

# The Ellul Forum

for the Critique of Technological Civilization

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## Frederick Ferré on Liberating Science, Technology & Religion

### From the Editor

I am very happy to be able to finally put this issue on Frederick Ferré's approach to "Liberating Science, Technology and Religion" to press. It was delayed six months by the death of Jacques Ellul and the need to put together a special memorial issue. It is very appropriate to follow that issue with this one, for Frederick Ferré is surely a kindred spirit with Ellul. Ferré's is Research Professor of Philosophy and co-founder of the graduate Faculty of Environmental Ethics at the University of Georgia. His work on science, technology and religion spans more than three decades and includes his *Philosophy of Technology* (Prentice Hall, 1988) as well as his recent *Hellfire and Lightning Rods*. He is currently at work on a trilogy of books on philosophy and value: *Being and Value, Knowing and Value, Living and Value*. Ferré's work seeks to liberate science, technology and religion from inappropriate paradigms so that they, in turn, can be truly liberating and humanizing forces for our future. His work deserves careful reading and critical attention. This issue of the *Forum* is meant to contribute to that task.

I introduce the *Forum* with a review of Ferré's book, *Hellfire and Lightning Rods: Liberating Science, Technology and Religion*. Then chapter three from Ferré's book, "New Metaphors for Technology," is reprinted here with the kind permission of Orbis Books. This is followed by a critical response to Ferré's essay by Robert Fortner. Ferré is then given the opportunity to respond and bring the dialogue to completion.

In addition to our *Forum* theme for this issue we also have a guest essay by Pieter Tijmes, a member of our editorial board and European circulation manager for the *Forum*. Tijmes reflects on Ellul's view of technical autonomy in light of current post-modern thought. We also have a dialogue section in which David Lovekin responds to the review by Timothy Casey of his book on Ellul, *Technique, Discourse and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul*, which appeared in Issue # 10. My apologies to David Lovekin. This should have been published two issues ago, but space considerations made that difficult. In the Dialogue section Peter Haas also responds to my book *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* Haas' criticisms are provocative and naturally led to my attempt to answer them in the piece that follows his.

Finally, we have two books reviewed in our book review section. The first is *Conversations with Jacques Ellul (Entretiens avec Jacques Ellul)* by Patrick Chastenet. Chastenet, who was Ellul's research assistant for years, offers us valuable insights into Ellul's life and thought as Joyce Hanks indicates in her review. The second review is of *The American Hour* by the the Oxford scholar, Os Guinness. This is done for us very ably by Donald Evans, the Director of the Ellul Institute in Riverside California.

Darrell J. Fasching  
Editor

### In This Issue

*Bulletin Board* p. 18

*Guest Essay:*  
The One Best Way  
by Pieter Tijmes p. 2

*Forum Intro:*  
Review of Frederick Ferré's  
*Hellfire and Lightning Rods*  
by Darrell J. Fasching p. 3

*Forum: Metaphors and  
Technology*  
New Metaphors for Technology  
by Frederick Ferré p. 5

*Forum Response:*  
Response to Frederick Ferré's  
"New Metaphors for Technology"  
by Robert S. Fortner p. 8

Language and Technology: A  
Reply to Robert S. Fortner p. 10

*Forum Dialogue*  
A Response to Timothy Casey  
by David Lovekin p. 11

A Response to Darrell  
Fasching's *The Ethical  
Challenge of Auschwitz and  
Hiroshima*  
by Peter Haas p. 14

A Response to Peter Haas  
by Darrell J. Fasching p. 15

*Book Reviews*  
*Entretiens avec Jacques Ellul*  
by Patrick Chastenet  
Reviewed by Joyce Hanks p.16

*The American Hour* by Os  
Guinness  
Reviewed by Donald Evans p 17  
*About the Ellul Forum*

p.19

# The One Best Way Of Technology?

by Pieter Tijmes

It sounds reasonable that if technology is autonomous, it cannot be politically steered and that if it is steerable, it cannot be autonomous. Not everybody has the same feelings for the concept of the "autonomy" of technology. It is often used as an alarming and disturbing concept. In that case the autonomy of technology refers to a societal development independent of desiderata external to technology. That is, the internal desiderata of technology such as rationality, efficiency, efficacy, represent a normativeness of its own that casts off other norms, for example those of politics, ethics, religion. Technological developments are thus considered as an "irresistible" force not to be controlled by men. Human choices and societal values cannot give any direction to it. That means that technology is autonomous in the sense that it generates a lot of options without being asked. The functionality of these options compared to the available and already realized possibilities is the decisive factor for the realization of the new options. These technological possibilities are not an expression of human needs, rather they are realized in order to evoke human desires. Nobody knows at this moment which products will appear within ten years on the market as the so-called fulfillment of our wishes. The most vigorous argument in favor of the new product is that the available product is inferior to the technical specifications of the new one, as an investigation of the marketing of HDTV compared to the normal TV illustrates.

This train of thought is sharply contrasted with the idea that society is malleable by the human subject and human action. Ellul deplors the situation in which the subject does not play any role and the technological imperative replaces the ethical imperative. Post modernist thinkers e.g. Axelos, Vatimo, etc., may agree with Ellul's analysis in the sense that the human subject does not give a substantial direction to the technological developments, but their appreciation is different. This has led to the so-called postmodern reconsideration of the human subject. The subject does not hold the autonomous position, giving direction and sense to history, that the enlightenment attributed to it. It is only one element in the technological network. Technology has become the subject of history. It takes the place of the human subject. It is obvious that these postmodernist representatives cannot be accused of pessimism. In contrast with Ellul they emphasize an affirmative and liberating attitude towards technique; planetary technology is to be accepted and to be affirmed without reserve. The world is to be considered as play from this technological perspective. The idea that man is not responsible for it is understood as liberating.

In the above it is a matter of two different attitudes towards technology, on the one hand an alarming and distressing appreciation (Ellul), and on the other hand a postmodern and optimistic one. Neither of them provides a basis for policy. In both cases steering by politics is not opportune. Ellul rebels against this and the representatives of postmodernism I mentioned are completely satisfied with it.

In both, Ellul and postmodernism as well, one is confronted with the idea that everything is a product of human hands, whereas the grasp on the whole has been withdrawn from human beings. This is not an outright new view of history. Marx expresses similar thoughts as follows: "In the social production of their life men enter into definitive relations," and he calls these relations "indispensable and independent of their will." The same thought is to be found in Adam Smith, when he holds the conviction that steering of society was a prerogative for the invisible hand of the Almighty. A ruler who takes the direction that the society and its international environment are moving in may have the illusion that he actually rules. However, determining the direction and following the direction already in motion are obviously not the same.

I like to defend the view that the agreement on the role of the individual in the historical and societal process - argued by Ellul in the

wake of Marx and Adam Smith - depends upon the distance one is prepared to take with regard to technological and societal developments. The greater the distance, the more plausible their point of view is. At a great distance one only has an eye for the *collective* social reality developing independently of the *individual* reality. Personal decisions do not appear within this (Durkheimian) way of looking by Ellul. The distance and the perspective one chooses determine what one sees and discerns. At a distance technological development may be presented as the "one best way." To put it another way: Ellul, Marx and Smith look at society from an outsider's perspective. Seen from this perspective there is an order on the level of the whole of society. The insider's perspective, that is the perspective of an actor within the society, discerns other phenomena and sees a different order.

It is social-constructivist research that takes a closer look and has, as consequence, obviously an eye for the personal and societal struggle that lies at the basis of the definitive direction of technological development. That research confines itself to the context of the developmental process of technical artifacts and shows that as long as the power struggle for the technical design has not been decided, the technological process may take - so to say - any direction. In short, there is no "one best way" of technology, if a closer look is given to it. This does not mean that determinism has been overcome, because the social-constructivist analyses articulate just the contingency of the developments and not their steerability. In the nineteenth century there were many designs of bicycles. Which kind of bicycle was emerging and which models of bicycles were pushed to the margin of history, was not to be decided in advance either on rational and technical or on social and cultural criteria. Many factors played their role chaotically and unexpectedly. According to the social-constructivist analysis the genealogy of the bicycle brings an unpredictable and uncontrollable process into the open. Drawing attention to the relevant social groups essential for the outcome of the technical process does not mean the rescue of human freedom from the technical autonomy. In this social-constructivist understanding, determinism of the technical is only exchanged for a broader set of determinant factors (i.e., of the technical, the social, the cultural, etc.).

Ellul of course would not be impressed by this relatively new approach towards technological developments and in any case he would not accept it as a critique of his view on technical autonomy. He would comment that this new approach cannot claim that the outcome of the technical developments is a result of three or more equal factors - technical, social, cultural, etc., because in our time the technical has shaped the social and cultural. That means that requirements external to technique may only be *conceptually* separated. Technical values such as rationality, efficiency, efficacy have become our definitive cultural values.

What conclusions can we draw? The options -- whether technical developments are either autonomous or steerable -- are not adequate. (a) Developments are not autonomous to the extent they are socially and culturally embedded. Technique "in vitro" does not exist. (b) However, the alternative view that "technique is steerable" does not gain the upper hand either. There is of course no denying the fact that specific technical developments are to be initiated: one can produce atomic bombs, launch moon projects, start aids-research, make new varieties of plants, animals, maybe of man. One can do a lot. One can also stimulate existing developments or steer away from them, but the outcome and effects of initiations and stimulations are not predictable - technically, socially or culturally. Indeed, one can do a lot, but one is not in a position to play the invisible hand of the Almighty. That observation was a good theological insight on the part of Adam Smith -- one worth remembering whenever we engage in technological planning.

## Forum Intro: Essay Review

### *Hellfire and Lightning Rods: Liberating Science, Technology and Religion* by Frederick Ferré. Orbis Books, 1993, 223 pages.

Reviewed by Darrell J. Fasching, University of South Florida

Frederick Ferré's *Hellfire and Lightning Rods* is an important contribution to reflection upon religion, ethics and public policy in a technological civilization. Since this is the primary area of my own concerns, I read it with keen attention and considerable profit. The title is based on a story that Ferré tells of his father, as a young boy, hearing a sermon. It seems the preacher castigated his flock, made up of mostly farmers, for placing lightning rods on their barns. Their sin, apparently, was attempting to use technology to deflect the just wrath of God. Ferré takes this as a picturesque introduction to the conflict between religion and scientific technology.

We live in a time of critical transition, says Ferré -- a time of "worlds coming to an end and new worlds being born." With the advent of nuclear power and nuclear weapons, to pick the most dramatic example, the stakes involved in the conflict between the two different epistemic and valuational worldviews of science and religion have gotten much higher than they were in the days of Ferré's father's childhood. Even setting nuclear issues aside, time has run out on the modern world. Ferré argues that neither science nor religion have fully faced up to the coming transition to a post-modern world. The stakes are high because the myths of modern technology promotes unlimited growth while the exponential growth of the population of the earth and its consumption of our limited resources is enough to guarantee that a post-modern world will impose limits upon us and require a world in homeostatic balance. The task Ferré sets himself is to suggest how the transition from a world of unlimited growth to a world of homeostatic balance can be brought about. To this end he surveys the realms of both religion and science and identifies the resources of each that might be of assistance.

Ferré begins his book with an introductory chapter that explains the inevitability of having to make the transition to a post-modern world of limits. The remaining fifteen chapters are then organized in five parts dealing with (1) Technology and Religion, (2) Science and Ultimate Belief, (3) Myths and Modernity, (4) Toward a Multi-Mythic Organicism and (5) Organicism in Religion.

One of the strengths of Ferré's analysis is that he sees the conflict between science and religion, not as a conflict between the secular and the sacred but between two sacred worldviews each of which has historically exhibited both strengths and weaknesses. Religion, he reminds us, is a way of valuing which shapes every aspect of life and expresses itself in stories and images which profoundly shape our sense of reality and our actions.

