

**Adams, Noel**

**Ellul and Kierkegaard on the Significance of Humiliation: Influence, Similarities, Differences**

Sarah Pike Cabral's essay (in 2012) summarizes Kierkegaard's influence on Ellul's writing. Drawing on the scholarship of Eller, Rognon, Lovekin, and Terlizzese, she illustrates how there is much agreement between the two thinkers: Both agree that Christianity cannot be reduced to a system (either philosophical or theological); that the individual's relation to the divine entails radical freedom; that Christendom is a perversion of Christianity; that Christianity's truth cannot be expressed directly but rather only indirectly; that reality is a synthesis of possibility and necessity. This essay contributes to that body of literature by focusing on the way in which humiliation is central to their thinking. Even though there are aspects of Ellul's conception of humiliation that seem to be influenced by Kierkegaard, there is at least one significant difference between them. Whereas Ellul is optimistic that there can be a reconciliation of the spoken word with a proper understanding of reality, Kierkegaard is not. Kierkegaard insists that there is an essential incommensurability between the transcendent paradoxical-religious realm (in which genuine Christian faith is established) and the immanent realm of actuality (in which we exist). From the point of view of rational, universal discourse, this incommensurability enshrines humiliation as Christianity's centerpiece.

Dr. **Noel S. Adams** is an associate professor in the philosophy department at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, having been there since 2002. He teaches graduate and undergraduate courses on Kierkegaard, the philosophy of religion, and the boundary between faith and reason. His research and publication record reflect these interests. His enduring interest in Kierkegaard, and his ability to read and speak Danish, has resulted in his earning fellowships and grants allowing him to work on several research projects over the past 30 years at both the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre in Copenhagen, Denmark and the Hong Kierkegaard Library in Northfield, Minnesota.

**Beaulac, Vincent**

**The Silenced Dialogue: Digital Isolation, Autistic Students, and the Humiliation of the Word in Education**

Pending.

**Bennett, Stephanie**

**What's Missing? How and a Changing Church Ecology**

Pending.

**Blum, Peter**

**Speech, Embodiment, Word: Ellul and Merleau-Ponty on *la Parole***

Pending.

**Cali, Dennis**

**Word, Image, and the Fate of Education**

Pending.

## Cérézuelle, Daniel **Words, Idolatry, and Iconoclasm, from Marcel Proust to Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul**



Charbonneau and Ellul insisted that the State and Technique have turned into alienating powers because we worship them and turned them into modern-day idols. But renouncing idolatry is difficult, because it has deep roots in our psyche. Marcel Proust (1871–1922) had no apparent concerns about the State and technology, but he had an intimate understanding of idolatry. Focusing on amorous passion and snobbism, he describes how idolatry results from an idealizing process, based on a perversion of language and of the function of names which allows us to create images of “false greatnesses” to which we sacrifice our lives. To free ourselves from the enslavement of idolatry and its deceptive discourse, our reason should pay close attention to our impressions profondes, our deep impressions, and to the sensorial dimensions of our incarnate mode of existing. Like Proust, to regain control over our lives, Ellul and Charbonneau aim, each one in his own way, at a reincarnation of discourse. Giving voice to some of our deep impressions and to our experiences of incarnate beings is one of the foundations of Charbonneau’s and Ellul’s iconoclastic crusade against modern idols.

**Daniel Cérézuelle** was born in Bordeaux in 1948. He studied philosophy and social sciences with Jean Brun, Jacques Ellul, and Hans Jonas. As a philosopher he has taught philosophy of technology in France and in the United States. As a sociologist he is investigating the social importance of the non-monetary economy in a modern society. He is the executor of Bernard Charbonneau’s literary estate. Main publications: *La technique et la chair, essais de philosophie de la technique* and *Nature et liberté, introduction à la pensée de Bernard Charbonneau*.

## Cerling, Lee



### **Language: Prison-House or Transcendence?: AI “Speech” vs. Ellul and Balthasar**

In the 20th century, enormous pressure was exerted on language due to the advent of the industrialized “mass language” of the newspaper, radio, television, and advertising. This pressure, critics observed, made language, the instrument of human thought, increasingly dysfunctional and susceptible to abuse. In *The Humiliation of the Word*, Jacques Ellul extended this critique by showing how words were not merely abused, but increasingly being entirely displaced by nothing more than images. Today, AI-generated language—the product of pure technique—is disarmingly seductive, but is in actuality nothing but tokens and calculable probabilities. Language must, in this use of it, become the fiercely all-encompassing “iron cage” so clearly diagnosed by Max Weber. How to escape this “iron cage”? In considering this question, I bring Ellul and the Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar into dialogue. Superficially, they oppose each other, with Ellul emphasizing the importance of language and Balthasar emphasizing the importance of “seeing.” But both were keen and sensitive observers of the 20th century; and I will argue here that they have far more in common than first appears, and that exploring this commonality can illuminate a path forward for all who wish to take language seriously.

