib-liques bien entendu). Et cependant, Kierkegaard est present, *incognito* (terme cher a Kierkegaard), du debut a la fin du texte d'Ellul, et notamment au moment ou se noue de maniere decisive le fil de son argumentation. Les principales references implicites au philosophe et theologien danois concernent la distinction entre « la maladie qui n'est pas a la mort » et « la maladie a la mort » ; elles renvoient donc, tacitement, a l'ouvrage de Kierkegaard intitule: *La maladie a la mort* (*The Sickness unto Death*). Un parcours a travers ce livre serait ainsi susceptible d'eclairer l'approche de Jacques Ellul.

JACQUES ELLUL ET S0REN KIERKEGAARD

Il convient en effet d'avoir presente a l'esprit la filiation tres nette entre Kierkegaard et Ellul. Celle-ci passe, on le sait, par Karl Barth, mais lorsque ce dernier s'eloigne de Kierkegaard, Jacques Ellul s'eloigne de Barth pour rester arrime a Kierkegaard ; en d'autres termes, Ellul n'est barthien que lorsque Karl Barth est kierkegaardien. S'il s'autorise des critiques envers Barth sur le plan theologique (comme envers Marx sur le plan sociologique), en revanche, Jacques Ellul n'est jamais critique envers Kierkegaard.Il l'exprime d'ailleurs en ces termes:

Habituellement, dans mes lectures, le mecanisme critique de la pensee joue aussitot, et je suis appele a repondre: "Oui, mais ..." Les auteurs qui ont eu le plus d'influence sur moi m'ont fait penser par reaction. Je n'ai jamais adhere a un systeme. A l'egard de Barth lui-meme, j'ai toujours pris une distance critique. Ma reaction a Kierkegaard n'a rien de comparable. Ici, je suis seulement a l'ecoute. Je ne cherche pas a imiter, ni a appliquer methodes ou concepts. Je suis renvoye a moi-meme par un miroir qui rend eclatantes pensees, contradictions, exigences, presence a la vie et presence de la mort. Renvoye a moi-meme, mais plus du tout semblable a ce que j'etais avant d'avoir lu tel ou tel texte. Interpele. Mis au pied du mur, par un rapport singulier qui m'interdit toute echappatoire. J'ecoute. Je ne discute pas la pensee de Kierkegaard, mais je me sens oblige de repondre, de repondre a un autre qu'a Kierkegaard lui-meme[73].

Cette longue citation atteste que Kierkegaard s'avere etre le creancier intellectuel et spirituel par excellence de Jacques Ellul. Ce point ne fait que confirmer l'interet que presente pour nous un detour par l'œuvre kierkegaardienne.

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[73] Jacques Ellul, « Preface », in Nelly Viallaneix, *Ecoute, Kierkegaard. Essai sur la communication*

LA MALADIE A LA MORT: DISSIPATION DE MALENTENDUS

La lecture de *La maladie a la mort* requiert neanmoins quelques precautions, en raison d'un certain nombre de malentendus tenaces dont l'ouvrage a pu patir tout au long de sa reception en France[74]. Le principal de ces quiproquos, et le plus dommageable, est la premiere traduction du livre, sous le titre: *Traite du desespoir*. Et cet intitule fautif (puisque le titre originel danois: *Sygdommen til Doden*, signifie litterale-ment: *La maladie a la mort*) n'a pas contribue pour une petite part a la diffusion d'une image particulierement sombre du penseur de Copenhague. Or, en 1947, lorsque Jacques Ellul ecrit « Positions bibliques sur la medecine », il ne dispose en fran^ais que de cette premiere traduction ; ce n'est qu'en 1971, lors de la publication du volume XVI des *(Euvres Completes* de Kierkegaard en fran^ais, dans une edition academique[75], que le titre correct commencera a s'imposer (meme si l'on continue aujourd'hui encore a citer le *Traite du desespoir*).

Ces donnees editoriales devaient etre mentionnees, pour souligner la rigueur de Jacques Ellul, qui, sans s'arreter a la reputation deletere de Kierkegaard, lit attentivement *La maladie a la mort* et en rend compte avec justesse. Car s'il est bien question de desespoir dans cette muvre, celui-ci n'est decrit que pour mieux proclamer, par contraste, l'esperance chretienne. Le titre le dit bien, puisqu'il renvoie aux paroles de Jesus dans l'evangile de Jean: « Cette maladie n'est point a la mort ; mais elle est pour la gloire de Dieu, afin que le Fils de Dieu soit glorifie par elle[76] » . Un fin connaisseur de la Bible comme Jacques Ellul fait aussitot le rapprochement. En fran^ais courant, on parlerait plutot de « maladie mortelle » ; l'expression inhabituelle « maladie a la mort » surprend ceux qui n'ont pas de culture biblique, c'est-a-dire la grande ma-jorite des Fran^ais, en 1947 comme aujourd'hui, et ouvre done la porte a tous les malentendus. En realite, *La maladie a la mort* (dont le sous-titre est: *Un expose psychologique chretien pour I'edification et le reveil)* est un traite et une meditation sur l'esperance chretienne.

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de la parole (2 tomes), Paris, Les Editions du Cerf (coll. Cogitatio Fidei), 1979, tome I, pp. ii-iii.

[74] Voir: Helene Politis, *Kierkegaard en France au XXe sie-cle: archeologie d'une reception*, Paris, Editions Kime, 2005 ; Florian Forestier, Jacques Message et Anna Sven-bro, *Kierkegaard en France. Incidences et resonances*, Paris, Editions Bibliotheque nationale de France, 2016.

[75] Voir: S0ren Kierkegaard, *(Eiivres Completes*, Paris, Editions de l'Orante, tomes I-XX, 1966–1986.

[76] Jean 11, 4.

LA MALADIE A LA MORT: DU DESESPOIR A L'ESPERANCE

La maladie a la mort parait sous un pseudo nyme: Anti-Climacus. Le *Post Scriptum definitif et non scientifique aux Miettes philosophiques* (1846)[77] etait signe de Johannes Climacus: il exprimait la pretention rationaliste, aux echos hegeliens, de s'elever de la terre au ciel par une echelle (« climax » en grec signifie: « echelle ») et de rendre compte de l'ensemble du reel sous forme de systeme totalisant. Anti-Climacus, qui signe *La maladie a la mort* (1849)[78], mais aussi *L'ecole du christianisme* (1850)[79], est le contraire de Climacus: le temoin de la verite chretienne, qui se revele aux hommes par un mouvement descendant, inverse au mouve-ment ascendant de la presomption humaine. Anti-Climacus est celui qui accueille le Dieu de Jesus-Christ, qui se fait connaitre lui-meme par sa Parole.

L'auteur le dit d'emblee: « la maladie a la mort est le desespoir »[80]. Et il poursuit la chaine d'identification en ces termes: « le desespoir est le peche »[81]. Mais il y a deux formes de desespoir, et donc de peche: le desespoir-faiblesse et le desespoir-defi. Le desespoir-faiblesse consiste a ne pas vouloir etre soi, a se fuir soi-meme dans tous les divertissements que le monde propose. Le desespoir-defi consiste a vouloir etre soi, mais tout seul, sans alterite, et notamment sans l'alterite divine. Ainsi, paradoxalement, « le peche consiste, etant devant Dieu ou ayant l'idee de Dieu, et se trou-vant dans l'etat de desespoir, a ne pas vouloir etre soi, ou a vouloir l'etre »[82]. On comprend bien ici que le peche ne doit pas etre compris sur un plan moral: « le contraire du peche n'est nullement la vertu (...), c'est la foi »[83].

Mais si le contraire du peche est la foi, et si le desespoir consiste a ne pas vouloir etre soi, ou a vouloir l'etre, comment concevoir le contraire du desespoir, c'est-a-dire l'esperance? Celle-ci consiste, selon Kierkegaard, « en ce que le moi, etant lui-meme et voulant l'etre, devient transparent et se fonde en Dieu »[84]. En d'autres termes, voici « l'etat d'ou tout desespoir est banni: le moi qui se rapporte a lui-meme et veut etre lui-meme devient transparent et se fonde en la puissance qui l'a pose »[85]. Ainsi l'esperance chretienne, antidote a l'egard de toute forme de desespoir, revient a faire le saut de la

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[77] Voir: S0ren Kierkegaard, « Post Scriptum definitif et non scientifique aux Miettes philosophiques », *(Eiivres Completes*, Paris, Editions de l'Orante, tomes X-XI, 1977.

[78] Voir: S0ren Kierkegaard, « La maladie a la mort », *&u-vres Completes*, Paris, Editions de l'Orante, tome XVI, 1971.

[79] Voir: S0ren Kierkegaard, « L'ecole du christianisme », *(Eiivres Completes,* Paris, Editions de l'Orante, tome XVII, 1982.

[80] S0ren Kierkegaard, « La maladie a la mort », *op. cit.,* p. 169.

[81] *Ibid.*, p. 231.

[82] *Ibid*, p. 233.

[83] *Ibid.*, p. 238.

[84] *Ibid.*

[85] *Ibid.*, p. 285.

foi, a plonger en Dieu qui nous accueille les bras ouverts, a renon-cer ainsi a soi-meme, pour finalement se retrouver soi-meme, mais grace au detour par l'alterite divine.

Le principal critere discriminant entre le desespoir et l'esperance, c'est l'alterite: que l'on se fuit soi-meme ou que l'on veuille etre soi-meme, on nie l'alterite de Dieu ; tandis que si je rentre en relation vivante et confiante avec le Dieu vivant et vivifiant, alors je deviens reellement moi-meme et je suis gueri du desespoir. Car alors ma maladie n'est pas « a la mort », elle a pour finalite la glorification de Dieu.

POSITIONS BIBLIQUES SUR LA MEDECINE: VERS UNE APPROCHE SPIRITUELLE DE LA MALADIE

Telle est donc l'impulsion philosophique et theologique que promeut S0ren Kierkegaard en 1849, et qui se trouve a l'arriere-plan, sur un mode implicite, un siecle plus tard, du texte de son heritier spirituel, Jacques Ellul, intitule: *Positions bibliques sur la medecine.* Comment deceler l'incidence de l'reuvre du penseur de Copenhague sur celle du professeur de Bordeaux, au sujet de la maladie?

De meme que, chez Kierkegaard, le peche ne doit pas etre compris dans un sens moral, mais spirituel, de meme le desespoir ne doit pas etre reduit a un mode psychologique, mais apprehende dans sa dimension spirituelle. Ainsi, dans la perspective kierkegaardienne, un homme desespere (sur un plan spirituel) peut tres bien ne pas le savoir (sur un plan psychologique): la fuite a l'egard de lui-meme, ou l'affirmation forcenee de lui-meme, lui cachent a ses propres yeux sa reelle condition d'homme desespere, c'est-a-dire independant a l'egard de Dieu. La maladie a la mort est celle qui eloigne de Dieu.

Jacques Ellul applique le meme raisonnement a la mal-adie proprement dite. La maladie, au sens courant du terme, peut etre « a la mort » ou ne pas etre « a la mort »: selon que le malade se tourne ou non vers Dieu. Cela signifie qu'une maladie mortelle, c'est-a-dire une maladie qui conduit vers une mort physiologique, peut tres bien ne pas etre « a la mort » si le patient s'en remet a Dieu au cours de sa maladie. Inversement, une maladie curable, et dont le patient finit par guerir sur un plan physiologique, peut tres bien etre une maladie « a la mort » si ce patient se detourne de Dieu tout au long du processus therapeutique.

S0ren Kierkegaard, dans son ouvrage *La maladie a la mort*, parle peu de maladie au sens physiologique, et se concentre sur la question de la maladie spirituelle qu'est le desespoir. Il consacre neanmoins les deux pages du « Pream-bule »[86], juste apres l'« Avant-propos », a l'articulation entre maladie physiologique et maladie spirituelle: c'est ainsi qu'il rappelle la parole de Jesus, selon laquelle la maladie de Lazare « n'est pas a la mort », alors que, pourtant, Lazare meurt peu de temps apres ; et Jesus annonce alors ouvertement a ses disciples: « Lazare est mort »[87]. Ainsi la mort peut tres bien

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[86] Voir: *ibid.*, pp. 167–168.
[87] Jean 11, 14.

etre la consequence d'une maladie qui « n'est pas a la mort ». La maladie et la mort de Lazare, on le sait, seront l'occasion de la glorification de Dieu, par le biais du signe de sa resurrection operee par Jesus. C'est pourquoi sa maladie n'etait pas « a la mort », alors meme qu'elle etait mortelle.

C'est ce point decisif qui permet a Jacques Ellul de poser la question du sens: qu'une maladie soit mortelle ou non, l'essentiel est qu'elle ne soit pas « a la mort », c'est-a-dire qu'elle soit vecue avec Dieu, et que ce soit ce lien vivant et confiant avec le Dieu vivant et vivifiant qui lui donne un sens.

Cette distinction fondamentale, d'inspiration kierkeg-aardienne, entre la maladie « a la mort » et la maladie mor-telle, eclaire les reflexions de Jacques Ellul sur la problema-tique des remedes: les therapeutiques de type materialiste, qui materialised l'homme, et le reduisent a sa dimension physiologique, a un ensemble d'atomes, peuvent guerir une maladie curable, ou faire reculer l'echeance finale d'une maladie incurable, mais dans les deux cas elles ne peuvent l'empecher d'etre « a la mort ». Cette orientation peut conduire a l'acharnement therapeutique, ou a des exploits medicaux, mais dans tous les cas le maintien en vie sans orientation spirituelle depouille cette vie de tout sens veritable, en la reduisant a un processus physico-chimique.

C'est pourquoi Jacques Ellul termine son texte en interrogeant la validite de tel ou tel remede « devant Dieu ». La seule guerison reelle, affirme-t-il, est la resurrection ; et il prend soin de preciser, afin de lever toute ambiguite ou d'eviter tout contresens, que cette resurrection ne concerne pas seulement la fin des temps, le jugement et le salut, mais qu'elle a lieu « des maintenant », *hic et nunc*. Nous pouvons ressusciter au cours de notre vie si nous placons resolument celle-ci sous le regard de Dieu. Alors l'esperance prend le pas sur le desespoir, et aucune des maladies que nous endurons, y compris les maladies mortelles, n'est « a la mort ».

CONCLUSION

Dans une etude biblique a propos de 1 Corinthiens 15, en date de 1988 et recemment publiee[88], Jacques Ellul expose une idee fort suggestive: de meme que, dans la tradition juive, le jour commence au coucher du soleil et s'acheve avec la montee du soleil et le plein jour, de meme la mort precede la vie: « Nous commencons par une vie qui est une veritable mort, et nous achevons notre vie sur la resurrection »[89]. Nous passons donc de la mort a la vie lorsque, par la nouvelle nais-sance, nous entrons d'emblee, au cours de notre pelerinage terrestre, dans la vie eternelle. Des lors, toutes les maladies qui peuvent nous assaillir, nous affecter, nous diminuer, nous faire terriblement souffrir, peuvent se voir conferer un sens. Elles ne peuvent plus etre, a strictement parler, des maladies « a la mort » ; elles peuvent meme devenir, comme toute chose dans notre

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[88] Voir: Jacques Ellul, *Mort et esperance de la resurrection. Conferences inedites de Jacques Ellul*, Lyon, Editions Olivetan, 2016.

[89] *Ibid.*, p. 124.

vie, des signes a la gloire de Dieu[90]. Tel est le riche heritage kierkegaardien transmis a Jacques Ellul, telle est la source existentielle et spirituelle qui irrigue sa pensee.

A propos de l'auteur

Frederic Rognon est Professeur de philosophie a la Faculte de theologie protestante de l'Universite de Strasbourg ; directeur de publication de la revue *Foi & Vie* ; auteur de: *Jacques Ellul. Une pensee en dialogue*, Geneve, Labor et Fides, 2007, 2013; *Generations Ellul. Soixante heritiers de la pensee de Jacques Ellul*, Geneve, Labor et Fides, 2012.

Commentary

Richard Stivers

Jacques Ellul's article on illness, health, and medicine is remarkable. It repudiates the common view about the primary causes of illness and health and calls into question the glory of modern medicine. I will comment on the concept of spirit and how it relates to the body and soul (mental and emotional life) complex, and on the attempt of modern medicine to bring spirit under its aegis.

For a long time we have been aware of how our emotional state affects our body, and vice versa. We speak about psychosomatic illnesses or about how readily one can somatize emotional distress. Then too we are aware of the toll that stress takes on bodily health. We are comfortable with the idea of a body-mind or body-soul complex, disputes about which part is dominant notwithstanding. Neglected is spirit or self as Soren Kierkegaard defines it. Ellul has clearly drawn upon Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety and The Sickness unto Death* in this regard.[91]

Ellul maintains that body, soul, and spirit form a unity whose inner workings only God knows and controls (without diminishing Christian freedom). What scripture does reveal to us, however, is that spirit is the primary factor. As Ellul indicates, life and death have a double meaning, because spiritual death and bodily death, on the one hand, and spiritual life and physical life, on the other hand, are intimately related. Our relationship with God (whether or not we are aware of it) is the basis of our existence. God created us and sustainsour existence and maintains arelationshipwithusthatis spirit or self. Strictly speaking, spirit or eternal self involves a consciousness of God's relationship to us, but for those who are unconscious of the relationship, spirit or self remains dormant. Nevertheless, God sustains the relationship, no matter what we understand and do.

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[90] Voir: 1 Corinthiens 10, 31: « Ainsi, soit que vous mang-iez, soit que vous buviez, soit que vous fassiez quelque autre chose, faites tout pour la gloire de Dieu ».

[91] Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*. Trans. Reidar Thomte (Princeton: Princeton Uni-

For Kierkegaard, the sickness unto death is despair, a sickness of the spirit, an anxiety without hope. In *The Concept of Anxiety*, he maintains that we consciously or unconsciously regard our relationship to God ambiguously: We are caught, we can neither control the relationship nor dismiss it. This ambiguity breeds anxiety.

Sin is despair and despair is sin, so writes Kierkegaard: Sin is a state or condition rather than occasional, discrete offenses. Despair and sin stand in dialectical relationship rather than being separate entities. Despair is part of sin, and every sinner is in despair. No one is without some despair.

Unconscious despair entails ignorance and distraction. Ignorance because one has not heard the Good News of the Gospel, and distraction because culture, which is based on idolatry, distracts us from the truth of Jesus Christ. No distraction, however, can mitigate the pangs of despair over our relation to God. As Kierkegaard observes, despair is "deep in the heart of happiness."[92]

Despair increases as the consciousness of spirit or self increases. There are two major forms of despair in which a consciousness of having a spirit or self is present. The first he refers to as a despair of weakness—not wanting to become the self that God expects. The other is a defiant despair—wanting to become the self that one desires. In addition, there is a despair over one's sins and a despair over ever being forgiven one's sins. For those who have heard the Good News, one either despairingly chooses a state of sin or accepts the gift of faith—a self grounded transparently in God. Hence faith is the opposite of despair.

Despair and sin have a profound influence on the health of the body and soul because, as previously indicated, body, soul, and spirit form a unity. The omission of spirit in medical treatment is catastrophic. Repentance and conversion are essential for the health of the spirit and for one's overall health. To suggest this to a physician today would surely bring disbelief or ridicule.

Toward the end of the article, Ellul mentions that scripture reveals the potential of medicine to become an idol and thus to "encroach upon God's domain." As medicine has become part of the technological system, it actively promotes a cure for everything, including aging. It is utopian and thus religious in its belief in science and its veneration of technology.

The capitulation of religion to medicine is indicated by the following example. One of my teachers in graduate school (a rabbi) was studying the relationship between Protestant ministers, Catholic priests, and Jewish rabbis, on the one hand, and Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers, on the other hand. The question was whether the helping professionals with religious beliefs were willing to refer clients with spiritual issues to the appropriate religious leader. At the same time, were the religious leaders willing to refer members of their congregation with "secular" problems (emotional and social) to a helping professional? (Notice how

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versity Press, 1980), *The Sickness unto Death*. Trans. Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin, 1989).

[92] Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 55.

spiritual was separated from emotional and social in the research.) Not surprisingly, he discovered that the helping professionals *never* referred patients or clients with spiritual problems to a religious leader, because of the assumption that a spiritual problem was only an emotional problem. By contrast, religious leaders were more than eager to refer members of their congregation to helping professionals. Equally revealing was the number of religious leaders who aspired to obtain a degree in one of the helping professions, to make them better able to offer advice to their members in need. Can we not say that for both groups, spiritual problems had been reduced to emotional problems and that religion was reduced to a subjective choice one made? If religion becomes in Kierkegaard's words a "quack doctor," how can it compete with the technologically driven helping professions?[93]

A number of critics have pointed out the deleterious impact of modern medicine on the overall health of the patient. Ivan Illich (*Medical Nemesis*), William Arney and Bernard Bergen (*Medicine and the Management of Living*), Ray Downing (*Biohealth*), Nortin Hadler (*The Last Well Person*), Ronald Dworkin (*Artificial Happiness*), and Richard Stivers (*Shades of Loneliness*), among others, have made criticisms that range from overtreatment, creating chronic patients, systemic iatrogenesis, biological reductionism, and the neglect of social factors, to the totalitarian direction of medicine to control every aspect of life.[94]

Medicine has become part of the "happiness industry," not just the health industry. Health and happiness are two of the chief mythological values of technological utopianism. The storyline is that science and technology will lead us to a state of perfect health and complete happiness in this world. The myth contradicts everything scripture teaches us about the world, sin, illness, and death. Medicine is now in the vanguard of an aggressive attack upon God, wisdom, and spirit.

In *Artificial Happiness*, anesthesiologist Ronald Dworkin argues that our culture is preoccupied with artificial happiness. He identifies four ways of obtaining artificial happiness: psychotropic drugs, alternative medicine, intensive exercise, and spirituality. Real happiness, he claims, is earned by assuming responsibility for our actions, by effort, and by concern for others. Artificial happiness is happiness on the cheap— a superficial, transitory mood. Artificial happiness covers over and compensates for widespread loneliness and unhappiness.

Most telling is the tendency of medicine to appropriate spirituality. First, spirituality had to be separated from religion and then become an end in itself. Second, spirituality had to be reduced to a biochemical phenomenon. Since medicine had asserted that

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[93] Soren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination, Judge for Yourself!* Trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 80.

[94] Ivan Illich, *Medical Nemesis* (New York: Pantheon, 1976), William Arney and Bernard Bergen, *Medicine and the Management of Living* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), Raymond Downing, *Biohealth* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), Nortin Handler, *The Last Well Person* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), Ronald Dworkin, *Artificial Happiness* (New York: Carroll and Graff, 2006), Richard Stivers, *Shades of Loneliness* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

feelings were biochemical at bottom, spiritual feelings were part of medicine's domain. Dworkin states that "the medical profession now controls all three dimensions of life—the body, the mind, and the spirit."[95]

Scripture teaches us that our relationship to God is the most important factor in our overall health. Modern medicine teaches us that nothing is more important than the health and happiness of our bodies. Modern medicine aspires to rival God in the control of illness and health, but ends up an empty idol.

About the Author

Richard Stivers is Distinguished Professor of Sociology Emeritus, Illinois State University.

Sin as Addiction in Our "Brave New World"

Richard Stivers

We know from scripture that humans sin, are born in sin, and are in bondage to sin. Biblical ideas of sin have a hard time being recognized today, however. Liberal Christianity has de-emphasized sin or reduced it to injustice and inequality. Conservative Christianity has tended to equate sin with personal immorality. In either instance, the truth about sin has been diminished. As S0ren Kierkegaard reminded us, sin is not merely a matter of discrete sins but of an orientation, a way of life. Furthermore, scripture makes sin a spiritual matter, not just a moral issue. Idolatry is the worst sin.

To overcome sin we must contest various evil powers as well as our own desires. In *If You are the Son of God*, Jacques Ellul argues that one of the meanings of sin is that of an external power that influences or even controls us.[96] The evil powers that scripture reveals to us do not have an independent existence; they exist only in and through their relations to us. But they are real! There is no principle of evil nor an evil god. In a sense, the evil powers are our unintended creation. Money and political power, for example, are evil powers. Money and politics are not evil in themselves but in the spiritual value we attribute to them.

Scripture indicates that sin is both individual and corporate. The very concept of the "world" suggests as much. Cultures are anchored by a sense of the sacred, that is, by that which is experienced as absolute power, reality, and meaning. Examples of the sacred include nature, the tribe, money, and the nation state. The socially constructed sacred (tacitly, not consciously) provides both meaning and the basis for control in society. All social institutions obtain cultural authority as a result. *Exousia* refers to a spiritual power that the social group employs beyond that which it receives from its cultural mandate. The social group thus becomes more than the sum of its parts, spiritually and not just psychologically. But *exousia* refers to a material power as well.

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[95] Dworkin, *Artificial Happiness*, 215.

[96] Jacques Ellul, *If You Are the Son of God*. Trans. Anne-Marie Andreasson-Hogg (Eugene, OR:

All members of the group are motivated by covetousness and the will to power, which are the source of sin. The social group provides an absolute identity for the individual and excites the individual's desire through its internal competition for wealth and power. Hence the group is held together in part by the negative unity of sin. Social institutions do not fully control the will to power, for, as Max Weber noted, the exercise of power invariably exceeds the limits that cultural authority imposes on it. This excessive power (*exousia*) is both material and spiritual, power and value, human and alien. Sin is, in turn, both internal and external, individual and collective.

Scripture is replete with figures of speech, especially metaphors. God, for instance, is king, fortress, shepherd, and so forth. A metaphor is not to be taken literally, of course; it entails a comparison. What is less well known is compared to what is better known: God is compared to a fortress. No one metaphor is sufficient, for each metaphor reveals different aspects of the phenomenon. To say that "love is a rose" suggests that love blooms and fades, is fragrant, and is capable of inflicting pain. "Love is a journey" implies that love is not static and that the movement may be more important than the final destination. Unlike the logical concept, metaphor never permits us to pretend to grasp the phenomenon as it is in itself. The numerous metaphors about God are a warning not to claim to define and know God as He is. We apprehend God by comparison.

Often neglected in discussions of metaphor is the status of the better-known term. For metaphor to be vital, the better-known term must be common. The metaphorical comparison necessitates reflection on both terms. Consequently, we learn more about what we ordinarily take for granted, the better-known term. This will become apparent as we examine the following metaphors of sin.

The most prevalent metaphor for sin in scripture is sin is bondage or slavery. John, Paul, and Peter refer to sin this way. Jesus says, "Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). Paul states, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). Peter proclaims, "They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; for whatever overcomes a man, to that he is enslaved" (2 Pet. 2:19). Slavery was widespread in the Roman world, and it was well understood that it takes away secular freedom. In attempting to understand sin, which destroys Christian freedom, the early Christians employed the metaphor that "sin is slavery." In doing so, they make us reflect on the *institution* of slavery.

In *The Ethics of Freedom*, Jacques Ellul suggests that "sin is alienation" is the metaphor that best resonates with our experiences today.[97] Ellul was not a Marxist, but he nonetheless employed Marx's concept of alienation. Under industrialized capitalism, the worker was alienated from his work, that is, he lost ownership and control

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Wipf and Stock, 2014).

[97] Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*. Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), ch. 1.

over the process of work and the product. His work became merely a means of profit for the capitalist, who had made him a "wage slave." Because work was central to Marx's view of the human being, self-alienation followed alienation from work. To be alienated means to be possessed by another. Ellul's book was published in 1975, and parts of it were written in the 1960s. He understood that technology had become a more important factor than capitalism in the organization of society. Consequently, he applied the concept of alienation in a new way to demonstrate that in replacing human experience with objectified expertise, technology was itself alienating.

I think that today, however, another metaphor is more appropriate: "Sin is addiction." Before examining addiction as a metaphor for sin, I should point out that all three metaphors, enslavement, alienation, and addiction, suggest being possessed by a person or force. Karl Barth once said that rather than say, "I have faith," I should say, "Faith has me." The three metaphors for sin suggest that I should say, "Sin has me," rather than, "I sin." In addition, all three metaphors reveal something about the larger society. To be enslaved makes manifest the institution of slavery; to be alienated reveals the institutionofindustrializedcapitalism;tobeaddicteduncoversthe technological system.

I will not attempt to define addiction in scientific terms. Is it physical, psychological, or both? Are there degrees of addiction? Instead, I will employ the term in its colloquial sense: something we can't seem to stop doing even though it's not necessary for our survival. Or a compulsion from which we can't or don't want to escape. Most people associate addiction with drugs and alcohol. Increasing numbers of people talk about addiction to social media, but the list of addictions keeps growing.

Julian Taber, who is a therapist to gambling addicts, developed the Consumer Lifestyle Index/Appetite Inventory.[98] It attempts to be a comprehensive list of addictions. The range of addictions is enormous: gambling for money, lying, laxatives, shopping, petty theft, sugar-based foods, tobacco products, exercise, talking for talking's sake, religious activity, work for the sake of being busy, trying to get attention for its own sake, self-help groups, and so forth. The obvious conclusion is that anything can become addictive. In "The Acceleration of Addictiveness," Paul Graham argues that technological progress brings more addictiveness.[99] Technological progress creates ever more products and services to which we may become addicted. Addiction to technology is the necessary result of technological progress. My point is not that addiction is omnipresent but that more of us are perceiving it this way. Talk of addiction brings in more conversationalists every day.

I will discuss addictions to machine gambling, video games, and social media in order to examine the metaphor that sin is addiction. We spend more money on casino gambling than on music, movies, and sports events together. Most of the gambling occurs with slot machines and video poker. One hundred and fifty-five million Amer-

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[98] Cited in Natasha Schull, *Addiction by Design* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 242–43.

[99] Paul Graham, "The Acceleration of Addictiveness." www.paulgraham.com/addiction.html. Accessed 12 November 2013.

icans play video games and spend more than twice as much on them as they do on movie tickets. Soon virtually everyone will have a smartphone or similar device to use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media. Not all players and users are addicts, but much has already been written about the heavy use of these technologies as if it were an addiction.

Enslavement, alienation, and addiction all have sociological contexts. In the former, the context is an institution, in the latter, an entire social environment—technology. Following Jacques Ellul, by "technology" I mean both machines and nonmaterial technologies such as bureaucracy, advertising, and propaganda. Beginning in the eighteenth century, material and nonmaterial technologies advanced together. Nature and human society were increasingly brought under technology's purview. With the advent of the computer, it became possible to coordinate major technologies to form a system at the level of information. Technology has thus become a system. Human society now opens to two environments nature and technology.

Modern technology shattered the unity of culture. Technology supplants experience and meaning; it is solely about the most efficient (powerful) means of acting. Society is organized at the level of technology but disorganized at cultural and psychological levels. Culture is randomly created and fragmented in its meaning and purpose as a creation. The result is a plethora of moralities and art and entertainment styles. The lack of cultural unity makes psychological fragmentation inevitable: we are reduced to being role players who create multiple images for ourselves and others.

Technological growth has been accelerating for over 150 years, although not evenly across the various sectors. Moreover, there appears to be no purpose or end to it. Implicit in the growth of technology is the mandate "If it can be done, it must be done." The traditional tension between what is and what ought to be has been superseded by that between what is and what is possible. Consequently we have only limited moral control over the employment of technology. We have become as fatalistic about technology as so-called "primitive" people were about nature. Hence we have an irrational faith in technology.

Technology has an impact on the individual's psyche just as great as its influence on culture. Technology directly and indirectly provokes a need for ecstasy. The very point of addiction is to create a continuous ecstatic state. Ecstasy is an altered state of consciousness, an escape from the rational self. Ecstasy is a kind of high that can be achieved by rapid, repetitive movement, continuous loud music, drugs, and alcohol, for example.

Cultural anthropologists have a category of religion they call "ecstatic religion." It includes rites organized to produce an ecstatic state in the participants. Such rites may involve orgies, drunkenness, and violence. Victor Turner maintains that the rites designed for ecstasy bring about a communion of equals, a *communitas*, whereby status differences and power relationships are temporarily set aside.[100] A feeling results of one

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[100] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977).

in all and all in one. Some have extended the meaning of ecstatic communion to include communion with machines. Today we have technology to help us achieve ecstasy.

Technological progress has increased the pace of life: we do more in less time. Speed has become an end in itself. Time urgency entails a compulsion to do as many things as rapidly as possible, including a preoccupation with time, rushed speech and eating, driving too fast and angrily, waiting impatiently, and feeling irritable and bored when inactive. Concurrently, we suffer from time scarcity. Family life and leisure mimic the speed of the workplace. With mother and father both working and the children in a plethora of organized activities, parents have to become efficiency experts. Tourism and vacations typically involve stuffing as many activities as possible into the shortest period of time.

Speed itself can produce a mild ecstatic experience. Milan Kundera observes that "speed is the form of ecstasy the technical revolution has bestowed on man."[101] We internalize technological stimuli. Wolfgang Schivelbush refers to this as the "stimulus shield."[102] We adjust to and normalize the ways that technology alters our sense of time, place, speed, sight, and sound. Each time a faster mode of transportation was introduced, people had to adjust to it, and eventually the previous mode seemed hopelessly slow. Humans internalized the speed of the train, for example, and later, when given a choice, they rejected the horse and buggy. Today we internalize the speed of faster computers and are impatient when forced to use slower ones. We come to resemble the faster technology that stimulates us: we act by reflex, not reflection.

Technology creates a need for ecstasy as an escape mechanism. Anthropologist Roger Caillois observed that the more extensive and intensive the social controls in a society, the more exaggerated the ecstatic response.[103] We cannot tolerate living in a social world that is too ordered. Never before have humans lived with so many rules—technical, bureaucratic, and legal. The proliferation of administrative laws, bureaucratic norms, and technical rules that accompany each new technology makes it impossible for anyone to be aware of them, let alone remember them. We feel the pressure to escape them in irrational ways: drugs, alcohol, sex, sports, gambling, and so forth. A Columbia University psychiatrist found that the harder college students (especially males) studied during the week, the more they felt the need to escape the rational order of obtaining good grades by giving themselves over to instinctual desire and temporarily losing their conscious selves.[104]

Technology indirectly produces loneliness from which an escape is necessary. Christian psychiatrist J. H. van den Berg demonstrated that the loss of a common morality beginning in the eighteenth century in the West resulted in human relationships be-

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[101] Milan Kundera, *Slowness* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 2.

[102] Wolfgang Schivelbush, *The Railway Journey* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

[103] Roger Caillois, *Man and the Sacred*. Trans. Meyer Barash (New York: Free Press, 1959). See also Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*. Trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964), chapter 5.

[104] Herbert Hendin, *The Age of Sensation* (New York: Norton, 1975).

coming vague and dangerous.[105] A common morality in society meant that one could trust people even if one did not especially like them. The decline in trust makes everyone a potential enemy. Loneliness ensues. Van den Berg argues that loneliness is the nucleus of psychiatry, and that all psychiatric disorders are intertwined because all patients share the same existence. For many of us, loneliness does not result in a fullblown psychiatric disorder, but the number of Americans in therapy, self-help groups, and on drugs for depression is legion.

Loneliness manifests itself in many ways, some of which conceal the loneliness. One of them is the need to talk incessantly, sometimes to anyone who will listen, about trivial matters. I can't be lonely if I am talking to people! With the adventofemailand-socialmedia,wecanbeincommunicationwith others anytime we feel the need. The result is the ecstasy of communication. The speed by which information is transmitted from person to person produces a mild ecstatic state.

If technology creates a need for ecstatic release, it also produces the means to achieve ecstasy. Machine gambling is a prime example. In *Addiction by Design,* Natasha Schull interviews gambling addicts and discovers that what they most crave, even more than winning, is the "zone," in which "time, space, and social identity are suspended in the mechanical rhythm of a repeating process."[106] In other words, a state of ecstasy. Gamblers enter the zone when their actions and the functioning of the machine become indistinguishable. Schull borrows the term "perfect contingency" to describe the sense that addicted gamblers have of a perfect alignment between their actions and the machine's response. They prefer "sameness, repetition, rhythm, and routine."[107] Slot machines and video poker are the most popular gambling formats. As gamblers develop a tolerance for the technology (stimulus shield), the games become faster and more complex. For instance, in video poker, Triple Play Draw Poker allows players to play three games at once and make three times as many bets. Triple Play has given way to Five Play, Ten Play, Fifty Play, and even Hundred Play Poker.

Video game addicts too desire to merge with the machine, to achieve communion with it. In *God in the Machine: Video Games as Spiritual Pursuit*, Liel Leibovitz, himself a video game player, describes how reflex replaces cognitive awareness the greater one's skill and mastery becomes. His experience is mainly with the World of Zelda. Repetition is the foundation of play, from the "ballet of thumbs" to returning to the same play section without stop and with little if any variation. The spiritual pursuit that Leibovitz claims is the deeper rationale for playing video games is ecstasy. If ecstatic religion is a legitimate category of religion, then video games are a subcategory. In defense of his interpretation, Leibovitz argues that video games teach one the joy of learning to love the game and designer above all, of giving up "all other ways of

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[105] J. H. van den Berg, *The Changing Nature of Man*. Trans. H. F. Croes (New York: Norton, 1961).
[106] Schull, *Addiction by Design*, 1–27.
[107] Schull, *Addiction by Design*, chapter 6.

being in the world" and of "understanding one's place in the world."[108] He calls this a kind of Augustinian condition. I am not arguing that his interpretation is correct but only that he points out how seriously we should take the pursuit of ecstasy through our technologies.

The social media are not ostensibly about communion with a machine but with other people. We must remember, however, that every technology that permits us to communicate with others mediates the relationship. Social media "addicts" appear to spend less time servicing their addiction than do gambling and video game addicts. Nonetheless, a large number of social media users admit that they cannot give up their devices, if only for a day. In the smartphone industry, it is commonly thought that people check their phones at least 150 times a day. Some are even bedeviled by phantom ringing or vibrating phones. One third of Americans claim they would rather give up sex than their cell phones. But is this really about communion with others and creating a community?

In *Alone Together*, Sherry Turkle discovers that the community of one's friends, say, on Facebook, is both fragile and enslaving. On social media, people are role players, presenting a self to others that will be most accepted and admired. The relationships established in social media networks are purely aesthetical and superficial. Only face-to-face moral relationships are deep and truly passionate, Kierkegaard has noted. Indeed, the more time one spends on Facebook, the more lonely one feels. Turkle observes that many young people prefer texting someone to talking to her. The reason is that a call involves more commitment than a text. A call could prove unpleasant and demanding.[109]

The social media intensify the urge to conform to the group. Turkle discovered that some young people believe that everything they do in public will end up on Facebook or its equivalent. This leads to "anticipatory conformity." She also claims that the social media are producing "group feelings," or ecstatic communion.[110] Elias Canetti terms a group that becomes a unified whole the "open crowd," the truest expression of the crowd phenomenon.[111] Within the open crowd there is a sense of absolute equality, because all divisions among people are momentarily obliterated. The ecstasy that ensues from the use of the social media is not communion that establishes a community, but communion that creates an open crowd, always poised to become a mob. There is no freedom and love in the crowd. Because they wear the mask of love, the social media are the most pernicious of the addicting technologies.

Because we internalize technological stimuli (stimulus shield), we develop a tolerance for them and demand that they be even more intense. This is a classic problem in the acceleration of addiction. The technology industry is accommodating; it designs these technologies to be ever more addictive.

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[108] Liel Leibovitz, *God in the Machine* (Conshohocken: Templeton, 2013), 125.
[109] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), chapter 10.
[110] Turkle, *Alone Together*, 262, 177.
[111] Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*. Trans. Victor Gollancz (New York: Seabird, 1978), 16–17.

Those who design information and communication technologies and technological products design them to be addictive. In *Hooked*, Nir Eyal discusses in detail how to make products habit-forming.[112] The author has a background in the video game industry and advertising and has taught courses on applied consumer psychology at the Stanford Graduate School of Business. His book is a manual on how to make technologies and products attractive and addictive. He makes no pretense that it is not about manipulating the consumer.

In his model of how to "hook" the consumer, the "trigger" is what sets the behavior in motion. "External triggers" contain information with directions about what to do next. Advertising and word of mouth can motivate the consumer to require a new app for her smartphone, for example. Eyal maintains that the key to creating addiction is the "internal trigger." Associating a product with desire or fear appears to be the supreme internal trigger. The strongest emotional triggers are visual images. Eyal mentions that the internal trigger for Facebook is the fear of missing out, and, for Instagram, the fear of losing a special moment. The design of variable rewards is essential. Research has indicated that the anticipation of a reward, rather than the reward itself, motivates users. One receives a reward on occasion but not constantly. Those cherished images of family and friends are received only intermittently.

In *Addiction by Design,* Natasha Schull explores in great detail how the machine-gambling industry probes the psyche of the addict as an aid in designing gambling machines. Addicted gamblers want to play multiple hands or games as rapidly as possible without interruption. Variable rewards are built into the software of the machine to increase with the frequency of the smaller separate bets that gamblers prefer to make. Gamblers can thus enter "the zone" more quickly and stay there longer. Video game designers use a similar psychology to make their games more addictive.

We have entered a new phase of technological progress, in which there is a conscious effort to make us addicted to technology. This is nothing less than an intentional technological totalitarianism. Early on, we were only dimly aware of the totalitarian nature of the technological system. The technological system has now reached a stage in which experts openly discuss the desirability of the total psychological control of humans. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* almost perfectly anticipates today's technological totalitarianism.In his 1932 novel, Huxley talks about "conscription by consumption."[113] We are free, but only as consumers. In his dystopia, freedom is redefined as happiness. In this society, moral relationships are prohibited—no families or close friends—but only transitory, aesthetical ones. Perhaps his most brilliant insight was that pleasure was the chief agent of control. Sex, "soma" (an all-purpose drug for any psychological discomfort), and "the feelies" (cinema with full sensory stimuli) were the main obligatory pleasures. Huxley saw that group therapy would reinforce the controls technicians had established. Are we not in a brave new world with all our pharmaceuticals, self-help

[112] Nir Eyal, *Hooked* (New York: Penguin, 2014).
[113] Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1932), 33.

groups, social media, advertising, public relations, propaganda, experts on every aspect of life, culture reduced to its lowest level—entertainment—and widespread family dissolution?

What does addiction tell us about individual and corporate sin? Addiction takes possession to its zenith. Slavery and alienation both entail possession but not to the same extent. The metaphor of addiction demonstrates as well that pleasure is the key to sin's control over us. We love our sin. Addiction reveals the accelerating nature of sin: it is dynamic. We quickly sink deeper into sin. Finally, addiction reveals the totalitarian nature of sin. Sin wants all of us, all the time. These ideas are explicit or implicit in scripture but not in the form of a single metaphor if only because addiction as we know it did not exist then.

Earlier I suggested that a metaphor makes us reflect on the better-known term, not just the lesser-known term. "Sin as slavery" tells us how the institution of slavery takes away our freedom or enslaves us. "Sin as alienation" informs us how industrialized capitalism strips away our freedom or alienates us. "Sin as addiction" instructs us about how the technological system eliminates our freedom or makes us addicts. Each metaphor invites us to reflect on the specific ways that the world, as the place of sin, controls us.

My point is not that gambling, playing video games, and using social media are evil in themselves but rather that *exousia* are at work in our social institutions with the intent of turning us into idolators. In our world, idolatry is best understood as addiction to technology.

About the Author

Richard Stivers is Distinguished Professor of Sociology Emeritus, Illinois State University.

Review of Andre Vitalis, *The Uncertain Digital Revolution* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2016), 118pp.

Jeff Shaw

AndreVitalis is an emeritus professorat the University of Bordeaux, and his newest book, *The Uncertain Digital Revolution*, is one of many examinations of the impact that various technologies have had on the human condition and on contemporary society. Vitalis has also taught at the University of Nantes and the University of Rennes. He has been a consultant to the National Commission forInformatics and Civil Liberties, and to the Council of Europe, thus bringing the experience that he has gained in the classroom to the public forum. He brings an interdisciplinary approach to his work, and *The Uncertain Digital Revolution* presents the readernot only with his own thinking but also with ideas and suggestions from a number of philosophers who will certainly be familiarto readers of the *Ellul Forum*, such as Ivan Illich and Jurgen Habermas.

The Uncertain Digital Revolution is not a book about Ellul *per se*, but the book itself is an example of a style of inquiry that one finds in Ellul's work. Chapters such as "Security overLiberty" and "Digitalization and Revolution" give the readeran opportunity to engage with ideas from a scholar who has approached these important topics with the Ellulian dialectic at the forefront. Jacques Ellul himself is mentioned in the book, but this is Andre Vitalis's own evaluation of the digital phenomenon. Vitalis notes, "Ellul, known forhis technical analyses, has always paid great attention to IT by progressively making successive evaluations as the phenomenon has advanced" (100). Vitalis takes this successive evaluation and continues with it, leading the study of this critical component of *technique* and advancing it in the same spirit as one would have found from Ellul orMcLuhan.

A short book, *The Uncertain Digital Revolution* is highly recommended to Ellul scholars and those with an interest in his work, as well as to general readers. One will come away with an appreciation forthe pros and cons of the rapid strides that digital technologies have had and continue to have in areas such as privacy and security. Andre Vitalis has written extensively on this topic, and I highly recommend his work to those seeking to think critically about the human condition in the twenty-first century.

About the Author

Jeff Shaw is Adjunct Professorin the humanities department at Salve Regina University in Newport, Rhode Island. He is the author of *Illusions of Freedom: Thomas Merton and Jacques Ellul on Technology and the Human Condition*, published by Wipf & Stock.

Issue #60 Fall 2017

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For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Jacques Ellul, November 29th, 1944. Official identity photo, Municipal Council of Bordeaux archives privees famille Ellul / © Jerome Ellul

Contents

Editorial

Jeff Shaw

Welcome to the 60th edition of the *Ellul Forum*. This issue addresses two topics central to Ellul's thought—dialectics, and the homogenization of much of society, and the human condition as well. Authors Kevin Garrison and Richard Kirkpatrick provide their views on these two important topics, and we invite your comments and responses in the form of additional articles for publication in future editions of the *Forum*. Perhaps these articles will provide readers with a framework for constructing their own arguments for presentation at the next IJES conference in 2018. Please mark your calendars for this event, which will take place June 28–30, 2018 at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada. Speakers will include Walter Brueggemann, Frederic Rognon, David Gill, and Iwan Russell-Jones. You will not want to miss this event, and we hope that it builds upon the enthusiasm generated at the Berkeley conference last year.

For more information about the conference, please go to www.ellul.org. For registration information, go to http://ellul-2018conference.weebly.com. The cost is $120 for regular registration and $60 for student registration (includes banquet). The theme of the conference is "Jacques Ellul and the Bible: A Cross-Disciplinary Exploration."

Jacques Ellul is best known as one of the premier voices of the 20th century analyzing the emergence, characteristics, and challenges of the "technological society"—the growing and seemingly irresistible dominance of technological tools, processes, and values over the whole of life and the whole of the world. But the Bordeaux sociologist simultaneously produced almost as many works of biblical study and reflection as he did works of sociology. In these studies, Ellul delivered brilliantly creative insights as

well as provocative challenges to traditional theology. All serious students of Ellul, whether members of faith communities, like Ellul (in the French Reformed Church), or not, like his colleague and best friend Bernard Charbonneau, have found interaction with his theological writings an essential complement to the study of his great sociological works. This conference will seek a multi-perspectival hearing of scripture, stimulated by Ellul's works.

If you would like to submit a proposal for a presentation paper on Ellul's engagement with the bible, contact dgill@ethixbiz. com by the first week of October.

Jeff Shaw, Managing Editor

Jacques Ellul's Dialectical Theology: Embracing Contradictions about the Kingdom in the New Testament

Kevin Garrison

ABSTRACT

Jacques Ellul frequently uses "dialectics" as a tool for biblical understanding. Though Ellul expounds on his idea of a "dialectical theology" at different moments in his large collection of works, he rarely gives a clear view of how and where dialectics are present in the New Testament, specifically as it relates to the idea of the "kingdom of heaven." In order to make Ellul's ideas about theology more accessible to people unfamiliar with dialectics, this article attempts to do four things: 1) *define* Ellul's idea of dialectics, 2) explore *why* dialectics are necessary for understanding the bible, 3) identify *where* several of these dialectics occur in the New Testament, and 4) explain *how* they are relevant to contemporary Christians and Ellulian scholars.

INTRODUCTION

Most Christians reject the idea of contradictions in the bible, especially individuals from traditions that hold to the ideas of biblical literalism or the inerrancy of scripture.[114] The very word "contradiction" suggests that what God has spoken ("diction") has been refuted by oppositional statements ("contra"), and many Christians find it difficult to believe in a God who cannot provide a consistent narrative across multiple time periods and authors. However, an entire theological tradition exists which argues that there *are* contradictions in the bible and also attempts to understand how the paradoxes that emerge from those contradictions can enrich our understanding of theology. Called "dialectical theology," it is a tradition most often and most clearly associated with writings of S0ren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and, most importantly for this essay, Jacques Ellul (1912–1992), the French sociologist most famous

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[114] Jacob Van Vleet, *Dialectical Theology and Jacques Ellul: An Introductory Exposition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 49.

for his books *The Technological So-ciety*[115] and *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*.[116]

In this essay, I want to use Ellul's writings to provide both Christians and Ellulian scholars with a shorthand understanding of dialectical theology that can potentially challenge and enrich their readings of the bible, especially by looking at the New Testament idea of the "kingdom of heaven." For those interested in a much more detailed analysis of Ellul's dialectical theology, I recommend Jacob Van Vleet's 2016 publication *Dialectical Theology and Jacques Ellul*.[117] Or for those with time, the best source for understanding Ellul is to read Ellul himself. However, Ellul wrote more than 50 books in his lifetime and hundreds of articles, and more importantly, he rarely provides insights into his methods of inquiry—the so-called master keys that unlock the doors to the complexity of his thinking. As such, this essay is designed to accomplish several things: 1) *define* Ellul's idea of dialectics, 2) explore *why* contradictions and dialectics are necessary for understanding the New Testament, 3) share *where* several of these dialectics occur, and 4) explain *how* they are relevant for study. In the final section, I hope to share insights into how Ellul's dialectical theology has personally challenged my wife and me to re-think commonplaces in Christianity.

DIALECTICS

First, though, what is a dialectic? Dialectics has a rich philosophical history. In Greek philosophy, a dialectic is closely associated with a dialogue—a method of discovering truth as a group of individuals discuss, argue, and debate ideas. Plato's philosophy was expounded in written dialogues, such as his famous work the *Republic*,[118] where Socrates (via the Socratic method) attempted to serve as an intellectual gadfly who pestered the populace with questions designed to challenge them. More recently in 19th-century Germany, dialectics was re-envisioned as a method for discovering truth via a logical method. Called a Hegelian dialectic, truth emerges not from dialogue but from a thesis encountering an anti-thesis and then creating a synthesis that emerges from the two oppositions. Subsequent philosophers, such as Karl Marx and S0ren Kierkegaard, used Hegel's dialectic to create entire philosophical systems that could be applied to even history itself. For instance, Marx's work in the *Communist Manifesto*[119] was heavily influenced by dialectics, and his idea of material dialectics argued that the working class would eventually rise against the ruling class in a dialectical struggle, and the end result would see progress in social history.

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[115] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*. Trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage Books, 1964).

[116] Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*. Trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1965).

[117] Van Vleet, *Dialectical Theology and Jacques Ellul*.

[118] Plato, *Republic*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2000).

[119] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Vintage, 1998).

Garrison, Kevin. "Jacques Ellul's Dialectical Theology: Embracing Contradictions about the Kingdom in the New Testament." *Ellul Forum* 60 (2017): 3–10. © Kevin Garrison, CC BY-NC-SA.

Ellul was heavily influenced by Marx; he first read Marx at the age of 17, and he "plunged into Marx's thinking with incredible joy."[120] However, Ellul's understanding of dialectics takes a radical departure from both Marx and most philosophical traditions. Two years after reading Marx, Ellul had a "very brutal and very sudden conversion"[121] to Christianity, and for the rest of his life he was unable to reconcile the two opposing systems: Christianity and Marxism. In fact, Ellul argues that his understanding of dialectics emerged from his struggle to be both a Christian and a Marxist. He writes that "I was sometimes torn between the two extremes, and sometimes reconciled; but I absolutely refused to abandon either one."[122] This lived-world tension—how can one serve both Jesus and the man famous for claiming that religion was an opium?—heav-ily influenced Ellul's writings. He frequently wrote sociological books that have a counterpart in theological books, such as *The Technological Society*,[123] which describes the problem of *technique*, and *The Ethics of Freedom*,[124] which describes potential responses.

What makes Ellul's understanding of dialectics unique is that he thinks it is a mistake for a synthesis to always emerge out of a dialectical struggle. Instead, dialectics work best when the thesis and antithesis remain in tension, when someone claims two statements that cannot both be. Ellul writes of the "positivity of negativity"—that is, "if the positive remains alone, it remains unchanged: stable and inert. A positive— for example, an uncontested society, a force without counterforce, a man without dialogue, an unchallenged teacher, a church with no heretics, a single party with no rivals—will be shut up in the indefinite repetition of its own image."[125] Saying "no" or introducing a "negation" into a positive will radically transform a situation via a subsequent dialectical struggle. Ellul rejects the idea of progress—that a synthesis must always emerge; simply challenging the positive with a negative will transform "the situation,"[126] and that is enough. The result of dialectics is to take contradictory statements and live out the tension rather than trying to resolve the contradiction with a synthesis.

Most importantly, Ellul used his understanding of dialectics to inform his understanding of biblical exegesis, building on the work of Karl Barth and S0ren Kierkegaard's exegeti-cal methods. Ellul went so far as to claim that the "concept of

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[120] Jacques Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks On His Life and Work.* Ed. William H. Vander-burg; Trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Seabury, 1981), 5.

[121] Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age*, 14.

[122] Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age*, 15.

[123] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society.*

[124] Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom.* Trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976).

[125] Jacques Ellul, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretative Essays.* Ed. Clifford Christians and Jay Van Hook (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 295.

[126] Ellul, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretative Essays*, 296.

contradiction [without synthesis] is specifically a biblical concept."[127] Most Christians already assume some level of dialectical thought. Consider one of the more common examples: the *Incarnation*. The Incarnation is a contradiction that remains in an unresolved dialectical tension: how can Jesus, who became human, still be God? As the Nicene Creed states, Jesus is both "very God of very God" but also "was made man."[128] The tension is necessary, however. To claim Jesus as only God would place him in the realm of the transcendent. To claim Jesus as only man would place him as unable to answer the problem of human sin—how can a man, alone, undo what Adam's transgression did, without that man also being divine? The two images together give a fuller perspective of the infinite range of God.

When consistently applied to the bible, dialectics (as a method of interpretation) transforms Christianity from questions of orthodoxy (i.e., the correct interpretation) to a series of personal challenges to the church. It is worth quoting Ellul at length. He writes that a biblical dialectic "makes man's relation to God not a repetition, a fixity, a ritual, a scrupulous submission, but a permanent invention, a new creation of the one with the other, a challenge, a love affair, an adventure whose outcome can never be known in advance."[129] With this passage, Ellul brings back the mystery of God. The miraculous. The tension. The challenges. The impossibilities. Paul Tillich in his article on dialectical theology argues that a better term is "paradoxical" rather than "dialectical,"[130] but the end result is largely the same: dialectics and paradoxes embrace contradictions and tensions in the bible rather than looking for logical reconciliation. The resulting dialectical struggle pits one idea against a competing idea for the sake of freedom, truth, understanding, and faith.

CONTRADICTIONS

The "inerrancy of scripture" and "biblical literalism" traditions have heavily influenced modern biblical exegesis; therefore, before looking at several examples of biblical dialectics, it would be worthwhile to establish why the fear of biblical contradictions is unfounded.

First, to claim that the bible can have no contradictions provides a *logical* standard of measurement that the bible itself does not suggest. Theology—the *logos* or logic of God— assumes that we can understand God logically. However, logic is a human creation, not a biblical interpretation standard. That is, the law of non-contradiction states that if A is equal to B, then to claim that A is also NOT equal to B would be a logical contradiction. In our lived-world experiences, the law of non-contradiction is a necessity, for contradictions are called dishonesty, equivocation, lying, or deception. Humans cannot state, simultaneously, things such as, "Please close the door. Don't close the door," without causing inconsistencies in communication.

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[127] Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*. Trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 253.

[128] Nicene Creed, https://www.ccel.org/creeds/nicene.creed. *html*.

[129] Ellul, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretative Essays*, 299.

[130] Paul Tillich, "What is Wrong with the 'Dialectical' Theology?" *Journal of Religion* 15.2 (1935):

However, this does not mean that God himself adheres to the law of non-contradiction. Isaiah tells us that God's "thoughts are not your thoughts," (Isa. 55:8),[131] a claim that C. S. Lewis replicates when he claims that Aslan isn't a "*tame lion*."[132] Similarly, Peter wrote that "with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Pet. 3:8). Human logic does not necessarily apply to God. Therefore, when we encounter biblical "tension," Ellul argues that we should not search for a way to relax it and "add words aiming at a *logical* reconciliation,"[133] because the bible is "paradox" and "mystery," not "*logical*, organized thought."[134] If anything, we should expect that a God who miraculously inserts himself into history via the person of Jesus would far surpass any attempt to place him into the finite (and logical) mind of humans.

Secondly, analyzing contradictions via dialectical theology does not mean that we get bogged down in questions of scientific and historical accuracy, such as debating the discrepancies among the gospels regarding Jesus' death and resurrection. Instead, dialectical theology exhibits a concern for a *big-picture* interpretation of the bible. For Ellul, the Old and New Testaments are not primarily history, science, literature, a morality, or a book of wisdom. Rather, the bible is a challenge to its readers. The bible is unified by writers who record moments when God speaks and then narrate how those words work to reshape individuals and societies. The bible, from the early patriarchs to the judges to the kings to the prophets to the arrival of Jesus (God's word made flesh), shares how ordinary people encounter the word of God and then are changed, oftentimes radically. Genesis begins with God speaking the world into existence. Adam encounters God's voice in a garden, Moses encounters it in a flame, and Elijah in a still voice on the wind. Ezekiel hears it as rushing waters, Job experiences it as a thunderous roar, and Jesus begins his ministry after experiencing the voice of God in the form of a dove. For Ellul, it matters little how accurate the historical details are, or the representation of scientific knowledge. Rather, what matters is that the bible shares God speaking and humans responding. Today, when we read the bible, we participate in the tradition of the feast of tabernacles (Deut. 31:10–11) where we hear the word of God being spoken again. And again. And those words are then allowed to work on individuals and groups of individuals to change them, *regardless* of the historical accuracy of the claims.

Thirdly, the bible frequently *does* contradict itself. In fact, several contradictions define the Christian life and are taught in the modern church: the Incarnation (Is Jesus man, or God?), the Trinity (How can God be both one and three?), the process of salvation (Is it faith, or works?), living in the world (How does the Christian live

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127–45.

[131] All biblical quotations are from the New International Version.

[132] C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (New York: Collier, 1980), 180.

[133] Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe*. Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 38. Emphasis added.

[134] Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 25. Emphasis added.

in the world, but not be part of the world?), prayer (Are we supposed to pray, or does the Spirit intercede?) and so on. Or consider another simple example: Jesus is described both as the "lion of the tribe of Judah" and as a "sacrificial lamb." These metaphors provide us with competing images. A lion is a predator; a lamb is the prey. A lion is wild and untamed; a lamb is an agricultural product, subservient to human needs. A lion is powerful; a lamb is powerless. A lion is the king of beasts; a lamb is used in sacrifices. To describe Jesus in these two competing images provides us with an irreconcilable problem: Which is it? For Ellul, the answer is always: both.

A DIALECTICAL KINGDOM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In this section, I would like to focus on a single dialectic that is shared in the New Testament: the idea of the *kingdom of heaven*. As we'll see, the New Testament embraces several contradictory views of 1) the kingdom, 2) the kingdom's subjects, 3) the King, and 4) the King's return. As seen below, in Table 1, dialectical theology embraces these contradictory images, recognizing (as the circle implies) that we can never rest in one interpretation over the other. In the four subsequent sections we will explore each of these four contradictions, and in the conclusion I will share a personal example of how we can utilize these contradictory images to re-think our day-today experiences.

New Testament Contradictions	Interpretation 1	Interpretation 2
1) *Views of the Kingdom*	Absence: Near	Presence: Here
2) *Views of the Kingdom's Subjects*	Limited Salvation	Absence: Near
3) *Views of the King*	God as Judge: Lion	Absence: Near
4) *Views of the King's Return*	Not Yet	Absence: Near

Table 1: Dialectical Interpretation of the Kingdom of Heaven

New Testament Contradictions	Interpretation 1	Interpretation 2
1) Views of the Kingdom	Absence: Near	Presence: Here
2) Views of the Kingdom's Subjects	Limited Salvation	Absence: Near
3) Views of the King	God as Judge: Lion	Absence: Near
4) Views of the King's Return	Not Yet	Absence: Near

1) Conflicting Views of the Kingdom

Ellul begins his discussion of Christianity in *The Presence of the Kingdom*[135] where Jesus began his preaching: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt. 4:17). Most of Jesus' messages, sermons, parables, teachings, and prayers include a discussion about this kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount begins with the kingdom belonging to the poor in spirit and the persecuted. The Lord's Prayer invokes the coming of the kingdom. The 12 disciples are called to preach that the kingdom of heaven is near. The disciples quarrel about who is greatest in the kingdom. The parables begin with the injunction of "the kingdom of heaven is like ..." The end of the age is equated with the nearness of the kingdom. Jesus is called the king of the Jews.

What are we to make of this overwhelming discussion of a kingdom? The searchers for the "historical Jesus," such as James Tabor,[136] understand the prevalence of the word "kingdom" by arguing that Jesus and John the Baptist were partners in the insurrection that would overthrow the earthly kingdom of the Romans. But this is too simple, for Jesus claims that his kingdom is not of this world. Or, also according to the proponents of the "historical Jesus," perhaps the abundant mentioning of the kingdom is just an editorial preference of its authors. But again, this is insufficient as an explanation, because all four gospels contain frequent discussions of the kingdom—even John's gospel, the one most in opposition to the other three, tells Nicodemus that he must "see" (John 3:3) and "enter" (John 3:5) the kingdom of God by being born again. And most damaging to the "historical Jesus" claims comes from the fact that in the descriptions of the devil's temptation of Jesus, the devil offers "all the kingdoms of the world" (Matt. 4:8), and Jesus, if his mission was to re-take the kingdom for Israel, ironically refuses to take these kingdoms. And he does this *prior* to beginning his ministry. If Jesus' goal was to simply overthrow the Roman empire, then he should have accepted the devil's gift and saved himself months of persecution and eventually death.

So what, then, is this kingdom? Of primary importance, as already stated, is that Jesus begins his ministry in opposition to the kingdoms of the world. Before he preaches

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[135] Jacques Ellul, *The Presence ofthe Kingdom.* Trans. Olive Wyon (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1989).

[136] James Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

the nearness of *his* kingdom, he rejects outright the offer from devil to take authority and command over all of the *earthly* kingdoms. As Ellul says, "When Satan promises Jesus that he will give him these kingdoms, he is not lying. He can do so. He is the prince of this world. While it is true that all authority comes from God, it is also true that every manifestation of power is an expression of the might of Satan."[137] The kingdom of heaven is "not of this world" (John 18:36). If it was, then Jesus would have taken the offer from Satan and become the king of our current cities, governments, peoples, nations, empires, and rulers. But he doesn't.

More importantly, the kingdom is described exclusively in similes in the parables. The kingdom of heaven is *like* a mustard seed. The kingdom of heaven is *like* a treasure hidden in a field. The kingdom of heaven is *like* a net that was let down into a lake and caught all kinds of fish. Jesus does not give clear and precise descriptions of what the kingdom looks like, as if this kingdom could be described literally. This is important, for Jesus has already established a clear break of his kingdom from the world's kingdoms, and to then give a precise definition of his kingdom in terms of human language would be to equate the kingdom to *this* world—the very thing he has rejected. So figurative language is the only recourse, the only way to describe heaven's kingdom while still connecting to our lived-world experiences.

But perhaps most intriguing about the kingdom is how it is set in terms of an opposition, a dialectic of *absence* and *presence* (see Table 1). The kingdom is sometimes "near" (Matt. 4:17), and other times it is "in your midst" (Luke 17:21). It is sometimes something people should "seek" (Matt. 6:33), and other times it is something the disciples will "see" (Matt. 16:28). It is sometimes something to "enter" (Matt. 18:3), and other times it is "upon you" (Luke 11:20). Ellul bases most of his understanding of the New Testament on this dialectic, where "the whole deployment of the existence of the people of God (the church) and individual Christians is dialectic in the constant renewal of promise and fulfillment The kingdom

of heaven is among you, in the midst of you, or in you, but it will also come at the end of the age."[138]

2) Conflicting Views of the Kingdom's Subjects

A similar dialectic is revealed when attempting to determine *who* is a member of the kingdom of heaven: is the kingdom inclusive, or exclusive? *Universal* to all, or *limited* to some (see Table 1)? And how is a subject supposed to enter the kingdom—via human choice, or the grace of God?

Consider the question of choice. In Acts, Peter pleads with the crowd to "save themselves" (Acts 2:40) and 3,000 individuals "accepted his message" (Acts 2:41). But just a few sentences later, Luke claims that "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). These passages present an obvious tension: Who is in charge of salvation? Is it God who adds to the numbers, or is it the people

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[137] Ellul, *The Ethics ofFreedom*, 55.
[138] Ellul, *What I Believe*, 38.

who are commanded to save themselves? And later, Acts 10:44 states that "The Holy Spirit came on all who heard," and then, only three verses later, claims that "They have received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 10:47). Again, the contrast is to be noted. Who is in con-trol—the person, or the Spirit? The verb "came" suggests that salvation is an act of God, freely chosen in relationship to his people, offered as a gift. The verb "received" implies a human action, freely chosen *in spite* of the gift.

More importantly, the bible suggests two possibilities in regard to who will be saved: the all, or the few. The verses in support of *universal salvation* are numerous, and Ellul was a proponent of universal salvation. God is "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). "Every knee shall bow" (Rom. 14:11). Jesus died "once for all" (Rom. 6:10). But the verses that support *limited salvation* are just as numerous. "The one who believes in me will live" (John 11:25). Only "those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27) will enter the New Jerusalem. When Jesus is asked, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" (Luke 13:22), he replies that many "will try to enter and will not be able to" (Luke 13:24).

M. Eugene Boring makes the tension between universal and limited salvation clear in his essay "The Language of Universal Salvation in Paul."[139] All the numerous attempts to rationalize Paul's thinking about salvation have largely failed. It is impossible to reconcile the fact that Paul thought dualistically, with competing images about the work of Christ. As he writes, "Paul has statements of conditional, limited salvation, and statements of unconditional, universal salvation. Neither of these can be reduced to the other. Neither is what he 'really' thought. Neither should be subordinated to the other."[140]

3) Conflicting Views of the King

The messages surrounding God and his expressions—the Spirit and the Son—are similarly confusing. Who is God? Who is the King? Who is the one that Christians worship, pray to, bow down to, and accept as Lord?

The simple answer is that, from a dialectical perspective, we don't know. Our images are juxtaposed. We have already discussed the confusion about Christ as a lion and a lamb and the confusion of Jesus as a man or as the son of God (the Incarnation). Yet consider another—Jesus claims that he has not "come to bring peace to the earth," but a "sword" (Matt. 10:34), yet the Messiah is also called the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6), and Paul calls us to "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" (Col. 3:15). How can Christ be both a peace-bringer and peace-destroyer? How can the one who brings salvation also bring an instrument for *war* and *destruction*?

Consider yet another tension. Should God be worshiped as one who is to be loved, or as one who is to be feared? The bible tells us: both. The early church in Acts was "God-fearing" (Acts 9:31), and the source of motivation for preaching the gospel comes

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[139] M. Eugene Boring, "The Language of Universal Salvation in Paul." *Journal ofBiblical Literature* 105.2 (1986): 269–92.

[140] Boring, "The Language of Universal Salvation in Paul," 291.

when Christians "fear the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:11). Yet we also know that God is love, and that "love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18). Such makes no sense. How can one both *fear* God AND *love* him simultaneously?

There is no easy way to reconcile these competing images of Christ. As Boring makes clear, Paul himself is largely inconsistent in providing a single image of God and his work. As previously discussed regarding universal or limited salvation, the only clear way to reconcile the disparate views of Christ is to recognize that there are multiple, competing images of who God is. For Boring, in one view, God is viewed as *Judge*—the one who places responsibility on humans, who judges action and inaction, commands Christians to minister, share the good news, and to act in accordance with the Spirit rather than human nature. In the other view, God is viewed as *King*—the one who places responsibility on himself to save, gives grace freely, and completes the whole of salvation through the death of Christ (see Table 1).

These competing views, though, are quite necessary. Boring writes that

the limited salvation statements proceed from, and conjure up, the image of *God-the-judge* and its corollary, human responsibility. Without these statements, the affirmation of universal salvation could only be heard as a fate; evangelism loses something of its urgency, and Paul's hecklers would be justified in saying that we can and even should go on sinning because it magnifies God's grace (see Rom. 3:5–8, 6:1). The universal-salvation statements proceed from, and conjure up, the image of *God-the-king*, who finally extends his de jure gracious reign de facto to include all his creation. Without these statements, Paul's affirmations of a salvation limited to Christian believers must be heard as affirming a frustrated God who brought all creation into being but despite his best efforts could only salvage some of it, and as claiming that it does not ultimately matter that Christ has come to the world if the apostle or evangelist does not get the message announced to every individual.[141]

Essentially, these two conflicting views—God-as-Judge and God-as-King—do not need to be reconciled, leastwise not logically. Neither should the other conflicting views of God-as-Lion vs. God-as-Lamb, or God-as-Peace-Destroyer vs. God-as-Peace-Bringer, or God-as-Feared vs. God-as-Love, or God-as-Man vs. God-as-God.

4) Conflicting Views of the King's Return

A final dialectic emerges with the question of *when* Jesus will return to set up his kingdom: Has it happened *already*, or *not yet* (see Table 1)?

Perhaps most intriguing is the passage from Luke 21. The disciples are curious about the "end times." They want to know what the signs will be before the temple is dismantled. Jesus goes on an extended narrative of well-known apocalyptic situations—wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, pestilences, fearful events, great signs from heaven, persecutions, men will faint from terror, the heavenly bodies will be shaken. These fearful events are not left unresolved, however. Jesus immediately calms them by saying that "when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom

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[141] Boring, "The Language of Universal Salvation in Paul," 291. Emphasis added.

of God is near" (Luke 21:31). Such is an ironic statement: after the signs have been fulfilled, the message of Jesus hasn't changed—the kingdom is near. Such flies in the face of most apocalyptic interpretations which favor a time period breakdown (i.e., dispensationalism, or premillennialism, or postmillennialism). After all the signs have been fulfilled, we return to the beginning, the first message, the first claim of Jesus that "the kingdom is near." We don't hear the reassurance of the rapture message. We don't hear that the antichrist has been born. We simply return to what is already known.

Ellul refers to the tension between the presence/absence of the kingdom as the tension between the "already and the not-yet." Building on George Eldon Ladd's[142] work on inaugurated eschatology, Ellul argues that the "end times" have *already* happened, but are *not yet* fulfilled.

Consider the first part—the *already*. We are *already* "seated" in "the heavenly realms in Jesus Christ" (Eph. 2:6). *Already*, we "have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly.... You have

come to God" (Heb. 12:2). *Already*, there are many antichrists and the spirit of lawlessness is already at work. *Already*, we are in "the presence of God" and "in view of his appearing and his kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:1). *Already*, Christ has come, for "if we love ... God lives in us" (1 John 4:12).

However, the verses that support the *not yet* are just as numerous. We are *not yet* to be "easily unsettled or alarmed" by reports that "the day of the Lord has already come" (2 Thes. 2:2). *Not yet*, for in "just a very little while, 'He who is coming will come and will not delay'" (Heb. 10:37). *Not yet*, for we must "be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming" as "the Judge is standing at the door!" (Jas. 5:7, 9). *Not yet*, for we are commanded to "look forward to the day of God and speed its coming" where "we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth" (2 Pet. 3:12, 13).