When the world of modern science, the world of Newton and Galileo, overtook the Medieval Christian organic worldview, it replaced it with a mechanistic worldview, replacing at the same time the ideal of absolute dependence upon God with the ideal of mastery of the world. This new worldview, which brought with it its own cosmic myths and stories, was treated with the same sacred seriousness as its predecessor. It also brought with it its own ritualistic ethical imperatives of impersonal objectivity, mastery and an eschatological hope for unlimited growth. But in a post-modern world of limited resources such myths and values can only lead to apocalyptic consequences.

In a post-modern world our faith in modern science and technology is called into question. A technology of ever-increasing production

cannot save us. There are limits to growth. If we are to have a future both religion and science as sacred worldviews are going to have to undergo critique -- mutual critique. There are elements of both traditional science and religion that are dysfunctional in a post-modern world and there are other elements that offer us hope. The materialistic and mechanistic reductionism of modern science which views the world with a disembodied objectivity that devalues life, both biological and human, is being replaced with a new model of science embodied in ecology. If the former could find no place for the human in its mechanistic world picture (e.g., the mind-body problem), the latter places the scientist and all human beings (indeed all beings) directly in world of mutual interdependence and teleological processes -- a world which is truly an organic living body. If the mythological and metaphorical world of science must undergo a profound transition as we move into a post-modern world, so must religion, especially monotheistic religion. Its view of an all powerful, masculine, eternal and unchanging deity must give way to a more organic Whiteheadian or process view of God as embodied in the World (our mother earth) in a dialectical process of mutuality whereby God not only transforms the world but is transformed by it.

Thus both science and religion must move toward a mutual transformation which will lead to a world that values a holistic ecological sense of global mutuality in which unlimited growth is replaced by a homeostatic creativity that respects the limits of our biological or bodily condition.

If there is to be a mutual interaction between science and religion that shapes a new post-modern world then religion must play an important role in shaping public policy. Religion does this, Ferré argues, by shaping the public mythos or metaphorical world picture that shapes our sense of reality and inspires our actions. Thus Ferré seeks to Christianize technology. If giving drink to the thirsty, he argues, is a Christian act then so is providing the technology to purify a city's water system. What Christianity can provide is a "compassionate holism" to guide our selection and use of technique.

One of the strengths of Ferré's position lies in the fact that he does not ignore the fundamental pluralism of a post-modern world. Ours is not a time, he argues, that is likely to be transformed by a single synthetic vision or mythos. Christianity will not be in a position to transform the world all by itself. It will provide only one of many myths that will affect the shape of a post-modern world. Therefore, Ferré argues for a "multi-mythic organicism" -- a kind of coalition of religious worldviews that promote an organic holism rooted in a respect for the ecological limits that sustain life on this planet. Ferré focuses mainly on Christianity and Judaism as central traditions for any transformation of Western consciousness but he recognizes that a larger dialogue must take place that includes Islam and the religions of Asia as well. Everyone of these traditions, before it was overpowered by the modern mythos of the world machine, offered humanity an organic worldview and a sense of living within a world of sacred limits. In a post-modern world the recovery of these diverse organic visions will play a significant role in shaping a mythos and ethos, and hence the public policy, that will bring into being a global civilization of mutuality and interdependence.

This is what is required if we are to avoid an apocalyptic future. And yet Ferré is not overly optimistic. The churches, the synagogues and the religious communities of others around the world need to be agents of social change. Indeed they are admirably in a position to be just that, for they reach people across all boundaries of race and social status and move people to action by touching the deepest mythological levels of action and motivation. Unfortunately, says Ferré, our religious institutions are seldom truly engines of social change, they are far too conservative. They are largely held captive by the modern mythos and its values which makes religious people as much a part of the problem as they are part of the solution. Like Ellul, Ferré does not think we can socially engineer such transformations without destroying their authenticity. Such transformations must be true responses to our deepest religious experiences of transcendence. In the end, Ferré concludes only a miracle can bring about the needed transformation. On the one hand, this might seem unlikely, but on the other hand, religious life is rooted in miracles and profound religious transformations can occur just when you least expect them. And when (or should we say "if") that transformation comes, Ferré is convinced it will be ecological, feminist and liberative in its multi-mythic organic synergism.

Ferré's book is important and suggestive. It is important because it insightfully lays out the ways in which religion and scientific technology converge and diverge at the locus of the sacred and its mythic metaphors, and shows how the two can and should mutually transform each other. It is suggestive in its identification of the most promising point of convergence in the science of ecology with Whiteheadian process theism. Yet the suggestiveness of Ferré's book is also frustrating. At several points in the book he proposes possibilities without really making a case for them or exploring them in any depth. The shift from traditional theism to process theism is a case in point. For those who might not be familiar with process thought not enough is really said to make the suggestion plausible. The relationship between religions in multi-mythic organicism is also left tantalizingly vague. For a book about a global crisis not much is said about religions other than Judaism and Christianity. Given Ferré's ecological-process theism orientation, an exciting case could have been made for process theology as the hermeneutic link between Western theism and Asian religions, especially Buddhism.

For Ellul scholars there is one criticism of Ferré's book that cannot be avoided. Ferré critiques Ellul with an old and familiar accusation that Ellul is an unredeemed pessimist who can see no positive role for technology from a biblical perspective. Thus Ferré argues: "There is one serious defect in Ellul's position from a Christian standpoint: There is no final word of good news, no balancing affirmation of redemption to match the stern warnings of judgment and sin. . . . Ellul leaves us with despair, but that despair is not biblical" (52). A decade or two ago this argument would not have been surprising. It was in fact commonplace. But it is inexcusable now. For since then a lot of work has been done on Ellul that shows decisively that this is a misunderstanding of Ellul's position, although one that Ellul's hyperbolic style often invited. In fact, when Ferré advocates hope but warns that we should beware of false hope that leads to passive inaction (121-122) he is articulating a position that is identical to Ellul's.

Finally, Ferré argues for post-modern holistic organic metaphors over and against modern mechanistic world metaphors. The former, he argues, will provide the mythic-metaphorical foundation for public policy and a new world order that promotes mutuality, equality and interdependence. However, he makes this claim without seriously dealing with the propensity of organic metaphors to reinforce hierarchical inequality. I would venture to guess that throughout history organic thinking's primary function has been to mythologically reinforce social hierarchical stratification.

The "body" as a metaphor for the universe was used in ancient Hinduism to justify the caste system in India and the myth of the body was used in the deutero-Pauline letters of the Christian New Testament to justify the subordination of women to men (even as the body is ruled by the head). Organic thinking need not lead to such hierarchical

thinking, as Paul's authentic letters indicate with their emphasis on many different but equal parts forming one body. For Paul, Christ is the body, not the head of the body. Nevertheless, if organic metaphors are to shape the narrative imagination that will govern public policy some differentiation of organic metaphors needs to be made and an account given of how we can tap these metaphors in traditional religions without reinforcing hierarchical inequalities. Finally, let me conclude by saying that none of these criticisms in anyway takes away from the significant contribution Ferré has made in this book. They only leave us waiting for the next installment in the productive career of an important scholar.

## Hellfire and Lightning Rods

### Liberating Science, Technology, and Religion

by *Frederick Ferré*

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## New Metaphors For Technology

by Frederick Ferré, University of Georgia

(Chapter three of *Hell Fire and Lightning Rods*, reprinted with permission from Orbis Press)

What's in an image? A lot! That blunt reply is one of my main theses, as will become obvious through the remainder of this book. As we now circle deeper into an examination of the technological phenomenon, considering especially how practical technologies relate to the spiritual dimensions of life, it will help to consider a variety of alternate metaphors through which we may view our topic.

### Technology as Mirror of Humanity

No human societies, however ancient or primitive, have existed without implements, techniques, or artifacts of some kind. At a minimum, every society shows through its technologies (whether these be hand axes or blowguns, dugout canoes or pottery vessels) what it *knows how* to do. Such knowledge does not, of course, entail any theoretical knowledge explaining why the techniques work. Practical knowledge without theory may be honed to a fine edge simply by trial and error, apprenticeship, and imitation. Fortunate discoveries of successful methods—how to obtain temperatures hot enough to fire pottery, what proportions of materials to use for desirable results, and the like—were preserved by oral tradition for millennia before the invention of writing. Such genuine practical knowledge preceded accounts of *why* these methods should be successful. Sometimes theories were generated, as in alchemy, to account for the powers of known techniques; but always, until recent years, technological knowledge led the way.

Even at the dawn of modern science, practical knowledge of glass working led the way to Galileo's telescope and Torricelli's barometer. Today, multiplied by many orders of magnitude, science would be literally unthinkable without its vast embodiment in the instrumentation provided by those who know how.

But priorities in leadership respecting practical and theoretical knowledge are now radically reversed for those who live in the modern era. Today *theoretical* knowledge suggests and shapes our practical surroundings. It was only after Heinrich Rudolf Hertz had conceptualized the electromagnetic wave, for example, that the successful technologies of radio and television could follow. It was only after the famous linkage of matter and energy by Albert Einstein's " $E=mc^2$ " that the awesome practical possibilities of nuclear power could be pursued.

Technology has always reflected the character of the human knowledge of its era. Now the materialized products of our civilization's knowledge surround us, wrapping us in a technosphere born of the late marriage of theoretical with practical intelligence. But the situation is further complicated by the fact that in many ways practical intelligence, though not in the lead in the old way, still presses ahead of theory. Today the vast bulk even of "pure" science is big, expensive science, wholly dependent for its existence on the largesse of those—in government, in industry, and also in education—who may care more for practical fruit than for theoretical flowers. This is not always bad. Result-oriented research into the cure of disease or into

better ways of feeding the hungry, for example, is not wicked. But it reminds us that to recognize technology as reflection of human knowledge is, even today, not to find the image of pure theory alone.

This is to say, of course, that technology reflects human values. When we look at our artifacts, we see implicit in them our hopes and fears, goals and aversions. If a culture fears bad weather, these negative evaluations will be seen in its housing and clothing technologies. If a culture values meat eating, its weapons and traps will reflect its preferences.

By the same token, the technologies of an era will reflect what is taken as licit, i.e., not taboo in the working value-system of the human agents whose knowledge and values are being brought to bear on daily life. A vegetarian society will manifest a different food technology from a society specializing in animal husbandry or the hunt. A society taking for granted the legitimacy of judicial torture or the agonizing execution of witches will apply its knowledge to the refinement of deliberately pain-producing instruments and devices that would be unthinkable in other value contexts.

Perhaps it will be granted now that the collective technologies of an age reflect the dominant values and knowledge of the time. This need not in any way imply unanimity in valuing or uniform distribution in knowledge. On the contrary, the technologies of whips and chains in a slave society will be valued far differently by masters than by their slaves. Value conflicts in human societies are commonplace, and conflicts over technological embodiments of values must be expected. Likewise, knowledge is by no means uniformly distributed in many societies. The function of medieval guilds, for example, was to perpetuate *and guard* the practical secrets of a craft. Deliberate monopolization of knowledge or restrictions of access to it is a frequent feature in human societies, including our own.

Recognizing such knowledge restrictions and value conflicts helps to interpret much debate over technologies in our own time. Sometimes the case against one or another technology—or "technology in general," whatever that could mean—is put as though technology were something alien, inhuman, demonic. But this cannot possibly be the case, since all technologies are reflections of human knowledge and values. The charge that technology is "inhuman," if intended literally, rests on a conceptual confusion. It might more properly be said that the technology under attack is perceived as reflecting values that are keenly disapproved of, or as reflecting knowledge of which the protester has been kept in alienating ignorance, or both. It might further mean that the protester has a view of "the human" that is too restricted and idealized. One often finds the concept used normatively to rule out, e.g., torture and destruction, heedlessness, suicidal mania, or the like, as "inhuman." Indeed there is much in our technologies that is *inhumane*; there is much that is foolish, self-destructive, tragic. But to this extent we see reflected, there in our technologies, inhumane, foolish, self-destructive, tragic aspects of the human creature. Our knowledge, lofty and admirable though it is, is yet imperfect. Our values, sometimes noble, are often

short-sighted or worse. In our technology we see reflected the heights and the depths of what we are.