Dr. **Lee Cerling** is an associate professor in the Marshall School of Business at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, where he has taught business communication since 1999. With a BA in English and a PhD in rhetoric, both from the University of Iowa, he has always considered and taught business as a branch of the humanities, rather than as a social science. The five individuals who have had the greatest influence on his understanding of language and how it works are Aristotle, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Bruce Cockburn, Jacques Ellul, and C.S. Lewis. He first read *The Humiliation of the Word* during graduate school in the mid-1980s, and it has deeply shaped his understanding of what language is and what it is for.

## Eger, John



## The Endless Patter of Interpreting Emoji: How Ellul Helps us to Understand the Way We Communicate through Smiling Faces and Red Hearts

In 2021, a grain buyer reached out to farmer Chris Achter, asking if he would sell his flax at a particular price. Upon agreement, the buyer texted for confirmation of the contract, to which the farmer replied with a thumbs-up emoji. A problem arose when the buyer interpreted the emoji as acceptance of the contract, while the farmer had used it only to accept the text itself. The courts ruled the emoji was a valid digital signature, costing the farmer \$60,000. This presentation will draw on Ellul's unique perspective in *The Humiliation of the Word* to analyze the cultural acceptance of emoji as images that must be rigidly interpreted, regardless of the communicator's intent. There is a reliance on emojis to perform semantic lifting without inherent semantic content. This creates a hermeneutical chasm that Ellul can clarify and understand. Emojis act as determinate images with indeterminate interpretations. They are used to communicate expressions of ideas that can enrich tone, intention, and meaning. Ellul's description of the contradictory function of an image as "coherent, reliable, and inclusive," while being interpretively "insignificant," fits our culture's trust and use of emoji (Ellul 2021, 8).

**John Eger** has been a local church pastor for 20 years and currently serves in Massachusetts. He has been married for 22 years and has four children. His family loves living in New England and serving the people there. While pursuing a PhD in practical theology for the past two years, John has been able to research how individuals speak about faith when they experience ambiguity in their lives. This has led to a love for linguistics and how natural language builds and represents culture to form theological meaning. He currently writes on Substack at @jmceger.

## Forsberg, Geri



## Restoring a Theological Anthropology in Higher Education

In *The Humiliation of the Word*, Jacques Ellul presents three major domains of the Word. The panelists, Geri Forsberg and Dennis Cali, discuss how Ellul's understanding of the Word relates to education and communication. The crisis in the university today is a crisis of commitment to truth. Competing relativisms, ideological frameworks, and skepticism toward objective knowledge have weakened confidence in truth-seeking as a central academic mission. Truth is often replaced by perspective, power, or narrative. Language—once the foundation of scholarship, dialogue, and rational inquiry—is increasingly reduced to slogans, labels, and reactive discourses. There is a growing erosion of viewpoint diversity and of the willingness to engage with opposing ideas. Fear of social, professional, or institutional consequences can limit open discussion. The panelists discuss these and other crises in education.

**Geraldine E. Forsberg**, PhD, serves as the Co-President of IJES. Geri Forsberg (MA, International School of Theology; PhD, New York University under Neil Postman). She is currently a faculty fellow with Faculty Commons, a senior fellow with CCSN (Christianity and Communication Studies Network), and a member of the board of Integratio Press. She has published widely on Jacques Ellul's writings in relation to communication and education. Her most recent writings include "Narrative Art, Narrative Text: A Media Ecology Perspective" (Explorations in Media Ecology) and "The Christian Professor in the Twenty-first Century" in *From the Outrageous to the Scandalous: Re-Imagining Christian Thinking and Scholarship in an Age of Tribalism & Ideological Resentment*, edited by Robert H. Woods Jr. and Mark Allan Steiner. She serves on the English Department faculty at Western Washington University.

## Fynes, Poppy



## Ableist Intelligence: Normativity of AI Systems in Mediating Deaf People’s Communication

“Sign” languages, of any geographical or accentual variation, understandably face continuous scrutiny under the ever-present popularity of verbal dictation and autism. Through this, many potential problems arise with the current lack of accessible communication for those who rely on such sign languages for essential conversation—exacerbated by the rise of “AI” systems. Such AI systems regularly take the form of recognition and interpretation models, designed to provide seamless and accurate translation. In reality these systems are built from biased data and created without any input from deaf communities. Such models are widely used and accepted by their hearing counterparts—who remain ignorant to the inherent culture, semantics and colloquial language present in such deep and meaningful gestural language systems. For that AI technique to exist, sign language must be rationalized, in a search for profit that annihilates the conditions for communication and fails to capture the human experience of the deaf person. By that process, it presents normative effects, creating a model of Man, standardized, massified, and who has to adapt to the tool and technical milieu instead of the other way around, which we assume should have been the goal of such a technology.

