

The Ellul Forum

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

The Ethics of Jacques Ellul

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Jacques Ellul in his twenties

“We are entering into a new form of morality which could be called technological morality [Fr. morale technicienne], since it tends to bring human behavior into harmony with the technological world [au monde technique], to set up a new scale of values in terms of technology [en fonction de la technique], and to create new virtues.”

-Jacques Ellul

To Will & To Do (1965; ET 1969), p. 185

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From the Editors

Our topical focus in this thirty-ninth issue of *The Ellul Forum* is ethics. What is the *right* thing---not just the technologically effective or financially profitable or popular thing---to do in this or that context? What can we say about---and how can we further--*good* character and community?

For more than thirty-five years these have been among the primary organizing questions of my life and work---and Jacques Ellul has been my most important source of insight and challenge on this journey. It is no accident that my work (both teaching and writing) has been in two domains: developing what I hope is a more authentic Christian ethics for the church and developing a better business ethics for the general marketplace and workplace. In the first article of this issue I have tried to summarize the ongoing legacy and promise of Ellul's ethics.

Of course, the late John Howard Yoder and many other students of ethics have drawn deeply and creatively on Ellul's thought. One of the best and most creative among contemporary thinkers drawing on the Ellul tradition is our own colleague Darrell Fasching, founding editor of this journal, and professor at the University of South Florida. Darrell's work on comparative religious ethics is a brilliant contribution, especially to be welcomed in our world of religious misunderstanding and conflict. His article begins on p. 11. Darrell's book on the topic (co-authored with his USF colleague, IJES Board member Dell DeChant) is given a glowing review later in these pages by Prof. Louise Doire.

Randy Ataide, a business leader who wrote a master's thesis on Ellul and who recently started teaching business at Point Loma University, wonders if, somewhere beyond where Ellul's technological experience ended, new technologies might contribute to human community and to a modification of our obsessions with private ownership. Interesting thought piece.

Matt Patillo re-views Ellul's intro to ethics *To Will & To Do*, and Andrew Goddard re-views the organization of Ellul's *Ethics of Freedom*. Daniel Cerezuelle's new book on Bernard Charbonneau (Ellul's closest friend and intellectual conversation partner through his life) gets a brief introduction by Carl Mitcham.

As with any topic we approach, there is something on almost every page of this issue to disagree with. It goes with the Ellulian territory. Dialectic, struggle, tension, wrestling . . . and finally some flaming insight or another.

And now back to *Ellul Forum* Editor Cliff Christians for the next issues!

David W. Gill, Associate Editor

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Jacques Ellul's Ethics: Legacy and Promise

by David W. Gill

David W. Gill is President of the International Jacques Ellul Society; his first published book was a revised, abridged version of his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Southern California: The Word of God in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul (Metuchen NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984). This article was originally presented at a colloquium at the University of Poitiers and later published as a chapter in Patrick Troude-Chastenot, editor, Jacques Ellul: Penseur sans frontières (L'Esprit du Temps, 2005; pp. 61-77). Reprinted by permission.

Introduction

Ten years after his death, it is clear that Jacques Ellul's contributions to the field of ethics and moral theology are of significant and enduring value. Nothing will ever rival Ellul's sociological contributions to our understanding of technique and technology but, like his work on politics, social change, propaganda, communications, history, religion, and biblical interpretation, his work on ethics stands the tests of time and criticism. In this essay we will explore eight important contributions made by Ellul's ethics and then consider two especially promising directions for further developing an Ellulian approach to ethics.

Of course, before Ellul's ethics can be fully assessed, and before any significant further development of his approach can be carried out, a great deal of preliminary work remains to be done. The first challenge is simply to make Ellul's full body of ethical writing available to readers. Specifically,

- (a) his introduction to ethics, *Le Vouloir et le faire* (ET: *To Will and To Do*), is no longer in print in French or English; (1)
- (b) it is uncertain whether any manuscript exists of the second half of this introductory work, promised by Ellul long ago, but the question of its status must be definitively resolved; even his rough notes on the subject would be a great help;
- (c) while Ellul's *Ethique de la liberté* eventually appeared in three volumes in France, its English translation, *The Ethics of Freedom*, only represented

volume one and an abbreviated, early draft of volume three of this important work. About 500 pages of the original 800 made it to the English translation. The entire work needs to be available in both French and English; (2)

(d) Ellul's thousand page manuscript on the ethics of holiness continues to be unavailable in both French and English; apparently Ellul's handwritten manuscript has now been painstakingly converted into a typescript and could now be edited and published, but various problems could still derail the project; the completion of this big project is absolutely essential;

(e) Ellul's specific studies of the ethical virtues of hope and faith need to be republished; (3)

(f) while he did not prepare complete studies of love and the ethics of relationship (as he did with faith and hope and the ethics of freedom and holiness), he did write a few essays on love which could be brought together to help complete the overall architecture of his ethical thought; (4)

(g) Ellul's various articles (and extended sections in various books) on various aspects of ethics also deserve to be collected and made available to students of ethics. There are enough such articles and reviews to make up a substantial volume on its own. (5)

As this large body of writing becomes more fully accessible, the critical and constructive exploration of the implications and applications of Ellul's ethics can take place. (6) The general structure and logic of Ellul's ethics, including the points raised below in this essay, certainly deserve further attention. Additionally, Ellul's ethics invite specific application to challenges in such arenas as new technologies, the worlds of business, politics, and economics, and the life of citizens, disciples, nations, and churches.

The fact is that Jacques Ellul's ethical thinking is badly needed in the 21st century. With an astonishing foresight Ellul anticipated the global dominance of technique, on the one hand, and the critical importance of religions old (Islam, Judaism, Christianity) and new (the "new demons/possessors") on the other. Long before postmodernism was fashionable, Ellul fought against, and called us beyond, the dehumanizing

“raving rationalism” of the modern. While Ellul’s *popularity* may have been greatest during the 1960s and 1970s, his greatest *importance* may be yet to come, as our tottering global civilization begins to come to the end of itself.

* * *

Jacques Ellul made at least eight major contributions to the field of ethics. These are not just accomplishments of the past but promises for the future of the field.

1. “Lived morality” vs. theoretical morality. Ellul’s first contribution lies in his exposition of “lived moralities” vis-à-vis the various “theoretical moralities” of philosophy and religion. (7) The actual values by which people live deserve our attention much more than the theories advocated and debated by ivory tower intellectuals. It has been typical for students of ethics to spend much, if not most, of their time studying the ethical theories of Immanuel Kant, Thomas Hobbes, John Stuart Mill, David Hume, and others. But these are *theoretical* moralities. Ellul asks, “Who, apart from the specialists, is interested in Kant’s ethics? It is a matter for the philosophers, and the philosophers have no influence over morals. . . . No one thinks to govern his life according to the outcome of the quarrels among the specialists in philosophical ethics.” (8) These ethical theories tell us something not just about their philosophical authors but about the society, epoch, and intellectual environment in which they emerged. However, they also distract us from the reality of people’s actual ethical experience, character, decision-making, and behavior. A history and sociology of values, ethics, and morality will tell us a lot more about the essential character of ethics than a survey of the writings of the great philosophers. (9)

2. The integration of morality with the sacred. A second important emphasis in Ellul’s ethics is the inextricable relationship of morality to whatever is regarded as “sacred” in a society. “Every group is organized around what might be called a ‘principal motif’ . . . It is in relation to this principal motif that the group’s hierarchy of values is arranged.” “When a society no longer acknowledges a central motif . . . no morality can remain valid: or the same is true when the morality which is affirmed is out of harmony with the principal motif.” (10) In *The New Demons* Ellul describes how “it is important to have rules of behavior deriving from the sacred.” (11)

Another way to put it is that “our gods determine our goods.” Ethical reflection and ethical behavior is motivated, leveraged, and determined by what is our core purpose, our principal motif, our

sacred. No ethical or moral reform is possible without addressing the question of what is our sacred, our mission, our god. This point is utterly critical in the field of business and organizational ethics today: no improvement is possible without addressing the larger purposes of the organization. It has been common to try to separate ethics from religion and the sacred, on the assumption that the latter is necessarily divisive and is altogether dispensable to ethics and morality. Yet many people attest to the importance of religion as a source and shaper of their values and ethics; and those who do not, typically have some unacknowledged substitute sacred lurking just below the surface of their ethics and values. (12)

3. Technological morality as the dominant “lived morality” of our time. Third, Ellul identified and analyzed the dominant lived morality of our era, “technological morality,” with its core values of efficiency, normality, and success. (13) This technological morality is now deeply embedded in all sectors of our society, from business to education to religion. Ellul, far more than any other thinker, exposed the reality and nature of this enemy of an authentic ethics of life and freedom. Many have thought of technology as a “value-free” phenomenon. A means. Ellul showed that it has become a sacred “end,” the *telos* of our society, embedded with values. “The fact is that technology is felt by modern man as a sacred phenomenon. It is intangible, the supreme (in the cabalistic sense), unassailable operation. All criticism of it brings down impassioned, outraged, and excessive reactions in addition to the panic it causes.” (14)

In our postmodern context, it is often naively assumed that the only values to which we submit are those of our own personal choosing and that, in turn, we are (or we are the creators of) our own gods. Much of this is illusory and many postmodern individuals are unconsciously living out a worship of technique and a conformity to the values of technical morality. “We are entering into a new form of morality which could be called technological morality, since it tends to bring human behavior into harmony with the technological world, to set up a new scale of values in terms of technology, and to create new virtues.” (15) But this is not true merely with self-conscious postmodernists; technological morality has also invaded and colonized ethical thinking among Christians and other traditional groups, to a much greater extent than is realized.

4. The legitimacy of the morality of the world (the two ethics). Fourth, Jacques Ellul called attention to the value and importance of the morality of the world,

alongside the ethics arising out of a relationship with God. These two ethics each have their legitimacy, their distinctives, and their limitations. Despite Ellul's sometimes harsh critique of *both* of these ethical enterprises, his challenge to work at improving both of them is unmistakable.

"Life is possible within an ethical system. Apart from that it would be constant warfare, and interpersonal relationships would be unthinkable. Therefore we must respect this morality for its utility, since it is useful to man. . . . The Christian, because he is a man, should lend a hand in making the world livable. Morality is part of that task, the common morality, the morality of the group, interpersonal morality. We must respect it, build it, and strengthen it in company with our fellows." (16)

How do we do this? My view is that we begin by identifying the sacred, the central motif, the core purpose of any given group, large or small. What is it that is being treated as sacred? What is at the center of our attention, thinking, and purpose? Then, we critically reflect on whether this sacred stands as a worthy enough center of our common project. Finally, we work together to elaborate ethical guidelines that are in alignment with that "central motif."