### Technology as Lens of Humanity

A mirror is one metaphor for technology. A lens is another. A mirror is meant to reflect accurately, both blemishes and beauty. A lens, in contrast, can both magnify for vision and function as burning glass for power. So technology can bring aspects of our knowledge and values into clarifying focus and can turn them into effective instruments for deliberate social change.

Picking up the lens metaphor for modern technology, we may see features of our current knowledge and values as never before.

Modern science is the leading supplier of the theoretical knowledge that has led the development of technology in our civilization for approximately two centuries. It is not surprising, therefore, that our current technologies hold a magnifying glass to the qualities of that knowledge. We see, for example, modern technologies as specialized, devoted to solving specific aims and goals. Generating electricity is one such goal. Cleaning grime out of clothes is another. Providing rapid, comfortable private transportation is still another. We are used to technologies that aim at a few clearly defined effects. This focuses the fact that the methods of reasoning, the qualities of thought that have gone into the development of such technologies are themselves *specialized, linear, and specific*. Modern science adopted from Descartes one of his most important rules: to conquer each problem separately by concentrating on solving each component part. This preference for the precision of specialization and analysis has consequently permeated our culture and its artifacts. But, magnified by the lens of contemporary technology, it is evident that just such "rifle-barrel vision" has resulted in technologies that, in producing their intended results, produce other, objectionable results as well. Enormously effective electric power plants, if coal fired, pollute the atmosphere, but if nuclear, threaten the environment with immensely dangerous wastes over immensely long time frames. Chemically engineered detergents clean our collars wonderfully well, but (to our culpable surprise) over-fertilize our water systems to the point of eutrophication and environmental death. Private automobiles, brilliantly designed for comfort and speed, clog our cities, overwhelm our landscape with their required pavement, and contribute to the death of forests and lakes through acid rain. Through the magnifying lens of contemporary technology's ambivalent successes—a train of specific triumphs purchased at the cost of disastrous "side effects," which our favored ways of thinking did not encourage us to anticipate—we recognize the latent defects in linear, specialized modes of knowledge.

Many important values of modern society are also sharply focused when seen through the lens of our technology. We see, for example, large segments of modern technological society in quest of quantified efficiencies: factories measured in numbers of units produced, in "bottom lines" of profits and endless growth. Behind much of technology's built-in drive for quantity we find, not surprisingly, the preference for the numerable over the qualitative at the root of modern scientific thought itself. Concerned by the quantitative goals of much dominant technology, however, poets and others have long warned of the dangers in downgrading imponderable considerations, moral and aesthetic, and of taking "more" as equivalent to "better." Likewise, we can vividly see in our powerful technologies, which attack the earth and nonhuman species as mere resources for our human comfort and exploitation, the anthropocentric bias that has led us to claim complete dominion over the world of nature. Our dominant values, like our characteristic modes of thinking, are brought to sharp and challenging focus by a thoughtful look through the lens technology provides.

If a lens can focus light for illumination, it can also focus for energy. Philosophers who, through contemplating technology, have raised to new clarity pervasive modes of knowledge and habits of valuing are in a position not only to criticize but also to offer alternatives for constructive social change.

What would a mode of knowing be like that looked for understanding not primarily through dividing and conquering its questions

but through setting them in fuller context? Can the science underlying our future technologies be simultaneously rigorous and holistic? The science of ecology may be a hopeful model. In order to understand its proper subject matter, living organisms and their complex interactions within complete environments, scientific ecology, while using analytical tools, must stress the primacy of wider and wider patterns. Technologies reflecting such scientific knowledge would avoid the rifle-barrel vision that ignores "side effects" as though unanticipated negative effects were not all along part of the full range of effects to be considered.

Since ecology deals with the health of ecosystems, it cannot avoid qualitative considerations, inasmuch as health itself is a normative concept. Quantity plays its due part, but always a subordinate part, in such norm-guided thinking. Technologies designed with a stress on quality above quantity would reflect a greater readiness to seek optimum rather than maximum results; they would lead to balance and sustainability.

Finally, scientific ecology includes the human race as one important species in the global biosphere, as one among many. Technologies reflecting such ecological knowledge and values could not be engineered in heedlessness of the other inhabitants of the globe. Our alienated modern civilization would evolve, through such thinking and valuing, into a civilization more intent on designing artifacts that express respect for nature's wisdom and for including non-human interests as important practical goals. Such a civilization, holding before itself the mirror of new technologies that reflect such postmodern forms of knowledge and values, would behold a more beautiful human face than ours today.

### Technology as Incarnate Knowledge

The metaphor of "incarnation," drawn from religion, may show still more aspects of technology. For example, the technologies of a culture embody—incarnate—the state of *knowledge* within that culture. This need not be theoretical knowledge, on my understanding of "technology," since I grant the term to all practical implementations of intelligence, no matter how rudimentary or merely traditional in character.

Intelligence, however, must be an ingredient in anything properly classified as technological. This requirement rules out purely instinctive practical constructions—e.g., bee hives, birds' nests, and the like—that are imprinted or "hard-wired" into behavioral patterns regardless of changing circumstances. Still, intelligence need not be *theoretical* to be genuinely intelligent, i.e., to make appropriate responses to environmental circumstances by taking account of ideal possibilities and implementing them.

Characteristically, intelligence mediates behavior through *methods*, which are themselves nothing but sets of formal possibilities for disciplined action under specifiable circumstances; but a method, as a set of ideas for behaving, can be learned either by direct imitation or from theoretical principles. This merely means that some technologies may be transmitted by rote, rule of thumb, or apprenticeship (in a word, by *tradition*), while others may be transmitted by insight into broader abstractions from which specific methods may be deduced (in a word, by *theory*). In both cases, such technologies embody a kind of knowledge, whether it be "knowing how" or "knowing that." I do not, of course, suggest that "knowledge" of this sort entails *truth*, since effective methods may well be deduced from false theories. But in this historically relativized sense, the technologies of an era or a culture clearly embody its state of knowledge.

### Technology as Incarnate Values

Second, the technologies of a culture embody its *values*. As we saw above, these need not be the "official" values of the culture, as expressed in ethical codes or religious *mythos*. But at a minimum, one can see from the methods and artifacts in use what sorts of means are not taboo, what sorts of ends are considered licit. One finds embodied



in technology, in other words, the implemented values of a culture--the ones that override when all is said and done.

There is, of course, no technology without values. Knowledge alone, unharnessed to human valuing, would not result in technology any more than valuing alone, lacking the requisite knowledge, could find effective embodiment. Both are necessary conditions of the technological phenomenon. It would not be wrong, and it might be revealing, to say that technology is the offspring in *praxis* of the mating of knowledge with value, of epistemology with axiology.

In our own culture, the epistemological base of technology has for the past two centuries been increasingly pervaded with theoretical intelligence, as modern science has fulfilled the Baconian dream of translating knowledge into a torrent of "helps" for the human condition. As this new knowledge has provided us with power to do hitherto undreamed of things, our actual values have been revealed in proportion to the vast expansion of possible actions open for our value-laden choices. The overriding, governing values that have emerged incarnate in our artifacts--in our assembly lines, our weapons, our means of transportation and amusement, and in all the other implementations of the modern industrial world--are often in tension with our traditional accounts of what our supreme values are supposed to be.

This clash between overriding value-systems is what gives the incarnational approach to technology in fact its powerful religious dimension. Religion is above all a domain of intense and comprehensive values. It expresses what is taken to be most worthy of worship, what is sacred. It is a community's way of organizing, expressing, relating, and reinforcing its most intense and comprehensive valuations. Thus, if in our culture the principal source for technological knowledge is science, and if our actual practices and institutions embody our society's basic values, then the technologies that surround us are nothing less than incarnations of characteristically modern science and religion.

### Technology as "All Too Human"

One advantage of such an incarnational metaphor for technology is its total elimination of the false dichotomy between the technical and the human that plagues much popular and academic thinking. At one level this dichotomy shows itself in the pigeon-holing of issues as either "scientific and technological," on the one hand, or as "humanistic," on the other. In many universities, there is hardly any communication across these invisible but impenetrable boundaries. On my own campus, the problem is vividly incarnated in brick and stone. The sciences are housed in ugly, efficient buildings on top of one treeless hill, while the humanities enjoy beautiful, if decaying, buildings on an ancient, shaded hilltop--with the football stadium wedged menacingly in the gulch between. The few faculty who want to fraternize with their opposite numbers must pay twice the normal fees for parking, though (if not afraid of walking) they can meet on neutral ground for lunch.

At another level this imagined dichotomy manifests itself in the confused sense that technology and science are somehow autonomous, inhuman, or anti-human forces. The image of the machine out of control, the robots ruling their designers, the dominance of tools over their makers, is a familiar (and in many ways compelling) one. Charlie Chaplin's frantic struggles to keep up with the production line and his entrapment in the feeding machine in *Modern Times*, along with the countless other variations on this theme, from Fritz Lang's ravenous Moloch-engine in *Metropolis* to Stanley Kubrick's paranoid H.A.L. in *2001*, are all part of the cultural *mythos*.

The incarnational metaphor for technology need not obscure what these images suggest, that our technologies are fearsomely potent and can go wildly out of control. It merely makes it harder to say or think that technologies--even when raging loose and feeding on their designers--are in any way "alien" to the human. What we see when we see Chaplin trapped in the feeding machine, for example, is a victim in the clutches of incarnated human values yearning after maximized profits by eliminating the "inefficiencies" of the lunch

hour. When the machine sputters and spills the soup, what we see are incarnate limitations of the current state of knowledge. The machine is finally rejected ("not practical"), not because of the greedy goals it incarnates, but because of its cognitive defects. What we see, to take another example, when we see the monstrous power plant in *Metropolis* devouring its workers, is the readiness of the rulers above to exploit without compunction the labor force below.

If technology is the incarnate blending of fundamental knowledge with fundamental values--the joint implementation of whatever is current science with whatever is functioning religion--then our appraisals of the goods and bads of technology will at root be appraisals not of something alien but of human virtue and vice. Science itself, after all, is fully a human activity. It is properly included among the liberal arts. Its intellectual roots are deep in the philosophical quest for understanding the universe. Its theories and models are in dynamic mutual relationship with metaphysical ideas and cultural presumptions; it is shot through with value considerations, from the accepted norms of good thinking to the approval of peer reviewers. If scientific values tend systematically to ignore the values of tenderness, love, or concern for the objects of investigation, then we discover that human beings do not always value as fully as they should. If scientific thinking tends characteristically to lose sight of important complexities by reducing frames of discourse, or to sunder vital relationships in the process of analysis, then we realize that human beings do not always think as well as they should. Similarly, if technologies distort human existence or exacerbate economic injustice by forcing obedience to unfeeling rhythms or by centralizing control over the goods of life, we learn how selfish, short-sighted, cruel, or heedless we human beings can be. And if our technologies destroy us in the end, we shall prove how foolish a creature was *Homo sapiens*.

The incarnational metaphor for technology would gently draw us to see that we should not blame alien forces for our ills, but look instead to ourselves. We find out who we are, in part, by the technologies that we allow and applaud.

But doom and blame need not be our last words. On the contrary, if all the artifacts around us could be re-seen, re-felt, re-thought as the embodiment of someone's intelligence and someone's values, the world would not only begin to look different to us, it might become more plastic to our considered hopes. What would a world be like in which the dominant methods and typical artifacts incarnate the values (say) of Christian charity or Jewish observance or Islamic faithfulness or Hindu inclusiveness or Buddhist moderation or Taoist equilibrium? What sorts of things would we need to know in order really to incarnate such fundamental values in our implements? What sorts of artifacts would be unthinkable in such a world? What sorts would beg for invention and implementation?

There is no need to be utopian, however, to recognize the advantages of the incarnational metaphor for technology. Its main benefit is to shift the emphasis away from the external hardware and toward the central significance of our technologies. As an image to assist criticism and assessment, it offers a way across the fact-value, science-humanities, technical-personal abyss. As a guide to a postmodern--but still an inevitably technological--future, it may help us to concentrate more intelligent attention on clarifying those ideals that genuinely deserve incarnation.

