Jacques Ellul on Violence, Resistance, and War

edited by Jeffrey M. Shaw
Timothy J. Demy

The last few decades seem to have ushered in new levels of violence, challenging the notion that our globalized, interconnected world offers increased prospects for cooperation and peace. Many philosophers and theologians have offered various reasons for why this might be so, but none has come so close as the French philosopher Jacques Ellul to providing a comprehensive explanation for many of the pitfalls inherent in increasing levels of technological advance. The chapters in this book explore the phenomena of violence, terrorism, and war through the lens of Ellul’s thought. Readers unfamiliar with Ellul will find as much to consider in these chapters as those who have studied Ellul extensively, and for both the novice and the expert, this book offers an opportunity to both evaluate and reevaluate Ellul’s extensive thought on matters of importance to contemporary society.


Timothy J. Demy is a Professor of Military Ethics at the Naval War College. He also serves as the American managing editor of the Journal of Military Ethics.

“Jacques Ellul on Violence, Resistance, and War brings together insightful essays by leading scholars on Ellul’s relevance and foresight. In these times we owe it to ourselves to consider Ellul’s wisdom. This is a thoughtful collection that will help us to interpret, understand, and apply his profound ideas.”
—JACOB E. VAN VLEET, Diablo Valley College

“Jacques Ellul was one of the twentieth century’s most prolific and influential public intellectuals. That his work inspired both pacifism and violent protest is a sign of its power and complexity. In this volume, Jeffrey Shaw and other thoughtful contributors explore the implications of Ellul’s work as it relates to our contemporary world, awash as it is in violence. Anyone who wants to understand Ellul—or wants Ellul to help them understand the world—should read it.”
—NOAH TOLY, Wheaton College

“This book is a literary gem, with its readability index a number 10. The history is deep and the theoretical work crystal clear, the sociology is impeccable and the news events live. Relevance may be overvalued in publishing, but here it is pure gold: terrorism, police atrocities, cybersecurity, economic brutality, high-tech weapons of war, ruthless dictators—readers are absorbed and ideas emerge to help provide context to the violence. Ellul’s writing and reflections on violence and war give the book cohesion, and an all-star cast of Ellul scholars examines contemporary events through the lens of his thought, providing a new book that is stunning in its inclusiveness.”
—CLIFFORD CHRISTIANS, University of Illinois-Urbana


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EDITED BY
Jeffrey M. Shaw
&
Timothy J. Demy

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Acknowledgments

There are many people who helped put this book together, whether providing encouragement, or in formulating the idea to actually publish a book on Jacques Ellul and war. First among these is Tim Demy, friend and colleague at the Naval War College, and co-editor of this volume. It was his idea to bring together the leading scholars studying Ellul and those continuing to apply Ellul’s methodology in the twenty-first century. It is thanks to him that this book is in print.

Few books on Ellul see the light of day without David Gill’s active involvement. President of the International Jacques Ellul Society, David not only encouraged the project, but gave me permission to use articles that had previously been published in the Ellul Forum over the years. By doing so, readers can now reference articles on the topic of Ellul and war in a single volume.

Christian Amondson at Wipf and Stock has, as always, provided helpful oversight of this project, along with Brian Palmer, Laura Poncy, Ted Lewis, Joshua Little, and Calvin Jaffarian. Thanks are also due to the entire Wipf and Stock team, to include copy editors, cover designers, marketers, and contracting personnel.

Other Ellul scholars, friends, and colleagues who helped bring this volume to print include Lisa Richmond, who diligently reviewed and provided editing and stylistic suggestions for some of the following chapters. Thanks also to Allyson Rogers, Kent Walker, Bernard Bouyssou, Jerome Ellul, Sylvie Justome, Pierre Castro, and especially Daniel and Anita Ceruzuelle for their hospitality and conversation as hosts to visiting Ellulians in the summer of 2015.
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Introduction

It is nearly impossible to read the news and not stumble across a headline that proclaims some act of violence somewhere in the world. Whether conflict between nations, civil wars, or some combination of both, the twenty-first century has seen no decrease in war, terrorism, and bloodshed. Why is this? Has not our inter-connected and globalized world learned yet to live peacefully?

While some philosophers and academics have proclaimed that today’s world is actually more peaceful and less violent than in ages past, it would be difficult to argue that acts of sensational and purposeful violence have not captivated us over the last few decades. There is, however, one voice among many that has given us plenty to think about regarding some of the pitfalls that our increasingly technological world may continue to face. Jacques Ellul is that voice. This book brings together a number of perspectives on Ellul’s thinking about violence and war. Collected from conference presentations, previous editions of the *Ellul Forum*, or just plain new thinking, these articles give the reader an overview of Ellul’s writing on violence, resistance, and war.

