The Ellul Forum

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

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Technique, Ellul & the Food Industry

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For the Critique of Technological Civilization

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From the Editor

Jacques Ellul was dismissed from his university position by the Vichy government during World War II. He fled to the countryside with his wife Yvette and out of necessity became a farmer for four years. His neighbors graciously taught him the basics. He raised sheep and grew potatoes and corn. His wife raised chickens and rabbits; and they had a vegetable garden. Many farms that resembled Ellul's 70 years ago are today one crop or one animal agricultural factories. In Ellul's lifetime there was increasing industrialization of farming and he occasionally used agricultural examples in his writings on technique. If he were alive today it is hard to imagine him not having much more to say about the pervasive role of technique in the food industry. In this issue of the *Ellul Forum* we seek to do that sort of reflection. I have asked three practitioners to look at the food industry today through the lens of Ellul's writing on technique.

Each author stands in a different place and thus reports different things to us on his view through this lens. Robb Davis writes from the perspective of having worked internationally in community development –specifically in the areas of public health and nutrition. He challenges us to reflect on what the goal of the food industry should be and how technique's focus on means undermines that goal. Randy Ataide worked in the fresh tree fruit business for twenty years. He has been involved across the spectrum of this agribusiness including, growing, packing, storing, selling and distributing fruit. He recounts for us what he saw and learned by bringing Ellul into conversation with his experience in the food industry, and how Ellul influenced his business practices. After completing college and a master's degree in New Testament Matt Regier and his wife Tia bought a 20 acre farm in Kansas. Unlike the other two authors he had read little of Ellul's work, but was very familiar with the works of Wendell Berry. I asked Matt to read Ellul as he worked the land and cared for animals this summer, and in his essay bring Ellul into conversation with Berry.

The three articles, through echoing some of the same themes and through applying Ellul's thought in distinctly different ways, point to the great importance and rich possibilities of taking a critical look at our food industry through the lens of Ellul's writing.

We are also grateful to have Dr. Raymond Downing's brief essay on "Ellul and Medicine" in this issue. Ray is a physician working in Kenya. Ray's book *Life & Death in America* was reviewed in a recent issue of the *Ellul Forum.* Food and health care are not unrelated topics!

Mark D. Baker, Guest Editor

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Our Food System Equation

by Robb Davis

Our Food System Equation:
Inattention to Ends + The Imperative of Technique =
Prodigious Food Producing Capacity *and* Food Insecurity for Hundreds of Millions

by Robb Davis

Robb Davis has over 20 years of experience in international development in the field of maternal and child health and nutrition. He has worked for World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, and Freedom from Hunger. He was the executive director of the Mennonite Central Committee. He currently lives in Davis, California and directs support services at a local non-profit working with churches to face the challenges of homelessness. He also works two days per week at a local organic farm. Robb holds a Master's degree in Public Health and a Ph.D. in Population Dynamics from the Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health.

Inattention to Ends:

The first enormous fact that springs from our civilization is that today everything has become means. There are no more ends. We no longer know towards what we are heading. We have forgotten our collective goals. We have enormous means and we put into place prodigious machines in order to arrive nowhere . .. (1) .

The Imperative of Technique:

[Reason] . . . takes account of the fixed end of technique--efficiency. It notes what every means devised is capable of accomplishing and selects the ones that are the most efficient. . . . Thus the multiplicity of means is reduced to one: the most efficient (2)

Prodigious Food Producing Capacity:

Earl "Rusty" Butz, Richard Nixon's second secretary of agriculture . . . revolutionized American agriculture, helping to shift the food chain onto the foundation of cheap corn. Butz made no secret of his agenda: He exhorted farmers to plant their fields "fencerow to fencerow" and advised them to "get big or get out . . ." [He] began replacing the New Deal system of supporting prices through loans, government grain purchases, and land idling with a new system of direct payments to farmers. . . .

[T]he new subsidies encouraged farmers to sell their corn at any price, since the government would make up the difference . . . Instead of supporting farmers, the government was now subsidizing every bushel of corn a farmer could grow--and American farmers pushed to go flat out could grow a hell of a lot of corn (3) .

Food Insecurity for Hundreds of Millions:

Progress was made in reducing chronic hunger in the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s. For the past decade hunger has been on the rise (4) .

FAO estimates that 1.02 billion people are under-nourished worldwide in 2009. This represents more hungry people than at any time since 1970 and a worsening of the unsatisfactory trends that were present even before the economic crisis. The increase in food insecurity is not a result of poor crop harvest . . (5).

Our Food System: What Ends?

As the foregoing quotes reveal, we live in a world that simultaneously produces an extraordinary amount of food and sees a billion human beings facing food insecurity (which is not equivalent, but related, to the concept of chronic hunger). The reasons for this level of food insecurity are complex but an understanding of the pillars of food security reveals how it can exist in a world in which enough food is produced. Food security, according to the World Health Organization, is a function of food being physically *available* where people live, of people having sufficient financial resources to *access* food and of their ability to actually *utilize* the food they consume. This last point concerns whether a person's body can adequately absorb the nutrition from food s/he eats if that person has parasites or other diseases that impede absorption.

Increasing food security, then, requires that a complex set of factors be present within communities and households of which increasing food quantity (globally) is only one. This points to an initial problem in our current global food system: it is largely focused on the "end" of producing more food. In itself this end is not bad but is not really an "end" at all. Rather it is a means to another end--food security.

The theme of "ends" runs through much of Jacques Ellul's writing and he summarized its relation to *technique* in a series of interviews with William Vanderburg of the Canadian Broadcasting Network*:*

Technology (6) *is the extreme development of means. Everything in the technological world is a means and only a means, while the ends have practically disappeared. Technology does not develop toward attaining something. It develops because the world of means has developed, and we are witnessing an extremely rapid causal growth. At the same time, there is a suppression of meaning, the meaning of existence, the meaning of "why I am alive," as technology so vastly develops its power. (1981, p. 50)*

The fact that our industrial food system is not oriented towards the "end" of increasing human food security, leads to a number of pernicious effects, one of which is the use of food for other "ends" besides enabling human flourishing. The commodification of food is a simple fact of our industrial food system and places food at the mercy of global trade and markets. So a natural question might be "what are the 'ends' to which markets are oriented?"

William Cavanaugh (2008) suggests this response:

In the ideology of the free market . . . [t]here are no common ends to which our desires are directed. In the absence of such ends, all that remains is the sheer arbitrary power of one will against another. Freedom thus gives way to the aggrandizement of power and the manipulation of will and desire by the greater power . . .

Where there are no objectively desirable ends, and the individual is told to choose his or her own ends, then choice itself becomes the only thing that is inherently good. When there is a recession, we are told to buy things to get the economy moving; what we buy makes no difference. All desires, good and bad, melt into the one overriding imperative to consume, and we all stand under the one sacred canopy of consumption for its own sake.

That the market does not provide a sense of the ends to which our desires should be directed comes as no surprise, but what Cavanaugh argues is that many economists--and others--consider even questioning the ends of market exchanges as meaningless. However, if markets cannot assure a reasonable allocation of a commodity necessary for human survival (as the quotes at the beginning of this article suggest they do not) then the question of ends in relation to those markets would seem very relevant indeed.

In the 2009 documentary film *Food, Inc.,* which critiques the industrial food system, Richard Lobb of the US National Chicken Council says this about our industrial food system and its highly concentrated and intensive production approach: "What these systems of intensive production accomplish is to produce a lot of food, on a small amount of land at a very affordable price. Somebody explain to me, what's wrong with that?"

Presumably, what is wrong is the confusion of means and ends implied in his argument. Is the end of our food system to produce more--more cheaply (note: Loob has a very narrow definition of the true cost of our food system which we examine below concerning sustainability)? Or, is the end of our food system to assure that everyone has sufficient food of sufficient quality to lead a healthy life? The *Economist* (2009), in an article concerning the prospects for increased food prices and future food crises, would seem to argue along the same lines as Loob:

It may be too late to avoid another bout of price rises. Despite a global recession and the largest grain harvest on record in 2008, food prices are heading up again. Still, countries have a brief window of opportunity in which to set long-term policy goals without being distracted by panic measures. They need to do two things: invest in the productive capacity of agriculture and improve the operation of food markets. . . . Boosting world food production without gobbling up land and water will also require technology to play a larger role in the next 40 years than it has in the past 40, when people have been more or less living off the gains of the Green Revolution. Technology means a lot of things: drip irrigation, no-till farming, more efficient ways to use fertilisers and kill pests. But one way of raising yields stands out: developing genetically modified (GM) crops that, for example, use less water. (p. 14)

While the writer raises two critical elements concerning food insecurity, dealing with both the question of availability (boosting production) and access (improving markets), nowhere in the article is the question of the ultimate ends of the food system discussed. It is really all about "means": more food and better distribution.

The Economist article also takes us back to Ellul--the belief that technique will enable us to solve the problems that led to the 2008 food crisis so that it will

not be repeated. Our fixation on technique and means are two sides of the same coin. For newspapers like the Economist this faith in technique is unquestioned. Mennonite economist Henry Rempel (2003) summarizes the two sides of our technique- and means-focused economic system this way:

Our economic incentive system promotes continued technological change, but it does not encourage or welcome questions about its purpose.

We are working longer and rushing onward without deciding where we want to go… We have tried to avoid the issue by elevating progress to a matter of faith. (pp. 92 and 262).

Ellul says much the same thing in the short film *The Betrayal by Technology: A Portrait of Jacques Ellul,*

Technique does not accept to be judged. In other words, technicians cannot accept that someone articulates an ethical or moral judgment concerning what they do. And yet, to ethically, morally, and spiritually judge something is the highest human freedom. (Author's translation, emphasis added)

And so we are left with a food system that is capable of producing large quantities of food but incapable of focusing on the true ends for which it exists. And, because we focus on the technological means of producing and distributing, rather than on the ends, to question whether our technique--our prodigious means--are good or useful becomes a meaningless question—or, rather, a question that simply cannot be asked.

