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Technocratic Consciousness in the Thought of Jacques Ellul

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Technocratic Consciousness in the Thought of Jacques Ellul

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The dissertation is about Jacques Ellul, a French philosopher and theologian of the second half of the twentieth century. A critic of modernity, Ellul focuses on the ill effects of our obsession with technology, leading to its idolization. The technological development has created a new type of consciousness in the modern person, a technocratic consciousness, which Ellul calls "technique." Technique leads to spiritual degradation, replacing fundamental human values with a single value of efficiency.

The main target of Ellul's criticism is the modern state, which is the fullest expression of technique's social aspect. It is through the state, pervasive and omnipresent, that technique controls the totality of human life, leading to complete and inescapable objectification, entrapment, and subjugation of the human being. A Christian theologian, Ellul hopes to solve this crisis by showing the way to personal spiritual growth and thereby helping restore our
autonomy from technique. Although his solution is to the point, Ellul fails to demonstrate how such personal transformation translates into social change. Consequently, he lacks a true social theory.

The dissertation offers a friendly critique of Ellul's theory by focusing on his dialectical method. Considering himself a dialectician, Ellul does not see that dialectic operates as an organizing principle of reality reflecting contradictions within his target social phenomena, such as the state, and thus revealing their potential for transformation. If he had seen that, he would not have limited his solution to personal spiritual growth but rather would have put it in a broader context of social change.

Influenced by anarchism, Ellul is distrustful of conventional politics. His proposed social action is nonviolent direct action similar to the movements led by Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. As a result of such action, desacralizing technique and the state, Ellul hopes to form an alternative social organization, resembling a mutualist federation envisioned by classical anarchism. His theory foresees environmental and anti-globalization movements as well as other popular movements for democratization and transfer of power from the state to civil society.
This dissertation by Oleg Vasilyevich Yaroshin fulfills the dissertation requirements for the doctoral degree in politics approved by Stephen F. Schneck, Ph.D., as Director, and by William A. Barbieri, Ph.D., and David J. Walsh, Ph.D. as Readers.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my recently deceased mother, Ludmila Petrovna Kuropatova, who was my first teacher and whose unfaltering love and support have sustained me all my life.
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Finally, I want to thank Jacques Ellul himself for bringing into focus existential issues of modernity and offering a provocative theory that will stimulate public discourse on the meaning of social action for generations to come.
INTRODUCTION

This study is about the French philosopher and theologian Jacques Ellul. Ellul's oeuvre received popular acclaim primarily for his criticism of the uncontrollable use of technology and its social and spiritual implications. In his most famous book, *The Technological Society*, first published in France in 1954, Ellul develops his concept of technocratic consciousness that he calls "technique." Technique is a technical mindset, a mode of thought whose only preoccupation is achieving maximum efficiency in all spheres of human life. Technique does not understand any values but efficiency. Therefore, it effectively replaces all human values with efficiency, resulting in spiritual degradation and erosion of the foundational value system of the human condition.

Seeing technique as the primary cause of the modern crisis, Ellul tries to solve it through democratization. The democratization must come not from the world of politics in the framework of Western democracy but from direct action by social activists, not dissimilar to the movements of Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King. Such social action would lead to institution of direct democracy in place of representative democracy. Ellul is distrustful of representative democracy and conventional politics, seeing it as an instrument of manipulation of populus through propaganda and political technology, anti-democratic in its purpose, methods, and results.

Ellul is particularly concerned that technique has become an autonomous force that controls every aspect of life. Technology has become agency for everything we do, causing the destruction of our communicative and reflective space and separating us from nature and from each other. The focus of Ellul's concern is the modern state. The state manifests itself as "a cold
monster," a bureaucratic machine that imposes the technical logic of rules and procedures on every aspect of social life. We increasingly rely on the state for everything we do, idolizing it and leading ourselves into a trap of complete objectification and subjugation of the person by technical forces beyond our control. In order to subject humankind to its control, technique counts on our moral vulnerabilities, especially our materialistic propensities.

Ellul emphasizes the spiritual aspect of the modern crisis and the solution offered by him is a spiritual one. Ellul believes that only personal spiritual growth can help us break the otherwise irresistible spell of technique. However, Ellul's distrust of conventional politics seems to create a theoretical and practical predicament. By focusing exclusively on personal transformation of enlightened individuals, he fails to show how it would turn into a social transformation. Thus, the modern crisis, social in nature, remains without a solution rooted in social theory.

This study resolves this problem by creating a workable social theory that "practicalizes" Ellul by connecting his concept of personal transformation with the world of social action. In order to achieve this objective, it looks into Ellul's theoretical method, particularly his dialectic and his theology. The main contribution of this study is that it finds that the lack of a true social theory in Ellul's solution results from his dialectical method. Due to the inconsistencies in his dialectics, he overlooks those internal contradictions within technique and the modern state that open the possibilities for transformation. Similarly, because of his flawed dialectics, Ellul does not offer a convincing picture of how social awareness incrementally arises from elemental awareness of individual people.
The purpose and the method of this study inform its structure. The first chapter looks into those theories that influenced Ellul. They include anarchist influences and Karl Marx as well as the theology of Karl Barth and Søren Kierkegaard. The second chapter unpacks Ellul's theory by presenting its essential components, presenting Ellul as a theorist of direct action, first and foremost. The third chapter offers an analysis of what is the dialectical method and how Ellul's dialectic limits the possibilities of finding a solution for the modern crisis. It finds that Ellul tries to resolve the paradoxical relationship between ethics and politics by collapsing politics into ethics, thereby making his theory analytically incapable of handling the political reality. The fourth chapter considers Ellul's proposed solution to the modern crisis and puts it on a sound dialectical basis by proposing a dialectical abstraction of claims of justice.

This study tries to be as faithful as possible to the goals and methods of Ellul's theory. It is a friendly critique of Ellul. Despite its critical side, it underscores the value of Ellul's theoretical contribution and the particular applicability of Ellul's theory in the twenty-first century. Indeed, this century is marked by the growing importance of direct action, evidenced by the anti-globalization and environment movements as well as such pivotal events as the Arab Spring, the Occupy Wall Street Movement, the Tea Party Movement, and the ongoing Euromaidan and the Russian Spring. The growing intolerance of violence and oppression create an irresistible pressure for democratization through direct action outside the conventional political process, especially in countries with "deadlocked" democracies that fail to adjust to the growing demands for social justice. Ellul's theory greatly helps us to understand these new dynamics and therefore deserves greater attention in the community of social scientists.
Chapter 1. ORIGINS AND ROOTS OF ELLUL'S THOUGHT

To better understand something, it is always a good idea to look at its history first. Similarly, an analysis of a great thinker usually starts with at least some consideration of what might have contributed to his thought and the influences under which its genesis took place. This rather broad concept usually means a combination of life experiences, reading and education, associations, and trends of thought and concepts, to which the thinker was exposed and which, in turn, he exhibited in his *oeuvre* and his other statements. The primary source of learning about such contributions, of course, is the thinker himself. However, often it is not enough. People are not always clear or objective about their past experiences; their memories may fade, or they may have actuated their influences subconsciously, intangibly, indirectly, or without realization. This is why, when we analyze the genesis of one's thought, we also look at the facts of the thinker's life, to what theoretical or social movements he belonged and what movements recognized him as their own. Further, we look at the trends of thought that were contemporary to the thinker's life. Finally, we look at conceptual similarities and differences between the thinker's views and the views of his predecessors and contemporaries. This is how I will approach the genesis of Ellul's scholarship.

It has been established by students of Ellul, and admitted by him, that his scholarship developed along two interconnected and yet independent paths: his sociological and his
theological writing. Therefore, I have organized the scholarship, that influenced him, in two
groups accordingly. The first group, sociology, will include anarchist influences and Marx. The
second group, theology, will focus on Barth and Kierkegaard.

I. ANARCHIST FIRST

It is amazing how little recognition one can find in the secondary literature of the
anarchist influence on Ellul. Almost all books about Ellul, with a notable exception of the one
by Andrew Goddard, are silent on the issue. It is doubly strange because Ellul himself
recognized that influence on his formation as a thinker and an activist, wrote about anarchy
substantially and even dedicated a whole book, albeit a smaller one, to proving compatibility of
anarchy and Christian faith.

This omission is so obvious that it begs the question: Why is it so persistent? The reason
could be in the stigma attached to the notions of "anarchy" and "anarchism" today. Certainly, no
mainstream trend of thought or a major political movement likes to be called "anarchist," and the
concept is identified by this term, at least positively, only in academia. Another, and possibly
related, reason could be the respect for Ellul's own self-identification as a thinker. Indeed, he
seemed only reluctantly to admit anarchist influences on his thought and limited his association
with "anarchist" movements and "anarchist" philosophy.

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In light of this very limited recognition of the association of Ellul with anarchist thought, it is particularly striking how much he appears to be influenced by it. The first activist organization he joined in the personalist movement was essentially anarchist in its goals, ideology, and practice. He first studied Mikhail Bakunin, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and Peter Kropotkin at the same time as he first familiarized himself with Marx.³ His socialism, anti-technologism, and concepts of state, law, and politics are fully congruous with their anarchist conceptualization. His federalism and his views on violence are essentially anarchist as is his utopia of enlightened individuals living in locally governed entities under municipally organized government. In fact, the similarities are so significant that we can comfortably place Ellul's views within the typology of the anarchist movement with post-modernism, primitivism, traditional collectivism (as defined by Kropotkin⁴), and Christian anarchism.

This sub-chapter will be an attempt to identify the principal aspects of anarchist influence on Ellul. Of special importance will be the question of how much anarchism displaced Marxism in Ellul's sociology. To achieve this objective, it will first give account to what Ellul himself said about the importance of the anarchist influence on him. Then, it will focus on Ellul's formative years and their historic backdrop, as described in the biography by Goddard and by Ellul himself, to show how he became interested in anarchist thought and activism. Finally, it will consider similarities between Ellul's key concepts, including state, law, politics, federalism, violence, and technique, and the corresponding concepts by anarchist thinkers.

³ Ellul, Entretiens, 135-36; Ellul, Conversations, 87.
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IN POLITICS

When Ellul came of age to form his views in early 1930s, Europe was going through a turbulent period. It was a time of soul searching and ideological realignment, for which the stage was set by the aftermath of World War I, a wave of revolutions toppling European monarchies, a prolonged economic recession, the social-democratic movements becoming a part of the political establishment, the advent of fascism in Italy, Spain, and Germany, and the industrialization and consolidation of power by Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union. The realignment was marked by disillusionment in the romantic nationalism that preceded World War I and the idea of nation-state as the cornerstone of civic virtue. Another change was cooling off of the enthusiasm about communism and departure of the social criticism by the left from the idea of class struggle and from focus on the proletariat as the driving force of history. Finally, the war-mongering and fascist regimes brought into focus the danger of power consolidation at the hands of government leading to political totalitarianism.

Ellul's respect for anarchism is best revealed in his conceptualization of anarchy, considering it as a direct opposite of technique: historically, contemporaneously in the modern world, and futuristically.

In his historical analysis of the origin of technique, Ellul wrote about the climax of the Christian civilization, contrasting it to the Roman Empire on one hand and to a later degradation on the other:

The society which developed from the tenth to the fourteenth century was vital, coherent, and unanimous; but it was characterized by a total absence of the technical will. It was "a-capitalistic" as well as "a-technical." From the point of view of organization, it was an anarchy in the etymological sense of the word—and it was completely nontechnical. Its law was principally based on custom. It had no social or political organization based on reasoned, elaborated rules.
In all other areas—for example, in agriculture and industry—there was the same nearly total absence of technique.\(^5\)

In his analysis of the closure of technique in the modern age, Ellul again directly contrasted anarchy and technique as if they were in a dichotomous relationship of two opposites.

It is contrary to the nature of technique to be compatible with anarchy in any sense of the word. When milieu and action become technical, order and organization are imposed. The state itself, projected into the technical movement, becomes its agent.\(^6\)

Therefore, it was only logical that Ellul felt that anarchy was necessary to effectuate the required social changes in the future. When in the sunset of his life, Ellul was asked how he was influenced by anarchist thought, he admitted:

Towards the end of the 1930s I was an avid reader of Bakunin, Proudhon and I also read some Kropotkin. In as far as I felt the State was forever encroaching in domains that were outside its mandate, I felt that the anarchists' response was right, not for all time but in the actual context of modern society.\(^7\)

The defining characteristic of anarchism is rejection of the state as such.\(^8\) Ellul fully shared this anarchist approach to the state. He thought of any modern state as an agent of technique. According to Ellul, all three major types of state: fascism, communism, and liberal democracy shared this characteristic of the state that Ellul found to be most important. By virtue of this agency, any modern state was totalitarian.

Ellul's intellectual road to the rejection of the state started in 1930 during his student years. It was the time of the rise of fascism and the spread of the right-wing movements all over Europe, including his country France, where right-wing riots brought down a democratically

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elected government in 1934.\footnote{Goddard, \textit{Living}, 18.} The brutal and violent nature of fascism and the totality of government's control over its population put clearly into focus how great and how evil the power of the government can get if it remains unchecked.

Being the most totalitarian of all states, fascism was the fullest expression of the state as "the coldest of all cold monsters" to Ellul.\footnote{For the use by Ellul of this term coined by Nietzsche, see, e.g., Ellul, \textit{Entretiens}, 43; Ellul, \textit{Conversations}, 23 and Jacques Ellul, \textit{Anarchie et Christianisme} (Lyon: Atelier de Creation Libertaire, 1988), 6; Jacques Ellul, \textit{Anarchy and Christianity}, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 2.} He later said, "I did belong to every single antifascist movement I could find."\footnote{Ellul, \textit{Entretiens}, ; Ellul, \textit{Conversations}, 107.} He actively opposed right-wing groups such as the Fiery Cross (\textit{Croix de Feu})\footnote{According to his own recollections, Ellul demonstrated against the Fiery Cross on February 10, 1934. See Ellul, \textit{Anarchie}, 5; Ellul, \textit{Anarchy}, 1.} and later participated in the Spanish Civil War by helping to supply weapons to the anti-Franco forces, working in contact with Spanish anarchists. This strengthened his early anarchist thought.\footnote{Goddard, \textit{Living}, 274.} During World War II, he participated in the French underground Movement of National Liberation, acting as a liaison between guerrilla soldiers. He was later awarded the title Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem in Israel for saving the lives of many Jews he helped flee from arrest. Working for the Resistance, Ellul hoped that it would take the country to a revolution, not a communist one, but one resembling the vision of socialist anarchism.

In 1944 . . . we had been dreaming during the last few years of the Resistance, often expressed by the saying that we were going to move from Resistance to Revolution. But when we said that--and I would like to point out that Camus first used it in 1943 in combat groups--we did not mean a Communist, Stalinist, Soviet revolution. We meant a fundamental revolution of society, and we made great plans for transforming the press, the media, and the economic structures. They all had elements of socialism to be sure; but I would say it was more of a Proudhonian socialism, going back to grassroots by means of a federative and cooperative approach. We believed these things.
And when we surfaced during July 1944, we were several small groups trying to launch a revolutionary action.\textsuperscript{14}

In 1947, Ellul became disappointed in the politics of the government led by General Charles de Gaulle, "who wanted to install a traditional republican government." He was also distressed by the return of the former political parties "blocking" the efforts of the revolutionary groups. Ellul voiced his criticism in an article entitled in French "Dubious Proposals."\textsuperscript{15} The article became his first advocacy of anarchy. In the article, Ellul wrote, "I maintain that today and for a certain time in France, anarchy is the only possible solution."\textsuperscript{16} This "anarchy," advocated by Ellul, was an attack against politicians and included the elimination of some principal institutions of the central government such as the Council of Ministers, National Assemblies, and political parties.\textsuperscript{17} Ellul's disappointment in politics was so great that it led him to abandon political life. "The politician is powerless against government bureaucracy; society cannot be changed through political action," he lamented.\textsuperscript{18}

It is not by chance that the revolution, for which Ellul was hoping after the war, was "Proudhonian" and not "a communist revolution." Indeed, another factor explaining his anti-statism was his disillusionment with Marxism. There are three dimensions to this disillusionment: (1) the dissatisfaction with what Ellul thought was doctrinal failure of Marxism to explain the modern crisis; (2) developments in Stalin's USSR; and (3) differences with the French communists. The manner of Ellul's disillusionment with Marxism on all three levels

\textsuperscript{15} Ellul, \textit{Perspectives}, 23.
\textsuperscript{17} Goddard, \textit{Living}, 274.
\textsuperscript{18} Ellul, \textit{Perspectives}, 23.
demonstrates that to the extent he was not a Marxist, it was primarily because he was an anarchist. Indeed, his anarchist socialism effectively displaced Marxism in practically all of his key sociological concepts, including first and foremost his concept of the state.

The main problem about Marxism for Ellul was its failure to focus on what he thought was the principal fault line of the modern crisis: the conflict between spiritual forces and the economic order imposed by technique. Ellul criticized Marx for this by comparing him unfavorably to anarchist thinkers

He consecrated, theoretically and scientifically, the common sentiment of all the men of his century and furnished it with the prestige of dialectic. Proudhon and Bakunin had placed spiritual forces in rivalry with the economic order. Against them, Marx upheld the bourgeois order of the primacy of the economic, not, however, as a merely historical primacy but as a primacy in human hearts. If economic conditions are changed, men are changed. Marx made a success of the terrible confiscation. The spiritual resources released from oppression were to be put at the service of the oppressor, not, indeed, the bourgeois oppressor but the economic one. 19

Ellul later confessed that his "admiration" for Marx was "tempered" by the attitude of Marx to Proudhon in their dispute. Ellul explained that he "greatly liked" Proudhon and was "scandalized" by Marx's behavior towards him. 20

There is little doubt that socialism was a foundational part of Ellul's views, and his socialism could have been inspired by Marx as well as Proudhon. Nevertheless, his socialism appears to be defined primarily by his anarchism, and not Marxism. Ellul saw no incongruence between anarchism and socialism. Moreover, he stressed that he regarded anarchism as "the fullest and most serious form of socialism."21 Thus, it is no surprise that his critique of Marxist views and politics was not one of a "true" Marxist lashing at "unfaithful revisionists" but one of an anarchist.

19 Ellul, La Technique, 204-05; Ellul, The Technological Society, 222.
20 Ellul, Anarchie, 6; Ellul, Anarchy, 2.
21 Ellul, Anarchie, 7; Ellul, Anarchy, 3.
As he watched Stalin's USSR, Ellul was bitterly disappointed that the socialist state was betraying his expectations rooted in the ideal of a "Proudhonian revolution." What Ellul called "truly revolutionary" in Russia was represented by the government, established in the Ukrainian part of the former Russian Empire by Nestor Makhno, an anarcho-communist revolutionary and the commander of an independent anarchist army. Ellul "could not pardon" the suppression of the Makhno government by the Bolshevik government in 1921. He was also appalled how the Bolsheviks suppressed, in the same year, the rebellion of the sailors of the navy base of Kronstadt demanding freedom of speech and liberation of the soviets (workers' councils) from party control.

Ellul admitted that he "liked" Marx's "vision of a society in which the state would have withered away." Needless to say, it was the goal of the "Proudhonian revolution" too. However, he saw that in the USSR, the state has become more powerful since the time of the Bolshevik revolution. Its increasingly totalitarian nature, the "cold monster" aspect, manifested itself to him in show trials of Vladimir Lenin's close associates in the 1930s, including Nikolai Bukharin, whom Ellul admired. Ellul characterized this development as "a transition from a dictatorship of the proletariat to a dictatorship over the proletariat." Another great disappointment was the departure of the USSR from its early emphasis on the principles of internationalism and pacifism during the time right after World War I when there still was hope for a socialist world revolution. Ellul thought that these declared principles

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22 Some authors put Makhno's name on the pantheon of the founding fathers of anarchism alongside such names as Godwin, Bakunin, Proudhon, and Kropotkin. See Kinna, Anarchism, 11.

23 Ellul, Anarchie, 6; Ellul, Anarchy, 2.

24 Ellul, Anarchie, 6; Ellul, Anarchy, 2; Goddard, Living, 18.

25 Ellul, Anarchie, 6; Ellul, Anarchy, 2.
that he called "basic" "ought to have resulted in antinationalism." However, the Soviet government increasingly turned to nationalist propaganda as a way of mobilization for Stalin's policy of industrialization and development of national defense in the face of the militarization of Germany and Japan.

The disillusionment in the USSR was closely related to Ellul's disagreements with the communists at home while his political outlook, in Goddard's characterization, "moved still further from any sympathy with Soviet communism to a more anarchist-inclined Proudhonian socialism." He had no regard for showing total respect for orders from Moscow and they thought of him as "a little bourgeois intellectual." He admitted that his contacts with them were "poor" and that he "regarded them as insignificant." He disagreed with their understanding of Marx, thinking that their dogmatism turned Marxism into a "lie." However, what made him "detest the communists" was "their conduct during the Spanish Civil War and their horrible assassination of the Barcelona anarchists."

VIEW ON GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

There was a deeper reason why Ellul's disagreement with the communists was not political but theoretical. Ellul's response to modern politics was anarchy. It was evidenced by his proposed changes to the French government, mentioned above, essentially disbanding key institutions of the government and political parties. Theoretically and practically, his distrust of modern politics, interrelated with his distrust of the modern state, was typical for the anarchist version of socialism.

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26 Ellul, Anarchie, 6; Ellul, Anarchy, 2.
27 Goddard, Living, 20.
28 Ellul, Anarchie, 6; Ellul, Anarchy, 2.
Anarchist socialism was deeply divided with Marxism on the issue of strategies of change. Marx and his followers primarily focused on such avenues of change as (1) participation in parliamentary elections, designed to propel socialist parties to legislative power (Friedrich Engels); or (2) revolutionary conquest of political power by a "vanguard" party, such as the Bolsheviks (Lenin). The anarchists were highly critical of both avenues and favored direct action by the workers instead. They believed that participation in parliamentary elections was flawed. It required the creation of a political party but parties were inherently authoritarian. Moreover, the anarchists rejected the very idea of conquest of political power by the proletariat, thinking that liberation could be won only by spontaneous action.29 Put simply, they thought, as Proudhon put it, that "proletariat must emancipate itself without the help of the government."30

Similarly, Ellul bluntly rejected the idea of participation in party politics and advocated action outside the political system. Much the same as some classical anarchists, such as Errico Malatesta, he saw a dichotomy between popular revolution and parliamentary politics.31 To Ellul, the modern politics is nothing but an illusion of political action, created and run by technique. The totalitarianism of the modern state made politics the only avenue for resolution of all problems. And yet, no real resolution ever occurs. The political process has become completely autonomous of demands of morality, values, and faith because technique runs it so that only efficiency and effectiveness of the political result really matter. No real alternatives can be developed, or time given for their realization. The political environment is an imaginary world where only those "issues" matter that are so labeled by propaganda or public opinion.

29 Kinna, Anarchism, 126.
30 Cited in Kinna, Anarchism, 127.
31 Kinna, Anarchism, 127.
manipulated by technique. For all intents and purposes, today's politics is nothing but "the realm of the demonic." 32

Thus, in practical terms, the actions advocated by Ellul involved a wide array of extra-systemic activities aimed at shrinking the system's grip on society. They included "conscientious objection" ("l'objection de conscience") as the firstfruits of anarchy 33 and a program of depoliticization through "relativization, demythization and desacralization of politics." Ellul also called for creation of new bodies, autonomous from the state, such as autonomous provinces, unions, organization of the Christian church, or universities that used to challenge government in the past but now lost this role because of technique. 34

These proposals were based on Ellul's own experience, despite his great disillusionment with it. When Ellul spoke of a "revolution," his hopes were based on the example of the French Resistance and his earlier participation in a youth personalist movement. 35 These decentralized organizations with broad participation and spontaneous action, based on local cells, embodied the principle that Ellul is said to have first enunciated: "Think globally, act locally."

VIEW ON LAW

Ellul's theory suggests that direct action is the only hope because the modern legal system, just like modern politics, is corrupt and controlled by the state. He apparently built his concept of law on Kropotkin's theory viewing law as a product of modern civilization that

32 Goddard, Living, 269-73.
33 Ellul, Anarchie, 19; Ellul, Anarchy, 15. The full phrase is "I believe that anarchy first implies conscientious objection." In the French edition, "l'objection de conscience" is in quotation marks.
35 Goddard, Living, 21-29.
replaced "customs, habits, and usages," which regulated human relations before that.\(^{36}\) Kropotkin's view of law was highly negative, he thought that the principle of the rule of law was a hypocritical lie,\(^ {37}\) and he believed that law was an oppressive instrument of power, regimenting human life, inhibiting innovation, and corrupting those, involved in its creation and execution.\(^ {38}\)

Based on this characterization, Ellul developed his "anarchistic theory of law" as Goddard characterized it. Like Kropotkin, Ellul contrasts modern law to law rooted in custom. The former is determined by technique, it protects the state and is central to the modern crisis. It is non-normative (i.e., based exclusively on fact and science), fully controlled by the state, incomprehensible and separated from actual facts of life. In contrast, the law rooted in custom is responsive to the needs of people and, when necessary, protects them from the authorities. Ellul calls it "living law" ("droit vivant"). Like the classics of anarchism, Ellul hopes that in the future, the law will be created directly by society outside control of the state, and the authorities will be subordinated to it. Only such "living law" can be an instrument of change and liberation, and not modern law based on technique.\(^ {39}\)

VIEW ON FEDERALISM

The goal of an anarchist revolution is "anarchy," a society where all external authority disappears, replaced by self-control only. Different schools of anarchism are divided on the form this society will take.\(^ {40}\) However, on Kropotkin's initiative and in opposition to Marx, most of

\(^{36}\) Kropotkin, Petr Alekseevich, "Zakon i vlast" in Kropotkin, Anarkhia, 78-80.
\(^{37}\) Ibid., 76.
\(^{38}\) Ibid, 76-78, 80-97
\(^{39}\) Goddard, Living, 199-228.
them settled on the organizational principle of decentralized federation, first formulated by Proudhon. Proudhon's biographer (and a historian of anarchism) George Woodcock explains that the federal principle should operate from the simplest level of society. The organization of administration should begin locally and as near the direct control of the people as possible; individuals should start the process by federating into communes and association. Above that primary level the confederal organization would become less an organ of administration than of coordination between local units. Thus the nation would be replaced by a geographical confederation of regions, and Europe would become a confederation of confederations, in which the interest of the smallest province would have as much expression as that of the largest, an in which all affairs would be settled by mutual agreement, contract, and arbitration.

Ellul also called himself a "federalist." Here is how Goddard summarizes what Ellul considers "true federalism," based on half a dozen of his articles.

For Ellul, true federalism is a reaction against the modern nation state and depends on its destruction in order to create small communities and regions the size of Luxembourg or a Swiss canton. These will then develop a minimalist and relatively powerless federal structure to enable peaceful co-existence, co-operation, and co-ordination between the new political units.

We clearly see that Ellul's concept of federalism comes from its anarchist concept. However, he also differentiates his views from what he believes is the anarchist vision. According to Ellul, the true anarchists believe that a society with no state, authorities, or institutions is possible. In his view, however, such pure anarchist society is impossible although the anarchist fight is "essential." The reason is that he does not share the anarchist view that only society is corrupt but people are good by nature. People covet power and material things, and their covetousness knows no limits. A completely free society is impossible where people are competing for power or coveting the same things. However, people are capable of changing.