It is always important to keep in mind when reading Ellul that he is not a traditional philosopher. Rather than presenting a series of answers to various questions, his dialectical method provokes, prods, and compels us to think more deeply about the human condition as we find it. This book presents eleven chapters that address the topic of violence, resistance, and war in Ellul’s thinking.

David Gill leads off with a general overview of Ellul on violence. This chapter provides some background and framework for those that follow.
David Stokes then presents a comparison of Ellul with John Calvin and Karl Barth. Andrew Goddard brings us an updated version of Ellul and the just war tradition. Dal Yon Jing offers an Ellulian methodology for examining the consequences of increased cyber surveillance and security, highlighting some of the pitfalls inherent in an increasingly technological world. Stanley Anozie looks at the Nigerian government’s war against Boko Haram through the lens of Ellul’s thinking on war and propaganda. Andy Alexis-Baker looks at “just policing,” using Ellul as a backdrop. Richard Kirkpatrick presents a new analysis of Ellul and Machiavelli. Jeff Shaw examines Ellul and Thomas Merton and their thinking on propaganda as a form of violence. Peter Fallon looks at propaganda as well, but as a form of psychic violence. David Lovekin writes on technology and perpetual war, and Mark Baker concludes the chapters with his assessment of how Ellul influenced him to become a Christian pacifist. There are two book reviews in the appendix to help acquaint (or reacquaint, as the case may be) readers with Ellul’s thinking on violence.

Throughout the book, readers may encounter the word *technique*. Anyone familiar with Ellul and his writing will instantly recognize this concept—it is simply the focal point of his entire argument from his magnum opus *The Technological Society*. In order to bring new readers into the fold, according to Ellul,

> *Technique* refers to any complex of standardized means for attaining a predetermined result. Thus, it converts spontaneous and unreflective behavior into behavior that is deliberate and rationalized. The Technical Man is fascinated by results, by the immediate consequences of setting standardized devices into motion. He cannot help admiring the spectacular effectiveness of nuclear weapons of war. Above all, he is committed to the “one best way” to achieve any designated objective.¹

*Technique* is a key concept that one must understand in order to grasp Ellul’s message. It is a concept that will appear frequently in any discussion of Ellul.

Jacques Ellul does not belong to either the left or the right; he is neither liberal nor conservative. Only his individual positions on any given topic can be classified as such, and even then, it is difficult to locate him in any particular camp. This may be due to the fact that his thinking emerges from mid-twentieth century France, and is generally far more sophisticated than


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what we might find in early twenty-first century America. What passes for informed debate today is often no more than intellectual dribble, whether we get it from Jon Stewart or Rush Limbaugh. The parameters of discourse have collapsed to such a degree that we often find it difficult to entertain ideas that do not meet our predetermined specifications. Many who have read and considered Ellul’s work do not agree with his stance—something which you will find in the pages ahead. Ellul was not looking for followers, nor was he trying to convince anyone to think like he did. He simply presented his thinking to the world, and invited others to think for themselves, whether by using his writing as a starting point or not.

Thus, Ellul can be difficult for readers who are expecting to pick up a book that helps reinforce their particular stereotypes. If you want a book that supports your preconceptions about the way you think the world really is, stop reading now. If, however, you want to critically examine ideas of importance, and encounter ideas that may not necessarily be ones with which you thoroughly agree, then continue on, and join in the debate with Ellul, the scholar from Bordeaux, and the ideas that he has inspired in those who have interacted with his work. Better yet, take a look online at the Ellul Forum (https://journals.wheaton.edu/index.php/ellul) and perhaps contribute something to the discussion. And finally, peruse the large selection of Ellul’s work that has been translated by Wipf and Stock, and begin the journey into Ellul’s sociological and theological thinking. You will not be disappointed!

