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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.

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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.

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Editor's Letter

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.

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"Editor's Letter." *Ellul Forum* 63 (Spring 2019): 3.

God's Time:
Kierkegaard, Qohelet, and Ellul's Reading of Ecclesiastes

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 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.

Rollison, Jacob Marques. "God's Time: Kierkegaard, Qohelet, and Ellul's Reading of Ecclesiastes." *Ellul Forum* 63 (Spring 2019): 5–15.

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 *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 life-work 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 dialogue 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 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.

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.

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 distinction 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.

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.

Notes

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 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 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.
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*.
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.
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 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.
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."
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

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

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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]

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.

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]

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:

> [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:

> 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 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 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.

Notes

1. A word about terminology is in order: Ellul primarily speaks of *la technique,* which is variously 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.
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.
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.
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.
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).
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).
33. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, xxxii.
34. Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 116.

Celui dans lequel je mets tout mon cœur

Patrick Troude-Chastenet

Jacques Ellul avait-il une préférence parmi ses très nombreux 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 tremblement et ne puis m'avancer ici qu'avec crainte »)[4] et de Karl Barth (l'enfer reste une « possible impossibilité »).

Troude-Chastenet, Patrick. "Celui dans lequel je mets tout mon cœur." *Ellul Forum* 63 (Spring 2019): 27–32.

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 → espérance, espérer. 2. Sentiment qui porte à espérer → espérance. *Etre plein d'espoir.*
>
> **Espérance** 1. Sentiment qui fait entrevoir comme probable la réalisation de ce que l'on désire → assurance, certitude, confiance, conviction, croyance, espoir. 2. Ce sentiment appliqué à un objet déterminé → 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 tous les domaines comme seule finalité légitime indépendamment de toute autre considération, ne laisse aucune place à l'espérance. Or nous avons un cruel besoin d'espérance pour 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].

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 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].

Notes

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.
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.
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.
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.
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

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 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").

Troude-Chastenet, Patrick. "The One in Which I Put All My Heart," trans. Christian Roy. *Ellul Forum* 63 (Spring 2019): 33–38.

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 → espérance, espérer. 2. A feeling that leads one to hope → 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 → assurance, certitude, confiance, conviction, croyance, espoir. 2. This feeling applied to a specific object → 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 in cruel need of that kind of hope in order to survive. On the other hand, we 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 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: "To be able to hope in what does not deceive, one should first despair of all that deceives."[16]

Notes

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).
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.

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-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.
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

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

Lloyd, Zachary. Review of *Political Illusion and Reality*, ed. David W. Gill and David Lovekin. *Ellul Forum* 63 (Spring 2019): 39–41.

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

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

Roberts, Alastair. Review of *Our Battle for the Human Spirit*, by Willem H. Vanderburg. *Ellul Forum* 63 (Spring 2019): 43–45.

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 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 oppor-

tunity 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

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,

Lovekin, David. Review of *The Burnout Society*, by Byung-Chul Han. *Ellul Forum* 63 (Spring 2019): 47–53.

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 without 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, 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] 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.

Notes

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.
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.

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.

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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.

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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.

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