Joel Salatin, a self-proclaimed "grass farmer" in Virginia summarizes our modern food system's inattention to ends this way in *Food Inc.*

You know, we've become a culture of technicians. We're all into . . . we're all into the how of it. And nobody's stepping back and saying . . . "But why?"

So, what is the result of our modern food production system? If it is not focused on ends what do all these prodigious means actually produce? We have already seen what they do not produce: increased food security. But what are the results? I would like to briefly suggest four results of our industrial food system: the output of the system is unsustainable; the system produces commodities rather than food; the system produces great wastage and obesity in the industrial world--even as people struggle to eat elsewhere; and the system neglects critical elements that make for a truly *human* system.

Result: An Unsustainable System

Space does not permit a full analysis of the sustainability challenges of the industrial food system. In general, one can argue that the logic of *technique* has led to a system that solves every problem that comes its way, but in the process lays the groundwork for even more unforeseen problems. Ellul (1967, p. 105) addresses this reality, interestingly, in talking about modern "capitalistic" agriculture and Michael Pollen articulates it eloquently in the film *Food, Inc.* Notice how he returns to the theme of efficiency and links it to the problem of unpredictable and unsustainable systems that follow in the wake of the search for (as Ellul has put it) "the one best way:"

The industrial food system is always looking for greater efficiency but each new step in efficiency leads to problems. . . The industry's approach when it has a systematic problem . . . is not to go back and see what is wrong with the system, it's to come up with some high tech fixes to allow the system to survive. . . We've had a food system that is dedicated to the single virtue of efficiency. So, we grow a very small number of crops, a very small number of varieties, a very small number of companies. And even though you achieve efficiencies, the system gets more and more precarious.

And so technique is piled upon technique to maintain efficiency and find solutions to the inevitable emerging problems. The solutions applied then create their own problems. In the 2009 documentary film *Fresh* corn and soybean farmer George Naylor says this:

I'm a conventional farmer. Most of the chemicals and the technology that conventional agriculture uses is aimed at eliminating risk so you can produce the most "efficiently." It's not necessarily good for the environment, it's not good for the farmers, it's not good for our rural communities or consumers. But that's the way the system works. You produce the most to survive.

Notice that the challenge farmers face--the only way to survive is to produce "the most." We return, therefore, to the theme of "ends." The only end in sight is to increase production, even though that end is not sustainable for the land, for the farmer or for farming communities.

Result: Food as Commodity

I have already alluded to the problems that arise when food becomes merely another traded commodity. When food is a commodity not only does its price depend on markets--which, despite all the rhetoric are not "free" in any real sense (this is the point of *The Economist* article sited previously)--but it also becomes seen more and

more merely as an input used to produce other consumer goods. This is the case for corn in the US, which is used to feed cattle that have evolved not to eat corn but to eat grass. In itself using food crops to produce other forms of food may not be a problem (despite the real problem of feeding corn to beef cows), but when crops destined, even indirectly, for food are transformed into non-food products the ends of human food security are completely lost.

Mark W. Rosegrant, the Director of Environment and Production Technology Division at the International Food Policy Research Institute in testimony for the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (May 7, 2008) stated that nearly 40% of the increase in the price of corn and 20% of the price of wheat and soy during the 2008 food crisis was due to corn being shifted into biofuel production.(7) Indeed, even the price of rice in Asia was influenced by corn's shift away from food to biofuel because dry season rice in places like Thailand was replaced by corn which fetched higher prices on world markets. This non-food use of a food product led to higher prices for the basic staple of the world's poorest people and was promoted by the US government.

In addition, since World War II industrially produced food has become a commodity of a very different type as well. In their book *Food Aid After Fifty Years: Recasting its Role*, Christopher Barrett and Daniel Maxwell describe how excess food commodities (primarily corn and soy) have become a major element of the US government's contribution to international "food aid." And while the relative quantities going into food aid are small in comparison to the total amount of food produced, the authors show that this system has benefitted grain producers, grain processors, grain transporters and non-governmental humanitarian organizations much more than it has benefitted food insecure people around the world.

Again, the picture here is quite complex but official US assistance policy, which requires nearly all food aid to be grown and processed by US interests, shipped on US flag carriers and distributed by US-based NGOs, has created perverse incentives for all those concerned to keep the system in place despite its questionable impact on food insecurity. Barrett and Maxwell conclude a series of chapters in which they describe the development of food aid policy in the US and beyond over the past generation by saying this:

[I]n many ways, the global food aid regime remains tied to objectives that are often only tangentially related to the needs or rights of food-insecure people. (p. 192)

If the true ends of food production are not identified, food becomes a commodity like any other. This means that something produced to feed humanity can, if the prices are right, be diverted into the production of non-food consumables and be used as a political pawn in a global "humanitarian aid" system. In addition, if food is merely a commodity, its price determined in global markets, then those with financial resources can afford it--and do what they like with it--even as those without those resources go without. We turn to the implications of this in the next section.

Result: Wastage/Obesity

During the 2008 food crisis Homi Kharas a food policy analyst at the Brookings Institution summarized succinctly the reality of the crisis on the PBS Newshour (23 April 2008):

[T]his is not a problem of a global food shortage. This is really a problem of distribution. This is a problem of people who don't have enough money to buy food.

When food is a commodity those who have no money cannot get it. And what of those who *do* have the money? In the USA and other wealthy nations (and even among the wealthy in poorer nations) we see two realities that stem from cheap (relative to income) and plentiful food (keep in mind that the 2008 crisis occurred in the face of plentiful food): obesity and massive food wastage.

Summarizing data from the Centers for Disease Control a publication by the non-profit Trust for America's Health (2010) notes the following:

Nationally, two-thirds of adults and nearly one-third of children and teens are currently obese or overweight. Since 1980, the number of obese adults has doubled. Since 1970, the number of obese children ages 6-11 has quadrupled, and the number of obese adolescents ages 12-19 has tripled.

While it is true that obesity is due to many factors including lack of adequate physical exercise, the availability of inexpensive and highly processed food with its high quantities of fat, salt and sugar is also a contributor. When a limited variety of food (such as corn in the US) is overproduced, means are deployed to transform it for use in many ways, such as extracting its sugars for inexpensive sweeteners. These sweeteners then show up in a variety of cheap processed foods, fueling the obesity crisis.

A second result of cheap, plentiful food is food wastage that occurs during production, processing, and shipping, and in what is thrown out by consumers. A recent study

by Hall, Guo, Dore and Chow (2009) estimated the following:

In 1974 approximately 900 kcal per person per day was wasted whereas in 2003 Americans wasted approximately 1400 kcal per person per day or about 150 trillion kcal per year. . . [F]ood waste has progressively increased from about 30% of the available food supply in 1974 to almost 40% in recent years . . .

Our industrial food system produces large quantities of food and for those who can afford it this means wastage and overconsumption--even as one billion people remain food insecure.

Result: Neglect of Critical Elements of a Truly "Human" Food System

One other, rarely assessed, result of our industrial food system is that it neglects important elements of what make for a truly *human* system--one that honors humans in their roles as producers, preparers and consumers of food. We see this neglect in things such as consumers no longer being in contact with producers, the loss of fellowship during food preparation and eating, disconnect from the land, the loss of family farms and the devaluation of the role of farmers.

We will look at just one specific example of this neglect that concerns one of the most critical parts of our food system that serves the most vulnerable members of our global community. I am referring to the role of breastfeeding in the first two years of life.
In a landmark study of childhood mortality published in the *Lancet* (2008) researchers estimated that suboptimum breastfeeding is responsible for 1.4 million child deaths each year around the world. (p. 243)

Our industrial food system has no place for encouraging "optimal breastfeeding" because breastfeeding cannot be commodified. Indeed, food companies such as Nestle have spent a great deal of money convincing mothers to abandon this critical element of the human food system in favor of breast milk substitutes which *are* produced by the industrial food system.

If the ends of our food system were human food security we would take a more holistic look at all elements of the system to determine how best to achieve this end. In such a case we would be compelled to consider how to best support mothers to breastfeed their children given the critical place of this practice for the health and development of children. This is but one example of how our industrial food system neglects a critical element of a truly human approach to food.

Reorienting our Ends: Understanding our Food System as a "Power"

The foregoing argues that our industrial food system is a "technique-dominated" system that is focused on deploying prodigious means but pays scant attention to the ends of human food security. Ellul understood that such systems--indeed *technique* itself—was a "power." He described it as an "objectifying power" (1981, p. 49). Space does not permit an analysis of the concept of principalities and powers in the writing of Ellul, but we live in a time when theologians have begun to recapture a broader understanding of the concept from the writings of St Paul. (8) Included in this broader understanding is the idea that institutions and systems which God has created for good act as dehumanizing forces; essentially trading their true role in maintaining the conditions for human flourishing for other ends, including their own survival. In this way they reveal their "fallenness."

Our industrial food system has the potential to do great good. It is capable of producing food efficiently and in great variety. The markets that are part of the system have the potential to move food to places where it is in deficit. Governments have the potential to use the excess to meet acute suffering in the face of disaster or conflict. Despite this we find a system that is not focused on the ends of human food security. This, I have argued, has led to outcomes that do not honor human flourishing. In this sense one could argue that the system acts as a fallen power.

If indeed our "technique-dominated" food system is a fallen power the question then becomes, what should our response be? Ellul (1981) provided one way for Christians to think about how to face the power of technique (his words are echoed by others such as Stringfellow, Barth and Wink):

[O]ur attitude will be what may be called iconoclastic. . . . Iconoclasm means the destruction of religious images, but what does it mean here? It simply means that we must destroy the deified religious character of technique. . . If we see technique as nothing but objects that can be useful (and we need to check whether they are indeed useful); and if we stop believing in technique for its own sake or that of society; and if we stop fearing technique and treat it as one thing among many others, then we destroy the basis for the power of technique over humanity (pp. 108-109).

