The Ellul Forum

for the Critique of Technological Civilization

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Technique and the Paradoxes of Development

From the Editor

I am very fortunate to have a good editorial board who continue to contribute their talents to *The Ellul Forum*. For this issue Joyce Hanks, from the University of Scranton, is serving as Guest Editor. She has not only organized and edited this issue but translated all the main articles as well. This was a labor of love on her part which puts us all deeply in her debt. I am very greatful for her efforts in this regard. I will let Joyce tell you about this issue.

Darrell J. Fasching, Editor

About This Issue

This number of the *Ellul Studies Forum* attempts to show how Ellul's theories and principles can be pursued and applied in areas readers may not have seen before. My original intention was to request articles from French scholars who have used something from Ellul as a basis for their own work, but who have gone beyond merely summarizing or reaffirming what Ellul had previously stated. Both Daniel Cérézuelle and Serge Latouche exemplify this trend, I believe, and I am happy to present my translations of their articles to you in this issue of the *Forum*. Both authors were exceptionally helpful when I wrote them for clarifications of what they had originally submitted to me.

My own article was not originally intended for publication in the *Forum*. When Serge Latouche's article seemed to take some of Ellul's stance on development for granted, however, I felt my article might serve as an introduction to his study.

When Timothy Casey, a colleague, saw me reading David Lovekin's new book on Ellul, *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul*, he expressed an interest in looking at it. Later he agreed to review it for this issue of the Forum.

Serge Latouche teaches economics at the University of Paris XI and at the Institute for the Study of Economic and Social Development. His many published books include *Le procès de la science sociale (1984)*, *Faut-il refuser le développement?* (1986), *L'occidentalisation du monde* (1989), and *La planète des naufragés* (1991).

Daniel Cérézuelle, a former student of Ellul's at the University of Bordeaux who also studied under Jean Brun and Hans Jonas, has taught philosophy and worked as a sociologist. He serves as secretary of the international Society for the Philosophy of Technique, and participates in an ecological study group.

Timothy Casey chairs the Department of Philosophy at the University of Scranton (PA).

Joyce Hanks, Guest Editor

In This Issue

Bulletin Board

A Facelift and Change of Philosophy for the Forum

You may have noticed that this issue of the Forum has a different look to it Improvements in typesetting software have made it possible to do new things. With the change in layout also comes a slight change in name and philosophy. The name has been changed from ***The Ellul Studies Forum*** to ***The Ellul Forum***. The tag line has also been changed from "A Forum for Theology in a Technological Civilization" to "for the Critique of Technological Civilization." Dropping the word "studies" from the masthead is meant to suggest that we honor the work of Jacques Ellul best when we go beyond just studying Ellul and tackle the issues raised by technology which Ellul's work highlights. Dropping the word "theology" from the tag line is meant to indicate that while a central interest of the Forum is the theological critique of technological civilization, we are also interested in other critical approaches -- sociological, historical, philosophical, etc. This issue is a case in point. In this issue the central focus in not on theological issues but sociological ones. It is good to keep in mind the double focus of Ellul's work and carry that focus forward in our own work.

About Ellul

Jacques Ellul has received several distinguished honors this year. An auditorium at the Institute for Political Studies in Bordeaux has been named for him, he was chosen as a member of the Bordeaux Academy, and he received the Grand Literary Prize of the City of Bordeaux in June. Ellul fell ill and was unable to attend the ceremony for the awarding of this prize at the Bordeaux City Hall, with Jacques Chaban-Delmas, the mayor, presiding and speaking. Ellul's son Jean attended, and read his speech in his stead.

Ellul's most recent books include *L'homme à lui même*, published in 1992 by Editions du Félin (address: 42, rue Servan, 75011 Paris; tel. 48.05.80.71). This work explores the writer's impact on readers. A second new book by Ellul deals with the subject of "deviance" as a product of modern society, but we still lack its title and publisher.

Patrick Troude-Chastenet's long-awaited study on Ellul was published in November 1992: *Lire Ellul: Introduction à l'oeuvre socio-politique de Jacques Ellul* (202 pages). It can be obtained from the publisher, Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, Université de Bordeaux III, Domaine Universitaire, 33405 Talence Cedex, France, for 90 francs (not including postage).

L'Association Jacques Ellul

During the past year, Ellul family members and colleagueshave joined together for the purpose of preserving the collection of his writings and manuscripts, and making his work better known. The Association has now been legally registered in France, and will soon be ready to invite interested citizens of other countries to join. If you would like more information about the Association as it becomes available, please send your name and address to: Joyce M. Hanks, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Scranton, Scranton PA 18510-4646.

Ellul Documentary Debuts in Holland

(I wish to thank Professor Sape Zylstra, University of South Florida, for preparing this report based on Dutch press materials sent to us by the producers. -- D. Fasching, Editor)

A Dutch film institute, ReRun Productions, has announced the release of a fifty minute film on Jacques Ellul entitled *The Betrayal by Technology*. The film which was edited from over six hours of interviews with Ellul done in December of 1990, was broadcast on Dutch television in October of 1992. A version of this film is available with English subtitles. Interested parties should contact: Stichting ReRun Produckties, Postbus 43021, 1009 ZA Amsterdam Holland. (Phone 020-6922036.)

The film was previewed by a panel of three university professors as well as members of the press. Members of the panel criticized Ellul for his abstractions, determinism, exaggeration and lack of practical solutions. According to one -- "Everything that happens fits in his theory and hence the theory is wrong. The culture is responsible, not technology." However, journalists were less inclined to dismiss Ellul that facilely. They pointed out, among other things, that Ellul's fate was typical of society's critics since they are judged by the very norms and schemata with they criticize. In defense of Ellul it was further pointed out that his clearly formulated thought forced television viewers to become aware of their technological environment.

A Dutch newspaper article also devoted a long article to the Ellul controversy. The article pointed out that after WWII, Ellul wrote an essay with the title "Hitler has Won." In it he posited that what was characteristic of the Third Reich was not its ideology but its limitless technological thinking in terms of problem solving, efficiency, and goal-orientation, all brought into practice with the most developed means of power. In Western Society since that time, goal-directed, rationalistic, technological thought makes it difficult to entertain ideas which are not oriented to usefulness, end results and quantitative analysis. Aldous Huxley is quoted as saying of Ellul's *The Technological Society* (*La Technique*) -- "This is what I meant to say earlier in Brave New World." The article ends by pointing out that only among students in the United States in the sixties did Jacques Ellul find a true appreciation and following. (Editor's note: It is out of this context that *The Ellul Forum* was born.)

Reflections on Social Techniques

by Daniel Cérézuelle

Over a period of a dozen years, from 1979 to 1991, my professional activities as a sociologist often involved me in studying "social techniques." My efforts dealt especially with social techniques implemented in the context of public policy for fighting social inadaptation and marginalization.

Using these empirical studies as a basis, I have tried to develop a more theoretical and synthetic reflection concerning the role and limits of social techniques.[1] These have rarely been studied as techniques. My work owes much to Jacques Ellul's analyses of the social impact of techniques, and essentially confirms his insights. But my studies also suggest some new departures with respect to what Ellul found. This is particularly true in the area of human techniques and the possibilities of effective and efficient closure of a technical system.

Beginning in 1954, with his *The Technological Society*[2], Ellul emphasized the importance of human techniques, devoting the last hundred pages of his book to them. In particular, he pointed out that rapid technical development in society brings with it significant problems of social inadaptation. Such problems arise when an individual does not adapt to the "new sociological organism, which becomes his world" (*Tech. Soc.*, p. 334). When this occurs a person "loses his possibilities of subsistence, and is at last tossed on the social rubbish heap, whatever his personal talents may be" (*Tech. Soc.*, p. 334).

Ellul saw very clearly that technical development inevitably produces problems of social integration, and that human techniques come along to respond precisely to these problems. In fact, since the end of the Second World War, in France we have witnessed a considerable development of professional agencies in the area of social action. This development involves not only quantitative growth--of personnel, structures, and budgets, for example. It also involves qualitative growth in terms of more and more professionalization and specialization of personnel, and greater diversification in the institutions and techniques of intervention.

My empirical studies, carried out over a period of more than ten years, were designed mainly to evaluate the specialized agencies for implementing social techniques (relating to welfare, the struggle against poverty, help for maladjusted children, etc.). But evaluating the implementation of a single technique leads to a consideration of the problem of the potential effectiveness of the implementation of social techniques in general, in professional agencies. This question leads in turn to a consideration of general theoretical problems rooted in sociology and the philosophy of technique.

As with any engineering procedure, evaluation must take into account the fact that no technique is ever perfectly put into play. Between the conception of any technique and its application, we always find a gap stemming from the interaction of various social factors. We must do our best to reduce this gap to a minimum, realizing that we will always be left with an irreducible "residue" of inefficiency.