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42 Ellul, Entretiens, 169; Ellul, Conversations, 108.
43 Goddard, Living, 278-79.
Therefore, a social revolution\textsuperscript{44} will require a transitional period when a new society will grow out of the organizational cells within the existing one. A historical example of such cells, cited by Ellul, is the unions created by anarcho-syndicalists in 1880-1900 before they decided to have permanently appointed officials.\textsuperscript{45}

**VIEW ON VIOLENCE**

Ellul insisted that all action he was proposing must be nonviolent. He recognized that anarchists differed dramatically, if not diametrically, on the use of violence. He rejected violence completely. Trying to define his ideal form of anarchy, he said simply, "By anarchy I mean first an absolute rejection of violence."\textsuperscript{46} Then Ellul went on to say that he could not accept those anarchists who use violence as "a means of action."\textsuperscript{47} Ellul understood motivation behind violence, be it an effort to instill fear in those thinking about becoming government officials, to express despair, or to dissipate society's complacency about status quo and show its fragility. However, whatever the motivation, he was against violence completely as both ineffective and immoral. His historic examples are the direct action movements of Gandhi, King, Lech Wałęsa, and the first Christians, whom he contrasts to Black Muslims, Black Panthers, and the anti-Soviet movements in Berlin, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia.\textsuperscript{48}

Two things are interesting about Ellul's argument on violence. First, his approach is anarchist rather than Marxist. Indeed, the anarchists typically take the issue of violence as an

\textsuperscript{44} Goddard emphasizes that Ellul's anarchist fight is a revolutionary, not a reformist one. See Goddard, *Living*, 276. Ellul himself uses the term "revolutionary" extensively when he speaks about his proposed solution.


independent question as opposed to the Marxists making it dependent on other considerations, such as class struggle. Second, Ellul does not make nonviolence just a simple moral restriction or a way to enhance the legitimacy of a movement. For him, nonviolence is not just a simple characteristic of action. On the contrary, for Ellul nonviolence is a means of action, just as violence could be. "Not using violence against those in power does not mean doing nothing," he says. Nonviolence, if applied correctly, is an active force of resistance, rejecting power and fighting against it.

According to Ellul, nonviolence is an asset, and not a liability, for any form of resistance. He emphasizes that anarchism retains its rich and effective form when violence is taken out of it and, if anything, anarchism only gets purer and stronger without violence.

If I rule out violent anarchism, there remains pacifist, antinationalist, anticapitalist, moral, and antidemocratic anarchism (i.e., that which is hostile to the falsified democracy of bourgeois states). There remains the anarchism which acts by means of persuasion, by the creation of small groups and networks, denouncing falsehood and oppression, aiming at a true overturning of authorities of all kinds as people at the bottom speak and organize themselves. All this is very close to Bakunin.  

TECHNIQUE

In the subchapter on anarchism, I have gone through almost all key sociological concepts of Ellul, and they all turned out to be rooted in anarchist tradition. But what about technique, the

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49 Ellul, Anarchie, 17; Ellul, Anarchy, 13. An argument can be made here that Ellul's view of nonviolence as an active form of resistance is Christian (or at least early Christian) and not anarchist. However, Ellul made this argument in a book whose purpose was to show the compatibility of anarchism and Christianity. It appears that he believed that the nonviolent strand of anarchism and Christianity had a common position on nonviolence. If so, his Christian position on this issue can be considered as a position inspired also by anarchism.

50 Ellul, Anarchie, 17; Ellul, Anarchy, 13-14. Ellul likely refers here to "Principles and Organization of International Revolutionary Society" by Bakunin (Bakunin, Mikhail Aleksandrovich, "Printsip i organizatsia internatsional'nogo revolutsionnogo obschestva, II. Revolutsionnii katekhizis" in Anarkhiia i Poriadok (Moscow: EKSMO-PRESS, 2000), 276-306.
centerpiece of his sociology, for which he is best known? Is there any relation between Ellul's conceptualization of technique and anarchism?

We know from Ellul himself that he could have learned the concept of technique from his first intellectual mentor and friend Bernard Charbonneau with whom he shared his pro-anarchist views, including his opposition to the state.\(^{51}\) When Ellul met him, Charbonneau was already searching for a deeper cause of the modern crisis than Marx's capital, which ultimately became technique.\(^{52}\) Their positions on the issue were so close that it was Charbonneau whom Ellul wanted to write about technique while he, as a law student, wanted to focus on critique of the state. In response, Charbonneau chose to write about the state and asked Ellul to write about technique instead, the "distribution of labor" they followed for the rest of their lives.\(^{53}\)

Conceptually, Ellul's technique harks back to two traditions of social critics. Strictly speaking, technique is a way of thinking, rather than a material aspect of technology. To that extent, the concept has much kinship with theories of disenchantment and critique of reason.\(^{54}\) At the same time, technique is a product of the technological society. In that sense, Ellul can be considered as an early representative of the growing tradition of critics of technology and its

\(^{51}\) Jacques Ellul répond à A. Dumas. Réforme, 9 June 8, cited in Goddard, Living, 273. See also, Goddard, Living, 28 about Ellul and Charbonneau claiming that Technique was "a central phenomenon within the modern world" while they were in the personalist movement together in the 1930s. About Charbonneau, being Ellul's "intellectual master" at the time, who "taught [him] to think," see Ellul, Entretiens, 92-93; Ellul, Conversations, 56.


\(^{53}\) At the time, both Ellul and Charbonneau participated in Esprit, a personalist youth movement that emphasized spirituality, closeness to nature, and independence of mind. The movement largely shared anarchist ideas although it did not associate itself with anarchism. In France, Charbonneau is considered the founder of the modern environmental movement.

\(^{54}\) Ellul's relation to that rich tradition cannot be found in literature on Ellul. Perhaps because Ellul himself did not speak much about it. Nor did the most famous contemporary representatives of that tradition, with whom he had similar views, such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Jürgen Habermas, or other members of Frankfurt School. Nevertheless, some books on critical theory and disenchantment recognized Ellul for his contribution to critical theory. See, e.g., Gilbert G. Germain, A Discourse on Disenchantment, (Albany: State University of New York, 1993), 55-63.
effects on the person and society. The latter tradition has always had a strong following in, and perhaps even started within, the anarchist movement.

There have been two strands in anarchist approach to science. The first one, influenced by Kropotkin, exalted rational science for its explaining the natural world and thereby opposing religion, class rule, and ideology. Bakunin also sought to use science to develop an empirical theory for anarchism based on scientific methods to prove naturalness of anarchism and to lead society to the social well-being. An additional incentive for anarchists to recruit liberal science was dislodging the Marxists in their claim that Marx was the founder of "scientific" socialism.

At the same time, Malatesta, who can be considered the founder of the other strand, criticized Kropotkin for a mechanistic approach and confusing science and morals. However, this latter strand has not had a defining influence on the official anarchist position, and the current manifesto of the Anarchist International says that it is committed to "the method of modern science, introduced by Kropotkin."

Nevertheless, by the late twentieth century, the Luddite strand of anarchism developed into a well-recognized school of anarchism, called anarcho-primitivism, whose most notable representative in the United States, John Zerzan, believes that anarchism has undergone a transformation from "traditional, production/progress-embracing outlook, toward the primitivist

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55 Ellul himself adamantly denied that his theory was about anti-technologism or about critique of reason for that matter. He seemed to fear that the main goal of his sociology, i.e., making people "ask the right questions" will be lost or distorted once people start interpreting him within the conceptual framework of either tradition.
56 The most representative argument on the subject by Kropotkin is in "Anarchy, its Philosophy, and its Ideal" (Kropotkin, "Anarkhiia," 203-52).
57 A good example of this position is Bakunin's "Program of Society of International Revolution", where Bakunin says that "Positive and rationalistic science is the only torch that can lead man to knowing the truth and that can provide a measure for man's personal conduct and his relation to society." (Bakunin, Mikhail Aleksandrovich, "Programma Obschestva mezhdunarodnoi revolutsii" in Anarkhiia i Portadok (Moscow: EKSMO-PRESS, 2000), 307.
58 Kinna, Anarchism, 34-35.
59 Ibid.
critique or vision and its Luddite/feminist/decentralization/anti-civilization aspects."  

Primitivists advocate focus on personal identity, the quality of the natural environment, and building community that would provide individuals with an opportunity to live in harmony with each other and with nature.  

Another brand of anarchism, "postmoderns," is closely related to primitivists. Its representatives, such as Jonathan Purkis and James Bowen, have views that strikingly resemble Ellul's sociology. They believe that anarchism is about "a perpetual process of struggle that brings individuals together in complex networks of action, facilitating the expression of their differences rather than seeking finally to resolve them." They protest against "totalizing systems" in thought (the desire to design models for living, the search for theoretical certainty) and action (the imposition of the rules or norms of behavior and the formalization of patterns of organization).  

Primitivists have been inspired by individualism of Max Stirner and the surrealist politics of the Situationalist International (SI), a French neo-Marxist current of thought "that highlights the commodification, cultural repression and psychological manipulation of individuals in capitalism." It is quite remarkable that Ellul admitted in one of his books that he considered joining the Situationalist International at one point in his life, thereby admitting the apparent commonality of that organization's outlook and his own views.  

Despite the striking commonality between Ellul's technique and the similar anarchist concepts, it would be difficult to untangle their apparently mutual influences. Ellul's seminal

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62 Ibid., 22-23.
63 Ibid., 23.
book on technique, *Technological Society*, richly deserves its reputation of a pioneering effort of its kind. It is also true that Ellul owed some of his ideas on the technological society to prior thinkers. Assuming it was Ellul who was "first" to elucidate the dangers of the technological society, the point remains the same: He is a thinker, whose views are recognizably similar to the anarchist view of modernity, giving us a good reason to associate him with that strand of thought.

II. MARXIST OR NOT?

Ellul's first encounter with the works of Marx occurred during his second year at the university. Ellul later recalled:

I read Marx after my conversion. But I first heard about Marx when I was at the university in 1929 in a tutorial. . . It was of particular interest to me. . . My father was unemployed. I considered it was dreadfully unjust that a man of his ability should find himself in such a predicament. I was to find an explanation for the tragedy of my father in Marx's analysis of capitalism and the crises of capitalism…. Eventually I read his complete works.  

Ellul enthusiastically described what an epiphany Marx was for him, "I felt I understood everything . . . Marx was an astonishing discovery of the reality of this world. . . I had finally found the explanation. . ."  

The influence of Marx on Ellul is widely recognized in the secondary literature. Thus, Andrew Goddard, his biographer, points out that it was "a life-long influence" that "shaped his sociological analysis." David C. Menninger, who authored the most detailed account of the connection between Ellul and Marx, says that "[I]t is Karl Marx more than any other social

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64 Ellul, *Entretiens*, 91; Ellul, *Conversations*, 55.  
67 Ibid., 15.
theorist to whom Ellul acknowledges a deep intellectual debt." Menninger gives a deep and insightful analysis of the specifics of that debt, especially focusing on dialecticism.

At the same time, the scope of Marx's influence on Ellul have become a subject of some controversy. Moreover, both Ellul and the students of his thought point out that he was "Marx's student" but not a "Marxist revolutionary" and was quite critical of some aspects of his teaching.

This subchapter will analyze the extent and the nature of the influence of Marx on Ellul. It will confirm that this influence is substantial. However, it will also propose that what Ellul borrowed from Marx was largely limited to his "diagnosis" of the modern crisis to the exclusion of the "remedies." This distinction is significant as it may help elucidate why Ellul is sometimes criticized for not producing a meaningful "solution" to the crisis he so aptly exposed.

This distinction will define the structure of the subchapter. It will review the most important elements of Marx's influence on Ellul in two subchapters: (1) social criticism (the "diagnosis") of the current condition; and (2) the forward-looking social theory of change (the "remedy"). The choice of specific elements will be informed by their significance and commonality to Marx and Ellul as well as their importance to the subject of this study: the search for Ellul's solution to the modern crisis.

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69 Ibid., 17-31.
70 E.g., Michael Bauman's review of Ellul's Jesus and Marx that provoked "most scathing and vitriolic pieces in response." See footnote 36 in Goddard, Living, 16-17.
71 Menninger, "Marx," 17.
72 See, e.g., Ellul's criticism of Marx: "On the plane of human and spiritual life, Marx was—in a deep and not merely formal sense--a faithful representative of bourgeois thought," in Menninger, "Marx," 23.
1. Social Criticism ("Diagnosis") of Marx

In one of his early works, Ellul lamented that "today it seems necessary to find a new Marx" because he "was the only man of his time who grasped the totality of the social, political, and economic problems . . . and posed correctly the questions [facing] the civilization." Since no "contemporary utopian" had an adequate "breadth" to grasp the issues at hand, Ellul decided to undertake this messianic task.73

Ellul started out by taking Marx as the greatest authority in social analysis.

What seems absolutely necessary today is to do again precisely the same work that Karl Marx did a hundred years ago. Only thus can we have a hope of seeing more clearly in our situation. Only thereby will the utopias appear as the preparatory groundwork and will the technical solutions find their place.74

He credits Marx with positing a true "diagnosis," even though it was "ephemeral" and "true" only for his time.75 Therefore, we need to update the diagnosis for our time, using the method of Marx or, as Ellul put it, by "meeting the requirements, such as we can see them, in what Marx did."76

a. UNIVERSALITY OF APPROACH TO SOCIAL THEORY by Marx and Ellul: Singularity of Problem in Totality of Life.

Ellul believes that a "disinterested intellectual research" would be anti-scientific. Any scholarly quest must start with formulating its a priori boundaries. One boundary is "a spiritual position" that drives the choice of phenomena for the study. The other is the ultimate goal of "a

74 Ibid., 40.
75 Ibid., 39.
76 Ibid., 40.
certain way of living—that is, action." According to Ellul, Marx chose his subjects based on such a priori of his spiritual judgment.

Ellul insists that we need Marx's analytical method in this day and age for its total theory that gives us a "grasp of the world". It takes into account "the unity" of "the social, political, and economic realms" and analytically "synthesizes" their "external phenomena" to distill those "permanent forces" that are at work to lead us to the modern crisis, by analyzing the "tracks" those forces leave in each phenomenon while not being mislead by its "chaotic and disorderly appearance."  

Trying to follow Marx, Ellul strives to identify a singular defining principle and a singular "structure" that would be the base structure for the rest of the structures to rest. He needs to do it because he cannot accept those identified by Marx: private property as the defining principle, and the economic relations as the basic structure. He argues that private property and economic relations cannot be at the basis of the modern crisis because the crisis is equally present in the capitalist and the socialist countries. Therefore, the economic relations, as a structure, are themselves based on a structure that is more fundamental to our times.

In an effort to distill a singular principle and the most basic structure to replace those of Marx, Ellul looks for something so fundamental that it would relate to history as a whole and yet would be characteristic of our age. It would be something that "gives our modern world its authentic and undeniable character" and "gives a certain unity to the totality of this civilization, wherever that is manifested, and under whatever regime that might be." Historically, he thinks

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77 Ibid., 41-42.
78 Ibid., 42-43.
the forces in question revealed themselves as dominant beginning in the 16th century as the modern crisis appeared to develop from that mark in history.\textsuperscript{79}

Looking for the right dimension for his analysis, Ellul further narrows down his quest by taking his search away from the deepest and most general philosophical focus on the "permanent, eternal elements of the world as structures." He takes his search to a structure that is "close to persons" and "directly" affects them, a structure whose "last characteristic" is "that it concerns the individual life of persons" and that "[i]t is only in this measure that it is a structure of civilization."\textsuperscript{80}

It is "a structure that shapes average people" being "a decisive force in the organization of their life, in the order of their thoughts, in their behavior, in their habits" that has a "singular value," being most fundamental to all other structures, as it deals with the person. This reference to the person is a key singular value "even when we discover that such power tends precisely to destroy this person" "when we ponder that precisely all these systems make an abstraction of this person."\textsuperscript{81}

Thus, one mark of Marx's influence on Ellul is the universality of his theory, distilling and synthesizing one underlying cause of the modern crisis. Another is Marx's morally driven passion for making his theory a vehicle of help to the common person. Both thinkers had a certain disdain for "philosophy" for its dealing with questions so abstract that it rendered it virtually unyielding for social issues. Both focused on existentialist sociology cloaked in a

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 43.  
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 44.  
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 44.
shroud of "concreteness" and "realism." However, Marx's quest for the most fundamental structure ended with capital, Ellul's, with technique.

**b. DIAGNOSIS by Marx and Ellul: Total Crisis in Depth ("Alienation"/"Abstraction"), Scope ("Closure"/"Adjustment"), and Inevitability ("Historical Pre-Determination").**

Marx's way of looking for a central cause of the current crisis led Ellul to technique as "an organizing force parallel to Marx's idea of capital." Ellul recalled how, during his formative years, he wondered whether Marx, had he lived in the 1930s, would have chosen technique, and not capital, as the most important question of our time.

'... if Marx was writing now... would he bring all his analysis to bear on the problem of capital and its accumulation? Would there not be another more important question in his eyes?' Together with one or two friends, we thought that the central question was the development of la technique and that it was necessary to undertake an analysis of the technical phenomenon as Marx had attempted to analyze capital.

Despite that Ellul found a different cause for the modern crisis, his description of it is very reminiscent of Marx's description of capitalism. Indeed, both suggest absolute and total control of society by a material force causing its existential degradation. I will consider the commonality of the two concepts along the lines of three dimensions of the absoluteness of the crisis: its absolute depth revealed through "alienation"/"abstraction," its absolute scope revealed through "closure," and its absolute inevitability revealed through historical pre-determination.

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82 One can name other "structures," such as "private property," "means of production," or "social relationship of production," as "most fundamental" in lieu of "capital." However, Ellul finds it to be "capital." Certainly, capital has a closer connection to the concept of "alienation," which I find central to Marx's influence on Ellul. Therefore, it is more intuitive and productive for my comparison of Marx and Ellul.

83 Ellul identified as candidates for the next step in his analysis: Technique, Production, the State, the City, War, and Sterilization ultimately making Technique his structure of choice. See, Ellul, *Sources and Trajectories*, 45.


CRISIS'S ABSOLUTE DEPTH—"ALIENATION."

Marx believed that the modern capitalist progress results in antagonism between things that should be in harmony, that is, in alienation (Entfremdung) of the worker from his work (in the sense of both work product and as an activity) and from his human aspect. Not only is the worker exploited as merely a resource of production, deprived of making any input in the creative part of manufacture, and not only is he objectified through commodification of his labor power but, most importantly, he is alienated from his very essence that makes him different from an animal, namely, from his potential as a human person to actualize his purposeful ideas through his free choice.86

Ellul picks up this notion of alienation from Marx.

Our starting point must be the description of alienation which was given, if not first, at any rate most forcefully by Marx. Now it should not be forgotten that for Marx alienation is not a localized fact. It is not just a mark of the proletariat in a capitalistic word. . . It is the total condition of man and of every man the moment he steps out of the primitive commune and falls victim to division of labor and to exploitation. . . Alienation means being possessed externally by another and belonging to him. It also means being self-alienated, other than oneself, transformed into another. 87

Thus, the modern crisis reaches its ultimate depth: it is about destruction of us as humans.

CRISIS' ABSOLUTE SCOPE—"CLOSURE"/"ADJUSTMENT".

Marx thought that the crisis caused by the capitalist mode of production affected everybody, no matter how well situated in society. No one could possibly escape its degrading and dehumanizing effect. Everybody has become a slave to money and money has become the only expression of human worth. According to Marx, "[E]ach of your real individual life that

corresponds to man—and to nature—must be a definite expression of your real individual life that corresponds to the object of your will." But money, being the only meaningful agency in human relations, subverts and confuses that, leaving everyone dissatisfied and frustrated on the human level.

. . . it turns real human and natural faculties into mere abstract representations and thus imperfections and painful imaginings, while on the other hand it turns the real imperfections and imaginings, the really powerless faculties that exist only in the imaginings of the individual, into real faculties and power. This description alone suffices to make money the universal inversion of individualities that turns them into their opposites and gives them qualities at variance with their own. As this perverting power, money then appears as the enemy of man and social bond that pretend to self-subsistence. It changes fidelity into infidelity, love into hate, hate into love, virtue into vice, vice into virtue, slave into master, master into slave, stupidity into intelligence and intelligence into stupidity.  

As with alienation, Ellul fully embraces this vision of social reality by Marx as a complete inescapable closure (he calls it "adjustment") for our human aspect.

Money reduces man to an abstraction. It reduces man himself to something quantitative. Man is taken into consideration only to the extent that he has money. The man who has nothing is nothing nowadays. . . The man who has money is completely alienated even in its possession. The capitalist is simply capital made man. He has no existence of his own.

CRISIS'S ABSOLUTE INEVITABILITY — "HISTORICAL PRE-DETERMINATION."

On the temporal dimension, Ellul agrees with Marx's assessment of the current crisis as absolutely pre-determined by the conditions, rooted in the material world, and an inescapable logic of history.

Marx thought that history is driven by the development of means of production and exchange. As they develop, a tension arises between new means of production and the outdated

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89 Ellul, Ethique de la Liberte, v. 1, 24-25; Ellul, The Ethics of Freedom, 24-25.
90 Marx himself and many of his interpreters qualified this position by underscoring the importance of free will in taking history in a certain direction. (See, Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" in Marx, Selected Writings, 300.)
social conditions. Thus, the productive forces of capitalism initially developed under conditions of the feudal organization of agriculture and manufacture. As these forces matured, they were no longer compatible with the feudal relations of property, which became "fetters" on their development and "had to be burst asunder."^91

Substantively, Ellul's concept of history is different from the Marxist one. A law professor, teaching history of institutions, he focuses on institutional development and the development of ideas. As a Christian, he is uncomfortable with the Marxist concept that culture and ideas are just a part of a superstructure on the economic foundation of society. However, like Marx, he finds technological and scientific development to be an underlying force of history.

Indeed, according to Ellul, the emergence of "technical intention" leading society toward dominance of efficiency is a direct result of the emergence of the technological society, which, in turn, resulted from the industrial society brought to life by the increasing use of "procedures" of scientifically organized production. Each phase created preconditions leading to the next stage of development, ultimately ending with absolute dominance of technique.^92 Thus, just like Marx, Ellul sees the modern crisis as a logical and inescapable consequence of the historical forces, unleashed by economic progress, and thus pre-determined by them.

2. REMEDY by Ellul: No Dialectic of Class Struggle, No Communism.

The previous section showed certain commonality between Marx and Ellul in their diagnosis of the modern crisis. The underlying theme of that comparison is that both thinkers see it as an existential total crisis bringing our civilization to the brink of its existence. For Marx, this

^91 Karl Marx, "The Communist Manifesto" in Marx, Selected Writings, 225.
^92 Ellul, La Technique, 20-55; Ellul, The Technological Society, 23-60. See also Greenman, Schuchardt, Toly, Understanding, 23.
very gravity of the current condition, most pronounced in cyclical overproduction, is a
creative force of history, an important indicator that "the fetters" on further progress "have to be
burst asunder" in a class struggle, ultimately causing a social revolution and the creation of a
communist utopia.\textsuperscript{93} That is where he sees the escape out of the modern crisis, leading to its
complete resolution.

Ellul rejected Marx's idea of class struggle. First of all, technique as a mode of thinking
did not attach itself to a specific class of people. As a function of spiritual degradation, it existed
in an analytical dimension different from the class organization of society. Hence,
methodologically, class struggle did not lend itself to incorporation in Ellul's social theory.

However, Ellul's reasons for rejecting a solution based on class struggle are more than
methodological. They seem to be related to his overall distrust of the state, law, and politics as
well as his rejection of violence. Indeed, Ellul's opinion of real socialism, existing in "socialist"
countries, and of the communist-led revolutions, that produced it, was more negative than
sympathetic. To Ellul, Marxist socialism had a systemic problem related to its obsession with
organized production. If money is an enslaving necessity and a cause of alienation under
capitalism, work is a similarly pernicious necessity under socialism.\textsuperscript{94} He wrote:

It is possible to say, without paradox, that socialism takes the worst features of capitalism and
carries them to extremes while justifying them theoretically. In socialist society, individuals are
doubtless freed from subordination to others, such as capitalists, but they remain entirely
submitted to production: the economy is the basis of their lives. This precisely is the source of
real alienation—not the subservience of \textit{being} to personal \textit{having}, but the subservience of \textit{being}
to \textit{doing} and to \textit{collective having}.\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{93} Karl Marx, \textit{Communist Manifesto} (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1969), 226.
\textsuperscript{94} Greenman, Schuchardt, Toly, \textit{Understanding}, 89-91.
To be fair, Ellul was sympathetic to socialist ideas and was hoping for a socialist revolution in France right after World War II.\textsuperscript{96} However, his disdain for \textit{all} modern societies led him to think of them not in terms of social justice, like most intellectuals of his day, but in terms of a universal continuum on a scale of totalitarianism. Needless to say, Stalin's USSR did not fair very well on that continuum.\textsuperscript{97}

3. CONCLUSION

The previous section showed how Ellul's vision of the modern crisis was influenced by Marx. Ellul saw it as a total crisis created by a singular cause:

(1) The crisis is absolute in its scope: No one is positioned well enough to be immune to it.

(2) The crisis is absolute in its depth: It is truly existential and destroys the very thing that separates us from the animal world and makes us uniquely human, namely, free will in actualizing our creative potential.

(3) The crisis is absolute in its unavoidability: It is brought to life by the logic of history whose operation is pre-determined by material progress.

However, the influence of Marx seems to stop at the diagnosis of the crisis. By rejecting the concept of class struggle, Ellul effectively discarded the \textit{solution} of Marx. He rejected the dynamic force behind that solution: the class struggle leading to a socialist revolution. He also rejected the resolution of the crisis by institution of a socialist government leading society to the material abundance of communism.

\textsuperscript{96} Goddard, \textit{Living}, 32.
\textsuperscript{97} Greenman, Schuchardt, Toly, \textit{Understanding}, 82, 84, 89.
The rejection of these components had significant implications. Indeed, they were critical to the theory of Marx, not only for their narrative value, so to speak, but also for their role in the Marxist method itself. Indeed, for Marx, class struggle was not just a dynamic force of history but also a principal manifestation of its dialectic. The Marxist dialectic is so welded to the idea of class struggle that if one takes class struggle out of Marxism, one inevitably risks losing its dialectical method with it. How and whether Ellul resolved this dilemma will be the subject of chapter 3.

III. CHRISTIAN INFLUENCES

Ellul's oeuvre is structured along the lines of two strands: theological and sociological. So far, this chapter considered the influences on his sociology that have been represented by Marx and anarchism. Here, I will consider the influences on his theology.