## Forum Response

### Response to Frederick Ferré's "New Metaphors for Technology,"

by Robert S. Fortner, Calvin College

Perhaps the principal advantage of an incarnational image of technology is that it forces us to take account of the human condition. Ferré argues that the incarnational metaphor eliminates "the false dichotomy between the technical and the human that plagues much popular and academic thinking." However, I think the advantage of such a metaphor is not what it eliminates but what it affirms: the Janus-like aspect of the human condition. The human condition, as I see it, is one that itself is both good and evil. On the one hand, human beings are wonderfully creative: they mimic God's creative act itself, discovering, inventing, applying, and using technology to better the physical conditions of humankind. On the other hand they also demonstrate demonic qualities: denying, obfuscating, rationalizing, misappropriating and misusing technology, often thereby worsening humankind's lot.

From this perspective, which I assume Ferré shares at least to a degree, an incarnational metaphor for technology forces us to see technology for what it is—both benefactor and crippler of the environment, health, human relationships, material well-being, and ethical sensibility. To the extent that human beings carry good and evil within them, whatever they create can be expected to exhibit such qualities. So Ferré is right in asserting that a false dichotomy may be thus exposed. I suspect, however, that this exposure will come more obviously from baring the human being for what s/he is and arguing from there. Anything such flawed creatures create, not only technologically, but philosophically, politically, economically, culturally, and morally, will likewise be defective. After all, the human being is responsible for spoiling the creation by choosing to defy God's clear instructions.

It is not the overall theme of Ferré's essay, then, that I find troubling. Rather it is his method of proof, particularly the implications of his treatment of culture and value. He argues that "technology reflects human values. When we look at our artifacts, we see implicit in them our hopes and fears, goals and aversions. If a culture fears bad weather, these negative evaluations will be seen in its housing and clothing technologies. If a culture values meat eating, its weapons and traps will reflect its preferences." The argument that proceeds from this is analogic. "By the same token," he says, the technologies of an era will reflect what is taken as licit, i.e., not taboo in the working value-system of the human agents whose knowledge and values are being brought to bear on daily life."

The difficulties here are three-fold. The first is the overly-restrictive view of culture and the assumptions about cultural creation. Culture is not a tangible being or material object that fears or values. It is not something—as Ferré's examples suggest—that technologists or politicians create so that weapons or traps, housing or clothing, can reflect that creative act. He is more on target when he says that what is licit is that which is not taboo (defining what is by what it is not), but even this has limited utility. Cultures are more complex and unruly creations where millions of people are making choices about what to wear, eat, observe or listen to, how to treat one another, how to express themselves in the arts, how much to pay for the art created, what sort of religions to create or maintain, how to raise children, fund education, or practice politics. All participate in cultural creation, maintenance or decay.

Modern cultures are cauldrons of nearly endless possibility; they are full of contradictions. I increasingly see cars in Michigan with dual bumper stickers: "Choose Life" and the logo of the National Rifle Association. I cannot put these two commitments together. Do we

save the unborn urban fetus, I've asked myself, so he can be gunned down in the streets when he's fourteen? How is it possible that the very people who demand that the Supreme Court decision guaranteeing abortion under the "most basic right" of privacy be overturned—thus nullifying a declared civil liberty—can, on the same bumper, support an organization that itself demands absolute protection of another civil liberty—the right to bear arms—despite the fact that the Supreme Court has declared that the fourth amendment has no application beyond the right of the states to control a militia? How can a life that is so important before birth have so little value afterwards? Why should urban youths have the right to bear assault weapons to gun down those who were "saved" in the womb? This is but one cultural contradiction in our society, but both positions are equally "licit," as is the right to hold positions that others (in this case, me) find utter nonsense.

In reality modern culture disallows little, makes few activities illicit. There are extenuating circumstances that excuse murder, rape, burglary, or other heinous crimes. The debate about the sociological reasons for this—and the application of law to those of different races or financial capability—continues. As we are politically pluralistic we are culturally pluralistic: the society we have constructed is one dependent on the operations of a political process dependent on public and expert opinion, economic interests, and partisan compromise or obstruction. To anchor one's argument on such a fragile foundation thus seems to me rather too ambitious.

The second problem is a confusion between the *human* and the *humane*. Ferré tells us that it "cannot possibly be the case" that technology is "something alien, inhuman, demonic" because "all technologies are reflections of human knowledge and values." Technology cannot be *inhuman* because it is so reflective of humankind. He admits, however, that technology may be *inhumane*: "foolish, self-destructive, tragic" just as there is much about human creatures that is likewise "inhumane, foolish, self-destructive, tragic . . . ." Again, I want to admit that this may be true, but I dare not. Whether we like to admit it or not, human beings do commit *inhuman* acts. Hitler's annihilation of Jews, gypsies, Slovaks, and dissident Christians was not merely *inhumane*, it was also *inhuman*. I think Ferré has confused ends with means. It seems to me that genocide—whether practiced by the Nazis, Stalin, the Khmer Rouge, Somali warlords, Serbs, or Hutus—is inhuman. So is slavery, infanticide, cannibalism, or ritual sacrifices. These are ends: all deny humankind's most basic and necessarily inviolate ontological status as creatures made in the image of God.

We also know that some acts are more inhumane than others: when executions are performed, those that increase human suffering are more inhumane than those that do not. When wars are conducted using poison gas, napalm, flesh-shredding anti-personnel devices, or other indiscriminate weapons, we judge them more harshly than when more "precise" or "clean" weapons are used. There are international conventions aimed at controlling many indiscriminate weapons. The use of torture or imprisonment to stamp out insurrection or political dissent is likewise inhumane and emerges from the dark side of human nature.

I'll admit that I struggle with this distinction when I teach ethics. My students, I think, are actually better (or quicker, at least) at seeing the inhumane than they are the inhuman. They can imagine the pain inflicted by practices that damage the body or the mind. They have more trouble with acts that deny the inviolability of the soul, or, to



put it differently, that wound or deny God by degrading those made to reflect his image. That is not to say that students deny the evil of Nazism, but that, short of such obvious manifestations of inhumanity, they can't see how they could be judged inhuman. Cruelty they recognize (they see the methods), but denial of ontological status through racism or sexism (gentler versions of "master race" theology) are more elusive.

Based on my own understanding of this distinction, however, I would quarrel with Ferré's claim that humankind could not possibly create something inhuman. I think we do it all too frequently. We are all too prone to turn our backs on the "good" creation and embrace the demonic. Thus we can certainly create what is alien, inhuman, and demonic: whether law, attitude, or technology.

My third objection has to do with Ferré's use of religion. This comes in his section on "Technology as Incarnate Values." I'd like to unpack this section rather more carefully than the others to which I have objected. He begins with the statement that technology need not embody the "official" values of a culture, "as expressed in ethical codes or religious *mythos*." But this is a tautological argument. Ferré claims that technology must be seen as an embodiment of cultural values (as quoted earlier). But here he does not demand that the values so embodied are "official." This leaves us with no grounds to deny the embodiment since it can always neatly be argued that disagreements about whether a technology emerges from a culture's values are merely differences in emphasis or degree. One person sees instrumental values where another would demand demonstration of the power of those values in the culture. Since all cultures are (as argued earlier) complex and pluralistic, this provides us with little assistance. If we cannot demand that technology emerge from a culture's "official" values to accept it as a legitimate manifestation of that culture's commitments, then any technology can emerge from any culture at any time and no one would have the right to question its legitimacy or "licitness."

But this is not all. Technology, Ferré then continues, embodies a culture's "implemented values," those "that override when all is said and done." This actually complicates the tautology. Now whatever values a technology embodies functionally override whatever "official" values the culture may espouse. The "official" values thus recede in significance, allowing the technologist to ignore or trample them underfoot in the name of more important implemented values. If nuclear power facilities provide an illusion of economic value, despite their potential threat to the environment or their real costs of construction, maintenance, decommissioning, and storage of spent fuel, and the society allows itself to be deluded by illusion, or remains ignorant of the true economic and environmental costs, then illusion makes whatever the "real" or official values of the culture are counterfeit. Objecting to such a circumstance would be nonsense, since implemented values override even the official, widely-accepted, sanctioned cultural values of the society. Discourses on values in such situations are exercises in futility: the issues are too illusive for reasoned conversation.

And there is yet a third dimension to this exercise. Ferré tells us that "It would not be wrong, and it might be revealing, to say that technology is the offspring in *praxis* of the mating of knowledge with value, of epistemology with axiology." Since, as he again reiterates earlier in this paragraph, "there is . . . no technology without values," we are now even another step removed from understanding what those implemented values are. We cannot demand that technology represent the official values of a culture; neither can we demand that whatever values it does embody be clear in its operation—because these values may be camouflaged by their mating with knowledge. DNA tests are required to determine technology's parentage.

Despite the complexity introduced here in the effort to establish technology as incarnational, and the increasingly tenuous connections demanded between technology and what it incarnates, Ferré leaves us with a final demand in this section: "the technologies that surround us are nothing less than incarnations of characteristically modern science and religion." This seems to me an entirely too facile use of "religion."

People do not practice their religions identically. The varieties of religious experience in the Protestant tradition alone are staggering.

Some within this tradition are technological triumphalists: the purpose of any technology is to spread the Gospel and hasten the second coming. Others are technological quasi-luddites, such as the Amish. Still others are suspicious about the role of technology threatening the autonomy of religious life. Many in the "third way" churches (Mennonites, Brethren, Quakers) take this position. Calvinists affirm technology as a manifestation of God's goodness, but question its application by humans all too prone to deny God in their prideful quest for power, privilege, and wealth. Still others are dualists. There is simply too rich a set of responses within even this sector of "religion" to speak of a single set of characteristics that are incarnated in technology.

Finally, insofar as this section is concerned, I wish to address the implications of that final statement. Although Ferré has told us that technology embodies values, and that these values are not necessarily the official values of a culture, but are the offspring of epistemology and axiology, he would now claim that they are incarnations of "characteristically modern science and religion." Whatever values technology embodies, in other words, must be seen as incarnational of the values of our science and religion. It matters not what the official values of science or religion are, those embodied by technology override them, are the true incarnations of their values.

This, it seems to me, cedes to technology rather too much. Whatever is incarnate in our technology becomes, under this claim, what we worship. We may claim to worship God, Yahweh, Buddha, or Allah, to follow their commands or think using the worldview of their scriptures, but it is in technology that we see what is truly worthy of our attention. It is in technology that we recognize what we value; it is in technology that we demonstrate our commitments and construct our idols. In the end, I suppose we incarnate ourselves in technology and thus worship our own being. Religion is false consciousness.

I think this is where Ferré's analysis takes us, although I know he does not see it that way. His own claims are more modest: the incarnational metaphor "merely makes it harder to say or think that technologies—even when raging loose and feeding on their designers—are in any way 'alien' to the human." I would argue that it makes it impossible and must thus be rejected, for humans can—and have—acted in ways alien to their own humanness.

I began this essay saying that I found the incarnational metaphor Ferré constructs a useful one. Yet I have taken issue with it at every turn. What, then, is our difference? I think it is our respective starting points. I see humankind as a creature designed to act in particular ways: a creature grateful to its creator for life and worshipful of all that the creator made. Each of us then carries what Solzhenitsyn said is a heart cleft into good and evil portions, a heart created good but darkened and atrophied by human choice. So, while I agree that technology incarnates what we are, I disagree that we are, *ipso facto*, unable to claim technology to be alien or inhuman. Humankind, in my mind, is perfectly capable of producing both the inhuman and inhumane. In so doing it may even create artifacts that are alien to all that it claims—and truly believes—it values. Human beings can be committed to, and act on, contradictions. They can construct technologies that would destroy them, perhaps the ultimate denial of God's intentions for them. They can degrade one another, hate one another, and do despicable evil to one another. And at every turn, with every new act of degradation, hatred, genocide, or technological "advance," they take one step further away from God.