But the question of the efficacy of structures also involves the issue of the perfectibility of the techniques themselves.

We need to determine the source of the inadequacies we observe. Are they circumstantial; that is, due to prevailing political, economic, ideological, or other conditions when the techniques were implemented? Or are they inherent, stemming instead from the very nature of the techniques themselves, and from the means they use?

On a more fundamental level, we need to discover if the perfecting of these social techniques, and of human techniques in general, can enable us to overcome the social upheavals produced by modernization. How can we halt the process we observe at work in the technological society, where people find themselves divided into two groups, resulting in the exclusion of many? Will it be enough to use rational methods, diversifying the structures for social action and solidarity? Will it suffice if we accept the necessary financial sacrifices to make such techniques fully efficacious? In other words, can technique restore the social integration it has destroyed?

My work leads me to believe that social action techniques and the institutional structures that put them into play do not have, and cannot have, more than a limited efficacy. They do not enable us to struggle with any degree of success against the processes of exclusion and division that are at work in our society, foreseen by Ellul as early as 1954. My interpretation at this point contradicts most sociological analyses of social action. These analyses tend to attribute the inefficiency of social action to external ideological or political causes stemming from social relationships.

Using concepts formulated by Ellul, we can show, on the contrary, that social action techniques have little success because techniques tend to organize themselves into an antonomous system. From the point of view of bureaucratic management, social action techniques prove rather successful, since they do not produce clashes or serious conflicts (this has not always been the case!). A large number of measures are put into place every year; many families receive help and are followed up; many children are taken into custody and placed within specialized structures. Competent specialists at all levels accomplish their tasks responsibly.

If, however, instead of evaluating the quality of each professional's work, we consider how well this overall arrangement functions, we become aware of serious areas of malfunction: action takes place piecemeal, follow-up and coordination are lacking, and at all levels we observe that information fails to circulate adequately. Many specialists deal with people in connection with each of these areas, but the work is carried out on the basis of the least common denominator, as far as the various jurisdictions are concerned. No truly personalized strategy emerges for taking charge, although such a strategy would enable the various specialists to coordinate their work and adapt it to individual circumstances. Instead, each works independently.

These specialists take action concerning a given person, group, or organization. We note the same compartmentalization in institutions and social agencies. They cannot define truly coordinated policies for a given population or territory, if only because they lack information about the group that benefits from their work--and this is even more true for groups unrelated to them.

Thus the weakness lies not in the work of specialists, but rather in the functioning of the system within which they work, because it makes personalized action difficult. Specialists cannot redefine their objectives in a coordinated manner, depending on how situations evolve. Instead, we perceive juxtaposed, separate actions lacking in continuity. Whether we look at institutions concerned with teenage dropouts or child welfare services, each structure lies at the center of a very complicated system of interactions that produce a proliferation of internal and external interdependent relationships. As a result, the amount of information theoretically necessary to coordinate with other specialists or institutions continues to increase.

What characterizes this system is not complexity, but complication. But the level of complication is aggravated by the fact that in practice, we find chronic mutual ignorance between large and small agencies devoted to social action. Their ignorance leads to paralysis in policy formation and to bureaucratic management. In addition, the lack of information circulating among specialists produces the technical formalism we observe in the operation of institutions and social service agencies. Under such conditions, it is hard to see how a coordinated and personalized approach can become an option.

Such limits seem difficult to surmount: technical formalism and poor circulation of information cannot be interpreted as mere circumstantial malfunctions resulting from errors in organization. Nor can such problems be attributed to power struggles or to the class distinctions between professionals and their clients. Rather, these deficiencies appear to be inherent, stemming from the very nature of the technical actions to be put into play. Such problems have their origin in the process of placing social action within a technical framework.

The technical context reproduces the general characteristics of technical phenomena as Ellul has analyzed and described them: first we note a process of self-augmentation that is both qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative self-augmentation takes place by means of the diversification of specializations and the emergence of specific institutions, whereas quantitative self-augmentation occurs through the multiplication of institutions and the growth of professional staffs. We also observe something approaching automatism in this process of technification: one technical specialty calls for another, and changes are imposed on all, whatever their moral or political stance. Thus we can speak of universality and also of an irreversible process, in the sense that once it has been put in gear, no going back is possible: all institutions are obliged to follow suit.

These observations lead us to another essential facet of this technification: agencies tend to become systems through the proliferation of their functional regulations and information. Internal unification and consistency in the use of a technique, as well as consistency in external relations, require the establishment of a system. It becomes impossible to leave each technician and institution to function independently, able to respond to an understanding of local conditions. Planning in all its forms becomes more and more important, bringing with it a generalized interdependence of the elements of the technical arrangement. This interdependence takes place both among the elements of the technical arrangement itself and with other technical entities.Two main consequences of this technical system explain how the development of *zweckrationalität* can bring about irrationality, as Max Weber recognized.[3] The first consequence is that the level of techno-organizational complication continues to grow, leaving in its wake a constant deficit in communication and information. As a result, the consistency and efficacy of technical systems are continually compromised by insufficient information. Lack of information in turn augments the risk of errors in decision-making, blunders in execution, and, most of all, inertia and delay in decision-making.[4] The second consequence of the technical system is the tendency toward autonomy in the functioning of techniques and of logical mechanisms, to the detriment of whatever objectives are being pursued.

When we apply these general characteristics of all technical systems to social work, we understand why it involves such a disturbing contradiction. On the one hand, we have the needs of clients (assuming these can be expressed), along with the objectives and values of the professionals who serve them, contrasted, on the other hand, with the usual functioning of the means that have been put in place to reach these objectives.

This contradiction confirms Ellul's understanding of ambivalence and unity as they characterize all technical systems. Technical systems are ambivalent in that all technical progress gives rise to advantages, yet exacts a price in terms of the inconveniences it causes. In social work, for example, specialization at first permitted greater efficiency in the measures taken and in the particular operations put into place by each professional. But these indisputable gains exacted a price in terms of negative effects in the functioning of social institutions and their interactions. The unity of technique prevents us from separating its "good" effects from the undesirable ones. They remain indissolubly linked, so that if we want some of its effects, we must accept the others.

From a sociological point of view, then, it seems that depersonalized measures taken, bureaucratic compartmentalization, and technical formalism are consistently the normal way social techniques function, and quickly hobble their efficiency. As a result, these techniques' ability to struggle effectively against social exclusion rapidly reaches its upper limit (which is not the same thing as saying that their capacity is negligible in this regard).

We can generalize this proposition: careful study enables us to observe the same malfunctions in all similar technical entities: social action, health, cultural leadership and action, planning, territorial development, etc. We see the same principles at work in all heavily institutionalized organizations where technicians attempt to have an effect on people or social situations.

I believe these dysfunctions stem from a significant incompatibility. On the one hand, we have an institutional organization managed on the legal-rational basis typical of bureaucracies. This type of organization is strongly hierarchical, along the lines of a technical experimental model of operation. Its operations are quantifiably objective. On the other hand, we have skills and practices based on interpretations and qualitative evaluations that inevitably call for value judgments and, in the final analysis, for ethical points of reference. What is done in this realm cannot be depersonalized, as legal-rational logic would have it.

In the way social action is organized, the interests of technicians (looking for their own advantage, for recognition, promotion, and higher salaries) have merged with those of technical ideology. As a result, social action has become a technical system involving the separation of the person from his function. The system is regulated like a system organized for purposes of production, with a formal hierarchy of jurisdictions and powers. Such a system does not provide (in my view, it **cannot** provide) the conditions necessary for evaluation and regulation that would be adapted to the nature of the techniques effectively put into place by practitioners.

For this reason, in order to avoid conflicts, specialists sooner or later come to the point of keeping their technological involvement to a minimum. In this way the rationality behind technical mechanisms works itself out by functioning poorly. This arrangement serves the interests of all concerned, since the essential problem is to coordinate techniques, rendering them compatible in a non-conflictive whole.

It is normal that this unification among various techniques should prove detrimental, as far as the specificity of the problem being treated is concerned. In this context work tends to become bureaucratized. Regulations that should be based on evaluations of the content of an action tend to be based instead on lines of power and hierarchy that are unrelated to the problem at hand.

We can see then how the categories formulated by Ellul for thinking about modern technique enable us to explain the dysfunctions and irrationalities that hamper the effectiveness of social techniques. It is also clear why I believe it necessary to modify somewhat the concepts of human techniques Ellul proposes. He showed with amazing clarity how the general process of technification leads to the establishment of technical entities whose mission is to take charge of or modify a given aspect of society or human life. The development of society and the human sciences feed into these techniques, offering them operational models.