References

Chapter 1

Jacques Ellul on Living in a Violent World

David Gill

The English version of Jacques Ellul's book, *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective*, was first published in 1969. Such was the intense interest in Ellul's thought in that time period that the English translation was actually published three years in advance of the French original which was titled *Contre les violents*, literally “against the violent” or “against violence,” which is a bit stronger title than “reflections on violence.” Forty years later, is it possible to discern any measurable impact of Ellul's essay on the level of violence in our world? I don't think so, since it's worse than ever. And is it possible forty years later to discern any significant impact of Ellul's essay on the way Christians in the Francophone or Anglophone worlds view violence? Again, I don’t think so. The militaristic and violent attitudes of many Christians today are shocking, to say the least. The words embarrassing, dangerous, ignorant, faithless, and worldly are some of the other terms that come to mind. Other “religious” peoples have certainly also exhibited pendants for violence, the severity of which Ellul could scarcely have imagined. Of course, this is not Ellul's fault—except in the sense that he might have written more clearly and persuasively, but this is a charge that could be leveled at many great thinkers in our field and in many other fields as well.

1. This chapter is derived from a presentation delivered at the Society of Christian Ethics Annual Meeting, Washington, DC, January 7, 2012.
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In this centenary year of Jacques Ellul’s birth (January 6, 1912—May 19, 1994) I am among those suggesting that the twentieth-century poly-math of Bordeaux deserves a renewed and serious hearing in our troubled twenty-first century. Certainly on topics such as technology, politics, communications, religion, and ethics such attention is warranted. But on the specific problem of violence he has a great deal to say to us as well. Two preliminary ideas will set the stage for a discussion of his views on violence.

The first preliminary has to do with the context in which and from which Ellul wrote about violence. His childhood unfolded in France during the Great War which embroiled France and all of Europe. The Russian Revolution occurred when he was seven years old and loomed over Europe much more intensely than it did a distant USA. From 1936 to 1939 Ellul and many of his friends were close observers and in some cases actual participants in the Spanish Civil War (Bordeaux lies not far north of the Spanish border). During the Second World War, Nazi Germany occupied France, including Bordeaux in the Southwest. Ellul was fired from his university post for disloyalty to the collaborating Vichy government and spent the next four years of the occupation living and working on a farm outside of Bordeaux and as an active participant/leader in the Resistance. He says he did not personally engage in violence against the German forces but he knew of their activity rounding up the local Jewish population and sending them off to Auschwitz. His own elderly father was arrested and sent to a prison near the Swiss border where he became ill and died within a year. Ellul and his friends helped to hide Jewish men and women and provide them with false identity papers. In the 1950s, Ellul was among those urging the early decolonization of Algeria to avoid bloodshed. Their voices were ignored with horrible, violent consequences. And in the West itself after 1945, Ellul often decried the triumph of the spirit and weapons of war over the victors themselves, not just over the vanquished. Finally, on the local level, Ellul was for many years in the fifties and sixties a leader in a local juvenile gang “prevention club,” working with street gang members and their families to help them find another way, often also acting as their legal advocate in courtroom settings. During the 1968 French university student strikes and the violence which followed, Ellul was a faculty sympathizer and student advocate. There is no need to review the world situation from the sixties to the nineties since it is so well known. But it is important to understand that when Ellul writes about violence, he is anything but an ivory tower theorist unfamiliar with actual conflict.
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The second preliminary note has to do with Ellul's vocation as an intellectual and how this relates to our understanding of his writings on violence or any other topic. In short, Ellul is a prophet, a dialectician, and an existentialist. Expecting him to be anything else will lead to great misunderstanding and disappointment. He is a prophet rather than a teacher in the sense that he brings a specific message, a word, from outside a given topic or situation that can illuminate something that has been missing or overlooked. He upsets and challenges conventions and assumptions and standard ways of thinking and seeing. He is strange and uncomfortable. He is not the systematic, constructive teacher but the troubling critic. He is a dialectician in that he fundamentally believes that we understand reality by grasping the simultaneous truth of what appear to be opposites and contradictions, paradoxes, anomalies. This is for Ellul as fundamental to the Bible and theology as it is to sociology and history. Thus, Jesus is divine and human, God is three and one, the state is Babylon and Jerusalem, violence is necessary and unacceptable. There is no resolution of such dialectic intellectually or rationally—the resolution, or the synthesis, happens in life, in being and in acting. In other words we can live with the contradictions of violence, theology, etc., but we cannot iron them out in our theories and explanations. And this is where the existentialist label comes in. Ellul is an heir of Søren Kierkegaard. He is relentlessly anti-Modern. He cares nothing for comprehensive systems and theories and everything for life at this moment in this context. All of this may be unsatisfying to readers of Ellul who want something other than what he has to give. But what Ellul has to offer if taken for what it is, is a great gift to our thinking and conversation; it is not an adequate final destination, but a valuable part of the journey.