## Nina Seron- Abouelfadil



**Poppy Fynes** is a Deaf PhD researcher in safe artificial intelligence at the University of York. Her research focuses on the development of Sign Language recognition systems and the critical evaluation of accessibility technologies, with a particular emphasis on how such tools shape autonomy and inclusion for disabled communities. She previously worked in XR and accessibility, designing interactive systems and experiences for people with Visual Impairments as well as for tailored therapeutic scenarios. Alongside her academic work, she advocates for equitable, experience-led approaches to technology that foreground culture and diversity rather than erasure.

**Nina Seron-Abouelfadil** is a French-Moroccan PhD researcher in AI safety and philosophy of AI in the SAINTS CDT at University of York. She is working on a political ecology of AI, through the works of Jacques Ellul, André Gorz, and Ivan Illich, to determine whether AI as a tool could fit a post-growth world, and how. She was a city councillor of Vitry-sur-Seine, parliamentary attachée, and an activist for social, environmental, and democratic justice in France.

## Greenhalgh, Spencer



### Image and Word in Mormonism's Foundational Media Events

The particular relationship between Mormonism and media makes Ellulian thinking useful for scholars of Mormonism and makes Mormonism interesting from an Ellulian perspective. More specifically, Ellul's distinction between "image" and "word"—and between reality and truth—in *The Humiliation of the Word* is useful for understanding two foundational media events of Mormonism: a purported theophany experienced by Joseph Smith Jr. (his "First Vision") in the 1820s and his claim to have translated the Book of Mormon from ancient American records later in that decade. Believers, church leaders, and scholars have offered diverse perspectives on how to understand these two events, but many of these perspectives resemble one or the other of Ellul's twin conceptions of "image" and "word." Mormon apologists and authorities have tended to privilege perspectives that are focused on the "image"—and therefore on Ellul's "reality," which is purportedly self-evident and requires conformity. This consideration of Ellul in the context of Mormonism can help us see the image and the word as different attitudes toward media rather than as inherent qualities of a particular medium; it also gives scholars of Mormonism a way of understanding that tradition's continued relationship with media and technology.

**Spencer P. Greenhalgh** (BA, French Teaching, Brigham Young University, Utah; PhD, Educational Psychology and Educational Technology, Michigan State University) is an associate professor and program coordinator of Information Communication Technology in the School of Information Science at the University of Kentucky. He is an interdisciplinary researcher who studies digital platforms and other information communication technologies as they relate to education, Mormonism, and other phenomena. His research typically approaches these phenomena through "digital methods," collecting data directly from social media and other online platforms and then analyzing them as traces of human meaning-making practices; however, his work is increasingly theoretical, bringing Ellulian critique to bear on these same phenomena.

## Halton, Eugene



## The Humiliation of Vision

In *The Humiliation of the Word*, Jacques Ellul continued his critique of technological society by showing how the omnipresence of images has devalued the word as a basis for communicative dialogue and truth. Although sympathetic to Ellul's withering critique, his emphasis on the word seems to me excessive. I take a different perspective, considering two ways of knowing: the affirming outlook and the rational (doubting or abstracting) outlook. Rational cognition or "logical mind" works by negation, abstracting from a source rather than bodying forth. Affirmative mind connects relationally to a source, and in doing so participates in and embodies it. They can be understood as relational contraries. The asymmetrical balance between these two ways shifted in the course of history toward a progressive overelevation of rational mind and devaluation of affirmative mind. "Visual thinking" itself underwent contraction in modern life, through the rationalization of image and vision, which lost "sight" of sight as itself a form of touching, the image as a potential basis for vital imagination, and vision as potentially visionary. The reasoning power may try to claim its supremacy, but affirming passion ultimately surpasses dissenting abstraction as the touchstone for sustainable living.

**Eugene Halton** is a sociologist and philosopher and professor emeritus at the University of Notre Dame. He has written extensively on materiality, consumption and materialism, philosophical pragmatism, Lewis Mumford, and the problematic nature of modern civilization and the civilizational mindset more generally. His recent works concern a new philosophy of history regarding the limitations of the civilizational mindset, and guideposts toward re-attuning contemporary civilization to what he has termed "sustainable wisdom." Halton's first book, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (coauthored with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi), based on his dissertation, is regarded as a keystone in material culture studies and has been translated into four languages. His most recent book is *From the Axial Age to the Moral Revolution*, which rediscovered the lost work of 19th century philosopher John Stuart-Glennie. The book has changed the accepted history of the concept of the axial age, the period roughly centered about 600–500 BCE, when a new, reflective consciousness broke out across a variety of civilizations. Earlier books include *The Great Brain Suck*, *Bereft of Reason*, and *Meaning and Modernity*, all with University of Chicago Press. Halton is also coeditor of *Indigenous Sustainable Wisdom: First Nation Know-How for Reconsidering ideas of Guy Debord, Jacques Ellul, Marshall McLuhan, Ivan Illich, etc.*

## Hanson, Tyler

## The Transfiguration of Sight: Hope for Icons and the reconciliation of Imagination in Jacques Ellul's *The Humiliation of the Word*

Pending.

