

# The Ellul Forum

---

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Issue 60 | Fall 2017



Jacques Ellul, November 29th, 1944. Official identity photo, Municipal Council of Bordeaux archives privées famille Ellul / © Jérôme Ellul

The *Ellul Forum* is published by the International Jacques Ellul Society. Reasonable effort has been made to identify all copyright holders of materials published herein. The editor will be grateful to be notified of any corrections.

[www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org)

# Table of Contents

## 3 EDITORIAL

### ARTICLES

- 4 Jacques Ellul's Dialectical Theology: Embracing  
Contradictions about the Kingdom in the New Testament  
*Kevin Garrison*
- 12 Social Propaganda, and Trademarks  
*Richard L. Kirkpatrick*
- ### REVIEWS
- 18 Doug Hill, *Not So Fast: Thinking Twice About  
Technology*  
*David W. Gill*
- 21 Jacques Ellul, *Jacques Ellul on Violence, Resistance, and War*  
*Jason Hudson*
- 23 André Vitalis, *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest: Merton, Berrigan,  
Yoder, and Muste at the Gethsemani Abbey Peacemakers Retreat*  
*Chris Staysniak*

# Editorial

Jeff Shaw

Welcome to the 60th edition of the Ellul Forum! This issue addresses two topics central to Ellul's thought—dialectics, and the homogenization of much of society, and the human condition as well. Authors Kevin Garrision and Richard Kirkpatrick provide their views on these two important topics, and we invite your comments and responses in the form of additional articles for publication in future editions of the Forum. Perhaps these articles will provide readers with a framework for constructing their own arguments for presentation at the next IJES conference in 2018. Please mark your calendars for this event, which will take place from June 28-30, 2018, at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada. Speakers will include Walter Brueggemann, Frederic Rognon, David Gill, and Iwan Russell-Jones. You will not want to miss this event, and we hope that it builds upon the enthusiasm generated at the Berkeley conference last year.

For more information about the conference, go to [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org). For registration information, please go to <http://ellul-2018conference.weebly.com>

\$120 regular registration; \$60 student registration (includes banquet)

The theme of the conference is “Jacques Ellul and the Bible: A Cross-Disciplinary Exploration”

Jacques Ellul is best known as one of the premier voices of the 20th century analyzing the emergence, characteristics, and challenges of the “technological society” — the growing and seemingly irresistible dominance of technological tools, processes, and values over the whole of life and the whole of the world. But the Bordeaux sociologist simultaneously produced almost as many works of biblical study and reflection as he did works of sociology. In these studies Ellul delivered brilliantly creative insights as well as provocative challenges to traditional theology. All serious students of Ellul, whether part of faith communities like Ellul (in the French Reformed Church) or not (like his colleague and best friend Bernard Charbonneau), have found interaction with his theological writings an essential complement to the study of his great sociological works.

This conference will seek a multi-perspectival hearing of Scripture stimulated by Ellul's works.

Special heartfelt thanks to Eli Nupanga of Wheaton College for generously assisting with the formatting of this issue.

Jeff Shaw, Managing Editor

# Jacques Ellul's Dialectical Theology: Embracing Contradictions about the Kingdom in the New Testament

Kevin Garrison

**Abstract:** Jacques Ellul frequently uses “dialectics” as a tool for Biblical understanding. Though Ellul expounds on his idea of a “dialectical theology” at different moments in his large collection of works, he rarely gives a clear view of how and where dialectics are present in the New Testament, specifically as it relates to the idea of the “kingdom of heaven.” In order to make Ellul’s ideas about theology more accessible to people unfamiliar with dialectics, this article attempts to do four things: 1) *define* Ellul’s idea of dialectics, 2) explore *why* dialectics are necessary for understanding the Bible, 3) identify *where* several of these dialectics occur in the New Testament, and 4) explain *how* they are relevant to contemporary Christians and Ellulian scholars.

## INTRODUCTION

Most Christians reject the idea of contradictions in the Bible, especially individuals from traditions that hold to the ideas of Biblical literalism or the inerrancy of scripture.<sup>1</sup> The very word “contradiction” suggests that what God has spoken (“diction”) has been refuted by oppositional statements (“contra”), and many Christians find it difficult to believe in a God who cannot provide a consistent narrative across multiple time periods and authors. However, an entire theological tradition exists which argues that there *are* contradictions in the Bible and also attempts to understand how the paradoxes that emerge from those contradictions can enrich our understanding of theology. Called “dialectical theology,” it is a tradition most often and most clearly associated with writings of Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and, most importantly for this essay, Jacques Ellul (1912-1992), the French sociologist most famous for his books *The Technological Society*<sup>2</sup> and *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*.<sup>3</sup>

In this essay, I want to use Ellul’s writings to provide both Christians and Ellulian scholars with a shorthand understanding of dialectical theology that can potentially challenge and enrich their readings of the Bible, especially by looking at the New Testament idea of the “kingdom of heaven.” For those interested in a much more detailed analysis of Ellul’s dialectical theology, I recommend Jacob Van Vleet’s 2016 publi-

cation *Dialectical Theology and Jacques Ellul*.<sup>4</sup> Or for those with time, the best source for understanding Ellul is to read Ellul himself. However, Ellul wrote more than 50 books in his lifetime and hundreds of articles, and more importantly, he rarely provides insights into his methods of inquiry – the so-called master keys that unlock the doors to the complexity of his thinking. As such, this essay is designed to accomplish several things: 1) to *define* Ellul’s idea of dialectics, 2) to explore *why* contradictions and dialectics are necessary for understanding the New Testament, 3) to share *where* several of these dialectics occur, and 4) to explain *how* they are relevant for study. In the final section, I hope to share insights into how Ellul’s dialectical theology has personally challenged my wife and I to re-think commonplaces in Christianity.

## DIALECTICS

First, though, what is a dialectic?

Dialectics has a rich philosophical history. In Greek philosophy, a dialectic is closely associated with a dialogue – a method of discovering truth as a group of individuals discuss, argue, and debate ideas. Plato’s philosophy was expounded in written dialogues, such as his famous work *The Republic*,<sup>5</sup> where Socrates (via the Socratic Method) attempted to serve as an intellectual gadfly who pestered the populace with questions designed to challenge them. More recently in 19th century Germany, dialectics was re-envisioned as a method for discovering truth via a logical method. Called a Hegelian dialectic, truth emerges not from dialogue, but when a thesis encounters an anti-thesis and then creates a synthesis that emerges from the two oppositions. Subsequent philosophers, such as Karl Marx and Søren Kierkegaard, used Hegel’s dialectic to create entire philosophical systems that could be applied to even history itself. For instance, Marx’s work in the *Communist Manifesto*<sup>6</sup> was heavily influenced by dialectics, and his idea of material dialectics argued that the working class would eventually rise against the ruling class in a dialectical struggle, and the end result would see progress in

social history.

Ellul was heavily influenced by Marx; he first read Marx at the age of 17, and he “plunged into Marx’s thinking with incredible joy”.<sup>7</sup> However, Ellul’s understanding of dialectics takes a radical departure from both Marx and most philosophical traditions. Two years after reading Marx, Ellul had a “very brutal and very sudden conversion”<sup>8</sup> to Christianity, and for the rest of his life, he was unable to reconcile the two opposing systems: Christianity and Marxism. In fact, Ellul argues that his understanding of dialectics emerged from his struggle to be both a Christian and a Marxist. He writes that “I was sometimes torn between the two extremes, and sometimes reconciled; but I absolutely refused to abandon either one”.<sup>9</sup> This lived-world tension – how can one serve both Jesus and the man famous for claiming religion as an opium? – heavily influenced Ellul’s writings. He frequently wrote sociological books that have a counterpart in theological books, such as *The Technological Society*,<sup>10</sup> which describes the problem of *technique*, and *The Ethics of Freedom*,<sup>11</sup> which describes potential responses.

What makes Ellul’s understanding of dialectics unique is that he thinks it is a mistake for a synthesis to always emerge out of a dialectical struggle. Instead, dialectics work best when the thesis and antithesis remain in tension, when someone claims two statements that cannot both be. Ellul writes of the “positivity of negativity” – that is, “if the positive remains alone, it remains unchanged: stable and inert. A positive – for example, an uncontested society, a force without counterforce, a man without dialogue, an unchallenged teacher, a church with no heretics, a single party with no rivals – will be shut up in the indefinite repetition of its own image”.<sup>12</sup> Saying “no” or introducing a “negation” into a positive will radically transform a situation via a subsequent dialectical struggle. Ellul rejects the idea of progress – that a synthesis must always emerge; simply challenging the positive with a negative will transform “the situation,”<sup>13</sup> and that is enough. The result of dialectics is to take contradictory statements and live out the tension rather than trying to resolve the contradiction with a synthesis.

Most importantly, Ellul used his understanding of dialectics to inform his understanding of Biblical exegesis, building on the work of Karl Barth and Søren Kierkegaard’s exegetical methods. Ellul went so far as to claim that the “concept of contradiction [without synthesis] is specifically a biblical concept”.<sup>14</sup> Most Christians already assume some level of dialectical thought. Consider one of the more common examples: the *incarnation*. The incarnation is a contradiction that remains in an unresolved dialectical tension: how can Jesus, who became human, still be God? As the Nicene Creed states, Jesus is both “very God of very God,” but also “was made man.”<sup>15</sup> The tension is necessary, however. To claim Jesus as only God would place him in the realm of the transcendent. To claim Jesus as only man would place him as unable to answer the problem of human sin – how can a man, alone, undo what Adam’s transgression did without that man also

being divine? The two images, together, give a fuller perspective of the infinite range of God.

When consistently applied to the Bible, dialectics (as a method of interpretation) transforms Christianity from questions of orthodoxy (i.e. the correct interpretation) to a series of personal challenges to the Church. It is worth quoting Ellul at length. He writes that a Biblical dialectic “...makes man’s relation to God not a repetition, a fixity, a ritual, a scrupulous submission, but a permanent invention, a new creation of the one with the other, a challenge, a love affair, an adventure whose outcome can never be known in advance”.<sup>16</sup> With this passage, Ellul brings back the mystery of God. The miraculous. The tension. The challenges. The impossibilities. Paul Tillich in his article on dialectical theology argues that a better term is “paradoxical” rather than “dialectical,”<sup>17</sup> but the end result is largely the same: dialectics and paradoxes embrace contradictions and tensions in the Bible rather than looking for logical reconciliation. The resulting dialectical struggle pits one idea against a competing idea for the sake of freedom, truth, understanding, and faith.

## CONTRADICTIONS

The “inerrancy of scripture” and “Biblical literalism” traditions have heavily influenced modern Biblical exegesis; therefore, before looking at several examples of Biblical dialectics, it would be worthwhile to establish why the fear of Biblical contradictions is unfounded.