One other comment on Ellul's approach: in his classic two-volume Maincurrents in Sociological Thought, Raymond Aron summarizes a basic difference between the continental European sociologists like Max Weber and Emile Durkheim and those of the American tradition. The continental types tended to create descriptive models, inviting us to reflect on their explanatory power, while the Americans tend to generalize based on statistical, empirical research. This is helpful in understanding Ellul's approach in this and other works. There is a vast research behind his work but it is not statistics so much as history and culture. Readers seeking social scientific research in that quantitative mode will almost always find Ellul frustrating and unpersuasive. With regard to violence, Ellul creates a model to try to explain it; in the old metaphor of shoes and feet, his explanatory model is
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like a shoe. It is for us to try it on, and to see if it fits as we live out our own reflection and experience, and as we walk in it.

So let me review briefly Ellul’s discussion of violence, sticking fairly closely to his 1969 book, Violence. Ellul first reviews how he sees the historical traditions in the Christian church—from the virtual pacifism (partly principled, partly by default) of the first three centuries when Christianity was excluded from power to the epoch of Christendom when from St. Augustine to Martin Luther the theologians approved the just use of force and violence internally and just wars externally. He then moves to the post-Christendom world which ranges from the advocates of pacifism and non-violent resistance on the one hand to the theology of revolution on the other and everything in between.

Ellul concludes his review of this history by saying those who seek a Christian theory for the appropriate use of violence

try to formulate a compromise between the demands of the Christ and the necessities of the world, to work out a quantitative determination, a balance of factors that will bring in a viable social order . . . [they] cherish the hope that the various elements involved can be brought into accord. They forget that this is the world that has absolutely rejected Jesus Christ, that there can be no accord between the values, the bases, the stoikea of the world and those of the revelation . . . [T]he attempt to assimilate world and faith to each other is one mistake, and the attempt to separate them radically is another . . . If the Incarnation has a meaning it can only be that God came into the most abominable of places (and he did not, by his coming, either validate or change that place) . . . So we must stand at a distance from our society, its tendencies and movements, but we must never break with it, for the Incarnation has taken place. We are invited to take part in a dialectic, to be in the world but not of it, and thus to seek out a particular, a specifically Christian position. It is from this point of view that we shall consider this problem of violence, which is so urgent and tragic today.²

Ellul argues that we need much more realism in our understanding of violence. Violence is endemic to human history; it is found everywhere and at all times. In this, Ellul agrees with Thomas Hobbes. This is the state of nature. Theologically, biblical revelation shows the same thing: violence is of the order of the fall; from Cain killing Abel to the world crucifying

Jesus to the apocalyptic conflict of Armageddon, violence is the condition of humanity. Politically, all states are based on violence and there is no fundamental difference between violence and force.

Even as moral and Christian-influenced a nation as the USA, Ellul argues that free market competition, such as that which supports the US economy, can represent a kind of economic violence and coercion no different than what one would find in a system based on centralized planning. Violence is about coercing and attacking others, forcing their acquiescence, dominating and imposing your will upon them. This can be done physically, of course, but it is still violence if the coercion is psychological, economic, ideological, or otherwise. It is the opposite of inviting or allowing a free choice or response by the other.

Violence, Ellul argues, is the natural condition of humanity; it is part of the order of necessity. Some violent acts may seem like they are the free, reckless striking out against others. But whether premeditated and planned or not, violence in its various forms is not about freedom but about necessity. In other words, violence is a kind of interwoven web that draws us into its expression that imposes itself on our lives, that pressures us to participate in it and continue it.

But as hopeless and pessimistic as all of that sounds, necessity is not quite the same thing as fatality or destiny. It is possible to resist. It cannot be eliminated from a fallen world but it is important to try to mitigate its impacts, address and ameliorate where possible the conditions that foment it, and heal and comfort those suffering from it. Ellul has sometimes written that he describes a world that will exist if we do nothing to resist it or refuse its direction. He has said that when God wants someone to do something he first makes him mad. It is only when we feel that a situation is hopeless and completely sealed off that we will sometimes finally act.

But let’s go back to violence in the order of necessity. Ellul’s views on violence can basically be summarized by the following main points:

1. Continuity: once you start using violence you can’t get away from it.
2. Reciprocity: those who live by the sword will die by the sword; using violence against an enemy produces enemies intent on retaliation.
3. Sameness: all violence is the same, of a piece; it is impossible to distinguish justified and unjustified or liberating and enslaving violence; one kind leads to the others, involves the others.
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4. Violence begets only violence and violence-corrupted ends: the means affect the character of the end. Violent means do not and cannot produce a peaceful end. At best the result is a kind of “détente-based-on-violence.”