## Hartsock, Luke



## When Words Become Weights: Ellul’s Prophecy Realized in Large Language Model Training

Jacques Ellul’s *Humiliation of the Word* (1981) warned that image-dominated culture would reduce language to propaganda, spectacle, and powerless noise. Writing before the internet, Ellul could not have foreseen how thoroughly his prophecy would be realized in the training data of Large Language Models. This paper argues that LLM training methodology literally enacts the humiliation Ellul described. When we scrape the internet to train trillion-parameter models, we are decontextualizing words from embodied speakers, commodifying human discourse as extractable patterns, reducing language to statistical tokens divorced from meaning-making communities, and automating the very depersonalization Ellul warned would destroy authentic communication. We have trained systems on pre-humiliated language—Reddit threads, SEO spam, engagement bait—then further optimized them via reward mechanisms that privilege virality over truth. It is technique all the way down. I then examines how “agentic AI”—systems that act autonomously in the world—compounds these problems by automating humiliated communication at scale. When voice AI handles customer service or dispatch coordination, are we liberating humans from drudgery, or mechanizing the speech-acts that constitute human dignity? However, this paper is not merely diagnostic. I propose design principles for non-humiliating AI: augmentation rather than replacement of human communication, preservation of speaker agency and dignity, and transparent acknowledgment of limitations. Using my company’s voice dispatch system as a case study, I demonstrate that it is possible to build AI that serves human flourishing rather than extracting from it. The humiliated word can be resurrected—but only if we choose to build differently.

**Luke Hartsock** is co-founder/CEO of Gearvox, an AI startup whose platform automates ~25,000+ customer conversations monthly to deploy technicians—connecting the in-person power of field service with competent agentic AI. He studied international studies and intellectual history at the University of Washington, focusing on economic development of deeply divided societies. In 2008 he founded Decisive Data, a data analytics tech-service provider helping organizations use data to realize better outcomes; the company was acquired in 2021. His approach to AI design integrates Ellul’s theology of the incarnate Word with Girard’s mimetic theory as frameworks for preserving human dignity in automated communication.

**Heckman, Davin**



## **What Is a “Word” to a Large Language Model?**

This paper will discuss Large Language Models and AI imagery in light of Ellul’s *Humiliation of the Word*. Beginning with a discussion of orality versus text, and the visualization of the language in print media, I will move through a discussion of how LLMs “understand” human language (trained on massive datasets, forming semantic associations between words, and using probabilistic models to determine “correct” answers), I will address the difference between language use for machine intelligence and human speakers. Next, I will discuss how these models generate visual imagery, which often appears abundant, playful, even “conversational” in digital spaces (lending a kind of pseudo-orality to audio/visual communication). Building on earlier writing on poetic language versus instrumental language, I will explore a range of creative practices that intervene in the emerging organization (really “ordinalization”) of language in LLMs, that allow human users to probe the edges and limits of machine thinking, and that seek to evade or redirect the flood of visualization that is quickly overriding our ability to make sense of the world. Critical to this discussion will be Ellul’s observations on the disintegration of meaning and the hopeful possibilities in a return to intimacy and orality in culture.

**Davin Heckman** is a professor of communication and media at Winona State University and the author of *A Small World: Smart Houses and the Dream of the Perfect Day* (Duke UP 2008). He serves on the board of the Electronic Literature Organization, and his writings on digital poetics can be found in electronic book review, Rhizomes.net, and Hyperrhiz. His area of research is creative digital media practice, and he is exploring his growing interest in Jacques Ellul, René Girard, and Dorothy Day. Mainly, Davin enjoys spending time with his family.

**Hogg, Robert**

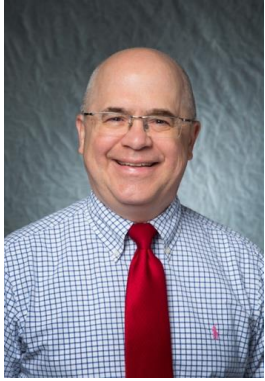
## **Holocaust, Propaganda, JE**

Pending.

**O'Malley,  
Timothy**

Pending.

## **Honegger, Mark**    **Can You Trust AI?**



In *The Humiliation of the Word*, Jacques Ellul argues that "a computer must never, ever be accepted as an ultimate reason," which would be to treat the computer as if it were a human making claims of truth. It is this personification of technology that is at the heart of the challenges that AI poses. The development of greater computing resources has made possible the analysis of large language models whereby an exceptionally large amount of data can be used to predict what word might come next in a particular sequence. The models are based on statistical correlations between word occurrences, not on meaning or human intention. This leads to the following anomalous relationship: an AI program produces words linked together by statistical patterns (not by meaning!), but that output is interpreted by meaning-making humans as meaningful. That is, the meaning comes not from the computer but from the interpreter. This needs to be compared to a human interaction, where a speaker does produce meaning and a hearer interprets their language as meaning. Thus, there is a need to demystify AI, so that you do not treat its output as you would the language of another human being.