Based on his own admission, Ellul strived to keep his sociology and theology completely separated. However, he thought that there was an important "interplay" between them. Yes, they "belonged to two different registers," but they were "inter-related" at the same time, and it was "not possible to read one without the other."98

Whether the two strands are two equals or the theological strand has an upper hand is an open question. At least, Ellul himself did not mean for the relationship between them to be hierarchical. They seem to have complemented and corrected each other where either of them might be lacking. However, one thing is clear: understanding Ellul's theology helps to understand his sociology.99

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98 Ellul, Entretiens, 141; Ellul, Conversations, 90-91.
99 For a discussion on the subject, see Goddard, Living, 53-57.
Ellul became a devout Christian in his youth, before he became acquainted with Marx and anarchist thinkers at the age of seventeen. His Christian faith was critical for the formation of his world outlook and his thought. Ellul admitted that he could not find answers to "the questions of life" in Marx. He found his answers to those existential questions in the Gospels and the works of Christian theologians.

Ellul's theology developed as a result of three theoretical dynamics that will define the structure of this subchapter: (1) the adoption of the dogmatics of John Calvin and Barth; (2) the fascination with the existentialism of Kierkegaard; and (3) the choice of the dialectical theology of Barth and Kierkegaard in opposition to that of Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich.

1. Dogmatics of Calvin and Barth.

Ellul was not a "technical theologian." Therefore, he relied substantially on specific dogmas developed systemically by other theologians, including, first and foremost, Calvin and Barth. There is a vigorous discussion in the secondary literature of whether and how much Ellul was a "Calvinist" or a "Barthian." Participating in this discussion would be outside the scope of this study. However, by his own admission, Ellul familiarized himself well with both

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100 Ellul, *Entretiens*, 86-87; Ellul, *Conversations*, 52.
102 These three dynamics were identified based on the analysis of Ellul's theoretical methods by Daniel B. Clendenin although the concepts he used were named "theological positivism," "existentialism," and "dialectic." *Theological Method in Jacques Ellul* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 5-25. I do not quite agree with the label "positivism," and I believe the label "dialectic" should be substituted by "dialectical theology" (something I will explain later in this study. However, Clendenin's overall analysis is excellent and has been very useful for the purposes of this study.
104 A good summary of that discussion can be found in Clendenin, *Theological Method*, 6-13.
thinkers, first with Calvin and then, much more deeply and enthusiastically, with Barth.\textsuperscript{105} The doctrinal similarity between them and Ellul is widely recognized as well as the view that Ellul shares some, but certainly not all, of the aspects of their dogmatics, being a creative and productive theologian in his own right.\textsuperscript{106}

The interplay of Ellul's theology and that of Calvin and Barth is complex and includes a multitude of dogmas. Here, I will review those of them that are most fundamental to Ellul's theology and most relevant to the subject of this study. They include: the Word of God, Authority of the Scriptures, Christocentricity, and Christian's Participation in Social Action.\textsuperscript{107} Ellul's theology as a whole will be reviewed in the next chapter of this study.

(i)\textit{The Word of God}. Ellul borrowed the concept, founded by Calvin and further developed by Barth, that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God and contains everything that is needed for salvation. Despite that the Bible is written by different authors, its divine truth is given by God alone, and therefore it is unified in authorship and must be read as one coherent revelation. It does not take special scholarly knowledge or training to understand it, and the church does not have a right to impose its interpretation of the Scriptures on laymen. Moreover, the Bible is not simply a textbook of answers to ethical questions, it is the source of the right

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\item See, e.g., Ellul, \textit{Entretiens}, 81-82; Ellul, \textit{Conversations}, 48-49. It must be pointed out that whenever Ellul was asked whether he was a Calvinist, he almost seemed to cringe, so energetically he denied it while admitting that "Calvin's writing influenced [him] some time ago" and he "moved away" from his position since then. (See Jacques Ellul, \textit{A Temps et à Contretemps: Entretiens avec Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange} (Paris: Le Centurion, 1981), 54-55, 73-75; Jacques Ellul, \textit{In Season, Out of Season: An Introduction to the Thought of Jacques Ellul}, trans. Lani K. Niles, based on interviews by Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981) 57-59, 78-80). However, his only explanation was that he found Calvin "boring," too focused on logic, and too "intellectual". He never seemed to make any specific doctrinal explanation of his subsequent disagreements with Calvin. (Ellul, \textit{Entretiens}, 81-82; Ellul, \textit{Conversations}, 48-49.) Neither was Ellul consistent in citing Barth when he used his dogmatics. (Bromiley, \textit{"Barth's Influence."} 33.) For these reasons and because Barth himself is known to follow Calvin, it is quite difficult for students of Ellul to untangle the exact influences of each of them on Ellul's theology.
\item Ellul himself expressed the view that he was "a follower of Barth" ("barthien") but was not an unconditional Barthian. Ellul, \textit{Entretiens}, 81; Ellul, \textit{Conversations}, 49; Bromiley, \textit{"Barth's Influence."} 33.
\item This choice was prompted by Bromiley, \textit{"Barth's Influence."}
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questions, because "[t]he freedom of the word of God implies a questioning of the intrinsic abilities of all subjects" ("le pouvoir propre de tous les sujets").¹⁰⁸

The doctrine has critical implications for Ellul's concept of freedom that is a cornerstone of his theology and plays an equally critical role in his sociology.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, if the Word is absolute, it cannot be understood relative to the conditions of the world or manipulated and compromised by scholars and institutions, controlled by technique, such as the institutionalized church. Ellul particularly credits Barth for distinguishing between "faith" and "religion," calling his analysis "remarkable."¹¹⁰ The absoluteness of the ethical standard set by the Word is the guarantee of freedom ("the ethical aspect of hope" ("le visage éthique de l'espérance"))¹¹¹ from the necessity of the world. Ellul, like Barth, defines freedom as "knowing God's will in order to fulfill it,"¹¹² thinking that

Whenever the witness of holy scripture is received and accepted man has a freedom and a power which fulfill human pretensions and which correspond to the power and freedom of the word of God itself.¹¹³

(ii) Interpretation of the Bible. It is a related concept derived from the same Calvinist principle of the Scriptures being an inerrant expression of the Word of God, sufficient for salvation, that does not require a scholar or a church to understand or interpret. Barth took the position (criticized by both "fundamentalists" and the "liberals") that the first principle of

¹⁰⁸ Ellul, Ethique de la Liberté, v. 1, 71; Ellul, The Ethics Of Freedom, 62.
¹⁰⁹ For arguments that "freedom" versus "necessity" is central to Ellul's theological method, see, e.g., Clendenin, Theological Method, 57-89.
¹¹¹ Ellul, Ethique de la Liberté, v. 1, 11; Ellul, The Ethics Of Freedom, 12.
¹¹² Ellul, Ethique de la Liberté, v. 1, 71; Ellul, The Ethics Of Freedom, 62. (Translation is mine.) This concept is based on the famous saying by Paul, "For freedom Christ has set up free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke or slavery." (Gal 5:1)
¹¹³ Ellul, Ethique de la Liberté, v. 1, 75; Ellul, The Ethics Of Freedom, 66.
interpreting the Bible is not its historic or factual accuracy but its understanding through the teaching of Jesus Christ. Ellul followed this Christocentric approach to the Bible.

The Barthian approach made particular sense to Ellul because he abhorred the "intellectualization" of the Scriptures. He found it dangerous to subject the Bible to the vagaries of scholarly exegesis and insisted that, being an objective truth, it is immune to history, culture, and linguistic setting.

(iii) Christocentricity. Ellul follows Barth in focusing on Christ's reconciliation through death and resurrection. Ellul emphasizes that Christ was the full substitution for the city of Jerusalem and the temple. Like Barth, he insists on the universal salvation of all people. To Ellul, it must exist to show the absoluteness of God's Love, without which true Hope cannot be.

This focus on Christ's full redemption and its absoluteness in universal salvation are key to Ellul's theology. Indeed, it is built on the concept of full and absolute fall of humankind out of grace of God through the original Rupture of the Communion with God, resulting from the original sin. The Rupture created the current condition of the separation of humankind and nature from God, where people and nature in their care are cursed to a life of the "world," controlled by Satan and permeated by hatred, degradation, and death. Sociologically, the curse of the Rupture finds its parallel in the degrading dominance of technique. The human condition is controlled by necessity, completely devoid of hope but for Christ. According to Ellul, his redemption and substitution allow those who believe in him, to be free again in the world of necessity and to live a life of "the Word," that is, a life of Hope in the world of hopelessness.

(iv) Christian's Participation in Social Action. Calvin believed that Christians should participate in politics, especially elections, so they can help create good conditions for the church
and remove those magistrates who oppose God. Implicit in this idea was a notion that one may need to enjoy certain rights and freedoms in order to become and be a Reformed Christian.

Similarly, Barth believed that people must have certain conditions of life, such as free time and adequate income, so they can learn the truth revealed by God in the Scriptures. Therefore, Barth believed that social action is important for a Christian that can ensure the creation of such conditions and thereby help spread the doctrine and the praxis of the Gospels. A strong believer in "practical" Christianity, he joined the Social Democratic Party and consistently focused his teaching on social justice and criticism of Western capitalism.114

Ellul was inspired by Barth's practical, dynamic and revolutionary approach to Christianity. This approach was probably the main reason he so proudly called himself a "Barthian." Following Barth, he was a strong believer in the unity of doctrine and praxis of the Gospels. It followed from this position that a Christian must be socially active. However, unlike Barth or Calvin before him, Ellul separated politics and social action. He believed that politics is controlled by technique and therefore that a Christian should not engage in the political process, not on its terms at least. A Christian can be a member of a political party or work at any other institution of government or politics. However, because a Christian is uniquely equipped by the Gospels to see the truth, the Christian's true social role must not be with such institutions but with extra-political social action aimed at profaning politics, actively boycotting it, revealing it as an illusion, and making people "ask the right questions" whose focus is outside the political world.

2. Existentialism of Kierkegaard.

Ellul was very impressed with the works of Kierkegaard. Indeed, Ellul once said that he and Kierkegaard were "closer than brothers." Kierkegaard was the only author, besides Marx, whose entire oeuvre Ellul claimed to have read.\(^ {115} \) Ellul found in Kierkegaard a kindred soul: a radical self-taught theologian with a passion for Christ, a non-conformist rejecting and criticizing the religious establishment and the organized church. Most importantly, Ellul was impressed by the way Kierkegaard approached faith: not as a student of Christian dogmatics, but as a person focusing on the direct experience of his communion with God. When asked how he came to Kierkegaard after his conversion, he said

I was captivated by Kierkegaard because what he said went straight to my soul. Quite abruptly I realised that reasoning with the intellect alone and reasoning based on living experience are simply words apart. My passion for Kierkegaard began at that time and has remained with me through the rest of my life.\(^ {116} \)

Being a self-proclaimed Barthian, Ellul was somewhat disappointed with Barth's focus on academic exegesis of the Scriptures rather than on how a person perceives God in the course of her life experiences. At the same time, other thinkers who inspired Ellul, such as Marx, focused on the person's experiences but failed to see the spiritual side of the issues at hand. Kierkegaard filled this void. Ellul said about this:

We come after Barth, and still we can do something different from what he did. One can be after Durkheim or Weber and come up with a different sociology. In contrast to this, the Marx-Nietzsche-Freud trio fastens us to a wall like a pinned butterfly. It is no longer possible to say "after" . . . If we are to recover any hope we shall have to go through a veritable disenchantment on the intellectual, spiritual, and social levels. . . . With regard to this trio, we would have to perform the same operation which Kierkegaard performed on the Hegelian myth, for let us remember that it was Kierkegaard, and not Marx, who was able to rise above Hegel and relocate man. Marx has only managed to shut man up still more within the Hegelian domain, and he has added economic determinism to state determinism, sometimes called liberty. What Kierkegaard

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\(^ {115} \) Goddard, Living, 16.
\(^ {116} \) Ellul, Entretiens, 90; Ellul, Conversations, 54.
did, we should be able to do again. But he was able to do it only with strict reference to the revelation in Jesus Christ, that is to say, in committing the reality of the intellectual operation he was undertaking to the freedom of action of one more powerful than himself.\(^\text{117}\)

The attainment of hope, the "exiting from the magic cave to find the sunlight once again," for Ellul, like for Kierkegaard, is a "subjective" process taking place at the level of the individual, who, however, recognizes the absolute unchanging truth of the word of God irrespective of the historic or cultural circumstances. Kierkegaard warned that two spheres, Christianity's "objective subsistence apart from all believers" and Christianity as "inwardness of the believer," are different spheres that should not be confused:

God does not think, He creates; God does not exist, He is eternal. Man thinks and exists, and existence separates thought and being, holding them apart from one another in succession. . . Subjectivity is truth, subjectivity is reality.\(^\text{118}\)

Similarly, Ellul tries to separate himself from Barth, who he thinks excessively "objectifies" the Word of God, ignoring the critical importance of experiencing the Word. At the same time, Ellul criticizes Bultmann and Tillich, who he believes go to the opposite extreme, trivializing the question of God's objective existence and turning him into a mere reflection in a person's mind.\(^\text{119}\)

The subjective reality of hope by definition finds its locus in the mind of an individual. It is the individual, as opposed to Christian community, that both Kierkegaard and Ellul put in the center of their theology. They do it because of their frustration with organized religion.


Both theology and sociology of Ellul required a complete separation of the individual from her environment so she can find the truth unimpeded by external influences. Theologically, it was important to protect the individual from the shackles of scholasticism of religious institutions, distorting the Word. Sociologically, it was equally important to clear the space for the individual's freedom from the ubiquitous presence of technique that has penetrated every aspect of the world, imposing uniform perceptions based on false premises. Thus, the individual must become a *tabula rasa*, the ground zero, the locus, and the sole vehicle of regaining hope.

. . . the present movement is so radical that it is only by going back to the root—which is always the individual human being—that it will be possible to mend matters. . . . When I speak of the individual as the source of hope I mean the individual who does not lend himself to society's game, who disputes what we accept as self-evident. . . . who questions even the movement of this society. . . . This radical subjectivity will inform also the three human passions which seem to be the essential ones—the passion to create, to love, to play. . . . It is in the building of a new daily life, in the discovery of things, acts, situations utterly different from those that society would fasten on us, that this subjectivity can express itself. . . . I am convinced that Christians are absolutely the only ones who can attempt it—but here too on condition that they start from zero. Kierkegaard, it seems to me, alone can show us how to start. . . . If we are to question our society in so radical a fashion, we must adopt a point of view essentially different from that of society's—one that we cannot arrive at by starting from our human wisdom. It is precisely because [the Bible] speaks of a Wholly Other that the revelation provides us with a point of view and a point of departure that are essentially different.\(^\text{120}\)

This statement shows how highly Ellul regarded Kierkegaard. He was the thinker in whose ideas Ellul found his agent of radical change, his savior from our modern crisis: a passionate nonconformist Christian, actively living the Word of God in a world of the ruptured Communion with Him.

3. Dialectical Theology of Barth and Kierkegaard in Opposition to Bultmann and Tillich.

Dialectic is vast and perhaps the most complicated subject in philosophy because, as Daniel B. Clendenin put it, "it means all things to all people." Ellul particularly lamented misunderstanding and underappreciation of dialectic in the United States. He proudly considered himself a dialectician and referred to dialectic as an important key to understanding his works. Because Ellul considered dialectic a critical part of his method, I will dedicate a separate chapter to it. Therefore, the scope of review of Ellul's dialectic here will be limited to those influences that help understand Ellul's own typology of dialectic as "dialectic of faith" versus "dialectic of hope." This typology will be the key to unpacking Ellul's dialectical method later on in this study.

Ellul said in an interview about the importance of dialectic in his scholarship:

It is true that there is a dialectic within my work, and it is entirely central in that I have discovered progressively that in the world we live in there are no means of thinking and acquiring knowledge that are not of a dialectical nature. . . . Marx is one of those who led me to this realization, but I was much more attracted at first by his economic interpretation than by the philosophical aspect of his thought. . . . Much later I was to realize, again in retrospect, that Christianity and biblical thought are dialectical.121

Thus, Ellul identified two major influences on his dialectic that corresponded to his sociology and theology respectively: the Hegelian dialectic of Marx and the theological dialectic.122 Indeed, in his discussions of dialectic scattered around his books, he invariably referred to both strands.

121 Ellul, A Temps et à Contretemps, 178-79; Ellul, In Season, 201-02.
122 I use the term "theological dialectic" here to avoid the narrower term "dialectical theology," which applies to a specific school of thought represented, inter alia, by Barth, and which I will use later accordingly. At the same time, "theological dialectic" distinguishes it from non-theological dialectic, such as Hegelian, an important distinction to make so we can analyze why Ellul sometimes rejected it in favor of the biblical dialectic.
However, according to Clendenin, it is the latter that provides the key to understanding Ellul's dialecticism. He writes:

> Any discussion of Ellul's dialectic which fails to examine it from the theological or biblical perspective is inadequate. . . . For Ellul, the Bible is the prototype for all dialectic, for dialectic "is especially a biblical concept," in contrast to philosophical thinking which tends to resolve and to synthesize contradictions.123

There is little doubt that Ellul was inspired by Marx's dialecticism. Nevertheless, it is an open question how much Ellul internalized it and applied it in his works and why he rejected it as unnecessarily formalistic and inapplicable to some important contradictions that he thought could not be "synthesized." An argument can even be made that the sociological dialectic of Ellul was largely informed by his theological dialectic. However, in this chapter, I limit my focus to the theological prong of the dialectical influences.

In the pre-Barthian era, the use of dialectic in theology, including, first and foremost, liberal theology, was geared toward a "continuity" of all life bringing God and the person together as two phenomena in one "organic unity." One notable exception was Kierkegaard, who emphasized that the Wholly Other God and the person belonged to two different dimensions.124

After World War I, in the early 1920s, Barth began his movement, later named "dialectical theology," whose doctrine is characterized by emphasis on discontinuity and disunity of the Wholly Other God and the person. According to Clendenin,

> Major tenets of the "dialecticians" included God's aseity as Wholly Other, the infinite, qualitative difference between God and man, time and eternity, the absolute discontinuity between the biblical revelation and reason or religion, and the exclusivity of Jesus Christ. Its "dialectic," therefore, required the critical negation of man's efforts at establishing this continuity of all life and the maintenance of a tension between God's No and Yes.125

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123 Clendenin, *Theological Method*, 49.
124 For history and origin of dialectic theology, see Clendenin, *Theological Method*, 35-36. Clendenin attributes it, *inter alia*, to "the shattering impact of World War I."
125 Clendenin, *Theological Method*, 36.
By late 1920s, the dialectical theology forked into doctrinal variations that opposed each other in a heated academic debate. The most notable of them was the controversy between Barth on one side and Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich on the other. Bultmann and Tillich believed that a person's perception of the Scriptures evolves as the person lives through her worldly experiences, through a process of correlation of the two realms, the biblical and the worldly, in a way of dialectical synthesis. In this dispute, Ellul firmly sided with Barth. Barth was concerned about this fusion of the two realities and insisted on complete separation of the objective aspect of the Bible from its subjective reflection in the mind of a Christian.

According to Ellul, both Bultmann and Tillich, focusing exclusively on the subjective reality of God, reduced his objective reality to a function of our perception, with resulting adulteration of God's aspect as absolute and unchanging truth. Ellul said:

> What we are proposing is obviously the direct opposite of what Bultmann has been sponsoring. Bultmann begins by affirming the given realities of the world, e.g., science or history, and then proceeds to criticize, not just the modes of explanation, but the very core of what is passed on to us by the Bible. When the Bible has been stripped in this way, all that finally remains is myself in relation to a God to whom I have given existence. The same applies to the attempt of Tillich to find common ground between culture and revelation. What is more clearly needed here is the either-or which is more consonant, I think, with Scripture, not the synthesis or reconciliation which each attempts with new methods and which gives no help to those who famish through appeasement and toleration.\(^{126}\)

In order, to preserve "the Otherness of God," Ellul emphasized that a new dialectic is needed, not one based on a formalistic pursuit of "synthesis" but one that would reflect and underscore the separation of the Word from the world. Ellul called it a "dialectic of hope" in contrast to what he named a "dialectic of faith."

The "dialectic of hope" is most fundamental to Ellul's theory both as a theoretical method and as a specific "dialectic," imbedded in reality and organizing it in a certain way. The dialectic of hope is existential, not abstract or "philosophical," and it reflects the dogma of separate existence of the Wholly Other God. The dialectic of hope was formulated in opposition to Barth, whom Ellul credits with the dogmatic aspect of the Wholly Other God but believes that his dialectic theology, good for explaining the Scriptures, is too "scholarly" for producing an outlook that would include both the divine and the human reality. In other words, Ellul wanted a dialectic that would reconcile the two realities but without the correlationist synthesizing approach of Bultmann and Tillich.

For his dialectic of hope, Ellul turns to Kierkegaard. According to Eller, "Kierkegaard and Ellul agree on what they mean by 'dialectic' against the more common understanding of the term." Eller argues that by choosing a "theology of confrontation" and refusing to use Hegelian synthesis and Tillich's dialectic of "correlation," Ellul chose "Kierkegaard's understanding of dialectic rather than the popular definition inherited from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel."¹²⁷

So what is the "dialectic of hope"? It is best to understand it through comparison with the "dialectic of faith."¹²⁸ Ellul recognized that both dialectics are legitimate theoretical tools but that their spheres of application must be different. The dialectic of faith is for the interpretation of the dialectic that is imbedded in the Scriptures and that was used by those who wrote the Bible. In contrast, the dialectic of hope is a tool of reviving interest in faith. To do that, we must first make people receptive to faith, make them interested in "asking the right questions." Therefore, hope

¹²⁷ Eller, "Ellul and Kierkegaard," 55. It was a general characterization by Eller about Ellul's dialectic and he did not mention specifically the "dialectic of hope" in his article. However, it is the existential "dialectic of hope," as Ellul described it, that shows tracks of Kierkegaard's theory in contrast to the "dialectic of faith" that Ellul suggests for academic interpretation of the Bible and that manifests influences of Barth's dialecticism.
¹²⁸ Ellul, L'Espérance Oubliée, 85-90; Ellul, Hope in Time of Abandonment, 84-89.
becomes more important than faith. We need the dialectic of hope more than anything else, because there is too much confusion about the creed even in the church, let alone in society. This confusion is beyond academic discourse about biblical dogmas and goes to the most basic level of the relationship between God and the person.

The dialectic of hope is the one that responds to the life itself. It is not about theory anymore but about introducing a dynamic (as opposed to factual) element to their life. We have to set hope in motion. Therefore, we need to find a dialectic that is capable of setting it in motion, in other words, a dialectic of hope.

The key characteristics of the dialectic of hope are as follows. It is existential, "a dialectic of the concrete," as opposed to looking for theoretical "systems" or "solutions"; it is not what is "commonly presented," as opposed to the traditional Hegelian synthesizing; and it is focused on confrontation. It is analogous to two permanently unsynthesized electrical poles, one with a positive and the other with a negative charge, that continuously generate sparkles between them. The poles are the Word of God and the world. They cannot be reconciled: It would violate the Wholly Otherness of God; and they cannot be separated from each other: It would destroy the saving presence of God in our lives. The sparkles between the poles are the motion of hope overcoming the current crisis. This is something Ellul wants to create in society just like what Kierkegaard was trying to do with his radical Christianity and through his dialecticism.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is not easy to identify theoretical influences on Ellul. His theory is complex and original. It is composed of two strands, sociological and theological, meant to be separate but

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ultimately influencing and complimenting each other. The task is doubly difficult because Ellul is an intuitive thinker with a passionate style, not prone to methodical narration and rarely citing works of the others. However, a comparative analysis of his works, his biography and his own admission help us see four major influences: anarchism, Marx, Barth, and Kierkegaard. All four complemented each other and defined four separate aspects of Ellul's thought despite some overlap.

The greatest influence on Ellul's sociology came from the anarchist tradition or, more specifically, from its anarcho-socialist brand. Ellul owed his socialist views to both Marxism and anarchism. However, it was anarchism that provided him with conceptual building blocks for his sociological theory, including their concept of the state, politics, law, violence and federalism and their critique of scientific reason and technology. Ellul integrated these theoretical components in his outlook of reality, focused on critique of reason obsessed with efficiency and trapped in the static uniformity forced on us by the technological society. This outlook is much in sync with some strands of current anarchism, suggesting extraordinary kinship between Ellul and anarchist thought.

Another influence of anarchism on Ellul is its characteristic existentialist phenomenology of social forces at work in modern society. For anarchists, power, the state, and politics are self-sufficient social phenomena as opposed to being simple manifestations of underlying phenomena, such as a ruling class, an interest group, or a mode of production. Hence, the phenomena themselves, and not the people behind them, are the pressure points of their revolutionary action. It is they who constitute the "enemy" of an anarchist battle cry. Similarly,
Ellul concentrated his critique on technique per se and not on a social group with a vested interest, as a Marxist likely would.

Finally, Ellul adopted an anarchist-style "generalist" approach to his revolutionary agenda. If a Marxist agenda is usually focused on seizing political power as an instrument of revolutionary change, a typical anarchist agenda is wrapped around diverse and nonspecific social action leading in a generally described direction. Similarly, Ellul's agenda of social change is based on a general idea of destruction of intellectual complacency, desacralization of existing institutions, discrediting dominant ideas, encouragement of nonconformism, and creation of distrust of the political and ideological establishment. Put simply, it is an agenda to stimulate critical thinking.

Despite the prevalence of anarchist influence on Ellul's sociology, Marx also had a big say in shaping his views. In contrast to anarchism, Ellul owes relatively few conceptual building blocks to Marx. Marx's influences on Ellul were mostly related to his analytical method.

First of all, the theoretical depth of Marx inspired Ellul's interest in a scientifically developed radical social theory. To be fair, both Marx and the anarchists infused in Ellul his critical socialist outlook: his focus on social injustice and the miserable plight of the common person. However, Marx suggested to him the possibility of a total comprehensive theory focusing on a single underlying issue rooted in material reality. Anarchism, with its theoretical decentralization and lesser depth (once pointed out by Ellul himself), seemed to be less equipped to do it.

Secondly, Marx inspired Ellul to adopt dialecticism as a part of his analytical method. It is an open question how faithful Ellul was to Marx's dialectic. However, Ellul learned from him
the fundamentals of the dialectical method and the idea that social reality cannot be understood with linear logic alone, and a good social analysis must be based on dialectical logic.

As to the substantive (as opposed to the methodological) aspects of Marx's theory, Ellul adopted relatively few concepts of Marxism. It is hardly a surprise, given that Ellul considered the social theory of Marx outdated and in need of an update. However, there are some significant doctrines that Ellul borrowed from Marxism. The most significant of them is alienation. Alienation is at the center of the existentialist sociology of Ellul. It helps him demonstrate the totality of the modern crisis and the urgency of revolutionary action. Another important Marxist concept borrowed by Ellul is the idea that history is a product of dynamic material forces. This idea helped Ellul describe the genesis of the modern crisis and its current dynamic. Finally, Ellul borrowed the Marxist view of the modern crisis as total and absolute, inescapably leading humanity to the brink of a revolutionary adjustment or demise.

Looking at the conceptual influences of Marxism, they all seem to relate to the description of the current condition ("diagnosis") and not of the solution ("remedy"). Indeed, the remedy of Marx was based on his class theory and communism, neither of which Ellul could accept. Class struggle meant violence and the discipline of "democratic centralism" of a communist party. Communism meant closure of diversity of thought and obsession with economic progress. The anarchist and the Christian in Ellul abhorred both.