First, to claim that the Bible can have no contradictions provides a *logical* standard of measurement that the Bible, itself, does not suggest. Theology – the *logos* or logic of God – assumes that we can understand God logically. However, logic is a human creation, not a Biblical interpretation standard. That is, the law of non-contradiction states that if A is equal to B, then to claim that A is also NOT equal to B would be a logical contradiction. In our lived-world experiences, the law of non-contradiction is a necessity, for contradictions are called dishonesty, equivocation, lying, or deception. Humans cannot state, simultaneously, things such as “Please close the door. Don’t close the door.” without causing inconsistencies in communication.

However, this does not mean that God himself adheres to the law of non-contradiction. Isaiah tells us that God’s “thoughts are not your thoughts,” (Isaiah 55:8),<sup>18</sup> a claim that C.S. Lewis replicates when he claims that Aslan isn’t a “*tame* lion”.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Peter wrote that “with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day” (2 Peter 3:8). Human logic does not necessarily apply to God. Therefore, when we encounter Biblical “tension,” Ellul argues that we should not search for a way to relax it and “add words aiming at a *logical* reconciliation”<sup>20</sup> because the Bible is “paradox” and “mystery,” not “*logical*, organized thought”.<sup>21</sup> If anything, we should expect that a God who miraculously inserts himself into history via the person of Jesus would far surpass any attempt to place him into the finite (and logical) mind of humans.

Secondly, analyzing contradictions via dialectical theology does not mean that we get bogged down in questions of scientific and historical accuracy, such as debating the discrepancies between the gospels regarding Jesus' death and resurrection. Instead, dialectical theology exhibits a concern for a *big picture* interpretation of the Bible. For Ellul, the Old and New Testaments are not primarily history, science, literature, a morality, or a book of wisdom. Rather, it is a challenge to its readers. The Bible is unified by writers who record moments when God speaks and then narrate how those words work to reshape individuals and societies. The Bible, from the early patriarchs to the judges to the kings to the prophets to the arrival of Jesus (God's word made flesh), shares how ordinary people encounter the word of God and then are changed, oftentimes radically. Genesis begins with God speaking the world into existence. Adam encounters God's voice in a garden, Moses encounters it in a flame, and Elijah in a still voice on the wind. Ezekiel hears it as rushing waters, Job experienced it as a thunderous roar, and Jesus begins his ministry after experiencing the voice of God in the form of a dove. For Ellul, it matters little how accurate the historical details are, or the representation of scientific knowledge. Rather, what matters is that the Bible shares God speaking and humans responding. Today, when we read the Bible, we participate in the tradition of the Feast of Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 31:10-11) where we hear the word of God being spoken again. And again. And those words are then allowed to work on individuals and groups of individuals to change them, *regardless* of the historical accuracy of the claims.

Thirdly, the Bible frequently *does* contradict itself. In fact, several contradictions define the Christian life and are taught in the modern church: the incarnation (is Jesus man or God?), the Trinity (how can God be both one and three?), the process of salvation (is it faith or works?), living in the world (how does the Christian live in the world, but not be part of the world?), prayer (are we supposed to pray or does the spirit intercede?) and so on so forth. Or consider another simple example: Jesus is both described as the "lion of the tribe of Judah" and a "sacrificial lamb." These metaphors provide us with competing images. A lion is a predator; a lamb is the prey. A lion is wild and untamed; a lamb is an agricultural product, subservient to human needs. A lion is powerful; a lamb is powerless. A lion is the king of beasts; a lamb is used in sacrifices. To describe Jesus in these two competing images provides us with an irreconcilable problem: which is it? For Ellul, the answer is always: both.

### A DIALECTICAL KINGDOM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In this section, I would like to focus on a single dialectic that is shared in the New Testament: the idea of the *kingdom of heaven*. As we'll see, the New Testament embraces several contradictory views of 1) the kingdom, 2) the kingdom's subjects, 3) the King, and 4) the King's return. As seen below, in Table 1, dialectical theology embraces these contradictory

images, recognizing (as the circle implies) that we can never rest in one interpretation over the other. In the four subsequent sections, we will explore each of these four contradictions, and in the conclusion, I will share a personal example of how we can utilize these contradictory images to re-think our day-to-day experiences.

New Testament Contradictions	Interpretation 1	Interpretation 2
1) <i>Views of the Kingdom</i>	Absence: Near	Presence: Here
2) <i>Views of the Kingdom's Subjects</i>	Limited Salvation	Absence: Near
3) <i>Views of the King</i>	God as Judge: Lion	Absence: Near
4) <i>Views of the King's Return</i>	Not Yet	Absence: Near

Table 1: Dialectical Interpretation of the Kingdom of Heaven

### 1) Conflicting Views of the Kingdom

Ellul begins his discussion of Christianity in *The Presence of the Kingdom*<sup>22</sup> where Jesus began his preaching: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17). Most of Jesus' messages, sermons, parables, teachings, and prayers include a discussion about this kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount begins with the kingdom belonging to the poor in spirit and the persecuted. The Lord's Prayer invokes the coming of the kingdom. The twelve disciples are called to preach the kingdom of heaven is near. The disciples quarrel about who is greatest in the kingdom. The parables begin with the injunction of "the kingdom of heaven is like..." The end of the age is equated with the nearness of the kingdom. Jesus is called the king of the Jews

What are we to make of this overwhelming discussion of a kingdom? The searchers for the historical Jesus, such as James Tabor,<sup>23</sup> understand the prevalence of the word "kingdom" by arguing that Jesus and John the Baptist were partners in the insurrection that would overthrow the earthly kingdom of the Romans. But this is too simple, for Jesus claims that his kingdom is not of this world. Or, also according to the proponents of the historical Jesus, perhaps the abundant mentioning of the kingdom is just an editorial preference of its authors, but again, this is insufficient as an explanation because all four gospels contain frequent discussions of the kingdom – even John's gospel, the one most in opposition to the other three, tells Nicodemus that he must "see" (John 3:3) and "enter" (John 3:5) the kingdom of God by being born again. And most damaging to the historical Jesus' claims comes from the fact that in the descriptions of the devil's temptation of Jesus, the devil offers "all the kingdoms of the world" (Matthew 4:8), and Jesus, if his mission was to re-take the kingdom for Israel, ironically refuses to take these kingdoms. And he does this *prior* to beginning his ministry. If Jesus' goal was to simply overthrow the Roman Empire, then he should have accepted the devil's gift and saved himself months of persecution and eventually death.

So what, then, is this kingdom?

Of primary importance, as already stated, is that Jesus be-

gins his ministry in opposition to the kingdoms of the world. Before he preaches the nearness of *his* kingdom, he rejects outright the offer from devil to take authority and command over all of the *earthly* kingdoms. As Ellul says, “when Satan promises Jesus that he will give him these kingdoms, he is not lying. He can do so. He is the prince of this world. While it is true that all authority comes from God, it is also true that every manifestation of power is an expression of the might of Satan”.<sup>24</sup> The kingdom of heaven is “not of this world” (John 18:36). If it was, then Jesus would have taken the offer from Satan and become the king of our current cities, governments, peoples, nations, empires, and rulers. But he doesn’t.

More importantly, the kingdom is described exclusively in metaphorical language – the parables. The kingdom of heaven is *like* a mustard seed. The kingdom of heaven is *like* a treasure hidden in a field. The kingdom of heaven is *like* a net that was let down into a lake and caught all kinds of fish. Jesus does not give clear and precise descriptions of what the kingdom looks like, as if this kingdom could be described literally. This is important, for Jesus has already established a clear break of his kingdom from the world’s kingdoms, and to then give a precise definition of his kingdom in terms of human language would be to then equate the kingdom to *this* world – the very thing he has rejected. So metaphor is the only recourse, the only way to describe heaven’s kingdom while still connecting to our lived-world experiences.

But perhaps most intriguing about the kingdom is how it is set in terms of an opposition, a dialectic of *absence* and *presence* (see Table 1). The kingdom is sometimes “near” (Matthew 4:17), and other times it is “in your midst” (Luke 17:21). It is sometimes something people should “seek” (Matthew 6:33), and other times it is something the disciples will “see” (Matthew 16:28). It is sometimes something to “enter” (Matthew 18:3), and other times it is “upon you” (Luke 11:20). Ellul bases most of his understanding of the New Testament on this dialectic, where “the whole deployment of the existence of the people of God (the church) and individual Christians is dialectic in the constant renewal of promise and fulfillment [. . .]. The kingdom of heaven is among you, in the midst of you, or in you, but it will also come at the end of the age.”<sup>25</sup>

## 2) Conflicting Views of the Kingdom’s Subjects

A similar dialectic is revealed when attempting to determine *who* is a member of the kingdom of heaven: is the kingdom inclusive or exclusive? *Universal* to all or *limited* to some (see Table 1)? And how is a subject supposed to enter the kingdom – via human choice or the grace of God?

Consider the question of choice. In Acts, Peter pleads with the crowd to “save themselves” (Acts 2:40) and 3,000 individuals “accepted his message” (Acts 2:41). But just a few sentences later, Luke claims that “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). These passages present an obvious tension: who is in charge of salvation? Is it God who adds to the numbers or is it the people who are commanded to save themselves? And later, Acts 10:44 states

that “The Holy Spirit came on all who heard. . .” and then, only three verses later, claims that “They have received the Holy Spirit. . .” (Acts 10:47). Again, the contrast is to be noted. Who is in control – the person or the Spirit? The verb “came” suggests that salvation is an act of God, freely chosen in relationship to his people, offered as a gift. The verb “received” implies a human action, freely chosen *in spite* of the gift.

More importantly, the Bible suggests two possibilities in regards to who will be saved: the all or the few. The verses in support of *universal salvation* are numerous, and Ellul was a proponent of universal salvation. God is “all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28). “Every knee shall bow” (Romans 14:11). Jesus died “once for all” (Romans 6:10). But the verses that support *limited salvation* are just as numerous. “The one who believes in me will live” (John 11:25). Only “those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Revelation 21:27) will enter the New Jerusalem. When Jesus is asked “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” (Luke 13:22), he replies that many “will try to enter and will not be able to” (Luke 13:24).

M. Eugene Boring makes the tension between universal and limited salvation clear in his essay *The Language of Universal Salvation in Paul*.<sup>26</sup> All the numerous attempts to rationalize Paul’s thinking about salvation have largely failed. It is impossible to reconcile the fact that Paul thought dualistically, with competing images about the work of Christ. As he writes, “Paul has statements of conditional, limited salvation, and statements of unconditional, universal salvation. Neither of these can be reduced to the other. Neither is what he ‘really’ thought. Neither should be subordinated to the other”.<sup>27</sup>

## 3) Conflicting Views of the King

The messages surrounding God and his expressions – the Spirit and the Son – are similarly confusing. Who is God? Who is the King? Who is the one that Christians worship, pray to, bow down to, and accept as Lord?