Applied to our modern food system, Ellul's words present both a way forward and a challenge to the received wisdom of what it will take to "feed the world." Technique does not focus on ends. However what we desperately need at this time is to focus on the

true ends of our food system. Perhaps initially this means raising the simple question of what, exactly, the end of our food system should be. Joel Salatin, in *Food, Inc.*, does just that.

Imagine what it would be if, as a national policy, we said we would only be successful if we had fewer people going to the hospital next year than last year? How about that for success? The idea would be to have such nutritionally dense, unadulterated food that people who ate it actually felt better, had more energy and weren't sick as much? Now you see that's a noble goal.

In addition to focusing on ends we need to challenge the idea that our industrial food system is the only way to "feed the world" as many would argue. There is a deep faith that the "means" we have deployed are the best way forward (if only we can continue to apply better *technique* to improve them). It would thus seem that as we focus more on the ends of our food system we must also be willing to challenge the belief that it is necessary to maintain the current industrial food system as the "one best way." This is a complex task that will require time and the creation of alternatives to what we have. Such alternatives are being created in many places around the world and this provides hope that we can faithfully challenge the "religious" commitment to the "essentialness" of our industrialized food system.

Notes

1. Ellul, J. (1948). *Présence au monde moderne*. Geneva, Editions Roulet. P. 62--author's translation
2. Ellul, J. (1967). *The technological society*. New York, Vintage. p. 21
3. Pollan, M. (2006). *The omnivore's dilemma : a natural history of four meals*. New York, Penguin Press. pp. 51-53
4. Grebmer, K. v. (2009). *2009 Global hunger index : the challenge of hunger, focus on financial crisis and gender inequality*. Bonn; Washington, D.C.; Dublin, Ireland: Welthungerhilfe ; International Food Policy Research Institute ; Concern Worldwide.
5. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United,. (2009). *The state of food insecurity in the world 2009: economic crises - impacts and lessons learned*. Rome, FAO.
6. Technology is the translation here though Ellul would have preferred *technique* which I will attempt to use throughout.
7. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRY5Klj8R9w accessed 23 September, 2010
8. Some critical writings include: Berkhof, H. (1962, 1977). *Christ and the Powers*. Scottsdale, PA, Herald Press. Wink, W. (1992). *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*. Minneapolis, MN, Augsburg Fortress. Dawn, M. (2001). *Powers, Weakness and the Tabernacling of God*. Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans. Yoder, J. H. (1994). *The politics of Jesus : vicit Agnus noster*. Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans / Paternoster Press (esp Chapter 13). Stringfellow, W. (1973). *An ethic for Christians and other aliens in a strange land*. Waco, Tex.,, Word Books. Gingerich, R. and T. Grimsrud, Eds. (2006). *Transforming the Powers: Peace, Justice and the Domination System*. Minneapolis, MN, Augsburg Fortress.

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IF WE SERVE THE GOD OF PRODUCTIVITY IS THERE ROOM FOR JESUS?

ELLUL'S TECHNIQUE, SACREDNESS AND DISTORTION IN THE MODERN FARM ECONOMY

by Randy Ataide

Randy Ataide is professor of entrepreneurship and executive director of the Fermanian Business & Economic Institute at Point Loma Nazarene University. He previously worked in agribusiness for 20 years. He completed a M.A. in Theology at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary and a J.D. at San Joaquin College of Law. He has also completed the Owners/Presidents Program, at Harvard Business School and the Executive Management Program at Stanford Graduate School of Business.

I. Introduction

In the opening years of the new millennium, aficionados of global economic and technological systems were in full bloom. The harnessing of the amazing power of supercomputers allowed the global banking system to consolidate and ever-more sophisticated financial products rapidly came to market, proffered by multi-national trading platforms, replacing once and for all the genteel and conservative tools and methods of the traditional banking industry. While the all powerful economic engines of the U.S., German, U.K. and other highly developed economies roared on, we concurrently observed previously moribund economies enter the 21st century; Spain undertook residential housing construction at record levels producing approximately 200,000+ new units per year while tiny Iceland and Ireland became bastions of global capitalism with powerful banks loaning billions of dollars and euros. China emerged as an economic superpower and with its astounding annual growth in the 10+% range underscored the era of the "new economy."

These powerful and seemingly positive economic forces that took root in global economy in the 1980's had taken hold in the farm economy long before. Since the advent of the Industrial Revolution, farmers had freely embraced all sorts and forms of technological innovations to spur productivity. No less a figure than Alan Greenspan, the U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman from 1987-2006 stated in 1999 that "Over the past thirty years, farm value-added per hour worked has grown at an average rate of more than 4.5%, roughly three times the rate of increase in output per hour in the nonfarm business sector of our economy."(1) The use of computers and modern technology was fully embraced by the global farming industry, most notably the U.S. and Western Europe, and most pundits and politicians were quick to point to the farm economy as a significant part of the "productivity revolution." Even small farmers had access to global positioning satellite (GPS) technology; genetically modified seed reduced the use of pesticides and increased profits and production; water-monitoring and management systems allowed crops to be planted in areas and on soil types that were unthinkable just a generation ago. It was a heady time, perhaps reminiscent of the late 1920's.

In contrast to Greenspan's exuberance about the global economy generally and the farm economy specifically, I ventured into the conversation with my Master's Thesis titled *If We Serve A God of Productivity Is There Room For Jesus? An Analysis and Application of Jacques Ellul's Thesis of Technique In The Agri-Business World* in fulfillment of my M.A. in Theology from the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno (2). Returning to complete a long dormant graduate degree in theology, I was encouraged by the faculty to attempt an integration of some of Ellul's work into the everyday agri-business world that I had inhabited for over 20 years—Ellul was provocative indeed, but how did he look in the "real world" and could one draw any practical conclusions from this analysis? I was spurred on in from a variety of sources and experiences to this inquiry into Ellul. One example was the jarring headline from a agricultural trade journal with the following banner headline on the front page—*"Raisin Growers Look to Machines for Salvation."* The article went on to profile the newest generation of mechanical raisin harvesters, and the owner of the machines featured confidently stated "By using some modern technology…we have got things down to where it is almost a perfect system for the

times we are in."(3) Such overt statements that farmers frequently make towards the benefits of technology for farming only serve to underscore a troubling and harmful underlying philosophy towards the land: it has too often become a means to an end, just another asset to exploit.

I concluded that there were indeed significant and generally negative impacts upon farmers and agriculture through "the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency for every field of human activity" which Ellul identified as the *Thesis of Technique*. My conclusions, of significant concern for the farmer and perhaps even more importantly, the consumer, held that this efficient aggregation of methods when applied to farming will inevitably lead to a profound distortion of the authentic relationship between farm and farmer. What has occurred I viewed as a violation of the sacred trust between those who are "on the land" and principles of land ownership and stewardship found in the ancient Hebrew Scriptures. But what were the practical implications of this violation that we could find in modern farming? These included:

- Unreasonable expectations and demands of farm employee & land productivity.
- Domination and subordination by the employer over the farm employee.
- The inevitable demand and drive for larger and larger farms, leading to huge corporate operations.
- The loss of personal identity and self-worth for those caught in the productivity demands of modern farming.
- A pervasive attitude of domination and subjection of the environment.
- The rise of modern government farm policy and the widespread use of farm commodity subsidies.

Each of these are developed at great length within the thesis, but they are best understood within the context of a long and systemic decline in farm product prices, in numerous commodities, sectors and products across all farming regions. I was alarmed, and remain so to this day, at how the rise of modern farming productivity practices has paralleled widespread decline in prices to farmers, farm bankruptcies, massive cycles of under and over-production and depression in the farm economy. My research utilized my experience as the co-founder and President of a diversified tree fruit company (peaches, plums and nectarines), which by the time that I wrote the thesis in 2002 had grown to a company that provided fresh fruit to many of the leading grocery retailers throughout North America, a large cold storage, shipping and sales facility, ten packing sheds and an alliance with other competitors to provide retail customers with ready to eat fruit. As is typical in our industry, our fruit was sourced from dozens of small and mid-size independent farmers, for whom we acted as their exclusive sales, marketing and storage agent. What was not so typical was that from our 1994 start, we attempted to have a greater level of openness and communication between our company and these independent farmers than was customary in our industry, most specifically by seeking our input from them on key strategic decisions of the company, an area that was normally reserved for owners of similar situated companies. The operational model that we had built was considerably different than competitors, and yet in a very difficult economic environment we were successful and to this day the company and most of these growers have thrived. In my original thesis, I attempted to analyze this farming and agricultural business experience, to dig into the motivations and principles as to how and why we had built a viable company when most others had failed.(4)

What emerged in my study of farming through the lens of Ellul was a far clearer theological framework than I had previously had, one from which to evaluate the application of technology to the farmer so that I could offer some practical counsel to the farmer. This analysis ultimately led me to an in-depth study on the word *augment* and drew from its Latin and Sankskrit etymology to show that it included vitality, luster, splendor and energy, and that to augment something meant "to furnish abundantly with something, to heap upon, give to, enrich, endow, bless and load with."(5) This is not mere kindness but rather a realization that the individual, firm or venture and its products and services exist not merely for productivity and profitability, but rather for deeper and generally unexplored or unconsidered purposes. The unbridled power and influence and distraction of technology is checked, indeed confounded, when collaboration is a vital and active part of the business model and I offered some key choices and examples of collaboration over competition that our companies had introduced that had led to not only a healthier view of technology but actually enhanced business viability for ourselves and our many fruit growers and community.

