

The **Ellul** Forum

Number 65 Spring 2020



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The **Ellul** Forum

About

Jacques Ellul (1912–94) was a French thinker and writer in many fields: communication, ethics, law and political science, sociology, technology, and biblical and theological studies, among others. The aim of the *Ellul Forum* is to promote awareness and understanding of Ellul's life and work and to encourage a community of dialogue on these subjects. The *Forum* publishes content by and about Jacques Ellul and about themes relevant to his work, from historical, contemporary, or creative perspectives. Content is published in English and French.

Subscriptions

The *Forum* is published twice a year. Annual subscriptions are \$40 USD for individuals/households and \$80 USD for institutions. Individual subscriptions include membership in the International Jacques Ellul Society, and individual subscribers receive regular communications from the Society, discounts on IJES conference fees, and other benefits. To subscribe, please visit www.ellul.org.

Submissions

The *Forum* encourages submissions from scholars, students, and general readers. Submissions must demonstrate a degree of familiarity with Ellul's thought and must engage with it in a critical way. Submissions may be sent to ellulforum@gmail.com.

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Call for Papers

The spring 2021 issue of the *Ellul Forum* will be a theme issue on Christian responses to modern technology, guest edited by Richard Stivers and J.M. van der Laan.

In his prophetic work *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, Jacques Ellul argues that the church needs to rethink its position on technology in terms of abandonment / hope. He asserts that we live in a time, not unprecedented, in which God has abandoned us and we him. We are left to our own devices, notably technology. Christian hope must fill the void of God's abandonment of the church and the world.

We are calling for papers on a Christian response to modern technology in terms of abandonment / hope. What does it mean to relate to technology and use it as an act of hope? You may choose to write about a specific technology or set of technologies, or about technology in general. The papers should be less academic and more existential. We need to clarify our starting position, rather than work out a detailed ethic, Ellul states. We will assume that readers will have at least a general knowledge of Ellul's ideas about technology.

Submissions may be in essay or short story form. They should be in English and between 3,000 and 4,000 words. Submissions are due by October 31, 2020. Please send your submission to ellulforum@gmail.com.

How I Discovered Hope

Jacques Ellul

Reading the eighth chapter of Paul's Letter to the Romans was a watershed in my life. In fact, it was such a totally decisive experience that it became one of the steps in my conversion. And for the first time in my life, a biblical text really became God's Word to me.

I had often read the Bible. I had found it to be of great religious and intellectual interest. I had discovered admirable poetic texts. I'd found historical knowledge—and subjects worthy of reflection. I'd even found—in the Gospels, for example—some elements to nourish my young faith. But until that decisive, watershed experience, I'd never been *seized* by a written text. Never before had a text so suddenly transformed itself into Absolute Truth, truth beyond debate, truth like a blinding light.

I can't even describe what happened then. Nor do I think it could possibly be explained psychologically. But this eighth chapter of Romans, which I'd already read many times, suddenly became many things for me. It became the answer to so many of the questions I'd been asking. It became the place where I simultaneously encountered the Absolute and Eternity. It became a living, contemporary Word, which I could no longer question, which was beyond all discussion. And that Word then became the point of departure for all my reflections in the faith.

I'd like to underline three essential themes of Romans 8: freedom, the sufferings of the present time, and the salvation of the world.

First, let's look at freedom. The law of the Spirit of life in Jesus Christ, Paul writes, "freed me from the law of sin and death" (v. 2). Life and freedom, freedom and salvation, that's what Paul is writing about in this chapter. The salvation he speaks of is not merely that of the soul but that of the whole of

life. The liberation he speaks of is not merely that of the spirit. It's a salvation, a liberation that puts me on *the path of freedom*.

Modern psychology is more and more demonstrating that all of human life is dominated by the feeling of death, conditioned by it. Death represents bondage, obligation, fatality. Death is the final, inescapable reality of human life. And death is tied to sin, in that sin (this isn't merely a matter of morality!) is a break with God. Since God is the Living One, a break with God inevitably leads to death. All of us have broken with God. We are all therefore given over to fate, to necessity. We are conditioned, whether biologically, culturally, socially, economically, or by political dictatorship.

And here's where the work of God in Jesus Christ comes in: because of what God has done, we're no longer inevitably subject to that law. A freedom is possible, which will express itself in all of our bondages. To live according to the Spirit is to move at all times in the direction of human liberation. Now certainly it's a mistake to confuse political liberation with the liberation that is in Christ. But the liberation that Christ gives to those who believe *must* also express itself in the struggle for the material, economic, and political liberation of the rest of humanity. That isn't the most important thing, but it is the way faith expresses itself.

What's most important is to transmit this faith that liberates. What's most important is to transmit this Spirit that permits us to become detached from things of the flesh. People who are materially or physically liberated always end up re-creating the constraints, obligations, and dictations that formerly bound them. So it's necessary that all people know and practice the liberation of the Spirit—and then diligently seek the full liberation to which the Spirit drives us.

One further point: it's wrong to imagine that liberation in Christ is a permanent state or condition. We constantly lose it. It must constantly be given to us anew. And so I have often found myself needing to re-learn what it is to be free in Christ.

But let me go on. For the salvation Paul is speaking of, the text reminds us (in strong fashion), can't be just a personal affair. Although "*my* salvation" has preoccupied Christians for years, that's a terribly egotistical way

of looking at things. Salvation is far more than an individual matter. And if you read Romans 8:18–24, you will see that Paul throws us into solidarity with the whole of creation. The creation’s sufferings, he tells us, arise out of human sin—out of my sin. The world and I are connected!

This was an answer to the many questions I’d had about the injustice of the world. This was the text that led me to become politically and socially involved. Suddenly I saw that my personal solution was connected with things larger than myself. It was connected to the whole of creation. The creation had been “subjected to vanity”—or futility—because of human sin. Like us, the creation is destined to death, destined to have no further meaning. And if all is connected, I came to see then, I can’t be saved alone. If I’ve been saved in faith, then that concerns the whole of creation. I can’t be liberated or emancipated by myself!

Now in these same verses (Romans 8:18–24), Paul also connects the themes freedom and hope. The world, he says in verse 21, *will* be set free from its bondage to corruption. In this desolate, meaningless world, where evil and injustice always win, it always seems that one life cannot exist except by the death of others. The best of human intentions always seem to be turned around and made into evil. The world consists of darkness. No light remains. But at the heart of this dark world, Paul tells us, hope is nevertheless to be found. There’s nothing *but* hope, but there *is* hope. It is there for all—in every life, in each birth, in each act of charity, in each dawn, in each light (even that of the sun!). In all of these, we see signs of hope. And this hope is not merely human. It comes from the One who allows this suffering creation to continue to exist, and permits it to *wait*.

The creation—and humanity—don’t know exactly what they’re waiting for. Still, they wait—with the certainty that “All this *will* change.” And the voice of God answers, “Yes, they have good reason to wait.” What they’re waiting for, Paul says, is for “God’s children to be revealed” (v. 19). Let’s be careful here. It’s important to understand what this *doesn’t* mean. It does *not* mean a judgement where certain of God’s children will be damned while others are declared to be God’s children. No, what’s told us in verse 22 is that *all of creation* is involved. The revelation that the creation is waiting for is that *all* are God’s children. Now that’s something that can heal

the sickness of creation. All of creation—humans, animals, things—*all* are promised salvation, reconciliation, new birth, new creation.

Finally, I want to share what grasped me in a radical way. When I read Romans 8:32–39, I saw with blinding certainty that “If God is for us, who can be against us?” How is it possible for anything (even myself—my doubting spirit, my attitude of rejection) to separate me from God?

God’s gift of the Son is *proof* that God loves us. Paul tells us that there is nothing in God but this love. Except for such a love, God wouldn’t have had to deliver himself, in the person of the Son, to death. This love I speak of is nothing less than the love of *God*, the *Almighty*, the *Eternal*, the *Universal*. From this point on, God is not going to allow anything to exist outside of that love. Outside of God, only ‘Nothing’ (nothingness!) remains. And since God *is* Love, then *all* is in God’s love. And since that love is the love of the *Almighty*, what could ever be mighty enough to detach us from it? I go through all the miseries of the world carried by this hope. And this hope gives me power, because I know that both those who know of it and those who don’t are walking together to meet their Lord and their Saviour.

Today, as I reread this text, I realize that Romans 8, indirectly, without my knowing it, has inspired all the research I’ve done over the last fifty years. One day, many years ago, it gave me an indestructible certainty. And I see now that these words of Paul—and the certainty they gave me—were the kernels of ideas brought to fruition only later in my life. Truly, Romans 8 has been God’s Word to me.

This essay was first published in The Other Side, March 1980, pp. 28–31. As this magazine is no longer in print, we were unable to seek permission for this reprinting.

The Dialogue of Sign and Presence

Introduction

Jacob Marques Rollison

Few things in life are as exciting as finding what you are seeking. Sometimes, when a search has gone on for a long time, we lose hope, finding it hard to believe that the search could ever come to an end. But how joyful the moment when hope is united with its object! The joy is even more pronounced when finding is discovering, when the union with what we barely knew enough to seek combines with the novelty of discovering something or someone we had never encountered. But still more delicate and more precious (if also less verifiable) is the conviction that what you are seeking has been seeking you all along.

The article that you are reading is a testament to such a seeking, hoping, finding, and discovering on many levels. One might call this multifaceted process “research,” if the term did not smack so much of stale academia. But if academic research can be seen simply as a rigorous apparatus for more living and personal seeking, then the shoe might be a fit. And when research searches us too, this back-and-forth movement might be better described as a dialogue.

The following is a brief introduction to “The Dialogue of Sign and Presence (Notes for a Christianity Learned by Heart)” a never-before-published article by Jacques Ellul. It happens to be one of his earliest (and perhaps one of his most difficult) articles and touches the very heart of his enormous corpus of writings.

Finding the Article

Like many of Ellul’s unpublished writings, the article is in the Ellul family archives near Bordeaux, France, which is currently under construction by

Jérôme Ellul with the help of Jean-Philippe Qadri and members of the Ellul family. It was found among the many boxes of papers that have remained largely untouched from the time of Ellul's death in 1994 until quite recently. As such, the story of its finding is relatively unremarkable. But for me, learning of the existence of this article was a crucial moment in a long search.

I have been avidly reading Ellul's works since I first encountered them at Wheaton College in Illinois in 2009. In Ellul's works, I find what I suspect many of his readers find: an interpellation, a call, and an interrogation; a challenge to try to understand the world; an erudite and humble guide; but moreover, sometimes, the voice of a prophet. As Ellul reminds us, in biblical parlance a prophet is only such if they are somehow tied up with the speaking of God. Ellul wrote for readers of all faiths and none, but in his theological writings Ellul wrote about the God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ. For Ellul, God is not an idea but the Living one, the one who sought him out and confronted him as a teenager, who gave him a task to accomplish, and who accompanied him through all his undertakings, risks, achievements, and losses. Ellul invites believing readers into his own intimate dialogue with God, then encourages them to look for what God might be saying in their own lives.

Having spent much time in dialogue with Ellul's writings, I became convinced that *presence* (and a closely related term, *signification*) were crucial terms to Ellul's ethics and overall thought, terms that have not received the attention they are due. One of the guiding questions of my doctoral research at the University of Aberdeen was therefore, "What does Ellul mean by presence?" Very few of his contemporaries understood his use of the term in *Presence in the Modern World* (among other places), tending to reduce it to political engagement; this elicited Ellul's spirited critique in *False Presence in the Modern World*. But questions of presence and signification pop up throughout his biblical studies, his theological ethics, and even in his non-theological works as well.

Andrew Goddard's wide-ranging work on Ellul encouraged my thinking, noting that in *Les combats de la liberté*, Ellul "trac[es] the origins of *Presence* [in the *Modern World*] to a 1936 article."¹ Yet when I looked through all of

Ellul's published and unpublished material from the 1930s that I could find, nothing seemed to match up with this description. Goddard's note thus confirmed my hunch that presence was important to getting what Ellul was really after in his ethics, but I also knew that there was more to the story than was currently available.

In the fall of 2016 I came to Strasbourg, France, for an extended research trip. While in France I spent a week in Bordeaux, during which I was privileged to discuss my work both with leading Ellul scholars such as Patrick Chastenet, Daniel Cérézuelle, and Jean-Philippe Qadri, and with members of the Ellul family. Jérôme Ellul graciously invited me to spend time with him in the archives that he is constructing. Among several decisive thesis-shaping moments that took place in the archives, Jérôme, knowing that my research focused on presence, casually handed me this article. Upon reading the title alone, I was stunned; I knew I was holding exactly what I had been looking for.

Once back in Aberdeen, I transcribed the article. Jérôme and Jean-Philippe graciously corrected my transcription. I then translated it into English, a translation that I have revisited and revised for the present publication.

The Article's Context

"The Dialogue of Sign and Presence" is remarkable for several reasons. First, the article was most likely written in 1936, as indicated by Ellul's remark cited above, and by Jérôme Ellul and Jean-Philippe Qadri's estimation based on its place in the archives and the paper it was written on. This means that it is among the very first of the roughly 1,100 articles that Ellul (who would have turned 24 years old that year) wrote, positioning it at the very beginning of his writing career.