The simple answer is that, from a dialectical perspective, we don’t know. Our images are juxtaposed. We have already discussed the confusion about Christ as a lion and a lamb and the confusion of Jesus as a man or as the son of God (the incarnation). Yet consider another – Jesus claims that he has not “come to bring peace to the earth,” but a “sword” (Matthew 10:34), yet the Messiah is also called the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), and Paul calls us to “let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts” (Col. 3:15). How can Christ be both a peace-bringer and peace-destroyer? How can the one who brings salvation also bring an instrument for *war* and *destruction*?

Consider yet another tension. Should God be worshiped as one who is to be loved or one who is to be feared? The Bible tells us: both. The early church in Acts was “God-fearing” (Acts 9:31), and the source of motivation for preaching the gospel comes when Christians “fear the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:11). Yet we also know that God is love, and that “love drives

out fear” (1 John 4:18). Such makes no sense. How can one both *fear* God AND *love* him simultaneously?

There is no easy way to reconcile these competing images of Christ. As Boring makes clear, Paul himself is largely inconsistent in providing a single image of God and his work. As previously discussed regarding universal or limited salvation, the only clear way to reconcile the disparate views of Christ is to recognize that there are multiple, competing images of who God is. For Boring, in one view, God is viewed as the *Judge* – the one who places responsibility on humans, who judges action and inaction, commands Christians to minister, share the good news, and to act in accordance with the Spirit rather than human nature. In the other view, God is viewed as a *King* – the one who places responsibility on himself to save, who gives grace freely, and completes the whole of salvation through the death of Christ (see Table 1).

These competing views, though, are quite necessary. Boring writes that:

The limited salvation statements proceed from, and conjure up, the image of *God-the-judge* and its corollary, human responsibility. Without these statements, the affirmation of universal salvation could only be heard as a fate; evangelism loses something of its urgency, and Paul's hecklers would be justified in saying that we can and even should go on sinning because it magnifies God's grace (see Rom 3:5-8, 6:1). The universal-salvation statements proceed from, and conjure up, the image of *God-the-king*, who finally extends his de jure gracious reign de facto to include all his creation. Without these statements, Paul's affirmations of a salvation limited to Christian believers must be heard as affirming a frustrated God who brought all creation into being but despite his best efforts could only salvage some of it, and as claiming that it does not ultimately matter that Christ has come to the world if the apostle or evangelist does not get the message announced to every individual.<sup>28</sup>

Essentially, these two conflicting views – God-as-Judge and God-as-King – do not need to be reconciled, leastwise not logically. Neither should the other conflicting views of God-as-Lion vs. God-as-Lamb, or God-as-Peace-Destroyer vs. God-as-Peace-bringer, or God-as-Fearful vs. God-as-Love, or God-as-Man vs. God-as-God.

#### 4) Conflicting Views of the King's Return

A final dialectic emerges with the question of *when* Jesus will return to set up his kingdom: has it *already* happened or *not yet* (see Table 1)?

Perhaps most intriguing is the passage from Luke 21. The disciples are curious about the "end times." They want to know what the signs will be before the temple is dismantled. Jesus goes on an extended narrative of well-known apocalyptic situations – wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, pestilences, fearful events, great signs from heaven, persecutions, men will faint from terror, the heavenly bodies will be shaken. These fearful events are not left unresolved, however. Jesus immediately calms them by saying that "when you see these things

happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near" (Luke 21:31). Such is an ironic statement: after the signs have been fulfilled, the message of Jesus hasn't changed – the kingdom is near. Such flies in the face of most apocalyptic interpretations which favor a time period breakdown (i.e. dispensationalism, or premillennialism, or postmillennialism). After all the signs have been fulfilled, we return to the beginning, the first message, the first claim of Jesus that "the kingdom is near." We don't hear the reassurance of the rapture message. We don't hear that the anti-Christ has been born. We simply return to what is already known.

Ellul refers to the tension between the presence/absence of the kingdom as the tension between the "already and the not-yet." Building on George Eldon Ladd's<sup>29</sup> work on inaugurated eschatology, Ellul argues that the "end times" have *already* happened, but are *not yet* fulfilled.

Consider the first part – the *already*. We are *already* "seated" in "the heavenly realms in Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 2:6). *Already*, we "have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly [...] You have come to God" (Hebrews 12:2). *Already*, there are many antichrists and the spirit of lawlessness is already at work. *Already*, we are in "the presence of God" and "in view of his appearing and his kingdom" (2 Timothy 4:1). *Already*, Christ has come, for "if we love [...] God lives in us" (1 John 4:12).

However, the verses that support the *not yet* are just as numerous. We are *not yet* to be "easily unsettled or alarmed" by reports that "the day of the Lord has already come" (2 Thessalonians 2:2). *Not yet*, for in "just a very little while, 'He who is coming will come and will not delay'" (Hebrews 10:37). *Not yet*, for we must "be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming" as "the Judge is standing at the door!" (James 5:7,9). *Not yet*, for we are commanded to "look forward to the day of God and speed its coming" where "we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth" (2 Peter 3:12,13).

Furthermore, in eschatology, we see a tension between the *already* and the *not yet* in terms of Christians' new and old bodies. *Already*, "he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy" (Hebrews 10:14), but *not yet*, for I have not "already been made perfect" (Philippians 3:12). *Already*, anyone in Christ is "a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17), but *not yet*, for "what we will be has not yet been made known" (1 John 4:4). *Already*, "you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26), but *not yet*, for "we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons" (Romans 8:23). *Already*, "in him, we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21), but *not yet*, for "we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope" (Galatians 5:5). *Already*, "you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ" (Galatians 3:27), but *not yet*, for "meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling" (2 Corinthians 5:2). *Already*, we are transformed by "the renewing of our minds" (Romans 12:2), but *not yet*, for Christ "will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body"

(Philippians 3:21). *Already*, “you will come to understand fully” (2 Corinthians 1:14), but *not yet*, for only “then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Therefore, the most common interpretations of the “end times” don’t quite stand up to scrutiny – the typical view of such famous series like *Left Behind* ignore the complexities of the text – yes, there is a rapture; yes, there is a tribulation; yes, there is a millennial reign; and yes, there is a judgment. But how? Are these claims literal or metaphorical? And when? Will the return of the king happen soon or in the distant future? These questions tend to lose some of their importance when juxtaposed against the other half of the scriptures – that Jesus has *already* inserted himself in human history, brought access to the kingdom, provided new bodies, clothed people in righteousness, and taken them to heaven to be seated next to him. But then we look around us and realize: but *not yet*.

### Conclusion: Dialectical Theology in Practice, Living the Contradiction

When we read the Bible dialectically, we should feel somewhat dismayed. I frequently do. Such also explains why reading Ellul, as David Gill writes, “may infuriate you”.<sup>30</sup> Very little about the Christian life makes easy and *logical* sense upon close examination.

So what to do? Why are these dialectics important?

To answer this question, let us recall the story of Abraham – most specifically the moment at which he becomes the “man of faith” (Galatians 3:9) – when he decides to sacrifice his son. This moment is discussed at length by Søren Kierkegaard in his 1843 book *Fear and Trembling*.<sup>31</sup> Abraham is told to leave his family and go to the land of Canaan. God promises Abraham that, “To your offspring I will give this land” (Genesis 12:7). Through the years, God continually reaffirms his promise that he will be given a child through Sarah. And then, after Abraham is 100 years of age, the promise finally comes true, and Isaac is born.

And then, the *absurd* happens. God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering. God has, in the previous chapter, told Abraham that it is Isaac who fulfills the covenant between God and Abraham – it is Isaac who will become a great nation. And now, Isaac shall die. God has, in all human logic, *contradicted* himself. Isaac, as dead, cannot fulfill God’s promise, yet Abraham does the most unexpected thing of all: he doesn’t argue, question, or attempt to rationalize the command (as anyone in the 21st century would – anyone who has killed their children and blamed it on “God told me so” is rightly labeled “insane”). Instead, he does the exact opposite. He gets up early the next morning (as if killing his son is something that cannot wait), travels for three days (who among us would drive for three days to kill our child?), and tells his son that God will provide the lamb (effectively, he lies to his child). And he even goes to the extreme measure of actually reaching for the knife before the angel intervenes and gives a ram in Isaac’s stead. The absurdity of this story cannot be articulated with any clarity. It is impossible to ponder a

man killing his own child – especially a child of God’s promise – without any questioning or back-talking or rationalizing or crying. Yet the author of James tells us that at that moment, the “scripture was fulfilled” because “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (James 2:23).

For Ellul and dialectical theology, such is the only choice that we have available to us: when God doesn’t make sense, do we dumb down the message, ignore part of his words, and attempt to make it accessible to all? Or do we accept the contradictions as are, embrace them, and believe God against everything that makes sense? The subsequent dialectical struggle reveals truth in a way that resolving the tension does not.

Consider a personal example of a dialectical struggle that emerged from reading the New Testament: the question of *tithing*. We know that it is “hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:23). But such begs the question of how much money should a person give in order to enter the kingdom: some or all?

On the one hand, the Bible often claims that we should give *all* we have. Jesus tells the rich man “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (Luke 18:22). Or when the poor widow places two copper coins into the temple treasury, Jesus praises her, saying “she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on” (Mark 12:44). Or in another example, both Ananias and Sapphira are killed for withholding from the church part of the sale of a piece of property. On the other hand, we simply *cannot* give everything we have. Timothy says that “anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8). Or Paul says that “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Or Timothy commands “those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth” (1 Timothy 6:17), but not to stop being rich.

These two competing images about money and possessions – give all, keep some – serve as a dialectic that offers us a truth that the two images, alone, cannot. Specifically, it reveals a challenge to transcend the power of money. Ellul claims in *Money and Power* that the “Christian attitude toward the power of money is what we will call ‘*profanation*.’ To profane money, like all other powers, is to take away its sacred character,”<sup>32</sup> and we do that via the act of *giving*. That is, if money is ultimately an earthly expression of power – power over people, power over objects, power over worrying about the future – then the Biblical dialectic suggests that we transcend that power by giving it away. Ellul claims that giving is “one act par excellence which profanes money by going directly against the law of money, an act for which money is not made”.<sup>33</sup> Giving keeps us from the love of money, from greed, from an abundance of possessions, from treasure on earth. When we give, we establish that the power of money does not hold sway over us. The extreme, then, of giving everything, completely eliminates its power, though we fully recognize that we also need money to live, to eat, to sleep.