Furthermore, in eschatology, we see a tension between the already and the not yet in terms of Christians' new and old bodies. *Already*, "he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy" (Heb. 10:14), but not yet, for I have not "already been made perfect" (Phil. 3:12). *Already*, anyone in Christ is "a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17), but *not yet*, for "what we will be has not yet been made known" (1 John 4:4). *Already*, "you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26), but *not yet*, for "we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons" (Rom. 8:23). *Already*, "in him, we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21), but *not yet*, for "we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope" (Gal. 5:5). *Already*, "you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ" (Gal. 3:27), but *not yet*, for "meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling" (2 Cor. 5:2). *Already*, we are transformed by "the renewing of our minds" (Rom. 12:2), but *not yet*, for Christ

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[142] George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974).

"will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3:21). *Already*, "you will come to understand fully" (2 Cor. 1:14), but *not yet*, for only "then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12).

Therefore, the most common interpretations of the "end times" don't quite stand up to scrutiny—the typical view of such famous series like *Left Behind* ignore the complexities of the text—yes, there is a rapture; yes, there is a tribulation; yes, there is a millennial reign; and yes, there is a judgment. But how? Are these claims literal or metaphorical? And when? Will the return of the king happen soon or in the distant future? These questions tend to lose some of their importance when juxtaposed against the other half of the scriptures—that Jesus has *already* inserted himself in human history, brought access to the kingdom, provided new bodies, clothed people in righteousness, and taken them to heaven to be seated next to him. But then we look around us and realize: but *not yet*.

Conclusion: Dialectical Theology in Practice, Living the Contradiction

When we read the bible dialectically, we should feel somewhat dismayed. I frequently do. Such also explains why reading Ellul, as David Gill writes, "may infuriate you."[143] Very little about the Christian life makes easy and *logical* sense upon close examination. So what to do? Why are these dialectics important?

To answer this question, let us recall the story of Abra-ham—specifically, the moment at which he becomes the "man of faith" (Gal. 3:9)—when he decides to sacrifice his son. This moment is discussed at length by S0ren Kierkegaard in his 1843 book *Fear and Trembling*.[144] Abraham is told to leave his family and go to the land of Canaan. God promises Abraham that, "To your offspring I will give this land" (Gen. 12:7). Through the years, God continually reaffirms his promise that he will be given a child through Sarah. And then, after Abraham is 100 years of age, the promise finally comes true, and Isaac is born.

And then, the *absurd* happens. God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering. God has, in the previous chapter, told Abraham that it is Isaac who fulfills the covenant between God and Abraham—it is Isaac who will become a great nation. And now, Isaac shall die. God has, in all human logic, *contradicted* himself. Isaac, as dead, cannot fulfill God's promise, yet Abraham does the most unexpected thing of all: he doesn't argue, question, or attempt to rationalize the command (as anyone in the 21st century would—anyone who has killed their children and blamed it on "God told me so" is rightly labeled "insane"). Instead, he does the exact opposite. He gets up early the next morning (as if killing his son is something that cannot wait), travels for three days (who among us would drive for three days to kill our child?), and tells his son that God will provide the lamb (effectively, he lies to his child). And he even goes to the extreme measure of actually reaching for the knife before the angel intervenes and gives a ram in Isaac's stead. The absurdity of this story cannot be articulated with

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[143] David Gill, "Jacques Ellul: The Prophet as Theologian." *Themelios* 7.1 (1981): 4–14.

[144] S0ren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling,* Trans. Walter Lowrie (Radford, VA: Wilder, 2008).

any clarity. It is impossible to ponder a man's killing his own child—especially a child of God's promise—without any questioning or back-talking or rationalizing or crying. Yet the author of James tells us that at that moment, the "scripture was fulfilled," because "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Jas. 2:23).

For Ellul and dialectical theology, such is the only choice that we have available to us. When God doesn't make sense, do we dumb down the message, ignore part of his words, and attempt to make it accessible to all? Or do we accept the contradictions as are, embrace them, and believe God against everything that makes sense? The subsequent dialectical struggle reveals truth in a way that resolving the tension does not.

Consider a personal example of a dialectical struggle that emerged from reading the New Testament: the question of *tithing*. We know that it is "hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:23). But such prompts the question of how much money a person should give in order to enter the kingdom: some, or all?

On the one hand, the bible often claims that we should give *all* we have. Jesus tells the rich man, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Luke 18:22). Or when the poor widow places two copper coins into the temple treasury, Jesus praises her, saying, "She, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on" (Mark 12:44). Or in another example, both Ananias and Sapphira are killed for withholding from the church part of the sale of a piece of property. On the other hand, we simply *cannot* give everything we have. Timothy says that "anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8). Or Paul says that "the one who is unwilling to work shall not eat" (2 Thes. 3:10). Or Timothy commands "those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth" (1 Tim. 6:17), but not to stop being rich.

These two competing images about money and posses-sions—give all, keep some—serve as a dialectic that offers us a truth that the two images, alone, cannot. Specifically, it reveals a challenge to transcend the power of money. Ellul claims in *Money and Power* that the "Christian attitude toward the power of money is what we will call '*profanation*.' To profane money, like all other powers, is to take away its sacred character,"[145] and we do that via the act of *giving*. That is, if money is ultimately an earthly expression of power—power over people, power over objects, power over worrying about the future—then the biblical dialectic suggests that we transcend that power by giving it away. Ellul claims that giving is "one act par excellence which pro-fanes money by going directly against the law of money, an act for which money is

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[145] Jacques Ellul, *Power and Money*. Trans. LaVonne Neff (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 109. Emphasis in the original.

not made."[146] Giving keeps us from the love of money, from greed, from an abundance of possessions, from treasure on earth. When we give, we establish that the power of money does not hold sway over us. The extreme, then, of giving everything completely eliminates its power, though we fully recognize that we also need money to live, to eat, to sleep.

For my wife and me, this dialectic has been quite freeing and challenging, both. During the early part of our marriage, we focused on what most Christians focus on: tithing ten percent of our income, which provided us with an easy number to apply, and it matched up with the Old Testament calls for the firstfruits to be offered to the priests. However, the challenge of the New Testament is to give as a way to desacralize money, to dethrone it as an earthly power, to recognize that money is not a part of the kingdom of heaven. Tithing is one way of diminishing money's power, but tithing can easily subvert the message of the bible by focusing on giving as a commandment rather than giving as a way of demonstrating love for others. That is, it became too easy for us to claim: We gave our ten percent to the church this month, thus we did the right thing, rather than carefully attending to the power of money in our lives. Each month, now, we are *challenged* to seek out new ways to give and share our worldly possessions with others, not just with the church but with everyone who is in need. Each month is a resultant Ellulian dialectical tension: an invention, a creation, a challenge, an affair, an adventure.

The only way to respond to the dialectical tensions of the bible is by living them out—much like Abraham did. Much like my wife and I have tried to do. Much like Ellul tried to do. Just as Abraham is the man of faith, so must Christians be. Faith is the living out of the contradictions. Faith is claiming the *already* in the face of the *not yet*—claiming the unseen over the seen. Christians must always act as if everything depends upon them—the kingdom of heaven is near, the Judge is at the door, the human is called to action, the ambassador of Christ is on the move, and Christians must always be advancing toward the kingdom that cannot be seen, toward a work that is never complete, and toward a God that is to be feared. But Christians must never forget that while they must act as if salvation depends upon them, they must remember also: Christ has already come, his work is complete, "it is all finished,"[147] the kingdom is already upon them, they have already been saved by his death, they can rest in heavenly places, knowing that the King of love has given people freedom, hope, and eternal security.

But, not yet.

About the Author

Kevin Garrison is an associate professor of English at Angelo State University, where he teaches and writes about theories of technology, focusing primarily on the ideas of Jacques Ellul.

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[146] Ellul, *Power and Money*, 110.

[147] Jacques Ellul, *The Politics of God and The Politics of Man*. Trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley

Social Propaganda and Trademarks

Richard L. Kirkpatrick

Trademarks are pillars of social propaganda and the technical system. In his vast body of work, Jacques Ellul seems not to have analyzed trademarks as such, but he did discuss at length commercial advertising—"the driving force," he said, of the technical system.[148] Trademarks *are* advertising and the prime features *of* advertising,[149] so Ellul's discourse on the one illuminates the other.

First, Ellul distinguishes "social propaganda" from "vertical propaganda." The latter is mere deliberate agitation by demagogues, all too familiar a phenomenon. Social propaganda is, however, according to Ellul, "much more subtle and complex." "Stabilizing and unifying," it is an integrative propaganda of conformity "made *inside* the group (not from the top)." It "springs up spontaneously; it is essentially diffuse;

it is based on a general climate, an atmosphere that influences people imperceptibly without having the appearance of propaganda; it gets to man through his customs, through his most unconscious habits. It creates new habits in him; it is a sort of persuasion from within. As a result, man adopts new criteria of judgment and choice, adopts them spontaneously, as if he had chosen them himself. But all these criteria are in conformity with the environment and are essentially of a collective nature. 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.[150]

Every word of this description applies to trademarks, as shown below. Social propaganda also has an "alienation" effect that paradoxically complements its integrative function towards the same end, "reinforcing the individual's inclination to lose himself in something bigger than he is, to dissipate his individuality, to free his ego of all doubt, conflict, and suffering—through fusion with others ... blending with a large group ... in an exceptionally easy and satisfying fashion... [Propaganda] pushes the individual into the mass until he disappears entirely."[151] In sum, social propaganda is "total" and induces in people unforced conformity or habituation by tran-quilizing emotional effects.

(Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 192.

[148] E.g., Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*. Trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), ch. 18, "Advertising." See p. 349.

[149] *Gilson on Trademarks* 1:03[4] ("The trademark owner ordinarily makes every effort to convert its mark into a motivating symbol and advertising tool that communicates the desirability of its product. Trademarks function through advertising to create a market for products, and consumers are induced to try a product through the created appeal of the advertised mark"); *McCarthy on Trademarks* 3:12 (Advertising); Restatement (Third), Unfair Competition, § 9, comment c (1995).

[150] Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*. Trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage, 1965), 64. See Ellul, "The Obstacles to Communication Arising from Propaganda Habits." *The Student World* 52.4 (1959): 401–10.

[151] Ellul, *Propaganda*, 169.

Next, and more importantly, the social propaganda of trademarks utilizes all available media to support the "technical system." That is the ensemble, "the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency … in every field of human activity." It too is a spontaneous order, not imposed "from above."[152] While displayed on the material productions and operations of the technical system, trademarks are ultimately symbols in consumers' minds. There they are manipulated as psychological techniques to order, form, and conform human behaviors. Ultimately, trademarks, when managed to a point of optimal efficiency, become autonomous, self-directing functions of the technical system.

Trademarks began as something very different and in some ways opposite from what the technical system has made them. The contrast clarifies somewhat our current milieu; we take it for granted and are so immersed in it, as in a cloud, that we do see it whole.

In the old days, proprietary "brands" simply indicated ownership, e.g., of livestock; "guild marks" indicated products of certain regulated craftsmen; etc. Such traditional uses long antedate the technical system. An article published in 1927, partly quoting H. G. Wells, described the traditional model of product sales based on the *personal reputation* of the seller. For example, everything a neighborhood grocer sold was "from stocks of his own buying and his own *individual reputation* … And the oilman sold his own lamp oil, and no one asked where he got it [The] signboard of an inn … symbolized to the

hungry and weary traveler a definite smiling host, a tasty meal from a particular cook."

Yet even a century ago, the new trademark regime already was pervading the market. Corporations "were reaching their hands over the retail tradesman's shoulder, so to speak, and offering their goods in their own name to the customer."[153] The process of "reaching over the shoulder" was the first step in the abstraction of trademarks—from the personal to the impersonal and to anonymity. Now defined by federal statute, a trademark indicates "the source of the goods, even if that source is unknown."[154]

One of the most conspicuous and emblematic types of trademark is the franchise mark. It is the "cornerstone" or "central element" of the franchise, a business method now omnipres-ent.[155] The franchise model for fast-food services supplanted the old individuated tavern with a "*definite* smiling host" and "a *particular* cook." "Boniface" was a happy expression current in H. G. Wells's day for the jovial innkeeper. In contrast,

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[152] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*. Trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage, 1964); *The Technological System*. Trans. J. Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980); *The Technological Bluff* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990).

[153] Frank Schecter, "The Rational Basis of Trademark Protection." *Harvard Law Review* 40.6 (1927): 813, 818–19 (quoting in part H. G. Wells at n. 21; emphasis added and in original).

[154] 15 U.S.C. 1127 (emphasis added).

[155] *McCarthy on Trademarks* 18:65.

the franchise now routinely presents customers with anonymous, "front-line service providers" who "put on a happy face" in compliance with "integrative display rules."[156]

McCarthy summarizes the role of trademarks and the psychological conditioning process that escorted consumers from the tavern boniface to the faceless franchise service provider:

In a cottage-industry economy where there is considerable variance in quality between each soup maker and between each batch, individual customer experimentation is necessary. In a relatively nondeveloped, localized and close-knit society, this may be possible. In a developed, mobile and urban economy, trademarks are essential to reduce the costs of finding a level of quality and price that the consumer desires, according to his or her individual tastes.[157]

As another commentator explains:

From the English Middle Ages up to the American Nineteenth Century, and even beyond, most businesses were local in nature. Consumers knew the tradesmen with whom they dealt, and they were familiar with the locations, employees and reputations of many of the manufacturers of the products they purchased. However ... explosions of population, communications, transportation and technology placed the consumer at a substantial distance from the manufacturer. The consumer no longer knew about the manufacturer, which might have its offices, production facilities and employees on the other side of the world.. He

found, however, that if he purchased a trademarked product from far away and was satisfied with its quality, he could rely on the trademark in future purchases to obtain the same level of quality.[158]

Interestingly, both commentators associate the transformation of trademarks with mere material enlargement of the marketplace, technological advances in communication and travel, etc. No doubt, they had their part. But why did such developments not simply multiply the number of sole propri-etors—little cottage businesses, shopkeepers, and bonifaces, each using a personal name or insignia on the signboard hanging over the front door? Might not the intellectual or psychological aspects of the transformation have been its predicates rather than accidental by-products, i.e., the sociological phenomenon of technique intervened as the cause, not a consequence, of the revolution in the function of trademarks?

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[156] Such rules are designed to create "affiliation" between the customer and the business. Personnel are recruited, selected, and retained in part on the basis of being willing and able to display this "positive affect." (There is, of course, a technical term for the technical effort: "Emotional labor.") D. Wagner et al., "Driving It Home: How Workplace Emotional Labor Harms Employee Home Life" 67 *Personnel Psychology* 487 (2014); J. Allen et al., "Following Display Rules in Good or Bad Faith?: Customer Orientation as a Moderator of the Display Rule-Emotional Labor Relationship." *Psychology Faculty Publications*, Paper 90 (2010).

[157] *McCarthy on Trademarks* 2:5.

[158] *Gilson on Trademarks* 1:03.

"McDonaldization," as Ritzer has explained, is "the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world." The chief principles of McDonaldization are Efficiency, Calculability, Predictability, and Control.[159] While Ritzer finds their roots in Max Weber's conception of instrumental rationality,[160] he acknowledges that Ellul "has much in common" with Weber.[161] Prevailing constructs of trademarks touch all the chords of efficiency, cal-culability, predictability, and control. Ellul, however, reaches over these attributes or symptoms of the system to expose its underlying nature and true power.

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A trademark owner is obligated by law to "*control* the nature and quality of the goods ... with which the mark is used."[162] Here, "quality" is not necessarily excellence but merely a characteristic of the product. The "actual quality of the goods is irrelevant: it is the control of quality that a trademark holder is entitled to maintain."[163] The "control" symbolized by the mark guarantees predictable consistency of product everywhere, every time it is purchased.[164] The "source" indicated by a mark is not necessarily its actual *maker*; it is the "source of control" of the product's consistency. The mark, detached, as it were, from the seller and the product maker, indicates the source or power that controls the maker.[165]

It is revealing that much of the discourse about this trademark function cites fast-food franchises as exemplars—Mc-Donaldization indeed. "The cornerstone of a franchise system must be the trademark or trade name of the product."[166] Franchises sym-

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[159] George Ritzer, "The McDonaldization of Society." *Sage* (8, 2014), 1, 14–16; see Ritzer, ed., "McDonaldization: The Reader." *Sage* 3 (2009).

[160] Ritzer, "The McDonaldization of Society," 30–31.

[161] George Ritzer, "The Technological Society: Social Theory, McDonaldization and the Prosumer," in H. Geronimo et al., eds., *Jacques Ellul and the Technological Society in the 21st Century* (New York: Springer, 2013), 35.

[162] 15 U.S.C. 1127 (emphasis added).

[163] El Greco v. Shoe World, 806 F.2d 392, 395 (2d Cir. 1986).

[164] *McCarthy on Trademarks* 3:10. Common usage and the legal definition of a trademark as a "symbol" (of goodwill) seem to invite comparison to Ellul's extensive discourse on the relationship of symbols and the technical system. The "symbolic" function of trademarks in the technical system is, however, incommensurate with Ellul's grand civilizational conception of symbols as ways that humankind relates to the natural world and apprehends reality. Killing or co-opting symbolism in this wide sense, the technical system, according to Ellul, symbolizes nothing but itself. See Ellul, *The Technological System*, 177; also Ellul, "Symbolic Function, Technology, and Society," *Journal of Social and Biological Structures* 210 (1978); and Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*. "What symbols are necessary are produced out of technique itself. Television or advertising offer abundant symbols of technique but those come from the very working of technique itself." Jacques Ellul, *The Empire of Non-sense: Art in the Technological Society* (2014) quoted in David Lovekin, "On the Symbol in the Technical Environment: Some Reflections," *Ellul Forum* 57 (2016). If the word "symbol" opens a wrong door in this context, then trademarks are better termed "signals" as discussed herein.

[165] *McCarthy on Trademarks* 3:4.A (emphasis added).

[166] *McCarthy on Trademarks* 18:65; see 3:10.

bolized by marks are gigantic exercises of control, featuring dictionary-sized contracts and manuals specifying, and inspectors scrutinizing, every aspect of operations and service in the minutest detail. Of course, "calculability," another element of the ensemble, is critical to the operational efficiency and profitability of the franchise—demanding inventories of every bean, itemized accounting to the penny, units produced, units sold, units employed, and so on.

The "control" symbolized by trademarks guarantees "predictability." The authorities are unanimous. "The point is that customers are entitled to assume that the nature and quality of goods and services sold under the mark at all licensed outlets will be consistent and predictable."[167] "[T]he quality level, whatever it is, will remain consistent and predictable among all goods or services supplied under the mark."[168] "Trademarks [are] indications of consistent and predictable quality assured through the trademark owner's control over the use of the des-ignation."[169] "Every product is composed of a bundle of special characteristics. The consumer who purchases what he believes is the same product expects to receive those characteristics on every occasion."[170]

Trademarks also answer the fourth principle: efficiency, the key to the technical system. According to economists, trademarks "promote economic efficiency."[171] "Trademarks are indispensable for the efficient provision of products with the wide range of variety and quality combinations demanded in a modern economy." Interests include efficient communication reducing "search costs," efficient allocation of resources, rational decisions resulting in efficient choices by consumers.[172] In this realm, trademarks "serve as a means of communication between otherwise unknown or anonymous producers and their prospective customers."[173] The trademark "makes effective competition possible in a complex, impersonal marketplace by providing a means through which

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[167] *McCarthy on Trademarks* 18:55 (emphasis added); 2:4 ("predictable quality of goods" and "reliability"); 14:11 & 19:90–91 (certification mark reliability).

[168] *McCarthy on Trademarks* 3:10 (emphasis added).

[169] Restatement (Third) of Unfair Competition 33 cmt b (1995) quoted in Eva's v. Halanick, 639 F3d 788, 790 (7th Cir 2011) (emphasis added); see Barcamerica v. Tyfield, 289 F.3d 589, 595 (9th Cir 2002) ("customers are entitled to assume that the nature and quality of goods and services sold under the mark at all licensed outlets will be consistent and predictable").

[170] Societe Des Produits Nestle v. Casa Helvetia, 982 F.2d 633 (1st Cir. 1992). "An important ingredient of the premium brand inheres in the consumer's belief, measured by past satisfaction and the market reputation established by Borden for its [canned milk] products, that tomorrow's can will contain the same premium product as that purchased today." Federal Trade Comm'n v. Borden, 383 U.S. 637, 649 (1966) (Stewart, J., dissenting).

[171] Landes & Posner, "The Economics of Trademark Law," 78 *Trademark Rep* 267 (1988); Landes and Posner, "Trademark Law: An Economic Perspective" 30 *Journal of Law and Economics* 265 (1987); see *McCarthy on Trademarks* 2:3.

[172] Economides, Economics of Trademarks, 78 *Trademark Rep* 523 (1988).

[173] Restatement (Third) of Unfair Competition 9, comment c (1995).

the consumer can identify products which please him and reward the producer with continued patronage."[174] In the marketplace, trademarks are, in a word, "signals."[175]

A related function of trademarks is to symbolize the "goodwill" of the business with which it is used.[176] Goodwill, or, brand equity, is an intangible property of a peculiar kind. It resides *in customers' minds*, their favor towards the business symbolized by its mark. If customers like a product, goodwill leads them to future purchases, guided by the brand, of the same product.[177] "The strongest brands in the world *own a place in the consumer's mind*."[178]

In 1942, the new trademark system was rapidly taking form, but enough of the old regime remained to reveal by contrast what was happening to a keen observer, in the position, so to speak, of one standing on a beach and watching a tidal wave approach. Such was Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter. He explained in a trademark case:

The protection of trademarks is the law's recognition of the psychological function of symbols. If it is true that we live by symbols, it is no less true that we purchase goods by them. A trademark is a merchandising short-cut which induces a purchaser to select what he wants, or what he has been led to believe he wants. The owner of a mark exploits this human propensity by making every effort *to impregnate the atmosphere of the market with the drawing power of a congenial symbol*. Whatever the means employed, the aim is the same—to convey through the mark, in the minds of potential customers, the desirability of the commodity upon which it appears. * * * The creation of a market through an established symbol implies that people float on a psychological current engendered by the various advertising devices which give a trade-mark its potency.[179]

This passage sounds the same themes and wording as Ellul's description of social propaganda, quoted above. The same ideas appear in a later judge's explanation of the fast food restaurant trademark model:

A person who visits one Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet finds that it has much the same ambiance and menu as any other. A visitor to any Burger King likewise *enjoys a comforting familiarity* and knows that the place will not be remotely like a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet (and is sure to differ from Hardee's, Wendy's, and Applebee's too). The trademark's function is to tell shoppers *what to expect*—and whom to blame if a given outlet falls short. The licensor's reputation is at stake in every outlet, so it invests to the extent required to keep the consumer satisfied by

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[174] Smith v. Chanel, 402 F.2d 562 (9th Cir. 1968).

[175] C. Greenhalgh & M. Rogers, *Innovation, Intellectual Property, and Economic Growth* (Princeton 2010), 40.

[176] See 15 U.S.C. 1060.

[177] McCarthy 2:17; Kirkpatrick, L*ikelihood of Confusion in Trademark Law,* 2d ed. (2016), xxii.

[178] Tushnet, "Gone in Sixty Milliseconds: Trademark Law and Cognitive Science," 86 *Tex. L. Rev.* 507, 513 (2008) (emphasis added).

[179] Mishawaka v S.S. Kresge, 316 U.S. 203, 205, 208 (emphasis added).

ensuring *a repeatable experience.*[180]

Trademarks are limitless. Virtually anything can be a trademark if it has inherent or acquired distinctiveness symbolizing goodwill in the minds of consumers.[181] Trademarks include not only distinctive logos and slogans, but also spokespersons, characters, colors, sounds, scents, and "trade dress"—the configuration of products, product features, product packaging, product containers, store decor, etc. Trade dress is the total image of a product and may include features such as size, shape, color or color combinations, texture, graphics, or even particular sales techniques."[182] As Justice Frankfurter observed, trademarks globally "impregnate" the atmosphere. Unlike patents and copyrights (different species of intellectual property having limited terms of legal protection), the exclusive legal rights of the trademark owner are perpetual as long as the brand continues to sell.

Trademarks are a universal phenomenon. Over 24 million marks are actively registered now throughout the world in some 200 countries and other jurisdictions.[183] If the number seems extraordinarily high, consider the alternative. As explained by the economists, trademarks are informational short-cuts; without these simple signals, the average purchaser would be inundated with even more unmediated information than already inundatory, as Ellul says, in "a world ... that is astonishingly incoherent, absurd, and irrational, which changes rapidly and constantly for reasons [one] cannot understand." People "cannot stand this; [they] cannot live in an absurd and incoherent world." Being "engulfed in information," they are "in desperate need of a framework within which to classify information." "Information, therefore, must be condensed, absorbable in capsule form." Trademarks answer the need: they are encapsulated information. The fact that there are 24 million of them demonstrates the immensity of the *Totality* of the system and the incomprehensibly vast volumes of information the ensemble produces.[184] The global spread of marks also demonstrates "a technical phenomenon completely indifferent to all local and accidental differences."[185]

It remains true that trademark law is basically national in character. There is no worldwide trademark law as such. There is, however, accelerating global convergence of the applied principles of trademark law, and international treaties (e.g., the Paris

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[180] Eva's v Halanick, 639 F.3d 788, 790 (7th Cir 2011).

[181] Excluded from trademark status are words that are generic names of products, and product shapes or features that are functional. These exclusions do not detract from the efficiency of the technical system, but enhance it.

Producers are free to copy words and product designs that cannot serve the function of unique source identification. The unfettered competition, it is thought, increases overall output, lowers prices, and enhances quality.

[182] *McCarthy on Trademarks* 8:4.

[183] The number of registrations was provided to me by Thomson Reuters, one of the leading international trademark search companies.

[184] Ellul, *Propaganda,* 145–46; "Information and Propaganda," *Diogenes,* (5/18, June 1957), 61–77. Ellul's 1973 book draws passages and ideas from his 1957 article.

[185] Ellul, *The Technological Society,* 406.

Convention, the Madrid Protocol, the European Union) are facilitating transnational trademark registration and protection on an enormous scale—all tending toward a *Unified* global system in fact if not in law. Commercially developed countries all officially recognize trademark counterfeiting as wrongful, and even the ones that in fact blink at it at least pay respect to the law and enforce it from time to time with highly publicized displays of the destruction of seized counterfeits. As countries develop economically and grow their own legitimate businesses, they fully enter the trademark system where genuine marks are protected and counterfeiters prosecuted.

A complementary function of trademarks is to erase the traditional effects of geography on product characteristics. The descriptions quoted above of the old regime recognized *variety* as something naturally to be expected in the same type of product found from one place to another. The franchise substitutes uniformity for variety across all geographic territories. One of the most powerful legal features of a United States trademark registration enables the registrant to eliminate confusingly similar junior marks in remote territories as the franchise expands. Thus, federally registering a mark is one of the first orders of business for franchisors and any other entrepreneurs intending to expand geographically under its mark, as almost all hope to do. Trademark law is so comprehensively flexible, however, that if the qualities of a product (e.g., cheese or wine) reputedly depend on the geographic locale of production, the place name may acquire exclusivity at law as an appellation of origin or geographic indication (e.g., Roquefort cheese or Napa wine). All certified producers in the area may use the appellation, but each invariably adds to the label its own unique brand, which functions in the usual way.

Trademarks, being property rights or rights of exclusion, have the protections and force of law, thus act as powerful engines of social propaganda and the technical system. Trademarks are so important to the system that the law brooks no interference with them. A confusingly similar mark, in particular, distorts the trademark information signal and the owner's sole control of the branded product. To suppress infringements, trademark law fields battalions of enforcement mechanisms that have evolved far beyond "fraud," a legal term rooted in the antiquated economy based on personal reputation. Traditional fraud in trade was deliberately palming off inferior product under a spurious brand, actually deceiving the customer. From this simple beginning, trademark infringement law has sprawled unrecognizably. Now, infringement means causing "*likelihood* of confusion," that is, a probability, anything over 50 percent. Actionable confusion is a state of mind of "appreciable" numbers of persons, but as few as 15 percent of potential customers will suffice. The trademark owner need not prove that the infringer intended to deceive, nor prove that any customer in fact was deceived or confused. "Likelihood" is all. The products need not be the same (competitive), only "related" in consumers' minds. In a breathtaking inversion, a claim for "unfair competition" may be brought by a plaintiff who *does not compete* with the defendant. Infringement does not require confusion as to source, but may extend to confusion about sponsorship or approval of the product. The marks need not be the

same, only confusingly similar, often a highly subjective judgment. Relevant confusion is not limited to purchasers, but extends to potential purchasers, influencers of purchase decisions, and in some cases the general public. Actionable confusion need not occur at the point of sale, but may occur before or after sale, e.g., by those who merely observe the infringing mark. Relevant confusion may be "subliminal."

An even more powerful legal enforcement mechanism protects famous marks from "dilution"—"blurring" or "tar-nishment" of the brand in the minds of relevant persons. Of course, "likelihood of confusion" and "dilution" are extremely vague concepts considered by some to be inherently biased in favor of trademark owners. Verdicts and judgments must be based on inferences or guesses about the "likely" state of mind of a mass market of consumers. It logically follows from the "rationality" of the system that infringement is considered from the perspective of the "reasonable person," a legal fiction. Penalties for trademark infringement, dilution, counterfeiting, and cybersquatting include injunctions, damages, statutory damages, lost profits, disgorgement of profits, unjust enrichment, punitive damages, and attorney fees. Awards may be trebled to deter future infringement.[186] Criminal counterfeiting is subject to fine or imprisonment or both. The relative ease of stating a plausible infringement claim, and the high cost of defense, are *in terrorem* mechanisms that generally suppress anything that might come close to owners' marks. Behind trademarks, as behind every technique, lies *Power*.

While maintenance of control and of distinctiveness are the principal rationales for the aggressive legal enforcement of trademarks, social propaganda as a technique in the service of efficiency is the true, hidden driver of the system. In Ellul's thought, it is elementary that "veracity and exactness are important elements in advertising."[187] Trademarks displayed in advertising are a kind of "rational propaganda" used to promote products together with "technical descriptions or proved performance."[188] "False designations of origin" and "false or misleading representations of fact" impermissibly disrupt the informational signals that are supposed to guide consumers accurately and with optimal efficiency.[189]

While touring this iron cage of calculability, control, efficiency, etc., we have repeatedly encountered a seemingly discordant factor: human feelings—in particular, needs for comfort, stability, ease, satisfaction, congeniality, avoidance of risk and of unpleasant surprises, etc., all enabling people to "float" on the psychological current (Frankfurter's phrase). The "reasonable person" is a fiction of law and economics; real people are the targets of integrative propaganda. More, perhaps, than economists and lawyers, brand managers are attuned to the emotional needs of people for brand structure. In Ellul's phrase: "the more comfortable ... the better it works." For the consumer, trademarks as social propaganda "artificially soothe his discomforts, reduce his tensions, and place him in some human context." Thus, there is "the need for propaganda"; without

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[186] Richard Kirkpatrick, *Likelihood of Confusion in Trademark Law.*
[187] Ellul, *Propaganda*, 53–4, 56–7.
[188] Ellul, *Propaganda*, 84.
[189] 15 U.S.C. 1125(a).

it, one "experiences the feeling of ... facing a completely unpredictable future." As discussed, predictability is one of the fundamental imperatives of the trademark system, not only for material goods, but also for the psychological comfort of the consumer, who is able to move in "a familiar universe to which he is accustomed."[190]

Brand resonance "is characterized in terms of *intensity* or depth of the psychological bond that customers have with the brand."[191] In an extraordinary mirror-effect, brands "may take on personality traits or human values and, like a person, appear to be 'modern,' 'old-fashioned,' 'lively,' or 'exotic,'" because "consumers often choose and use brands that have a brand personality *consistent with their own self-concept.*" Word of mouth is one of the strongest kinds of "advertising"; consumers become "brand evangelists or ambassadors." It follows that a "brand community" arises "in which customers feel a kinship or affiliation with other people associated with the brand."[192] On the other hand, many people, perhaps most, are "involuntarily and unconsciously" drawn into the "psychological collectivization."[193] They float on the current. Either way, brands as social propaganda integrate them into the technical system.

* * *

This brief survey of trademarks as a form of integrative social propaganda shows the basic characteristics of the technical system as identified by Ellul, including Unity, Universality, Totalization, all in the service of Power.[194] Two related characteristics remain: Automatism and Self-Augmentation. Ellul takes us into the core of the system.

Understood as functions of social propaganda and technique, trademarks are deterministic—self-directing. Once a technique is refined to optimal efficiency, it is no longer subject to choice. "It obeys its own determination, it realizes itself."[195] True to this imperative, "trademarks have a self-enforcing feature. They are valuable because they denote consistent quality, and a firm has an incentive to develop a trademark only if it is able to maintain consistent quality."[196] Trademark owners have a legal duty to "police" their marks at the risk of losing their unique distinctiveness.

Trademark law's likelihood-of-confusion requirement is designed to promote informational integrity in the marketplace. By ensuring that consumers are not confused about what they are buying, trademark law allows them to allocate their capital *efficiently* to the brands that they find most deserving. This, in turn, incentivizes manufacturers to create robust brand recognition by *consistently* offering good products and good services, which results in more consumer satisfaction. That is the virtuous

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[190] Ellul, *Propaganda*, 73, 76, 143, 187.

[191] Konrad Keller, *Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring, and Managing Brand Equity.* 4th ed. (Pearson, 2013) (emphasis in original).

[192] Id. at 87, 92–93.

[193] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 406–07.

[194] Supra, n. 4.

[195] Ellul, *The Technological System*, 141.

[196] William Landes & Richard Posner, "The Economics of Trademark Law," 78 *Trademark Rep* at 271.

cycle envisioned by trademark law, including its trade-dress branch. As stated [by the U.S. Supreme Court]:

In principle, trademark law, by preventing others from copying a source-identifying mark, reduces the customer's costs of shopping and making purchasing decisions, for it quickly and easily assures a potential customer that *this* item—the item with this mark—is made by the same producer as other similarly marked items that he or she liked (or disliked) in the past. At the same time, the law helps assure a producer that it (and not an imitating competitor) will reap the financial, reputation-related rewards associated with a desirable product. The law thereby encourages the production of quality products, and simultaneously discourages those who hope to sell inferior products by capitalizing on a consumer's inability quickly to evaluate the quality of an item offered for sale. It is the source-distinguishing ability of a mark ... that

permits it to serve these basic purposes.[197]

The circularity of this reasoning matches that of the system. Trademarks reinforce themselves. Business people have a choice whether to adopt Trademark A or Trademark B, but to adopt *a* trademark they must; there is no debate or discussion whether to do so. The system is pervasive and immersive, like the "atmosphere." Entire fields of brand psychology and brand management—supported by innumerable statistical consumer surveys and focus groups—are devoted to the study of "authority brands, solution brands, icon brands, cult brands, lifestyle brands," and so on.[198] Trademarks especially serve the personal craving for predictability and consistency, while avoiding at all costs variance and unwanted surprise. Ellul teaches that people are drawn "into the net of propaganda," which "is exceptionally efficient through its meticulous encirclement of everybody."[199]

H. G. Wells's picture of the old days is erased or reversed: the personal guarantee of the neighborhood grocer becomes the impersonal guarantee of an anonymous source of control of products distributed in a mass market. Product quality defined as excellence becomes quality defined as a mere characteristic, be it however so poor. Consumers choose brands to define themselves, and they find in brands responsive humanoid personalities. Consumers who wish a change from an accustomed brand will select a new brand, itself promising consistency and predictability. The brand on a product is branded—burned and seared, as it were—into the minds of consumers, who literally "identify" with it. In the technical system described by Ellul, the predictable consistency of the product has its counterpart in the consistent predictability of the human.

About the Author

Richard L. Kirkpatrick is a lawyer and practices trademark law. The views herein are his own and not attributable to his law firm or its lawyers or employees. Richard

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[197] Groenveld v Lubecore, 531 F3d 1, 12–13 (6th Cir 2013), quoting Qualitex v Jacobson, 514 U.S. 159, 163–64 (1995), quoting in part *McCarthy on Trademarks* 2:01 (emphasis added and in original).

[198] Stefania Salviolo & Antonio Marazza, *Lifestyle Brands: A Guide to Aspirational Marketing* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[199] Ellul, *Propaganda*, 9–10, 64–5, 74–6, 79–81, 84.

L. Kirkpatrick is also author of "Ellul, Machiavelli, and Autonomous Technique," *Ellul Forum* 56 (2015), republished in Jeffrey Shaw, *Jacques Ellul on Violence, Resistance, and War* (Pickwick, 2016).

Review of Doug Hill, *NotSo Fast: Thinking Twice About Technology* (University of Georgia Press, 2016) 221 pp.

David W. Gill

Doug Hill is a journalist and independent scholar who has studied the history and philosophy of technology for more than 25 years. His work has appeared in the *New York Times, Boston Globe, Atlantic, Salon, Forbes, Esquire*, and his blog "The Question Concerning Technology" *(*http://thequestion-concemingtechnology.blogspot.com*)*. Over the past 50 years I must have read more than 100 books on technology and its impacts on individuals, organizations, communities, businesses, schools, nations, and the world. Jacques Ellul, Albert Borgmann, Langdon Winner, Carl Mitcham, and many others have probed the technological depths—or the specifics of various technological domains or problems—but we always need helpful introductions that are comprehensive in scope, deeply researched, and written in an accessible, illuminating style. The late Neil Postman did this in his *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (1992). And now Doug Hill's *Not So Fast: Thinking Twice About Technology* will serve well as today's essential introduction to the subject. I can't recommend it highly enough.

We all experience how pervasive are today's technological devices. There is no escape. Communication media, transportation, entertainment, manufacturing, robotics ... we are totally surrounded, invaded, dominated. Much of this is welcome and positive, of course. My wife's hip and shoulder replacements are incredible gifts. I value Facebook for helping me stay in touch with over 1,000 of my former students and colleagues from across the globe. But Doug Hill steps back and helps us see the shape and nature of the "forest" when often we only see the "trees" and not the overall pattern, linkages, and commonalities. His discussion proceeds in five stages.

In Part One, Hill shows how technological optimism and technological concern (sometimes fear, resistance, criticism) have long coexisted. Today's technological optimists, evangelists, and dreamers, such as Ray Kurzweil, Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk, and Nicholas Negroponte, represent a tradition going back through Henry Ford, Frederick Taylor, and Francis Bacon to some of the ancients. And all along there have been critics, questioners, and prophets, from Theodore Roszak and Wendell Berry to Martin

Heidegger, Henry David Thoreau, the Luddites, and many classical thinkers and commentators. "Ambivalence" is an appropriate term for recognizing that technology has its positive up-side—but comes with downside trade-offs, hidden costs, unpredictable consequences, and cumulative effects. Getting some long-term historical perspective on tecnology is really essential for both creators and users.

In Part Two, Hill asks, What exactly is "technology?" It is not just "applied science." It is not just machines, tools, and devices. Not just IT. A "narrow, internalist" definition focuses on things, objects, hardware, and engineering stuff. The "broad, externalist" school views not just all of that but also the "users and the broader social and political contexts in which they're used" (49). For Jacques Ellul, perhaps Hill's favorite philosopher of technology, it is about "technique"—the broad system and milieu driven by the search for effective, efficient "means." It is not just about tools but about a method (rational, scientific, and quantitative) approaching all of life. Science itself, today, depends on (not precedes) technology for its means and achievements. Hill argues that the basic "nature" of technology is to be expansive, rational, direct, aggressive, controlling, and linked or converging with other technologies. Traditional moral values of "good" and "evil/bad" are replaced by "success" and "failure" in the technological milieu. We could add "speed," "predictability," "replicability," and "power" to that list of core technological values. Technology today is not quite "fate" or deterministic, but it moves ahead autonomously, with little or no human or moral resistance apparent. Technological problems require and lead to further technological responses, more and "better" technology. A major challenge we face today is to be so absorbed in (and overwhelmed by) all of our particular technologies that we fail to see the whole. We take for granted the atmosphere in which we live and breathe. Hill quotes the old joke about a fish being asked, "How's the water?"—and replying, "What's water?"

In Part Three, Hill explores human relations in an era of technology. Rather than toward *quality* (a combination of caring and attention), our technology inclines us toward distraction and disengagement. This affects our human interrelationships but also our relationship to our machines and to our work (including the loss of craftsmanship, participation, and attention, alongside huge productivity gains). Another characteristic is *absorption*—excessive focus, even addiction to our technologies. Hill worries also that we are being drawn into a *dreamworld* of virtual reality that blinds us to flesh-and-blood reality. The borders between reality and technological fantasy are increasingly blurred. How does such a citizenry make good political choices? Finally, Hill warns us about the tendency toward *abstraction*—distance from the subjects, products, and impacts of our actions. Medical machines and instruments can provide amazing assistance to doctors and nurses—but they can also create distance. The doctor knows the test results but not the actual patient. Distant targets of drone warfare are abstractions, easier to kill thoughtlessly. How does technology in its various forms affect the way I relate to my colleagues, friends, and loved ones? How does it affect my work, play, and rest? These fundamental questions must be faced and discussed, and Hill's book is a provocative, thoughtful opening statement for such reflection and discussion.

In Part Four, Hill discusses the ways technology crosses traditional boundaries between humans and machines and between humans and animals. There is no doubt that environments affect and modify humans. The food we eat modifies us. Exercise modifies our muscles and organs. Prostheses can improve our lives. Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (2010) shows how our brain physiology and chemistry is modified by information technology. Some of the technological impact on humans is intentional, some unintentional. The technological dreamers such as Ray Kurzweil dream of intentionally, radically merging humans and machines. Do we just watch passively as these efforts and experiments proceed? So too, the boundaries between humans and animals have been crossed, but are there limits or guidelines?

Finally, in Part Five, Hill cautions about leaving our future to risk-taking gamblers. He recalls how high-profile technology leaders Norbert Wiener and Bill Joy came to have second thoughts and express great caution about the vast destructive potential of advanced technology. Every technological development entails risk as it amplifies effects and links together with other technologies. We, the public, are the guinea pigs impacted by these risks. Shouldn't we have some say about experiments that could have catastrophic impacts on our lives? Techie hubris, even arrogance, combined with (1) a desire for career power, wealth, and fame, (2) a general lack of broad education in history and the humanities, and (3) an absence of real membership in responsible, accountable human community beyond the tech world ... leads to risk on a catastrophic scale.

In conclusion, Hill asks not for a rejection of technology but for appropriate restraint and caution and for some reconsideration of our purposes and ends in life, not just as individuals but as professions, as societies and nations. What are the Ends we wish to pursue and achieve and in light of which our technological research and development must be judged? As Ellul often said, our technological Means have taken over and become the End. They are uncritically accepted and self-justifying. Thoreau warned that we could become "tools of our tools." Hill's book title means everything in this argument: "not so fast"! Yes, let's keep moving; there are many positive achievements, and promises of more. But slow down and take seriously some "second thoughts" and opinions as we proceed. The stakes are too high not to do so.

Not So Fast is a joy to read because it is such beautiful writing—but I don't just mean beautiful as literary artifice. It is a content-rich page-turner, drawing readers forward in a life-enhancing "thought experiment": What if we looked at our various technologies that have changed our lives (so positively in many cases—and so frustratingly and aggravatingly in others) as a whole ensemble? What if we tried to see what all these technologies have in common and how they join together as a system with a kind of philosophy and set of common values? What if we dipped back into history to see the origin and development of our technological world and could hear from the past and the present, from those who loved and promoted technology and from those who resisted, worried, and cautioned about it? Hill pulls it off and walks

us through this thought experiment. He doesn't go down every byway possible. For me, two additional questions are (1) how might faith traditions such as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism provide constructive guidance and community leverage vis-a-vis technology, and (2) how best can we prepare for a rapidly arriving world of automated joblessness, the vastly increased wealth disparities that come with it, and the personal and social chaos of a world without (adequate) work? But this is asking too much of Hill's already abundant argument. Get it, read it, then form a book discussion group around it. Make it an assigned reading in your courses. *Not So Fast* was published by a smaller academic press and could be overlooked, so let's get the word out to our networks.

About the Author

David Gill is the president of the International Jacques Ellul Society.

Jacques Ellul on Violence, Resistance, and War

Jason Hudson

Jacques Ellul's dialectical method embraces the tension between necessity and freedom. In conversations about violence and war, the extreme dialectical poles are idealistic pacifism and pragmatic justification. *Jacques Ellul on Violence, Resistance, and War*, edited by Jeffrey Shaw and Timothy Demy, enters into this tension by bringing together a collection of essays that engages with Ellul's work from a variety of perspectives: theological, philosophical, practical, historical, and existential. When read as a complete work, however, it provides a holistic vision of Ellul's thinking and some of the ways scholars and practitioners have sought to interject possibility and freedom into our violent world of necessity.

In the first chapter, David Gill commends Ellul's work on violence and insists on its enduring relevance. His essay, "Jacques Ellul on Living in a Violent World," prepares the reader to navigate those that follow, by introducing Ellul's dialectic approach. Gill assures readers that the essays that follow will not articulate a rational ethic of violence that might be universally applied. Rather, he explains, Ellul invites readers to understand the nature of violence as a necessity and to live a particular style of life that creatively introduces possibility into situations that are otherwise closed and determined.

Chapter two, "Calvin, Barth, Ellul, and the Powers That Be," examines Ellul's exegesis of "the powers" in scripture against those of John Calvin and Karl Barth. Ellul's reading of the biblical *exousiai*—powers and authorities—is essential to his anarchism, nonviolence, and dialectical thinking. In this chapter, David Stokes shows how Calvin and Barth endorse state power, as either an actual or a potential representative of God's action in the world. Ellul, in contrast, identifies the state as a power, an *exousiai*, that is disarmed and put to open shame by Jesus Christ. This nuance, then, relativizing

state power, allows Ellul the space to see the state as a necessary power that makes life possible but also a power that must be transgressed for the sake of freedom.

Andrew Goddard, in chapter three's essay, "Ellul on Violence and Just War," examines how Ellul challenges the just-war tradition by including war in his treatment of violence. Goddard outlines Ellul's Christian realist approach to violence. First, Ellul acknowledges that violence is unavoidable and necessary for the survival of the state. Yet he also seeks to be realistic about the nature of violence, that it has its own logic and is never fully under human control. Despite its necessity, Christians who use violence must do so without an easy conscience but must acknowledge their own violence as a sign of their lack of freedom. Finally, Goddard imagines a middle way, a "chastened form of just war thinking" that might emerge from Ellul's critique when taken as a challenge to just-war theory rather than a complete repudiation.

In chapter four, Andy Alexis-Baker analyzes the theory of just policing from an Ellulian perspective. Against those who tout just policing as an alternative to just war, Alexis-Baker convincingly argues that policing as we know it is a modern invention rooted in post-Civil War efforts to control newly freed slaves (in the south) and the vices of the working classes (in the north). Alexis-Baker shows that just policing is likely to produce worse outcomes than just war. Finally, he highlights one Colombian community whose approach to security demonstrates the possibilities of balancing security with human dignity.

Chapters five and six are case studies that seek to apply an Ellulian framework to specific cases of violence. In chapter five, "Cultural Interpretation of Cyberterrorism and Cybersecurity in Everyday Life," Dal Yong Jin examines the increasing importance of cybersecurity in the face of emerg-ingcyberterrorism. In chapter six, "The Nigerian Government's War Against Boko Haram and Terrorism: An Ellulian Communicative Perspective," Stanley Uche Anozie examines the Nigerian government's propaganda war with the terrorist group Boko Haram. On the surface, chapters five and six seem to be weak points in the collection as they apply Ellul in problematic ways. However, the strength of these essays is that they highlight the difficulty of bringing Ellul's thought into the reality of extremely complex situations. Moreover, in reality, Ellul has inspired some to pacifism and anarchism and has moved others to use violence in desperation against technology's determinism.

Chapter seven, "Ellul, Machiavelli, and Autonomous Technique," considers how Machiavelli prefigures Ellul's conception of technique, particular regarding ends and means. In his essay, Richard Kirkpatrick shows that for Machiavel

subjects and objects—governors and governed—are flattened out, or hollowed, as all become means in an autonomous march to nowhere. In a passage that pointedly reminds the reader of today's political reality, Kirkpatrick highlights, via Machiavelli's Ferdinand, how in the absence of ends spectacle is used to control or appease subjects through confusion and fascination. Despite this essay's interesting and well-argued

connections between Ellul and Machiavelli, the reader is left to make the connections between the essay and violence and war.

In chapter eight, Jeffery Shaw considers how Ellul and Thomas Merton compare on propaganda as a form of violence. Though other chapters have addressed propaganda, Shaw helpfully situates violence and propaganda within Ellul's concept of technique. This important step opens the door for readers to begin thinking about how the treatment of violence in this volume might illuminate thinking about other areas of technique. Finally, Shaw shows Merton to be more optimistic about human attempts to transcend technique through asceticism.

Peter Fallon continues the theme of propaganda as violence in chapter nine, "Propaganda as Psychic Violence." Fallon's contribution is a rigorous examination of Ellul's thought in this area. He seeks to delineate why propaganda counts as a form of violence within Ellul's definitions. To do so he examines the phenomenon of the happy, though psychologically determined, propagandee who is conditioned to love her captor. Finally, he considers how Ellul's theological work opens possibilities for revolution, the transgression of deterministic technology, propaganda, violence, etc.

In his dubiously named chapter ten essay, "Technology and Perpetual War: The Boundary of No Boundary," David Lovekin continues to explore the boundaries of how Ellul's conception of violence can be framed. With concern for the philosophical nature of Ellul's work, Lovekin examines the nature of the same and the other within the dialectic. Violence, he argues, results from the dissolution of space between sign and signified that is necessary for dialectic. Against the hubris of violence that seeks to subsume the other into the self, Lovekin seeks a wholeness that allows a plurality of differences to exist in necessary dialectical tension.

Finally, Mark Baker concludes the collection with his personal reflection on encountering Ellul's work while experiencing a disenchanting conflict in El Salvador, titled, "My Conversion to Christian Pacifism: Reading Jacques Ellul in War-Ravaged Central America." This essay offers a fitting conclusion, as the reader may feel a bit like Baker, grasping for a way to make sense of a phenomenon that we see and experience around us—and in us—daily. His narrative style allows Baker to approach Ellul's treatment of violence, which, given its placement in the collection, should be well covered territory, through a fresh lens. His essay brings a simplicity and clarity to many of the ideas previously discussed. By discussing his conversion, he makes a compelling case for those who are still clinging to the myths of redemptive violence or trapped in the hopelessness of necessity.

About the Author

Jason Hudson is a PhD student at Cliff College, UK, and an adjunct professor at Cincinnati Christian University. His current work seeks to bring the thought of Jacques Ellul and Wendell Berry to bear on contemporary problems and questions, particularly within Western evangelicalism.

Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest: Merton, Berrigan, Yoder, and Muste at the Gethsemani Abbey Peacemakers Retreat

Chris Staysniak

From November 18 to 20, 1964, the renowned writer and Catholic monk Thomas Merton hosted a small retreat on the grounds of his Gethsemani Abbey Trappist community. While in terms of gender and race the group was quite homogenous, it still was a remarkable ecumenical gathering of 14 men that included some of the leading prophetic peacemaking voices of the day. In addition to Merton himself, there was A. J. Muste, at that point a living legend among labor, antiwar, and civil-rights organizing circles; Mennonite pacifist scholar John Howard Yoder; the dynamic duo of the "Catholic Left," brothers Dan and Phil Berrigan; and Catholic Worker activists Tom Cornell and Jim Forest. The gathering also entailed several other Catholic and Protestant peace organizers, such as the Presbyterian John Oliver Nelson and Methodist Elbert Jean. While they did not have the same national name-brand recognition as some of the other participants, they too were critically important fixtures of the intertwined civil rights and antiwar movements that fueled the period's unparalleled social ferment. For three days this group converged in Kentucky to explore how they might better ground their peacemaking efforts in a world awash in violence as they explored and probed the retreat's theme, "The Spiritual Roots of Protest."

This unique gathering has, until now, largely relegated to passing references and footnotes. But through meticulous archival research, Gordon Oyer has recovered these proceedings in *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest*. Oyer, himself of Mennonite background, stumbled upon mention of the retreat while reading Yoder's writings. From this obscure starting point, he has painstakingly recovered the rich conversations at this extraordinary retreat from an array of diaries, transcripts, marginalia, and other archival sources.

At face value, a book about three days' worth of advanced theological conversations does not sound like a riveting narrative. But Oyer's study makes for a very compelling read about these men of great action taking time to unpack their own ideas, beliefs, and motivations in a thoughtful effort to more deeply and spiritually sustain their peacemaking activities. We need little reminder that these exchanges from over half a century ago are still valuable today. As Oyer writes, "They raised essential, timeless questions we would do well to ask ourselves 50 years later. They also helped model the mutual support required for people of faith to embark on and sustain active, resistant, nonviolent protest against the cultures of domination that human civilization seems destined to evoke" (xvii). Like all good prophets, their warnings, for better and for worse, resonate with a certain timelessness. The interplay of ideas and thinkers, both those present like Muste, Yoder, the Berrigans, and Merton, and those not, like

Massignon and Ellul, is rich. At times one must read quite closely to follow all of these threads, but ultimately Oyer deftly weaves them together.

Readers of this journal will be interested to know that while he was not physically present at this gathering, Ellul still enjoyed considerable influence over it. As Oyer ably demonstrates, in drawing up the agenda and preliminary themes for the conversation, Merton drew heavily from Ellul's *The Technological Society* (as well as from the French scholar and pioneer of Catholic-Muslim interfaith dialogue, Louis Massignon). In Ellul's writings, Merton found a kindred spirit as by the mid-1960s he began to devote serious thought and reflection to the place of technology in modern life, particularly when it came to the tools of death and destruction, and the increasingly normalized assertions by U.S. policymakers that national security was bound in technological superiority. In Ellul's work, Merton found a powerful and extensive ideas that helped complement and advance his own thinking.

Throughout much of chapter three, Oyer explores Merton's reading of *The Technological Society* in detail. As Merton wrote, among other reflections, "I am going on with Ellul's prophetic and I think very sound diagnosis of the Technological Society. How few people really face the problem! It is the most portentous and apocalyptic thing of all, that we are caught in an automatic self-determining system in which man's choices have largely ceased to count" (61). On further reflection he walked back some of his initial response, ultimately finding Ellul to be "too pessimistic" (61), though this conclusion probably would have been revisited had he read more of Ellul's opus of published pieces, particularly his theological work (a characteristic of Ellul's writing that Oyer acknowledges later). But as Oyer shows, Ellul's writings struck a deep chord in Merton, and, as such, helped shape the initial discussions of this remarkable retreat.

Staysniak, Chris. Review of Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest: Merton, Berrigan, Yoder, and Muste at the Gethsemani Abbey Peacemakers Retreat. Ellul Forum 60 (2017): 22–22. © Chris Staysniak, Cc BY-NC-SA.

Oyer ends the book with a thoughtful epilogue that asks how these questions of the spiritual roots of protest, technology, and how one can be sustained over the long haul of peacemaking in a war-ridden world. He, like those at the Gethsemani retreat, offers no concrete answers. But in itself, *Exploring the Spiritual Roots of Protest* is a rich read that provides theological and intellectual manna for those who look to take a stand today against the forces of militarism, unchecked capitalism, environmental degradation, and an ethos that puts the individual above all, with costs the entire global community must ultimately pay. The conversations of *The Spiritual Roots of Protest* indeed remain relevant, and for that reason this book is a worthwhile read for all those who feel that prophetic tug towards peacemaking efforts to help heal our broken world.

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"[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

The Ellul Forum

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

Issue #61 Spring 2018

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.*[200]

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

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[200] 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.

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 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"[201]. 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)[202]. 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[203]. 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, "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,

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[201] Nicholas Lash, "Performing the Scriptures," in *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM, 1986), p. 43.

[202] *Midrash* refers to both ancient Jewish writings on Scripture and to a method of interpretation.

[203] 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).

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[204]. 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 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

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[204] 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.

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!)[205].

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[206]. We need to learn the language, structure, forms, conventions, and so forth before we can become competent readers of Scripture[207].

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 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[208].

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[205] See pp. 6–16, *Being*, for a fuller treatment of Ellul's objections to some of the critical stances by biblical scholars.

[206] Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses.* (NY: Schocken, 1995), is a wonderful counter example to the trend to be "contemporary."

[207] 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.

[208] For a fuller discussion of this, on which this article partially draws, see my forthcoming article

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[209]. 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 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,

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in Stephen Barton (ed), *Idolatry in the Bible, Early Judaism and Christianity* (T&T Clark, 2005).

[209] 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.

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[210].

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.

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[210] 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[211].

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

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connection.

[211] 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).

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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 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 1'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. Meditation 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 trans-mettre 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, theoio-gie 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 ».

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Ellul's God's Politics

by Chris Friesen

Re-View of Jacques Ellul, The Politics of God and the Politics of Man *(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), translated by G. W. Bromiley from Politique de Dieu, politiques de l'homme (Paris: Nouvelle Alliance, 1966).*

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 theodicy, 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. Whitehead 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."

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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 "cul-

tural 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

21 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.

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A Review of Les Dix Commandments Aujourd'hui & Le Decalogue

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 stereo-

types. 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.

— ⊠*Hom*mage 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, Andr*e* 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 #62 Fall 2018

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The Ellul Forum

Number 62   Fall 2018

Editor

Publisher

The International Jacques Ellul Society

www.ellul.org

Credits

About

Jacques Ellul (1912–94) was a French thinker and writer in many fields: communication, ethics, law and political science, sociology, technology, and biblical and theological studies, among others. The aim of the *Ellul Forum* is to promote awareness and understanding of Ellul's life and work and to encourage a community of dialogue on these subjects. The *Forum* publishes content by and about Jacques Ellul and about themes relevant to his work, from historical, contemporary, or creative perspectives. Content is published in English and French.

Subscriptions

The *Forum* is published twice a year. Annual subscriptions are $40 usd for individuals/ households and $80 usd for institutions. Individual subscriptions include membership in the International Jacques Ellul Society, and individual subscribers receive regular communications from the Society, discounts on IJES conference fees, and other benefits. To subscribe, please visit ellul.org.

Submissions

The *Forum* encourages submissions from scholars, students, and general readers. Submissions must demonstrate a degree of familiarity with Ellul's thought and must engage with it in a critical way. Submissions may be sent to ellulforum@gmail.com.

Contents

Editor's Letter

Welcome to the newly reinvigorated *Ellul Forum*. With this issue, the International Jacques Ellul Society relaunches the *Forum* as a printed journal, published twice yearly and mailed to subscribers. Subscription to the *Forum* is via membership in IJES. To subscribe / become a member, please visit ellul.org. Back issues will continue to be made available freely at our website but after a delay of some months.

The essays published in this issue by A. F. Moritz and Kelsey L. Haskett are based on their respective presentations at our Ellul and the Bible conference that was held in June 2018 in Vancouver, British Columbia. These scholars pay welcome attention to Ellul's poetry, a relatively underexplored area of his work.

Frederic Rognon's article is also based on his presentation at the conference. It addresses a fundamentally important question: How did Ellul read the Bible, and what can his manner of Bible reading offer us today? Daniel Cerezuelle's explication of Ellul's

concept of technique was originally written as the foreword to *The Technological System* reprinted by Wipf and Stock in 2018. It not only describes the evolution of Ellul's thought on this central theme but also reveals that Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau developed their ideas about technique very early in their lives.

Book reviews serve to bring attention to some of the many interesting works currently being published on themes relevant to Ellul's thought. We provide two reviews in this issue, by J. Peter Escalante and Jonathan A. Tomes. We express our gratitude to Lemon Press Printing for its assistance in producing this issue.

"Editor's Letter." Ellul Forum 62 (Fall 2018): 3.

Jacques Ellul's Apocalypse in Poetry and Exegesis

A. F. Moritz

Although not published until 1997, Jacques Ellul's booklength poem *Oratorio: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* was written in the 1960s (publisher's jacket copy), and thus it seems to antedate the composition of his 1975 exegetical work *The Apocalypse: Architecture in Movement.* Both works center on the relationship of the human word to God's Word and the struggle of the best speech amidst babble and falsehood; together they throw great emphasis on the centrality of these themes in Ellul's thought. The poem presents in a white-hot fusion the dialectical ideas, including those regarding the word and communication, that become a basis of Ellul's exegesis of the Apocalypse of John.

We can see this in two essential and related elements of *Oratorio*: the image of the mendicant, and the idea of the presence of the end in the beginning and throughout history. In Ellul's poem, the wandering beggar is the Word of God in the world, powerless unless it is received, constantly appealing for love. Similarly, the end that is already present in history is the Word that needs and begs to be heard. This idea of the end in the beginning, which is Ellul's radical eschatology, is expressed both in the mendicant and in the very structure of *Oratorio*, which in turn mirrors the structure of the Apocalypse as Ellul analyzes it. Both poems—for so Ellul terms the Apocalypse (259)—use a symmetrical form to symbolize that the basic structure of history is the hidden presence of the Eternal in Time, which makes an appeal, as the mendicant does, eschewing power until a response of love shall be given.

Throughout *Oratorio* the mendicant appears in various guises and is particularly expressive of the humility and humiliation of the word, which is everything—creation and salvation—yet which is nothing if not received.

The wandering beggar who constantly knocks, constantly appeals, is made fundamentally identical by Ellul's poetry with the hiddenness of eternity in time and of glory in failure. For Ellul, the end that is in the beginning is not a goal or place but a living, overlooked person always coming toward us. The obscurity of Ellul's beggar combines in a single image the Second Person, and poetry, and the intellectual, around

the theme that powerlessness is love's only power, because the word is its only possible means.

The figure of a poor wanderer appears in the poem variously as beggar, as pilgrim, as an absent outcast merely implied by a human sob or plea, and even as the white horseman of the Apocalypse. The white horseman is for Ellul the word of God, and in "Part One" of *Oratorio* this horseman speaks and calls himself a pilgrim, becomes a pilgrim:

> And I will be the hand stretched out for alms
>
> the gaze of the defeated one begging to live the step of the condemned man who stumbles and pleads and I will be the cry of all people dying ... (19)

This is echoed at the end of "Part Two: The Horse of War," where the white horseman suddenly appears again, must wander all the roads, and becomes a beggar who "knocks at your door, trying your refusal." As "Part Two" concludes, the poet transforms this "vagabond of the end of the world" back into "the white horseman [who] triumphs in his misery" (60).

In the opening of "Part Five," the poem's last part, this vagabond figure is the pilgrim, as earlier, but here he is also, for the first time, the Wandering Jew:

> Trudge, O pilgrim, all through the aged times of history
>
> Haggard, O Wandering Jew, trudge through the newborn times ...
>
> Can you find any other trace in the dreary past than the horses' iron prints engraved in the clay the broken bones of the Farnese marbles and the printed witnesses of a divided word? (81)

In this figure Ellul converges Christ the Word with humanity seen in Christ. That is, humanity is here symbolized in its best possible representative within the reality of the broken world: the one who hungers and thirsts for justice and truth, the one who relentlessly searches and appeals, the one who is truly poor. For Ellul's poem, Christ is well depicted as the Wandering Jew, the one forbidden to rest, as in the legend, and forced to walk undyingly through the painful world. Although Ellul transforms the legend such that the Wandering Jew is not cursed by Christ but is Christ, nevertheless the Wandering Jew remains also exactly the figure of the legend: the Word of God in submitting to what man has decided submits all human beings to it, by enduring it in powerless love and refusing to end it by power. Thus, as we shall see, the Wandering Jew as Christ, at the poem's end, is a symbol deepening the vision of the very beginning of *Oratorio*.

At first, "Part Five" sounds the dark note of the triumph of the three horsemen who bring tribulations ("The horses' gallop has ringed life in / there is nothing beyond their seduction / war and blood-passion ... // Power that pleases our desiccated heart" [81–82]). Then, the second section of "Part Five" is an appeal; the beggar is reduced to his sob:

> O Lord Sabaoth of the subtle ear, discern this sob this moan suffocating in
> these tumbled ruins and rolling barrages this sob, this moan of the human
> heart and all creation ...

> But you don't bridle the wandering horses and put an end to the adventure
> Why do you wait so long to judge, disappointing so much hope (87)

In the fourth section of "Part Five," God speaks and addresses himself to the sorrowing, yearning voice that has sung the previous sections, calling the singer a "Seer / Voyant" (89). God speaks and includes this seer among those "to whom this fog," human history, "serves only in that it divulges the single Light." God says,

> Listen to them singing—I hear and grasp the song better than you—
> "what good is this retinue and array
> what good is this glory
> what good are these twistings and turnings
>
> when a name, a single name, satisfies our memories
>
> when a day, a single day, satisfies our love?" (91)

Here we find a meta-poetry, in which Ellul imagines God quoting but transforming to a greater clarity and a greater music all that his poem and his life's work have seen and expressed. In this way the poet and intellectual are taken up and affirmed in the powerless power of the word. "Part Five," and thus *Oratorio* as a whole, ends in a one-page section that returns to the

> homeless beggar [who] roams the borders of History and raps at the door
> seeking alms
> the beggar the presence unacceptable at all times raps at every door, a
> tireless knocking
> and stretches out a hand for grace, bread, a piece of fruit, mysterious pulsing
> sun (94)

These lines, which are nearly but not quite the last in *Oratorio*, lay strong emphasis on an Ellulian cluster of themes: human exclusion, the basic and underlying glory of existence, and the duty of the one who must bear witness and ask for love, must ask that there be love. It is history—human ex-clusion—that seems impregnable. *Oratorio* gives full attention to the nightmare of history, and, following it, *The Apocalypse: Architecture in Movement* affirms that "the world is going to belong to the autonomy of humans." But also as in *Oratorio*, this is because of "the decision of God to adopt ... the way of nonpower, of incognito, of humility, of the renunciation of his power in order to be nothing more than love" (79, translation altered). In face of human autonomous recalcitrance, "the sole victory of God is the fact of his word... He has no other weapon" (109), and

without this Word of man ["who bears witness"], there is no Word of God either. The Word of God falls in the void if there is not an ear to hear it. And the Lord evokes that ear ... (103)

Hearing and responsiveness are key, for the "end" is not a time or a goal but a person who acts and communicates. Ellul calls God the one who "comes, but he embraces all, the totality of time and events," and states that

> The future is not an emptiness of time, indeterminate, unknown: the future is that which comes; it is filled (like our past) with the presence and action of the one who traverses this future toward us from the end of time. (101–02)

This concept of one who comes and who embraces the totality of time and events, expressed conceptually in the later exegetical work, is already present in every aspect of *Oratorio*'s form, whether we examine the details of its verse or its overall structure. Looking first of all at the verse, we see Ellul immediately start with the end in the beginning. The opening eight lines present an origin story with the timelessness of archetypal myth but express it in a way that is also a concrete, if allusive, analysis of the historical genesis of human violence and the way it is interlaced with an ever-present activist hope of peace. The opening lines, like the whole poem, portray this interlace as the structure of time and history and of any ordinary earthly moment in our lives.

The first two lines set out the end and beginning of human existence and the history that connects them:

> Blood poured out when history was closed
> and the beginning of the world was a clenched fist ... (9)

This asserts that violence, and perhaps sacrifice, was in the beginning of history, and also at the end. The moment "when history was closed" was and is "the beginning of the world." When history became exclusion supported with violence, the result was spilled blood ... and this is human history. The beginning of our world was the clenched fist of exclusion, threat, and violence, and so it remains. The syntax makes the "whens" of beginning and end the same. If this "when" seems momentarily to belong to a timeless myth-time, and if it seems to determine a fate, that doesn't last long, not even to the end of the sentence, for the continuation is something unexpected, an irruption of freedom and beauty into the scene:

Blood poured out when history was closed and the beginning of the world was a clenched fist, uncontrollable measure of the delight of loving where freedom alone opens its rose ...

No sooner do we learn that the beginning was already the disastrous end, the mutual destructive violence of beings closed to each other, than we find out that this very same

reality was a measure of love's delight, where lonely freedom dwells and opens a rose. The rose, symbol of beauty, sexuality, freshness, and renewal, is made a symbol of the same history that has just received the opposite characterization. With the rose, the verb tense abruptly, "illogically," switches to the present. Freedom causes the beginning and end to be transformed in the now; their fear and horror are sub

sumed in the opening rose and the delights of love.

Thus, end and beginning are so fused that they are revealed to be one thing. Ellul's full opening passage continues this procedure and confirms this reading:

Blood poured out when history was closed and the beginning of the world was a clenched fist, uncontrollable measure of the delight of loving where freedom alone opens its rose and freedom alone demanded total love.

Love alone was free and the blood flowed before creation—from which nothing had been excluded— sang for its first and its final recourse.

Here we find that freedom was alone in the beginning, that it alone can open the rose of creativity, that it demanded total love. This idea has two elements. Firstly, a demand requires a scope for action. Time, history, and progress are implied: a direction and meaning for time. Time and history are given as possibility, and their use for love is enjoined. Love demands a work of transformation, by which the beginning and end of clenched fist and spilled blood will no longer be the beginning and the end. Ellul's line "et la liberte seule exigeait tout amour" means that freedom both demanded to be loved and demanded of all things that they love. The second element is expressed in the verb "exigeait," "demanded": the past tense now returns, showing that freedom's "now" has transformed the past, creating a new origin from which a going-forward is now possible.

"Love alone was free" begins a second sentence, occupying lines six to eight. The personified freedom that was acting in lines four and five is revealed to be "Love." Ellul fits his sentence into the three verse lines in such a way as to convey that the spilled blood was also, and first, Love's blood, and it flowed temporally before and spatially in view of the creation. Thus, the word "creation" is made to mean at once the human creation of violently spilled blood and an anterior, more fundamental creation that subsumes it, a creation in which the spilled blood is already transformed into Love's self-sacrifice. Love was free, the lines tell us, and its blood poured "before" creation, that is, in its view. But the syntactical jolt at the turn of lines seven and eight stresses the sense of "prior to": Love was alone, and was free and gave its blood prior to the moment when creation sang for deliverance from the violent history it had just constituted itself as.

Turning from particular verses to the poem's totality, we find that Ellul has given *Oratorio* a symmetrical form, consonant with his visionary sense of the perennial total presence of the end in the beginning, with the disregarded word being the real presence of freedom, life, and peace. The poetic form he creates resembles the one he perceives in the Apocalypse as analyzed in *The Apocalypse: Architecture in Movement.* That book's major point concerning structure is that the Apocalypse is best under-

stood from the center outward, five sections arranged around the third central section, which he calls the "keystone," Apocalypse 8–14:5. Ellul finds that the Apocalypse is a progressive narrative and argument, a vision of history, but simultaneously, through its symmetrical aspect, it expresses the eternal. He finds this dual structure to be one with the poem's meaning. He writes that

The Apocalypse does not describe a moment of history but reveals for us the permanent depth of the historical: it is, then, one could say, a discernment of the Eternal in Time, of the action of the End in the Present. (24)

The structure of *Oratorio*, developed years earlier, is strictly symmetrical and embodies this same meaning. The book is in five parts, the central three parts concerning the three horsemen of the Apocalypse (6:3–8) that in Ellul's view are destructive yet constrained to be ultimately beneficent by God's plan. The central section, "Part Three: The Black Horse," is the longest and most complex and concerns the horse that Ellul aligns closely with his analysis of technique, politics, the state, and human self-deception and self-aggrandizement. It is flanked by "Part Two: The Horse of War" and "Part Four: Death," which mirror. This structure corresponds to the poem's vision of history, which can be summarized in three points: 1) War is the most horrible expression of death but not the whole of it. 2) Death is the ultimate reality of human works; it is their end but also stands at their origin and is constantly present within them. 3) The basic reality of death is the rejection of God, the self-assertive pride endemic to human works. The poem's symmetrical structure places the last point, the basic one, in the central position.