Second, the article crucially represents what might be the clearest and most important glimpse of the crucial role that Ellul's wife, Yvette, played in his work. Patrick Chastenet goes to great lengths to discuss Yvette with Jacques in interviews conducted at the end of his life. In beautiful and intimate descriptions, Ellul highlights how Yvette brought him out of his books and taught him to relate to others, to *live*, to disdain power, to love the forest, and much more. He notes, too, that she read and commented

on his writings, often with astounding insight.² He dedicates several of his books to her, and his chapter on “Lifelong Love” in *What I Believe* stems from his marriage with her.³ But her presence is rarely apparent in the content of the books themselves. Yvette is, however, very visibly and unavoidably present in this article. The original article is written by Jacques in pen, then commented on by Yvette in pencil; Jacques even sometimes responds to Yvette’s comments again in pen. If this article was indeed written in 1936—that is, the year before the two married—Ellul’s closing line (“oh mon amie chrétienne!”) appears in a different light. The content of the article bears witness to Yvette’s influence on Ellul, to the lived dialogue between them that contextualizes and nourishes the dialogue in the article.

The Article’s Content

This article is full of beauty and poetry, but it does not always come easy. I would rank it among the least accessible of Ellul’s works; but the effort required to grasp it is well spent. Without giving a complete analysis, I will suggest how this article might be read, as well as several ways in which I find this article foundational to Ellul’s thought as a whole.⁴

From the outset, this article is about dialogue. Structured as a discussion between two characters, this ostensibly unfinished article *is* a multi-layered dialogue: the dialogue between Jacques and Yvette comments on a dialogue between two unidentified speakers who discuss a back-and-forth dialogue between sign and presence. We start out *in medias res*, without any introduction; the dialogue finishes with the two speakers seeming to agree, humbly emphasizing the limited unity of sign and presence, body and spirit, before a resolving by fading into Yvette’s poetic commentary and Ellul’s joyful exclamation. Starting this way leaves the reader trying to figure out what is going on from the beginning, but things become somewhat clearer in ¶12–14 before the conclusion.

The chief concern of the article is *ethical*. The subtitle locates the rest as a sketch of “Notes for a Christianity Learned by Heart,” and it opens discussing ethical rules and spiritual values. As the dialogue progresses, it becomes clear that the most important consideration is how to understand the presence of God and what God’s presence means for understanding

relations between time and space, body and spirit, and sign and presence. How to think about *God's* presence is thus crucial for thinking about the *Christian's* presence in the world.

Theologically, to consider the presence of God is inextricably linked to the question of eucharistic communion, the bread and wine sacramentally consumed by the church. Denominations are split over the specifics of *how* it is that Christ is present in this act: that is, whether the elements of bread and wine are transformed, “transubstantiated” into the actual body and blood of Jesus, or whether the elements are “merely” symbolic of Christ’s body and blood, or whether Christ is somehow mysteriously present in a way that neither of these two quite capture. Ellul almost never addresses the Eucharist in his works, which further highlights this article’s unique posture. The biblical citations opening the article signal the Eucharist as linked to the issues under examination, but Ellul does not explicitly delineate his dogmatic position. How, then, are we to understand divine presence?

One of the most important lines in this article comes in ¶12:

God, bound by no law and by no historical cohesion, could effectuate the rescue of lost man without a tangible sign of this sanctification. In other words, He could efface original sin without sending the Christ. He could have just had a prophet announce that Christ *had already* come and that the redemption of those who wanted to put their faith in Christ *had already* happened. It would be enough to justify Christ’s presence through dialectical reason, saying that man, having been lost by the fault of a man, had been redeemed by the blood of a man. [...] And yet, He sent Christ.

In a Kierkegaardian theological move, Ellul situates the saving work of Jesus Christ in his incarnation, death, and resurrection within a framework of the freedom of the trinitarian God.⁵ Because God does not *have* to send Christ, for Ellul, Jesus Christ’s bodily incarnation is a communicative sign *freely* given to humanity. Were humanity living in sinless communion with God, they might not need this sign to instigate faith, but the incarnation is a sign given to help a sinful humanity “who need to break bread together to know what communion is.” However, the incarnation is not just a signpost pointing back to something else; the whole point of the dialogical unity of *sign* and *presence* is that God is present in God’s signs. Jesus Christ is God’s

giving of himself to humanity. As all through the Old Testament wisdom literature, as throughout John's Gospel, God's word invites us to *taste* and to *see*, to bind God's commands on our *fingers*, write them on the tablet of our *heart*, to *cover* our naked bodies in the Gospel like clothing and armour. Ellul has not given us a dogmatic look at the Eucharist but a poetic affirmation that God is fully (and even bodily) present with us. Knowing God is a fully embodied adventure; the speaker who affirms the carnal presence of Christ cannot reduce this presence to intellectual dogma.

I suggest that thinking God's presence in this way implies a three-part dialogue, seen most clearly in ¶14. First, a *body-spirit* dialogue: bodily presence is indissociable from spiritual presence. Second and third, in the last two lines of ¶14 we see that this dialogue implies both a *time-space* dialogue, and a *sign-presence* dialogue: bodily presence is a *sign* of spiritual presence. I suggest that true presence for Ellul involves all three parts of this dialogue. No one of these pairs can do without the other, but their relation is not static, either; it is a dialogue. If this is too complicated, we might suggest the following citation as the closest to a concise definition of "presence" as Ellul gets: "Presence is above all a testimony of the person. [...] It is the complete engagement of the being in this gift that one person is to another. It is the complete engagement of God in this gift of God."

Taking this understanding of presence seriously should significantly affect how we read Ellul's works. The most obvious impact comes in interpreting his theological-ethical works. This conception of presence is a structural theme running throughout *Presence in the Modern World*. *To Will & To Do* is an extended meditation on the trouble that presence causes for dogmatics and ethics. *Hope in Time of Abandonment* diagnoses the failure of signification and presence as a driver of theological ethics under postmodern conditions. *The Humiliation of the Word* calls for re-starting the blocked dialogue of sign and presence. However, this even shifts the weight of our understanding of Ellul's sociological works on technique: I suggest that *technique* can be understood as *anti-presence*. Ultimately, we might hear Ellul as principally a thinker of presence, rather than of technique.

Finally, this should also cause us to reconsider standard approaches to Ellul's corpus. Most of Ellul's interpreters rightly invoke "dialectic" as an in-

terpretive tool for understanding how his whole work fits together. But what is dialectic? Is it, as in Socrates' usage, a dialogue? Or is it more of a logic of evolving forces in tension, as for Hegel? Both usages are certainly present in Ellul's work and among his interpreters. But I suggest that however helpful it might be in understanding Ellul's work, the second interpretation on its own is insufficient. This article purposely undermines "dialectical reasoning" as sufficient in itself for considering God's presence and our ethical presence to one another. Dialectic *as logic* excludes the presence of the other; only dialectic as *embodied dialogue* can ultimately allow for true communion.⁶

Concluding Remarks

As Ellul has remarked, the beauty of dialectic as dialogue is that it never ends. I have by no means exhausted this article's potential; I have only presented some of what seem to me to be the main points, picking the low-hanging fruit. Hopefully you too will join in the conversation; if so, we will all be better off. And who knows? You too might find what you are looking for.

Special thanks to Jérôme Ellul and the Ellul family for allowing this article's publication, to Jérôme and Jean-Philippe Qadri for their help with transcribing the article, and to Lexington Books for allowing me to publish my interpretive summary here.

Notes

1. Andrew Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2002), 53.
2. Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity: Conversations with Patrick Troude-Chastenet*, trans. Joan Mendès France (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005). See especially 1, 58–59, 80–81, 93–98.
3. For the dedications, see *To Will & To Do* and *Reason for Being*. Ellul, *What I Believe*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 66ff. Importantly, the theme of the importance of "dialogue" in marriage returns at 77–78.

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4. For my full analysis, see Jacob Marques Rollison, *A New Reading of Jacques Ellul: Presence and Communication in the Postmodern World* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020), which should be available soon.
5. Ellul's description pays clear homage to Kierkegaard's understanding of God as the "Unconditioned" one. Cf. Frédéric Rognon, *Jacques Ellul: Une pensée en dialogue* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2013), 171.
6. For more on these questions, see Brian Brock, "Prayer and the Teaching of Christian Ethics: Socratic Dialogue with God?" *Studies in Christian Ethics* 33.1 (2020): 40–54.

The Dialogue of Sign and Presence

Text

Jacques Ellul and Yvette Ellul

Matt. 26:26: And while they were eating, Jesus took bread and having given thanks, broke it, and gave it to them saying: Take, eat, this is my body . . .

Luke 24:30: And as they were at the table with him, he took bread and gave thanks, then having broken it, he gave it to them. In this way their eyes were opened and they recognized him.

¶1 Let us be wary of the Spirit and spiritual values. We are not spirits, and we must recognize our powerlessness. With a stew in front of me, I don't feel spiritual at all. Why? I believe I am only more aware of myself. Will I say I am disgusted? To what good?! Shouldn't I shave? well? I have no desire to break my attachment to my flesh, for what could I do without it? Move toward the development of the spirit?—if it is to the detriment of my flesh, I refuse. I am body and soul. I will remain body and soul. A presence is not an absence for me. A presence demands the body and the soul.

“I am perfectly spiritual, what does dogma matter to me? I live the rule.” But if it is thus, what good is living? If I live the rule, it is because I am the rule. If I am the rule, I have no possibility of diversity. Yet diversity is my nature. . . . But I could respond that since I am the rule, I have a common measure with God. So be it. I am persuaded that I have a common measure with God, but if it is thus, I no longer understand either sign or presence.

¶2 Let's pursue this—“I am the rule”—so then, it is I who create the common measure with God; it is I who, as the rule, have the common measure; it is I who measure myself against God. Nevertheless, can I not have my

Translator's Note:

Words shown in *italics* were written by Yvette between the lines of Jacques's manuscript. I have tried to place them where they appear in relation to Jacques's words. Words shown in ***bold italics*** are Jacques's responses to Yvette. Words shown with solid underline were underlined by Jacques. Words shown with double solid underline were underlined by Yvette. Bracketed numbers in the text indicate page breaks in the original document. Pilcrows (¶) are editorial insertions; these mark apparent transitions between speakers or clear indentations in the original manuscript.

salvation on my own? Certainly not; but this salvation is only possible because I am the rule. Without this, I wouldn't be able to benefit from the salvation offered to me. But then, if this salvation is offered to me, how can it be that it comes from God, since I, who am perfectly spiritual, reject dogma?

¶3 I did not say that I rejected dogma at all. I said that at a certain level of spiritual elevation, dogma is no longer necessary, and consequently, that I can directly know and live the rule. We have passed rather quickly over this in your haste—so be it, but if you know the rule directly, you must be able to live it. For either you esteem that your action (because it is yours, and because your spiritual development is sufficient) is the rule itself—or you yourself posit the rule as known, yet exterior to yourself, but able to be known by you, and you must conform yourself to it. In the first case, you posture yourself as God, because the knowledge of the rule does not depend on God but on you—and it is after having acted that you can consider your action as rule. And in this case, you are no longer open to the [2] presence of God. If indeed you suppose, you feel that you are predestined to salvation, you can thus suppose this without sin, I believe; but you cannot without sin say that your action suffices for salvation—(which is another way of saying that it is the rule); now you have conceded that your salvation comes from God. If you listen to God you can no longer speak of a rule, and your action is thus justified because it is, but then you can no longer make salvation depend on it, which has no meaning. *exactly* If, on the contrary, you situate the rule as exterior to yourself but directly known by you, a further step is necessary to act out this rule. For we agree on the fact that one must apply this rule and not confine oneself to knowing it (knowledge supposes action, for that matter), but in this case you suppose that you are capable of applying it, and how will you apply it if not in and by your flesh? You therefore esteem your flesh capable of acting on the rule by itself, alone—thus sanctified before salvation—but in doing so you presume your salvation, not in positing yourself as predestined, but in positing yourself as blameless—and you commit a sin.

