

The Ancient Conflict between *Techne* and *Metis*

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2018 Ellul Conference Banquet Talk

(Abstract)

In his discussion of I and II Kings, Ellul focused on the prophetic narratives of Elijah and Elisha to the neglect of the royal chronicle all around those narratives. In his discussion, moreover, he reads (as I am wont to do) with a heavy accent on theology (with echoes of Karl Barth) and the centrality of God for these narratives. In his exposition, however, I will contend that Ellul overstates the theological claim of the prophetic narratives because he failed to consider the remarkable and intentional juxtaposition of the prophetic narratives and the royal chronicle, a juxtaposition that is central to how the books of Kings are shaped and to be read. More likely the prophetic narratives assume and operate with a different epistemology that is grounded in the very different sociology of rural subsistence peasants that contrasts with the epistemology and sociology of the royal elites. The agents in the royal chronicle (the kings), as every “state,” seeks to override the epistemology and socio-economic claims of subsistence peasants, an epistemology and claims that they do not understand or appreciate.

It is certain, of course, that YHWH, the God featured in the prophetic narratives, is allied with the peasants. My inclination, however, is to see that the agency of YHWH is much less central to these narratives than Ellul proposed. Much more central in these narratives is the capacity of these prophetic figures to operate with and play upon the wisdom of the peasants (*metis*) in a way that bamboozles royal *techne*. In the interest of this inclination I will consider in turn the narratives of II Kings 4:1-7, 5:1-27, 6:8-23, and 6:24-7:20. In each case the greater force for life is beyond the reach or ken of the royal administrator; it is thus a force for life that eludes royal administration but that effectively engages the peasant community in transformative ways when properly mobilized.

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June 27, 2018