On either side of these three parts lie "Part One: The Word of God," in which the Word is largely represented as the white horseman of Apocalypse 16:2 and 19:11, and "Part Five," untitled, which can be characterized by a phrase from it: "morning comes, / borne by the First, the horseman of the dawn." These two parts, like Parts Two and Four, mirror each other. In Part One, the Word of God must set out on its painful course through human history. In Part Five, there is a more complete revealing of the Word's permanent success and agony and of its way of existing for us in history. Part Five focuses on the accomplishment of what is announced as plan in Part One and becomes crisis and death in Parts Two, Three, and Four. It's important to keep in mind, though, the constant and extreme paradoxical interminglings of Ellul's verse. Anyone will be bewildered who expects a pure presentation in each section of one stage, the discourse then moving on to the next stage. There is scarcely an exultant line that does not contain its charge of deathliness and desperate challenge; there is scarcely a cry of despair that does not imply hope and the redeeming if hidden action of divine love.

True poetry always comes up against the inexpressible, and perhaps most essentially here, where the task is to see the hidden in the obtrusive, the eternal in time. *Oratorio*'s final stanza sings a visionary future in which suddenly the three terrifying horses gallop

away and vanish and the permanently present reality always advancing toward us is indeed fully here:

All you who so often felt their hatred

and shivered at their hoof beats, you frail catkins of the green ash tree, look—look, the morning comes,

borne by the First, the horesman of the dawn

at last known by all who come to open and to close the black doors of fate

to give the Beggar's glory back into his hands. (94)

This great final passage can be compared with lines from *The Apocalypse: Architecture in Movement* that describe God's ever-present eternity in concepts that catch up the poem's glancing and profound images of nature—the fruit, the mysterious pulsing sun, the spring catkins of the ash tree likened to human beings and to the coming of dawn and of a beautiful horse:

The eternity of God is not an immobility; it is a perpetual beginning, a newness always being born, an absence of custom, necessity, destiny; an absence of repetition... And eternity is a spring gushing

with non-predetermined instants, always fresh, new, surprising... That is what our text calls Life ... a love that does not wear out, ... always as full, as stirring, as surprising as on the first day. (216, translation altered)

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Ellul's City in Scripture and Poetry

Kelsey L. Haskett

In the summer of 2017 I had the privilege of visiting the Ellul family at their home outside Bordeaux and of examining some of Jacques Ellul's archives with them, in particular a number of handwritten poems that had never been published. As a professor of French literature I was drawn to the poems and eager to help with transcribing them into typewritten form and then translating them into English. The first four poems that we reviewed were poems Ellul had written to accompany the publication of his book *The Meaning of the City* but that the editor had declined to publish at the time. It is evident from our current vantage point that these poems not only enhance the substance of Ellul's book, but that their very personal meaning also sheds light on the author himself, who dared to expose his emotions and experiences in a way that reveals both his profound engagement with this topic and, indeed, a part of his inner

life that he may not have divulged elsewhere. While the book explains theologically the essential concepts of Ellul's city, it is in the poems that he explores his own experience of living in the city, with a parallel unfolding of themes. Anyone reading these poems without being familiar with the book would certainly be surprised, if not perplexed, by the vehemence of the author in his condemnation of the city. Although his verse is metaphorically very graphic and convincing in conveying the failure of the city to meet human needs, the reasons for his consistently negative stance are not fully revealed in the poems themselves. It is only when they are read in conjunction with the book that the basis for the poet's attitude is disclosed. Thus, I would like to briefly review the major themes of the book pertaining to an understanding of the poems, before turning to the poems themselves.

The Meaning of the City, as a theological work, analyses the role of the city as portrayed throughout the Bible, with tremendous scope and originali-ty—with the city's development being used as a metaphor for the trajectory of humankind, from its rejection of God to its final redemption through Christ. Instead of focusing first on humanity's origins in the Garden of Eden, Ellul begins with man's revolt against God and its manifestation in the building of the first city by the first murderer, Cain, thereby conferring on the city from the outset the notion of spiritual rebellion that Ellul sees as its root. Condemned to be a fugitive and a wanderer for the sin of having killed his brother, Cain flees from the presence of the Lord and builds a city, in an attempt to end his wandering and establish a secure place, a home, which in fact he never finds. For Ellul, "The seed of all man's questings is to be found in Cain's life in the land of wandering" (3). His relationship with God now broken, he finds no comfort in the mark of protection God puts on him. Ellul affirms,

The city is the direct consequence of Cain's murderous act and of his refusal to accept God's protection For God's Eden he substitutes his own, for the goal given to his life by God, he substitutes a goal chosen by himself—just as he substituted his own security for God's. Such is the act by which Cain takes his destiny on his own shoulders, refusing the hand of God in his life. (5)

Ellul sees in Cain's creation of the city the beginning of all civilization. He goes on to elucidate the origins of basically all the significant cities in the Bible, stating that, "All the builders were sons of Cain and act with his purpose" (10). Tracing the steps of Nimrod and other builders, he examines the multiple purposes of the city as it develops, including the role of Nineveh as an agent of war, Pharaoh's cities as economic strongholds, and Babylon as the synthesis of civilization, showing that there are spiritual powers behind each of these. Spiritually speaking, the kings of Israel fare no better than their pagan counterparts, despite having been chosen by God. Beginning with Solomon, they succumb to their desire for power and riches and put their confidence elsewhere than in the Lord when they decide to build their cities. The central problem the city represents for Israel, according to Ellul, is the clash between

the spiritual power of the city and the spirit of grace that God wants to bring to bear upon the city. There is a fundamental opposition between the Lord and the city, and a "consciousness ... of the city as a world for which man was not made" (42).

The Meaning of the City thus provides the theological underpinnings for Ellul's depiction of the city in his poems. For Ellul, "The city is cursed. She is condemned to death because of everything she represents" (47). Ellul cannot do otherwise but reject the city in his poetry, just as he sees God doing in his theology. The reason for this divine rejection, Ellul maintains, is that "[i]nto every aspect ... of the city's construction has been built the tendency to exclude God" (53). This would seem all the more so in the modern city, where natural beauty has been replaced by lifeless artifice, and human agency by technological progress. Before touching on the final destiny of the city, as it unfolds at the end of Ellul's book, let us now turn to the poems Ellul wished to incorporate into his exegesis of the city, considering not only their poetic value, meaning, and relation to the book, but in particular their revelatory value as it applies to Ellul's life, emotions, and personal spiritual journey, as a man living in the city, like most of us are compelled to do.

Ellul's City in Poetry

Poem 1 — Lights over the City

I followed my dream in the heart of strange cities
Amid cast-iron flowers and cement tree trunks.
Everything is natural and simple and my dream rushes Past hearts completely mass-produced—hearts made of magnets.
A button—everything lights up and the sky becomes red Red that is truly astonishing—red over the city And this sky where not a single bird still moves
Seems to be a piece of ground where some enormous drunk has vomited The drunk, is it me? Man? (with a capital M)
The Machine? The fluid? or perhaps heaven?
I do not know—I see and continuously chew on
This discovery like a honey-filled candy
A dream under heaven? What a joke
I certainly want to hang on to "civilizations"
But let them produce flowers, even faded ones Something human—not excrement
However over there, very far away (a bell tolls) A man alone finds himself in a bright fire And a dense vibration—everything purrs The walls of white marble—of gray everite A rough cement ground and the opal window panes with a faint glimmer coming from the rust-colored copperware. Everything purrs—and vibrates—strange pale coloring Which slowly coats and then swallows everything.

In the middle, without a sound—without moving—without life Black transformers crouched down every evening strive—without passion (a man watches them closely) And without knowing why—to flood the black sky.

"Lights over the City" is a very personal poem, as the first-person pronouns "I" and "my" immediately reveal. We begin with the poet following his dream, which turns out to be more a nightmare, as it thrusts him into the heart of the city, where all is false, just like the hearts of the people who live there. The industrial forms of cast-iron and cement that replace the natural vegetation in the city's landscape reflect, in fact, the inhabitants' hearts made of magnets. Forged in the hardest of materials, incapable of expressing true emotion or individuality, these hearts have all come out the same, and their force of attraction is anything but human. Ironically everything appears to be natural and simple, as if it has always been this way; it is only the poet who is not duped by what he sees.

In the sky, a simple button turns everything to red, and through artificial illumination, alluded to in the title, nature is once again obliterated; and just as there is no natural vegetation in the city, there are no birds flying in the sky. The metaphor used to describe the sky is as repulsive as the poet can possibly make it: it is nothing but an ugly stretch of ground, entirely vilified by the vomit of an enormous drunk.

Through this and the other images in the poem, the senses of the reader are attacked by the portrait of the city that emerges: the stench of vomit fills our nostrils like the foulness of the pollution that blankets the modern city; visually speaking, everything is artificial—from the industrially made imitations of plants and trees to the red, electric light; on a tactile level, everything is hard and cold, including people's hearts; and the absence of birds moving in the sky, while suggesting the death of nature, reinforces the sense of immobility in this stifling atmosphere.

These impressions of the city are followed by the poet's interrogations as to the source of the vile substance that now transforms the sky—not only destroying the natural canopy of light but figuratively, one might add, obscuring our dreams of truth and beauty, freedom and dignity, and highlighting the city's failure to produce anything of worth for humanity. Does the responsibility lie with the individual, the society, the technological world we have created, or elsewhere? the poet ponders. While not rejecting human civilization outright, he nevertheless condemns in the strongest possible terms our modern relinquishment of all that is human for the sake of a society that produces nothing but dung, nothing but a betrayal of all that we are.

The last verse of the poem depicts again a presumably red light, a bright fire, now accompanied by the dense vibration of an electrically charged environment permeating the whole cityscape. Everything is swallowed up by the strange pale coloring that fills the atmosphere, emanating from black transformers crouched down in the night like beasts in the jungle, flooding the black sky with their abnormal light. An absence of passion typifies this electrically controlled world, overseen nevertheless by man, and evoking once again the city dwellers' hearts of magnets, suggesting now the possibility of electromagnets, running on electricity and manipulated by its current, reinforcing

the absence of the human and the power of technology in this strange city humankind has built for itself.

Poem 2 — Streets

Oh streets, empty streets, streets muddy with people and mud!
Streets that swallow up women, drunkards, and madmen
Streets I so often walked
And where for a long time I searched
In vain
Something that was me
Ah, streets! Polished and mundane levelers
Where I must walk at the same pace, at the breakneck speed
Of everyone, of all!
Of all those who are not crazy!
And I am
All that which is not me!
Neither I! Nor you, nor anyone, nor even (not even) shame
Draws attention in the street which comes, goes, descends, and rises Because it's all the same
From the marvelous awakening of the rooster
Until evening when I sleep—
Everything is meaningless in the street, especially life
Everything is hidden under a respectable veil, and envy
Shakes amiably, callously, the hand
Of vice, only to choke tomorrow
And at daybreak
Reappear around me
Ah, streets, I hate you in my heart, great swallower of souls
Breathing your skillful, artificial, and shameful flame into uneven walkers of your polished paving stones into walkers that your paving stones render polished too,
And empty, just like me

In Ellul's second poem, "Streets," he opens up on an even more personal level, situating himself in the city in a very tangible way. Like the "strange pale coloring" in the previous poem, the streets swallow up the passers-by, especially the vulnerable. The poet's familiarity with these streets is accompanied by a sense of alienation that runs throughout the poem, although it is not technology that alienates him this time but the superficiality of the people who walk the streets and the absence of meaning that characterizes their lives. The poet seeks his identity in streets he cannot relate to, although the reader may sense they are simply a catalyst for his intense self-searching that will never find answers here, having little to do, in reality, with the streets themselves.

The pressure to conform is revealed in the second verse, where the poet is reduced to the common level of the masses, advancing at the same pace as they, unable to maintain a distinct identity, and turning into something he knows is not he. Nothing stands out in the crowd, either positively or negatively, because "everything is meaningless in the street, especially life." The poet's existential crisis is lived in the street, heightened by the banality and the pretense of the people around him, arousing his hatred for all that is false, all that is polished and artificial in society. The streets are also a "swallower of souls," because everyone has, in effect, sold their soul to the mediocrity of the city, renouncing a higher way and ending up empty, just like the poet. This emotional poem, replete with exclamation marks, evidently reflects a time in his life when Ellul was searching for truth and meaning and when nothing on the human level could satisfy his deepest longings, least of all the activities of the city played out in the lifeless streets he was obliged to travel.

Poem 3

In the stench of urine and gasoline and sewers And in the horrible drama of my tempted soul And in the obscure words, remarks thrown up To heaven, of hatred, fury, love
I saw randomly and wretchedly
Against the sky reeking of factories and vices
Two naked, straight, and harsh branches of winter
In the shape of a cross—a star in the background was looking on—
For the first time a ray of hope appears in the third poem, standing out against the vileness of the city, portrayed once again by images that irritate our senses. The poet himself is in the throes of a personal drama, as his soul wrestles with temptation—but this time he throws up some reckless words to heaven, the prayer of a desperate man, and in the midst of his hopelessness appears a sign: the symbol of the cross, etched across the sky by two lifeless branches but infused with hope by the star looking on, signifying through the verb an animate being, a Being who cares and who sees our plight.

Poem 4

Light on the eyes, light in the sky
nothing rumbles or passes by disturbing the light and the serenity of things is first
before all-powerful and all-existential
rustling of a leaf in the sun that envelops it
smothering of the soul in the hands of the living God bitter sorrow endured within the trembling fulfillment of the eyes covered with light
I only knew this in a brutal world
chaos of crushing iron, stone, and steel

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where the flowers and fruit are forged from the abnormal

where abstraction escapes and the deformed creates intoxicated with the averagely hideous city what is the despair that came looking for me what grandeur in this destiny that oppressed me what madness in the passions, actions, thoughts—all shameful?

You alone, you know, oh God who was seeking me despite myself, against myself, who came and loved me for the sake of your love, your will, your very name and who knew how to find within my feeble cowardice the pure gold that you yourself put in the mud

In the mud of the city with narrow windows where nothing is seen but a star-shaped lamp as false as virtue, as mediocre as vice where nothing is disclosed to astonished eyes

of the clear light purely poured down from your heaven, oh my God

Thus you found me—you loved me so much that despite my fury and my taste for suicide despite my strong desire to no longer be lucid I had nothing left but a single port—all others being closed by you yourself Lord who directed this struggle— it was to recognize at last that this fall, mortal, dreadful, to the chasm that you open was the only view that you cover from my eyes

Oh last judgment!

last day that we live in the city of men!

city of factory smoke, of offices

that open at eight o'clock and smell of stale tobacco city of hospitals where the patient is a number city of prisons where the drama is words

Oh last judgment that descends in silence on this man walking among other men

This final poem represents a drastic change in tone for the poet. Artificial light now changes to God's pure light, as he relates a spiritual experience that has radically transformed his life. Having opened the door a crack to the hope of the cross in the previous poem, he now throws it wide open, flooding the first verse with light. In lines slightly reminiscent of Blaise Pascal's "Memorial," in which he begins the description of his dramatic conversion experience with the exclamation "Fire," Ellul focuses on the light that has opened his eyes to the truth of the gospel: "Light on the eyes, light in the sky / nothing rumbles or passes by disturbing the light." Serenity and nature replace the negative emotions and images of the previous poems, turning the "bitter sorrow endured within the trembling" to the "fulfillment of the eyes covered with light." Just as the personal God Pascal discovers at the time of his conversion is not the God of "philosophers and scholars," Ellul's God is not, first and foremost, "all-powerful and all-existential" but rather a loving God who seeks out the individual and guides him into his light.

This discovery has not come easily for the poet. Having endured in the "brutal world" of the city the "chaos of crushing iron, stone, and steel where the flowers and fruit are forged from the abnormal," he realizes nonetheless that God was seeking him, despite his thoughts and actions, despite himself, and indeed against his own natural tendencies to reject God. It is God's love, described here in the most tender of terms,

that made all the difference for Ellul, winning him over in the midst of his painful emotions, including suicidal thoughts and a desire to escape from reason, maybe even into madness. He understands that God was searching within his frail frame of dust the "pure gold" God himself had placed there, seeing both his eternal value and his rich potential in this life. He knows it was God who directed his struggle and led him to Himself and has protected him from the dreadful consequences of the Fall that he will never see, being covered by God's love. This last thought leads Ellul to a sudden consciousness of the day of judgment, coming to end life in the city, or the world, where ordinary lives are being lived out in total oblivion to their current degradation or impending doom. The last two lines, somewhat surprising, suggest to me the poet's awareness of human destiny, which abruptly descends on him with the grim realization that there are others in this world who have not yet seen the light and whom he cannot forget as he goes about living in their midst. His description of God's love and grace throughout the poem seems too poignant for us to think that he now fears judgment for himself, I would submit, but points rather to his quickened sense of responsibility for the rest of humanity who have yet to experience this love.

My interpretation of these lines is reinforced by a chapter in *The Meaning of the City,* which, after an extensive discussion of God's condemnation of the city throughout the book, opens with the following words: "But it is in these cities we must live" (72). Ellul then quotes Jeremiah's injunction to the captives of Israel being carried off to Babylon: "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 will you find your welfare" (Jer 29:7). God will carry out his own judgment, contends Ellul, but he asks us to participate in the life of the city and to seek her welfare, praying for her and warning her of judgment. It is with this in mind that I read the concluding lines of Ellul's last poem, where the awareness of the coming judgment falls upon the poet who knows, in the end, that he must reach out to the city.

I believe this poem is particularly significant in that it expresses in a very intimate way what Ellul was reluctant to discuss throughout the rest of his work. In *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity*, he does provide some insight into his conversion in his conversation with Patrick Chastenet, saying of his encounter with God,

I knew myself to be in the presence of something so astounding, so overwhelming that it entered me to the very center of my being. That's all I can tell you.... Afterwards I thought to myself, "You have

been in the presence of God." (52)

He also asserts that he has "never written about [his conversion] and ha[s] no intention of doing so," but adds, "As I have already explained for my poems, they give away too much about me" (53). It is only through his poetry, then, that Ellul is able to overcome his scruples and invite his readers into his private world.

Before concluding his book, Ellul examines the role of Jerusalem in the world and the watershed moment of Christ's coming in history, presenting finally the miracle of

the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city that transcends all that exists in the world. God does not restore his original order at the end, explains Ellul, but creates another, where he makes all things new. Man wanted to create a city where God would be excluded, but God will create a city where he will be all in all. It is here that Christ's final victory will be realized and where God himself will fulfill all the hopes of his people.

As we study the poems Ellul has produced to accompany this book, we see a progression from the themes of dehumanization and alienation to a gradual revelation of hope and finally transcendent love. In tandem with the book, the poetic themes of depersonalization, degradation, and despair are intersected by a ray of hope that converges with the poet's search for something more. While the book devotes a chapter to the transformation Christ's life brought to the world, Ellul's final poem relates the transformation of his own inner life through his encounter with Christ, powerfully contrasted with his earlier poems and concluding with his return to the needs of the city and a realization of his new role. His poetry does not develop the latter themes of the book, because it stops with his own personal story. But through his poetry he opens up his life in a way that makes his theology come alive and convinces us that it has much more to do with his own personal reality than with theory and exegesis alone.

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The "Analogy of Faith": What Does It Mean? Why, and What For?

Frederic Rognon

As a diligent reader of the Bible, Jacques Ellul placed scriptural revelation at the heart of his work, and in particular, his ethical works. It is thus that he can write,

The criterion of my thought is biblical revelation; the content of my thought is biblical revelation; my point of departure is furnished by biblical revelation; the method is the dialectic according to which biblical revelation is given to us; and the objective is the search for the signification of biblical revelation for ethics.[1]

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[1] Jacques Ellul, *Le Vouloir et le Faire. Une critique theologique de la morale* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, [1964] 2013), 19.

Ellul's ethical thought is thus "scripturo-centric," conferring a singular status on the biblical text. How, in effect, did Jacques Ellul read the Bible? And in what manner is his reading original, singular, and capable of renewing current interpretations?

To respond to these questions, we will proceed in four steps. First, we will indicate the critique that Ellul addressed to exegesis. Next, we will present the core principles of the Ellulian approach to the Bible. In the third step, we will pause on the method *par excellence* recommended by the professor from Bordeaux: "the analogy of faith." And we will conclude with four examples of biblical texts interpreted according to the analogy of faith.

Critique of Exegesis

Ellul addresses lively critiques toward historical-critical exegesis as well as structural exegesis. He does not consider them to be false or vain, as they are doubtless exact and useful for the nature of the science, but they do not take one step towards the ultimate. Certainly, they are in the service of exactitude, but they say nothing on the subject of truth and do not permit it to be glimpsed but perhaps hide it.[2]

It is thus the tension between Reality and Truth that is invoked here to disqualify scientific and technical exegetical methods, a tension that recurs throughout the Ellulian oeuvre. Ellul particularly reproaches these methods for stripping the biblical text of any spiritual dimension and reducing it to nothing more than a text like any other (similar to a work of Homer or Plato). To treat the Bible like an inert object would be like surgeons forgetting that the patients on whom they are operating are alive, performing a dissection or an autopsy instead of an operation that would save them.[3]

This accusation recalls S0ren Kierkegaard's polemical and sarcastic charge against those who pretend to read a love letter with an arsenal of dictionaries, concordances, and encyclopedias.[4] Now, the Bible is a love letter, sent by God to his readers, to touch their hearts and address the most intimate areas of their existence.

Ellul equally critiques the marxist exegesis that was fashionable in the 1970s, and notably that of Fernando Belo, who purported "to read Mark via Marx."[5] The professor from Bordeaux catalogs the innumerable historical errors that permit Belo to integrate

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[2] ———, Sans feu ni lieu. Signification biblique de la Grande Ville (Paris: La Table Ronde, [1975] 2003), 17.

[3] Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte,* vol. 1 (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1975), 210.

[4] Cf. S0ren Kierkegaard, "Pour un examen de conscience recommande aux con-**The "Analogy of** temporains" (1851). *ttuvres Completes*, vol. 18 (Paris: Editions de 1'Orante, **Faith"** 1966), 83–87.

[5] Cf. Fernando Belo, Lecture materialiste de l'evangile de Marc. Re'cit, pratique, ideologie (Paris: Le Cerf, 1974), 18.

the gospel into the marxist schema[6] and particularly reproaches him for performing a materialist and political reduction of a text that, precisely, refuses any materialist interpretation of life.[7]

What, then, is the alternative that Jacques Ellul proposes to these exegetical impasses?

The Core Principles of the Ellulian Approach to the Bible

If Ellul refuses the scientific approach to the Bible, it is in order to oppose it to meditation inspired by Kierkegaard. This latter approach amounts to considering biblical revelation as addressing the very existence of the subject. But in this regard, he inverts the contemporary perspective, notably in Protestant milieus, that consists in opening the Bible each time that we seek a response to our questions (whether ethical, social, or existential). Ellul clearly does not conceive of the Bible as a recipe book, nor even as a book of responses to our questions. The Bible is not a book of responses but a book of questions, which God poses to the believing reader.[8] If we come to the Bible with questions, these will find no response here; instead, they will undergo a displacement, a decentering, and we will come away from the Bible with our questions renewed and with new questions posed to us.[9] It is therefore up to us to respond to them, that is, to be responsible in assuming our responses.

The Bible is thus a book that directs man to his freedom and responsibility. A believer's reading is a listening, since faith is revitalized in silence.[10] The Bible poses us three principal questions.[11] It poses a confessional question, "Who do you say that I am?"[12] an ethical question, "What have you done with your brother?"[13] and an ex-

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[6] Cf. Jacques Ellul, *L'ideologie marxiste chretienne. Que fait-on de l'evangile?* (Paris: La Table Ronde, [1979] 2006), 113–53.

[7] Cf. Ellul, L'ideologie marxiste chretienne, 148–50.

[8] Cf. Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte,* 1:203, 2:164, 181–82; *La foi au prix du doute: « encore quarante-jours... »* (Paris: La Table Ronde, [1980] 2015), 147–52; « Karl Barth et nous », *Bulletin du Centre protestant d'etudes* 37:4–5 (June 1985): 5–12 (here, 7); *La Genese aujourd'hui,* with Francois Tosquelles (Le Collier: Editions de l'AREFPPI, 1987), 214; *Mort et esperance de la resurrection. Conferences inedites de Jacques Ellul* (Lyon: Editions Olivetan, 2016), 53; *Les sources de l'ethique chretienne. Le Vouloir et le Faire, parties IV et V*, introduction and notes by Frederic Rognon (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2018), 57–58; Gilbert Comte, « Entretien avec Jacques Ellul: "Je crois que nous sommes dans une periode de silence de Dieu" », *Le Monde* (8 novembre 1977): 1–2 (here, 2).

[9] Cf. Ellul, Ethique de la liberte, 2:164; La Genese aujourd'hui, 214.

[10] Cf. Ellul, *La foi au prix du doute*, 151–55.

[11] Cf. Ellul, *La foi au prix du doute*, 135–37.

[12] Matt 16:15, Mark 8:29, Luke 9:20. The range of Peter's responses could support the Ellulian reading of the Bible as a book of questions. The responses can thus vary from one person to another, but also with one person according to their stage in life.

[13] Cf. Gen 4:9-10a. More specifically, the text says, "The Lord said to Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel?' He replied, 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?' Then he said, 'What have you done?'"

istential question referring to our quest, "Who are you looking for?"[14] We are thus interrogated and invited to give a confessional response, an ethical response, and an existential response, by the word and by our life. Cain, for his part, refuses to respond to the question of God and thus assume his "responsibilities."[15] We often pose questions to the Bible or about the Bible; too often, we forget to receive the questions that the Bible itself poses to us.[16] Instead of posing questions to the Bible, as the believer ordinarily does, and instead of posing questions about the Bible, as the exegete does, with both cases starting from extra-biblical concerns, at risk of instrumentalizing revelation, it is a matter of letting the Bible pose questions to the world and to believers. It is thus a matter of having a freedom as robust toward the assumptions of the world as it is toward the given revelation.[17]

"The Analogy of Faith"

The royal method that Ellul proposes, in order to escape both literalism and textual critique, is that of the "analogy of faith." This expression comes to us from the apostle Paul, who employs it only once (it is thus a *hapax*) in the epistle to the Romans[18]: Kara t^v 'avaZoY^av T^g nicTsmc in Greek,*fidei analo-gia* in Latin. It is situated in a passage dedicated to different qualities that are given to different people in the heart of the Church: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, generosity, direction of the community, mercy.[19] The analogy of faith is attached to the persona of the prophet:

Since we have different gifts, according to the grace that has been accorded to us, let the one who has the gift of prophecy exercise it according to the analogy of faith.[20]

John Calvin borrowed this Pauline expression in his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*[21] (in his exegesis of Rom 12:6) and in several places in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.[22] In his commentary, Calvin pleads in favor of a broad conception of prophecy, understood not as the gift of predicting the future but as a right intelligence of Scripture and a capacity to explain it clearly. It is thus to seek to accord all doctrine taught from Scripture with the foundations of the faith.[23] In *Institutes of the Christian*

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[14] John 20:15.

[15] Cf. Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte*, 2:181–12.

[16] Cf. Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte*, 1:203.

[17] Cf. Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte*, 1:205.

[18] Rom 12:6b.

[19] Cf. Rom 12:4–8.

[20] Rom 12:6.

[21] Cf. Jean Calvin, *Commentaires de Jean Calvin sur le Nouveau Testament.* Vol. 4, *Epitre aux Romains* (Aix-en-Provence / Fontenay-sous-bois: Editions Keryg-ma / Editions Farel, 1978), 292–93.

[22] Cf. Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chretienne* (Aix-en-Provence / Charols: Editions Kerygma / Editions Excelsis, 2009): « Au roi de France », xxx ; book iv, chap. xvi, §4, 1252; book iv, chap. xvi, §8, 1256; book iv, chap. xvii, §32, 1321.

[23] Cf. Jean Calvin, Commentaires de Jean Calvin sur le Nouveau Testament. Vol. 4, Epitre aux Romains, 292–93.

Religion, Calvin mentions the analogy of faith beginning in his address to the king of France that introduces the work. Against his adversaries who accuse him of turning the Word of God from its true meaning, the Reformer recalls this:

When St. Paul wanted every prophecy to be conformed to the analogy and likeness of faith, he gave a most certain rule for testing every interpretation of Scripture (Rom 12[:6]). Now if our teaching is measured by this rule of faith, we have the victory in hand.[24]

In the main body of this voluminous treatment, John Calvin has recourse to the concept of the analogy of faith on the subjects of the baptism of children and the communion meal. Infant baptism is not explicitly affirmed in the Bible, but a silence does not imply a censure; otherwise, women would not be permitted to take communion. On the other hand, there is a question of the baptism of entire families; it is thus conforming to the analogy of faith that we can lay biblical foundations for the baptism of chil-dren.[25] By the same token, the Reformer defends his comprehension of the mystery of the holy supper based on the methodological principle of the analogy of faith.[26] According to Calvin, the analogy of faith thus consists in interpreting Scripture by Scripture, allowing Scripture to interpret itself: to dig deeply into each text to make it cohere with the other texts of the Bible. Ellul joins Calvin in his understanding of this rule of reading, while still slightly demarcating his own position. In the second part of *To Will and To Do*,[27] posthumously published in French and currently under translation into English, the professor from Bordeaux devotes long passages of his writing to the analogy of faith.[28] Following Karl Barth, while polemically disagreeing with him, Ellul begins by clearly distinguishing the *analogia fidei* from the *analogia entis*, a concept that is situated at the base of natural theology in the style of Thomas Aquinas.[29] His critique directed towards Barth consists in saying that the theologian from Basel ceded to the temptation that he denounced himself (of resorting to the *analogia entis*). Ellul then distances himself from Calvin in limiting the analogy of faith to the exercise of prophecy in the strict sense, in place of making of this rule a very general principle for the interpretation of all biblical texts.[30] He nevertheless understands the prophet's mission as being properly ethical—that is, as consisting

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[24] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1541 French Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 8. For the French, see Calvin, *Institution de la religion chretienne*, xxx. (Translator's note: my own translation of the French varies slightly: "When Paul declared that all prophecy ought to be interpreted according to the analogy and the similitude of faith (Rom 12:6), he pronounced a rule sure to apply to all interpretation of Scripture. If then our doctrine is examined according to this measure of faith, we have the victory in hand.")

[25] Cf. Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1541 French Edition, 1252, 1256.

[26] Cf. Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1541 French Edition, 1321.

[27] Cf. Ellul, Les sources de l'ethique chretienne. Le Vouloir et le Faire, parties IV et V.

[28] Cf. Ellul, Les sources de l'ethique chretienne, 287–311.

[29] Cf. Ellul, Les sources de l'ethique chretienne, 281–85.

[30] Cf. Ellul, Les sources de l'ethique chretienne, 292.

of enunciating an ethic, under the inspiration of the Spirit, and in guaranteeing its objectivity by confronting it with Scripture:

If, then, prophecy consists in this formulation of a moral here and now, inspired by the Spirit of God, departing from and relating to Holy Scripture, we understand that the analogy of faith in question here effectively concerns the interpretation of biblical texts, and that is a matter of a guarantee of objectivity.[31]

This does not prevent Ellul from implicitly positioning himself close to the broad conception of Calvin in applying this method to numerous texts, in which he believes he discerns an ethical intention: "There cannot be a formulation of a moral for Christians based on the deep comprehension of ethical texts unless the analogy of faith can be applied," he declares.[32] He defines the analogy as "a relation between elements of different natures or dimensions"[33] but also as "the comprehension of the *reason*"[34] for this relation. The interpretation of Scripture therefore consists in understanding the gap between biblical revelation and the contemporary moral of an era, in order to reproduce the same gap in our own milieu, without adopting in a literal manner a statement that is outmoded today. It is the work of salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ that constitutes the objectivity of the very heart of revelation. The entire Bible points to Jesus Christ and designates him as Lord and Savior. Consequently, Jesus Christ must be the constant in relation to which the analogy of faith must be established.[35] And if a passage of the biblical corpus seems to depart from the image and the face of the God of love that Jesus has revealed to us, it must be worked on, to the point of discerning what can be made consistent with this kernel of revelation.

Examples of Applying the Method of the Analogy of Faith

We will take four examples of difficult biblical texts that the method of the analogy of faith will allow us to clarify, by hearing them in echo with other texts, in a harmonious symphony. We present them by relying on Ellul's commentary but also by extending it beyond what Ellul wrote concerning these texts.

Qoheleth / Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes is the biblical book that Ellul loved the most: "There is probably no other text in the Bible that I have so probed, from which I have received so much—

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[31] Ellul, Les sources de l'ethique chretienne, 293.
[32] ———, Les sources de l'ethique chretienne, 297.
[33] ———, Les sources de l'ethique chretienne, 297.
[34] ———, Les sources de l'ethique chretienne, 297.
[35] Cf. Ellul, Les sources de l'ethique chretienne, 308–11.

that has affected me and spoken to me so much."[36] He therefore devoted a work of meditation to Ecclesiastes, *Reason for Being*[37]—a book that he considered to be the conclusion to the whole of his work.[38] For his study, our author affirms to have chosen a path that inverts the academic method, departing from the Hebrew text itself and not from commentar-ies.[39] He similarly refuses to consider the Bible as equal to any other literary text, since it is the bearer of revelation.[40] That is why Ellul seeks a textual coherence beyond apparent contradictions: for example, between "all is vanity (including wisdom)" and "seek wisdom (because it comes from God)." And he orients this coherence in a dialectical movement between "Reality" and "Truth." The Reality is that all is vanity, and the Truth is that everything is a gift of God. Reality prevents the Truth from being an evasion, while the Truth prevents Reality from being hopeless.[41]

All commentators of Ecclesiastes have been disconcerted by the absence of a logical plan and have generally searched to identify different authors and different editorial layers. According to Ellul, the coherence does not come from a plan but from a weave, like a threading of reflections that become entangled, echoing one another. The dialectic between vanity and wisdom finds its end in God: wisdom makes the vanity of everything apparent, but wisdom is itself vanity, and yet vanity is overtaken by wisdom. And nevertheless, the book of Qoheleth does not end in this immanent circle, because of the reference to God, which is central and decisive because it ties together the dispersed factors. The contradictions are not gross errors of forgetfulness, as the exegetes say, but one of the keys of the book: "The principle of non-contradiction is a principle of death. Contradiction is the condition of a communication."[42] The work of Kierkegaard was decisive for Ellul's discernment of the dialectical movement at the heart of the book of Qoheleth. And it is equally in reference to the Danish thinker that our author finally pleads in favor of a subjective and intuitive approach:

above all, to let oneself be seized by the beauty of the text, to receive it first of all in emotion and silent listening as with music, and to allow one's sensitivity, one's imagination, to speak before wanting to analyse and "understand."[43]

Ellul synthesizes his approach by a spiral schema,[44] thanks to which we can traverse the apparent contradictions of the book of Qoheleth in following the movement of the text. We are not dealing with a book written by three authors: the one, skeptic and disillusioned, seeing in all things only vanity; the second, rich with experiences, considering a wisdom without God as an art of living with realism and lucidity; and

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[36] Jacques Ellul, *La raison d'etre. Meditation sur I'Ecclesiaste* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987), 11.

[37] Cf. Ellul, *La raison d'etre.*

[38] Cf. Ellul, *La raison d'etre*, 13–14.

[39] Cf. Ellul, *La raison d'etre*, 11. This remark betrays deep prejudices as to the exe-getical methods taught and practiced in the faculties of theology.

[40] Cf. Ellul, *La raison d'etre*, 16–18.

[41] Cf. Ellul, *La raison d'etre*, 42.

[42] Ellul, *La raison d'etre*, 52.

[43] ———, La raison d'etre, 323.

[44] ———, La raison d'etre, 40.

the third, who confesses his faith in God. It is a matter here of one author, who departs from vanity (1:1–11), responds to it with wisdom (1:12–18), but falls again into vanity since wisdom itself is vanity (2:1–11). This vicious circle finds its opening in God (who appears for the first time in 2:24); it is "before God" that everything takes on meaning, because everything is a "gift of God" (3:10–17; 5:17–19); therefore, "fear God" (5:6). And God has the last word (12:10–13). It is indeed a matter of applying the method of the analogy of faith, for God is the beginning, the center, and the end of the Bible, all converges toward him, and consequently every text that would seem to neglect him can be clarified if we dig to the point that, finally, we find God therein.

The Parable of the Wedding Party[45]

Our second example will be that of the parable of the wedding party.[46] We are within a parable of the Kingdom. These parables of the Kingdom are spread all along the Gospel of Matthew, from chapter 13 until chapter 25, with each one giving us an image of the Kingdom of heaven: "The Kingdom of heaven is like " Like a man, a mustard seed, yeast, a hidden

treasure, a merchant, a net, a king. Here, in our parable, the Kingdom of heaven is similar to a king. This king organizes a wedding feast for his son. Once the feast is put in place, he sends his servants to call those who were invited. These invitees were thus aware of the invitation, they knew that the wedding feast was going to take place and that they were invited. And yet, they make excuses and decline the invitation, too occupied with their fields and commerce. The invitees seize the servants, insult them, and kill them. So the king takes his vengeance by making them perish. Then he tells his servants to go and invite everyone they can find, in the streets and crossroads: "wicked and good," the text specifies. Wicked and good, all are invited. This seems to be a first decisive element.[47] And the wedding hall is full of guests. Now, one man has not worn his garment for the wedding feast. Only one in the whole crowd: this is a second determining element.[48] The king asks him how he entered, and he remains silent. So the king says to his servants, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The king behaves in the manner of a tyrant. Ought we therefore identify the king with God, as is often done? Must we identify the indifferent guests with believers who are a bit too lukewarm, and the poorly dressed guest as the unbeliever, the incredulous one, the infidel, the one who does not live according to the gospel, as we often do? Must we therefore see in this parable a means of terrorizing bad believers by threatening them with hell, as has

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[45] Cf. Jacques Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, comp., ed., and trans. Willem H. Vanderburg (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 188–95.

[46] Cf. Matt 22:1–14, Luke 14:16–24.

[47] Cf. Ellul, On Freedom, Love, and Power, 191.

[48] Cf. Ellul, On Freedom, Love, and Power, 191, 194.

often been done? Is this the image of the Father that Jesus came to reveal to us, when he addressed himself to us in an uncoded manner outside of the parables?

Let us therefore reconsider the elements that constitute the point of the text: wicked and good share the feast, and only one is thrown into the darkness, punished and tormented. Even the indifferent guests are not thrown into the darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. They are killed, they are dead, but they are not submitted to these torments. Nothing is told us about what happens to them after their death. There is only one here who is condemned, expelled, tormented for all. Who is this one if not Christ himself? This man who is thrown out, without a wedding garment, it is Jesus himself! This man who stays silent when interrogated and threatened, it is Jesus, who remained silent before Pilate! All the others are clothed in a wedding garment, the wicked and the good, everyone! For it is Jesus who took on himself our faults and was condemned for us, in our place! This is what the apostle Paul says to the Corinthians in a text just as enigmatic and scandalous: "The one who knew no sin, God made him become sin for us, so that we could become in him the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). He did not become a sinner; he became sin! And he paid for us. He was cast into torment, weeping and gnashing of teeth: he "descended into hell," as the Creed says. All this was done for us. And this is consistent with the whole of the gospel message, according to the analogy of faith.

So then, we might say: But this God is cruel, who casts his son into torment! It is here that I see the whole interest of believing in the Trinity. If we believe that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, if Jesus Christ is none other than God, God as the Father is God and as the Holy Spirit is God, then this is not a god who cruelly casts a man, *a fortiori* his son, into torment. Let us not be prisoners of a literal or allegorical reading of the parable, according to which a king expels a guest. The king does not represent the Father; he represents the Kingdom, since it is the Kingdom of heaven that is like a king. No, according to the trinitarian faith, it is God as Jesus Christ who gives himself fully for us: it is a gift of self and not the sacrifice of someone else. God gives himself fully to suffering and torment, to weeping and gnashing of teeth, so that we who are sinners may be freed, saved from these troubles. And this is in coherence with the whole of the gospel message, according to the analogy of faith.

The parable ends thus: "For many are called, but few are chosen." Here again, the formula is strange. The parable has just told us that the wedding hall was full of guests, yet the lesson of the parable consists in telling us that there are many called, but few chosen. We thus cannot reasonably identify the guests, who are innumerable, with the chosen, who are very few. Perhaps the guests are the called rather than the chosen. This final formula cannot signify that very few will be saved at the end of time.[49] "Few are chosen" can mean, by euphemism: "none are chosen, not one chosen." This formula signifies thus that we are not worthy of being saved, not one among us, but that Jesus alone has paid so that we might be saved. This formula signifies the infinite love of the

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[49] Cf. Ellul, On Freedom, Love, and Power, 193–95.

Father without which we can do nothing by ourselves. And this, too, is in coherence with the whole of the gospel message, according to the analogy of faith.

The Parable of the Judgment[50]

Our third example is that of the parable of the Judgment. This text poses a certain number of problems. It seems to go against the idea of salvation by grace and to defend the idea of salvation by works. Moreover, it raises the question of hell[51]: those who have accomplished works of mercy (the sheep) will be blessed and will enter into the Kingdom, and those who have not accomplished these works (the goats) will be cursed and will go into eternal fire. For those who have given food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, those who have welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, visited the sick and the prisoner, have served Christ himself. They therefore have the right to eternal life. But those who have not done all this have not served Christ. And consequently, they will go to eternal punishment.

But there is a small detail here that has too often gone neglected: the sheep are all surprised to learn that they have served Christ in serving their neighbor; by the same token, the goats are all surprised to learn that they have not served Christ in not serving their neighbor. They discover this only after the fact. Thus they are unaware, at the moment of their encounter with their neighbor, that Christ identified himself with the littlest person, that he was, literally, this little one. In other words, those who appear in Matthew 25 have not read Matthew 25! And for good reason! This effect of surprise is the first decisive element. For we see thus that the sheep have acted in this manner not in order to be saved but because they let their hearts speak. The attitude of the sheep, like that of the goats, was linked not to salvation but to the capacity or incapacity to love the neighbor in distress. It is the opening or closing of the heart that is in question here, the opening or closing of the heart before the concrete situation and the immediate needs of the littlest one there is, quite simply.

It is in this manner that a second small detail, still more decisive, must be noticed. First of all, what the Son of Man really says to the goats is that "in the measure where (e^'oaov) you have not done this for one of these little ones, it is for me that you have not done it." It is a question of one of these little ones. This means that it suffices to neglect one little one, only one, to be damned! Even if you help 99 little ones, if you leave one of the hundred aside without regarding them, you are damned! But this signifies therefore that we are all damned, for we have all neglected our neighbor at least once. We are all condemnable. This is the logic of the Law of the First Testament: it suffices to have broken one of the 613 commandments of the Torah, all while having

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[50] Cf. Matt 25:31–46.

[51] Ellul points out that there is no question of hell except in the parables, because these are not lessons of doctrinal teaching. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Ce que je crois* (Paris: Grasset, 1987), 257–58; *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, 157.

accomplished the other 612, to have sinned against the entire Torah. But now if we look at what is said to the sheep, we observe that the same thing is said—the same, but inverted—on the subject of the sheep: "In the measure where you have done this for one of these little ones, it is for me that you have done it." This means that it suffices to have served one little one, only one, to be saved! Now, we have all helped our neighbor at least once. Even one time! Thus, we are all saved! Or more precisely, we are all at once condemned and saved, or rather, condemnable and acquitted, for we are all, every woman and man among us, simultaneously goat and sheep. Each one of us is at once a goat and a sheep.

It is here that the point of our text is situated: in this paradoxical knot between what we have not done, even if only once, and what we have done, even if only once. In our condemnation, which we all merit, and our salvation, which none of us merits but which is offered to all. And this paradox invites us to turn towards grace. All condemnable, we cannot live except by the grace of God. And in this, this text echoes in every gospel, in the epistles, and in the whole of the New Testament, according to the analogy of faith. For this parable is made to bring us to commit ourselves into the hands of grace.

Men and Women[52]

Our fourth and final example concerns what the apostle Paul says about women and to women. Generally, we have an image of Paul as a conservative phallocrat, which we illustrate by citing the famous formula, "Wives, be submitted to your husbands!"[53] But how can we understand this injunction, which contradicts the liberating work of Christ for women, these first witnesses of the resurrection, which is to say, the first witnesses of what is at the very heart of our faith[54] (which is absolutely unique among all religions), and which contradicts even the word of Paul that affirms that "there is neither man nor woman"?[55] How may we interpret this verse according to the analogy of faith? First of all, Paul does not say, "Wives, be submitted to your husbands!" We must return to the preceding verse, to read, "Be submitted to one another!"[56] And verse 22 continues, "In the same fashion, wives, towards your husbands!" Thus, wives are invited to do regarding their husbands what everyone does (men included!), one to another, at the heart of the Church. Additionally, Paul addresses husbands, saying, "Husbands, love your wives!"[57] employing the verb aYanetv, which does not designate conjugal love but unconditional love, the love with which God loves us. And there is

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[52] Cf. Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme* (Paris: La Table Ronde, [1984] 2011), 122–24; *The Subversion of Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1986), 78–79.

[53] Eph 5:22.

[54] Cf. Ellul, La subversion du christianisme, 120; The Subversion of Christianity, 77.

[55] Gal 3:28.

[56] Eph 5:21.

[57] Eph 5:25a.

a further addendum to this addendum: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for her!"[58] Thus, Paul asks of men something much more demanding than he asks of women: to be ready to give their life for their wife.[59] And this is in coherence, according to the analogy of faith, with what biblical revelation says about women and about relations between men and women, including Paul, who affirms in the first epistle to the Corinthians, "The body of the woman belongs to her husband."[60] This conforms completely to the mentality of the era, but he hastens to add, "and the body of the husband belongs to his wife."[61] This is absolutely inconceivable, unheard of, revolutionary, subversive, both in Paul's time and today: complete equality between men and women, even in bed. The method of the analogy of faith allows us to see that Paul, far from being a frightful misogynist, is a man of the avant-garde.

Conclusion

Throughout these four examples, chosen from among many others, Jacques Ellul invites us to rediscover the Bible as a love letter from God to men, including in its most enigmatic aspects. Such is the potential for the renewal of traditional readings that the method of the analogy of faith offers us.

« L'analogie de la foi »: qu'est-ce que cela signifie? Pourquoi et en vue de quoi?

Frederic Rognon

Lecteur assidu de la Bible, Jacques Ellul a place le donne scripturaire au creur de son reuvre, et notamment de son reuvre ethique. C'est ainsi qu'il peut ecrire:

> Le critere de ma pensee est la revelation biblique ; le contenu de ma pensee est la revelation biblique ; le point de depart m'est fourni par la revelation biblique ; la methode est la dialectique selon laquelle nous est faite la revelation biblique ; et l'objet est la recherche de la signification de la revelation biblique sur l'Ethique[62].

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[58] Eph 5:25.

[59] Cf. Ellul, La subversion du christianisme, 123; The Subversion of Christianity, 79.

[60] 1 Cor 7:4a.

[61] 1 Cor 7:4b.

[62] Jacques Ellul, *Le Vouloir et le Faire. Une critique theologique de la morale* (1964), Geneve, Labor et Fides, 2013² , p. 19.

La pensee ethique de Jacques Ellul est donc « scripturo-centree », tout en conferant a la Bible un statut bien singulier. Comment, en effet, Jacques Ellul lit-il la Bible? Et en quoi sa lecture est-elle originale, singuliere, et susceptible de renouveler les interpretations courantes?

Pour repondre a ces questions, nous procederons en quatre temps. Nous indiquerons tout d'abord quelles sont les critiques que Jacques Ellul adresse a l'exegese. Nous presenterons ensuite les grands principes de l'approche ellulienne de la Bible. Dans un troisieme temps, nous nous arreterons sur la methode par excellence que preconise le professeur de Bordeaux: « l'analo-gie de la foi ». Et nous terminerons avec quatre exemples de textes bibliques interpretes selon l'analogie de la foi.

Critique de l'exegese

Jacques Ellul adresse de vives critiques a l'encontre de l'exegese histori-co-critique comme de l'exegese structurale. Il ne les considere pas comme fausses ou vaines, car elles sont sans doute exactes et utiles pour le jeu de la science, « mais elles ne font pas avancer d'un pas vers l'ultime. Elles servent assurement l'exactitude mais ne disent rien au sujet de la verite, et ne per mettent pas de l'entrevoir mais peut-etre la cachent »[63]. C'est done la tension, recurrente tout au long de l'reuvre ellulienne, entre la Realite et la Verite, qui est ici convoquee pour disqualifier les methodes exegetiques de type scientifique et technique. Jacques Ellul leur reproche tout particulierement de depouiller le texte biblique de toute dimension spirituelle et de le reduire a n'etre qu'un texte comme un autre (a l'instar d'une reuvre d'Homere ou de Platon). Prendre la Bible comme un objet inerte, c'est ressembler a un chir-urgien qui oublierait que le malade qu'il opere est vivant, pour le dissequer ou pratiquer une autopsie au lieu d'une operation qui le sauverait[64].

Ce grief rappelle la charge polemique et sarcastique de S0ren Kierkegaard contre ceux qui pretendent lire une lettre d'amour avec un arsenal de dic-tionnaires, de concordances et d'encyclopedies[65]. Or, la Bible est une lettre d'amour, envoyee par Dieu a son lecteur, qu'elle touche au creur et au plus intime de son existence.

Jacques Ellul critique egalement l'exegese marxiste, en vogue dans les an-nees 1970, notamment celle de Fernando Belo, qui pretendait « faire lire Marc par Marx »[66]. Le professeur de Bordeaux inventorie les innombrables erreurs d'ordre historique qui ont permis a Belo de faire entrer l'evangile dans le schema marxiste[67], et lui reproche tout

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[63] Jacques Ellul, *Sans feu ni lieu. Signification biblique de la Grande Ville* (1975), Paris, La Table Ronde (coll. La petite Vermillon n°191), 20032, p. 17.

[64] Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte,* Geneve, Labor et Fides (coll. Nouvelle serie theologique, n°27+30), 1975, tome 1, p. 210.

[65] Cf. S0ren Kierkegaard, « Pour un examen de conscience recommande aux con-temporains » (1851), *ttuvres Completes*, Paris, Editions de l'Orante, volume XVIII, 1966, p. 83–87.

[66] Cf. Fernando Belo, Lecture materialiste de l'evangile de Marc. Recit, pratique, ideologie, Paris, Le Cerf, 1974, p. 18.

[67] Cf. Jacques Ellul, *L'ideologie marxiste chretienne. Que fait-on de l'evangile?* (1979), Paris, La

particulierement d'operer une reduction materialiste et politique d'un texte qui recuse precisement toute interpretation materialiste de la vie[68].

Quelle est donc l'alternative que propose Jacques Ellul a ces impasses ex-egetiques?

Les grands principes de l'approche ellulienne de la Bible

Si Jacques Ellul recuse l'approche scientifique de la Bible, c'est pour lui opposer la meditation d'inspiration kierkegaardienne. Celle-ci revient a considerer la revelation biblique comme ce qui s'adresse a l'existence meme du sujet. Mais a ce propos, il inverse la perspective courante, notamment en milieu protestant, qui consiste a ouvrir la Bible chaque fois que l'on cherche une reponse a nos questions (ethiques, sociales ou existentielles). Jacques Ellul ne con^oit evidemment pas la Bible comme un livre de recettes, mais pas meme comme un livre de reponses a nos questions. La Bible n'est pas un livre de reponses, mais un livre de questions, que Dieu pose au lecteur croyant[69]. Si nous entrons dans la Bible avec des questions, celles-ci n'y trou-veront pas reponse, elles y subissent un deplacement, un decentrement, et nous ressortons de la Bible avec nos questions renouvelees et de nouvelles questions qui nous sont posees[70]. C'est alors a nous d'y repondre, c'est-a-dire d'etre responsables en assumant nos reponses.

La Bible est donc un livre qui renvoie l'homme a sa liberte et a sa respons-abilite. La lecture croyante est une ecoute, puisque la foi se ressource dans le silence[71]. La Bible nous pose principalement trois questions[72]. Elle nous pose une question confessante: « Qui dites-vous que je suis? »[73], une question ethique: « Qu'as-tu fait de ton frere? »[74], et une question existentielle quant a notre quete: « Qui cherches-tu? »[75] Nous sommes donc interroges, et invites a donner une reponse confessante, une reponse ethique et

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Table Ronde (coll. La petite Vermillon n°246), 20062, p. 113153.

[68] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 148–150.

[69] Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte*, *op. cit.*, tome 1, p. 203 ; tome 2, p. 164, 181–182 ; *La foi auprix du doute: « encore quarante jours... »* (1980), Paris, La Table Ronde (coll. La petite Vermillon n°404), 2015[3] , p. 147–152 ; « Karl Barth et nous », *Bulletin du Centre protestant d'etudes*, 37e annee, n°4–5, juin 1985, p. 5–12 (ici p. 7) ; *La Genese aujourd'hui* (avec Francois Tosquelles), Le Collier, Editions de l'AREFPPI, 1987, p. 214 ; *Mort et esperance de la resurrection. Conferences inedites de Jacques Ellul*, Lyon, Editions Olivetan, 2016, p. 53 ; *Les sources de l'ethique chretienne. Le Vouloir et le Faire, parties IV et V*, Introduction et notes de Frederic Rognon, Geneve, Labor et Fides, 2018, p. 57–58 ; Gilbert Comte, « Entretien avec Jacques Ellul: "Je crois que nous sommes dans une periode de silence de Dieu" », *Le Monde*, 8 novembre 1977, p. 1–2 (ici p. 2).

[70] Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte*, *op. cit.*, tome 2, p. 164 ; *La Genese aujo-urd'hui* (avec Francois Tosquelles), Le Collier, Editions de l'AREFPPI, 1987, p. 214.

[71] Cf. Jacques Ellul, La foi au prix du doute: « encore quarante jours. », op. cit., p. 151–155.

[72] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 135–137.

[73] Matthieu 16,15 ; Marc 8,29 ; Luc 9,20. La diversite des reponses de Pierre pourrait etayer la lecture ellulienne de la Bible comme livre de questions. Les reponses peuvent ainsi varier d'une personne a l'autre, mais aussi chez une meme personne selon les etapes de la vie.

[74] Cf. Genese 4,9-10a. Le texte dit plus precisement: « Le Seigneur dit a Cain: "Ou est Abel ton frere?" Il repondit: "Je ne sais pas. Suis-je le gardien de mon frere, moi?" Alors il dit: "Qu'as-tu fait?" ».

[75] Jean 20,15.

une reponse existentielle, par la parole et par notre vie. Cain, pour sa part, refuse de repondre a la question de Dieu, et donc d'assumer ses « responsabil-ites »[76]. On pose trop de questions a la Bible ou sur la Bible, et l'on oublie trop souvent de recevoir les questions que la Bible elle-meme nous pose[77]. Au lieu de poser des questions a la Bible, comme le fait d'ordinaire le croy-ant, et au lieu de poser des questions sur la Bible, comme le fait l'exegete, dans un cas comme dans l'autre a partir de preoccupations extra-bibliques, au risque d'instrumentaliser la revelation, il s'agit de laisser la Bible poser des questions au monde et aux croyants ; il s'agit donc d'avoir une liberte aussi grande envers le donne du monde que celle a laquelle nous pretendons vis-a-vis du donne revele[78].

« L'analogie de la foi »

Mais la methode royale que propose Jacques Ellul, afin d'echapper a la fois au lit-teralisme et a la critique textuelle, est celle de l' « analogie de la foi ». Cette expression nous vient de l'apotre Paul, qui l'emploie une seule fois (c'est done un *hapax*) dans l'epitre aux Romains[79]: Kara t^v 'avaXoY^av T^g nicTsmc en grec, *fidei analogia* en latin. Elle se situe dans un passage consacre aux differents charismes qui sont donnes aux uns et aux autres au sein de l'Eglise: prophetie, service, enseignement, exhortation, generosite, direction de la communaute, misericorde[80]. L'analogie de la foi est attachee au charisme de prophete: « Puisque nous avons des dons differents, selon la grace qui nous a ete accordee, que celui qui a le don de prophetie l'exerce selon l'analogie de la foi »[81].

Jean Calvin a repris cette expression paulinienne dans son *Commentaire de l'epitre aux Romains*[82] (dans son exegese de Romains 12, 6), et a differentes reprises dans l'*Institution de la religion chretienne*[83]. Dans son commentaire, Calvin plaide en faveur d'une conception large de la prophetie, comprise non pas comme le don de predire l'avenir, mais comme une droite intelligence de l'Ecriture et une capacite a l'expliquer clairement. Il est donc demande d'accorder toute doctrine enseignee a partir de l'Ecriture avec les fondements de la foi[84]. Dans l'*Institution de la religion*

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[76] Cf. Jacques Ellul, Ethique de la liberte, op. cit., tome 2, p. 181–182.

[77] Cf. ibid., tome 1, p. 203.

[78] Cf. Jacques Ellul, Ethique de la liberte, op. cit., tome 1, p. 205.

[79] Romains 12, 6b.

[80] Cf. Romains 12, 4–8.

[81] Romains 12, 6.

[82] Cf. Jean Calvin, Commentaires de Jean Calvin sur le Nouveau Testament. Tome quatrieme: Epitre aux Romains, Aix-en-Provence / Fontenay-sous-bois, Editions Kerygma / Editions Farel, 1978, p. 292–293.

[83] Cf. Jean Calvin, Institution de la religion chretienne, Aix-en-Provence / Charols, Editions Kerygma / Editions Excelsis, 2009: « Au roi de France », p. xxx ; livre iv, chapitre xvi, §4, p. 1252 ; livre iv, chapitre xvi, §8, p. 1256 ; livre iv, chapitre xvii, §32, p. 1321.

[84] Cf. Jean Calvin, Commentaires de Jean Calvin sur le Nouveau Testament. Tome quatrieme:

chretienne, Calvin mentionne l'analogie de la foi des son adresse au roi de France qui introduit l'ouvrage. Contre ses adversaires qui l'accusent de detourner la Parole de Dieu de son vrai sens, le Reformateur rappelle ceci:

Quand Paul a voulu que toute prophetie soit interpretee selon l'anal-ogie et a la similitude de la foi (Romains 12, 6), il a enonce une regle sure pour apprecier toute interpretation de l'Ecriture. Si donc notre doctrine est examinee selon cette regle de foi, nous avons la victoire en main[85].

Dans le corps meme du volumineux traite, Jean Calvin a recours au concept d'analogie de la foi au sujet du bapteme des enfants et de la sainte Cene. Le pedobaptisme n'est pas explicitement affirme dans la Bible, mais un silence ne veut pas dire reprobation, sinon les femmes ne pourraient etre admises a la Cene ; en revanche, il est question de baptemes de familles entieres ; c'est donc conformement a l'analogie de la foi que l'on peut fonder bib-liquement le bapteme des enfants[86]. De meme, le Reformateur defend sa comprehension du mystere de la Cene a partir du principe methodologique de l'analogie de la foi[87]. Selon Calvin, l'analogie de la foi consiste donc a interpreter l'Ecriture par l'Ecriture, a laisser l'Ecriture s'interpreter elle-meme: a creuser chaque texte afin de le mettre en coherence avec les autres textes de la Bible.

Jacques Ellul rejoint Calvin dans sa comprehension de cette regle de lecture, tout en s'en demarquant quelque peu. Dans la seconde partie de *Le Vouloir et le Faire*[88], texte inedit recemment publie en fran^ais et en voie de traduction en anglais, le professeur de Bordeaux consacre de longs developpements a l'analogie de la foi[89]. A la suite de Karl Barth, mais aussi en polemique avec lui, il commence par distinguer nettement l'*analogia fidei* de l'*analogia entis*, concept qui se situe a la base de la theologie naturelle de type thomiste[90]. Sa critique a l'encontre de Barth consiste a dire que le theologien de Bale a cede a la tentation qu'il denon^ait lui-meme. Jacques Ellul s'eloigne ensuite de Calvin en limitant l'analogie de la foi a l'exercice de la prophetie *stricto sensu*, au lieu de faire de cette regle un principe tres general pour l'inter-pretation de tous les textes bibliques[91]. Il comprend neanmoins la mission du prophete comme etant proprement ethique, c'est-a-dire comme consistant a enoncer une ethique, sous l'inspiration de l'Esprit, et a en garantir l'objectivite en la confrontant a l'Ecriture:

Si donc la prophetie consiste dans cette formulation d'une morale *hic et nunc*, inspiree par l'Esprit de Dieu a partir de, et par rapport a, l'Ecriture sainte, nous com-

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Epitre aux Romains, op. cit., p. 292–293.

[85] Jean Calvin, Institution de la religion chretienne, op. cit., p. xxx.

[86] Cf. ibid., p. 1252, 1256.

[87] Cf. ibid., p. 1321.

[88] Cf. Jacques Ellul, Les sources de l'ethique chretienne. Le Vouloir et le Faire, parties IV et V, op. cit.

[89] Cf. ibid., p. 287–311.

[90] Cf. ibid., p. 281–285.

[91] Cf. ibid., p. 292.

prenons bien que l'analogie de la foi dont il est question ici concerne effectivement l'interpretation des textes bibliques, et qu'il s'agit bien d'un garant d'objectivite[92].

Il n'empeche que Jacques Ellul se rapproche implicitement de la conception large de Calvin en appliquant cette methode a de nombreux textes, dont il croit discerner l'intention ethique: « Il ne peut y avoir de formulation d'une morale pour les chretiens a partir de la comprehension profonde des textes ethiques que s'il peut y avoir analogie de la foi », declare-t-il[93]. Il definit l'analogie comme « un rapport entre des elements de nature ou de grandeur differentes »[94], mais aussi comme « la comprehension de la *raison* » de ce rapport[95]. L'interpretation de l'Ecriture consiste donc a comprendre l'ecart entre la revelation biblique et la morale courante de l'epoque, afin de reproduire le meme ecart dans notre propre milieu, sans adopter a la lettre un enonce aujourd'hui perime. Or, ce qui fait l'objectivite du creur meme de la revelation, c'est l'reuvre de salut accomplie par Jesus-Christ. Toute la Bible renvoie a Jesus-Christ, et le designe comme Seigneur et Sauveur. Par consequent, Jesus-Christ doit etre la constante par rapport a laquelle l'anal-ogie de la foi doit s'etablir[96]. Et si un passage du corpus biblique semble s'eloigner de l'image et du visage du Dieu d'amour que Jesus nous a revele, il s'agira de le travailler, jusqu'a y discerner ce qui peut etre mis en coherence avec ce noyau de la revelation.

Exemples d'application de la methode d'analogie de la foi

Nous prendrons quatre exemples de textes bibliques qui font difficulty et que la methode d'analogie de la foi va permettre d'eclairer en les situant en ycho avec d'autres textes, dans une harmonieuse symphonie. Nous les presentons en nous appuyant sur le commentaire de Jacques Ellul, mais aussi en le prolongeant au-dela de ce qu'il nous en dit.

Qoheleth

Qoheleth est le livre biblique que Jacques Ellul affectionne le plus: « Il n'y a prob-ablement pas de texte de la Bible que j'aie autant fouille, dont j'aie autant reˆu—qui m'ait autant rejoint et parle »[97]. Il a donc consacre a l'Ecclesiaste un ouvrage de med-itation, *La raison d'etre*[98], qu'il considere comme la conclusion de l'ensemble de son reuvre[99]. Pour son etude, notre auteur affirme avoir pris le chemin inverse de la meth-

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[92] Ibid., p. 293.
[93] Ibid., p. 297.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Cf. ibid., p. 308–311.
[97] Jacques Ellul, La raison d'etre. Meditation sur I'Ecclesiaste, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1987, p. 11.
[98] Cf. Jacques Ellul, La raison d'etre, op. cit.
[99] Cf. ibid., p. 13–14.

ode universitaire, en partant du texte hebreu et non pas de commentaires[100]. Il refuse egalement de considerer la Bible comme n'importe quel texte litteraire, alors qu'elle est porteuse de la revelation[101]. C'est pourquoi Jacques Ellul cherche une coherence textuelle au-dela des apparentes contradictions, par exemple en-tre « tout est vanite (y compris la sagesse) » et « recherchons la sagesse (car elle vient de Dieu) ». Et il repere cette coherence dans un mouvement dia-lectique entre « Realite » et « Verite ». La « Realite », c'est que tout est vanite, et la « Verite », c'est que tout est don de Dieu. La « Realite » empeche la « Verite » d'etre une evasion, tandis que la « Verite » empeche la « Realite » d'etre desesperante[102].

Tous les commentateurs de l'Ecclesiaste ont ete deconcertes par l'absence de plan logique, et ont generalement cherche a identifier des auteurs dif-ferents et des couches redactionnelles. Selon Jacques Ellul, la coherence ne vient pas d'un plan mais d'une trame, comme un tissage de reflexions qui s'enchevetrent en echos. La dialectique entre la vanite et la sagesse trouve son issue en Dieu: la sagesse fait apparaitre la vanite de tout, mais la sagesse est elle-meme vanite, et cependant la vanite est depassee par la sagesse. Et neanmoins le livre de Qoheleth ne s'acheve pas dans ce cercle immanent, a cause de la reference a Dieu, qui est centrale et decisive car elle noue les facteurs disperses. Les contradictions ne sont pas de grossiers oublis, comme disent les exegetes, mais l'une des cles du livre: « Le principe de non-contradiction est un principe de mort. La contradiction est la condition d'une communication »[103]. LAuvre de Kierkegaard a ete decisive pour le discernement par Jacques Ellul du mouvement dialectique au sein du livre de Qoheleth. Et c'est egalement en reference au penseur danois que notre auteur plaide finalement en faveur d'une approche subjective et intuitive:

D'abord se laisser saisir par la beaute du texte, d'abord le recevoir dans l'emotion et l'ecoute silencieuse comme une musique, et laiss-er sa sensibilite, son imagination parler avant de vouloir analyser et « comprendre »[104].

Jacques Ellul synthetise son approche par un schema en spirale[105], grace au-quel on peut traverser les apparentes contradictions du livre de Qoheleth en suivant le mouvement du texte. Il ne s'agit pas d'un livre ecrit par trois auteurs: l'un, sceptique et desabuse, qui ne verrait en toutes choses que vanite ; le second, riche d'experiences, qui considererait une sagesse sans Dieu comme un art de vivre avec realisme et lucidite ; et le troisieme, qui confesserait sa foi en Dieu. Il s'agit du meme auteur, qui part de la vanite (1, 1–11), lui repond par la sagesse (1, 12–18), mais retombe dans la vanite puisque la sagesse elle-meme est vanite (2, 1–11) ; ce cercle vicieux trouve son ouverture en Dieu (qui apparait pour la premiere fois en 2, 24) ; c'est « devant Dieu » que tout

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[100] Cf. ibid., p. 11. Cette remarque trahit de graves prejuges quant aux methodes exegetiques en-seignees et pratiquees dans les Facultes de Theologie.
[101] Cf. ibid., p. 16–18.
[102] Cf. ibid., p. 42.
[103] *Ibid.*, p. 52.
[104] *Ibid.*, p. 323.
[105] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

prend sens, car tout est « don de Dieu » (3, 10–17 ; 5, 17–19), c'est pourquoi « crains Dieu » (5, 6). Et Dieu a le dernier mot (12, 10–13). Il s'agit bien de l'application de la methode d'analogie de la foi, car Dieu est le debut, le centre et la fin de la Bible, tout converge vers lui, et par consequent tout texte qui semblerait le negliger peut etre eclaire si on le creuse jusqu'a ce que, finaluent, on y trouve Dieu.

La parabole des Noces[106]

Notre second exemple sera celui de la parabole des Noces[107]. Nous sommes dans une parabole du royaume. Ces paraboles du royaume sont egrenees tout au long de l'Evangile de Matthieu, depuis le chapitre 13 jusqu'au chapitre 25, et nous donnent chacune une image de ce qu'est le royaume des cieux: « Le royaume des cieux est semblable a ... » A un homme, a un grain de moutarde, a du levain, a un tresor cache, a un marchand, a un filet, a un roi. Ici, dans notre parabole, le royaume des cieux est semblable a un roi. Ce roi organise des noces pour son fils. Et une fois le festin mis en place, il envoie ses serviteurs appeler ceux qui etaient invites. Ceux qui etaient invites etaient done deja au courant de 1'invitation, ils savaient que les noces allaient avoir lieu, et qu'ils y etaient convies. Et cependant, ils se derobent, et declinent l'invitation, trop occupes a leurs champs et a leur commerce. Et les convies se saisissent des serviteurs, les outragent et les tuent. Alors le roi se venge en les faisant perir. Puis il demande a ses serviteurs d'aller inviter tous ceux qu'ils trouveraient, dans les carrefours et les chemins, « mechants et bons », precise le texte. Mechants et bons: tous sont invites. Cela semble etre un premier element decisif[108]. Et la salle de noces est pleine de convives. Or, un homme n'a pas revetu son habit de noces. Un seul dans toute la foule: c'est un second element determinant[109]. Le roi lui demande comment il a pu entrer, et il garde le silence. Alors le roi dit a ses serviteurs: « Attachez-lui les pieds et les mains, et jetez-le dans les tenebres du dehors, ou il y aura des pleurs et des grincements de dents ... » Le roi se comporte a la maniere d'un tyran. Faut-il donc identifier le roi a Dieu, comme on l'a souvent fait? Faut-il identifier les invites desinvoltes aux croyants un peu trop tiedes, et le convive mal vetu a l'incroyant, a l'incredule, au mecreant, a celui qui ne vit pas selon l'Evangile, comme on l'a souvent fait? Faut-il donc voir dans cette parabole un moyen de terroriser les mal-croyants en les menaˆant de l'enfer, comme on l'a souvent fait? Est-ce cela l'image du Pere que Jesus est venu nous reveler, lorsqu'il s'adresse a nous de faˆon decryptee, en dehors des paraboles?

Reprenons donc les elements qui constituent la pointe du texte: mechants et bons partagent le festin ; et un seul est jete dans les tenebres, puni et supplicie. Meme les invites desinvoltes ne sont pas jetes dans les tenebres ou il y a des pleurs et des

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[106] Cf. Jacques Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, Compiled, Edited and Translated by Willem H. Vanderburg, Toronto / Buffalo / London, University of Toronto Press, 2010, p. 188–195.
[107] Cf. Matthieu 22, 1–14 ; Luc 14, 16–24.
[108] Cf. Jacques Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, *op. cit.*, p. 191.
[109] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 191, 194.

grincements de dents. Ils sont tues, ils sont morts, mais ils ne sont pas soumis a ces supplices. Rien ne nous est dit sur leur sort apres la mort. Il n'y en a qu'un qui soit condamne, expulse, supplicie. Il n'y en a donc qu'un seul qui paie pour tous. Qui est-ce, sinon le Christ lui-meme? Cet homme debraye, sans vetement de noces, c'est Jesus lui-meme ! Cet homme qui garde le silence quand on l'interroge et qu'on le menace, c'est Jesus, qui s'est tu devant Pilate ! Tous les autres sont revetus d'un habit de fete, les mechants et les bons: tous ! Car Jesus est celui qui a pris sur lui nos fautes, et a ete condamne pour nous, a notre place ! C'est ce que dit l'apotre Paul aux Corinthiens dans un texte aussi enigmatique et scandaleux: « Celui qui n'a point connu le peche, Dieu l'a fait devenir peche pour nous, afin que nous devenions en lui justice de Dieu » (2 Co 5, 21). Il n'est pas devenu pecheur, il est devenu peche ! Et il a paye pour nous. Il a ete jete dans les supplices, les pleurs et les grincements de dents: il est « descendu aux enfers », comme dit le Credo... Tout cela a ete fait

pour nous. Et cela est en coherence avec l'ensemble du message evangelique, selon l'analogie de la foi.

Alors, on pourrait dire: mais ce Dieu est cruel, qui jette son fils dans les tourments ! C'est ici que je vois tout l'interet de croire a la Trinite. Si nous croyons que Dieu est Pere, Fils et Saint Esprit, si donc Jesus-Christ n'est pas un autre que Dieu, mais qu'il est Dieu comme son Pere est Dieu et comme le Saint Esprit est Dieu, alors ce n'est pas un dieu qui jette cruellement un homme, *a fortiori* son fils, dans les supplices. Ne soyons pas prisonniers d'une lecture litterale ou allegorique de la parabole, selon laquelle un roi expulse un convive. Le roi ne represente pas le Pere, il represente le royaume, puisque c'est le royaume des cieux qui est semblable a un roi. Non, selon la foi trinitaire, c'est Dieu en tant que Jesus-Christ qui s'est donne pleinement pour nous: c'est un don de soi et non pas le sacrifice de quelqu'un d'autre. Dieu s'est donne pleinement a la souffrance et aux tourments, aux pleurs et aux grincements de dents, pour que nous, qui sommes pecheurs, en soyons liberes, en soyons sauves. Et cela est en coherence avec l'ensemble du message evangelique, selon l'analogie de la foi.