¶4 But nevertheless, I can hold two perfectly coherent positions; on the one hand the flesh can be purified by the spirit, and spiritualized, without necessarily implying a duality of nature. On the other hand, I can know

the rule without being able to apply it, without supposing that I can live it. There are two successive states here: one of knowledge, which via purification of the flesh moves towards the second, which is a state of life. And the passage from the one to the other happens through my will, under the influence of the direct and spiritual knowledge of the rule. at all / by necessity identical

¶5 Let us accept this, even though I don't clearly see this duality (for there is duality in the first state, since the flesh is an obstacle to the realization of the rule) which is transformed into unicity. I do not understand this process. It matters little. But I cannot understand that I could be capable of directly knowing the rule while I am still in a state of sin and incapable of realizing it. I do not see (since I am disabled, and you recognize that I can be incapable at this moment of living and being this rule) how I could know it if not through revelation. But if I know it in this way, it inevitably conforms to dogma. And, by the way, I don't understand at all by what means you can know the accuracy of the rule if you do not relate it to dogma. For if you are perfect, of course I want you to have the certitude of the rule, but we have seen that this is impossible. And you have conceded that you were not perfect at all to begin with, [3] so I don't see what certitude you can have of this rule that you cannot apply and for which you have no criteria. Nevertheless, let us allow that your certitude would be sufficient to conform your life to your rule, and that you would thus be able to purify your flesh. You tell me that you spiritualize it, that you can bring the flesh and the spirit to unicity. And thus you are perfectly spiritual. Henceforth, your attitude is certainly justified. On the one hand, you can know the rule directly and with certitude, on the other hand you can live it—and the two become one. By the same token, you can henceforth neglect dogma, since there is dogma only because there is incertitude. And opposite dogma, it seems you can neglect worthless matter and the flesh. Fine. You perfectly embody the saying that it is by the fruit that we can know the tree. You bear good fruits since you are spiritual, pure, and in this you are sanctified. But what worries me is this unicity. There is no duality of nature. I don't know. In any case, as I was saying at the beginning, I am certain that if I stop eating for a month, I will die of hunger. Will I say that this doesn't matter? I believe that even spiritually, this is extremely important.

¶6 Yet I can defeat matter by the spirit.

¶7 You can defeat matter on the condition of satisfying its needs. And if you reduce it to that, you seriously risk the backlash of the defeated. If you seek only to defeat and to limit its needs, they will be all the stronger since they will be more limited, and you would expend even more spiritual energy to defeat them—so much so that all you have taken away from matter, as a result, you will have taken away from the spirit. But don't take the opposing view and tell me that all that you would have ceded to matter you would have won by the spirit. But let's pursue this; admitting that you would have attained this unicity, do you believe yourself to be nearer to perfection? Doubtless, perfection is not unicity, but it is essentially diversity in unicity. And it is in this that it escapes us. Unicity can always be grasped, no matter how absolute it may be—all the elements of this unicity are gathered within limits. A number, no matter how high, will never exceed our understanding; on the contrary, absolute diversity in absolute unicity inevitably escapes us, and it is in this diversity that divine perfection resides. Now, you deny the first element of diversity that you have at your disposal.

¶8 Nevertheless, Christ spiritualized the flesh, and if he dwelt in a body of flesh, he never ceded to the temptations of the flesh, no?

¶9 [4] I believe that there is some confusion here. Christ surely did not spiritualize the flesh, since he did not disrupt the Sabbath by picking heads of wheat at the edge of a field and rubbing them in his hands, eating the grains of wheat. But if he did not sin at all, this is not because he had spiritualized the flesh, it is that sin is not of the nature of the flesh, any more than it is of the nature of the spirit. It is of the nature of man. And if we always speak of temptations of the flesh, it is that they are more visible, and crude, but with original sin removed, neither flesh nor spirit inevitably contain sin. *Good Lord* By the fact that he could not sin spiritually, Christ considered the body as what it really is: the temple of God—but I do not in the least see a spiritualization of the flesh here, but only a unity, a communion of the flesh and the Spirit *coexistence* *Good* in their profound diversity.

¶10 Would I make matter perfectly obedient to the spirit, and perfectly embodying the rule that the spirit is unknown? [sic] But this is impossible, because this would suppose,

first of all, that I cannot sin in spirit; yet, I can sin in spirit, I can

not true. I cannot not realize it (the whole being)

know the rule and not apply it because the flesh is opposed to it, and that thus

unless you consciously and voluntarily and grotesquely take the opposing view

the spirit tends to change the rule because matter is powerless. And it is

but why eternally separate spirit and matter and

now that dogma must come into play. It is a perfect expression of

why always this opposition. Since sin is not

realism. Dogma finds its foundation in the existence of matter. It is

of the flesh and is not of the spirit but it is of man.

its measure and respects it. That which tries to escape dogma denies the reality of man by the same token, because it denies the possibility of man's sin. Dogma is the judgement on man, at the same time as the condition of his salvation, because if man is not the rule he cannot even conceive of an offer of salvation. He cannot conceive of it except by dogma, but if he is the rule, we have seen that he becomes incapable of salvation because he is committing a definitive sin *No.* and straying from perfection by the fact that he is the rule. Dogma is thus necessary to me because I am not and I know that I cannot be perfectly spiritual.

¶11 But I see a terrible danger here: if you deny that we could directly know the rule, do you not at the same time deny the possibility of a calling? If indeed you say that calling returns inevitably in dogma, it is too easy to respond that the one who receives the calling can perfectly ignore dogma—and that calling, incidentally, has no need of a sign. By the very fact that it is absolutely personal to an individual, [5] it has no need of a sign; it is an affair between God and the one who receives the calling. And here again, I see nothing but a spiritual action without the diversity you have spoken of. By giving a calling to a man, God expects precisely this act of the man's faith in his calling. Now if the act of faith is based on a sign, on a manifestation, it is no longer an act of faith. What God wants is precisely the leap into the unknown, the brusque separation of what was before with what he proposes—and what He proposes is precisely this calling which is

Translator's note: for this section, I have broken the lines as they are broken in the manuscript, to keep Yvette's remarks where they appear relative to Jacques's text.

known only spiritually, *are you sure?* and which must be accepted as such. The only true rescue of man by God is a purely spiritual rescue; God's only true action in man is purely spiritual action; man cannot boast about living *about living, period* at once according to the flesh and according to the spirit. And by the way, there is considerable danger in telling me that the sign is necessary and that dogma is a necessary expression of God—an expression that is valid for all. For dogma existing by matter and for matter, as you have precisely stated, only supposes a relation between matter and dogma. And thus you are led to admit that since dogma can only judge matter, it is matter that it must judge. Thus, man must be judged by spiritual action. And just as you accused me of performing a solely spiritual action, I accuse you of moralizing the Spirit. If you accept dogma as a sign of the Spirit, you are thereby constrained to construct a morality as a function of dogma. Yet who could claim that morality is the very expression of the Spirit? All Christ's teaching goes against this. In short, as soon as you accept the sign as a spiritual necessity, you enter a labyrinth that you can't get out of except by subordinating the Spirit to the matter; the slippery slope is unavoidable.

¶12 While listening to you, I was thinking that we should have distinguished two things. On the one hand, the relation of God to man, and on the other hand, man's action in relation to God. And it is by fault of not having distinguished them that your argument seems convincing. When I think of the relation of God to man, I say that the sign is necessary—and thus you say that I deny calling, which is based on the acceptance of an order by faith. But we must stop ourselves here. I will not allow you to [6] make the leap from calling to morality without acknowledging it, and—having told me that I deny the calling—make it into an obligation for me to accept a morality. Once again, you speak without accounting for the sinful state of man. You are taking the notion of calling in a pure state, as if man were not a sinner. Indeed, for a man without sin, it would be a paradox to speak of a calling on the one hand, of the sign on the other. God would no longer be a hidden God for him, because he would be able to see him face to face. And furthermore, even if it were not so in this regard, the man without sin would receive the order of God exactly by virtue of what he is, because he would live totally by faith; and of course, he would not need a sign, because his faith would be a sign to him and (which is also important) a means of differentiation, both sufficient. But

for we who are in a state of sin, which you don't think to bring up again, God is a God who is hidden, on the one hand, and this is partly our fault because we don't want to fully enjoy the benefits of God's goodness. And on the other hand, our faith is never sufficient to accept something as the order of God, if it goes against our nature and our will; we are always of little faith, because we are also incapable by our very nature of contenting ourselves with our faith to differentiate spiritual values (such is the sense of "be as little children") (cf. this study). And God knows this well and has never refused the sign to the one who asked it of Him. It is by virtue of our status as sinners that the sign is necessary. And I will come back to this in a little while. But for the moment, I would first like you to recall the innumerable times where Christ, after having accused those who asked him for a sign of a lack *of* faith, nevertheless gave them this sign. In general, the miracles are nothing other than this. But they always require an element of faith from those who ask for the sign. When Christ refuses the sign, it is always when a temptation is proposed to him (cf. the study of those who have tempted God). In short, the sign becomes confirmation, but never a point of departure.

But this still seems insufficient to me; we cannot make use of this or that situation except by our interpretation of it [7], which is necessarily personal, and can be falsified when it is separated from ourselves. You have said something that seems very important to me: the rescue must be purely spiritual. But if you accept that the rescue of a man must be purely spiritual, i.e., that it has no need of confirmation by any sign, in any case you must admit (and I would not be far from admitting it like you, but in another sense) that the rescue of all men, that is their redemption—and thus their sanctification—could also be effected in a purely spiritual fashion. God, bound by no law and by no historical cohesion, could effectuate the rescue of lost man without a tangible sign of this sanctification. In other words, He could efface original sin without sending the Christ. He could have just had a prophet announce that Christ had already come and that the redemption of those who wanted to put their faith in Christ had already happened. It would be enough to justify Christ's presence through dialectical reason, saying that man, having been lost by the fault of a man, had been redeemed by the blood of a man. And the whole theory (almost heretical, if you ask me) of Jesus as an expiatory victim ("victim" here is not heretical, but

immolated by your transgressions, and not for your transgressions, as we say) is developed on this basis. But if this would satisfy us and would seem like a completion, a circle that cannot be broken, we must consider that God was in no way bound to this dialectical progression. He could have enacted the salvation of men without sending Christ. And yet, He sent Christ. And we know that it would not be the same for us if we knew ourselves to be saved by the virtue of a disincarnate God, having given us no other sign than this affirmation, instead of knowing ourselves saved by virtue of the incarnate Christ, the living sign of our sanctification. Christ was not thus a necessity for the salvation of man since God could effect this salvation without incarnating himself, but it was a necessity for the sign of salvation. *Yes* Now this sign was necessary, precisely because if the sign had not taken place, the certitude of our salvation would not have entailed the change signified in us. Once again, we are sinners. If for a non-sinful man, the certainty of his salvation [8] can act directly and with no other condition, for us, we necessarily need a sign of this certainty so that this certitude becomes a living reality. A sign that our salvation is not inefficacious and that it is bought by God himself, that it is not a caprice on the part of God. Such is the value of the sign of Christ for the certainty of our salvation. The sending of Christ is thus the quintessential example of the necessity of the sign of spiritual action. I thus cannot see how you were accusing me of not recognizing the calling? But having now addressed the first element, I can consider the second element, which is separate: you accuse me of forming a morality as a function of dogma, a sign thus recognized as necessary, *for all but not for each one* and of no longer judging by the spirit except according to this morality, and thus reducing the spirit to a rule. Fine; but to explain this, I will have to call on another notion: that of presence. You agree that if there is a power escaping all codification, it is that of presence. Presence is extremely complex, but in any case, it cannot be translated into defined rules. Models can no longer be applied wherever there is a true presence. And this does not mean that morality excludes presence, but that where there is presence, there cannot be a known morality but only a formulated morality. *Yes* Now, what does dogma signify if not the affirmation of a presence? So here we are before this simple dilemma, in which dogma affirms a presence superior to itself, and it can no longer give rise to an ordinary morality. Or, dogma does not affirm this presence, in which case we can construct a code based on dogma. But precisely, Christian dogma al-

ways comes down to this idea of the constant presence of Christ. A spiritual presence on the one hand, but also—I will go as far as to say a carnal—in any case, a temporal presence. For let us not forget that though Christ is seated at the right hand of God, he nevertheless lived in the Roman year 754, in a village in Judea; and that he crossed the Jordan on wide, flat boats driven by ferrymen with long mustaches and robes with big purple stripes; and that therefore, having asserted his presence in time, he continues to be in time. Dogma is only meaningful to the extent that for each man, Christ is temporally near to him. But if this is the case, this dogma can no longer give rise to a morality, because the presence of Christ gives each man the ability to take up this dogma for himself, and since there is thus the presence of the sign, there cannot be any codification of the spirit.

¶13 [9] But I still don't quite understand this temporal presence. If I can accept that a spiritual presence cannot be reduced to a formula (which is what I am bending over backwards to show to you), must I accept by analogy that a carnal presence is of the same nature? And this relates, incidentally, to your first element: I do believe that the sign of God has a value—for man's salvation. But I hold that this sign is in the spiritual presence of Christ. In other words, the sign of salvation is the gift of God—and nothing else. Posed in these terms, I agree; but if you speak of the spiritual presence of Christ, do you believe that this presence cannot be apprehended directly, unmediated by dogma—and therefore, that we can hardly speak of presence, for it is rather a communion; but that we must instead exclude the notion of dogma, since two are incompatible? I do not think that a discussion of this quasi-carnal presence would be possible, because an entire world separates it from the other presence; and to me, it seems vain to look for its importance.