As a result, following Ellul in *The Technological Society*, we can speak of the "encircling" of the person,[5] as illustrated by the multiplication of specializations and means. All the same, we can also wonder if the tendency of techniques within the technical system to integrate everything with themselves is not what makes the system constitutionally incapable of effectively integrating humanity and society into its logic.

I believe this incapacity is inherent, stemming precisely from the systemic nature of technique, especially where human techniques are concerned. Human techniques are "soft" and subject to interpretation, so that it is not possible to objectify completely the conditions that make them effective. For this reason, when these techniques are set in an institutional environment, they seem destined to break down quickly, turning into mere formalistic procedures. This occurs even when the techniques are constructed according to a rigorous operational model.

Clearly, I offer these remarks only as a hypothesis, formulated on the basis of the study of social action, rather than of the totality of human techniques. If this view is confirmed, it offers a possible limit to Ellul's idea of technique as a world that closes in on itself, and of the totalization of technical logic, as one of the possible horizons of our history. If my hypothesis proves true, the technical system, in order to function well, needs to produce a certain social system, but cannot produce it. Concretely, the technological society will find itself constantly troubled by a persistent lack of social integration that threatens its cohesion, and no technique will be able to eliminate the problem.

Ellul has also contemplated such a limit to the technological system's capacity for closing in on itself. At the end of *The Technological System*, he emphasizes that technique is utterly rational, but that irrational elements come into play when technique comes into contact with a reality of a different order, whether nature or society (pp. 293-309). These reflections show the importance, for both sociological and philosophical purposes, of a careful study of social techniques, and, more generally, of human techniques. These constitute the "new frontier" of technical progress, on which I am concentrating my research efforts.

NOTES

[1] See Daniel Cérézuelle, *Crise de l'emploi, exclusion et développement social: Synthèse présentée en vue de l'habilitation à diriger des recherches en sociologie* (Bordeaux: Université de Bordeaux II, 1992).

[2] English translation: Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964). Hereafter referred to as *Tech. Soc.*

[3] Translator's note: Talcott Parsons defines Weber's *Zweckrationalität* as "action as motivated by a plurality of relatively independent ends, none of which is absolute," adding that "*Zweckrationalität* refers primarily to considerations respecting the choice of means and ends which are in turn means to further ends, such as money," and that "expediency" sometimes suffices as a definition. Quoted in J. E. T. Eldridge, ed., *Max Weber: The Interpretation of Social Reality* (New York: Scribner's, 1971), pp. 78-80 n.1.

[4] See I. Grandstedt, *L'impasse industrielle* (Paris: Seuil, 1980).

[5] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980), pp. 382-392.

Jacques Ellul on Development: Why It Doesn't Work

by Joyce M. Hanks

People all over France were up in arms several years ago, over the powerful image they had encountered in a novel. Jacques Ellul often tells the story of readers' reaction at the prospect of millions of unexpected Third World refugees debarking on France's southern shores, in search of food. The supplies in their famine-ridden countries have given out, and they have taken to sea to keep from starving, looking for a civilization with some remaining stores. Their sheer numbers prevent the authorities from stopping them or sending them back where they came from. What to do with these endless hordes?

In the United States, most of us have no recollection of invading armies. We have not even heard stories from our elders about our land being overrun by outsiders. But in Europe such memories remain fresh, and earlier history abounds with such tales--thus the impact of the French story. Ellul uses it to drive home the necessity of doing *something* about the Third World. No longer can we ignore its needs, or hope its problems will simply go away. They affect all of us, in our interdependent world. Some way to develop the Third World and bring it up to an acceptable standard of living seems urgent.

Ellul began writing on technique and development in 1972.[1] He had already concerned himself with the problems of the Third World, before we began using that term.[2] More recently he wrote a book that features development and the Third World as its main themes: *Changer de révolution* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1982). Not yet available in English, we might translate this book's title as *Switching Revolutions*, or *Changing to Another (Kind of) Revolution*. The book's subtitle reads *The Inevitable Proletariat*. When he considers the Third World in this work, Ellul appears to take a sociological approach, but we will see that he adds a theological twist.

Actually, it amounts to more than a twist. Ellul's sociology is couched in his theology, although most scholars I have heard on the subject seem unaware of his Christian commitment. Reading his most famous book, *The Technological Society*, a person finds no clues that would indicate Ellul had ever heard of Christianity. I have checked his notes from university courses he gave on propaganda and Marxism without finding any hint of a Christian perspective.

Yet Ellul clearly maintains that he conceives of sociology at least in part as a means of understanding our society in order to discover how Christians should participate in it. Christian believers need to comprehend the world in order to proclaim the Christian message in an understandable fashion. Ellul would like his sociological works to serve as an "instrument of knowledge," and his theological studies to help towards a Christian understanding of sociological reality.[3] But up to now scholars have rarely confronted these two strains of his thought.

Change as a theme runs through both Ellul's sociology and his theology. He believes human life must include change in order to have meaning ("On Dialectic," p. 296). But, parting company with Hegel and Marx, Ellul denies that a new state of things inevitably entails progress. His refusal to view change as necessarily positive forms the key to Ellul's view of what the Third World needs. At the risk of sounding extremely conservative and thoroughly negative, he distinguishes development from growth (see the article by Serge Latouche in this issue for the growth-development distinction as it applies to biology, according to Charles Darwin). In Ellul's view, technological growth, especially when it takes place rapidly, inhibits human development on all levels, including economic development. In what follows, we will explore this view, and observe how life in the Third World illustrates it.

Why does Technique fail to help development along, we may ask? Partly, Ellul suggests, because technology grows in spurts, here and there, in one area and then another. Human development however, needs to take place in a *balanced* fashion--and Technique's jagged motion disrupts this balance.

At this point we should review Ellul's definition of Technique, to avoid misunderstanding. Some people use the word "technology" to describe what he prefers to call "Technique," defined as "the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity" (*The Technological Society*, p. xxv). To simplify, we will follow Ellul's tendency to concentrate on efficiency as the focus of Technique. Technological growth involves searching for the most efficient way of doing things, and then adopting that method. Normally it is very difficult to control this process once it has been put in place, Ellul believes--but we will return to this idea when we talk about solutions for the Third World.

Ellul sees human development as proceeding by a slow, trial and error process, involving experimentation, resolution of conflicts, and compromise. True development leads to consequences that are not predetermined but that stem from value judgments hammered out by a group working together. Growth based on Technique and efficiency, however, tends to produce something like puzzle pieces that no longer fit together, at least not the way we intended them to.

In-vitro fertilization can serve as an example, with the fallout it produces in family relationships. We can readily see that nobody worked on figuring out how our society wants or needs the family to develop, and then came up with in vitro fertilization as a way to arrive at that development. On the contrary, this laboratory procedure was discovered, perfected, and used as a way to combat infertility. At the same time, it created new family relationships that we have great difficulty piecing back together in any manageable way.

Similar trends plague the Third World. For example, the growth of technology tends to lure people to the cities, thoroughly disrupting families in the process. We continue to applaud growth in industries and urban levels of luxury that attract more and more people toward urban centers, and then we seem surprised when traditional cultures have difficulty adapting and surviving in a citified environment they were not developed to deal with. Balance has been unceremoniously disrupted, with consequences we all know about.

I remember distinctly my experiences in the year 1977, when I was involved in building a house in San José, the capital of Costa Rica. Most unskilled construction workers had migrated to the city from relatively stable rural communities. In the capital they found themselves on the bottom of the economic ladder, paid such a low wage it was nearly impossible for them to survive, let alone support a family. At first I wondered why many of them

had hangovers so fierce they failed to report to work on Monday mornings. When these workers missed work on Monday, they forfeited their entire overtime pay for the week! But gradually I learned to understand something of how degraded and alone they felt, and how hopeless. They had none of the supportive structures around them, none of the help they would have received if they had been living in the communities they had grown up in.

Ellul's maintains that technological growth with its unforeseen consequences makes gradual, careful development difficult or even impossible. What sort of model can you set up for development when you never know what technical advances will come along to turn it upside down? How can you find the resources necessary for development--raw materials, energy, and human capacity--when Technique as it grows tends to absorb them all?

An example: Costa Rica's foreign exchange, hard-earned from cultivating coffee and bananas largely by hand, evaporates, most of it spent on petroleum to keep fancy imported automobiles supplied (although most people in the Third World, including Costa Rica, get around by riding public buses). The country must severely limit the number of advanced degree students it sends abroad to study, since dollars are so hard to come by. Costa Rica also, of course, has great difficulty paying its foreign debt, for the same reason. Has anyone consciously decided that maintaining the price of gasoline at bargain levels for the sake of the wealthy, who drive a Mercedes-Benz, should have higher priority than enabling professors to travel abroad to obtain their doctorates? Probably no choice was ever made--the country just assumed it needed to keep importing more petroleum in order to become more "developed" and "progressive."