Since the completion of my thesis, much has changed in my personal life as well. In 2006, I left the day-to-day business operations of my agricultural and farming company to take a position in the faculty of the Fermanian School of Business at Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU) in San Diego, moving from the Fresno region where I had spent most of my life. I now teach entrepreneurship and management at both the undergraduate and graduate level and also am currently the Executive Director of the Fermanian Business &

Economic Institute of PLNU, and with my skilled colleagues generate business and economic forecasts, studies and reports for both clients and PLNU. However, for the first time since 1986, I am no longer an executive of a California-based agricultural company for in late 2009 I completed the sale of my business interests to the co-founder of our firm. But I remain close to many within the industry and retain ownership of a large tree fruit farm (now leased to a local farmer who lives near the property) and while my interests and research has broadened to the larger economy, agriculture will always be of great interest to me both personally and professionally.

The present article will offer a brief review and address selected questions from the original thesis in 2002. Much has changed since that time: It has been noted by leading economists that we are in an era of an "economic reset" with little present clarity as to what the future may hold. What is clear however is that individuals, institutions, organizations, companies and even entire nations or economic zones are under enormous strain, reorganization and restructure and the global food industry remains in great turmoil. Having a clearer understanding of what may have caused (or continues to cause) this economic reset should be important to all of us, farmer and non-farmer, American and non-American, and Christian and non-Christian alike.

II. Does Technology Provide Freedom for the Farmer?

In my original Master's Thesis, I summarized selected Ellul writings, drawing primarily from *The Technological Society* and *Money and Power*, and affirmed his assertion that technology was an act of subordination: regions, countries, economic and political systems, regional and local cultures and communities and finally even the most fundamental human decisions were continually subject to the power of subordination that technological superiority demanded. For example, Ellul pointed to the influence of technique into areas of scientific research and energy, as a way to illustrate the large scale power of technique. But he also believed that "Death, procreation, birth, habitat: all must submit to technical efficiency and systematization, the end point of the industrial assembly line. What seems to be most personal in the life of man is now technical" and "The essence of civilization is thus absorbed."(6)

With such provocative statements, Ellul has been roundly criticized by technological advocates and apologists; however, a closer reading of Ellul reveals that his hostility was not towards technology *per se* but rather the unbridled power of "technocrats" who appeared to be no different than other oppressors exercising any form of excess power and influence. (7) In my view, the more interesting question is the inquiry as to the *neutrality* of technology, for this is the bedrock of technology apologists, claiming that in the final analysis technology has improved the majority of people's lives, and that additional emphasis needs to be placed on technology to solve our remaining problems. But is technology's value and benefit actually *neutral*? Is it devoid of values and the imposition of these values upon those around it? Is it only of negative value when negatively used?

In the ordinary usage as an abstract noun, value means goodness, desirability or worth. In other words, value is that property of a thing that makes it worthy of realizing or embracing or by extension to the negative, something worth avoiding, minimizing or eliminating. But for the farmer, my evaluation and conclusions drawn of technology's positive and negative value needed an additional consideration, one that Ellul brought us to in many settings: *does it create freedom for the user(s)?* My analysis of technology in the farm economy demonstrates that it frequently, if not inevitably, reduces rather than enhances individual as well as collective freedom. How could this be when the technological prowess of the farmer is held up as an ideal user of technology?

I concluded that unbridled reliance on technology—such as "the almost perfect system" for raisin farmers previously cited--distracts us from the authentic, spiritual and universal nature and blessing of food production, distribution and consumption. It in effect destroys any consideration of a philosophy of food and for the Christian, the more important loss of a theology of the land. And while technology cannot be severed from farming, it must be viewed and used with caution and discernment. Equipment, chemicals, computers, mechanization and many other technological manifestations all would point to the need for discernment. It distracts the farmer from the true purposes of farming, food production, food consumption and all ancillary issues, which Scripture points us to on many occasions. The farmer finds him or herself far less free than supposed.

For the modern farmer and consumer the wide diversity of products available is often validation of technology's value and that having more products is proof of having freedom. But Ellul disagreed: "First of all, freedom is not necessarily having lots of consumer goods to choose from. A person can be utterly free and yet never have anything to eat but rice. And he can be utterly alienated in a restaurant where he has his pick of a thousand different dishes. In reality, all that exists is kinds of choices, which are not of the same nature (choosing the

man or woman to build one's life with is different from choosing an electric coffee grinder), and zones of choices."(8)

For the Christian, freedom is a topic that the Apostles returned to time and time again in their counsel to the churches. (See for example Gal. 5:13-16; 1 Cor. 5:1-8; 7:17-24; 8:1-18; 1 Pet. 2:16). The Christian of any strata, setting or time should as well maintain the position that technological processes must be subordinate to human processes, or more precisely, human relationships are always superior to technical relationships. In the final analysis the Christian, and indeed many other world religions, places the personal relationship with God at the highest level, followed closely by the community relationship. By introducing freedom as a critical component of our hierarchy of value, I believe we avoid the frequent entanglement of most discussions of technology, for freedom within human, community and spiritual relationships is a clearer and superior analysis to simply "keeping score" between technology aficionados and critics alike as to the various benefits and drawbacks of technology. As Ellul urged, we must seek ways in which we may *transcend* technique, and freedom is a primary example and standard in which we can do so.

III. Violation of the Sacredness of Land through the Distraction of Technology

Turning to food production, in my original thesis I articulated a *theology of the land* and argued that what had developed was a distorted view of the land entrusted to us. The starting point for this can certainly be the Scriptures, as the word rendered as 'land' appears over 2,500 times in the Hebrew Bible, leading to the remarkable statement by a renowned scholar that "Statistically, land is a more dominant theme than covenant."(9) Christian theologian John Calvin referred to the natural world as "the theater for his glory" (10) while C.S. Lewis noted that "God and nature have come into a certain relation. They have, at the very least, a relation—almost, in one sense, a common frontier—in every human mind."(11)

Ellul was also not silent on the topic of nature and the human relationship to land. "The novelty of our era is that man's deepest experience is no longer with nature. For most practical purposes it no longer relates to it. From the moment of his birth, man lives knowing only an artificial world (and)…nature is now subdued, subjugated, framed, and utilized. No longer is it the threat and the source, the mystery, and the intrusion, the face and the darkness of the world—either for the individual or the group. Hence it is no longer the inciter and the place of the sacred."(12) This is a rich and powerful commentary by Ellul, and gives opportunity for formidable personal and communal reflection. My own reflection and study of the possibility that nature is subdued and subjugated led me to the analysis and conclusion that there were at least six substantive examples of the violation of the sacred within the modern farm economy, which were noted in the introductory section of this paper.

What all of these six points have in common is the theme of distraction: what is real and authentic is supplanted by the unbending ritual of larger, bigger, more and faster. I concluded that technology in food production was not neutral, and that what has occurred is that many in food production have lost the sense of the sacred: the land and all that it offers to the wise steward is instead supplanted by a factory approach with a dullness and automatic view of land as something to be exploited. And while I did not develop it in my original thesis, I came to conclusion long before the 2006 film "Fast Food Nation" that most consumers had long since lost any sense of the sacred in consumption of food. It was disposable, cheap, standardized and of little enduring value other than satisfying basic hunger impulses, and if 1,000 calories was what was needed to satisfy hunger, 2,000 or more calories, even in single food items, was even better. Food as having any sense of sacredness was long lost by most of us. No wonder that the entire industry of food production, harvesting, distribution, economics, policies and consumption is so easily distracted: it has been commoditized and reduced to its lowest common denominator.

Many of us who are 50 years of age or older can recall the uniqueness of the seasonality of fresh fruits and vegetables: strawberries in spring and early summer, peaches in mid-summer, sweet white corn and watermelon in late summer, pumpkins in fall. Our families adjusted our diets, and more importantly our expectations, as the year unfolded. But this farming reality is lost on most modern consumers—the nexus between consumers and stores is such that farm products of incredible diversity are in effect demanded throughout the year. This has caused huge, yet widely ignored and un-chronicled, damage to the farmer. Ellul predicted this modern reality and ignorance—what he called the advent of the "technological environment"--with "This means that man has stopped existing primarily in his 'natural' environment (made up by what is vulgarly called 'nature': countryside, forests, mountains, ocean, etc.) He now is situated in a new, artificial environment. He no longer lives in touch with the realities of the earth and the water, but with the realities of the instruments and objects forming the *totality* of his environment. He is now in an environment made of asphalt, iron, cement, glass, plastic and so on." (13)

Consider the indictment by Victor Davis Hansen of the modern consumer: “The ultimate enemies of agriculture are more insidious and imperceptible. They, like you, are actually rather nice to see and meet. They are ourselves: ‘good people.’ But they, who work so hard and so long at hospital, plant and office, have become—have had to become—accustomed to cheap food, to the economy of scale at all costs. They want food pretty, cheap and now! Always. And from very far away! Whatever the cost, damn the consequences…they must expect—and can always get—food at the only price they are willing or able to pay. It is true of all of us. Because our food is so inexpensive, so attractive, safe, and plentiful, they have a margin to put our money elsewhere.”(14)

Thus, the obligation and opportunity to develop a healthy theology of the land rests not upon the shoulders of the farmer alone. And the Hebrew Scriptures provide to all of us in the community—not just the farmer but the non-farmer as well--two specific regulations that ensured that the land holder remained fully aware of the ultimate owner of the land: Sabbath and Jubilee. These practices imputed to the Israelites a community oriented life-style, based upon clear theological instruction, that developed a mindset of consideration, mutual aid, and concern. Additional agricultural festivals only served to reinforce the Sabbath and Jubilee mindset, through joyous communal thanksgiving celebrations.(15) We need to be aware that the underlying principles of these two land regulations have been so ignored by the distraction of the technique of modern farming that I believe that we are facing a stern warning: “But if blessing follows obedience, curse within the land and even deportation from it will result from disobedience.”(16) Accordingly, it is a communal obligation to renew the importance of the sacredness of the land.