¶14 Once again you deform what I have observed; you deform everything spiritual. You absolutely insist on maintaining your independence in the material domain, which is why you declare that a world separates material and spiritual presence. Still, this world is traversed by the sign; *Yes* but I would like to remind you that this gift of God took on a human form, that the blood of Christ was not mystical blood but red blood, the blood of a carpenter, who planed boards from city to city until he was thirty years old, who worked his muscles on the plane and jointer plane. I want you to remember that the communion of Christ is not a mystical union but a communion of living and

sinful men, speaking and discussing and denying, who need to break bread together to know what communion is. You tell me that you can appreciate spiritual presence, but that it is vain to look for material presence—an admirable sophism. How can you grasp something that is suddenly felt and lived in a flash, yet at the same time refuse to attribute any importance to what your hands touch and your eyes see? As for me, I believe in the carnal presence (and in this I push my thinking to the limit!) of Christ. As to the importance of this presence, I need no other testimony than the fact of his showing himself to the disciples after his resurrection. Prove the resurrection? Fine. But not a spiritual resurrection, for he [10] knew how susceptible we can be to mysticism. See how he insists on proving to them that he is living flesh and bone. A spirit does not eat, which is why he asks for something to eat. A spirit has no flesh, which is why he makes them touch and feel him. He comes time and again, he walks alongside them. This is the culmination of three *years* of preaching, in which each word is a revolt against the detachment of the spirit from the flesh. He returns, a carnal presence, living and breathing. And this is the full realization of: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I will be there among you.” I will be—me, Christ—that is, God *Incarnate* and not me, the Holy Spirit. I believe in the carnal presence of Christ, because this carnal presence is a necessary presence. Spiritual presence is insufficient, *which is the presence that only our spirit/mind grasps* which is why he did not neglect any sign of this carnal presence. This does not mean that I believe in visions, etc., which are the exasperation of this spiritual quest that Christ does not impose on us. As for me, I cannot dissociate carnal and spiritual presence. Note well the order. Presence in the complete sense of the word involves both elements, because presence is above all a testimony of the person. A witness borne by the person about the person. Consequently, it is the complete engagement of the being in this gift that one person is to another. It is the complete engagement of God in this gift of God. (So much so that human relations end up having the same nature as the relation of man to God. It is not for nothing that we are given the same commandment concerning God and the neighbour.) But this witness can only be such when it is borne by the entire person, body and soul. And the relation of the two presences is obvious for me. I know very well that spiritual presence can do without bodily presence, *Ah, there it is!* insofar as the spirit infinitely exceeds

us and can be constant and permanent. The Spirit participates in the eternal, and not the body; *And the resurrection of the flesh?* A ~~spiritual~~ *real* presence *not {unreadable} in the first state. there must have been presence in the complete sense = spiritual presence real presence and impose itself and there is still presence* can be close to another spirit but it is fragility itself caught between mystique and sin.

We should be able to make out the original fault starting from this one

On the contrary, bodily presence cannot exist by itself. This word signifies nothing,

Hold on, hold on . . .

there is no carnal presence, as such. There cannot be presence—bodily presence—except because there is spiritual presence.

there will be no real presence except if you are spiritual presence, i.e., if your being is alert, ready to grasp real presence—I would almost say incorporate it into itself

Good

It only becomes presence by virtue of spiritual presence. Material presence [11] thus becomes the culmination of spiritual presence. *Néi*¹ But once it is manifested, a reversal takes place, *it is this which appears, but not which is they condition each other mutually* and henceforth carnal presence becomes a condition of spiritual presence. This latter can no longer do without corporeal presence, because we cannot pass from the complete to the ideal, *God—Spirit! Very good* without getting the impression of a decadence and a resignation. The witness would cease to be, for corporeal presence has become the base and support of spiritual presence. This latter gives birth to its own reality. *Yes* It is thus this that a bodily presence *reasoning* is born, but once birthed, this latter becomes necessary to spiritual presence; unity in the order of simultaneous space takes the place of successive unity in the order of time. Dissociation is impossible because henceforth bodily presence is the sign of the other *the* presence.

¶15 And with that, I have finished. What more could I say? The two elements that I had dissociated are united. The sign and presence. Presence is the sign of the gift, and bodily presence is the sign of the spirit. The two are one and the same. Presence and the sign. For the sign is the confirmation of the Spirit, and the sign is the presence of the promise. *the sign is not uniquely corporeal—so?* Spirit and love. Promise and confirmation. All is indissolubly linked,

Translator's

note: for this section, I have broken the lines as they are broken in the manuscript, to keep Yvette's remarks where they appear relative to Jacques's text.

the one leads to the other since there is no more separation here. Every sign asked for and obtained is a confirmation of the spirit already received, for the sign is such only by the spirit that is predisposed. *receives* Likewise, all bodily presence is such only by the spiritual presence that gives it its meaning. But blind, with clumsy hands, what would I make of the Spirit in my flesh, and of the spiritual presence without the body that I hold to?

*Let's not forget that "the body," bodily presence is always linked to spiritual presence; it is presence that you hold to; it is not the body. **Very good** No spiritual presence without bodily presence either, which will be perhaps unreal in the sense of unpalpable, but magnificently real by virtue "of the whole" that it engenders, and which is neither a creation nor an exasperation. A real presence, I tell you, which was not spiritual only because it was not bodily, but which attained my being—and in this it was not uniquely spiritual. For the complete joy of real and total presence was in me and not only in my spirit—and because I could not do otherwise, not even dive into the Apocalypses, I took the Bible and I opened to the page of the resurrection of Christ and I was astonished . . . and I meditated on the resurrection of the flesh, which will be the resurrection of the being. From here, we plunge into the domain of the unreal and our fingers cling to nothingness and sand. Reason rebels and the spirit withdraws. But we must have the courage to live this instability . . . so close. There is no longer anything but God.*

oh my Christian friend!²

Notes

1. Perhaps the word *née* (born)?
2. *amie chrétienne*.

The Dialogue of Sign and Presence

Interpretive Summary of the Argument

Jacob Marques Rollison

Following my reading of the original document, I have assigned paragraph numbers to break where it seems that Ellul is transitioning between speakers. In the original, these are marked only by the beginning of a new line; it is thus perhaps an interpretive move to assign these to different speakers, but a move that I view as concretizing what is evident within the text. I will refer to these two speakers as Speaker A (SA) and Speaker B (SB) for convenience.

¶1. SA suggests that directly knowing and living ethical rules excludes dogma. The ethical problem of posing rules gives humans a common measure with God, but this problematizes both presence and sign (discussed further on), because the life and the rule seem separate—too much spiritual development excludes the body.

¶2. SB challenges this as contradictory, saying that if one creates this ethical rule / common measure¹ with God, it cannot be useful for salvation (which can only be from God); but if one rejects dogma, the rule / measure cannot be from God either. Yet, the human must be the measure of this salvation for it actually to be salvation of the human.

¶3. SA retorts that they did not reject dogma but that a certain level of spiritual development will exclude it, since the ethical rule can be directly lived and known. SA suggests that either their action is the rule, or the rule is posited as known and exterior to themselves. In the first case, they are in the place of God, which problematizes God's presence—the rule justifies, which excludes an external salva-

tion. In the second case, if the rule is exterior to themselves, there is a gap to cross to act out the rule in the flesh—but the flesh is sinful, so we cannot presume our salvation.

¶4. SB says that the apparent contradiction is coherent if taken dialectically, as stages in succession: the spirit purifies and spiritualizes the flesh via one's will. One begins by *knowing* the external rule "spiritually," then *enacting* it in the flesh.

¶5. SA rejects this as insufficient, seeing a problematic duality implied between spirit and body, even in the first "stage," which then moves towards unicity. But this is problematic. First, because in a sinful state how is knowledge of the exterior rule possible without dogma? Second, even allowing that one can achieve this unicity by conforming one's life to an exterior rule, this unicity itself is troubling . . . is the flesh truly spiritualized—i.e., can one stop eating physical food?

¶6. SB says that the spirit can defeat matter.

¶7. SA agrees, but says that this defeats the spirit as well. Besides, even this unicity would not be perfection, because divine perfection is *diversity in unity*, which unicity can never grasp.

¶8. SB suggests that Christ resolves this problem: did Jesus not spiritualize the flesh?

¶9. SA says no, in fact, he did not—sin is a problem of the *human*, not the body or the spirit. Therefore, Christ did not *spiritualize* the flesh but only gave a unity, a communion of flesh and spirit in diversity.

¶10. SB rejects an intended subordination of flesh to spirit, but they do imply an opposition between them in which the spirit tends to modify the rule because of the weakness of the flesh: this is the place for dogma. "Dogma finds its foundation in the existence of matter," measuring and respecting it; dogma is necessary because I cannot be perfectly spiritual. In this section, Yvette notably pushes back on the speaker's separation of spirit and flesh in sin.

¶11. SA suggests that the notion of "calling" problematizes SB's schema. Because calling is an individual and purely spiritual phenomenon, it needs no sign and thus no diversity of matter and spirit. God desires a

pure “leap of faith,” which the giving of a sign would invalidate. God’s “rescue” of humanity is only spiritual. If one says that the sign is necessary and dogma is universal, there is a problem: dogma only measures matter, presupposing only a dogma-matter relation, not a dogma-God relation. So dogma cannot judge the spirit. But if this dogma is taken to be the sign of the spirit’s work, morality must be elaborated in function of dogma—and thus the spirit is moralized! Once the sign is a spiritual necessity, spirit is necessarily subordinated to matter.

¶12. SB gives a long argument: SA’s objection is only convincing because they have failed to distinguish the relation of God to the human from the action of the human in relation to God. For the first of these, the sign is necessary. SA ignores the sinful state of humanity, treating “calling” as if addressed to a sinless human. This human would need no sign, “God would no longer be a hidden God,” and their faith would be sufficient as a sign and for discernment. But because we are sinful, God is hidden; our faith is too little, so God always gives a sign to those who demand it. But it is only a sign *to faith*, a confirmation and not a point of departure.

Since this sign is communicated *to us* and relies on our interpretation of it, it is thus *inseparable from us*. If SA is right and the “rescue” must be purely spiritual, the sign would not be necessary; God could simply have had a prophet announce that salvation *had* been effected, and dialectical reason would suffice for humans to have faith. But God *did* send Christ. Jesus is the *living sign of our sanctification*; *Jesus was not a necessity for the salvation of humanity but for the sign of this salvation*. We need signs so that our certainty becomes a living reality. Christ is the “quintessential example of the necessity of the sign of spiritual action.”

To fully comprehend this, the notion of *presence*, inherently complex, is necessary. Presence *can have no fixed rules*. True presence kills any models; the presence of God thus implies that there can be no (directly, certainly, exteriorly) known moral rule but only a *formulated* or constructed morality. And the *presence* of Jesus Christ is the core of Christian dogma. This presence is not just spiritual, but carnal, or in any case temporal: “since there is thus the presence of the sign, there cannot be any codification of the spirit.”

¶13. SA is confused on temporal presence. Spiritual presence is irreducible to a formula, certainly, but is carnal presence the same? Yes, signs are valuable for human salvation, but they are only such in the presence of Christ—the sign is nothing but a gift of God. But is Christ’s spiritual presence only graspable in dogma? We can hardly speak of it—it’s more of a communion, but this problematizes dogma, no?

¶14. SB objects: SA has again insisted on the division of matter and spirit! The sign overcomes the world. This “gift” takes on a human form! “The communion of Christ is not a mystical union but a communion of living and sinful men, speaking and discussing and denying, and who need to break bread together to know what communion is.” But how can spiritual presence be discussed without carnal presence? *SB affirms their belief in the carnal presence of Christ.* This is insisted upon by Gospel accounts of his eating with disciples, being touched and seen after the resurrection. “This is the completion of 3 years of preaching, of which each word is a revolt against the spirit detached from the flesh.” God *incarnate* is among us in the church, and this carnal presence is a necessary sign. Here we see the most complete attempt at a definition of presence: “Presence involves the two elements, because presence is above all a testimony of the person. A witness borne by the person about the person. Consequently, it is the complete engagement of the being in this gift which one person is to another. It is the complete engagement of God in this gift of God.” Human-to-human relations are filtered through human-God relations. *Witness* demands both the body and soul—the entire person. While the spirit can exceed the body (and here, Yvette pushes back), bodily presence is nothing without spiritual presence. Material presence is only such by the spiritual; but then, a reversal occurs in which carnal presence becomes the condition of spiritual presence. Henceforth they are indissociable.

¶15. It is hard to tell who finishes; it seems SA has come around to SB’s position, accepting that they were wrong to have dissociated matter and spirit. “The two are one and the same. Presence and the sign. [...] All is indissolubly linked.” Yvette ends with a poetic focus on the unity of body and spirit.

Notes

1. The French *règle* can be translated as “ruler,” in the sense of a measuring instrument, as well as “rule,” in the sense of a law, code, or regulation. I believe that both senses are implied in this article.