**Mark Honegger** is a professor of linguistics in the Department of English at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette, where he oversees the MA concentration in TESOL. His research focuses on cross-cultural differences in meaning. He is also interested in how Jacques Ellul's analysis of technique can contribute to an understanding of culture and cultural change today in a wide variety of settings.

## **Hudson, Jason**    **Dialectical Presence, Partisan False Presence, and Christian Thirdwayism**

Pending.

## **Landgraf, Ginny**    **Bearing True Witness for One's Neighbor in a Time of Climate Science Censorship: Why Truth Needs Reality in a Material, Interconnected World**

Pending.

**Littlehale,  
Matthew**

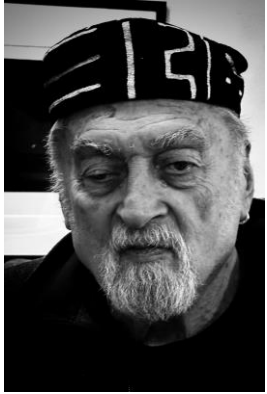


**The Humiliation of the Meme: The Word and Its Transmission in the Digital Age**

Today, we are constantly bombarded by images overlaid with text (memes) via algorithms designed to maximize platform engagement through the collection of media consumption data based on habits. Our attention is co-opted by outrageous content which has formed us into an “outrage culture” beyond our own control, all while distorting what truth actually is. In this paper, I will discuss the effects of technique and its impetus on the drastic changes in the way that information is transmitted over the past 50 years and its implications on revealed truth. I focus on the way in which technique has reshaped the way we communicate and pass information generationally, both vertically between generations and horizontally within a generation. We will see how memes represent a degradation of not just truth, but the Logos. We have distilled “the Word become flesh” into pithy short form videos and memes, losing the how in which the divine revelation is shared through words communally rather than memes distributedly. The transition from word to meme has fundamentally altered how truth is perceived—from hearing that requires faith and time to seeing that creates false immediacy.

**Matthew Littlehale** brings a unique perspective to theology through his dual vocation in technology and ministry. As a software engineering industry leader, he has led software teams across marketing technology, data science, machine learning, and artificial intelligence. This has provided deep insight into the algorithmic systems that are shaping contemporary communication. Simultaneously, as director of Dinner Church at The Feast—a twice-weekly communal meal serving primarily low-income and homeless neighbors—he witnesses the irreducible importance of embodied presence and table fellowship in Christian community. This intersection of high-tech professional work and incarnational ministry practice uniquely positions him to examine how technique transforms religious discourse and what faithful resistance might require in an algorithmic age.

## Lovekin, David



## Image, Word, Desire, and the Search for the Center

Ellul, in *La technique*, describes technology historically and sociologically as the wager (*enjeu*) of the century. At stake is human freedom. At no time are humans free from determinisms, nor are they free from making choices. The world is not given but made, and making takes place within the domains of the image and the word. The means of hope God grants in the power of making with the word, a power he shares with humanity. The wager keeps happening: Do humans choose what they have made and not grant God's making? Or, do they grant a measure of perfection and otherness in their making? An image is what appears undeniable but insignificant. Images belong to the realm of reality that refers to the true that makes insignificance possible. Significance is added by a word, not seen but made, to qualify and situate what is seen. The image is like what is produced in a camera: hundreds or thousands of moments that are meaningless until tied together by memory and imagination. The certainties of technique are false certainties and ultimately contradictions without guarantees. *Enjeu* also means "play." Ellul writes that the self cannot become itself "unless it enters into the game of the possible and the necessary of freedom and necessity. . . . The play between these two realities is what makes human existence possible." I will further flesh out these points by using my own photography as an instruction of finding a dialectical center in perception and its representations. I will take up my work on Lebanon, Kansas, claiming to be the center of the United States. I will claim that a center begins with the point on which we stand, from which we speak.

**David Lovekin** is professor of philosophy emeritus at Hastings College, Hastings, Nebraska. His PhD is from the University of Texas at Dallas. He is the author of *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul*. He is co-editor with Donald Phillip Verene of *Essays in Humanity and Technology* (1978). He is co-editor of *Political Illusion and Reality* (2018) with David Gill. He is co-translator of Jacques Ellul's *Empire of Non-Sense*, a critique of modernist art (2014). He has published numerous essays on Ellul and Giambattista Vico that deal with technology as a concern for the philosophy of culture in the spirit of Ernst Cassirer to grasp technology as a symbolic form.