For my wife and me, this dialectic has been quite freeing and challenging, both. During the early part of our marriage, we focused on what most Christians focus on: tithing 10% of our income, which provided us with an easy number to apply, and it matched up with the Old Testament calls for the first-fruits to be offered to the priests. However, the challenge of the New Testament is to give as a way to desacralize money, to dethrone it as an earthly power, to recognize that money is not a part of the kingdom of heaven. Tithing is one way of diminishing money's power, but tithing can easily subvert the message of the Bible by focusing on giving as a commandment rather than giving as a way of demonstrating love for others. That is, it became too easy for us to claim: we gave our 10% to the church this month, thus we did the right thing rather than carefully attending to the power of money in our lives. Each month, now, we are *challenged* to seek out new ways to give and share our worldly possessions with others, not just with the church, but with everyone who is in need. Each month is a resultant Ellulian dialectical tension: an invention, a creation, a challenge, an affair, an adventure.

The only way to respond to the dialectical tensions of the Bible is by living them out – much like Abraham did. Much like my wife and I have tried to do. Much like Ellul tried to do. Just as Abraham is the man of faith, so must it be for Christians. Faith is the living out of the contradictions. Faith is claiming the *already* in the face of the *not yet* – claiming the unseen over the seen. Christians must always act as if everything depends upon them – the kingdom of heaven is near, the Judge is at the door, the human is called to action, the ambassador of Christ is on the move, and Christians must always be advancing toward the kingdom that cannot be seen, toward a work that is never complete, and toward a God that is to be feared. But Christians must never forget that while they must act as if salvation depends upon them, they must remember, also: Christ has already come, his work is complete, “it is all finished,”<sup>34</sup> the kingdom is already upon them, they have already been saved by his death, they can rest in heavenly places, knowing that the King of love has given people freedom, hope, and eternal security.

But, not yet.

### About the Author

Kevin Garrison is an associate professor of English at Angelo State University where he teaches and writes about theories of technology, focusing primarily on the ideas of Jacques Ellul.

### Notes

1. Jacob Van Fleet, *Dialectical Theology and Jacques Ellul: An Introductory Exposition* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2016), 49.
2. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*. Trans. John Wilkinson (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1964).
3. Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*. Trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1965).
4. Jacob Van Fleet, *Dialectical Theology and Jacques Ellul: An Introductory Exposition* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2016).
5. Plato, *The Republic*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2000).
6. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, New York, NY: Vintage, 1998.
7. Jacques Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks On His Life and Work*. Ed. William H. Vanderburg, Trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York, NY: Seabury, 1981), 5.
8. Jacques Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks On His Life and Work*, 14.
9. Jacques Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks On His Life and Work*, 15.
10. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*.
11. Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*. Trans. and Ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976).
12. Jacques Ellul, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretative Essays*. Ed. Clifford Christians and Jay Van Hook (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 295.
13. Jacques Ellul, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretative Essays*, 296.
14. Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*. Trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 253.
15. Nicene Creed, <https://www.ccel.org/creeds/nicene creed.html>.
16. Jacques Ellul, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretative Essays*, 299.
17. Paul Tillich, “What is Wrong with the ‘Dialectical’ Theology?” *The Journal of Religion* (15/2, 1935), 127-45.
18. All Biblical quotes are from the New International Version.
19. C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (New York, NY: Collier, 1980), 180.
20. Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe*. Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 38. Emphasis added.
21. Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 25. Emphasis added.
22. Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*. Trans. Olive Wyon (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers and Howard, 1989).
23. James Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2006).
24. Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, 55.
25. Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe*, 38.
26. M. Eugene Boring, “The Language of Universal Salvation in Paul.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* (105/2, 1986), 269-92.
27. M. Eugene Boring, “The Language of Universal Salvation in Paul,” 291.
28. M. Eugene Boring, “The Language of Universal Salvation in Paul,” 291. Emphasis added.
29. George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism*. (Grand Rapids, MI:

- Eerdmans, 1974).
30. David Gill, "Jacques Ellul: The Prophet as Theologian." *Themelios* (7/1, 1981), 4-14.
  31. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Trans. Walter Lowrie (Radford, VA: Wilder, 2008).
  32. Jacques Ellul, *Power and Money*. Trans. LaVonne Neff (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 109. Emphasis in the original.
  33. Jacques Ellul, *Power and Money*, 110.
  34. Jacques Ellul, *The Politics of God and The Politics of Man*. Trans. and Ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 192.

# Social Propaganda, and Trademarks

Richard L Kirkpatrick

**T**rademarks are pillars of social propaganda and the technical system. In his vast body of work, Jacques Ellul seems not to have analyzed trademarks as such, but he did discuss at length commercial advertising —“the driving force,” he said— of the technical system.<sup>1</sup> Trademarks *are* advertising and the prime features *of* advertising,<sup>2</sup> so Ellul’s discourse on the one illuminates the other.

First, Ellul distinguishes “social propaganda” from “vertical propaganda.” The latter is mere deliberate agitation by demagogues, all too familiar a phenomenon. Social propaganda is, however, according to Ellul, “much more subtle and complex.” “Stabilizing and unifying,” it is an integrative propaganda of conformity “made *inside* the group (not from the top).” It “springs up spontaneously; it is essentially diffuse;

it is based on a general climate, an atmosphere that influences people imperceptibly without having the appearance of propaganda; it gets to man through his customs, through his most unconscious habits. It creates new habits in him; it is a sort of persuasion from within. As a result, man adopts new criteria of judgment and choice, adopts them spontaneously, as if he had chosen them himself. But all these criteria are in conformity with the environment and are essentially of a collective nature. Sociological propaganda produces a progressive adaptation to a certain order of things, a certain concept of human relations, which unconsciously molds individuals and makes them conform to society.<sup>3</sup>

Every word of this description applies to trademarks, as shown below. Social propaganda also has an “alienation” effect that paradoxically complements its integrative function towards the same end, “reinforcing the individual’s inclination to lose himself in something bigger than he is, to dissipate his individuality, to free his ego of all doubt, conflict, and suffering — through fusion with others ... blending with a large group ... in an exceptionally easy and satisfying fashion.... [Propaganda] pushes the individual into the mass until he disappears entirely.”<sup>4</sup> In sum, social propaganda is “total” and induces in people unforced conformity or habituation by tranquilizing emotional effects.

Next, and more importantly, the social propaganda of trademarks utilizes all available media to support the “technical system.” That is the ensemble, “the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency ... in every field of human activity.” It too is a spontaneous order, not imposed “from above.”<sup>5</sup> While displayed on the material productions and operations of the technical system, trademarks are ultimately symbols in consumers’ minds. There they are manipulated as psychological techniques to order, form, and conform human behaviors. Ultimately, trademarks, when managed to a point of optimal efficiency, become autonomous, self-directing functions of the technical system.

Trademarks began as something very different and in some ways opposite from what the technical system has made them. The contrast clarifies somewhat our current milieu; we take it for granted, and are so immersed in it, as in a cloud, we do not see it whole.

In the old days, proprietary “brands” simply indicated ownership, e.g., of livestock; “guild marks” indicated products of certain regulated craftsmen; etc. Such traditional uses long antedate the technical system. An article published in 1927, partly quoting H.G. Wells, described the traditional model of product sales based on the *personal reputation* of the seller. For example, everything a neighborhood grocer sold were “from stocks of his own buying and his own *individual reputation* ... And the oilman sold his own lamp oil, and no one asked where he got it ... [The] signboard of an inn ... symbolized to the hungry and weary traveler a definite smiling host, a tasty meal from a particular cook....”

Yet, even a century ago, the new trademark regime already was pervading the market. Corporations “were reaching their hands over the retail tradesman’s shoulder, so to speak, and offering their goods in their own name to the customer.”<sup>6</sup> The process of “reaching over the shoulder” was the first step in the abstraction of trademarks — from the personal to the impersonal and to anonymity. Now defined by federal statute, a trademark indicates “the source of the goods, even if that source is unknown.”<sup>7</sup>

One of the most conspicuous and emblematic types of trademark is the franchise mark. It is the “cornerstone” or

“central element” of the franchise, a business method now omnipresent.<sup>8</sup> The franchise model for fast food services supplanted the old individuated tavern with a “definite smiling host” and “a particular cook.” “Boniface” was a happy expression current in H.G. Wells’ day for the jovial innkeeper. In contrast, the franchise now routinely presents customers with anonymous, “front-line service providers” who “put on a happy face” in compliance with “integrative display rules.”<sup>9</sup>

McCarthy summarizes the role of trademarks and the psychological conditioning process that escorted consumers from the tavern boniface to the faceless franchise service provider:

In a cottage-industry economy where there is considerable variance in quality between each soup maker and between each batch, individual customer experimentation is necessary. In a relatively nondeveloped, localized and close-knit society, this may be possible. In a developed, mobile and urban economy, trademarks are essential to reduce the costs of finding a level of quality and price that the consumer desires, according to his or her individual tastes.<sup>10</sup>

As another commentator explains:

From the English Middle Ages up to the American Nineteenth Century, and even beyond, most businesses were local in nature. Consumers knew the tradesmen with whom they dealt, and they were familiar with the locations, employees and reputations of many of the manufacturers of the products they purchased. \* \* \* However ... explosions of population, communications, transportation and technology placed the consumer at a substantial distance from the manufacturer. The consumer no longer knew about the manufacturer, which might have its offices, production facilities and employees on the other side of the world. ... He found, however, that if he purchased a trademarked product from far away and was satisfied with its quality, he could rely on the trademark in future purchases to obtain the same level of quality.<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, both commentators associate the transformation of trademarks with mere material enlargement of the marketplace, technological advances in communication and travel, etc. No doubt, they had their part. But why did such developments not simply multiply the number of sole proprietors — little cottage businesses, shopkeepers, and bonifaces, each using a personal name or insignia on the signboard hanging over the front door? Might not the intellectual or psychological aspects of the transformation have been its predicates rather than accidental by-products, i.e., the sociological phenomenon of technique intervened as the cause, not a consequence, of the revolution in the function of trademarks?

“McDonaldization”, as explained by Ritzer, is “the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world.” The chief principles of McDonaldization are Efficiency, Calculability, Predictability,

and Control.<sup>12</sup> While Ritzer finds their roots in Max Weber’s conception of instrumental rationality,<sup>13</sup> he acknowledges that Ellul “has much in common” with Weber.<sup>14</sup> Prevailing constructs of trademarks touch all the chords of efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. Ellul, however, reaches beyond these attributes or symptoms of the system to expose its underlying nature and true power.