**The Dialogue
of Sign and
Presence
Interpretive
Summary**

Information as a Problem for Human Freedom: Jacques Ellul's Contribution to Library Science

Lisa Richmond

Freedom of information is a fundamental commitment of the academic library profession.¹ This commitment, while important and necessary, places emphasis on the harm that results from the absence, not the presence, of information, and generally treats information itself as an unambiguous good. According to the French social theorist Jacques Ellul (1912–94), however, information creates important problems for democratic societies and for individual human lives. “The free flow of information” is not the problem, he says. “The fundamental problem regarding information resides elsewhere, within the close relationship between information and propaganda.”²

Propaganda for Ellul is one manifestation of a pervasive, governing feature of contemporary life that he terms *la technique*. Technique is “to seek in everything the absolutely most efficient means.”³ Technique foregrounds means, and the ends recede from view. Technique becomes its own end. Whenever we proceed to do something because we *can* do it—without asking if we should do it, why we should do it, what end it serves, whether that end is good, and how good is to be defined—then technique is at work in us. Ellul’s book *La technique ou l’enjeu du siècle* (1954), translated into English as *The Technological Society* (1964), expounds this argument in detail. A subsequent book, *Propagandes* (1962), translated into English as *Propaganda* (1965), demonstrates how technique manifests itself in the sphere of communication. Since its publication in 1962, scholars have

viewed this book as one of the most important studies of this subject, possibly the most important.

But what more particularly does it mean if propaganda is a method or technique for achieving results, rather than a way of knowledge that seeks to make things understood? In a famous remark, Joseph Goebbels, the chief of the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda in Nazi Germany, observed, “We do not talk to say something, but to obtain a certain effect.”⁴ Some theorists define propaganda as all persuasion-oriented discourse. This definition seems to me to be so all-encompassing as to be unhelpful if not meaningless. In this paper I will use the definition set forth by the scholar Stanley Cunningham. Propaganda, he suggests, is “a vast and complex modern social phenomenon,

rooted in a series of cognitive disorders in which there is an erosion of superior epistemic values (e.g., truth, truthfulness, rationality and sound reasoning, understanding, evidence along with its procedural safeguards, critical review and evaluation) in favour of cultivating lesser epistemic forms (e.g. attention, impressions, belief, images, information bytes or factoids), as well as downright negative states (confusion, ignorance, misunderstanding, error and falsity).⁵

Let us now consider what Ellul calls the close relationship between information and propaganda. His argument can be expressed in four steps.

1. Propaganda Uses (True) Information

Information is a constituent of both propaganda and, what I will call, following Cunningham, higher-epistemic discourse. No less a propagandist than Vladimir Lenin stated that “in propaganda, truth pays off.” The US government during World War II provided this instruction to its agents: “When there is no compelling reason to suppress a fact, tell it. [...] Aside from considerations of military security, the only reason to suppress a piece of news is if it is unbelievable.”⁶ Propaganda and higher-epistemic discourse do not differ according to the presence or absence of information but to how information is used. “We must make a radical distinction,” Ellul says,

between a fact on the one hand and intentions or interpretations on the other; in brief between the material and the moral elements. The

truth that pays off is in the realm of *facts*. The necessary falsehoods, which also pay off, are in the realm of *intentions* and *interpretation*. This is a fundamental rule for propaganda analysis.⁷

Where higher-epistemic discourse uses information in the service of careful reasoning and evaluation, propaganda uses information—even the same piece of information—in lower-epistemic ways. Information is used to create the desired psychological conditions, and then it is discarded. “The facts, the data, the reasoning—all are forgotten, and only the impression remains.”⁸

2. Information Is Necessary to Propaganda

Access to information is therefore a prerequisite of propagandistic effect. Ellul sees the rise of propaganda in its modern form as coincident with the rise of literacy, education, and the mass media. “A man who cannot read will escape most propaganda,” Ellul notes, “as will a man who is not interested in reading”:

People used to think that learning to read evidenced human progress; they still celebrate the decline of illiteracy as a great victory. [...] They think that reading is a road to freedom. All this is debatable, for the important thing is not to be able to read, but to understand what one reads, to reflect on and judge what one reads. Outside of that, reading has no meaning (and even destroys certain automatic qualities of memory and observation).⁹

Educated readers, Ellul notes, are more apt to recognize that the information brought to their attention may not be what is most important (and that “importance” is a highly contingent concept), that it may contradict other information, and that “chance plays a large part in the access one has to [particular] information.”¹⁰ He suggests that the information we receive is rapidly flowing, atomized, and often ambiguous. It does not, on its own, provide explanatory power for human life.

Ellul also notes that the educated person’s information comes mostly second-hand, via publications and the pronouncements of experts. It is not received from those who are personally known and trusted, nor can it be verified directly. Most likely, it concerns matters that only a specialist could verify—and today no intellectual is a specialist beyond a narrow

domain. Thus such a person's "opinion will ultimately be formed solely on the basis of the facts transmitted to him, and not on the basis of his choice and his personal experience."¹¹

Ellul describes the educated class of today as a mass of highly mobile and solitary individuals whose psychic reality is to feel entirely responsible for their own decisions, thrown upon their own resources, in a world that appears more and more complex and even catastrophic, and without the meaning offered in previous eras by family, village, or religious community. (Ellul does not say that traditional sources of meaning were necessarily accurate or good for human freedom, only that they did provide a framework of meaning for the members of those societies.) Although Ellul states that "a high intelligence, a broad culture, a constant exercise of the critical faculties, and full and objective information are still the best weapons against propaganda,"¹² these conditions are exceedingly difficult and rarely achieved. Since information serves mostly to heighten anxiety and enervate will, the primary experience of most so-called well-informed persons is "inferiority and fear."¹³ Propaganda then steps in and offers relief for this intolerable condition.

3. In Turn, Information Renders Propaganda Necessary

"Information actually generates the problems that propaganda exploits and for which it pretends to offer solutions," Ellul says. "In fact, no propaganda can work until the moment when a set of facts has become a *problem*."¹⁴ Ellul speaks of what he calls *integration propaganda*, the soft enfolding of our thoughts, beliefs, and actions into a complete outlook or way of life that is offered to us readymade and comforting. It offers its patients a total explanation and a conviction of personal significance. It operates by means of *myth*, another important concept for Ellul, an "all-encompassing, activating image" that serves to situate and valorize human lives.¹⁵ A human being "needs explanations, broad answers to general problems. He needs coherence, an affirmation of his own worth."¹⁶ All this propaganda provides. Because propaganda responds to such a deep need in the human psyche, Ellul suggests that people "collude" in their propagandization.

4. Propaganda Ultimately Triumphs Over Information

Democratic societies cohere not primarily by force but by the cultivation of public opinion. Coherence is attained via adhesion to social myths and to the attitudes and commitments they engender. The educated class is the most necessary for the cultivation of public opinion. It would seem that here we have an opportunity for higher-epistemic forms of persuasion that seek to honor and preserve human dignity and freedom. But Ellul points out that the battle between propaganda and higher-epistemic discourse cannot be an equal one. “The man who informs honestly must say: ‘Here are the facts, believe them or not as you see fit.’”

And so from this point on [...] propaganda will always triumph over information. [...] Wherever there is propaganda, information, if it is to survive, must utilize the same weapons. [...] It] forces the informant to engage in counterpropaganda. If one wishes to avoid this conflict and preserve independence, objectivity, the dispassionateness of information, then all kinds of propaganda must be forbidden. Strict control must be exerted over the press, the radio, and so forth. This would call for a rigorous censorship. [...] In other words, the guaranty that information would have its full educational effect would rest on authoritarian measures.¹⁷

Because democratic government must be concerned with self-legitimation, it cannot survive without the use of propaganda.

Let us consider a specific example. A government could observe that if the desired result in the context of global warming is a population that supports alternative energy sources, then that population’s actual understanding of the complex science of global warming is irrelevant. Which is more important, the government might ask itself: getting the results we want by propaganda, or making an idol of knowledge and venturing on an unnecessary and possibly futile detour into educating the people so that they will be able to make an informed decision about global warming—particularly when we know that other interested parties will be asserting their own propaganda in the service of their own ends? The plausibility of the propagandistic approach to driving public opinion can tend to draw even non-totalitarian institutions. Simply making an abundance of information easily accessible does not guarantee a future for civilizational concern for knowledge and understanding.

Application

I now offer several observations for our profession. First, we can observe that library science as a profession is deeply enmeshed in what Ellul has called *technique*. Library science arose in the late nineteenth century, when technique was asserting itself across all domains of life. Melvil Dewey (1851–1931), one of the founders of American library science, strongly embodied technique. His passion for efficiency drove his Library Bureau and other library-related innovations, as did his support of the metric system and spelling reform.¹⁸ Ellul does not argue that technique is intrinsically bad, but he reminds us that people tend to believe that “when difficulties concerning the organization of information are resolved, everything will be resolved. This is a dangerous illusion.”¹⁹

Much of our effort within the academic library profession continues to focus on making library-based scholarship more efficient. But what is in fact the relationship between scholarship and efficiency? The University of Chicago sociologist Andrew Abbott has performed an extremely valuable service to our profession by suggesting that since we have not developed an adequate theory of library-based scholarship, we have no way to judge whether these efficiencies do in fact benefit it.²⁰ We are not able to assess the relationship between means and end.

Second, we can note that our professional concern to oppose censorship—the withholding of information—has obscured for us the equally important concern to understand and oppose propaganda—the use of information in inferior epistemic ways. My recent search in *Library, Information Science, and Technology Abstracts* database produced 2,377 entries with the subject word *censorship* and just 176 with the subject word *propaganda*. This inattention to the reality of propaganda is particularly troubling when we note Ellul’s comment that “all serious propagandists know that censorship should be used as little as possible.”²¹

And third, I suggest that by accepting *information* as the matter with which our profession is concerned, we directly strengthen the power of propaganda by obscuring the distinction between higher- and lower-epistemic forms of communication. Philip Agre, formerly professor of information studies at UCLA, notes that “the term ‘information’ rarely evokes the trou-

bling questions of epistemology that are usually associated with terms like ‘knowledge’ and ‘belief.’”²² If we made knowledge the focus of our profession, rather than information, we would be more interested as a profession in questions of epistemology: how people come to know rightly anything that they do know.

Of course, librarians have adopted the information paradigm because it enables them to render the particular carrier irrelevant: books *per se* are no longer librarians’ particular concern. But Agre reminds us that scholarly communities orient not to information but to “literatures.” A literature, he notes,

has a history (founders, milestones, rise and fall) and a structure (founding texts, survey articles, textbooks). Each of these in turn reflects a set of practices (research methods, standards of evidence, forms of argument) and a system of institutional relationships (dominant and dissident lines of thought, powerful and marginal research groups, politics of publication and funding). A research community’s insiders read its literature with such things in mind. [... A literature is a map of] a complex and differentiated terrain.²³

The information terrain, by contrast, is flat and featureless. We librarians morselize information so that it can be tagged, stored, and retrieved—directly reinforcing this impression of equality between one citation and the next. “The ideology of information [...] serves to position librarianship as a neutral profession,” Agre notes, and “the library presents itself largely as a blank screen upon which particular communities can project their own practices and projects.”²⁴ Ellul, however, would question whether our professional neutrality is even possible, regardless of whether it is desirable. After the informant (let us say, the collection-development librarian,)

has chosen, more or less wisely, the facts which he will bring to the public’s attention, he runs up against a second difficulty: how should he present these facts? All on the same level, in the same way, giving them equal importance, so that it will be entirely up to the reader to select and establish his own scale of values? [...] Despite appearances, this would not constitute true objectivity; one would be caught in the following dilemma: either to present facts of unequal importance as if they were all alike, and thus falsify reality, or to establish a hierarchy of facts—emphasizing certain ones and giving them a prominent place.²⁵

Before we conclude that Ellul would urge us to adopt an educational rather than a neutrality model of librarianship, he goes on to note that if the informant does attempt to establish a hierarchy of facts, “there is no assurance that his decisions would be valid,” that is, objectively true.²⁶ Problems adhere to both the educational and the neutrality models.

Conclusion

One definition of *information* often used in our profession is “that which reduces uncertainty.”²⁷ Ellul points to the world’s inherent uncertainty and ambiguity and notes that information in itself does not resolve these conditions. But he also shows us that the problems of information for human freedom are important and interesting. As a profession, we need to move beyond our sole reliance on what we could call the Enlightenment view of information—the argument that truth inexorably overcomes falsity if only it has the opportunity to be proclaimed. This view is transmitted through such classic works as Milton’s *Areopagitica* and John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty*, works that are widely taught in library schools as foundational to our professional self-understanding. I would like to encourage us to make Jacques Ellul’s *Propaganda* as well known and important to library science as these works are.

Addendum: Fatalism and Freedom

On first encountering his ideas, one may conclude that Ellul is a pessimist, even a fatalist. If he is right in thinking that democracy has in fact a greater need to deploy propaganda than do other forms of government, and if those who are most motivated to understand and respond to their situation may be most propagandized, doesn’t this mean that our best hopes for human freedom are illusory? To respond to this good question would require another essay. But to pique your interest, and, I hope, prompt you to read Ellul for yourself, let me close by quoting a few lines from Ellul’s introduction to *Propaganda*:

I shall devote much space to the fact that propaganda has become an inescapable necessity for everyone. In this connection I have come upon a source of much misunderstanding. Modern man worships

“facts”—that is, he accepts “facts” as the ultimate reality. [...] He obeys what he believes to be necessity.