From reading his biography, Ellul appears to be bedazzled by Marx more than any other social critic or perhaps even any other author. However, in the end, he could not come to terms with substantive Marxist theory because Ellul the Marxist was displaced in him by Ellul the anarchist and Ellul the Christian.
Ellul lamented that he could not find answers to "questions of life" in Marx. What Ellul meant by that was the spiritual aspect of the human condition. A reformed Christian, he turned for answers to radical theology of Barth and Kierkegaard.

Barth, for Ellul's theology, was what anarchism was for his sociology: He provided him with conceptual building blocks for his theory: his dogmatics, including most importantly his doctrine of God as the Wholly Other and his Christocentric interpretation of the Bible. Both were critical for Ellul's view of the Word of God as the absolute unchanging truth and therefore the only source of Hope in our world of ruptured Communion with God, corrupted by idolatry and false values forced on us by the Satanic force of technique.

Another important contribution of Barth to Ellul's thought was his "practical Christianity," a conviction that faith is meaningless without praxis. This is why Ellul felt that relying on theology alone, without the assistance of sociology, would be like "standing on one leg." For Barth and Ellul after him, Christianity is a socially active force, saving the world by living the Word in it.

Finally, Barth gave Ellul his method of dialectic theology as an important theoretical tool for building his understanding of the Bible and ultimately developing the theological side of his theory.

Despite his fascination with Barth, Ellul was craving a more "existentialist" Christian outlook. He found it in Kierkegaard with his focus on the subjective reality of a Christian. The "passionate" Christianity of Kierkegaard resonated with Ellul. The main implication of the Kierkegaardian outlook for Ellul was radical nonconformism leading Ellul to his concept of "dialectic of hope": The solution to the current crisis will come from the tension created in the
mind of a Christian by the permanent unresolvable contradiction between the two realities of
the Christian's life: the saving Word of God and the world condemned to damnation.
Chapter 2. COMPONENTS OF ELLUL’S THEORY

The theoretical legacy of Ellul is vast and complex. It includes about 40 books, let alone hundreds of articles and interviews. Ellul planned his *oeuvre* as an integrated whole early in his life. Each book is meant to address one component of his overall theory. This is probably why students of Ellul tend to focus on those components that they consider central to Ellul’s thought.

Because of the complexity of Ellul’s theory, it is a challenge to match him to any kind of typology. According to Clendenin, Ellul has been characterized as a theological positivist, an existentialist, a prophet, and a dialectician. I will try to demonstrate that Ellul is, first and foremost, a theorist of direct political action, whose entire theory is geared to this concept and is organized around it.

This approach to Ellul is suggested by his own ambition as a thinker. Indeed, he said that "a new Marx" was needed for our age, and he dedicated his life to building a theoretical legacy that clearly demonstrated that he was trying to be one. Ellul himself once confessed, "I was actually a Marxist in 1933-34. And I asked myself then: If Marx were alive today, would he be so disposed to cite as the crucial social phenomenon of history the ownership of property? What would he cite as crucial? And I decided that it would be the phenomenon of technique." Thus, Ellul himself provided us with a goal and a standard that can fairly be used for evaluation of his own theory. In this chapter, I will try to demonstrate that his theory lends itself well to social movements that tend not to rely on existing political institutions for their action. That includes the current anti-globalization movement as well as a large array of post-modern ecologist, anti-
technologist, pacifist, anti-authoritarian, anti-colonialist, and civil rights movements. In light of this view, it is hardly a surprise that Ellul praised Gandhi and King, mentioning them as good examples of an effective social movement.¹ Therefore, I want to consider his theory as one of direct political action where the technical concepts of "revolution," "civil disobedience," and "direct action" merge and find a common home of sorts.

However, we must keep in mind that the word "political" may be a less-than-perfect choice to describe Ellul’s theory. Ellul himself considered politics a realm corrupted by technique and therefore inherently unfit as an avenue of social change. Instead, he advocated "social action" outside the mainstream politics. I believe that the word "direct" takes care of this apparent contradiction between Ellul’s term "social action" and the term "political action" because it defines political action as extra-systemic, that is, it places it outside the established political structures.

The elimination of the contradiction does not mean necessarily that the "social action" proposed by Ellul and "direct political action" mean the same thing. However, I think the term "direct political action" is the best common denominator between Ellul’s "social action" and the area of human activity commonly defined as "politics" when it is understood broadly enough to include unconventional, nonconformist, anti-establishment, radical, anti- and extra-systemic political action. Thus, I believe the two terms, the Ellulian "social action" and "direct political action," can be used interchangeably for the purposes of this study. In my description of Ellul’s theory, I will try to use his term "social action" as he understood it. Otherwise, I will try to use

¹ Ellul was quoted on Marx in Goddard, Living, 126. On his opinion about Gandhi and King, see Ellul, Anarchie, 16; Ellul, Anarchy, 12.
the term “direct political action” as it seems to be more self-explanatory to describe the movement Ellul tried to foster.

I. TECHNIQUE or WHAT IS THE MODERN CRISIS? (SOCIOLoGY)

One defining characteristic of direct political action is a widespread sense of urgency to act, the kind of urgency that cannot wait for established political institutions to take the necessary actions. This sense of urgency results from a perception that the status quo is completely unacceptable. This is why I start here from Ellul’s description of the modern crisis, the crisis embodied in a peculiar historical phenomenon that he calls “technique.”

1. Meaning of the Term “Technique” and Related Concept

The first mention of “technique” by Ellul dates back to 1935, when he and Bernard Charbonneau jointly wrote a manifesto for the personalist movement, of which they were members. The manifesto identified two great problems of the contemporary society, “fatalities” and “gigantism,” as two anonymous forces, which no one attempted to control. The former related to war, fascism, and disequilibrium in production, whereas the latter meant concentration of production, the state, capital, and population. That section of the manifesto was followed by paragraphs saying:

The means of realization of this concentration is la technique, not as an industrial procedure but as a general procedure. . . La Technique dominates man and all man’s reactions. Against it, politics is powerless. . .

2 "Directives pour un manifeste personnalisé" (also known as "Manifeste an 83 pointes") in Revue française d’histoire des idées politiques (1999), 9:1. Translated by, and cited in, Andrew Goddard in Goddard, Living, 129.
Goddard restates the subsequent paragraphs of the manifesto:

What is being witnessed is the disappearance of the consciously acting human being as people become like machines, submitting themselves en masse to the orders of abstract powers. This is described as ‘social sin’... ‘sin against the spirit’... and the refusal to live... In language that explicitly reappears nearly fifty years later as central in Ellul’s 1982 book Changer this is said to represent ‘the fact that man is becoming totally proletarian’... There is, therefore, a fundamental revolutionary necessity and ‘the Revolution will not be made against people but against institutions’

Ellul fully developed the concept of technique in his most famous book, which he wrote in the late 1940s and which was first published in French in 1954, with two more books written about technique afterward. Ellul originally entitled the book “The Technical Society (“La Société Technicienne”), possibly, as Goddard suggested, emulating Le Capital as he tried to do for the 20th century what Marx had succeeded doing for the 19th. When the book was published, it came out under the title “La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle,” which can be translated “Technique or the Gamble of the Century.” The meaning of the French word enjeu is “gamble,” “stake,” “bet,” or, in a figurative sense, “goal” or “sense” (with a business connotation of “reward”). The choice of this word by Ellul suggests that he wanted to emphasize both the centrality of technique to our age and the grave recklessness of humanity’s obsession with it. The book made him world-famous when it was published in English in 1963 under the title The Technological Society.

Ellul’s “technique” is not “technology,” strictly speaking. Indeed, Ellul takes care to distinguish his “technique” from the definition of technology by its famous critic Lewis

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3 Goddard, Living, 129.
5 Goddard, Living, 134.
Rather, it is a *modus operandi* of reason, conceptually similar to “instrumental reason” of Max Horkheimer, whose well-known book about it, *The Eclipse of Reason*, came out seven years before Ellul’s book on technique. On the other hand, the concern that technology imposes its logic on other spheres of human life makes Ellul similar to other critics of technology, for example, Hans Jonas and Martin Heidegger.

Ellul sees technique as a technocratic way of thinking motivated solely by efficiency, dominating all spheres of human life. This is how Ellul himself defined it in the book:

> The term *technique*, as I use it, does not mean machines, technology, or this or that procedure for attaining an end. In our technological society, *technique* is the *totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency* (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity.

### 2. Historical Origin of Technique

A historian of institutions, Ellul dedicates most of the first chapter of his book to the historical origin of technique. Here, he follows Marx, trying to understand a phenomenon from its history: looking for its causes in the material history of humankind and focusing on conflict, tensions, and dialectic.

According to Goddard, the main point of Ellul’s historical analysis, which is at the heart of his sociology, is to show that the modern civilization brought to life by technique is a

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7 As noted before in Chapter 1, Ellul himself denied that his theory was a critique of reason.
9 See, e.g., Hans Jonas, “Toward a Philosophy of Technology” in *Technology and Values* ed. Craig Hanks (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2010), 12-25; and Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology* in *Technology and Values*, 100-13.
10 Ellul, *The Technological Society*, xxv, italics original. The citation is of the “Note to the Reader” that does not appear in the French editions of the book.
completely novel phenomenon.\textsuperscript{12} He describes technique as the cause of the demise of the traditional Western civilization. The crisis that it has created is a radically new phenomenon with nothing like it in the past. It is a qualitative transformative leap from the old techniques that were used by artisans, peasants, and magicians, to a new reality. What characterizes that reality is a transformation in the relation between technique and society where humankind has become subjected to a constantly growing and inescapable power of technique.\textsuperscript{13}

Ellul’s “technique” is a broader concept than “technology.” However, its origin and development are rooted in history of technology and the scientific method. As new inventions gradually accumulated from the year 1000 to about 1750, and new discoveries were made, their critical mass led in the 18th century to a materialistic outlook based on the belief that “the problem of life would be resolved when men were able to work less while consuming more.”\textsuperscript{14} This idea was first formulated in the philosophy of Voltaire and Diderot but became a dominant frame of mind by the middle of the 19th century with the development of certain favorable historical “factors.”

Drawing from such authors as Mumford, Arthur Vierendeel, and André Vincent, Ellul identifies five such factors: (1) a “technical complex,” i.e., an aggregation and merger of “partial inventions” when they were “combined into an assemble” causing a trend to “continuous self-perfection”; (2) the population explosion; (3) the emergence of an economic milieu that is both “stable” enough for purposeful research and “flux” enough to allow rapid change resulting from it; (4) plasticity in the social milieu with the disappearance of “social taboos” and “natural social

\textsuperscript{12} Goddard is particularly keen on this point and laments that experts on Ellul overlook the importance of it as a central point of Ellul's sociology. See, Goddard, Living, 131.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 117, 118, 131, 133, 147-49, 152.

\textsuperscript{14} Ellul, La Technique, 42; Ellul, The Technological Society, 46.
groups”; and (5) “a clear technical intention that combines the other factors and directs them toward the pursuit of the technical objective.”

Some of these factors occurred at various points in history. However, a revolution in the “technical movement” took place in the middle of the 19th century with the advent of “technical intention” when a relentless pursuit of a singular, most efficient solution became the production’s most important aspect. At that point, a simple quantitative augmentation of technical knowledge led to a qualitative leap to “technique” as it exists today.

Ellul’s historical analysis of the origin of technique is interesting not only for its account of the causes of technique but also for its description of the pre-technique society. Indeed, contrasted to technique, the pre-technique society takes the role of a social ideal that, by implication, Ellul laments losing and wants to bring back.

He starts his analysis by rejecting the idea that modern technical innovation is a mere continuation of primitive techniques, that they are of the same nature, and that “there has always been technique.” Ellul identifies himself with those thinkers who, like Marx and Engels, think that modern society is undergoing a qualitative transition resulting from quantitative progress.

Beyond a certain quantity, the phenomenon, even though in a sense it remains the same, does not have the same quality, is not of the same nature.

From the standpoint of simple technological development, the only difference between the old society and the modern one is the speed of that development. However, what held back the technological development was also creating a richer, happier, and more fulfilling life where people could realize their human potential far better than they do in modern society. First, the

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15 Ellul, La Technique, 44-55; Ellul, The Technological Society, 47-60.
16 Ellul, La Technique, 48-49; Ellul, The Technological Society, 52-53.
17 Ellul, La Technique, 58; Ellul, The Technological Society, 62.
application of technique was narrow in scope. Therefore, social relations, political acts, and military and judicial life responded mainly to “social spontaneities.” The law expressed itself in customs without “any character of technical rigor.” The state “manifested itself simply,” not as a technical reality. In other words,

[T]hese activities depended more on private initiative, short-lived manifestations or ephemeral traditions, than on a persevering technical will and rational improvements.\(^\text{18}\)

This limited “technicization” led to a truly social life. Work was not a goal but “a pretext for coming together.” When people had enough, they stopped working, as work did not make sense at that point. “It was better not to consume than to work hard.” The rest of the time, people engaged in conversation, games, and meditation. Their concept of comfort was built around “a feeling of moral and aesthetic order” and was “closely bound up with the person,” not objects. For example, it was build around open spaces, in contrast with today’s concept of comfort as accumulation and perfection of goods and machines.\(^\text{19}\)

The second limitation on technique in the pre-technique society was a limited variety of technical means. Therefore, people tended not to improve those tools that worked well enough. Instead, they focused on improving their own skills. Thus, production was centered around a master craftsman with a full panoply of skills related to his trade, not around production processes engaging persons for their specialized skills. Hence, the success in production required perfection of the skills of the craftsman, not of his tools. In contrast, in today’s production, with a


\(^{19}\) Ellul, *La Technique*, 61-61; Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 66.
great choice of instruments, what is required is the perfection of instruments, not of the human beings.\textsuperscript{20}

The third limitation for technique’s development was rooted in the local nature of production due to limited communications in the ancient world. Thus, each “technical phenomenon” was imbedded in its civilization of which technique was only one element along with such other factors as flora, climate, and political regime, with which technique was intertwined and on which it depended. As a result, ancient societies had a distinct personality and their own fate. Techniques were separated by different cultures and were not considered a commodity as they are today. Being locked in its unique and diverse environments technique could not develop autonomously as it does today. Thus, different societies had different techniques to achieve a certain result.\textsuperscript{21}

In addition to this spatial limitations, there was a temporal one: techniques developed ever so slowly, leaving large gaps among research, invention, and techniques based on them. Because of this evolutionary slowness, humans were ahead of techniques and had a meaningful control over their use and their influence. The very instruments they used still had an esthetic dimension: they were decorated and were supposed to be pleasing to the eye. Efficiency did not yet strip them of everything but their utility, becoming the only factor of a technique’s evolvement. Even though individual people still participate in the development of technique, their role is completely defined by the search for ultimate efficiency.\textsuperscript{22}

Finally, in pre-technique societies, human beings could exercise choice. They could choose the shape of their society by electing whether it should be expansionist and war-oriented

\textsuperscript{20} Ellul, \textit{La Technique}, 62-63; Ellul, \textit{The Technological Society}, 67-68.
\textsuperscript{21} Ellul, \textit{La Technique}, 63-65; Ellul, \textit{The Technological Society}, 68-70.
\textsuperscript{22} Ellul, \textit{La Technique}, 65-69; Ellul, \textit{The Technological Society}, 70-74.
or inward and spiritually and mystically oriented. There was a certain equilibrium between world and person. In addition, the power of the state was counter-balanced by multiple groups and loyalties to which an individual could attach himself. This variety was ensured because

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\text{[t]here was no irrefutable constraint on man, because nothing absolutely good in response to everything else [i.e., efficiency] had been discovered. We have noted the diversity of technical form and the slowness of imitation. But it was always human action which was decisive. When several technical forms came into contact, the individual made his choice on the basis of numerous reasons. Efficiency was only one of them. . .}^{23}
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Even though the person lived within the framework of a civilization, the means of control of the person were not “technical.” That ensured individual choice even in most technical civilizations of the pre-technique era, such as the Roman Empire. Even there, a person could control his destiny by withdrawing from society and living in the country or in solitude. Hence, a person could evade military service, taxes, imperial jurisdiction, or other aspects of the power of the Empire, rendering it powerless against him. Even greater was the person’s freedom from the influence of material techniques.\(^{24}\)

Thus, Ellul described the traditional society as naturally "human" existence. According to him, people lived their lives autonomously from the state. They could control their own destiny and their spiritual development. They could realize their creativity freely and spontaneously, leading to great social and cultural diversity. They valued leisure more than work and used it for esthetic and spiritual development. Human skills and not machines were the main productive force. Most importantly, the person was "a subject of moral judgment," realizing her innate hunger for mystery and spiritual fulfillment.\(^{25}\) Humankind did not try to "conquer" nature but

\(^{23}\) Ellul, La Technique, 71; Ellul, The Technological Society, 76.
\(^{24}\) Ellul, La Technique, 71-72; Ellul, The Technological Society, 77.
\(^{25}\) Ellul, La Technique, 122-23, 130-31; Ellul, The Technological Society, 134, 141-42.
respected it and strived to live in organic harmony with it. All these characteristics suggest the centrality of the human "being" in the pre-modern society that ended with the advent of technique.

3. Three Types and Seven Characteristics of Technique

Ellul identifies three “types” and seven “characteristics” of technique. Since technique is the embodiment of the modern crisis, its typology and character not only outline the parameters of technique but describe the crisis itself, being broad and deep beyond imagination. Thus, Ellul finds three types of technique that, acting in concert, control every aspect of human existence: (1) “economic” that targets everything related to economy and production; (2) “organizational” that covers politics, government, and law; and (3) “human,” which is an accommodation tool helping technique subordinate humans (along with other biological beings) to its organizational logic of a machine, for example, through anti-depressants or genetic engineering. Ellul dedicates a full chapter of Technological Society to each type, showing how each of them plays a unique and necessary role in complete subjugation of the totality of human life, and perhaps nature itself, to integrated control of technique, and yet, the difference between them is not essential to Ellul. According to him, there are no different techniques anymore. There is only one monistic technique that has different manifestations.

The “characterology of technique,” as Ellul calls it, describes how technique operates to achieve its efficiency-oriented objectives. First, he briefly describes two “essential” characteristics of techniques: rationality and artificiality. Ellul explains that he does not want to
spend much effort on them, because they are commonly covered in the literature on the subject. However, the true reason for Ellul’s lack of attention to these two characteristics seems to be that they do not appear to be unique to modern society, and therefore they do not lend themselves to his critique of it. Nevertheless, it is not to say that these characteristics are unimportant in his overall argument. On the contrary, based on Ellul’s definition of “human” as “spontaneous,” “creative,” and “irrational,” it is the “rationality” of technique that makes it fundamentally incompatible with what is the “human” method. Technique puts everything through a “discourse” in every operation and then reduces everything to its own “logical dimension.” It systematizes, specializes, and standardizes instead of applying “creativity.”

As to the “artificiality” of technique, it is “opposed to nature” simply by definition. On a large scale,

[I]t destroys, eliminates, or subordinates the natural world, and does not allow this world to restore itself or even to enter into a symbiotic relation with it. The two worlds obey different imperatives, different directives, and different laws which have nothing in common. Just as hydroelectric installations take waterfalls and lead them into conduits, so the technical milieu absorbs the natural. We are rapidly approaching the time when there will be no longer any natural environment at all.

The remaining five characteristics of technique are all new phenomena that manifested themselves only in modern society. The first of them is “automatism of technical choice.” When everything is measured, and the most efficient method has been established, “the technical movement becomes self-directing.”

Technique itself, ipso facto and without indulgence or possible discussion, selects among the means to be employed. The human being is no longer in any sense the agent of choice.

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26 Ellul, La Technique, 73-74; Ellul, The Technological Society, 78-79.
27 Ellul, La Technique, 74; Ellul, The Technological Society, 79.
28 Ellul, La Technique, 74; Ellul, The Technological Society, 80.
The choice the human being makes these days is only one in favor of a more efficient method. When all alternatives are weighed and discussed, the one that is chosen is always the most efficient solution. From Ellul’s point of view, this is not a “choice,” because a machine can also make this operation. Human motives are not taken into account, and, when they are (for example, when trade unions make their demands), the whole society becomes appalled by this and rises against it. What Ellul is saying is that the choices we make have lost their teleological component. The question “Why?” does not matter anymore, and all that is left is the question “How?”

The second characteristic of technique is “self-augmentation.” Ellul writes:

Self-augmentation can be formulated in two laws:
1. *In a given civilization, technical progress is irreversible.*
2. *Technical progress tends to act, not according to an arithmetic, but according to a geometric progression.*

Ellul identifies several aspects (“elements”) of self-augmentation of technique: replacement of the role of an individual scientist by a process of atomized data aggregation by a multitude of people, “collective, anonymous” research; the fact that technique demands vast resources and therefore prospers more in rich countries, while making them even richer; self-engendering of technique by application of every invention to multiple other fields; creation of machines that require whole new organizational units of people for their support; and the determination of consumption patterns by the producer. As in the case of *automatism*, the main implication of self-augmentation is the disappearance of the individual creative human decision-maker as a

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meaningful agent of economic life. Instead, human beings are being reduced to the role of a fungible record-keeper for the machine. Even though technique is a “form,” it undergoes no modification, no matter to what it is applied. Its movement is both its being and its essence. Whatever it touches becomes like technique, but technique never becomes like anything else.\(^\text{30}\)

This takes us to its next characteristic.

Technique's third characteristic is "monism," which means that “[t]he technical phenomenon, embracing all the separate techniques, forms a whole.” This unity of technique reveals itself in many ways. One aspect of monism is uniformity of technique’s characteristics no matter the area in which it operates. In this sense, a technique of a printing press has the same properties as the technique of the propaganda that defines the newspaper’s content. Technique has a single essence despite the variations in its appearance.\(^\text{31}\)

The most disturbing aspect of monism is that new techniques need to be employed quickly, but their detrimental effects reveal themselves only over time. Hence, the destructive effects of every new technique must be absorbed before they become known. Correcting these harmful effects requires the introduction of further new techniques, which, in turn, cause harm before it is finally discovered. This vicious circle of necessity of new techniques repeats itself \textit{ad infinitum}.\(^\text{32}\)

Monism also means that changes in one area automatically cause changes in all other areas, thereby changing the social milieu to accommodate the new technical reality. For example, new techniques in policing create new practices in data aggregation, profiling, and surveillance, resulting in a police state, which, in turn, creates new propaganda justifying these practices. All

\(^{30}\) Ellul, \textit{La Technique}, 79-87; Ellul, \textit{The Technological Society}, 85-94.
\(^{31}\) Ellul, \textit{La Technique}, 87-88; Ellul, \textit{The Technological Society}, 94-95.
\(^{32}\) Ellul, \textit{La Technique}, 97-102; Ellul, \textit{The Technological Society}, 105-11.
of these techniques operate in concert, making exponential proliferation of new techniques an unavoidable necessity. Therefore, Ellul argues that it is naive to think that a technique is just a means at the hands of people and that it is the people who decide whether to use it and for what purpose. On the contrary, technique imposes its own goals and changes the social milieu accordingly. This goal of technique is always dominant, and there are no social forces that are capable of resisting it.\(^{33}\)

The fourth characteristic of technique is “technical universalism,” which Ellul defines as geographic and qualitative manifestation of technique’s dominance. Geographically, technique is a great eraser of diverse cultures and civilizations in the name of progress. On the qualitative dimension, its triumphant march leads to loss of relevance of human beings, collapse of indigenous cultures, moral and sociological destruction of traditional agrarian populations, disappearance of locally oriented economies, “psychological adaptation of family life to military or industrial methods,” and replacement of old religions with a new idolatry of worshiping technique. Put simply, technique brings the whole diverse world to a common denominator of uniform technical slavery, where human beings and their social organizations become faithful servants of technique with their individuality completely effaced.\(^{34}\) As Ellul argues,

Technique cannot be otherwise than totalitarian. It can be truly efficient and scientific only if it absorbs an enormous number of phenomena and brings into play the maximum of data. In order to co-ordinate and exploit synthetically, technique must be brought to bear on the great masses in every area. But the existence of technique in every area leads to monopoly.\(^{35}\)

\(^{33}\) Ellul, La Technique, 88-96; Ellul, The Technological Society, 95-104.

\(^{34}\) Ellul, La Technique, 106-121; Ellul, The Technological Society, 116-33.

\(^{35}\) Ellul, La Technique, 114; Ellul, The Technological Society, 125.
Finally, the fifth characteristic of technique is “autonomy.” It is probably the most important one to Ellul’s theory because it explains why technique substitutes its own goals for any other and how it becomes the only moral authority.

Ellul defines autonomy of technique: “External necessities no longer determine technique. Technique’s own internal necessities are determinative. Technique has become a reality in itself, self-sufficient, with its special laws and its own determinations.”36 This principle holds for any area of technique. For example, the police can only be efficient when it becomes independent from external supervision and can obey only its technical laws, as distinguished from rules of justice or legality.

However, technical autonomy also manifests itself in issues of morality and spiritual values.

Technique tolerates no judgment from without and accepts no limitations. It is by virtue of technique rather than science that the great principle has become established: chacun chez soi [“good fences make good neighbors”]. Morality judges moral problems; as far as technical problems are concerned, it has nothing to say. Only technical criteria are relevant. Technique, in sitting in judgment on itself, is clearly freed from this principal obstacle to human action. . . Thus, technique theoretically and systematically assures to itself that liberty which it has been able to win practically. Since it has put itself beyond good and evil, it need fear no limitation whatever. It was long claimed that technique was neutral. Today this is no longer a useful distinction. The power and autonomy of technique are so well secured that it, in its turn, has become the judge of what is moral, the creator of a new morality. Thus, it plays the role of creator of a new civilization as well. This morality—internal to technique—is assured of not having to suffer from technique. In any case, in respect to traditional morality, technique affirms itself as an independent power. Man alone is subject, it would seem, to moral judgment. We no longer live in that primitive epoch in which things were good or bad in themselves. Technique in itself is neither, and can therefore do what it will. It is truly autonomous.37

The substitution of the value judgment of technique for human morality occurs because technique is totalitarian and requires monopoly. Indeed, any considerations, other than technical

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36 Ellul, La Technique, 122; Ellul, The Technological Society, 133-34.
37 Ellul, La Technique, 122-23; Ellul, The Technological Society, 134.
ones, are shackles on efficiency. Thus, the human component in a technical arrangement is its weakest spot because a person can have, for example, emotions, fatigue, or considerations unrelated to his technical task. This puts a great pressure on workers to behave exactly like machines. Ellul gives an example of a test pilot who had to quit his job because his wife greeted him so happily, when he returned home from work, that he began dreading a crash, which affected his judgment during test flights.\(^\text{58}\) This trend reveals itself at its fullest in the mentality of technicians who tend to personify machines in an expression of sacralization.