\* \* \*

A trademark owner is obligated by law to “control the nature and quality of the goods ... with which the mark is used.”<sup>15</sup> Here, “quality” is not necessarily excellence but merely a characteristic of the product. The “actual quality of the goods is irrelevant: it is the control of quality that a trademark holder is entitled to maintain.”<sup>16</sup> The “control” symbolized by the mark guarantees predictable consistency of product everywhere, every time it is purchased.<sup>17</sup> The “source” indicated by a mark is not necessarily its actual maker, it is the “source of control” of the product’s consistency. The mark, detached, as it were, from the seller and the product maker, indicates the source or power that controls the maker.<sup>18</sup>

It is revealing that much of the discourse about this trademark function cites fast food franchises as exemplars — McDonaldization indeed. “The cornerstone of a franchise system must be the trademark or trade name of the product.”<sup>19</sup> Franchises symbolized by marks are gigantic exercises of control, featuring dictionary-size contracts and manuals specifying, and inspectors scrutinizing, every aspect of operations and service in the minutest detail. Of course, “calculability”, another element of the ensemble, is critical to the operational efficiency and profitability of the franchise — demanding inventories of every bean, itemized accounting to the penny, units produced, units sold, units employed, and so on.

The “control” symbolized by trademarks guarantees “predictability”. The authorities are unanimous. “The point is that customers are entitled to assume that the nature and quality of goods and services sold under the mark at all licensed outlets will be consistent and predictable.”<sup>20</sup> “[T]he quality level, whatever it is, will remain consistent and predictable among all goods or services supplied under the mark.”<sup>21</sup> “Trademarks [are] indications of consistent and predictable quality assured through the trademark owner’s control over the use of the designation.”<sup>22</sup> “Every product is composed of a bundle of special characteristics. The consumer who purchases what he believes is the same product expects to receive those characteristics on every occasion.”<sup>23</sup>

Trademarks also answer the fourth principle: efficiency, the key to the technical system. According to economists, trademarks “promote economic efficiency.”<sup>24</sup> “Trademarks are indispensable for the efficient provision of products with the wide range of variety and quality combinations demanded in a modern economy.” Interests include efficient communication reducing “search costs”, efficient allocation of resources, rational decisions resulting in efficient choices by consumers.<sup>25</sup>

In this realm, trademarks “serve as a means of communication between otherwise unknown or anonymous producers and their prospective customers.”<sup>26</sup> The trademark “makes effective competition possible in a complex, impersonal marketplace by providing a means through which the consumer can identify products which please him and reward the producer with continued patronage.”<sup>27</sup> In the marketplace, trademarks are, in a word, “signals.”<sup>28</sup>

A related function of trademarks is to symbolize the “goodwill” of the business with which it is used.<sup>29</sup> Goodwill, or, brand equity, is an intangible property of a peculiar kind. It resides *in customers’ minds*, their favor towards the business symbolized by its mark. If customers like a product, goodwill leads them to future purchases, guided by the brand, of the same product.<sup>30</sup> “The strongest brands in the world *own a place in the consumer’s mind*.”<sup>31</sup>

In 1942, the new trademark system was rapidly taking form, but enough of the old regime remained to reveal by contrast what was happening to a keen observer, in the position, so to speak, of one standing on a beach and watching a tidal wave approach. Such was Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter. He explained in a trademark case:

The protection of trademarks is the law’s recognition of the psychological function of symbols. If it is true that we live by symbols, it is no less true that we purchase goods by them. A trade-mark is a merchandising short-cut which induces a purchaser to select what he wants, or what he has been led to believe he wants. The owner of a mark exploits this human propensity by making every effort *to impregnate the atmosphere of the market with the drawing power of a congenial symbol*. Whatever the means employed, the aim is the same -- to convey through the mark, in the minds of potential customers, the desirability of the commodity upon which it appears. \* \* \* The creation of a market through an established symbol implies that people float on a psychological current engendered by the various advertising devices which give a trade-mark its potency.<sup>32</sup>

This passage sounds the same themes and wording as Ellul’s description of social propaganda, quoted above. The same ideas appear in a later judge’s explanation of the fast food restaurant trademark model:

A person who visits one Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet finds that it has much the same ambiance and menu as any other. A visitor to any Burger King likewise *enjoys a comforting familiarity* and knows that the place will not be remotely like a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet (and is sure to differ from Hardee’s, Wendy’s, and Applebee’s too). The trademark’s function is to tell shoppers *what to expect*—and whom to blame if a given outlet falls short. The licensor’s reputation is at stake in every outlet, so it invests to the extent required to keep the consumer satisfied by ensuring *a repeatable experience*.<sup>32</sup>

Trademarks are limitless. Virtually anything can be a trademark if it has inherent or acquired distinctiveness symbolizing goodwill in the minds of consumers.<sup>34</sup> Trademarks include not only distinctive logos and slogans, but also spokespersons, characters, colors, sounds, scents, and “trade dress” — the configuration of products, product features, product packaging, product containers, store décor, etc. Trade dress is the total image of a product and may include features such as size, shape, color or color combinations, texture, graphics, or even particular sales techniques.<sup>35</sup> As Justice Frankfurter observed, trademarks globally “impregnate” the atmosphere. Unlike patents and copyrights (different species of intellectual property having limited terms of legal protection), the exclusive legal rights of the trademark owner are perpetual as long as the brand continues to sell.

Trademarks are a universal phenomenon. Over 24 million marks are actively registered now throughout the world in some 200 countries and other jurisdictions.<sup>36</sup> If the number seems extraordinarily high, consider the alternative. As explained by the economists, trademarks are informational short-cuts; without these simple signals, the average purchaser would be inundated with even more unmediated information than already inundatory, as Ellul says, in “a world . . . that is astonishingly incoherent, absurd, and irrational, which changes rapidly and constantly for reasons [one] cannot understand.” People “cannot stand this; [they] cannot live in an absurd and incoherent world.” Being “engulfed in information,” they are “in desperate need of a framework within which to classify information. . . .” “Information, therefore, must be condensed, absorbable in capsule form.” Trademarks answer the need: they are encapsulated information. The fact that there are 24 million of them demonstrates the immensity of the *Totality* of the system and the incomprehensibly vast volumes of information the ensemble produces.<sup>37</sup> The global spread of marks also demonstrates “a technical phenomenon completely indifferent to all local and accidental differences.”<sup>38</sup>

It remains true that trademark law is basically national in character. There is no worldwide trademark law as such. There is, however, accelerating global convergence of the applied principles of trademark law, and international treaties (e.g., the Paris Convention, the Madrid Protocol, the European Union) are facilitating transnational trademark registration and protection on an enormous scale — all tending toward a *Unified* global system in fact if not in law. Commercially developed countries all officially recognize trademark counterfeiting as wrongful, and even the ones that in fact blink it at least pay respect to the law and enforce it from time to time with highly publicized displays of the destruction of seized counterfeits. As countries develop economically and grow their own legitimate businesses, they fully enter the trademark system where genuine marks are protected and counterfeiters prosecuted.

A complementary function of trademarks is to erase the traditional effects of geography on product characteristics. The descriptions quoted above of the old regime recognized variety as something naturally to be expected in the same type

of product found from one place to another. The franchise substitutes uniformity for variety across all geographic territories. One of the most powerful legal features of a United States trademark registration enables the registrant to eliminate confusingly similar junior marks in remote territories as the franchise expands. Thus, federally registering a mark is one of the first orders of business for franchisors and any other entrepreneurs intending to expand geographically under its mark, as almost all hope to do. Trademark law is so comprehensively flexible, however, that if the qualities of a product (e.g., cheese or wine) reputedly depend on the geographic locale of production, the place name may acquire exclusivity at law as an appellation of origin or geographic indication (Roquefort cheese or Napa wine). All certified producers in the area may use the appellation, but each invariably adds to the label its own unique brand, which functions in the usual way.

Trademarks, being property rights or rights of exclusion, have the protections and force of law, thus act as powerful engines of social propaganda and the technical system. Trademarks are so important to the system that the law brooks no interference with them. A confusingly similar mark, in particular, distorts the trademark information signal and the owner's sole control of the branded product. To suppress infringements, trademark law fields battalions of enforcement mechanisms that have evolved far beyond "fraud", a legal term rooted in the antiquated economy based on personal reputation. Traditional fraud in trade was deliberately palming off inferior product under a spurious brand, actually deceiving the customer. From this simple beginning, trademark infringement law has sprawled unrecognizably. Now, infringement means causing "*likelihood of confusion*", that is, a probability, anything over 50%. Actionable confusion is a state of mind of "appreciable" numbers of persons, but as few as 15% of potential customers will suffice. The trademark owner need not prove that the infringer intended to deceive, nor prove that any customer in fact was deceived or confused. "Likelihood" is all. The products need not be the same (competitive), only "related" in consumers' minds. In a breathtaking inversion, a claim for "unfair competition" may be brought by a plaintiff who *does not compete* with the defendant. Infringement does not require confusion as to source, but may extend to confusion about sponsorship or approval of the product. The marks need not be the same, only confusingly similar, often a highly subjective judgment. Relevant confusion is not limited to purchasers, but extends to potential purchasers, influencers of purchase decisions, and in some cases the general public. Actionable confusion need not occur at the point of sale, but may occur before or after sale, e.g., by those who merely observe the infringing mark. Relevant confusion may be "subliminal."

An even more powerful legal enforcement mechanism protects famous marks from "dilution" — "blurring" or "tarnishment" of the brand in the minds of relevant persons. Of course, "likelihood of confusion" and "dilution" are extremely vague concepts considered by some to be inherently biased

in favor of trademark owners. Verdicts and judgments must be based on inferences or guesses about the "likely" state of mind of a mass market of consumers. It logically follows from the "rationality" of the system that infringement is considered from the perspective of the "reasonable person", a legal fiction. Penalties for trademark infringement, dilution, counterfeiting, and cybersquatting include injunctions, damages, statutory damages, lost profits, disgorgement of profits, unjust enrichment, punitive damages, and attorney fees. Awards may be trebled to deter future infringement.<sup>39</sup> Criminal counterfeiting is subject to fine or imprisonment or both. The relative ease of stating a plausible infringement claim, and the high cost of defense, are *in terrorem* mechanisms that generally suppress anything that might come close to owners' marks. Behind trademarks, as behind every technique, lies *Power*.