5. The necessity and urgency of Christian ethics.

Fifth, Ellul was a pivotal figure in convincing a whole generation of Christian theologians (perhaps especially in America) that dogmatics were not enough, that the faith must be articulated in an ethics and lived out in faithful discipleship in the world. The conflict between Christian faith and modern culture was not to be played out merely as a contest of ideas and arguments (as Protestant orthodoxy and Fundamentalism were inclined) but rather in a whole style of life that included behavior as well as thought. But is the language of ethics and morality appropriate here? Ellul is at his most extreme dialectical contradiction in his answer. Christianity is not about morality but about faith, about a life in response to God's presence and word. "The biblical concept of the good as the will of God immediately prohibits us from formulating an ethic. An ethic is always, ultimately, the formation of a good in itself." (17)

"And yet a Christian ethic is indispensable," Ellul says. (18) "The construction of a Christian ethic is necessary, first of all, because it is a guide, an indication given to faith, a real assistance to the brethren." (19) Ellul's dialectic highlights the radical difference between the ethics of the world and the ethics of the Word. What unites both disparate phenomena under the rubric of ethics is their common quest to know what is right and good. Beyond that,

they are radically distinctive. The fact that Ellul himself set out to write a massive three-part introduction to a Christian ethics ought to put to rest any thought that Christian ethics is an unworthy pursuit.

6. A Christian ethics centered on Jesus and guided by Scripture. Sixth, in rebuilding a Christian ethic for our times, Ellul made a huge contribution with his insistent focus on Jesus and Scripture. "The word of God is fully expressed, explained, and revealed in Jesus Christ, and only in Jesus Christ, who is himself, and in himself, the Word." (20) "We know God fully only in Jesus Christ." (21) And about Scripture, Ellul says "The criterion of my thought is the biblical revelation, the content of my thought is the biblical revelation, the point of departure is supplied by the biblical revelation, the method is the dialectic in accordance with which the biblical revelation is given to us, and the purpose is a search for the significance of the biblical revelation concerning ethics." (22) Ellul's work provided fresh, insightful, and powerful new understandings of the ethical implications of these core authorities in the Christian life.

After Ellul, Christian ethicists paid more---and better---attention to Jesus and Scripture, which simultaneously lends their work credibility in the church and revolutionary distinctiveness in the world. Part of what keeps our ethical systems and approaches humble and temporary, as Ellul urges, is that the criteria of the good and right are located in the authority of Jesus and Scripture. All commentaries, systems, traditions, and teachings are a step removed from these authorities.

7. The priority of a Christian ethics of "being" (over "doing")

Seventh, Ellul's ethics emphasize "being" over "doing." "Man always looks for a good which will determine a 'deed' ---whereas in Jesus Christ it is always a matter of 'being'." (23) Ellul reflected at great length on the Pauline virtues of faith, hope, and love as accounts of the appropriate stance before the Wholly Other God. "When asked what to *do*, Paul answers by saying what we should *be*." (24) While ethics will sketch out decision- and action-guidelines---indicatives if not imperatives---the heart of the matter in Christian ethics is to be brought into a stance of hope before God (to which God can give freedom), a stance of faith (to which God can provide holiness and distinctiveness), and a stance of love (to which God can respond with the gift of renewed relationships). In a Christian church deeply tainted by the modern scientific quest for abstract, universal laws followed by rational decision

and effective action, Ellul's call back to an ethics of stance and virtue, is a powerful antidote. (25)

8. The temporary, limited status of all Christian ethics. Eighth, and finally, Ellul's emphasis on the "temporary" and humble status of any Christian ethic, including his own, is a rare but essential call to freedom and responsibility in the field of ethics. Ellul frequently wrote and said that he was not creating another system but rather trying to provide his readers with the means to think out for themselves the meaning of their life or faith or ethics. It is an ongoing challenge to all who labor in this field, not to fix the work of Ellul or anyone else in stone but to stand on his shoulders, to learn from him and then push forward to an even better understanding of ethics for the time and place in which we must live. Ethics has so often been a means of judging, condemning, and rejecting others (and often enough oneself also) in an arrogant, domineering way. Ellul shows us a different path that is simultaneously bold and humble.

* * *

Preserving and Extending Ellul's ethical legacy

These eight contributions Ellul has made to the field of ethics are of no small importance to a world and a church that struggle to know what is the right thing to do in so many circumstances and domains. We should remember that Ellul would not be the first intellectual whose work grew in importance after the author passed from the scene. Søren Kierkegaard's biggest, if not also his greatest, work, the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* sold only a dozen or so copies in his lifetime. But after SK's death, various scholars and friends saw with growing clarity the value of his legacy and refused to let it disappear. Today there are hundreds of thousands of copies of *Postscript* being studied in dozens of languages. Jacques Ellul had greater impact on his contemporaries than did Kierkegaard but we face a similar challenge to promote the publication, translation, distribution, and study of his works. We should aim to do as well with Jacques Ellul's legacy as the intellectual heirs of Kierkegaard did with his.

A Deeper Understanding of Character and Virtue in Ethics

As Ellul's ethical works become more fully available to serious students, one of the most important avenues of further study will be to consider in depth Ellul's work on the ethics that flows from the classic theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. The postmodern attack on modern moral theories (Kant, Mill, et al) has roots not just in the existentialist approach to ethics articulated in different ways by

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche but in the virtue ethics traditions of pre-modern societies. How is Ellul's understanding of a theological virtue ethics similar and different to the approaches of moral philosophers and theologians, such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas?

In his *Ethics of Freedom* Ellul provides us with some general comments on ethics and virtue as well as some specific insights into the virtue of hope and the ethics of freedom. Ethics "flows out of the relationship with Christ," Ellul writes. (26) Paul's theological virtues of faith, hope, and love provide a "mediation" of that relationship. Each of these virtues "expresses a specific type of behavior." Thus, hope is expressed in freedom, faith in holiness, and love in relationship. Ellul published individual books on hope and faith, and extended articles and chapters on love. His three-volume ethics of freedom was published; his thousand-page manuscript on the ethics of holiness may yet be published. He did not write the ethics of relationship. Ellul believed that the hope/freedom studies were the most important studies for our era, a time of loss of authentic hope and freedom. Ellul presented faith/holiness and love/relationship as a dialectical relationship in which the first draws us away (producing a distinctiveness of identity) and the second sends us back (into relationships and presence in the world).

The language Ellul uses to describe hope and freedom helps illuminate what he understands virtue to be. Hope is a "response of man to God's work for him," a "response to God's love and grace." (27) Hope rests on the resurrection and victory of Jesus Christ. Hope is not just an emotion or feeling but an "actualization here and now" of an anticipated life and glory; it is a "way of living." Freedom, in turn, is God's gift and response to man's hope. Freedom is a "situation made for us"---not an expression of our will or our being, a "fruit" rather than a "work," in the traditional Pauline terminology. Freedom is not a virtue or a fragment of the Christian life but the "climate of all virtues." "Freedom is first a power or possibility---a power to act and obey." (28) Ellul says that there is "no incontestable outward sign" of freedom in a life but that there is nevertheless a qualitative difference perceived on a personal and relational level. The freedom that comes from hope characteristically strains toward the future, and leaves the old behind. Freedom is not sitting back and letting God work---it is knowing God's will and doing it." (29) By hoping in God, one is attached and linked to God's future and thereby freed from and in the present.

Ellul's expositions of hope and freedom are exhilarating, not just theologically but politically and

culturally. What we can already see in his hints about faith and holiness, and about love and relationship, is equally promising. But how does Ellul's work on virtue ethics relate to that of other ethical writers? From Aristotle onwards, virtues have been thought of as traits and habits of character. Long debate has taken place about the sources of virtue---to what extent is it the training of a natural endowment? To what extent are the virtues gifts of God (the "infused" virtues of Thomas Aquinas)? Whether gifts of nature or God, what are the roles of socialization and personal choice in the nurture and expression of a virtue like hope or love? What does it mean to value and pursue hope or another virtue in my own life? How do I proceed? Is it possible to make a *habit* of the stance of hope or faith? Or must it be an *existential choice* in every given moment and circumstance? Much of the virtue ethics tradition has argued that we must simultaneously seek to appropriate the virtue as an ingrained habit, capacity, and disposition and as a vital, existential stance in the moment. It is not either/or but both/and. And God is fully capable of doing a work of molding character as habit and embedded disposition as well as initiating a stance of hope or faith, in the existential moment. Ellul's language is distinctly tilted toward the Kierkegaardian individual in the moment. But there are also hints of possible connections to a more Thomistic approach.

The challenge is to go (with Ellul) beyond both schools of thought and articulate a virtue ethics appropriate to our time and place.

A Better Understanding of Individual and Community in Ethics

A second promising avenue to explore in Ellul's ethics has to do with the role and importance of *community* (in its various forms). Ellul's work hints at such moral community but places far greater focus on the lone individual and the mass society, at the two extremes. Emile Durkheim's fear of the erosion of intermediate groups, with the anomistic individual pitifully subject to the impersonal mass, seems to have become our fundamental reality. But is this the end of the story? Ellul's dialectical form of expression often results in a very pessimistic answer to the question of moral community. But the same dialectic grounds our radical refusal to yield to such pessimism. Thus, the exploration of moral community is a path begging for ellulian attention.

Ellul argues that social transformation results from the accumulation of a vast number of individual decisions from below. (30) It is only the individual act of freedom that can break the technological system of ideology and belief (though the technological system of

material correlation and integration is almost impossible for that individual to break)(195). Individual Christians have sometimes been free, he says, but not the church (289). His ethics is an *individualistic* ethics, not part of a commitment to a collective movement, but it is not *private* (210). This is hard for people to grasp or accept because the modern mind is used to collectivist thought. Sociology tends to give primacy to the group with no real safeguards for the force and validity of individuals, but the individual is key (296). Christian freedom is individual and personal in origin and execution but also necessarily collective in its reference and consequences because of the centrality of love (270). So it is the lay individual who is on the frontier of church and world where the decisive action and conflict takes place. "But it is only on the basis of a church which is a strong body and community that this is possible for the layman" (298).