4. Technical Dystopia: Technique as New Environment, Sacralization of Technique, New Dichotomy of Freedom and Necessity, Technique and Power

In light of its characteristics, persuasively described by Ellul, technique presents itself as the ultimate monstrous totalitarian ruler. At the end of his book on technique, Ellul writes about a recently published scientific prognosis for year 2000 that predicted a utopia where all problems would disappear as a result of new scientific discoveries: the population would be artificially stabilized, the consumption would be abundant, information would be transferred directly into the brain, and people would always be happy, as their nervous systems would be technologically manipulated. Ellul compares this utopia to a dystopia portrayed by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World*. He argues that the society, predicted by the scientists, would be “a world-wide totalitarian dictatorship which will allow technique its full scope,” and in comparison to which, Adolf Hitler’s was “a trifling affair.\(^\text{39}\)


Ellul is appalled by the teleological naïveté of science that refuses to seriously consider the question “Why?” If a cultural lag is being reduced, what culture are we trying to help? Will it destroy a unique cultural heritage in the process? If we enjoy new scientific discoveries, what is the true cost of them for us? It follows from Ellul’s analysis of technique that the reason why the scientists do not ask themselves questions of purpose is because of their sacralization of technique and the illusion that technique gives power and freedom.

According to C. George Bonello, the spell of technique is so effective because of the “power urge” that human beings inherently possess. The urge to dominate over nature and other people draws people to the use of “instrumental reason.” However, as Ellul leads us to believe, such use of reason also leaves people powerless, and the domain of instrumental reason “results in an overall irrationality.”

A similar argument can be applied to “freedom” that technique allegedly engenders. Freedom is an important concept for Ellul, and some scholars, such as Darrel J. Fasching, believe that the dichotomy of freedom and necessity is central to Ellul’s theory. Fasching uses an argument similar to Benello’s and states it in terms of “freedom” that technique appears to create. According to Fasching, the sense of power over nature and society gives us the idea that technique gives us freedom. However, according to Ellul, this freedom is illusory because technique has formed an environment that works like an artificial enclosure where technique makes new requirements, against which we are helpless. Thus, the “freedom” is illusory while the necessities are real.

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The artificial enclosure, created for us by technique, is a realm of necessity because of its inescapable nature and totality of scope. In fact, technique takes so much of our environment that it constitutes the very milieu in which we live, which Ellul called “technical milieu.” Goddard explains this concept in detail in his book.42 Ellul argues that the original milieu for human beings was nature. Then, it was society. Now, the technical milieu is increasingly our milieu. Thus, the modern crisis is not social or political. Instead, it is a crisis caused by transition to a different milieu.

The crisis that we are approaching today is of yet another order. For it entails the transition, not from one form of society and power to another, but to a new environment. For approximately the last five thousand years we have lived in the environment...of society, in which politics plays the major role. ...But everything is now changing. The present crisis...has nothing in common (n'a rien de commun) with previous historical crises...43

II. POLITICAL TECHNIQUE (SOCIOLoGY)

Ellul distinguishes three main spheres of technique’s action: politics, economy and the so-called “human techniques,” that is, those that are responsible for the adaptation of a person and the rest of the living world to technical reality.44 To each of them, he dedicates a full chapter of The Technological Society. In this subchapter, I will focus on Ellul’s view of political technique as it helps understand Ellul's distrust of conventional politics and his insisting on direct action instead. Indeed, according to Ellul, participation in politics is senseless and unethical as it serves the self-augmentation of technique at the expense of human autonomy and freedom. In the framework of this chapter, this analysis identifies how Ellul fits the paradigm of a theorist of

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42 Goddard, Living, 146-47.
43 Translated by and quoted in Goddard, Living, 146-47.
44 Ibid., 148-49, 228, 319.
direct political action, prompted by the anarchist influences on his social theory, established in Chapter 1.

The main underlying concern for Ellul is that state and politics set ethical standards, thereby displacing the ethical judgment of a person. As the power of the state grew vast and complex to the point of managing every aspect of our day-to-day activities, it turned into a form of deity, which we worship and on which we rely for guidance and well-being. This aspect is most troubling to Ellul as it seals our destiny of living under totalitarianism of the modern state. Thus, the tug-of-war for control between values and power can be forever lost by the values in view of the enormity of the power of the modern technicized state.

1. Definition of State, Its Historical Origin, and Totalitarian Nature of Modern State

Ellul’s concept of state is an amalgam of the anarchist and the Weberian vision. State is defined as a certain form of political power that reached its most complete form in the modern times as a result of (1) progressive enhancement of “social and political organization based on reasoned, elaborated rules”; (2) encroaching on and taking over what used to be the private sphere; and (3) departure from the “a-technical” and “a-capitalistic” society ruled by laws of “customs” as it was the case in Europe between the tenth and the fourteenth century.

According to Ellul, the technique of the modern state first originated in Ancient Rome. The state, as we know it, was the main heritage of Rome for Europe. It was Rome that first developed and applied a uniform organizational system to a vast area under its control. Ellul

46 Goddard, Living, 262ff, 270; Ellul, L’Illusion Politique, 85; Ellul, The Political Illusion, 86.
47 Ellul, La Technique, 31; Ellul, The Technological Society, 34; Goddard, Living, 263. About attribution of Ellul’s view of state to Weber, see Goddard, Living, 266.
contrasts the Roman “technical” approach to reality to the one of the Greek city-states that he
cconsiders to have been the epitome of the localized, organic, and non-technical approach to
government, focused more on custom rather than rule.\textsuperscript{48}

As the Roman Empire collapsed, the Roman technique of governance gradually eroded
and was largely abandoned approximately by the tenth century as Europe reached climax of
Christian civilization. Ellul thought of it as a civilization that was “an anarchy in the
etymological sense of the word” as it was “completely nontechnical” in government, agriculture
and industry.\textsuperscript{49}

After the fourteenth century, Europe went through a number of crises, each of which led
to a major revolutionary leap in the use of technique in government, ultimately leading to the
advent of the modern liberal nation-state in the nineteenth century.

Ellul emphasizes the dramatic qualitative difference between the modern state and its
previous forms. In fact, he believes that the difference is so great that it renders any comparison
between them completely unyielding and irrelevant. According to Ellul, any focus on different
forms of the modern state or the intricacies of their composition, such as branches of
government, checks and balances, the party system, or balance of power, simply obscures the
real issue: the technical nature of the modern state.

According to Ellul, all forms of the modern state—fascist, communist, or liberal—are
totalitarian in nature as technique made their functions so complex, ubiquitous, and intrusive that
they all effectively control every sphere of our lives, and we are fully dependent on government
for almost everything we do. To be fair, there are some differences in the levels of totalitarianism

\textsuperscript{48} Ellul, \textit{La Technique}, 25-29; Ellul, \textit{The Technological Society}, 27-32.
\textsuperscript{49} Ellul, \textit{La Technique}, 31; Ellul, \textit{The Technological Society}, 34.
among the three, like in a continuum, but we should not be misled by them: they are all totalitarian nevertheless.\textsuperscript{50} Ellul points out that it was, in fact, the liberal nation state that was the precursor of the fascist state in Europe. He writes:

To be sure, we are aware of all the differences that may exist between the Soviet state and the American state, the British state, or the French state. There are juridical and constitutional differences, differences of practice and intention. They exist, but are of little consequence compared with the similarities, and particularly with the general trend. There are more differences between the American state of 1910 and that of 1960 (despite the constitutional sameness) than between the latter and the Soviet state (despite the constitutional differences).\textsuperscript{51}

Thus, Ellul takes us from our customary level of analysis of government and its workings to a completely novel dimension, rendering traditional political science irrelevant. It follows from Ellul that the only dimension that matters is the technical nature of the modern state and its control by technical will.

2. State as Bureaucracy: Futility of Political Control, Rule of Law, Nation as Object and Resource of State, State as New God, Absence of Public Opposition to State

The reason why Ellul is trying to shift focus to the technical aspect of the state is because he believes that technique informs all its meaningful actions, which is the primary concern for him. Indeed, technique became such an important component of the modern state that there is hardly anything left in it other than technique.

Using the Weberian model of describing the state as nothing but a giant bureaucratic machine,\textsuperscript{52} Ellul underscores its mechanistic aspect where nothing matters but efficiency of bureaucratic output. However, the modern bureaucracy is not like the one in the olden days.

\textsuperscript{50} Greenman, Schuchardt, Toly, \textit{Understanding}, 82, 84, 89. 
\textsuperscript{51} Ellul, \textit{L'Illusion Politique}, 17; Ellul, \textit{The Political Illusion}, 10; see also Ellul, \textit{Entretiens}, 136-37; Ellul, \textit{Conversations}, 88 about “the American State” being “just as totalitarian” as “the communist State.”
\textsuperscript{52} Gill, \textit{The Word of God}, 128.
Now, it has acquired new characteristics that make it much more detached from the public and much more autonomous from external control. According to Goddard, Ellul formulates three “laws” that make it possible. The first law is the continuity and stability of bureaucracy that make it impervious to political changes. The second law is specialization and rationalization of bureaucracy ignoring variances between specific persons, values, and ideas for the sake of efficiency. The third law is that the process of decision-making is so anonymous and secret that hardly anyone can ever be responsible for anything.53

Ellul emphasizes that political control of the state is nothing but a fiction. First, the modern person does not have enough leisure to process the information necessary for such control.54 Second, the machinery of the modern state has become so complex and so professionalized that politicians can never grasp its workings. They are not technically trained, and bureaucracy knows it. They have to rely on bureaucracy for the preparation of all the decrees. Their signature is attached to them. However, they do not read them because they do not have specialized knowledge to understand them or time for reading them.55 Moreover, they are hardly interested in such understanding because they do not have time for it: political careerists, they are too busy with the politics of re-election and related propaganda. Hence, bureaucracy enjoys full autonomy from political supervision at least as long as it can generate enough propaganda talking points for the politicians.56

One of the greatest concerns for Ellul, whose main academic training was in law, is the use of the so-called rule of law by the modern state. Law is a function of justice. As such, it

53 Goddard, Living, 266.
54 Ellul, L’Illusion Politique, 134; Ellul, The Political Illusion, 137.
55 Ellul, L’Illusion Politique, 148-49; Ellul, The Political Illusion, 152.
56 Goddard, Living, 266.
always has a potential of resisting complete technicization. During the period of natural law, there was “a certain equilibrium between the pursuit of justice and the judicial technique.” As the state consumed the function of law, the equilibrium was lost, and the law became nothing but a juridical technique merged with the political technique in the overall framework of the state. The human element of the law manifested in its pursuit of justice was lost. Ellul considers the modern legal system completely disconnected from the actual imperatives of life. The law churned by the state is nothing but a web of rules, an instrument for the governance by technique.

Not only does the modern state care little for the well-being of its citizens, it has reduced them to objects, treating them as a mere resource of the state. The control of the state now includes the economy and therefore the provision of all goods and the distribution of all resources. The modern economy is an inter-connected economic system. Therefore, it is critical that the nation is integrated with it as an economic resource, carefully tariffed and closely regulated.

As the state provides all goods, the citizens become dependent on it. No matter what the problem, they turn to the state for resolution. The state appears so omnipotent to them that they treat it effectively as their new god. Indeed, the state acquires an ethical dimension: The ethics code of a good citizen requires him to do things that are good for the state and prohibits those that are harmful to it.

In view of the danger the modern state presents to the public, it is paradoxical that there is so little or no opposition to it. Ellul gives an elaborate explanation for it, including the absence of

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sudden and therefore noticeable transformations; the comfort of hiding behind familiar perceptions about politics; the fear of realizing that the technical reality revealed in the modern state has a wide scope that goes beyond the state and encompasses virtually the entire life; and finally, and most importantly, the association of the modern state with the promise of such public goods as order and comfort, with which it is hard to part and which play a critical role in the deification of the state as a sacred entity.

3. Ubiquitous Politics: Effect of State Growth on Politicization of Everything, Politics as Sacred Duty, Belief in Politics as Panacea for All Problems

As the state grows in power, and the society becomes dependent on it for its very survival, all aspects of life become the prerogative of this totalitarian state. Thus, everything enters the realm of the political and becomes politicized.

The essential element that must be taken into consideration if we want to understand the total phenomenon of politization is a fact that is, if not the cause, at least the moving force of this phenomenon. The fact is the growth of the state itself. Governmental action is applied to a constantly growing number of realms. The means through which the state can act are constantly growing. Its personnel and its functions are constantly growing. Its responsibilities are growing.  

As a result, political participation is now deemed necessary, it is a duty and a right of every citizen. Moreover, it is considered the highest civic virtue. Faith and morals become politicized too. They and the whole value system become subordinated to political interests. In essence, the politics replaces them and becomes the main identification for an individual in society. It is now the person’s political position that informs how other people identify themselves in relation to that person and whether they want to associate with her.

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60 Ellul, L’Illusion Politique, 16; Ellul, The Political Illusion, 9.
As the state becomes totalitarian and runs all facets of human life, and everything becomes politicized, politics is viewed as the sole and the most appropriate instrument of change, a panacea for resolving all problems. It includes all social action in its political purview. Any social activity initiated outside the system is immediately incorporated or rejected and thereby doomed by the political establishment. Politics not only penetrates everything, it also displaces all other action.

4. Politics as Technique: Autonomy, Submission to Necessary or Ephemeral, Illusory Discourse, Propaganda as Political Technique

Ellul identifies three principal characteristics of modern politics that, in his opinion, is disconnected from the reality of life, leading us to a theater of shadows, a realm of the illusory. The three characteristics outlined by him in the book entitled *Political Illusion* include (1) the autonomy of politics; (2) the submission of politics to the necessary or the ephemeral (as opposed to what is important and lasting); and (3) the dominance of propaganda-made “political facts” in the public discourse.\(^{61}\)

AUTONOMY. Technique has fulfilled the dream of Niccolò Machiavelli to make politics free from considerations of faith, values, and morality and, instead, to make it driven solely by efficiency and effectiveness. There is much reference to values in modern politics, but it is nothing more than a manipulative legitimization of policy, an ideological ploy devoid of any real meaning.

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\(^{61}\) I borrowed this choice of characteristics, outlined as chapters by Ellul in Ellul, *L'Illusion Politique*; Ellul, *The Political Illusion*, from Goddard, who gives a detailed review and analysis of these characteristics in Goddard, *Living*, 270-73.
According to Ellul, “This autonomy of political affairs is essentially the result—as Max Weber said—of the fact that the modern state’s principal law is force.”

The outstanding fact about the state is that force has become its monopoly. “The modern state is a power group of institutional character seeking to monopolize force within the limits of a territory. . . .” The state prevents other groups from using force: it is no longer acceptable that a party, union, or clan should act by force; it is even less acceptable in the case of an individual—he would simply be a criminal. For a long time the state hesitated with regard to groups. But in our day we see that precisely because groups still try to utilize force, the reaction of the state becomes harder and more relentless. The police have become a decisive and necessarily uncontrolled elements.

The modern state translates its monopoly on physical force into a monopoly on psychological force, thereby extending its autonomy from the physical aspect to the moral aspect:

. . . finally, this force, which for a long time was purely physical, has taken on a new dimension in our day—it has become psychological force or violence. When the state utilizes propaganda—“violates” the masses and insidiously determines the citizen’s behavior—it exercises repressive coercion but on a larger scale. Force is in this way no longer used only by the police; it invades the individual’s soul in order to obtain his enthusiastic allegiance, his faithful behavior, his devotion to a cause. But this does not change the basic effect of the force used: the state still acting autonomously; and this occurs because propaganda escapes all criticism and all moral control.

Thus, values have become a decorative element that allows the state, through the use of political technology, to accommodate and manipulate human psychology for the actual goals, such as election results, that have nothing to do with those values.

Influenced by anarchist views, Ellul is a strong believer in the fundamental incompatibility of power and values, perhaps even a dichotomous inverse relation between them.

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62 Ellul, L’Illusion Politique, 71; Ellul, The Political Illusion, 71.
63 Ellul, L’Illusion Politique, 72; Ellul, The Political Illusion, 72. In quotation marks, Ellul cites Arthur Sylvester, assistant secretary of defense in charge of public affairs at the Pentagon, speaking in October 1962, who, according to Ellul, espoused Lenin's view on this issue by saying that 'Information is an instrument of power' and that 'it is a constant in history that the government has the right to lie in order to save itself.' Ellul uses this as an illustration to support his critique of the monopoly of the modern state on information.
64 Ellul, L’Illusion Politique, 77; Ellul, The Political Illusion, 77.
In light of that, it is intuitive to him that the growing power of the modern state, by logic of its very existence, reduces the ability of values to have a say in its political decisions.

NECESSARY AND EPHEMERAL. Political decisions that can have a real and lasting impact on people’s lives are being replaced by those that are either necessary or ephemeral.65

The decisions are necessary because they are made in the absence of real alternatives and thus reflect no freedom of action on part of a politician. Again, such approach is a direct result of efficiency being the sole value and consideration that technique finds important. Thus, all goals in modern politics are ultimately subordinated to the singular goal of economic growth and prosperity, rendering all other objectives either derivative or irrelevant.

A necessary decision can be lasting because it is important to technique, the only judge of what is consequential in politics. However, if it is not so “necessary” (and thus reflecting freedom of action on part of a "technical" politician), it is bound to be "ephemeral” and have no lasting effect whatsoever. Such decisions are doomed by technique from the very beginning, and they only serve as a safety valve of sorts to give the political system the appearance of freedom. Hence, no lasting or fundamental changes are possible in modern politics, other than those that advance the interests of technical will.

IMAGINARY WORLD OF POLITICS. Political environment in today’s politics is largely defined by imaginary political facts. The facts giving rise to political action are not local like they were in the past. They are no longer facts that directly affect lives of the citizens. Instead, they are facts that propaganda and the resulting public opinion select and designate for political action.

Information itself has not sufficient duration or intensity to create a public opinion even after having interested the people. Precisely because there is such a great diversity of information, a single item does not suffice to polarize attention. To accomplish that it would be necessary for the great majority of individuals to pay attention at the same moment to the same fact but that is inconceivable. In any case, the pure fact has no power at all. It must be elaborated with symbols before it can emerge and be recognized as public opinion.

Information cannot therefore make a fact arise in political life or give it the character of a political fact. Only propaganda can. Only propaganda can make a fact arouse public opinion; only propaganda can force the crowd’s wandering attention to stop and become fixed on some event; only propaganda can tell us of the foreseeable consequences of some measure. Propaganda can make public opinion coalesce and orient it toward a certain event which then becomes a political fact or a political problem at that very moment. Only propaganda can transform individual experience into public opinion. One could use all great political events to demonstrate the general validity of this process.  

These facts are usually global, not local, and they are no longer directly related to people’s lives. They are focused on the state, not the local community. Put simply, they are the facts of an imaginary political world of no consequence for the individual person. This world is built by powerful interest groups manipulating propaganda to shape public opinion around those stereotypes that help those groups to channel political action in the direction of their choosing.

Any considerations of ethics, democracy, or well-being play a superficial propagandistic role at best. The proposed political alternatives are not real alternatives. They are but a cover for advancement of the interests of technique, and their sole purpose is to deflect the attention of the public and create a propagandistic illusion.

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Ellul’s theology appears to fit the paradigm of “radical orthodoxy.” Radical orthodoxy is the return of Christian orthodoxy, but with a historical and linguistic difference that makes possible theological work in politics, economics, and ethics. D. Steven Long wrote of it:

Radical orthodoxy cannot be understood without some prior knowledge of the debates within and between modern and postmodern philosophy. Radical orthodoxy is a theology that enters into that fray by remembering orthodox Christian claims and showing how they bear on those debates. . . .

Radical orthodoxy cannot develop theology solely by professing basic Christian dogma; it develops theological doctrine always at the same time that it discusses politics, economics, and ethics. It is radical not only in re-membering the roots (radix), but also in re-membering intrinsic and necessary connection between theology and politics, and this calls into question modern politics, culture, art, science, and philosophy.

Assuming Ellul’s theology fits the paradigm of radical orthodoxy, the purpose of his theology must be correlated with the purpose of his sociology, that is, to educate people about the modern crisis and steer them towards a revolutionary social change.

There is much discussion in the secondary literature about what constitutes the key to unpacking Ellul’s theology. Some believe that the cornerstone is his juxtaposition of two cities: the city of God and the worldly Babylon possessed by technique. Others argue that the “hermeneutical key” to Ellul’s theological method is “dialectic of freedom and necessity” with its tension between freedom and necessity. And yet others think that the basis of his theology

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67 Technically, the movement was born in 1999 with the publication of a book was published, creating the term and the movement, eds. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, Graham Ward, eds., Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology (London: Routledge, 1999). However, Ellul seems to fit the same paradigm of thought.


69 Ibid., 130-31.

70 Clendenin, Theological Method, 57ff, 89ff. Darrel Fasching also interpreted Ellul's theology (as well as as his sociology) as built around the concepts of freedom and necessity. See, Fasching, Thought, 15ff, 65ff.
is in the idea of rupture of the communion with God, the fallout of which is life in a cursed world of sin and violence, culminating in the modern realm of technique.\textsuperscript{71}

All of that controversy appears to be based on the assumption that it was the Christian dogmatics that was the primary mover of Ellul’s theological thought. However, if we look closely at the origin of Ellul’s interest in Christianity, we see that it occurred when he was intensely interested in explaining the political and social reality unfolding around him. He found God at about the same time as he found Marx and was an avid reader of Proudhon. As it was discussed in the first chapter, that was a time of great social upheaval all over Europe, including a political polarization in France, a rise of fascism in Italy, Germany, and Spain, and a consolidation of power by Stalin in the USSR.

Ellul did not hide that fact that he turned to both sociology and theology for an explanation of this socio-political reality. He became interested in sociology in order to turn theology into an instrument of social change, and his participation in the personalist movement, a religious organization with a goal of social change, supports that claim.

Thus, Ellul’s focus on social revolution appears to be the main driving force of his exploits in both sociology and theology. This is also congruous with Long’s characterization of radical orthodoxy as using Christian claims primarily for a discourse on politics, economics, or ethics. All of this suggests that Ellul’s Christian dogmatics, albeit complex and well developed, played a role that was subordinated to his interest in social revolution and therefore can hardly be the center of gravity of his theology. Therefore, I propose that the true centerpiece around which his theology is built is his idea of a Christian as an agent of social transformation. His dogmatics

\textsuperscript{71} For an excellent and much more complete account of various approaches to Ellul's theology, see, Goddard, Living, 59-62.
is simply a belief system for a Christian, like himself, enabling him to be an effective soldier fighting for social change. It appears to me that only with this assumption in mind can we fully understand Ellul’s theological teaching as a fully integrated theory.

In this subchapter, I will try to present Ellul’s theology as derived from the characteristics of a Christian transformative figure that transcends the fatalities of our world fallen under the spell of technique. As I do this, I hope to achieve two objectives: understanding what really ties Ellul’s theology together and proving, in the overall analysis of this chapter, that his theoretical legacy is one of a theorist of direct political action.

So far, this chapter has considered (1) why Ellul believed that our world is in a crisis that requires immediate remedial action, and (2) why Ellul believed that this remedial action cannot be obtained through conventional politics. This subchapter will complete that analysis by considering what actor and what action Ellul expects to bring about the changes.

1. “Radical Subjectivity,” Individual in Direct Contact with God

The first question Ellul tries to answer by his theology is “Who is the agent of change?” His revolutionary is, first and foremost, a true Christian, by his faith, not just by his “religion,” as his faith gives him a vantage point of judgment liberated from influences of technique.

This Christian is an individual, liberated spiritually and intellectually by his Christianity. He is a lone fighter, impervious to external influences imposed by technique by way of propaganda or other manipulation of public opinion. His judgment is not fashioned by any group or affiliation. Indeed, should it have been so influenced, he would have invariably fallen under the influence of technique as technique has already subjected to its goals the entirety of his social
environment. Thus, although he lives "in" the world, he is not "of" it, because he forms his opinion about it based on his subjective experience of God. Ellul writes:

The Bible tells us that the Christian is in the world and that there he must remain. The Christian has not been created in order to separate himself from, or to live aloof from the world. . . Similarly, Christians are not meant to live together in closed groups, refusing to mix with other people. The Christian community must never be a close body. Thus if the Christian is necessarily in the world, he is not of it. This means that his thought, his life, and his heart are not controlled by the world, and do not depend upon the world, for they belong to another Master. Thus, since he belongs to another Master, the Christian has been sent into the world by this Master, and his communion with his Master remains unbroken, in spite of the ‘world’ in which he has to live.  

It is critical for him not to be contaminated by the teachings of organized religion, whose scholasticism and tendency to compromise with authorities distort the Word of God. Because of this, religion can be just the opposite of faith.

The immediate reality. . . is that the revelation of Jesus ought not to give rise to a religion. All religion leads to war, but the Word of God is not a religion, and it is the most serious of all betrayals to have made of it a religion.  

Ellul needed his Kierkegaardian subjectivism and the opposition to organized religion, as professed by Kierkegaard and Barth, to create conditions for the formation of his “true” Christian. He could not exist without them. Ellul insisted that “only by going back to the root,” that is, to “the individual human being,” can the present “radical movement” get us out of crisis. The Christians should “start from zero” with a clear mind from the point of the Revelation of Christ.

Ellul considers himself a “realist,” which means “the fundamental attitude of the Christian toward the world” with “the foundation in ethics.” He also believes that the reality can only be “grasped and experienced directly.”  

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ought to engage in “contemplation”\(^75\) and embrace a contemplative way of life, which is a necessary condition of assuming individual freedom.\(^76\) Ellul writes:

Awareness as an individual concern must be associated with another attitude: contemplation. It would represent a vital breach in the technological society, a truly revolutionary attitude, if contemplation could replace frantic activity. Contemplation fills the void of our society of lonely men.\(^77\)

He goes on, citing Octavio Paz:

... contemplation is the art of discovering things that science and technology cannot reveal. Contemplation restores to man the spiritual breadth of which technology divests him, to object their significance, and to work its functional presence. Contemplation is the key to individual survival today; an attitude of profound contemplation allows actions to redeem their significance and to be guided by something other than systems and objects.\(^78\)

Ellul concludes:

That is the way man can recover himself today. If you would be genuinely revolutionary in our society... be contemplative: that is the source of individual strength to break the system.\(^79\)

Contemplation is a necessary condition for recovery of individual freedom in a world of necessity. However, it is not a sufficient condition. Indeed, such freedom might be difficult to bear because of the dependencies and the illusions created by technique. This is why one also needs hope, a true hope, different from the false hope artificially instilled by politics and technique of sacralization of the technological society.\(^80\) This hope can only be attained from the communion with God, restored by Christ.

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\(^76\) Fasching, *Thought*, 61.


2. Nonconformism

The next question Ellul answers with his theology is “What kind of basic knowledge does the agent of change/revolutionary need?”

As Long observed, radical orthodox thinkers tend to have sympathy with forms of orthodox theology represented, *inter alia*, by Barth. He also wrote that “[w]hile radical orthodoxy is more interested in mediating other discourses via theology, it claims to be less accommodating to the modern spirit than even those theologies that eschewed mediation altogether,” such as that of Barth’s.  

Ellul theologically “mediates” his sociological discourse by bringing into the fray the uncompromising orthodox position of Barth on the Word of God, interpretation of the Bible and Christocentricity. Ellul believes that the Word of God is inerrant and pure. It is above cultural and historical differences and it is not susceptible to them. When the Old Testament speaks of a specific historic era, its truths are not specific to it, they are absolute. To Ellul, this does not mean that one should look in the Bible for historic or factual accuracy. It means that one should interpret it strictly in accordance with the teaching of Christ that transcends time and all cultural variations.