While maintenance of control and of distinctiveness are the principal rationales for the aggressive legal enforcement of trademarks, social propaganda as a technique in the service of efficiency is the true, hidden driver of the system. In Ellul's thought, it is elementary that "veracity and exactness are important elements in advertising."<sup>40</sup> Trademarks displayed in advertising are a kind of "rational propaganda" used to promote products together with "technical descriptions or proved performance."<sup>41</sup> "False designations of origin" and "false or misleading representations of fact" impermissibly disrupt the informational signals that are supposed to guide consumers accurately and with optimal efficiency.<sup>42</sup>

While touring this iron cage of calculability, control, efficiency, etc. we have repeatedly encountered a seemingly discordant factor: human feelings — in particular, needs for comfort, stability, ease, satisfaction, congeniality, avoidance of risk and of unpleasant surprises, etc., all enabling people to "float" on the psychological current. (Frankfurter's phrase.) The "reasonable person" is a fiction of law and economics; real people are the targets of integrative propaganda. More, perhaps, than economists and lawyers, brand managers are attuned to the emotional needs of people for brand structure. In Ellul's phrase: "the more comfortable ... the better it works." For the consumer, trademarks as social propaganda "artificially soothe his discomforts, reduce his tensions, and place him in some human context." Thus, there is "the need for propaganda"; without it, one "experiences the feeling of ... facing a completely unpredictable future." As discussed, predictability is one of the fundamental imperatives of the trademark system, not only for material goods, but also for the psychological comfort of the consumer, who is able to move in "a familiar universe to which he is accustomed."<sup>43</sup>

Brand resonance "is characterized in terms of *intensity* or depth of the psychological bond that customers have with the brand."<sup>44</sup> In an extraordinary mirror-effect, brands "may take on personality traits or human values and, like a person, appear to be 'modern', 'old-fashioned', 'lively', or 'exotic,'" because "consumers often choose and use brands that have a brand personality *consistent with their own self-concept*." Word-of-mouth is one of the strongest kinds of "advertising"; con-

sumers become “brand evangelists or ambassadors.” It follows that a “brand community” arises “in which customers feel a kinship or affiliation with other people associated with the brand.”<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, many people, perhaps most, are “involuntarily and unconsciously” drawn into the “psychological collectivization.”<sup>46</sup> They float on the current. Either way, brands as social propaganda integrate them into the technical system.

\* \* \*

This brief survey of trademarks as a form of integrative social propaganda shows the basic characteristics of the technical system as identified by Ellul, including Unity, Universality, Totalization, all in the service of Power.<sup>47</sup> Two related characteristics remain — Automatism and Self-Augmentation. Ellul takes us into the core of the system.

Understood as functions of social propaganda and technique, trademarks are deterministic — self-directing. Once a technique is refined to optimal efficiency, it is no longer subject to choice. “It obeys its own determination, it realizes itself.”<sup>48</sup> True to this imperative, “trademarks have a self-enforcing feature. They are valuable because they denote consistent quality, and a firm has an incentive to develop a trademark only if it is able to maintain consistent quality.”<sup>49</sup> Trademark owners have a legal duty to “police” their marks at the risk of losing their unique distinctiveness.

Trademark law’s likelihood-of-confusion requirement ... is designed to promote informational integrity in the marketplace. By ensuring that consumers are not confused about what they are buying, trademark law allows them to allocate their capital *efficiently* to the brands that they find most deserving. This, in turn, incentivizes manufacturers to create robust brand recognition by *consistently* offering good products and good services, which results in more consumer satisfaction. That is the virtuous cycle envisioned by trademark law, including its trade-dress branch. As stated [by the U.S. Supreme Court]:

In principle, trademark law, by preventing others from copying a source-identifying mark, reduces the customer’s costs of shopping and making purchasing decisions, for it quickly and easily assures a potential customer that *this* item—the item with this mark—is made by the same producer as other similarly marked items that he or she liked (or disliked) in the past. At the same time, the law helps assure a producer that it (and not an imitating competitor) will reap the financial, reputation-related rewards associated with a desirable product. The law thereby encourages the production of quality products, and simultaneously discourages those who hope to sell inferior products by capitalizing on a consumer’s inability quickly to evaluate the quality of an item offered for sale. It is the source-distinguishing ability of a mark ... that permits it to serve these basic purposes.<sup>50</sup>

The circularity of this reasoning matches that of the system. Trademarks reinforce themselves. Businesspeople have a choice whether to adopt Trademark A or Trademark B, but to adopt *a* trademark they must; there is no debate or discussion whether to do so. The system is pervasive and immersive, like the “atmosphere”. Entire fields of brand psychology and brand management —supported by innumerable statistical consumer surveys and focus groups— are devoted to the study of “authority brands, solution brands, icon brands, cult brands, lifestyle brands,” and so on.<sup>51</sup> Trademarks especially serve the personal craving for predictability and consistency, while avoiding at all costs variance and unwanted surprise. Ellul teaches that people are drawn “into the net of propaganda”, which “is exceptionally efficient through its meticulous encirclement of everybody.”<sup>52</sup>

H.G. Wells’ picture of the old days is erased or reversed: the personal guarantee of the neighborhood grocer becomes the impersonal guarantee of an anonymous source of control of products distributed in a mass market. Product quality defined as excellence becomes quality defined as a mere characteristic, be it however so poor. Consumers choose brands to define themselves, and they find in brands responsive humanoid personalities. Consumers who wish a change from an accustomed brand, will select a new brand, itself promising consistency and predictability. The brand on a product is branded —burned and seared, as it were— into the minds of consumers, who literally “identify” with it. In the technical system described by Ellul, the predictable consistency of the brand has its counterpart in the consistent predictability of the human.

### About the author

Richard Kirkpatrick is a lawyer and practices trademark law. The views herein are his own and not attributable to his law firm or its lawyers or employees. Richard L Kirkpatrick is also author of “Ellul, Machiavelli, and Autonomous Technique,” Ellul Forum # 56 (2015) republished in Jeffrey Shaw, *Jacques Ellul on Violence, Resistance, and War* (Pickwick, 2016) chapter 7.

### Notes

1. E.g., Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*. Trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990) ch XVIII “Advertising,” see p 349.
2. Gilson on Trademarks 1:03[4] (“The trademark owner ordinarily makes every effort to convert its mark into a motivating symbol and advertising tool that communicates the desirability of its product. Trademarks function through advertising to create a market for products, and consumers are induced to try a product through the created appeal of the advertised mark”); McCarthy on Trademarks 3:12 (Advertising); Restatement (Third), Unfair Competition, § 9, comment c (1995).

3. Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*. Trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1965), 64. See Ellul, "The Obstacles to Communication Arising from Propaganda Habits." *The Student World* (52/4, 1959), 401-10.
4. Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda*, 169.
5. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*. Trans. John Wilkinson (New York, NY: Vintage, 1964); *The Technological System*. Trans. J. Neugroschel (New York, NY: Continuum, 1980); *The Technological Bluff*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990).
6. Frank Schecter, "The Rational Basis of Trademark Protection," *Harvard Law Review* (40/6, 1927), 813, 818-19 (quoting in part H. G. Wells at n 21; emphasis added and in original).
7. 15 U.S.C. 1127 (emphasis added).
8. McCarthy on Trademarks 18:65.
9. Such rules are designed to create "affiliation" between the customer and the business. Personnel are recruited, selected, and retained in part on the basis of being willing and able to display this "positive affect." (There is, of course, a technical term for the technical effort: "Emotional labor".) D Wagner et al, "Driving It Home: How Workplace Emotional Labor Harms Employee Home Life," *67 Personnel Psychology* 487 (2014); J Allen et al, "Following Display Rules in Good or Bad Faith?: Customer Orientation as a Moderator of the Display Rule-Emotional Labor Relationship," (2010) Psychology Faculty Publications, Paper 90.
10. McCarthy on Trademarks 2:5.
11. Gilson on Trademarks 1:03.
12. George Ritzer, "The McDonaldization of Society." *Sage* (8, 2014), 1, 14-16; see Ritzer, ed, "McDonaldization: The Reader." *Sage* (3, 2009).
13. George Ritzer, "McDonaldization of Society," 30-31.
14. George Ritzer, "The Technological Society: Social Theory, McDonaldization and the Prosumer," in H Geronimo et al, eds, *Jacques Ellul and the Technological Society in the 21st Century* (New York, NY: Springer, 2013), 35.
15. 15 U.S.C. 1127 (emphasis added).
16. *El Greco v. Shoe World*, 806 F.2d 392, 395 (2d Cir. 1986).
17. McCarthy on Trademarks 3:10. Common usage and the legal definition of a trademark as a "symbol" (of goodwill) seem to invite comparison to Ellul's extensive discourse on the relationship of symbols and the technical system. The "symbolic" function of trademarks in the technical system is, however, incommensurate with Ellul's grand civilizational conception of symbols as ways humankind relates to the natural world and apprehends reality. Killing or co-opting symbolism in this wide sense, the technical system, according to Ellul, symbolizes nothing but itself. See Ellul, *The Technological System*, 177; also Ellul, "Symbolic Function, Technology, and Society," *Journal of Social and Biological Structures* (210, July 1978); and Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*. "What symbols are necessary are produced out of technique itself. Television or advertising offer abundant symbols of technique but those come from the very working of technique itself." Jacques Ellul, *The Empire of Non-sense: Art in the Technological Society* (2014) quoted in David Lovekin, "On the Symbol in the Technical Environment: Some Reflections," *Ellul Forum # 57* (June 2016). If the word "symbol" opens a wrong door in this context, then trademarks are better termed "signals" as discussed herein.
18. McCarthy on Trademarks 3:4.A (emphasis added).
19. McCarthy on Trademarks 18:65; see 3:10.
20. McCarthy on Trademarks 18:55 (emphasis added); 2:4 ("predictable quality of goods" and "reliability"); 14:11 & 19:90-91 (certification mark reliability).
21. McCarthy on Trademarks 3:10 (emphasis added).
22. Restatement (Third) of Unfair Competition 33 cmt b (1995) quoted in *Eva's v Halanick*, 639 F3d 788, 790 (7th Cir 2011) (emphasis added); see *Barcamerica v. Tyfield*, 289 F.3d 589, 595 (9th Cir 2002) ("customers are entitled to assume that the nature and quality of goods and services sold under the mark at all licensed outlets will be consistent and predictable").
23. *Societe Des Produits Nestle v Casa Helvetia*, 982 F.2d 633 (1st Cir. 1992). "An important ingredient of the premium brand inheres in the consumer's belief, measured by past satisfaction and the market reputation established by Borden for its [canned milk] products, that tomorrow's can will contain the same premium product as that purchased today." *Federal Trade Comm'n v. Borden*, 383 U.S. 637, 649 (1966)(Stewart, J., dissenting).
24. Landes & Posner, "The Economics of Trademark Law," 78 *Trademark Rep* 267 (1988); Landes and Posner, "Trademark Law: An Economic Perspective" 30 *J of Law and Economics* 265 (1987); see McCarthy on Trademarks 2:3.
25. Economides, *Economics of Trademarks*, 78 *Trademark Rep* 523 (1988).
26. Restatement (Third) of Unfair Competition 9, comment c (1995).
27. *Smith v. Chanel*, 402 F.2d 562 (9th Cir. 1968).
28. C Greenhalgh & M Rogers, *Innovation, Intellectual Property, and Economic Growth* (Princeton 2010) p 40.
29. See 15 U.S.C. 1060.
30. McCarthy 2:17; Kirkpatrick, *Likelihood of Confusion in Trademark Law* (PLI 2d ed 2016), Preface p xxii.
31. Tushnet, "Gone in Sixty Milliseconds: Trademark Law and Cognitive Science," 86 *Tex. L. Rev.* 507, 513 (2008) (emphasis added).
32. *Mishawaka v S.S. Kresge*, 316 U.S. 203, 205, 208 (emphasis added).
33. *Eva's v Halanick*, 639 F.3d 788, 790 (7th Cir 2011).
34. Excluded from trademark status are words that are generic names of products, and product shapes or features that are functional. These exclusions do not detract from

the efficiency of the technical system, but enhance it. Producers are free to copy words and product designs that cannot serve the function of unique source identification. The unfettered competition, it is thought, increases overall output, lowers prices, and enhances quality.