As I read Ferré I find him wanting to maintain a consistency in his evaluation of humankind that I do not find compelling given our sordid history. I wish he were right: that we were incapable of producing what is alien to our being, of making what is inhuman. And, while I certainly am no Luddite, I do think Mary Shelley's vision of what we are capable of—either individually or collectively—is perhaps more true than we would like to believe. Frankenstein perhaps is possible, despite our recognition that creating such a monster might violate every reasonable expression of human value, religious sentiment, or even scientific ethic. I do not think we should lose sight of that possibility even in arguing for a new metaphor to understand technology.

# Language and Technology: A Reply to Robert S. Fortner

by Frederick Ferré

I appreciate Robert Fortner's expression of sympathetic understanding for the overall themes in my "New Metaphors for Technology." As he summarizes his main point of agreement it is indeed central: he shares my sense of the interweaving of good and evil in the character of whatever we flawed human creatures create.

The three difficulties he then thoughtfully expounds are important but less central. In fact I suspect that we agree even more than he realizes. Some of the apparent problems he raises are, I believe, more due to differences in our use of language than to our sense of the realities that challenge us.

His first difficulty rests what he detects as my seeming to treat culture as a too-simple "something." This surprises me, since I went to some lengths stating my view that the values and knowledge (thus the technologies) found within cultures are by no means simple or harmonious. For example, I contrast the values of the slave class within a slave culture with the master class, and point to the different valuations of whip and thumbscrew technologies by these respective groups within a single social order.

I hope I do not reify "culture" as a too-simple phenomenon when I write about "a vegetarian society" or "a society taking for granted the legitimacy of judicial torture." If I seem to, I can assure Fortner that this was just a way of speaking—exactly in the spirit of his way of speaking about "us" (humankind) at the end of his discussion. I realize (and my examples of conflict within a culture should make this clear) that such ways of speaking do not preclude variety within the class drawn together by a common noun. There doubtless will be meat-eaters in vegetarian societies, just as there are devoted vegetarians in our dominantly meat-eating culture. But one can still use the noun "culture" modified by largely justified adjectives. Our own culture is remarkably pluralistic (as Fortner rightly points out); but this is something that can be said truthfully *about our culture*. Further, enculturation is an important phenomenon. As those who have tried to reform the "institutional press," for example, of any fraternity-dominated college campus will know, values are not delivered at the retail level alone. Individuals participate, as Fortner says, "in cultural creation, maintenance, or decay"; but, no less importantly, cultures—complex as they are—shape individuals too.

Fortner's second difficulty rests on my recommendation, which follows from the "mirror" metaphor, that we should see technology as a reflection of the "human," for better or for worse. He prefers a different use of the word "human" in which a normative commitment prevents the very worst we do from being called "human" behavior at all. I recognize his preference, which is more intelligible and more frequent than his students seem to think. It is quite possible to define the "human" in this normative way, giving it what is sometimes called a "persuasive definition"; it may even make one feel better about being human oneself if one can take the worst atrocities of our species and thrust them outside the pale of human conduct.

I prefer the other usage of "human"-language. Fortner's normative definition rests uneasily on an elaborate theory of ontological status. It requires, among other things, a distinction between "true" humanity and "actual" humanity that many find foggy. Even if one agrees theologically with the ontological status implied, including the elusive "Image of God" doctrine, it becomes difficult and arbitrary to draw the line between acts that are "merely" *inhumane* and those that slide over into the supposedly *inhuman*. Where does the "awful" become the "super-awful"? I suspect there is no genuine line at all, but only a vague but strongly felt sliding scale of horror, depending on many (culturally conditioned) factors.

I prefer a no-nonsense empirical approach in which even the most awful horrors, if done by humans, are indicators of what depths humans can sink to. Certainly one popular use of words is to call these

acts "inhuman"; but if Fortner really understands some objective distinction separating such a linguistic policy from the alternative practice that condemns these same acts as unspeakably cruel, debased, and horrifyingly "inhumane," he has not communicated it in his remarks.

Finally, Fortner's third difficulty rests on different linguistic recommendations for using the words "values" and "religion." He bristles at my statement that "technology need not embody the 'official' values of a culture." But what I mean is nothing strange and certainly nothing tautological.

The "official" values of a culture are expressed through the recognized religions and moral codes of that culture. How often clergy of those recognized religions decry the fact that the behavior of their congregants fails to embody the values supported in the faith whose creeds they mouth! Even Deacons may not be turning the other cheek; even Elders may not be selling all and giving to the poor; even Sunday School teachers may not be forgiving "seventy times seven." The point is: to clarify one's real or effective values one should look to one's actual expenditures of time and effort and money.

That is the simple point I am making here. In a culture that calls itself Christian, even the Christians may not be heeding the call to "behold the lilies of the field," but rather heeding the imperatives of the automobile to pave those fields for highways and parking lots (around churches!). This does not mean that their actual, effective values in rejecting alternatives to the automobile culture should escape critique. On the contrary. To clarify the real values incarnated in a technology is to raise them to the level of awareness where effective ethical and religious critique becomes possible.

As to the meaning of "religion," I confess that we probably really do differ on the use of this term. I have defined the word so often in my writings over the last thirty years that I did not in this little chapter define it again but simply used it in the sense of "most intense and comprehensive valuing" that I have defended for so long. On my definition there is nothing shocking about a religious position's involving "false consciousness." There are many expressions of religion, not all of them good, kind, enlightened, or pure. Idolatry is a religious phenomenon steeped in false consciousness. The alternative to acknowledging this is to define "religion" in a normative way that assures the exclusion of whatever we do not like. On my understanding of "religion," we can confront, in the name of religion, what is false in *bad* religions without denying that they are *truly* religions. Again, as in the case of "human," I find myself preferring a no-nonsense, take-the-bitter-with-the-sweet use of language over the employment of persuasive definitions that in the short run flatter the definiendum but make subsequent distinctions of thought harder to sustain.

The disagreements between my critic and myself are as I see it mainly differences of preference over the use of key terms. Even his concluding invocation of Frankenstein seems to fit this pattern. I wholly agree that "Frankenstein"-technology happens. What we need to remember is that the name "Frankenstein" refers to the good *Doctor* Frankenstein, not to his monster. Well meaning Frankensteins have populated our world with offspring they subsequently would like to disown, like Mary Shelley's horrified Doctor. Their monstrous products go on to have a dynamic of their own, as I pointed out by my own examples of technology gone wildly out of control. But this does not mean that even these horrors are other than human products. Thus my suggested metaphors will help if they can save us from falling into defensive attitudes of denial toward our terrible mistakes, from rejecting our responsibility to try to repair the damage, and from soothing our human self-love by putting the blame "elsewhere."

# A Response to Timothy Casey's Review of: *Technique, Discourse and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul*—

by David Lovekin

In my book, *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1991), I advance my interpretation of Ellul in ways that reflect my readings of Cassirer and Hegel, with Vico's influence acknowledged in the preface and present as inspiration. I do not argue these interpretations. I do not set Cassirer, Hegel, and Ellul against each other to determine a winner. Comparison studies of other figures with Ellul such as Marx, Kierkegaard, Barth, and Mumford were available. I presented an Ellul hitherto unnoticed, an Ellul who could be read philosophically and independently from his theological involvements. Typically, Ellul's readers founder over theological issues. I present a philosophical reading that does not exclude theology but which takes up larger concerns. I see Ellul, Cassirer, and Hegel as fellow travelers, as philosophers of culture.

My preface begins with the following questions: "(1) In what sense does Ellul have a philosophy of technology? (2) What does Ellul mean by technology? (3) What is Ellul's answer to the problems posed by technique in the contemporary age?"(12).

My "Introduction" displays Ellul's philosophical owl ranging over the twilight of a Cartesian world overtaken by conceptual processes and procedures, a world that Descartes could only have imagined but a world much extended from methods seeking the clear and distinct. In the *Discourse on Method* Descartes announced that he would set aside the fables and histories of the past, exotic and distracting stories, for example, like those of a Don Quixote whose world was turned upside down by books, in a search for a less extravagant truth that could be written in the language of Lower Brittany, by which I assume he meant a language replete of metaphor. Descartes imagined that if the city of knowledge could be torn down and rebuilt using the plumb line of reason, a city built on the edifice of certainty would arise. Descartes wished to banish the "*mauvais génie*," the "evil genius," and to move the mind face to face with truth itself, to move judgment together with perception in a communication perfectly adequate to the task.

Ellul's genius sees technique as this manifestation of Cartesian intention in the development of symbols and technical phenomena. Descartes hoped to collapse the distance between mind and its object with a language drawn along mathematical lines in accordance with the Aristotelian laws of thought, where A could not be both A and not A at the same time. Descartes, from his window in the *Meditations*, looked out on the street below and saw men passing by and then realized that he had not seen them but that he had made a judgement. They could be hats and cloaks covering automata, he reasoned. Were they men or not men?(21) This is the kind of gap between sensation and reason, between the mind and the body that Descartes wished to close with a clear and distinctly centered methodology.

A similar gap yawns between technical intention and the world, Ellul realizes. For example, in the task of chopping trees with an axe, one is limited by one's bodily abilities, by the hardness of the wood, and by a variety of diversionary thoughts that might take the tool-user from the task at hand, from what Ellul calls the technical operation. The technical phenomenon appears, an epistemologically-laden idea,

with consciousness and judgment, with the concern to apply a mathematics-like method to accomplish a task to achieve absolute efficiency. The chain saw or the bulldozer, a more extreme application, may be the result. Like Cartesian intention, the concern is to produce identities without differences, to produce the "one best way" of accomplishing the task. With the bulldozer all humans can cut the forest in the same way because it is the device that does the cutting; the human becomes a disembodied intention or, more accurately, the bulldozer is the embodiment of that intention.

Of course, the "one best way," the absolutely efficient, never comes, but the intention to rationalize all processes, all mind-body interactions, is unceasing. Difference, otherness of all kinds, is the obstacle in the march toward the truth. I then indicate that Hegel's notion of a bad infinity, of a *Schlecht-Unendliche*, characterizes technical intention as Ellul understands it. A bad infinity is an infinity that is present only as the next moment that never comes or present in the denial of the totality of finitude, i.e. in the claim that the infinite is not any finite thing, a claim that is at bottom skeptical. Thus, a bad infinity leads to the necessary linking of all things in a system of purely internal relations established in the face of utter meaninglessness, the second sense of the bad infinity. Ellul wants an infinite that is both present and absent in all relations(24-25).

Then, in chapter one, "Ellul and the Critics," I show that Ellul's readers do not understand these aspects of technical intention that underlie his social analyses. And, further, they do not connect this sense of technical logic to his biblical exegeses. A theory of the symbol is required.

Descartes did not haphazardly single out myths and fables in his attempts to unify science, philosophy, and theology. The fable, the parable, the myth, do not obey an Aristotelian logic. Ellul understands the implications of technical, Cartesian logic for Biblical literature, for symbols that address the Wholly Other. For technical logic God could not be "three in one," the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Such paradox is necessary, for Ellul: God is both inside and outside of His creation, which occurred once perfectly and yet continually occurs, truths guaranteed to drive the Cartesian mind mad. The symbol is the form of discourse that enables and even requires these paradoxes to occur: the symbol, the metaphor, establishes relations of identity in difference, where difference remains. God is understood in all things and yet as apart from all things: both of these senses are required by God as a symbol. Technique must challenge such a God to make meaning absolutely immanent, to make technique the sacred itself.

Ellul distinguishes between *Le Vrai*, the True, and *Le Réel*, the Real, to clarify his understanding of the symbol, which is also expressed in the relationship between the image and the word. The True is the domain that surrounds—the domain of the Wholly Other—and gives meaning to the Real, to the immanent, to that which is before one. The True is what the metaphor seeks. The metaphor, what Ellul calls the word, is the symbol in which two seemingly contradictory meanings may repose, like the notion of a loving and a judging God. The Real is the realm of the image, the clear and distinct(48-49). Technical logic attempts to reduce the word to the image; to reduce

the ambiguous and uncertain to the clear and distinct; to reduce the spontaneous and bodily technical operation to the conceptual technical phenomenon.