Et la parabole se termine ainsi: « Car il y a beaucoup d'appeles, mais peu d'elus ». La encore, la formule est etrange. La parabole vient de nous dire que la salle de noces etait pleine de convives. Et la leˆon de la parabole con-siste a nous dire qu'il y a beaucoup d'appeles, mais peu d'elus. On ne peut donc pas raisonnablement identifier les convives, qui sont innombrables, aux elus, qui sont tres peu nombreux. Les convives seraient peut-etre plutot les appeles que les elus Cette formule finale ne peut pas signifier que

tres peu d'hommes seront sauves a la fin des temps[110]. « Peu d'elus » peut vouloir dire, par euphemisme: « pas d'elus, aucun elu ». Cette formule sig-nifie donc que nous ne sommes pas dignes d'etre sauves, aucun d'entre nous. Mais que seul Jesus a paye pour que nous soyons sauves. Cette formule signifie l'amour infini du Pere sans lequel

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[110] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 193–195.

nous ne pouvons rien faire par nous-memes. Et cela encore, c'est en coherence avec l'ensemble du message evangelique, selon l'analogie de la foi.

La parabole du Jugement

Notre troisieme exemple est celui de la parabole du Jugement[111]. Ce texte pose un certain nombre de problemes. Il semble aller a l'encontre du salut par grace, et defendre l'idee du salut par les reuvres. De plus, il y est question de l'enfer[112]: ceux qui auront accompli des reuvres de misericorde (les brebis) seront benis et entreront dans le Royaume, et que ceux qui ne les ont pas accomplies (les boucs) seront maudits et iront dans le feu eternel. Car ceux qui ont donne a manger a celui qui avait faim, a boire a celui qui avait soif, ceux qui ont accueilli l'etranger, vetu celui qui etait nu, visite le malade et le prisonnier, ont servi le Christ lui-meme. Donc ils ont droit a la vie eternelle. Mais ceux qui n'ont pas fait tout cela n'ont pas servi le Christ. Et par consequent, ils iront au chatiment eternel.

Mais il y a la un petit detail qui a trop souvent ete neglige: les brebis sont toutes surprises d'apprendre qu'elles ont servi le Christ en servant leur prochain ; de meme, les boucs sont tout surpris d'apprendre qu'ils n'ont pas servi le Christ en ne servant pas leur prochain. Ils ne decouvrent cela qu'apres coup. Ils ignoraient donc, au moment de leur rencontre avec leur prochain, que le Christ s'identifiait a ce plus petit, qu'il etait, litteralement, ce plus petit. En d'autres termes, les personnages mis en scene en Matthieu 25 n'avaient pas lu Matthieu 25 ! Et pour cause ! Et cet effet de surprise est le premier element decisif. Car on voit ainsi que ce n'est pas pour etre sauvees que les brebis ont agi de la sorte, mais parce qu'elles ont laisse parler leur creur. L'attitude des brebis comme celle des boucs n'etaient pas liees au salut, mais a la capacite d'aimer ou a l'incapacite d'aimer le prochain qui se trouve dans la detresse. C'est l'ouverture du creur, ou la fermeture du creur, qui est en cause, ouverture ou fermeture du creur devant la situation concrete et devant les besoins immediats du plus petit qui se trouve la, tout simplement.

C'est alors qu'un second petit detail, encore plus decisif, doit etre releve. Tout d'abord, ce que le Fils de l'homme dit aux boucs, c'est que « dans la mesure ou (e^'oaov) vous ne l'avez pas fait a l'un de ces plus petits, c'est a moi que vous ne l'avez pas fait ». Il s'agit bien de l'un de ces plus petits. Cela veut dire qu'il suffit d'avoir neglige un petit, un seul, pour etre damne ! Meme si vous aidez 99 petits, si vous passez a cote du centieme sans le regarder, vous etes damnes ! Mais cela signifie donc que nous sommes tous damnes, car nous avons tous neglige au moins une fois notre prochain. Nous sommes tous condamnables. C'est la logique de la Loi du Premier Testament: il suffit d'avoir manque a l'un des 613 commandements de la Thora, tout en ayant

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[111] Cf. Matthieu 25, 31–46.

[112] Jacques Ellul signale qu'il n'est question d'enfer que dans les paraboles, car celles-ci ne sont pas des lemons d'enseignement doctrinal: cf. Jacques Ellul, *Ce que je crois*, Paris, Grasset, 1987, p. 257–258 ; *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, op. cit., p. 157.

accompli les 612 autres, pour avoir transgresse la Thora toute entiere. Mais si nous regardons maintenant ce qu'il est dit des brebis, nous constatons qu'il est dit la meme chose, la meme chose inversee, au sujet des brebis: « Dans la mesure ou vous l'avez fait a l'un de ces plus petits, c'est a moi que vous l'avez fait ». Cela veut dire qu'il suffit d'avoir servi un petit, un seul, pour etre sauve ! Or, nous avons tous aide au moins une fois notre prochain. Meme une seule fois ! Donc, nous sommes tous sauves ! Ou plus exactement, nous sommes tous a la fois damnes et sauves, ou plutot con-damnables et acquittes, car nous sommes tous, chacune et chacun d'entre nous, a la fois bouc et brebis. Chacune et chacun d'entre nous est a la fois un bouc et une brebis.

C'est la que se situe la pointe de notre texte: dans ce nreud paradoxal entre ce que nous n'avons pas fait, ne serait-ce qu'une seule fois, et ce que nous avons fait, ne serait-ce qu'une seule fois. Entre notre condamnation, que nous meritons tous, et notre salut, que personne ne merite, mais qui est offert a tous. Et ce paradoxe nous invite a nous tourner vers la grace. Tous condamnables, nous ne pouvons vivre que de la grace de Dieu. Et en cela, ce texte fait echo a tout l'Evangile, aux epitres, et a l'ensemble du Nouveau Testament, selon l'analogie de la foi. Car cette parabole est faite pour nous amener a nous en remettre a la grace.

Hommes et femmes[113]

Notre quatrieme et dernier exemple concerne ce que l'apotre Paul dit des femmes et aux femmes. On a generalement l'image d'un Paul conservateur et phallocrate, et on cite pour l'illustrer la fameuse formule: « Femmes, soyez soumises a vos maris ! »[114]. Mais comment comprendre cette injonction, qui contredit l'reuvre liberatrice du Christ envers les femmes, premiers temoins de la resurrection, c'est-a-dire premiers temoins de ce qui est au creur meme de la foi[115] (ce qui est absolument unique parmi toutes les religions), et qui contredit meme la parole de Paul qui affirme qu'« il n'y a plus ni homme ni femme »[116]. Comment interpreter ce verset selon l'analogie de la foi? Tout d'abord, Paul ne dit pas: « Femmes, soyez soumises a vos maris ! » Il faut remonter au verset precedent, pour lire: « Soumettez-vous les uns aux autres ! »[117] Et le verset 22 poursuit: « De meme, vous les femmes, a vos maris ! » Ainsi, les femmes sont invitees a faire vis-a-vis de leurs maris ce que tout le monde fait (y compris les hommes !), les uns envers les autres, au sein de l'Eglise. Ensuite, Paul s'adresse aux maris pour leur dire: « Maris, aimez vos femmes ! »[118], en employant le verbe aΥaneiv, qui ne designe

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[113] Cf. Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme* (1984), Paris, La Table Ronde (coll. La petite Vermillon n°145), *2011[3]* , p. 122–124 ; *The Subversion of Christianity*, transl. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Eugene (Oregon), Wipf & Stock (The Jacques Ellul Legacy Series), 1986, p. 78–79.

[114] Ephesiens 5, 22.

[115] Cf. Jacques Ellul, La subversion du christianisme, op. cit., p. 120 ; The Subversion of Christianity, op. cit., p. 77.

[116] Galates 3, 28.

[117] Ephesiens 5, 21.

[118] Ephesiens 5, 25a.

pas l'amour conjugal, mais l'amour inconditionnel, l'amour dont Dieu nous aime. Et il y a d'ailleurs une suite a cette suite: « Maris, aimez vos femmes, comme Christ a aime l'Eglise et s'est livre lui-meme pour elle ! »[119] Ainsi, Paul demande aux hommes quelque chose de bien plus exigeant que ce qu'il demande aux femmes: d'etre prets a donner leur vie pour leur femme...[120]' Et cela est en coherence, selon l'analogie de la foi, avec ce que la revelation biblique dit des femmes, et des rapports entre hommes et femmes, y com-pris Paul qui affirme dans la premiere epitre aux Corinthiens: « Le corps de la femme appartient a son mari »[121], ce qui est tout a fait conforme a la mentalite de l'epoque, mais il s'empresse d'ajouter: « Et le corps du mari appartient a sa femme »[122]. Et cela, c'est absolument inconcevable, inoui, revolutionnaire, subversif, pour l'epoque comme pour aujourd'hui: l'egalite complete entre hommes et femmes, y compris au lit. La methode d'analogie de la foi nous permet de voir que Paul, loin d'etre un affreux misogyne, est un homme d'avant-garde.

Conclusion

A travers ces quatre exemples, choisis parmi beaucoup d'autres, Jacques Ellul nous invite a redecouvrir la Bible comme une lettre d'amour de Dieu aux hommes, y compris dans ses aspects les plus enigmatiques. Tel est le potentiel de renouvellement des lectures traditionnelles que nous offre la methode de l'analogie de la foi.

Jacques Ellul: From Technique to the Technological System

Daniel Cerezuelle

Jacques Ellul (1912–94) had a lifelong concern with what he called "Technique." Over the course of four decades, he published three major books on the role of technology in the contemporary world: *The Technological Society* (French 1954, English 1964), *The Technological System* (French 1977, English 1980), and *The Technological Bluff* (French 1988, English 1990). These books are not disconnected but represent a constant deepening, by a mature thinker, of earlier intuitions.

In 1935, Jacques Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau, then just 23 and 25 years old respectively, composed a document that they called "Instructions for a Personalist

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[119] Ephesiens 5, 25.
[120] Cf. Jacques Ellul, La subversion du christianisme, op. cit., p. 123 ; The Subversion of Christianity, op. cit., p. 7.
[121] 1 Corinthiens 7, 4a.
[122] 1 Corinthiens 7, 4b.

Manifesto."[123] In this text of about 15 typewritten pages, they protested the depersonalizing nature of modern daily life. The increasing power and concentration of vast structures, both physical (the factory, the city) and organizational (the State, corporations, finance), constrain us to live in a world that is no longer fit for mankind. Unable to control these structures, we are deprived of freedom and responsibility by their anonymous functioning; and thus we have all become proletarians. "Man, who has everywhere only a small and specific job to perform, and in which fate, rather than man, has become the manager, is made into a proletarian." "In a society of this kind, the type of man who acts consciously becomes extinct." Charbonneau and Ellul were not content only to denounce this sorry condition of modern man. To improve it, they also pointed to its underlying cause, which they believed it was necessary to act upon. This cause is the uncontrolled development of Technique, and during the past two centuries it has become a determining social force. "Technique dominates man and

Cerezuelle, Daniel. "Jacques Ellul: From Technique to the Technological System."

Translated by Lisa Richmond. Ellul Forum 62 (Fall 2018): 59–66. © Wipf and Stock Publishing. Originally published as Daniel Cerezuelle, foreword to The Technological System, by Jacques Ellul (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018). Reprinted with permission. 59

all of man's reactions; against it, politics is powerless." Technique's increasing power also abets totalitarianism and the wanton destruction of nature. It is urgent therefore to put Technique in its proper place, so that it might be managed by a commanding power.

This "necessary revolution" is assuredly not simple, for what Ellul and Charbonneau called Technique is not only machines but also the pursuit of efficiency in every field: "Technique is the means of producing concentration; it is not an industrial process but a way of acting in general." It is thus not only our tools and methods of production that must be changed but also our institutions and our style of life. Against the technicist and productivist ideology of their day, it was in the name of an objective of personal freedom and autonomy that our two young thinkers advocated for a limitation to our technological and economic power: "an ascetic city, so that man might live."

Charbonneau and Ellul did not invent the concept of Technique to describe the unified process of social transformation whose overall effect eludes our choices. From the close of the First World War, various thinkers had been sensing that something new was transforming the human world: Spengler, Berdayev, Junger, Huxley, Valery, Bergson,

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[123] Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul, "Directives pour un manifeste per-sonnaliste" (Bordeaux, 1935). Reproduced in Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul, *Nous sommes des re'volutionnaires malgre nous: Textespionniers de l'ecologiepolitique,* intro. Quentin Hardy, texts transcribed Sebastien Morillon, corr. and annot. Christian Roy (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2014). Quotations from sections 17, 21, 25, and 26.

and others. Yet our two "Gascon personalists" were probably among the first, long before Heidegger, to give Technique a central role in the transformations of the modern world and to perform a radical critique upon it in the name of a demand for freedom. The technicization of the world, just like the unfolding of capitalist logic, takes place beyond our control and sometimes even beyond our awareness. It proceeds according to its own logic, which confers on it a broad autonomy. This idea of an autonomy of Technique, just like an autonomy of the State, was common to Charbonneau and to Ellul. They both engaged in a critique of the State and of Technique, and often in the same terms. In a lecture given in 1936, Charbonneau explained that "our civilization is not identified by an 'ism.' It cannot be categorized; it is born of an age of technological changes."[124] In another talk given in 1945, a few months after Hiroshima, he invited his listeners to notice "the autonomy of technique" as the first step toward achieving a "control over techniques."[125]

Ellul later recounted that immediately following the Second World War, in a social context of euphoric fascination with State-directed economics and technological progress, the two friends decided to undertake an in-depth critique of the State and of Technique. As a legal scholar of the history of institutions, Ellul would have preferred to study the State, but Charbonneau had already begun to prepare a work on this subject and asked Ellul to start instead upon the part of their common program that had to do with Technique. This is how Ellul developed in *The Technological Society* a systematic analysis of Technique's decisive role in contemporary society.[126]

Ellul's analysis owed much to the influence of Marx, which Ellul always acknowledged. But whereas in the 19th century Marx had insisted on the role of capital, and on the autonomous logic of its development, to explain the social disorganization (general proletarization) and political disorganization (revolutions) of his day, Ellul believed that for the 20th century it was Technique that had become the primary factor determining social life. Technique develops according to its own logic, which confers on it an autonomy analogous to that of capital in the previous century:

Technique conditions and calls forth the social, political, and economic changes. It is the driver of everything else, despite appearances and despite man's pride, which claims that his philosophical theories still have determining power and that his political regimes are decisive for progress. Technique is no longer determined by external necessities but by internal ones. It has become a reality in itself, sufficient unto itself, with its particular laws and its own decisions.[127]

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[124] Bernard Charbonneau, "Le progres contre l'homme." In Charbonneau and Ellul, *Nous sommes des revolutionnaires malgre nous*, 96.

[125] ———, "An deux mille." In Charbonneau and Ellul, *Nous sommes des revolu-tionnaires malgre nous*, 202, 208.

[126] Ellul, *La technique ou lenjeu du siecle* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1954). *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964).

[127] ———, *La technique*, 121.

This affirmation of Technique's developmental autonomy in modern society (and in this society alone) led to misunderstanding and numerous misinterpretations. In reading Ellul we must bear in mind that for him autonomy does not mean independence, and he never forgets that Technique develops in a society in which other non-technological forces are also at work. Ellul made use of the metaphor of cancer: this proliferation of harmful cells occurs according to a specific logic of self-generating growth. Biologists study its mechanism, and its results can be fatal to the organism in which the cancer develops. But the life of this organism, without which the cancer would not exist, follows another very different logic, and this logic can obstruct the cancerous cells' proliferation in such a way that many early cancers do not develop further.

For Ellul, Technique cannot develop except within certain social and cultural conditions. For Marx, economic laws are historically determined. Over the course of history, various societies have been acquainted with currency, banking, and private property, and yet they were not subject to the logic of what Marx calls "Capital" that characterizes industrial society. In the same way, for Ellul, Technique is not individual techniques. He distinguishes carefully between the technological *operation*, which is inseparable from man's mode of being in the world and is a sort of anthropological constant (which is why it is absurd to accuse Ellul of technophobia), and the technological *phenomenon*, which is specifically modern and might just as easily have not come to pass. Technique's autonomy is not a permanent and necessary attribute of all Technique; it is a social fact that is historically determined, particularly by the attitudes and values of men. "The technological phenomenon is the preoccupation of the great majority of the men of our day to seek out in all things the absolutely most efficient method."[128] Ellul's formulation is striking: he does not say that the technological phenomenon "requires" the preoccupation of men, but that it *is* this preoccupation. This preoccupation is inseparable from a conviction, namely, that all increase in the power to effect (efficiency) is good for man. But this is true only for our day; it was not always thus and may change again.

We find the same idea in *The Technological System*: "Self-generating growth rests upon Technique's *a priori* justification *in the consciousness*."[129] But it is clear that if for Ellul this is the conviction of our day, it may disappear, and the technological phenomenon may disappear with it. Autonomy is not an intrinsic and permanent characteristic of human Technique. It is relative to a particular state of the society and to the mindset that prevails in the civilization at the present time. This is why this alleged partisan of technological determinism writes, "There is no Technique in itself, but in its implacable advance it requires man's participation, for without him

[128] ———, *La technique*, 19.

[129] ———, *Le systeme technicien* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1977), 241. *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980). Italics mine.

it is nothing."[130] Man's consent is what drives Technique's domination. So although relative, this idea of autonomy enables us to explain some of the difficulties that we all encounter in our individual and collective life. Technique is not a tool that we can use as we wish and that remains subject to our intentions. Rather, it has its own force of expansion and its own effects, whether social, cultural, political, or ecological. In particular, "it bends in its particular direction the wills that use it and the goals that are proposed for it,"[131] and our passion for technological power involuntarily brings into being particular situations that are especially hard to remedy. Without an understanding of this domination's overall logic, our specific actions will not succeed in freeing us from it.

Twenty years after the publication of *The Technological Society*, Ellul felt it necessary to complete and update his analysis, for the situation had gotten worse. Not only do we have techniques at our disposal that are more and more numerous and powerful, but the development of the electronic techniques of information and communication confer on the autonomy of Technique dimensions that are qualitatively new. Of course, such novelty is not absolute. When he first published *The Technological Society*, Ellul emphasized the tendency of modern Technique to eliminate human interventions, and he stressed the importance of the computer's appearance, which he called the "mathematical machine." The computer was enabling the development of servo-mechanisms capable of performing more and more subtle tasks, previously performed by men, by inserting into the machine the ability to recognize feedback action. Ellul warns the reader, "This is a beginning; all cybernetics is oriented in this direction,"[132] and it makes possible the rise of mass unemployment, which is a factor of war; but he does not extend his analysis of the role of informatics further.

In addition, Ellul clearly identified how technological systems tend to become constituted. Four years before the publication of Gilbert Simondon's book *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*,[133] Ellul pointed out that one of the factors of Technique's autonomization is the tendency of technological elements to become constituted into groups and systems:

Technique obeys its specific laws, with each machine in functional obedience to the others. Thus each element of the technological whole follows laws that are determined in relation to the other elements of this whole, laws that are thus internal to the system and cannot in any way be influenced by external factors.[134]

In the context of the 1950s, Ellul did not feel the need to take these prescient remarks further. In hindsight, with the rise of the computer, they took on a new meaning and needed to be deepened. *The Technological System* updated and renewed Ellul's

[130] ———, *La technique*, 203.

[131] ———, *La technique*, 128.

[132] ———, *La technique*, 124.

[133] Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (Paris: Aubier, 1958). It is unlikely that Ellul was aware of Simondon's work before 1954.

[134] Ellul, *La technique*, 125.

reflection on the autonomy of Technique by drawing on the ideas of technological environment, information, and system, which thinkers such as Simondon and Leroi-Gourhan had been developing in the intervening years.[135]

Ellul shows first that the objective of mastering Technique is all the more difficult to attain because Technique has become man's environment. In the technological society, technical mediation becomes all-encompassing; it determines the relationship not only to nature but also to other men; it disqualifies the symbolic mediations that man had patiently built up. "Technique therefore forms a continuous interface on the one hand, and, on the other, a generalized mode of intervention."[136] With regard to this technological environment that orients his perception of reality and his desires, modern man has great difficulty maintaining a critical distance. This enfolding is all the more troubling given that Technique tends to transform itself into an overall technological system, whose different parts are in increasing functional interrelation and interdependence due to techniques that permit the constant treatment and exchange of information. On the one hand, this technological system is in permanent expansion and cannot be stabilized, and on the other, the informational integration of the technological holism produces a tendency to self-regulation and a level of complexity and inertia that makes correction more difficult.

To reorient this technological system by criteria that are no longer technological but ethical or spiritual seems more difficult than ever. Yet to interpret Ellul's analyses as a justification for fatalism would be to misunderstand him. On the contrary,

My attitude is no more pessimistic than that of a doctor who examines a patient and diagnoses a cancer. I have always tried to warn, to issue the alert. I am still persuaded that man remains free to initiate something other than what appears inevitable.[137]

To conclude, one could apply to this Ellulian analysis of Technique what Jacques Ellul said of Charbonneau's analysis of the State[138]:

Bernard Charbonneau seems to describe an abstract mechanism, the State, that functions on its own, has its own consistency, its motive for development, its coherence. As if there were a cancer developing in society, in itself, on its own, beyond man's control. And this is the first impression that may arise when we read this subtitle: "By Force of Circumstance." I therefore am not involved. The avalanche is accumulating on the heights, but I am in the valley. There is nothing I can do about it. Yet it is precisely this illusion and this justification above all that Bernard Charbonneau is denouncing

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[135] Andre Leroy-Gourhan, *Milieu et techniques* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1945) and *Le geste et la parole* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1964–65).

[136] Ellul, La technique, 44.

[137] Jacques Ellul and Patrick Chastenet, A contre-courant (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1994), 75. Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity, trans. Joan Mendes France (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005).

[138] Bernard Charbonneau, LEtat (Paris: Economica, 1987). When this book was first circulated in 1951 as a mimeographed document, its full title was L'Etat: Par la force des choses (The State: By Force of Circumstance).

throughout this book. The State has developed on its own exactly to the extent that man has given in—and more: that man has wanted it this way. "Force of circumstance" functions blindly, to the precise degree to which man gives up. Power grows implacable because no man is capable of the smallest act of freedom. In other words, as the reader reads of this growth of the coldest of all cold monsters,[139] he stands before the mirror of his own complicity, his own irresponsibility. And this is why we have a book that takes up a position verging on the unbearable.[140]

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[139] Friedrich Nietzsche's definition of the State in Thus Spoke Zarathustra.
[140] Ellul, "Une introduction a la pensee de Bernard Charbonneau." Cahiers du Sud

Issue #63 Spring 2019

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The Ellul Forum

About

Jacques Ellul (1912–94) was a French thinker and writer in many fields: communication, ethics, law and political science, sociology, technology, and biblical and theological studies, among others. The aim of the *Ellul Forum* is to promote awareness and understanding of Ellul's life and work and to encourage a community of dialogue on these subjects. The *Forum* publishes content by and about Jacques Ellul and about themes relevant to his work, from historical, contemporary, or creative perspectives. Content is published in English and French.

Subscriptions

The *Forum* is published twice a year. Annual subscriptions are $40 usd for individuals/ households and $80 usd for institutions. Individual subscriptions include membership in the International Jacques Ellul Society, and individual subscribers receive regular communications from the Society, discounts on IJES conference fees, and other benefits. To subscribe, please visit ellul.org.

Submissions

The *Forum* encourages submissions from scholars, students, and general readers. Submissions must demonstrate a degree of familiarity with Ellul's thought and must engage with it in a critical way. Submissions may be sent to ellulforum@gmail.com.

Editor's Letter[1]

Welcome to number 63 of the *Ellul Forum*. Jacob Marques Rollison opens this issue with an article focusing on Ellul's deep and lifelong engagement with the biblical book of Ecclesiastes. As Jacob argues, "Ecclesiastes is central to Ellul's entire theology, and understanding his unique reading of Ecclesiastes clarifies Ellul's relation to his primary extra- scriptural theological source, the Danish Lutheran thinker Søren Kierkegaard." Jonathan Lipps follows, comparing Ellul's analysis of the technological phenomenon with that of Albert Borgmann and highlighting points of similarity and difference between these two thinkers. In our third article, Patrick Troude-Chastenet provides a meditation on Ellul's understanding of Christian hope. "Hope is the foundation of his whole ethics of freedom," Patrick writes, and the only basis for the Christian's presence in the world in this "time of abandonment."

We round out this issue with three book reviews. Zachary Lloyd provides a review of *Political Illusion and Reality*, a volume arising from the IJES conference held in 2016. Alastair Roberts reviews the most recent work by Willem H. Vanderburg. And third, David Lovekin offers us an extended review of Byung-Chul Han's *The Burnout Society*.

The *Forum* welcomes your submissions and suggestions year-round. Please write to us at ellulforum@gmail.com.

We are grateful to Lemon Press Printing for its assistance in producing this issue.

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**God's Time: Kierkegaard, Qohelet, and Ellul's Reading of Ecclesiastes[2]

Jacob Marques Rollison

In *Reason for Being*, Jacques Ellul delivers the results of his lifelong meditation on the biblical book of Ecclesiastes. One of the most interesting features of this book is how it reveals Ellul's own approach to thinking about time, to living as a temporal creature. It is hard to read Ellul without interrogating oneself; allowing Ellul's reading of Ecclesiastes to question our own relation to time might prove a fruitful exercise. To this end, this article examines Ellul's reading of the biblical book of Ecclesiastes as a central element of his thought.[1] I argue that Ecclesiastes is central to Ellul's entire

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[1] This article is a revised version of a paper presented at "Ellul and the Bible," a conference of the International Jacques Ellul Society held at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada, 28–30 July 2018. The

theology and that understanding his unique reading of Ecclesiastes clarifies Ellul's relation to his primary extra-scriptural theological source, the Danish Lutheran thinker Søren Kierkegaard.[2] Specifically, I suggest that Ellul reads Ecclesiastes through the lens of Kierkegaard, but then reads Kierkegaard through Ecclesiastes. These crossed readings structure Ellul's approach to the definitive category for Ellul's theological ethics—the *present time*.

To explore these topics, this article will make five successive points: first, Ellul was deeply rooted in Ecclesiastes for the length of his career. Second, the present time structures Ellul's whole work. Third, Ellul reads Ecclesiastes through Kierkegaard, making Ecclesiastes an existential book of ironic anti-philosophy. Fourth, Ellul re-reads Kierkegaard through Ecclesiastes, which alters Kierkegaard's philosophical approach to time and his ironic use of words. Finally, I suggest that this approach to time informs Ellul's understanding of the present time, which is *the* definitive category of his theological ethics. To conclude, I will then offer a few Ellulian ethical considerations for how we might think about time today.

Ellul's Relationship to Ecclesiastes

Ellul's personal engagement with Ecclesiastes spanned his entire career and almost his entire life. In a late interview, Ellul said the book was one of his favorites even at the age of 12.[3] In the opening pages of his book *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes,* published in 1987, Ellul says his only qualification for writing it

> is that I have read, meditated on, and prayed over Ecclesiastes for more than half of a century. There is probably no other text of the Bible which I have searched so much, from which I have received so much—which has reached me and spoken to me so much. We could say that I am now expressing this dialogue.[4]

If this claim was published in 1987, his "dialogue" with Ecclesiastes must have begun as early as 1937—one year after the publication of his doctoral work and thus at the very beginning of his writing career. In fact, it is possible that Ellul even began writing

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argument is developed at length in chapter 1 of Jacob Marques Rollison, *A New Reading of Jacques Ellul: Presence in the Postmodern World* (forthcoming from Fortress Press / Lexington Books).

[2] Among prominent secondary readings of Ellul, Willem H. Vanderburg seems to be the only other one who emphasizes the centrality of Ellul's reading of Ecclesiastes to his whole project. See Willem H. Vanderburg, *Secular Nations under New Gods* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), especially 300–388.

[3] Olivier Abel, *Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Ellul, Jean Carbonnier, Pierre Chaunu: Dialogues* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2012), 61.

[4] Jacques Ellul, *La raison d'être: Méditation sur l'Ecclésiaste* (Paris: Seuil [Points: Sagesse no. 229], 1987), 11. In my rendering, I have borrowed from Hanks's translation in Jacques Ellul, *Reason for*

Reason for Being long before its publication. This would not be the first book written in this way; several of Ellul's books were written over a long period, such as *The Meaning of the City* and *The Ethics of Freedom.* Since Ellul mentions that he was already doing secondary reading on this book 30 years before its publication, and he mentions that for this specific book he wrote out his thoughts before doing the secondary research, it is plausible that he began writing the book in the 1950s or even earlier.[5]

Furthermore, Ecclesiastes informs his theology from beginning to end. References to Ecclesiastes abound in his *Presence in the Modern World* (1948), his full introduction to Christian ethics, *To Will and To Do* (1964), and his commentary on Second Kings, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* (1966), to name just a few.

Moreover, from the beginning of his writing career in the 1930s, Ellul had planned this study to be his "last word." In *Reason for Being*, Ellul writes: Some forty years ago, I envisioned that a contemporary meditation on Ecclesiastes could serve as an adequate conclusion to the lifework I was beginning to foresee. It seemed, however, that it could come only at the end of my journey, both intellectual and lived... In other words, if Presence in the Modern World formed the general introduction to all that I wanted to write, Ecclesiastes will be the last word.[6]

From the very beginning, Ellul valued Ecclesiastes *so much* that his meditations on it form his work's conclusion, his final statement.

If Ellul's whole theological-ethical project is based on biblical revelation (as he claims on the first page of *To Will and To Do*),[7] then clearly, as the biblical book that occupied him the most, Ellul's "biblical" thinking should naturally be heavily weighted toward Ecclesiastes.

The Present Time in Ellul's Theology

Ellul said he began with *Presence in the Modern World* and ended with *Reason for Being.* This important statement expressing how Ellul viewed his own work should affect how we read Ellul's entire corpus. Specifically, the role of *presence* and the present time is a central feature of both books. I will briefly highlight how presence structures Ellul's theology in these books.

Before we address these books, however, it would be proper to begin where Ellul himself began. Even before *Presence in the Modern World*, one of his earliest articles lays the foundation for the meaning of presence. This unpublished 1936 article, titled "The Dialogue of Sign and Presence," is an 11-page handwritten manuscript of a dia-

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Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 1.

[5] See Ellul, *Reason for Being*, 2.

[6] Ellul, *Reason for Being*, 3–4; modified with reference to *La raison d'être*, 13. "Last" here is not to be read chronologically—on the same page, he says he will write more if God allows him but will not finish all he had planned.

[7] Jacques Ellul, *To Will & To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969), 1.

logue between two characters. It was marked with edits by Yvette Lensvelt, who later became Ellul's wife. The extant manuscript is by no means in a polished or publishable state; any conclusions drawn from this very difficult article necessary involve the reader's active engagement and interpretation. The following paragraphs, therefore, stem from my own reading.[8]

The conversation between the two voices in this article (along with the dialogue between Ellul, Yvette's commentary, and Ellul's responses) discusses presence as a complex three-part dialogue. The first part is a dialogue between God's presence and communicative signs given to believers. As emphasized in Protestant theology, Jesus Christ is both God's Word and God himself; in the same way, God himself is *present* in these signs that he gives to believers. This means that God's signs are always more than just signs: they not only represent God but also include an element of God's presence. In Christian theology, discussions of signs and questions of presence generally focus on the Eucharist, the liturgical practice of eating bread and wine as representing (or making present) the body and blood of Jesus Christ. While this article does include discussions of these elements (one of the rare occasions in Ellul's writing to do so), Ellul's theology generally focuses on the Church, Christ's body, as God's presence in the world.

This leads to the second part of the dialogue, between a person's body and their spirit—in other words, between bodily and spiritual presence, which are inseparable. It must be emphasized that the summary I give here is more black and white than the article itself: Ellul and Yvette use a variety of terms to discuss the non-bodily element that I have called "spirit." The third part is a back-and-forth dialogue between space and time. Readers familiar with Ellul's emphases in his later book *The Humiliation of the Word* will recall that he linked sight with space and hearing with time. *Humiliation* saw the late 20th century as characterized by a dominance of space and images, and called for a renewed emphasis on the word and time. This article thus establishes the important equilibrium between space and time (and thus, between seeing and hearing) long before they are developed much later in *Humiliation*.

True presence involves all three elements of this dialogue—sign-presence, body-spirit, and space-time. Naturally, Jesus Christ is the center of this discussion: Christ is God's word (thus a sign of God), God in a fleshly body, and God in our time: in Jesus Christ, God is *present*. Note that I am not trying to indicate that Ellul had a philosophy of existence that involved these three elements. Instead, by calling these three elements "dialogues," I am trying to express that Ellul thought that such a philosophy was impossible without cutting one of these elements off from its living relationship with the other.

If *Presence in the Modern World* is read in this light, it becomes clear that this book is precisely an elaboration of Ellul's idea of *presence*, in the *modern world* described

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[8] I give my full interpretation and treatment of the article in Jacob Marques Rollison, *A New Reading of Jacques Ellul: Presence in the Postmodern World*.

by his modified Marxist sociology. The triple dialogue from the 1936 article roughly structures the chapters of this 1948 book. Each of the first three chapters roughly corresponds to one element of the triple dialogue. The end of the book puts all three in relation, seeking to rediscover a style of Christian life that could fulfill the conditions for true presence.

Crucially, this introduction to his whole work begins theologically with the New Testament language of "redeeming the time." A central move in the first chapter examines verses from Colossians 4 and Ephesians 5 that speak of "redeeming the time." In biblical language, redemption implies liberation, as in Paul's language of Christ liberating humanity from slavery to sin. But what could it mean that *time is enslaved*? I suggest that this question occupies Ellul for the rest of his career; his sociological work aims to describe time's slavery today so that Christians can set about their divinely ordained task of redeeming it, which he treats in his theological ethics.

In this way, the present time is at the heart of Ellul's opening to his project; what about his conclusion? In *Reason for Being*, Ellul reads Qohelet, the writer of Ecclesiastes, as a thinker whose thought stays within the limits of the present time. In Ellul's reading, Qohelet centrally emphasizes how time and death prevent human thought from accessing any eternal, absolute knowledge. This is how Ellul reads *vanity*—as the anxiety caused by thinking about the future and the fact that the past is gone. He writes, "The future unforeseeable, the past forgotten, only the present remains."[9] All we have is the present time, and wisdom consists in knowing this and not going beyond it. Within this present, *God's* presence is "the meaning, the purpose, the origin, and the end of the entire work."[10] So Ellul's conclusion also reads God's presence with us in the present time as the heart of Ecclesiastes—and thus the heart of his closing statement.

The theme of presence thus opens and closes Ellul's theology and bookends his whole project. By informing Ellul's present, Ecclesiastes thus informs his entire thought from beginning to end.

Reading Qohelet through Kierkegaard

It is therefore important to understand what is unique about Ellul's reading of Ecclesiastes. We cannot do so without diving into Ellul's other primary theological source, the Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard. Frédéric Rognon has called *Reason for Being* Ellul's most Kierkegaardian book, and for good reason.[11] We can see many similarities between Ellul's reading of Kierkegaard and his reading of his favorite biblical book. Without developing them, I will list a few examples here.

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[9] *Reason for Being*, 67; modified, *La raison d'être*, 80–81.

[10] *Reason for Being*, 22; modified, *La raison d'être*, 32.

[11] Frédéric Rognon, *Jacques Ellul: Une pensée en dialogue* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2013), 179.

First, Ellul explicitly reads Qohelet's *vanity* as equivalent to Kierkegaard's *anxiety*. Both describe the relationship between the limited and temporal creature that is the human being, and its future—or more precisely, the individual human's lack of an indefinite future, due to death. Second, Ellul thinks Ecclesiastes clearly indicates that it was written by Solomon, but Ellul believes that this is chronologically impossible. Furthermore, "Qohelet," which can be translated as "one who assembles," is an ironic name for the author of such a solitary book. When read through the lens of Kierkegaard's many pseudonymous writings, Ellul sees this contradiction as meaningful and intentional: Qohelet becomes a Kierkegaardian anti-philosopher. At the end of his work, Kierkegaard clarified that his pseudonymous works should be taken with a grain of salt. In these works, Kierkegaard purposely included philosophical ideas to ironically undermine them. This is precisely what Ellul sees in Qohelet: an ironic thinker who includes Greek philosophical ideas to show their ultimate vanity.

I will focus on one decisive way that Ellul's reading of Ecclesiastes draws on Kierkegaard. I have shown that Ecclesiastes is at the heart of Ellul's reading of the Bible, and that presence is at the heart of Ellul's reading of Ecclesiastes and thus is central for his project. Ellul's presence can be read as an adaptation of Kierkegaard's major theological theme: contemporaneity with Christ. Kierkegaard's *Practice in Christianity* insists that to be a Christian is to be contemporary with Christ. Walter Lowrie writes that this theme becomes "an emphatic and persistent theme" for Kierkegaard, who equates contemporaneousness with faith itself.[12] Describing this contemporaneity, Kierkegaard writes:

> It is indeed eighteen hundred years since Jesus Christ walked here on earth, but this is certainly not an event just like other events... No, His presence here on earth never becomes a thing of the past, thus does not become more and more distant—that is, if faith is at all to be found upon the earth... But as long as there is a believer, this person ... must be just as contemporary with Christ's presence as his contemporaries were.[13]

He later even calls contemporaneity "[his] life's thought."[14]

Thus, when Ellul reads Ecclesiastes, he reads it in a distinctly Kierkegaardian light. Ellul's emphasis on God's *presence in the present* is his own version of Kierkegaard's *contemporaneity with Christ.* Ellul's two major theological sources meet in the very theme that opens and closes his entire work: the present.

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[12] Cited in Robert Bretall, ed., *A Kierkegaard Anthology* (New York: Random House [Modern Library], 1943), 375.

[13] Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity. Kierkegaard's Writings*, v. 20, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 9.

[14] Søren Kierkegaard, *The Moment and Late Writings. Kierkegaard's Writings*, v. 23, ed. Howard

Re-Reading Kierkegaard through Qohelet

Not only does Kierkegaard affect Ellul's reading of Qohelet; I will now show that, in turn, Ellul's Kierkegaardian reading of Qohelet reflects back and alters Ellul's reading of Kierkegaard himself.

That Ellul is deeply Kierkegaardian is well known; works by Vernard Eller, Frédéric Rognon, and Sarah Pike Cabral, among others, have admirably substantiated this fact. Jean-Luc Blanc writes, "Ellul is Kierkegaard in the twentieth century!"[15] However, having acknowledged this strong continuity between the two, their *differences* matter just as much.

Rognon has described Ellul's reading of Kierkegaard as "libertarian," acknowledging that Ellul modifies elements of Kierkegaard's thought. In my estimation, Ellul's reading of Kierkegaard makes two very important changes: Ellul modifies Kierkegaard's irony, and Kierkegaard's conception of time.

First, Ellul changes Kierkegaard's irony. As mentioned above, in his late work Kierkegaard stated that his use of pseudonyms was intended as a signal that he did not *directly* mean what he was saying. The reader should be constantly on guard for irony, wordplay, and indirect communication in these works, never taking anything at face value. By contrast, Ellul sometimes employs pseudonyms but still generally writes things that he directly means. Certainly, Ellul is ironic toward himself as an author; his very decision to base his work's conclusion on Ecclesiastes clearly demonstrates this kind of irony. But Ellul *never* adopts Kierkegaard's ironic approach toward his own words. While he may say "I could not write today what I wrote then," Ellul never says "I did not mean what I wrote."[16] Irony toward one's own speech is the opposite of Qohelet: Ellul reads Ecclesiastes as saying that *everything* is vanity—except the spoken human word.

Second, and more importantly for this paper, Ellul changes Kierkegaard's philosophical approach to time. Despite his ironic undermining of abstract philosophy, Kierkegaard's approach to time includes static philosophical elements—even in his non-pseudonymous theological works (which thus means that this approach to time must be taken seriously, not ironically). According to Flemming Fleinert-Jensen, Kierkegaard's presence is "independent of time... [I]n this situation of contemporaneity, times and places do not count, because it is a question of the register of the absolute."[17] What Fleinert-Jensen describes might be called a dialectic of time and eternity, which relies on a conception of time inherited from Plato. Employing this time/eternity distinc-

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V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 290.

[15] Jean-Luc Blanc, "Jacques Ellul et la Dialectique." *Revue Réformée* 33.165 (July 1990), 42.

[16] Cf. Ellul's comments on his earlier writings regarding Jean-Paul Sartre, in Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity: Conversations with Patrick Troude-Chastenet* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 99.

[17] Flemming Fleinert-Jensen, *Aujourd'hui—Non pas demain! La prière de Kierkegaard* (Lyon: Éditions Olivétan [Veillez et priez], 2016), 101.

tion gives Kierkegaard strong critical force, to be sure; but Ellul sees it as importing a Greek way of understanding time into Hebrew thought. For Ellul, conceiving "the eternal" in this way goes directly against Qohelet, whose *vanity* undermines this Greek philosophical approach to time. Instead, Qohelet forbids knowing anything outside of time except Jesus Christ, whom we know precisely because he entered time. We know of God *only* what he reveals of himself *in* time.[18] Thus, reading Kierkegaard in light of Ellul's reading of Qohelet strips Kierkegaard's time of its philosophical elements, leaving only the existential present—the present that we cannot conceive of as an idea but in which we live our lives. So, I suggest that Ellul reads Qohelet through Kierkegaard, which means that Ecclesiastes is a book of ironic anti-philosophy, restricting human thought to the humble limits of the present. Ellul also reads Kierkegaard through Qohelet: this changes the present from a philosophical contrast between a moving time and a static eternity, into the lived moment of God's self-revealing.

God's Present Time

To see where all of this leaves us, I will now combine the points I have made in this article. Ellul's lifelong engagement with Ecclesiastes drives his biblical approach to theological ethics. Because Ellul views theological ethics as relating to God's presence in the present time, he begins and ends his entire project with a focus on the present. His understanding of presence comes from his mixed readings of Kierkegaard's "contemporaneity with Christ" and Qohelet's emphasis on vanity. Reading both sources through each other changes both, making Qohelet into an ironic anti-philosopher and making Kierkegaard *less* philosophical. This mix informs Ellul's whole project: rather than reasoning based on absolutes, Ellul opens his eyes and ears (like Qohelet) and makes personal and sociological observations of what he sees and hears in the world around him. This realist approach would lead him to despair if not for his lived experience of the presence of God in his own time. For Ellul, all theological-ethical reasoning happens in the present moment, and God is presently acting in this present moment with us; theological ethics thus is a process not of reasoning based on eternal "Christian" principles but of actively seeking and living with and in the presence of God, here and now.

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[18] Cf. this citation from Jacques Ellul, *The Theological Foundation of Law* (London: SCM Press, 1961), 46: "It is one thing to say, 'Justice existing eternally by itself.' It is quite another to say, 'The Will of God is justice.' For the first affirmation is essentially static, and the Greek system understood it as such, whereas the second is dynamic. Eternal as God's will is, it is nevertheless not immobile. The opposite is true. The scriptures reveal that we cannot know the will of God apart from God's Revelation, outside the act of God and consequently *hic et nunc*. The will of God in the manifestation of justice is therefore no rigid framework wherein we can arrange our concepts. Nor is it a kind of principle from which we can deduce a system. At all times it is action... We cannot know either its essence or its form apart from the present and concrete act of God, which is judgement. In other words, where there is no judgement, there is no justice and only in judgement do we grasp justice."

What does this mean for us today?

In Western society, we often think of time as a commodity. We live by clock-time, in which every second is equal to every other second; time is an empty container that we fill with whatever we want—work, leisure, entertainment, and so on. Following Ellul, we might see our commonplace phrases as revealing something true about ourselves; phrases such as "time is money," "killing time," and "time crunch" suggest that perhaps we treat time with a certain utilitarian brutality. By contrast, in a 1960 essay, Ellul develops a much more theological approach to time.[19] Reading the first verses of Genesis, Ellul views time and space as God's first creatures. Calling time a *creature* emphasizes its dependence on its creator. Like the rest of creation, time is thus put under human authority; like other creatures, it can be cared for, or abused. Instead of our modern clock-time, Ellul draws on Ecclesiastes, seeing that God has made a time for everything, and everything beautiful in its time. Rather than being an empty container, or a commodity, the present time is *God's* time; each moment is a temporal gift. Ellul's emphasis on the New Testament language of *redeeming* this time reminds us that if time is enslaved, it is partially because we have abused it; part of our participation in Jesus Christ's redeeming work is to find a new way of thinking and talking about time that does not enslave or kill it. Only in this lived present time can we encounter God. Remember that Ellul's journey of faith began with an "encounter with God [that] provoked the upheaval of my entire being, beginning with a reordering of my thought. It was necessary to think differently from the moment where God could be near."[20] Ellul's theology is thus a forceful call to look endlessly for the presence of the living God revealed in Jesus Christ, who is at work in the present time just as much as 2,000 years ago.

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[19] Jacques Ellul, "Notes en vue d'une éthique du temps et du lieu pour les chrétiens." *Foi et Vie* 59.5 (Sept.–Oct. 1960), 354–374.

[20] This is my translation from Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *À contre-courant: Entretiens* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 2014), 120.

Efficiency and Availability: Jacques Ellul and Albert Borgmann on the Nature of Technology[3]

Jonathan Lipps

Jacques Ellul (1912–1994) and Albert Borgmann (born 1937) have both attempted to unmask the hidden technological engines of modern society. Their work jointly discerns what is most essential about technology, helping to create the space necessary for any human response to the subtle dangers of our increasingly technological world. Writing in different generations and in different languages, their ideas can nonetheless be held together as sometimes parallel and always insightful revelations of a perplexing phenomenon, carving out roughly similar conceptual territory despite their many differences, whether in genre, style, scope, or outlook. The purpose of this essay is to explore the nature and consequences of modern technology via the thought of Ellul and Borgmann, drawing them into a conversation with one another that does not, for the most part, occur within the pages of their books.

The volumes under consideration for this essay will of necessity be limited to the seminal works of each thinker: for Ellul, *The Technological Society* (1964) and *The Technological System* (1980), with additional help from *Presence in the Modern World* (1948), and for Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* (1984), along with insight from his later *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology* (2003). There are immediately obvious surface differences between Ellul and Borgmann. As a French sociologist and theologian, Ellul is concerned to produce a broad unifying description of seemingly disparate phenomena across all levels of human society, from the economy to politics to the state to work. Borgmann, a German-born philosopher familiar with the methods of modern analytic philosophy, touches on the same subjects but within a framework much more devoted to clarity of definition and stepwise reasoning. Ellul looks at general historical, political, or economic changes in order to find the evidence of "technique," whereas Borgmann follows a "paradigmatic" method, attempting to show how all components of the technological system exhibit the same features as obvious examples.[1]

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[1] A word about terminology is in order: Ellul primarily speaks of *la technique,* which is variously

These surface differences are arguably minor in comparing the thought of Ellul and Borgmann, however significantly they might have influenced the audience or reception of their works. Let us now examine the substantive framework of each thinker with respect to the core questions of technology.

The Nature of Technology

Ellul and Borgmann have both rendered a great service to their readers in highlighting the complexity involved in giving a suitable definition of technology. Many of the extant conceptual understandings of technology that *have* been articulated fail to capture or explain the deeper reality of the technological phenomenon. What is it, then? For Ellul, technique is "the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity."[2] Contrary to popular understanding, technique has nothing to do with machines *per se* but is a much broader concept, encompassing any method, including political or religious ones. Technique is simply "*means* and the *ensemble of means*."[3]

This is all that we need to define the nature of technology for Ellul, but of course there is much more required to understand the consequent determining role of technology in society, and much more to say about how this singular focus on efficiency plays out (not least in making specifically *modern* technique an entirely new phenomenon). In his works, Ellul makes several attempts at schematizing the characteristics of technology, which result in the following insightful (if not always clearly delineable) set of features:

Autonomy—no authority external to technology manages or restrains it. *Unity* (or unicity)—technology is now a system with so many interlocking parts that it must be understood first and foremost as a whole.

Universality—technology extends inexorably in all directions: "horizontally" (across the globe) and "vertically" (up and down the levels of human experience from home life to work to politics).

Totalization—when technology invades a certain area, it necessarily links up with other technologies in order to function, which implies the eventual totality of the technological domain.

Automatism—human choice is superfluous with respect to the natural unfolding of technology's inner logic.

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translated as "technique" or "technology" (sometimes infelicitously so, Ellul would say). Borgmann, writing in English, simply uses "technology." In this essay I will use the terms interchangeably, but prefer "technology" outside of quotations. For my purposes, Ellul's "technique" and Borgmann's "technology" overlap enough in meaning to support the points I will be making.

    [2] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage, 1964), xxv.

    [3] *Ibid.*, 19. Italics in the original.

Self-augmentation—technology needs less and less direct intervention to move forward.

Borgmann is clearly well aware of Ellul's work, mentioning Ellul's viewpoint specifically as an example of the "substantivist" perspective on technology (which Borgmann defines as the stance within which technology has its own force or existence outside of human choice). In this context he disagrees with Ellul, arguing that the

> concept of technique [suffers] from a debilitating generality... Efficiency is a systematically incomplete concept. For efficiency to come into play, we need antecedently fixed goals on behalf of which values are minimized or maximized.[4]

In other words, he claims that Ellul's position is ultimately circular, reducing technology to an unexplained *explanans*.[5]

Borgmann would nonetheless agree with much of Ellul's characterization of technology, with the claim that modern technology is different in significant ways than what came before, and with the claim that technology is indeed the hidden engine of most aspects of society, even if he finds the explanatory power of "efficiency" to be lacking. Borgmann offers in its place a more "realist" view of technology that avoids recognizing technology as a force in its own right.[6]

Borgmann sees the fundamental *raison d'être* of technology as the promise rooted in Enlightenment ideals "to bring the forces of nature and culture under control, to liberate us from misery and toil, and to enrich our lives."[7]

This can be summed up in the word "availability"—

> Goods that are available to us enrich our lives and, if they are technologically available, they do so without imposing burdens on us. Something is available in this sense if it has been rendered instantaneous, ubiquitous, safe, and easy.[8]

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[4] Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 9.

[5] We should be clear that Borgmann does not want to sideline Ellul's work in general, and certainly finds it important, or it would hardly make sense for him to serve on the advisory council of the International Jacques Ellul Society!

[6] There is room for future dialogue here, however. Ellul is quite clear that he does not intend for technology to be regarded as *metaphysically* distinct and autonomous and is quite happy to allow that at any given point it is indeed human beings who make the relevant decisions. Ellul simply wants to argue that *sociologically*, in practice, there is virtually no possibility of choosing outside the trajectory of technology. For his part, Borgmann does not always shy away from treating technology as a force, if only as a way of speaking, for example, calling it a "tendency that asserts itself" (Albert Borgmann, *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003], 17) or noting that "the parlance [of the substantive view] is convenient" (Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 41). Ellul and Borgmann are probably closer on this point than has been realized.

[7] *Ibid.*, 41.

[8] *Ibid.*, 41.

In this way Borgmann attempts to give non-circular content to the Ellulian notion of "efficiency" and declare that what is maximized is a human good (of any kind—heat, clothing, music, health, etc.) and what is minimized is the burden required to obtain the good (time, labor, expense, etc.). Any object or system that brings this maximization of availability into our lives is called a "device," and by examining this pattern at work all across the world of modern technology we come to realize that the heart of technology is the "device paradigm."

Borgmann thus shares with Ellul the argument that the core essence of technology can be divined in surprising places, for example, in claiming that microwave dinners or Cool Whip are devices in just the same way as TV sets or mobile phones, because they conform to the paradigm of availability maximization.[9] It is not a neutral thing for a device to come onto the stage, however, because there are direct and sometimes dire consequences of the device paradigm. For Borgmann, these necessary consequences constitute a "paradigmatic explanation"[10] of technology, lending explanatory support to the observations of Ellul (i.e., the totalization and automatism of technology), which would otherwise be mere givens.

The Consequences of Technology

For each of our authors, it is in drawing out the (sometimes unexpected) consequences of technology that their essential frameworks are put to the test. Ellul and Borgmann both go into quite a bit of detail on these consequences, in all levels of human society and life. In this essay, we will restrict our comparison to their treatment of (a) the fate of traditional culture, (b) labor and leisure, and (c) the world of politics.

When it comes to the consequences of the new technological culture for traditional modes, Ellul is clear:

> Technical invasion does not involve the simple addition of new values to old ones. It does not put new wine into old bottles; it does not introduce new content into old forms. The old bottles are all being broken. The old civilizations collapse on contact with the new. And the same phenomenon appears under every possible cultural form.[11]

Or even more strongly:

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[9] See *ibid.*, 51 and Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 15.

[10] Both Borgmann and Ellul rely on Thomas Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* to support the notion of a paradigm. See Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 68, for example.

[11] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 121.

> [Technique] dissociates the sociological forms, destroys the moral framework, desacralizes men and things, explodes social and religious taboos, and reduces the body social to a collection of individuals.[12]

Modern society is not, despite what many think, simply "the traditional society *plus* technologies."[13]

While for Ellul all this is simply an observation mentioned in connection with the universality of technology, Borgmann gives a more specific explanation based on the device paradigm. The major consequence of any device is the introduction of an artificial division between the good that is produced and the machinery that produces it. As device machinery evolves (along the Ellulian trajectory of "one best means," i.e., maximization of availability), the good (by supposition) stays the same. The result is *commodification*—the severing of a good from its traditional context in order to make it more readily available.[14] On the surface, making a good more readily available is unobjectionable. In traditional cultures, however, goods were embedded in a unified system that held them in concert with numerous other tangible and intangible goods. When goods become technologically available, their production relies less and less on the traditional context, which thereby becomes superfluous and eventually disappears, taking along with it any of these "unrelated" goods.[15] Borgmann is essentially making the same point as Ellul, but is also giving a cogent explanation of it based on the device paradigm.

What results for both authors is a sort of rift in our everyday lives. Ellul decries the meaninglessness of city life and the techniques of organized mass entertainment that serve primarily to adjust the human being to an inhuman environment.[16] Borgmann laments the loss of "distinction between 'simulated experience' and 'the real thing.'"[17] Both authors place much emphasis on the unfortunate transformation of work into a mindless drudgery supporting the technical machinery of society, whose only value is providing resources to expend on equally mindless leisure. Here again Borgmann's device paradigm is a helpful complement to Ellul's eloquent observations:

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[12] *Ibid.*, 126.

[13] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (Euguene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1980), 88.

[14] Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 48.

[15] For the sake of brevity, we omit the many examples that help clarify this argument, except for this one: the wood-burning stove provided the good of heat, the same way that an electric or gas furnace now does. But the wood-burning stove required physical exertion (cutting the wood), engagement with nature (going into the forest), and familial closeness (its heat only extended in a small radius). It also necessitated communal enjoyment of music or story rather than allowing the possibility of each person disappearing into her own room for individual consumption of entertainment. All of these goods were unintentionally stripped from our lives with the introduction of central heating (*ibid.*, 41).

[16] Ellul, *The Technological Society,* 37.

[17] Borgmann, *Power Failure,* 125.

> The sharp division in our lives between labor and leisure is a unique feature
> of modern existence... Leisure consists in the unencumbered enjoyment of
> commodities whereas labor is devoted to the construction and maintenance
> of the machinery that produces the commodities[18]

he says, precisely articulating Ellul's "division of man into producer and consumer."[19] This modern split is echoed in many other areas, such as education. Borgmann and Ellul have many insights in common here that we must pass over, for example, the relatively new distinction between means and ends, which Borgmann sees as an instantiation of the device paradigm and which Ellul sees as the loss of extra-technological ends altogether.[20] When it comes to politics, there is substantial underlying agreement in treatment by our two thinkers, despite little obvious overlap in topic and style. Politics, the state, and related issues take up quite a bit more space in Ellul, who sees technology as the determining factor *par excellence* ("Political motivations do not dominate technical phenomena, but rather the reverse"[21])Without carving as wide a swath as Ellul, Borgmann looks specifically at liberal democracy in America but agrees that it is only the technological paradigm that allows the current political situation to function, offering liberty, equality, and self-realization essentially on the model of a technological device.[22] Borgmann exposes the central lacuna in liberal democracy as the same as the limitation inherent in technology's promise: what we end up with is a negative sort of freedom guaranteeing the absence of limits, rather than a positive freedom leading to a concrete Good Life, despite claims that "happiness" is around the corner. Ellul would enthusiastically join with Borgmann here, and Borgmann's discussion of freedom could just as easily have been taken from Ellul's own works.[23]

The Response to the Technological Situation

Even in the previous section's brief sketch, it is clear that technology, whether characterized by Borgmann or Ellul, is a challenge to a full and free human life. At

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[18] Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 114. Ellul sees the causality going the other way, and leisure arising as the antidote to technological labor, rather than the commodity for which technological labor is the machinery (see Ellul, *The Technological System*, 62).

[19] *Ibid.*, 69.

[20] For now we can say that both authors see this split as fatal: "for Christians there is no separation between end and means," says Ellul (Jacques Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, trans. Lisa Richmond [Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016], 51), and Borgmann makes a similar point: "In the Gospels ... freedom is not divided into the machinery of liberation and the state of liberty; it always occurs as an event in which liberty and liberation are one" (Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 99).

[21] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 251.

[22] Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 86.

[23] To list just one example: "The choice among technological objects is not of the same nature as the choice of a human conduct. There is no theoretical category of 'choice' that would express freedom." (Ellul, *The Technological System*, 321).

this point, Ellul becomes conspicuously silent and is officially dubious about the upshot of concrete action.[24] It is not however that he thinks the challenge cannot be met,[25] but that his job is merely to diagnose the disease ("I am in the position of a physician who must diagnose a disease and guess its probable course"[26]). It is primarily in Ellul's non-sociological works that he discusses what is necessary for resisting mass culture, techniques of propaganda, and so on.

Borgmann is not so circumspect and devotes much of his books to suggestions both concrete and abstract for how we might move forward individually and as a society. Essentially, Borgmann believes that we should neither reject technology entirely nor hope for reformation from within the resources of the technological paradigm, but that we should institute a reformation *of* the paradigm itself. What does this reform look like? "The reform ... would prune back the excesses of technology and restrict it to a supporting role."[27] In essence, we need to eschew the "regardless power" of technology and instead operate out of a "careful power."[28]

Put positively, Borgmann hopes that we can sidestep the hypersensitivity of technology to judgment[29] and argues that we need to rigorously oppose the rifts caused by the device paradigm in our lives, by creating space for "focal things and practices." Focal things (for example, nature) speak to us as an undivided unity and command our attention as *things* instead of *devices*. Focal practices (for example, running) "guard in its undiminished depth and identity the thing that is central to the practice, to shield it against the technological diremption into means and end."[30] We cannot commend focal things and practices according to the standards of efficiency or availability, for that would be to deliver them back into the technological paradigm.[31] Instead, we speak about them "deictically" (winsomely, always from personal experience), and strive for focality both in our personal lives and as the result of public political engagement.

Whether or not Ellul would hold out hope for the outcome of such political engagement, he would certainly applaud Borgmann's measured vision. Neither author wishes (nor thinks it possible)[32] to do away with technology, but to restrain it, to

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[24] *Ibid.*, 282.

[25] In fact: "The challenge is not to scholars and university professors, but to all of us. At stake is our very life, and we shall need all the energy, inventiveness, imagination, goodness, and strength we can muster to triumph in our predicament" (Ellul, *The Technological Society*, xxxii).

[26] *Ibid.*, xxxi.

[27] Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 247.

[28] Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 88 and 90.

[29] "The discovery of the technological system normally seems like an attack against technology, a criticism of technology per se" (Ellul, *The Technological System*, 14).

[30] Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 209.

[31] Ellul senses the same thing when he talks about the "difference between a fisherman, a sailor, a swimmer, a cyclist, and people who fish, sail, swim, and cycle for sport. The last are technicians" (Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 383).

[32] So Ellul: "[Technology] is now our one and only living environment" (Ellul, *The Technological System*, 42).

introduce the concept of a limiting factor above technology itself, however undesirable limits may be to those of us who are heirs of the technological system today. Ellul, at the last, does not shy away from calling us to resist the runaway self-augmentation of technology: "Each of us, in his own life, must seek ways of resisting and transcending technological determinants. Each man must make this effort in every area of life, in his profession and in his social, religious, and family relationships."[33] Borgmann echoes these exhortations in numerous places, upholding the traditional virtue of fortitude in the face of apparent technological determinism: "Fortitude needs to become the defining virtue of the postmodern era."[34] The insight of both Ellul and Borgmann is proved by the staying power of their ideas. Despite writing before the advent of widespread personal computing, or indeed the Internet, to say nothing of the subsequent explosion of social media and the like, their theories help to explicate exactly what we see happening around us with the spread and consequences of the latest technologies. If we combine Ellul's notion of "efficiency" with Borgmann's concept of "availability," we can use them as a tightly focused beam in the focus of true "apocalypse," revealing the all-too-simple but all-too-unacknowledged drive at the heart of our technological society. And if we augment Borgmann's suggestions for political and economic reform with some of Ellul's healthy skepticism about "revolution," not to mention his insistence on the systemic nature of technology, we will not lose heart even when triumph seems far away. Ultimately, what Ellul (circumspectly) and Borgmann (directly) join together in calling forth in us is the recovery of virtue that does not derive from or bow to technology but that guards our own inner lives from being mere replicas of the devices we now encounter everywhere around us.

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[33] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, xxxii.
[34] Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 116.

Celui dans lequel je mets tout mon cœur[(4)]

Patrick Troude-Chastenet

Jacques Ellul avait-il une préférence parmi ses très nom-breux livres ? À cette question rituelle—mais ô combien difficile à trancher pour un auteur—Ellul avait répondu que, finalement, *L'espérance oubliée* était son livre préféré : « C'est celui dans lequel je mets tout mon cœur »[1]. Cette confidence à elle seule justifierait la lecture de ce livre non seulement pour les lecteurs du registre théologique de son œuvre mais également pour ceux qui souhaitent, par manque de curiosité ou pour des raisons épistémologiques, se cantonner exclusivement au seul volet socio-politique.

On peut bien sûr choisir délibérément d'ignorer l'un ou l'autre des deux registres—et même en tirer grand profit[2]—mais on se condamne alors à passer à côté de l'essentiel : à ne pas saisir le cœur de son message pour paraphraser Ellul lui-même. On le sait, Ellul se moquait comme d'une guigne des frontières académiques[3]. Il oblige le spécialiste de sciences sociales à s'improviser théologien et le théologien à se faire historien, juriste, sociologue, philosophe et politiste. Comment ignorer les quatre volumes de son *Éthique de la Liberté* ou sa méditation sur l'Écclésiaste mais comment vouloir passer sous silence sa trilogie sur La technique, celle sur la révolution ou encore son maitre ouvrage sur la propagande ?

Jacques Ellul avait fini par admettre que les deux volets de son œuvre étaient à la fois rigoureusement séparés mais qu'ils se répondaient l'un l'autre. La dialectique jouant du reste à l'intérieur de chacun des deux registres mais aussi d'un registre à l'autre. Cette pensée dialectique on la retrouve pleinement dans *L'espérance oubliée* où l'auteur ne cache pas sa dette à l'égard de Søren Kierkegaard (« je l'écris avec

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[1] Jacques Ellul/Patrick Chastenet, *À contre-courant*, Paris, La Table Ronde, « la petite vermillon », 2014, p. 230 ; *Entretiens avec Jacques Ellul*, Paris, La Table Ronde, p. 181 ; Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology and Christianity*, Eugene, Oregon, 2005, p. 116.

[2] Cf. sur des registres différents : Didier Nordon, *L'homme à lui-même*, Paris, Editions du Félin, 1992, et Jean-Luc Porquet, *L'homme qui avait (presque) tout prévu*, Paris, Le cherche-midi, 2003.

[3] Patrick Troude-Chastenet, (Dir.) *Jacques Ellul, penseur sans frontières*, Le Bouscat, L'Esprit du Temps, 2005.

tremblement et ne puis m'avancer ici qu'avec crainte »)[4] et de Karl Barth (l'enfer reste une « possible impossibilité »).

S'il est une conviction centrale dans l'œuvre d'Ellul, qui le conduira du reste au milieu des années 1960 au principe du Salut universel, c'est que Dieu est avant tout Amour. Certes Dieu est aussi Justice mais si Dieu est Amour il ne peut condamner une seule de ses créatures sans reconnaître par la même que le sacrifice de son fils Jésus sur la croix aura été inutile. Comme le dit Paul : tout homme est sauvé en Christ. Le Jugement ne signifie pas la condamnation. Selon le cas, Dieu ne retiendra de nos vies que de l'or ou du marbre ou du bois ou de la paille. L'enfer n'existe pas. Plus exactement il est employé comme métaphore dans la Bible, l'homme le vit déjà sur terre et il reste toujours possible. Pourquoi ? Parce que rien n'est impossible à Dieu car il est Dieu, mais en même temps l'existence de l'enfer est impossible car Dieu est amour. Ellul rejoint Barth : « Il faut être fou pour enseigner le Salut universel mais il faut être impie pour ne pas le croire »[5].

Ellul distingue radicalement l'espoir de l'espérance. Dans la langue française usuelle ces deux mots sont souvent employés comme synonymes[6].

> **Espoir** 1. Le fait d'espérer, d'attendre quelque chose avec confiance ^{à} espérance, espérer. 2. Sentiment qui porte à espérer ^{à} espérance. *Etre plein d'espoir.*
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> **Espérance** 1. Sentiment qui fait entrevoir comme probable la réalisation de ce que l'on désire ^{à} assurance, certitude, confiance, conviction, croyance, espoir. 2. Ce sentiment appliqué à un objet déterminé ^{à} aspiration, désir, espoir.

Mais alors que la langue française comporte également l'expression *espérances trompeuses* au sens d'illusion, de leurre, pour Ellul c'est l'espoir qui trompe. « L'espoir est la malédiction de l'homme »[7], affirme-t-il. Rien de moins ! N'est-ce pas l'espoir qui en définitive a permis le génocide des juifs? « Tant qu'il y a de la vie, il y a de l'espoir » dit le vieil adage populaire. L'espoir signifie donc que l'on peut encore éviter le pire alors que, dans la terminologie ellulienne, l'espérance intervient au contraire lorsque le pire est certain. L'espoir est la passion des possibles alors que l'espérance est celle de l'impossible.

Dans quelle situation sommes-nous aujourd'hui ? D'une part, nous pouvons constater que le XXème siècle aura été celui de la barbarie, du mépris de l'homme, de la trahison de tous les grands idéaux, des désillusions et du soupçon généralisé. La société technicienne, c'est-à-dire une société qui place la recherche de l'efficacité dans

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[4] Jacques Ellul, *L'espérance oubliée,* Paris, Gallimard, 1972, Paris, La Table Ronde, 2004, p. 77.

[5] Patrick Chastenet, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 173. ; Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, op. cit., 2005, p. 112.

[6] *Petit Robert de la langue française*, nouvelle édition millésime 2007, pp. 928–929.

[7] Jacques Ellul, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

tous les domaines comme seule ~lequel je mets~ ^Celui dans^ finalité légitime indépendamment de toute autre considération, ne laisse **tout mon** aucune place à l'espérance. Or nous avons un cruel besoin d'espérance pour ^cœur^ vivre. D'autre part, nous sommes entrés dans le temps de la déréliction : une période où Dieu se tait et donc, paradoxalement, une période propice à l'espérance. Comme l'homme moderne est persuadé qu'il peut assumer seul tous ses besoins grâce à la technique, alors Dieu le laisse face à son destin. Même s'il est présent dans la vie de certains d'entre nous il est absent de l'histoire de nos sociétés. Cette situation n'a d'ailleurs rien d'exceptionnelle.

> Il ne faut pas oublier, rappelle Ellul dans un entretien, que bibliquement Dieu intervient rarement sur des périodes qui durent des centaines d'années. De même que Dieu parle rarement. Si vous pensez que cela commence en quatorze cent avant Jésus-Christ et qu'il y a quoi ? Ce que contient l'Ancien Testament : sept ou huit cents pages. Cela ne fait pas beaucoup—sur quatorze cents ans—de paroles de Dieu[8].

Ce silence ne signifie pas que Dieu nous rejette mais que nous le rejetons. Dans ce monde plein de bruit et de fureur Dieu ne souhaite pas opposer sa Parole aux jacasseries des hommes.

La déréliction concerne aussi l'Église puisque depuis longtemps déjà l'Église n'est plus l'Église, l'or s'est mué en plomb, la parole du Christ s'est transformée en son contraire, comme le déplore Ellul après Kierkegaard[9]. L'Église se conforme au monde alors que le chrétien doit être le sel de la terre. La présence au monde moderne souhaitée par Ellul diffère radicalement du conformisme sociologique. « Ne vous conformez pas au Siècle présent »[10], demande Paul dans l'Épître aux Romains (12,2). L'injonction de Paul est tellement récurrente dans l'œuvre d'Ellul que l'on peut dire qu'elle a pour lui valeur de commandement et qu'elle est à peut-être à la source d'une grande partie de son anticonformisme.

Malgré la trahison de l'Église et la « subversion du christianisme », Ellul ne se résigne pas. Il rejoint le théologien Jürgen Moltmann pour faire de l'espérance le cœur de la vie chrétienne mais à la différence de ce dernier il ne croit pas que la promesse se réalise avec certitude[11]. La libre grâce—l'homme sauvé par pure grâce, sans aucune participation des œuvres—aurait pu donner lieu, chez les protestants, à un désespoir absolu ou inversement à un quiétisme total. À la suite de Max Weber, Ellul a montré qu'il n'en fût rien[12].

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[8] Patrick Chastenet, *op. cit.*, 1994, p. 165 ; Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 114.

[9] Cf. Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme*, Paris, Seuil, 1984, La Table Ronde, 2001.

[10] Jacques Ellul, *Éthique de la liberté*, Genève, Labor et Fides, tome II, 1975, pp. 85–111.

[11] Frédéric Rognon, *Jacques Ellul, une pensée en dialogue*, Genève, Labor et Fides, 2007, p. 103.

[12] Jacques Ellul, « Les sources chrétiennes de la démocratie. Protestantisme et Démocratie », in Jean-Louis Seurin, *La démocratie pluraliste*, Paris, Economica, 1980, p. 86.

Car le « tout est permis » de l'apôtre Paul ne justifie pas le « n'importe quoi ». Au contraire, il faut faire « comme si ». Comme si Dieu n'existait pas, et comme si tout dépendait de nous.

Néanmoins, il ne faut pas confondre : le salut est non pas le résultat de la vertu mais son origine. Mener une vie vertueuse pour être sauvé n'a pas de fondement dans l'Écriture. Pourtant on y trouve des injonctions parfaitement contradictoires : « vous êtes sauvés par le moyen de la foi » (...) Et Paul d'ajouter : « par conséquent travaillez à votre salut avec crainte et tremblement, car c'est Dieu qui produit en vous le vouloir et le faire selon son bon plaisir »[13]. Selon Ellul, il est inutile de chercher à réduire cette contradiction, au cœur même de la vie de Jésus. Si nous sommes sauvés par grâce, pourquoi travailler à notre salut, et réciproquement ? Jésus lui-même a accepté de souffrir et de mourir, « comme si » il n'était pas le fils de Dieu. « Personne ne prend ma vie, c'est moi qui la donne. »

Toute l'éthique chrétienne se pense au travers de la relation dialectique unissant ces deux contraires : le salut par grâce et les œuvres de la vie. Amour, espérance, liberté et responsabilité sont inséparables. Il n'y a pas d'autre impératif que l'amour dans la liberté. « La liberté est le visage éthique de l'espérance »[14], écrit Ellul dans l'introduction du tome I de son *Éthique de la liberté* où il prend la peine de préciser qu'il avait commencé à rédiger ces pages sur l'espérance en 1960, donc avant la publication de l'ouvrage de Moltmann. L'espérance est le fondement de toute son éthique de la liberté. « Seul l'homme libre peut espérer »[15]. La présence du chrétien au monde interdit de se figer dans le passé—par la répétition d'une attitude moralisante—et dans l'avenir, par la projection d'une idéologie à réaliser. Le chrétien est libre parce qu'il espère. « L'espérance est la réponse de l'homme au silence de Dieu. » L'homme devient vraiment libre lorsqu'il décide d'espérer et d'imposer à Dieu son espérance. C'est un appel à Dieu contre Dieu. Une lutte de l'homme pour contraindre Dieu à briser son silence et à tenir ses promesses. L'espérance sonne alors comme une mise en accusation de Dieu au nom de la Parole de Dieu.

