

The Ellul Forum

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Issue 45 Spring 2010

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Ellul in the Undergraduate Classroom



“At the beginning I couldn’t see myself in a professor’s robe speaking to 150 students. And then, fairly soon, I came to love it, less for what I taught than for the students.”

*-Jacques Ellul In Season, Out of Season
(1981; ET 1982), p. 159*

The Ellul Forum

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

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The Ellul Forum is published twice per year, in the Spring and Fall. Its purpose is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

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From the Editor

Typically *The Ellul Forum* is scholar-to-scholar. *Academics* who study the technological society explore issues for those of us who think and write about technology, often in reference to Ellul. The *public* is also the *Forum's* focus on occasion — citizens, government workers, non-profit personnel, youth workers, and media professionals who deal with the meaning of this technological era in their everyday experience.

This issue makes *students* central. How can the scholarship on technology be taught? Where do Ellul studies fit into the curriculum? How can the liberal arts orientation of Ellul's work be taught in liberal arts terms, rather than as a module in science and engineering? *The Ellul Forum* regularly reviews Ph.D. dissertations on Ellul written around the world. This time the focus is undergraduates.

Rather than a survey and overview of education generally, Issue #45 is an in-depth case study of an interdisciplinary course taught recently at Wheaton College (Illinois) entitled, "Jacques Ellul: Technology, Politics and Ethics." Team-taught by professors in theological studies, urban politics and communication, it demonstrates how much serious learning can be accomplished in a semester. The materials indicate the positive spin-off efforts for the campus, and suggest ways to establish courses on Ellul and technology in the curriculum longer term.

Members of the International Jacques Ellul Society are guest editing the future issues of the *Forum*:

Fall 2010: Mark Baker, editor, "Technique, Ellul and the Food Industry" (mbaker@mbseminary.edu);

Spring 2011: Dell DeChant and Darrell Fasching, editors, "Religion and Popular Culture" (ddechant@tampabay.rr.com);

Fall 2011: Andy Alexis-Baker and John Zerzan, editors, "Anarchism" (jesusradicals@jesusradicals.com).

They welcome your suggestions and proposals.

2012 is the centenary of Ellul's birth. Special issues of the *Forum* will be published and commemorative events are being planned. Please feel free to send us your ideas and suggestions and let us know of any other celebrations you know of.

Clifford G. Christians

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Encountering Jacques Ellul On His Own Terms

by Jeffrey P. Greenman, Read Mercer Schuchardt, & Noah Toly

This article discusses a successful experimental course on Jacques Ellul developed at Wheaton College (IL), a Christian liberal arts institution in the evangelical Protestant tradition. Offered in 2009, the interdisciplinary course was co-taught by Dr. Jeffrey P. Greenman (Christian ethics), Dr. Read Schuchardt (media ecology) and Dr. Noah Toly (urban politics). The professors describe the aims of the course, discuss their approach to teaching, and offer reflections about lessons learned about teaching Ellul's thought.

“No one is using my studies in correlation with one another, so as to get at the heart of our crisis in a conscious manner, based on a Christian understanding of it...” (1)

Background

The idea for a course on Jacques Ellul arose during a conversation that took place at the Black Dog Tavern in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts in July 2008. During a dinner break from the workshop on experiential education they were attending, Noah Toly asked Jeff Greenman a few questions about the theology of Karl Barth, and soon the discussion turned to the connections between Barth and Ellul. Toly and Greenman discovered their mutual interest in Ellul, and Toly added that their colleague, Read Schuchardt, was highly indebted to Ellul. Eventually someone said: “Maybe someday we should do a course on Ellul. After all, we've got the Ellul Papers on campus.” The course that eventually took place at Wheaton College during fall semester 2009 was the result of an integrative academic vision, fruitful collaboration among colleagues, and significant institutional support.

The academic vision for the course took shape based on the contributions of all three of us, each of whom brought to the table a unique experience with the study of Ellul. Toly first encountered the work of Jacques Ellul at the University of Delaware. He read *Technological Society* for a doctoral proseminar on Technology, Environment, and Society and found Ellul's analysis trenchant. Introducing Ellul, the course instructor made passing mention of Ellul as a “Huguenot,” but did not acknowledge Ellul's theological work. Following the Ellul trail in the library, Toly encountered the rich resources of Ellul's explicitly Christian writing. Though his dissertation committee chair would later discourage him from pursuing that angle, saying he was sure that Toly could not connect

Ellul's theological arguments to environmental justice, Toly investigated the link more carefully, publishing an article on Ellul and climate change while still a Ph.D. student and beginning an encounter with the broader range of Ellul's works. Still, he hoped for an opportunity to explore more deeply the connections between the sociological and theological halves of Ellul's corpus.

For Greenman, his journey with Ellul's thinking began with reading *Presence of the Kingdom* as a seminary student about 25 years ago. The opening chapter's picture of the Christian in the world strongly captured his imagination, and played an important role in setting his personal and scholarly trajectory toward theological engagement with issues of public life. Ellul's vision of the critical place of the layperson as the channel through which the Gospel reaches the world, and of the Christian way of life as fundamentally “agonistic,” was especially captivating. As a scholar of theological ethics, Greenman had engaged Ellul's arguments about the nature of Christian ethics and the possibility of natural law as well as his withering critique of moralism. He had read *Technological Society* and some of Ellul on politics, but not much else of the Ellulian corpus.

Meanwhile, Schuchardt was interested in Jacques Ellul from his study in Neil Postman's Media Ecology program at New York University. There he read *The Technological Society* and *Propaganda*; digging deeper on his own for dissertation research, Schuchardt also encountered *The Presence of the Kingdom*, *Sources and Trajectories*, and *The Humiliation of the Word*. It was not through the NYU courses that Schuchardt learned of Ellul's deep Christian faith, however, but through his own research, which was both a thrilling and disconcerting discovery. Thrilling because here was a thinker who analyzed and understood the world around him through the lens of, or at least alongside his understanding of, Christianity. Ellul sums this approach up most succinctly in his Introduction of *The Humiliation of the Word*:

Rather, I try to do here the same thing I do in all my books: face, alone, this world I live in, try to understand it, and confront it with another reality I live, but which is utterly unverifiable.

“Here is a man in whom there is no guile!” Schuchardt thought, for even if they differed on their interpretations of

Christian theology, at least the cards were on the table. The pure intellectual honesty and academic integrity of this approach, no matter what one's theological commitments, inspired Schuchardt greatly. But as a Christian himself, the disconcerting thing was the discovery that Ellul's faith played almost no part of the discussion at the graduate level reading of his key works. This was especially troubling for him during the reading of *Propaganda*, in which Ellul's discussion on propaganda's effects on the church struck Schuchardt as both historically and philosophically profound – *but only if one took the possibility of divine authority seriously*. Schuchardt supposes he found, in retrospect, Ellul's assessment of modern society as further evidence, on the positive side of the ledger, for the reasonableness of the faith.

So we knew that the idea we had hit upon while at Martha's Vineyard was a very special one, promising as it did the opportunity for significant academic innovation: the in-depth study of a thinker whose interests ranged broadly enough that three different academic divisions could rightfully claim him as their own, conducted at a school whose heritage and purpose centers on engagement with the entire spectrum of the liberal arts within a Christian context. In short, we could offer a course on Ellul that honestly took stock of all of his claims and allegiances, one that looked at him and his work holistically. In fact, once back on campus, we were somewhat surprised to discover that Wheaton appeared to have never offered a full course on Ellul. So, in early fall 2008, Toly, Greenman and Schuchardt met to explore the idea of a semester-long, team-taught, interdisciplinary course: "Jacques Ellul: Technology, Politics & Ethics." We will provide a detailed description of the aims, strategies and requirements for this course later in this essay. A clear picture of the administrative logistics necessary for us to mount the course comes first.

It is important to understand that we intended that the course be offered as a cross-listed course between three departments: Political Science, Communication, and Biblical & Theological Studies. For now, it is relevant to know that Wheaton allows new courses such as ours to be offered under the category of "Experimental Courses." Approval for such a course is a matter of the department head's signature and the Registrar's endorsement. Department approval for an "Experimental Course" does not involve putting a detailed proposal before an entire department; this step is needed only after such a course is taught twice, at which point the department must vote to add the course to the official College Catalog. This policy encourages faculty innovation in the classroom and allows timely courses to go into action more quickly. Therefore in our case, all that was required was a simple one-page form, with a short summary of the course (akin to the eventual course description on the syllabus), that was acceptable to the three department chairs. Since Greenman serves in this capacity for Bible & Theology, that meant we only needed the support of the chairs of the other two departments. Fortunately, both chairs were enthusiastic about this venture. That was the first hurdle cleared: the course could be tri-listed in the next year's course offering schedule,

allowing students to receive credit for the course in one of three departments. Most students eventually registered with the department of their major.

The next steps required broader administrative support beyond the three departments. Our plan was for a four-credit hour course, with the goal that all three professors would be attributed with four hours toward their required teaching load, allowing all three to be in the classroom for the entire semester. A major part of our goal for the course was interdisciplinary discourse, a feature that seemed unlikely unless all three could interact with each other and with the students during each class period. Wheaton makes available each year a small amount of funding through its "Faith and Learning" program that operates out of the Provost's office. The program has several facets, mostly designed around faculty development in the area of practicing thoughtfully Christian scholarship and thinking through one's academic discipline from the standpoint of Christian faith. One aspect of the program offers funding for co-taught courses that cross disciplinary boundaries (e.g., a course on theology and art is shared by a theologian and an art historian). Since interdisciplinary thinking is a key feature of the liberal arts tradition, we felt we had a strong case. The endorsement of the Provost enabled Toly and Schuchardt to receive four hours of teaching load credit for their involvement, while their respective departments received additional funding to hire an adjunct professor to cover two hours of teaching. Thus, the department did not lose two hours of teaching, and the professors were able to participate in the entire class. (Greenman's teaching load is variable on account of his primarily administrative assignment, so that was not a factor for the Bible & Theology department.)

Without these specific forms of substantial institutional support for the course, the course probably would not have happened at all. We are grateful that it did not prove difficult to make the case that such a course would be a valuable addition to the course offerings at Wheaton. Ellul's stature as an eminent Christian thinker who engages the social, political, economic and technological dimensions of modern and contemporary culture made him an appealing subject for a course. Moreover, the presence of the Jacques Ellul Papers in Wheaton's Archives gave us a clear rationale and allowed us to offer undergraduates a rare opportunity to conduct archival research.