Ellul feels strongly that we cannot advance true development so long as we continue to assume that economic and technological growth, as the solution to everything, hold the only means of realizing our hopes. We have made a myth, even a god, of our notion of technical progress, so that no one is allowed to attack it. People see progress as inherently necessary, obviously crucial, and unfailingly good, so that if a person suggests that progress may not be inevitable and wonderful, he is treated like an outcast. As Ellul explains, the notion of the value of progress constitutes an unexamined assumption in our society.

What are we supposed to do, then? Hand-wringing will not accomplish much, nor will shedding of tears--these constitute our industrial society's frequent response to images of Third World suffering. Learning to take a critical attitude towards Technique is the place Ellul believes we must begin. We can begin to control and use technology only when we have emptied it of its mystique. This applies to industrial societies as well as to the Third World. Although he contends we must control Technique, Ellul has no illusions, no wish to eliminate it, as some writers have charged.

In fact, he makes concrete suggestions for its careful Third World use, in *Changer de révolution*. Ordinarily Ellul shies away from proposing sociological solutions, holding that first we must arrive at a thorough understanding of the problems we want to solve. As for the Third World, he prefers to leave the working out of specific solutions to those who know individual countries and ethnic groups intimately. The best designers of specific solutions for the Third World are those who have lived their lives there.

Uncharacteristically, however, Ellul brims with suggestions for what to do about the Third World in *Changer de révolution*.

In his previous writing, Ellul had recommended Third World development that was not oriented toward Technique. But with dramatic changes taking place in Technique itself, he begins in this work to recommend its sparing and careful use, once its probable effects have been thoroughly studied. In this way, he feels, we can hope to tame technological growth so that it serves Third World societies. He warns, however, that we will still have to deal with Technique's unforeseeable consequences, which often prove extremely disruptive.

With the development of practical robots for industry, for example, Ellul suggests that highly technical production units could be introduced in the Third World without drastically disrupting traditional cultures, since they would require few people to work in them. And new developments in information systems, based on the personal computer, could enable the Third World to by-pass what had seemed an inevitable centralization of many aspects of life. Commercial and industrial enterprises can now be managed locally, in small units of perhaps no more than 100 people, and coordinated with other units by computer networks. In other words, we can find ways to control Technique instead of letting it control us. We could say that the personal computer makes "small" possible as well as beautiful.

In *Changer de révolution*, Ellul mentions a further advantage in these new possibilities: the latest, automated factories would enable growth to take place without displacing large groups of people. Most Third World families already engaged in agriculture could remain in place, and could return to producing food crops, instead of concentrating on exportable products. With new automated factories, Third World countries would depend less on foreign trade, and could feed their people.

Reducing exports and accumulating fancy new factories sound to most people like utterly utopian ideas for today's Third World. Most of us have assumed that poor countries needed to gear up to export more and more, in order to pay their debt. But Ellul proposes we attempt something much more radical.

Ellul believes the Third World's problems are so complex and intractable that piecemeal solutions cannot work. Yet we must find a solution, or modern society will not survive. Ellul, along with many others, believes we are headed for a catyclism of unthinkable proportions, if the Third World is not turned around. At this stage, with our world as interdependent as it has become, no nation will escape the consequences of relentlessly increasing population and poverty in the world's southern peoples. We must do something drastic, but he doubts we will.

When the nightmarish novel mentioned at the beginning of this article troubled French society so deeply, Ellul thought practical steps might be taken to work for change in the Third World, to avoid just such a scenario as the one depicted in the book. But people got over their fright, and nothing changed.

Jonathan Kozol's book, *Savage Inequalities* (New York: Crown, 1991), makes a similar point: Americans who feel well-off may wish the problems in poor school districts would simply go away. But since that will not happen, we would do well to take ghetto problems seriously, if only for the sake of our own long-term interests.

Ellul proposes we take the Third World's dilemma seriously, as well, donating large amounts of aid--so much aid, so freely given, that it will noticeably reduce our society's standard of living. Ellul maintains we would be giving up nothing but gadgets we do not need, but probably most of us would feel seriously deprived.

He says we must stop depleting the Third World's resources, and instead give these countries what they really need: specifically, what *they* perceive they need. We cannot understand Ellul on the Third World unless we appreciate this point. Concretely, for example, he believes he knows young French-trained Africans who have not bought into the establishment in their countries, who could recommend what their countries need most for real development. Ellul maintains we should orient a significant sector of our economy toward producing for the Third World, at great cost to ourselves, since no other way exists to avoid catastrophe.

We need to offer carefully studied and adapted agricultural help, soft technologies, automated production units and other items the Third World needs not just in order to survive, but to move ahead, on the basis of its own culture and social structures. As an example, Ellul suggests we could help some societies develop a simple technology, based on locally available resources, for the production of solar pumps.

Ellul may give the impression in *Changer de révolution* that he is uncharacteristically in favor of a world-wide, universal scheme, but in any case he does not think it could ever succeed unless essentially personalized. He proposes a kind of "twin cities" approach, or an institution-to-institution basis for involving ourselves in the Third World's needs. Now that computers enable us to coordinate just about anything, such a structure should be possible.

Readers of *Changer de révolution* find it easy to criticize such a bold plan, especially since it depends heavily on recent technological developments. Ellul's proposal for developing the Third World undoubtedly holds many pitfalls, but his analysis of Third World problems that need solving cannot easily be dismissed. Despite the generally recognized urgency of these problems, we resist radical suggestions--Ellul's or anyone else's--for improving things. We prefer to believe that somehow the situation will take care of itself. We firmly resist any challenge that would result in a lowering of our standard of living, even when it seems likely that a head-in-the-sand approach will eventually lower our standard of living a great deal more. Ellul does not believe enlightened self-interest is strong enough to motivate rich societies to give part of their wealth away, however necessary it may be to do so.

In the final two pages of *Changer de révolution*, however, Ellul contends that Christian believers have more to draw on than self-interest. He believes they have sufficient motivation to help others, and sufficient faith to take risks--an ability to look at the world realistically and take steps to save it. Such acts normally take place only if people have adequate information--which may explain why Ellul has written so many books.

I believe we can best grasp Ellul's distinction between technological growth and human development by means of examples. In "Ellul and Development in Central America" (*Cross Currents*, 35.1 [Spring 1985]:65-71), Bob Ekblad recounts the adventure he and his wife, Gracie, shared as they attempted to apply Ellul's principles while living and farming in rural Honduras.

Bob and Gracie's approach was to concentrate on observing and learning, rather than criticizing their neighbors' methods. But they absorbed everything they could from a farmer whose agricultural approach had enabled him to live off formerly useless land. At considerable sacrifice, they lived on a very simple level, and in this way gained some understanding of the people around them. They used local tools, antiquated transportation, and did their own work, without electricity, preparing and eating the food typical of their region.

When their ridiculous-looking agricultural methods produced a crop the likes of which no one in their area had ever seen, the Ekblads suddenly found themselves surrounded by an audience of eager learners. These later learned to teach others, in a complex, on-going effort in which the Ekblads continue to participate actively by means of annual visits. When, as Ellul suggests, they found that material progress did not solve people's basic problems, they developed a spiritual ministry related to their agricultural program. The Ekblads encountered many difficulties as they sought to contribute to human development in Honduras, but clearly they succeeded.

In Costa Rica, I witnessed a less happy sort of "progress." Traditional Costa Rican food consists of three basic items: rice, beans, and tortillas. Formerly hundreds of Costa Rican women provided the tortillas for consumption in their neighborhoods. They prepared them at home, beginning at 3 or 4 in the morning, every day. Someone picked them up to transport them to corner stores and super markets, by bicycle or very small truck.

It was a kind of slave labor, working hard every day, getting up before anyone else in the family did, making hundreds and hundreds of tortillas between the palms of their hands, then cooking them over the fire in a pan that looks like a miniature wok. We might wonder where the *masa*, the ground corn used to make a tortilla, spent the night, or what animals and insects ate their share before the *masa* was turned into tortillas. Probably the process was not very hygienic. And when the woman turned the tortilla over in its "wok," she may have licked her fingers first, to keep from getting burned. These women were not paid very well, either, for all their hard work. All in all, we can find much to criticize in such a system. "Development" would seem to be in order. Time for progress.

Enter a shiny new factory, owned by foreigners. It was designed to turn out thousands and thousands of perfect tortillas, very fast. And, best of all, they were packaged in neat, hygienic, orange plastic bags (transparent on the back, so you could see if the tortillas had already turned moldy from sitting too long in the store). The bags had nice, smiling happy faces that looked like human tortillas on the front. It was all very hygienic, and involved no slave labor. Distribution involved a large, shiny truck that was much more efficient than the old delivery system.