In my opinion, necessity never establishes legitimacy; the world of necessity is a world of weakness, a world that denies man. To say that a phenomenon is necessary means, for me, that it denies man: its necessity is proof of its power, not proof of its excellence.

Confronted by a necessity, man must become aware of it, if he is to master it. As long as man denies the inevitability of a phenomenon, as long as he avoids facing up to it, he will go astray. [...] Only when he realizes his delusion will he experience the beginning of genuine freedom.

[I] tend to believe in the pre-eminence of man and, consequently, in his invincibility.²⁸

Notes

1. This essay was first delivered as a talk for an audience of academic librarians. It is printed here in the *Ellul Forum* in the hope that it has interest more broadly as an introduction to Ellul's thought on these important societal questions.
2. Jacques Ellul, “Information and Propaganda.” *Diogenes* 5 (1957): 62.
3. “Rechercher en toutes choses la méthode absolument la plus efficace.” Jacques Ellul, *La Technique* (Paris: Economica, 1990), 18–19.
4. Quoted in Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Knopf, 1966), x note.
5. Stanley B. Cunningham, “Reflections on the Interface between Propaganda and Religion.” In *The Future of Religion*, ed. Paul Rennick et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 84. For a full discussion of this definition, see Cunningham's excellent book *The Idea of Propaganda: A Reconstruction* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002).
6. Ellul, *Propaganda*, 53.
7. Ellul, *Propaganda*, 53.
8. Ellul, *Propaganda*, 86.
9. Ellul, *Propaganda*, 108.
10. Ellul, “Information and Propaganda,” 68.
11. Ellul, *Propaganda*, 87.

12. Ellul, *Propaganda*, 111.
13. Ellul, "Information and Propaganda," 75.
14. Ellul, *Propaganda*, 114.
15. Ellul, *Propaganda*, 31.
16. Ellul, "Information and Propaganda," 76.
17. Ellul, "Information and Propaganda," 66–7.
18. Ellul specifically mentions card files and libraries (*fichiers, bibliothèques*) as examples of intellectual technique. Ellul, *La Technique*, 19.
19. Ellul, "Information and Propaganda," 62.
20. Andrew Abbott, "The Traditional Future: A Computational Theory of Library Research." *College & Research Libraries* 69 (2008): 524–45.
21. Ellul, *Propaganda*, 16n.
22. Philip E. Agre, "Institutional Circuitry: Thinking about the Forms and Uses of Information." *Information Technology and Libraries* 14 (1995): 225.
23. Agre, "Institutional Circuitry," 226.
24. Agre, "Institutional Circuitry," 226.
25. Ellul, "Information and Propaganda," 69–70.
26. Ellul, "Information and Propaganda," 70.
27. As for example in Allen Kent, "Education for Information Science." In *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*, ed. Allen Kent, 47 (New York: Dekker, 1968–), v. 41, supp. 6. This definition is usually traced to Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1949).
28. Ellul, *Propaganda*, xv–xvi.

Media Ethics and Global Justice in the Digital Age **by Clifford G. Christians**

Randal Marlin

Christians, Clifford G. *Media Ethics and Global Justice in the Digital Age*. Cambridge University Press, 2019, 408pp.

Clifford Christians needs no introduction to longtime IJES members. The collection of essays he edited with Jay M. Van Hook in 1981, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays*, remains of enduring value, and under his editorship the *Ellul Forum* thrived from 2000 to 2012. David Gill, then associate editor, wrote in the fall 2008 issue on “Practical Politics” that “[t]his has to be one of the most interesting issues in the twenty-year history of the *Ellul Forum*.”

Christians has had a long and distinguished career as a professor of communications at the University of Illinois, Urbana, retiring around 2008 but continuing his scholarly work since then. *Media Ethics and Global Justice in the Digital Age* is a work of breathtaking erudition, bringing a lifetime’s preoccupation with philosophy and journalistic ethics to bear on the current upheaval in journalistic financing and practices caused by the latest developments in Information Communication Technology (ICT).

In light of the sea change in the contemporary media brought about by the internet and social media, including “networking, search engines, computer databases, online and cyberspace,” Christians argues for a whole new re-theorizing of media ethics, one that takes into account globalization and the consequent interfacing of so many different cultural traditions.

It is well known that ICT has changed consumers’ journalistic reading habits. Search engines spare scholars days of work trying to track down some newspaper or broadcast item. We can connect with foreign language newspapers instantly. With blogs, retired journalists or specialists in other fields

compete for attention with reporters in long-standing media. Often the former are more knowledgeable. But along with the knowledgeable you get blowhards and charlatans who also create followings, and you get misinformation, pornography, slander, and descent to hitherto-suppressed depths of vulgarity, insults, and lack of basic human decency.

Christians reminds readers of this, in case they have forgotten, on page 152 where he expounds on Jürgen Habermas's ethical norms of communication. There is a tacit validity claim that a person's speech acts should be socially appropriate or just, and that they show right treatment of others. He gives examples where President Donald Trump's speech acts violate this norm.

Questions involving justice, such as who gets access to media, are part of the re-theorizing. But more ambitiously he also wants the ethics to incorporate an ontological dimension, in other words, judgements about what it means to be a human being—not just objectively, as some kind of machine, biological organism, or statistic—but also subjectively, in terms of our aspirations, worries, choices, and freedom.

The latter kind of thinking may recall the existentialist movement: Kierkegaard, Heidegger and—very topically, with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic—Camus. Christians sees Ellul as within this tradition: “For Ellul, the existential problem in advanced industrial societies is the disappearance of ends themselves. In its preoccupation with mechanical systems, public life ignores moral imperatives” (64).

Christians's human-centred approach to technology rejects the “neutral” or “instrumentalist” approach, where engineering experts are allowed “tunnel vision” regarding the morally relevant consequences of their inventions. He opposes the idea that the use of Facebook for ridicule, the excess of pornography on websites, out-of-control surveillance, and the like, are things for which the enablers of the relevant technology should be blame-free. What gets lost in the preoccupation with technological wizardry so viewed, he notes, is pursuit of the common good.

Heidegger's insight into truth as a kind of unveiling or disclosure (*aletheia*), as distinct from mere correctness, figures importantly in the new, justice-incorporating media ethics. There is one particular passage that

is worth quoting at length, incorporating as it does one of Ellul's central insights.

[Ellul's] *la technique* goes beneath the surface to the basic issues underneath. The problem is not technological products per se, but *la technique*, the mystique of efficiency that underlies them. The issue is not machines first of all, but the spirit of machineness, the instrumental worldview on which systems depend. When efficiency, speed, and productivity dominate, morality rooted in human life becomes alien to us. Ellul's *la technique* is an academic version of *aletheia*, disclosing the heart of the matter: in the process of constructing the digital order, moral purpose is sacrificed to maximizing technical ends. (161–62)

Reflecting on this passage, I was reminded of a story told to me by a US government worker, how during the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon, when smoke and flames were billowing, workers were hesitant to move because of a strict standing-order not to leave before a certain time. One woman did not hesitate: “My mama didn’t raise me no fool,” she announced, leaving immediately and inspiring others to do the same, possibly saving some lives.

There is a pre-theoretical, pre-conceptual understanding of the world that needs to be revisited when basic values like self-preservation become obscured. Martin Buber distinguished the pre-conceptual, open, dialogical relation with the other (I–Thou), from the conceptualized, closed, and objectifying understanding (I–It). Christians’s global media ethics would attend to the pre-theoretical as a way of finding common ground with other cultures.

Christians’s media ethics reaches out to many different cultural backgrounds for what they can contribute to our understanding. From Confucius he brings in the idea of *He*, harmony, harmonization, with its link to music. I recall philosopher Frank Knopfmacher’s appeal to the “culturally well-formed ear” in answer to the problem of meta-institutional ethical guidance. What seemed fifty years ago a very weak appeal today seems to me to get some traction from the notion of harmony, or *He*.

Among the many interesting ideas Christians explores is what he calls “interpretive sufficiency.” This separates in-depth, quality reporting from

interpretations that merely string together news items with some superficial narrative.

Sufficiency requires grounding interpretations historically and biographically, “so that they represent complex events and multilayered cultures adequately” (170). “The cases and illustrations that are selected for in-depth stories must be representative of the class, ethnicity, social unit, or organization to which they actually belong” (170–71). That of course requires a level of knowledge, understanding, and skill that doesn’t come cheap. But spelling out what high-quality journalism entails may usefully inspire both producers and consumers who might find some way of reaching each other in the fluid media scene today.

Of course, when it comes to political interpretation, there can be differences of opinion about what is “sufficiency.” For example, in my reckoning, all the indignation against Russian leader Vladimir Putin’s interference in the US election deserves to be tempered by awareness of the help American advisors gave to get Yeltsin re-elected in 1996, with disastrous consequences for Russia (see *Time*’s cover story for July 15, 1996, “Yanks to the Rescue: The Secret Story of How American Advisors Helped Yeltsin Win”).

I mention this because Christians pays attention, through the work of Anton Shekhovtsov and Estonian Kristina Müür, to Russia’s information-warfare apparatus that sought to justify the military invasion and annexation of Crimea “while ridiculing Ukrainians as fake Russians, fascists, and Western puppets, and Ukraine as a failed state” (153). I agree that there was a violation of one of Jürgen Habermas’s truthfulness norms of public communication. But the example reinforces a prevailing media narrative that leaves out some key elements of the overall picture.

These elements include, for example, Ukraine’s repudiation of an agreement with Russia to continue to lease the major Russian naval base at Sebastopol, the wishes of Russian-speaking Crimeans, the undoubted involvement of the US in guiding the political outcome of the 2014 Maidan protests, and the expansion of NATO member states up to Russia’s borders, contrary to a reported tacit understanding between Russia and the US at the time of the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Christians has given us a magisterial work, full of valuable expositions and incisive analyses of the contributions of others to media ethics and its philosophical underpinnings. His bibliography runs to 52 pages, and references abound on nearly every page.

Scholars will delight in this rich supply of ancient, modern, and very contemporary tributaries to the theme of his book. The ordinary reader may find the work daunting, but the scholar will appreciate his widely cast survey of the field, synchronic and diachronic, and the numerous leads for pursuing items of particular interest.

Fortunately, Christians has formulated a memorable triad of concepts for bringing the reader back to the new media ethics in the age of global, technically advanced information-communications technology. These are “truth-telling, human dignity, and nonviolence” (22). These follow from a pre-theoretical reverence for life and universal human solidarity (132). The philosophy of technology he espouses produces a “human-centered theory of media technology that is integrated into research and case studies. An agenda emerges for a new theory of communication ethics that is international, multicultural, and gender inclusive” (22).

Readers of the *Ellul Forum* will be gratified to see the ideas of Jacques Ellul woven so neatly into the overall fabric of Christians’s justice-oriented and globally situated media ethics in the digital age.

Jacques Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau in French Surveys of the Degrowth Movement

Christian Roy

Biagini, Cédric, David Murray, Pierre Thiesset, eds. *Aux origines de la décroissance: cinquante penseurs*. Montreal: Écosociété / Paris: Le Pas de côté & L'Échappée, 2017, 318pp.

Cérézuelle, Daniel. *Bernard Charbonneau ou la critique du développement exponentiel*. Paris: Le passager clandestin, “Les précurseurs de la décroissance” series (S. Latouche, ed.), 2018, 112pp.

Latouche, Serge. *Jacques Ellul contre le totalitarisme technicien*. Paris: Le passager clandestin, “Les précurseurs de la décroissance” series (S. Latouche, ed.), 2013, 112pp.

Latouche, Serge. *Le pari de la décroissance*. Paris: Pluriel, 2006, 2010 (with a new foreword), 302pp.

Latouche, Serge. *Renverser nos manières de penser. Métanoïa pour le temps présent. Entretiens avec Daniele Pepino, Thierry Paquot et Didier Harpagès sur la genèse et la portée d'une pensée alternative*. Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2014, 192pp.

Since the turn of the century, initially centred in francophone countries (though it quickly spread to Italy, Spain, and Latin America as its main hubs), a radical current within political ecology has been rallying under the banner of *décroissance*—a straightforward French word that is yet hard to translate beyond Romance languages. Rather than literal “decrease,” the corporate-sounding “downsizing,” or the more individual-centred “downshifting,” the neologism “Degrowth” is most often used in English¹ to refer

to a movement whose members wittily call themselves *objecteurs de croissance* (a play on *objecteurs de conscience* for “conscientious objectors”), as nay-sayers to the established religion of endless growth that is the self-evident common tenet of all other ideologies, whether right, left, or even mainstream ecological. The newspaper launched by *Adbusters* in 2004 that serves as the movement’s irreverent mouthpiece (in the tradition of *Charlie Hebdo*, where Bernard Charbonneau felt at home), *La Décroissance*, published in its (soon out-of-print) July 2014 issue a supplement presenting twenty-eight thinkers from the two previous centuries that were critical of industrialism, defending human-scale societies that eschewed the predatory premise of ever-expanding production. The Quebec publisher Écosociété joined with two like-minded French publishers, Le Pas de côté and L’Échappée (which had already included Ellul and Charbonneau in *Radicalité, 20 penseurs vraiment critiques* in 2013), to put out in book form an expanded version of that overview of Degrowth thinkers in the modern era. *Aux origines de la décroissance* covers fifty of them and features three contributors familiar to English-speaking Ellulians: Frédéric Rognon on Lanza del Vasto, Daniel Cérizuelle on Bernard Charbonneau, and Patrick Chastenet on Jacques Ellul.