A final piece of financial background is also worth noting. We enlisted the help of a master's degree student in systematic and historical theology, Kirsten Guidero, to serve as a teaching assistant for the course. She participated in each class session, assisted the professors with course preparation and with course mechanics such as taking attendance and recording grades, and provided encouragement and guidance for students as they worked on their research papers. Elsewhere in this issue of the *Forum*, Kirsten describes her experience in this role. In financial terms, she was paid an hourly wage for her involvement in the course through an account under Toly's auspices within the Urban Studies program.

Course Aims & Organization

There were 14 students enrolled in the course, including one graduate student in theology. We also had an undergraduate auditor, as well as an auditor who was an American missionary to France. This proved to be an ideal size for a discussion-based, seminar course. We had hoped for some students in the class who were French majors or highly capable of reading French, but in the end, none of our students had strong French skills.

Here is the course description we used on the syllabus:

Jacques Ellul (1912-1994), a French Protestant polymath, was one of the most fascinating and provocative Christian thinkers of the 20th century. This interdisciplinary, team-taught class explores his contributions to the fields of sociology, communication, political science, urban studies, and theology by focusing primarily on his work related to technology, politics and ethics. Special attention is given to the theme of freedom and necessity in his work. The course also aims to put Ellul into dialogue with key interlocutors in these various disciplines. The class operates as a seminar that assumes high levels of student interaction and discussion. In addition, the class emphasizes independent research on Ellul making use of a unique resource at Wheaton College: an expansive archive of Ellul materials (second largest such collection in the world).

For our purposes in this article, we should highlight our two most important learning objectives. Our goal was that students would be able to (1) “describe and evaluate the main themes in the writings of Jacques Ellul as a major Christian thinker” and (2) “interact critically and reflectively with Ellul’s ideas in order to formulate deeper understandings of their implications for contemporary Christian engagement with the realms of technology, politics and ethics.” From these two items it can be seen that we wanted to enable our students to get to the heart of Ellul’s ideas. Also, it should be clear that teaching such a course at a Christian liberal arts college allowed us complete freedom to engage Ellul’s Christianity without any sense of embarrassment. Our students were interested in Ellul precisely because he was a Christian, albeit one whose theology differed in several respects from their own.

The course met twice a week for a two-hour class period for an entire semester. We found that there were a number of clear educational advantages in a full semester course, rather than a half-semester course (which is a popular format for electives at Wheaton). These included:

- 1) It takes several weeks for students to begin to figure out how Ellul’s mind works and to become comfortable with his unusual writing style. The full semester gave them enough time to become familiar with Ellul’s way of operating.
- 2) A full semester allowed us to assign a significant amount of reading from Ellul (as well as other thinkers) so that students could encounter Ellul’s thought across a range of topics.

- 3) Gradually as the semester unfolded, students were increasingly able to make connections between the readings they had been doing and among the key themes of the course.
- 4) This format also gave us the opportunity to have students present the findings of their own research at the end of the semester.

Getting Started

To begin the semester, Greenman provided a detailed lecture to introduce Ellul’s life and thought. The lecture put Ellul in his French context, sketched some of the life experiences that so significantly influenced his thinking, and set the stage for Ellul’s interaction with key thinkers such as Karl Marx, Karl Barth and Soren Kierkegaard. Next, the class watched the 1992 film “Betrayal by Technology” that features extensive interviews with Ellul. Then we received a tour and orientation to the Jacques Ellul Papers in the Wheaton Archives from David Malone, Head of Archives and Special Collections. The introductory section of our course concluded with a session led by Schuchardt that discussed Ellul’s “76 Questions Concerning Technology.” Using the iPhone as a case study, we engaged many of these questions to orient students to key concerns of Ellul and to his characteristic mode of thinking. In this context we also highlighted Ellul’s characteristic emphasis on the primacy of posing the right problems while resisting premature answers. These components enabled our students to get their bearings. We were ready to start.

We began by spending three class periods discussing *The Presence of the Kingdom*, led by Greenman. Ellul himself stated that he felt this book was the best introduction to his thought. Since it is more accessible than many of Ellul’s works, it was a relatively easy entrée into a strange new world. But we were also keenly aware that Ellul was French, that none of our students (except for one graduate student who audited) spoke much, if any, of the language, and that given the 30-60 year gap between the works we were reading and our own cultural context, we would need to do a lot of bridge-building and gap-jumping for the students.

So next, Schuchardt offered seven class periods devoted to discussions on the dense *The Technological Society* in which he gave a close reading of the text and tried to contextualize and illustrate its insights with current examples, one method of which was to show film clips from *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, *They Live*, and Mark Osborne’s brilliant 6-minute film *More*, among others. As we reached the middle of the semester, students made class presentations based on an Ellul book that was not assigned reading for the course, a book of their choice designed to be used in their research paper due at the end of term. Then, Toly led six class sessions devoted to *The Meaning of the City*, followed by four days led by Greenman on Part 4 of *The Ethics of Freedom*. The course concluded with a guest lecture by Dr. Cliff Christians, then four class presentations by students about their research papers.

Within the first week of the semester, uncertainty over who was “leading” the class was resolved by Dr. Greenman’s wonderful analogy, and we quickly became known to the students as “the three-headed dog.” They addressed each of us this way in conversation and often via e-mail. On the one hand this lent itself to all sorts of humor, from discussions of puppy-ness to rabies, to metaphors of being pulled in three directions at once, to one student creating a digital illustration of a Japanese manga dog with three heads, upon which he superimposed our three faces. But on the other hand, and most concretely, it gave students a way of addressing in the singular the plurality of our leadership, and so instead of saying, “I’m not sure which one of you I should address this question to...” they could simply say, “Three-headed dog, what do you think of...?” This metaphor also summarizes nicely how we each felt about our Ellul scholarship. No one of us had read all of Ellul, and none of us feels like we see the whole picture well enough to teach the course on our own, so one of the nicer aspects for the professors was the ability to enjoy their humility by recognizing that together we comprised a fairly decent comprehensive Ellul scholar.

Before we discuss in detail the pedagogical strategy we used, in summary the course requirements emphasized reading the Ellul texts, making class presentations, and writing a 20-25 page research paper using the Ellul material in our archives. Students prepared questions from their readings for each day of class. They wrote a short review essay on a supplementary Ellul text, made a total of four class presentations, and wrote a major essay on a topic of their choice.

Pedagogy

Collectively teaching Jacques Ellul to Christian undergraduates is a unique pleasure, a bit like training goslings to fly. You know they’re going to take to it naturally once they get pushed out of their comfort zone, and you simply try to push them as gently and confidently as you can while downplaying the laws of gravity. Beyond the integration of faith and learning as a matter of harmony with Ellul’s own vision for his work, our course pedagogy was arranged around three further points of emphasis: interdisciplinarity, interlocutors, and inquiry.

From the beginning, the course was conceived as an interdisciplinary endeavor, one that would include instructors and students from multiple departments or programs at the College. The first thing to be agreed with regard to this course was that someone at the College should teach a course on Ellul, helping students to gain from his thoughtfulness, exploring his model of integrating faith and learning, and putting to use the material in Wheaton’s special collection. The second thing to be agreed, however, was that no one person would have the range of expertise required to do justice to Ellul’s thought. From our perspective, the course had to be interdisciplinary, and this would mean interdisciplinary instruction, with faculty from Biblical & Theological Studies, Communication, and Politics & International

Relations. This range represented every academic division at the College.

Interdisciplinarity would also mean reaching out to a broad range of students. Beyond our own majors, we had hoped to see students from many others. As the course was to be discussion-oriented, we intended for students from diverse majors to bring a wide variety of experience and expertise to bear upon Ellul’s writing and anticipated that we would all benefit from the distinct student voices. In the end, we enrolled undergraduate students from a dozen different majors along with two graduate students. Their diverse interests and experiences made the seminar both more challenging and more enriching for its exchanges between students who would not normally participate in the same upper division course.

In this way, students served each other as interlocutors in a 15-week discussion of Ellul’s work and its implications for our own lives. Importantly, though, students also engaged with several of Ellul’s own interlocutors. In each “part” of our course—technology, politics, and ethics—Ellul’s writing was put into conversation with three types of interlocutors: Ellul’s influences, Ellul’s contemporaries, and our own contemporaries. These interlocutors included film directors, guest speakers, and authors. All played important roles in realizing course goals.

In addition to their required readings, students were invited to spend an evening at each faculty member’s home, enjoying dinner and a movie together. We took three extracurricular Sunday nights to watch full versions of feature length films taken from the range of film history in order to help students “see” and interact with some of Ellul’s major themes. For the students these film screenings were not mandatory, but by offering dinner and a movie on Sunday nights (when Wheaton students are “on their own” for meals) it was gratifying to see the majority of the class show up each time. And the film discussions frequently carried back over into the classroom conversation, inspiring students who had not seen the films to rent them and watch them on their own. We watched *Koyaanisqatsi*, *Metropolis*, and *Brazil*, each movie roughly corresponding to a specific “part” of the course—*Koyaanisqatsi* to technology, *Metropolis* to politics, and *Brazil* to ethics. The Greenman, Schuchardt, and Toly families rotated hosting responsibilities and the three faculty alternated in facilitating discussion of the films. The movies gave students access to another mode of engagement with the themes and issues around which the course was organized. Dining together in faculty homes served to humanize our endeavor toward both a right understanding of and right living in technological society.

The humanization of our work was also aided by the two guest speakers who helped bridge the gap between Ellul’s context and the students’ lived experience. Schuchardt invited Eric Brende and Cliff Christians, having known about Eric Brende from his book *Better Off: Flipping the Switch on Technology* and knowing Dr. Christians through his membership and participation in the Media Ecology Association. Both guests spoke in class. Both also gave an evening lecture on campus in order to

bring more of the College community into our project. Brende even joined students for dinner and the showing of *Koyaanisqatsi* at the Schuchardt home. Both visitors put a human face on Ellul's interlocutors, personalizing the task at hand and making it easier to imagine and understand our "conversation partners" as real people, even when we may only have had access to their writings. Their contributions added wonderfully to the discussion in class, and also brought great attention to a) the Jacques Ellul archive and special collection; b) the course we were teaching; and of course, c) the individual authors themselves.