Ellul insists on complete “Otherness” of God from our world. Theologically, it follows from the rupture of God’s communion with people through their original sin. Ellul abhors any effort to reconcile God or his teaching with the “world.” The human reality of the world and the divine reality of the Word of God are two completely separate, irreconcilable kingdoms, and any

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82 The term borrowed from Long, “Radical Orthodoxy,” 131.
synthesis of them, such as the one attempted by such theologians as Tillich and Bultmann, is distortion of Christ’s teaching.

To support his claim of God’s Wholly Otherness, Ellul focuses on the stories of the Ruptured Communion with God, Redemption by Christ, and biblical eschatology to create a theological vignette for his interpretation of social history, anchoring his sociological criticism of modernity in the ethical message of the Scripture. These stories create a foundation for Ellul’s concept of Hope. We must have Hope to survive in the world of the Ruptured Communion with God, full of violence and lure of addictive sin. That Hope is given to us by Christ through His Redemption. He made it possible for us to live in this world while being not of it, to be immune to its imperatives, and to be free from its necessities.

Ellul’s loathing of compromise on Christian dogmas translates into the social nonconformism that he expects of his Christian revolutionary. Being firmly anchored in his unadulterated knowledge of the teaching of Christ, Ellul's revolutionary is well positioned to have a clear picture of the true reality of our world as consumed and destroyed by technique. No propaganda or public opinion can affect his judgment, and therefore he will not compromise. He understands that because of the Otherness of God, the tensions between the Word of God and the world will never be resolved. They will constantly generate a diversity of new ideas. He will welcome and seek these tensions. Moreover, he will generate them with “asking the right questions.” Technique’s magic of choking diversity with its static focus on efficiency will be helpless against him.

Sociologically, such nonconformism fits perfectly in the paradigm of an activist of direct action, rejecting any participation in conventional politics or any compromise with the
authorities. Ellul’s theology turns his revolutionary into an ethically focused, anti-
“progmatic,” selfless, and unbudging activist. Theologically, such nonconformism is fully
congruous with the doctrine of Otherness of God. Indeed, “God cannot be mocked.” One must
not use Him for self-justification.

3. Practical Christianity

Ellul’s theology is, at its core, a “practical theology,” a theology that not only concerns
itself with actual everyday life and societal phenomena but tries to normatively asses them and
pragmatically respond to them. Ellul did not see Christianity simply as a quest of ethical self-
improvement and Communion with God. To be a Christian means to live one’s faith actively.
Theological doctrine did not make any sense to Ellul without Christian praxis. Such praxis
included not only charitable action but also social action directed at transformation of society.

Ellul opposes the traditional interpretation of humility by the Church as submission to
authorities and exaltation of government as a gift from God. His view is just the opposite: his
ideal is an activist “aiming at a true overturning of authorities of all kinds as people at the bottom
speak and organize themselves.”83 It is no surprise that he believed that Christians make good
anarchists and vice versa. His agent of change will never delegate mending social ills to someone
else, least of all the authorities. Ellul categorically disagrees with the traditional Christian
interpretation of government as a gift from God. Traditionally, this interpretation was supported
by the passage in the Scriptures, where Paul asks to pray for kings. Ellul objects to such
interpretation:

83 Ellul, Anarchie, 17; Ellul, Anarchy, 13-14.
We have quoted the passage in which Paul asks that prayer be made for kings—the plural shows that we cannot expound this as we did in the case of 1 Peter—namely, for those in authority, for the government. This verse confirms what I said above. Paul is saying in effect that we are to pray for all people. Included are kings and those in high office. We are to pray even for kings and magistrates. We detest them, but we are still to pray for them. No one must be excluded from our intercession, from our appeal to God’s love for them. It might seem completely crazy, but I knew some German Christians who were in the resistance movement against Hitler, even to the point of plotting his overthrow, and who still engaged in prayer for him.84

Ellul needs practical Christianity because without it, there is nothing left, with which to change the world. Indeed, if everyone (except for the Christians and, we can assume, very few others) is poisoned by technique, it is up to the Christians to change the world. They become the vanguard force of change. Therefore, Christianity must include aggressive social activism. Such approach fits the normative paradigm and the style of action of an anarchist socialist revolutionary, impatient to correct the incongruences between reality and his outlook locked on uncompromising ethical principles.

4. Nonviolence

The fourth question Ellul answers with this theology is in what type of action the revolutionary engages to effectuate social change. One critical aspect of that action is nonviolence. Ellul adheres to strict principle of Christian pacifism rooted in his firmly Christocentric approach to faith.

Ellul’s view of violence is a rather unconventional one: It explains violence in realist terms while insisting on an uncompromising nominalist ethical approach to it. Indeed, Ellul interprets violence as a given in our world fallen from God’s grace after breaking its Communion with him in the original sin. Violence is a natural thing; we are born with propensity for it, and

84 Ellul, Anarchie, 93-94; Ellul, Anarchy, 82.
we will never be rid of it.\textsuperscript{85} However, a true follower of Christ must follow His teaching and example and therefore renounce violence and abstain from it at all cost.

Any exercise of power involves violence. Wherever there is power, there is violence. Power is inherently violent. But power is also corrupt. Hence, there is no distinction between “justified” and “non-justified” violence. Violence is never “justified.” We simply must avoid it, and when we cannot, we must confess it as a sin and repent. Thus, Ellul has an uncompromising view of violence, both ethically, as a Christian, and sociologically, based on his anarchist rejection of power and authority.

Ellul himself never engaged in violent action during his participation in political life. However, as a member of French Resistance, he considered using violence if attacked. Theoretically, he seemed to avoid addressing this issue until much later in his life, possibly because it was difficult to find a persuasive argument in favor of never justifying violence while accepting it as a necessary part of our existence, at least sociologically. Maybe this is why his book on violence (\textit{Violence}) is a theological piece.\textsuperscript{86}

However, in \textit{Anarchy and Christianity}, he bravely engages in a purely sociological discussion of violence, justifying nonviolence as a much more effective form of social action, giving specific historic examples to prove his point, contrasting, \textit{inter alia}, the movement led by King to the similarly situated movements of the Black Muslims and the Black Panthers. Ellul praises King for his peaceful methods and favorably compares him to the Black Muslims and the Black Panthers who engaged in violent actions. He attributes King's success to his nonviolence.

\textsuperscript{85} Goddard, \textit{Living}, 184-85.
and blames the violence of the other groups for "gaining nothing" from their struggle and "even losing some of the gains made by King." 87

Like all other aspects of his theology, Ellul develops his view of violence around the persona of a Christian fighting for social change. This perspective can help explain why he virtually substituted a theological theory of violence for a sociological one. It follows from his approach, that, as Goddard put it, “Any political stance must be combined with a moral and spiritual transformation of the person.” 88 Indeed, this is how Ellul himself distinguished his view on violence:

Here is the centre of my disagreement. The authors of this project are very violent against the moral and religious aspects of non-violence. They wish to separate non-violence from this foundation in order to offer a political analysis and an effective, realistic political project and they view all other forms of argument as idealistic and false. Unfortunately, the authors themselves are idealist and falsely realistic as everything which they propose presupposes a change of everyone’s personality, a moral and spiritual conversion. . . . And, I am sorry to say, such a mutation of personality will not come from a political programme, nor from new institutions, nor from a movement, but precisely from an individual work (not an individualist one!) which is moral and spiritual. To tear up that root, which is a preliminary foundation, is to reduce all the rest to nothing. We need to recall that as soon as the Christian foundations, motivations, and speeches of Martin Luther King were disowned, the movement became violent. . . . 89

In Violence, Ellul formulates five laws of violence, applicable to all instances, historically and geographically. The first law is continuity: “Once a man has begun to use violence he will never stop using it,” for reasons of seeming simplicity and “practicality” of this method. You cannot start a dialog or adopt a new attitude after using violence. To prove his point, Ellul gives examples of the revolution in France in 1789, whose chain of violence continued until 1914, and

87 Ellul, Anarchie, 16; Ellul, Anarchy, 12.
88 Goddard, Living, 180.
the revolution in Cuba in 1959 that betrayed the expectations of "the Marxist idealists" by instituting a government that "rules only by violence."  

The second law is *reciprocity*: "All who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). Here, Ellul denies that there is any distinction between “good” and “bad” use of violence as “violence creates violence, begets and procreates violence.” He emphasizes that a victory won with it does not bring peace or freedom, as victors always proceed to violent in-fighting after they win or bring violence of the government onto themselves, like it was after the black riots in Newark in 1967. He goes as far as to say that he saw no difference between the Nazi concentration camps and the camps, to which French collaborators were sent after the war, even positing that at least the “Hitlerites were more honest than our modern socialists, anticolonialists, etc.”

The third law of violence is *sameness*: “It is impossible to distinguish between justified and unjustified violence” and “All kinds of violence are the same.” Condoning some violence is condoning all of it. Consenting to using it is consenting to its use by the adversary. Here, Ellul cites, as violence, not only law enforcement or military violence but violence done in economic international relations by the West to the Third World, echoing the concerns of the modern anti-globalization movement. His scope of “violence” also includes “psychological violence,” such as propaganda, “biased reports,” “brainwashing,” and “intellectual terrorism.” In fact, he believes

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90 Ellul, *Contre les Violents*, 123; Ellul, *Violence*, 94.  
that such violence is “the worst of violences” as it “lays hold of the whole man, and, without his knowing it, gelds him.”

The fourth law is that “violence begets violence—nothing else.” Ellul calls violence “par excellence the method of falsehood.” It renders all goals unattainable because “Whenever a violent movement has seized power, it has made violence the law of power.” No justice or liberty ensues.

Finally, the fifth law is that “the man who uses violence always tries to justify both it and himself.” Here Ellul emphasizes that the very use of violence creates hatred. “The plain fact,” he says, “is that violence is never ‘pure’.” In essence, the use of violence is a way of certain moral downfall.

In summary, Ellul’s view of violence is moored to a sociological or “pragmatic” argument. However, its foundational justification is theological. It follows from Ellul’s emphasis on Christocentricity as one of the pillars of his theology. It fits the paradigm of direct action of the nonviolent strand that was shared by such great leaders and theorists as Gandhi and King and that was more recently manifested on Taksim and Tahrir Squares. Ellul needs his Christian pacifism to support his anarchist sociology of nonviolence as the only effective way to fight the coercive power of the state in all its manifestations, including brainwashing and propaganda, which Ellul considers the worst forms of violence as they change the spiritual and human essence of the person and corrupt him from within.

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95 Ellul, Contre les Violents, 127; Ellul, Violence, 97-98.
96 Ellul, Contre les Violents, 131; Ellul, Violence, 100. Ellul used italics for “nothing else.” He did not use italics for “par excellence.” The italics have been added for designation of foreign words.
97 Ellul, Contre les Violents, 131; Ellul, Violence, 101.
98 Ellul, Contre les Violents, 134-35; Ellul, Violence, 103-04.
99 For a polemic of the importance of Christocentricity for Ellul's concept of violence, see Goddard, Living, 186.
IV. CONCLUSION

Early in his life, Ellul developed the ambition to become “a new Marx.” He was concerned with the violence and the injustice he saw in Europe during the turbulent 1930s, and he came to realize that the new technical forces of that time brought to life a new era, rendering old recipes of social change obsolete. These forces gained the level of autonomy and control so great that they were destroying the European civilization itself. They created a new technical milieu where people’s lives were no longer defined by social or political forces but rather by the relationship of the person and technique. Thus, it was an existential crisis, and a new comprehensive theory, focusing specifically on that relationship, was urgently needed to address it.

The purpose of such theory would be to educate people about the nature of the crisis and to explain to them that they cannot effectuate the needed social changes by way of traditional politics. A new type of action was needed, a *direct* social action by enlightened individuals, understanding the nature of the crisis and critically assessing reality by “asking the right questions.” This action must take place outside the realm of conventional politics. Moreover, one of its main tasks would be to unveil the falsehood and the corruption of politics. In a sense, it would be *anti*-political.

Thus, the first order of business for Ellul was to educate the public about the crisis and its gravity, the second,—to explain that political participation is not the way to resolve it, and the third,—to describe what would constitute the agent of change: an enlightened individual who would “ask the right questions” and lead people to freedom.
At the center of the crisis, Ellul saw “technique” that he described in a book that brought him international acclaim, entitled *The Technological Society*. Technique was not exactly technology. It was, rather, a technocratic way of thinking, an organizational approach, obsessed with efficiency and recognizing it as the only value worth pursuing. In that regard, it was conceptually similar to what Horkheimer called “instrumental reason” in contrast to teleological reason, concerned with ethical considerations and the classical notion of “wisdom.”

Modern technique grew out of aggregation of technological knowledge, scientific advances, and certain conditions favorable to industrial production. It also came from a change in people’s perceptions, defining happiness as “working less while consuming more,” an outlook first expressed philosophically by Voltaire and Denis Diderot. All of these things reached a critical mass in the “technical movement” around the middle of the 19th century, bringing about “technical intention,” a singular focus exclusively on efficiency for every solution. Since then, the traditional values, including those defining the European civilization, were being lost at an exponential speed, causing a global existential crisis. The perception of happiness from a fulfilling, truly social life, cultural diversity, closeness to nature, and respect for a human being was increasingly a thing of the past, replaced by consumerism, participation in meaningless political rituals, mass culture, and objectification of the person and nature. Most importantly, technique has created a “technical milieu,” an inescapable artificial environment, a realm of necessity, where people completely depend on technique and effectively lose their spiritual freedom. By discrediting and disposing of the old sacred, technique has become the new sacred, which people worship and adore and to which they go for guidance.
Ellul believes that everything is affected and controlled by technique nowadays, including political life. This is why he thinks it is critical to discredit conventional politics so that people are no longer misled by the idea that they can resolve their problems by using political avenues. He achieves this by describing the nature and the workings of “political technique.”

Ellul’s definition of state and politics is derived from his concept of power as a violent expression of our natural desire for control. Ellul believes that power equals violence. He also believes that state is a political form of power. Therefore, the state must be approached critically a priori. However, now the state has grown into an enormous bureaucratic machine, so large and so procedurally oriented that it has virtually merged with technique. The state has become a political manifestation of technique. This aspect of the modern state has become its defining characteristic. All other aspects, such as constitutions, checks and balances, and democratic elections, are almost irrelevant. In fact, so much so that there is a greater difference between the United States of the beginning of the twentieth century and today’s United States than between the latter and the USSR in Ellul’s day.

The only thing that informs the actions of the modern state is the efficiency of bureaucratic output. The modern bureaucracy is detached from people, as it is too rigid and obsessed with procedure, to pay any attention to the variances among specific individuals. Moreover, its decision-making has become anonymous with resulting loss of individual responsibility. The political control of the state is a fiction, because all that politicians do is worry about re-election, and the agencies are so specialized that a politician cannot understand their operations anyway.
However, what is most disturbing about the state to Ellul is that its functions have expanded so much, including the economy, that it is now responsible for every aspect of our daily life. Because of this, it has acquired the sacred status of a universal caretaker. Serving it and participating in politics is considered a sacred duty. Consequently, the modern state is totalitarian: it controls everything and everyone. These characteristics are shared by every one of them. Therefore, all modern states are totalitarian, and the differences among a fascist, a communist, and a liberal state are nothing but trivial.

As everything is within the purview of the modern state, everything becomes politicized. Participation in politics becomes the most appropriate vehicle of addressing social problems. And yet, politics is least equipped to do it because modern politics is a mere instrument of boosting legitimacy of the state through manipulation of public opinion and creation of an illusion of democratic control of the state. Politics today is purely Machiavellian: completely autonomous from moral considerations. Moreover, real issues that impact people’s lives are no longer addressed by the political process. The only serious issues that are actually considered are those that are important to technique. The rest are ephemeral and have no serious lasting effect. Finally, political environment is driven only by “political facts,” that is, the facts designated by the political machine as worthy of political action. These facts are no longer those that affect the lives of the people. Instead, they are the facts that help propaganda deflect the attention of the public from what is truly important. The modern world of politics is nothing but a sham of propaganda.

Thus, Ellul rejects the idea of addressing the modern crisis through conventional politics. He believes that change should be effectuated outside the world of politics by select individuals,
educated about the crisis by thinkers like him. But who are these people, and what will make them receptive to such education? Ellul’s response to these questions lies in his theology.

Ellul’s theology is not merely a doctrinal system of views but an instrument of social change. His formation as a Christian coincided with his formation as a theorist of social revolution. He was looking in sociology and theology for answers to similar questions. These two sides of his theoretical legacy complement each other and are closely inter-connected despite that Ellul tried to keep them doctrinally separate. Certain sociological issues, such as violence, are addressed by him almost entirely in terms of theological reasoning. His position on others, such as law, are heavily influenced by his theology.

Moreover, it appears that Ellul’s entire theological theory has been built to explain the same reality he tried to explain sociologically. Like in Homer’s Iliad, where we see every event in two dimensions, human and divine, Ellul’s description of reality is a two-dimensional exposé where one can lay his theological vignette over his sociological depiction and get a perfectly matched integrated picture. That makes his theology, in effect, just as purposefully an instrument of social revolution as his sociology. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that he developed his theology around his own persona of a revolutionary. In fact, he prided himself in actually living his theory in real life. Consequently, his theology is, first and foremost, a spiritual guide (which, for him, also means a real-life manual!) designed for a Christian as an agent of social change. It is no wonder that Ellul believed that anarchism and Christianity were made for each other.

Indeed, only a Christian who lives the Word of God in the fallen world controlled by technique can be free through Christ. This freedom means the ability to be immune from the
brainwashing spell of technique. Therefore, it means the ability to understand the important issues of our time and educate and lead others to the path of liberation.

The characteristics of a true Christian, developed by Ellul in his theology, are a necessary requirement for such a person. Ellul’s subjective understanding of God makes him immune to the adulteration of Christ’s teaching by academics or organized religion, corrupted by technique. His nonconformism, founded in his uncompromising belief in the Otherness of God, ensures that he will not indulge in self-justification, compromising with technique. His belief in living his faith through Christian praxis will make him actively engage in social action. Finally, his Christocentricity, with its staunch commitment to nonviolence, will put him on the right path to revolutionary action.
Chapter 3. DIALECTICAL METHOD OF ELLUL

I. INTRODUCTION: DIALECTIC AS ISSUE OF DISCOURSE ON MODERNITY

The main purpose of this methodological analysis in the framework of the dissertation will be to determine what aspects of Ellul’s method have a bearing on his social theory or lack thereof. What changes in his method could have helped him to come to a more developed “remedy” for the crisis he so well elucidated? Ellul dates the arrival of the modern technical mindset by the 18th century. One of the causes of the emergence of a “clear technical intention” in Europe of that time was the “utilitarian and pragmatic” philosophy of the Age of Enlightenment that “fixed the goal of science” to “narrowly confine life to the material.” According to Ellul, these philosophers based their views on the assumption that one cannot judge what one cannot see. This led them to conclude that “the foundation of the civilization is technique, not philosophy or religion.” This philosophy was especially reinforced by the theory of Hegel and later by that of Marx. Indeed, it was Marx who “rehabilitated technique in the eyes of the workers” by making them believe that their enslavement was “the fault of their masters and not of technique itself.” Alluding to Marx’s failure to predict history through his dialectical analysis, Ellul called it a “vanity” to believe that “we can impose our theories on history” and claimed that “[a]ny philosophy which asserts that human experience repeats itself is ineffectual.” In contrast to Hegel and Marx, who, as Ellul believed, reinforced technique with their theory, he exalted the “prophetic voice” of Kierkegaard that “warned against it” very early, when it had just begun to form. Ellul lamented that these warnings were not heard because they “were
too close to the truth.”\textsuperscript{1} Thus, Ellul identified his vision of the crisis of modernity in the framework of a discourse that has been central to political philosophy since the 18th century: the discourse between two great philosophical traditions, one represented by rationalism and the other--by its critics.\textsuperscript{2}

This discourse was exemplified and epitomized by the critique of Hegel by Kierkegaard. In his famous work \textit{Either/Or} (1843), Kierkegaard disagreed with Hegel’s interpretation of Christianity that was new and fashionable and gained a tremendous popularity. Kierkegaard was especially concerned with its implications for the life of a Christian. He critiqued three key themes of Hegel’s philosophy that are at the core of his method, to which we now refer as “Hegelian dialectics”: rationalism, philosophy of history, and Hegel’s concept of unity and reconciliation.\textsuperscript{3}

What makes Ellul’s theory particularly fascinating is that, in his critique of modernity, he tried to capture both approaches: Kierkegaard’s subjectivism and the dialectics of Hegel and Marx. Like Kierkegaard,\textsuperscript{4} Ellul admired Hegel for the analytical power of his dialectics, but, being a Christian, he also saw its limitations for addressing issues of ethical choice. On those issues, Ellul sided squarely with Kierkegaard, who, motivated by Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Shelling’s anti-Hegelian lectures, thought that certain aspects of subjective reality, such as ethical alternatives or other issues demanding a decisive choice, do not lend themselves to

\textsuperscript{1} Ellul, \textit{La Technique}, 42, 49-51; Ellul, \textit{The Technological Society}, 46, 52, 54-55.
\textsuperscript{2} According to Ellul, “technical movement” ultimately solidifies in a “clear technical intention,” which means a conscious and purposeful pursuit, at the level of society at large, of technical progress, as opposed to making specific technical improvements as was the case before the 18th century.
\textsuperscript{4} Kierkegaard once said about Hegel, “I feel what for me at times is an enigmatic respect for Hegel; I have learned much from him, and I know very well that I can still learn much more from him when I return to him again. . . His philosophical knowledge, his amazing learning, the insight of his genius, and everything else good that can be said of a philosopher I am willing to acknowledge as any disciple.” Kierkegaard, \textit{Journals and Papers} (1608), cited in Clare, \textit{Kierkegaard}, 46.
Hegelian *Aufhebung.* As such, they must be approached in terms of the traditional Aristotelian system of logic, known as “the principle of contradiction” or “the law of excluded middle” (hence, “either/or”) as opposed to a synthesizing “resolution” envisioned by Hegel.6

In this chapter, I will consider Ellul’s theoretical method through a prism of his view of dialectics. His apparent departure from dialecticism of Hegel and Marx seems to be key to understanding his theory. This departure is most visible in Ellul’s “dialectic of hope” as well as his eschatological philosophy of history, to which I will pay substantial attention in this chapter. The structure of this chapter will be defined by this attempt to engage Ellul’s problematic through friendly critique of his method in light of the overall objective of the dissertation. First, I will consider what we mean under dialectical method. Then I will unpack Ellul’s method and see how his approach to dialectics affected his theory. Finally, I will offer a critique of some pertinent aspects of his method.

II. DIALECTICAL METHOD

GENERAL CONCEPT OF DIALECTICS

I will first look at dialectics in general to better understand what we normally mean under the term “dialectical method.” It seems that there is no more elusive concept in philosophy than

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5 My preferred English equivalent for *Aufhebung* is “resolution,” and I will try to use it (or the original German term) in this study unless I cite other authors, in which case I will use their respective terms. The literature on Hegel uses “reconciliation,” “overcoming” and some other terms to translate *Aufhebung*. The challenge of translating the term is in its ambiguity, apparently intended by Hegel. Indeed, the translation should capture two mutually exclusive connotations of the German word: “change” and “preservation” at the same time. Hegel chose the word *Aufhebung* to describe the result of discharging tension between two opposites, not by elimination of one of them but by movement to a new level of their relationship. For a good discussion of the term in the context of Kierkegaard's critique of the concept it represents, see Jon Steward, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 187-78.

“dialectics.” Indeed, the on-line *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* does not have a separate entry for it, while it mentions it in 232 entries dedicated to other subjects. There are hardly any philosophical treatises on “dialectics” in general, and yet there is a multitude of them on specific dialectical methods of just about any thinker who ever used the term. Ellul himself lamented that he thought that for so many students of philosophy, especially those from America, dialectics was “strange.” And yet, so many in philosophy consider it a Holy Grail that mysteriously pierces the veil of otherwise invisible truth. They treat it as a mark of philosophical virtuosity and a virgin land of the unknown, while many others scorn it as trickery and a false proposition under disguise of science.

However, dialectics has not been an exclusive privilege of the philosophers. Indeed, the concept has long been a part of the thought process of an ordinary person across cultures. If we heed Ludwig Wittgenstein’s advice and stop for a moment to “think” as “philosophers” but “look” instead for the meaning of language representations of dialectics, we will easily find its elemental presence through the entire fabric of collectively developed folk “philosophy” evidenced by its reflection in proverbial sayings and common metaphors and analogies. Popular English phrases like “It’s an ill wind that blows any good,” “blessing in disguise,” “no great loss without some small gain,” “Every cloud has silver lining,” “on the flip side,” “One door closes, the other one opens,” “double-edged sword,” the notion that a “carrot” works best with a “stick,” the idea that “a good cop” delivers best in a team with a bad one, and the perception that “good news” always comes with a “catch” or “bad news” are just a few examples of popular dialectical thought. This presence of dialectical thinking recurs across very different cultures. For example, Russians commonly use phrases like “there wouldn’t be happiness but for the help of

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misfortune,” “the other side of the medal,” “When [the grief] is milled, flour will settle down,” and “There is no bad without some good.” There is a universally recognized notion that “good qualities” are extensions of “bad qualities.” And there is even a visual representation of how dialectics works in the Chinese symbol of “yin yang” (阴阳). All of this proves that “common sense” is, at the very least, not averse to dialectical thinking.

The fact that the concept of dialectics, if not the term, is so deeply rooted in popular perceptions is significant on many levels. First, contrary to Kierkegaard’s opinion, it suggests that dialectical logic is a part of “common sense” and is deeply rooted in the thought process of a common person dealing “subjectively,” and not “academically,” with the “concrete,” including choices one must make in real life. The choices may be dichotomous, but the reasoning behind them apparently is not. Second, if we assume that the collective mind of all people makes a best collective “philosopher” because it accumulates and processes the largest aggregate feedback from reality, then the reality indeed is organized dialectically as best we can tell. Third, the concept of dialectics was not born in the twisted mind of an eccentric philosophical genius of Hegel. It appears to have been out there for a very long time. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that it is as old as human reason.

Even machine thinking that, much to Ellul’s frustration, deals with tasks of ever-growing complexity cannot do without dialectics. We get significant signals legitimizing dialectical logic from the world of computer science and data aggregation. Indeed, a recent bottleneck in the development of computer logic was caused by its initial “dichotomous” binary system of signs based on “yes” or “no.” The crisis was finally resolved with the addition of a third option of “yes and no.”
However, the history of dialectics as a developed concept of philosophy seems to have started with Heraclitus of Ephesus. Heraclitus saw both natural and social history as being in a constant cyclical change. The physical world went through downward cycles of fire turning into water, and water into air, which in turn becomes fire again, thereby ending and starting a new cycle. Similarly, human history goes through cycles of “kindling” manifested by war and, “burning” manifested by peace. At the same time, Heraclitus believed that the world is like a river whose water is always changing. We cannot step into the same river twice.\(^8\)

If we combine the river analogy with Heraclitus’s view of history as a cyclical change, we get a picture of cycles that never take the world back to quite the same initial position. If so, Heraclitus expressed a dialectical vision of history similar to the one that many of us share today: as a constantly unfolding spiral motion of opposites in the medium of time, propelled by the energy generated by their repulsion of each other, trying to get out of their situational unity, in which they find themselves trapped, where the opposites radically reform themselves every time they enter a new cycle, thereby negating the very negation they previously had.