In chapter two, "Ellul and the Problem of a Philosophy of Technology," I work around the metaphor of Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater* (1908), about which Ellul and Cassirer had decided views (68-81.) Although they are not reading each other, a specific problem is in the European air, which will of course translate into two world wars of immense proportion: the problem is of the relationship between human culture, symbolic creation, moral responsibility, and the world and cosmological order. Although Ellul wants to deny the perspective of Absolute Idealism, a boring reading of Hegelian philosophy, he is no realist either and is often appreciative of Hegel's notion of the dialectic. Neither the world (after the Fall) nor the human self are simply givens. The human is involved in a process of self creation and world creation at once through symbolic processes. The symbol is an extension from the human just as the human is an extension of the symbol. Both are and are not each other, an essential dialectical tension which cannot be collapsed, as in fact technique seeks to do. The infinite, the goal of the symbol always exceeds the grasp although consciousness may forget this. *Lethotechny*, a forgetting that results from the proliferation of technical phenomena, sets in (98).

In the modern age, in the technological city built to the specification of the plumb line of reason, we, like puppets, hang from the device. I show, then, how the *Philosophie der Technik* tradition begun in the writings of neo-Hegelian Ernst Kapp (1977) and extended by the work of Ernst Cassirer brackets and frames an Ellul hitherto unread.

On my reading of Ellul, the mind never fully makes the world, which it amplifies and enlarges; the mind's making requires the givenness of the object of the other. For example, thinking about dogs is not the same thing as thinking dogs, what the Aristotelian god would do. And yet technique forgets its limitations in relation to an Wholly Other. In the wake of this forgetting the "system" of technique ensues.

A clear image of the technical system, which I discussed in great detail in chapter five, "The Technological Phenomenon and the Technological System," could be found in attempts at disease control in Borneo in 1973, attempts which increasingly abound. Insecticides were used to control malaria. These insecticides accumulated in cockroaches that became resistant to the insecticides. Geckoes that fed on these insects became slothful and fell prey to cats, which died of this indirect poisoning. Rats multiplied and threatened a plague. The army parachuted in cats. The logic of technique is the logic of the Borneo cat toss, where the othernesses of nature are taken up by the technical system, which, as a form of consciousness becomes unconscious. Technique sets out to conquer disease, for example, and then must contend with the disease it has created or the disease that it has directed. The irony that empowers Ellul's account rests ultimately in the reality that is not made but which nonetheless makes its appearance in the process of making, like Peirce's category of *secondness*, which might reinstate memory, the humanities' hope in response to technique.

The symbol that Ellul understands respects and requires otherness. Cervantes needed his audience. The dog needs a name. The certain, what Ellul calls the realm of the image, is always *there*, by definition. The certain as a reference is always needed. Technique, however, denies the importance of the outside element, the perspective that surrounds and locates. In its march toward certainty, the cliché is produced, the discourse of technique that I examine in my last chapter. The word cliché originally referred to the eighteenth century printer's dab and also was related to "cliquer," to the sound produced. Thus the word cliché was originally a metaphor (207). Words in the technical society go the way of tools, the technical operation that is subsumed in conceptualization. The meanings of words became merely other words, a situation that made deconstructionism possible, and ironically, some of its critics. Frederic Jameson attacked deconstruction-

ism in *The Prison House of Language* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1972). The epigram was attributed to Nietzsche: "We have to cease to think if we refuse to do it in the prison-house of language..." (208-209). Jameson, whom I telephoned, was at first unsure where he had found the quote; later he said that he had found it in "some essay of Erich Heller's." I tracked the essay to Heller's "Wittgenstein and Nietzsche" (*The Artists's Journey into the Interior*, New York & London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976, p. 219) in which he offered a poetic translation of a line in Nietzsche's *Der Wille zur Macht*. "Zwange" was used to mean "constraint," which Heller turned into "prison-house." The question is not whether or not the translation is good; the question is: what has happened to the original?

Granted, the human is never before the "original" in any absolute sense. The word is never fully adequate, a notion that runs through the writings of Cassirer, Hegel, Ellul, and Vico. The notion of the original is, nonetheless, the spirit's goal. I knew my book would never fully realize Ellul's thought, but I was interested in his reaction to an earlier draft of the work. Here is a translation of Ellul's letter of March 22, 1987:

Pardon my writing to you in my own hand and in French. I received your book in good time. I haven't read it all, because I have little work time available. but everything I read appeared to me quite excellent and the plan you have chosen is quite interesting. Of course there remain many things in my biography you could not know. But everything that you said is exact and well-put in relation to my books. I greatly appreciated your chapter—The Cliché as Consciousness.

I do not claim on the principle of authority to have presented the true Ellul, but I do believe I have offered an interesting Ellul; apparently Ellul agrees. Clearly, Ellul puts his case in a thoroughly Christian context; I do not. Clearly Ellul's emphasis is not philosophical, not avowedly in the *Kulturphilosophie* tradition. But, what could be wrong in giving such a reading if it worked, if it opened Ellul up to a greater readership, and if it was done with respect?

My reading has not pleased reviewer Timothy Casey in *The Ellul Forum*, 10, 1993, 13-14. Casey acknowledged my book to be "provocative" (13) but then he appears to have dismissed it because the book was devoid of fully developed argument (14), because it was written in what he called a dense style that "...seems to revel in inconsistency and ambiguity" (14), and because I did not maintain a critical distance on Ellul's thought (14). I am apparently trapped with Ellul in a kind of Cartesianism that sets subject over against object (13-14). Further, I have put religion aside: "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 the transcendence" (14).

Mr. Casey is disturbed, "maddened" even (14), by my decision to treat the critics as I did -- not to argue with them but to show that their positions were not mine, to show that they neglected the whole of Ellul's thought. He objected, apparently, to my decision to briefly present my own view of Ellul, which I then balance against these other readings. My tone was defensive, he said (14); and I only gave a "perfunctory" criticism of Ellul's thought in my last chapter. And in the chapter "Ellul and the Problem of a Philosophy of Technology," Casey wrote: "...Lovekin omits any reference to Marx, Heidegger or Lewis Mumford, key figures in anybody's history of the philosophy of technology" (14).

I find Mr. Casey's remarks interesting on a number of counts. He wanted me to argue, to write a book with a history of the philosophy of technology that "anybody" would write, the kind of book I stated clearly that I would not write. I added "perfunctory" criticisms of Ellul's work in my last chapter to show how easy they were to make (Lovekin, 213-214). Analysis is much easier than synthesis. He disliked my stylistic decision to put my view against the critics, which

I did to show the importance of my view, to show that it was not "everybody's" view. And, in the bargain, he upbraided me as a "shrewd"(14), "devotee,"(14), *ad hominem* if I have ever heard such. He called me "secular" as well(14) without explaining how this fit with my apparent posture of devotee.

He argued that I gave little attention to the Cartesianism in Ellul's, Hegel's, and Cassirer's thought, although he allowed that I was right to point "to Descartes' elevation of method as the herald of the technical phenomenon" (14). He, nonetheless, rankled at my lack of argument and at my "ambiguities." So, I was both Cartesian and not Cartesian enough; I was shrewd and secular but also a devotee. I think my worst crime for Casey was, however, that I did not write the book that he had wished me to write. My reading was not his.

Here is Casey's example of my "ambiguous" style: "*La technique* is a mentality within society; it is the attitude of society toward technique" (Lovekin, 68; Casey, 14). This sentence, broken from context, required the reader to follow a fairly difficult point: technique is a mentality within society that, at the point of technical "autonomy," threatens to become the society itself. When technical mentality becomes autonomous, it is no longer conscious of itself as a form of consciousness. Technique is, from the Ellulian standpoint, a part of society, but from technique's perspective, that part becomes the whole, is the whole. I tried to avoid the fallacies of composition and division; the part must not be the whole and the whole must not be the part. Technique becomes the sacred when it becomes the necessary. One symptom of technical autonomy is the desire always for a solution or the suggestion that the Wholly Other could ever be put to page, what Casey seems to desire from me.

Casey has confused the book he would write with the one I have written. He reads Ellul, Cassirer, and Hegel as Cartesians, and I do not. Granted, all three do not have a full-blown theory of the imagination, which may be required to avoid many of Descartes' problems. But these thinkers did not regard the concept to be finally adequate to the task of constructing a human world. None of these thinkers want the dialectic between image and word (in whatever terms these notions were conceived) to stop. Thus, Casey's claim: "It is hard, then, to accept the Ellulian subordination of the visual image in favor of the word"(14) is wrong. Ellul intends no such subordination, as my reading showed. Casey stated: "In Lovekin's depiction, Ellul is clearly a philosopher of an old fashioned sort..."(13). Whether "old fashioned" is a pejorative, another *ad hominem*, is not my concern, which is that Casey has missed the novelty of my reading of Ellul with a reading of Cassirer and Hegel that is not common garden variety.

Casey wrote: "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 a 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" (13.) Does Casey mean to suggest that there is a solution to the mind-body problem? Is he saying that because Ellul locates technical mentality in the duality of mind and body that Ellul is a Cartesian? Does being a dualist make one a Cartesian? Ultimately, Descartes' problem may be in wanting to rid himself of dualism or in his not seeing his dualism in holistic enough terms, in not seeing the powers of reason over and against the powers of the imagination. Descartes seems to have required the "evil genius," (that is itself not a clear and distinct idea) to move from doubt to certainty.

Casey claimed, further: "Lovekin keeps Ellul's Christianity at arm's length and respectfully refuses to grant it philosophical status (14). This is wrong. I wished to allow the separation of religion and philosophy and believed it was possible to give a philosophical account of what Ellul puts in religious terms, an approach Ellul himself uses in *The Technological Society*. Casey said that I gave

religion a back seat; I say I have given it another seat, the seat of the other, which can be couched in philosophical terms.

My concern was to present an Ellul other readers had not read. In relation to these stated goals, Casey seems to grant that I succeed: "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"(13). Are these goals not enough?

Mr. Casey may soon be writing his book, blowing up his own dog, providing the many details that I and others could have added but did not, which is as it should be, why we write, and why we look for readers sympathetic to our stated tasks. Reading and writing is a masquerade that requires complicity, the appearance of the true other, which is no mere negative--a fluorescent whine -- but opposition in which the true is backlighted, revealed both as what is and what is not.

# A Response to Darrell Fasching's *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?*

by Peter J. Haas, Vanderbilt University

Human beings, Professor Fasching notes at one point in this book, are not just storytellers, they are story dwellers. By this he means that stories bring into consciousness our ideas of the world and our place in it. In so doing, they give structure to our vision of the future and how we will get there. In light of the atrocities of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, Fasching argues in *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima* (SUNY, 1993), we need to change our foundational stories. The old stories, with their old ethic will lead only to destruction. This is so because such narratives do more than offer a self-definition; they also tell us who stands outside the community and how we are to treat those others.

In *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz*, as well as *The Ethical Challenge*, Fasching argues that the events of Auschwitz and Hiroshima force us in the West to face the symbolic universe that has led to such atrocities being committed against the other. His thesis is that we can prevent further atrocities of this kind, and possibly our own destruction along the way, only by constructing a new narrative that will evaluate human rights, and specifically human dignity, to the ultimate level. We simply have too much power, and are too aware of human frailty, to continue unchanged.

The argument, as will be clear to readers of this newsletter, is based on a fundamental distinction made by Jacques Ellul between what he called "sacred" and what he called "holy". Both terms, for Ellul, refer to an ultimate reality that transcends our everyday existence. The "sacred" defines a specific community and describes the ultimate locus of purity, goodness and righteousness for that particular group. In general we think of the sacred as related to religious communities, but it can apply in Ellul's sense, to secular communities as well. As I understand it, a sacred narrative is any narrative that legitimizes the status quo of a group in ultimate terms and defines the final goal that all true members of that group wish, or should wish, to achieve. The problem is that the sacred legitimizes and sacralizes only its own community. By its very nature, it must define the other as outside the true community and so, at least potentially, as dangerous. In opposition to this, Ellul proposes what he calls the "holy," that is, that posture or narrative which constantly brings into question the present order and its existing structures. The holy defies the claim of absolute truth or absolute virtue. Thus while the sacred wants to establish the given structure as ultimate, the holy always wants to open new doors and reveal new possibilities.