Eric Brende came first, during the part of the semester where we were discussing *The Technological Society*, and he came not as an Ellul scholar, but as an example of a plausible response to taking the problems of a Technological Society seriously on the individual level. Despite being a genuine neo-Luddite in many respects himself, Schuchardt felt it was important that we not end *TS* with the pre-emptive despair of the rhetorical question, "What can *possibly* be done about it?" Since turning back the clock was not an option in most students' minds, Schuchardt wanted to gently remind them, in living form, of G.K. Chesterton's comment that in fact, you could: all you had to do was reach behind it and turn it back. The students enjoyed the opportunity to interact with a living author, to get a signed copy of his book, and to ask detailed questions about he makes a living selling homemade soap and driving a pedal-cab rickshaw in St. Louis to support a wife and three children. To many students, just discovering that this guy "was for real" was a valuable education in our estimation. Brende was very insightful about the current world situation and living with an active resistance to the technological imperative, but he did not speak too much about these efforts in relation to his Catholic faith, nor did he address any specific aspect or element of Ellul's work.

For these purposes we had, at the end of the semester, Dr. Clifford Christians, Research Professor of Communications at University of Illinois, co-editor of *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (2) and General Editor of the Ellul Forum. Christians also joined us in Wheaton, offering the perspective of someone who has spent decades studying the work of Ellul. He gave a wonderful college-wide lecture with slides and video on truth-telling in a technological age, and offered examples from Al-Jazeera, the film *Elephant Man*, and the documentary *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. In both lecturers' cases, there was heavy attendance from students in the class, even though the events were not mandatory, and college interest trebled or quadrupled from class interest. On a personal level, it was a treat to spend time with and eat meals with Eric and Cliff, and in both cases we agreed that future events of this type were well warranted.

As students soon learned, some of our interlocutors agreed with Ellul, while others did not. Those that disagreed were sometimes more, sometimes less, sympathetic toward Ellul's own positions. In assigning critical interlocutors, we assured ourselves that students would attempt to hold Ellul to account as much as Ellul held us to account. We also hoped to honor Ellul's

commitment to dialectical reasoning as a means of advancing understanding. He was committed to "the no" not only as a way to advance human history in a dialectical fashion, but also as an epistemology (3). Hopefully the observation and practice of this approach has increased student capacities for critical negation of arguments both within and beyond the classroom.

Requiring students to read Ellul's detractors as well as his supporters also put students on more equal footing in the classroom, tempering any sense of the class as an Ellul fan club. Those who, more often than not, agreed with Ellul were in good company, joined as they were by Postman and others. But so were those who disagreed, accompanied by Moltmann and Mumford. In this way, students came to own both our assigned authors and each other as their own interlocutors. It was our hope that, by the end of the semester, students would have become accustomed to sharpening each other through this kind of intellectual accountability.

And they came to discover further interlocutors in their research, enriching the dialogue inside and outside of class. In the final weeks of the course, each student was required to present a research paper to the class—a not unusual requirement for a course of mixed upper division undergraduates and graduate students. The paper required students to discern a theme in Ellul's work, to trace that theme through a number of Ellul's works, including some from the special collection, and to write about how that theme intersected with a contemporary issue or controversy. In this way, students would become Ellul's interlocutors, themselves. One student, Daniel Saunders, discovered the work of Gabriel Vahanian in the Ellul Special Collection and wrote his research paper on the differences between Ellul and Vahanian. In a very real way, Daniel came to know Vahanian as his own interlocutor when he sent his paper to Vahanian, who graciously took the time and effort to respond.

Each research paper was also assigned a respondent, a student who would read the paper in advance and prepare a 10-minute presentation in response. The response was meant to be critical, affirming the research paper where appropriate, negating it where appropriate, and provoking thoughtful discussion during the ensuing time of question and answer. Just as Brende, Christians, and the authors whose work we read had done for the whole semester, spurring more careful consideration of Ellul and more thoughtful dialogue about his work, our students were expected to do at the end of our time together. So they came to discover themselves as interlocutors, and we enjoined them to accept the responsibility that came along with that role.

Given that this was a discussion-based course, student responsibility was a key to learning outcomes. Because we wanted students to be prepared for each class session's discussion, we needed some manner by which we could help to ensure not only their reading, but their active and critical engagement with Ellul and others. We needed an assignment that would not only provide accountability, but also promote classroom engagement through active engagement with readings. We were not only interested in

ensuring that students could comprehend and recite main points, but also in encouraging students to ask significant questions of their interlocutors, in spurring them on toward inquiry.

We decided to require every student to submit three types of questions about each day's readings. The question types corresponded to three of the four tasks of New Testament ethics, according to Richard Hays' argument in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. (4) For each set of readings, students were required to submit descriptive, synthetic, and pragmatic questions. The first were supposed to interrogate the propositions, logic, and evidence of the arguments read for that day. That is, students were to submit a descriptive question concerning what the author might have meant. The second type of question, the synthetic question, was meant to help students to situate a reading within the context of the other readings assigned for that day or within the context of the course readings and discussion so far for the semester. And the third question type, the pragmatic, required students to inquire into the real world origins or implications of a given author's argument. By this means, all students were supposed to come to class prepared for discussion, having already explored the meaning of their readings and contextualized them in both immediate and broader senses—both within the class session and semester and according to their observations of and participation in the “real world.”

Perhaps this approach to the course afforded a fit between the ends and the means of our experience. If, indeed, this aspect of the course has been formative, then we believe it is consistent with Ellul's concern for articulating questions and problems before answers and solutions. Ellul regarded as perverse our inclination to answer what has not yet been rightly posed as a question, to solve what has not yet been properly problematized. In his essay, “Needed: A New Karl Marx,” he writes,

“This is the folly of our time: we claim to give solutions without even looking at the problems. We cast a superficial glance over the world and pretend to organize it for a thousand years. It is not one of the least contradictory traits of our epoch that we demand answers before we are capable of formulating clearly the questions... Solutions to what? That is one of the most suggestive surprises there might be.... Nobody is concerned to know the problem. One begins with the very general and vague idea: ‘it's not working.’ What? Everything: the economic, the political, and social. More precisely? Unimportant. Vain analyses, mind games. What is needed is a remedy, and that right away.... Now these problems are all, without exception, wrongly posed because they are conceived as causes when they are only effects.... The problem is posed well enough in reality, in the practical life, but it is not formulated, it is not intellectually, analytically conceived. Now it is impossible to answer a question when the question is not thus posed.” (5)

We can only hope that our students have come to appreciate the interdisciplinarity, interlocution, and inquiry that we sought to model in the course. For the three of us, what were in some senses capricious choices at the beginning of the semester have become to greater extent pedagogical commitments. While we set out to provide an opportunity for Ellul to shape the ideas and dispositions of our students, in the end and as with most teaching experiences, we found ourselves shaped by the opportunity, as well.

Takeaways

All of us—not just the students—learned from the course. Clearly, it provided an opportunity for the faculty to learn more about Ellul. But we also learned from each other. As Schuchardt's approach was the media ecology angle, Greenman's was theology, and Toly's was environmental studies/political science, the course really did offer a tripartite dissection of Ellul's work. If you borrowed Teilhard de Chardin's concept of the Cosmosphere, Noosphere, and Biosphere, there was a rough parallel to our approach through theology, media, and environment. And this worked exceptionally well for the students, who themselves were coming from multiple different major areas of concentration, but who were (mostly) all strong enough students to benefit from a multilayered approach. Now that the course is over, however, each of us would feel much more confident in teaching an Ellul class on his own. It was a course we would have each liked to take, and by teaching it we did get to learn quite a bit from each other, not just on disciplinary approach, but on teaching methods as well.

Toly learned from Greenman to appreciate and communicate to students the context of an author's work. Greenman's hard work situating Ellul paid off with students and Toly was reminded of the importance of such work to student motivation and understanding. Toly also watched Schuchardt personalize the content of the course and connect with students in a way that modeled passionate inquiry.

Given Greenman's background as a theologian, what was most illuminating about the course for him was discussing Ellul's more non-theological works in the wider context of Ellul as a Christian thinker. This approach enabled him to gain a more comprehensive picture of Ellul's entire project. Also, the courses' “interlocutors” in media studies and urban politics were almost entirely new to him, and through our interaction with these figures he was better able to see the distinctiveness of Ellul's thinking and to begin to trace the logic of how Ellulian “instincts” might operate with regard to current questions of media, technology and urban life.

Schuchardt came to the task of team-teaching a course on Ellul with a palpable joy. Of the three of us, Schuchardt was perhaps the least “objective” in his approach, as he was so enthusiastic and gung-ho about teaching Ellul from what he considered to be “his own” approach, that he probably was more of a cheerleader for the Ellul team than a dispassionate scholar considering his arguments. Schuchardt greatly valued the ability of Drs.

Greenman and Toly to teach from a more detached position, even as he recognized he was not there yet.

In short, teaching Ellul as a Christian thinker to a classroom of Christian students felt like teaching Ellul the way it was meant to be taught, and this to a very captivated audience. It was the class each of us looked forward to teaching (or participating in) the most each week, and several students said the same about their experience.

Overall, what did students think about our experiment? The personal reflections included in this issue of the *Forum* by four students should give a flavor of the class response. In addition, we used our standard course evaluation process. The student feedback was honest and constructive. A few themes emerged: students would have appreciated more variety in our use of classroom time, particularly more lecturing from the professors to go alongside the discussions of texts. They also recommended greater variety in our assignments. The submission of three questions related to the readings for each class period became monotonous in the eyes of a number of students. We were also interested to see that some students noted their appreciation that the three professors offered differing interpretations of Ellul's thought, while others were somewhat frustrated since they felt that the three professors appeared to disagree too often. Some felt us too critical of Ellul, others saw us as not critical enough.

What will we change, or not change, when we offer this course again? We would continue to use three films, but perhaps change the films offered. It seemed that *Metropolis* worked the best, but the other two potentially could be replaced. We should work to integrate the films into the class discussions more directly and deeply, and perhaps even require a short written response to the films.

The class presentations of student research, with peer respondents, would definitely be continued. We would give clear, blunt instructions about what to do and what must be avoided in making an effective presentation.

Given what we affirmed in the course description about the importance of the theme of freedom and necessity as our chosen framework for reading Ellul, we agree that we did not stick closely enough to that strand. We touched on it often, and on occasion went into a good amount of detail regarding what Ellul was thinking about freedom and necessity. But this theme did not emerge clearly enough as the organizing thread of the course. Some students struggled to locate any strand to pull together a fascinating series of readings and conversations. "All this is interesting, but how does it hang together?" is the question we need to address more directly and concretely when we offer it again. An introductory lecture to frame this theme at the outset of the semester would probably be very helpful.

We would continue the use of "interlocutors" but consider engaging fewer figures so that we could interact more deeply with those chosen. For instance, we could focus on Lewis Mumford as the prime dialogue partner for our politics section, and work more with Soren Kierkegaard as the chief interlocutor for the ethics material. It seems to have been overly ambitious to address both one of Ellul's contemporaries and one of our

contemporaries. Perhaps we need to choose just one interlocutor for each major section of the course.