Whatever the sociologists may say about the life of groups, communities, and institutions, Jesus and the Bible (Ellul's avowed authorities for his ethical thought) certainly provide strong and unrelenting calls to moral community. In a general sense, "it is not good for one to dwell alone" (Genesis 2:18). In a very specific way, the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount (the most famous ethical teaching of the Bible) were given to a community, not to an individual. Jesus sent his disciples out two-by-two, not one-by-one. Jesus promised "wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst" and that whatever two or three "bound on earth" (a metaphor for moral decision-making) would be bound in heaven. Members of the "body of Christ" should value the other parts of the "body" and realize that it takes all parts of a body to make it function properly. (31)

It is certainly important to hear Ellul's warnings about how groups can be the instruments of social conformity and are subject to laws of bureaucracy. It was sad to hear him confess (as he often did) that he never personally experienced community in any significant way that he could write about. Community seemed an impossible ideal to Ellul. He had a good eye for the hypocrisy and conformity of the church. Nevertheless, the actual communities of Israel and the early church are never presented in the Bible as anything other than flawed, imperfect phenomena; they are not dispensable just because they are so far from ideal. Indeed the community is essential for the individual's *discernment* of the ethical right and good, and the community is essential for the *carrying out* of the right and good. The community is where character is formed and where individuals are taught the counter-narrative to the story

of technological growth and goodness that otherwise becomes our central motif.

Ellul certainly hints at the importance of moral community, but it is largely undeveloped (much as it was in the writings of Kierkegaard). Perhaps Ellul's work on the ethics of love/relationship would have developed this part of the picture. It is for us now, to pursue the project.

* * *

Looking back at Jacques Ellul's writings on ethics ten years after his death is as challenging and provocative an experience as it was to first encounter them in past decades. It is impossible to measure his influence on the field of ethics; while many scholars and writers owe him a great debt, he has never been a central figure in the "ethics establishment." His role has been that of a prophet to the intellectuals---rather than a guru or creator of a school of disciples. But his legacy continues to challenge and inspire. It will be to our great loss if we do not explore and elaborate Ellul's ethical thought during the coming years.

Notes

1. *Le vouloir et le faire: recherches ethiques pour les chretiens*. Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1964. English translation by C. Edward Hopkin: *To Will and To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians*. Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969.
2. *Ethique de la liberte*. (Geneve: Labor et Fides) Tome 1, 1973; Tome 2, 1975; Tome 3 (*Les Combats de la liberte*), 1984; English translation by Geoffrey W. Bromiley: *The Ethics of Freedom*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).
3. *L'Esperance oubliee* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972); English translation by C. Edward Hopkin, *Hope In Time of Abandonment* (New York: Seabury, 1973); *La Foi au prix du doute* (Paris: Hachette, 1980); English translation by Peter Heinegg: *Living Faith: Belief and Doubt in a Perilous World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).
4. For example, "Eros et Agape" and "...Et le Reste" in *Foi et Vie*, vol. 75, no. 2 (March-April 1976), pp. 62-81, 93-100; "Lifelong Love," in *What I Believe* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 66-86.
5. For example, "Notes en vue d'une ethique du temps et du lieu pour les chretiens," *Foi et Vie*, vol. 59, no 5 (Sept-Oct 1960), pp. 354-74; "The Ethics of Nonpower," trans. Nada K. Levy, in Melvin Kranzberg, ed., *Ethics in an Age of Pervasive Technology* (Boulder: Westview, 1980), pp. 204-212; "The Ethics of Propaganda: Propaganda, Innocence, and Amoralism," trans. D. Raymond Tourville. *Communication*. Vol 6, no 2 (1981), pp. 159-175; "Morale et technique," *Medianalyses: Cahiers de recherches communicationnelles*, no. 2 (May 1982), pp. 24-29; "Recherche pour une ethique dans une societe technicienne," *Annales de l'Institut de philosophie et de sciences morales* (Universite libre de Bruxelles, 1983), pp. 7-20.
6. Several studies of Ellul's ethics have, of course, appeared over the years. The best recent study is Andrew Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Carlisle UK: Paternoster, 2002), especially pp. 101-114; see also: Darrell Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Lewiston NY: Mellen, 1981), especially pp. 93-176; David W. Gill, *The Word of God in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul* (Metuchen NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984); and Gene Outka, "Discontinuity in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul," in Clifford G. Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, editors,

Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1981), pp. 177-228.

7. See *To Will and To Do*, Chapter 7, "The Theoretical Moralities," and "Chapter 9, "The Lived Moralities," pp. 127-139, 159-171.

8. *To Will & To Do*, p. 129

9. Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has brilliantly called attention to the lessons of lived moralities and the flaws of theoretical ones in his influential works *After Virtue* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame, 2nd ed., 1984) and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1990). Jacques Ellul was already addressing this topic in the early 1960s.

10. *To Will & To Do*, pp. 164. 165.

11. Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons* (New York: Seabury, 1975), p. 65. Translated by C. Edward Hopkin from *Les Nouveaux Possedes* (Paris: Librairie Artheme Fayard, 1973).

12. See David W. Gill, "Ethics With and Without God," in David W. Gill, editor, *Should God Get Tenure: Essays on Religion and Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 129-145.

13. *To Will and To Do*, Chapter 11, "Technological Morality," pp. 185-198.

14. *New Demons*, p. 71.

15. *To Will & To Do*, p. 185.

16. *To Will & To Do*, pp. 80-81.

17. *To Will & To Do*, p. 202; see also "Moralism," Chapter 4 of Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 69-73; Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley from *La Subversion du Christianisme* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1984).

18. *To Will & To Do*, p. 245.

19. Jacques Ellul, *Presence of the Kingdom* (New York: Seabury Press, 1967), pp. 21-22; Trans. Olive Wyon from *Presence au monde moderne* (Geneve: Roulet, 1948).

20. *To Will & To Do*, p. 27.

21. *The Ethics of Freedom*, p. 51.

22. *To Will & To Do*, p. 1.

23. *To Will and To Do*, p. 28.

24. *Ethics of Freedom*, p. 309. My own two-volume introduction to Christian ethics focuses first on *Becoming Good: Building Moral Character* (InterVarsity Press, 2000) and then on *Doing Right: Practicing Ethical Principles* (InterVarsity Press, 2004).

25. Among those who have led the movement back toward virtue, character, and "being" in Christian ethics are Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981), and *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1975), Peter Kreeft, *Back to Virtue: Traditional Moral Wisdom for Modern Moral Confusion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), and Gilbert Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984).

26. *Ethics of Freedom*, p. 7.

27. *Ethics of Freedom*, p. 13.

28. *Ethics of Freedom*, p. 103

29. *Ethics of Freedom*, p. 62. Other page references in this paragraph refer to this book.

30. *Ethics of Freedom*, p. 473.

31. See David W. Gill, "The Reality of Our Communities," chapter 3 of *Becoming Good: Building Moral Character* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 43-61, for a discussion of community in Christian character formation.

Jacques Ellul on Ethics & Morality

Ethical Theories

“It would, of course, be impossible to describe, however sketchily, the innumerable theoretical moralities developed in the course of time by philosophers, founders of religions, etc., the moralities of Moses, Confucius, Aristotle, Plato, the Stoics, Saint Thomas, Erasmus, Kant, Nietzsche . . .

“Let us recall, first of all, that theoretical morality is never ‘pure,’ that is, unaffected by its milieu. It is always to a greater or less extent, an expression of the environment in which it is elaborated. . . The intellectual, philosophical, religious, scientific trends of the moment strongly (but not totally) determine the moralist in the creation of a new system of ethics. Yet this moralist strives for an exact product. He wants to settle that which *should be* with the maximum of impartiality, to put a group of precepts together logically, to provide a rational justification for the requirements of the moral conscience of the moment, and in pursuing this ambition he goes far beyond the working morality of the group in which he finds himself. . . .

“All of this brings us to a consideration of the great weakness of theoretical moralities; namely, their lack of application. Whether applicable or not, they usually are scarcely applied in fact. The inhabitants of a city, the members of a group, the citizens of a nation, give very little heed to the morality developed by one of their number. Who, apart from the specialists, is interested in Kant’s ethics? It is a matter for the philosophers and the philosophers have no influence over morals. Even when there is a deep community of interests between the group and the moralist, the latter is still a stranger and his morality is not applied. . . . A few intellectuals know them, but one can say that by the very fact that it is a matter for intellectuals the dialogue remains at that level, rather than at the level of practical behavior. And no one thinks to govern his life according to the outcome of the quarrels among the specialists in philosophical ethics.”

To Will & To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians (1964; ET, 1969), pp. 127-129.

Lived Moralities

“A lived morality is located at the sociological level, not only because, as we have said, there is no morality except in relationships among individuals, but also because the various elements of the moral phenomenon are directly or indirectly produced by the social group. . .

“The connection between morality and society is certain. . . . First of all, no society can exist and develop without a morality. We have already indicated that morality is necessary for any group whatsoever. Society must supply its members with a criterion of good and evil, a hierarchy of values, a list of imperatives, goals to be attained which are characterized as ‘good,’ a definition of the just and unjust, and prohibitions setting the limits to freedom of action. Without these, the society could not operate. Were it based exclusively on self-interest, or exclusively on restraint, it would meet with an insurmountable psychological obstacle or would dissolve into ceaseless conflict. . .

“In every society there is an essential motif, a chief center of interest, an undisputed assumption, a goal recognized by all. . . This principal motif is always both ideological and material. It is bound up with a certain structure and it expresses itself in an aspiration. It is not a belief alone, nor is it a fact alone. It involves a combination of the two. It is in relation to this principal motif that the group’s hierarchy of ‘values’ is arranged, and that the striving toward the desirable and the imperatives of the obligatory are established. . . But this principal motif is always bound up with the various group structures: economic, technological, religious, political, cultural, and demographic. The morality expresses the structures in terms of obligation and duty, with a view to preserving them, perpetuating them, and regulating man with respect to them.

“When a society no longer acknowledges a central motif, or when its structures are no longer felt to be necessary, no morality can remain valid.”

To Will & To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians (1964; ET, 1969), pp. 159-65 passim.

Technological Morality

“A transformation in the lived morality is taking place under our own eyes. [Ed. Note: Ellul is writing in the early 1960s]. We are entering into a new form of morality which could be called technological morality since it tends to bring human behavior into harmony with the technological world, to set up a new scale of values in terms of technology, and to create new virtues. . .