5. Justification: all users of violence try to justify it and themselves; but it is always a sign of incapacity, an inability to imagine or follow an alternative path, always from mixed motives that may include hatred, greed, etc.; it leads to hypocrisy.

These five precepts are perhaps overstated, but Ellul has seen too many alleged liberators with clean hands wind up being corrupted by their very process of taking and holding power. He has seen too many idealistic movements turn into violent oppression and too much high-flown rhetoric masking a hidden violence under the surface. Too many wars of liberation end in slavery, and too many “wars to end wars” lead to more and worse wars. So Ellul’s bold, overstated, oversimplified descriptions of violence are actually a helpful prophetic challenge: if we get involved in any violence or coercion, we had better do so with our eyes open. If we don’t resist, this is all we are left with.

Ellul believes that this violence in the world of necessity is inescapable in any total sense. We are caught in it and there is no total escape from its impact. In practice we will find ourselves in situations where we simply are cornered and cannot find another way out than violence, whether that is killing or maiming an attacker, trying to assassinate a tyrant, joining an army to beat back an invading force, or laying off a band of loyal workers before our company winds up in bankruptcy. We can’t find another way. We act in a violent fashion. And for Ellul this is understandable and even “condonable” in some cases. Ellul says that violence can even have its own virtues within this world of necessity: it can bring about disorder, crush the lie, reveal the true situation, and explode the façade. So Ellul condones the violent revolts of at least some oppressed groups. But what he says is that this is not holy or Christian or just violence—but rather is an example of yielding to necessity in a fallen world. The appropriate rhetoric is not “God led me to kill you” but “I just couldn’t find another way so I had to kill him.”

But for Christians, Ellul says, we must not assume that what is natural is what is good or that what is necessary is legitimate. Christ came to shatter necessity and introduce freedom. Christ makes us free to struggle against necessity, to resist being defined by necessity. Where death is the
final necessity, Christ brought resurrection. Where society was necessarily ordered and stratified along rigid ethnic lines, Christ brought reconciliation and a new order of freedom. So it is the calling of Christians to resist and refuse violence and introduce another alternative, a way of freedom.

If we join a movement, we should not participate in any of its violent acts, whether it be vandalism, arson, or murder. We should not support the violent tactics even though we support the group’s claims of justice. We should bear witness to the group itself about another way and remind the group of the humanity and value of the enemy oppressor, despite how they have been treating the group. If we are part of such conflicts, Ellul urges Christians to be on the side of the poor and to look for the truly poor—the unpopular poor who have no advocates. Christians should be their advocates and use their own position to plead their case before the powerful. If they do wind up yielding to necessity and being involved in violence they should freely admit that they are doing this out of their own choice, their own fear or desperation. We must never sprinkle our wars and violence with holy water or blame what we do on God, relying on the just war tradition to explain why we acted as we did. Instead, we confess that we are sinners caught up in a sinful world.

Ellul closes by calling for what he terms “Christian radicalism” and the “violence of love.” This illustrates Ellul’s hard core dialectical thinking. In a world of necessity he calls for freedom. In a world of mass society he focuses on the individual. In the Here and now God arrives as the Wholly Other. In a material world he calls for a spiritual warfare. In a world of realism he calls for radicalism. In an unloving violent era he calls for the violence of love.

Here is how he describes it: “What Christ does for us is above all to make us free . . . But to have true freedom is to escape necessity or rather to be free to struggle against necessity. Therefore I say that only one line of action is open to the Christian who is free in Christ. He must struggle against violence precisely because apart from Christ violence is the form that human relations normally and necessarily take.” Ellul continues with that statement that “either we accept the order of necessity, acquiesce in and obey it . . . or else we accept the order of Christ but then we must reject violence root and branch.”