With regard to our assigned readings, we were generally pleased with our choices. We found *Technological Society* to be the most challenging text to teach, and would probably experiment with different approaches to handling that book when we teach it again. We agree that this book, as well as *Presence of the Kingdom*, is utterly essential reading for a course like ours. But *TS* is a peculiar and repetitive work that sometimes develops arguments in a decidedly non-linear fashion. It makes difficult plowing for newcomers to Ellul's work, and perhaps a more thematic approach to teaching it would yield deeper analysis and discussion. We also would like to somehow rearrange the semester's flow of reading to allow a few additional class periods to discuss *The Ethics of Freedom* toward the end of the semester. We discovered that this text was valuable in pulling together various threads of the course, and in helping students see better how Ellul's thought works itself out in more practical or concrete spheres of life.

Although we liked the assignment to require students to submit three types of written questions for each segment of reading, we realize that we did not take full advantage of these questions. We should use them more strategically as a mechanism for generating discussion, and if we did so, it would help students bridge the various teaching styles and personalities of the three professors. In addition, we understand why some students found the assignment monotonous or boring. We are inclined to periodically require a 1-page paper to a set question as an alternative to writing questions.

If we metaphorically trained our student goslings to fly by pushing them out of their nest, then we should also add that a lot of falling and flapping takes place before flight, and we did have a few broken, or at least injured wings. One student dropped out mid-semester due to the difficulties of trying to add the class to a schedule and workload that was already overlaid; another nearly dropped but pulled it through at the last moment, though the work showed the strain of trying to digest too much too soon. So while, statistically speaking, the class was an overwhelming success, we would be remiss to not acknowledge that we set a fairly ambitious course and really did stick to it, which presented some challenges for some students. However, one of the nicest aspects was to team-grade student papers, and this was especially pleasant during the final grade assessment, where we really could discuss each student's strengths and weaknesses, could offer insights into aspects of student growth that others might have missed or not been aware of, and this we would say had the overall effect of boosting the grades of the weakest students by rewarding them for mid-course corrections or for simply having the stamina to not quit. The educational value of a C or a D is something undervalued in these days of grade inflation, but we continue to believe that even those students for whom the class presented their toughest academic challenge will benefit in the long run from their participation in this most unique experience. We learned along the way that Ellul

had one of the highest drop-out rates among graduate students of his in France; we felt like our experience was just the opposite. We had a high retention rate and, as a former advertising, marketing, and PR man, Schuchardt would say we would have no trouble filling the class to capacity if we offered it again.

Further experience bears out this observation. After the fall semester was over, some students gathered in northern Wisconsin for Wheaton's January one-week intensive classes, where the Ellul course was a significant part of their discussion. Two students came up to Greenman asking, "Can we talk some more about what Ellul means by desacralization?" Even now, mid-way through the next semester, there is still a lot of "buzz" on campus. As the director of Wheaton's "Media, Reformation, and Modernity" trip to Germany and Switzerland in summer 2010, then the fall 2009 Jacques Ellul class, combined with his pseudo-fluency in French, now has Schuchardt thinking that an academic travel to Bordeaux is not beyond reasonable consideration. If we

three could make that a reality, then Schuchardt thinks both students and professors would eat it up.

Notes

- (1) Jacques Ellul, "On Dialectic," in C. G. Christians and J. M. Van Hook, eds., *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1981): 307.
- (2) Clifford G. Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, eds., *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1981).
- ³(3) Jacques Ellul, "On Dialectic," in *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays*: 291-308.
- (4) Richard Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperOne, 1996).
- (5) Jacques Ellul, "Needed: A New Karl Marx (Problems of Civilization II)," in M. Dawn, ed. *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul that Set the Stage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

Ellul & Gojira

Technique, King of the Monsters

by Lee Ketch

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Jacques Ellul's doubts concerning popular cinema are well established. The industrialization and popularization of cinema has made it a mass medium. According to Ellul, the mass media is first and foremost a technique of propaganda, therefore popular cinema as part of the mass media is "only a game" (1979 p. 2) and not to be taken seriously. Even if we agree with Ellul on the dangers of popular cinema, is it possible that a film could still speak the truth? Ellul never used his self-contained theoretical model to analyze an actual film. If we apply his dialectical reasoning to an example, it becomes evident that popular cinema can in some cases be a conduit for truth, regardless of technological conditions. Ishiro Honda's 1954 horror classic *Gojira* is one such film in that it achieved cultural popularity while also addressing themes antithetical to the technological society.

Technique of Popular Cinema

Ellul's opinion of modern art as a whole appears rather grim. For Ellul, the messages of modern art are all too often submitted to technique's rational frameworks and efficacious modes of distribution. Though he does not

disdain rationale and efficiency in and of themselves, problems arise when rationality and efficiency become lifestyles and overextend their reach. This devotion to efficiency has produced the defining business of the popular film industry: distribution. Whether a film is considered a "popular film" or an "art film" is entirely contingent upon how it is moved through the distribution machine. The content or the message of a film aids its popularity depending on the way the distribution industry interprets and packages that message. As Ellul says, "The great transformation of this century is that the utility of art is regarded as its function." (1979 p. 26) Organizations with a totalizing economic outlook like film distribution can industrialize and therefore devalue artistic vision, making it a "mechanized mirage" (Wang, 2009 p. 462). This is simply one of the compromises of the popular film industry.

Ellul and Gojira

But just how totalizing is this system? Even though it single-handedly established Japan's popular cinema industry and launched the longest running franchise of all time, *Gojira* avoids the irresponsibility that Ellul feared. *Gojira* is a horror-monster film that is centered on the giant atomically-charged lizard Godzilla and its attack on Tokyo. The film does not boast an

intricate or nuanced narrative, but its theme does speak to a complex issue: atomic power has disastrous consequences. Producer Tanaka Tomoyuki wanted a topic that would appeal to a skittish post-WWII Japan: "The theme of the film, from the beginning, was the terror of the Bomb...mankind had created the Bomb, and now nature was going to take revenge on mankind" (Kalat, 1997 p. 129). There were two goals for the film: to appeal to a wide audience and to address a delicate topic artistically. As evident by its financial success, the filmmakers met their first goal. In order to determine whether they succeeded in their second, we should see if they meet Ellul's standards.

For Ellul, nuclear development goes back to the fall of man, the moment when we "had taken over a realm reserved for God" (1982 p. 115). He asks, "are we not precisely at the limit beyond which we make ourselves equal to God, where we do what God does – and can we enter into this competition" (1982 p. 116)? When it comes to nuclear development, there "isn't any respect either for the Creator or for the creation"; it is simply "research for power" (1982 p. 116). Man attempts to create using the basic building blocks of life, but his ends are only ever those of power and, ultimately, destruction. When man has given birth to a technology that disrespects the foundational authority of God, how can he expect anything less than a monster?

Honda's film engages directly with this concept. Author William Tsutsui writes: "To Honda, Godzilla was a means of 'making radiation visible'.... *Gojira* challenged the morality of the atomic age and rendered terrifyingly real the destructive power of radiation....Radiation is not something mysterious, antiseptic, or theoretical in *Gojira*, but is an unrelenting lethal force unleashed against nature and humankind alike" (2004, pg. 33).

Honda does not attempt either to explain away or to capitalize on the aftermath of WWII; rather he directly confronts the audience by visualizing a truth in a way only cinema can. Cinema offers aesthetic advantages that are exclusive to the medium. Godzilla truly becomes "terrifyingly real" when it is larger than life, accompanied by a bombastic score, and put on display in a room full of hundreds of gaping audience members. The cinema is where Godzilla as a symbol truly finds efficacy.

Ellul also states that the first atomic bomb came about "because everything which is a technique is necessarily used as soon as it is available, without distinction of good or evil" (1965 p. 100). He bemoans that we "have neither the criterion nor the motivation *not* to pursue to the nth degree everything that can satisfy our power" (1982 p. 116). For Ellul, this inability to say "no" leads us to one of two points: either we finally attain the illusion that we can create without God, or we destroy ourselves in the process. Godzilla is the personification of the latter. It is not a force of nature inexplicably wreaking havoc on humanity; it is nature in revolt. The nuclear subtext, historically and symbolically, makes clear for us

the primary personification of Godzilla: the destruction that nuclear power leaves in its wake.

Conclusion

When Ellul says that popular cinema is "nothing but a game," he does not mean that it is deterministically a dead medium. As both creators and watchers of media, we are to be "renewed men [and women] whose reordered consciousness opposes *la technique's* tutelage." (Christians & Real, 1979 p. 5) The avenue for truth begins at this foundation of renewal. Ellul only offers us a start; the specifics are up for evaluation. We must be dialecticians in our media consumption, affirming both the "yes" and the "no," distinguishing truth from pure amusement, but recognizing that they may be present together.

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Dialoguing Ellul & Vahanian

Technique: Dehumanizing Totalitarianism or Utopian Hope

by Daniel Saunders

Daniel Saunders (*Class of 2011, Wheaton College*) is working toward his degree in *Communications: Media Studies*.

After spending an entire semester embedded in the context of Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society*, stumbling across Gabriel Vahanian's *God and Utopia* was eye-opening, if not completely transformative in my reading of Ellul and other "theologies of technology." My struggle to synthesize the dehumanizing totalitarianism of Ellul's technological society—a society in which the practical technological tool becomes the imperative technological system of *la technique*, a system that is all means and no ends—with Vahanian's utopian (but more emphatically, *eschatic*) hope led to a consideration of the fundamental nature of technique. For Vahanian, technique is not the quasi-Gnostic phenomenon Ellul derides when he writes that "technology reduces Christianity to the inner life, to spirituality, to salvation of the soul" (1981 p. 98). Rather, Vahanian expounds technology as the restorer of the eschatological dimension of faith—for changing the world is more incarnation-minded than removing oneself from the world. Thus one asks, in spite of Ellul's critiques, could technology be neutral? What does it mean for technology to properly situate humankind to its environment, enabling the existence of a truly incarnational presence of the church on earth? Where does our hope lie—in Ellul's apocalyptic or Vahanian's utopian understanding?