À la question insoluble de l'antériorité de la grâce à la repentance, Luther répondit par son célèbre : « toujours et en même temps pécheur et juste et pénitent ». La Bible met la crainte en relation dialectique avec l'amour et le pardon. De la même façon, on y trouve un renouvellement constant de la promesse et de l'accomplissement, du royaume déjà au milieu de nous et du royaume à venir à la fin des temps, autrement dit : du « déjà » et du « pas encore ». Jésus-Christ est déjà le seigneur du monde, mais pas encore, puisqu'il le sera définitivement lors de sa parousie.

Au cours de son essai Ellul avoue que l'on ne peut pas *parler* de l'espérance mais seulement la vivre. Comment définir la situation paradoxale du chrétien au sein du monde moderne ? Face au débat qui opposa deux penseurs personnalistes : le catholique

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[13] Ephésiens (2,8) et Philippiens (2,12), d'après la traduction Segond, 1977, Société biblique de Genève, Trinitarian Bible Society, Londres.

[14] Jacques Ellul, *Éthique de la liberté*, Genève, Labor et Fides, tome I, 1973, p. 11.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Français Emmanuel Mounier (1905–1950) partisan de l'optimisme tragique au protestant Suisse Denis de Rougemont (1906–1985) partisan du pessimisme actif, Ellul décide de renvoyer les deux camps dos à dos. Optimisme et pessimisme étant des sentiments humains, la seule formule acceptable à ses yeux est celle du « pessimisme de l'espérance ». Celle qui permet de penser dialectiquement ce que Karl Barth nomme la libre détermination de l'homme dans la libre décision de Dieu. L'homme naturel trouvera toujours, et à raison, une forte tonalité pessimiste dans les écrits de Jacques Ellul mais le chrétien devra se souvenir des paroles de l'écrivain Georges Bernanos : « Pour être prêt à espérer en ce qui ne trompe pas, il faut d'abord désespérer de tout ce qui trompe »[16].

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[16] Dans *La Raison d'être. Méditation sur l'Ecclésiaste*, Ellul ne donne pas la source de la citation mais elle est extraite de *La liberté, pour quoi faire ?*, Paris, Gallimard, 1953, p. 249.

The One in Which I Put All My Heart[(5)]

Patrick Troude-Chastenet

Did Jacques Ellul have a preference among his great many books? Ellul answered this ritual question—one that is all too difficult for an author to decide—by saying that, in the final analysis, *L'espérance oubliée* was his favorite book: "It is the one in which I put all my heart."[1] This confidence alone would justify reading this book, not only for readers of the theological register of his work but also for those who wish, either through lack of curiosity or for epistemological reasons, to confine themselves exclusively to the socio-political part.

One may of course deliberately choose to ignore either one or the other of the two registers—and even greatly benefit from it[2]—but then one is condemned to miss what is most important: not to grasp the heart of his message, to paraphrase Ellul himself. As we know, Ellul did not care a whit about academic boundaries.[3] He forces the social-science specialist to pretend to be a theologian and the theologian to become a historian, a jurist, a sociologist, a philosopher, and a political scientist. How do you overlook the four volumes of his *Éthique de la Liberté* or his meditation on Ecclesiastes, yet how can you fail to mention his trilogy on Technique, that on revolution, or again his key work on propaganda?

Jacques Ellul did finally admit that the two sides of his work were at once rigorously separate yet in mutual correspondence. This dialectic also happened to play out within each of the two registers but also between one register and the other. This dialectical thinking is also very much present in *L'espérance oubliée*, where the author makes no

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[1] Jacques Ellul and Patrick Chastenet, *À contre-courant* (Paris: La Table Ronde, "La petite vermillon" series, 2014), 230; *Entretiens avec Jacques Ellul* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1994), 181; Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology and Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 116.

[2] See on different registers: Didier Nordon, *L'homme à lui-même* (Paris: Editions du Félin, 1992) and Jean-Luc Porquet, *L'homme qui avait (presque) tout prévu* (Paris: Le Cherche-midi, 2003).

[3] Patrick Troude-Chastenet, ed., *Jacques Ellul, penseur sans frontières* (Le Bouscat: L'Esprit du Temps, 2005).

secret of his debt to Søren Kierkegaard ("I only write this with trembling and can only advance here with fear"[4]) and to Karl Barth (hell remains a "possible impossibility").

If there is a central conviction in Ellul's work, which incidentally would lead him in the mid-1960s to the principle of universal Salvation, it is that God is above all else Love. To be sure, God is also Justice, but if God is Love he cannot condemn a single one of his creatures without admitting by the same token that the sacrifice of his son Jesus on the cross would have been in vain. As Paul says, every man is saved in Christ. The Judgment does not mean condemnation. According to the case, God will keep from our lives only gold or marble or wood or straw. Hell does not exist. More precisely, it is used as a metaphor in the Bible; man already experiences it on earth and it always remains possible. Why? Because nothing is impossible to God because he is God, but at the same time the existence of hell is impossible since God is Love. Ellul agrees with Barth: "One has to be mad to teach universal Salvation, but one has to be impious not to believe in it."[5] Ellul radically distinguishes *espoir* from *espérance*. In customary French language, these two words often get used as synonyms.[6]

> **Espoir** 1. The fact of hoping, of expecting something with confidence ^à espérance, espérer. 2. A feeling that leads one to hope ^à espérance. *Etre plein d'espoir:* being full of hope.
>
> **Espérance** 1. A feeling that makes one make out as probable the realization of what one wishes ^à assurance, certitude, confiance, conviction, croyance, espoir. 2. This feeling applied to a specific object ^à aspiration, désir, espoir.

But while the French language also includes the expression *espérances trompeuses* in the sense of illusion, of a lure, for Ellul, it is only *espoir* that deceives. "Hope is the curse of man,"[7] he states. No less! Is it not hope that ended up allowing the Jewish genocide? "As long as there is life, there is hope," says the old popular saying. Hope as *espoir* thus means that the worst can still be avoided, while, in Ellul's terminology, hope as *espérance* comes in on the contrary when the worst is certain. *Espoir* is a passion for possible outcomes, while *espérance* is a passion for the impossible.

In what situation do we find ourselves today? On the one hand, we can take stock of the fact that the 20th century has been that of barbarism, of contempt for man, of the betrayal of all great ideals, of generalized disillusionment and suspicion. Technological society, that is, a society that places the search for efficiency in all areas as the only legitimate end, independently of any other consideration, leaves no room for hope as *espérance*. Now, we are _{Which I Put} ^{The One in} in cruel need of that kind of hope in

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[4] Jacques Ellul, *L'Espérance oubliée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972; Paris: La Table Ronde, 2004), 77.

[5] Patrick Chastenet, *op. cit.*, 1994, 173; Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *op. cit.*, 2005, 112.

[6] *Petit Robert de la langue française*, new edition, 2007, 928–929.

[7] Jacques Ellul, *op. cit.*, 189.

order to survive. On the other hand, we **All My Heart** have entered the time of abandonment: a period in which God is silent and thus, paradoxically, a period well suited for *espérance*. Since modern man is convinced that he can fulfill all of his needs alone thanks to technique, God leaves him to face his destiny. Even if he is present in the life of some of us, he is absent from the history of our societies. There is nothing unusual about this predicament, by the way. As Ellul reminds us in an interview, we must not forget that, biblically,

> God rarely intervenes over periods that last hundreds of years. Likewise, God rarely speaks. If you think that it begins in 1400 BC, and that there is what? What the Old Testament contains: seven or eight hundred pages. That does not amount to a lot—over 1400 years of words of God.[8]

This silence does not mean that God is rejecting us but that we are rejecting him. In this world full of noise and fury, God does not care to oppose his Word to men's chatter.

This abandonment also concerns the Church, since, for a long time already, the Church is no longer the Church, gold has turned into lead, Christ's word has turned into its opposite, as Ellul bemoans after Kierkegaard.[9] The Church conforms itself to the world, whereas the Christian must be the salt of the earth. The presence to the modern world that Ellul called for is radically different from sociological conformism. "Do not conform to the pattern of this world,"[10] asks Paul in the Letter to the Romans (12:2). Paul's injunction is so recurrent in Ellul's work that it can be said it is tantamount to a commandment for him, and it may be the wellspring of much of his anticonformism.

Despite the betrayal of the Church and the "subversion of Christianity," Ellul is not resigned. He concurs with theologian Jürgen Moltmann in making of hope the heart of Christian life, but unlike the latter he does not believe that the promise is fulfilled with certainty.[11] Free grace—man saved by sheer grace, without any participation from works—might have given rise in Protestants to an absolute despair or else to total quietism. After Max Weber, Ellul has shown this was not the case.[12] For the apostle Paul's "everything is permitted" does not justify "anything goes." On the contrary, one has to act "as if." As if God did not exist and everything depended on us.

Nevertheless, we should not mix things up here: salvation is not the result of virtue but its origin. Leading a virtuous life in order to be saved has no grounding in Scripture. And yet we find in it utterly contradictory commands: "You have been saved through faith." And Paul adds, Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in

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[8] Patrick Chastenet, *op. cit.*, 1994, 165; Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *op. cit.*, 2005, 114.

[9] Cf. Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1984, La Table Ronde, 2001).

[10] Jacques Ellul, *Éthique de la liberté*, v. 2 (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1975), 85–111.

[11] Frédéric Rognon, *Jacques Ellul, une pensée en dialogue* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2007), 103.

[12] Jacques Ellul, "Les sources chrétiennes de la démocratie. Protestantisme et Démocratie." In Jean-

my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.[13]

According to Ellul, it is useless to try to reduce this contradiction at the very heart of the life of Jesus. If we are saved by grace, why work for our salvation, and vice versa? Jesus himself agreed to suffer and die, "as though" he was not the son of God. "No one is taking my life, it is I who give it." All of Christian ethics is thought through the dialectical relation between these two opposites: salvation by grace, and the works of life. Love, hope, freedom, and responsibility are inseparable. There is no other imperative than love in freedom. "Freedom is the ethical face of hope [*l'espérance*],"[14] wrote Ellul in the introduction to volume 1 of his *Éthique de la liberté*, in which he takes care to specify that he had begun to write these pages on hope in 1960, thus before the publication of Moltmann's work. Hope is the foundation of his whole ethics of freedom. "Only a free man can hope."[15] The Christian's presence to the world forbids him to become frozen in the past—by the repetition of a moralizing attitude—and in the future, by the projection of an ideology to be realized. The Christian is free because he hopes. "Hope is man's response to the silence of God." Man becomes truly free only when he decides to hope and to impose his hope on God. It is a call to God against God. A struggle of man to compel God to break his silence and to keep his promises. Hope then sounds like an indictment of God in the name of the Word of God.

Luther answered the insoluble question of grace's anteriority to repentence with his famous "always and at the same time sinner and just and penitent." The Bible puts fear in dialectical relation to love and forgiveness. In the same way, we find in it a constant renewal of the promise and the fulfillment of the kingdom already among us and the kingdom to come at the end of time, in other words: of the "already" and the "not yet." Jesus Christ is already lord of the world, but not yet, since he will be definitively at his parousia.

Through his essay, Ellul admits that one cannot *talk* about hope as *espérance*, but only live it. How do we define the paradoxical situation of the Christian within the modern world? Ellul's position in the debate between two Personalist thinkers, the French Catholic Emmanuel Mounier (1905–1950), favoring a "tragic optimism," and the Swiss Protestant Denis de Rougemont (1906–1985), favoring "active pessimism," Ellul was to stay clear of both. Optimism and pessimism being human feelings, the only acceptable formulation for him was that of a "pessimism of hope," that which makes it possible to think dialectically what Karl Barth calls the free determination of man in the free decision of God.

Natural man will always rightly find a strongly pessimistic tone in the writings of Jacques Ellul, but the Christian should recall the words of writer Georges Bernanos:

Louis Seurin, *La démocratie pluraliste* (Paris: Economica, 1980), 86.

[13] Ephesians 2:8 and Philippians 2:12, New King James Bible.

[14] Jacques Ellul, *Éthique de la liberté*, v. 1 (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1973), 11.

[15] *Ibid.*, 11.

"To be able to hope in what does not deceive, one should first despair of all that deceives."[16]

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[16] In *La Raison d'être. Méditation sur l'Ecclésiaste*, Ellul does not give the source of the quotation, but it is taken from *La liberté, pour quoi faire ?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), 249. *Translator's note*: Catholic novelist and polemicist Georges Bernanos (1888– 1948) had come to the same conclusions about Technique and the threat it posed to the human spirit and meaningful freedom as Jacques Ellul; they quoted each other approvingly and apparently corresponded, being alone in raising this issue as paramount in post-war years of general enthusiasm for technological Progress, including among Christians. Thus, Mounier took explicit aim at Bernanos, with implicit allusions to Ellul and Charbonneau (defectors from the *Esprit* movement he had launched in 1932), in his posthumous critique of critics of Technique, *La Petite peur du XXe siècle* (translated as *Be Not Afraid: A Denunciation of Despair* [New York: Sheed and Ward], 1962).

Political Illusion and Reality edited by David W. Gill and David Lovekin[6]

Zachary Lloyd

Gill, David W., and David Lovekin, eds. *Political Illusion and Reality: Engaging the Prophetic Insights of Jacques Ellul.* Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018, 316pp.

Political Illusion and Reality is a collection of 23 essays centered on Jacques Ellul's political thought. As the title of the book indicates, it takes as its pivot Ellul's 1965 *L'illusion politique*, first translated into English as *The Political Illusion* by Konrad Kellen in 1967. Although Ellul himself noted that his political work was rooted in particularly French concerns (French statecraft, institutions, and personalities), the essays gathered in *Political Illusion and Reality* concretely demonstrate his belief that his observations hold universal value and application. The essays in this collection are remarkably multiform in approach, splendidly various in style, and arise from an international community of scholars, activists, medical practitioners, and civil leaders. To lend the book overall coherence, the editors have helpfully organized the collection into three distinct (yet interrelated) sections: "Foundations," "Applications," and "Appropriations." "Foundations" features essays exploring Ellul's ideas in relation to his precursors and his contemporaries, intending to give us a fuller, more rounded understanding of his political analyses. This section also, importantly, presents us with Jacob Rollison's translation (for the first time into English) of Ellul's 1936 article "Fascism, Son of Liberalism." Next, "Applications" offers us a diverse set of essays reflecting on how Ellul's thought can inspire and guide specific political engagements. The authors of this section—activists and community organizers in the thick of things—concretely show us how Ellul's dictum to "think globally, act locally" can be put into play in a variety of political contexts. Lastly, "Appropriations" attempts to situate Ellul's sociopolitical analyses in the landscape of the here-and-now and offers us some directives for how we might progress toward a more truthful, equitable, and sustainable future. As a whole, *Political Illusion and Reality* can profitably be read under two main registers: 1) as a scholarly supplement to Ellul's *The Political Illusion* (and to his other

political writings, such as his chapter on "Technique and the State" in *The Technological Society*), and 2) as a modern advancement, critique, and application of his ideas. The book may also serve as a useful introduction to Ellul's political thought for readers who are familiar with other aspects of his philosophy. As with his studies of law, social institutions, theology, and ethics, Ellul's political analyses center on the ever-pervasive notion of *la technique*: basically, the totality of methods of and for achieving absolute efficiency in every field of human knowledge. Ellul's overriding theme guiding his political thought is that the heightened technological character of modern life—including the newly formed methods of "social engineering" aimed at the individual, the bureaucratization of the community and the state, and the electrification of the means of communication—has made the control of events both by politicians and by the public completely illusory. The concept of efficiency—central to the technical mentality—drives politics, even as the political realm has become, arguably, less and less efficient. Efficiency, as the new moral good of political discourse, is increasingly sought after and yet rarely attained. The modern complexities of statecraft thus become a means for retaining the mere illusion, and not the reality, of political effectiveness. In the modern digital age especially, when efficiency becomes increasingly conceptually linked to a kind of instant gratification, political leaders find their authority displaced, if not subverted. Beholden to the immense power of images, politicians adapt: they become technicians of the image. Exceptionally skilled at seeing certain images as symbols, as signs of something else, they then give these symbols over to the populace to sate (or thwart) rising political passions. For Ellul, when everything becomes political in this way, nothing is, simply because real politics no longer exists. Political illusion—which for Ellul is tantamount to idolatry—is a veil utterly shrouding all meaningful efforts to confront real human challenges and needs.

It is within this decidedly pessimistic context (not uncommon to Ellul's sociological analyses) that the authors of *Political Illusion and Reality* are writing, and their own conclusions can often seem just as grim. The book itself, however, gives us cause for real optimism. As the product of a conference on Ellul's political thought held in Berkeley, California, in 2016, *Political Illusion and Reality* is a testament to the ways in which Ellul's thought can bring an international community together in hope and shared commitments. Beyond the book's significant intellectual contributions, its call for awareness, community, and shared responsibility in the face of troubled political times is perhaps its most inspiring achievement.

Our Battle for the Human *Spirit* by Willem H. Vanderburg[7]

Alastair Roberts

Vanderburg, Willem H. *Our Battle for the Human Spirit: Scientific Knowing, Technical Doing, and Daily Living*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016, 440pp.

The influence of Jacques Ellul is pronounced throughout this, the fifth in Willem Vanderburg's series addressing the relationship between technique and culture. After undergoing something akin to an intellectual conversion experience as an engineer reading *The Technological Society*, Vanderburg travelled to France, where he studied under Ellul for four and a half years. Since that time, the influence of technique upon the formation of culture has been the focus of his research.

Within this book, which does not require familiarity with the preceding instalments in the series (he reprises their core arguments in his introduction), Vanderburg offers what he describes as "the most ambitious interdisciplinary synthesis" he has yet attempted. The result is a frequently brilliant and stimulating, if somewhat sprawling and repetitive, survey of the contemporary structuring of science, technology, economy, society, and personal life, the destructive impact that the rise of technique has had upon them, and prescriptions for their remedial "resymbolization."

We face a crisis of knowing and doing, a crisis occasioned by the fragmentation of thought and life by a world of theoretical and practical technique into discrete and mutually alienated domains. In the realm of knowing, this is seen in myopically discipline-based thought. In the realm of doing, it is seen in the compartmentalization of technique, which abstracts domains of activity from the larger fabric of life, society, and the world and causes them to develop autonomously, utterly unmindful of their effects and externalities in a broader ecosystem. These approaches both contrast and unavoidably conflict with the interconnectedness of human life, society, and the biosphere, with their unconsidered externalities inflicting increasingly damaging results. Typical responses to the destructive impact of apotheosized technique are offered in "end-of-the-pipe" solutions, with little attention given to preventative approaches. Vanderburg considers how the design process could be reordered in terms of the irreducible integration of different realms of life, preserving it from its dysfunctional

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and often counterproductive operation in terms of narrowly discipline-based thought. In some of the most insightful parts of the book, Vanderburg discusses the historical metastasis of technique in its host societies since the Industrial Revolution, disordering an increasing number of systems and organs of society as its mediation replaced that formerly played by culture. Vanderburg demonstrates the explanatory power of the category of technique over various alternatives, which both fail to appreciate the deep essential commonalities shared by seemingly disparate or opposing economic, political, and social systems and lack the capacity either adequately to explain or conceptually to grapple with the mutations that have occurred in areas such as the economy over the last couple of hundred years.

> Beyond its catastrophic toll upon the natural environment, as technique overwhelmed culture and desymbolized society, progressively reorganizing life in terms of non-life, social and individual existence have suffered profound alienation and dysfunction. This has precipitated the introduction and intensification of technique-based approaches to human populations, engineering social bonds where organic society has been eradicated, uniting society through the empty and alienating spectacles of mass media, inculcating compensatory "secular myths" to substitute for the loss of the symbolic world of culture and ensure greater conformity to technique, managing the symptoms of the dysfunction it causes through medication and other end-of-the-pipe solutions, and the development of technocratic states to perform the integrating role formerly exercised by culture.

> Vanderburg argues for the necessity of resymbolization to wrestle with the reality of our new life-milieu of technique. The dominance of technique and its desymbolizing effects leave us incapable of perceiving, let alone effectively addressing, the underlying causes of the dysfunctions afflicting our biosphere, lives, and societies. While he believes that the window of opportunity for effective change is rapidly closing in many areas, he offers some hopeful suggestions for meaningful action.

With extensive editing, this could perhaps have been a better book at even half the length. Nevertheless, it is a worthy and timely development of Ellulian thought.

The Burnout Society by Byung-Chul Han[8]

David Lovekin

Han, Byung-Chul. *The Burnout Society*, translated by Erik Butler. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015, 68pp.

The Burnout Society is part of a new series (Stanford Briefs) published by Stanford University. This outing attempts a diagnosis of society's current ills with philosophy and the social sciences. Han maintains that society has moved from an immunological paradigm to a neurological one. Han identifies ills such as depression, attention-deficit disorder, and borderline-personality disorder as defining the current social order/disorder. He visits Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, Herman Melville, Roberto Esposito, Jean Baudrillard, Alain Ehrenberg, Michel Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, Gilles Deleuze, Giorgio Agamben, Richard Sennett, Peter Handke, Freud, Kafka, Aristotle, Kant, Nietzsche, and Hegel, and others, all in 60 pages. Han's abiding thesis is that a healthy self would need a good dose of Otherness, which makes self-knowledge possible. He tests his paradigm in a variety of texts that he presumes the reader already knows.

This modern malaise is due to an over-active ego, an ego replete in consumption. The self is compromised and captured in an abundance of information geared to survival concerns, like a feral animal without the relief of Otherness: activity for activity's sake (12–13). Disease from outside, immunological disease, is a form of Otherness that no longer characterizes the milieu of "excessive positivity," Baudrillard's notion of "viral violence" is modified as is Foucault's notion of external punishment, the gaze from outside. The outside moves inside. Neurological violence exhausts and saturates rather than deprives and alienates (7). This new violence is systemic with Otherness absorbed. Otherness keeps freedom alive and narcissism at bay: a self without the Other is not a stable self but a self-consuming self, a self-become Other (39). I know what I am by knowing what I am not, as Sartre would say.

"Should" is replaced by "can," enlarging Foucault's critique of disciplinarity. A paradigm of "discipline" is subsumed in a paradigm of "achievement." As Alain Ehrenberg states, "The depressed individual is unable to measure up; he is tired of having to become himself" (9). Individuals become "entrepreneurs of themselves" but with-

out senses of self, without the Other. Freedom is of much concern, ironically, as it fades with achievement as an absolute. Nothing is impossible presumes that nothing is possible (22). Multi-tasking is symptomatic of the self of consumption, absorbed in everything and nothing, a scattered self. Walter Benjamin in his reveries for a deep boredom where, "a dream bird ... hatches the egg of experience" is unavailable to such a self. The Benjaminian *flâneur*, I would add, is placed on the treadmill and not allowed to dance or to dally and to transcend the achievement principle of linear walking (14).

Han considers Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* and the distinction between a *vita contemplativa* and a *vita activa*. The ancient Greeks gave priority to the former, to the degradation of the latter, which they regarded as sheer restlessness. Arendt wants to find value in an active life, in the possibility of heroic creativity (16–17). Han states:

> According to Arendt, modern society—as a society of "laboring" [arbeitsgesellschaft]—nullifies any possibility for action when it degrades the human being into an animal laborans, a beast of burden. Action, she maintains, occasions new possibilities, yet modern humanity passively stands at the mercy of the anonymous process of living. (17)

Han disagrees. The modern ego is far from passive but is "just short of bursting" (18). There is no loss of individuality and no signs of animality, lacking Otherness noted above. And then: "Life has never been as fleeting as it is today... The late modern ego stands utterly alone" in a world lacking narrative and plot, bare being (18). There is no freedom when there are no constraints: for example, in the Master/Slave relation neither the master nor the slave is free, dominated by "hysterical work" and hyperactivity (19). Nietzsche wanted to revive a *vita contemplativa* that addressed the calm, the compelling, in a deep attention, which is anything but passive. By contrast, machines operate unthinkingly; they cannot pause or digress: "the computer is stupid insofar as it lacks the ability to delay" (22). We lose the capacity of rage, Han states, that involves the ability to put all into question. Gone is the state of "not-to" found in Zen meditation, the art of letting things go. Han examines Melville's Bartleby and his mantra "I would prefer not to," which is not the negative potency of the Zen practitioner or an attempt to delay (25). It is the apathy that dooms Bartleby, a blank gaze at a "dead brick wall" (26). Bartleby is exhausted and not transformed as Agamben claims; Bartleby has not achieved a high metaphysical potency. Han concludes: "Bartleby's *Dasein* is a negative being-unto-death" (28).

Modernity is not afflicted by negativity but by an excess of positivity, a tiredness born of excessive achievement that brings nothing. This is not the tiredness that may lead to community, to a Sabbath where we could enjoy time off, to a true rest. This is an "I-tiredness" that does not invoke "we-tiredness," as Handke notes (31–34). This tiredness admits the Other in response, in letting go. The tired, exhausted self shrinks while seeming to expand, but only in achievement, which is without matter or measure.

Han considers the Prometheus myth, that hero who stole tools and fire for human betterment but who then suffers from an eagle consuming his liver, which grows back endlessly. As Kafka had it: "The gods grew weary, the eagles grew weary, the wound closed wearily" (35). Han suggests ambiguity: perhaps the pain—the liver—is the self-exploitation of the alter ego, waging a war on itself. Or, perhaps it is as Kafka suggested, a healing tiredness open to community and a way from self-absorption (35–36).

Opening to Freud, the achievement ego is different from the disciplinarity of a divided self: id, ego, and super ego, out of which character is formed in resistance to alterity. The modern person is without character. This ego is not Kant's moral conscience (40–42). A sense of closure or judgment does not manifest in an endless anxiety of "can" without "should." This person without qualities does not mourn, does not suffer melancholy, in the absence of a sense of loss, which Han finds unexamined in Ehrenberg. Agamben, as well, does not grasp the complete lack of Otherness in attempts to locate the modern self as a *homo sacer*, an outsider who can be punished and sacrificed in the face of some sovereignty. Such alterity, Han concludes, does not feature in a burnout society. The modern selves cannot be killed: "Their life equals that of the undead. They are too alive to die, and too dead to live" (51).

This examination, a kind of drive-by philosophy, is exhausting. The reader—at least this one—seeks a pause beyond the rush of concepts. We need a place to stand, a story or a narrative. If we are readers of Ellul, who is not mentioned, we could claim that Otherness is co-opted by technology that has replaced the natural and cultural worlds with technical phenomena that technical consciousness has constructed but which are taken for reality and not known as constructions. We give the illness a name. The consciousness of technique does not know itself and is lost in its own objectifications; it cannot symbolize itself without objectivity: it is a bad infinity having neither goal nor purpose beyond itself. For this reason, social networks crumble as a sense of reality (the Other and Others) needed for political action dissipates along with the nonrenewable natural resources (Others) upon which life depends.

We could revisit Arendt's examination of the human dimensions of labor, work, and action as they played between an active and contemplative life for a sense of place and narrative.[1] The contemplative life was privileged in the ancient Greek world as thinking pursued eternal truths typically unavailable to the hurly-burly of public life. Socrates and Aristotle stood apart from the crowd. Labor in this world occupied the space of the home. "Labor" is the watchword, signifying a circularity moving between death and creation. Women greatly defined this space. Work took place in the world outside the home, typically taken up by men reaching for a measure of immortality—for something that would last. Language enabled the transition and interplay between the public space and private space in opening to action, to the unknown, the unforeseen,

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[1] To date, I would suggest Margaret Canovan's, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992) as one of the best overarching studies of her thought.

and the unpredictable. The philosophical stance was problematic. Socrates is the city's victim in the crime of being Other.

In the modern age, private space and the public space are transformed into "social space," losing the character of each. The work place and the home place combine. Words and deeds are silenced or rendered anonymously in some officialese or *am sprache*. Workers and laborers become functionaries in the march of science and technology that dictate our expressions, goals, and projects. Bodily life, central to ancient labor, is transformed. Tools and devices carry the day. Arendt finds that labor will hold sway in the modern age when it is no longer possible to do or to say great things in public, when thinking becomes calculation and statistical analysis, as Han notes, but without seeming to appreciate the transformed sense of labor she has in mind. Activity becomes passive when it becomes meaningless; individuals lose individuality when action and space no longer help to locate them as individuals, when the otherness that requires speech and narrative is hobbled to the sound bite and tweet. She writes:

> It is a society of laborers which is about to be liberated from the fetters of labor, and this society does no longer know of those other higher and more meaningful activities for the sake of which this freedom would deserve to be won. Within this society, which is egalitarian because this is labor's way of making men live together, there is no class left, no aristocracy of either a political or spiritual nature from which a restoration of the other capacities of man could start anew. Even presidents and kings, and prime ministers think of their offices in terms of a job necessary for the life of society, and among the intellectuals, only solitary individuals are left who consider what they are doing in terms of work and not in terms of making a living. What we are confronted with is the prospect of a society of laborers without labor, that is without the only activity left to them. Surely, nothing could be worse.[2]

Arendt does not advocate an impossible return to tradition that ignores the problems and inequities in those traditions. She wants to observe and understand those traditions that made our present possible. The realm of *homo faber*, man the maker, gained force and presence in the realm of action, losing the onus placed on it by contemplation and thought, which came to doubt itself. Cartesian doubt led to a question of whether nature could be known with certainty because God had made nature. Giambattista Vico, in his *De antiquissima Italorum sapientia* (*On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, 1710), made this issue a principle: *Verum esse ipsum factum.*[3]

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[2] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 5.

[3] Giambattista Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians Unearthed from the Origins of the Latin Language*, trans. L. M. Palmer (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press,1988), 46. Vico's insight in this work is noted by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*, 298. See also her references to Vico at 232 and 283n.

The true is the made. Vico concluded, Arendt noted, that if the mind can best know what it has made, then the natural sciences had to give value to the human sciences, notably geometry and history. Vico thought that this would lead to a study of moral and political sciences. Instead, human making flourished establishing pride of place, or a place in pride. The true, then, was that which appeared in the force of human hands and later in technique, hands that became very busy.

Taking up Arendt's spirit, we move to *The New Science of Giambattista Vico* (1744) where Vico stated that the first making was poetic making.[4] Vico did not make this up, just as the *verum/factum* principle was not made up. Vico discovered it in the literatures of the ancients. The first word—*pape*— was uttered from the fear and wonder of ancient people (Vico called them *giganti*, giants) as they faced a thundering and lightning-filled sky (448). This event, Vico claimed, caused some of humanity to turn, to run, and to hide in caves, while others—the most robust—stood to face this Other and uttered the first word in response: a contemplation in wonder that founded meaningful human action.[5] This discovery and action took place in the face and sound of Otherness. Human culture and language began with this epiphany. *Fantasia*, or imagination, was the prime mover with this originating metaphor. As culture advances, or devolves, language takes a turn.[6] Metaphors became concepts, concepts became objects, and humanity becomes dissolute. Han would say: burned out. Vico said: "Men first feel necessity, then look for utility, next attend to comfort, still later amuse themselves with pleasure, thence grow mad and waste their substance."[7] Han's text is an invitation to others' writings. This is its great value. It is good when books talk to each other, when the voices of Otherness hold forth. Han provides us with unexpected connections and conclusions, and we should welcome them, but we should also take time to pause, open to *fantasia*, to consider Vico's new/old science, and to let the dream bird come out.

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[4] Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico,* trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).

[5] *Ibid.*, par. 377.

[6] *Ibid.*, pars. 400–411.

[7] *Ibid.*, par. 241.

About the Contributors

Jonathan Lipps is Founding Principal of Cloud Grey, a software consulting firm focusing on mobile app test automation strategy. Pivoting frequently between the academic and technological worlds, he holds a BA and MA in philosophy from Stanford University and an MPhil in general linguistics and comparative philology from Oxford University. He is currently working toward an interdisciplinary ThM from Regent College, examining the intersection of technology and theology.

Zachary Lloyd studied with David Lovekin at Hastings College before going on to complete an MA in philosophy at the New School for Social Research. He is currently a PhD student in comparative literature at the City University of New York. **David Lovekin** is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Hastings College in Nebraska. He is the author of *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (1991), co-translator of Ellul's *Empire of Non-Sense: Art in the Technological Society* (2014), and co-editor of *Political Illusion and Reality: Engaging the Prophetic Insights of Jacques Ellul* (2018).

Alastair Roberts (PhD, Durham University) works for the Theopolis and Davenant Institutes.

Jacob Marques Rollison is a postdoctoral researcher in theological ethics living in Strasbourg, France. He is a member of the IJES board of directors and is currently translating Ellul's volumes of theological ethics. He holds a PhD in theology from the University of Aberdeen.

Patrick Troude-Chastenet is Professor of Political Science at the University of Bordeaux, president of the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul, director of the *Cahiers Jacques-Ellul*, and member of the board of directors of the International Jacques Ellul Society.

About the International Jacques Ellul Society

The International Jacques Ellul Society, founded in 2000 by former students of Ellul, links scholars, students, and others who share an interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912–94), longtime professor at the University of Bordeaux. Along with promoting new publications related to Ellul and producing the *Ellul Forum*, the Society sponsors a biennial conference. IJES is the anglophone sister society of the francophone Association internationale Jacques Ellul. The objectives of IJES are threefold:

Preserving a Heritage. The Society seeks to preserve and disseminate Ellul's literary and intellectual heritage through republication, translation, and secondary writings. **Extending a Critique**. Ellul is best known for his penetrating critique of *la technique*, of the character and impact of technology on our world. The Society seeks to extend his social critique particularly concerning technology.

Researching a Hope. Ellul was not only a social critic but also a theologian and activist in church and community. The Society seeks to extend his theological, biblical, and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

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Issue #64 Fall 2019

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The Ellul Forum

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The *Forum* encourages submissions from scholars, students, and general readers. Submissions must demonstrate a degree of familiarity with Ellul's thought and must engage with it in a critical way. Submissions may be sent to ellulforum@gmail.com.

Editor's Letter[9]

This issue of the *Forum* serves as a foretaste of our upcoming conference, to be held in July 2020 at the University of Strasbourg, France, on the theme of "Ellul and Charbonneau on Ethics in an Age of Ecological and Technological Change." As many readers of the *Forum* will know, Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul were lifelong friends whose works focused on similar concerns and who complemented each other's investigations. The conference is being sponsored jointly by IJES and our francophone sister society, the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul. If you have so far been undecided about attending, we hope that this *Forum* issue will tip you in the right direction. Registration is now open: to register, please visit https://ellul2020conference.weebly.com or follow the links on the IJES website at www.ellul.org.

The *Forum* always welcomes your submissions and suggestions. Please write to us at ellulforum@gmail.com.

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[9] "Editor's Letter." *Ellul Forum* 64 (Fall 2019): 3.

Nature and Scripture in Bernard Charbonneau's *The Green Light*[(10)]

Christian Roy

Having translated Jacques Ellul's posthumous book on *Theology and Technique* for Wipf and Stock, I was struck by the way that it makes explicit the intertwining of these two strands of his lifelong investigation: Christian faith and the sociology of the modern world, carried out in the parallel series of books devoted to their respective ramifications, that here come together at last. A crucial issue on which that convergence comes to bear is that of "Limits," to which an important chapter is devoted. It deals among other things with the thesis, fashionable since Lynn White's famous 1967 article about "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,"[1] that locates these in biblical religion's "departure from the origin where there were limits to man's enterprise over nature," when, "surrounded by a sacred universe, man knew himself to be limited in his enterprises. He might have techniques, but he could not use them just anywhere nor anyhow." The Promethean hubris of the "unlimited remained a virtuality, but prohibitions remained more powerful."

> And so it comes about that Christianity intervenes in this equilibrium, by desacralizing the world, deritualizing religion and negating magic. It brings things down to being only things, it refuses the limits of a sacred that it manifests as imaginary, it kills the gods of the forest, the earth and the waters, and as a result puts all things at the disposal of man who can, from now on, use "nature" as he sees fit, without limits imposed from the outside. Why should one respect what is now no more than matter?

> And we must here pay heed to B. Charbonneau's call-out: by spiritualizing God too much, by making him radically heavenly and Transcendent, man was necessarily pushed away toward Matter, his action was materialized, man's material instinct was liberated. [...]

> Christianity has separated what the ancient world, and the traditional world, had carefully joined, balanced. From that moment on, man may

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[1] Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis." *Science* n.s. 155.3767 (March 10, 1967): 1203–07.

seek the most efficient means and use everything without limits and without shame. The unlimited is inherent to Christianity itself, perhaps not the Christianity of theologians, but Christianity as experienced by the masses of the faithful, and producing effects that were not so much spiritual (having to do with holiness), but concretely historical ones.[2]

Carl Amery's Ecological Challenge to Christianity: Contrasting Responses of Ellul and Charbonneau

Ellul seems to be referring here, perhaps from an early draft, to the chapter on "Nature and Christianity" of Bernard Charbonneau's 1980 book *Le Feu vert. Autocritique du mouvement écologique* (my English translation of which was published by Bloomsbury in 2018 as *The Green Light: A Self-Critique of the Ecological Movement*), as well as to Bavarian writer and environmentalist Carl Amery's 1972 book *Das Ende der Vorsehung. Die gnadenlosen Folgen des Christentums* (i.e., *The End of Providence: The Merciless Consequences of Christianity*). Both Ellul and Charbonneau engage at length with the latter's 1976 French translation as *La Fin de la Providence*, albeit with different emphases. Charbonneau is much more positive about this critique, whereas Ellul remains rather defensive and apologetic. This is what enables Ellul's just-cited mention of Charbonneau's challenge to Christians to seamlessly segue into an implicit account of what sounds more like Amery's own positions about Christianity's ambiguous "success" in a disenchanted world of its own making.

Ellul feels the challenge of Amery's book so keenly that he devotes to it a whole "Annex to the Fifth Chapter" on "Ethical Mediation." On the one hand, he locates it as part of the trend that traces to Christianity as such "all the evil of modern Western society." "Christianity set out on a quest for the final Kingdom and only ends up in a general conquest of the world," in the guise "of technical expansion, of 'planetary revolution.'"[3] That hardly seems controversial to the world historian that I sometimes purport to be, at least if we are talking about a specifically Western Christianity where, under Charlemagne for the first time, the "mechanical arts" came to be theologically valued as instrumental in the gradual restoration of the full power over Creation that Adam had enjoyed before the Fall and that made him the image of God on earth. This conflation of the divine image with human power over the world as a totality fuelled the technological revolutions that spread from monasteries to fields and thence from cities to the State, with a Church mandate to gather the ends of the earth as one for the end times of a historicized millennial Kingdom. Far from being the result of the

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[2] Jacques Ellul, *Théologie et Technique. Pour une éthique de la non-puissance,* ed. Yves Ellul and Frédéric Rognon (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2014): 181–82.

[3] Ellul, *Théologie et Technique,* 299.

intrusion of non-Christian impulses soon after the Reformation, as Ellul insists, the Western drive to cosmic mastery was always intimately linked to this eschatological pattern, from the Scientific Revolution effected by millenarian evangelical Christians who sought the mind of God in the laws of nature, to the Positivists who took them as scripture of a new religion of industry, and beyond to the current transhumanist endeavor to remake reality as the new creation of omnipotent "spiritual machines" (Howard Rheingold).[4] Whether this really existing historical and cultural Christianity is true to the essence of the faith is of course a different matter, and as a Christian whose loyalty is to the Gospel rather than to Christendom, Ellul is quite ready to take a stand against the latter's dubious holdovers alongside non-Christian critics of technological society, such as Charbonneau and Amery. Ellul's other problem with the latter however is that "what he puts forward as an ethic, to which I readily subscribe, has no chance of being born for lack of a positive motivation" for "post-Christian man who lives without hope, in anguish, in the shadow of death. What could be the use of driving him deeper, of telling him no one will come to his help?" He views *The End of Providence* as "actually just an iteration of Death of God Theology."

> Man must be persuaded that nobody is going to come to his help, that the God on whom he was relying is absent, and that he must manage on his own with the problems he has raised. [...] Now, I say that without hope and without the certainty of a Transcendence, the situation in which we are can only lead to suicide. Amery, with his book, seems to me to hasten the temptation of collective suicide.[5]

Charbonneau has a very different, even sympathetic, assessment of this very stance of Amery's that troubles Ellul so much. In keeping with their common early calls for "an ascetic City so that man may live,"[6] Charbonneau holds that "faith alone will be able to impose the asceticism" required to recognize the material limits of embodied life in all areas. "We may say with Carl Amery that, since the sacrifices needed to save the earth and man 'can hardly find justifications in our immediate interests, the call to a religious renewal seems well-founded.'"[7] And Charbonneau proceeds to quote at length as its ground the same passage that seemed so dispiriting to Ellul, as though his friend could

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[4] See David F. Noble, *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1999). I am indebted to this book in my own account of "Space, Time, and the Christian Matrix of Faustian Man," a paper given at the conference "100 Years after the Publication of *The Decline of the West*: Oswald Spengler in an Age of Globalisation," October 17–18, 2018, Blankenheimerdorf and Brussels. https://youtu.be/H7O9JUcBRvQ. Downloadable (pending publication of the proceedings) at www.academia.edu/39267384.

[5] Ellul, *Théologie et Technique,* 306.

[6] This is the title of the last section of their 83 "Directives pour un manifeste personnaliste" (1935). See Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul, *Nous sommes des révolutionnaires malgré nous. Textes pionniers de l'écologie politique* (Paris: Seuil, 2014), 80.

[7] Bernard Charbonneau, *The Green Light: A Self-Critique of the Ecological Movement*, trans.

not entertain the hypothetical bracketing of reliance on a divine breakthrough awaiting us ahead in time to save us. But Ellul appears to misunderstand this as an *a priori* exclusion of that possibility, when it may be a precondition for it in Charbonneau's reading of Amery, who, invoking Job's "lived experience of human and earthly finitude," writes that "we have to treat the future itself 'as though' it could and should be defined in purely human ways," in order to be responsible for our actions. And we must not allow any agency, be it divine or human, to leave half-open the least way out, to count on any miraculous intervention whatsoever, to spare us the sufferings we have laid in store and inflicted upon ourselves with our own hands. We must, to speak in theological language, tend towards this final kenosis, this ultimate self-emptying: the renunciation of any guaranteed future. It is only by losing it that we will win it. [...] We have entered a new phase of divine unfathomability.[8]

This could well be read as an illustration of Ellul's crucial contrast of *espoir* and *espérance*: the former has to be lost or renounced for the latter to come into play as an opening to unforeseeable possibilities, with no certainty to fall back on, only *faith*.[9] And this is precisely the point that Charbonneau makes, arguably more Ellulian than Ellul himself here, in support of Amery's insistence on "lowering the growth rate to restore equilibrium," which he sees as a road without end that begins at our own feet, no matter one's situation or the timescale involved, regardless of the odds of success as we take one small step after another.

> Despite a glaring emergency, it is only very gradually that it will be possible to perform such an about turn, after many conflicts and compromises with large interests and the public's habits (let us only think of the car), with mythologies, such as ideological and nationalist passions. To take on such an adversary with our eyes open, hope is but a feeble help; it will take faith in the meaning and necessity of that enterprise. But the choice is between the latter and nothingness.[10]

Charbonneau's words, written forty years ago, neatly capture the predicament we can no longer evade today and the kind of spiritual resolve required to face it. This is what he likes to call a post-Christian situation, assuming a Christian problematic of incarnation, yet independent of continued belief in the objects of faith. In line with Amery's kenotic approach to eschatology, Charbonneau feels that, not speaking as one himself, "a Christian can answer such a challenge only by effecting a Copernican reversal at the level of religion itself; if it puts Christian faith in question, it does seem true to its general direction though."

Christian Roy (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 74.

[8] Charbonneau, *The Green Light,* 75.

[9] See Jacques Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment* (New York: Seabury, 1977).

[10] Charbonneau, *The Green Light,* 185–86.

The current crisis finds us fundamentally involved in the earth which we had purported to escape. And it is no longer from the heavens or from nature or from History that rescue will come, but from the— paradoxically spiritual—experience of an Earth where man forever more makes a decision against entropy, death and necessity in a struggle that may be crazy, but that is the only meaningful one. Only the freedom that is its conscience will be able to save us: this time in the sense in which we say that we save ourselves from drowning. But it is written somewhere that the spirit became incarnate in a body.[11]

Charbonneau's Ambivalent Reading of Christian Scripture

This last sentence, shorn of its dogmatic content, is at the core of Charbonneau's existential thought as it directly translates into ecological commitment. This is the foundational insight he takes from Christianity and remains ever faithful to, and in light of which he assesses the way it has translated in this religious tradition that has much to answer for in terms of its historical and environmental impact but to which he remains indebted for his moral compass. I will not attempt here to give a panorama of Bernard Charbonneau's thinking on Nature and Christianity, a topic that exercised this reverent agnostic all his life, largely in uneasy but mutually fruitful dialogue with the staunch, if critical, Christian Jacques Ellul. An admirable paper along these lines has already been given by Frédéric Rognon at the Bernard Charbonneau conference in Pau in 2011, which I urge readers of French to download from the online proceedings.[12] But in keeping with the IJES conference theme, I will confine myself in the rest of this paper to skimming Charbonneau's close reading of the Bible over the first half of the "Nature and Christianity" chapter of *The Green Light*, this being his most sustained published engagement with Christian Scripture itself as a focus, rather than Christian civilization in general, in order to tease out the dynamics and paradoxes of the denial of limits that has largely driven the latter.

From the outset, Charbonneau draws from the Creation story a rebuttal of its simplistic anti-environmental interpretation by non-Christians (and even by some Christians, such as those supporting the Trump administration), since "man received as his property the earth that Providence created for him. But nowhere does it say that he has the right to destroy God's handiwork. This sovereignty given to man has another, even more basic reason. If God gives it to him, it is because God created him in his

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[11] Amery as quoted in Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 75–76.

[12] Frédéric Rognon, "Bernard Charbonneau et la critique des racines chrétiennes de la Grande Mue." In Alain Cazenave-Parriot, ed., *Bernard Charbonneau : habiter la terre. Actes du Colloque du 2–4 mai 2011, Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour.* DVD accompanied by a booklet, Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour, 2011, 108–116. https://lagrandemue.wordpress.com/

image: sovereignty over nature belongs to the very being of the God of Jews and Christians," since, unlike "Greek or Oriental 'pagans,'" who divinized nature, "the personal and transcendent God distinguishes himself from it."[13] Likewise, "the Old Testament reminds man that he was drawn from the silt of the earth," and to that extent stands over against it as a distinct and autonomous *human* being, i.e., one that comes from the ground (*humus*) but is not reducible to it, though he returns to it in his fallen historical state. The sovereignty he has been granted is not absolute like that of his creator, it is bounded by Adam's finitude, and due to sin, his work is never purely good. If, instead of being the vague sense of a general and abstract evil, the awareness of sin and evil was that of our own limits and of human weakness, it could be the wellspring of a more realistic view of nature, and warier of man and his works.[14]

But the exile from Eden into a nature now fallen along with man and turned into "a jungle ruled by the survival of the fittest"[15] instead launches its former lord on a path of precarious mastery, where he constantly feels the need to defend and consolidate the limits of his uneasy comfort zones. It is thus "the divine curse that condemns him to build the city"[16]—the foundational act of civilization as one of disobedience to God for which Ellul blames man in his theology of the city based on the biblical stories of Cain and Babel.[17] But Charbonneau seems to be suggesting that man's own creation of a social and technological microcosm shielding him from the elements with artificial barriers to unmediated reliance on unpredictable, hostile nature, rather than a declaration of independence from divine Providence as

> Ellul sees it, was an inevitable and therefore legitimate response to the new conditions into which God allows man to find a footing in his exile. Condemned to till the earth, he is less and less in magical communion with things, brought to mere utility by a will to power that reduces them to dust as soon as he lays hold of them. An ambivalent curse since it was imposed by God, work is both a duty and a blessing that happens to come along with the promise of deliverance from it.[18]

But according to Charbonneau, a perverse interpretation of this "curse-blessing" afflicts many one-sided readers of the Bible, such as the Puritans, who "had a religion of work that they transmitted to capitalist societies": As long as we are going to bear suffering and inflict it upon ourselves, we might as well derive delight from it, either by enjoying other people's suffering out of sadism or our own suffering out of masochism:

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[13] Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 66.

[14] Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 70.

[15] Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 67.

[16] Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 70.

[17] Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City,* trans. Dennis Pardee (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011).

[18] Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 67.

a specifically human and Christian vice, doubtless unknown in nature. But look at all these new pleasures![19]

The this-worldly asceticism of the Protestant work ethic was so successful in its unintended consequence of producing an embarrassment of riches[20] that, transfigured by Fordism's use of mass purchasing power to drive the industrial economy, the guilty pleasures of consumption eventually became hallowed as an unmixed blessing and sign of election in the new dispensation of a consumer society driven by an endless stream of new technological distractions, proof of the bounties of a secular providence that hardly needs explicit religious validation by a prosperity gospel. "For, always for good or ill, the old man lives on in the new: the pagan in the Christian,"[21] just as Christian patterns live on in the ostensibly heathen hedonism of a post-Christian civilization.

"But it would be a mistake to reduce the Old and even the New Testament to a progressive ideology," Charbonneau insists, for "there is hardly a chapter without its own retort":

> At the same time as the condemnation of nature, we find in the Bible its glorification. It is everywhere in the Old Testament, rooted (or mired), far more than the New, in its soil and its people: in the Promised Land that is not in Heaven but smack in the middle of a geographic and historical crossroads.[22]

Still, "the Heavenly Jerusalem is not of this world, and things go awry every time man attempts to build it on earth. [...] And the *Psalms* and the *Prophets* constantly renew the condemnation of any human work that wants to equal that of God."

> Although the New Testament continues the spiritualist and universalist tradition of the prophets, it remains nonetheless rooted in a Galilean countryside peopled by shepherds, agriculturalists and fishermen, where nature is omnipresent.[23]

In the guise of the birds and the lilies of the fields, "far from being cursed, nature is held up as an example to men, with their anxiety and greed for power and money."

> But the glorification of nature in the New Testament is not exactly that of the Old. It is no longer its power that is praised, but its humble beauty and its carefreeness. What is put into question by the Gospel and the prophets, more than nature, is the social power that does it violence, as it does to men. It is war, money, the Law.[24]

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[19] Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 67.

[20] See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (London: Penguin, 2002).

[21] Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 68.

[22] Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 69.

[23] Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 70.

[24] Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 70.

Oblivious to this serious business of human affairs, Christ thus lives "like an anarchist who ignores the economy and politics, without which men would have little power over nature. If Christians had strictly followed the Gospel's teaching, their power would hardly have gone beyond that of a tribe of gypsies or Indians" and there would have never been such thing as Christian civilization to upset the old ways of all human societies throughout the world, leading it at once to unity and to the brink of collapse. Just as biblical transcendence tends to "bring upheaval to the earth in the attempt to realize an impossible ideal," "Gospel anarchism is condemned to subvert a society that can only realize the conditions of freedom by translating them into laws and sanctions," a process known as civilization. "But if the old law is abolished, it is in favour of another one that belongs to personal conscience and love," as a new way of approaching not only the neighbor as irreplaceable person, regardless of social function or context, but also a nature now stripped of the power once wielded by its divinized features and likewise given over to human care and respect in its vulnerable if daunting otherness.

> If Christ finishes the process of disembodying the spirit, he re-embodies it on the other hand as no other religion has done, in a Godman who, through his body, lives, experiences death throes and then expires on a cross in his time and place.[25]

Disentangling Christianity and Progress

The kind of behavior that led Jesus to this divine consecration of human life is inseparable from his corporeal assumption of its mortal limits, so that incarnation refers not just to Christ's theological status or his sacramental incorporation of elements of the world but to the consistent translation of ethical principles into action within these limits: "hearing these words and putting them into practice." This demand now has to go deeper than ritual observance and socially sanctioned propriety, since

> no law determines how that is supposed to happen, it is up to freedom to do it. When that happens, nothing is negligible anymore: neither earth nor history; at every moment, a game is being played out in which the stakes are personal and universal salvation.[26]

It will no longer do to view this salvation in mostly otherworldly terms, however, now that "a secularized, rogue Christianity is at work throughout the human species,"[27] exposing it along with most other species to the Sixth Great Extinction in which this spiritual tradition was instrumental, like it or not. For "Progress, the continual

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[25] Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 71.
[26] Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 71.
[27] Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 72.

development of science and technique, is inseparable from evangelical Christian faith; without it, it would have lacked an engine, nothing would have driven humans, until then steeped in the sacred, to break with the gods, except for the God-Man"[28] who brought a new heaven and a new earth within their reach. This alone could eventually turn the given earth and sky into mere springboards or fuel reserves for the historical journey to a better world as *telos* of all thought and activity. "But if the old chains binding man to the earth and man to man held on their own, the new link can only be tied freely by every man, at the risk of losing himself."[29]

This is why Charbonneau welcomes Carl Amery's call for an end to Providence as the assumption of a divinely ordained happy end to the human adventure on this planet. He agrees that people have to be disenchanted of this sacred history of salvation that remains in the guise of Progress in the wake of the disenchantment of all other forms of the sacred it has enabled. It is a personal leap of faith in meaningful life without ultimate guarantee that Charbonneau demands of every human, no matter his or her beliefs or lack thereof, to defy the hopeless odds of steering mankind on the narrow path to meaningful collective survival. Where Ellul takes Amery to task for leaving out the transcendent hope that he deems indispensable to keep the future open, Charbonneau finds support in this thinker for both the spiritual and practical value of entertaining as he always has the uncomfortable question of the "only thing we can hold against pure Christianity" of the kind his friend is a reliable witness to: "Is not the challenge it puts to the hominid mammal, that of a new Law embodied in an individual freedom, too far beyond its capacities?"[30]

This question is not a rhetorical one to this agnostic. Yet even in the worstcase scenario of irredeemable environmental doom, Charbonneau maintains that there is no way back to conditions prior to biblical revelation and its possibly fatal world-historical consequences: "the old order is crumbling, and we do not have any other way" beyond the dead end of Progress than that Way of personal freedom opened by the embodied Word as revealed in Christian Scripture —for better or for worse. "If it happens that man is not up to the challenge of his own destiny, then that will have been the mistake of his Creator, whether God or nature."[31]

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[28] Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 72.
[29] Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 72.
[30] Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 72.
[31] Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 72.

Jacques Ellul and Exodus: A Summary and Review[11]

G. P. Wagenfuhr

This paper summarizes and reviews the place of exodus[1] in the corpus of Jacques Ellul. I argue that Ellul rightly understands the centrality of exodus and God as liberator in the Bible, but that he is bound to a perspective that prevents him from explaining in satisfactory detail what exodus is for. That is, every liberation is from a bondage to a goal. Ellul regularly underemphasizes the place of the people of God, the mission of that people, and the connection of the exodus with the Kingdom of God. Nevertheless, his understanding of the centrality of exodus in the Bible makes him a prescient thinker whose theology of freedom remains well worth continued study.

Ellul on Exodus

The theme of exodus occupies an important place in the thought of Jacques Ellul, as it forms the biblical foundation of his theology of freedom. While a fair amount has been written on Ellul and freedom or liberation, I am not aware of a specific investigation into his view on exodus.

Rather than surveying the literature reference by reference, we will proceed thematically. This is somewhat easy to do, because Ellul's use of the concept of exodus is consistent in many of his works. Although I will aim to cite multiple references as they are available, this article should not be understood to be a complete index entry to his vast corpus. Although *The Ethics of Freedom* is his central work on freedom, and thus on exodus, he makes claims unique to other works as well.

The Centrality of Exodus in Scripture

Exodus is a Greek word meaning a "way out." Generally, it refers to any major act of leaving. In the Bible it is specifically used to refer to the particular event of the Hebrew

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[1] Throughout this paper, I use *exodus* in lowercase to refer to the biblical theme found in Abraham's call, the liberation under Moses, and the work of Jesus. *The exodus* refers specifically to the liberation of God's people from Egypt. The book of the Bible is always referred to as *the book of Exodus*.

people leaving Egypt and going into the wilderness. By extension, it refers to any way out of a type of oppressive situation, like subjection to Rome by the Jewish people of the Second Temple period, or even as a general human condition like that of sin. Ellul argues that exodus is *the* central narrative of the Hebrew Scriptures.[2] It is a major part of Pauline theology, which is not in contrast but is complementary to the rest of the New Testament.[3] Jesus' whole work is seen as an exodus.[4] Interestingly in this regard, Ellul explores the Pauline and Johannine literature and compares them, but he does not make use of key passages of Luke in *The Ethics of Freedom*. In his inaugural address in the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus claims that he is the fulfilment of the year of the Lord's favor, in which he will proclaim liberty to the captives (4:18–21). This is a surprising omission that would have significantly strengthened Ellul's position on the centrality of exodus and linked exodus with jubilee.

Ellul characteristically does not thoroughly defend the claim that exodus is the central biblical narrative nor cite sources that would support this claim. Such a claim is far less radical-sounding after the thorough work of more-recent biblical scholars such as N. T. Wright.

God as Liberator

Just as exodus can refer to a specific event in the Bible or a generalized theme of leaving oppression, so too is God understood as the one who brings the people of God out of Egypt and the one who frees people from oppression in general.[5] God is known as liberator, for Ellul. He makes the bold claim that God is God only as our liberator.[6] This is not a claim about the nature of God so much as it is about God's relationship to a people bound by necessity and slavery. God is the God of Israel because of his liberating action, as in Exodus 20. Thus, God can be known only in the experience of liberation. This is an important reason why Ellul's thinking shifts on the order of how one comes to know sin. He explains that he began with a strong Calvinistic view of sin and moved later in life to seeing sin less and less as an important category. Following

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[2] Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 39; Jacques Ellul, *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 298.

[3] Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 94–98.

[4] Jacques Ellul, *Living Faith: Belief and Doubt in a Perilous World*, trans. Peter Heinegg (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 276.

[5] Examples of this abound in Scripture. The songs of Moses and Miriam (Ex 15), Hannah (1 Sam 2), and Mary (Lk 1:46–55) should be added to the long list of Psalms that convey this theme of the exaltation of the weak or lowly. Jesus' sermons about the Kingdom of God/heaven likewise include the same kind of power reversals (Mt 5:1–12, Lk 6:20–49).

[6] Ellul, *Ethics*, 96.

Barth, Ellul sees that sin can be recognized only through the experience of liberation in Christ. The depth of sin is revealed only after one has been rescued from the sin itself. This means that the message of sin is itself a message predicated on the reality of liberation.[7] Like any situation of normalcy, one requires critical distance to better understand the shape of a situation in which one formerly lived.

Ellul makes the sovereignty of God dependent on God as liberator. In *The Subversion of Christianity,* he writes about Islam's influence on Christianity, which he sees in the doctrine of providence. Islam holds to a very strong version of submission to the will of God. Ellul thinks that providence is

> the very reverse of what we are told about the biblical God, who opens up freedom for us, who lets us make our own history, who goes with us on the more or less unheard-of adventures that we concoct. This God is not "providence" (which is never a biblical word). He is never the determinative cause or an irreducible conductor of events.[8]

God's sovereignty, although not expressed in providence,[9] is still necessary for liberation. "God has to be ours, and sovereign, if we are to be truly free. Israel is free only to the extent that its God is absolutely sovereign."[10] That is, God must be a higher authority than all others, or we fall back into slavery as the Israelites do. If God is not sovereign, he does not have the power to truly liberate. This deduction from the essence of God (sovereign) to his historical action (liberation) does not deeply interest Ellul, who would prefer to refer to God as revealed in Scripture rather than God as he must be based on logical outcomes of his divine essence. He maintains that the two perspectives—God does everything and humans do nothing, or humans do all things—are unbiblical.[11] He believes in a third option, that God has full sovereignty, and thus full potentiality, but does not use his power to override the will of humans. Instead God uses his power and authority to liberate people according to his will.

The Judeo-Christian God is unique in his revelation as the liberator. Ellul contrasts Yahweh with Ancient Near Eastern gods, who are not sovereign, so that human history is really just the "'fallout' of divine misadventures."[12] And he contrasts the God of the Bible with Allah of Islam, whose all-encompassing and unalterable will is his primary

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[7] Willem H. Vanderburg, ed. *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (Toronto: Anansi, 2004), 85.

[8] Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 107.

[9] See also Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), chapter 12.

[10] Ellul, *Ethics*, 96–97.

[11] Ellul, *Subversion*, 147–48.

[12] Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation*, trans. George W. Schreiner (New York: Seabury, 1977), 49.

attribute.[13] Indeed, so crucial is God as liberator to the Bible, Ellul thinks, that God's first real self-revelation is in his call to Moses from the burning bush to act on behalf of liberation.[14]

While God is clearly the liberator in the exodus, the great and final exodus comes in Christ, which has become a major theme of recent New Testament scholarship. But whereas current scholarship often points toward the historical aspects in which Christ saw himself, and Paul saw Christ, as liberator (from Rome, from law), Ellul also emphasizes the current aspects of liberation in Christ. Christ frees us from politics, from being *in* politics, for example.[15] Jesus' incarnation and crucifixion is the final exodus, the banishment of death.[16]

Although Ellul consistently points to the necessity of the sovereignty of God for the reality of liberation, he also says that God cannot be understood as the master of the universe,[17] as Christ *Pantocrator*.[18] By this he means that God is better known through exodus than through Genesis, and that God revealed himself as Jesus. Jesus is localized, personal. God's love is expressed in direct, personal ways, not in a universal sense. God is revealed in Christ on the cross, not in universal lordship.[19] This is a major aspect of Ellul's theological and ethical vision. God allows human freedom, but that does not make him any less sovereign.

The Historicity of the Exodus

The exodus is the great historical event in which God liberates Israel from Egypt. But for Ellul the exodus is not the only liberative event in the Bible. He points also to Abraham's call out of Ur as an exodus, and to the whole work of Jesus.[20] These are portrayed as historical acts of liberation. But as he is with many other points in the Old Testament, Ellul is less interested in establishing the historicity of the events than he is in reading the text as a revelation of the character of God. For Ellul, biblical history is not a bare catalogue of events but the revelation of God's meaning for human history. Thus, whether or not the exodus of Moses happened as narrated in the book of Exodus does not interest Ellul, and he does not discuss it. Although Ellul does not believe in

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[13] Ellul, *Subversion*, 107.

[14] Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 58.

[15] Jacques Ellul, *False Presence of the Kingdom*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1972), 183. By "in politics," Ellul means that Christians are able to choose to join in the political arena but are not subject to it. Politics is "there to get into as a pure act of will."

[16] Ellul, *Living Faith*, 276.

[17] Jacques Ellul and Patrick Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity*, trans. Joan Mendès France (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 103.

[18] Ellul, *False Presence*, 69.

[19] Ellul, *Ethics*, 85.

[20] Ellul, *Living Faith*, 274.

a distinction between a Christ of faith and a Christ of history and has little time for Bultmannian demythologization,[21][22] he is nevertheless careful to distinguish the reality of the historical event from its enduring theological implications and spiritual realities. One might argue that exodus is a typological theme for Ellul. That is, the exodus of Moses is a type that gives structure to much of the rest of the biblical revelation. Ellul means this in some specific and some general ways.

Specifically, Ellul links the work of Christ with the Passover lamb. "The Word, the passage, the crossing, is the celebration of liberation. History can be read only in the light of this liberation."[23] For Ellul, humans must be liberated for God to be God, and all history leads to this liberation, which is its final product. We might say that, for Ellul, the crucifixion of Jesus, the paschal lamb, is *the* historic event, the point at which history definitively gains its meaning and purpose. Again, this liberation is possible only by recognition of the sovereignty of God in the Lamb.

From this point, Ellul can move to see exodus as a spiritual or existential reality. Ellul notes on a number of occasions that *mitzraim*, the Hebrew word for *Egypt*, means "twofold anguish" and cites the Talmud for this interpretation.[24] This "twofold anguish" is oppression and death. Egypt is both physical oppression and spiritual finality in meaninglessness. The liberation of God cannot be limited to one or another in isolation. This hints, of course, at Ellul's ethics found in many of his theological works, such as in *Presence in the Modern World*. But this link between historical and existential reality is also clear in his concept of the principalities and powers. Ellul's perspective on the powers has been elaborated at length.[25] He views the powers as having a reality dependent on humans, but this is still a reality that is oppressive. The exodus is liberation from the powers.[26] Pharaoh is not simply Pharaoh but a power of oppression, an embodiment of the prince of the world.

Threefold Exodus

In one of his few hints at the corporate aspect of liberation, Ellul explains that exodus has three aspects: God's self-revelation that brings a people into his mystery, liberation from oppression and idolatry, and the institution of a people by giving a law of liberty.[27] Each of these has a depth to it. God's self-revelation is liberative. This freedom from slavery to the necessary course of events and situations is what gives

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[21] Ellul, *Apocalypse*, 49. This entire book is dedicated to this thesis. See also Ellul, *Subversion*, 147–49.

[22] Ellul, *Ethics*, 68–69.

[23] Ellul, *Apocalypse*, 119.

[24] Ellul, *Reason for Being*, 39; Ellul and Vanderburg, *Perspectives*, 84.

[25] Marva Dawn, "The Concept of 'the Principalities and Powers' in the Works of Jacques Ellul" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 1992).

[26] Ellul, *Ethics*, 133.

[27] Ellul, *Ethics*, 96.

meaning to history, as written by the liberating God. Liberation from oppression includes both a spiritual and a material element inseparably. Ellul here also notes that liberation is from idolatry. This highlights another major theme in Ellul's work, which is his investigation into false belief. One could easily argue that much of Ellul's sociological work subtly points to the idolatry of various fields: *la technique*, *la politique*, propaganda, power and violence, money and economics, the State, and the city. Each of these represents a field in which humans aim to construct ultimate meaning, solutions, and security, but which are all false sources of meaning.[28] Again, God must be entirely sovereign if he is to be liberator, which means that all other powers must be submitted or dethroned. The problem that lies at the heart of idolatry is the enthronement of anything else, the sacralization of the forces of necessity and determination.[29] Thus, Ellul says, "Spiritually the most destructive and deceptive act is that of making a virtue of necessity."[30] To claim that obeying necessity or adapting to contextual determinations is virtuous is an annihilation of any possible meaning, because it shows that humans are fully and only products of their environment. For Ellul, there is no meaning if there is no freedom. If all things are predetermined or fate, an *amor fati*, like that of Nietzsche, is nothing but capitulation. Exodus thus begins with God's self-revelation, which opens humans up to the possibility of the alternative, to the destruction of the power of necessity. God is outside of contextual determinations or the realm of necessity, so that his self-revelation is a revelation of an alternative and thus the possibility of freedom. Exodus then liberates people from necessity and from the idolization of necessity. This is both a material and an imaginative liberation. Exodus is a liberation from myth, which is the formation of narratives of meaning that integrate people into an environment of determinisms. And liberation in Christ is freedom from alienation,[31] which is Ellul's best attempt at modernizing talk of sin. There is external alienation, in which a person is possessed by another or by a larger category such as a corporation. Self-alienation is the defining of oneself in another. This is slavery, but it focuses on the dehumanizing aspect of redefinition of identity rather than simply on the conditions of subjection.[32] Finally, exodus leads to the giving of law, which we explore in the next section.

Freedom and Law

In the exodus, God liberates a people to the wilderness wherein he gives them his law. Ellul, a scholar of the history of institutions, is keenly aware of the realities of law. The giving of law is the grounds of freedom, "the charter of the liberty of the people

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[28] Ellul, *Ethics*, 97–98.
[29] Ellul, *Ethics*, 37–50.
[30] Ellul, *Ethics*, 45.
[31] Ellul, *False Presence*, 206.
[32] Ellul, *Ethics*, 24.

of God."[33] Ethics, for Ellul, is the grounds of freedom, not its inversion. The law of God is a law of liberty. It forms the basis for an expression of freedom by retaining the sovereignty of God. "The deeper meaning is that the law is the word of God. It is thus liberation. The aim of the commandment is to free, not to enslave."[34] Law forms the limits in which freedom is possible.[35] It is a schoolmaster of freedom. It is not the end of freedom but its foundation. There is a necessary tension between obedience and transgression, which is what enables freedom.[36] Although the law is the basis of Israel's freedom, the history of Israel and that of humanity is to constantly fall into new forms of bondage. Eventually, even the law of God becomes a bondage for Israel.[37] The very grounds of exodus thus can become a new bondage. This happens when the tension between obedience and transgression is resolved on one side or the other. Freedom occurs in a tension between slavish obedience and rebellion. Constant transgression of the law is itself a way that one defines oneself by the law. The purpose of the law of God is to help maintain a tension that enables the law to recede into the background as a foundation of liberty. When Israel elevates the law over the Spirit of God, the law becomes a slave master.[38] Put another way, when the law becomes an independent objective power, rather than an expression of the sovereignty of the liberating God, it enslaves. Thus, the first commandment of the Decalogue is the command to worship and serve Yahweh alone.

Bearing God's Revelation

Exodus is the grounds of any human ability to bear the revelation of God to the world. Without living in the freedom of God there is no possibility of revealing God.[39] The brief paragraph in *The Ethics of Freedom* (96) provides a helpful window onto the whole theological framework of Ellul's thought. The role of Israel and of the Christian is to reveal God to the world, and for this to be accomplished there must be evidences of full liberation. That is, liberation cannot simply be spiritual. It must have concrete implications (as Ellul wrote *Presence in the Modern World* to explain). On the other hand, the liberation cannot be expressed in the ways that the progressive world is already working within. There must simultaneously be a revelation of God and a submission to God's total sovereignty for any material liberation to be real (as Ellul wrote *False Presence* to explain). The Christian life of exodus is therefore a constant interplay between discerning the forces of alienation, calling all to submit to God in Christ with his love, and acting in concrete ways to demonstrate this.

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[33] Ellul, *Ethics*, 96.
[34] Ellul, *Ethics*, 122.
[35] See also Ellul, *Reason for Being*, 298.
[36] Ellul, *Ethics*, 347–49.
[37] Ellul, *Ethics*, 97.
[38] Ellul, *Ethics*, 147.
[39] Ellul, *Ethics*, 96.

Exodus as the Location of Christian Life

In *Living Faith* (French title: *La foi au prix du doute*), Ellul concludes his reflections on faith, hope, and doubt with a long chapter on Jonah as the model for the Christian life. Jonah had to experience his own exodus, not when he ran from God and found himself in a big fish, but when he had to go to Nineveh. God's call was for him to leave his world behind and enter the world of his enemies, not to pursue his own task but to bring the revelation of God to a people under judgment.[40]

Christian faith is a movement, for Ellul.[41] It is not a static state of being but a constant movement out of the world and to the world. Exodus is not about a condemnation of the world as evil, as with the flood of Noah.[42] It is liberation from the world, so that, free in Christ, one can bring the revelation of God's Kingdom to a world bent on suicide.[43] Moving out of the world is obedience to the call to become a people of God, a holy people. But this people exists for the purpose of being sent into the world with the message of reconciliation. Within this movement comes formation, maturity, freedom. If this movement is schematized or turned into a static Christ and Culture model, like that of Niebuhr, confusion of holiness and mission results.

Thus, the Christian location is exodus, wilderness, or exile. The Kingdom is not yet present enough that the Christian can live within it in a largely material way. But the Kingdom is the call of the Spirit and the imagination. Thus, the actual location of the Christian tends to be in exile, unable to be part of the world, envisioning another, and working as exiles within the world for its reconciliation. The mere acceptance of Christ is to place oneself in exile. Exile is not a choice of the Christian life; it is the necessary condition. That means that Christian faith is the rejection of our land, our home, our milieu, our professions.[44] This exodus is a "mortal combat with the world."[45] But exodus is not the conclusion of the movement of the Christian life, it is the prerequisite to entry into the world. This reentry is the calling of Jonah, the preaching of God's judgment in love upon human alienation. This call is a total refusal to allow the world to march toward its necessary self-destruction. But Christian faith is built not on rescuing the world but on faithfulness to God.