## Mandt, Sophia



## The Agony of Idolatry: Word-Humiliating Worship and Separation from God

This paper will bring Ellul into a theological conversation with other critics of technology. The intent is to clarify the dehumanization caused by the sacrifice of the fragile word on the idolatrous altar of technological progress. The paper will focus on Ellul's *Humiliation of the Word* to explicate Ellul's argument that technological progress inevitably minimizes the importance of the Word and breeds alienation from the presence of God. I will bring Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Creation and Fall* into conversation with Ellul, underlining how the fallen human is now "a prisoner, a slave, of the world . . . its dominion is an illusion." Bonhoeffer describes technology as "the power with which the earth seizes hold of humankind and masters it" (67). I will emphasize the dark implications of the entrance of sin into the world because of Adam and Eve's disobedience to the spoken commands of God. I will also introduce Norman Mailer's *Of a Fire on the Moon* as a modern critique of the mass mentality and celebration of humanity's technical prowess. Ultimately, the essay will argue for an acknowledgement of the gravity of the degradation of speech, speech which reflects the Biblical God who *spoke* the world into existence. The arrogant and idolatrous tendencies of humans do urgently call for Ellul's vigorous defense of the Scriptural and anti-technical Word.

**Sophia Mandt** is a rising senior at Hillsdale College, where she studies sociology and social thought and journalism. Sophia is an editor and contributor to the Hillsdale Forum, the news director for WRFH Radio Free Hillsdale 101.7 FM, and a graduate of the National Journalism Center, where she was placed with Reason Magazine. Her work has been referenced in outlets such as the New York Post, The R Street Institute, and RealClearEducation. Sophia thinks Ellul is an integral figure toward understanding the realities behind many economic, social, and spiritual problems. Recently, she has been drawn to the works of Merleau-Ponty and Mercea Eliade because of how both writers challenge the dominant paradigm of technocracy and cybernetics. In her free time she loves reading and good conversation.

## Morelli, Michael

## Revolutionary Images? Going to the Cinema with Jacques Ellul

Pending.

## Peone, Dustin



## Vico, Joyce, Ellul: Patternminds and Paradigmatic Ears

Jacques Ellul sets himself against the main currents of modernity in his argument for the primacy of *hearing* as the source of meaning in the human world. He is not, however, alone in his insights. James Joyce similarly understood and honored the primacy of the word. In *Finnegans Wake*, the receptiveness to the word is the master key to the human world. The hero of the *Wake* is H. C. Earwicker (“that patternmind, that paradigmatic ear”). Earwicker is receptive to the voice of God as it speaks through the patterns of history. Earwicker is also “Ear-Vico”; the “trellis” of *Finnegans Wake* was the *New Science* of Giambattista Vico. In considering what Mr. Earwicker is ‘earing, we must consider what Vico heard. For Vico, the work of understanding the meaning and course of human institutions is not the work of the eye. One must be receptive to the sounds and rhythms of the deepest past—in particular the clap of thunder, which is the first word of God. I wish to put Vico, Joyce, and Ellul in conversation with one another, and to use Ellul’s philosophical analysis to enrich the poetic wisdom of Joyce and the philological insights of Vico.

**Dustin Peone** is lecturer in philosophy at Mercer University. He has written six books, including *Shame, Fame, and the Technological Mentality*; *Making Philosophy Laugh*; and *Vico and Literature*. He is also managing editor of the *Philosophy of Humor Yearbook*.

## Roy, Christian



## The Primacy of Speech in Bernard Charbonneau's Media Ecology

In 1945, Bernard Charbonneau introduced the 1,000-page *Summa* of his critique of technological society, developed over 15 years with Jacques Ellul, as the fruit of their failure to generate new communities through direct dialogue on a human scale. The written word was for Charbonneau a dubious substitute for the first of media: speech, the standard by which he judged other media to counteract what he would call *Mediatized Society* in an eponymous book written in 1986, still pointing to the prewar press clubs he led with Ellul as a grassroots revolutionary tactic. For the modern humiliation of speech through its industrial reproduction reduces it to noise as chatter or to the false speech of disinformation and propaganda. While “the inflation of so-called voices, words, sounds and images devalues language,” no communication media can replace it. Hence, “one of the tasks of an opposition to industrial society is to defend that most ‘organic’ of means of communication: speech,” one “that can be heard and expressed by anyone,” not just specialists. This is reflected in the diction of Charbonneau’s books, often pointedly addressed to “you the reader” who might be moved to action by the urgency of this message in a bottle.