Christianity and Technique

The relationship between Christianity and technique remains essential to the dialogic synthesis of Ellul and Vahanian. In exploring the history and progression of technology, one cannot fail to see the (A) indelible impact wrought by the Christian church. Up to the sixteenth century the sacred and profane distinctions of medieval Christianity limited the use of technology to the practical tool, mediated by the sacred; however, the Reformers' "desacralization" of Christian thought based on a new self-awareness laid the foundation for technique as all-encompassing method. It is from this point that Ellul traces the advent of the absolute technological system wherein "the technique of the present has no common measure with that of the past" (1964 p. xxv), aided by a (B) church (captivated by the sacred) that has accepted the substitution of technique for the truest desacralizer—the

presence of Christ. For Ellul, the Christian church has been subverted by various outside sources and has been transformed into a vacuous religion. Nevertheless, subverted as it was and still is, the church and the Christian faith (C) will continue to be faithful through the Holy Spirit. The phrase Ellul leaves with us at the end of the seemingly hopeless *The Subversion of Christianity* is the Italian *eppur si muove*—yet it moves. It follows that $A+B=C$; in other words, the history of the church is a history of sin and multiple failings and an existence marked by the "unlivable paradox" of remaining in the "point of contact" between this world and the *other-world* of Christ's Kingdom. Yet for Ellul, this viewpoint looks *back* to humankind's prelapsarian condition for its example of such a life "free" from technique and in full, unmediated communion with God, as it then looks to the *end* when God will reveal all.

From the Mythological Milieu to the Technological Milieu

For Vahanian, technique seems to be an integral part of our humanity: "Man is and always has been technological man, if only because technique exists from the moment that man invents himself, realizes himself" (1977 p. 96). According to Vahanian, technique gears us toward a shift in milieus—from the mythological to the technological. In the mythological milieu, redemption is understood as soteriological, based on otherworldly moralism and the changing of worlds in a life after death. In the technological milieu, redemption is understood as eschatic-utopian, based on an incarnational transformation of the world here and now. It is concerned with bringing the true incarnation of the Kingdom of God to His people, of truly humanizing that which is alien to humankind—simply understood as the fulfillment of God's redemption of humanity:

The human is the "event of God," though God is the ever-present other by which humans become what they are not...Technological civilization gives humans an earthly dimension heretofore neglected in favor of the soul and its heavenly aspirations. Body language brings the utopian reality of the human and God into the realizable present and thereby makes the human body and the social structure the instrument of the kingdom and the incarnation of God! (Kliever, 1990, p. 9).

Apocalypse and Utopia

Ellul's admitted problem with the semantics of *utopia* leads him to mistrust theories like Vahanian's. Although he attempts to be as incarnation-minded as Vahanian, Ellul's dialectic leads him to advocate an "active pessimism" of apocalyptic hope—as such, the Christian is to be a *sign* of hope, always *pointing* to the end of time when God will reveal and consummate all, a literal 'apocalypse' or revelation. But Ellul does not go far enough. The vision of the New Jerusalem Ellul gives us in *The Meaning of the City* (even if he does not admit it) is in the same utopian vein as Vahanian, predicating as it does the Garden of Eden (which although existing as myth is still technical and utopian—do gardens naturally occur in nature?). Ellul fails to take note of the fact that (D) technique seems to play some vital role in God's plan for human redemption and that his New Jerusalem actually offers us the utopia of Vahanian's technological milieu. Ellul reminds us that our spiritual security cannot abide in any object *per se*, even technological utopianism. God alone grants the freedom to be spiritually secure, rooted in

Godself. However, a faith truly oriented towards the *eschaton*, in the already and not yet, must be a truly incarnational faith. And this means that the church may use technology as it becomes a body concerned with "wording the world and worlding the word" (Vahanian 2001)—an *iconoclastic* rather than a desacralizing entity. Only then will the Kingdom of God begin to be truly realized.

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Putting Technology in Place

Ellul & the Environment

by Kari Amick

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This essay was written in twenty-first century America. It springs out of the work of a French intellectual writing in the latter half of the 20th century, yet it is rooted in a distinctly American and western place and in a uniquely American understanding of land. This understanding of land is complicated by the technology used to manage and understand land, and can result in degradation and disconnection from place. Jacques Ellul provides a paradigm for understanding technology, but fails to fully delineate its impact on relationships with the natural environment.

Jacques Ellul (1964) defines technique as "the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency" (p. xxvi). Examples proliferate in the modern world, and appear in every area of life: education, politics, laundry, transportation. For Ellul, as described in "Technique in the Opening Chapters of Genesis", technique appeared as a result of the fall and its attendant curses (Ellul, 1984, p. 129). Prior to the fall, relationships required no intermediary: relationships between mankind, God and nature were all immediate. The result of the fall

was a series of ruptured relationships for humanity: they could no longer relate directly with God, and they could only eat of the ground through painful toil. Technique then appeared as a necessary buffer between man and his environments—physical, social and spiritual—and eventually progressed into Ellul's technological society.

The technological society's attempt to remove itself from its environment through technique has created alternative milieus, resulting in a multitude of troubles. At the core is the fact that "technique worships nothing, respects nothing. It has a single role: to strip off externals, to bring everything to light, and by rational use to transform everything into means" (Ellul, 1962, p. 142). The technological society offers a life full of means, but utterly meaningless. This consumes all aspects of human life, "our technological society stands ready to offer our neighbors, children, grandchildren, and God's good creation as burnt sacrifices to Mammon" (Toly, 2005, p. 75). Technological means demand constant sacrifice of material resources, and result in environmental degradation as well.

The mechanisms of physical technique are derived from natural resources. Machines require metal of all sorts: cell phones require coltan, copper is used in

wiring, aluminum is demanded for cans (McPhee, 1971, p. 49). Energy, in its various permutations, goes into producing the trappings of technique. Food energy for humans is derived from the land as well. To ensure these resources are produced efficiently, production processes are themselves technicized, exacerbating degradation. Efficient food production often results in thoughtless land management, simply because the health and long-term viability of the land is not a factor in short-term productivity (Pollan, 2008, p. 1). And while food and other resources are certainly necessary, degradation results when informed land management succumbs to the efficiency of technique.

Three aspects of technique make land degradation permissible. Firstly, technique creates the situation Garrett Hardin (1968) describes in “The Tragedy of the Commons”: the environment is seen only as a means of economic gain, and so this gain is given an inherent value which places it above the environment (p. 1207). Ellul (1978) rightly noted that “if man possessed land, he was in a position to command” (p. 85). Modern landowners transform this power into material wealth as quickly as possible, rather than understanding their land thoroughly and maintaining it well.

Second, most attempts to stem the tide of technique by setting apart land that should remain unused or ‘wild’ actually end up simply furthering the role of technique in society. While functional land should be limited and certainly should not be enmeshed with the land, it remained an unquestioned necessity. Thus, even the concept of wilderness—a place Ellul (1970) commends for the spiritual fulfillment Christ found there (p. 131)—becomes a means to various removed ends. Land is thus divided and defined, with different techniques allotted for the management of each type, while land itself remains merely a means to achieving one end or the other, fulfillment spiritual or physical.

Finally, as technique becomes our environment, the natural environment loses its value. This not only creates environmental problems, but spiritual ones as well: “What was once abnormal has become the usual, standard condition of things. Even so, the human being is ill at ease in this strange new environment, and the tension demanded of him weighs heavily on his life and being” (Ellul, 1964, p. 321). Technique has become our environment and god, yet fails to fully replace either of these, and thus humanity remains unsatisfied. Technique is not sufficient for us, and nothing is sufficient for it.

The technical relationship to land was questioned when Aldo Leopold (1966) proposed a novel treatment of the land to combat “a system of conservation based solely on economic self-interest” (p. 251). He suggested a “land ethic” which “enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land” (p. 239). The land ethic does not place the land above humanity, but simply expands the community of both, making the fields of the neighbor as valuable as the

neighbor himself. While Leopold’s solution remains visionary, it is a vision crippled by its inability to reach fruition. As Leopold writes, “we shall never achieve complete harmony with land, any more than we shall achieve absolute justice or liberty for people. In these higher aspirations the important thing is not to achieve, but to strive” (p. 210). The technological society is what shackles Leopold’s vision. Yet Ellul saw a way to escape technique: Christ.

Christ changes what was wrought in Eden, and in so doing changes the Christian’s approach to the world. Simply put, Christ frees humanity, and “freedom in Christ means living in the real world and not a utopian world” or a world “fixed” by technological means (Ellul, 1976, p. 368). The Christian can acknowledge the extent to which solution is impossible: yet the Christian is the only one who can even begin to approach a solution. Christ has given us a gift so vast we can never repay it and can do nothing to deserve it: our salvation is an outpouring of his grace. This vitality of this grace allows us to “reciprocate by abandoning attachment to worldly things, that is, by directing [our] lives back toward God” and finally create the sort of community Leopold envisaged (Hyde, 2007, p. 69). This freedom, found only in Christ, allows the Christian to evade the demands of technology and live rightly on the land. While our work will remain incomplete until Christ’s return, we can begin to move forward, with “no legacy to fall back on; everything must be initiated” (Ellul, 1971, p. 300).

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Economy & Ecclesia

Ellul on Capitalism, Church, & Individual

by Jake Rollison

Jake Rollison (*Class of 2010, Wheaton College*) is working toward a degree in Economics.

The reader of Jacques Ellul needs only a basic familiarity with his works to recognize that his combination of indiscriminate criticism of social phenomena and applied theology leads him to some practical conclusions which are somewhat unorthodox, at least, and quite radical, at most. This paper attempts to synthesize critiques of modern capitalist political economy (and the Christian church's relation to it) from Ellul's works and then to distill practical implications of Ellul's ideas for the life of the individual Christian. In doing so, we find that a serious consideration of Ellul leads the Christian to similarly unorthodox or radical practical conclusions.

Consideration of the modern political economy in Ellulian terms makes an already 'dismal science' even more dismal. The conditions of a society mired in technique leave little to no room for individual freedom, a situation so constricting that the human becomes a mere cog in a self-determining, totalitarian machine (Ellul, 1964, p.162; Ellul, 1984, p.11.). Ellul describes economics as absorbing all social activities to the extent that "Man is capital, and he must become perfectly adapted to this role" (Ellul, 1964, p.224, p.158, p. 239). The modern economy is abstract and impersonal, and money and political power are in fact powers themselves apart from any instrumental use (Ellul, 1979, p.2.; North, 1994 p.363). An emphasis on abstracted models and quantifiable data necessarily precludes "consideration of those dimensions of life unsuitable for quantification and measurement" (Clark, 1998, p.310-311; Ellul, 1984, p.13). The Ellulian view stands in direct opposition to the foundational premises of neo-liberal economics, which view money as instrumentally neutral and see individual freedom as supreme, immutable, and unaltered by material conditions.