After Heraclitus, the development of the dialectical method was put on hold. In the meantime, the term “dialectic” was widely used, although its meaning, despite a modicum of apparent similarity to the dialectical principles of Heraclitus, was very different. What “dialectic” meant in Classical Greece was the art of argument, often formally logical but substantively superfluous if not absurd, based on linear (in contrast to dialectical) logic. It was the meaning exclusively ascribed to the term in the time of Plato and Aristotle and afterwards, throughout the Medieval Ages. When used in bad faith, “dialectic” meant sophistry, a trickery with words, designed to dupe a doofus into believing something that is not true.

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This classical understanding of the term is widely used and respected today, thanks to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Socrates, as described by Plato, used a technique, now well known as “Socratic method,” which consisted of asking questions designed to elicit truth about the higher good, the truth, to which the interlocutor would seemingly come himself, but not without the guiding hand of Socrates. Typically, Socrates, would discredit premises of the interlocutor by repeatedly bringing up a new exception to the interlocutor’s previous statement, ultimately cornering the interlocutor and leaving him no choice other than adopting the premise Socrates himself had in mind all along. The method is brilliant, not only because the interlocutor is led to believe that the conclusion he makes is his own, and not Socrates’s, but also for its exposure of intellectual complacency. Even though the method has elements of “dialectic” due to the fact that it includes oppositional statements of arguing interlocutors, no logic is used by interlocutors other than linear. Similarly, Aristotle and the medieval thinkers influenced by him, such as Boethius and William of Ockham, used a method of argument called “dialectic.” It was based on following certain steps in logical analysis of alternatives based on a certain stated premise. Again, the juxtaposition of alternatives may make one think of them as a thesis and an anti-thesis and therefore a “dialectic.” However, the logic used for such analysis was purely linear and not dialectical.

This confusion about the term is very unfortunate, because it renders the term “dialectics” meaningless. Indeed, the “dialectics” of Socrates and Aristotle is based on linear logic, whereas the dialectics of Heraclitus, Hegel, and Marx is based on the dialectical logic. The dialectical logic is defined as “dialectics” precisely to the exclusion of linear logic. Therefore, to call linear
logic “dialectics” means to leave the true dialectics without definition at all. In other words, there is no dialectics but Dialectics.

Thus, we have confusion about the term “dialectics” coming from history of the word. In view of this confusion, I must make certain what I mean by the term. When I speak of dialectics in this study, I will try to use the term (when I do not qualify it) only in association with the method of Heraclitus, Hegel, and Marx.

There is an important variation on dialectics that I mentioned in Chapter 1, that is, “dialectics” without resolution. This type of dialectics was used by some theologians, including Barth and Kierkegaard, who influenced Ellul. Resolution is a defining principle of dialectical logic. Technically speaking, leaving the resolution out is tantamount to leaving the “therefore” clause out of a logical formula or leaving an equation sign, with whatever follows it, out of a mathematical formula. I will focus more on the unresolvable dialectics later in this chapter. Here, I will simply define the true dialectics to the exclusion of the dialectics without resolution so I can compare them analytically. Therefore, I will use a nomenclature that will give them two different names to designate them, quite appropriately, as two different methods, so completely different that they in fact oppose each other (quite un-dialectically!) without any hope of resolution. Put simply, there is no such thing as a dialectic without synthesis. When there is no synthesis, there is no dialectic in any sense of logical science. Indeed, for all practical analytical purposes, such “dialectic” is nothing but a statement of paradox. As such, it defies all formal logic (linear and dialectical) and therefore remains unresolved in terms of either. From the standpoint of logical science, calling it a “dialectic” is a grave misnomer. What such designation means practically is only that the statement in question is paradoxical, nothing more.
Thus, I will have to be consistent in using three different terms to designate three completely different methods that do not overlap: (1) “dialectics,” that is, “true” dialectical logic; (2) “linear logic” (which is self-explanatory), including Aristotle’s “law of non-contradiction” (both “A” and “not A” cannot be the same thing at the same time), Socratic, Aristotelian, and Medieval “dialectics”; and (3) “statement of paradox” or “incomplete dialectic,” which essentially is a claim of incompatibility, a statement without resolution, including resolution that would be based on linear logic.

HEGEL

The next dialectical thinker who picked up, where Heraclitus left off, was Hegel. His input in the formulation of dialectical logic was so great that the dialectical logic itself is often called “Hegel’s method.”

Hegel’s conceptualization of logic is most famously presented in his *Science of Logic*. For Hegel, logic is the starting point for a philosopher. It is so because this is the only discipline involving “thought thinking about itself.” Other disciplines take thinking for granted, simply starting from what appears to be “self-evident.” In the words of John W. Burbidge, “Logic, for him, is not simply the abstract form of valid syllogisms, but rather the process of reasoning that both generated the forms and moves beyond them. It is reasoning about reasoning.”

Logical thinking has a great advantage of being “universal and binding,” something accepted by most "reflective people.” If we look at this aspect from a practical standpoint of

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10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., 94.
social organization, logical thought like no other, lends itself to collective communicative action. Indeed, individuals often have a disposition to disagree due, for example, to their conflicting interests. And yet, the rules of logic are capable of forming a notion that is universally accepted as "just.” Put simply, logical thinking is the most legitimate and credible way of thought.

In his definition of logic, Hegel creates a more multi-dimensional system than, for example, Plato does. Both thinkers had a method designed to address paradoxes and anomalies by developing a theory that would try to accommodate all of their aspects. However, as Burbidge argues,

In ordinary reflection. . . these operations function in isolation. Once understanding fixes its terms, it stops thinking and simply holds to the distinction made. The paradoxes in Plato's dialogues are not ultimately resolved. . . Theory construction, divorced from the discipline of understanding and the awareness that anomalies develop out of inherent limitations, becomes pure fantasy and loses its tie with reality.

For Hegel, rational thinking involves integrating all three operations [of logical thinking: understanding, dialectic (i.e., reference to the contrary) and speculation] into a single complex process of thinking. A category is fixed by understanding, that in itself leads over to thinking its opposite in a dialectical transition, thought then reflects on the whole development to identify its essential dynamic and set it within a more general context. But the process does not stop there. For the result of speculative reflection is a complex thought, whose components need to be fixed by understanding and whose internal dialectical relations need to be defined. Once that is done, the complexity collapses into a singular term that understanding must again determine and fix.12

This process of resolution of a paradox is commonly described (in Fichtean terms) as sublation of thesis and antithesis through their synthesis.

However, this logic is not just a process of thought. For Hegel, it is "the essential structure" and therefore is "true of the world.” In other words, the dialectical logic reflects how

12 Ibid., 91-92.
the world unfolds. Thus, it is not only an organizing principle of thought but also an organizing principle of reality in a metaphysical sense. Hegel thinks of these two loci of dialectics, metaphysical and analytical, as one unified locus. His view of reality is monistic. Its fundamental structure unifies both human thought as well as the world’s natural and spiritual phenomena, where aggregated human thought is a reflection of reality upon itself.

It is important to note what makes dialectical logic different and uniquely important in comparison with its linear counterpart. Unlike linear logic, dialectical logic includes a temporal dimension, and that implies change. We can analyze events that occur at different moments in time in a linear logical analysis. In fact, we do it all the time. However, such analysis cannot really include temporality, because the objects of such analysis remain functionally unaffected by time itself as if they existed permanently in stasis outside the temporal dimension. Change is the expression of functionality of time, and time cannot functionally realize itself other than through change. Thus, change is a necessary premise of dialectical logic. Indeed, its most permanent feature is the notion of impermanence. Without assumption of change, no dialectical analysis is possible a priori. Stephen Houlgate aptly described Hegel's concept of logical transition of space and time:

Ordinary consciousness, Hegel claims, tends to separate space and time from one another: 'we have space and also, time'. Philosophy, by contrast, 'fights against this "also"' and understands time to be nothing but the passing away of space itself.

All time is, is the present that continuously vanished and comes into being: 'neither the past is, nor the future, but only the present'. . . just as space mutates logically into time, so time itself mutates logically back into space. This logical transition is made necessary by the fact that the present is actually to be understood in two different ways. On the one hand, the present is the individual 'now' that vanished as soon as it arises. Since each such 'now' immediately gives way to a new one, time is the unending, continuous succession of vanishing moments, each of which 'is the result of

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13 Ibid., 93.
the past and is pregnant with the future’. On the other hand, the present is also the universal 'now' that continues uninterruptedly throughout this succession of vanishing moments. This 'now' does not itself vanish, but endures.\textsuperscript{15}

Such logic, incorporating universal temporality as a foundational metaphysical principle, has critical implications for philosophy of history and ethics. First of all, philosophy, as any human thought, can only be understood in the context of history. As Hegel famously said, "Philosophy is its own age comprehended in thought."\textsuperscript{16} Second, there is no such thing as self-sufficient and self-enclosed mind. Any individual mind is but a product of its time and place, and if it claims to produce a philosophical system, it must presuppose history and not just abstract from it.\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, metaphysics is bound to be limited by experience.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, God, providence, and immortality do not transcend the world but are "ideas realized in history" where providence is the "ultimate purpose of history itself" and where evil is necessary to realize the end of history.\textsuperscript{19}

What is critical to Hegel's historical method is that reality, historical as it is, learns from its own experiences or, as Frederik Beiser put it, "historicism becomes the self-conscious and general method of philosophy, the weapon to be wielded against its own pretenses and illusions" in a "self-critical" and "self-reflective" way.\textsuperscript{20} Once, understood historically, all absolute ideas, such as "natural law" or supernatural revelation of God reveal themselves as illusory, their absolute and "eternal" value collapsing.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{16} Cited in Frederick C. Beiser, "Hegel's Historicism" in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Hegel}, 270.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 270-71.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 272.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 273.
And yet, on a flip side of this relativism, there is absolute category that is above and beyond of this world: Hegel believes that there is a reason in being, nature and history, the "absolute spirit" that underlies our world and its evolvement. This "Idea" manifests itself through the fundamental rationality of the world, the rationality, which, in turn, has a form of the dialectical logic Hegel proposed in his philosophy. In other words, if there is a god to be found in Hegel’s system, he runs the world through dialectics. But if development of the world is teleological, then after a number of cycles of its evolvement, learning from its own past, the absolute spirit is bound to lead, after trial and error and course correction, out of our modern crisis (or rather a succession of crises) to what seems to be a continuously refined promise of a better future.

Thus, Hegel seems to leave us with an unbearable ethical dilemma: Should we make our choices with the goal of placing ourselves on the right side of history, as it seems at the moment, or should we make them based on history’s ultimate goal that we may never know but can assume as an absolute? Of course, we will never fully admit the limited nature of our knowledge. Therefore, we will always keep trying to overcome the dilemma by fusing the here-and-now and the absolute in a single question: "Am I on the right side of history, both here and now and in terms of its ultimate end?" The good news is that Hegel tells us that our angst over our imperfect knowledge will end at the ultimate point of evolvement, where self-perfecting thought finally transcends itself by turning into "pure will,” a higher form of existence after all has been "thought out" and "understood,” a Hegelian version of the end of history having burned up the energy that propels its movement.

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22 Houlgate, An Introduction to Hegel, 25.
The dialectical logic entered the final stage of its development when Marx began to use it in his sociology. Marx and his associate Engels developed it into a widely recognized, well established, and formalized analytical methodology. The goal of this undertaking was to create a truly scientific philosophical method.\textsuperscript{23} Impressed by Hegel during his student years, Marx used Hegel’s dialectics to create his theory of dialectical materialism. Advances in science of that period, particularly in chemistry and biology, made linear logic incapable of giving an adequate explanation to many newly discovered phenomena. Unlike linear logic that demanded a static universe, the dialectical logic could explain the essence of motion without inherent contradiction. The contradiction of something being in two places at the same time was overcome by motion from one place to another.\textsuperscript{24} Incorporating motion, change, and development as a necessary assumption of logical analysis opened new horizons in science. It enabled science to focus on the correlation between “what” (knowing) and “how” (using), that is, to constantly test and update the universal knowledge by putting it to practical use.\textsuperscript{25}

After Marx and Engels, dialectical materialism was further developed into a sophisticated school of thought, primarily by social scientists in socialist and post-socialist countries as well as Marxist theorists in Western academia who turned Hegel’s “laws of dialectics” into elaborate concepts while unfortunately attaching some ideologically motivated stigma to them. These laws of dialectics, including the unity and conflict of the opposites, the transition of quantity into quality and vice versa, and negation of negation, have played a major role in science and social theory even though often without appropriate credit to those who first formulated them.

\textsuperscript{24} George Novack, \textit{An Introduction to the Logic of Marxism} (New York: Merit Publishers, 1969), 40-41.
\textsuperscript{25} Gollobin, \textit{Dialectical Materialism}, 44.
When Marx applied the principles of dialectical materialism to social history, he created his theory of historical materialism. Explaining historical changes, Marx used dialectics to show how history unfolded in a stage-by-stage development, fueled by progress in means of production. The progress was a result of human activity motivated by improvement of means of subsistence. These changes in technology led to improvement in organization of production by dividing labor responsibilities in order to achieve greater productivity. The division of labor determined the social structure on which the society was based, “social relations of production,” which, in turn, informed the class structure of society. As technology changed, the social relations of production changed with it, leading to advancement of new dominant classes, demanding a greater say in society. This pressure of newly empowered classes to update the old political and social “superstructure” of the economy resulted in social revolutions leading to a new superstructure adjusted to the changes in its economic base.

This concept of historical development based on changes in means of material production has become a dominant view of history in Western academia and is rightly considered the greatest and the most influential contribution of Marx to social science. However, Marx, quite undialectically, thought that historical development will end in a communist society where the dialectic of history will reach its final resolution with the extinction of classes and a permanent institution of social justice and economic prosperity.

This teleological model of communism was used by socialist countries as an official doctrine. As their system of economic organization realized its potential and began to stagnate, Marx’s utopia lost its credibility. The political systems in those countries, seen in the West as repressive and “undemocratic,” also led to general disappointment in the ideas of communism.
When these systems could no longer deliver on their promise of constant growth in public goods and economic prosperity, the pressure from within to reform them led to their complete political transformation.

In an ironic twist of history, these transformations both confirmed and discredited historical materialism. On one hand, the historical dialectic of Marx was confirmed in the socialist countries. The new social mobility and equality, the dramatic improvement in literacy and public education, the economic prosperity that created a large educated class out of impoverished workers and peasants, the scientific developments, the universal suffrage and the idea of direct democracy, all triggered the level of modernization that “outgrew” the economic and political restrictions the system had to undertake to serve those priorities at the expense of personal liberties. Socialism helped create a well-educated, economically stable, and politically savvy population, informed about developments in the world, that wanted greater personal autonomy and was not so interested in social justice and the public well-being. Put simply, by “modernizing” their population, the socialist system created its own “grave maker” exactly as Marx had predicted it for capitalism of his time. The educated class of the socialist countries, represented by reformist “softliners” in their communist governments, played a role that Marx allocated for the proletariat of his day.

On the other hand, historical materialism was also discredited by these developments. They showed that communism failed to provide a sufficient teleological foundation, at least in the long run, for a modern society. As a dominant ideology, it could only serve as a temporary ideological foundation to legitimize a short-term rapid modernization of a traditional society.
The disparity between the success of historical dialectics of Marx and his “unsuccessful” utopia can be a result of Marx’s inconsistency in applying dialectics to his own theory. It is somewhat ironic that Marx, the most famous dialectician, became interested in dialectics not for its own sake but only in relation to his social theory. In fact, Marx never wrote about dialectics per se but mainly when he discussed it in a more general context of his sociology. What made Marx interested in dialectics was its ability to explain and predict revolutionary transformations of social life. Thus, if Hegel built his whole theory around dialectics as a central principle, Marx used it only in a subordinate role of justifying certain aspects of his philosophy of history.

In order to make Hegel’s dialectics better serve his theory, Marx made a number of significant changes to the dialectical method, that are commonly known as “standing Hegel on his head,” thereby creating his own distinct brand of dialectics.

Marx believed that Hegel’s dialect was “mystical” in form

When I have shaken off the burden of my economic labours, I shall write a dialectic. The correct laws of the dialectic are already included in Hegel albeit in mystical form. It is necessary to strip it of this form.

The critique by Marx of the “mysticism” of Hegel’s dialectic reveals, better than anything else, Marx’s own approach to dialectics. First, Marx did not like Hegel’s method for its apparent deduction of reality from thought. He wrote, “Hegel fell into the error of considering the real as the result of self-co-ordinating, self-absorbed, and spontaneously operating thought.” This shows how strongly Marx felt that dialectics was not only an instrument of knowing material

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26 However, Engels later aptly filled that gap.
reality but also an organizing principle of material reality itself. To Marx, dialectics is “a science about general laws of movement of both the external world and the human thought.”

Marx was very suspicious of any attempt at deducing material reality from thought, believing that it was futile. To know reality scientifically, we must acknowledge its existence independently from our thought. It is the material reality that is the primary mover of the thought process, and not vice versa.

Secondly, Marx thought that Hegel’s dialectical method was “mystical” because, in the words of Sidney Hook, Hegel “used it as an instrument to establish the logical structure of one all-inclusive whole.” Hence, partial knowledge of it is impossible until we know all of it. Thus, Marx rejected the dialectical monism of Hegel’s description of reality, based on impracticality: the impossibility of knowing a reality so described. The third reason for Marx was similarly a “practical” one: He believed that Hegel tells us that the Absolute Spirit of reality will realize itself, but that we will not fully know when, where, or how until it happens. Thus, according to Marx, Hegel’s system contradicts a possibility of using the dialectical method for empirical knowledge.

Whether Hegel’s method actually suffered from “mysticism,” as Marx alleged, is an open question. It could be that Hegel was simply a more consistent dialectician than Marx and that Marx did not notice this, carried away by practical objectives of his theory. Unlike Marx, who picked and chose dialectical abstractions as he saw fit for his theory, Hegel, in his obsession with dialecticism, was bound to create a completely dialectical picture of reality. Indeed, dialectical

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30 Hook, *From Hegel to Marx*, 62.
31 Ibid.
logic inherently demands complete monism as well as indefinite division of reality at the same time. Therefore, in Hegel’s case, simply following the logic of dialectics led him to a monistic outlook where all aspects of reality, including its material (by implication when not by name), epistemological and spiritual aspects, as well as all other aspects (whatever they may be) had to merge in a unified image of constant self-perfection.

However, there can hardly be any doubt that Marx radically practicalized Hegel’s method by turning it from a general philosophical principle to a logical instrument of interpreting material reality. For Marx, who believed in the primacy of material reality, such interpretation was the basis of all knowledge including one of morality. An opponent of religion, Marx was appalled that “the creator” (a human being) worshiped his “creation” (god). To Marx, god was a fiction. The sole source of ethical knowledge, according to Marx, is the material world in which we live.

As it often happens, the dialectical method of Hegel and Marx has been considered as a package with the rest of their theory. This creates a dilemma for many students of their theoretical legacy. Many thinkers who disagree with their substantive theory often bend, question, or reject, quite unfairly, their dialectical logic with it. Thus, critics of Marx’s “godlessness” are inclined to see his dialectical method as inherently suspect. The blunt rejection of religion by Marx, as well as the loss of credibility by “real socialism,” and the general disenchantment in technological progress, exalted by Marx, due to environmental degradation and ill effects of economic globalization, gave new energy to criticism of Marxist “materialist” dialecticism in the post-World War II period. A new wave of critics of Hegel and Marx emerged, insisting that spiritual reality should be considered as dominant or only reality. These critics
trivialized or discredited material reality and its dialectical interpretation, citing the entrapment in our technological world as the main crisis of modernity. Ellul was one of the first representatives of this new movement.

Of course, dialectics presupposes change, and therefore absolute values by definition do not lend themselves easily to dialectical interpretation. I will engage this dilemma later in this study. Suffice it to say here that Marx resolved the relation of fact to value by fully rejecting autonomy of morals. He refused to have an ethical foundation for socialism, for which he is often blamed as an “anti-moralist” and a “relativist.” Many were so appalled by Marx’s rejection of autonomy of morals, that they also rejected the substance of his social ethics based on principles of distributive justice, joining the quire of those who did that for ideologically motivated loathing of political regimes of “real socialism.”

However, as many interpreters failed to notice, Marx was no nihilist. He anchored his ethics in a strictly rationalist way of organizing social reality, which, along with distributive justice, implied such value-oriented judgments as personal freedom, expressed through human autonomy, and realization of inherent creativity of a human being. Thus, a complete picture of Marx’s ethics emerges only when he is viewed not only through the prism of his philosophical system but in combination with his *a priori* motivation behind his social theory: his criticism of capitalism as a fundamentally immoral subjugation of our human nature and the existentialist angst it creates in a person. This aspect reveals the subjectivism of a non-dialectical Marx, a passionate existentialist, fighting for freedom of human spirit, in some way indistinguishable

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from Kierkegaard. This aspect of Marx revealed in his concept of alienation was noticed by Ellul and influenced him a great deal.

Marx’s ethical judgment (and his dialectical inconsistency!) was also revealed in his monistic ontology. Marx described the capitalist reality and the bourgeois state as the incarnation of evil, enslaving, objectifying, and dehumanizing every human being, rich or poor. This is done through the agency of money. This picture of reality also influenced Ellul’s ontology of technique and state.

Summarizing Marx's role in the development of dialectical theory, we have to recognize that he further developed and popularized Hegel’s dialectics. However, he made it subject to criticism and rejection based on ideological grounds, often unfairly. Marx’s dialectical theory created a realistic picture of historical progress, based on the development of new techniques. This outlook has become the most influential method in Western historical science. At the same time, Marx’s legacy left questions, with which subsequent social thinkers, like Ellul, had to deal. The most important of them is how the issue of “is” squares with the issue of “ought.” Marx himself failed to be consistent on the issue. On one hand, the dialectical side of his theory, with its radical rationalism and focus on material reality, negated any autonomy of ethics, and it can be argued that Marx effectively “collapsed the fact/value distinction.” And yet, we have to realize that even “dispassionate” statements of fact by Marx implied fundamental moral judgment. Even more so on his “non-dialectical side,” where Marx appeared a very different theorist: a subjectivist thinker and a passionate advocate of free realization of our human aspect. This contradiction largely influenced the works of Ellul and their contradictions and complexity.

III. ELLUL’S DIALECTICAL METHOD

There is a paradoxical relationship between ethics and reality. The paradox arises from the inherent contradiction between the ideal and the real, between a wish and a possibility, between a fixed absolute and a fleeting material fact. The paradox is inescapable unless we presume that ethical concerns are the only true reality. But then again, how do we reconcile such a reality with our actual material existence without constantly running into paradoxical contradictions between them?

This paradoxical relationship permeates the problematic of modern political philosophy. We are constantly struggling with our anxiety of losing teleological control of history. Our greatest fear is that history is a runaway train, rushing us into a world of closed fatalities pre-determined by gigantic evil forces, unseen from our small perspective, for whom we are but tiny marginal objects, whose desires and aspirations are of no consequence. We need our absolute ideals as a source of hope that we, acting together, can still put the train on a track that is right for us. I will not discuss here whether such ideals have any traction in the actual world of politics or they are just a decoration in a theater run by the “instrumental reason” of new Machiavellis, Sun Tzus or, worse, an impersonal political machine. For now, I will focus on the dilemma of Ellul in his attempt to create a “true” sociology that would be based on ethical ideals.

Influenced by sociology of Marx, Ellul was a strong believer in the dialectical method. Like Marx, he hoped to abstract the principal dialectic that informed the general history of humankind. Ellul’s understanding of history was formed in the two-dimensional framework of his oeuvre: theological and sociological. As he himself wrote about it, he could not accept
Marx’s “emphasis on the uselessness of considering the question of God’s existence.” At the same time, he found “social theories of the Church” “antiquated,” and Christian socialism “very superficial, failing to get to the heart of the problem.”

Besides, was this revelation I had received from God capable of being systematized? Of being generalized? I saw quite well the possibility of communicating piety and prayer on the individual level but nothing beyond that. I thus remained unable to eliminate Marx, unable to eliminate the biblical revelation, and unable to merge the two. For me, it was impossible to put them together. So I began to be torn between the two, and I have remained so all my life. The development of my thinking can be explained starting with this contradiction.  

Thus, the very dual character of Ellul’s theoretical interest created the framework for a paradoxical reflection of “questions of life” as they manifested themselves to him. He thought of this duality as “dialectical.”

The interplay between the two is very important for me as I have always thought that there should be a dialectical relation between a sociological and theological writing. It is not possible to read one without the other. . . They do belong to two different registers. They are inter-related if you like. In much the same way as a negative pole and a positive pole interact and then sparks fly between them. . .  

Ellul’s view of history fell in this dualistic paradigm. Ellul sees history eschatologically. History to him is a journey from the rupture of humankind’s Communion with the Wholly Other, as a result of its original sin, to the final day of Judgment. In a chapter on the Book of Revelation, entitled “The Revelation of History” in his book *Apocalypse*, Ellul describes his philosophy of history. First of all, Christ is the revealer of history of humankind. Only He knows its meaning by virtue of his redemption of it

. . . by comparison to Jewish apocalyptic and to the naturalistic vision of history this text furnishes some startling novelties. . . There is then finally the affirmation that, in the last resort, it is Jesus Christ who is the master of this unchaining [i.e., opening of the four seals]. And not the Christ triumphant and judge: the crucified Lamb, precisely the one. . . crushed by the justice of

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men and by the cupidity of men and at the same time by the historic, military, and economic expansion of one of the greatest civilizations. The Lamb is, finally, the one who does not at all create the Scourges, not even evoke them, but who discloses them. And in fact it is clearly in the moment of the crucifixion that there has been disclosed what Power is, and what the Justice and Government of men are! . . . the opening of the seals makes it possible to read the interior of the book, that is, the meaning of history. . . .

But God is also an active force of history by virtue of direct participation in it through the Word:

The Word of God is not an exterior, foreign power, falling from the sky. . . . no, here very clearly it is integrated in the general movement. It is not only the preaching of the Gospel but . . . every act of love which makes God present in the midst of men. . . The Word of God also makes history with the others. This is why if there is no progress toward the Kingdom of Heaven, there is also no collapse into the “Habitation of the Dead,” Hades... And it is also because all Biblical thought . . . is dialectic that we are assured that the white horseman is certainly the Word of God: if he were war, and the red horseman revolution (or civil war) there would be no dialectical movement: all the horses would be upon the same line and there would be no interplay between them.