“Technology supposes the creation of a new morality. It informs the whole of public, professional, and private life. One can no longer act except in relational to technical ensembles. Hence there is need to create new patterns of behavior, new ideas, new virtues. At the same time, new choices are set before man which he is in no way prepared to face. . .

“The probability is that a new morality will be created which will put its blessing upon man’s subjection to the technological values and will make him a good servant to this new master, in trustfulness and loyalty, in the spirit of a service freely rendered. . .

“Contemporary man is very generally convinced that technique is the good, that it concurs in man’s good and will bring about his happiness. Should man recoil before this prospect, the proof of the technical good is confirmed, reinforced, and assured by the various pressures at the disposal of the technological civilization: the testimony of its successes, the importance of the necessity for its development, the certainty of progress, the marvelous concordance of the techniques. How can all that fail to convince a man inwardly that he should participate with all his heart in the development of such a good? . . .

“In this technological morality there is also set up a scale of values which are truly valid for man and which the individual accepts as such. Without doubt, one of the important facts in this sphere is the transformation of technology itself into a value. For the man of today, technology is not only a fact. It is not merely an instrument, a means. It is the criterion of good and evil. It gives meaning to life. It brings promise. It is a reason for acting and it demands our commitment. . .

“In this technological society the normal tends to replace the moral. Man is no longer asked to act well but to act normally. . . the highest virtue demanded of man today is adjustment. . .

“We should bear in mind a third value characteristic of this morality: namely success. In the last analysis, good and evil are synonyms for success and failure. . .

“[T]he ‘more’ becomes a criterion in itself. The new morality justifies automatically that which is ‘more.’

To Will & To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians (1964; ET, 1969), pp. 127-129.

Christian Ethics

“In reality, the problem that confronts us is that of the Christian ethic, an ethic which has nothing in common with what is generally called ‘morality,’ and still less with the Christian ‘virtues’ in the traditional sense. . . It is never a series of rules, or principles, or slogans . . . we can never make a complete and valid description of the ethical demands of God, any more than we can reach its heart. We can only define its outline, and its conditions, and study some of its elements for purposes of illustration.

“The heart of this ethic may be expressed thus: it is based on an ‘agonistic’ way of life; that is to say, the Christian life is always an ‘agony,’ that is, a final decisive conflict; thus it means that constant and actual presence in our hearts of the two elements of judgment and grace. But it is this very fact that ensures our liberty. We are free because at every moment in our lives we are both judged and pardoned, and are consequently placed in a new situation, free from fatalism, and from the bondage of sinful habits. . . .

“The two dominant characteristics of this ethic are, so it seems to me, (a) that it should be temporary, and (b) that it should be apologetic.

“(a) *Temporary*: because it concerns a given and variable situation. We are not concerned with formulating principles but with knowing how to judge an action in given circumstances. Thus we are not bound to hold closely to moral ideas which must be invariable, but the Scripture teaches us that its ethic varies in form, and in concrete application to situations and places. . . There are consequences of the faith which can be objectively indicated. . . The construction of a Christian ethic is necessary, first of all, because it is a guide, an indication given to faith, a real assistance to the brethren; and then, because it allows us to give a real content to the judgment which God pronounces upon us; and finally, because it is necessary for the life of the Church. But this elaboration must not be substituted for the fight of faith which every Christian must wage; that is why it is indicative, not imperative. We must not imagine that this ethic will give us the permanent solution of all problems. That is why, essentially, it ought to be temporary; it needs to be continually revised, re-examined, and re-shaped by the combined effort of the Church as a whole.

“(b) Further, the Christian ethic is necessarily *apologetic* in character. . . . That is to say, that the ‘works’ done in virtue of, and in consequence of, the Christian ethic, ought to appear in the light of Jesus Christ as veritable good works . . . of such a quality that they lead men to praise God. When they do this, they do constitute an apologetic.”

Presence of the Kingdom (1948; ET 1951), pp. 20-23.

The Ethics of Holiness in an Age of Globalization: The Significance of Jacques Ellul's Work for Comparative Religious Ethics by Darrell J. Fasching

Darrell J. Fasching is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of South Florida, Tampa. His book *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Edwin Mellen Press, 1981) was the first English language monograph published on Ellul. Darrell is also author of *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima* (SUNY, 1993) and co-author (with Dell deChant) of *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach* (Blackwell, 2001) reviewed elsewhere in this issue. He was the founding editor of *The Ellul Forum* in 1988.

For more than a quarter of a century now I have been engaged in a theological approach to comparative religious ethics. See especially *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima* (1993) and *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach* (with Dell deChant, 2001).¹ This approach has been built around Ellul's distinction between the sacred and the holy. Ellul first made this distinction in his second book, *The Presence of the Kingdom* (1948, English translation 1967) and gave his most detailed analysis of it in *The New Demons* (1973, English translation 1975.) These two terms, "sacred" and "holy," are typically used as synonyms, but Ellul uses them as antonyms – opposites. The sacred, he argues, is a reverse image of the holy. It is like looking in a mirror -- what seems to be the same is really totally reversed.

Following Durkheim, the sacred is for Ellul the sociological dimension of all societies that provides a sense of order necessary for human social life but which tends to become absolute, totalitarian and demonic. Ellul argues that the word of God manifests the power of the holy to call into question and desacralize all sacred orders. This is what the Christian Gospel did for classical western culture by demythologizing and desacralizing its myths and rituals -- its "sacred way of life" required by the gods of nature. In the modern world, he argued, Christianity is called to do the same for technological society, by

desacralizing the sacred technological order that superseded and replaced the sacred natural order.

For Emile Durkheim, religion is to be understood as a human response to the overwhelming (and therefore sacred) power of society upon which we depend for our existence. Without being fully conscious of the reason for their actions, he would say, tribal peoples revere their sacred ancestors or *totems* (both human and non-human) as symbols of the sacred order of their society. For Durkheim the singular purpose of religious myth is to sacralize society so that its customs can be considered sacred and bring social stability to human life.

Yet another of the great founders of sociology, Max Weber, argued that this is not the only social function of religion. Weber argued that while religion functions much of the time to sanction the "routine order" of society (i.e., the sacred customs) as Durkheim claimed, still sometimes religion manifests the dramatic power to desacralize and disenchant society, and in so doing bring about dramatic social change. It does this by calling into question the supposed sacredness of the old order. Indeed the same religious tradition can at different times do both. Sometimes religion sacralizes society and sometimes it secularizes it. Thus Weber argued that Roman Catholic Christianity functioned to sacralize the social order of the Middle Ages while Protestant Christianity functioned to secularize that social order, contributing to the emergence of the modern secular society. (Of course for Weber secularization is irreversible while for Ellul, once a new "secular" order is established there is nothing to prevent that order from becoming a new sacred order, requiring further acts of desacralization.)

Ellul's understanding of the sacred and the holy, it always seemed to me, has a lot in common with Weber's views, but in my conversations with Ellul he always denied the influence of Weber and persisted in giving Marx all the credit. Nevertheless, I still find it useful to understand Ellul through the prism of Weber's perspective, in which he argued that

charismatic religion inserts itself into the sacred routine of social order, calls it into question and initiates a desacralizing transformation of society.

For Ellul, that transformation is a moment in which the holy manifests itself as the insertion of a wholly other dimension of transcendence into sacred order. This is made possible by the gift of apocalyptic hope in God as the Wholly Other. The goal is not to destroy a sacred way of life but to call it into question, transform and “rehabilitate” it, by opening it to transcendence -- making human freedom and dignity possible in rebellion against all sacred necessities. With these distinctions Ellul opens up an approach to comparative religious ethics as identifying “sacred ways of life” in need of rehabilitation by experiences of the holy. Ellul helps us get things into correct perspective when he argues that “the sacred is not one of the categories of religion. Religion, rather, is one possible rendition of the sacred” alongside of politics, economics, and other cultural enterprises.²

Ellul, standing in the French sociological tradition that goes back to Durkheim, is simply stating what is obvious to this tradition; namely, that every society is legitimated by some sense of the sacred. This sense of the sacred pervades every aspect of culture, not just “religion” in its explicit institutional forms. Indeed, in most times and places in history, religion and culture have been indistinguishable.

In making his distinction between sacred and holy, Ellul was not thinking so much about comparative religious ethics as the Christian ethical encounter with society in history. But his work suggested to me a theological path into comparative religious ethics, one useful in defining theology as an academic (rather than confessional) discipline essential to the tasks of religious studies in secular universities. This would not be a Christian theology but what Paul Tillich called a theology of the history of religions. Drawing on Ellul’s work, and that of Gabriel Vahanian who also makes this distinction between the sacred and the holy, I have argued that religious studies is about more than “religions” (that is, as Ellul insists, it is about the sacred in all its manifestations) even as theology is about more than “God.”³ From this perspective, comparative religious ethics is about comparing sacred ways of life that are normative for societies and their critique under the influence of diverse experiences of the holy. “Theos” or “God” is only one name for such experiences. Buddhism, for example, offers significant alternatives.

Theological ethics is the task of critical normative reflection on the dimension of the sacred that pervades and shapes all cultural activities. And all critique of the sacred, I would argue, is rooted in some

experience of the *holy* as *wholly other*. I will give you three examples: the Biblical critique of society in the name of a God who cannot be named or imaged and in whose image we are created; the Socratic critique in the name of the Unseen Measure as the measure of every human being; the Buddhist critique in the name of the emptiness of all selves. In all three cases the self reflects the image of the holy as wholly other (transcendence) that cannot be defined and confined to any sacred order and which every sacred order must respect and accommodate if it is to be just and compassionate.

In ancient Israel, prophets like Jeremiah (in the 6th century BCE) insisted that God demanded a life of holiness which called into question the sacred order of society in the name of justice for the widow, the orphan and the stranger (those neglected and repressed by the sacred order of society). In a parallel fashion the Buddha (who lived in India about the same time as Jeremiah), called into question the sacred order of the caste system and welcomed lower castes and outcaste into his holy community (the sangha) as equal with persons from all higher castes. The heart of prejudice and injustice is the claim reinforced by sacred social orders that some are more human than others and therefore deserve a more privileged status. But in the biblical tradition all are created in the image of a God who is without image even as for Buddhism all selves are empty, so that for either -- no caste or class can claim special privileges.