Best of all, said some people, the price was right. With the new system, tortillas were cheaper than when the women made them. Naïve soul that I am, I thought perhaps the machines could make the tortillas more cheaply. But a wiser observer predicted that the price would go up as soon as the women's tortillas had been driven from the market as a result of the factory competition--just as fancy new imported colas had shot up in price once the traditional, locally-made soft drinks disappeared, years before. Sure enough. After a while the women had no buyers to speak of, and tortillas soon began to cost more.

Who are the winners and the losers here? The winners are the foreign factory owners, whereas the women who supported or helped support their families by making tortillas are clearly the losers. And what about the people of Costa Rica? They may enjoy slightly more identical tortillas, but I doubt they're as fresh--and they certainly cost more than before. Not to mention that the profit from the whole operation fails to stay in the country. Like the quantities of imported gasoline Costa Rica burns, its tortillas may be convenient, but they contribute to the lack of foreign exchange.

When we evaluate the tortilla war according to Ellul's principles, we cannot count a factory as a contribution to development, when it merely replaces hand labor that was already in place, or when it serves only to put people out of work, by fancying things up a bit. Ellul would label this kind of "progress" gadgetry. And he encourages us not to throw out time-honored ways of doing things without careful study.

On the contrary, through the change they brought about, Bob and Gracie Ekblad made a significant contribution to Honduras' ability to feed itself. The Ekblads accomplished this by learning before they attempted to teach, and taking their place humbly alongside Honduran peasants. Significantly, they helped a group of poor farming families to grow in human dignity as they improved the quality of their lives and then learned to help others do the same. This is the kind of "development" I believe Ellul proposes--costly but genuinely useful for the Third World.

Notes

[1] Jacques Ellul, "Technique et développement," in C. A. O. Van Nieuwenhuijze, ed., *Development: The Western View/La perspective occidentale du développement* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), pp. 258-295.

[2] See Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964); *Autopsy of Revolution*, trans. Patricia Wolf (New York: Knopf, 1971); and *De la révolution aux révoltes* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1972).

[3] Jacques Ellul, "On Dialectic," in Clifford G. Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, eds., *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (Urbana: University of IL Press, 1981), pp. 306-307.

"Good" Development and Its Mirages

by Serge Latouche

> "To develop an area" signifies the radical destruction of all natural vegetation in the area involved. It means resurfacing the newly-bared earth with concrete, or, in the best-case scenario, with grass or parking. If there is leftover space, it gives way to a concrete wall for consolidation purposes. Dams straighten out any small streams that cannot be channeled. Development means infesting the entire area with pesticides, and finally selling it at the highest possible price to some citified fool of a customer.[1]

Sustainable development has become fashionable as the basis for conferences. We have seen it at work in Rio at the United Nations' "Earth Summit" on development and the environment (June 1992), and in the Forum of the world's Non-governmental Organizations at La Villette, in Paris (December 1991), which prepared the Rio summit. Considering all the various kinds of dangers that development poses to humanity, we can only rejoice at this rather late-blooming insight.

Hundreds of thousands of members of the human species have already died as a result of the development of civilization. The civilization of development threatens thousands of others with genocide, or at least ethnocide. They range from north to south, from the Inuits and the Lapps of the far north's frozen steppes to tropical Indians like the Yanomano of the Roraima territory in Brazil, and the Tuareg people of the scorching Sahara.

Even more alarming, as far as our survival is concerned, 175,000 plant and animal species become extinct every year. Six million hectares (nearly fifteen million acres) of Amazonian jungle go up in smoke annually so that large-scale *fazendeiros* can produce more cattle, and so that their smaller counterparts can survive.[2]

Are we threatened with skin problems because of holes in the ozone layer? Are we victimized by NASA's huge maneuvers as it attempts to give new life to its programs, or by by Dupont's manipulations of the stock market?[3] Such threats distress us even more when we realize that we have no control over the gigantic and insidious pollution of our oceans and atmosphere due to radiation and toxic chemicals.

In spite of the recent summit, careful observers of society may remain skeptical--not suspicious of anyone's sincerity about the goals expressed, but questioning the consistency of current demands. We may legitimately ask whether it is possible to provide everyone with guaranteed development and a clean environment at the same time. "Sustainable" development is merely the latest entry in a long series of conceptual innovations intended to inject the harsh reality of economic growth with a dose of idealism.

Reflecting on the bad experiences and contradictions involved in "good" development may help us understand why some remain pessimistic about the probability and stability of "sustainable" development. This process will also enable us to delineate the practical consequences of such skepticism.

I. Development as Always "Good"

"Permanent, "sustainable," or "lasting" development is simply the most recent phase of "good" development.[4] Development has had to be corrected, almost since its inception in the 1960's, to satisfy the aspirations of the masses and the elites who were supposed to bring it about. The multiplication of terms used to describe development amounts to an attempt to ward off its negative effects through magic. Thus we have seen developments labeled "indigenous," "endogenous," "participatory," "communitary," "integrated," "authentic," "autonomous and popular," and "equitable," not to mention "local," "micro-,""endo-," and even "ethno-development"!

Socialist development probably opened the door for all these strategies based on incantation. The wildly spectacular effort to make socialism's mythical paradigm prevail over the equally mythical paradigm of development fared poorly, as is well known.

The intention was to avoid the *bad* result that development might produce for accidental, rather than congenital, reasons. So a non-existent monster, a straw man was created: "bad development." But nothing "bad" can actually touch development for the simple reason that development is considered the very incarnation of the "good." It would be more precise and logical to use Albert Tevoedjre's term, "counter-development," when one wants to attach a stigma to perversions that need denouncing.[5]

The expression "good development" is redundant, since development by definition consists of "good" growth. And "growth" is also considered to be a good against which no evil force can prevail.

Development as good growth.

"Growth" and "development" as intertwined concepts come to us from biology, especially from Charles Darwin. Georges Canguilhem comments:

> When he makes a precise distinction between growth and development, Darwin opposes the adult and the embryo on the basis of both size and structure. Any living thing can continue to grow while ceasing to develop. Resembling an adult, in weight and volume, it will remain fixed at a given stage of its specific infancy, as far as development is concerned.[6]

Transposed to the social sphere, development is *non-homologous* growth of the economic organism. If industrialization had proceeded since the nineteenth century along the lines of purely quantitative growth, we would have arrived at a monstrous absurdity. The earth would be covered with steam engines, coal resources exhausted, and pollution would have killed off all life forms. Instead, physical, technical, and ecological *self-regulation* took place, by force of circumstances. These led to fundamental *qualitative* mutations, so that we can speak of a process of *self correction*, which does not stop at this point. The vigorous pursuit of this corrected growth gives birth more or less spontaneously to *social* regulation.

In view of these facts, we can properly define economic development as the "trickle down" effect of industrial growth.[7] This term, sometimes referred to as what "percolates down," simply means that, beyond a certain threshold, growth in production results in social *fallout*. Growth cannot help but more or less benefit everyone.

In developed countries, even the most economically liberal ones, the poor of Victorian England described by Charles Dickens and proclaimed by Karl Marx did not multiply. Wealth spread to all. Here again, development corrects growth and constitutes a *good* thing.

In consumer societies, Keynesian economics, coupled with fordism, leads to an additional step towards the "good." This method of social and political regulation aims at the distribution

of wealth (big salaries and corporate profits resulting from regular growth in productivity), with a view to maintaining the economy at a high level. Perhaps we could go still further and say with Pope Paul VI that "development . . . cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic, it must be well rounded; it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man."[8] Surely we should consider this point of view extreme and pointless, since it would imply some doubt about the ethical value of growth. But, as we have already seen, growth constitutes what is truly "good" and "beautiful" in modern times.

Growth as the "good"

Since 1949, when we started our race toward the highest possible Gross National Product per person, human societies have chosen as their goal an increase in the *standard of living*. Clearly this has to be a "good" thing, since the very term "well-being" helps to define the living standard. Industrialization and technique are means which could lead to good or evil, in the abstract. But the growth of these means becomes an end in itself. Furthermore, these means are considered the only possible way of arriving at the Good, as if no civilization had preceded the industrial age!

We find a striking illustration of such thinking in the report given by French engineer and economist Edouard Parker to the international Forum of the High Road (Nov. 1991), endorsed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.[9] Parker's report demolishes all criticisms of growth and proposes nothing less than a goal of ten percent annual growth for the Third World. Why such a high rate of growth? Because a minimal level of two or three percent is required to avoid stagnation and to compensate for demographic growth. An additional four percent is needed to improve the living standard, and three percent more for the purpose of reducing under-employment.

At this stage, the famous "trickle down" effect makes itself felt: growth becomes development. Next we enter the equally famous "demographic transition," in which well-being induces a strong reduction in the birth rate. At this point, we can indulge in the luxury of fighting pollution and preserving our culture; Parker writes: "by the year 2000, we expect an Algeria proud of its Islamic identity with $4800 per person, based on present levels."