The latter essay seems a little off topic at times, as though equating Degrowth with ecology as such. For instance, Chastenet’s answer to those who point out how little Ellul wrote about nature is to stress his ecological credentials, apparently consisting in having exposed the combination of sacralized Technique with State power as the major threat to nature (whereas the threat to the human spirit always takes centre stage until late in his life). Chastenet goes on to attribute to Ellul himself this original idea of Charbonneau’s of a technologized second nature overtaking the first nature that man needs in order to concretely experience his freedom.² He more aptly notes how Ivan Illich recognized his indebtedness to Jacques Ellul for his concepts of threshold and convivial austerity, and how *décroissants* explicitly claimed both thinkers’ legacy in later developing their own concepts of voluntary simplicity and frugal abundance. It is clear that this line of thinking can be traced much further back than Ellul’s 1982 book *Changer de révolution*, whose theses Chastenet sums up—indeed half a century earlier, to the *Directives for a Personalist Manifesto* co-written with Charbonneau

in 1935. “This manifesto states quite openly that economic growth is not synonymous with personal development and ends with a call to build ‘an ascetic city so that man may live.’”³

Technique would then be used to limit tiresome, repetitive, and dangerous tasks, to reduce work time, and not to indefinitely pursue the race for growth.⁴ This text thus prefigures the positions of 1970s political ecology (Dumont, Gorz, Illich, Moscovici, Schumacher), revolving around the principle of voluntary austerity, and the more recent ones of the *objecteurs de croissance*.⁵

Most of the thinkers Chastenet mentions here have their own entries in the same book. In his 2006 book on the wager of Degrowth, Serge Latouche includes another one covered there, François Partant, alongside Ivan Illich and Jacques Ellul, as part of that era’s small “International” of critics of industrial development as a bad idea in itself, but above all for the so-called Third World defined in terms of “underdevelopment.”⁶ It was as an heir to that group that Latouche, thinking of the book *Demain la décroissance* by Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen⁷—another maverick (i.e., atypically sane) economist included in that anthology, had made Degrowth the rallying cry of new generations as an antidote to the oxymoron of sustainable development in a famous 2002 article.⁸ The next year, Latouche discovered another kindred spirit with the French translation of the magnum opus of Günther Anders (first husband of Hannah Arendt—who follows him alphabetically in *Aux origines de la décroissance*) on the obsolescence of man when consumption passes for citizenship: “many of his ideas can be found again in Illich and already in Jacques Ellul,”⁹ Latouche admits in a book of interviews on “turning around our ways of thinking” as the conversion our times demand. (The title even uses the Patristic word *metanoia*, tellingly for an atheist who, despite having had many people of faith such as Ellul and Illich as fellow travellers beyond the productivist consensus, feeling closer to Castoriadis and invoking Thoreau as a Degrowth forerunner, has come to see “the need for a non-religious spiritual dimension” to “re-enchant the world” with “a form of secular spirituality or some kind of immanent transcendence.”¹⁰) He also says he met both Ellul and Charbonneau, found much in common with Illich in their work, though he always had some trouble reading Charbonneau.¹¹ That may be one reason he reserved for himself the first installment on Ellul in a series of short books he has been

editing since 2013 as introductions to the forerunners of Degrowth, and where several of the usual suspects soon to be featured in *La Décroissance* already appear in the same combinations (Cérézuelle on Charbonneau, Rognon on Lanza del Vasto, etc.). An important difference is that the range of authors covered reaches further afield and in time to the “great ancestors”:

Those who, although living in a different society than ours, laid down philosophical bases that objectors to growth cannot overlook. Behind its provocative wording, the phrase “degrowth” refers to a break with the *Westernization of the world*¹²; it therefore results in the reopening of history to diversity; beyond this diversity, Degrowth builds on a kind of “universal common treasury,” close to what was traditionally called wisdom. All “wisdoms” are based on the capacity for self-limitation, be it Stoicism, Epicureanism, Buddhism, African wisdoms, Native American wisdoms, etc.¹³

Christianity is conspicuously absent from this array of converging wisdom traditions. It is thus no surprise that the way Ellul’s faith informs his germane assumptions appears as something of a stumbling block to Latouche’s otherwise deep appreciation of this thinker. He begins his short introduction to Ellul, preceding a selection of texts for which he largely depended on Frédéric Rognon,¹⁴ by acknowledging that, from the start, Ellul was considered one of the main thinkers of Degrowth, even though he never used the word; but then again, neither did equally important forerunners such as Ivan Illich or Cornelius Castoriadis. Latouche claims that Charbonneau by contrast explicitly adopted the term *décroissance*.¹⁵ (Indeed, one of the gems in Daniel Cérézuelle’s own sampling in a following volume on Bernard Charbonneau is a March 1974 article on “the costs of growth and the gains of degrowth” that he published in the regular column “Chronique de l’an deux mille” that Ellul gave him as editor of the Protestant review *Foi et Vie*.¹⁶) In a footnote, Latouche takes up from Rognon a list of the “impressive number” of references to Ellul in his own works,¹⁷ to which new titles would no doubt be added now, such as last year’s overview of *La Décroissance* for the venerable “Que sais-je?” series of brief introductions to thousands of specialized topics by top authorities in the field (e.g., Ellul did the one on *Histoire de la propagande* in 1967, as Mounier had done the one on *Le Personnalisme* in 1949 for Presses universitaires de France). Here, Latouche can start the chapter on “Degrowth themes in the thought of Jacques Ellul” by stating that the intellectual framework that would lead

him to Degrowth theory was to a large extent already established in *La Mégamachine* (1995), a book dedicated to the memory of Jacques Ellul.

The critique of technique drawn from his stimulating and hard-hitting analyses was already joined in it to a critique of development and growth inspired by the ideas of Ivan Illich and the philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis, both of them forerunners of Degrowth as well. Ellul favourably refers to the latter fairly often and Illich regarded Ellul as his master (“*Maître Jacques*”).¹⁸

Castoriadis and Illich are the only two thinkers Latouche ever refers to as his own masters in his lectures,¹⁹ so Ellul would seem to come into play for him as an implicit second-degree master acknowledged by his own master (in a way that may call to mind the many people who came to Charbonneau due to Ellul’s insistence that he owed his key insights into modern society to his old friend). Latouche goes through five major themes of Degrowth that he finds very much present in Ellul: the critique of geometric reason (exponential growth), the reduction of work time (still through Technique in Ellul—but Latouche prefers the popular rejection of work discipline for festive pursuits), an indictment of the disvalue generated by technical progress (an Illichean term for the forced replacement of perfectly fine older techniques and materials), the bankruptcy of modernity’s promise of happiness (with a call for more frugal yet fulfilling ways), the colonization of imagination by technique as a source of consumerist addiction (to prosthetic enhancements that atrophy our capacity for enjoyment).²⁰ “Jacques Ellul’s analysis thus concurs with the diagnosis of objectors to growth, namely that a growth society is neither desirable nor sustainable.”²¹ And yet, Ellul’s exclusive focus on Technique makes him miss some aspects of the Degrowth approach,²² such as the issue of the plutocratic oligarchy of multinational corporations, since market considerations often weigh more in the ways technology develops than a supposedly autonomous, actually dubious “rationality,” let alone central State planning. “Even as technical frenzy entails globalization and the end of national regulations as the last substitutes of community functioning, Ellul persists in seeing the State as the *bête noire* as much as Technique,”²³ his vision skewed by Gaullist State-directed modernization, which he can see culminating only in totalitarian world dictatorship. Sometimes touted by some today as “the man who foresaw almost everything,”²⁴ he for instance did not see the “neoliberal counter-revolution”

coming and proved unable to revise his Cold War-era assumptions accordingly.²⁵ Latouche quotes the entry on “Technique” that Castoriadis wrote for *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, where Ellul is pictured as a “negative Marxist” for the primacy he gives to technical determinism—only for the worst, while the later Mumford’s idea of the Megamachine takes a broader view of what is involved in the modern system, beyond what Langdon Winner calls Ellul’s “technological sleepwalking.”²⁶

There is an element of world-weary fatalism in the way he looks at history. Something like Muslim predetermination—mektub—and Calvinist predestination, even if he totally rejected the latter as a theologian.

For we must not overestimate Technique’s performances, nor underestimate the flaws and numerous failures of large technical systems. The catastrophes they sometimes generate—major risks can unfortunately never be ruled out—are also opportunities to put into question, at least partially, Technique and the underlying beliefs in science and progress. There is such a thing as a *pedagogy of catastrophes* which Ellul hardly considers at all.²⁷

Even then, as Virginia Landgraf points out, Ellul can find some new relativized place for Technique and money in the alternative social vision of *Changer de révolution*, but none whatsoever for the State,²⁸ unlike objectors to growth—not to mention Charbonneau (even though he is the one who insisted on writing the book on *L’État* and delegated to Ellul the task of writing the one on *La Technique*, to treat what had initially been his own big idea). It would seem that for Ellul, ethics excludes politics of any kind and ought to substitute for it as an ethics of non-power, boiling down to the conscientious objection of faithful individuals to politics as the exercise of power. “*À l’espoir du militant, il oppose l’espérance du croyant*”²⁹—to the dismay of many secular activists. Latouche for his part may echo Ellul in his insistence that *décroissance*, like the related Native-led Andean movements pursuing *buen vivir* or “living well” as opposed to “a better life,” should not seek to seize power but keep working as a *contre-pouvoir* to any and all powers that be.³⁰ Yet he still finds it “reasonable for a secular person to follow Gramsci in tempering the pessimism of reason with the optimism of the will,”³¹ open to the kind of historical surprises Ellul would rather keep for God to make as a foretaste of a better world only to be found beyond

this one. Thus, the unforeseen “collapse of the Soviet world goes to show that technical society and ‘hard’ totalitarianism do not form the best alloy to ensure the permanence of the technical system,” as Ellul tends to assume. On the other hand, it is just that the “soft” totalitarianism of consumer society is so much better at this,³² which underlines all the more clearly the inherent limit of exclusive reliance on the demand for ethical autonomy: “the will that must orient techniques is itself oriented by techniques,”³³ as Daniel Cérézuelle writes—a point that George Grant could have made, but which Latouche does not dwell on. Thus, it does not prevent him or Latouche—who quotes him at length—from being less pessimistic than Ellul about the prospects of countering the remaking of man by Science and Technique, by way of the kind of moratorium Charbonneau often called for.

Today, morality requires not only that we refrain from performing certain actions but also from having certain means at our disposal.³⁴

Making IT ethics-compliant may demand the collective definition of power thresholds not to go beyond and the adherence to an “ethics of non-power.”³⁵

“This is exactly the hope [*espoir*] that the Degrowth project holds out,”³⁶ adds Latouche, for whom, “since the final triumph of boundless power [*surpuissance*] is not unavoidable, a society of prosperity without growth may be possible. But Ellul’s hope [*espérance*] does not really allow the prospect on this earth.”³⁷ This is why there is more than such an ethic to this project, as it “contains a practical action side that is almost absent in Ellul. The Ellulian project of transformation remains confined to necessary resistance and individual dissidence, closer to voluntary simplicity than to the radical metamorphosis of Degrowth.”³⁸

By contrast, Bernard Charbonneau usually makes a point of providing often fairly detailed examples of concrete, gradual steps to be taken outside the treadmill of growth to have a shot at a relatively soft landing on terrain more conducive to human flourishing. A more generic approach that Cérézuelle likes to dwell on in his treatments of Charbonneau is a moratorium on R & D,³⁹ but also on economic growth itself, for the sake of balance. “The sufferings inherent in expansion: conversion and repurposing, the disruption of customs, and the adaptation effort that any change entails, would be paid for at their fair price; we would then see which businesses

are humanly profitable and those that are not,”⁴⁰ taking capitalism at its word by factoring in those costs until externalities are no longer offloaded to the environment and the general public. The former’s transformation has limits that are beyond the latter’s capacity to foresee. Enforcing these limits with a view to balance instead of growth would remove the economy from the driver’s seat to consider man’s physical and spiritual needs instead, in a more complete accounting of its effects, so that any damage to human or environmental well-being would incur massive fines. “The emphasis would shift from economic means to human ends: from production to consumption, or rather to use, from power and profit to happiness, from the State to the person.”⁴¹ If, like Ellul’s, “Charbonneau’s thought is very close to Ivan Illich’s reflections on power thresholds beyond which our tools become counterproductive,” his assumptions remain more clearly grounded in common sense.