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[40] Ellul, *Living Faith*, 277.

[41] See G. P. Wagenfuhr, "Revelation and the Sacred Reconsidered: The Revelation of God in Jesus Christ as Desacralising Reorientation to 'Milieu' in and beyond Jacques Ellul" (PhD diss., University of Bristol, 2013).

[42] Ellul, *Living Faith*, 277.

[43] Jacques Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World: A New Translation*, trans. Lisa Richmond (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), 15.

[44] Ellul, *Living Faith*, 274.

[45] Ellul, *Living Faith*, 274.

Exodus and Freedom as Not Happiness

The act of liberation, as with Jonah's rebellion, is utterly devastating to a life integrated into the world. The experience of exodus is not happiness. Indeed, Ellul thinks, if the act of liberating the world from its sacral attitudes toward its contemporary idolatries is not accompanied by a reason for living that can adequately sustain a will-to-life, it would have the tendency to drive the great majority of people to insanity or suicide.[46] Ellul often points to the Israelite desire in the wilderness to return to the perceived good life of slavery in Egypt. Interestingly, as Old Testament scholar and agrarian Ellen Davis points out, this good eating in Egypt was likely an accurate memory. Ancient Egypt had a varied and nutritious diet. She says, "No people would eat so well again for a thousand years."[47] This lends further credence to the reality about which Ellul is speaking. Christian freedom is a lifestyle that is in direct contradiction to the lifestyle of happiness. Humans, like the Israelites, prefer the security of bondage, which is regarded as happiness, to the risks of freedom. Freedom is risk, it is the "non-satisfaction of needs that we see as natural or essential,"[48] such as those of security.

The Exodus Temptation of Jesus and the Self-Limitation of Freedom

One final aspect to point to is Ellul's regular use in his theology of Jesus' temptations. For Ellul, God risked everything by sending Jesus into the exile/exodus of temptation in the wilderness. Jesus was entirely free to choose to submit to his desires or the temptation of the devil, and it is on this risk that God's plan of reconciliation hinges. The wilderness is a place of dislocation, where there are no grounds of support. Ellul merges exodus, the flood of Noah, and the temptation of Adam all into this one event. It is the success in Christ of overcoming the temptations of materialism, power, and spiritual proof, temptations that led Israel into bondage throughout its history. Jesus resists temptation by accepting his relation to God. True freedom is, again, submission to the sovereign God alone. This alone is the force that can free people from determinations and necessities. Jesus demonstrates freedom by self-limitation. Rather than by an expression of his power, Jesus chooses limits for himself within which he is free.[49]

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[46] Ellul, *The New Demons*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1975), 208.

[47] Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 70.

[48] Ellul, *Ethics*, 262–63. See also Ellul, *Subversion*, 167.

[49] Ellul, *Ethics*, 51–62. See also Jacques Ellul, *Si Tu es le Fils de Dieu*. In *Le Défi et le Nouveau : Œuvres Théologiques 1948–1991* (Paris: Table Ronde, 2007), 937–1016.

This concept of self-limitation and refusal of power finds expression throughout Ellul's works, including many of his sociological works in which he is critical of the uncritical implementation of what is possible.

Evaluation of the Exodus Theme in Ellul

I believe that Ellul has identified the heart of living the Christian faith by focusing so intently throughout his writings on the biblical themes of exodus and liberation. His understanding of an intolerable dialectical existence between slavery and freedom, and the careful elaboration of what that freedom truly means, is accurate. This aspect of Ellul's work has received great support from New Testament scholarship in recent decades, with the rise of the "New Perspective on Paul" and study of the genre of apocalyptic. The radical inbreaking of the Kingdom and its total otherness from the kingdoms of this world confirm Ellul's appraisal of New Testament theology. Furthermore, Ellul rightly understands that exodus is central to both the Old and New Testaments and is indeed one of their chief unifying elements. This means that Ellul's understanding of the role of *torah* in the Bible, and its transition from Old to New Testaments, is commendable. He was able to see that *torah* can be both the ground of freedom and the source of slavery, and he does so without creating some Jewish-Christian opposition in which Jews are legalists and Christians are about freedom. This corresponds very well to the more recent reappraisal of the pharisees in Second Temple Judaism,[50] though Ellul would not have known this.

But this leads to one area in which Ellul's thought about exodus is limited. The exodus under Moses was about the formation of a people of God. Ellul recognized this, but he did not develop much of an ecclesiology of freedom or exodus. The work of Christ in liberating people was not simply for individual, personal relationships with God but for the formation of a community in which the Kingdom of God is plausible and tangible. This is a key ecclesial concept that I elaborate in detail elsewhere.[51] Most basically it means that the Kingdom is not intended to be aspirational for individual experience but a shared communal experience that normalizes the values of the Kingdom and thus may be perceived as reasonable. Ellul does not develop much in the way of a communal life of liberty. There are a variety of likely reasons for this. His own ecclesial experiences did not fill him with hope in the institution of the church. Such disappointment has become an increasingly common experience among Christians in the North Atlantic, as evidenced by copious data from major church-research institutions on reasons for church decline, as well as in the necessary shift in the social function of church

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[50] N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God. Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996).

[51] G. P. Wagenfuhr, *Plundering Eden: A Subversive Christian Theology of Creation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, forthcoming).

institutions under a post-Durkheimian late secularism.[52] This is a situation in which Moses figures are desperately needed. There must be the development of bold leaders who can take the risks of freedom in modeling and fostering exodus communities, for the Christian life of liberty to be plausible and tangible. These communities can then form the basis of a prophetic "Yet forty days!" that Ellul recognizes is necessary.

Along with his limited ecclesiology, Ellul significantly underdevelops a portrait of the life of the Kingdom. Perhaps ironically, Ellul focuses so much of his effort on explaining the reality of the Kingdom, the dialectic of its presence/absence, and the Christian's place within it, that he doesn't spend much time explaining his perspective of what characterizes the Kingdom. Put another way, Ellul doesn't say much about what freedom or liberation is for or to. What is that vision of the city of God of Hebrews? Certainly Ellul develops his view of *anakephalaiosis* or recapitulation,[53] in which God takes up the history of humanity and reconciles it with himself. But Ellul's eschatology lacks crucial dimensions that would otherwise round out his ethical call to "freedom to." Put another way, Ellul does not adequately spell out the mission of God's people. Rescue, salvation, liberation is not the goal but the beginning of God's purposes in the world. Certainly this is a theological weakness that Ellul shares with generations of theologians who have fixated on salvation as the core theme of Christianity.

And although Ellul is himself a major forerunner of the ecological movement, along with his friend Bernard Charbonneau, he also misses bringing the whole of creation into the exodus theme. Although Ellul believes in the salvation of all creation, he does not detail what the reconciliation of all creation means or how that fits into his theory of Christ as the one who gives meaning to history. We might say that he runs the risk of seeing God as liberator of humanity without seeing God as the Creator who is rescuing all creation *from* humanity as well.[54] Exodus and the wilderness is replete with symbolic content to aid ecological thinking of exodus. Again, Ellul makes a significant interpretative error in *The Meaning of the City* that perhaps prevents him from drawing more ecological conclusions. Does the history of creation not have meaning until humanity arrives on the scene? Certainly not. This anthropocentric danger is endemic in Ellul's Barthian Christocentrism that focuses on the salvation of humanity to the neglect of the restoration of creation. This does not mean that Ellul's ethic is anti-ecological, of course, only that it has a conceptual weakness that hinders it from becoming a major source for contemporary ecotheology.

Lacking also is any real connection of liberation with jubilee or the practices of the sabbath year. Certainly, Ellul mentions the sabbath as a sign of liberty in the Old

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[52] See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007) and G. P. Wagenfuhr, "Religion comme jeu : la situation au XXIème siècle." In *Comment peut-on (encore) être ellulien au XXIe siècle ?* (Paris: Table Ronde, 2014).

[53] See Ellul, *What I Believe*, chapter 16, and Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, trans. Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), chapter 6.

[54] See Wagenfuhr, *Plundering Eden.*

Testament and as a mark of Christian freedom.[55] But as he does so, he consistently fails to speak about the sabbath year and the year of jubilee. This legal framework would significantly bolster his theology of liberation in that it would add some content to a positive ecclesiology or view of Kingdom life as intentionally liberating. It would also go some way to addressing the ecological deficit that his work on liberation has. And it would aid in his theological ethic of self-restraint and exercise of non-power.

Certainly, Ellul's understanding of freedom and exodus is deeply engrained in his existentialism. This is both positive and negative. It is positive in the reminder that the life of Christian faith is not reducible to a formula, a static worldview, or applicable principles. It forces the Christian to meet with his or her own individual alienations in an encounter with Christ. But his existentialism is also one of his chief weaknesses. As we've seen, it prevents a more mature exploration of the people of God in a robust ecclesiology and eschatology. In the 21st-century post-Durkheimian secular world, the formation of communities of faith will be increasingly a conscious and difficult effort, and sources of inspiration are needed for this task. It is therefore lamentable that Ellul does not provide much help for a time of building new communities and expressions of Christian discipleship.

All that said, Ellul's thinking about exodus is both an excellent microcosm of his theology in general and an accurate explanation of biblical theology in a way unique to himself.

Liberation Theology?

We cannot conclude this review without mention of Thomas Hanks's article "The Original 'Liberation Theologian'?" Hanks compares Ellul's thinking on liberation (as of 1985) with the development of liberation theology in Latin America. He finds, rightly, that Ellul was a precursor to the theologies of liberation that developed later in the 20th century, though Ellul came from a different background and thus had different emphases. Hanks notes how Ellul shares with liberation theology the idea that salvation is liberation. He also quotes Geoffrey Bromiley, the major translator of both Karl Barth and Jacques Ellul, a quotation worth copying here:

> This freedom (unleashed at the cross) is received exclusively in Christ, making the gospel essentially one of liberation. Here again is a theme that recurs constantly in Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, and Ellul takes it up with vigor. Liberation, he thinks, provides the present age with a better figure of salvation than redemption does.[56]

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[55] Ellul, *Ethics*, 129–30, 496; Jacques Ellul, *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective*, trans. Cecilia Gaul (London: S.C.M. Press, 1970), 128; Ellul, *What I Believe*, chapter 12.

[56] Geoffrey Bromiley, "Barth's Influence on Jacques Ellul." In Clifford G. Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, eds, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays*. Quoted in Thomas Hanks, "The Original 'Liberation

Exodus helps inform Ellul's claim that in our time the concept of redemption is better understood as liberation and de-alienation.[57] This is partly due to the archaic nature of the concept of redemption but also due to the deeper alienations of modern life.

Ellul is not a liberation theologian in the Latin American sense of the term. He remained deeply critical of baptizing political movements and imagining that they represented the Kingdom of God. Thus, Hanks sees Ellul transcending liberation theology. Ellul perceived the centrality of exodus through Scripture, rather than seeing Scripture as a tool for revolution. In this way, Ellul retains a non-instrumental value for theology unlike other theologies of liberation.

Conclusion

This paper examined the exodus theme in much of the corpus of Jacques Ellul. It was not comprehensive, and only touched on his much wider theme of liberation and freedom. This paper has demonstrated that Ellul saw exodus as the central theme of the Bible and God's chief characteristic as liberator. It also showed that exodus provides a window into his theology as a whole in its major outlines. Ellul was a forerunner, in some ways, of more recent trends in New Testament scholarship concerning the centrality of exodus, even if he missed some key texts and themes that would have supported his view (i.e., Luke). His analysis is not perfectly accurate, nor is it comprehensive. It has weaknesses, but on balance I believe that Ellul's contribution to modern theology is vital to retain the dialectical movement of the life of exodus/exile/wilderness in which freedom is difficult and bondage is attractive. His work on liberation and exodus is not timeless, but it has aged well. It should not stand as the only word on the subject, but it still provides a needed voice of critique and encouragement in theology today.

Theologian'?" *Cross Currents* 35.1 (1985): 21.

[57] Ellul, *Ethics*, 67.

Le plus dur des devoirs : La liberté chez Bernard Charbonneau et Jacques Ellul[12]

Daniel Cérézuelle

Dès les années trente Bernard Charbonneau (1910–96) et Jacques Ellul (1912–94) ont voulu susciter un mouvement de critique du développement industriel, du culte de la technique et de l'État, et jeter les bases d'une maîtrise collective du changement scientifique et technique. Dans leurs *Directives pour un manifeste personnaliste*[1], texte rédigé en 1935, Charbonneau et Ellul se révoltent contre la dépersonnalisation de l'action et l'anonymat qui résultent du fonctionnement normal des structures économiques, institutionnelles, administratives et techniques qui organisent la vie sociale de leur temps et déterminent son évolution. Il en résulte un monde caractérisé par l'anonymat, l'absence de responsabilité personnelle. Comme l'écrit Charbonneau dans un texte de 1939 : « La société actuelle, par ses principes et son fonctionnement ne peut avoir qu'un résultat : la dépersonnalisation de ses membres.[2] ». En 1937 dans *Le sentiment de la nature, force révolutionnaire*[3], Charbonneau montrait comment le développement industriel prive les hommes de la possibilité d'établir un rapport équilibré et épanouissant avec la nature. Cette montée en puissance et cette autonomisation des *structures* s'impose comme un phénomène social total, et détermine aussi nos manières de penser et de sentir. Convaincus qu'une pensée qui n'est pas mise en pratique est dérisoire, Charbonneau et Ellul se sont associés pour agir afin de contribuer à une nécessaire réorientation de la vie sociale, remettre à leur place la technique et l'État et promouvoir « une cité ascétique afin que l'homme vive ». À ce titre on peut

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[1] CHARBONNEAU (Bernard) et ELLUL (Jacques), « Directives pour un manifeste personnaliste », in *Nous sommes révolutionnaires malgré nous. Textes pionniers de l'écologie politique*, Paris, Le seuil, 2014.

[2] CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), « Réformisme et révolution », revue *Esprit* n° 77, 1939.

[3] CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), « Le sentiment de la nature, force révolutionnaire », in *Nous sommes révolutionnaires malgré nous. op. cit.* Texte disponible sur le site https://lagrandemue.wordpress.com/

[12] Cérézuelle, Daniel. "Le plus dur des devoirs: La liberté chez Bernard Charbonneau et

considérer ces deux jeunes Bordelais comme des précurseurs de l'écologie politique et du mouvement décroissant.

Charbonneau et Ellul étaient convaincus que les formes conventionnelles d'action politique qui visent l'accès au contrôle de l'État pour réformer la société de haut en bas sont inadaptées pour susciter un changement qu'ils envisagent en termes de *civilisation*[4]. Fidèles à leurs intuitions de jeunesse, tout au long de leur vie ils resteront, « unis par une pensée commune[5] » comme l'écrira Charbonneau au lendemain de la mort d'Ellul. Ils agiront, parfois séparément, parfois ensemble, dans deux directions complémentaires : d'une part tenter de diverses manières de susciter un mouvement collectif visant une réorientation non productiviste, non techniciste et non étatiste des pratiques sociales ; d'autre part mener un travail « théorique » d'approfondissement de leur critique sociale et des raisons d'être de leur engagement, travail qui donnera lieu à la publications de nombreux ouvrages qui, souvent mal reçus ou ignorés lors de leur parution, s'avèrent prémonitoires et nous donnent des repères précieux pour penser notre situation présente et tenter d'agir. Si ce travail de critique sociale s'avère aujourd'hui si pertinent c'est qu'il a été conduit à partir d'un point de vue très particulier qui est celui de la liberté.

Une valeur commune : la liberté

Pour Charbonneau et Ellul, tout ce qui réduit la maîtrise des individus sur leur vie quotidienne est un mal. Face à une civilisation qui institutionnalise et porte à l'extrême la scission du matériel (puissance et efficacité) et du spirituel (autonomie, égalité, justice ...), Ellul et Charbonneau se soucient d'instaurer des conditions de vie qui soient concrètement compatibles avec l'exigence de responsabilité personnelle de chacun dans tous les domaines de sa vie. Ce point de vue éthique a inspiré une œuvre écrite abondante qui, chez l'un comme chez l'autre, s'organise autour de deux pôles étroitement complémentaires. D'un côté un volet de leur œuvre est consacré à l'analyse des contradictions du monde moderne, qu'il s'agisse de la croissance de l'État et du phénomène totalitaire, de la dégradation des conditions de vie quotidienne et de la nature, du rôle social de la science (Charbonneau), ou qu'il s'agisse de la technique, de la propagande, des idéologies etc. (Ellul). D'un autre côté chacun a consacré un second volet de son œuvre à une explicitation des raisons éthiques et spirituelles qui les ont incités à s'opposer aux évolutions sociales qu'ils observaient et à promouvoir une réorientation de la civilisation. C'est au nom de la liberté qu'ils s'obstinent à évaluer les institutions et les techniques non seulement en termes d'efficacité mais

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[4] LOUBET DEL BAYLE (Jean Louis), « Bernard Charbonneau, le contexte personnaliste des années trente et sa postérité » in Jacques Prades (sous la direction de) *Bernard Charbonneau, une vie entière à dénoncer la grande imposture*, Toulouse, Eres, 1997.

[5] CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), « Unis par une pensée commune », revue *Foi et vie*, vol. XCIII, n°5–6, décembre 1994. Texte disponible sur le site `https://lagrandemue.wordpress.com/`

aussi (et surtout) en fonction des conséquences qui en résultent pour la maîtrise de chacun sur ses conditions de vie concrètes. Inlassablement ils posent la même question : quelle place la civilisation industrielle et technicienne laisse-t-elle au pouvoir de décision de l'individu dans sa vie quotidienne ? C'est au nom de la liberté qu'ils critiquent non pas tout ce qui est moderne (ils ne sont pas réactionnaires) mais principalement l'autonomisation du pouvoir de l'argent, de l'État et de la technique. Comme le disait Jacques Ellul : « Rien de ce que j'ai fait, vécu, pensé ne se comprend si on ne le réfère pas à la liberté.[6] ». L'exigence de liberté est à l'arrière-plan de sa critique sociale ; et dans ses nombreux ouvrages théologiques il a tenté d'en expliciter les fondements et de préciser pourquoi l'appel à vivre la liberté s'enracine dans sa foi chrétienne.

De même Bernard Charbonneau, lui aussi, parle de la liberté dans tous ses ouvrages. Le texte fondamental autour duquel s'organise toute son œuvre s'intitule *Je fus, Essai sur la liberté*. Et si Charbonneau se fait dès les années trente l'avocat de la défense de la nature, c'est surtout parce que pour lui la société industrielle prive l'individu moderne non seulement de beauté mais aussi de liberté. Il ne s'agit donc pas tant de sauver la nature pour elle-même que de préserver les conditions d'existence d'une humanité libre dans une nature terrestre vivante. Charbonneau ne croit pas qu'il y ait pour l'homme une manière « naturelle » de vivre, qui définirait une fois pour toute la bonne vie et ce n'est pas la nature « en soi » qu'il convient de protéger : sa puissance cosmique dépasse infiniment l'homme et les galaxies n'ont nullement besoin de son respect. La nature est invincible, c'est l'homme, capable de liberté, qui est fragile. Charbonneau redoute que l'imprudence et l'inconséquence humaines favorisent une réorganisation de la nature, qui de toute façon, produira de nouveaux équilibres, mais dans lesquels l'homme libre n'aura peut-être plus sa place. C'est aussi au nom de la liberté qu'il procède dans *L'État* à une critique approfondie des logiques qui favorisent la sur-organisation sociale. Dans un texte écrit vers la fin de sa vie, il écrit La liberté ... c'est le dernier mot ; en dehors d'elle bientôt il n'y aura plus que des chiffres. Mais est-ce un rêve ou un mensonge ? En tout cas, dans ce livre, fragment de l'œuvre d'une vie, l'auteur s'est efforcé d'en faire autre chose qu'un mot. Ce qu'il a pu dire en dépit de la censure, du silence et de l'indifférence, de sa jeunesse à sa vieillesse n'a eu que ce motif. La description, qu'il a tenté dans d'autres

> livres, de la mutation radicale de l'espèce humaine provoquée par le développement de la science et des techniques, peut se résumer par la menace qu'il fait peser sur la liberté, plus encore que sur la terre[7].

C'est donc à partir de l'exigence de liberté que nos deux personnalistes gascons ont élaboré leurs œuvres respectives. Je me bornerai dans la suite de cet article à signaler quelques points forts de cette convergence.

[6] CHASTENET (Patrick), *Lire Ellul. Introduction à l'œuvre sociologique de Jacques Ellul*, Talence, Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1992.

[7] CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), *Quatre témoins de la liberté. Rousseau, Montaigne, Berdiaev, Dos-*

La liberté est dans l'acte

On ne trouvera pas dans les œuvres de Charbonneau et d'Ellul une philosophie de la liberté au sens traditionnel du terme. En effet, l'un et l'autre répugnent à donner une définition de la liberté et de ses conditions métaphysiques. Bien qu'ils l'abordent chacun de manière très différente, tous les deux ont en commun une approche existentielle de la liberté, basée sur l'approfondissement de l'expérience que l'individu peut faire de sa liberté. Ainsi dans *Je fus* Charbonneau se refuse à donner une définition conceptuelle de la liberté et d'en préciser les conditions transcendantales ou métaphysiques. Pour lui, la liberté ne se prouve pas, elle ne se démontre pas par des raisonnements, mais quand je parle à un homme ou quand j'attends qu'il me réponde, je postule qu'il est capable de liberté—sinon je ne lui parlerai pas ! Ce constat suffit car, au fond, Charbonneau est convaincu qu'une démonstration logique de la possibilité de la liberté ne rendra pas les hommes plus libres, c'est-à-dire plus aptes à vivre leur liberté.

> Si la liberté est disponibilité devant les possibles, l'acte libre est le choix qui les sacrifie : la liberté réelle est toujours négation de la liberté théorique [...] La réalité de la liberté n'est pas dans les preuves de la science ou de la philosophie—elles te l'assureraient que tu l'aurais perdue, mais dans la personne vivante. Ce qui départage la fatalité de la liberté ce n'est pas ta métaphysique mais ton acte, celui qui les réunit tous : ta vie. Le déterminisme n'est vrai que dans la mesure où quelqu'un refuse la décision qui manifesterait son inanité. Prends-la, et tout change. Mais cette preuve à la différence des autres n'est pas donnée une fois pour toutes. Si l'effort se relâche le monde se remet à crouler. Atlas n'a pas fini de porter le faix de la terre. [...] Si la liberté était fatale elle ne mériterait plus son nom. [...] Il n'y a pas de liberté mais une libération, et surtout un libérateur[8].

Et ce qui intéresse surtout Charbonneau c'est de comprendre pourquoi et comment la liberté peut se perdre. En effet alors que la pensée libérale, tout comme ses héritières socialistes et marxiste s'intéresse surtout aux forces naturelles, politique ou sociales qui menacent la liberté de l'extérieur, Charbonneau s'intéresse aux dimensions autodestructrices de la liberté car les tentatives modernes de libération de l'homme ont trop souvent débouché sur son asservissement à de nouvelles formes de contraintes sociales. La démarche d'Ellul est très proche. C'est ainsi qu'en introduction d'un texte resté longtemps inédit en France et intitulé « Les structures de la liberté », Ellul écrit « Je ne poserai pas la question métaphysique de la liberté humaine, à laquelle je serais bien incapable de répondre.[9] ». « Dieu seul sait si nous sommes libres ou non. [...] Il

toïevski, Paris, R&N, 2019.

[8] CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), *Je fus. Essai sur la liberté,* Bordeaux, Opales, 1980, pp. 130–31.

[9] ELLUL (Jacques), « Les structures de la liberté », in *Vivre et penser la liberté*, Genève, Labor et Fides, 1919, p. 55.

a bien fallu que l'homme vive en faisant comme s'il était libre, en jouant le jeu de la liberté, c'est-à-dire en faisant son histoire. Cela seul m'importe[10]. » ; « il convient donc de démythifier la liberté pour savoir non pas ce qu'elle est mais qui je suis appelé à être en tant qu'homme libre.[11] ».

Ellul poursuit :

> La première certitude que nous pouvons avoir, c'est que la liberté ne peut être que mouvement, changement, volonté de passage, de transformation. [...] La liberté ne peut être potentielle car, nous l'avons vu, on ne sait qu'elle n'existe ni par un raisonnement métaphysique ni par un examen psychologique mais seulement par l'expérience du vécu. Prétendre être potentiellement libre c'est entrer dans l'illusoire et la justification qui est la négation même de la liberté. Ou celle-ci est vécue, mise en action, et par conséquent mouvement, ou elle n'est rien[12].

Ainsi, ajoute Ellul, la liberté ne peut être un état, une situation acquise, un être figé, ou encore un résultat *obtenu* ; elle est dans l'acte qui cherche à faire reculer les contraintes : « s'il n'y a pas de liberté instituée, s'il n'y a pas de liberté donnée, s'il n'y a pas de liberté en soi, si elle est toujours en mouvement, alors cela implique l'obstacle et le refus qu'il faut vaincre. La liberté n'est jamais autre qu'un refus à un ordre de contrainte[13]» ; ou encore :

> L'homme déterminé qui conquiert sa liberté ne le fait que parce qu'il est déterminé ; c'est pendant sa conquête qu'il est libre, et la liberté n'existe que par rapport et en fonction des déterminations. Nous atteignons ici le cœur des structures de la liberté. Car il n'y a pas d'autre mouvement de la liberté que celui-là.[14]

Ainsi, pour Charbonneau et Ellul, on n'est pas libre parce que l'on vivrait dans un contexte politique, économique, technique ou culturel qui nous garantit la possibilité de faire des choix. Nous croyons que plus les possibilités de choix sont nombreuses et plus nous sommes libres, sans prendre conscience que ces choix qui nous sont proposés peuvent être complètement aliénés ou insignifiants. La liberté est bien autre chose qu'un choix offert ; elle est action, effort de libération. La liberté est présente lorsque nous faisons le difficile effort d'incarner par des actes nos valeurs spirituelles à rebours des déterminismes naturels et sociaux.

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[10] *op. cit.* p. 95.
[11] *op. cit.* p. 90.
[12] *op. cit.* p. 91.
[13] *op. cit.* p. 103.
[14] *op. cit.* p. 101.

Il n'y a de liberté que par l'acte de l'individu

Dans les quelques ouvrages « spéculatifs » qui jalonnent son œuvre, Charbonneau s'interroge sur la liberté, cette force d'arrachement qui n'existe que dans et par l'individu et qui le pousse à dire *non* à ce qui semble fatal. Dans *Je fus*, il ne cesse d'affirmer que « la liberté c'est le *je* quand il n'est pas un faux semblant[15] » et qu'il n'y a de liberté que par l'acte d'un individu qui s'efforce de s'arracher aux déterminismes naturels, sociaux et psychologiques. Cette conviction qu'il ne saurait y avoir de liberté que par l'individu soutient également tout son livre *Une seconde nature* qui explique combien il est difficile à un individu de prendre ses distances à l'égard de sa société. Enfin, vers la fin de sa vie, dans son livre *Quatre témoins de la liberté*[16], il lui a paru nécessaire de reprendre cette question dans le chapitre "Nicolas Berdiaev. Le Chrétien, individu ou personne ?". Là aussi il reprend le débat de sa jeunesse avec le personnalisme communautaire de Mounier et s'engage dans une discussion serrée pour défendre la primauté de la source individuelle de la liberté. Bien entendu, Charbonneau reconnait que la société offre à l'individu des médiations institutionnelles, techniques et culturelles qui le protègent et rendent *possible* le développement de son individualité, mais en même temps, comme une mère abusive, elle réprime l'individualité et ses prétentions à la liberté, ce qui nous arrange bien et à quoi nous consentons volontiers tout en prétendant le contraire, car le plus facile c'est de jouer la comédie de la liberté tout en restant bien sagement installé dans le sein maternel, d'où l'essai ironique intitulé *Bien aimer sa maman*[17]. Charbonneau sait ce qu'il doit à la société. Par exemple il reconnaît que pour un Occidental, et pour lui en particulier, le sens de la liberté et de l'individualité est un des legs du Christianisme[18] ; mais il n'écarte pas la possibilité que d'autres individus, tel Socrate, en d'autres temps et dans d'autres civilisations aient été à même d'incarner ces valeurs sans avoir été touchés par l'appel du dieu des Juifs et des Chrétiens.

Pour Ellul aussi il n'y a de liberté que par l'individu. Ce thème est repris dans plusieurs de ses ouvrages. Il explicite cette conception dans « Les Structures de la liberté » où il affirme qu' « il n'y a et ne peut y avoir de liberté qu'individuelle.[19] ». Ellul revendique sur ce point l'héritage de Marx :

> L'homme pour Marx est avant toute chose appelé à être libre, sujet, et cette liberté s'exprime dans une domination des conditions qui le déterminent, dans une possibilité de s'exprimer dans son œuvre (son travail) sans en être dépossédé, ce qui revient au même que la possibilité de faire lui-même son histoire... par conséquent l'orientation finale de la pensée de Marx n'est ni

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[15] CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), *Je fus, op. cit.* p. 31.
[16] CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), *Quatre témoins de la liberté, op. cit.*
[17] CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), *Bien aimer sa maman,* Bordeaux, Opales, 2006.
[18] Cf. ELLUL (Jacques), « La liberté fondatrice de l'Europe », in *op. cit.*, p. 143.
[19] ELLUL (Jacques), in *op. cit.,* p. 63.

la justice ni l'égalité, ni même l'établissement du socialisme, mais bien la liberté. [...] Comme corolaire, pour Marx, il n'y a ni une liberté de nature, ni une liberté d'origine, ni une liberté historique : il faut la faire[20].

Bien entendu, Ellul n'ignore pas qu'il y a des prises de conscience collectives : mais il ne s'agit jamais que d'accumulation de prises de conscience individuelles. Il n'y a pas de mouvement d'une collectivité en soi. « Quelle que soit la forme de la tendance à la liberté dans une collectivité, on peut affirmer absolument que l'initiative en revient toujours à un individu, qui veut la liberté.[21] ». Mais Ellul affirme en même temps qu'il n'y a pas de liberté hors du social : « Il va de soi que l'individu n'est pas sans une société, sans un groupe pour lui. Il va de soi que la liberté ne peut jamais être une propriété individuelle[22] ». L'insertion dans le collectif est donc une condition de la liberté. Mais le collectif est forcément répressif et la liberté individuelle suppose donc un affrontement, une capacité de résistance à la contrainte sociale. Ainsi le rapport entre liberté personnelle et société est éminemment paradoxal.

Le collectif est le lien nécessaire, indispensable, où s'inscrire dans la liberté [...] Il devient la condition objective de la liberté parce que c'est sa présence qui exige l'objectivation de la liberté, l'affrontement qui conduit à savoir si cette liberté n'est que prétexte, illusion, ou attestation. Le collectif est alors à la fois l'occasion de la liberté (sans lui, elle ne pourrait jamais s'attester, elle serait toujours supposée) et la possibilité de la liberté (sans lui la liberté n'aurait jamais aucun moyen d'expression). Ainsi la société, le groupe, la collectivité ne peuvent jamais être libérales ou permissives, ce n'est jamais par fusion en eux que l'on trouve la liberté, mais sans eux cette liberté n'est que problème. On peut en débattre indéfiniment, il n'y a aucune solution. On ne saura jamais que l'homme est libre, sinon par son affrontement avec l'en deçà de la liberté, avec cette réalité très exacte qui la nie. Ainsi le collectif est le lieu où la volonté individuelle, que l'on pourrait appeler, à la limite, la métaphysique de la liberté, est sommée de se découvrir dans sa réalité en même temps que dans sa vérité, c'est-à-dire de devenir historique[23][24].

Ainsi, paradoxalement, la liberté ne peut exister que pour autant qu'il y a un individu capable d'affronter, d'entrer en tension avec cette même société qui pourtant lui permet d'exister. C'est pourquoi, dans *De la révolution aux révoltes*, il écrit au sujet de la « révolution nécessaire » :

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[20] ELLUL (Jacques), « Les structures de la liberté », in *op. cit.*, p. 62.
[21] ELLUL (Jacques), *Vivre et penser la liberté*, p. 64.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 70.
[23] Ici Ellul s'oppose aux conceptions de Sartre sur le groupe en fusion.
[24] ELLUL (Jacques), *Vivre et penser la liberté*, p. 71.

Nous en revenons toujours au même point : dans notre société, ce n'est plus à partir des structures, des collectivités que l'action révolutionnaire peut se produire, mais elle doit s'effectuer d'abord dans l'individu car c'est l'individu qui est menacé de disparition. [...] c'est dans l'individu que doit s'effectuer le travail révolutionnaire et s'établir la tension conflictuelle impliquée par la révolution[25].

Ellul et Charbonneau s'accordent pour penser que, puisqu'elle doit s'incarner dans un donné naturel et social qui la rend possible tout en lui résistant, la liberté ne peut être absolue, elle est toujours relative ; ainsi le rêve d'une liberté totale est littéralement insensé, car la liberté ne peut être un état, elle consiste en un effort de libération qui aboutit plus ou moins. Mais cette victoire, toujours précaire, débouche forcément sur une condition difficile à vivre : la liberté est une ascèse. Elle n'est qu'un possible, et le faire advenir demande un effort constamment renouvelé ; et cela met un fardeau terrible sur les épaules de chacun d'entre nous.

Echapper à l'angoisse de la liberté

Dans *Je fus* puis dans *Une seconde nature*, Charbonneau tente d'élucider le caractère paradoxal de la liberté et de comprendre pourquoi elle est si difficile à vivre. D'un côté elle est puissance d'arrachement, capacité de mise à distance et de prise de conscience par rapport aux évidences du réel. Elle suppose une capacité à enregistrer une contradiction entre une aspiration à des valeurs (vérité, beauté, paix, justice ...) qu'il faut bien appeler spirituelles et la réalité de l'ordre du monde qui résiste à ces valeurs car il est soumis à d'autres logiques, naturelles ou sociales. Cette expérience de distance critique est douloureuse, car elle met l'individu en conflit avec sa société mais aussi avec soi-même en tant qu'il appartient à sa société à laquelle il est uni par un lien intime, de sorte qu'il fait fréquemment demi-tour devant l'effort d'une prise de distance à l'égard de sa société que réclame un acte réellement libre. Si l'homme moderne a tant de mal à prendre conscience des contradictions de sa société, ce n'est pas seulement parce qu'il est soumis à une pression sociale qui s'exercerait sur lui de l'extérieur. C'est aussi parce qu'il est un individu pensant et capable de liberté que tout homme est habité par une tendance spontanée à intérioriser le fait social ; et ce conformisme social se nourrit du tragique de la liberté. Charbonneau réactualise les intuitions des grands fondateurs de la philosophie existentielle : Montaigne, Pascal, Kierkegaard et Nietzsche, en montrant que l'homme est un animal social qui rêve d'une liberté qu'il ne supporte pas. Nous ne cessons de revendiquer le caractère personnel et libre (peut-on distinguer les deux ?) de nos actes, qu'il s'agisse de notre style de vie, de nos goûts esthétiques, de nos loisirs, de nos convictions politiques et religieuses, de nos engagements politiques ou autres. « C'est mon choix », proclamons-nous tous

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[25] ELLUL (Jacques), *De la révolution aux révoltes* [1972], Paris, La table Ronde, 2011, pp. 85–86.

ensemble avec une conviction toujours renouvelée. Mais un examen rétrospectif un peu honnête révèle vite que ces actes étaient surtout conformes à notre milieu, à l'air du temps, à des emballements collectifs et à des modes, à des modèles institutionnels ou professionnels etc. Où est l'individu capable de prendre ses distances et d'agir selon soi ? Charbonneau a cette phrase terrible : « Mais il se peut après tout, que fait pour rêver la liberté, l'homme ne soit pas fait pour la vivre.[26] ». En effet, l'expérience individuelle de la liberté expose tout homme à une contradiction angoissante entre l'exigence d'un sens personnel et le constat de sa finitude, de la contingence et de l'absurde de sa vie sociale. Le philosophe Jean Brun, commentant la conception de la liberté de Bernard Charbonneau écrivait que la liberté est une ascèse car « être libre c'est supporter, et non fuir, cette tension entre l'expérience centrale de la liberté et l'épreuve qu'il est difficile de la vivre.[27] ».

C'est pour fuir cette dimension tragique de la liberté que l'homme se fait doublement social et choisit une « servitude volontaire » rassurante en intériorisant les valeurs et les modèles sociaux et en s'identifiant à la société de son temps. Ainsi, dans *Une seconde nature* Charbonneau montre comment, à peine s'est-il distingué de la nature qui l'environne, l'homme cherche à se fondre dans une « seconde nature », sociale cette fois-ci, qui le protège du sentiment de sa faiblesse et de sa finitude, mais au prix de son individualité. C'est pour éviter d'avoir à vivre cette tension que chaque homme intériorise activement la contrainte sociale et adhère aux valeurs collectives du moment, et ce avec toutes les forces conscientes et inconscientes de son esprit. Plus que d'un consentement passif à une force qui s'impose de l'extérieur il s'agit d'une participation active qui ne veut pas se reconnaître comme telle, qu'il s'agisse, par exemple, de l'adhésion à des idéologies politiques ou à celle du développement. En dépit du mince vernis d'une culture individualiste, dans la société moderne tout comme dans l'ancienne, le fait social s'impose spontanément comme une vérité et comme un ordre juste. Et comme la société d'aujourd'hui est une société du changement, c'est donc tout « naturellement » qu'elle produit l'homme-du-changement, l'individu disposé à accepter et justifier jusqu'aux aspects les plus contestables du développement industriel et technoscientifique. Jacques Ellul fait un constat analogue :

> J'aurai envie de dire que l'homme recule toujours devant l'aventure véritable de la liberté.[...] L'homme ne se conçoit homme que s'il est libre [...] Il semble n'avoir qu'une orientation depuis les origines alors qu'il était un membre indistinct du groupe ; c'était par un mouvement imperceptible, le dégagement de la personne hors du communautaire, comme insensiblement la plante se tourne vers le lieu d'où lui vient la lumière—mais en même temps, chaque fois qu'il a été en mesure de vivre libre ou d'exercer sa liberté, il en fut soit incapable soit terrorisé. Il s'est chaque fois inventé

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[26] CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), *Le Système et le Chaos, op. cit.*, p. 257.
[27] BRUN (Jean), « Une ascèse de la liberté, à propos de *Je fus* », revue *Réforme*, 1980. Texte disponible sur le site `https://lagrandemue.wordpress.com/`

de nouvelles chaînes, une nouvelle fatalité, il s'est inscrit dans une nouvelle dialectique, il s'est donné de nouvelles autorités, il a édifié une nouvelle morale, aussi implacables, déterminantes, contraignantes que celles contre lesquelles il s'était affirmé libre. Devant l'espace béant l'homme ne peut se hasarder à tout risquer. La liberté se révèle comme une mise à l'épreuve si radicale que l'homme n'accepte jamais ce risque[28].

C'est pourquoi,

Ce n'est pas vrai que l'homme veuille être libre. Ce qu'il voudrait ce sont les avantages de l'indépendance sans avoir aucun des devoirs et des duretés de la liberté. Car la liberté est dure à vivre. La liberté est terrible. La liberté est aventure. La liberté est dévorante, exigeante. Un combat de chaque instant, car autour de nous ne cessent de se multiplier les pièges pour nous enlever la liberté ; mais surtout parce que la liberté, en elle-même, ne nous laisse aucun repos. Elle exige de se dépasser, elle exige la remise en question incessante de tout, elle suppose une attention toujours en éveil, jamais d'habitude, jamais d'institution. La liberté me demande d'être toujours neuf, toujours disponible, de ne jamais me cacher derrière les précédents ou les échecs passés. Elle entraine des ruptures et des contestations. La liberté ne cède jamais à aucune contrainte et n'exerce elle-même aucune contrainte ; Car précisément, il n'y a de liberté que dans un contrôle permanent de soi-même et dans l'amour de celui qui m'est proche[29].

Une des raisons pour lesquelles ce contrôle permanent de soi-même est particulièrement difficile c'est qu'il est très difficile de prendre ses distances avec la société à laquelle nous appartenons. Bien souvent nous justifions nos conduites au nom de la liberté, sans nous rendre compte que la plupart du temps notre « choix » est parfaitement déterminé par le contexte social qui est le nôtre. Certes l'automobile individuelle augmente notre puissance de déplacement, mais comme le remarque Ellul

dès qu'il y a trois jours de vacances, un pont, trois millions d'automobilistes se précipitent sur les routes. Plus merveilleux, chacun est libre, il le fait librement. Combien de fois n'a-t-on pas dit « Quand je prends mon auto-mobile, je suis libre de la prendre ». L'ennui c'est qu'il y a trois millions de Français qui disent en même temps « je suis libre », mais ils le disent ensemble, en bloc, c'est-à-dire qu'en fait il s'agit d'un mouvement auquel on obéit ; c'est une obéissance à la masse[30].

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[28] ELLUL (Jacques), « Les structures de la liberté » in *op. cit.*, p. 55.

[29] ELLUL (Jacques), *La subversion du christianisme* [1984], Paris, La Table ronde, 2001, p. 257.

[30] ELLUL (Jacques), *L'esprit de puissance et l'impuissance de fait,* Conférence du 2 avril 1990 à Mérignac. Texte inédit.

La liberté consiste bien à « pouvoir faire ce que l'on veut » comme dit le sens commun, mais chacun des termes de cette définition est problématique. Rien n'est moins naturel que ce pouvoir et rien n'est moins facile que de vouloir l'exercer. La liberté, écrit Charbonneau « n'existe pas en dehors du combat par lequel l'homme terrasse en lui-même l'être social.[31] ».

Il n'y a donc pas de liberté sans force d'âme. La liberté n'est pas un droit ni une propriété de l'humain, comme le croyaient les libéraux, mais le plus difficile des devoirs.

La tension entre puissance et liberté

Nous nous exonérons de ce fardeau en confiant notre liberté au fonctionnement de dispositifs impersonnels sensés nous libérer des contraintes et des nécessités naturelles et sociales. Certes la liberté a besoin de médiations qui lui permettent de s'affirmer face aux forces naturelles ou sociales sans s'épuiser dans une confrontation qui serait constamment à recommencer. Mais, nous disent Charbonneau et Ellul, qu'il s'agisse de la monnaie, de l'État ou de la technique, ces médiations ne sont pas neutres. Elles tendent à s'autonomiser selon une logique propre ; et leur puissance, qui répond si bien à nos désirs, fait obstacle à cette même exigence de liberté qui leur a donné naissance.

On sait depuis longtemps qu'il en va ainsi avec la monnaie. Elle facilite les échanges et la concentration du capital qui rendent possible la création d'outils qui augmentent la productivité du travail et cette « richesse des nations » que nous voulons toujours voir croître pour augmenter nos possibilités de choix parmi les biens disponibles. Mais la monétarisation toujours croissante des échanges et la multiplication de la monnaie engendrent des effets de puissance, favorisent l'autonomisation des logiques financières qui, laissées à elles-mêmes, tendent à se soumettre l'ensemble de la vie sociale et ont des effets sociaux, environnementaux et culturels désastreux et devant lesquels la fascination productiviste pour l'efficacité économique nous laisse impuissants. C'est pour nous prémunir contre cette fascination asservissante que Charbonneau et Ellul ont chacun écrit un ouvrage sur le rapport à l'argent[32].

De même, nous attendons de l'État impersonnel qu'il nous défende contre les abus du pouvoir personnel et nous lui confions le monopole de la violence pour qu'il soit en mesure d'imposer la loi à tous, de défendre nos « droits » et nos libertés. Ainsi, pour Montesquieu, c'est l'existence d'un mode particulier d'organisation du gouvernement qui permet de déterminer si on est libre ou pas : « La liberté politique, dans un citoyen, est cette tranquillité d'esprit qui provient de l'opinion que chacun a de sa sûreté : et, pour qu'on ait cette liberté, il faut que *le gouvernement* soit tel, qu'un citoyen ne puisse pas craindre un autre citoyen[33] ». Ou encore « Il faut que, *par la*

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[31] CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), *Je fus, op. cit.,* p. 162.

[32] CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), *Il court, il court, le fric,* Bordeaux, Opales, 1996 ; ELLUL (Jacques), *L'homme et l'argent* [1954], Lausanne, Presses bibliques universitaires, 1979.

[33] MONTESQUIEU, *De l'Esprit des lois,* « De la Constitution d'Angleterre », livre XI, chap. VI.

disposition des choses, le pouvoir arrête le pouvoir[34]. ». Charbonneau et Ellul, qui ont eu une conscience aigüe du péril totalitaire, ne contestent pas la sagesse d'une telle conception, mais ils soulignent qu'elle est trop partielle et oublie l'essentiel.

> La liberté politique—et elle peut prendre bien d'autres formes que celle du parlementarisme à l'anglo-saxonne—plus qu'une cause est l'effet d'une liberté plus profonde. Même les libertés individuelles : habeas corpus, droit de s'exprimer et de se déplacer, inviolabilité du domicile etc. encore plus importantes dans la vie quotidienne que le droit de vote, ne sont que des conséquences. Si elles garantissent aux individus un domaine où exercer leur liberté, à leur tour elles n'existent que parce que des hommes les ont un jour revendiquées et qu'ils songent encore à les défendre : sans eux elles survivront quelque temps encore par inertie, puis disparaîtront d'elles-mêmes [...] Ce n'est pas pour rien que le siècle du totalitarisme a succédé à celui du libéralisme, cela seul aurait dû nous alerter sur la relation qui les unit.[35]

Si nous nous ne résistons pas pour remettre l'État à sa place, il finit par intervenir, au nom de l'intérêt général, dans tous les domaines de la vie. Tout étant fait pour le peuple, mais rien par le peuple, la liberté n'est plus que celle d'effectuer des choix qui ne changent rien. Ellul ne dit pas autre chose : Autrement dit, je pourrais généraliser en avançant que le corps social accorde finalement les libertés qui n'ont aucune importance et qui ne risquent pas de mettre en cause les principes ou encore le processus d'évolution des sociétés. Tant qu'une liberté revendiquée est dangereuse, elle est toujours refusée. Quand on assiste à une « libéralisation », il ne faut pas se glorifier d'une conquête ; il faut comprendre que l'adversaire a accordé ce qui n'a plus de valeur. Ainsi actuellement, la liberté spirituelle, la liberté de consommation, la liberté des loisirs.[36]

Et dans un texte plus récent :

> Nous constatons sans peine l'existence de deux secteurs dans nos sociétés. Le secteur des « choses sérieuses » où il n'est toléré aucune liberté de choix, qu'il s'agisse de la production, du métier, de l'ordre public, de l'argent, de l'information, de la science etc. et le « secteur de la liberté » c'est-à-dire des choses sans importance, les loisirs, la mode, les choix de consommation... encore que dans ces domaines, un devoir reste impératif : c'est quand même de faire comme tout le monde et d'entrer par exemple dans le cadre des loisirs possibles, organisés, aménagés.[37]

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[34] *Ibid.*, livre XI, chap. IV.
[35] CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), *Je fus, op. cit.*, pp. 28–29.
[36] ELLUL (Jacques), « Les structures de la liberté », in *op. cit.*, p. 53.
[37] ELLUL (Jacques), *Déviances et déviants dans notre société intolérante,* Préface de Jean-Louis Porquet, Toulouse, ERES, 2013, p. 96.

Nous attendons du perfectionnement des techniques une protection contre notre faiblesse naturelle. Et plus nous sommes fascinés par la puissance qu'elles nous procurent, plus notre liberté est éliminée de notre vie quotidienne. Division du travail, perte d'autonomie, manque de sens, sur-organisation bureaucratique de la vie sociale, opacité des logiques qui la conditionnent, organisation des loisirs, gestion urbaine, aménagement du territoire etc. Tout ceci est engendré par des évolutions technico-économiques qui sont subies plutôt que choisies et sur lesquelles nous n'avons guère de prise. À partir de 1930 la société industrielle se transforme en société technicienne [...] Le fait majeur est celui de l'organisation, du développement des services, de l'universalisation des techniques etc. Or, pendant ce temps, que voyons-nous ? [...] On croit faire la révolution de la liberté en luttant contre l'industrialisme, mais celui-ci (qui bien sûr, comme le capitalisme, existe toujours) est largement dépassé. La question de l'aliénation n'est plus celle du capitalisme, mais de l'invasion de l'individu par la multiplication des techniques externes, et internes, comme par exemple la manipulation psychologique (propagande, publicité, création de nouveaux besoins etc.), son insertion dans le système technicien qui laisse de moins en moins d'autonomie d'action, son encerclement par les objets techniques, son adaptation par toutes les voies.[38]

Esprit de puissance ou esprit de liberté?

Pour Charbonneau il ne peut y a voir de liberté sans l'exercice d'une certaine puissance. Dans un premier temps tout progrès de la puissance peut être considéré comme un progrès de la liberté. La création d'une cité ou d'un minimum d'État ou de techniques efficaces libère de la violence de la nature et des rapports de rivalité et de domination ; mais les médiations et les outils de la puissance sont ambivalents et ne sont pas neutres et, passé un certain seuil de puissance, produisent à la fois de la liberté et de la domination. Ainsi, en permettant à l'homme d'accéder à une certaine maîtrise des forces naturelles, la technique a permis à l'homme de réduire sa vulnérabilité, d'augmenter la productivité du travail. La puissance économique elle aussi est bonne car elle peut libérer du caractère répétitif du labeur et crée les conditions d'une capitalisation des œuvres de l'esprit. Cependant l'augmentation de la puissance qui a accompagné les progrès de la rationalité finit par se retourner contre l'esprit de liberté qui lui a donné son dynamisme. Mais après s'être appliqué sur la nature hors de l'homme, avec des effets environnementaux et sociaux de plus en plus préoccupants, mu par un esprit de puissance qui n'arrive pas à se donner de limites, l'ordre technique s'intériorise ; un nouveau stade s'ébauche, « caractérisé par l'usage de techniques de plus en plus discrètes, celles de la vie et de l'esprit humain. Après avoir couvert toute l'étendue visible, la technique se prépare à refluer invisiblement dans les profondeurs

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[38] ELLUL (Jacques), « Les structures de la liberté », in *op. cit.*, p. 44.

de l'homme.[39] ». Dans une conférence prononcée en avril 1990[40] Ellul souligne le paradoxe suivant : l'homme occidental est habité par un esprit de puissance qui s'est investi dans l'argent, l'économie, la science et la technique. Or la montée en puissance de ces médiations débouche sur une impuissance de fait, individuelle et collective. Ainsi, pour Charbonneau comme pour Ellul, l'autonomisation des médiations qui permettent la liberté engendre des fatalités qui menacent la liberté ; mais cette autonomisation, elle, n'est pas une fatalité. Elle est l'effet d'un esprit de puissance matérielle qui aspire à une liberté désincarnée et n'arrive pas à se donner des limites. Et toute l'œuvre de ces deux penseurs est un appel adressé à chacun pour résister à cet esprit de puissance.

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[39] CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), *Le Système et le Chaos,* Paris, Economica, 1990, p. 27.
[40] ELLUL (Jacques), « *L'esprit de puissance et l'impuissance de fait* », *op. cit.*

The Hardest Duty: Freedom in the Thought of Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul[13]

Daniel Cérézuelle

Beginning in the 1930s, Bernard Charbonneau (1910–96) and Jacques Ellul (1912–94) sought to instigate a movement that would criticize industrial development and the worship of technique and the State and that would lay the foundations for communal control over scientific and technical change. In their "Steps toward a Personalist Manifesto,"[1] which they drew up in 1935, Charbonneau and Ellul turned against the depersonalization of action that results from the normal functioning of the economic, institutional, administrative, and technical structures that organized the social life of their day and determined its development. What results is a world characterized by anonymity, by the absence of personal initiative and responsibility. As Charbonneau wrote in 1939, "There can be only one outcome for present-day society, based on its principles and functioning: the depersonalization of its members."[2] In 1937, in *The Feeling of Nature as a Revolutionary Power*,[3] Charbonneau showed how industrial development keeps men from the possibility of establishing a balanced and fulfilling relationship with nature. This increasing power and autonomization of *structures* is imposed as a total social phenomenon and also determines the way that we think and feel. Convinced that a thought that is not put into practice is ridiculous, Charbonneau and Ellul joined forces to contribute to a necessary reorientation of social life, putting the economy, technique, and the State back in their proper places, and to promote "an ascetic city, so that man might live."In this way, these two young men from Bordeaux may be viewed as progenitors of political ecology and the degrowth movement.

Charbonneau and Ellul believed that conventional forms of political action, which are directed at accessing State control in order to reform society from the top down,

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[1] Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul, "Directives pour un manifeste personnaliste." In *Nous sommes révolutionnaires malgré nous: Textes pionniers de l'écologie politique* (Paris: Seuil, 2014).

[2] Bernard Charbonneau, "Réformisme et révolution." *Esprit* 77 (1939).

[3] Bernard Charbonneau, "Le sentiment de la nature, force révolutionnaire." In *Nous sommes révolutionnaires malgré nous*. https://lagrandemue.wordpress.com/

are poorly suited to initiating a change that they thought of in terms of *civilization*.[4] Faithful to the intuitions of their youth, throughout their lives they remained "united by a common thought,"[5] as Charbonneau would write shortly after Ellul's death. They acted sometimes apart, sometimes together, in two complementary directions: on the one hand, they attempted in various ways to raise up a collective movement aiming for a reorientation of social practices that would be neither productivist nor technicist nor statist; on the other, they engaged in a "theorical" work of deepening their social critique and the reasons for their commitment. This work would result in the publication of many books that were often poorly received or ignored at first but proved to be prescient and to offer us invaluable bearings for thinking through our present situation and attempting to act. If this work of social criticism seems to be so relevant today, it is because it was carried out from a very specific initial point of view, that of freedom.

Freedom: A Value in Common

For Charbonneau and Ellul, everything that reduces individuals' responsibility and autonomy in their daily life is harmful. Faced with a civilization that institutionalizes and carries to the extreme the split between the material (power and efficacity) and the spiritual (autonomy, equality, justice ...), Ellul and Charbonneau were concerned with establishing conditions of life that might be compatible in concrete terms with the need for each person to have responsibility for all areas of his life. This ethical point of view gave rise to a wealth of written work that, for each of them, is arranged around two closely complementary poles. The one part of their work was devoted to analyzing the contradictions of the modern world, such as the growth of the State and the totalitarian phenomenon, the degradation of the conditions of daily life and of nature, and the social role of science (Charbonneau), or technique, propaganda, ideologies, and so forth (Ellul). For each of them, the second part of their work was devoted to clarifying the ethical and spiritual reasons leading them to oppose the social developments that they were observing and to advocate for civilization to be reoriented. In the name of freedom, they insisted on evaluating institutions and techniques not only in terms of efficacy but also (and above all) in relation to the consequences that result for each person's control over the concrete conditions of his life. They relentlessly kept asking the same question: What place does industrial and technicist civilization leave to the individual person's power of decision in his daily life? It was for freedom that they critiqued not all that was modern (they were not reactionaries) but primarily the autonomization of the power of money, the State, and technique. As Jacques Ellul

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[4] Jean Louis Loubet del Bayle, "Bernard Charbonneau, le contexte personnaliste des années trente et sa postérité." In Jacques Prades, ed., *Bernard Charbonneau, une vie entière à dénoncer la grande imposture* (Toulouse: Eres, 1997).

[5] Bernard Charbonneau, "Unis par une pensée commune." *Foi et vie* 93.5–6 (1994). `https://lagrandemue.wordpress.com/`

said, "Nothing that I have done, lived, or thought can be understood apart from its relationship to freedom."[6] The necessity of freedom forms the backdrop to his social criticism, and his many theological works attempt to set forth freedom's foundations and clarify why the call to live in freedom found its root in his Christian faith.

Bernard Charbonneau also spoke of freedom in all of his books. The fundamental text that his whole work is organized around is titled *I Was: An Essay on Freedom.* And if Charbonneau from the 1930s onward became an advocate for the defense of nature, it was particularly because he believed that industrial society deprives the modern individual not only of beauty but also of freedom. Thus it was not a matter so much of saving nature for itself as of preserving the conditions in which a free humanity could exist within a living, earthly nature. Charbonneau did not believe that man had a "natural" way of life, one that defined the good life once and for all. Nor did he believe that it was nature "as such" that should be protected: its cosmic power infinitely exceeds man, and the galaxies have no need of man's respect. Nature is invincible. It is man, capable of freedom, who is fragile. Charbonneau feared that human imprudence and recklessness would increase the reorganization of nature, but whereas nature would re-stabilize itself anew, the free man would perhaps find that he no longer had a place within it. In *The State*, freedom also motivated his in-depth critique of the processes that promote social over-organization. Late in his life he wrote, Freedom ... that is the final word; after it there will soon be nothing but numbers. But is freedom a dream or a lie? In any case, in this book that is the fragment of one life's work, the author has done his best to make of it something other than a word. What he could say, despite censorship, silence, and indifference, from his youth to his old age, has had only this one theme. His attempt in other books to describe the radical mutation of the human species that is being brought on by the development of science and techniques can be summed up in the threat that it places upon freedom, more than upon the earth.[7]

Thus it was that, starting with the necessity of freedom, our two Gascon personalists developed their respective bodies of work. I will limit myself in what follows to pointing out a few main points of this convergence.

Freedom Lies in the Act

We will search in vain in Charbonneau's and Ellul's works for a philosophy of freedom in the traditional sense of the term. In fact, each of them resisted offering a definition of freedom and of its metaphysical conditions. Although it was quite different for each one, what they held in common was an existential approach to freedom that was grounded in a deepening of the individual's experience. In *I Was*, Charbonneau

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[6] Patrick Chastenet, *Lire Ellul: Introduction à l'œuvre sociologique de Jacques Ellul* (Talence: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1992).

[7] Bernard Charbonneau, *Quatre témoins de la liberté: Rousseau, Montaigne, Berdiaev, Dostoïevski* (Paris: R & N, 2019).

refused to provide a conceptual definition of freedom and to specify its transcendental or metaphysical conditions. For him, freedom cannot be proven, it cannot be demonstrated rationally, but when I speak to a man or when I expect that he will respond to me, I posit that he is capable of freedom—if not, I would not be talking to him! This observation is enough, because Charbonneau was ultimately convinced that a logical demonstration of the possibility of freedom would not make men freer, that is, more capable of living out their freedom. If freedom means the availability of possibilities, then the free act is the choice that sacrifices them. Real freedom is always the negation of theoretical freedom. [...] The reality of freedom does not lie in the proofs of science or philosophy—these would ensure that you lose it—it lies within the living person. What divides fate from freedom is not your metaphysics but your act, and what brings them together is your life. Determinism is true only to the extent to which someone refuses the decision that would make its futility plain. Grasp that, and everything changes. But this proof, unlike others, is not given once for all. If the effort flags, the world starts to disintegrate again. Atlas has not ceased to bear the weight of the earth. [...] If freedom were fated, it would no longer be worthy of its name. [...] There is no freedom, but a freeing, and above all, one who frees.[8]

Charbonneau was primarily interested in understanding why and how freedom can be lost. Liberal thought, just like its socialist and Marxist inheritors, was interested primarily in freedom's theoretical *conditions*, the natural, political, or social powers that threaten it from the outside. But Charbonneau was interested in the *personal exercise* of freedom, and in particular in its self-destructive dimension, because modern attempts to liberate man have too often resulted in his enslavement to new forms of social constraints.

Ellul's approach was quite similar. In his introduction to a text that remained unpublished for many years, called "The Structures of Freedom," Ellul wrote, "I will not put the metaphysical question of human freedom; I would be quite incapable of answering it."[9] "God alone knows if we are free or not. [...] Man had to live as though he were free, acting out this freedom, that is, working out his history. This alone is what concerns me."[10] The important thing is not to establish a freedom from the outside, but to live it: "What matters then is to demythicize freedom, in order that I might know not what it is but who I am called to be, as a free man."[11]

Ellul continued,

> The first thing that we can be sure of is that freedom can only be movement, change, the will to change, to transform. [...] Freedom cannot be potential, because, as we have seen, we know that it exists neither by metaphysical

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[8] Charbonneau, *Je fus: Essai sur la liberté* (Bordeaux, Opales, 1980), 130–31.

[9] Jacques Ellul, "Les structures de la liberté," in *Vivre et penser la liberté* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2919), 55.

[10] *op. cit.*, 95.

[11] *op. cit.*, 90.

reasoning nor by psychological examination but only by lived experience. To claim to be potentially free is to enter into the illusion and justification that is the very negation of freedom. Either it is lived, put into action, and as a result into movement, or else it is nothing.[12]

Thus, Ellul added, freedom cannot be a state, an established situation, a set way of being, or yet an outcome that *has been reached*; freedom lies in the act, which seeks to push back constraints: "If there is no freedom that is established, no freedom that is given, if there is no freedom as such, if it is always in motion, then this entails the obstacle and the refusal that must be overcome. Freedom is never anything other than a refusal of an order of constraint."[13] Or again:

> The determined man who conquers his freedom does so only because he is determined; it is while he conquers that he is free, and freedom exists only in relation to, and in terms of, what determines. Here we arrive at the heart of the structures of freedom. For freedom has no other movement than this.[14]

Thus, for Charbonneau and for Ellul, freedom does not come from living in a political, economic, technical, or cultural context that guarantees us the possibility of making choices. We believe that the greater the possibilities of choice, the freer we are, without realizing that these choices that are being *suggested* to us may be completely alienating or meaningless. Freedom is something very different than a choice being offered; it is an action, the effort of liberation. Freedom is present when we make the difficult effort of embodying our spiritual values through our actions, counter to natural, psychological, and social deterministic processes.

There Is No Freedom but through an Individual's Act

In several "speculative" works that are key to his oeuvre, Charbonneau investigated freedom, this power of uprooting that exists only in and through the individual and that propels him to say *no* to what seems to be fated. In *I Was*, he continually asserted that "freedom is the *I* when it is not a pretense,"[15] and that there is no freedom except by the action of an individual striving to uproot himself from natural, social, and psychological deterministic processes. This conviction that there can be no freedom except through the individual also underpins his whole book *A Second Nature*, which explains how difficult it is for an individual to stand apart from his society. Finally, toward the end

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[12] *op. cit.*, 91.
[13] *op. cit.*, 103.
[14] *op. cit.*, 101.
[15] Charbonneau, *Je fus, op. cit.,* 31.

of his life, in his book *Four Witnesses to Freedom*,[16] he thought it necessary to take up this question again, in the chapter "Nicholas Berdyaev: The Christian, an Individual or a Person?" Here also he goes back to the debate of his youth with the communitarian personalism of Mounier and engages in a close argument to defend the primacy of the individual source of freedom. Of course, Charbonneau recognized that society offers institutional, technical, and cultural intermediaries to the individual, which protect him and make the development of his individuality *possible*, but at the same time, like an abusive mother, society punishes this individuality and its claim to freedom. And this suits us well; we willingly agree to this while claiming the opposite, because the easiest thing is to playact freedom while quite sensibly staying at our mother's breast, whence the ironic essay that is titled *Loving One's Mother Well*.[17] Charbonneau knew what he owed to society. For example, he recognized that for a Westerner, and for him in particular, the sense of freedom and individuality is part of the Christian heritage,[18] but he did not reject the possibility that other individuals, such as Socrates, in other times and other civilizations, might also have embodied these values without being touched by the call of the god of Jews and Christians.

For Ellul also there is no freedom except through the individual. This theme is reprised in several of his works. He elaborated on this idea in "The Structures of Freedom," where he states that "freedom is and can only be individual."[19] On this point, Ellul laid claim to the heritage of Marx: For Marx, man is above all called to be free, to be a subject, and this freedom is expressed in a mastery over his determining conditions, in a possibility of self-expression in his work (his labor) without its being taken from him, which comes down to the possibility of making his own history. [...] Thus, the final orientation of Marx's thought is neither justice nor equality, nor even the establishment of socialism, but indeed freedom. [...] As a corollary, for Marx there is neither a freedom of nature, nor an original freedom, nor an historical freedom: it must be made.[20]

Of course, Ellul understood that realization can be communal; but this is always the accumulation of individual realizations. A community has no motion in itself. "Whatever form the tendency to freedom takes in a community, we can affirm absolutely that the initiative always comes down to one individual, who wants freedom."[21] Yet Ellul also maintained that there is no freedom apart from the social: "It is clear that the individual does not exist without a society, without a group. It is clear that freedom can never be an individual possession."[22] To be part of the community is thus a condition of freedom. But what is communal is necessarily repressive, and so individ-

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[16] Bernard Charbonneau, *Quatre témoins de la liberté*, *op. cit.*
[17] Bernard Charbonneau, *Bien aimer sa maman* (Bordeaux: Opales, 2006).
[18] Cf. Ellul, Jacques, "La liberté fondatrice de l'Europe." In *op. cit.,* 143.
[19] Ellul, *op. cit.,* 63.
[20] Ellul, "Les structures de la liberté," 62.
[21] Ellul, *Vivre et penser la liberté*, 64.
[22] Ellul, *Vivre et penser la liberté*, 70.

ual freedom involves a confrontation, a capacity for resistance against social constraint. The relationship between personal freedom and society, then, is eminently paradoxical.

> The community is the necessary and indispensable link where we can inscribe ourselves in freedom. [...] It becomes freedom's objective condition, because it is its presence that turns freedom into an objective reality, in a confrontation that enables us to know whether this freedom is only pretext, illusion, or witness. The community is thus both the opportunity for freedom (without it, freedom could never be demonstrated, it would always be putative) and the possibility for freedom (without it, freedom could never have any means of expression). Society, the group, the community can never be liberal or permissive, freedom is never found by merging with them, but without them this freedom is just a problem. It can be debated endlessly, but there is no solution. We will never know if man is free except through his confrontation with freedom, with this very precise reality that denies it. The community is the place in which the individual's will, what we can almost call the metaphysics of freedom, is summoned to reveal itself in its reality and truth, that is, to become historical.[23][24]

Paradoxically, then, freedom can exist only insofar as there is an individual capable of confronting, of entering into tension with, this very society that is what also enables him to exist. This is why, in *From Revolution to Rebellions*, he wrote, in reference to the "necessary revolution":

> We always come back to the same point. In our society, it is no longer from structures, from communities, that revolutionary action may arise; it must happen first in the individual, because it is the individual who is threatened with extinction. [...] It is in the individual that the revolutionary work must take place, and it is in the individual that the conflictual tension that revolution involves must be developed.[25]

Ellul and Charbonneau agreed that freedom cannot be absolute. It is always relative, because it must be realized within a natural and social setting that both makes it possible and also resists it. To dream of complete freedom is literally absurd, then, because freedom cannot be a state. It is an effort of freeing, and it succeeds to a greater or lesser degree. But this ever-precarious victory leads necessarily to a condition that is hard to live out. Freedom is an ascesis. It is only a possibility, and to make it happen requires a continually repeated effort. And this places an awesome burden on the shoulders of each one of us.

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[23] Here Ellul is opposing Sartre's conceptions about the group merged together.

[24] Ellul, *Vivre et penser la liberté*, 71.

[25] Jacques Ellul, *De la révolution aux révoltes* (Paris, Table ronde, [1972] 2011), 85–86.

Escaping the Dread of Freedom

In *I Was*, then in *A Second Nature*, Charbonneau attempted to set out the paradoxical character of freedom and understand why it is so difficult to live out. On the one hand, it is the power of uprooting, the ability to stand apart and become aware of the evident facts about the real. It assumes an ability to register a contradiction between an aspiration to values (truth, beauty, peace, justice ...) that are properly speaking spiritual, and the reality that the order of the world resists these values because it is obedient to other laws, both natural and social. This experience of critical distance is painful, because it places the individual in conflict with his society and also with himself as a member of his society and tied closely to it. As a result, he often turns back from this effort to take a distance from his society that a truly free act requires. If modern man has so much difficulty becoming aware of the contradictions of his society, it is not only because he is obedient to a social pressure that is being exercised over him from the outside. It is also because he is a thinking individual and capable of freedom. Within every man one finds a spontaneous tendency to internalize the social fact, and this social conformism draws its strength from the tragic side of freedom. Charbonneau brought back into focus the intuitions of existential philosophy's great founders, Montaigne, Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche, in showing that man is a social animal who dreams of a freedom that he cannot bear. We never stop claiming the free and personal (can these two be distinguished?) character of our actions, in our lifestyle, aesthetic tastes, leisure activities, political and religious convictions, political involvements, or any other. "The choice is mine," we declare in unison, with a conviction that is continually rekindled. But when we look back with any honesty, we quickly see that these actions were mostly in tune with our milieu, the spirit of the times, the community's sudden enthusiasms and what was in style, institutional or professional patterns, and so forth. Where is the individual who is able to stand apart and act for himself? Charbonneau could make this grim statement: "It is possible, after all, that man is made for dreaming of freedom but not made for living it."[26] The individual experience of freedom exposes every human being to a dreadful contradiction between the demand for personal meaning and the recognition of his finitude, of the contingency and absurdity of his social life. The philosopher Jean Brun, commenting on Bernard Charbonneau's understanding of freedom, wrote that freedom is an ascesis because "to be free is to bear, and not to flee from, this tension between the central experience of freedom and the trial that shows how difficult it is to live out."[27]

In order to flee from this tragic aspect of freedom, man becomes all the more social and chooses a reassuring "voluntary servitude" by internalizing the values and models of his society and by identifying with the society of his day. Thus, in *A Second Nature*, Charbonneau demonstrated how man, as soon as he distinguishes himself from the

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[26] Charbonneau, *Le système et le chaos, op. cit.,* 257.

[27] Jean Brun, "Une ascèse de la liberté, à propos de Je fus." *Réforme* (1980). https:// lagrande-mue.wordpress.com/

nature that surrounds him, seeks to merge with a "second nature," a social one this time, that protects him from feeling his frailty and finitude but does so at the cost of his individuality. Each man actively internalizes social constraint and adheres to the communal values of the moment, so as to avoid having to live out this tension. And he does so with all the conscious and unconscious powers of his mind. This is not a passive consent to a power imposed from the outside but an active participation—one that does not want to be recognized as such, whether it concerns one's adherence to political ideologies, for example, or to that of development. Despite a thin veneer of individualistic culture, in modern society as in pre-modern ones, the social fact is spontaneously enforced as a truth and a just order. And since the society of today is one of change, it is entirely "natural" that it produces "the man of change," the individual prepared to accept and justify even the most debatable aspects of industrial and technoscientific development.

Jacques Ellul made a similar observation:

> It feels like man always draws back before the true experience of freedom. [...] Man understands himself as man only if he is free. [...] He seems to have been oriented like this right from the start, when he was one indistinct member of the group. The person's disengagement from what is held in common occurs by an imperceptible movement, just like a plant that turns imperceptibly toward the place that the light is coming from—but also, each time that he was in a position to live freely or exercise his freedom, he was either unable or terrified to do so. Each time, he invented new chains for himself, a new fatalism, he adopted a new dialectic, he gave himself new authorities, he constructed a new morality, just as implacable, determining, and constraining as those that he had declared himself to be free of. As he stands before the gulf, man cannot venture to risk everything. Freedom is revealed to be such a radical test that man never accepts this risk.[28]

This is why

> it is not true that man wants to be free. What he wants is the advantages of independence without any of freedom's duties and difficulties. For freedom is hard to live out. Freedom is dreadful. Freedom is a venture. Freedom is all-consuming and exacting. It is a fight at every instant, because the traps that lie around us to take away our freedom do not cease to proliferate. But supremely because freedom itself leaves us no rest. It demands that we go beyond, it demands that everything be constantly questioned, it requires that our attention be always on the alert, never routinized, never institutionalized. Freedom demands that I be always fresh, always ready, never hiding behind past precedents or failures. It involves rifts and controversies.

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[28] Ellul, "Les structures de la liberté," 55.