Good or bad, technique and growth are always "good", since they increase possibilities, create jobs (even when they eliminate others), and offer solutions for all the problems they create.

Finally, the factor that makes economic growth an indisputable good, according to prevailing morality, is that it results from *behavior* which is also moral. According to Max Weber's analysis,[10] Western economies took off as a result of the culture's widespread work ethic and entrepreneurial spirit, based on scrupulous honesty, a taste for hard work, integrity, punctuality, denial of the pleasures of the flesh, and thrift. Unlimited accumulation of material wealth constitutes the visible evidence of the accumulation of *merit*--undeniable proof of divine blessing.

Failure and the test of facts

Over against such strong belief, the repeated resounding failures of development projects in the Third World during the past four decades and the spectacle of "bad development" in many countries have proved powerless to challenge the "good development" model. Certainly, as Dominique Perrot has written,

"by means of a systematic transformation of nature and social relations into commercial goods and services . . . development appears as the most enormous and all-encompassing enterprise of dispossession and expropriation for the sake of the dominant minorities of all time."[11]

We have seen that well-being defines in part the goal of a rising standard of living. But the reality of this "well"-being consists not of a *quality of life* but rather of a *quantity* of gadgets presented as useful, on the very basis of their production and consumption. Development is a mass of "things"; "well-being" amounts to nothing more than possessing them. Development disillusions the world by eliminating the value of things. By reducing the universe of creatures to the level of the production of useful things, development degrades ethics itself. The Good merges with goods and possessions, and becomes identical with them. There is no escape from vulgar utilitarianism.

Morality becomes more a hypocritical facade than a reality. In fact, we find trickery everywhere. Business ethics exalts the will to power, egoism, and contempt for the weak and the losers.[12]

The advocates of "good" development know and say all this, but the spectacle of the fantastic power of our technological society inhibits them from questioning it in any fundamental way--yet another witness to technique's totalitarianism. Instead, they look to development to cure the very ills it inflicts.

In the conclusion of his book, *Les chrétiens et le Tiers-Monde*, Bertrand Cabedoche writes: "The word 'development' may have lost its appeal after so many disappointing experiences. But it remains the only word shared by all human beings that can express their hope."[13] Let the planet perish, just so long as development is saved!

II. Sustainable Development as a Paradox

The paradox of political economy's view of "nature"

From one point of view, "nature" and taking the environment into account are at the heart of the founding of economics, as we see it in the words of classic economists. Economic science is *naturalist*. The "nature" that economists have made for themselves is even more constraining than the one described by contemporary ecologists. It is constructed by capitalist economy, a kind of miserly mother.

Scarcity occupies a central place in the economic scheme of things. This scarcity, unknown in traditional societies, has been shown to be a product of enclosure laws and the establishment of individualist society.[14] Economists are the first to sound the alarm when it comes to the *limits of growth*. David Ricardo, like Thomas Malthus, points out the natural limits of wealth determined by the finite availability of fertile land and the existence of decreasing yields. W. Stanley Jevons, in his book *The Coal Question* (1865), was probably the first to warn of the depletion of ore reserves.[15]

This hostile nature, however, is stripped of all value, and considered as lying outside the economy. Jean-Baptiste Say wrote of "natural objects . . . air, water, or solar light. These may be denominated *natural* wealth, because they are the spontaneous offering of nature; and, as such, mankind is not called upon to earn them by any sacrifice or exertion whatever; for which reason, they are never possessed of exchangeable value."[16]

This exclusion of nature will weigh quite heavily on future patrimony, but it is no stranger to the metaphysical dogma of the natural harmony of interests. This postulate, which denies human conflict for the sake of growth and optimal economic development, is at the heart of economics. It is a postulate based on the will to subdue nature, and opposes nature. Believing it requires that one accept many simplifications and illusions. The result is that lasting development can only be paradoxical.

In the hands of the economy, the environmental crisis reinforces the productivism of our technological society. The United Nations pamphlet for Rio's Earth Summit 1992 speaks of managing the environment by means of "ecologically rational techniques." Environmental management may lead us to a new Western imperialism that would involve no real protection for nature.[17]

Adam Smith's "Invisible Hand" forms the framework for classic, and later neo-classic, economic theory. On the basis of the minimal observation that it is in wolves' interest that there be lots of sheep, and that they be well fed, some economists drew the

maximal conclusions of the libertarians. This road leads to the strongly-held underlying belief in the myth of *development*: growth profits everyone, and development is within everyone's reach--the famous "trickle down" effect.

Nature has to be denied if one is to move from observing a fact (that there are non-contradictory interests in the economic domain) to believing that the well-understood fundamental economic interests of humanity are not conflictive in nature (that there is a single path for the development of all). The only apparently certain interest human beings hold in common is the fight against nature. Nature's potential finitude justifies the cooperation of all for the good of all.

The universality of modernity and of the economy depends on constituting nature as humanity's enemy. We have an undeniable illustration of this principle in the fight against AIDS. In spite of the violent conflict between the French team of Professor Montagnier and the American team of Professor Gallo, collaboration continues for the sake of saving humankind. We can see this attitude that opposes humanity and nature as early as Aristotle: "no friendship with inanimate things is possible, just as there is no justice toward them--no more than there is human justice for a horse or an ox."[18]

The project of modernity that makes humanity the possessor and master of nature, pacifies us by constituting humankind as the virtual subject of history by means of a declaration of war on nature. This amounts to a very aggressive attitude. Francis Bacon wrote that "nature is a prostitute; we should humble her, penetrate her secrets, and chain her up at will" (Rouland, p. 249). We see this approach illustrated in the squandering of natural resources, just as we see it in the treatment of guinea-pigs. Violence between human beings, and conflicts and contradictions of all sorts are deflected against nature, our common scapegoat.

The trap of "permanent" development

The definition of "permanent" development as it appears in the Brundtland report takes nothing but permanence into account. It involves a "process of change through which the exploitation of resources, investment policy, and technical and institutional changes all harmonize together, reinforcing people's present potential and their future needs."[19]

"Permanence" refers not to "genuinely existing" development, but to reproduction. Sustainable reproduction reigned over the planet as a whole until the eighteenth century. It is still possible to find "experts" in sustainable reproduction among the Third World's older generation. Artisans and peasants who have preserved much of their ancestors' ways of thinking and acting live in harmony with their environment. They do not act as predators toward nature.

In contrast, the historical and practical meaning of development, linked with the project of modernity, goes contrary to the idea of permanence. It involves exploiting, making the most of, and reaping benefits from human and natural resources. The Invisible Hand and the natural harmony of interests guarantee that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. Why worry about anything?

Integrating artificially quantified elements of the environment with economic calculations does not change the nature of development or the logic of modernity. It is good, for example, to take agriculture's caloric production into account and to reduce the squandering of fossil energy. We know that to produce a calorie, traditional agriculture consumes 0.01 calorie, compared with 500 for the most modern methods. Taking such facts into account does not change the obsession with maximizing, or the reduction of social factors to numbers. Fleeing further into technique is our approach to resolving the problems posed by the technological system.

The assumption of the natural harmony of interests is not radically questioned (it cannot be challenged unless we question the universalism of humanity). Rather, it is expanded in a sort of "ecological keynesianism." In this view, one affirms that the expense of preserving the environment is cost-effective in the long run. "Ecological keynesianism" also considers that this cost suits the interests of all economic players (when their interests are *properly understood*), since it creates outside effects and a large amount of spillover in the form of jobs. Ecology and the environment are in a sense booby-trapped by development, by the logic of the technological society and modernity.

At times "alternative," "lasting," or "sustainable" development is used as a rationale for the proposal of widely varying anti-capitalist and anti-productivist projects. Their purpose is the elimination of the plagues associated with under-development and the excesses of "bad" development. Aiming to produce a people-centered, inclusive, convivial society, such projects have no more to do with development than "affluent primitive societies" did.[20] Some pre-industrial societies reached remarkable human and esthetic heights without knowing anything at all about "development."

The debate over the word "development" is not a matter of words. Whether we like it or not, we cannot make development something different from what it has been. Development has been and is the westernization of the world. Words take their root in a story; they are connected with representations that usually escape the speaker's consciousness, but which have a hold on our emotions. There are smooth words that act as a balm to the heart, and words that wound. There are words that stir up a people and turn the world upside down. Liberty and democracy have been and remain words of that kind. Then we have poisonous words that infiltrate the heart like drugs, perverting desire and clouding judgment.

Development is one of these toxic words. We can of course proclaim that from now on "development" will mean the opposite of what it has meant. Declaring that "good development" means first of all placing value on what one's parents did, on having roots, amounts to defining a word by its opposite.[21] Development has been, and remains, an uprooting.