IV. An Alternative Business Model for Farmers

The demise of the modern family farm has been widely chronicled, and the reasons for the decline are many, and beyond the scope of the original thesis and this update to fully address. However, there is significant uncertainty as to the future of farming in the U.S. None other than US Agricultural Secretary Tom Vilnick summarized in Congressional testimony the state of the American Farmer in 2010, specifically noting that the farm economy has been in recession for more than 20 years and that "In the past 40 years, the United States lost more than 1 million farmers and ranchers. During that period, income from farming operations, as a percentage of total farm household income, plunged to half of the previous level. Today, only 11 percent of family farm income comes from farming. These factors have changed the face of rural America…We need to develop new strategies to bring prosperity back to rural America in a sustainable and significant way.”(17)

In my thesis I rejected the assertion by many farm advocates and politicians that the answers to restoring viability to the farm would come from farm policy, subsidies and political action. Rather, I concluded that these actions often led to the destruction of farms and only furthered the negative impact of the distraction of technology upon the farm. In its place, I offered advice from my own farming and farm business experience, all of which can be best understood by embodying the spirit of collaboration, communication and cooperation over unbridled productivity and competition. Some examples from my own business experience served to provide practical counsel as to how farmers could both be both theologically astute and operationally viable.

For the first five years of our business, specifically 1994-1999, our company utilized a business model that is fairly standard for most businesses: we would compete in the marketplace head to head vs. other similarly situated tree fruit producers. While we had some success with this strategy, it wasn’t until a fortuitous business meeting with a competitor that the business took a significant and lasting positive turn. In 1999, after developing a new product of ripe and ready to eat peaches and nectarines called Summeripe®, we were asked to a meeting by a company who had suffered some loss of customers due to our new product line. During this meeting, the owners of the other company floated the idea of their purchasing our company and my partner and I going to work for their company.

While selling our company was not a tantalizing idea for either my partner or I, it did lead to an interesting opportunity, one which to our knowledge had never been used in the tree fruit industry: while our companies would remain independent, we would create a strategic alliance based upon mutual company support of Summeripe® and customers and prospects would be pursued for the benefit of both companies.(18) In time, what developed was an alliance among six different independent companies, all supporting Summeripe and common standards that included a code of ethics, grower practices, customer solicitation procedures and other practices intended to bring a higher level of communication, trust and respect to the production side of the tree fruit industry. The model was embraced by some in our industry and scorned by others, and while not perfect in design or in execution, it was a significant breakthrough from the traditional practices of the industry that has had lasting effect. We shifted the focus away from volume and onto quality. We determined

that we would not attempt to be the largest tree fruit company but rather be the one that was singularly focused upon providing the consumer the best tasting fruit possible.

The dedicated growers, employees and customers of the "Summeripe Alliance" permeated into other areas of our company. Growers now found their own fruit loaded on the same truck with fruit from former competitors for a common customer; regular meetings and sharing of technical information was enhanced among growers and packers for the common good not only within our own company but among the entire Alliance. In our own firm, we worked hard at creating a less hierarchal organization, one where all departments and employees were united around the common purpose of promoting our premium product. Within just a few years, Summeripe® branded premium tree fruit was securing a price premium of $2-$3 a box over our regular fruit, creating a significant incentive for our growers and providing what was likely the critical amount of increase in their income to remain in tree fruit farming. I am convinced that what we successfully did was to confound technique.

I am pleased to report that despite continued negative economic forces in the fresh fruit market through the 2010 season, the company I co-founded in 1994 is thriving and many of its growers remain viable family farms. By many accounts, the foundational principles of the company and its relationships of collaboration, communication and cooperation remain intact, albeit now under different leadership than my own.

V. Conclusion

I remain convinced, and in fact I believe that current experience is even more compelling than in 2002, that unbridled competition in not only the farm economy but in all elements of life does not in the final analysis serve more than just a few who master its tools and techniques. One should not conclude that I am anti-competition or anti-technology (which I am not), but rather what I am for is collaboration as a balance to competition, as a powerful force that confounds the distraction of technique. This is at its core a movement towards not only reimagining the sacred in areas far beyond the rites and rituals of the contemporary Christian, but for the non-Christian as well. How our food is grown and how we consume it, but even more importantly how we conceive of it is something that affects us all. This reimagining and rediscovery of the sacred will in the final analysis lead to a better farming, consumer and theological experience for all of us.

Notes

1. Greenspan, Alan. *The farm economy* At the Annual Convention of the Independent Bankers Association of America, San Francisco, California March 16, 1999.
2. The thesis is available from Hiebert Library at Fresno Pacific University or from the author, RandyAtaide@pointloma.edu .
3. Terry Kibler, "Raisin Growers Look to Machines for Salvation," Fresh Fruit & Raisin News, 1 Jan. 2003, Vol. 19, Number 1, 1.
4. Indeed, industry statistics show that tree fruit growers and packers have consolidated a great deal over the past twenty years, with approximately 75% of all going out of business and leaving farming.
5. Charlton T. Lewis, and Charles Short, A New Latin Dictionary, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1898), s.v. "augeo." Also, John Grimes, A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy—Sanskrit Terms Defined in English, (New York: Macmillan, 1976), s.v. "ojah."
6. Jacques Ellul. The Technological Society. (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1964), 128-129.
7. See for example http://www.tentmaker.org/biographies/ellul.htm
8. Ellul, The Technological Society, 320.
9. Elmer A. Martens, God's Design- A Focus on Old Testament Theology, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 97-98.
10. William A. Dyrness, The Earth is God's—A Theology of American Culture. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1997), 116.
11. C.S. Lewis, Miracles, (New York: MacMillan, 1960), 31.
12. Jacques Ellul, The Presence of the Kingdom, (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989), 109.
13. Ellul , The Technological Society, 38-39.
14. Victor Davis Hansen, The Land Was Everything—Letters from an American Farmer, (New York: Free Press, 2000), 110-111.
15. See Ex. 23:34; Lev. 23; Num. 28; Deut. 16.
16. Martens, God's Design, 110.
17. USDA News Release No. 0198.10. Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Makes Case for Stronger Rural America. April 21, 2010.
18. Note that this alliance is different than traditional agricultural cooperatives, which are federally chartered and require a common ownership process. Ours was an alliance of independently owned companies with no intention of changing the ownership of our companies, but rather for the mutual goal of supporting a common premium brand of fruit. Participation was wholly voluntary and as companies joined the alliance they paid a per box charge for the use of the brand and support services.

Jacques Ellul & Wendell Berry on an Agrarian Resistance

by Matthew Regier

Matthew Regier and his wife Tia Regier live outside of Peabody, Kansas where they are slowly working to restore a neglected farm that sits on twenty acres. They sell eggs and vegetables at the local farmers markets. He completed a M.A. in New Testament at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary.

In his books on technique, Jacques Ellul describes a world that is *of necessity* plunging towards death. Perhaps, his popularity as a writer would have blossomed had he not said that the "technical system has *definitively* escaped from control by the human will."(1) The world does not like to be told that it is not in control. Or, for that matter, that the "worst has become much more probable" or that we must "give up thinking we can improve the world."(2) Reading an Ellul book on technique is a bit like being in an instructional pamphlet for school children during the cold-war nuclear scare. We can follow the authorities' directions to duck under our chairs, but it won't save us from the coming destruction.

And yet other works (namely his theological ones) show that he believes passionately in freedom and hope. Is this a contradiction? Well, yes . . . and no. It is not with confusion or ambivalence that Ellul embraces this dialectic of hope and fatalism. Nor does Ellul think that his proclamation of hope in any way undoes what he has said about the inevitability of technique enslavement of humanity. Perhaps the best word to describe Ellul's dialectic is *apocalyptic*. The destruction of the world (3) is at our doorstep and Ellul is prophesying in the streets.

What then is the source of Ellul's unlikely hope? He himself says that it is only God's action which gives any him any hope.(4) Does this mean that humans can do nothing but passively wait for God's action? Not at all. Rather, Ellul is holding out hope for a *true* revolution.(5) In his interview with Patrick Troude-Chastenet, he says (paraphrasing Marx) that "when man realizes that he no longer has the means of influencing the situation he begins to revolt."(6) For Ellul such a revolt or revolution will not occur at the national level but rather at a communal (and individual) level. The community Ellul envisions would "question unceasingly all that man calls progress, discovery, facts, established results, reality."(7) It would be an other-(material) worldly community living in the reality of the eschaton.(8)

But what, concretely, might such a community look like? Moreover, is such a community possible? How does such a community resist in the midst of the technical environment? I would like to propose that the most effective community of resistance would be an agrarian community. And I can think of no better spokesman for an agrarian resistance than the novelist, poet, essayist and farmer, Wendell Berry.

A French Sociology professor and a Kentucky farmer might seem strange candidates for a comparison or even a conversation. Berry gives no indication of ever having read Ellul, nor does he speak of a great technological phenomenon such as Ellul describes. Berry does not speak of a "technical" society, nor does he generally speak of an autonomous technological force behind political and economic realities. He is more likely to speak about the "modern world" or the global economy. However, he sometimes comes close to describing the same kind of autonomous phenomenon as Ellul:

> *Without that willingness [to limit our desires] there is no choice; we must simply abandon ourselves to whatever the technologists may discover to be possible.(9)*
>
> *Technology can grow to a size that is first undemocratic and then inhuman. It can grow beyond the control of individual human beings—and so, perhaps, beyond the control of human institutions. How large can a machine be before it ceases to serve people and begins to subjugate them?(10)*

Both Ellul and Berry have developed a reputation of going "against the tide" and have been rejected by both sides of the political spectrum for being either impractical radicals or reactionary technophobes. Both decry specialization in thought as well as in practice, as both have written in many disciplines (with the consequence of sometimes being ignored by "serious"

scholarship). Each has created over decades a corpus of work marked by remarkable thematic continuity, exploring the same phenomena from multiple disciplinary postures. Both saw the magnitude of the current ecological crisis with considerable prescience(11) and connected it to the rise of modern agriculture and the consequent rural depopulation and the general contempt for rural people and rural places.(12) Both explicitly decried the polarization between the "conservationists" who view all human intervention in nature as bad, and the conquistadors who see the world as infinitely exploitable.(13)

Both men quote with no small amount of bewilderment from the utopian futurologists. Both see the technical world as creating a new kind of slavery, more comprehensive than anything the world has seen before.(14) Accordingly, both authors see the only possibility of freedom existing outside this system. And while they speak of freedom in different ways, both insist that it must be found *within* the acceptance of limits, rather than in "liberation" from restrictions of any kind.