Some three centuries later, in Ancient Greece, Socrates repeated this pattern in his “invention” of ethics as a category in Western philosophy. The Greek roots of our term “ethics” (*ethos*, *ethike*) like its Latin parallel (*mos*, *mores*) “morality” once meant the “customs” of the people – the sacred customs. However, after Socrates, ethics came to mean “the questioning of the sacred customs” by asking: *Is what people call “good” really the good?* This is a dangerous question. Socrates was put on trial and executed for “impiety towards the gods” and “corrupting the youth” because he dared to question the sacred way of life of Athenian society. Yet Socrates’ goal was not to demean the Athenian way of life but to rehabilitate it and raise it to a higher level.

The life and death of Socrates (like that of Jeremiah and the Buddha) illustrates the tension between the sacred and the holy. As Ellul insists, every society needs the stability provided by a sense of sacred order. But sometimes order is achieved in society at the expense of virtues such as justice and compassion. As Socrates put it, every society must be more than just the “cosmos writ small” (sacred order), it must also be “the human writ large” (the holy),

provided we understand the measure of the human to be the “Unseen Measure.” No society can be a good society which sacrifices justice and compassion for human beings in the name of sacred order. Morality need not simply be a mirror of sacred order. It can be transformed to meet the demands of the holy. The goal of the Socratic ethic of the holy is to rehabilitate the sacred order of Athenian society so that its sacred customs or morality, reflect both a sense of order and of justice.

Socrates crime was asking people whether what they called the good really was the good. It was a crime of corrupting the youth because he taught them to question the sacredness of the Athenian way of life and so led them astray. It was a crime of impiety toward the gods because what people called the good was a way of life legitimated by an appeal to sacred/divine origins. His enemies accused Socrates of being an atheist. But Socrates himself argued that, on the contrary, he was compelled to question the Athenian way of life by some mysterious God (apparently a stranger to the Athenian pantheon) who had sent him as a “gad-fly” to the city of Athens. Thus Socrates’ protest against the sacred order of Athenian society was itself rooted in an alternative type of religious experience. An experience he described as an inward movement of “the soul” toward a wholly other “Unseen Measure” which called all other measures of the public good into question so that no society could be called good that was not just toward its members.

Socrates opposed “the way things are” (Is = Ought) with an understanding of the Good that transcends the sacred order of things and calls it into question (Ought vs. Is). His death in protest of unjust laws became a model of civil disobedience for both Eastern and Western modern exemplars of the ethical life, like Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. It was both an act of respect for morality (he does not flee “the laws”) and at the same time an ethical call to transform morality in the name of justice.

To say that a way of life is sacred is virtually, by definition, to say that it is “beyond questioning.” The sacred is typically surrounded by a taboo which forbids all questions. Socratic questioning is inherently subversive and desacralizing, that is, secularizing activity. As with Buddhism, it produces the paradox of a form of religious expression that seems irreligious, even as early Christians seemed atheistic and irreligious for questioning the sacred way of life of the Romans.

As Ellul notes, the Hebrew term for “holy” (*qadosh*) suggests that to be holy is to be “set apart.” Ellul finds this occurring through apocalyptic hope in the Wholly Other, I would argue that the experience of

doubt and questioning is an equally valid avenue. When we are seized by doubt and by wonder we are seized by the holy: we are *estranged* or set apart from the sacred order of things. We find ourselves alienated from our sacred way of life and able to see it as if through the eyes of a *stranger*. Seeing from this perspective enables us to put all things in question. From this point of view, the inner demand for rationality (i.e., that our doubts and questions be pursued and answered) is an opening of the self to the infinite. All answers are finite and limited. Every answer generates more questions: we always have more questions than answers. Moreover, we do not initiate such experiences of doubt and wonder, they come upon us. We are seized by them the way Siddhartha was when he felt compelled to leave the security of the palace grounds only to encounter the old man, the sick man, the dead man and even more doubts and questions.

Such experiences demand from us the integrity to follow the questions wherever they lead. In saying this, I have in mind Augustine’s *Confessions*, where he says that a key turning point in his life was reading Cicero’s *Hortensius* which set him on fire with the desire to seek wisdom. This experience, he said, made him resolve never to cling to any partisan answers but rather to follow the questions wherever they led him (Book 3:4). Later in the *Confessions* he suggests that the wisdom he first surrendered to when he first surrendered to his doubts was none other than Christ, the wisdom of God (Book 11:9).

Thus faith begins, for Augustine, with a surrender to doubt— and trusting doubt opens him to the infinite wisdom of God through his quest for insight. Interestingly, it is through reading the pagan author Cicero, not the Bible, that this openness to self-transcendence and divine wisdom first occurs. For Augustine, faith is setting out on a life journey without knowing where he is going, trusting his surrender to doubt, his passion for wisdom, to lead the way. Indeed, in his Trinitarian writings Augustine argued that you cannot seek the God you do not know unless that God is already at work in your doubts and your passion for wisdom, leading you to him.

Without such experiences of the holy we would not experience the gap between “what is” and “what might be,” and between “what is” and “what ought to be.” To be human is to be capable of migrating into new worlds in time, space and imagination. Our openness to the infinite requires of us openness to other worlds (both actual and possible). In this sense, the claims of the holy as a type of human experience demand from us a hospitality to strangers and their strange worlds. Theological ethics, academically

conceived, requires engagement with the plurality of human experiences of the sacred and the holy.

Even from the perspective of Christian theology, while I would argue that there is no way to God except through Christ, I would quickly add -- provided you understand that there is no way to Christ except through hospitality to strangers and their strange worldviews. For when we welcome the stranger we welcome either God (Genesis 18:1-5), God's messiah (Matt 25:35) or God's messengers/angels (Hebrews 13:2). To turn your back on the stranger is to turn your back on God. A world without strangers is a world without God. An affirmation of religious pluralism is compelled by the very logic of a biblical ethic of hospitality.

To be faithful to this logic we need to distinguish sacred moralities from various ethics of holiness that have emerged in history because this distinction clarifies the ambiguity surrounding the influence of religion on human behavior by exposing the demonic manifestations of religion for what they are. How is it that most Christians in Nazi Germany, either actively or passively, supported Hitler's attempted annihilation of the Jews while some felt their faith required them to oppose Hitler and rescue Jews? The first divided the world into sacred and profane realms and relegated the Jews to the profane realm of subhumans. These *Deutsch Christians* remade God in their own image as a true Aryan. Or how is it that, in the Southern United States in the middle of the twentieth century, both the proponents of segregation and the opponents of segregation (in the civil rights movement lead by Martin Luther King Jr.) could each think of themselves as following the Christian way of life. The proponents of segregation interpreted the Christian story in such a way as to divide the world into sacred and profane. Only whites were fully human and so permitted full access to the sacred order of society, blacks were profane and less (than) human and permitted only in certain controlled areas (separate water fountains, separate bathrooms, separate entrances to buildings, etc.) The opponents of segregation interpreted the Christian story in exactly the opposite direction, as one that demanded the desacralization of sacred order in the name of all that is holy so as to bring about equality and justice. The histories of religions and cultures are rife with such examples.

The distinction between the sacred and the holy is meant to express the idea that religious experiences are not all the same -- the "sacred" and of the "holy" name two categories of types of experiences (in each category the experiences are not necessarily all the same but can be grouped together because they have similar functional impacts on society) that shape

the narrative imagination in opposing directions, so that the very same tradition and the very same scriptural stories can be interpreted very differently, encouraging opposing patterns of behavior. By separating the uses of "sacred" and "holy" (and in a parallel manner, "morality" and "ethics") in this way we are saying that the collection of social behaviors that are generally labeled "religious" are not all religious in the same way. So we are arguing that it is very helpful to give separate meanings to terms that have been used interchangeably in order help us see and understand these differences.

While the center of a sacred society is within its boundaries and measured by all who share the same identity, in a holy community the center is to be found, paradoxically, outside its boundaries, in the stranger who is wholly other. For strangers and outcasts are those whose identity does not fit within the sacred order of things and consequently cannot be named or measured in its categories. A holy community is typically a subculture which functions as a "counter culture," an alternative community within a sacred society whose way of life calls that society's sacred order into question. The experience of the holy desacralizes all sacred societies and sets in motion the development of an ethic of hospitality to the stranger.

Unlike the sacred and the profane, the holy and the secular are not opposites but complementaries. The world is experienced as secular for it is not the holy (the infinite) which is always wholly other (immeasurable and indefinable) than the finite world. The stranger's "difference" is a reminder of this wholly-otherness (for the stranger's ways, like God's, are not my ways and his thoughts are not my thoughts -- Isaiah 55:8-9).

The Appendix (below), a charting of the *Characteristics of the Sacred and the Holy*, outlines some of the key features of these opposing patterns of religious ways of life. In a sacred society all who are alike (for example, sharing a common ethnic identity) form a sacred circle of all who are the same -- and therefore "fully human." All strangers -- that is, all who are different -- are outside this circle and seen as profane and less (or less than) human. One only has full moral obligations toward those who are human.

The experience of the sacred sacralizes the finite order of the society, seeing a society's way of life as an expression of the sacred cosmic order of things. And what is sacred is held to be beyond question. The way things are in this sacred order is the way they ought to be (Is = Ought). A very different form of religious experience gives rise to the holy community. For the experience of the holy generates a human response to the sacred which calls it into question by

insisting that ultimate truth and reality are radically different than this world and its sacred powers and sacred orders. Consequently, the holy encourages doubt and questioning. The way things are is not the way they ought to be and so the way things are must be called into question by the way things ought to be (Ought vs. Is).

The distinction we are making between the sacred and the holy is typological. That is, it is a model to be used to help us sort out human experiences and behaviors. If taken too literally, however, it may become a stereotype. The difference between the sacred and the holy is not a difference to be found between religions, as if some were pure models of one and some pure models of the other. Rather, the sacred and the holy should be seen as opposing tendencies or ways of experiencing life, to be found in all persons and all communities/cultures (whether they appear to be religious or not). Every actual culture and religion (indeed every person's identity) is likely to embody tendencies of both models -- the sacred and the holy -- in a complex and sometimes self-contradictory way of life. Thus, for instance, to cite the Buddhist sangha as an example of a holy community does not mean that it has not also functioned much of the time as a sacred society. Likewise for Christianity or any other tradition.

The world as we know it is passing away. The great world religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam, or Hinduism and Buddhism, or Taoism and Confucianism go back to the beginnings of civilization and are deeply bound up with the civilizations in which they emerged: the Middle East, India and China. In the past these religions and cultures lived in relative isolation from one another. Today our situation is dramatically different. For today we live at the beginning of an age of globalization created by the advance of techno-economic and communications techniques encircling the globe.