Whether we like it or not, so long as we continue to struggle against the effects and evils of development, all the while placing ourselves under the protection of its banner, we will be encouraging the arrogance of economists who can perfectly well appropriate these demands, turning them inside out. We have an example of such co-opting in the Parker report to the Forum of the High Road: "industry and high-tech are much less detrimental to nature than the Third World with its extreme poverty." Parker also states that "ecology as it is presently conceived by most minor groups . . . leads straight to ecological disaster."[22] Parker comes close to the declaration by Gilberto Mestrinho, governor of the state of Amazonas and the great terror of the 1992 Rio summit: "we will develop the Amazon, in spite of the Greens' vile plot."[23]

For now, we need to remember that an inhabitant of the northern hemisphere consumes eighty times more energy than a person from the south; that the United States alone sends between seven and eight tons of carbon per capita into the atmosphere; and that ninety percent of the 320,000,000 tons of toxic waste produced in 1989 originated in member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.[24]

III. Conclusion

The greatest threat hanging over our planet may not be the destruction resulting from our infatuation with the Megamachine. Our blindness and our powerlessness constitute the real threat. Like the Romans when their republic was declining, "we can endure neither our evils nor their cures."[25] We refuse to make the proper diagnosis of the disease, and we content ourselves with bandaging its symptoms. We expect remedies from

the very source that is aggravating the ill. Proposing "lasting" development as a remedy for the evils of development amounts to prolonging the agony of the patient as long as possible by keeping the virus alive.

According to Jacques Ellul, asking our contemporaries to renounce technique (and, we might add, development) is like asking neolithic society to burn the forest that constitutes its environment.[26] It is clear that we will renounce neither technique nor development. It is not even certain that we will hesitate to burn the last forests and the last neolithic societies that still live there. Is there then no hope or future perspective for the planet or for humanity?

The Indians of British Colombia, on the eastern shore of the Pacific (the Kwakiults, Haidas, Tshimshians, etc.), believed the salmon to be living beings like themselves, that lived in tribes at the bottom of the sea, in their tepees. At the time of year when the fish began to return upstream, the Indians welcomed the first salmon to arrive as an important visitor. The ate it ceremoniously. Its sacrifice constituted only a temporary loan. They returned its skeleton and other inedible parts to the sea, thus permitting the devoured guest's rebirth. In this way the coexistence and symbiosis of the salmon and the Indians was perpetuated in a satisfactory manner. With the arrival of the Europeans and the establishment of a canning factory at the mouth of every river, the race for profit brought overfishing in its wake. The Indians concluded that the salmon disappeared because the Europeans failed to respect the ancient rite. Who could claim they were wrong?

This attitude toward nature, found in most societies, is based on our participation in the cosmos. It implies a reciprocal relationship between us and the rest of the universe. People are prepared to give themselves to "Gaia," just as she gives herself to them.

Returning to this pre-Aristotelian spirit may well be necessary for our survival. We must note, however, that we lack the resolve to take this path, in spite of the great commotion made about ecology and in spite of significant protective measures we have taken.[27]

My book *La planète des naufragés* begins with this epigraph, a statement by the chief of the Lakota Oglala Sioux, Russell Means: "it is only a question of time before we see what Westerners call 'an average catastrophe of global proportions.' It will be the job of Amerindian peoples, and of all 'natural' peoples, to survive."[28]

Those excluded from development and left out by modernity, the shipwrecked of the great society, are surely better equipped to work out a new pact with "Nature." Their alliance will bypass the West's rape of nature and enable them to rejoin the harmony of the cosmos.

Notes

[1] Konrad Lorenz, *L'homme en péril*, trans. Jeanne Etoré (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), p. 13.

[2] Patrice van Eersel, "Le Brésil déchiré par l'écologie," *Actuel, no. 12 (3 Dec. 1991).*

[3] See Claude J. Allègre, *Economiser la planète*, Coll. Le Temps des Sciences (Paris: Fayard, 1990).

[4] Economics is a religion that has English as its sacred tongue. As a result, French experts have struggled to translate its terms. After Ignacy Sachs' very good "ecodevelopment" was not accepted in the 1970's, "sustainable development" became the norm fifteen years later.

[5] Albert Tevoedjre, *La pauvreté, richesse des peuples* (Paris: Editions Ouvrières, 1978); English ed. *Poverty, Wealth of Mankind* (Oxford and New York: Pergamon Press, 1979).

[6] Georges Canguilhem, *Etudes d'histoire et de philosophie des sciences* (Paris: Vrin, 1968), p. 115.

[7] In the report of Lawrence F. Salmen of the World Bank dated 29 August 1991, we read: "During the first two decades of its existence, the World Bank tended to idenfity development with economic growth. The benefits of growth were supposed to trickle down, so that the poor benefitted automatically from the creation of jobs and the increased production of goods and services." See *Courrier International*, no. 68 (20 Feb. 1992).

[8] Pope Paul VI, "Populorum progressio," encyclical on the development of peoples, 26 March 1967, no. 275, in Claudia Carlen Ihm, ed., *The Papal Encyclicals 1958-1981* (Raleigh: Pierian Press, 1991), p. 185.

[9] Paul Fabra, "10% de croissance pour le tiers-monde?," *Le Monde* (3 Dec. 1991), p. 28.

[10] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Scribner, 1958).

[11] Dominique Perrot, "Les empêcheurs de développer en rond," *Revue Ethnies*, 6, no. 13 (1991), 5.

[12] See my book, *La planète des naufragés* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991), especially chapter 3.

[13] Bertrand Cabedoche, *Les chrétiens et le Tiers-Monde* (Paris: Karthala, 1990), p. 255.

[14] See especially Jean-Pierre Dupuy and Jean Robert, *La trahison de l'opulence* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976).

[15] W. Stanley Jevons, *The Coal Question: An Inquiry concerning the Progress of the Nation, and the Probable Exhaustion of Our Coal Mines*, ed. A. W. Flux (London: Macmillan, 1865).

[16] Jean-Baptiste Say, *A Treatise on Political Economy, or The Production, Distribution & Consumption of Wealth* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1964; 1st American ed. 1821; Fr. ed. 1803), p. 286.

[17] Guy Beney, "L'écologie globale, nouveau danger totalitaire," *Actuel*, no. 12 (3 Dec. 1991).

[18] Aristotle, cited by Norbert Rouland, *Aux confins du droit* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1991), p. 248. Aristotle goes so far as to add "or even on the part of the master toward the slave, as slave."

[19] See World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[20] Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1972).

[21] Halidou Sawadogo quoted in Pierre Pradervant, *Listening to Africa: Developing Africa from the Grassroots* (New York: Praeger, 1989), pp. 77 and 198.

[22] Fabra, "10% de croissance," p. 28.

[23] van Eersel, p. 60.

[24] Dominique Sicot, "L'aide met son habit vert," *Alternatives Economiques*, no. 92 (Dec. 1991), p. 33.

[25] Livy, cited by Jacques Ellul in his *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), p. 72.

[26] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980), p. 82.

[27] Most recently, American jurisprudence has been moving in the direction of reinforcing the ever increasing human control of natural processes through legal means. See Rouland, *Aux confins du droit*, p. 253.

[28] "Toujours la même rengaine," *Revue du M.A.U.S.S.* (Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales), no. 7 (1990), p. 71.

Book Reviews

Technique, Discourse and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul by David Lovekin, (Lehigh University Press, 1991).

Reviewed by Timothy Casey

There can be no question anymore of the importance of Jacques Ellul's place in 20th century thought or of his influence on a variety of disciplines and thinkers concerned with modern technology and its alleged benefits and harms. What remains unclear is how to asses the locus and value of his major achievements. David Lovekin's *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1991) is a provocative attempt to argue that the thrust of Ellul's work lies in the direction of philosophy and a theory of culture. In this rendering theology takes a back seat and is subordinated to the more general post-modern problem of "the Other" and its role in keeping alive transcendence in the face of technique and the reductionistic tendencies of the technical phenomenon.

While Ellul himself seems to recoil from being tagged a philosopher or, worse yet, a metaphysician, Lovekin makes a persuasive case for the philosophical cast of Ellul's critique of technology, inviting his readers to see and judge Ellul on strictly philosophical terms. Indeed, Lovekin believes that an almost universal ignorance of Ellul's philosophical message accounts for a myriad of serious miscontruals and misguided judgments on the part of his many critics and even a few of his followers. Lovekin asks us, in other words, to read Ellul not just as a sociological critic of technology with traditional theological and religious answers to the problems technology poses, but primarily as a philosopher who addresses the great philosophical questions of our day.