Based in Montreal, **Christian Roy** (PhD, McGill, 1993) is a cultural historian, an art critic, a film scholar, and a multilingual translator, e.g., from German of Carl Schmitt and Paul Tillich and into English of Jacques Ellul (*Theology and Technique*, Wipf & Stock, 2024) and Bernard Charbonneau (*The Green Light. A Self-Critique of the Ecological Movement*, Bloomsbury, 2018 and *Mediatized Society* in instalments by crowdfunding at <https://www.patreon.com/christianroymedia>, 2025). Roy’s independent research focuses on lesser-known strands of the Personalist intellectual tradition (such as the Ordre Nouveau group, the Bordeaux School, etc.), to dig up their roots in interwar Europe. Website: <https://roychristian.academia.edu>

## Samalavičius, Almantas



### Reclaiming the Word in the Age of an Image

The author of the paper argues that Jacques Ellul predicted a set of pressing issues that society already dominated by technique would inevitably face as soon as the culture of images takes over. His insights were soon confirmed: Computer and smartphone screens have become essential metaphors of contemporary global culture. Although some important authors writing in the seventies of the last century (such as Marshall McLuhan) avoided discussing the destructive nature of such a transformation, Ellul offered a sound and timely analysis as ascending visual culture based on images rather than words or texts has only expanded since publication of *Humiliation of the Word*. Reconsidering ideas of Guy Debord, Jacques Ellul, Marshall McLuhan, Ivan Illich, etc., the author suggests that the currently dominating culture of an image cannot and should not be reduced to binary opposition paganism vs Christianity as authors such as Camille Paglia or Arthur Hunt insist. He argues that despite the persistence of such an attitude one needs to go beyond it. Though currently dominating visual culture can hardly be effectively reversed, it can be resisted. Sustaining reading is one of such resistance strategies.

**Almantas Samalavičius**, PhD, is a professor at Vilnius Gediminas Technical University's School of Architecture, where he teaches architectural criticism and aesthetics, architectural and urban theory, as well as landscape theory and aesthetics, and supervises PhD dissertations. He has been a visiting professor at Illinois University at Chicago, Diponegoro University and Bandung Institute of Technology (Indonesia), Rome University Sapienza (Italy), Kyungpook National University (South Korea), Kobe University and Shibaura Technological Institute (Japan), etc. He is an author and editor of more than two dozen books (some ten titles available internationally), including *Ideas and Structures: Essays on Architectural History and Aesthetics* (2011), *Rethinking Modernism and the Built Environment* (2017), *Neoliberalism, Economism and Higher Education* (2018), *Site, Symbol and Cultural Landscape* (2021), *Architecture, Well-Being and the Built Environment* (2025). Since 2012 he is the editor in chief of an international *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism* and serves as associate editor of Lithuania's leading cultural monthly, *Kultūros barai*. His writings have been translated into 15 languages and won him eight awards in his home country. His scholarly interests range from architecture, literature, and higher education to an inquiry on what technologies say about contemporary society.

## Schuchardt, Read An Idol That Speaks: Humiliating the Word by Exalting the Language

In *The Humiliation of the Word*, Ellul posits that the dual nature of the spoken word is its simultaneous fragility and its robustness as the articulator of our most deeply held beliefs. The necessity of this dynamic tension, both for epistemological humility and for Ellul's necessary distinction between Reality and Truth, is the key insight that makes Ellul's understanding of the Word as central to any contemporary analysis or critique of Artificial Intelligence. In this paper, the author contrasts the iconography of the original word with the idolatry of the word-like products of Artificial Intelligence, and attempts a rudimentary taxonomy for distinguishing between the two. The paper also considers AI in light of the tower of Babel and the Creation, both through an Ellulian lens.

**Read Mercer Schuchardt** is associate professor of communication at Wheaton College, where he co-taught two sections of a course on Jacques Ellul. He is co-author, with Jeff Greenman and Noah Toly, of *Understanding Jacques Ellul* (Wipf & Stock, 2018).

**Shipp, Meg**

## **Time to Think: Fighting for Focus in an Accelerated Age**

Pending.

**Soucy, Garrett**

## **Poetry as the Redemption of Efficiency**



There is a line of understanding that runs through the history of poetic thought and literary criticism that understands poetry to be something like efficient linguistic reduction. Unlike the efficiency of the image, however, the distillation process that takes place in poetry does not incite a distancing of the word from its context; rather, it reveals the hidden and discreet aspects of the word's wider context. Poetry teaches a kind of analogical holism. In my presentation, I will develop a cartography of poetic thought throughout history that proves the art of poetry to be one of the most important prognostic tools available to the human in response to Ellul's diagnosis. Learning the art of poetry teaches a virtuous form of efficiency rather than the viciousness of the efficiency of the image. Poetry catechizes her students into clarifying the word's context through a distilled form of telling rather than detaching the word from its context through a reduced form of showing.

**Garrett Soucy** has written a book on the literary motif of rocks and stones in Scripture, published by Wipf & Stock, entitled *Who Is This Rock?*. His first book of poems, *Between the Joints & the Marrow*, published by Fernwood Press, is an imaginative tour guide of each book of the Bible. He has lectured on poetry and religion. His poems and lyrics have been published in *Aesthetica*, *Ekstasis*, *Second Nature Journal*, and elsewhere. His poem, *Hellmouth*, was shortlisted for the 2023 *Aesthetica* Award in Creative Writing. He lives with his wife and eleven children in rural Maine where he ministers at Christ the King Church.