4. Ibid., 129.
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And mind this means all kinds and ways of violence: psychological manipulation, doctrinal terrorism, economic imperialism, the venomous warfare of free competition, as well as torture, guerilla movements, police action. The capitalist who, operating from his headquarters, exploits the mass of workers or colonial peoples is just as violent as the guerilla; he must absolutely not assume the mantle of Christianity. What he does is of the order of necessity, of estrangement from God, and even if he is a faithful churchgoer and a highly educated man there is no freedom in him.\(^5\)

Taking the above ideas into consideration, Ellul suggests that we need a renewed “Christian radicalism”: “If the Christian is to contend against violence (whatever its source) he will have to be absolutely intransigent, he will have to refuse to be conciliated . . . Christian faith is radical, decisive like the very word of God, or else it is nothing.”\(^6\) This does not mean withdrawal from the world or inaction or passivity but rather full, living presence in a violent world but with something specific and unique to offer. Ellul stated that “because Christianity is the revelation of the Wholly Other, that action must be different, specific, singular, incommensurable with political or corporate methods of action.”\(^7\) It does not mean counseling the poor and oppressed to be submissive and accepting but to be their advocate, to urge their cause and call for justice.

One of Ellul’s recurring themes in his other books is the importance of the “watchman on the wall” who foresees distant, approaching events and warns the city. In an era absorbed in a blizzard of “breaking news” and current events and celebrity tweets, who will play that role and foresee with greater depth and understanding coming conflicts and challenges that could well lead to violence in our streets or between nations? All too often it is when we are in the middle of a hot war or conflict that people demand insight, answers, and solutions. But by that time situations are much less fluid and amenable to change. Necessity and the laws of violence have taken over completely. So one of the ways Christians can fulfill their role in society is to try to serve as the watchman on the wall to speak and act while situations are still fluid. Where is the next Iraq or Libya or Ukraine? What can be done or said now to find another way than the violence that will inevitably arrive if we do nothing and allow things to develop as they are?

\(^5\) Ibid., 130–31.
\(^6\) Ibid., 145–46.
\(^7\) Ibid., 148.
Radical Christian presence should provide an inexhaustible source of creative ideas and actions for nonviolent resolution of grievances, misunderstandings, ignorance, fear, and injury. Rather than just providing analyses and justification for violent acts, followers of the Wholly Other should provide creative, constructive alternatives including diplomacy and redress of grievances. Radical Christians should be present in the movements and groups of our world but always playing the role of ambassador to the group from Christ's kingdom with its distinctive values. Helping our group to understand and see the humanity of the rival and the enemy, even becoming the enemy's advocate and protector if our side somehow wins.

In the end, what can we make of Ellul's approach to violence? In general I think that his perspectives are very insightful, important, and helpful. They certainly challenge us to think again, more deeply and carefully, about our world and its violence and coercion. All of his points are important considerations, and applying his thinking in today's world of ever-increasing violence committed on behalf of values that are claimed to be rooted in religious faith creates enormous challenges. But as I said earlier, Ellul is a prophet, not a teacher. I think the prophet is inadequate on a couple of points in particular. While I am generally in agreement about the centrality of freedom in Christian and human existence, I don't think that it can stand alone. Love and justice, for example deserve to be at the heart of our thinking as well. Necessity cannot be all bad. There is a necessity to eat, to love, to sleep, and to work. Theologically these are part of creation, not just part of the fall. That eating or working, for example, can become obsessive and toxic is part of the fallenness and brokenness of human life. So fasting and Sabbath-keeping are important acts of freedom from necessity but they don't stand alone and suggest that we stop eating or working entirely. Coercion is also part of raising children, teaching students, and managing traffic flows, but coercion needs to be evaluated and limited, and the coercers need to be held accountable. However, failing to exercise discipline or to correct the erring child, the failing student, or the speeding driver is not a choice that serves their humanity—or their freedom. So Ellul's descriptions of freedom and necessity are interesting and illuminating and challenging but insufficient.

A second problem is that by defining violence so broadly and rejecting it so completely, we are left with no criteria or method to do less damage rather than more (to say nothing of greater good, should that be possible). The just war criteria is one helpful avenue, and the chapters which follow
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will provide insight into Ellul’s thinking on just war and violence as phenomena worthy of critical thought and analysis.

References

Chapter 2

Calvin, Barth, Ellul, and the Powers That Be

David Stokes

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good and you will receive its approval; for it is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. (Romans 13:1–5)

A well-known anecdote tells of Karl Barth returning a photograph of himself to an admirer. Upon it he had inscribed: To a Barthian from one who is not a Barthian. The Swiss theologian’s inscription emphasized a point he was to make frequently throughout his five-decade dominance of European theology. There are no set protocols by which to practice the craft of theology. Rather, theological reflection demands that one listens to the Word of God in obedience—without doctrinal presuppositions or systematic technique. Few admirers of Barth heeded this demand more than the French sociologist and theologian, Jacques Ellul.

1. Scripture citations throughout are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.