The absence of limits is not simply an economic problem (where the idea of limitless growth has caused much devastation), but a wider cultural one.(15) In an essay on modern poetry, Berry critiques the modern poet's rejection of form and narrative.(16) If an "anything goes" approach is good for writing poetry, it will also be good for how we treat each other (evident in modern views on sexuality) and how we treat the earth (be it removing mountains or topsoil). "When the self is one's exclusive subject and limit, reference and measure, one has no choice but to make a world of words.(17) And this gives to one's own suffering and death the force of cataclysm." Where Berry speaks of a "world of words," Ellul speaks of a "verbal universe." For Ellul, a philosophy without limits (where the self dissolves into an endless sprawl of linguistic modifiers) is no philosophy at all,(18) but rather a rabbit trail leading to absurdity.(19)

Knowledge too must be limited (a scandal to the modern intelligence); "some things must not be learned."(20) This is what Berry means when he says that, "In ignorance is our hope,"(21) and, I think, what Ellul means by rediscovering "the limits of the Holy."(22)

Both authors condemn simple or fast solutions that rest on an "ends-justify-the-means" doctrine (where the advocates of such solutions assume far more knowledge than they actually have or is even available).(23) Berry sees such an approach as a failure to recognize the connectedness and patterns of life itself, where Ellul has shown that technique actually creates a situation where the means *become* the ends. This is because technique cannot recognize humanistic ends but only aims at efficiency, speed and quantity of production.(24)

Ellul's insight is particularly apt to understanding the situation of modern agriculture. The primary goals of any agriculture must be something like (A) to feed humans, (B) to maintain the fertility of the land, and (C) to earn a wage for the farmer. This is hardly controversial. Yet, modern agriculture fails miserably in meeting these needs. Most obvious is the rapid degradation of the land and the loss of its soil. The economic stability of farmers and farm families has been almost as equally a failure, with massive numbers of farms being dissolved or absorbed in the last sixty years or more. Finally, although a great deal of food is certainly being produced, much of it fails to nourish humans. Some of it must be discarded to ensure a good price, some of it is stored indefinitely because of over-production, some is converted to fuel, and large amounts of grain are fed to cattle and other ruminants for which a grain diet is neither natural nor healthy. Likewise, much of our food is processed, pasteurized, hydrogenated, transported and stored to such an extent that it loses its ostensible nutritional value. The ends are not met (and remarkably seldom even discussed) because the means (efficiency, speed, production) have become the ends.

Of course, when this happens, absurdity entails. There can be no doubt that modern agriculture is driven by organization, rationality, and efficiency. But the actual results are more often disorder, unreasonableness and remarkable inefficiency. When a calorie of food requires at least three calories of petroleum energy (or up to 35 calories for grain-fed beef), how can we say the present system is reasonable or efficient?

There are other themes and ideas which are crucial to both authors: waste, the creation of new needs to ensure technological progress, the uselessness of technological gadgets, the replacement of physical work with sport or exercise, the dangers of escapism, the problem of "experts," the myth of objectivity and the actual partiality of a science in service to the technical economy, collective culpability, the ugliness of the modern technical world (aesthetics are not a mean and hence not a technical end), the necessity of a local culture and the destructiveness and actual impossibility of a universal or technical culture, and many others.

Of course, Ellul and Berry are not without their differences, and it would be interesting to explore these if space permitted. But I believe by exploring their points of contact we can begin to trace the contours of a community that is in position to resist the powers of destruction that surround it.

I suggest that a community of resistance must be agrarian, because only a community dependant on agriculture can have any true independence. To live in recognition of our dependence on the land is an act of gratitude as well as sanity; as Berry observes, "To the extent that we must eat and drink, and be clothed, sheltered, and warmed . . . the idea that we have now progressed from a land-based economy to an economy based on information is fantasy"(25) It is a fantasy, nevertheless, that forms the narrative of the global economy.

With the term "agrarian" I aim to evoke a world in which technique is held in check by moral, religious, and aesthetic customs. An agrarian community will be marked by face-to-face relationships developed over generations, rootedness in place, attention to context, reliance on each other, and the development of a truly local culture. People in such a community will cultivate the skills necessary for careful living (rural skills), they will pursue knowledge rather than information, they will know the land as they know each other, and their knowledge of the land and each other will teach them how to care for *that* place.

Inherent in all of this, is the recognition and appreciation of limits. Such a recognition is the necessary prerequisite to personal humility, but it is also the first step to understanding a place. Good agriculture mimics nature.(26) A "global culture" assumes to a large extent that any*thing* may be inserted into any*place*, be it a retail store, a tree, or a bean field. A local culture rather grows out of a place by observing it for generations and passing on those observations to posterity. These "observations" are not so much recorded data, but shared stories and experiences that form the collective memory of a people on the land. It should by now be apparent that such a community cannot be created *ex nihilo*, but is a long time in the making. This alone is a scandal in an age of the instantaneous. Even so, it will not be enough for a community to resist the modern obsession with mobility. Members (to use Berry's word) of the community become at least as knowledgeable about local plant and animal species as they are of local sports teams. Moreover, the task of understanding and managing a local ecosystem is made more difficult by the preponderance of invasive species. But there is also pleasure to be had—the pleasure of naming birds or wildflowers, planting a garden, or gathering eggs. These are pleasures more promising (if more taxing) than those proffered by the entertainment experts who can only give us the desire for a life that is not our own.

It will be objected that such a community can only be conceived in rural areas. One response would be to immigrate back to the country. It is a painful irony that while the world anguishes about over-population, the countryside (where watchers and stewards of the land are desperately needed) continues to be emptied. (Ellul after all has said that dispersing the city would mean the end of the machine, the end of modern technology.)(27) Another response is that our cities must also become more agricultural, which is to say less parasitic, which is to say less like cities.(28) This will not happen without resistance. There is a great deal of fertility and water in cities given over to the growth of "ornamentals" which could support the production of surprising amounts of food given adequate care and skill. Animal husbandry is an important compliment to horticulture, and so we must also introduce livestock into our cities. It need not be said that urban and suburban communities which outlaw clotheslines, will not look kindly on backyard goats or pigs. And yet, these same neighborhoods assume that the same backyard is a perfectly sane place to house a man-eating dog.

Moreover, rural places are not necessarily at an advantage for an agrarian revolution. Much of the land has been urbanized or abandoned (to disuse or absentee farming). Just as rural places have not been able to keep their land, so also they have not been able to keep their "best" people. The mark of success in a small rural town is (upon graduation from school) to never be seen there again. The education system conspires with the urban-technical "culture" to enforce (and finance) this idea of success. What remains of the town after decades of faithfully sending off the "successful?" The two small towns closest to our own farm are paradigmatic: unemployment, high crime rates, sometimes dismal living conditions, homelessness (despite an abundance of abandoned homes), obesity and substance abuse, failing literacy, and other typical incarnations of despair. What is the possibility of inciting a revolution in such a place?

While Berry does paint a somewhat less fatalistic picture than Ellul, he never advocates for a kind of optimism. The lure of false optimism is as strong as ever with the recent (in America) rise of the "green" movement. While this very admirable movement has already produced much that is good, there are still great dangers in its becoming fashionable. "Organic" has already become a label under which modern agriculture can continue without fundamental change. Meanwhile, the "ecological crisis" is often reduced to the issue of greenhouse gases and carbon emissions which the world hopes can be "solved" with non-petroleum energy sources. But there is no technology that will replace our topsoil or revive the many dead-zones in our world. Moreover, the reduction of our ecological problems to energy conservation, will drive people (who are unwilling to limit their desires) to find solace in a

technically simulated reality (what Albert Borgman calls hypermodernism or hyperreality(29)). The recent explosion of communicational gadgetry confirms that what Ellul twenty years ago called the "erotico-communicational world of science fiction"(30) was then only in its beginning stages.