Freedom never gives in to any constraint and never imposes any. Because, precisely, there is no freedom except in permanent control over oneself and in loving the person next to me.[29]

One of the reasons that this permanent control over the self is particularly hard is that it is not natural to stand apart from the society that we belong to. Very often we justify our conduct in the name of freedom, without realizing that most of the time our "choice" is completely determined by our social context. Certainly, each individual automobile increases our power to go from one place to another, but, as Ellul noted,

> As soon as we have three days of vacation, a long weekend, three million drivers rush to the highways. More astonishingly, each one is free, they do so freely. How many times has it been said, "When I take the car, I am free to do so." The problem is that there are three million Frenchmen who are saying "I am free" at the same time, and they are saying it together, *en bloc.* That is, it is actually a movement that they are obeying; it is an obedience to the mass.[30]

Freedom does consist in "being able to do what you want," as common sense has it, yet each term in this definition is problematic. Nothing is less natural that this ability, and nothing is less easy than wanting to exercise it. Freedom, Charbonneau wrote, "does not exist apart from the fight in which man slays the social being within himself."[31]

There is no freedom without strength of soul. Freedom is not a right or a natural property of the human person, as liberals have believed, but the most dreadful of duties.

The Tension between Power and Freedom

We release ourselves from this burden by trusting our freedom to the functioning of impersonal arrangements that are supposed to liberate us from natural and social constraints and necessities. Certainly, freedom needs mediations to enable it to assert itself against natural or social forces without being exhausted by this ongoing confrontation. But, Charbonneau and Ellul told us, whether it has to do with money, the State, or technique, these mediations are not neutral. They tend to become autonomous following their own logic, and their power, which responds to our desires so well, impedes the very demand for freedom that gave rise to them.

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[29] Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme* (Paris, Table ronde, [1984] 2001), 257.

[30] Jacques Ellul, "L'esprit de puissance et l'impuissance de fait." Unpublished lecture, Mérignac, 2 April 1990.

[31] Charbonneau, *Je fus*, 162.

We have known for a long time that this is the case with money. It enables the exchange and concentration of capital that enables new tools to be created that increase the productivity of work and this "wealth of nations" that we always desire to see grow so that we can increase our possibilities for choice among the goods available. But the ever-increasing monetarization of the exchanges and the multiplication of money engenders powerful effects and favors the autonomization of financial processes, which, left to themselves, tend to subjugate the whole of social life and have disastrous social, environmental, and cultural effects that render us powerless before the productivist fascination for economic efficiency. To warn us against this enslaving fascination, Charbonneau and Ellul each wrote a work about the relation to money.[32]

Likewise, we expect that the impersonal state will defend us against the abuses of personal power, and we entrust it with the monopoly of violence so that it might be in a position to impose the law on everyone and defend our "rights" and freedoms. Thus, for Montesquieu, the existence of a particular mode of governmental organization is what enables us to determine if we are free or not: "Political liberty, in a citizen, is the tranquility of mind that comes from the opinion that each one has of his security; and, in order to have this liberty, *the government* must be such that no citizen can fear another citizen."[33] Or again, "It is necessary, *by the way things are arranged*, for power to check power."[34] Charbonneau and Ellul, who had a keen awareness of the totalitarian peril, did not question the wisdom of such a conception, but they emphasized that it is too partial and forgets what is essential: Political liberty—and it can take many other forms than that of Anglo-Saxon–style parliamentarianism—is the effect, not a cause, of a deeper liberty. Even individual freedoms, *habeas corpus*, the right to self-expression and freedom of movement, the inviolability of the home, and so forth, which are more important to daily life than is the right to vote, are only results. If they guarantee individuals a sphere in which to exercise their freedom, they in turn exist only

> because some men one day laid claim to them and still remember to defend them. These freedoms will survive with them for some time yet, by inertia, and then will disappear on their own. [...] It is no coincidence that the century of totalitarianism followed that of liberalism. This alone should have alerted us to the relationship between them.[35]

If we do not resist and put the State in its place, it will end up infiltrating every sphere of our lives, in the name of the common good. When all is done for the people but nothing by the people, freedom is only the freedom to make choices that change nothing. Ellul did not say otherwise:

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[32] Bernard Charbonneau, *Il court, il court, le fric* (Bordeaux: Opales, 1996); Jacques Ellul, *L'homme et l'argent* (Lausanne, Presses bibliques universitaires, [1954] 1979).

[33] Montesquieu, "De la Constitution d'Angleterre." In *De l'Esprit des lois*, book 11, chapter 6.

[34] Montesquieu, book 11, chapter 4.

[35] Charbonneau, *Je fus*, 28–29.

In other words, I could generalize by suggesting that in the end, the social body extends the freedoms that have no importance and that are unlikely to call into question a society's principles or even the process of its development. When a freedom that is demanded is dangerous, it is always refused. When we witness a "liberalization," we should not boast of having conquered. We should understand that the adversary has granted what no longer has value. These are, at the present time, spiritual freedom, freedom of consumption, freedom of leisure.[36]

And in a later work:

We easily observe the existence of two sectors in our societies. The "sector of serious business," where no freedom of choice is permitted, in production, trades, public order, money, information, science, etc., and the "sector of freedom," which is to say, things without importance, leisure activities, fashion, consumer choices... Yet even in these spheres an imperative duty remains: to act like everyone else, and, for example, join in with the available pastimes that have been organized and laid out for us.[37]

By perfecting techniques, we expect protection against our natural frailty. And the more fascinated we are by the power that they bring us, the more our freedom is eliminated from our daily lives. The division of labor, the loss of autonomy, the lack of meaning, the bureaucratic over-organization of social life, opaque processes that condition us, the organization of leisure activities, urban management, land management, and so on: all these are generated by technico-economic developments, which we undergo and do not choose, and over which we have almost no control.

Beginning in 1930, industrial society was transformed into technicist society. [...] The primary fact is one of organization, the development of services, the universalization of techniques, etc. During this time, what do we see? [...] As we struggle against industrialism, we think we are engaging in a revolution of freedom, but industrialism (which still exists, of course, just like capitalism) is largely out of date. The question of alienation is no longer that of capitalism but of the invasion of the individual by the multiplication of external and internal techniques such as psychological manipulation (propaganda, advertising, the creation of new needs, etc.) and its insertion into the technical system that leaves less and less autonomy of action, its encompassing by technical objects, and its adaption by all means.[38]

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[36] Ellul, "Les structures de la liberté," 53.
[37] Jacques Ellul, *Déviances et déviants dans notre société intolérante* (Toulouse: ERES, 2013), 96.
[38] Ellul, "Les structures de la liberté," 44.

Spirit of Power or Spirit of Freedom?

For Charbonneau, there can be no freedom without the exercise of a certain power. At first, each advance of power can be viewed as an advance of freedom. The creation of a city, or the creation of a minimum of state or effective techniques, frees us from nature's violence and from relationships of competition and domination. But power's mediations and tools are ambivalent and not neutral, and once they go beyond a certain threshold of power they produce freedom and domination both. Thus, by allowing man to attain to a certain mastery over natural forces, technique has enabled him to reduce his vulnerability and increase the productivity of labor. Economic power is also good, because it can free us from the repetitive nature of labor and create the conditions for a capitalization of the works of the mind. The growth of power, however, that has accompanied the advance of rationality ends up turning against the spirit of freedom that gave it its dynamism. But after having been applied to nature apart from man, with environmental and social effects that are ever more worrisome, moved by a spirit of power that never succeeds in limiting itself, the technical order turns inward. A new stage emerges, "characterized by the use of techniques that are ever more discrete, those of the life and spirit of man. After having covered every visible surface, technique gets ready to flow invisibly into the depths of man."[39] In a lecture given in April 1990,[40] Ellul stressed the following paradox: Western man is inhabited by a spirit of power that threw itself into money, the economy, science, and technique. Now the increasing power of these mediations is in effect leading to both individual and collective powerlessness.

Thus, for Charbonneau as for Ellul, the autonomization of the mediations that enable freedom spawns fated patterns that threaten freedom. But this autonomization is not itself a fate. It is the effect of a spirit of material power that aspires to a discarnate freedom and is incapable of giving itself limits. The whole work of these two thinkers is a call to each one of us to resist this spirit of power.

Translated by Lisa Richmond with the assistance of Christian Roy.

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[39] Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Système et le Chaos* (Paris: Economica, 1990), 27.

[40] Ellul, "L'esprit de puissance et l'impuissance de fait," *op. cit.*

Anarchie et christianisme par Jacques Ellul[14]

Patrick Chastenet

ELLUL (Jacques), *Anarchie et christianisme*, Lyon, Atelier de création libertaire, 1988; nouvelle édition, Paris, La Table Ronde, 2018, « La petite vermillon », 160 pp.

J'imagine volontiers un logicien ayant à examiner la question suivante : sachant d'une part que les anarchistes rejettent toute forme de religion et d'autorité, et que d'autre part les chrétiens prônent l'obéissance au pouvoir politique, comment peut-on être à la fois anarchiste et chrétien ? Mais dans ce domaine comme dans l'ensemble de son œuvre, Jacques Ellul n'a que faire des pures questions abstraites, logiques ou spéculatives. Il ne s'exprime pas en qualité de spécialiste de philosophie politique ou d'histoire des idées, pas plus qu'en tant que théologien. Ce qui le préoccupe est de donner un sens à sa propre histoire personnelle, et à travers elle d'aider les chrétiens et les anarchistes qui auront eu, comme lui, à concilier douloureusement, ce double engagement, cette double fidélité.

La tâche n'est pas facile si l'on s'en tient au sens commun. D'un côté, les anarchistes regroupés sous la bannière noire du « Ni Dieu, Ni maître », portée haut par le Russe Michel Bakounine et son ami aquitain Elisée Reclus. De l'autre, les chrétiens rivés sur quelques versets de l'épitre de Paul aux Romains :

> Que chacun se soumette aux autorités en charge. Car il n'y a point d'autorité qui ne vienne de Dieu, et celles qui existent sont constituées par Dieu. Si bien que celui qui résiste à l'autorité se rebelle contre l'ordre établi par Dieu.

Pourtant, au prix d'une réflexion exigeante et d'un art de la dialectique dont seul Ellul a le secret, il est possible d'aller bien au-delà de cette incompatibilité fondamentale. Dans *Anarchie et christianisme* Ellul reconnait avoir lu Proudhon en contrepoint de Marx mais il s'était empressé de lire également Celse, Feuerbach, d'Holbach, La Mettrie, et autre penseurs matérialistes pour éprouver la solidité de sa foi. Après l'apologète chrétien Lactance qui attribuait ce raisonnement à Epicure, Bakounine avait cru trouver l'argument dirimant face au Dieu chrétien. Compte tenu de l'existence du mal dont

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nous pouvons observer les manifestations tous les jours, soit Dieu est tout puissant mais alors il n'est pas bon, soit il est bon mais alors il est impuissant. L'objection semble en effet imparable. Soit Dieu est bonté, amour, mais alors il ne peut rien contre le mal sur terre. Soit il est le Tout-Puissant, mais alors c'est un Dieu malfaisant. Lorsque l'on observe le monde comme il va, un Dieu à la fois amour et puissance semble en effet une contradiction dans les termes. Mais Ellul a beau jeu de montrer que ce n'est pas Dieu mais l'homme qui fait le mal. Un Dieu qui forcerait l'homme à faire le bien supposerait un homme robot, précisément le contraire de la conception ellulienne de la liberté tout droit inspirée de Karl Barth. Le grand théologien protestant l'a en effet aidé à penser dialectiquement l'obéissance de l'homme libre à l'égard du Dieu libre, autrement dit l'idée centrale du message biblique : la libre détermination de la créature dans la libre décision du Créateur.

Ellul considère du reste que c'est Bakounine dans son livre *Dieu et l'État* qui a le mieux résumé l'ensemble de la critique anarchiste à l'égard de la religion en général et du christianisme en particulier. Depuis, rien de décisif n'a été écrit sur le sujet du côté des anarchistes. Au-delà des thèses exposées dans *Anarchie et christianisme*, il n'est pas inutile de reconstituer en parallèle les itinéraires ayant conduit Ellul à la foi chrétienne au plan éthique et à la position anarchiste au plan politique. Dans les deux cas rien de nécessaire, rien de prévisible, rien d'inéluctable, rien de déterminé mécaniquement par son milieu social, rien d'inscrit dans une quelconque idiosyncrasie.

Son père était grec orthodoxe d'éducation mais voltairien de conviction, quant à sa mère elle était résolument protestante mais n'affichait pas ses croyances religieuses pour ne pas contrarier son mari athée. La conversion d'Ellul au christianisme a pris la forme d'une sorte de révélation brutale le 10 aout 1930, où il a senti la présence de Dieu, puis d'un long processus de plusieurs années durant lequel il s'est efforcé d'échapper en vain à ce qui allait provoquer un bouleversement total de sa pensée et de sa vie[1].

Quant à son ralliement à la cause anarchiste, il s'est effectué lui aussi par étapes successives. Ellul a d'abord été un fervent lecteur et admirateur de Marx. S'il a également lu avec beaucoup de profit Proudhon, Kropotkine et Bakounine, ces auteurs lui ont toujours semblé plus faibles au plan théorique que l'auteur de *L'idéologie allemande*. Dès le début des années 1930, la lecture de Marx n'avait rien pour lui d'un pur exercice intellectuel. Son père étant alors privé d'emploi, il ressentait

> comme une injustice terrible qu'un homme de sa qualité se trouve dans cette situation. Par son analyse du capitalisme et de ses crises, Marx me fournissait une explication au drame vécu par mon père[2].

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[1] ELLUL (J.) et CHASTENET (P.), *Entretiens avec Jacques Ellul*, Paris, La Table Ronde, 2014 « la petite vermillon », pp. 118–20; ELLUL (J.) et TROUDE-CHASTENET (P.), *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity*, Eugene, Oregon, Wipf and Stock„ 2005.

[2] ELLUL (J.) et CHASTENET (P.), *op. cit.,* p. 124; ELLUL (J.) et TROUDE-CHASTENET (P.), *op. cit.,* p. 55.

Soucieux de ne pas en rester à une approche livresque mais de changer radicalement la société, Ellul prit d'abord contact avec des membres de la S.F.I.O. Section française de l'internationale socialiste qui le déçurent par leur carriérisme, puis avec des militants communistes plus préoccupés de la ligne du Parti que d'herméneutique marxiste. Finalement, c'est au sein de la mouvance personnaliste incarnée par les revues *Esprit* et *Ordre Nouveau* qu'il trouva l'occasion de mettre en pratique, dans le sud-ouest de la France, la pensée de Marx et de Proudhon.

Au plan international, les procès de Moscou, les purges staliniennes visant des marxistes qu'il admirait—comme Boukharine par exemple—, mais surtout le comportement des communistes durant la guerre civile en Espagne commencèrent à le rapprocher nettement des anarchistes. Par l'intermédiaire d'un ancien camarade de classe, Ellul et sa femme aidèrent d'ailleurs de jeunes anarchistes espagnols venus en France pour se procurer des armes. Au plan interne, l'arrivée au pouvoir du Front populaire (1936–37) le remplit d'espoir et il crut fermement que l'heure de la révolution venait enfin de sonner. Ce fut du reste la seule fois où il avoue avoir voté. La déception fut proportionnelle aux attentes suscitées.

A la Libération lui qui avait rêvé sous l'Occupation de passer, selon le slogan du mouvement Combat, « De la résistance à la révolution » assista, impuissant, au retour en force des partis traditionnels et des puissances économiques. Dans ces conditions, la France ne méritait pas le qualificatif de démocratie, ou du moins, elle illustrait seulement la formule de Marx : « la démocratie est la faculté pour le peuple de choisir qui l'étranglera ! » Lorsque en 1947, il évoqua pour la première fois publiquement son inclination libertaire, dans l'hebdomadaire protestant *Réforme*, il prit énormément de précautions :

> Je maintiens qu'actuellement et pour un certain temps, en France, l'anarchie est la seule solution possible. Je ne prétends nullement que c'est le régime de l'avenir, mais celui du moment présent ; ni le régime universel et idéal, mais local et concret[3].

Alors qu'il entretenait déjà des relations d'amitié, et avait mené de nombreux combats aux côtés de militants anarchistes, il fallut attendre 1974 pour qu'il revienne sur le sujet de façon nettement plus audacieuse et argumentée. Dans un article intitulé « Anarchie et christianisme »—publié initialement par la revue *Contrepoint* et réédité en 2008[4]—Ellul posait les premiers jalons du livre éponyme où il confirmait en substance que la position anarchiste était la plus à même de permettre à l'individu de devenir une « personne » capable d'exercer un contrôle sur les décisions prises au nom du

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[3] ELLUL (J.), « Propositions louches », revue *Réforme*, 28/06/1947.
[4] ELLUL (J.), « Anarchie et christianisme », in TROUDE-CHASTENET (P.), Dir., *La Politique, Le Bouscat, L'Esprit du Temps*, Paris, diffusion PUF, 2008 (coll. Cahiers Jacques-Ellul), pp. 95–118.

peuple, d'introduire des grains de sable dans une mécanique trop bien huilée, de créer des tensions face à un pouvoir politique totalitaire par essence.

Face à ses détracteurs Ellul (2003, p. 259) a souvent dû rappeler qu'il ne s'opposait pas à l'État et à la technique, en soi, mais à leur sacralisation ici et maintenant[5]. C'est leur combinaison, tout à fait inédite dans l'histoire de l'humanité selon lui, que l'on trouve à la source de l'aliénation et de la réification de l'homme. L'État-nation étant devenu la puissance coordinatrice de l'organisation technicienne ; on ne peut toucher à l'un sans atteindre l'autre. Dans ces conditions, l'anarchie constitue une attitude de résistance face à l'oppression techno-étatique.

Le livre *Changer de révolution* (1982) inspiré en partie des thèses de Radovan Richta et d'Ota Sik mais aussi des théories *conseillistes* semble aller dans cette voie[6]. De même que la micro-informatique permettrait de sortir du système technicien, « de même ces granules sporadiques permettraient de construire un socialisme révolutionnaire de la liberté ». Ce socialisme pourra-t-il attribuer une finalité à cette technique, cette technique pourrat-elle devenir l'instrument de ce socialisme ? La conjonction de ces deux mouvements n'a rien d'automatique, prévenait-il. Et en effet, à la lecture du *Bluff technologique* (1988) on s'aperçoit que le rendez-vous n'a pas eu lieu. Considérant que son livre *Changer de révolution* avait donné lieu à des contresens, Ellul semble soucieux de justifier la continuité de ses analyses : J'ai simplement indiqué qu'il pouvait y avoir une mutation s'il y avait conjonction entre quelques techniques-moyens, et un changement à cent quatre-vingt degrés du politico-économique. J'indiquais aussi que le temps pour ce faire était bref, peut-être quelques mois, au mieux quelques années. Ces années sont écoulées. Il est aujourd'hui trop tard pour espérer changer le cours de la technique[7].

Impression confirmée par *Anarchie et christianisme* (1988) où s'il présente l'anarchisme comme « la forme la plus complète et la plus sérieuse du socialisme[8] », il nous dit aussi que l'homme étant ce qu'il est, la société anarchiste idéale n'est pas de ce monde.

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[5] ELLUL (J.), *Les nouveaux possédés*, Paris, Fayard, 1973, p. 259. Réédition Mille et une Nuits, 2003.

[6] ELLUL (J.), *Changer de révolution. L'inéluctable prolétariat*, Paris, Seuil, 1982.

[7] ELLUL (J.), *Le bluff technologique*, Paris, Hachette, 1988.

[8] ELLUL (J.), *Anarchie et christianisme*, Paris, La Table Ronde, 1998 (coll. La petite vermillon), p. 10.

Kierkegaard's Theological *Sociology* by Paul Tyson[15]

Paul Martens

Tyson, Paul. *Kierkegaard's Theological Sociology.* Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019, 148pp.

Paul Tyson's *Kierkegaard's Theological Sociology* is as expansive as it is succinct and as provocative as it is explanatory. In this small text, Tyson, a Senior Research Fellow with the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Queensland, presents a constructive argument for theologically informed sociology with a sharp polemical edge directed at intellectual and practical forms of materialist atheism.

Structurally, the text is constituted of two parts: (1) a reading of Søren Kierkegaard's *Two Ages* through an Augustinian lens intended to reconstruct a model of studying society in a theological register, and (2) a loose appropriation of Kierkegaard's model to engage critically the deformed roles that knowledge, money, and religion play in contemporary materialist societies. As such, this theological text is a mix of intellectual history, social history, social analysis, and normative claims.

The issue at the heart of this text is the binary choice that is forced in social theory after the Enlightenment: to adopt or reject methodologically materialist and non-theologically framed social sciences. Tyson argues that, historically, the possibility of real choice between the two options was foreclosed somewhere between 1840 and 1860; during these decades the legacy of David Strauss, Ludwig Feuerbach, and the other young Hegelians was open to either a Marxist or a Kierkegaardian direction. By the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* late in 1859, however, "the study of society by positivistic and pragmatic lights was moving ahead powerfully" (40). Or, in short, the wrong fork was taken, with consequences that have very recently been recognized within the field of social theory. Against this background, Tyson's text should be understood as a theological intervention that contributes to the long-awaited rehabilitation of social theory.

So, to the role of Kierkegaard in the text. Against the declension narrative that haunts and motivates the text, Kierkegaard is the champion that performs diagnostic, constructive, and exemplary roles, and it is worth attending to each of these briefly.

Nearly half of Kierkegaard's *Two Ages* is a series of concluding reflections on "the present age," or Golden Age Denmark. Ostensibly reviewing Thomasine Gyllembourg's novel titled *Two Ages* (hence Kierkegaard's title), Kierkegaard compares and critiques "The Age of Revolution," the age of passion and immediacy, and "The Present Age," the age of reflection, envy, leveling, superficiality, and abstraction. Kierkegaard's diagnosis of mid-nineteenth century Denmark is prescient and almost wholly embraced in Tyson's critique of contemporary idolatries that yield modes of existence consisting of little more than mass consumption of material meaninglessness. It is also important to note that John Milbank should probably be given some credit for instigating Tyson's diagnostic project, and that Tyson supplements Kierkegaard's diagnosis with Ellul's critique of the twentieth-century obsession with instrumental power and efficiency and, inevitably, propaganda.

Kierkegaard's diagnosis, however, is not merely a negative; it is rooted in a constructive vision that Tyson also utilizes to provide an alternative to the spiritual problem of the present age. That constructive vision is rooted in an expansive understanding of worship, doxology: "It is the right worship of God that enables human flourishing for individuals within human communities" (ix). On this matter, Tyson's appropriation of Kierkegaard is not quite as seamless, because Kierkegaard's theology—including but not limited to *Two Ages*—is a little more wary of the nature of communities and communal practices than Tyson seems to be. What Tyson argues is that the logic of worship plays itself out in various social contexts and that society simply cannot be understood apart from worship. No doubt this is true. Framed this way, however, Tyson's argument betrays a notion of something like a nostalgia for Christendom, where societies are or ought to be understood as uniformly oriented toward the same worship. Kierkegaard lived in such a context, and his account of worship deliberately attempted to foreclose an automatic communal outcome:

> If the individual is unwilling to learn to be satisfied with himself in the essentiality of the religious life before God, to be satisfied with ruling over himself instead of over the world [...] then he will not escape from reflection.

So, while Kierkegaard and Tyson both agree that one's relationship with God is inseparable from one's social life, Tyson's appropriation of Kierkegaard is self-consciously contextualized within the "Platonist tradition of the West" (49), a tradition that worried Kierkegaard because of its potential alignment with Hegel's theological vision. I raise this point not to be contentious but simply to note that the theological sociology Tyson eventually develops has debts to Kierkegaard, but it also has debts that would make Kierkegaard nervous, especially the implication that Christianity is a tradition in which "divinity, value, thought, and meaning are primary and where contingent matter embedded in the spatio-temporal manifold is a derivative property of ontic reality" (51). No doubt Kierkegaard would rephrase in quite different language, but he too would agree that particular forms of life (e.g., the aesthetic and the ethical) are

not accidentally problematic but are problematic precisely because they do not align with the proper role ascribed to humans within the created order.

In the end, however the debts are apportioned, Tyson's critique of contemporary practices in the present age is incredibly pointed and persistent. For many in the developed world, it is hard to imagine any other existence except perhaps revolution. In this context, Kierkegaard's final appearance in Tyson's argument is that of exemplar—a prophet, a Socratic gadfly from the 1840s that gives in to neither idolatry nor dystopian despair. And, at this final moment, Tyson fittingly turns from argument to exhortation: "Let us follow [Kierkegaard's] lead and think about our social context through a doxological lens, and pursue the practice of right worship in all humility" (125).

The Green Light by Bernard Charbonneau[16]

Jacob Marques Rollison

Charbonneau, Bernard. *The Green Light: A Self-Critique of the Ecological Movement*, trans. Christian Roy. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, 248pp.

Bernard Charbonneau's *The Green Light* provides a profound and provocative entrance into contemporary ecological dialogue and into Charbonneau's thought (and if I am not mistaken, his debut in English). It explores the ecological movement's intellectual foundations and historical development, probes its political makeup and pitfalls, accounts for the current situation (in 1980 France, though it is still very instructive today), and offers political recommendations for forward movement.

The book opens with two helpful contributions: a foreword by Piers H. G. Stephens, environmental philosopher at the University of Georgia, who helpfully situates *The Green Light* as a prescient forerunner of current ecological debates, and an introduction by Daniel Cérézuelle, philosopher and specialist on Ellul and Charbonneau, who sketches *The Green Light*'s relation to the main lines of Charbonneau's writings. A preface by Charbonneau lays foundational concerns, situating one of the book's foci as retrieving the words *nature* and *freedom* from "the dustbin of history" (xxxiv). Charbonneau writes from his meditations and observation of the effects of technological development on his lived environment, doing so in common language.

The text is structured like a plant whose (part I) "seeds," (II) "roots," (III) "diseases and poisons," and (IV) "fruits" move from the ecological movement's origins to its theoretical foundations, then to its current political situation and problems plaguing its growth, before finally offering a proposal for ecological politics. "Seeds" schematizes the movement's historical development, tracing the origins of present-day ecology from events and ideas from the ancient world, the era of Christendom, the thought of Rousseau, and the modern era, after which Charbonneau hears ecology's "great silence." As the benefits of technological progress reached their limits, the integrated, vulgarized, bourgeois discourse that the present incarnation of the ecological movement represents shot up rapidly. Charbonneau explores the current movement's North

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[16] Rollison, Jacob Marques. Review of *The Green Light: A Self-Critique of the Ecological Movement*, by Bernard Charbonneau, trans. Christian Roy. *Ellul Forum* 64 (Fall 2019):

American origin and Protestant heritage, seeing it not as a revolutionary counterforce but as a reaction to techno-scientific development. He finds a similarly propagandistic pattern in French ecology from the 1960s–80s, with 1970 as a watershed year. He finds the current movement to be a "melting pot" of contradictions, enveloping Marxists and anarchists, the average person and the marginalized, flip-flopping from right to left.

"Roots" (part II) explores a contradiction between nature and freedom as the dialectical foundation of a true ecology. Humans are a constantly negotiated combination of the two, unable to forgo either one. While Charbonneau refuses to give clean-cut definitions of these two terms, nature is knowable in negative contrast to human artifice, and freedom is the "claim of the part against the whole" (48). Seeking a balance between the city and the country, Charbonneau wants dialogue between human creation and the otherness of nature, between freedom and necessity. But our age of maximized growth finds freedom at risk of self-destruction. Charbonneau explores the specific form of this dialectic that Christianity has bequeathed to ecology, allowing him to define ecology's task thus: if "man is not up to the challenge of his own destiny, then that will have been the mistake of his Creator, whether God or nature" (72).

"Diseases and poisons" (III) evaluates the current traps that ecology must avoid yet endlessly falls prey to. Charbonneau wants a relative and realist ecological politics that does not seek heaven on earth but only the avoidance of hell (92). Ecology also tends to be marginalized, or to be co-opted into contemporary mediatized politics, exchanging a clear vision of its goals for more powerful means and reducing itself to just one more political option; this is how society "recycles" ecology, including it in its own system and blunting its revolutionary edge. Charbonneau hopes for a true ecological politics that would transcend right/left binaries and restore meaning to politics.

Finally, the fourth part, "Fruits," moves toward proposals for what ecological politics might look like. Charbonneau seeks nothing less than a "counter-society" built around a "refusal of absolute power" (141–42). For Charbonneau, the tricky question for establishing a post-Christian, humanist counter-society concerns how to maintain techno-science's relativity in the absence of religious truth. Without claiming to have the answer, he recognizes that ecology does treat "ultimate" questions, though without claiming to seek truth, only to respond to a situation. True ecology is a "revolution for that which exists" (148). True politics should be lived at the individual level, involving simple things such as taking one's time, eating well, and watching one's words, since language links the individual to society. It should involve small meetings, real dialogue, and no media, publicity, or violence. Ecology can play a prophetic role regarding the State. Power must be carefully limited; the goal is no longer unfettered growth but a purposed equilibrium. As sites of the human/nature dialogue, agriculture and leisure are key elements in this battle.

Those familiar with Ellul and Charbonneau's lifelong friendship will enjoy spotting both significant commonality and difference between the two thinkers, gaining a fresh perspective on Ellul as well. Certain themes recall the duo's personalist agenda from the 1930s, including the threat of unlimited development and State centrality, the push for

federalist democratic political organization, and common language as the fragile and crucial link between the individual and society. Their different perspectives on religious faith exist in appreciative tension, keeping both respectfully on their toes. While not always easily accessible, *The Green Light* is a careful call to seek the limits that would allow for true freedom, in relation to both the artificial and the natural world—and, notably, a call that avoids apocalypticism, cheap sloganeering, and propaganda. As such, it is a timely volume, especially in its new translation. It is hard to tell whether the mellifluous, thought-provoking, and at times arresting (if also dense, enigmatic, and sometimes sarcastic) prose owes more to Charbonneau's meditative and communicative style or to Christian Roy's deft and poetic translation; in any case, both are to be thanked for this splendid volume's existence (at all, and) in English, respectively.

About the Contributors

Daniel Cérézuelle is an independent scholar in Bordeaux, France. He is the executor of the literary estate of Bernard Charbonneau and a board member of the Société pour la philosophie de la technique. He is the author of *Écologie et liberté : Bernard Charbonneau précurseur de l'écologie politique* (2006).

Patrick Chastenet is professor of political science at the University of Bordeaux. He is president of the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul, director of the *Cahiers Jacques-Ellul*, and author of *Introduction à Jacques Ellul* (Paris, La Découverte, 2019).

Paul Martens is associate professor of ethics and director of interdisciplinary programs in the College of Arts and Sciences at Baylor University.

Jacob Marques Rollison is a postdoctoral researcher in theological ethics living in Strasbourg, France. He is a member of the IJES board of directors and is currently translating Ellul's volumes of theological ethics. He holds a PhD in theology from the University of Aberdeen.

Christian Roy is a historian, translator, and art critic living in Montreal and is a member of the IJES board of directors. He holds a PhD from McGill University.

G. P. Wagenfuhr is the coordinating theologian of ECO: A Convenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians and the founder/pastor of The Embassy, a new model for reconciling church and seminary. He is author of *Plundering Egypt: A Subversive Christian Ethic of Economy* (2016), *Unfortunate Words of the Bible: A Biblical Theology of Misunderstandings* (2019), and *Plundering Eden: A Subversive Christian Theology of Creation* (2020), all with Cascade Books. His PhD (2012, University of Bristol) focused on Jacques Ellul's understanding of the Christian faith as movement.

About the International Jacques Ellul Society

The International Jacques Ellul Society, founded in 2000 by former students of Ellul, links scholars, students, and others who share an interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912–94), longtime professor at the University of Bordeaux. Along with promoting new publications related to Ellul and producing the *Ellul Forum*, the Society sponsors a biennial conference. IJES is the anglophone sister society of the francophone Association internationale Jacques Ellul. The objectives of IJES are threefold:

Preserving a Heritage. The Society seeks to preserve and disseminate Ellul's literary and intellectual heritage through republication, translation, and secondary writings. **Extending a Critique**. Ellul is best known for his penetrating critique of *la technique*, of the character and impact of technology on our world. The Society seeks to extend his social critique particularly concerning technology.

Researching a Hope. Ellul was not only a social critic but also a theologian and activist in church and community. The Society seeks to extend his theological, biblical, and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

IJES is a nonprofit organization, fully reliant on membership fees and donations from supporters worldwide. For more information or to become a member, please visit ellul.org.

Issue #72 Fall 2023

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The Ellul Forum

About

Jacques Ellul (1912–94) was a French thinker and writer in many fields: communication, ethics, law and political science, sociology, technology, and biblical and theological studies, among others. The aim of the *Ellul Forum* is to promote awareness and understanding of Ellul's life and work and to encourage a community of dialogue around his ideas. The *Forum* publishes content by and about Jacques Ellul and about themes relevant to his work, from historical, contemporary, or creative perspectives. Content is published in English and French.

Subscriptions

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Submissions

The *Forum* encourages submissions from scholars, students, and general readers. Submissions must demonstrate a degree of familiarity with Ellul's thought and must engage with it in a critical way. Submissions may be sent to ellulforum@gmail.com.

A Honduran Mayor's Experience of Ellul's Political Illusion[17]

Mark D. Baker

In the midst of introducing me to his boss, and greeting my family, "Eduardo" (not his real name) 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, Eduardo's statement begged for further explanation and conversation. Questions immediately flooded my mind. We were both just passing through La Ceiba. This chance encounter did not allow for that conversation. I vowed to myself that on a future visit to Honduras I would visit Eduardo and follow up on that comment.

In the early 1980s, fresh out of college, I taught at a bilingual high school in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. I met Eduardo, 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. Eduardo enthusiastically encouraged my critical thinking. We became soulmates. We actively sought to convince others that working for justice for the oppressed was central to the Christian faith, and we reflected on ways we could do that ourselves in the present and future.

I first encountered Ellul's writing in that time period. Eduardo 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. Eduardo, however, read *The Political Illusion* and *Politics of God, Politics of Man* from a different setting than I did. His family was politically active. He knew politicians. For him, becoming an elected government leader, or a high-level bureaucrat, was a realistic idea. Eduardo took Ellul's warning seriously, but rather than ruling out participation in politics Eduardo entered the fray with the hope that because of what he had learned he could be a different type of politician.

In 1985, Eduardo's uncle became a candidate for president, and Eduardo worked in his campaign. His uncle lost in the primary election, and in January 1986, Eduardo shared the following reflections with me:

> 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 a 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.
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> I was in 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.
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> 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.[1]

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[1] In June 1983, I returned to the United States. I went to Honduras each summer, and while there visited Eduardo until he graduated and returned to his home city. His words are excerpts from a

Eduardo'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 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 had the opportunity to do so. Leaders in his party determined they needed some younger candidates to compete better with the opposing party. They persuaded Eduardo to run for mayor of a large 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. We passed through his city on one trip, and I had arranged for us to visit Eduardo. I had not seen him for a few years. He sat behind a large desk in an air-conditioned office. Aides sat at his side. 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 some poor and landless people 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 Eduardo was in jail and accused of misusing public funds.

He was forced out of office. In the end, he was found innocent. I left Honduras that year to begin my doctoral studies and did not see Eduardo 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 Eduardo 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." What follows are excerpts from interviews I did with Eduardo on June 24, 2004, and June 16, 2017.

Eduardo: True, I did positive things as mayor. I am grateful I had the opportunity to do so. I did not just give handouts but began projects that people worked themselves to obtain the results. Yes, some good was accomplished. As Ellul says early in his book *The Political Illusion*, "Political decisions are still possible. The point here is merely to demonstrate the growth of limitation weighing them down."[2] The latter is clearly evident in my experience.

I won in a landslide, three to one. I did not think about how my opponent felt. After the election, he despised me. His sons had been my friends. He had been friends with

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transcription of a cassette recording he sent me in January 1986.

[2] Jacques Ellul, *The Political Illusion*, trans. Konrad Kellen (Knopf, 1967), 33.

my father. In politics, when you take a space you are taking it away from someone else, and they want that space.

As mayor I got even better in my speaking ability, but I also became ever more enamored with the feeling of being able to move a crowd. I learned to say the things they wanted to hear. The longer I was in office, the more absorbed I became in seeking power for myself, and the more the power I obtained changed me. Increasingly I used laudable goals to justify questionable means.

I see that now; I did not see it then. A few people, but only a few, tried to tell me. People who really love you will slap your face. I remember my mother saying, "You are changing; the real you is still there, but there is a layer that is not letting your true personality shine out." At the time, I thought she was being over-protective, that she did not know things I knew. One aide, "Miguel," told me, "You are changing." I ignored him and listened to all the others that praised me.

Mark: You did not finish your term; you ended up in jail. What happened? **Eduardo:** As Ellul points out, in politics the power struggle is not just between parties but also within a party. And as a politician, one's obligation is to help the party—to make that a principal concern.[3] I thought that since I was mayor I could do what I wanted, what I thought was best. It was an illusion. The same people that had encouraged me to run, the elders of my party, turned against me. They would call and critique the things I was doing. For instance, they would say, "Why are you paving that road? You will get no political advantage from that. Most of the people who live there are from the other party." Or, "Why are you helping that organization? They were against us in the past." They challenged me, but I kept doing what I thought was best. When they saw they could not control me, they viewed me as a loose cannon and they wanted to get me out of there. I did not realize how selfish they were and how devious they could be. I did not imagine that they would get together and strategize about how they could hurt me, how they could get me out of office. But they did. Although in the end I was found innocent, they did succeed in getting me out of office.

Those were dark days. Sometime later, I started reading Ellul again. His writing penetrated me. It brought to light what was hidden. It was as if he was saying to me, "Eduardo, they gave you the chance to be a politician, they gave you the power. What happened?" And as God asked Adam and Eve, Ellul asked, "Why are you hiding?"

Mark: When you read Ellul this time, it was as if he was saying that Miguel was right, your mother was right?

Eduardo: Yes, because they were speaking with love. I think that is the Ellulian way—love.

Mark: What had you been hiding from yourself that Ellul brought to light?

Eduardo: Why do people seek power? The real question is, why do we change when we have power and forget why we sought power in the first place? Power changes

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[3] *Ibid.*, 151.

people. Politics is grounded in the power of the world. The realm of politics is full of mirages, it distorts reality.

Mark: And when you were in the middle of it, you were not aware of that.

Eduardo: It is very difficult to see. You are walking in hell—not that you are burning, but you are losing your soul. You put your soul in the darkness, and you feel comfortable with it. It absorbs you more and more. That is what worldly power does.

When I love, I do not have to prove to others that I have more power. That was the contrast between the party leaders, absorbed in power-seeking, and Miguel and my mother, absorbed in loving. In a related way, there was the contrast between how people treated me before and after I was mayor. When I was at the peak, our friend Santos came to visit me. According to the political people around me, in terms of the elite, he was a nobody—a simple carpenter. He was proud to be with me: "This guy, the mayor, is my friend." Of course, lots of people wanted to be around me then and say I was their friend. They disappeared when I lost power, when I was disgraced. But Santos was special, because when I was in the pit, he came too. He did not judge me. He just sat there with me. I do not know how to explain that. He did what someone who loves you would do.

Similarly, the person who worked in my office who confronted me was also, in political terms, a nobody. Miguel ran errands. Yet not only was he the only one to challenge me when I became absorbed in power-seeking, he also was the only one from those working for me who stuck with me even when I was in jail and run out of office. There is something very telling in these three people, my mother, Miguel, and Santos—how little power they had and how differently they acted than those concerned with accumulating power.

Mark: Let's move to the present. You have been asked, lobbied, to become involved in politics again. Why do you say no?

Eduardo: I have not said no one hundred percent. True, I have turned down requests to run again. I have not been a candidate, but I am still involved in politics. Because I grew up in it, have been a candidate, won an election—people call me for help, for advice—especially local candidates. They assume that because I have been there, I know things they do not know.

Tomorrow morning I will join two women who have asked me to accompany them in a meeting with a political leader—to help mediate. I am not sure why; perhaps they think I will protect them, I will be fair. Perhaps because I am the son of a man who was a leader in the party and I was a mayor, they think I still have power. They have the illusion. Power—we keep coming back to that word.

Mark: When people come to you for help and counsel, do you try to be for them what Ellul was for you?

Eduardo: Of course. I was walking down the street; I saw the car and did not move. I got hit. Do you think I will stand by and not say something when the car is about to hit a friend? I see myself in them. Yes, I talk to them, but not with much success.

You can tell them, as someone could have told me, "You will not change the world." And they respond, as I would

have, "You are crazy, you do not know who you are talking to." **Mark:** You have experienced that?

Eduardo: Yes. I have a very close friend who is a surgeon—a brilliant man. He decided to run for office. I asked him, "Why are you doing this?" He said, "I have been saving people one at a time in the operating room. More must be done. I do not want to stand on the sidelines. We need to change the world." I said to him, "You have a beautiful family, a great career, the reputation as the best surgeon in the country; why tarnish that reputation?" He told me this story: "I was in the operating room. A girl was brought in who ate half a banana she found at the dump. It was poisoned—rat poison. She died. Same age as one of my daughters. I imagined my daughter on the operating-room table dying because she desperately ate a banana from the garbage—in a country with an abundance of bananas, that exports bananas. I feel a calling to change things."

His story is like mine. He was going the right way, but he was destroyed by the surroundings, by other politicians—envy, he became too strong. Of course, he was not perfect. I am not saying that, but he loved his people, was willing to sacrifice so much. Again, Ellul was right.

Mark: Yet, the doctor was correct to say that something has to change. You were correct years ago, when you ran for mayor, to say that there were problems at the structural level that must be addressed. But Ellul exposes the illusion of doing that through politics. What alternative did you suggest to the doctor?

Eduardo: You cannot isolate yourself from politics. Achieving true change through politics is an illusion, but Ellul is not calling for inactivity. Ellul states that the Kingdom of God will come. One could respond to that and say, "Fine, the Kingdom will come, I will just live comfortably and let it come." Ellul, however, tells us that as Christians we do not have that option. We must be in the world, and work for change, but work for change with faith and hope that our work will not be futile, because God is at work. We cannot stand idly by. We are called to love.

Mark: What about you? What about all our talk of justice thirty-five years ago?

Eduardo: 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."

Mark: Can you give an example of your seeking to live this out?

Eduardo: I work for a company that makes plastic bottles for soft-drink companies in a few different factories in Central America. I ran the factory in Honduras for a number of years. With Isaiah 58 in mind, I proposed to the owner and other administrators that whatever we produced above a certain level in my factory we would give as bonus to the workers. My thinking was that once the company had covered its costs and met its goals, why not give the extra gain to the workers. The others thought I was crazy.

They looked at me and said, "Why would we do that? The workers are being paid minimum wage. If you want to give away your salary, you can."

I tried to figure out a way to do it on my own, but when I presented the idea to some workers they did not believe me. They thought it was just a scheme to get more production, please my boss. They did not think they would really get a bonus.

One of my managers, an accountant, suggested I give them something to show that I was trustworthy: I really did want to give them a bonus. I did not like his suggestion; it felt too paternalistic. But the accountant came up with an elaborate plan to give everyone a new bike—the company would pay part, workers would pay the rest over time (they ride bikes to work). The 120 workers in the factory got together and then came to me and said no. They did not need new bikes. But, they said, if I was willing to give some money, could they start a cooperative loan fund, with the company matching what employees contributed to the fund. Workers could borrow money from the fund when emergency needs came up.

The fund quickly ran out of money. I put in some more than just the matching; still, it ran out regularly. One day, when the fund was very low, two men came together to make sure the other would get some. I was very impressed. Although I felt like giving some of my own money so each would get the full amount they needed, I did not want to undercut their spirit of solidarity and sharing. They split the amount in the account.

On Labor Day, May 1, we typically had a company picnic. The company provided the food. It was a good day but not a great day. So that year I asked the workers, "What shall we do for Labor Day?" One said, "My wife is a great cook, she could make—." Someone else then volunteered to make something else. The day had a very different feel. Gradually things began changing in the factory. It was much cleaner. They did not want someone else to have to clean up their mess. They showed more respect for the janitors. One man received training on how to run a machine. At his initiative, he taught others what he had learned, rather than guarding his ability and status.

Shifts became competitive in a healthy way, seeing who could produce more. Production went up. Before they were little islands in the same plant. They became more of a community, a team.

After about eighteen months the owner told me, "Eduardo, give them the bonus you had originally proposed"—tying it to production over a certain level. It is not that I had become more persuasive, or that they had a new awakening in relation to justice for all. Rather, production had gone up so much that the owner was making so much more money that he was going to have to pay a lot more taxes.

> **Mark:** Ellul's "Meditation on Inutility," at the end of *Politics of God, Politics of Man*, is a challenging word to the Eduardo who was mayor and thought, "I am going to change things," but a word of freedom to the Eduardo of the present who says, "I am a servant of Jesus, seeking to follow where he leads."
>
> **Eduardo:** Yes.

Mark: You are still actively involved in trying to live out Isaiah 58, "to loose the bonds of injustice," even if you are not using the means that many in the world would see as the most obvious means to use to achieve that end.

Eduardo: Yes, that is very accurate. I think a huge difference is that Jesus tells us to not draw attention to ourselves, to "not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,"[4] and politicians do the opposite. What is most important is that you are seen. Perception is more important than reality. I have seen political advisors tell my friends, "You have to do this, because perception is more important than reality." And it is not just politicians. Think of the social clubs that so proudly deliver wheelchairs to the needy—and get their picture in the paper. In the process, they destroy the dignity of the person receiving the wheelchair. I tell them, "Fine, do these actions, but do not let anyone know." They look at me like I am crazy. Too many of us are looking for Jesus by going to church, but we avoid him in the street.

Mark: Your comments lead me to reflect on my reading of Ellul's "Meditation on Inutility." Although my story is not as dramatic as yours, Ellul's writing has penetrated me numerous times and revealed things hidden. Reading these pages was one of those instances. The unworthy servant pronounces this unworthiness *after* acting. I realized that much of my reading and thinking, including my reading of Ellul, was seeking to avoid "useless" acts. I wanted to figure out *ahead of time* what would not work, so I could do what would work. That is not the freedom Ellul writes about.

Thank you for so openly sharing from your life and your ongoing journey to live out this freedom, to love and resist the political illusion. I deeply value our friendship and conversation over the years. May we both continue to be sensitive to ways the Spirit of Jesus calls us to act with confidence that God will use our actions in the present and in the Kingdom to come. Yet, as Ellul writes, we do not know which acts God will retain and use. "I have to realize that the acts I think indifferent might be the very ones that God retains."[5] May we live in this freedom and hope.

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[4] Matthew 6:3.

[5] Ellul, *The Political Illusion*, 71.

Meditation on Inutility[18]

Jacques Ellul

In spite of God's respect and love for man, in spite of God's extreme humility in entering into man's projects in order that man may finally enter into his own design, in the long run one cannot but be seized by a profound sense of the inutility and vanity of human action. To what end is all this agitation, to what end these constant wars and states and empires, to what end the great march of the people of Israel, to what end the trivial daily round of the church, when in the long run the goal will inevitably be attained, when it is always ultimately God's will that is done, when the most basic thing of all is already achieved and already attained in Jesus Christ? One can understand the scandalized refusal of modern man who can neither accept the inutility of what he has done nor acquiesce in this overruling of his destiny. One can understand that the man who wants to be and declares himself to be of age is unwilling to acknowledge any tutor, and, when he surveys the giddy progress of his science, cannot admit that it has all been already accomplished by an incomprehensible decree of what he can only regard as another aspect of fatality. In fact, in spite of all that we have been able to learn in these pages, before God we are constantly seized by an extreme feeling of inutility. It begins already on the sixth day, when we come up against the inutility of the function of Adam in the garden of Eden. Here is this man, the lord and master of a creation which has been handed over to him and which is perfect when set under the eye of God. Yahweh takes man and sets him in the garden of Eden in order that he may till it and keep it. But what sense is there in tilling it? Already on the third day God has set up the order whereby plants and trees propagate themselves. Everything grows in abundance. God himself causes trees of all kinds to grow out of the soil and they are pleasant to the sight and good for food. What can tilling mean in these conditions? The point of tilling is either that things cannot grow without it, or that the various species should be improved, or that plants which produce food should be protected against noxious weeds, or that the yield should be increased. But in this perfect order there is no place for cultivation. And keeping? Against whom or what is man to keep it? What external enemy threatens the perfect work in which everything is good? What protection can man give to a world where God himself is the full protector? Against what disorder is he to keep it when order is the finished work of God? What place is there for tilling and keeping in the perfect

[18] Ellul, Jacques. "Meditation on Inutility." In *Politics of God, Politics of Man. Ellul Forum* 72 (Fall 2023): 15–22. © Wipf and Stock Publishers. Used with permission.

fellowship and unity represented by God's work, in this creation in which there is no division, when everything has a part in everything else, when each fragment is not just a fragment united to all the others but also an expression of the total unity of a creation that reflects the perfection of its creator, when the bond between the Lord and the universe is of such perfection that the Lord's rest is the equilibrium of his creation? Tilling and keeping make sense only in a world in which things are divided, the unity is shattered, equilibrium has been disturbed, and the relation between the Lord and his creature has been destroyed. To till it and keep it? It is God's command and yet a useless service.

Then we are confronted by the law or will of God broken down into commandments entailing our works. But works to what end? What are we to make of the long struggle of the Hebrew people, which regards works as necessary to salvation, except that it is all useless? What are we to make of works performed to effect reconciliation with God, except that they are all in vain? The whole frenzied effort of well-intentioned man has been crushed. At a stroke we learn that in Jesus Christ salvation is given to us, that God loved us first before we did anything, that all is grace; grace—gracious gift, free gift. Life and salvation, resurrection and faith itself, glory and virtue, all is grace, all is attained already, all is done already, and even our good works which we strive with great difficulty to perform have been prepared in advance that we should do them. It is all finished. We have nothing to achieve, nothing to win, nothing to provide. On this road it is not that half is done by God and half by man. The whole road has been made by God, who came to find man in a situation from which he could _{on Inutility} not extricate himself. But what about works? Not just the deadly works of the law, which are deadly because man thinks he can fashion his own salvation, which is his destiny, by them, but the works of faith, the works without which faith itself is dead, the works which are the expression of the new birth, the fruits of the Spirit—of what use are these works? Why should we do them? Here again we come up against the same inutility, the same vanity, as we contemplate God's omnipresence and stand in the perfect presence of his love. And yet works are demanded of us; they are God's command and yet a useless service.

We turn next to prayer, to the relation with the Father which Jesus himself taught, the gift which confuses us since what is given to us is that we may speak with God as a man speaks with his friend. But again the thought arises: Your Father knows what you need. Of what use is it, then, to confide our fears and plans to him, to present our requests and problems? God knows well in advance that we are not aware of all our needs, of all that saddens us, of all that lacerates us. He knows in advance. What good is it, then, to seek his blessing, his help, the gift of his Spirit? What good is it to pray to him for our mutual salvation and to present to his love the living and the dead? Does he not know them each one? For each one did he not on Calvary undergo the shed blood and the bowed head? For each one has he not decided in love from all eternity and brought his benediction in person to all distress and toil? And when we haltingly seek to express ourselves in prayer, we have every reason to be discouraged

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in advance: "You do not know yourselves what you should ask." You do not know your true needs or real good. Fortunately there is one to help. The Holy Spirit intercedes for you before the Father with sighs that cannot be uttered (Rom 8:26ff). But if this perfect prayer is rendered by other lips than ours, if it is out of our hands, of what avail is our own awkward formulation of our requests and complaints? Why put our hands together for him who himself prays for us? We are thus struck by the vanity of prayer, by its inadequacy and poverty. Prayer? It is God's command and yet a useless service.

Then there is wisdom, human wisdom, man's intelligent ordering of his life, the serious employment of right reason, the attempt to find the proper way of life, the whole enterprise that takes form in political action and personal morality, in social work and poetry, in economic management and the building of temples, in the constant improvement of justice by changing laws, in philosophy and technology, the manifold wisdom of man which is also inscribed in the wisdom of God and which may be an expression of this wisdom, the first of all God's works that rejoiced before him when he laid the foundations of the world (Prov 8:22ff). And yet—are we not told that God has convicted of folly the wisdom of the world? "For the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men. [...] Consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards" (1 Cor 1:l8ff). Human wisdom, futile pride, a Babel built by those who think they are wiser than God; man has been able to plumb the depths, to find gold there, and to explore the oceans, as Job says, "but where shall wisdom be found?" (Job 28:12). Human wisdom, an incomparable excuse for all that we are not, under the concealment of all that we do! But should we invent it? Should we reject all its work? Should we lead the world to nothingness, because nothingness is the way of resurrection? Should we already cut the harvest because the venomous fruits of wisdom are indissolubly linked to the adorable fruits of the same reason? It is not yet time, says Jesus, and he restrains the seventh angel; wisdom must pursue its work. Wisdom; it is the command of God and yet a useless service.

We now come to preaching. What language, what word, what image, what eloquence can pass on a little of this flame to others? All that we count most dear and profound and true, we want to communicate, not to make others like ourselves, not to win them or constrain them, but to show them the way of life, the irreplaceable way of love which has been given to us, so that they can have a share in the joy of this wedding. But the language is empty and conveys nothing; the form gives evidence of our own unskillful hands. Nothing becomes true except by the Holy Spirit. What can we say, and why should we say it, if everything depends on this unpredictable act of the Spirit of God who blows where he wills (John 3:8) and lays hold of whom he wills, if inward illumination is directly from God, who calls Paul when he is a persecutor and Augustine in his rhetorical pursuits and makes all truth known to both of them? If our words to even the dearest of brothers are lifeless and fall to the ground unless the Holy Spirit comes _{on Inutility} and breathes on them, if our tongue is mute in spite of our illusions, as that of Zechariah was (Luke 1:19ff), or if, which is worse, it is unclean,

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as that of Isaiah was (Is 6:5), and if the angel alone can release it, what is the good of preaching and speaking and witnessing and evangelizing? Does not God do it quite well by himself? And yet—"How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? [...] So faith comes from what is heard" (Rom 10: 14–17), and again: "Go [...] teach all nations" (Matt 28:19). Futile preaching, and yet so important that Paul can cry: "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor 9:16). Preaching! It is God's command and yet it is useless service. What we have been saying can all be summed up in the judgment which Jesus passes with intolerable clarity: "Say, 'We are unworthy servants.' " But we should isolate two different elements in this saying in Luke 17:10. Jesus says: "When you have done all that is commanded, ..." Jesus is not evading the problem of law and order. There is a divine law, which is a commandment, and which is addressed to us. Hence we have to fulfil it to the letter. We have to do all that is commanded. The sense or conviction of the utter futility of the work we do must not prevent us from doing it. The judgment of uselessness is no excuse for inaction. It is not before doing or praying or preaching that we are to proclaim their inutility. It is not before their work that Elisha, Jehu, and Hezekiah proclaim the uselessness of their work, which is only a fulfilment of God's action. Pronounced in advance, futility becomes justification of scorn of God and his word and work. It is after doing what is commanded, when everything has been done in the sphere of human decisions and means, when in terms of the relation to God every effort has been made to know the will of God and to obey it, when in the arena of life there has been full acceptance of all responsibilities and interpretations and commitments and conflicts, it is then and only then that the judgment takes on meaning: all this (that we had to do) is useless; all this we cast from us to put it in thy hands, O Lord; all this belongs no more to the human order but to the order of thy Kingdom. Thou mayest use this or that work to build up the Kingdom thou art preparing. In thy liberty thou mayest make as barren as the fig tree any of the works which we have undertaken to thy glory. This is no longer our concern. It is no longer in our hands. What belonged to our sphere we have done. Now, O Lord, we may set it aside, having done all that was commanded. This is how Elisha and Elijah finished their course.

The second point to be noted in the verse is that it is not God or Jesus who passes the verdict of inutility. It is we ourselves who must pronounce it on our work: "We are unprofitable servants." God does not judge us thus. He does not reject either us or our works. Or rather, he does not echo the verdict if we have passed it ourselves. If (as Christ demands) we judge ourselves in this way when we have done all we could do and accepted all our responsibilities, if we are able to view our own works and most enthusiastic enterprises with the distance and detachment and humor that enable us to pronounce them useless, then we may be assured of hearing God say: "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt 25:21). But if we pass in advance this bitter judgment of uselessness that paralyzes and discourages us, if we are thus completely lacking in love for God, or if on the other hand we magnify our works and regard them as

important and successful (Jesus, little Jesus, I have so wonderfully exalted you, but if I had attacked you in your defenselessness your shame would have been as great as your glory [...]), if we come before God decked out in the glory of these lofty, grandiose, and successful works, then ... "woe to you that are rich" (Luke 6:24), for the rich man today is the successful man.

Everything is useless, and we are thus tempted to add: Everything, then, is vanity. We are tempted, for it is a temptation to do only what is useful and to assimilate the judgment of Ecclesiastes on vanity (1:2ff) to the inutility which we have been briefly sketching. Now this spontaneous reaction raises a question. Why are we so concerned about utility? Why do we regard what is not useful as worthless? In reality, we are obsessed at this point by the views of our age and century and technology. Everything has to serve some purpose. If it does not, it is not worth doing. And when we talk in this way we are not governed by a desire to serve but by visions of what is great and powerful and effective. We are driven by the utility of the world and the importance of results. What counts is what may be seen, achievement, victory, whether it be over hunger or a political foe or what-have-you. What matters is that it be useful.

My desire in these meditations on the Second Book of Kings is to call our judgments into question. Yes, prayer is useless, and so too are miracles and theology and the diaconate and works and politics. The healing of Naaman served no purpose, nor did the massacres of Jehu.

The piety of Hezekiah could be no more effective than the impiety of Ahaz. But what then? We must fix our regard on another dimension of these acts, of all these acts that kings and prophets had to perform. It is just because these acts were useless and did not carry with them their own goal and efficacy that they are on the one hand testimonies to grace and on the other an expression of freedom. To be controlled by utility and the pursuit of efficacy is to be subject to the strictest determination of the actual world. To want to attain results is necessarily not to be a witness to the free gift of God. If we are ready to be unworthy or unprofitable servants (although busy and active at the same time), then our works can truly redound to the glory of him who freely loved us first. God loved us because he is love and not to get results. Our works are thus given a point of departure and they are not in pursuit of an objective. If we act, it is because God has loved us, because we have been saved, because God's Spirit dwells in us, because we have received revelation, and not at all in order that we may be saved, or that others may be converted, or that society may become Christian or happy or just or affluent, or that we may overcome hunger or be good politicians. Elisha goes to anoint Hazael because he is ordered to do so and not so that Hazael may do good. In this way the freedom of our acts, released from worry about usefulness or efficacy, can be a parable of the freedom of the love of God; but not in any other way.

It is thus in this bread cast on the waters (Ecc 11:1), in all these somber and passionate acts we have been reading about together, in all these past decisions, that we have seen outcroppings of freedom. Just because these acts were useless within the plan of God, man was free to do them. But he had to do them. To do a gratuitous,

ineffective, and useless act is the first sign of our freedom and perhaps the last. The men of the Second Book of Kings, each in his own place, played their part for God. But none of them was indispensable. None of them served in a decisive way the great plan of the Father accomplished in the Son, the mysterious purpose the angels wanted to look into (1 Pet 1:12). None of them did the radical deed, and each was free in his own way. "A wonderful freedom," one might say, "if it can have only vain and futile works as its object! If to be successful we must be subject to necessity or fatality, then so be it!" In fact, if nothing in the Second Book of Kings had taken place, if none of the decisions of these men had been made, little would have changed. Israel and Judah would have been led into exile, the remnant would still have been weak, and the plan of God would have been fulfilled as it was in Jesus Christ. Nothing would have been different in the facts, in what we call history. If we do not pray, if we do not do the works of faith, if we do not seek after wisdom, if we do not preach the gospel, nothing in history, nor very probably in the church, would look much different. The world would go its way, and the Kingdom of God would finally come by way of judgment. And yet there would be lacking something irreplaceable and incommensurable, something that is measured neither by institutions nor metaphysics nor products nor results, something that modifies everything qualitatively and nothing quantitatively, something that gives the only possible meaning to human life, and yet that cannot belong to it, that cannot be its fruit, that is not its nature. This is freedom: man's freedom within God's freedom; man's freedom as a reflection of God's freedom; man's freedom exclusively received in Christ; man's freedom which is free obedience to God and which finds unique expression in childlike acts, in prayer and witness, as we see these in the Second Book of Kings, within the tragic acts of politics and religion.

Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley.

Hope as Provocation[19]

Charles Ringma

It is not my intention to fully set out Ellul's comprehensive biblical and sociological perspectives,[1] although I will have to refer to some of his central concepts. But my focus is to point out that Ellul in his writings provides a rich spirituality of hope that is theologically centered, is world-engaging, and has a vision for the life of the world to come. Put most simply, Ellul asserts that the "vision of God's people is both historical and prophetic and is lived in hope."[2] Therefore, "hope is in no way an escape into the future, but is [...] an active force, now."[3] This hope, according to Ellul, is not simply a psychological imperative and posture. Rather, it is a theological and spiritual gift. He writes: "In Christ, [is] a power which can cause hope to be born," because "Jesus Christ is the living hope."[4] And for Ellul, hope is waiting for the Kingdom of God, the presence of the Spirit, and the "return of Christ." But this waiting is not passive; it is a "wideawake waiting"[5] for God's final future.

Ellul has woven the theme of hope through much of his writing. It is important, therefore, to touch on some of the broader dimensions of his work. Ellul has primarily written in two fields, the sociological and the biblical-theological. In the latter, he writes as a lay theologian. And in this domain, he explores many themes from a fundamental dialectic of being "in Christ," and being "in the world." Ellul is deeply concerned about the way Christians and the faith community should live their faith in society. And he is not reluctant in pointing out the failures of the church in history.[6] At the same time, Ellul is hopeful about the transformative power of God's revelation in Christ in renewing individuals and the church and impacting society through the prophetic voice and actions of those who have been impacted by Christ.[7]

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[1] Andrew Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Paternoster, 2002) has provided a wide-ranging interpretation of the life and work of Ellul.

[2] Jacques Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, ed. Willem H. Vanderburg (University of Toronto Press, 2010), 222.

[3] Jacques Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work*, ed. Willem H. Vanderburg (Anansi, 1997), 107.

[4] Jacques Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (Seabury, 1973), 162, 165.

[5] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 260–61.

[6] Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Eerdmans, 1986).

[7] Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 2nd ed., trans. Olive Wyon (Helmers & Howard, 1989).

But unlike so many writers who write about God's concern for the world but do not demonstrate any insightful understanding of society, Ellul's writings constantly set out a reading of the world that shows its structures, its ideologies, its beauty, its deep follies, perversions, and lack of freedom and justice. Just focusing on one societal dimension, he is well known for the way he has engaged the problem of technology in contemporary society.[8] I regard Ellul as a significant contemporary transformational and missional thinker, and I am always surprised to see his name missing in missional texts.[9] Ellul was both a scholar and an activist. His activism ranged from political involvement, to working with delinquent youth, to ecological issues. And this activism was informed by a critical and selective use of Marx, the philosophy of personalism, a modified Barthian theology, and a firm belief in the power of biblical revelation regarding the person and work of Christ. Andrew Goddard concurs. He writes that Ellul was

> an activist whose personalist convictions and faith in Jesus Christ made him a revolutionary dissenter and true "protest-ant," who in living out the Word of God radically critiqued and resisted established institutions and the direction of the modern world.[10]

What is of interest and significance in this broad profile of Ellul is that he was particularly sensitive in both his thought and activism to power issues[11] and the human propensity toward creating alternative kingdoms to God's Kingdom.[12] It is therefore not surprising, as Goddard points out, that "throughout his life he was constantly to be found on the margins,"[13] rather than in mainstream institutions and movements. Marginality is thus an important dimension of understanding Ellul and his work. Ellul himself writes, "Transformation of the church does not begin at its human head, but

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[8] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Eerdmans, 1990). Ellul's concern about technology has to do with the instrumentalization of life and a commitment to efficiency as a final goal. He says this "structures modern society" and is so invasive that it leaves us "anxiety-ridden (*Perspectives on Our Age*, 73, 89). But he says that we can live with technology "in the perspective of the Kingdom" (*The Presence of the Kingdom*, 72).

[9] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in a Theology of Mission* (Orbis, 1991), James M. Phillips and Robert T. Coote, eds., *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission* (Eerdmans, 1993), F.J. Verstraelen, ed., *Missiology: An Ecumenical Introduction: Texts and Contexts of Global Christianity* (Eerdmans, 1995).

[10] Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World*, 50.

[11] Ellul rejects the use of violence and is deeply concerned about the misuse of power. The "anarchism" that he promotes is one that "acts by means of persuasion, by the creation of small groups and networks" that denounce oppression and work for freedom and justice. *Christianity and Anarchy*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Eerdmans, 1991), 11, 13.

[12] Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*.

[13] Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World*, 51.

with an explosion originating with those at the fringe."[14] Clearly Ellul saw himself there.

This is not without profound implications. Ellul believed that so much of what we seek to do is "idolatrous" and with unexpected outcomes. Thus, while we need to work for the good, we also, and possibly often, have to work against the very good we are seeking to promote and institute. This involves a profound self-critical posture rather than a flag-waving conformism or a self-congratulatory triumphalism.

What is possibly most significant here is that Ellul critiques the Christendom model, where church and society reinforce each other and where the church seeks political support to gain influence. The core idea, that the more powerful the church is, the greater good it can do in society, is, according to Ellul, an illusion. He makes the generalization that Christianity "should never seek to justify any political force," whether conservative or revolutionary.[15]

In this broad context, Christian hope for Ellul is not rooted in our religious institutions but in the revelatory power of God, who "descends to humanity and joins us where we are."[16] This power liberates us because it is the power of Christ, who is the "Liberator."[17] This encounter with Christ is a free gift of grace and is an act of faith. Ellul writes: faith "grasps me and takes me [...] where I do not want to go."[18] While Ellul does not go into much detail regarding his own coming to faith, he does admit that the Bible "seduced me" and that he experienced "a very sudden conversion."[19] Stating it most simply, Ellul writes: I "can affirm [...] that the hope is in God through Jesus Christ."[20]

To live this hope in Christ means that other hopes have to be relinquished. Ellul makes the point that if people "have their hope," then they "have no need of the hope that is in Christ."[21] And in his writings Ellul gives much attention to the hopes we should abandon, including political systems, the power of technology, and our own achievements that weren't birthed in the power of the Spirit. Ellul is deeply concerned that we so easily "deify" our own systems. He laments that we have created and embraced "the deified religious character of technology." We should, therefore, be iconoclastic and "destroy false images."[22]

But he also stresses that we need to abandon all our institutional attempts in the name of religion to control and market God. Ellul points out that "we wish to use the divinities" and that we attempt "to take possession of God."[23] Within this frame he

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[14] Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, 212.
[15] Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, 126–27.
[16] Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age*, 95.
[17] Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age*, 103.
[18] Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, 162.
[19] Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age*, 13, 14.
[20] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 159.
[21] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 160.
[22] Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age*, 108.
[23] Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age*, 95, 96.

is deeply concerned about institutional Christianity. His concerns include the way the church seeks social power, its adoption of particular political ideologies when these are seen as convenient, its orientation toward conservatism, its cultural conformity, and its escape into "personal piety."[24]

While Ellul is seen by some as being too dark and pessimistic, this is a premature misreading.[25] Ellul is hopeful about God's faithfulness, the power of God's revelation, and the renewing and revitalizing work of the Holy Spirit.[26] He has hope for the renewal of the institutional church. He writes that there may be "dead institutional dogmas," but then new light and life appears. The Bible, he says, "is always alive," and the "Holy Spirit has not been defeated."[27] And even though he has some harsh things to say about the institutional church—"the archangel of mediocrity is the true master of the church"[28]—he also calls the church the bride of Christ and celebrates that Christ "cannot abandon the church."[29] But he believes that the church needs to be constantly renewed. He writes: "The church institution can be valid only if there is interference, shock, overturning, and initiative on the part of God."[30] This disruptive and renewing work is the work of the Spirit. For Ellul, while Christ is the genesis and model of our hope, the Holy Spirit is the great empowerer. He writes: "The Holy Spirit gives hope where all is despair, the strength to endure in the midst of disaster, perspicacity not to fall victim to seduction, [and] the ability to subvert in turn all powers."[31] One can hardly be more hopeful! But note where his hope is placed. It is a challenge to articulate Ellul's gestalt of hope, since it is so multi-layered, but here is my summary.

First, Ellul acknowledges that all people place their hope in something. Thus, hope is generic to the human condition.

Second, Christian hope—through the power of revelation and the Spirit— needs to denude us of our false hopes. Thus, Christian hope is both affirmative, and critical or deconstructive. It affirms the power of Christ and in his light exposes all false hopes, whether ideological or political. This has important implications. Christian hope is not an add-on. It is not all other hopes and also Christian hope, but hope in God alone. This makes conversion for Ellul such a profound one. One's whole world through Christ is turned upside down.

Third, as we seen, Ellul is not enamored with institutions, including the church, but he believes they are necessary and are important when they are impacted and renewed

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[24] Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, 193.

[25] Ellul speaks about his "known pessimism," but he exclaims: "I am not without hope, not at all." *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 167.

[26] Ellul believes that "the Spirit is a power that liberates us from every bondage," and he laments that Christianity has "left the Holy Spirit unemployed." *The Subversion of Christianity*, 12, 13.

[27] Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, 201–202.

[28] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 136.

[29] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 136.

[30] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 139.

[31] Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, 190.

by the movement of the Kingdom of God. And that is what needs to constantly occur if hope is alive and active.

Fourth, Christian hope is not simply an emotional or psychological interiority, it is to be an embodied hope. He writes that Christians need to be an "incarnation" of Jesus Christ, who is "the living hope."[32] He further notes that "a hope lived and living is the prior condition for witness" to the world.[33] Elsewhere he elaborates: "The life of Christians is what gives testimony to God and to the meaning of this revelation" in Christ.[34] This is important. It is so easy to categorize hope in spiritual terms. And so easy to merely think of interiority. But Ellul's great challenge is that a living hope is where people live the gospel. Living that well occurs when the "church is forced back to its origins," and people are alive due to the "presence of the Holy Spirit" and people in humility pray and witness.[35]

Fifth, Ellul acknowledges the value of Moltmann's theology of hope. He notes that we are not marching toward the Kingdom of God but that "the Kingdom of God is bursting violently into our times."[36] However, the Kingdom does not come in the way we expect and certainly not in some grandiose way. Ellul speaks of "God's secret presence in the world" and says that this presence is in an "appearance of weakness."[37] He continues: "God strips himself of power and presents himself to us as a little child," but at the same time "the incarnation of Jesus Christ has achieved all that I could hope for in terms of relationship with God."[38] All of this means that for Ellul a very different understanding of kingdom and of power is at play.

God's way in the world is the way of Jesus Christ and of the Beatitudes.[39] This is the way of God's "upside-down" way of redemption, restoration, forgiveness, peacemaking, and justice. Ellul further points out that the Kingdom of God is "visible only in hope," that the Kingdom in Christ is fully not-yet, that we don't progress toward the Kingdom but that it comes to us as God's "sovereign initiative."[40] Ellul calls this way of being and living as "apocalyptic"—which is to live the "last" in the present and to "act at every moment as if this moment were the last."[41] This makes Kingdom-living not one of secure structures but a precarious journey of faith, hope, and love.

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[32] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 165.
[33] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 165.
[34] Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, 6.
[35] Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, 208, 209.
[36] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 172.
[37] Ellul, *What I Believe*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Eerdmans, 1989), 148.
[38] Ellul, *What I Believe*, 150, 85.
[39] Ellul stresses that in the Incarnation a "profound and instantaneous break has taken place" between the old order of things and the new that has come in Christ. Christians are to live that new order which Ellul calls the "new order [...] of the Beatitudes." *The Ethics of Freedom*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Eerdmans, 1976), 278.
[40] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 207, 208.
[41] Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 23.