**Sundby, Chris**

## **Jaques Ellul and the Situationists: May '68, Le blouson noirs, and the Spectacle**



"Dear friend," begins a 1962 letter from Guy Debord to Jacques Ellul. Debord—of Situationist International (SI) fame—had not yet written his well-known 1967 book, *The Society of the Spectacle*, which influenced Ellul and his *Humiliation of the Word*. The friendly letters from Debord to Ellul in the 1960s mention exchanging books, meeting in 1962, and disagreeing about les blousons noirs and Ellul's Christianity. Many of Ellul's books from this period and after reference Debord directly or indirectly, and this presentation explores this influence as well as describing their meeting(s). I begin to explore the following questions: What was it that Debord found "quite remarkable" in Ellul's writing? And why did Ellul describe Debord's thought as "rigorous and explanatory," even enquiring about joining the SI?

**Christopher Sundby** is beginning a doctoral program in history this September at the University of Manitoba, exploring nationalism, socialism, and violence in 19th- and 20th-century Mennonite history. He has a master of arts in theological studies from Regent College, where he explored Dietrich Bonhoeffer's influence on North American Anabaptist thought. He has also published on Paulo Freire and Mennonites, Bonhoeffer and Anabaptism, and has a paper currently prepared for publication on Peter Kropotkin and Anabaptism. He lives in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, where he does community work at Jacob's Well.

## Sutherland, Dawn **Simulated Speech and the Silence of Meaning: Reclaiming the Word in an Age of Noise**



Orwell feared a state that would ban words. Huxley feared that words would drown in sensation. Ellul feared that the word itself would be humiliated, emptied of truth, displaced by image, and replaced by *technique*. Postman feared that once truth became entertainment, censorship would no longer be necessary. They were all right. The contemporary condition instantiates each diagnosis at once. AI mimics speech without listening; propaganda no longer requires enforcement, only curation. The word is not ignored; it is algorithmically replaced. The crisis is ontological before it is political or cultural. What erodes is not only truth but the conditions under which truth could be spoken, heard, or desired. Drawing on Ellul's *La parole humiliée*, the biblical theology of *dabar* and *logos*, and a theological anthropology grounded in the *imago Dei* as a speaking and listening creature, this paper traces the diagnosis and proposes the recovery of the Word as theological resistance to the regime of *technique*.

**Dawn Lewis Sutherland** is a Bible scholar and professor at Liberty University, where she specializes in philosophy of religion, theological anthropology, ethics, and Old Testament / ANE comparative theology. She is the author of *From Babel to AI: Idolatry, Transhumanism, and the Crisis of Imago Dei* (Wipf and Stock, 2025) and its devotional companion volume, *From Babel to AI, Volume 2: A Devotional Awakening to Faith, Identity, and Technology* (2026), with a foreword by David W. Gill. Her work engages Ellul, Bonhoeffer, and patristic sources to interrogate the metaphysical dislocation of language and personhood in technological society. She has presented in philosophy of religion and theological ethics across the United States and abroad. In 2025, she was named Early-Career Philosopher of Religion of the Year (IVP/Tyndale). Her research interests center on the *imago Dei*, the doctrine of the Word, and the theological consequences of *technique*.

**Thomas, George**

## **Images, Desire, and the Primacy of the Word**



In analyzing the dominance of images since the mid-twentieth century, it commonly is argued that images independently establish a reality, thereby marginalizing language; yet the meaning and even the perception of an image depends on discourse. I focus on two aspects of the contemporary situation: the proliferation of “fake images” with technologies such as AI, and an increase in the volume of words via the internet and social media. I argue that in the contemporary situation, images do not establish reality thereby proving a narrative; rather, images are “believed” if they embody a narrative. I use Ellul’s analysis in *The Humiliation of the Word* and the relationship he identified in *Presence in the Modern World* between information (phenomena) and interpretation/meaning (myth) to explore the continued primacy of the word. I draw on contemporary, historical, and biblical cases to explore the mutual relationship between myths (in particular, false narratives) and their powerful embodiment in images. Mechanisms include belief (of the myth), desire (for glory), within the logic of technique (necessary methods). I identify implications. For the Christian speaking to the contemporary situation, old imperatives are reinforced: speaking truth and desiring God’s glory.

**George M. Thomas** (PhD, sociology, Stanford University) is professor emeritus of sociology, politics, and global studies at Arizona State University. He conceptualizes world cultural processes as global rationalism (instrumental rationalism or technique), studying their constitutive effects on authority and identity and subsequent effects on religious movements and rights. Current research explores the relationship between sovereignty and the sacred, apparent in the modern nation-state’s desire for glory. He analyzed the rise of religious technique in *Revivalism and Cultural Change* (University of Chicago Press, 1989) and global rationalism and global civil society in *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations Since 1875* (co-edited with John Boli, Stanford University Press, 1999) and has published in numerous scholarly journals.

**Tuttle, Ian**

## **JE & Jean-Louis Chrétien**

Pending.