In this environment, the spiritual heritages of the human race have become our common inheritance, forming a rich ecology that can provide us with the wisdom we need to guide us in the new millennium. The more complex an ecology is, the more stable it is. And the more simplified an ecology becomes, the more unstable it becomes until it reaches a point where it is in danger of collapsing, unable to support life. The important thing to remember is that ecological diversity and complexity sustain life. This is as true for world culture as it is for nature.

The time when a new world religion could be founded -- the time of a Moses, Jesus, Siddhartha or Mohammed--says contemporary theologian John Dunne, has passed. The spiritual adventure of our

postmodern world is different. "The holy man of our time, it seems, is not a figure like Gotama [i.e., the Buddha] or Jesus or Mohammed, a man who could found a world religion, but a figure like Gandhi, a man who passes over by sympathetic understanding from his own religion to other religions and comes back again with new insight to his own. Passing over and coming back, it seems, is the spiritual adventure of our time."⁴ What is required today is not the conquest of the world by any one religion or culture but a meeting and sharing of religious and cultural insight. Our common future depends upon our capacity to welcome the stranger, that is, our capacity for hospitality.

The spiritual adventure of passing over into the life of the stranger and coming back with new insight is a world-transforming process whose results have been keenly felt in the emergence of a global ethic of non-violent resistance to all assaults against the sanctity of human dignity. It illustrates the way in which comparative religious ethics can advance a normative ethic through cross-cultural dialogue.

Martin Luther King, Jr. openly admitted that his own commitment to non-violent resistance or civil disobedience as a strategy for protecting human dignity had its roots in two sources: Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and Gandhi's teachings of nonviolence rooted in his interpretation of the Hindu scripture, the *Bhagavad Gita*. Belonging to the next generation, King never met Gandhi, but did travel to India to study the effects of Gandhi's teachings of non-violence on Indian society. In this he showed a remarkable openness to the insights of another's religion and culture. In Gandhi and his spiritual heirs King found kindred spirits, and he came back to his own religion and culture enriched by the new insights that came to him in the process of passing over and coming back. Martin Luther King, Jr. never considered becoming a Hindu, but his own Christianity was profoundly transformed by his encounter with Gandhi's Hinduism.

Just as important, however, is the fact that Gandhi himself engaged in the spiritual adventure of passing over. As a young man, Gandhi, at the age of 19, came to England to study law. His journey to England led him not away from his Hinduism but more deeply into it. For it was in England that Gandhi came to discover the *Bhagavad Gita* and to appreciate the spiritual and ethical power of Hinduism. Because he had promised his mother that he would remain vegetarian, he took to eating his meals with British citizens who had developed similar commitments to vegetarianism through their fascination with India and its religions. It is in this context that Gandhi was brought into direct contact with the 19th century Theosophists, for in these circles he met Madame

Blavatsky and her disciple Annie Besant, both of whom had a profound influence upon him. His associates also included Christian followers of the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, who, after his midlife conversion, had embraced an ethic of non-violence based on Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount*.

At the invitation of his theosophist friends Gandhi read the *Bhagavad Gita* for the first time, in an English translation by Sir Edwin Arnold, entitled *The Song Celestial*. It was only much later that he took to a serious study of it in Sanskrit. Thus, seeing through the eyes of Western friends, he was moved to discover the spiritual riches of his own Hinduism. The seeds were planted in England, nourished by more serious study during his years in South Africa, and brought to completion upon his final return to India in 1915.

Gandhi was especially influenced by the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy and his understanding of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The message of non-violence -- love your enemy, turn the other cheek -- took hold of Gandhi. And yet Gandhi did not become a Christian but rather returned to his own religion and culture, finding parallels to Jesus' teachings in his own Hindu tradition. And so he read his own Hindu scriptures with new insight, interpreting the Bhagavad Gita allegorically as a Hindu scripture of non-violent resistance to evil. And just as King used Gandhi to help him fight non-violently for the dignity of Blacks in America so Gandhi used Tolstoy to help him fight for the dignity of Hindus under British rule, and of the lower castes and outcastes within Hindu society in India.

Gandhi never seriously considered becoming a Christian any more than King ever seriously considered becoming a Hindu. Nevertheless, Gandhi's Hindu faith was profoundly transformed by his encounter with the Christianity of Tolstoy just as King's Christian faith was profoundly transformed by his encounter with Gandhi's Hinduism. For Gandhi, seeing the Sermon on the Mount through the prism of the Gita, "gave teeth" to the message of Jesus, showing that turning the other cheek did not require surrendering to evil but rather required non-violent resistance against all evil. In the lives of Gandhi and M.L.King, Jr. we have examples of "passing over" as a profoundly transforming postmodern spiritual adventure.

Non-violence, King argued, is more than just a remedy for this or that social injustice. It is, he became convinced, essential to the future survival of humanity in an age of nuclear weapons. The choice, he argued, was "no longer between violence and nonviolence. It is either nonviolence or nonexistence." Truth is to be found in all religions, King argued, and "injustice

anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly." The scandal of our age, said Abraham Joshua Heschel, is that in a world of diplomacy "only religions are not on speaking terms." But no religion, he argues, is an island and we all need to realize that "holiness is not the monopoly of any particular religion or tradition." "Buddhism today" says Thich Nhat Hanh, "is made up of non-Buddhist elements, including Jewish and Christian ones." And likewise with every tradition. "We have to allow what is good, beautiful, and meaningful in the other's tradition to transform us," he says. The purpose of such passing over into the other's tradition is to allow each to return to his or her own tradition transformed. What is astonishing, says Thich Nhat Hanh, is how we will find kindred spirits in other traditions with whom we share more than we do with many in our own tradition.⁵

What may we hope for from the practice of passing over and coming back? Certainly, our goal should not be to make everyone the same. The global ethic I envision emerging from the way of all the earth need not (indeed must not) aspire to make everyone conform. Alfred North Whitehead once noted that approximately 10 % of the European population participated in the Renaissance and yet the Renaissance transformed Europe. Creative minorities can be a powerful fermenting influence, bringing about profound cultural, even global, transformations. Ten percent of the world's population, engaged in passing over and coming back, working through the presence of diverse holy communities-- Buddhist, Jewish, Christian and other kindred religious and secular communities -- can be a saving remnant.

The journey of passing over and coming back is itself a kind of spiritual practice -- a pilgrimage involving hospitality to the stranger. On this pilgrimage we wrestle with the stranger, ourselves, and the mystery of the holy (the one who refuses to give us his name). Like Jacob (Genesis 32:22-31), we may come away limping but blessed, transformed and given a new name -- "Israel." The meaning of this new name, we are told is, *he who wrestles with God and humans and wins*, even though no one has been defeated. And like Jacob, we may walk away saying we have seen God face to face. Out of such a pilgrimage could emerge a new way of life for a new millennium in which the sacred is rehabilitated by an ethic of the holy embodied in the practice of hospitality. In this ethic we pass over into the lives and cultures of stranger only to come back to our own with new insight. As a Christian, that is the only way I can encounter the

Christ who is the wisdom of God. Would Ellul agree? I don't know. However, Ellul, with his commitment to universal salvation, certainly had the spirit of openness necessary for such a view. Moreover, he always encouraged us to "think for ourselves." In my view, this is where the ethics of holiness leads.

Notes

1. See especially *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima* (SUNY, 1993) and also *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach*, (with Dell deChant, Blackwell, 2001) and my chapter on new and new age religions and ethics in *World Religions Today* (with John Esposito and Todd Lewis, Oxford, 2006). See also, my chapter "Religious Studies and the Alienation of Theology" in *Religious Studies, Theology and the University*, edited by Linell Cady and Delwin Brown (SUNY, 2002). Most of this

essay is drawn from arguments previously made in these publications.

2. *The New Demons*, (Seabury Press, 1975), p. 48.
3. See "Religious Studies and the Alienation of Theology" as listed in note 1.
4. John Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), p ix.
5. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail" in *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World* edited by James M. Washington (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1986 & 1992), p. 85. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays [of] Abraham Joshua Heschel*, edited by Susannah Heschel (N.Y.: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996), pp 241 & 247. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (N.Y.: G.P. Putnam and Sons, Riverhead Books, 1995), pp. 9&11.

Appendix: Characteristics of the Sacred and the Holy

Sacred Society

Center within itself

Sameness = measure of the human

Hostility to the stranger

Sacred is opposed to Profane

Sacralization of the finite cosmos/society, expressed in a sacred way of life

Cosmos writ small

Answers are absolute
answers imprison us in the finite

God in the image of self

This-worldly

Hierarchical

Honor

Morality

Is = Ought
The way things are is they way they ought to be.

Holy Community

Center outside of itself in the stranger

Difference = measure of the human

Hospitality to the stranger

Holy and Secular

Desacralization or secularization of the finite in the name of the infinite – only the Holy is holy: the world is not profane but secular

Human writ large

Questioning and Doubt as measure of faith: we always have more questions than answers this keeps us open to the infinite (leap of faith)

Created in the image of a God without image

Other-worldly

Equality and interdependence

Dignity

Ethics

Ought vs. Is
The way things ought to be calls into question the way things are.

Re-Viewing Ellul

Jacques Ellul

To Will & To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians

Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969.

English translation by C. Edward Hopkin from

Le vouloir et le faire: recherches ethiques pour les chretiens.

Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1964.

Re-viewed by Matthew Patillo

Princeton Theological Seminary

How can a society or an individual found an ethical system? Is there a transcendental or metaphysical ground from which one can reason ethically, or an absolute standard by which we can decide whether a given action is right or wrong? And, if no such foundation is possible, can we be content, and can society survive relying on casuistry, relativism, and pure pragmatism?

A Christian might be led to conclude that, apart from belief in the one, true God, it is impossible to establish a legitimate foundation for ethics. All other ethical systems must be founded on a false transcendence (Ellul's "theoretical moralities") or would necessarily take some form of moral relativism ("lived moralities"). Christendom has historically presented itself as the only sure guide to human behavior, as possessing the eternally secure basis for ethical decision-making, but it is precisely on this point that Ellul radically challenges Christian thought. It is not the case, he argues, that the Hebrew and Christian scriptures offer the only true ethical system; rather, it is the biblical revelation that condemns all ethical systems, and makes a Christian ethic *impossible*. Instead of saying that apart from God no ethical system is possible, Ellul contends that, apart from God, *only* ethics is possible.