The modern economy is more than impersonal—it is *antipersonal*. The progression of the technological society and its economy create a milieu in which humanity is changed and adapted to detrimental conditions. The consideration of humanity in scientific, quantifiable terms shapes them in the form of the *homo economicus*—the abstracted, quantified humanoid of their models (Ellul, 1964, p.219). Moral reasoning is replaced with economic assumptions and spiritual life is replaced by economic life

(Ellul, 1964, p.286; Ellul, 1968, p.2; Ellul, 1993, p.155). Thus human nature is in danger of spiritual retardation by the economic milieu in which it finds itself and the individual is devalued in light of the greater needs of an efficiency-oriented society (Ellul, 1967, p.5; Frank, 2006, ch.17). In fact, Ellul entirely rejects the efficacy of economic systems to create better static conditions for humanity at all (Ellul, 1984, p.15, 17; Ellul, 1991, p.14).

It would seem from this study that there is no hope for humanity—that we are caught in a web of techniques which end up controlling themselves and us. Personal agency is rendered ineffective, freedom is ruled out, and we are left to either aid the machine or to be removed from it. The reader who fails to incorporate Ellul's theology is largely stuck here in quite a depressing and desperate state. An examination of Ellul's theology, however, finds hope for humanity in one source— the work of Jesus Christ.

(Note: Because economics was not a separate subject before 1500 (and even then, it was only studied under the larger umbrella of 'political economy') (Landreth & Colander, 2002, p.15), we will consider earlier church-economy relations first in terms of centralized authority and then in terms of the problem of money.)

While the church is the bearer of this one hope, it has (in Ellul's perspective) often failed to fulfill its unique role. What is its proper role? Ellul interprets the Bible as consistently critical of all mechanisms of political authority, pointing out that God's 'mouthpiece' (the prophets) always spoke in opposition of the king and the state (Ellul, 1991, p.51-52). Christ continues and amplifies this tradition (Ellul, p.71). The church, then, should be an entity entirely separate from the state with no power, authority, or hierarchy (Ellul, p.62, Ellul, 1948, p.9). For Ellul, the church cannot build the kingdom of God through political action—despite its acting to the contrary for nearly 2,000 years (Ellul, 1968, p.4). Historically, it has tended either to isolate itself from secular politico-economic systems or be absorbed into them without distinction.

The church behaved in the proper (Ellulian) manner for roughly the first 300 years of its existence (Ellul, 1991, p.91-95), until the conversion of the emperor Constantine (Ellul, p.28). This resulted in the clericalization of the church (adoption of a power structure) and a

mentality of a ‘christianized’ state. Whether in terms of medieval Christendom or contemporary ‘Christian patriotism,’ these changes have persisted in some form until the present day (Ellul, p.28; Moltmann, 1968, p.58). In relation to structures of power, then, the church has conformed instead of maintaining its unique situation.

In terms of the problem of money, the church has done a similarly poor job. The writings of Thomas Aquinas on just price theory and natural law represent a step away from the previously dominant Aristotelian view of money (in which profit-making was unnatural and dishonorable) and a break with Christ’s radical warnings against serving Mammon (Aristotle, in *Source Readings* (1954), p.6). While not explicitly condoning profits (material gain above what was required for subsistence), Aquinas had a softer view towards them and implied that a positive instrumental use of profits legitimizes them, making arguments from practicality and efficiency (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part II, Question 77, Art. 2). Writers during the Protestant Reformation continued the trend of moving away from ecclesial rejection of power structures and money and toward a view of them as inherently neutral and only valued instrumentally. Protestantism provided the common ethical beliefs which value theory and early classical economics were built. (Kauder, 1953, p.138-139; Witte, 2009; Hill, 2009; Pierotti, accessed 11/22/09). Thus, rather than rejecting money’s power, the church effectively legitimized private property and changed social norms in favor of profit (through Thomistic natural law and the Protestant work-ethic). From here, academics such as Adam Smith built capitalism on the church’s foundations.

Today, the church maintains a wide spectrum of beliefs about money and the state, ranging from newer (if revised) forms of Christendom to the ‘prosperity-gospel’ and everywhere in between. The vast majority of these are insufficient to Ellul.

In our ongoing attempt to strike the proper balance between complete withdrawal from the world and total assimilation, is there an Ellulian answer? Yes, but not an easy one. The freedom given to Christians through Christ’s work causes serious difficulties in attempting to pin down practical admonitions (Ellul, 1976, p. 300, 309; Barth, 1960, p. 85). Freedom through Christ represents the only possible liberation from the necessity and determinism of the modern economic apparatus, and is the only force which can counter the economy’s totalitarian nature. It is this Christian freedom which simultaneously protects Christians from corruption by the means of the world and rejects distillation into an easy, universal ethic. It is only there, in the tension between freedom and necessity that the Christian church can fulfill its unique role.

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A True Solidarity: Christian Community in the Thought of Jacques Ellul

by Ben Robertson

Ben Robertson (*Class of 2011, Wheaton College*) is working toward his degree in Media Studies.

One of Ellul's most compelling arguments is his analysis of the social alienation experienced by the individual within the technological society. In reading Ellul, I wanted to uncover his thought regarding a possible Christian response to this alienation. Clifford Christians' article "Ellul on Solution" (1981), in which Dr. Christians discusses the frustrating nature of Ellul's "heavy individualism," was a great starting point and gave me a filter for reading Ellul on community. The three-pronged approach Dr. Christians identifies within Ellul's writing—awareness, transformation, and the concrete action based on these two—is most clear when it is understood in the context of Ellul's Christianity as a response to alienation, and we will approach his thought in this order (p. 154).

Awareness

As Ellul (1967b) says, "The first duty of a Christian intellectual today is the duty of awareness" (p. 98). Thus, we begin with an exploration of the sociological conditions of our technological society as described by Ellul. Ellul's concept of the individualist *and* mass society is integral to understanding the shift away from traditional sociological organization (1965 p. 90). For Ellul, alienation arises out of the sociological reorganization along technical values which accompanies the individualist trend in 19th century Europe (p. 93). The rising value given to the individual eclipses the value of any group affiliation (p. 20). Thus, when "the small groups that are an organic fact of the entire society"—such as the family, village, or parish—are broken up, the individual does not become a free, self-made man, but is made defenseless against propaganda and social currents, resulting in "direct integration into mass society" (pp. 90-92). Western, technological society is a society of alienated individuals organized in an unstructured mass.

Ellul reveals the spiritual significance of the sociology of the mass in his *Meaning of the City* (1970). Here, Ellul describes the mass as a constant force and source of alienation; a "sheet of glass" between every individual that is invisible but completely isolating (p. 125). For Ellul, the mass society is a dangerous spiritual reality. Freedom comes only in the awareness brought by the presence of Jesus (p. 129). The Christian convert has a radically new framework for approaching the mass, the city, and technological society, granting him true awareness of his circumstances and the freedom change

them. His spiritual freedom enables him to work as an acid, decomposing the bonds and structure of alienation within technological society (p. 133).

Transformation

What kind of sociological transformation does this spiritual freedom entail? Ellul treats this question in several books under different terms. In *The Technological Society* (1964), he discusses "real community," which is necessarily anti-technical because of its particularism (pp. 207-208). He develops this idea further in *Propaganda* (1965), with the depiction of "local, organic groups," which are able to resist psychological technique (propaganda) and to be well off materially, spiritually, and emotionally (p. 91). Furthermore, in *The Political Illusion* (1967a), Ellul advocates for the creation of "positions in which we reject and struggle with the state," which take the form of "social, political, intellectual, or artistic bodies, associations, interest groups, or economic or Christian groups totally independent of the state, yet capable of opposing it, able to reject its pressures as well as its controls, and even its gifts" (p. 221). These associations must be intellectually, materially, and morally independent of the state in order to be truly confrontational and anti-technical, and their existence as such re-introduces value systems that are not technical in nature (p. 222). Nevertheless, what is it that allows the real community present within local, organic, independent groups to be *truly* independent and anti-technical?

The answer for Ellul is, of course, that they must be Christian. In *The Presence of the Kingdom* (1967b), we find a similar discussion regarding the role of the church in the technological society. For Ellul, Christians ought to create a new style of life that "permits them to escape from the stifling pressure of our present form of civilization" (p. 46). Most importantly, this endeavor is "a work that is both collective and individual," and "necessarily a corporate act" (pp. 122-3). In fact, an essential condition for this new style of life is "the substitution of a true solidarity among Christians (a solidarity—voluntarily created by obedience to the will of God) for the sociological solidarity, purely mechanical in character, which is being dinned into our ears, and which people want to make the basis of the new world" (p. 124).

Concrete Action

Undoubtedly, there is overlap between Ellul's ideas of real community, organic groups, independent

associations, and true solidarity among Christians. Furthermore, there is an inherent opposition in his writing between the sociological forms of our society and the responsibilities of Christians. We would misunderstand Ellul, however, if we took him to be advocating a return to an idyllic past. Ellul's ideas regarding dialectic and the ecological effects of technique prevent him from valuing any historical situation over any other; there is no dialectical progress, and regression is impossible. There is only change. Thus, Ellul is hesitant to advocate any concrete plan of action.

This is often what people find most frustrating about Ellul, yet he is simply attempting to avoid creating a group of his own followers, leaving the reader with great responsibility. It is difficult to find any concrete solution in Ellul's writing, but this is only because Ellul knows that problems must be addressed at the level of the real man (1967b p. 82). What then is the significance of community in all this? Ellul (1976) answers in his typically overstated fashion: "the particularity of the individual makes no sense and has no value unless it finds expression in a community" (p. 296). Accordingly, we are to understand that Christ calls his followers out of technological

alienation into communion with the Church, as a body that may prophetically point to the ever-imminent Kingdom of God.

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Student Reflections on Ellul

Living the Dialectical Tension

by Graham Smith, Ashleigh Lamb, & Juliana Wilhoit

Following are responses from three students in the Wheaton College Jacques Ellul seminar discussing what each gleaned from the course's format and content. We have chosen to adopt as the title for this entire piece the phrase Juliana Wilhoit used for her reflection because each student's contribution demonstrates a unique response to Ellul's challenge towards forming a lived ethic in any number of academic or vocational fields. Graham Smith is an Economics major, Class of 2012. Ashleigh Lam is a Biblical and Theological Studies major, Class of 2010. Juliana Wilhoit is a Political Science and Interdisciplinary Studies, Class of 2011.