It is not surprising that as a Frenchman Ellul addresses the basic concerns of structuralism and deconstructionism, concerns which can be gathered under the general rubric of philosophy of language. Ellul's rejection of contemporary French philosophy reflects his own metaphysical conception of the word as symbol and the image as a copy subordinated to some pre-given orginal. Lovekin cites *The Humiliation of the Word* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985) regarding the status of the image according to Ellul:

> The image contains within itself a deep contradiction. It is not ambiguous: it is coherent, reliable, and inclusive; but it is insignificant. It can have innumerable meanings, depending on culture, learning, or the intervention of some other dimension. For this reason, I must learn to interpret it. The image is clear, but this clarity does not imply certainty or comprehension. My certainty is limited to this directly perceived reality that my sight reveals to me (Lovekin, p. 235; Ellul, p. 8).

On Lovekin's reading, Ellul interprets the post-modern death of the author/speaker and the reduction of language to self-referential signs and images as further indications of the dominance of technique and the loss of transcendence toward an Other which enables communication and the sharing of a stable world held in common. The technological proliferation of mainly visual images through television, film, photography and video has transformed what was essentially a typographic culture into a world of fast-moving images that throttle the brain and seem to stop thinking and critical reflection in their tracks. Here the real world of technique fatefully conjoins with a deconstructive nihilism for which nothing exists outside the text.

In Ellul's philosophical court modern art also must plead guilty to this secular assault on the Other. Art in our time exhibits little if any suspicion of the image. Rather, it seems more than eager to wallow in the play of surfaces and to mock the symbolic character that art works of old embodied and encouraged. Apparently in league with the deconstructionists, contemporary artists seem intent on denying the truth-function of art in favor of mindless parody with no origin or transcendent end. This art, in effect, is an anti-art, the kind of imaging that neither recognizes nor respects any originals to be imitated or symbolized. As Lovekin expresses it, "Language is reduced to one dimension by the machine--by the computer--to be followed by the artists. Flaubert feared the cliché. Modern artists embrace them" (p. 210).

What lies behind this slow descent into a Platonic cave with no exterior is, for Lovekin's Ellul, the essentially technical transformation of the word from spoken to written language. As Plato made clear in the *Phaedrus*, the replacement of an oral with a written tradition is dangerous to memory and its role in the recollection of Being; such forgetfulness sends us on a way that increasingly obscures our vision of truth and goodness. The written word ceases to be a symbolic instrument that places us in direct contact with the truth, as oral language does. Because it is *seen*, writing usurps the role of the original and traps us in a world of our own making, a world of images that deflect our sight away from the Other towards what is comfortably the Same. The spoken word, on the other hand, retains its function as symbol and serves as a medium of transcendence. According to Lovekin, it breaks the downward pull of images into the cave and opens us to "the realm of the story, the narrative," where humans can meet as humans outside the technical system and its de-humanizing demands. Here the Other can be as Other and not as one more functional component in the system beyond which there is no Other.

In Lovekin's depiction, Ellul is clearly a philosopher of an old-fashioned sort who believes in the priority of original over image, oral language over written, the transcendent over the immanent (in spite of Christ's transcendent immanence). More specifically, Lovekin places Ellul's philosophy of technology in the tradition of Hegelian dialectic and Ernst Cassirer's *Kulturphilosophie*. If anything this goes a long way toward defusing the popular image of Ellul as a wild-eyed radical inimical to the Western tradition and its standards of rationality and philosophical discourse. If Ellul is a radical, it is only in the sense that he wants to take us back to our roots -- both Biblical and philosophical -- as a way of regaining a measure against which we can compare and judge the distortions of our technological society.

It is instructive, then, to reflect on the traditional, and especially metaphysical, aspects of Ellul's thought. From a contemporary philosophical vantage-point Ellul seems not so much representative of Western metaphysics as entrapped in it. What is more, this metaphysics is of particularly modern vintage -- Cartesian, to be exact. In describing technique as a mentality or form of consciousness, Ellul takes over the ontology of the self as *subject* and the thing as *object*, quite unintentionally reinforcing the anthropocentrism that lies at the very center of the modern technological assault on nature. Modern anthropocentrism sim-

ply asserts that humans can know only what they make. As Lovekin puts it,

One does not live in a world in which significance is simply given. Significance is made and apprehended at the same time. The given always has a symbolic nature: meaning points to the object of meaning as well as back to whom that object has meaning. Meaning is the *result* of experience with an object. It is not simply outside or inside the observer. Meaning is in the conjunction of innerness and outerness (p. 117).

Humanity as *homo symbolicus* is the creator of its own reality. Just how this human subject, outside religious and theological assumptions, is ever to make contact with the truly Other remains philosophically unclear. For Lovekin, the problem seems hardly to exist, let alone to throw Ellul's philosophical project into serious doubt.

For while Lovekin is right in pointing to Descartes' elevation of method as the herald of the technical phenomenon, he is either unaware of, or unwilling to acknowledge, the Cartesian elements running through Hegel, Cassirer and Ellul. This is most apparent in Ellul's suspicion of the image in contrast to the word. The modern denigration of the perceptible, visible world begins with Descartes' metaphysical justification of a *res extensa* devoid of any sensuous content or qualitative substance and plays itself out in the technological degradation of nature and concomitant creation of a technosphere inhospitable to the senses and aesthetic sensibility. It is hard, then, to accept the Ellulian subordination of the visual image in favor of the word even in light of the daily visual bombardment showered upon us by the modern media. One feels in Ellul's metaphysics the faint presence of a particularly Cartesian brand of nihilism which in the name of the *logos* would have us turn our backs on the visible world so as not to affirm the dessicated sphere of *la technique*. But just as we can distinguish between authentic, loving speech and idle, malicious gossip -- both forms of orality and direct communication -- surely we can discriminate between the superficial images that tie us to the cave and those that liberate the spirit.

More generally, Lovekin's treatment of Ellul's philosophical side, while a valuable service in itself, suffers from the enthusiasm of a devotee. Lovekin is simply too eager to accept Ellul's self-characterizations and descriptions of his philosophical project. When, for example, Ellul states that "I have sometimes been captivated by a line of poetry or by an expression from a novel. There is a mysterious instant. Suddenly a phrase becomes a personal utterance. It penetrates your life," Lovekin comments without irony that "Reading and knowing carried very profound existential weight for Ellul" (p. 126). More serious is Lovekin's assumption that Ellul has seen beyond the technological phenomenon, even though Lovekin keeps Ellul's Christianity at arm's length and respectfully refuses to grant it philosophical status. While there are other Ellulians who do not share in Ellul's religiosity, Lovekin's secularism is particularly disturbing since he provides no philosophical counterpart to Christianity that can underpin an authentic transcendence of the technological society or provide a significant Wholly Other that can serve as the *telos* of that transcendence.

The book is maddening on several other, less serious counts. As an "introduction" to Ellul's philosophy it fails to lead the reader into Ellul's tangled web of terminology and ideas. Key terms are broadly defined -- when they are defined -- so much so that Lovekin almost seems to revel in inconsistency and ambiguity. What, for example, is one to make of a sentence like this: "*La technique* is a mentality within the society; it is the attitude of society toward technique" (p. 68)? Furthermore, the style is dense, and the chapters are poorly organized. The book gets off to a rocky start with Lovekin taking on Ellul's critics before introducing us to the core of Ellul's philosophy. (There is a brief introduction to Ellul's overall position, but it hardly suffices to prepare the reader for the critical forays of the opening chapter.) What is worse, Lovekin sidesteps the objections of these critics -- most notably those of Samuel Florman and Melvin Kranzberg -- by rejecting them as academic examples of technique itself. While this may be true, it is incumbent upon Lovekin to show the reader why this is a bad thing. Lovekin is shrewd enough to recognize the alleged neutrality of technology as the underlying assumption of these criticisms, but he misses the opportunity to discredit this rather common but misleading notion about our machines and technologies.

Instead, an embattled, defensive tone takes the place of argument and persists throughout the rest of the book, lending the unfortunate impression that it is Lovekin and Jacques Ellul against the rest of the world. This absence of critical distance from its subject underlies the book's lack of balance and measure. Lovekin's only attempt at a critical assessment of Ellul occurs in two brief paragraphs toward the end of the book (pp. 214-15) and is at best perfunctory. This does not inspire confidence in Lovekin's reading of Ellul or in his situating of the Ellulian corpus in the field of philosophy of technology. In an early chapter on "Ellul and the Problem of a Philosophy of Technology," Lovekin omits any reference to Marx, Heidegger or Lewis Mumford, key figures in anybody's history of the philosophy of technology. His reluctance to set Ellul off against different or opposing philosophical views ultimately mars this attempt to uncover a full-throated Ellulian philosophy of technology. Like technique itself, Ellul is in need of an Other against which he can be measured and evaluated. Unhappily, Lovekin fails to provide us with this contrast.