Berry does not promise that any course of action will solve the problems our world faces. For Berry, as for Ellul, hope is something profoundly different than optimism, something that would persist even in the certainty of destruction. In this sense Berry, too, is something of an apocalyptic voice:

It is presumptuous, personally and historically, to assume that one is part of a "saving remnant." One had better doubt that one deserves such a distinction, and had better understand that there may, after all, be nothing left to save. Even so, if one wishes to save anything not protected by the present economy—topsoil, groves of trees, the possibility of goodness or health of anything, even the economic relevance of the biblical tradition—one is part of a remnant, and a dwindling remnant too, though not without hope, and not without the necessary instructions, the most pertinent of which, perhaps, is this, also from Revelation: "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die."(31)

Notes

1. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 101, my emphasis.
2. Jacques Ellul, *Presence of the Kingdom*, 2nd ed. (New York: Seabury, 1967), p. 7.
3. I use this phrase in the way that the biblical apocalypticists often do, describing events of such singularity and significance that only "end-of-the-world language" will do. And yet, the literal destruction of the world is not out of sight for Ellul, both in the sense that technique signals the end of human civilization (and the beginning of Technical civilization) and in the more material sense of nuclear threat and ecological ruin.
4. Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), p. 22.
5. See esp. *The Presence of the Kingdom.*
6. *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity*, p.26.
7. *Presence of the Kingdom,* p. 37.
8. *Presence of the Kingdom*, pp. 38-40.
9. Wendell Berry, "Horse Drawn Tools and the Doctrine of Labor Saving," pp. 104-112 in *The Gift of Good Land*, (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1981), p. 112.
10. "Agricultural Solutions for Agricultural Problems" pp. 113-124 in *The Gift of Good Land*, p. 121.
11. Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau were "advocating for the country people" and addressing the "economic consequences of emptying the countryside" in an ecological context back when they were both active in the *Espirit* in the 1930s, see *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity*, p. 64; Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1977), pp. 27-38.
12. Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 155 and *The Technological Bluff*, p. 229, 252; Wendell Berry, "What Are People For?" pp. 123-125 in *What are People For?* (New York: North Point, 1990).
13. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, 229; Berry exposes the errors of both sides in many essays, see esp. "Getting Along with Nature" pp. 6-20 in *Home Economics* (San Francisco: North Point, 1987).
14. Berry makes the point memorably in *The Unsettling of America*, p. 12; cf. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, (New York: Vintage, 1964), p.117;
15. Ellul insists that technique will accept no limitations, *The Technological Society*, pp. 134, 180.
16. See esp. "The Specialization of Poetry" pp. 3-23 in *Standing by Words* (San Francisco: North Point, 1983).
17. "The Specialization of Poetry," p. 8.
18. *The Technological Bluff*, p. 216.
19. *The Technological Bluff*, p. 201.
20. Wendell Berry, "People, Land and Community," pp. 64-69 in *Standing by Words*, p. 68; see also "The Way of Ignorance" pp. 53-67 in *The Way of Ignorance* (Shoemaker & Hoard, 2005).
21. Wendell Berry, "Healing," pp. 9-13 in *What are People For?*, p. 13.
22. The Presence of the Kingdom, p. 110.
23. See esp. Berry's exposure of the Sierra Club's investments in Exxon, General Motors, Tenneco, steel companies "having the worst pollution records in the industry" and others, *The Unsettling of America*, p. 17. Remarkably enough, the Sierra Club nevertheless published the book.
24. This is because technique itself is a use, *Technological Society*, p. 98.
25. Wendell Berry, "Local Knowledge in the Age of Information," pp. 113-125 in *The Way of Ignorance* (Shoemaker & Hoard, 2005).
26. This, in a nutshell, is the thesis of Sir Albert Howard, whose work Berry acknowledges over and over.
27. *The Meaning of the City*, p. 155.
28. See *The Meaning of the City*. In this book, Ellul would seem to suggest that a sustainable city is simply impossible, or contrary to the nature of a city. He nevertheless, advocates for a kind of resistance in the "heart of the city."
29. *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
30. *The Technological Bluff*, p. 264
31. Wendell Berry, "God and Country" pp. 95-102 in *What are People For?*, p. 102.

Ellul & Medicine

by Raymond Downing

Raymond Downing is a physician working in Kenya.

Four years ago, as part of the research for *Death and Life in America: Biblical Healing and Biomedicine*, I wrote to Joyce Hanks requesting help with finding Jacques Ellul's writings on health and medicine. She kindly sent me an entire envelope of articles, clippings, and book chapters, most of them in French. The earliest was his "Positions bibliques sur la medicine" from *Les deux cités: Cahiers des associations professionnelles protestantes*, vol. 4 (1947). Finding no published English translation, I asked a friend to translate it, and found that my thinking and writing were essentially following the outline he had roughed out in that early article.

His thesis was straightforward, and at core neither surprising nor unique. People, he said, have "two parts: soul-body and spirit, [which are] closely linked, inter-penetrated one by the other, to such an extent that no one can distinguish them and separate that which is natural from that which is supernatural in man." But more than just this link, "the physical only seems like a sign of that which is spiritual... The true drama, the true action has a place in a theatre where we haven't our ticket, where we aren't at ease." That sign is often an illness for which we seek medical help, but biomedical doctors usually don't have a ticket for the spiritual theatre, the ultimate source of the illness. They therefore focus on the physical, which Ellul calls "only a consequence, only a secondary phenomenon" – only a symptom.

I have considerably condensed his argument. He takes pains to point out that "this link between illness and sin must not be understood in a simplistic sense," such as "it's the worst sinner who is the most ill – or that illness is a sign of a bigger sin." Not at all. However, "to cure illness without the forgiveness of sins is only an adjournment, a whitewash, a fleeting crack of the whip: it isn't health. This deliverance from illness isn't of value in itself: it could mean being better only temporarily."

"Illness," he says, "possesses a profound meaning… and the doctor must evidently be attentive to not divorce illness from its meaning." Unfortunately, biomedicine cannot tell us what that meaning is, and thirty years later Susan Sontag wrote a polemic against the cultural meanings of illness she saw – still present, perhaps, because of the remnant of understanding in our culture that illness *does* have meaning. In her writing, however, she wanted "not to confer meaning… but to deprive something of meaning." She was troubled by the inappropriate and damaging metaphors of illness she confronted, and wrote to demonstrate "that illness is *not* a metaphor"(1). Ironically, she was left with only biomedicine, and betrayed a confidence and faith in it far beyond my own.

It is this difficulty we have with meanings, and the temptation to deny them altogether, where Ellul's 1947 argument begins to anticipate so much of what he later wrote about technology. He suggests that biomedical treatment is not only incomplete, but could also be counterproductive. Denying meaning that is there is certainly counterproductive, because it leads us away from healing. There is a similar dynamic when biomedicine (successful productive biomedicine) "generates hope and provokes faith." In doing so "it clothes itself in things that do not belong to it: it wears praise and the recognition which belongs only to God." This is "when medicine becomes an idol, when it becomes a power which addresses itself independently to God." Any idol, whether secular or spiritual, is counterproductive precisely because it is false.

But there are other more direct forms of counterproductivity that Ellul mentions. For example: "We note that man succeeds in part to suppress pain but not to defeat or to make illness subside. Because if an illness ends, how many other forms reappear or crop up for the first time?" The question was speculative, but half a century later research seemed to show that Ellul was on the right track. In the last decade of the 20th century there was a study of treatment methods for newly diagnosed early prostate cancers: half received surgery, and the other half didn't. Those with surgery were less likely to die of prostate cancer, but 6 years after diagnosis overall death rates in both groups were the same. In other words, "prostatectomy does not change the date of death; all it

changes is the likelihood that prostate cancer will be the direct cause."(2)

Ellul goes on: "If acute illness is arrested, to what extent are such things as general health, racial resistance weakened? If microbial illnesses seem defeated, to what extent are mental and emotional illnesses increased?" Again, recent research confirms Ellul's insight. Considering cancer survivors, those people with a diagnosis of cancer who have been treated and are still living, studies in the last decade have shown the following: "Compared with their peers, cancer survivors experience significantly decreased quality of health; increased incidence of chronic health conditions; increased levels of psychological disability; and other physical, emotional, and financial challenges."(3) We may have defeated the cancer, but we clearly did not defeat ill health.

And finally, Ellul says, because of our individualistic and materialistic approach to remedies, we are left with "only one aim: to suppress suffering." In doing so, "we have lost the sense of the relativity of life and the insertion of the individual in the communities and real generations. All this distorts the idea of remedies. The true remedy is one which reaches illness in its roots, and one which acts more or less in the long term, which likewise can only take effect in our descendants." To 21st century ears, this sounds like gene therapy, but gene therapy does nothing to situate us in our communities and with our ancestors and descendants. Symptom relief remedies, which do not "reach illness in its roots," are ultimately counterproductive because they draw attention away from the true nature of the illness. True healing, as Ayi Kwei Armah demonstrates in his novel *The Healers* (4), is healing not just of disease, but of entire communities.

In light of this very early interest that Ellul had in medicine, and the increasing relevance of all of his technology studies to biomedicine, I find it interesting – well, troubling actually – that there is so little "Ellulian" analysis of biomedicine today. I reviewed all the issues of the *Ellul Forum* since its inception, and found only 2 articles devoted specifically to health or medicine (in Issue #8 on Illich). Even followers of Illich focus elsewhere: the new *International Journal of Illich Studies* (5) – a welcome addition to these conversations – is led mostly by educators. If *Medical Nemesis* was his most successful book, where are the doctors, nurses, pharmacists, therapists and counselors in this discourse?

Admittedly, doctors, nurses, and the lot are practitioners, busy practical people, not always given to reflection on what we do. Fair enough, but where are the medical sociologists? Actually, the problem here is not their silence, but the inaccessibility of what they write. In continuing research following *Death and Life in America*, I encountered a lot of their ideas and analyses of my own profession that were quite new to me – and discovered in the process how little overlap there is between our conversation and theirs. Of course our writings are as inaccessible to them as theirs are to us. I wonder what Illich or Ellul would say about this "expert" writing that only other experts in the same field can understand? Yet even the sociologists, when they mention Illich, refer mostly to *Medical Nemesis* – certainly a fine work, but only the first of his many other even more cogent reflections on biomedicine. Why have we gotten stuck on *Medical Nemesis*?

Of course there are those who seem to have never heard of *Nemesis*, and most public debates in healthcare focus elsewhere. The biggest concern today, especially in the US, is finance reform, not healthcare reform: how can we finance the system we have? That introduces a slightly more important issue, the nature of that system. But again, we get derailed: instead of looking honestly at that system to see what it really accomplishes, we concentrate mostly on making it more efficient (Ellul would not be surprised). Our concern is not "illness in its roots" but our system in its roots.