35. McCarthy on Trademarks 8:4.
36. The number of registrations was provided to me by Thomson Reuters, one of the leading international trademark search companies.
37. Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda*, 145-46; “Information and Propaganda,” *Diogenes*, (5/18, June 1957), 61-77. Ellul’s 1973 book draws passages and ideas from his 1957 article.
38. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 406.
39. Richard Kirkpatrick, Likelihood of Confusion in Trademark Law.
40. Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda*, 53-4, 56-7.
41. Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda*, 84.
42. 15 U.S.C. 1125(a).
43. Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda*, 73, 76, 143, 187.
44. Konrad Keller, *Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring, and managing Brand Equity* (Pearson 4th ed 2013) (emphasis in original).
45. Id at 87, 92-93.
46. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 406-07.
47. *Supra*, n 4.
48. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, 141.
49. William Landes & Richard Posner, “The Economics of Trademark Law,” 78 *Trademark Rep* at 271.
50. *Groenveld v Lubecore*, 531 F3d 1, 12-13 (6th Cir 2013), quoting *Qualitex v Jacobson*, 514 U.S. 159, 163-64 (1995), quoting in part McCarthy on Trademarks 2:01 (emphasis added and in original).
51. Stefania Salviolo & Antonio Marazza, *Lifestyle Brands: A Guide to Aspirational Marketing* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
52. Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda*, 9-10, 64-5, 74-6, 79-81, 84.

## Review of Doug Hill, *Not So Fast: Thinking Twice About Technology* (University of Georgia Press, 201.) 221 pp. pb.

David W. Gill

**D**oug Hill is a journalist and independent scholar who has studied the history and philosophy of technology for more than 25 years. His work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Atlantic*, *Salon*, *Forbes*, *Esquire*, and his blog “The Question Concerning Technology” (<http://thequestion-concerningtechnology.blogspot.com>). Over the past fifty years I must have read more than one hundred books on technology and its impacts on individuals, organizations, communities, businesses, schools, nations, and the world. Jacques Ellul, Albert Borgmann, Langdon Winner, Carl Mitcham, and many others have probed the technological depths—or the specifics of various technological domains or problems—but we always need helpful introductions that are comprehensive in scope, deeply researched, and written in an accessible, illuminating style. The late Neil Postman did this in his *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (1992). And now Doug Hill’s *Not So Fast: Thinking Twice About Technology* (2016) will serve well as today’s essential introduction to the subject. I can’t recommend it highly enough.

We all experience how pervasive are today’s technological devices. There is no escape. Communication media, transportation, entertainment, manufacturing, robotics . . . we are totally surrounded, invaded, dominated. Much of this is welcome and positive of course. My wife’s hip and shoulder replacements are incredible gifts. I value FaceBook for helping me stay in touch with over a thousand of my former students and colleagues from across the globe. But Doug Hill steps back and helps us see the shape and nature of the “forest” when often we only see the “trees” and not the overall pattern, linkages, and commonalities. His discussion proceeds in five stages.

In Part One, Hill shows how technological optimism and technological concern (sometimes fear, resistance, criticism) have long coexisted. Today’s technological optimists, evangelists, and dreamers like Ray Kurzweil, Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk, and Nicholas Negroponte represent a tradition going back through Henry Ford, Frederick Taylor, Francis Bacon to some of the ancients. And all along there have been critics, questioners, and prophets from Theodore Roszak and Wendell Berry to Martin Heidegger, Henry David Thoreau, the Luddites, and many classical thinkers and commentators. “Ambivalence”

is an appropriate term for recognizing that technology has its positive, up-side—but comes with down-side trade-offs, hidden costs, unpredictable consequences, and cumulative effects. Getting some long-term historical perspective on technology is really essential for both creators and users.

In Part Two, Hill asks what exactly is “technology?” It is not just “applied science.” It is not just machines, tools, and devices. Not just IT. A “narrow, internalist” definition focuses on things, objects, hardware, and engineering stuff. The “broad, externalist” school views not just all of that but also the “users and the broader social and political contexts in which they’re used” (p.49). For Jacques Ellul, perhaps Hill’s favorite philosopher of technology, it is about “technique”—the broad system and milieu driven by the search for effective, efficient “means.” It is not just about tools but about a method (rational, scientific, and quantitative) approaching all of life. Science itself, today, depends on (not precedes) technology for its means and achievements. Hill argues that the basic “nature” of technology is to be expansive, rational, direct, aggressive, controlling, and linked or converging with other technologies. Traditional moral values “good” and “evil/bad” are replaced by “success” and “failure” in the technological milieu. We could add “speed,” “predictability,” “replicability,” and “power” to that list of core technological values. Technology today is not quite “fate” or deterministic but it moves ahead autonomously, with little or no human or moral resistance apparent. Technological problems require and lead to further technological responses; more and “better” technology. A major challenge we face today is to be so absorbed in (and overwhelmed by) all of our particular technologies that we fail to see the whole. We take for granted the atmosphere in which we live and breathe. Hill quotes the old joke about a fish being asked “how’s the water?”—and replying “what’s water?”

In Part Three, Hill explores human relations in an era of technology. Rather than toward *quality* (a combination of caring and attention) our technology inclines us toward distraction and disengagement. This affects our human interrelationships but also our relationship to our machines and to our work (including the loss of craftsmanship, participation, and attention, alongside huge productivity gains). Another characteristic is *absorption*—excessive focus, even addiction to our

technologies. Hill worries also that we are being drawn into a *dreamworld* of virtual reality that blinds us to flesh-and-blood reality. The borders between reality and technological fantasy are increasingly blurred. How does such a citizenry make good political choices? Finally, Hill warns us about the tendency toward *abstraction*—distance from the subjects, products, and impacts of our actions. Medical machines and instruments can provide amazing assistance to doctors and nurses—but they can also create distance. The doctor knows the test results but not the actual patient. Distant targets of drone warfare are abstractions, easier to kill thoughtlessly. How does technology in its various forms affect the way I relate to my colleagues, friends, and loved ones? How does it affect my work, play, and rest? These fundamental questions must be faced and discussed and Hill's book is a provocative, thoughtful opening statement for such reflection and discussion.

In Part Four, Hill discusses the ways technology crosses traditional boundaries between humans and machines and between humans and animals. There is no doubt that environments affect and modify humans. The food we eat modifies us. Exercise modifies our muscles and organs. Prostheses can improve our lives. Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brains* (2010) shows how our brain physiology and chemistry is modified by information technology. Some of the technological impact on humans is intentional, some unintentional. The technological dreamers like Ray Kurzweil dream of intentionally, radically merging humans and machines. Do we just watch passively as these efforts and experiments proceed? So too, the boundaries between humans and animals have been crossed, but are there limits or guidelines?

Finally, in Part Five, Hill cautions about leaving our future to risk-taking gamblers. He recalls how high profile technology leaders Norbert Wiener and Bill Joy came to have second thoughts and express great caution about the vast destructive potential of advanced technology. Every technological development entails risk as it amplifies effects and links together with other technologies. We, the public, are the guinea pigs impacted by these risks. Shouldn't we have some say about experiments that could have catastrophic impacts on our lives? Techie hubris, even arrogance, combined with (1) a desire for career power, wealth, and fame, (2) a general lack of broad education in history and the humanities, and (3) an absence of real membership in responsible, accountable human community beyond the tech world . . . leads to risk on a catastrophic scale.

In conclusion, Hill asks not for a rejection of technology but for appropriate restraint and caution and for some reconsideration of our purposes and ends in life, not just as individuals but as professions, as societies and nations. What are the Ends we wish to pursue and achieve and in light of which our technological research and development must be judged. As Ellul often said, our technological Means have taken over and become the End. They are uncritically accepted and self-justifying. Thoreau warned that we could become "tools of our

tools." Hill's book title means everything in this argument: "not so fast"! Yes, let's keep moving; there are many positive achievements and promises of more. But slow down and take seriously some "second thoughts" and opinions as we proceed. The stakes are too high not to do so.

Not So Fast is a joy to read because it is such beautiful writing—but I don't just mean beautiful as literary artifice. It is a content-rich, page-turner, drawing readers forward in a life-enhancing "thought experiment": what if we looked at our various technologies that have changed our lives (so positively in many cases—and so frustratingly and aggravatingly in others) as a whole ensemble? What if we tried to see what all these technologies have in common and how they join together as a system with a kind of philosophy and set of common values? What if we dipped back into history to see the origin and development of our technological world and could hear from the past and the present, from those who loved and promoted technology and from those who resisted, worried, and cautioned about it? Hill pulls it off and walks us through this thought experiment. He doesn't go down every byway possible. For me, two additional questions are (1) how might faith traditions like Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism provide constructive guidance and community leverage vis-a-vis technology, and (2) how best can we prepare for a rapidly-arriving world of automated joblessness, the vastly increased wealth disparities that come with it, and the personal and social chaos of a world without (adequate) work? But this is asking too much of Hill's already abundant argument. Get it, read it, then form a book discussion group around it. Make it an assigned reading in your courses. Not So Fast was published by a smaller academic press and could be overlooked so let's get the word out to our networks.

#### **About the Author**

David Gill is the President of the International Jacques Ellul Society.

## Review of Jeffrey Shaw and Tim Demy, *Jacques Ellul on Violence, Resistance, and War* (Pickwick Publications, 2016.) 171 pp. pb.

Jason Hudson

Jacques Ellul's dialectical method embraces the tension between necessity and freedom. In conversations about violence and war the extreme dialectical poles are idealistic pacifism and pragmatic justification. *Jacques Ellul on Violence, Resistance, and War*, edited by Jeffrey Shaw and Timothy Demy, enters into this tension by bringing together a collection of essays that engages with Ellul's work from a variety of perspectives: theological, philosophical, practical, historical, and existential. When read as a complete work, however, it provides a holistic vision of Ellul's thinking and some of the ways scholars and practitioners have sought to interject possibility and freedom into our violent world of necessity.