Sixth, it should be clear by now that Ellul does not sketch out for us a nice program of how to live the journey of life and hope well. Instead, he accents precarity, which makes the Christian life very dependent on God's continuing initiative in our life and service. Therefore it should not surprise us that Ellul seeks to present us with varied colors in the tapestry of hope that are usually missing in our sometimes benign theologies of hope. One usually missing strand has to do with the interplay between God's absence and our hope. Ellul writes that in the long journey of the church there are "periods [...] or epochs of history in which God abandons man[kind] to [... its] folly," and that a "man [woman] is without hope because God is silent."[42] He immediately goes on to make the point that Christians can never say that because Jesus was abandoned for our sake, we will never be. He thus speaks of the silence of God and our experience of the "desert." But he makes the point that God's silence is never "final" and that we are always abandoned "in God."[43] All of this may point us in the direction of the dark night of the soul, but more specifically that our so-called mastery in the technological world can't be replicated in our relation to God. God is sovereign and not at all at our disposal. Ellul reiterates: that "Jesus Christ is God-with-us, does not at all preclude [...] abandonment."[44]

Seventh, the silence of God can lead to an abandonment of hope. But Ellul wants to awaken us to the opposite. He believes that hope becomes alive "in our abandonment."[45] And he wants us to enter into "conflict with God," since "when God turns away, he has to be made to turn back to us again."[46] Here Ellul evokes the biblical tradition that one can wrestle with God, lament, and press God for answers.[47] These answers are not for our personal and often whimsical needs but have to do with God's presence and God's renewing work in our lives, the church, and the world. The point here is clear enough: we don't honor God's sovereignty when we fall into a sullen silence, but when we actively engage God. Ellul writes that we must not "sit in weary resignation," nor should we necessarily think that "we must repent" of something, but we "must arouse God" and recapture the idea that "God repented."[48] Ellul concludes: "Hope is protest [...] before God."[49] There is nothing impious about any of this. The God of the biblical story is quite capable of dealing not only with our sin and folly but also with our longing, our cries, and our lament. And God can more than cope when in faith and hope we cry out for the renewing presence of God. This is important for Ellul, for he notes that while we humans can do and achieve much, we "cannot fill the void

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[42] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 121, 111.

[43] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 126, 122.

[44] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 129.

[45] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 177.

[46] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 179, 177.

[47] Walter Brueggemann concurs. He writes: "It is Israel's characteristic strategy of faith to break the silence and so to summon the absent, negligent God of promise back into active concern." *Old Testament Theology: An Introduction* (Abingdon, 2008), 313.

[48] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 183

[49] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 180.

left by the withdrawal of God."[50] And we should not try, for we will only come up empty-handed or embrace ineffective substitutes.[51] It is here that we most clearly see the theme of this discussion—hope is a form of provocation.

Eighth, hope in Ellul's thinking is not what we hope for due to our own efforts. Ellul writes: "Hope is not self-fulfilment by one's own powers."[52] He notes that hope is not "acting on the basis of the possible"; rather, "hope is the passion for the impossible."[53] This means that for Ellul hope is something that is radically different. He seeks to explain: hope is not a little addendum to our knowing and acting, but when knowing and acting are impossible, then "hope is born."[54] Thus there is an ultimacy to hope. And for Ellul this is clear. Hope, he says, takes place when all our "justifications" cease and we "connect hope with [...] God's promise" and are carried by the Holy Spirit, "who leads us to this hope."[55]

So, what does all of this have to do with a missional spirituality of hope? Again, we have to note that Ellul does not explicitly use this terminology. But it is implicit in his writings. Here is an attempt to articulate this. Ellul is deeply concerned about the church. He believes that we need to face the brokenness in our institutions and to acknowledge our propensity to mediocrity and an unhelpful conservatism. He is also deeply concerned about the world and has made a vigorous attempt to understand it in terms of its ideologies and social structures.

He believes that our personal faith and the life of the faith community needs constant renewal through the revelatory Word in Christ through the life-giving Spirit. This is the irruption of the Kingdom of God in our lives and institutions. And it is this irruption that makes the church a prophetic community in its witness to the world. He stresses that hope, while a generic condition, needs to find its genesis and outworking in a hope in Christ, who as redeemer and icon of the new humanity is the fulfilment of all of our hopes. Hope in Christ has both present-day and future implications. And when our hope is weak and we are in the "desert" of life, we are called to provoke God to again draw near to comfort and sustain us in the journey of faith. A transformational spirituality lies at the heart of Ellul's writings. And hope lies not in our conformity to the world, nor does it lie in the prowess of our religious institutions. It lies in the Spirit's ongoing disturbance and empowerment as people seek to live in Christ and in the Beatitudes as a witness to what God's final freedom will be like.

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[50] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 190.

[51] Ellul in these and related remarks is in the domain of the "dark night of the soul." See St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, trans. E. Allison Peers (Dover, 2003) and one man's experience of the dark night: Terry Gatfield, *Benson and the Narratives of the Organic Christian Life* (Morning Star, 2019). The "dark night" invites one to spiritual direction: see Christopher Brown, *Reflected Love: Compan-ioning in the Way of Jesus* (Wipf and Stock, 2012). And to spiritual discernment: see Irene Alexander, *Stories of Hope and Transformation: Mary's Gospel* (Wipf and Stock, 2013).

[52] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 189.

[53] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 194, 197.

[54] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 201.

[55] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 204, 202, 210.

Jacques Ellul, Ivan Illich—and Jean Robert[20]

Carl Mitcham

On November 11–13, 1993, the University of Bordeaux hosted a small international gathering on "Technique and Society in the Work of Jacques Ellul." In the closing session of the three days, a frail Ellul made a brief appearance; in light of his death the following May, this must have been one of his last public appearances. Immediately following Ellul, Ivan Illich, who had made a pilgrimage to Bordeaux to participate, gave an extended testimony to the importance of Ellul's work and its influence on his own thinking. In Illich's words, "Ellul continually recaptures the fundamental intuitions of his earliest work, always clarifying them more. His tenacity, humility, and magnanimity in the face of criticism make him an example one must bow to."[1]

Illich, whose *Tools for Conviviality* (1973) was an effort to point toward possible political reforms to address the culturally corrosive expansion of technique, went on to remark on how discovering Ellul's concept in the 1960s enabled him

> to identify—in education, transportation, and modern medical and scientific activities—the threshold at which these projects absorb, conceptually and physically, the client into the tool; the threshold where the products of consumption change into things which themselves consume; the threshold where the milieu of technique transforms into numbers those who are entrapped in it; the threshold where technology decisively transforms into Moloch, the system.

It is not difficult to find references by Ellul to the work of Illich as well. *Le Système technicien* (1977), which revisits and critically extends the argument of *La Technique* (1954), makes four pointed references to *Tools for Conviviality*. Illich's book, Ellul wrote, "has an excellent view of the technological system when he shows that 'the functioning and design of the energetic infrastructure of a modern society impose the ideology of the dominant group with a force and penetration inconceivable to the priest

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[1] English translations of both statements can be found in *Technology in Society* 17, no. 2 (1995): 231–38.

[...] or the banker.' "[2] And "Illich sees [the] connection between technologies perfectly when he shows the correlation between teaching and technological growth, or between the latter and the massive organization of 'health.' "[3]

In January 1992, a year prior to the Bordeaux conference, the *Ellul Forum* published a guest edited issue (no. 8) on "Ivan Illich's Theology of Technology," seeking connections with Ellul's theological studies. In spring 2003, the *Forum* also published "Remembering Ivan Illich and Katherine Temple." Temple had written her PhD dissertation on Ellul under George Grant, the Canadian philosopher heavily inspired by Ellul, and had worked for years at the Catholic Worker house in New York, with which Illich had a spiritual relationship.

As has been the case with Ellul, Illich's life (1926–2002) and work is continuing among a diverse circle of colleagues and friends, of whom Jean Robert (1937–2020) was among the most dedicated. Robert was a Swiss French architect who wrote with equal fluency in French, German, Spanish, Italian, and English, and who in the 1970s immigrated to Mexico and became the designer of such convivial tools as the composting toilet. He does not explicitly reference Ellul in this article—and yet his argument about the transformation of tools or instrumentality into systems clearly echoes and offers a new anthropological perspective on what was a thread running through almost all of Ellul's sociological work. In fact, in another article authored during the same period as the one printed here, Robert makes an explicit connection. He describes Ellul and Illich as authors working "on parallel tracks in their efforts to name the post-industrial Erewhon and to devise concepts to understand its elusive new threats." In their later works both departed from their early

> analyses of "the technological society" and of "convivial tools," respectively, and proposed the word "*System*" to name what lies beyond the age of instruments. Both understood that a unique historical mutation had rendered obsolete the very concepts that had previously allowed them to be unusually acute analysts of the late Technological Age. Both saw the mutation of the technological society into the system a betrayal of the vocation of the West, by the West. This vocation is a call to freedom. Tools are compatible with freedom if they are available to both be taken up and put down. This double possibility can only be preserved when tools are strictly limited in power, size, and number.[4]

There is no "International Ivan Illich Association," though there is a website devoted to "Thinking After Ivan Illich," which includes a periodical named *Conspiratio*.

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[2] Jacques Ellul, *Le Système technicien* (Calmann-Levy, 1977), chap. 4, note 22.

[3] Ellul, *Le Système technicien*, chap. 6, note 4.

[4] Jean Robert, "Beyond Tools, Means, and Ends: Explorations into the Post-Instrumental Erewhon," in Glen Miller, Helen Mateus Jerónimo, and Qin Zhu, eds., *Thinking Through Science and Technology: Philosophy, Religion, and Politics in an Engineered World* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2023),

Given the encounter between Ellul and Illich, it seems spiritually appropriate for the International Jacques Ellul Society to invite the heirs of Illich to visit.

The following text, written by Robert shortly before his death, owes its existence to Sajay Samuel, who is not only editor of the *Ivan Illich: 21st Century Perspectives* book series published by Penn State University Press, but has also curated a number of Robert's English texts for the *International Journal of Illich Studies*.[5]

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[5] Consult the *International Journal of Illich Studies* 6, no. 1 (2018) and 8, no. 1 (2021).

Goodbye to Tools: On the Historicity of Technology

Jean Robert

The Critique of Tools in the "After Tools" Era

In the 1970s, Ivan Illich examined the use of modern technologies in four kinds of service institutions: schooling, transportation, medicine, and housing. In each of them he showed that technological tools requiring professional management beyond certain limits infringe upon people's innate and autonomous abilities to learn, walk, heal, or build a roof over their head. Schools muscle out vernacular learning possibilities; cars and public transportation paralyze the feet; doctors crusade against the historic arts of suffering and of dying; housing degrades the art of dwelling into a demand for square feet and housing units. Illich named this destruction of natural and culturally determined abilities by the institutional use of technology "counterproductivity," which he defined as the negative synergy between an autonomous and a heteronomous mode of production.

Illich not only denounced the "radical monopoly" that schools establish upon learning, cars and highways upon movement, doctors upon caring, and architects upon dwelling. He also focused attention on how the symbolic power inherent in the institutional use of modern technologies frames our fundamental certainties and creates the "axioms" out of which our "social theorems" are generated. Schools are dominated by professional teachers and professionally controlled boards; cars and highways are the products of engineering; in the medical encounter, doctors diagnose illnesses, prescribe medicines, and the medical profession has the power to sue unlicensed practitioners and to subpoena suspects of medical self-help; architectural associations define the standards that your house must obey and protect their members against self-builders. In every case, the encounter between the user and the professional and/or its design and standards shapes perceptions that are appropriate for a client or, in the case of medicine, a patient. Illich studied the client-professional relation as the cast in which, around 1970, the self-perception of most modern human beings was coined. He called this coined demand for professional services an "imputation of needs" that contributed to "the professionalization of the client." From the beginning, Illich had the intuition that medicine stood out in this analysis, but it was not until two decades later that

he could see clearly why: the certainties of the technological age affected medicine much later than any other profession. In medicine, counterproductivity took such dimensions that Illich had to adopt a new technical term to define it: "iatrogenesis." In *Limits to Medicine*, he documented clinical, social, and cultural iatrogenesis, that is, the professional generation of a multifaceted misery. Medicine had become an enterprise pretending to abolish the art of suffering by means of a war against traditional self-perceptions. Only so could it convince patients that the pursuit of happiness manifests itself as a quest for health. Thanks to the shift through the perception-shaping power of medicine, Illich could see education, transportation, health care, and housing institutions as four examples of mega-machines aiming at laundering the *conditio humana* of its tragic dimension.

Illich understood very early that his analysis had two sides: on the one hand, he had to propose a theory of technology in which there would be a special case for its modern, industrial variety. On the other hand, he had to study the "sociology" of the special groups that monopolized society's most potent tools in order to produce services. These groups are generally called professions. The institute whose foundation he inspired and which Valentina Borremans headed from 1964 to 1974, CIDOC, became the world's leading place for the critical study of professions. Since the professions controlled the services that were supposed to meet the clients' needs, the professional was but an operator of a service-producing "tool." This correspondence to the contemporary belief that, when you are sick, for instance, you go to a doctor, who uses the tools or instruments of his profession to reestablish some disturbed function in your organism.

In later years, however, Illich was self-critical about the ingenuity with which he had put in the same bag hammers, schools, hospitals—that is, material devices and institutions—and expressed regret for having so misled the best minds among his listeners. He, and some others, had then crossed a watershed beyond which it was no longer possible to think in these terms:

I was not aware of this watershed when I wrote many of my earlier books, and I am at fault for having persuaded some very good people who read me seriously that it makes sense to talk about a school system as a social tool, or about the medical establishment as a device.[1] Nonetheless, he never changed a word of his early works. I sometimes suspect that his self-critique was in part a rhetorical device that he used to point to the epochal threshold that he, like many of his usual interlocutors, had crossed. Illich spoke of people who had abandoned the secular hopes of industrial society, of new agnostics who recognized one another, sometimes by their gait, more often by their laughters and their silences, but were unable to give names to their new perceptions:

> The people who speak to me, as opposed to those who spoke to me twenty years ago, recognize [... that they are in] a world, not the future world but

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[1] David Cayley, *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich as Told to David*

the present world, which is built on assumptions for which they haven't found the appropriate names yet.[2]

But at the time of *Tools for Conviviality*, it still seemed reasonable to put in the same category a device that can be taken in the hand and a service agency, because both appeared as means to reach personal goals, which was also congruent with the way the public at large perceived tools and institutions. This conflation simply revealed that the essence of an institution as well as of a tool could be expressed in the same way: a hammer was a device for nailing, and a school was a social arrangement for learning. Another way of saying it is that tools and institutions were understood as instrumental causes of the achievement of goals. In hindsight, the epoch in which you could not speak intelligibly about what happened to you without ushering in some instrumental causes of your predicament can be called the epoch of dominant instrumentality. Illich did not yet question this epochal mind frame. However, against the industrial "system's" tendency to foist bureaucratic controls and dependencies onto the relation between man and tool, he stressed autonomy (personal or communitarian), conviviality, and equity. Conviviality required tools of the right size, while equity required defining limits to the tool's inputs and outputs. According to these two criteria, everything that could be causal in the attainment of goals could be called a tool, though to be good, a tool had to obey negative design criteria that set limits to its size, its inputs, and its outputs. Within these limits, a tool could maintain a harmonious morphological relation with the body and its natural powers. Such an equitable and convivial tool—be it a material device or an institution—would foster its user's autonomy and so be the contrary of an industrial tool. The opposition between convivial and industrial tools was illustrated by the contrast between a bicycle and a car. Beyond certain critical thresholds of size, power, and management, material tools as well as service institutions such as schools, highways, or hospitals inevitably became counterproductive. In retrospect, counterproductivity can be understood as a deviation from their "tool" quality, so *Tools for Conviviality* appears today as a defense of the "toolness" of tools, a plea for an equitable and convivial instrumentality conferring autonomy on the users of all kinds of tools. At the time when he wrote the book, Illich did not question tools *per se*. Instead, he proposed remedies for outsized instruments—whether objects or institutions—that, by exceeding critical thresholds, had come to produce exactly the contrary of what was expected of them. He defined a kind of dimensional envelope of the "toolness" of tool. The remedies to counterproductivity were politically defined limits destined to reestablish and preserve the right proportion in size, accumulated power, or degree of necessary management. Whether remedies that would restore the "toolness" of systems can still be envisaged today will be discussed at the end of the article. In the light of Illich's latest reflections, this would require limits to size, power, and management, but above all a restoration of the distance or distinction between any tool and its

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Cayley (Anansi, 2005), 77.

[2] Cayley, *The Rivers North of the Future*, 221.

user. If schools, for example, maim their students' autonomous-learning capacity and discourage autodidacts by putting them on meaningless tracks, not only their size and power must be reduced but their obligatory character must be questioned, for, if you cannot leave the school when you want, it is not a tool: the critical distance or the distinction between you and the school system has been suppressed, and you cannot decide to "take" or to "leave" it. You have become a *homo educandus*, a client glued to the educational institution that claims to serve you.[3] Comparable reflections apply to other big service agencies such as hospitals and transportation systems. What would the restoration of that distance mean in a social order whose fundamental principle seems to be the systemic suppression of it? Illich's notion of an institutional inversion might still enlighten this debate.

As Illich himself recognized later, in the 1960s and 1970s, he did not think of questioning the concept of instrumental cause or instrumentality itself: "Now, I'm the author of a book called *Tools for Conviviality.* When I wrote that book, I also believed that the idea of a tool as a means shaped to my arbitrary purpose had always been around."[4]

To summarize, when he wrote that book, Illich still thought that (1) tools have always been around (or, which is saying the same, that instrumentality is a natural category), (2) everything that "is shaped to my purpose" is a tool, and (3) as far as they can be used by people for their personal purposes, institutions are also "tools." Around 1980, however, he started to question some of the very assumptions of his previous books on tools and institutions. He also noted that others were undergoing a change in feelings and conceptions that echoed his. I'll try to summarize how Illich saw this change in his and many of his friends' perceptions and how he associated it with a historical watershed. The mutation of the professional-client relation will, once again, be the model.

"Before" the watershed, Illich already perceived that the relationship between the professional and his client shaped the client's auto-ception or self-perception. This shaping of perception resulted from an imputation by the professional of who the client was and an interiorization of this imputation by the client. In the case of medicine, this imputation implied a diagnosis, a prescription, and the threat of some sanction in case of a breach of the rules. The typical patient interiorized professionally imputed needs of health care by claiming his right to diagnosis, analgesics, preventive care, and medicalized death. A university student became a *homo educandus* by swallowing the suppositions of the school board and conceiving himself as a producer-consumer of knowledge. A car driver became *homo transportandus* by swallowing the car that paralyzed his feet and thus becoming a chauffeur of himself. In short, the patient "interiorized" the medical diagnosis; the student the school system; the driver the traffic system; the resident of an assigned housing the architects' standards, and they became

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[3] The point where he had dropped out: a hierarchy of drop-outs.
[4] Cayley, *The Rivers North of the Future*, 72–73.

respectively *homo iatrogenicus*, *homo educandus*, *homo transportandus*, and *homo castrensis* (billeted man). Yet, according to his instrumental perspective, Illich could still think of each of them as of somebody who could stand at some critical distance to the great institutions of health, education, transportation, or housing. Illich thought the typical consumer of services as "someone who stood [or: could choose to stand] in front of large institutions with the idea, at least, that he could use them for the satisfaction of his own dreams or his own needs."[5]

This "someone" was a citizen who—at least in the rich parts of the world— believed that, by claiming a right to his privilege, he provided grounds for its extension to everyone. The allusion to the satisfaction of "dreams and needs" clearly indicates that Illich thought that institutions, like domestic hammers or bicycles, ought to be at the service of personal intentions. Yet the important words in the phrase are "who stood" or who could still stand in front. When a hammer offers itself to you, you confront it with the capacity to take it or leave it. In his early books, Illich spoke thus of material tools and institutions in front of or at a distance from which you could stand to decide if you wanted to take them or leave them.

In the Grip of Systems

In his later reflections however, Illich realized that we had entered an epoch in which the distance, the space between a "tool" and its user that allowed the latter to take or leave the object that offered itself as a tool, was no longer warranted. In absence of this distance or space, you can no longer ponder if you want to take the object or leave it. It is "it" that takes you: the "tool" is no longer a tool, but a system. By Illich's definition, the fading of the distance between "tools" and you is the criterion by which to characterize the epochal change that started in the 1980s. So, the change about which he speaks as the end of "dominant instrumentality" and of "images" is also, in a way, the end of dominant space. When you could stand at a distance from a device like a hammer and decide if you were going to take it or leave it, you were in space: space belonged to the age of tools. When you feel taken, engulfed, "sucked" by a device like Windows, you are in the age of systems, in which there is no space left between you and what you perhaps still call "tools."

Illich acknowledged Max Peschek, an old student of his who led a seminar in Bremen over "the fundamental mistake of Ivan Illich," to have admonished him about his "error" in *Tools for Conviviality*. "What Illich did not understand, according to Peschek, and he is certainly right, is that when you become a user of a system, you become part of the system."[6]

In the 1980s, "after" the watershed, Illich understood that people were absorbed by artifacts or institutions that they could no longer hold at a distance and from which

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[5] Cayley, *The Rivers North of the Future*, 162.
[6] Cayley, *The Rivers North of the Future*, 78.

they could no longer distinguish their hand or their body. This mutation requires new concepts. In absence of that distance, space, or distinction, there can be no tools anymore but only systems that integrate you, "suck" you in. On the other hand, for all of the second millennium of European history, tools were not only around but it was also impossible to think without assuming their omnipresence. Illich's notion of a change of era implies that we can no longer think the world in which we now live as a vast bench offering us all kinds of tools for our purposes. In other words: tool and instrument are no longer adequate categories for thinking what is presently happening to us. And this goodbye to tools is also—and for the same reason: the fading of distance, space, and distinction—a goodbye to images: when people let themselves be swallowed by a world conceived as a system, this world can no longer be represented in images, because an image presupposes a standpoint, that is, some "soil" under the feet and a distance between an eye and an object. An image implies that the observer and the observed are in the same space, in which the observer stands (on his standpoint) in front of, vis-à-vis, the observed object. In a world of images, space can still be called locative space, because it locates the eye and the object between which the image can be a medium. In the System Age, the distance that allowed one to situate oneself in front of the object he might take as a tool in his hand or as an image in his gaze is suppressed. A systemic world is made present to people's fantasy by a show of seductive random sequences of visual stimuli that are not images but what Illich, after Uwe Pörksen, called visio-types. Yet, without the possibility of "standing in front" to decide—which also means to distinguish—,

> the possibility of political engagement, and the language of needs, rights, and entitlements, which could be used during the 1960s and 1970s ceases to be effective. All one can wish for now is to be freed of glitches [...] or to adjust inputs and outputs more responsively.[7]

Only so long as some standpoint vis-à-vis the reality was still possible could people feel that they had some power. The discourse on responsibility typical of these years reflected people's trust—already greatly an illusion—in the power of institutions and the possibility of their participation in them.

"After" the crucial passage from instrumentality into systems, Illich saw what happened to the typical client who had let himself be swallowed by a world conceived as a system. This world could no longer be represented— which always implied an extrinsic view, that is, a consideration-at-a-distance—but was experienced intrinsically as an interrupted flux of sensorial stimuli. In the new era, choice and decision, and responsibility, have lost any meaning. The characteristic human being has become someone who has been caught and swallowed by one of the tentacles of the social system. For him, there remains no hope to participate in the creation of something worthy of being hoped for.

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[7] Cayley, *The Rivers North of the Future*, 162.

Having been swallowed by the system, he conceives himself as a subsystem, frequently as an immune system. Immune means provisionally self-balancing in spite of any change in environmental conditions. Fantastic talk about life as a subsystem with the ability to optimize its immediate environment—the Gaia hypothesis—takes on a gruesome meaning when it is used by someone who has been swallowed by the system to express his self-consciousness.[8]

In such a world, where the distance between an artifact and its user no longer exists and the gaze no longer has a standpoint, whatever seduces you into taking it as a means to ends, or into looking at it, is not the artifact's "tool quality" or "image quality," that is, its capacity to help you meet your ends or provide you with a representation of the world you live in. It's a form of seduction, for which there is not yet a name and to which Illich ascribed a religious character. In the religion of the system world, personal purposes and goals are illusory. The system world is no longer instrumental or representational, and to keep saying that it is a world of tools and images is to fail to understand its novelty. Yet, if Illich is right in perceiving that some twenty years ago we had crossed a major watershed, it must not have gone unnoticed by other thinkers.

The "Postmodern" Diversion

In the radio interview that David Cayley conducted with Illich shortly before his death, Cayley repeatedly invites him to acknowledge a convergence between his position and what is called postmodernity or postmodernism. For instance, Cayley once and again asks him if he agrees that "the most common way to speak of that new sense of being on the watershed is to call it the beginning of postmodernity," or if the terms "postmodern," "postmodernism" could suggest "a return to a pre-instrumental innocence." In his responses, Illich compared such questions with baits that his interviewer was throwing him in order to make him speak on fashionable topics such as postmodern poetry, novels, and philosophy, on which Illich had nothing to say. At other times, however, he took Cayley's instigations as questions on the transformation perceived by many of his friends and interlocutors, and upon the discussion of which the term "postmodernism" had established a kind of radical monopoly.

> How has that passage, that mountain we came across in the 1970s, affected our sense of—I use the word for lack of anything better— timelessness and spatiality and frontier—the three inevitably go together. Now in order to speak about this transition, this transformation, the transmogrification to which you allude—we both know what you are alluding to even though we are not quite certain precisely what we are speaking about, and that's one

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[8] Cayley, *The Rivers North of the Future*, 163.

of the difficulties in this particular conversation—in order to understand this transmogrification, I at least have to look at it historically.[9]

Is not what had happened to tools and images—to "technology" and "representation"—namely, the loss of the critical distance, the distinction between body, hand, and tool or eye, standpoint, and object, now also affecting philosophy, literature, poetry, architecture? Postmodernism is a way of talking in which the speaker seems to know the box he is alluding to, yet the box has no outside from which he could see it and he is not quite certain either of what there is in the box. What does remain of philosophy in the age after tools, images, and space? For me, more than the postmodernist's answers, this question invokes George Gamow's Flatland. The fallen man who slowly wakes up after having been almost beaten to death might perceive that, sucked by the soil, his body is part of it like a corpse. However, if he finds the strength to stand up, he will distinguish himself from the mud in which he lay unconscious for so long. In space, at a distance, the soil will acquire a relief, curvatures: here the gutter into which he had been thrown, the road pavement, the embankment of a railroad. Perhaps the police will want to survey the site of the assault, take measurements of its particularities. Such measurements of the soil's curves can be called extrinsic, taken from a distance that maintains the distinction between the soil and the body.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, physicists announced that the three-dimensional space in which we experience our bodies to be immersed is actually curved in a way that we cannot perceive because we are "glued" to its curvature: no extrinsic measurement can be taken of it. To explain to laymen like me how we can take intrinsic measurements of our invisibly "curved" world, Gamow invited us to imagine a purely two-dimensional universe, Flatland. Like us in our "three dimensions," Flatlanders would be glued to their two-dimensional space, unable to perceive its curvature (imagine that Flatland is a sheet of paper that, "from outside," you can bend at will). The only way for Flatlanders to take a measure of Flatland's curvature, Gamow taught us, is to take it intrinsically, by verifying if the Pythagorean theorem holds and evaluate local curvatures as deviations from it. I don't know if I understood Gamow correctly, but it seems to me that what he suggests is that Einstein's geometric reconstruction of gravity as local curvature of a four-dimensional manifold or "space" is the equivalent of what Flatlanders were supposed to be doing in Gamow's tale. Postmodernism is a multidimensional Flatland that can be experienced only intrinsically, in the sense that it abolishes all the distances that allowed you to distinguish yourself from it.

In my studies—strongly influenced by Illich's work and conversations with him—two changes of the sense of the *ubi*, the "here" and the "now," mark the beginning and the end of modern times:

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[9] Cayley, *The Rivers North of the Future*, 180–81.

1. the passage of my somatic presence (my carnal "here") within a cosmic order to the location of my body in a universal container, a passage that I define as the transition from a *topocosmos* to a locational space;

2. the demise of locational space by the suppression of extrinsic distinctions and hence of particular standpoints.

Conceptually, space had always been a box: unbound because lacking an enclosure, thus "beyondless," but boxing all what exists simultaneously and, according to Einstein, finite. Yet, due to the limited power of the feet, even in locational space every place had always had a beyond in the walker's perception. Albrecht Koschorke stresses the "*aporia* of the horizon" in a world without a beyond because all frontiers have been trespassed and all once-unknown territories explored and conquered. It is another way to express that the demise of all frontiers also marks the end of critical distance, "extrinsic" considerations, and finally of locational space itself.

All That Comes to an End Had a Beginning

What Cayley insisted on calling "the beginning of postmodernity" Illich invited him to see as "the end of the age of dominant instrumentality." What now comes to an end, "at least in the mind, and the feeling, and the body and the breathing of some people" is the age of tools and tool-making, of instruments: it is the age of instrumentality or of technology. And if it comes to an end now, it had a beginning. The certainties that are fading today "are of a kind for which the Middle Ages and the times before had no sense or taste." So there was an epoch in which the certainties of existence of our youth—such as space and time, the here and the beyond, tools and images—were conditions for thinking and speaking in an intelligible way. And there must have been a time before it, in which people resolutely turned their backs on such certainties.

Review of *The Culture of Cynicism: American Morality in Decline*[21]

Jason Hudson
Richard Stivers, *The Culture of Cynicism: American Morality in Decline*. Wipf and Stock, 2023.

This 1994 book by Richard Stivers has been republished by Wipf and Stock with a new introduction. *The Culture of Cynicism* is a stimulating work that traces the ebbs and flows of American morality, from its roots in the Enlightenment, through its assimilation to industrialism, and finally to the technological morality of power in the twentieth century. In his introduction, Stivers suggests that his thirty-year-old analysis holds true for technology today. I agree; *The Culture of Cynicism* is profoundly prescient and is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the impact of technology on morality and the modern Western psyche.

Despite his claim that today's technology and those considered in his book are of a quantitative, not qualitative, difference (viii), Stivers leaves the reader to make the connections. He examines, for example, the influence of '80s and '90s television series, such as *Cheers* and *Married with Children*; but he has not edited this edition to demonstrate the qualitative links between phenomena of a quantitative difference. The reader must fill in the interpretive lacunae. An example that feels particularly cogent is this statement about the mechanization of daily life:

> My use of technique objectifies my abilities, just as the other's use of technique reduces me to an abstraction, to an object. Simultaneously technique fragments the personality because of the multiplicity of techniques. Each technique draws upon a different self; each technique employed by the other turns me into a different object, a different abstraction. (93)

Though written before the widespread availability of mobile phones, it could just as well apply to the performative nature of social media or the quantification of daily experiences by wellness and dating apps. However, that kind of analysis is left to the creativity of the reader.

On one hand, the failure to bring the analysis into the present is a weakness. Some contemporary readers will likely snicker at the dated references or his condemnation of

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[21] Hudson, Jason. Review of *The Culture of Cynicism: American Morality in Decline*, by Richard

rock-and-roll music. On the other hand, I suspect that I found the reading experience stimulating precisely because I had to draw many of the ideas into the present myself. The need to trace the gap between 1994 and 2023 invites the reader into the analysis and asks her to try on the critical framework to see if, in fact, it holds.

Stivers demonstrates a deep knowledge of Jacques Ellul's thought. Students of Ellul are likely to find Ellul's ideas explicated with a clarity and depth that will enhance their own understanding. More importantly, Stivers presses Ellul's thoughts forward by bringing key ideas from Ellul's work into conversation with cultural criticism, political theory, and sociological research. Stivers's voice and critical framework are clearly present as well. His subject mastery is clear. This alone makes the book valuable for those seeking to think deeply about Ellul's analysis of technique.

Perhaps the strongest example of Stivers pressing beyond Ellul is his examination of the movement from the social to the technological milieu. He shows how an economic morality, dominant in the nineteenth century, gave way to a technological morality in the twentieth. Ellul's understanding of these shifts is central to his overall thesis about the technological age. Stivers, however, adds layers of depth to Ellul's account by presenting the material, sociological, and psychological conditions under which these shifts occurred and the effects they had on the moral imagination of each emerging era.

Stivers begins his moral genealogy in the Middle Ages and moves through the Reformation and Enlightenment. Given his ultimate concern for American morality, he slows his examination to trace what he sees as America's central moral symbols, success/survival and health/happiness, through industrialization and into the twentieth century. In chapters 2 and 3, he maps these moral symbols onto a fascinating historical account of technological ascendency. "By the 1830s," he writes, "the idea of success had been translated into a moral program" (22). Economic success was interpreted as an indicator of virtue. But a shift occurred at the turn of the century toward collective notions of success, technological success propelled by the myth of progress. The success/survival aspect of technological morality is propelled by organizational technique and bureaucracy. The twentieth-century emphasis on collective success shifts the focus for individuals toward health and happiness, primarily through adjustment. Here again, readers will hear strong echoes of Ellul. What Stivers calls the ephemeral and compensatory aspects of a technical morality (adjustment), Ellul calls "human technology." These methods are meant to help humans adjust to the "abstract and impersonal nature of a society dominated by technology" (3). Stivers understands these ephemeral aspects of technological morality to be established by public opinion and peer-group norms.

Public opinion and peer-group norms lead to Stivers's extended analysis of media and television. Here his analysis is both dated and prescient. In many ways the psychological conditions of television have come into full bloom with social media and

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on-demand streaming. In this section, "From the Moral to the Visual: The Compensatory," Stivers again demonstrates a deep engagement with Ellul. He explores the relationship between truth and reality in relation to television as his key example of modern visualization. Stivers takes up complex ideas that are central to Ellul's *Humiliation of the Word* and presents them with a clarity that makes them seem obvious. He also shows how the flattening-out of truth into reality leads to meaninglessness. Language in a technological age is objective (technical) or purely subjective, and the interpersonal connections that are needed for meaning-making erode.

In the absence of meaning, we are left with mere spectacle and a cynical, nihilistic morality whose central value is power. Here again Stivers's analysis proves profoundly prescient. His insight into the technological morality of thirty years ago not only holds true, it seems to explain the modern day more accurately. For example, when the political right in America applauds the dismantling of tradition and institutions, and the left wields the bloated power of mega-corporations, we are witnessing the erasure of meaning and the valuation of power. Political discourse, so diminished by television, has been reduced to meaningless spectacle by social media. Stivers could not have anticipated how the decades following his work would continue to prove his thesis painfully accurate.

I will begin considering the weaknesses of *The Culture of Cynicism* by reaffirming my praise. Stivers's writing style is difficult. Despite sections of the book moving chronologically, it is not organized by linear argument. Rather, Stivers circles back to the same ideas, adding shade and nuance as he explores various historical or technological phenomena. At times he illustrates his ideas with appeals to literary fiction. At times he appeals to cultural examples contemporaneous with his writing. Without a clear methodology or systematic outline, the writing feels meandering. Nonetheless, the reader will have a sense that Stivers's critical framework is highly technical and rigorous. The reader can picture Stivers at a chalkboard, drawing a complex diagram of how the compensatory and ephemeral relate to peergroup norms and images, or how economic morality moved through precise phases, giving way to technological morality. However, his cyclical writing style makes it difficult to recreate this framework, at least upon one reading. Still, it is worth the effort; his framework is accurate and helpful.

I conclude with two more criticisms. The first is less substantial but not inconsequential. The title does not adequately reflect the book's content. There is no prolonged examination of cynicism as a concept. The argument builds to a brief mention of cynicism in the concluding pages. However, even there, the term is coupled with nihilism, which he calls cynicism's "twin disease" (180). Technology, power, consumerism, and meaninglessness all feature more centrally in the book's overall thesis. This does not undermine the validity of the book's arguments. Nonetheless, readers will be disappointed if they expect to find in these pages an argument focused on cynicism as a central component of American moral decline.

My second critique is more substantive. Stivers's concluding moral vision is underdeveloped and ultimately falls flat. He concludes, "What is required, then, is a

life-affirming ethic [...] of non-power and freedom" (180). He further explains that this ethic is a revolution against technological morality. He clarifies that the change he advocates cannot come by "resurrecting traditional values. It will come from the attempt to live out as nearly as possible an ethic of non-power" (181). He does not clearly define non-power nor how and where this ethic is to be lived, aside from the rather vague assertion that it is a life-affirming ethic that radically opposes technological civilization. Though earlier in the book he is clear that he is concerned about the move away from Christian morality, he is not clear in the end if his vision for non-power is grounded in Christianity or another ethical framework.

Perhaps Stivers intended his reader to take up these concluding concepts and follow them forward in Ellul. However, wanting the theological depth that Ellul brings to these concepts, I was left wondering why we should embrace non-power. What virtue drives us to non-power? Stivers runs into the age-old ethical problem of making an "ought" of an "is." He describes the loss of meaning, hopelessness, commodification of lifestyles and relationships, moral valorization of power, and so on. Certainly, these are moral problems. But a futurist may argue that we are experiencing a difficult but necessary transition phase that will give way to a welcomed technological morality in which ambiguities are reduced and compensatory pleasure and meaning are supplied *ad infinitum* by commodities. Conversely, Ellul grounds his ethic of non-power in Jesus's example. It is a particularly Christian calling and is not grounded in any good outside the Word of God. Ellul's ethic is not effective. Like sheep presenting themselves to wolves, those who take up an ethic of non-power can have no assurance of success. They must only trust that God's strength will be perfected in human weakness.

The failure to develop the central moral claim is indeed a weakness of *The Culture of Cynicism*. However, Ellul has developed non-power across several works, most notably *The Ethics of Freedom*, *To Will & To Do*, and *If You Are the Son of God*. Stivers cites Ellul frequently. Because non-power is so central to Stivers's conclusion, it may have been worth acknowledging that the concept he merely introduces can be explored further in Ellul.

I offer these criticisms because this book is worthy of deep engagement. It will greatly help anyone who wants to think seriously about our technological age and its moral underpinnings. While Stivers's book can stand on its own merit, its strengths are made stronger and its most significant shortcomings are mitigated when it is read as a companion to Ellul's work.

Review of *Propaganda 2.1: Understanding Propaganda in the Digital Age*[22]

John Fraim
Peter K. Fallon, *Propaganda 2.1: Understanding Propaganda in the Digital Age.* **Cascade, 2022.**

This work by media professor Peter Fallon offers a unique perspective on the ambiguous topic of propaganda. Fallon is professor of journalism and media studies at Roosevelt University in Chicago and active in the Media Ecology Association. Media ecology is the study of media, technology, and communication and how they affect human environments.[1]

Few books on propaganda have been written from a media-ecology perspective. In *Propaganda 2.1*, Fallon provides a framework for better understanding modern propaganda by tracing the evolution of propaganda from its origin in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* to the present, through three distinct eras. The first era lasted two thousand years, from the fourth century BC to the beginning of the twentieth century. The second era spanned the greater part of the twentieth century. The third era is the digital age. Each era of propaganda has a close connection to the media and communication technologies of its time. As propaganda evolved across these eras, the essential locus of propaganda moved from the content of a message to its context: from the message to medium.

Fallon locates the beginning of propaganda as a technique in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Rhetoric established two-way communication, in which one tries to control others' ideas and actions through persuasion. Interactive communication changed to mass communication in 1440 with the invention of Gutenberg's printing press. The publication and distribution of Martin Luther's ninety-five theses in 1517 was the first important event of mass communication. However, Fallon locates the roots of modern propaganda in the Vatican's establishment of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the

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[1] The theoretical concepts were first proposed by Marshall McLuhan in his 1964 work *Understanding Media*, and the term "media ecology" was introduced by Neil Postman in 1968.

[22] Fraim, John. Review of *Propaganda 2.1: Understanding Propaganda in the Digital Age*, by Peter K. Fallon. *Ellul Forum* 72 (Fall 2023): 55–62. © John Fraim, CC BY-NC-ND.

Faith (1622). For nearly half a millennium, he says, "we rarely recognized propaganda except when associated with religious controversy" (xxv).

Fallon notes that propaganda at the beginning of the twentieth century was still deeply rooted in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and methods of persuasion. For almost two thousand years, the technique was little known outside the small group of scholars who could read Greek. But the ideas of *Rhetoric* were made available to English readers in 1909, when *Rhetoric* was first translated into English. The persuasive techniques of the book found greatest influence in the new disciplines of advertising, sales, and public relations. Aristotle's methods found a rebirth in an industry seeking to create a society of mass consumers.

Propaganda was further developed as a technique during World War I through the efforts of Edward Bernays (Freud's nephew), Harold Lasswell, George Creel, Walter Lippmann, and Edward Filene. Jacques Ellul, explicating this period, writes, "The aim of modern propaganda is no longer to modify ideas, but to provoke action."[2] For example, the Committee on Public Information (CPI) was created during World War I to influence US public opinion and provoke action in support of the war effort.

When Ellul wrote in 1962 that "the propagandist must utilize all of the technical means at his disposal—the press, radio, TV, movies, posters, meetings, door-to-door canvassing,"[3] he was describing what Woodrow Wilson intended when he assigned George Creel to create and head the CPI. In just over twenty-six months, from April 14, 1917, to June 30, 1919, the CPI used every medium available to create enthusiasm for the war effort and to enlist public support against the foreign and perceived domestic attempts to stop America's participation in the war. This was the first intentional use of the US government to covertly manipulate the minds of its citizens.

Propaganda began to shift away from persuasion in the middle of the twentieth century, with systems and information theory and the publication of Norbert Weiner's *Cybernetics* in 1948. With systems theory and cybernetics, propaganda was no longer an isolated message but a part of a feedback loop within a system containing inputs and outputs.

Two important components of information and systems theory are entropy and redundancy. Entropy is the degree of randomness or disorder in a system and is part of the natural tendency of all ordered systems to move toward disorder and chaos as energy dissipates. Redundancy is the opposite of entropy and is the rule-based part of a system that allows order and predictability. It is the part of a message not determined by the sender: repetition, amplification, parallel-channel reinforcement, and structural redundancy. Unlike entropy, redundancy is a human invention, developed to bring clarity to human communication. Entropy is an inevitable force of nature. In effect, redundancy is a set of techniques invented by humans to fight the forces of entropy.

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[2] Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (Vintage, 1973), 25.

[3] Ellul, *Propaganda*, 9.

Fallon follows the evolution of propaganda—under the influence of systems theory—toward its flowering into what he calls propaganda 2.0. In many ways, Fallon's understanding of modern propaganda centers on Ellul's work. Fallon opens his book by explaining that his goal is not to improve upon Ellul but rather to "conform Ellul's analysis to the contours of our digital landscape" (xiv). Ellul's model demands a rethinking of propaganda after the influence of systems theory and cybernetics.

Fallon gives a brief presentation of the key characteristics and categories of Ellul's analysis of propaganda: the conditions, necessity, and the psychological and sociopolitical effects. In *Propaganda*, Ellul challenges some common notions, such as that education is the best defense against propaganda. Ellul shows the opposite: education is a prerequisite for propaganda. It is apparent that by 1954 Ellul had become a believer in the systems thinking of Weiner. For Ellul, propaganda was systematic. The technological system strives to maintain balance, momentum, and structural integrity. Propaganda plays an integral part in the technological system, making it consistent and predictable (redundant) regarding human behavior, which by its nature tends to be inconsistent and unpredictable (entropic).

A key component of the new systematic propaganda was the creation of what Ellul called "total propaganda," which refers to his idea that mass society must always use all technological means at its disposal. Individual technologies address specific dimensions of a propagandized message in its own way, thereby giving the illusion of a diversity of messages. For example, movies can entertain us and appeal to our emotions by the symbolic evocation of mythic themes (bravery, patriotism, undying love, transformation through hardship, etc.), while televised sports provide credible support for the value of competition—a central, fundamental value of the technological society. News programming allows us to feel involved in the public life of society, to form opinions about current issues. Entertainment diverts our attention from the harsher realities of life in the technological society. Nevertheless, the apparent diversity is an illusion as each instance serves the singular purpose of creating a predictable human response through propaganda.

Propaganda 2.1 (The Twenty-First Century)

Ellul died in 1994, before the advent of propaganda 2.1. While the model for propaganda 2.0 in the twentieth century was the certainty of redundancy, the model for propaganda in the twenty-first century, the digital age, is the uncertainty of entropy. It is the age of decentralized information, in which we are exposed to diverse and often paradoxical points of view. It is the difference between centralized control of information based on a oneto-many model, and a completely unregulated, multidirectional, free flow of information.

One of the conditions of the modern world is anxiety. A main factor creating anxiety is the breakdown of the uniform narrative (or information redundancy) that sustained

propaganda 2.0. The model of systematic, total propaganda described by Jacques Ellul is a system of maximum redundancy. It is a system based on the mass manufacture and distribution of uniform bits of information, a system embodying a one-to-many flow of information. All media in the system of propaganda work together and reinforce one another.

In the digital age, people are exposed to diverse and often paradoxical points of view. As Fallon notes, propaganda 2.1 is a model of competing propagandas, of uncertainty and doubt. It is a model of seemingly infinite information and extremely high amounts of randomness and entropy.

Perhaps more than anything else, propaganda 2.1 is characterized by paradox. Marshall McLuhan, for example, saw this paradox in his observation that the world was becoming a "global village" through the propagation of media technologies.[4] The electronic global cloud of information tended to make humans seem special and distinct and at the same time reduce them to insignificance as one of a mass in the global village. Another example is that while there are far more opportunities for learning in such a connected, global environment, much of the new information encountered in the entropic system is questionable and false. Fallon says, "It becomes, then, our responsibility to sort through it, weigh it, evaluate it, and either accept it or reject it" (104).

Surprisingly, propaganda 2.1 retrieves the interactivity of propaganda 1.0. Individuals can become not only passive receivers of information, but active creators and distributors as well. If, as McLuhan insisted, media act as extensions of the senses, the internet represents the extinction of the senses across the globe. While the internet may be the global extension of mind, the mind is a complex and chaotic phenomenon. As Fallon observes, Anyone who promised that the Internet was going to release us from the oppressive mass manipulation of the id and the superego that we've lived under since the days of Edward Bernays and extend only the balanced ego was, purely and simply, lying to us. The same genomic mutation that released creative expression, intellectual ferment, and serious debate also opened the door to reactionary close-mindedness, blatant ignorance and racism, flame wars, lies, and bullying. (109)

The paradox of propaganda 2.1 is represented by two views of the internet: cyber-utopian and cyber-dystopian. Cyber-utopians have a religious zeal about the emerging cyber world. They believe the future will be increasingly better, because humans have digital tools to design and engineer a better world.

In the early years of the internet, the cyber-utopians were predominant. Perhaps the most influential preacher of the posthuman cyber-utopian gospel was Ray Kurzweil. He coined the term "Singularity" to describe "a future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed" (116). The Singularity represents the merger of our biological

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[4] Cf. *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) and *Understanding Media* (1964).

thinking and existence with our technology, resulting in a world that is human but transcends our biological limitations.

Other leading cyber-utopians were Nicholas Negroponte and Kevin Kelly, co-founder of *Wired* magazine. In his book *What Technology Wants*, Kelly not only champions machine intelligence but also anthropomorphizes the internet, referring to it as a sentient being, an "intelligent superorganism."[5] Kelly's view echoes that of the twentieth-century French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who believed evolution is a divinely directed process with a clear and unambiguous direction, of ever-increasing organization and complexity, whose fulfillment is the fulfillment of all creation—the Omega Point.

Cyber-dystopians are now dominant. They fear the technological future. One of these prophets of digital doom is Andrew Keen, a Silicon Valley insider who rethought his early fascination with the internet and now calls it "the greatest seduction since the dream of world communism" (124). Keen's 2015 book, *The Internet Is Not the Answer*, is a scathing critique of a world created by utopian speculation and optimism about the promises of the internet. Among his economic charges, he argues that the internet has become a central cause of the growing gulf between rich and poor and the hollowing out of the middle class. Rather than generating more jobs, the digital disruption is a principal cause of unemployment. Rather than creating more competition, it has created new immensely powerful monopolies such as Google and Amazon. Rather than creating transparency and openness, Keen says the internet is creating a panopticon of information-gathering and surveillance, by which users are commodified and sold. Rather than creating more democracy, it empowers the rule of the mob. Rather than fostering a renaissance, it has created a culture of voyeurism and narcissism.

Fallon notes that of all the recent cyber-utopian or dystopian literature, Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows* is perhaps the most trenchant and significant, and certainly the one most grounded in empirical science. Carr relies on recent studies in neuroscience to support his argument that the internet is changing the structure of our brains, damaging them. This growing body of research supports the argument that the internet threatens to undo much of the development that reading generates in the human brain.

Fallon goes on to provide a tour of some of the phenomena of this new media landscape. He discusses such subjects as privacy and social media, the freeing of information, the influence of WikiLeaks, and characters such as Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning, and Edward Snowden. He discusses the net-neutrality movement and the movement to nationalize the internet and the electromagnetic spectrum. He contends that the FCC's pre-1984 definition of public interest needs to be restored.

Near the end of his examination of propaganda 2.1, Fallon calls for more deep reading. If we are to be responsible citizens in the era of propaganda 2.1, he argues, we must know how to think more critically. Information is important in the construction of knowledge, but information alone does not constitute knowledge. Paraphrasing the

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[5] Kevin Kelly, *What Technology Wants* (Penguin, 2011).

French polymath Henri Poincaré, "Knowledge is built of information in the same way a house is built of bricks; but an accumulation of bits of information is no more knowledge than a pile of bricks is a house" (163). In effect, there has to be a specific structure or organization of information, as well as a context within which to fit those pieces of information, before one has knowledge. Without these, all we have is profoundly entropic noise.

In the concluding chapter, Fallon articulates a profound ambivalence about the internet and other digital technologies in propaganda 2.1. On the whole, he finds himself more skeptical than enthusiastic about the digital revolution. He places himself in the camp of cyber-dystopians. He worries that the internet is a

> Trojan horse that ransacks our most precious and secret belongings when we welcome it into the privacy of our homes; or that we're becoming gadgets, mere appendages of the technologies that ought to be serving us; or that the easy retrieval of concise snippets of decontextualized information is hurting our ability to think deeply and critically; or that, rather than liberating us, the internet is morphing into a tool of government surveillance and oppression; or that the chaotic and constantly changing nature of digital information is destroying whatever remnants of a unifying and coherent narrative our culture ever had. (166)

While Fallon claims his book was written as an addendum to Ellul's *Propaganda* to "update and adjust the ideas found in that book for the twenty-first century" (xiii), he is also greatly influenced by McLuhan. In fact, the crux of Fallon's investigations is the synthesis of the contributions of McLuhan and Ellul, namely McLuhan's invisible environment of medium and Ellul's all-encompassing technique. An important question Fallon raises but does not answer is whether propaganda 2.1 might best be understood through the lens of media ecology and Ellul's thought.

I find it immensely hopeful that the elusive subject of propaganda is being viewed from the perspectives of media ecology by many in the International Jacques Ellul Society. Fallon, likewise, calls us to a new understanding of propaganda found in the confluence of Ellul's and McLuhan's ideas.

Review of Jacques Ellul and *The Technological Society* in the 21st Century⁽²³⁾

David Lovekin

Helena M. Jerónimo, José Luís Garcia, Carl Mitcham, eds. *Jacques Ellul and the Technological Society in the 21st Century*. Springer, 2013.

In June of 2011, an international bilingual conference, "Rethinking Jacques Ellul and the Technological Society in the 21st Century," was held at the Instituto de Ciências Sociais of the University of Lisbon, Portugal, to honor the legacy of Jacques Ellul. This volume contains some of the papers from that conference, which was hosted by Helena Jerónimo and José Luís, who provided the chapter "Fukushima."

Seventeen essays are grouped into three sections: "Civilization of Technique," "Autonomous Technology," and "Reason and Revelation." Section one, largely theoretical, examines the nature of technical reason and its effects on language, on culture, on productivity, on the nature of human freedom, and on the environment. Section two considers propaganda and truth, the cyber world, the out-of-control technological ordering, and its environmental impacts. Section three investigates Ellul's thought in relation to theological, ecumenical, and mythical sensibility. Ellul's thought is wide and deep and speaks to a variety of mentalities and socialities awake to the human condition so greatly challenged. The question of human freedoms and determinisms are at stake. Ellul's *The Technological Society* (1964) was a translation of the French *La Technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* (1954). Technology was humanity's wager, bet, stake of the twentieth century. The wager continues.

In the lead essay, Carl Mitcham examines the reception *The Technological Society* had in the United States that exceeded the interest in France. Ellul's critique of technology appeared along with the critiques of Karl Jaspers, Lewis Mumford, José Ortega y Gasset, Sigfried Giedion, and Martin Heidegger that flourished between the 1930s and 1950s. Criticisms of technology were in the air. The Europeans took to task the effect technology had on human life, culture, and tradition that resonated with Marxism. Americans were not primarily moved except with the critiques of Herbert

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Marcuse. The American transcendentalists and naturalists such as Emerson, Thoreau, Muir, and Rachel Carson offered a critique of technology in relation to nature and the environment that is still alive and that provided an audience receptive to Ellul.

Though influenced by Marx, Ellul hoped to do with "technique" what Marx had done with "capital." Ellul's critique provided a holistic view of the "technical phenomenon" that transformed "technical operations" into an "organizing logos" (22) and that had taken over human activity in all dimensions—political, economic, religious, social, etc., with an emphasis on "etc." This *logos* moved through rationality, artificiality, automatism, self-augmentation, monism, universalism, and autonomy, what Ellul calls the "characterology" of the technical phenomenon (22).

Ellul's *La Technique* had been in print in France for ten years before its English translation as *The Technological Society* in 1964 with the support of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara, California, founded by Robert Hutchins, former president of the University of Chicago. Initially, in 1961 a reading group was formed at the urging of Aldous Huxley to discuss *La Technique*, and member John Wilkinson decided to translate it with the Center's support. Distinguished sociologist Robert K. Merton provided a foreword recommending it. Its popularity spread among social critics of many stripes.

After World War II, American exceptionalism arose with the praise and worship of technology. The consumer society was in full bloom. Ellul also attracted leftist Protestant religious groups. Jim Holloway of the Committee of Southern Churchmen and editor of *Katallagate: Be Reconciled* was influential. *The Presence of the Kingdom* was translated in 1951 and a special issue of *Katallagete* was published in 1970 with essays by Christopher Lasch and Julius Lester. Will Campbell and Jim Holloway continued to rally the religious in response to civil rights and anti-nuclear forces.

I have simplified Mitcham's detailed account to his conclusion that, currently, Ellul appeals to Christian Critical Social Theorists and Secular Political Demythologizers. Ellul has sparked no mass movements, Mitcham concludes, but, as Frédéric Rognon notes, Ellul's thought has influenced the spiritual and intellectual journeys of many individuals, and this is appropriate: Ellul, "faithful to the Kierkegaardian matrix, spoke to each individual as a unique person irreducible to another, in order to lead her or him to make free, responsible existential decisions" (187). This volume reflects the engaged thought of many individuals drawn to the Ellulian task. For reasons of time and space, I select three essays that continue and expand my current research and that also support the dialectic within and between Ellul's studies.

In "On Dialectic," Ellul insists that his work be read dialectically: theology and sociology are in harmonious conflict, which is a contradiction but a necessary one. Necessity for Ellul is the negative necessary for a positive, which is a temporary synthesis (292–97). Hegel's and Marx's dialectics (in Ellul's view) fail in positing syntheses but are valuable in identifying contradictions from which we learn (294–97). History is replete with failures, which Ellul chronicles theologically and sociologically, but from which he concludes:

If the technological system is total then this factor has to exist outside it. But only the transcendent can be outside it. For me, then, the transcendent is, in the concrete situation in which technology has put us, the necessary condition for the continuation of life, the unfolding of history, simply the existence of man as man. This transcendent, however, cannot be a self-existing one. It has to be a revealed transcendent if man is to have reason and opportunity to launch upon a dialectical course in spite of the autonomy and universality of technology. [...] I am simply pointing to the unavoidable result of the twofold flow of my research, sociological and theological.[1]

George Ritzer, in "The Technological Society: Social Theory, McDonaldization and the Prosumer," questions the role of reason in Ellul's analysis, which Ritzer takes to be too totalizing. Daniel Cérézuelle, in "Technological Acceleration and the 'Ground Floor of Civilization,' " identifies technology as a force that weakens fundamental levels of communication and symbolization that are basic to human life. Langdon Winner, in "Propaganda and Dissociation from Truth," understands propaganda as essential in a technological society that, beyond appearance—and because of appearance—is fragmented and fragile. Politics was, for Ellul, the grand illusion, devoid of a true dialectic but drowning in the ephemera masquerading as necessary. No dialectical launch there. Fox News is shown as paradigmatic to a malaise of funneling falsehoods into a sleep of reason, the procrustean bed of technique. I will suggest that Ellul's notion of technical rationality is essentially reifying, in turning concepts into objects and objects into concepts, canceling a sense of an "other," an energizing negative. Symbolization requires an "other" to do its work, making culture and self-knowledge possible in the fundamental symbols of myth, language, and science as dialectical constructions requiring the negative, the other. Technical rationality is inimical to all three, although it is made possible by them; these origins are denied or forgotten. Propaganda first and foremost has to convince a populace of the superiority of politics, supported by technique, with images silencing words. I hope to make these essays speak to one another as they have spoken to me.

I

Ritzer's theory of "McDonaldization" is an extension of Weber's theory of rationalization. Ritzer criticizes Ellul for not openly dealing with Weber, a fault that could be laid at many feet; Jonathan Swift's battle of the books is never-ending. Ritzer chooses efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control as explaining his version of technology's hold. Efficiency becomes a fixed goal above others, such as tradition

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[1] Jacques Ellul, "On Dialectic," in *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Clifford G. Christians and Jay M. VanHook (University of Illinois Press, 1982), 308.

and a respect for the variety of human interactions in a social space, a workplace. Predictability and exactness follow, in the reduction of procedures to rules. Calculability emphasizes quantity over quality. And control results in a subordination of humans to tools and objects to be manipulated. These could have been suggested by Ellul's characterology, and Ritzer acknowledges a similarity.

However, Ellul is chided for not seeing the positive sides of each; sometimes it is good to calculate, to be efficient and predictable, and to be in control (38–40). Further Ritzer is "maddened" at what he takes Ellul's tendency to reify and totalize (41–43). Ritzer thinks this is a modernist's problem. I think, modernism aside, that Ritzer does not quite understand technique as an intentionality, a subject before an object that reifies and totalizes in the presences of "otherness." Ritzer writes: "[Ellul] was critical of the fact that in the pre-modern era there 'was no great variety of means for attaining a desired result, and there was almost no attempt to perfect means which did exist' " (36). Ellul was not critical of the pre-moderns and their means as operations (which Ritzer does not clarify) but did regard the perfection of efficient means as essentially technological, wherein lies the problem and the beginning of reification and totalization and the meaning of rationalization as it extended through the "characterology." Curiously, later he writes that Ellul claims that earlier societies were free of technique (42–43) and that Ellul thought it would be better to return to an earlier time (43). Ellul makes no such claim or hope for a return. Ritzer sees Ellul unwilling to elaborate on what he means by rationality although he gives it pride of place in his characterology and should have described more fully the distinctions that fall within various techniques (40–46).

Ellul is clear that all cultures have techniques, understood as technical operations, things that are done, such as typing on a keyboard, chipping an arrowhead, dressing a deer, and brushing one's teeth.[2] Traditions, aesthetics, moral tendencies, pragmatic concerns are transformed with the appearance of rational judgment, in the quest for absolute efficiency to rid the contradictions rife in the eyes of science and mathematics. Nature and traditions are no longer imitated. The human does not fly by flapping arms and imitating birds but by applying Bernoulli's law explaining air pressure. Any operation can appear before technical consciousness and judgment to perfect and to conceptualize. There can be a technique of brushing one's teeth, of swimming, of all measure of exercise, which was understood well by the Nazis, who organized youth camps, or by concerned parents. Technology or technique may be either good or evil. Below, I have included in brackets a phrase that Wilkinson left out of his fine translation.

> In technique, whatever its aspect or 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 systemization, division of labor, creation of standards, production norms and

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[2] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (Knopf, 1964), 19– 22.

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.[3]

Ritzer rightly warns of the irrationality of the rational, which technical rationality seeks to obviate. Technical rationality is irrational, Ellul showed, as the principles of logic and calculations of all kinds co-opt the cultural and historical traditions that made science and mathematics possible. Where would Descartes have been in his search for the clear and distinct without his "evil genius," who ushered in a transcendent but all-present God? In Ellul's definition of rationality[4] above, note the dialectic between word and image, subject and object, mind and body. The divisions and contradictions have to be present to be canceled. Also, the tension between the rational and the irrational belies their conflation. Ellul's history of technique was the history of human failure to become God-like. In the pre-technological world, a failed tool required a more skillful user. The tool of applied reason to be worked by anyone turns the worker into anyone, a mere A defined by being a not-A, which is what the technical mentality desires: the proliferation of technical phenomena follows. A concept is never its object or the original awareness that brought it about. Perfection is beyond reach, and knowing that takes it to another level. Without transcendentals such as beauty, goodness, and truth, what would perfection mean: one more blip on the screen? Artificial calculations with unpredictable results, independent of any transcendental judgment wherever they take root, are still artificial human attempts, regardless of whatever deified mantle such as efficiency they might wear. The totality of method is all there is: reason divides and divides and seeks syntheses, but the true evades all the specific attempts to reveal it. Evasions are part of the true. A-to-the-right or before-A will always be not-A. What A is not, remains. The scandal of logic is the lack of proof for its efficacy. Current mathematicians of the Gödelian stripe are wary of any attempt to absolutize mathematics. The uncertainty principles, like death, hang over us all, prosumers or not. Production, no matter how it is spun, is still not consumption in an ordinary sense. If we define production in the technological sense of nothing made by no one for nobodies, it might apply with no worries about sense.

To become aware of something is to enter a world of intention; to become aware of that awareness is to inhabit another space and time. The two will never be identical. The one requires the other in a dialectic. Ellul's hope was to awaken the sleeper on the procrustean bed of technique and to stop the loss of limbs and disembodiment

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[3] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 78–79.

[4] See my discussion on technical rationality in David Lovekin, *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Lehigh University Press, 1991), 157–76.

under the gaze of technical intention. Ellul's characterology is an exploration of the physiognomy of technical intention, allowing the reader to ask: is it so, or no? Meat on the fire pit is not the meat on the stove, which requires an energy source and techniques to devise it and then to deal with the resultant pollution. Techniques at the restaurant or at the drive-in usher in difference as well, requiring roads, vehicles, insurance of all kinds, and methods and propaganda for influencing those who have left home that it's OK to eat crappy food they did not make. They can look at pictures of food on the wall or in the menu and can bide their time with televisions and smartphones.

Ritzer's explorations more finely tuned would be welcome. Techniques can be both good and evil. Choosing crappy food, as long as it is a choice, is part of freedom's purview, as is the determining of "crappy." Ritzer's hope of meaningful engagement occurring with internet expansions, and of finding a welcoming space between the islands of McDonalds-like prosumption, might be the hope of failed dialectical reason or a fulfillment of the hope of technical reason (44–46). We can wait and see, but likely the image triumphs.

II

Daniel Cérézuelle notes Ellul's worry that technology de-symbolizes, and he draws upon Karl Marx, Ivan Illich, and Ernst Cassirer to further Ellul's case. Worrisome is the war on what Braudel called the "ground floor of society" (64). Sociologists and economists typically ignore the place below monetary culture and material commodification (64). This "vernacular economy" provides behavior patterns, know-how, norms, and values—in short, complex social rules—that are symbolically acquired (64). If this realm is not ignored, it is typically considered inexhaustible, to Cérézuelle's concern. Why is there so much poverty, inequality, and misery in developed countries? The welfare state can provide only material comfort, leaving aside the spiritual dimension, the symbolic realm.

The symbol makes culture possible through helping to develop a sense of self-autonomy and emotional expression, a feeling of embodiment in space and time through traditions and rituals and transpersonal interaction, and an awareness of limits that enable civility in word and deed. Technology inhibits these sensibilities, turning workers into anybodies, emphasizing the values of monetization and commodification over individual worth, disembodying the space and time beneath technical life that make life itself possible, and accelerating time needed to obtain social and personal skills such as nutrition. Making and acquiring symbols takes time and space. Symbols are a spiritual matter that lose ground in the energized materialism of technique. According to Cassirer and Ellul, symbols mediate the human between the oppositions of the natural world and the social world, for the self to become. The technological world poses the issue of opposition as a place of means without ends, which is not to say that

oppositions such as pollution do not assert themselves. Even scientists and technicians, from time to time, have to do the dance of cleaning house.

On the ground floor, essential symbolic learning begins. A mastery of body in time is fundamental, along with communication skills that prefigure an emotional self-discipline and an acceptance of law and authority. In all cases, an "other" is required. As Cérézuelle states, "I distance myself from my immediate experience and feeling in order to express them in words through the conventions of language" (65). This ability opens to the realm of the possible. Note that words as symbols refer, distance, and integrate, something symbols can't do in a technological society, Ellul will insist.[5] After the industrial revolution, the depletion of nonrenewable resources is a concern, but so is the weakening of symbolic resources. Cérézuelle lists anxieties over a lack of time and money, over a general decline of polite behavior and a respect for authority, and over a rise in violence, together with a disregard for maintaining dwellings and nutritional well-being, as evidence of an erosion of the ground floor (68). Material causes are suggested: accelerated social change, monetization and commodification of daily life, and a replacement of symbolic forms by technical planning, methodologies, and procedures. Some intellectuals deny the loss of symbolic life as a problem and instead see great hope in technological advance. Worry not about limits, they insist. Let technology cure the problems it has created (70). But the ground floor can't be ignored. As in the above consideration of technical rationality that aborts in endless advance or in the empty exhortations of efficiency, tangible goals beyond repetitions and instances must be obtained and maintained somewhere. That somewhere is culture, Cassirer would urge.

Cérézuelle comments that the symbol is a creation not from necessity but from a specifically human force "that elicits the commitment of the self in the world in a way that is emotional, sensual, and carnal as well as intellectual" (71). And further:

> Outside of this form, [...] matter has no meaning. Meaning is first; the symbolic form gives a easing to the elements of reality; it organizes action and knowledge. This is true not only for scientific knowledge but also for technical action and the culture of daily life. The utilitarian approach to technology, which is misleading insofar as it assesses technology in terms of objective needs, naturally elicits a technical response to associated ways of thinking. (70)

The symbol in its transcendence from the material world opens to the realm of possibility and choice. Cérézuelle states, "Symbols are the condition of freedom: Humans can choose only because they can symbolically consider several possibilities that have different meaning and values" (65). A is never simply not not-A. The realm of metaphor and contradiction is the beginning of a narrative and perhaps of thought

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[5] Jacques Ellul, *The Empire of Non-Sense: Art in the Technological Society*, trans. Michael Johnson

itself. For Ellul, God is both omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, and also enters history, suffers human misery, and limits his power.[6] God's power is present in self-limitation.

By distinction, the human person works in the world of the finite that is defined by an absolute that is present in human failure but encouraged by possibility, by the imagination, memory, and the capacity to negate. Even God is a being defined by what it is not. Following Ellul, I would suggest that distinction between words and images is a clue to understanding any absolute. The apparent creativity of science and technology depends upon the very factors that technology abhors.

III

To read and to hear dialectically is to be dialectically. "To be is to resist," Ellul might say. The ground floor of being takes place in relation to seeing and hearing, in oppositions intertwined.

A sound behind is greeted with a turn of the head. Sight—that which is before me as a sensuous presence—wants to locate what is behind, Together they contribute a fullness that is weakened in the technological society, Ellul states.[7] We can't see contradiction—a blue being not-blue—but we can say it, write it, and think it, with some struggle. But any word does not stop me from looking. To the contrary. The more we hear, the more we might look, in fact. "Fact" comes from *factum*, which means "made." And making means bringing what is not yet into being. This is a sense of making that I would offer as pre-technological, a sense of ourselves as a maker or a made. Does looking have the same effect?

Langdon Winner, in his discourse on propaganda, might say no. We are a culture addicted to images, and, quoting media critic Danny Schecter: "The more we see, the less we know" (110). But there are also words. Winner asks us to consider the Fox News slogan "We report, you decide." Those who watch Fox News do not want to know, and this Fox News clearly decides. Ordinary language fails. The viewers want to believe, Winner suggests (103–10). Words typically invite doubt and discussions, but words or images turned into clichés do not. Ironically, the word "cliché" entered into English as a printer's dab, which made a sound as it was pounded into a surface.[8] The other slogan, "Fair and balanced," is a no-brainer. If that were true, the hardcores would not watch.

In *The Political Illusion*, Ellul reveals how politics as debate and disagreement no longer exists. Instead, images and clichés dominate.[9] A true *sensus communis*, a "ground floor," is gone. To regain one, Winner suggests, we need to return to face-to-

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and David Lovekin (Papadakis, 2014), 30–31.

[6] Ellul, "On Dialectic," 299.

[7] Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Eerdmans, 1985), 9–11. See my discussion of this in *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness*, 207–14.

[8] See *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness*, 207–208.

[9] Jacques Ellul, *The Political Illusion*, trans. Konrad Kellen (Knopf, 1972), 40, 219.

face discourse, in words owned and shared by individuals, for and in a common good, beyond the realm of technique (113). And I think all Ellulians would agree.

The variety and the depth of the papers in this volume are remarkable. As Ellul said at the beginning of his bibliography of *The Technological Society*, books were meant to be read—not just consulted. That is why there is a "we" of thinkers who are puzzling beliefs and the possibilities of seeking a true that is a whole.

I would like to thank Drs. David Gill and Erik Nordenhaug for their editorial and spiritual assistances.

About the Contributors

Mark D. Baker is professor emeritus of mission and theology at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary. He previously was a missionary in Honduras for ten years. He has a PhD in theology from Duke University and an ma in New Testament from New College Berkeley. His books include *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* and *Centered-Set Church: Discipleship and Community Without Judgmentalism.*

John Frame holds a BA from UCLA and a JD from Loyola Law School and has had a career as a marketing executive and entrepreneur. He is the author of books, essays, and short stories on diverse subjects, including symbolism, media, music, film, photography, and social criticism. He is a board member of *New Explorations: Studies in Culture and Communication*, a journal founded by Marshall McLuhan in 1953.

Jason Hudson is a pastor at Redeemer Church in northern Kentucky. He holds a PhD in theology from the University of Manchester. His writing explores the work of twentieth-century critics of technology, with a particular focus on the intersections of Jacques Ellul and Wendell Berry and their implication for Christian ethics and ecology. He wants to be faithful to this ethic by cultivating the two-acre portion of the planet with which he has been temporarily entrusted.

David Lovekin is emeritus professor of philosophy, Hastings College, Nebraska. He is the author of *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* and co-editor of *Political Illusions and Reality: Engaging the Prophetic Insights of Jacques Ellul.*

Carl Mitcham is professor emeritus of humanities, arts, and social sciences at Colorado School of Mines, and international visiting professor of philosophy of technology at Renmin University of China. His most recent book is *Steps Toward a Philosophy of Engineering* (2020).

Charles Ringma is professor emeritus, Regent College, Vancouver; honorary research fellow, Trinity College Queensland, Brisbane; and professor in Asian Theologial Seminary's PhD program, Metro Manila. His latest book is *In the Midst of Much-Doing: Cultivating a Missional Spirituality* (Langham Global, 2023). This article is substantially taken from that book.

About the International Jacques Ellul Society

The International Jacques Ellul Society, founded in 2000 by former students of Ellul, links scholars, students, and others who share an interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912–94), longtime professor at the University of Bordeaux. Along with promoting new publications related to Ellul and producing the *Ellul Forum*, the Society sponsors a biennial conference. IJES is the anglophone sister society of the francophone Association internationale Jacques Ellul. The objectives of IJES are threefold:

Preserving a Heritage. The Society seeks to preserve and disseminate Ellul's literary and intellectual heritage through republication, translation, and secondary writings. **Extending a Critique**. Ellul is best known for his penetrating critique of *la technique*, of the character and impact of technology on our world. The Society seeks to extend his social critique particularly concerning technology.

Researching a Hope. Ellul was not only a social critic but also a theologian and activist in church and community. The Society seeks to extend his theological, biblical, and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom. IJES is a nonprofit organization, fully reliant on membership fees and donations from supporters worldwide. For more information or to become a member, please visit ellul.org.

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marked, but it could do with having more sub-headings marked. Quote indents are
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