Graham Smith

The course on Ellul challenged my interpretations and theories of the world by opening it up to paradox and tension, particularly as I encountered Ellul's critique of both the growth of scientific consciousness and the doctrine of progress in a world of improving technology. Ellul's method of analyzing the milieus that humans actually inhabit, instead of stripped down, abstract or theoretical ones, challenged my Enlightenment assumptions. I became convinced that Ellul is the necessary foil to the confidence in universal

conceptualizations and abstractions of the human being and human societies.

Ellul's method is a dialectical one, which gets us beyond reductionistic accounts of what it means to be human. Based on the lived reality he observes, his thought contains two poles that cannot be considered autonomously or neatly reconciled. Ellul's dialectic translated to the 21st century revolves around the aporia of the "One" and the "Many" and the seemingly endless permutations of this aporia: authority vs. libertinism, power vs. freedom, transcendence vs. immanence, multiculturalism vs. cultural conformity. Dialectic permits Ellul to address the full range of human meanings and purposes. He offers a more robust understanding that extends beyond the purely rational, quantified, and abstract being.

I was further challenged by Ellul's critique of nominal Christianity, which in his view has conformed to the ethos of the world. Ellul's Christianity is a totalizing and substantive calling, not a cheap substitute like that described in Money and Power: "To try to respond [to the poor] by joining a party, by accepting a program, by working at an institution, is to refuse responsibility, to escape into the crowds when confronted with God's question" (159). Yet Ellul also says that Christians should

be involved: it is Christians alone who “can contend against the powers that are at the root of the problem...It is the heart of the problem that must be attacked. And Christians alone can do that—because the others know nothing of this” (Violence 164).

Studying Jacques Ellul for a semester deeply influenced my thoughts about the world around me. Throughout the course readings, it became increasingly clear that Ellul is relevant for today. I think that Ellul can be used as the basis for a renewed discourse on power, technology, money, corporate-led globalization, neoliberalism, western civilization, and human nature with as much ethico-political urgency and aplomb as other contemporary voices emerging on these topics. As Ellul’s thought questions the genetics of the “globalizing village” and critiques the West’s conceptions of “progress” and “development,” he challenges technological assumptions about the purpose of human life and calls us to work towards a different reality indeed.

Ashleigh Lamb

Sometimes the things in life that you do grudgingly, out of obligation, end up being some of the most rewarding. Thus it was with me and the class I took last semester on Jacques Ellul. Prior to taking this class, I had no knowledge of Jacques Ellul or any of his writings or ideas. I was simply taking the class to meet a graduation requirement and was less than enthusiastic about it after I saw how much reading the class would involve.

I am a Biblical and Theological Studies major, with a concentration in Biblical Studies. Thus, I have spent more time studying the text of the Bible and its cultural context and history than I have studying theologians and their thoughts. I have become especially interested in studying issues of sexuality, gender, and marriage in the Bible and how they relate to modern Christian living. I did not expect those interests to be addressed in a class about ethics, technology, and politics. However, I found myself pleasantly surprised.

Throughout my reading of the works of Jacques Ellul and our class discussions, I was constantly struck by how applicable his works were to issues that I have developed an interest in, especially his ideas on technique and dehumanization. Though I did not at all expect to make connections between ideas learned in this class and my interest in sexuality, I found so many connections that I ended up writing my final paper for the class on how technique and propaganda influence modern adolescent romantic relationships.

Not only was reading the works of Ellul beneficial to my understanding of sexuality and romance, but I have constantly found links to Ellul in other classes, readings, and topics I have studied since. I find myself constantly thinking in a dialectical fashion and being rather skeptical of technology. I have also been greatly impacted by Ellul’s ideas on the meaning and method of Christian living. His dialectical and tension-filled ideas on the Christian life may be difficult to live out, but I feel they are also more realistic and true to the gospel than other methods I have encountered.

So though I may have learned about Jacques Ellul out of obligation, his work and thought have positively shaped the way I think and will continue to do so.

Juliana Wilhoit

Dr. Toly encouraged me to enroll in the Ellul class because it would “help me answer some of the questions I was asking.” These questions revolved around how to live in the world, and how to be a social critic without becoming cynical. Even with this encouragement, I doubted that anyone could help me figure out how to live, let alone a dead French man. The class looked interesting and was taught by an all-star cast, so I signed up for it anyway. Little did I know that not only would Ellul answer my questions but he also took my life, turned it upside down, shook it, and then set me off on a new trajectory.

Reading the *Technological Society* and *Technological System* paralyzed me; I found Ellul’s critiques shockingly relevant and accurate. I was faced with the fact that I live in a society that is continuing down a path of destruction through its use of technology and technique. Instead of answering my questions, these works compounded them: “How can I live in a way that does not continue the totalizing nature of technique? Is it even possible for me to do anything?” While Ellul raised these questions, he also provided an answer through his use of dialectics and his clear articulation of the need to live within the tensions inherent to our lives. His dialectic called me to action, but to action injected with humor and a refusal to take myself too seriously, because, as Ellul stresses, I cannot do anything; only the Christian God enables true revolt from technique (*Meaning of the City*, ch. 5).

Ellul also impacted my understanding of how to be an academic. As a political science and interdisciplinary studies major, I am interested in issues of geography and place that transcend many disciplines. I have found few academics who are as interdisciplinary as Ellul, who weaves history, philosophy, sociology, and theology together. Reading dozens of articles and books by Ellul over the semester allowed me to interact with him broadly, letting me see the consistency of his framework between works. Works like the *Technological Society* may not be explicitly Christian and works like the *Presence of the Kingdom* may not be sociological, but his framework remains consistent throughout. Ellul encouraged me to continue to do interdisciplinary work and showed me an appropriate framework of doing it.

Jacques Ellul’s impact on me has been permanent. I can no longer view the world in my black and white framework. Rather, I recognize the “both/and” quality and nature of the world in which I live. While this tension is difficult, it is also liberating because no choice is inherently worse than another. I am no longer crippled by the world, but invigorated by the possibilities. Ellul has been an intellectual mentor as well, carefully showing me how to construct a comprehensive and interdisciplinary social critique. I will always be grateful for my semester with Ellul and the professors who walked me through his

work. Thank you, Jacques Ellul, for showing me what it means to live and be a scholar.

Advancing the Dialectic

T.A.-ing Ellul

by Kirsten Laurel Guidero

Kirsten Laurel Guidero (*MA, Historical & Systematic Theology, Wheaton College, 2010*) served as the teaching assistant in the interdisciplinary Ellul course at Wheaton College.

Sex. Guns. Prayer. Water privatization. Urban gardening. Nuclear power. Godzilla. The ethics of stop signs. Turtles, buffalo, geysers, clocks, and Disney dollars.

During Wheaton College's fall 2009 course on the thought of Jacques Ellul, all these and more became subjects in a discussion that progressively unfolded a bit further each Tuesday and Thursday. Sometimes talk grew heated and intense, sometimes it remained quieter, and sometimes participants were so overwhelmed with the magnitude of what was being encountered that the faces around the table depicted bewilderment, plain and simple. But the seminar was always provocative, and its effects remain considerable, as evidenced by the ongoing conversations generated by students, the buzz on campus over Ellulian themes, and in faculty discussions of what comes next.

TAing for the course was one of the highlights of my academic year. Having read a bit of Marva Dawn, a theologian who retrieves and builds off Ellulian themes in considering biblical criticism and spirituality, I was somewhat familiar with Ellul's thought and intrigued by what I had seen. When I heard the preceding summer that the course would be offered and would be team-taught in an interdisciplinary manner, I jumped at the chance to be involved. Having allotted most of my time at Wheaton to more specialized theology courses but having greatly enjoyed a previous interdisciplinary course on theology and hermeneutics, I was eager to re-enter a multi-faceted learning environment. Furthermore, I had spent much of my undergraduate years examining the thought of great philosophers and writers in a seminar setting, each student investigating the texts from a particular perspective and with an eye toward his or her specific research questions—courses handled in much the same manner as the Ellul seminar was to be run. So the course was right up my methodological alley, and I twisted Dr. Jeff Greenman's arm to be allowed to assist. I might even have begged, for I was keen to witness, support, and partake of the kinds of conversations I enjoy so much.

As we together uncovered layers of Ellulian thought, the value I place on such conversations only expanded. For in Ellul, we encountered a consistent emphasis on the importance of conversing on and living out the complexities of daily existence. Such an emphasis clearly motivates Ellul's critiques of technology and propaganda, his sketches of 20th-century Christianity, and his ethics. The critiques of technique I had already encountered within writers such as Wendell Berry and Kathleen Dean Moore, and the confrontation of limp Christianity I had seen in the writers from whom Ellul drew, particularly Kierkegaard and Barth. But it was my exposure to Ellul's ethics that added some missing pieces for my own theological and philosophical pursuits. I was utterly refreshed as well as challenged by coming across an ethics that focuses on *not being an ethical system*—a stance with which many practitioners of varied faith traditions remain uncomfortable, and a stance that often rubs against the grain of much reflection within my own Christian tradition. Ellul uncovers the long-armed reach of the 'system' from the arena of politics to the sanctuary of the church to the fields of agriculture to the circles of communication and family, and in this act of exposure also lies the act of overcoming such systems. In short, Ellul's ethic is one that champions a return to living day by day based on the full recognition of human weakness, including the insufficiency of all human constructs—one sees clearly the Christian Reformed roots from which Ellul draws. Yet this is not an ethic of self-flagellation or human degradation; rather, it points with joy to the consummation of humanity in the person of the Christ—one sees here Ellul's post-WWII understanding that even in the midst of chaos and destruction, hope may return.

Reading Ellul then reinvigorated my own research into Christology and into the Christian doctrine of deification, a doctrine that emphasizes the capacity of humanity to access divine life through Christ while remaining fully human. I saw deep connections between my research into deification and the kind of ethical life Ellul envisions—a life that challenges systems of means that isolate people from the end of truth and goodness, whether those systems be political, social, economic, or religious. And one of the primary ways to challenge the systems of our technological age is to engage in the kinds

of conversations we embarked upon around that long seminar table, each student bringing a set of concerns and questions that enlivened the rest of the group. From environmental justice to the question of water access in South America, from the complexities of prayer to the formation of community, from modern practices of sexuality to the ideal of anarchy, the discussions ranged widely, doubled back, and informed each other. I left the class with more to chew on than I had expected as well as more clarity on the direction and importance of my own work, which will hopefully continue at the doctoral level next fall.