In the first chapter David Gill commends Ellul's work on violence and insists on its enduring relevance. His essay, "Jacques Ellul on Living in a Violent World" prepares the reader to navigate those that follow by introducing Ellul's dialectic approach. Gill assures readers that the essays that follow will not articulate a rational ethic of violence that might be universally applied. Rather, he explains, Ellul invites readers to understand the nature of violence as a necessity and to live a particular style of life that creatively introduces possibility into situations that are otherwise closed and determined.

Chapter two, "Calvin, Barth, Ellul, and the Powers that Be," examines Ellul's exegesis of "the powers" in scripture against those of John Calvin and Karl Barth. Ellul's reading of the biblical *exousiai*—powers and authorities—is essential to his anarchism, nonviolence, and his dialectical thinking. In this chapter David Stokes shows how Calvin and Barth endorse state power, as either an actual or potential representative of God's action in the world. Ellul, in contrast, identifies the state as a power, an *exousia*, that is disarmed and put to open shame by Jesus Christ. This nuance, then, relativizing state power, allows Ellul the space to see the State as a necessary power that makes life possible but also a power that must be transgressed for the sake of freedom.

Andrew Goddard, in chapter three's essay, "Ellul on Violence and Just War" examines how Ellul challenges the just war tradition by including war in his treatment of violence. Goddard outlines Ellul's Christian realist approach to violence. First Ellul acknowledges that violence is unavoidable and nec-

essary for the survival of the state. Yet he also seeks to be realistic about the nature of violence, that it has its own logic and is never fully under human control. Despite its necessity Christians who use violence must do so without an easy conscience, but must acknowledge their own violence as a sign of their lack of freedom. Finally, Goddard imagines a middle way, a "chastened form of just war thinking" that might emerge from Ellul's critique when taken as a challenge to just war theory rather than a complete repudiation.

In chapter four, Andy Alexis-Baker analyzes the theory of just policing from an Ellulian perspective. Against those who tout just policing as an alternative to just war, Alexis-Baker convincingly argues that policing as we know it is a modern invention rooted in post-Civil War efforts to control newly freed slaves (in the south) and the vices of the working classes (in the north). Alexis-Baker shows that just policing is likely to produce worse outcomes than just war. Finally, he highlights one Columbian community whose approach to security demonstrates the possibilities of balancing security with human dignity.

Chapters five and six are case studies that seek to apply an Ellulian framework to specific cases of violence. In chapter five, "Cultural Interpretation of Cyberterrorism and Cybersecurity in Everyday Life," Dal Yong Jin examines the increasing importance of cybersecurity in the face of emerging cyberterrorism. In chapter six, "The Nigerian Government's War Against Boko Haram and Terrorism: An Ellulian Communicative Perspective," Stanley Uche Anozie examines the Nigerian government's propaganda war with the terrorist group Boko Haram. On the surface chapters five and six seem to be weak points in the collection as they apply Ellul in problematic ways. However, the strength of these essays is that they highlight the difficulty of bringing Ellul's thought into the reality of extremely complex situations. Moreover, in reality, Ellul has inspired some to pacifism and anarchism and has moved others to use violence in desperation against technology's determinism.

Chapter seven, "Ellul, Machiavelli, and Autonomous Technique," considers how Machiavelli prefigures Ellul's conception of technique, particular regarding ends and means. In his essay, Richard Kirkpatrick shows that for Machiavelli

subjects and objects-governors and governed-are flattened out, or hollowed, as all become means in an autonomous march to nowhere. In a passage that pointedly reminds the reader of today's political reality, Kirkpatrick highlights, via Machiavelli's Ferdinand, how in the absence of ends spectacle is used to control or appease subjects through confusion and fascination. Despite this essay's interesting and well-argued connections between Ellul and Machiavelli, the reader is left to make the connections between the essay and violence and war.

In chapter eight, Jeffery Shaw considers how Ellul and Thomas Merton compare on propaganda as a form of violence. Though other chapters have addressed propaganda, Shaw helpfully situates violence and propaganda within Ellul's concept of technique. This important step opens the door for readers to begin thinking about how the treatment of violence in this volume might illuminate thinking about other areas of technique. Finally, Shaw shows Merton to be more optimistic about human attempts to transcend technique through asceticism.

Peter Fallon continues the theme of propaganda as violence in chapter nine, "Propaganda as Psychic Violence." Fallon's contribution is a rigorous examination of Ellul's thought in this area. He seeks to delineate why propaganda counts as a form of violence within Ellul's definitions. To do so he examines the phenomenon of the happy, though psychologically determined, propagandee who is conditioned to love her captor. Finally, he considers how Ellul's theological work opens possibilities for revolution, the transgression of deterministic technology, propaganda, violence, etc.

In his dubiously named chapter ten, "Technology and Perpetual War: The Boundary of No Boundary," David Lovekin continues to explore the boundaries of how Ellul's conception of violence can be framed. With concern for the philosophical nature of Ellul's work, Lovekin examines the nature of the same and the other within the dialectic. Violence, he argues, results from the dissolution of space between sign and signified that is necessary for dialectic. Against the hubris of violence that seeks to subsume the other into the self, Lovekin seeks a wholeness that allows a plurality of differences to exist in necessary dialectical tension.

Finally, Mark Baker concludes the collection with his personal reflection on encountering Ellul's work while experiencing a disenchanting conflict in El Salvador, titled, "My Conversion to Christian Pacifism: Reading Jacques Ellul in War-Ravaged Central America." This essay offers a fitting conclusion as the reader may feel a bit like Baker, grasping for a way to make sense of a phenomenon that we see and experience around us—and in us—daily. His narrative style allows Baker to approach Ellul's treatment of violence, which, given its placement in the collection, should be well covered territory, through a fresh lens. His essay brings a simplicity and clarity to many of the ideas previously discussed. By discussing his conversion, he makes a compelling case for those

who are still clinging to the myths of redemptive violence or trapped in the hopelessness of necessity.

### **About the Author**

Jason Hudson is a PhD student at Cliff College, UK, and an adjunct professor at Cincinnati Christian University. His current work seeks to bring the thought of Jacques Ellul and Wendell Berry to bear on contemporary problems and questions, particularly within Western evangelicalism.

## **Review of Gordon Oyer's *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest: Merton, Berrigan, Yoder, and Muste at the Gethsemani Abbey Peacemakers Retreat* (Cascade Books, 2016.) 274 pp. pb.**

Chris Staysniak

**F**rom November 18th-20th, 1964, the renowned writer and Catholic monk Thomas Merton hosted a small retreat on the grounds of his Gethsemani Abbey Trappist community. While in terms of gender and race the group was quite homogenous, it still was a remarkable ecumenical gathering of fourteen men that included some of the leading prophetic peacemaking voices of the day. In addition to Merton himself there was A.J. Muste, at that point a living legend among labor, antiwar, and civil rights organizing circles; Mennonite pacifist scholar John Howard Yoder; the dynamic duo of the "Catholic Left," brothers Dan and Phil Berrigan; and Catholic Worker activists Tom Cornell and Jim Forest. The gathering also entailed several other Catholic and Protestant peace organizers like the Presbyterian John Oliver Nelson and Methodist Elbert Jean. While they did not have the same national name-brand recognition as some of the other participants, they too were critically important fixtures of the intertwined Civil Rights and antiwar movements that fueled the period's unparalleled social ferment. For three days this converged in Kentucky to explore how they might better ground their peacemaking efforts in a world awash in violence as they explored and probed the retreat's theme, "The Spiritual Roots of Protest." This unique gathering has, until now, largely relegated to passing references and footnotes. But through meticulous archival research, Gordon Oyer has recovered these proceedings in *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest*. Oyer, himself of Mennonite background, stumbled upon mention of the retreat while reading Yoder's writings. From this obscure starting point, he has painstakingly recovered the rich conversations at this extraordinary retreat from an array of diaries, transcripts, marginalia, and other archival sources. At face value a book about three days worth of advanced theological conversations does not sound like a riveting narrative. But Oyer's study makes for a very compelling read about these men of great action taking time to unpack their own ideas, beliefs, and motivations in a thoughtful effort to more deeply and spiritually sustain their peacemaking activities. We need little reminder that these exchanges from over half a century ago are still valuable today. As Oyer writes, "they raised

essential, timeless questions we would do well to ask ourselves fifty years later. They also helped model the mutual support required for people of faith to embark on and sustain active, resistant, nonviolent protest against the cultures of domination that human civilization seems destined to evoke" (xvii). Like all good prophets, their warnings, for better and for worse, resonate with a certain timelessness. The interplay of ideas and thinkers, both those present like Muste, Yoder, the Berrigans, and Merton, and those not, like Massignon and Ellul, is rich. At times one must read quite closely to follow all of these threads, but ultimately Oyer deftly weaves them together. While not physically present at this gathering, readers of this journal will be interested to know that Ellul still enjoyed considerable influence over it. As Oyer ably demonstrates, in drawing up the agenda and preliminary themes for the conversation, Merton drew heavily from Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society* (as well as the French scholar and pioneer of Catholic-Muslim interfaith dialogue, Louis Massignon). In Ellul's writings Merton found a kindred spirit as he, by the mid-1960s began to devote serious thought and reflection to the place of technology in modern life, particularly when it came to the tools of death and destruction, and the increasingly normalized assertions by U.S. policymakers that national security was bound in technological superiority. In Ellul's work Merton found a powerful and extensive ideas that helped complement and advance his own thinking. Throughout much of chapter three Oyer explores Merton's reading of *The Technological Society* in detail. As Merton wrote, among other reflections, "I am going on with Ellul's prophetic and I think very sound diagnosis of the Technological Society. How few people really face the problem! It is the most portentous and apocalyptic thing of all, that we are caught in an automatic self-determining system in which man's choices have largely ceased to count" (61). On further reflection walked back some of his initial response, ultimately finding Ellul to be "too pessimistic" (61), though this conclusion probably would have been revisited had he read more of Ellul's opus of published pieces, particularly his theological work (a characteristic of Ellul's writing that Oyer acknowledges later). But as Oyer shows, Ellul's writings struck a deep chord in Merton, and,

as such, helped shape the initial discussions of this remarkable retreat. Oyer ends the book with a thoughtful epilogue that asks how these questions of the spiritual roots of protest, technology, and how one can be sustained over the long haul of peacemaking in a war-ridden world. He, like those at the Gethsemani retreat, offers no concrete answers. But in itself, *Exploring the Spiritual Roots of Protest* is a rich read that provides theological and intellectual manna for those who look to take a stand against today against the forces of militarism, unchecked capitalism, environmental degradation, and an ethos that puts the individual above all, with costs the entire global community must ultimately pay. The conversations of *The Spiritual Roots of Protest* indeed remain relevant, and for that reason this book is a worthwhile read for all those who feel that prophetic tug towards peacemaking efforts to help heal our broken world.

**About the author**

Chris Staysniak, PhD, is an American religious historian who teaches at Boston College. His research and teaching focuses on American religious and social movements.