Ellul confesses in his introduction that the biblical revelation supplies the criterion, content, point of departure, method, and purpose for his ethical research. Reasoning from scripture, he argues that when Adam and Eve disobediently appropriated the knowledge of good and evil, what humans assumed is the right to decide for ourselves what is good, and what is evil. Morality—even, or especially Christian morality—is a result of humans' fall into sin. Like

death and work, morality is a necessary part of our fallen world, but it is only a necessity. Christ did not suffer, die, and rise again to establish a new ethical system, but to lead humans back to God, whose will alone determines what is good. Ellul sees in Christ the possibility for humans to obey God's will in a way unmediated by theories, systems, and human choice.

On this last point we might wonder what Ellul has in mind exactly. Although a Christian morality is impossible, society still needs morality; because there can be no Christian morality, it must be a conscious morality, aware of its relativity, humble and under condemnation, in the service of the faithful and not imposed upon them. But how can an individual, much less a society, know the will of God in an immediate way? Here, Ellul relies largely on Karl Barth's dialectic: morality is necessary, but morality is impossible; everything depends on us, but everything depends on God. Each of us is utterly dependent on God, and each of us must reconstitute morality at the moment of every critical act, never allowing our decisions to become calcified in a system that would prescribe future action.

In the nearly 40 years since this book's publication, other writers without Ellul's Christian commitments have come to nearly identical ethical conclusions. One thinks of the impossibility for decision and action in the later writings of Derrida, for example, who complained that all ethical systems make humans no better than "smart missiles" programmed to hit a given target. Considering why and how the ethical theories of a Christian and an atheist agree could be a productive inquiry.

A second investigation that may be necessary is a reconsideration of "Pharisaical" ethics in light of more recent Paul scholarship and the vastly improved scholarship on 2nd Temple Judaism that has appeared since Ellul wrote. The opposition between Jewish and Christian ethics (law versus grace, old versus new, etc.) concealed in the Christian (and anti-Jewish) use of the term "Pharisee" can, and should be overcome.

A final potential objection is that the intervention of the Holy Spirit, which is absolutely crucial to responsible, ethical, Christian action in the world, is not or perhaps cannot be defined and explained by Ellul. But this may well be the main thesis and greatest merit of his work.

Jacques Ellul

The Ethics of Freedom

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976.

Translated and edited by Geoffrey Bromiley from the original *Ethique de la liberte*, (Geneve: Labor et Fides) Tome 1, 1973; Tome 2, 1975; Tome 3 (*Les Combats de la liberte*), 1984

Re-viewed by Andrew Goddard

Oxford University

Ellul's *Ethics of Freedom* is the largest of his books in English and yet the English version (517pp) lacks much material that is found in the 3 volume French edition (totalling nearly 900pp). It is, therefore, impossible to do any justice at all to the book(s) in so short a space and so I hope here simply to locate it within Ellul's writing as a whole, explore the complexities of the inter-relationship between the different volumes and note some of its themes.

Within Ellul's ethical writing project, *Ethics of Freedom* follows the earlier publication of an introduction to his ethic in *To Will and To Do* (1964, ET 1969). It represents, in fact, an early example of the recent recovery of virtue ethics, explicitly rejecting the division between general ethics and special ethics (discussing different issues and areas – sexual, medical etc) in order to explore what it means to live life as a Christian in relationship with Christ.

Ellul's plan was to write an ethic corresponding to each of the three theological virtues – an ethic of freedom relating to hope, an ethic of holiness relating to faith and an ethic of relationship relating to love. Two of these virtues were also explored more fully in other books – *Hope in Time of Abandonment* (1972, ET 1973) and *Living Faith* (1980, ET 1983). Ellul says he resolved to begin this trilogy with the *Ethics of Freedom* back in 1960 (though the seed ideas are evident in articles in the early 1950s on necessity and freedom in Paul, in ET in *Sources and Trajectories*). It remains, to date, the only volume to appear although a manuscript is in existence for *Ethics of Holiness* and may soon be published.

The nature of the relationship between the French and English editions of *Ethics of Freedom* is particularly complex and confused. While the exact inter-relationship will never be totally clear and different and inaccurate accounts have been given (including by Ellul himself and Geoffrey Bromiley, the English editor and translator), it now appears that the situation is roughly as follows. Volumes 1 and 2 of *Ethique de la liberte* appeared in French in 1973 and 1975 with the latter confusingly claiming to have

appeared originally in English as *Ethics of Freedom* in 1973.

When *Ethics of Freedom* did finally appear in 1976, Bromiley repeated this account and claimed that Parts I-III in the English edition were Ellul's volume 1 and Part IV was volume 2. In fact, Part IV bears no resemblance to volume 2 in French which is, in fact, unavailable in English. It was only with the appearance of *Les combats de la liberte*, *Ethique de la liberte Tome 3* in 1984 that the origins of Part IV of the English translation became clearer. In the opening to volume 3 Ellul refers to earlier versions of the material in the book. It was, he says, originally written in 1966, proofreading and modifications occurred in the 1970s and final revision took place in 1980-82.

On comparison it becomes clear that the English Part IV of *Ethics of Freedom* must have been one of the earlier (and shorter) drafts of what appears in this French third volume. Contrary therefore to Ellul's claim to Darrell Fasching that "the English edition is the more complete" the three French volumes – as shown simply by their respective lengths – contain much (the whole of volume 2 and a significant amount in volume 3) that is not found in English translation. We will, therefore, sketch the book's content by reference to the 3-volume French edition.

Volume 1 – parts I-III of the ET – offers a Christologically focussed account of Christian freedom in a world of bondage and necessity. This both illustrates the truth of Ellul's words that the ethics 'has to some extent been inspired by the theology of Karl Barth' and provides the fullest account of one of the central dialectical features of Ellul's theological ethic – that of being called and liberated to live the life of freedom that flows from communion with God in Christ and to do so in the face of the different forms of necessity that dominate and structure life in the fallen world (and are examined in other of Ellul's works, most famously *la Technique*).

Volume 2 opens with a quotation from another major influence on Ellul's ethics – Dietrich Bonhoeffer – and proceeds to offer descriptions of the characteristics of the life of Christian freedom. Here we have fascinating discussions of the law of freedom discovered through wisdom, the useless, provisional and relative, non-absolute character of lived Christian freedom, the nature of human works, and what it means to be human through non-conformity to the present age. The second chapter focuses on the freedom of the individual and explores such phenomena as living without covetousness, obedience, spontaneity and hypocrisy. We are offered here a portrait of the virtues and character of freedom in the life of the disciple of Christ.

Finally, volume 3 (and its earlier version in part IV of the ET) explores in more depth the implications of Ellul's eschatological ethic and the forms of expression for the life of freedom rooted in hope. It opens with further biblically based explorations of the features of this life – being strangers and pilgrims committed to lives of risk and contradiction – before providing even more concrete discussions of the shape of Christian freedom in various areas of life such as politics and the state (including early discussions of Ellul's anarchist thinking), religious freedom, work, sex (including contraception and homosexuality) and marriage.

Ethics of Freedom is not an easy read and far from being a standard ethical text as it resists the usual categorisations and methodologies of much ethical discourse. For those who persevere with it, however, it provides numerous fascinating insights and offers a stimulating, theological and biblically inspired vision of the life of Christian discipleship and of the characteristics to be found in human lives that faithfully seek to live out the good news that it is for freedom Christ has set us free.

Book Notes & Reviews

Daniel Cérézuelle

Écologie et liberté: Bernard Charbonneau précurseur de l'écologie politique

[*Ecology and freedom: Bernard Charbonneau as a precursor of political ecology*].

Lyon, France: Parangon, 2006.

Reviewed by Carl Mitcham

Colorado School of Mines

“Over the course of his long adult life, from when he turned 20 in 1930 to his death in 1996, Bernard Charbonneau reflected on the dangers that resulted for nature and for freedom from what was called the *Great Break*, that is from the rise in power of technical, scientific, and industrial progress. Some specialists in the history of ideas have considered him a precursor and a founder of French political ecology.

For a long time this perspective gave him at least a marginal place in the intellectual world. Yet today his work is very little known by the public and is totally ignored by philosophers, although his radical questioning is incontestably philosophical. However, with the passage of time his work appears more pertinent and contemporary; the ecological and political problems that Charbonneau set forth in the 1930s before a generally uncomprehending audience have only increased.”

Thus begins Daniel Cérézuelle's important new book on the work of a life-long friend and intellectual companion of Jacques Ellul, one to whom Ellul himself gave credit for much of the originality of his own thinking. As far as I know this is the only monograph in any language to be devoted to some aspect of the life and thought of Charbonneau. Cérézuelle, himself a friend with one of Charbonneau's sons as well as one of Ellul's, has written an analytic appreciation of Charbonneau's major but largely unrecognized contribution to the development of environmental philosophy — in a book that calls strongly for an English translation.

Following a brief introduction (chapter 1) and biography (chapter 2), Cérézuelle presents the central intuition of a “Great Break” (chapter 3) and summarizes Charbonneau's existential approach to social change (chapter 4). The core of the book considers in more detail some of Charbonneau's key analyses: the difference between totalitarianism and social totalization (chapter 5), the disdain of nature by industrial society (chapter 6), the dialectical relation between system and chaos (chapter 7), the reversal of freedom (chapter 8), and the de-incarnation of the spirit (chapter 9). By way of conclusion, Cérézuelle considers Charbonneau's perspective on the “faire société,” a term of richer connotation than “social constructionism” (chapter 10), and provides a brief bibliography of works by and about Charbonneau (chapter 11).

Of Charbonneau's 22 books approximately half were issued privately or semi-privately, five after his death. Eight more books remain unpublished. Because of his access to and close knowledge of the full complement of this work, Cérézuelle's book exhibits an authority that is, in addition, a deftly crafted volume. Until the French book is translated into English, readers may wish to consult his “Nature and Freedom: Introducing the Thought of Bernard Charbonneau,” published as one of a collection of six lectures by Cérézuelle in the *Colorado School of Mines Quarterly*, vol. 100, no. 2 (2000), as the result of Cérézuelle's residency as the Hennebach Visiting Professor in the Humanities, 1999-2000.