One reason we get away with emphasizing these superficial debates is that healthcare is such a huge industry in the West – some 16% of the GNP in the US. Of course we don't want to reduce this; it is a significant part of our economy's growth. We simply need to make it more efficient so that we can offer this same healthcare package to those who now can't afford it. Besides, the products of this system – technologies of symptom relief – are remarkably effective. When we choose to ignore the roots of illness, we get away with becoming triumphalist because our offerings "generate hope and provoke faith" – and of course "wear praise and the recognition which belong only to God."

Such triumphalism itself then becomes a debate. On the one side are those who are impressed with such technological wizardry, and who delight in predicting 21st century "biofutures". On the other are bioethicists who analyze each new electronic or genetic advance, and walk us through an "on the one hand this, on the other hand that" analysis, often concluding with a warning about being too hasty in adopting the latest – while being careful not to reject it out of hand. Illich, on the other hand, just 8 years before his death, called it all a Brave New Biocracy (6)- the end result of unchallenged medicalization we saw in *Medical Nemesis*.

I understand this hesitance to confront and criticize biomedicine. I first read *Medical Nemesis* in 1976 or 77, around the time I started reading Ellul. I was troubled, but did not know what to do with the critique; I was a newly graduated doctor, and apparently could not practice in the

presence of such dissonance. I put *Nemesis* aside and focused on Ellul's theology. Over 20 years later I reread *Nemesis* (by then, it did not seem all that radical) and began reading Ellul's studies on technology. Perhaps by then I was more aware of the limitations of my own profession. A decade after that I was entranced by Illich's subsequent writings on medicine, and now more aware of the influence of Ellul on Illich.

Intellectually, I had moved – but what then could I do about biomedicine itself? I had gone into medicine because (like so many others) I liked science and wanted to help people. I had also assumed (like so many others) that healthcare was neither as dangerous as the military (or fast food) industry, nor as useless as the celebrity (or fast food) industry; healthcare, I had assumed, *helped* people. I understand the reluctance to put healthcare in these same categories. Of course, there are things about biomedicine that I still think are good; I wouldn't be working in an academic department of Family Medicine if I felt otherwise. In fact, it is precisely that environment which encourages, or rather *requires*, that we ask very serious questions about what it is that we are teaching.

So how can we do this? For a start, Ellul's "Biblical Positions on Medicine" needs to be made available to an English-speaking audience. It is more relevant today than it was 63 years ago. But it needs contemporary comment; it needs to be built on. At the same time, the academic Ellul and Illich communities need to actively recruit those interested in biomedicine – and vice versa. There is a dynamic community of social scientists with a profound critique of biomedicine, but it is little known outside their academic community. And – far more difficult – medical practitioners need to be aware of these discourses. We, after all, are the ones who "practice" medicine; we need to think more deeply on *what* it is that we are practicing.

Finally, public debates on healthcare need substantial redirection – how, I don't know. The US needs to get beyond the insurance question and look more directly at what that insurance is buying. Europe and the US need to confront the elephant in their medical room: the massive exodus of patients from biomedicine to alternative healing approaches, which bespeaks profound dissatisfaction with what we offer. And in this light, we all need to stop assuming that the poor countries in the world always need what we have developed, whether family planning or ARV drug treatment for AIDS or legal abortions or kidney transplants.

In fact, maybe it's time to start learning something about healing from them.

Notes

1. Sontag, Susan, *Illness as Metaphor* and *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (Picador USA, 2001), p. 3, 93, 102.
2. Hadler, Nortin, *The Last Well Person: How to Stay Well Despite the Health-Care System* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2004) p. 96.
3. Sunga, Annette, et al, *Care of Cancer Survivors.* FP Essentials, Edition No 352, AAFP Home Study, Leawood, Kansas, American Academy of Family Physicians, September, 2008.
4. Armah, Ayi Kewi, *The Healers* (Per Ankh, Popenguine, Senegal, 1978).
5. http://ivan-illich.org/journal/index.php/IJIS
6. Illich, Ivan, "Brave New Biocracy: Health Care from Womb to Tomb", *NPQ: New Perspectives Quarterly*, Winter94, Vol. 11 Issue 1

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Book Review

The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals

By Michael Pollan
New York: Penguin Book, 2006. 450 pp.

In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto

By Michael Pollan
New York: Penguin Book, 2008. 244 pp.

Reviewed by Mark D. Baker
Associate Professor of Mission and Theology, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary

In *The Omnivore's Dilemma* Michael Pollan presents the history of four meals from their source to his plate. He follows the path corn takes from Iowa to his fast-food meal; he compares the journey of two organic meals, one purchased at Whole Foods and the other from a single farm; and he describes the hunting, gathering and growing he did to produce the fourth meal. His book, *In Defense of Food*, explores the origins and ill effects of what he calls the "age of nutritionism" and "the Western diet" and proposes guidelines for escaping those ill effects.

The books provide a wealth of opportunities for reflecting on Ellulian themes. I recommend reading the books with questions like: what do I see when I read this work through the lens of Ellul's *Political Illusion* or *Money and Power*? Where do I see evidence of Ellul's theory of technique or description of the powers? How does Pollan's work illustrate Ellul's thought and how do Ellul's ideas illuminate Pollan's work?

Rather than giving an overview and evaluation of Pollan's books I will share a few examples of my responses to the above questions. Technique is a dominant theme in the books. Often it is explicitly on the surface. How could one not think of Ellul and technique when reading sentences like: "There are a great many reasons American cattle came off the grass and into the feedlot, and yet all of them finally come down to the same one: Our civilization and, increasingly, our food system are strictly organized on industrial lines. They prize consistency, mechanization, predictability, interchangeability, and economies of scale" (2006, p. 201). Many topics in Pollan's books illustrate characteristics of technique described by Ellul and are also illuminated by Ellul's insightful analysis of technique. For instance the move from stone-ground wheat to roller-ground, highly refined wheat illustrates that in our technological age technique marches on without external impetus. If it is more efficient we adopt it. Steel rollers made it possible to remove the germ, and thus the oil, from wheat and grind the remaining endosperm into a fine white powder. This increased the shelf life of flour by many months. As a result each town did not have to have its own mill; the flour could travel great distances. Milling operations were centralized in big cities. "The problem was that this gorgeous white powder was nutritionally worthless, or nearly so" (2008, p. 108). Wherever these refining technologies flourished epidemics of pellagra and beriberi soon followed. Ellul tells us that when encountering problems caused by technique, rather than going back to the source of the problem the default approach is to use more technique to solve the problem. What was done? Nutritional science discovered vitamins and millers begin enriching flour with vitamins that had been removed or destroyed in the refining process. Pollan goes below the surface in an Ellulian manner and observes that we have been over-confident in thinking we know all the nutrients in a particular food and have failed to recognize that food is more than a collection of nutrient pieces. Technique's solution of adding vitamins to flour does not equal whole wheat flour. Pollan writes, "Deficiency diseases are much easier to trace and treat . . . than chronic diseases, and it turns out that the practice of refining carbohydrates is implicated in several of these chronic diseases as well—diabetes, heart disease, and certain cancers" (2008, p. 109).

Technique bashing is not Pollan's primary aim. In fact, Joel Salatin, the farmer most praised in the *Omnivore's Dilemma*, uses a lot of technique in doing sustainable agriculture. Here are just two examples. The schedule of what happens on a particular section of pasture is carefully controlled. Chickens follow cattle, and neither are allowed to graze too long; Salatin seeks optimum yield by allowing the grass to grow for a specific amount of time before bringing the cattle back. A super-lightweight portable electronic fence is a vital element in the whole operation. Many frequently misunderstand Ellul as being against all technology.

Contrasting case studies in Pollan offer the opportunity to ask the question: what is the difference between the role of technique at an industrialized cattle feedlot operation and at Joel Salatin's farm? How does Ellul's thought

illuminate the difference? In one we see what concerned Ellul, the rule of the spirit of technique and its focus on absolute efficiency driving every decision. In the other we see individual techniques and technologies used. Yet at times the most efficient approach is intentionally not taken because it conflicts with the overall goal of seeking to farm in a way that follows nature and leads to good relationships between the farmer and his neighbors and to health for all involved.

Sadly the books overflow with examples of diverse and widespread alienation brought about by unquestioningly following the spirit of technique. Pollan does an excellent job of not demonizing individual actors in the industrial food system. Although he does not present a conspiracy theory the alienating elements are so strong and effective that at one point I thought: it is as if you asked a commission to make changes to our agricultural food system so that it would ruin our health, make us more oil dependent, damage the environment, and stress farmers in a myriad of ways including economic. There was, of course, no commission, but we do see these results. As I read Pollan's books I increasingly found myself reflecting on Ellul's writing about the biblical theme of the powers. In *Ethics of Freedom* he writes "the powers seem to be able to transform a natural, social, intellectual, or economic reality into a force which man has no ability to resist or control" (p. 152). What then does an ethic OF freedom look like in relation to the food system today? Pollan provides information, concrete examples of alienation and freedom and he offers guidelines for consumers. Bringing Ellul into conversation with Pollan will lead to an even richer ethic of freedom.

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Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works

by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. Visit www.elsevier.com for ordering information.

The Reception of Jacques Ellul's Critique of Technology: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings on His Life and Thought

by Joyce Main Hanks (Edwin Mellen Press, 2007). 546 pp. This volume is an amazing, iundispensable resource for studying Jacques Ellul. All the books, articles, reviews, and published symposia on Ellul's ideas and writings are here.

Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul

by Andrew Goddard. (Paternoster Press, 2002). 378 pp. Eight years after being published, Professor Goddard's study remains the best English language introduction to Ellul's life and thought.

Librairie Mollat---new books in French

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux (www.mollat.com) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

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Ellul on DVD/Video

French film maker Serge Steyer's film "Jacques Ellul: L'homme entier" (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site www.meromedia.com. Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul's ideas.

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