Charbonneau is neither a primitivist nor a reactionary; he is convinced that there cannot be human freedom without a minimum of power to act: to live humanly, man needs efficient techniques, he needs dependable knowledge, he needs to produce and exchange goods and services, he needs political institutions. But, beyond a certain threshold, the accelerated multiplication of the power of these mediations has negative effects; the growth of industrial production, technoscientific development, and the proliferation of social controls end up threatening both the natural equilibriums that man needs and the freedom without which life loses its meaning.⁴²

—Not to mention its flavour, indistinguishable from the meaning of life for Charbonneau, and whose keenly felt loss always drove him to fight “the end of local identities, of landscapes, of food variety, of diverse ways of life,” coming along with “the rise of bureaucratization and the increasing blandness of existence.”⁴³

All of these processes are interrelated and mutually reinforcing as “the unleashing of a power-mindedness [*esprit de puissance*] that is no longer able to give itself limits”⁴⁴ since the beginning of what he calls mankind’s Great Moulting. This shedding of the natural environment of culture for an encompassing man-made social whole represents but the unchecked, ever-accelerating increase of that same power to act that Charbonneau sees as a condition of freedom but that now turns against it as total

organization—one that is more intimately internalized than the strictures of nature this system has overcome and replaced as the all-pervasive model of a sacred social order. “Technical and economic growth is at once the chief fact and the fundamental dogma of our time. Just as the immutability of an order that was at once natural and divine was that of the past.”⁴⁵ Even though economic references now play the same socially binding role that religious ones used to, Charbonneau finds they colour too much the concept of growth invoked by boosters and detractors alike; he argues that the idea of development better captures

the multidimensional character of the process. Thus, when in 1973 he publishes *Le système et le chaos*, his only book solely devoted to the critique of accelerated growth which everyone celebrated during the *Trente Glorieuses* [“Thirty Glorious Years” of post-war boom], he gives it as a subtitle “critique du développement exponentiel.”⁴⁶

It is unfortunate that this eloquent title was dropped in later editions, as there can be no better nutshell statement of the no-brainer untenability of the supposedly serious business-as-usual that now goes unchallenged as universal religion. The world economy is wholly premised on the mirage of sticking to an increasingly steep asymptotic curve with diminishing returns and the certainty of collapse at a point in time just over the deceptive horizon of that seemingly boundless ascent. But as Charbonneau warned in the original blurb of that book written between 1950 and 1967:

Unfortunately, at a production rate that rises by 6%, and then by another 6% the next year, the curve tends to the vertical, that is to the absolute, or the absurd in human terms. The question is not whether the growth rate will go down or not, but when and how: deliberately or as a result of a crisis. For the economy does not develop in a vacuum as economists believe, but in meat: in nature and the social. The exploding economy wreaks havoc on space-time, breaks natural and human equilibriums. Systematic growth spawns chaos, and the only way to master it is to refine the industrial system: to increase production even more so as to perfect control. But by the same token, where it fails, troubles and revolt flare up. Thus, as organization and its opposite mutually generate each other, our society finds itself on the horns of a dilemma, in both cases inhuman, between total system and total chaos. Unless . . .⁴⁷

—Unless, that is, a way out is found along the lines of a deliberate slowing-down and rechanneling of resources to convivial degrowth, averting the

otherwise guaranteed rude awakening of a shrieking halt to growth (not to mention catastrophic demographic “adjustment”): imagine a racing car running out of gas at full speed on a near-vertical trajectory aimed beyond space-time, which suddenly gives way to freefall to the devastated surface of a small world after all. Before this breaking point is reached,

it will be the various culprits in the ruin of the earth who will organize the rescue of what little of it will be left, and who, after plenty, will manage shortage and survival. For these people have no prejudices, they do not believe in development any more than in ecology: they only believe in power, which is that of doing what cannot be done any other way.⁴⁸

In this, they will not hesitate to call upon and co-opt the expertise and authority of environmental specialists. “Charbonneau therefore wonders if the emergence of an ecological movement (and this may also apply to the *décroissant* movement) will actually enable resistance to ‘the techno-industrial system’s totalitarian tendencies,’⁴⁹ a totalitarianism that he always saw as primarily social, unobtrusively embedded in daily life more than in political structures that may long retain the democratic veneer of the “electoral ritual.” True to the book where he found his original ideas validated early on (and whose author would fittingly be instrumental in the belated reception of Ellul’s *La Technique*), Charbonneau concurs here with the insights of Aldous Huxley, “who, in *Brave New World* (1932), described the totalitarian potential of a society that has given up growth and entrusted its steady state to a scientific élite.”

Charbonneau’s warning to ecologists also applies to *décroissants*. Indefinite growth in a finite world is an impossibility, and decreasing [*décroître*] is likely to be forced upon us by necessity. Entrusted to specialists of economic matters, a hierarchical, centralized, and authoritarian management of decrease [*décroissance*] (in the literal sense of a regression of production/consumption) may very well boost the risk of social totalization and a swallowing up of freedom against which Bernard Charbonneau has spent his whole life trying to protect us.⁵⁰

To conclude, Daniel Cérézuelle and Serge Latouche have both done a fine job of giving *décroissants* a sense of what they owe to, and could still find in, Charbonneau and Ellul as the direct forerunners of a movement that

comes closest to directly addressing many of the issues they were among the first to raise and are becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. Conversely, Ellulians therefore ought to avail themselves of the opportunity provided by these introductory surveys to get acquainted with the contemporary movement that is the most explicitly aligned with the priorities first outlined by the Bordeaux School almost a century ago.

Notes

1. Serge Latouche, *Le pari de la décroissance* (Paris: Pluriel, 2010 [2006]), 25n1.
2. Patrick Chastenet, “Jacques Ellul,” in Cédric Biagini, David Murray, Pierre Thiesset, eds. *Aux origines de la décroissance: cinquante penseurs* (Montreal: Écosociété / Paris: Le Pas de côté & L’Échappée, 2017), 107.
3. Chastenet, “Jacques Ellul,” 105.
4. Space does not allow me to do more here than note in passing that this idea and many of its specifics were eagerly appropriated by the Gascon Personalists from the usually overlooked Paris-based *Ordre Nouveau* movement where Personalism was first articulated as a revolutionary doctrine, and particularly from its main theorist, Arnaud Dandieu (1897–1933), highly regarded by both Charbonneau and Ellul, though for strategic reasons they were formally associated with Emmanuel Mounier’s *Esprit* movement until they seceded in 1937. As many of the sometimes hard-to-find texts anthologized in the books under review testify, from their earliest writings to the end of their lives, both thinkers always came back to Dandieu’s two-pronged institutional blueprint to master Technique and make it work for every person’s benefit in the “necessary revolution”—a phrase Ellul borrowed from Dandieu’s testament *La Révolution nécessaire* (Grasset 1933, reprint Place 1993). There, Dandieu described the combination of a guaranteed basic income (uncoupling revenue from the wage slavery of technologically doomed full-time jobs) with a civilian labour service (to distribute through the whole citizenry rather than leave to a proletarian class the decreasing residue of alienating tasks left by automation), that Ellul and especially Charbonneau would further refine to enable the widest array of humanly meaningful activity to flourish in the gaps deliberately left open in the technical drive for efficient performance, once the latter was unshackled from the profit motive and the growth imperative to reinvest productivity gains in more production, as opposed to freeing up time for truly human pursuits. The idea of basic income has fitfully resurfaced since then in public discourse and, even before being widely bandied about as part of policy

responses to the paid work shortages due to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, it had already gained renewed traction due to the predictable obsolescence of most jobs by automation. This challenge thus drove entrepreneur Andrew Yang to enter the race for US presidential candidate in 2020 with basic income as his core plank, of which other Democratic candidates have been supportive (not to mention the interest it has sparked among many Trump voters moved by distrust of the global socioeconomic order). I have tried to introduce Dandieu's prescient but forgotten contribution to these debates on the future of work in two texts available on my webpage roychristian.academia.edu: "Civilian Service for Social Security? Basic Income and Labor-Sharing in the Thought of Arnaud Dandieu," for the Seventh Congress of the U.S. Basic Income Guarantee Network, as part of the Eastern Economic Association Conference, Boston, March 8, 2008 (www.usbig.net/papers/183-Roy--BIGServiceDandieu.doc), and "Taking Back Risk and Credit to Spread the Gift of Trust: Arnaud Dandieu's Anti-Utilitarian Case for Basic Income," given at the 15th International Congress of the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN): "Re-democratizing the Economy," June 28, 2014, McGill Faculty of Law, Montreal, Quebec.

5. Chastenet, "Jacques Ellul," 104.
6. Latouche, *Le pari de la décroissance*, 24.
7. Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, *Demain la décroissance: entropie, écologie, économie* (Lausanne: Favre, 1979). Translation of *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).
8. Serge Latouche, "À bas le développement durable, vive la décroissance conviviale." *Silence* 280 (2002), cited in Serge Latouche, *Renverser nos manières de penser. Méta-noïa pour le temps présent. Entretiens avec Daniele Pepino, Thierry Paquot et Didier Harpagès sur la genèse et la portée d'une pensée alternative* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2014), 133.
9. Latouche, *Renverser nos manières de penser*, 122.
10. Latouche, *Renverser nos manières de penser*, 186–87.
11. Latouche, *Renverser nos manières de penser*, 119.
12. See Serge Latouche, *L'Occidentalisation du monde. Essai sur la signification, la portée et les limites de l'uniformisation planétaire* (Paris: La Découverte/Poche, 2005 [1989], "Essais" series, No. 203, 170 pp).
13. Latouche, *Renverser nos manières de penser*, 120.

14. Serge Latouche, *Jacques Ellul contre le totalitarisme technique* (Paris: Le passager clandestin, “Les précurseurs de la décroissance” series, 2013), 52n3.
15. Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 9.
16. Daniel Cérézuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau ou la critique du développement exponentiel* (Paris: Le passager clandestin, “Les précurseurs de la décroissance” series, 2018), 79–84. On a more skeptical note, the only occurrence I know of in Charbonneau’s books is just an ironic quip from 1980 in the one I translated as *The Green Light. A Self-Critique of the Ecological Movement* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 180, to point out that “zero growth” is as conceptually empty as would be the equivalent “zero degrowth.”
17. Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 10n1.
18. Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 12.
19. Latouche, *Renverser nos manières de penser*, 116–17.
20. Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 12–13ff.
21. Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 29.
22. Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 30.
23. Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 36.
24. Jean-Luc Porquet, *Jacques Ellul, L’homme qui avait presque tout prévu* (Paris: Cherche Midi, 2012).
25. Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 39.
26. Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 34–35, citing Frédéric Rognon, ed., *Généralisations Ellul: soixante héritiers de la pensée de Jacques Ellul* (Geneva: Labor et Fides / Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2012), 273.
27. Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 39.
28. Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 40, citing Frédéric Rognon, ed., *Généralisations Ellul*, 215.
29. Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 48.
30. Latouche, *Renverser nos manières de penser*, 127–29, 163.
31. Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 43–44.
32. Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 44.
33. Daniel Cérézuelle, *La technique et la chair. Essais de philosophie de la technique* (Lyon: Paragon/Vs, 2011), 136, cited in Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 46n2.
34. Cérézuelle, *La technique et la chair*, 135, cited in Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 45.

35. Cérézuelle, *La technique et la chair*, 158, cited in Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 46.
36. Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 46.
37. Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 50.
38. Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 52.
39. Cérézuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 49–51.
40. Bernard Charbonneau, *Le système et le chaos* (Paris: Le Sang de la Terre, 2012), cited in Cérézuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 52, as well as to conclude Cérézuelle, “Bernard Charbonneau,” in Biagini, Murray, and Thieset, eds., *Aux origines de la décroissance*, 65.
41. Charbonneau, *Le système et le chaos*, cited in Cérézuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 52, as well as in Cérézuelle, “Bernard Charbonneau,” in Biagini, Murray, and Thieset, eds., *Aux origines de la décroissance*, 65.
42. Cérézuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 45.
43. Cérézuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 41.
44. Cérézuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 45.
45. Charbonneau, *Le système et le chaos*, 7, cited in Cérézuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 28.
46. Cérézuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 32.
47. Charbonneau, *Le système et le chaos* (original edition, Paris: Anthropos, 1973, back cover), cited in Cérézuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 32–33.
48. Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 121, cited in Cérézuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 47.
49. Cérézuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 46, misquoting “industrial” as “techno-industrial” from a passage in Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 98.
50. Cérézuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 48.

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About the International Jacques Ellul Society

The International Jacques Ellul Society, founded in 2000 by former students of Ellul, links scholars, students, and others who share an interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912–94), longtime professor at the University of Bordeaux. Along with promoting new publications related to Ellul and producing the *Ellul Forum*, the Society sponsors a biennial conference. IJES is the anglophone sister society of the francophone Association internationale Jacques Ellul.

The objectives of IJES are threefold:

Preserving a Heritage. The Society seeks to preserve and disseminate Ellul’s literary and intellectual heritage through republication, translation, and secondary writings.

Extending a Critique. Ellul is best known for his penetrating critique of *la technique*, of the character and impact of technology on our world. The Society seeks to extend his social critique particularly concerning technology.

Researching a Hope. Ellul was not only a social critic but also a theologian and activist in church and community. The Society seeks to extend his theological, biblical, and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

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