But life as a TA does not just consist of the joys of good discussions, although those moments are certainly some of the key elements that motivate such work. Working as part of the Ellul seminar team meant that I also juggled more mundane tasks such as attendance-taking, reflection-grading, and paper-consulting. The fact that the course was taught by a trio of professors rendered some of those responsibilities more complex: we had to figure out

together along the way what the grading standards should be and how that translated into each project. Three very different teaching styles also kept the class on its toes as we moved back and forth between the professors' areas of expertise and discussion-leading. Finally, learning how to help students move forward in their widely varied areas of interest was also a challenging exercise for me as I consulted with many on their paper topics, offered research resources, and helped organize their thoughts. In each of these sectors, we had the opportunity to practice what Ellul preaches by focusing on the particular needs at hand and by engaging in careful dialogue to find the best solution. The challenges of the course, both content-wise and in terms of structure and mechanics, represented the opportunity for me to learn more about the craft of teaching and to further form myself as an academic within a community that continues to surprise many with its meaningful contributions towards engaging the issues of the day.

The Jacques Ellul Special Collection at Wheaton College

by David Malone

David Malone is Director of the Wheaton College Archives & Special Collections

The Jacques Ellul Papers, housed in the Wheaton College Archives & Special Collections, are based upon a three-reel microfilm set donated by Dr. Joyce Main Hanks, an alumna of Wheaton's graduate school. Through the facilitation of Wheaton faculty, Hanks began transferring materials to the Special Collections in 1986. Dr. Hanks created the microfilm from Ellul's papers as she created "Jacques Ellul: A Comprehensive Bibliography," published in *Research on Philosophy and Technology*, supplement 1, 1984, prepared with the assistance of Rolf Asal. The comprehensive bibliography was followed by an update in 1991 with "Jacques Ellul: A Comprehensive Bibliographic Update," in *Research in Philosophy and Technology*, vol. 11.

Upon receipt of the sixteen-millimeter microfilm, the staff of the Special Collections began to create a hard-copy print of each frame in the film. The prints from the microfilm, numbering over 6,000, comprise the bulk of the collection and measure over 7½ linear feet. These prints are of Ellul's writings, dissertations, books, and articles on

his writings and reviews of his books with dates ranging from 1936 to 1983, while the secondary material ranges in date from 1939-1984. The microfilm prints are followed by holographic and xerographic Ellul manuscripts totaling eight (8) inches. These are manuscripts for his books, lectures and addresses, and notes. Following the manuscripts are articles and reviews by Ellul, both xerographic and microfilm prints. The microfilm contains many of the hard-to-find Ellul essays, speeches and lectures. Within the collection, his writings are arranged chronologically. The prints follow the order found in the comprehensive bibliography and can serve well as a print finding aid. An online finding aid can be found at: <http://archon.wheaton.edu/index.php?p=collections/controlcard&id=13>

In addition to the manuscript material, the collection also contains secondary material (works on Ellul, critical reviews, correspondence concerning Ellul, and serials on Ellul studies).

In the time that the papers have been at Wheaton College, the collection has served the research needs of several doctoral students from around the globe as they pursued their studies. One of the earliest individuals to make significant use of the collection was Andrew

Goddard's Oxford dissertation, eventually published as *Living the Word, Resisting the World* by Paternoster (2002). More recent dissertations have come from Lawrence Terlizese's "Hope in the thought of Jacques Ellul" (2003) and Kunihide Matsutani's "Social philosophy of Jacques Ellul" (2005). Whereas earlier students traveled to Wheaton's campus, these latter students were able to utilize copies of the original microfilm via Interlibrary Loan and engage Ellul's papers at a distance. Two copies of the microfilm are available for short loans and consideration is being given to digitizing elements of the papers for access via Wheaton's online archival database.

Even though the vast majority of the collection is available at a distance by film, the physical collection at Wheaton presents the fullest and most complete collection of Ellul materials available for scholars and students. The fullness and breadth come in many forms. In addition to the traditional manuscript materials mentioned earlier, the collection seeks to obtain any and all published material with a direct tie to Ellul (rather than the many dissertations that may use Ellul as an interpretive model for an area of study). The collection included print materials (books, monographs and dissertations); however work still needs to be done to draw in the vast journal literature that exists. The collection also houses hundreds of audio materials ranging from interviews with Ellul by Hanks to his Bible

studies. The nearly two hundred studies were duplicated in 2002 with the assistance of David Gill from the personal collection of Franck Brugerolle, a friend of Ellul's. These may serve as a trove of material for future researchers, but await transcription and translation.

The goal of the Wheaton College Archives & Special Collections is to create the most extensive collection on Jacques Ellul possible. It is our desire to pull together Ellul's writings in their original form, as well as published editions and their translations into English and other languages. Along with this core we seek to surround the collection with associated resources and collections that can help inform the Ellul Papers.

If the reader would like to pursue access to the collection or to add to its resources he or she is encouraged to contact the Wheaton College Archives & Special Collections at the address below.

Wheaton College
501 College Ave., Wheaton IL 60187-5593
Tel: 630.752.5707 Fax: 630.752.5987
E-mail: special.collections@wheaton.edu
Web site: <http://library.wheaton.edu>

Book Review

Death & Life in America: Biblical Healing and Biomedicine by Raymond Downing

Scottsdale PA: Herald Press, 2008. 159 pp.

Reviewed by David W. Gill

Professor of Business Ethics, St. Mary's College
President, International Jacques Ellul Society

Raymond Downing and his wife, Dr. Janice Armstrong, both work for the Department of Family Medicine, Moi University School of Medicine, Eldoret, Kenya. Since finishing medical school at the University of Tennessee in 1978, Downing has practiced medicine among the Appalachian poor, on a Navajo Indian Reservation, and in Sudan, Tanzania, and Kenya.

Trained in Western scientific biomedicine --- but with a long clinical experience delivering healing and care outside of the West --- and with a deep immersion in biblical thinking about these topics --- Downing has written a truly outstanding, challenging, thought-provoking work. Western biomedicine is very powerful and Downing says "we need language that enables us to think and write about power." Biblical language provides great tools and perspectives.

Downing's book sets up a dialogue between modern biomedicine and biblical healing.

Downing draws a lot on the insights of Jacques Ellul and two others who were profoundly influenced by Ellul: Ivan Illich and William Stringfellow. He was able to access some of Ellul's difficult to find writings on medicine and health care. Illich's *Medical Nemesis* (1976) and Stringfellow's *A Second Birthday* (1970) --- and each of their long personal struggles with serious disease and health issues --- also play large in Downing's book.

Downing sees 1980 as a true "watershed" year when modern biomedicine yielded, or began yielding to, four trends. First is the dominance of the market, especially after a 1982 FTC decision prohibited the AMA from restricting advertising. Medicine and medical care has since been commodified and hustled for profits and lost its traditional professional ethos. Second, Downing describes how "medicalized prevention" has increased rapidly after 1980. By this he refers to statistical studies of risk factors, increased testing, and precautionary treatments which, while well-intended, disembody the patient.

The third change is the dominance of "systems thinking" --- biotechnology and medicine become a system of which we are a part, instead of thinking of medical "tools" which are used by physicians as appropriate. We become "tools of our tools." And fourth is the rise of

bioethics as a discipline under the simultaneous influence of western moral philosophy and a reductionist view of life as mere biological existence.

With biomedicine outlined in its historical context, Downing then turns to a reading of the healing stories of the Bible . . . from the frequent association of healing with the demonic and exorcism, to Jesus' admonition to "tell no one" after he healed them, to the raising of Lazarus, to the meaning of spitting on the ground to create some healing mud, to repairing Malchus's severed ear, to the wounded Beast that is healed in Revelation, to the relationship of forgiveness and sin to healing, to Jesus' own death and resurrection. It is flat out exciting, challenging, and illuminating to read and reflect on Dr. Downing's understanding of these amazing texts . . . all the time alongside the work and thinking of modern biomedicine.

In the end, we are not told to abandon all of western scientific biomedicine but rather to dethrone it and restore it to a more humble and appropriate role within a larger frame of reference that is shaped by the revelation and insight of Jesus and Scripture.

Buy this book not just for yourself but for all the health care practitioners and professionals you know. It is without doubt one of the top ten books I've read over the past couple years.

Book Notes

✍️Wipf & Stock Publishers, based in Eugene, Oregon, continues to delight and impress Ellul readers by their single-minded effort to publish or re-publish the works of Jacques Ellul. Wipf & Stock has already brought us Patrick Chastenet's wonderful interviews with Ellul, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity* (2005), Marva Dawn's collection and translation of eight Ellul articles, *Sources and Trajectories* (2003), Lawrence Terlizzese's dissertation, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (2005) and Ellul's *Money and Power* (2009). Next up will be new editions of Ellul's *Hope in Time of Abandonment* and *Living Faith*. Wipf & Stock is also pursuing a couple exciting Ellul translations, books that have only been available in French up to now.

✍️In 2008, a collection of Ellul's articles on Israel was published in French, *Israel: Chance de civilization* (Editions premiere partie, 2008; www.premierepartie.com; 411 pages). Volunteers to review or translate it? Write to the publisher for a review copy.

✍️Dr. Roelf Haan of the Netherlands published *Teologia y economia en la era de la globalizacion: Un aporte al dialogo con la teologia latinoamericana* (Buenos Aires: La Aurora/Instituto Universitario ISEDET, 2007; 426 pp.). This work draws heavily on Jacques Ellul and cites Matthew Pattillo's article on Ellul & Rene Girard in the Spring 2005 *Ellul Forum*. Reviewers and translators step up: we need to have a careful look at this impressive study.

International Jacques Ellul Society

www.ellul.org

P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705, USA

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.

Membership

Anyone who supports the objectives of the IJES is invited to join the society for an annual dues payment of US\$20.00. Membership includes a subscription to the Ellul Forum.

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Resources for Ellul Studies

www.ellul.org & www.jacques-ellul.org

The IJES web site at www.ellul.org contains (1) news about IJES 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.

The Ellul Forum CD: 1988-2002

The first thirty issues of *The Ellul Forum*, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for US \$15 (postage included). Send payment with your order to "IJES," P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

Back issues #31 - #44 of *The Ellul Forum* are available for \$5 each (postage and shipping included).

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 personalistes" (15 euros)
Volume 2: "La Technique" (15 euros)
Volume 3: "L'Economie" (21 euros).
Volume 4: "La Propagande" (21 euros).
Volume 5: "La Politique" (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. This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. Visit www.elsevier.com for ordering information.

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

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

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

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

Librairie Mollat---new books in French

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

Alibris---used books in English

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

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are www.chapitre.com and www.livre-rare-book.com.

Ellul on DVD/Video

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

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 system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.