How does this help us deal with the ethical challenge of twentieth century atrocities? The crux for Fasching, as we noted, is treatment of the stranger. Sacred narratives look at outsiders as parasites or demons, as people that need to be eliminated to pave the way to utopia. The post-Auschwitz and post-Hiroshima ethic must be a "holy" narrative that demands acceptance of the stranger, that is, of the other.

To be sure, this analysis of the (post-) modern situation makes a good deal of intuitive sense. There is little room for doubt that the Nazis demonized the Jews, that the Americans demonized the "Japs," that the Serbs, Croats and Muslims in the former Yugoslavia are busy demonizing each other. It is also clear, I am willing to concede, that unless the various peoples of the earth learn to accept the other we will produce more final solutions and so less futures. On the other hand, it appears to me that the strategy proposed here by Professor Fasching to deal with that is not as straightforward as it at first seems.

To begin with, I think there is a legitimate question about whether narrative is really the foundation of morality. Semioticians argue, quite persuasively for some, that stories, narratives, myths and the like are themselves already built on a prior substratum of convictions.

That is, we begin at base level with certain fundamental notions about good and bad, say, and then narrativize or put these into discourse so as to bring them into the individual conscious and then public realms. So on this view changing the narrative level is starting too high up the semiotic chain. If we hope to change an ethic, we must address ourselves first to the much deeper basic convictions and inchoate beliefs that provide structure to the logically subsequent act of narrative construction. The narrative that discursivizes these will then, on this theory, change on its own accord. I understand that this is far from a settled matter, but the claim that one can change an ethic by working on the narrative level alone is not, I suggest, immediately self-evident.

There is a second problem. It is that the notion that to be a good person one must accept the outsider is itself a particular narrative of certain liberal Western communities. Insofar as we succeed in making that narrative part of the narrative of others are we not by that very act (imperialistically) tinkering with or "improving" their narrative and so diminishing their otherness? Or to put matters slightly differently, ought I to accept an "other" who is other because he or she dwells within a narrative that demonizes, say, African-Americans? My point is that it would appear that the holy also has its binary opposite, just as does the sacred. In this case, one fundamental "other" for the holy is the sacred, that is, those narratives and their communities who refuse to acknowledge the holy. We can of course build a wonderful new holy narrative that includes Christian and Jew, Occidental and Oriental, believer and avowed secularist. But what do we do with those who refuse to participate in the bringing of this wonderful (to us) apocalypse and instead insist on constructing their own sacred (and nationalistic) utopias? Is our narrative to become a "super-narrative" by which other narratives are to be judged? That is, are we to be allowed to suppress their narratives and stop their Auschwitzes because of the demands of our narrative? If the answer is yes, as it seems to be, then I am not sure we have yet addressed adequately the full challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. We may be setting up, albeit in disguise, little more than another sacred structure.



# Response to Peter Haas

by Darrell J. Fasching

I appreciate Peter Haas' comments on my book *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* (SUNY, 1993). We share a common commitment to trying to understand how ethics ought to be done, if it can be done, after Auschwitz.

Peter Haas raises two salient objections to my argument in *The Ethical Challenge*.

The first objection is that narrative is not the really the foundation of morality and therefore striving to bring about a change at the narrative level starts at too superficial a level. Instead, he urges, we ought follow the lead of certain semioticians who suggest that narratives are rooted in more fundamental convictions or notions of good and evil which we then give expression to in narrative. Let me say that while I do not appeal to semiotic theory to make my case, I do not find myself in basic disagreement with Professor Haas' point. The only problem I have with it is that it is not a refutation of any position that I actually hold.

My argument in *The Ethical Challenge* is more complex than Professor Haas has suggested. In his own critique he recounts my argument that there are two types of narrative, the sacred and the holy. He also notes that I hold that sacred narratives sacralize their own community and demonize the other while holy narratives counter such tendencies by sanctifying the other, that is by welcoming the stranger. In the biblical traditions, for example, to welcome the stranger is to welcome God or the messiah or at least a messenger of God (i.e., an angel). In observing this, Haas correctly notes that I argue that ethics must be rooted in narratives of hospitality to the stranger but he curiously fails to grasp the connection I make between religious experience, forms of community and narrative.

In fact, my argument is that narratives are rooted in more fundamental attitudes and that these attitudes are themselves shaped by religious experiences of either the sacred or the holy. Moreover, these experiences produce different kinds of social organizations. The sacred producing hierarchical and exclusionary societies, the holy producing iconoclastic subcultures within such sacred societies whose ethical function is to call them into question by welcoming the stranger and protecting the dignity of the stranger.

Hence, I do not place all the weight on narratives alone but rather take a sociology of knowledge perspective. There are no such things as free-floating narratives. Every narrative is embodied in a community structured for action in the world by its experiences of the sacred and/or the holy (all traditions are shaped by both at one time or another). Chapter seven of *The Ethical Challenge* contains an extended discussion of the relationship between social structures, religious experiences and the narrative imagination. Here I compare the church, the synagogue and the sangha, their internal relations to authority and their external relations to the authorities of the larger sacred society. I argue that while Eastern notions of dignity can be found in the sangha traditions, Western notions of human dignity and human rights are rooted in the legal and social process of incorporation which has created self-governing communities that protect human dignity from the encroachments of the state, and that the roots of incorporation go back to the special legal status granted to Judaism and the synagogue tradition by the Romans.

I end the chapter by arguing that a public policy ethic of human rights and human liberation requires critiquing the sacred stories and social structures of every society whose narrative imagination is shaped by the sacred instead of the holy. Here I show that the Book of Revelation has been interpreted by people like Hal Lindsey to demonize the enemy during the period of cold war nuclear policy and yet others like Jacques Ellul interpret *the same story* to teach just the

opposite, namely salvation for the whole human race or God's universal hospitality. My final conclusion is that it is not the story in itself that is decisive (both use the same story) but the form of religious experience that shapes the narrative imagination of the one who interprets the story (e.g., Lindsey's sacral reading as opposed to Ellul's reading shaped by the experience of the holy).

Peter Haas' second objection likewise misses the point of my argument. In essence Haas argues that my characterization of holy narratives does not really escape the dualism of the sacred which demonizes the other because, by embracing the narratives of the holy, which include the other I am forced to reject those who embrace sacred narratives that reject the other, and hence I am back in the dualistic worldview I sought to escape or transcend.

Again Haas misses the complexity of my argument. In chapter five I argued that the possibility of a new cross-cultural ethic of human dignity, human rights and human liberation had been demonstrated by the lives of Tolstoy, Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. -- each of which profoundly influenced the ethical commitments of the next without any of them abandoning their own religious and cultural heritage. Gandhi remained a Hindu despite Tolstoy's influence and King remained a Christian despite Gandhi's profound influence on him. Yet the religious life of each was profoundly changed by that of the other, giving birth to a cross cultural ethic of non-violent civil disobedience against all sacred societies through movements of liberation which seek to protect the dignity of those who were treated as strangers within such sacred orders.

The point is, that what we learn from the non-violent ethics of Gandhi and King is that you can oppose unjust sacred dualistic orders without falling into demonizing narratives. So Peter Haas argument that "the holy also has its binary opposite, just as does the sacred" fails to convince me. It fails because even though an ethic of the holy does recognize some others as enemies it refuses to demonize such others. On the contrary, an ethic rooted in the holy requires that one love one's enemies and so does not fall back into the pattern of the sacred.

Finally, let me say that I have little patience for the argument that narratives of hospitality and human dignity (for after all, to offer hospitality to the stranger is to recognize the dignity of precisely the one who does not share my story) are exclusively Western and a form of liberal Western imperialism through which we are trying to impose our morality on other societies. First of all, in *The Ethical Challenge*, I show that Buddhism is the bearer of the tradition of hospitality to the stranger and human dignity in Asia (i.e., welcoming the outcast) in much the same way that Judaism is in the West. But secondly, wherever you go around the world it is not the persecuted and oppressed who are saying that the ethics of human dignity and human rights are a form of cultural imperialism. On the contrary, this is an argument you find promoted by those in power who are doing the persecuting and oppressing. I see no reason why I should be co-opted by that shoddy little game into legitimating the suffering imposed on my brothers and sisters in every culture around the world. Our ethical task is to unmask the bad faith of all such ideologies that legitimate violence under the guise of cultural diversity.

# Book Reviews

*Entretiens avec Jacques Ellul* by Patrick Chastenet. Paris: La Table Ronde, 1994. 209 pages.

Reviewed by Joyce Hanks, University of Scranton

Incisive interviews stretching over thirteen years join together to form this book, offering a vivid portrait of Jacques Ellul. Patrick Chastenet has done us another favor. Following his *Lire Ellul* (which gives the author's name as Patrick Troude-Chastenet; Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux [1992]; reviewed by Gabriel Vahanian in issue #11 of *The Ellul Forum*, July 1993), and *Sur Jacques Ellul* (*L'Esprit du Temps*, 1994; to be reviewed in a forthcoming issue of the *Forum*), he has published this third Ellul volume, the title of which translates to *Interviews with Jacques Ellul* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1994; 209 pp.).

Readers will find an amazing variety of information in Chastenet's book. Ellul answers questions about everything from the way he organized his ten-hour work days (as efficiently as possible, but always so as to be available to people in urgent need of him) to his views on organ transplants (essentially against). He offers details of his friendship with Bernard Charbonneau, his role in the Personalist movement, his wife Yvette's contribution to his life and work, and his participation in the Spanish Civil War and the French Resistance.

Many readers have come to know Ellul through the other books based on interviews with him—*Perspectives on Our Age*, edited by William H. Vanderburg (trans. Joachim Neugroschel; Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corp., 1981), and *In Season Out of Season*, based on interviews by Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange (trans. Lani K. Niles; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982; Fr. ed. 1981). Chastenet's work brings the reader up to date, to the end of Ellul's life, filling in some crucial blanks.

Chastenet now teaches at the two schools where he worked for years as Ellul's assistant: the University of Bordeaux and the Institute of Political Studies. Their long-term collaboration furnished Chastenet with detailed insight into Ellul's thought, particularly as it bears on politics. He knows when to request more information from Ellul, and how to underscore unresolved conflicts or areas of tension.

Like most series of interviews, this one at first appears to lack organization. Eventually a pattern becomes clear: the early chapters present influences on Ellul (in Chastenet's words; the interviews themselves begin in Chapter II), and his most closely held views and principles. Chapters IV through IX concentrate on biographical questions, in roughly chronological order. And the remaining chapters (X through XVI) explore Ellul's work, with an emphasis on science and art in Chapters XV and XVI. The book lacks chapter titles, but most chapters are preceded by an outline of their contents.

The usual influences on Ellul (Karl Marx, Soren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, Charbonneau) are joined here by Alexis de Toqueville (who perhaps had a greater impact on Charbonneau than on Ellul), Walther Rathenau, and Oswald Spengler. Ellul explains his rejection of Martin Heidegger and other less well-known thinkers of the thirties. He openly avows his debt to his wife, who he says "humanized" him, teaching him to be open and receptive to other people.

Aside from insights into his life (his discovery of the Bible as a child, an unforgettable portrait of his mother-in-law, his preference for listening to Bach as he wrote on technique, and to Mozart when writing theology), the reader will find substantive contributions to Ellul's thought in this volume. He denies, for instance, any manichean

tendencies, spells out what he believed to be a window of opportunity for controlling certain aspects of technique through micro computers, and emphasizes the importance of poetry in his life. Ellul's apparent approval of the transcripts of all but the last two of his interviews, and Chastenet's interviews with Charbonneau, add to the solidity of the book's contents.