Darrel Fasching & Dell DeChant
Comparative Religious Ethics:
A Narrative Approach

(Blackwell, 2001)

Re-viewed by Louise M. Doire
College of Charleston

In the fall of 2001 I was assigned to teach the Comparative Religious Ethics course at the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina. I had no textbook and began a search on the Internet. It was there that I was first introduced to *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach*, by Darrell J. Fasching and Dell DeChant. I ordered the book and we began to work with it in the classroom. Not three weeks into the course, September 11th arrived.

Teaching a comparative religious ethics course during that semester was a painful challenge. Fasching and DeChant's book provided us with a profound resource for questioning, analysis and hope.

This is a different kind of textbook. First, one does not typically find hope in a textbook. Secondly, the narrative approach recognizes what the world's best teachers have always known; that stories teach. It provides a wonderfully compelling and unique methodological alternative to a study of religious ethics.

The ethical foundations of each of the world's religions are explored through the ancient "stories" of individuals who have been lifted up by the tradition as models for noble and virtuous lives characterized by the seeking after justice and the alleviation of suffering. Krisna and Arjuna, Abraham and Job, Jesus of Nazareth, Siddhartha Gautama and Muhammad are presented as exemplary of the central ethical affirmations within each tradition.

The narratives of these ancient lives are accompanied by the life story of a contemporary figure; Gandhi, Rabbi Abraham Heschel, Martin Luther King, Jr., Thich Nhat Hanh, Malcolm X who embodied and reflected the ethical foundations of their religious tradition within the context of their lives.

Thirdly, the authors themselves are quite honest in admitting that their book proposes a thesis and that they seek "to persuade." They argue that the world's major religious traditions offer the possibility for locating a common "cross-cultural and interreligious ethic of human dignity, human rights and human liberation." The possibility for this common interreligious ethic emerges convincingly through the presentation of pervasive themes contained within the

narratives: "(1) wrestling with the stranger and (2) the quest for an answer to the problems of old age, sickness and death."

These narrative dynamics result in common resolutions of hospitality toward the stranger, compassion and the recognition of the interdependence of all being. My students then, and my students now continue to be most profoundly influenced by an analysis which provides the answer to their confusion as to how adherents within each respective religious tradition can read the same texts, be exposed to the same narratives and yet come to quite different ethical ways of being in the world.

This distinction is expressed in the text through a naming of "the sacred" and "the holy," described as "two categories of types of experience." A religious experience of the "sacred" identifies sameness as the ethical yardstick for measuring what is good; what is "right." An experience of the "holy" measures justice and righteousness by the treatment afforded to the "stranger," the one who is not alike. This invaluable analysis becomes practical when the experience of the holy is presented by the authors as something that can be cultivated and nurtured. For this, they return to the biographical narratives of those individuals who have "crossed over" to an appreciation of truth and wisdom in religious traditions other than their own and then, have traveled back to their religious roots enriched with renewed insight.

The brilliance of this text is that in the very presentation of the narratives, it offers students the possibility for engaging in that act; the act of crossing over and coming back. The proof of the theses rests not only within the pages of the book, but within the students themselves who express to me over and over again that this book has changed their way of being in the world.

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Personal Reflection

Ellul's Technique, Wikinomics, & the Ethical Frontier

by **Randy M. Ataide**

Point Loma University

Recently I came upon a video that stated “We are currently preparing kids for jobs that don’t exist using technologies that haven’t yet been invented in order to solve problems we don’t even know are problems yet.” My experience as a business practitioner who recently began a career as an educator of business students at a Christian University, allows me a good perspective from which to attempt determine any validity this caveat has.

On the one hand, Ellul’s observations and prophecies of technological development seem truer than ever. On the other hand, could we be entering into an undiscovered country of technological possibilities that Ellul was not able to wholly anticipate?

Technique & Human Community

Ellul suggested that technique would diminish our interest in both the study of the humanities and the building of authentic human community. My early foray into business education seems to confirm Ellul’s contention. A student may complain that some general education course interferes with the ability to take advanced courses on money, investing or entrepreneurship. Humanities it has been said, are concerned with “the complete record of human experience” and many students and those in the business world may seem little concerned with this record when the pursuit of a career awaits them. So too, technology can have an isolating effect.

But ironically, some opposite movement seems to be occurring. Technology is now being used to build communities that never existed before. Our progeny have been able to arrive at uses of technology that we did not recognize let alone develop or apply. While it is too soon to say that what is emerging is some form of *neo-technique*, some interesting trends of the use of technology away from the tendency to dehumanize need to be brought to our attention. The ethical

implications of these trends upon the field of business are enormous.

Technique & Private Property

From our earliest days of adolescent play we are urged by our parents to “share and share alike.” To do so is the essence of activity in the human community as a youth, and at that age we are in some ways a mere conduit freely receiving from our support structure and freely dispensing to our peers.

But in the early teenage years, this community dynamic shifts and the rise of individual possessiveness is dramatic and stays with us our entire lives. This tendency culminates in few arenas as much as our business systems. Indeed, most cultures of any level of organization, regardless of the particular political system, place high value not just on material ownership but on intellectual property, proprietary information, trademark and copyright protection.

Our system of business ethics reinforces follows this primacy of ownership protection for confidential work products. We have seen this play out most clearly in the battles between open-source use of film, music and other entertainment content, a conflict reminiscent of a small Dutch boy holding back a rupturing dam. But few have considered this pending explosion from an ethical perspective.

Open-source technology, in its many well-known forms such as Linux, flickr, MySpace, SocialText and Wikipedia, has fundamentally changed the focus of personal technology from separation and exclusion, two great fears of Ellul, to collaboration and community. The global community is in kindergarten once again, sharing our toys, knowledge and opinions freely and without restriction, except now we are doing it with powerful computers linked throughout the world. SnoCap, Proctor and Gamble’s InnoCentive Project, MIT’s OpenCourseWare and the FightAids@home initiative are just a few of the many formidable open business efforts. These remarkable low-cost collaborative infrastructures call us to indeed think globally and act locally, but it means something new and equally thrilling and frightening.

However, business ethics continue to focus upon disclosure, reporting and punitive actions and is generally oblivious to what is occurring. What is actually needed is a new Ellulian dialectic on the topic of technology, technique and ethics in business, for few can speak to the emerging reality as insightfully as Ellul. There is a new frontier of ethics and where it begins or ends is unclear. Fresh voices and new insights need to be soon considered.

News & Notes

✍ INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM:

“TELLING THE TRUTH: REVISITING JACQUES ELLUL IN AN AGE OF SPIN.” OTTAWA, ONT., 28-30 SEPT 2007

A conference at Carleton University is being organised in collaboration with the International Jacques Ellul Society and the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul. The prospects are very positive and planning must proceed now but all is subject to SSHRC funding with results to be announced June 30, 2007.

Proposals for papers must be submitted by e-mail **no later than April 15, 2007**, to the conference director, Prof. Randal Marlin, Department of Philosophy, Carleton University: marlin@ncf.ca.

Whether delivering a paper or not, plan on attending this rare occasion to meet other IJES members and Ellul scholars and readers and to discuss Ellul's provocative and helpful ideas.

Further information will be sent to IJES members in early July 2007.

✍ “SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES: ANARCHISM, CHRISTIANITY, & PRINCIPLES OF PEACE”

Conference August 10-11, 2007, at Loras College, Dubuque, Iowa. More info at www.jesusradicals.com

✍ NINETEEN ELLUL BOOKS FROM GALLIMARD

Thanks to the indefatigable efforts of Dominique Ellul and Editions Gallimard editor Dennis Tilinac, many of Ellul's French language books have come back into print, often with new introductions.

Le Défi et le Nouveau is the latest product: a collection of eight Ellul books in one thousand-page volume (English title by which they are known: *Presence of Kingdom, Jonah, Money, Politics of God, Violence, Prayer, Israel, If You are the Son of God*) for only 40 euros.

Gallimard also has the following individual volumes (English title by which they are known): *Commonplaces, Anarchy, Metamorphose du bourgeois, Subversion, City (Sans feu ni lieu), Hope, Faith, Jesus & Marx (Idéologie marxiste-chrétienne)*.

Finally, two recent volumes that are a completely new contribution to Ellul studies are *La Pensée Marxiste* (2003) and *Les Successeurs de Marx* (2007). Each of these volumes is a roughly 250 page account of Ellul's classroom lectures at the Institute for

Political Studies, University of Bordeaux, between 1947 and 1979. Former Ellul students Michel Hourcade, Jean-Pierre Jézéquel, and Gérard Paul are the team which collected, edited, and annotated these notes.

✍ TWO RECENT BOOKS OF NOTE

Willem H. Vanderburg, Director of the Centre for Technology and Social Development at the University of Toronto recently published a massive (540-page) addition to his critique of technological society: *Living in the Labyrinth of Technology* (Univ. of Toronto, 2005). Lawrence J. Terlizese's dissertation was also recently published as *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Wipf & Stock, 2005). Both books are scheduled for review in upcoming issues of *The Ellul Forum*.

International Jacques Ellul Society

www.ellul.org

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The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

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The IJES web site at www.ellul.org contains (1) news about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, (4) a complete index of the contents of all *Ellul Forum* back issues; and (5) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The French AIJE web site at www.jacques-ellul.org is also a superb resource.

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Cahiers Jacques Ellul

Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne

An essential annual journal for students of Ellul is *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, edited by Patrick Chastenet, published by Editions L'Esprit du Temps, and distributed by Presses Universitaires de France. Send orders to Editions L'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Postage and shipping is 5 euros for the first volume ordered; add 2 euros for each additional volume ordered.

Volume 1: "L'Années personnalistes" (15 euros)

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Volume 3: "L'Economie" (21 euros).

Volume 4: "La Propagande" (21 euros).

Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works

by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii, 206 pages. \$87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the

most valuable. Visit www.elsevier.com for ordering information.

Librairie Mollat---new books in French

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

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The Alibris web site (www.alibris.com) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

Used books in French: two web resources

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Reprints of Nine Ellul Books

By arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of several Ellul books originally published by William B. Eerdmans can now be purchased. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: *The Ethics of Freedom* (\$40), *The Humiliation of the Word* (\$26), *The Judgment of Jonah* (\$13), *The Meaning of the City* (\$20), *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* (\$19), *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* (\$28), *The Subversion of Christianity* (\$20), and *The Technological Bluff* (\$35). *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul* translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

Have your bookstore (or on-line book dealer) "back order" the titles you want. Do not go as an individual customer to Eerdmans or Ingram/Spring Arbor. For more information visit "Books on Demand" at www.eerdmans.com.

Ellul on Video

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

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desire.