Chastenet often transcribes Ellul's laughter for us, in addition to his words. On one memorable occasion, as the interviewer launches the first of a series of specific questions concerning Ellul's voting habits, his interview is thrown completely off track when Ellul informs him that he has never voted in his life!

Encountering Ellul in these pages resembles being struck by one's first reading of *The Presence of the Kingdom*. His views hang together extraordinarily well, and have considerable impact. This book provides a thoroughly useful guide to Ellul's life and thought, but also proves wonderfully readable. Readers new to Ellul will feel they get to know him well through the spontaneous, conversational style. Those who never met the man will find him thoroughly human and approachable as he reacts to events that took place after he wrote *The Technological Bluff* (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990; Fr. ed. 1988).

Many questions about Ellul will puzzle us for some time to come, and perhaps permanently. Chastenet's book resolves many of our questions, and deserves an English translation as soon as possible. That edition should add a much-needed table of contents, chapter titles, an index, and a revised bibliography.

*The American Hour: A Time of Reckoning and the Once and Future Role of Faith*, by Os Guinness, New York: The Free Press, 1993. 458 pages, Index.

Reviewed by Donald Evans, Director, The Ellul Institute, Riverside California.

The Inland Educational Foundation of California recently sponsored a three-day Chautauqua-style presentation on the theme "Democracy in America" in which scholars portrayed the life and works of historically significant voices. One of these was Alexis de Tocqueville who was brought to life by David Lytel, a senior policy analyst at the White House Office of Science and Technology. The keenest analyses of America's democratic character rely on foreign eyes, whether those of de Tocqueville, Lord Bryce, or G. K. Chesterton. Perhaps just such a thought prompted H. L. Mencken to write, "Most of the men I respect are foreigners."

One is tempted to add to the short list of foreign social critics the name of Jacques Ellul, except for the fact that Ellul has never visited the United States. On the other hand, American culture has visited him and invaded France where it has been studied and met with strong resistance as evidenced by the hard line taken by the government against the American entertainment industry in the recent GATT negotiations. Furthermore, Ellul has written extensively on the subject of freedom, which American democratic theory rightly holds so dear.<sup>1</sup> He typically argues that only Christians can introduce freedom into a technical civilization such as that of the USA.<sup>2</sup>

Ellul, the sociologist, is relevant to any discussion of democracy. Indeed, as Mark Noll remarks, "It is becoming increasingly difficult for historians of religion to maintain their prejudices against sociologists." Such prejudices are especially difficult to sustain in view of the popularity and brilliant analysis of *Habits of the Heart* by five scholars of whom three are sociologists.<sup>3</sup> In an earlier book Guinness has one of devil's minions contend, "Christians have no feel for the social dimension of faith, and no tool to analyze culture from the vantage point of ordinary experience....The majority of Christians avoid the social sciences like the plague, quite convinced that these disciplines are dangerously subversive, unsettling both to faith and morals. The present standing of the social science, the murkiness of its jargon and the open skepticism of its early days all contribute to this...After all, wasn't Marx a sociologist?"<sup>4</sup>

Guinness analyzes America with the eyes of a British sociologist. Readers may be familiar with one or more of his books, *The Dust of Death*, *In Two Minds*, or *Living With Our Deepest Differences*. Born in China but raised and educated in England, he is a graduate of the Universities of London and Oxford, gaining his D. Phil. from the latter. Since 1984 the writer has lived in the United States. He held the post of executive director of the Williamsburg Charter Foundation and was a drafter of the Williamsburg Charter.

This modern-day de Tocqueville is concerned about our troubled times, for he believes they are not rightly understood. He writes to help Americans understand their moment in history. The idea for such an undertaking came to him at Oxford where clouds parted and his argument came in a way he could not shake. His friends upon reading a first draft ten years ago thought he was hysterical, so he set the manuscript aside for six years. The appearance at this time of his idea, that America's hour is upon her, is born not of hysteria but of a deep conviction.

A critical key to appreciating his argument is to know that he writes for a secular audience. Thus, *The American Hour* is void of religious cliches and jargon and in their place is the language of modern sociology and historical faith. His vision is of the constructive role of religion in American life. This Oxonian scholar seeks to convince others by writing as if his readers were founding fathers instead of

following fundamentalists. The archbishop of New York comments that the book is "laced with pungent aphorisms that rarely become cliches...the entire text is worth careful study, but for those in a hurry, his aphorisms provide shortcuts to complex analyses of American culture."<sup>5</sup>

Guinness divides his argument in three segments with a question for each. How can the American democratic revolution be sustained? Where did the current crisis originate? What is the role of faith in the crisis? The three pivotal years in this century are 1917, 1945, and 1989. The latter being the year of the century, because the collapse of worldwide communism vindicates American democracy. The other two years and the periods following them are important to the political and economic order of things. America is however a cultural as well as a political and economic order. Does this cultural order nourish and promote freedom? According to Guinness, former beliefs, values, and ideas that once held Americans together are no longer binding. We are faced with a crisis of cultural authority that is religious and civic.

The crisis originated in the years since 1945. The '50s were years of build-up to the radical revolution of the '60s with its cultural rupture. The '70s were a decade of consolidation as the ethos of the '60s entered the main stream of America's consciousness. The next ten years saw cultural excesses and contradictions. The river of ideas that filled framers of this nation are now only a stream. The body of beliefs that motivated the Protestant Reformation are today weakened. Civic republicanism has practically faded from the scene. The Enlightenment with its high view of man and reason is in as much trouble as the other two beliefs.

The American experiment is revolution. Winning it two hundred years ago; ordering it during the next hundred years or so; and sustaining it during the twentieth century. The question is how to sustain it, given that our former habits of the heart are disappearing in an increasingly diverse culture. The '90s are years for recognizing the crisis and dealing with sustainment issues. Among the issues, by whose values should America be ordered? What is the proper role of faith and faiths in political life?

Guinness sees four broad outcomes for faith. First, pluralistic faiths may be irrelevant. They would neither nourish culture nor be democratic. Or, faiths would matter but not in any significant ways. Third, they would be harmful and produce an "apple pie authoritarianism." Finally, faith communities could spark a spiritual revival and an American renaissance. In contrast, Ellul paints a dimmer picture for democracy. Authoritarian democracies are already upon us. Increasing technologies, propaganda, psychological techniques, and the systematization of all institutions attack the man of faith and democracy simultaneously. While Guinness says little about the nature of faith communities, Ellul is specific. Among their attributes, he says they should be "totally independent of the state, yet capable of opposing it, able to reject its pressures as well as its controls, and even its gifts."<sup>6</sup> Of the two prophetic voices, Ellul's reaches the heart without illusions.

In any event, faith for Guinness is crucial for the strength and continuity of the American experiment. In the final chapter, "The Eagle and the Sun," Guinness invokes a metaphor of the American eagle:

The bird that carries the bolts of Jupiter is not an owl or a bat that could navigate in the skeptics' darkness of a universe without center or meaning. It is not a carrion, whose sole orientation is toward its prey. No, the American symbol carries a truth kept alive even in an ancient fable. It signals the highest classical understanding of the required source of a nation's *gravitas*. Above all, it points beyond itself toward the biblical insistence on the empty nothingness of idols and on the glory (or weight) of God as the only "real reality" in all the universe.<sup>7</sup>

He then concludes with a Chesterton quotation from *What I Saw in America*, "...it was far back in the land of legends, where instincts find their true images, that the cry went forth that freedom is an eagle, whose glory is gazing at the sun."<sup>8</sup> A master of quoteshmanship, Guinness like de Tocqueville is also a social critic who has plucked

the tail feathers of the American eagle and observed the lightness of faith at the heart of America's experiment in democratic freedom. The poet Goethe understood the sociologist Guinness when the German penned, "Each one sees what he carries in his heart."

One does need to fly above it all in order to gain perspective, but poetic flights of faith and fancy aside, sooner or later it is necessary to come down-to-earth and carry out a program of action. Having given us an insightful analysis of our plight and convinced us that America faces a time of reckoning, Guinness offers little advice on how to put his conclusions into practice. Up there we can fly on the wings of his words, but down here we look for advice as to how to work out the pragmatic theme of our American character. Down here we face cultural forces that Guinness mentions only in passing, e.g., mass media, violence, domination by technique, multinational economies, and huge bureaucracies. In fairness to him note should be made that he is doing the practical thing through his work on the Williamsburg Charter Foundation, and his other books indicate his awareness of these cultural forces. What Os Guinness writes he writes well. Let's leave it to other authors and non-writers to bring his ideas to life.

I found my copy of *The American Hour* in a used bookstore in Georgetown, D.C. The cracking sound of turning pages convinced me that it had never been read. This seemed strange because of the handwritten inscription on the fly page that read, "To Irving Kristol and Gertrude Himmelfarb: With deep gratitude and appreciation for the wisdom and courage of all your public contributions. Os Guinness. 25 X 92." One would have to know more about the book's provenance before concluding that it had been placed on a stack for discard by two of our nation's critical thinkers. No matter, wise readers will appreciate the latest Os Guinness book, if a copy should providentially find its way into their hands.<sup>9</sup>

## NOTES

1. See Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, trans. and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976. Ellul's *The Subversion of Christianity* and *The New Demons* also make good companion reading with *The American Hour*.

2. See Darrell J. Fasching's review of *Un Chrétien pour Israël* in *The Ellul Studies Forum*, No. 4 (November 1989), 2-3.

3. Robert N. Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1986. Even here it is interesting to note that "habits of the heart" is a Tocquevillian expression for the mix of traits essential to our national character.

4. Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File: Papers on the Subversion of the Modern Church*, Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983.

5. John Cardinal O'Connor, "Are We Headed for the Devil?," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 7, 1993, A12.

6. Jacques Ellul, *The Political Illusion*, trans. by Konrad Kellen, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967, p. 222. See especially the last two chapters, "Depolitization and Tensions" and "Man and Democracy."

7. p. 411.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Audio tapes of Os Guinness speaking on *The American Hour* at a Christian College Coalition conference are available from the Thomas F. Staley Foundation, Larchmont, New York. Also, the National Association of Evangelicals has published the introduction from Guinness' book, "The Crisis of the Mandate of Heaven," in the form of two Occasional Papers.

# Bulletin Board

## L'Association Jacques Ellul

During the past year, Ellul family members and colleagues have 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 welcomes new members. If you wish to join please send a check made payable to Joyce M. Hanks for \$15.00. Joyce is willing to register all American applicants and save us from the hassle of having to change our American dollars into French francs. Please send your check along with your name, address and phone number to: Joyce M. Hanks, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Scranton, Scranton PA 18510-4646.

## Meeting of the Jacques Ellul Association Held in Bordeaux

The Bordeaux-based Association Jacques Ellul met for its annual meeting on 19 November 1994. Deliberations included plans for the possible future disposition of Ellul's residence, which may be purchased from his heirs as a combination research center and gathering place. The Association will name a member to the Editorial Advisory Board of *The Ellul Forum*. Association members also had the opportunity to hear Bernard Rordorf speak on "The Silence of God and the Thought of Jacques Ellul."

## E-mail Your Comments to *The Ellul Forum*

If you have suggestions for future issues or reactions to past issues or just questions you would like answered you can now reach the editor of *The Ellul Forum*, Darrell J. Fasching on e-mail. Send your comments to: fasching@luna.cas.usf.edu.

## Retrospective on Jacques Ellul at Annual SPT Meeting in April

David Lovekin reports that The Society for the Philosophy of Technology will include a session entitled: "Retrospective on Jacques Ellul: 1912-1994" at its annual meeting in April. The session is tentatively scheduled for the afternoon of April 27th. There will be three papers presented: *Ellul as a Philosopher* by Donald Phillip Veneue (Emory); *Ellul as Prophet* by Erik Nardenbaug (Georgia State); *Ellul as Philosopher of the Symbol* by David Lovekin (Hastings College). Michael Zimmerman (Tulane), will be the respondent.