Finally, God participates in history by furnishing it with a dialectical structure, including its principle “final” eschatological dialectic that is at the basis of all other dialectics: His Judgment accompanied by his pardon revealing that the Judgment is one from God

They [the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse] would not be the forces of history: because in order that there be history, dialectic process is necessary. . . But our dialectic, that of the Bible, operates between the historical powers and the metahistorical power that is historicized. It is the only true dialectic possible. The final dialectic. Every other being penultimate and relative. . . . The scourge is always accompanied by the Word of God, who at the same time brings the expression of the judgment of God and his pardon. . .

The principle dynamic that defines this journey is society’s attempt to exclude God from its life on one hand and the redemption by Christ restoring the Communion on the other. According to Goddard, this world of broken Communion with God has four characteristics, all opposite to those it had when it was originally created: (1) It is now characterized by death, tied to sin, as “the final, inescapable reality of human life”; (2) it is no longer unified; instead, it is fragmented and divided; and humankind tries to re-unite by excluding God from its life; (3) it is
no longer characterized by God’s love (Agape), but by Eros, which includes covetousness and will to power, all originating in flesh; and (4) it is now a realm of necessity and not freedom.38

Thus, history evolves fueled by Christ’s saving power in the world fallen out of grace. The rupture with its deadly effect manifests itself in shutting down social dialectics, stopping development, and bringing about stasis. The dialectics is important as it leads to teleological discourse, stimulating reflection and ethical concerns. Such a discourse would provide an opening for the realization of the saving power of Christ. In order to create conditions for such realization, the main purpose of social action is to stimulate controversy, to question status quo, to ask the right questions in order to overcome social stasis, stimulate dialectics and revive social life by making people receptive to Revelation leading to their conversion.

Indeed, the ethics of Ellul is a missionary ethics. That is because the realization of Christ’s saving power and the restoration of Communion with God occur through voluntary conversion. Ellul sees a Christian’s life in the light of the same unresolved dialectic: He is living in the fallen world while not being of it. A Christian cannot escape the sins of the world of the broken Communion with God, but he repents and refuses to indulge in self-justification. A Christian leads a life of freedom in a world of necessity. He leads the others towards life from destruction.

Ellul’s Christian is not a member of a Church. In fact, he has nothing to do with organized religion at all. Moreover, his ethics is not based on any kind of Christian morality. He heeds the Word directly from God through his personal experience of him. This subjective aspect of knowing God is key to Ellul, and it is realized through his “dialectic of hope.”

38 Goodard, Living, 76-81.
Dialectic of hope is not only the centerpiece of his dialectics but also a bedrock of his entire theory, including his philosophy of history, his theology, and his sociological “solution” for the crisis of modernity. As such, it embodies and reflects starkly the strengths and weakness of Ellul’s theoretical method. “Dialectic of hope” is an epistemological foundation of Ellul’s system. Without it, the rest of his theology, and sociology for that matter, is not possible. “Dialectic of hope” frees the individual in his experience of God and lets him, uninhibited by external influences, become a beneficiary and an effectuator of a true reality in a world of falsehood.

The dialectic of hope is Ellul’s answer to the “philosophical” formal dialectics of Hegel and Marx. It is based on an unresolvable unsynthesizable contradiction between the Word of God and the world. Like the opposition of positively and negatively charged electrical poles, creating an electrical current, it forms “sparks” of ideas that challenge the false premises of technique and its idolization. Ellul is concerned that society “silenced God.” The dialectic of hope brings God back into social action by “unsilencing” Him.

The silence of God means the absence of history. Nothing could be more vainly presumptuous, more ridiculously sad, more profoundly unimpressive, more crucially impertinent, than to say that “man makes his history.”

The closure created by the falsehoods of today’s dominant beliefs is so great that for faith to have a chance, one first needs to regain hope.

What I mean, quite simply, is that the central question for man (and for the Christian) today is not whether to believe or not, but whether to hope or not. If someone says to me that a person obviously cannot hope in something he does not believe in, I reply that it is a matter of the dominant factor. In other words, for centuries hope has been defined in terms of faith (and rightly so). To believe in the Lord Jesus implied hoping for his return, the resurrection, etc. It is this relationship which now has to be turned around.

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39 Ellul, L’Espérance Oubliée, 91; Ellul, Hope in Time of Abandonment, 89.
The question is not one of denying the faith and saying that it is of no importance. Rather, it is no longer the dominant factor. Today it is hope which is called upon to arouse, incite, and induce faith; and to define it, that is to say, to give it content. Now, in the Christian life of today, we are called upon to believe what we hope. We must awaken people to hope, for only there can faith take root.”

Ellul makes a radical epistemological proposition by questioning “the dialectic of faith,” which he calls “an intellectual one.” He thinks that it is “impossible to prevent theological dialectic today from becoming ultimately an expression of the Hegelian dialectic.” His goal is “to show that the movement of hope is also dialectic, but that, in contrast to the dialectic of faith, it is inescapably a dialectic of the concrete.”

Thus, the dialectic of hope is based on direct experience; it is a function of practical reason rather than a philosophical system. Ellul writes:

. . . hope cannot be systematized (“ne peut être édifiée en système”). It implies action in the tangible (“l’intervention dans le concret”) as a condition of its very existence. It presupposes a positive, genuine change, in proportion as the dialectic unfolds. Otherwise there is no hope. The fact of the matter is that Marx’s thinking found such response among the proletariat because it was a bearer of hope, and Marx’s dialectic is a dialectic of hope precisely because it relates to the tangible and the concrete. Thus the proclamation of hope seems to me today to correspond both to what is needed and to what is possible.

This is the only “possible” way epistemically because traditional philosophy is impotent in the modern world obsessed with the “dynamic element” and the “factual element” of what we presume to be “scientific.” In our constantly changing world, the modern person cannot accept anything that appears to be “static.”

Christian faith is a primary victim of this preoccupation because of “its definitions, its dependence on a given something which has been revealed once for all.” In contrast, hope “is

40 Ellul, L’Espérance Oubliée, 89-90; Ellul, Hope in Time of Abandonment, 88-89.
41 Ellul, L’Espérance Oubliée, 88-89; Ellul, Hope in Time of Abandonment, 87.
42 Ellul, L’Espérance Oubliée, 88; Ellul, Hope in Time of Abandonment, 86-87.
headed to the future” it “is dynamic or it does not exist. If it exists, it cannot be other than power in action,” which, of course, puts it right out of, and possibly against, the institutional Church and organized religion. Thus, to recover Christianity just like any kind of teleological orientation in the modern world, it must be introduced through a dynamic force, a “power in action” of hope.43

The modern person is also completely preoccupied with “fact,” with “the concrete,” thus being unreceptive to “ideas” that do not have the appearance of being anchored in fact, despite that he is so vulnerable to “ideologies” or rather, he is so vulnerable to them precisely because he is so insecure about a nonfactual reality.

He [modern person] is a materialist by fact, not by doctrine. (“Il n’est pas matérialiste de doctrine mais de fait.”) He is attached to a real, which seems to him the only reality to be identified with truth. He has to have tangibles to hang on to. Now hope seems to me to answer precisely to that need.44

In his resort to practical reason in an attempt to restore value-based teleology, Ellul drew heavily from Kierkegaard. It was Kierkegaard who suggested to Ellul by his own admission that “reasoning with the intellect alone and reasoning based on living experience are simply words apart,” which Barth, his main influence on Christian dogmatics at the time, could not quite give him.45 Kierkegaard, according to Ellul, “was able to rise above Hegel and relocate man” away from the deterministic dependency on material reality. Ellul, like Kierkegaard, thought that it can only be done “with strict reference to the revelation in Jesus Christ,” that is, by “undertaking the freedom of action of one more powerful than himself.”46

43 Ellul, L’Espérance Oubliée, 88; Ellul, Hope in Time of Abandonment, 87.
44 Ellul, L’Espérance Oubliée, 88; Ellul, Hope in Time of Abandonment, 86-87.
45 Ellul, Entretiens, 90; Ellul, Conversations, 54.
46 Ellul, L’Espérance Oubliée, 58; Ellul, Hope in Time of Abandonment, 53-54.
This influence of Kierkegaard on Ellul’s method shaped his approach to dialecticism. To Ellul, the dialectical motion of “becoming” is an inward movement toward getting to know the higher reality of God.\(^47\) God is above the worldly reality, and therefore knowing God takes priority over any other knowledge.

This is a highly subjective process and it runs counter to any philosophical systematization or dialectical “synthesizing.” Ellul insists on this subjectivism by saying that the depth of the modern crisis is so great that we need “go back to the root—which is always the individual human being.” Thus, it is hopeless to mend things “by starting from our human wisdom,” meaning philosophical systems. For one, one must be a Christian to do this, but even Christians can only do it if they “start from zero.”\(^48\)

Thus, Ellul steps straight into the theoretical divide between Kierkegaard and Hegel over dialectics: Should dialectical analysis apply to ethical considerations, and if so, how? Kierkegaard believed that ethical choices do not lend themselves to synthesizing as they are made on the basis of either yes or no, generated by the inherently paradoxical relationship between them. But because for Ellul (and Kierkegaard) the ethical dimension was the only thing that was truly “real,” the method of exploring those choices, through juxtaposition of unresolvable paradoxes, informed the whole construction of reality in Ellul’s system.

This approach to dialectics comes from a long tradition of Christian thought. Trying to deflect the charge of irrationality in interpretation of certain Christian doctrines or what appeared to be contradictory passages in the Bible, Christian thinkers used two interpretive approaches:

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either suggesting that the Bible did not lend itself to the laws of linear logic (the “law of non-contradiction”) or shifting the focus of discussion to the “meaning” of the Scripture and thereby avoiding the subject of logicality altogether.\textsuperscript{49}

Barth, whose Christian dogmatics greatly influenced Ellul, tried to resolve Biblical paradoxes by suggesting a “supplementary” and “complimentary” dialectics. According to Bruce L. McCormack, a “supplementary dialectic” meant that a member of the pair in question predommates and eventually overcomes the other, where the stronger member either “takes up the weaker into itself with the result that the weaker member is either cancelled out altogether or is perhaps taken up into the other in a higher synthesis.” Thus, this type of dialectic leads to some sort of reconciliation. One example of such dialectic was the relationship between “real history” and “so-called history” in Romans I, when the “real humanity” in Christ subsumed the “unreal humanity” in Adam. The other type was “complimentary dialectic” where “two members stand over against each other in a relation of open contradiction or antithesis,” leading to no reconciliation but to “a ceaseless to-ing and fro-ing” instead.\textsuperscript{50}

According to a leading expert on Barth Eberhard Jüngel, Barth’s views on dialecticism developed over time. “Dialectical theology” characterized his thought during the earlier period of his writing (1918-27), after which he went to “analogical theology” (1931 and later). This shift in Barth’s dialectical theology was marked by an interesting conceptual change, noticed by Jüngel. According to Jüngel, in the beginning, Barth used the concept of the so-called inner dialectic of a being (“Sache”), which was meant to distinguish between the dialectic of speech about a being,


related to its dialectical knowing, and the dialectic that informed the being itself. The later Barth defined dialectic only as “a dialectic of human knowing.” Jüngel believed that (in the words McCormack)

... it then became possible for Barth to move on to a theology of an (in itself) undialectical Word of God and to bid farewell to a merely dialectical theology. From this point on, Barth began to develop his doctrine of the analogia fidei. 

Thus, the Barthian method transitioned from recognition of dialectic as a structure of reality itself to merely using it as a representation of the thought about reality and finally abandoning it altogether as an inferior method of dealing with matters of theology. It could be that for Barth, just like for Ellul, dialectic presented a threat to the immutable nature of the divine truth and its radical distinction from the “unreal” reality of the fallen world. Indeed, the insistence that God cannot be synthesized with human reality was the critical aspect of Barth’s (as well as Ellul’s) theology that put him on a collision course in the discourse with Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich about dialectical “correlation” of God and person, discussed in Chapter 1.

Despite that theological or biblical perspective was critically important for Ellul’s dialectical method, Ellul’s sociology was also influenced by non-theological social theory of Marx and anarchist thinkers, such as Proudhon, whose works Ellul studied in a young age.

It should be remembered that the stated purpose of Ellul’s project is to update the social theory of Marx for the current crisis of modernity. Ellul was very impressed with the method of Marx. In particular, Marx made him believe that a truly scientific social study cannot be done without taking into account the laws of dialectics. Indeed, when asked in an interview how

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51 McCormack, Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology, 6-7.
52 Clendenin, Theological Method, 49.
important dialectics was to his analysis and whether it can possibly take him “too far” to end up in “sophistry,” Ellul vigorously defended the dialectical method:

Dialectic reasoning is not something superficial it withstands time. It is not a matter of deciding yes or no but of determining how one thing affects the other in order to be able to pass to another level of understanding. For historians you must understand it is essential that the method contains the time component. It was for this reason that I was attracted to the work of Marx.53

At the same time, Ellul disagreed with the choice of the “basic structure” made by Marx for his social critique. Ellul believed that the social evils of the modern age are caused not by capital but, more fundamentally, by technique. Hence, a solution should come not from the institution of a socialist system of production, pursued by Marxists, but from the spiritual advancement of individual persons, regardless their social class or other social characteristics. The difference from Marx in his analytical goal, led Ellul to reject those dialectical abstractions that were central to Marx, including the relations of production resulting in class struggle as a dynamic force of social history. However, it was not only the choice of particular dialectics for his analysis, it was his dialectical method itself that led Ellul astray from Marx.

As Chapter 1 demonstrated, when Ellul was not a Marxist, it was because he was an anarchist and a Christian. Despite that Marx is widely recognized as the standard bearer of the modern dialectical method, it appears that Ellul borrowed his social dialectics not as much from Marx as from Marx’s early mentor Proudhon.

Proudhon disagreed with Marx that a dialectical contradiction must be resolved in synthesis. Trying to argue that the institution of property need not be eliminated, as long as it is based on principles of justice, Proudhon wrote:

53 Ellul, Entretiens, 91; Ellul, Conversations, 55.
I also substituted the principle of balance for that of synthesis. Until then I had shared Hegel’s belief that the two terms of the antinomy, thesis and antithesis, were to become resolved in a superior term synthesis. But I have since come to realize that just as the two poles of an electric cell do not destroy each other, so the two terms of the antinomy do not become resolved. Not only are they indestructible, but they are the very motive force of all action, life and progress. The problem is not to bring about their fusion, for this would be death, but to establish an equilibrium between them—an unstable equilibrium, that changes as society develops. I confessed this error quite plainly in my book Justice, as follows: “If my System of Economic Contradictions is not, as regards its method, a completely satisfactory work, it is because I had adopted Hegel’s view of the antinomy. I thought that its two terms had to be resolved in a superior term, synthesis, distinct from the first two, thesis and antithesis. This was faulty logic as well as a failure to learn from experience, and I have since abandoned it, FOR THERE IS NO RESOLUTION OF THE ANTINOMY. This is the fundamental flaw in the whole of Hegel’s philosophy. The terms are in a state of BALANCE, either with each other or with other antinomic terms, and this is what produces the desired result. But balance is not synthesis as Hegel understood it and as I too had supposed. Apart from this reservation made in the name of pure logic, I uphold today the rest of what I said in my Contradictions.”

Thus, Proudhon vision of dialectics’s operating in society was one of a force that stirred up unresolvable contradictions, thereby preventing choking closure of stasis. He could not have found a student more sympathetic than Ellul. In fact, in his description of a “dialectical” relation between his theology and sociology, Ellul used the same metaphor for dialectics as two unsynthesizable electrical poles generating sparks between them without ever resolving the tension between them. Just like Proudhon, Ellul’s main concern was to avoid stasis in society, imposed by technique. Ellul hoped to do this through unresolvable dialectical controversy, an ongoing stream of ideas, in Ellul’s case resulting from a permanent contradiction of two inseparable opposites: the Word of God and the world. 

Just like Proudhon on a sociological plane, Ellul loathed and distrusted preoccupation with synthesis. First, inspired by Kierkegaardian subjectivist approach, whose focus was on

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55 For an example of this recurring theme, see, Ellul, L’Espérance Oubliée, 85-90; Ellul, Hope in Time of Abandonment, 84-89, cited in Chapter 1.
direct experience of the individual, Ellul looked at synthesis as a mark of academic
dogmatism, unnecessarily burdening his analysis. Secondly, he saw synthesis as dangerous
correlationism, Tillich-style, fusing the biblical and the worldly and thereby destroying the idea
of Otherness of God. Finally, Ellul suspected inherent relativism that followed from a
synthesizing dialectic for a value system. Indeed, if, as Hegel had it, the values are subject to
synthesis, just like the rest of the “truth,” based on the state of our current aggregate knowledge,
then how can we align our actions with God, who by definition is absolute and is the source of
values? In other words, Ellul shared Proudhon’s panic attack in the face of relativistic
implications of Hegel’s system: If none of what we know can be real truth, then how can we be
sure of anything? Synthesis looked like a very discouraging drag, hampering any kind of
teleological advancement.

One related aspect of difference in the approach to dialectics between Hegel/Marx and
Ellul was that synthesis, where it appropriately arose, was a higher stage of development. Ellul
wrote:

. . . I am not certain that transition or innovation necessarily means progress. I thus differ totally
from Hegel and Marx, for whom the new state has to be progress in relation to the previous one,
since for them the fact of the synthesis (though Marx does not use this term) of the two preceding
factors (the positive and the negative) implies that the new state is superior. I have no guarantee
of this, and in Hegel and Marx its affirmation simply rests on a belief and an ideology of
progress. What I am sure of is that life simply presupposes the innovation, that man is a history
which includes negativity, and that to rest in an achieved state is in reality to deny both the life
and the history or specificity of man, to claim to stop history, which is (perhaps . . .) to enter the
Kingdom of God!

For me, then, negativity always has a positive value even though I am not sure that the
product of this dialectical step is necessarily superior to the preceding state. There are always
favorable and unfavorable elements. The new state or synthesis—or, if one will, equilibrium—
always brings inevitably another negativity which reproduces the contradiction and the
ineluctable movement. But why should this be better than definitive order and repetitive
organization? I will not enter into a discussion of entropy, of the total disorder that is ultimate
stability, but simply emphasize that human life has no meaning if there is no chance of changing
anything, no part of one’s own to play, that is, if there is no history begun but not yet finished.
And this is the precise moment that negativity comes to the fore. In one of my books, I adopted the famous statement of Guehenno: “the first duty of man is to say No.”

This passage brings to light three aspects of Ellul’s sociological dialecticism: (1) dialectics is first and foremost about diversity of opinion, a communicative *modus vivendi* in society that prevents stasis and stagnation characteristic of totalitarianism; (2) the more that such “dialectic” exists in society the better; (3) if society achieves a leap of synthesis, a new social arrangement, resulting from a crisis caused by a dialectical interplay, it is not necessarily for the better as “progress” does not mean getting closer to God.

And yet, the methods of Marx and Ellul are closer in some respects than meets the eye. When we compare their dialectical methods, we can see an interesting similarity. If Marx’s dialectic of material reality effectively subsumed his ethics in a monistic fusion, Ellul, influenced by him and trying to achieve the same level of monistic consistency, did exactly the opposite: His spiritual reality subsumed his material reality. Dialectically speaking, rejection of an idea is a manifestation of its acceptance. (A true “rejection” would be ignoring it!) Thus, even though the two cases seem to be examples of an opposite approach, they are, in fact, the same approach at some level and lead to the same dilemma: How do we integrate ethical reality and material reality without running into a paradoxical relationship between them?

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IV. CRITIQUE OF ELLUL’S DIALECTICS

PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

For Ellul, history is an eschatological development. There is one “final” dialectic that drives the entirety of history: the one leading to the Judgment Day. This dialectic was born and evolved from the Rupture of the Communion with God. Whatever happens between these two points in time is driven mainly by the unresolvable dialectic where God’s participation in history through His Word meets the fallen world, generating hope for the enlightened individuals. Ellul’s social history is a fluctuating vacillation, with which humanity exercises its freedom to realize God’s will. Social dialectic for Ellul is a form of social existence where, if such freedom exists and thrives, people have a meaningful chance to seek and find God through reflection and social discourse.

Considering social revolutions, Ellul thinks of them as regression, not progression of history. He notes that they never occurred before the modern age. They are a modern phenomenon, an expression of adjustment resulting from fatalities of the modern age. They result in violence and are aimed at continuation of the status quo in the principal structural composition of society. In that sense, they are “conservative, even reactionary” revolutions.\(^{57}\) Ellul disagrees with Marx that “[r]evolutions are the locomotives of history,” calling it a “gross misstatement of fact.” “On the contrary, he argues, they usually impede the development of history.”\(^{58}\) Despite that revolutions always have a plan, they result in nothing. They are always “anti-” and focus on defiance and rejection. They often have plans of “a nearly perfect order” and thus “positive” agenda. However, they invariably “dissolve into dreams” and are

\(^{57}\) Ellul, Autopsie de la Révolution, 52; Ellul, Autopsy of Revolution, 40.

\(^{58}\) Ellul, Autopsie de la Révolution, 51; Ellul, Autopsy of Revolution, 39.
"reformist" at best because the revolutions “against” are always absorbed by the system they try to destroy. Ellul believes that the “social feature,” on which “the realities of technology and the state” are founded, determines the nature of modern revolutions.

Ellul cannot accept modern revolutions because of his loathing of violence and the new type of totalitarianism and necessity they create. For Ellul, the focus of a revolution should be the state as such. He sees the state monistically as a uniform and faceless incarnation of the modern version of evil that “destroys individuality” and is the “keystone of our universe, of our economic existence, of all our satisfactions,” that “integrates” our society based on values of consumerism and objectification of the human being. Therefore, a “genuine revolution” that we need, according to Ellul, is one against the state, its "increased and improved organization," against consumerism and technological society, against the “distortion of culture” and “a certain dominance of man over man" ("une certaine emprise de l'homme sur l'homme") Such revolution would require a true “explosion” in the form of self-denial, lower efficiency and lesser planning in everything. Ellul believes that “only in that revolution man can rediscover himself and history.”

Thus, Ellul’s revolution is a spiritual event that, however, should trigger revolutionary action on the social plane. According to him, our main social crisis is a spiritual one. However, the resolution of that crisis will occur also in the social dimension, not only the spiritual one. His theory specifies the dialectic that drives the process in the spiritual dimension: the dialectic between the Word and the world. However, he does not explain whether and how that dialectic translates into a social dialectic that would take such spiritual event to the social level.

Indeed, any social transformation directed against social phenomena, such as the state, usually involves some agency in the form of social groups on a collision course with each other. If Ellul followed the dialectical method of his mentor Marx, his revolution against the state would be expected to involve two opposing forces, having vested interests for or against the state (and technique) accordingly. However, Ellul cannot see it that way because, according to his theory, no one is outside the monistic dominance of technique. In his uniform unbroken reality of technical evil, only Christians have a chance to see the light and ultimately lead others to the spiritual revolt against technique. But against whom do they fight? Their enemy is a monistic ghost in the form of popular culture, consumerism, and bureaucracy. They are to fight a habit, not other people.

Thus, Ellul takes an internal fight within inwardness of a Christian to a social plane without identifying social forces. To be fair, he mentions that “[b]y challenging technology we also challenge the affluent society.” However, he is very careful not call it “the affluent people” or a “group” or a “class,” not to name names so to speak. “The affluent society” ("la société d'abondance") is just a symbol of excessive “unassimilable” possession of material things. It is a category functionally similar to “the consumer society” with a spiritual rather than socio-economic connotation.62

Thus, the Ellulian revolution is about growing awareness of the importance of self-restraint and changing one’s lifestyle away from the one advocated by technique. Its goal is not to resolve “class antagonisms” by ending “the exploitation of one part of society by another” as it is for Marx.63 Instead, its goal is to create an environment where people can have a meaningful

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62 Ellul, Autopsie de la R évolution, 321; Ellul, Autopsy of Revolution, 273.
63 Marx, Communist Manifesto, 53.
opportunity to express their diverse opinions geared toward breaking the closure of

Ellul’s technique’s idolatry. By historical analogy, it may be similar to the birth of Christianity in the Roman Empire through elemental aggregation and dissemination of an idea through ever broader layers of the Roman society, starting with non-Romans, then affecting Romans and ultimately penetrating the Roman state machine all the way up to the emperor himself. However, Ellul does not make this analogy, and for good reason: This model would not help his argument, precisely because it would involve a social aspect, which invariably would have adulterated his focus on the spiritual.

Another reason for this could be that in Ellul’s system, technique manifests itself on the social plane first and foremost through the state. However, the state, according to Ellul, is a machine, an impersonal apparatus, an ensemble of institutions and organizations, with a monopoly of physical force, expressing the will of technique under disguise of expressing the common will of the people.64 It is a faceless and dispassionate manifestation of totalitarianism. It does not discriminate and is an “equal opportunity” evil. In other words, it is not viewed as a social relation.65 It is not a state “of the most powerful, economically dominant class” that “acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class” as it is for Marx.66 Hence, Ellul’s state, just like his technique, cannot become an arena of colliding social forces. Neither can it find its “gravemaker” in society or engender a social division that would lead to an affirmative social act of its destruction. Detached from a social force, it is largely an a-social

64 For the concept of state as an “ensemble of institutions and organizations” acting in the name of the common interest of people, see Bob Jessup, State Theory: Putting the Capitalist State in its Place (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), 341, 361.
65 The analytical importance of such conceptualization of state is explained in Jessup, State Theory, 339.
phenomenon, a monistic abstract absolute that cannot afford a grip for any social agency wishing to bring it to a fighting ring of a dialectical play-out.

There is another aspect of Ellul’s dialectic of history that defies social dialecticism. Unlike Marx, who believed that “the expropriation of the capitalists shall be ‘by the action of the immanent laws of capitalistic production itself, by the centralization of capital,’” Ellul does not believe that a true revolution will be caused by a “fatality,” that is, by a historical “objective necessity” anchored in material reality. Therefore, he does not leave space for dialectical abstraction of forces of change “based on the particular organization of elements in the real world,” subordinate to the laws of social history, similar to the laws of physics in natural history. According to Ellul, nothing good can possibly come from a “fatality.” Fatalities are created by modern socio-economic structures. They are manifestations of the realm of necessity that a real revolution should try to overthrow. A real revolution is a child of freedom given by Christ. Therefore, turning a spiritual choice into an inevitability is at odds with the very definition of that freedom. This brings us back to the paradoxical unresolved “dialectic” between God’s Word and the world. Ellul’s history is defined by it alone, and no other dialecticism is allowed a role in that reality.

ANALYTICAL DIMENSIONS

Whenever one engages in intellectual contemplation, the phenomenon contemplated is being observed in a certain dimensional context. Ontologically speaking, we single out and define a phenomenon by contrasting it to other similarly situated phenomena, or comparing it to

itself in a different moment in time. Trying to understand, we observe, statically or
dynamically, its relations that affect its condition or development. All of this “makes sense” only
because what is comparable or inter-related lends itself to the same analytical framework that
we, broadly speaking, call a “dimension” (similar to a physical dimension) or a “level of
analysis” or a “paradigm” or a “system.” Things that are outside that analytical framework,
where things are presumed to be inter-related, are usually ignored, as their relation to the thing
analyzed cannot be established logically. As a Russian proverb has it, "You should not say, 'I
have elder-berries in the garden but an uncle in Kiev.'"

Any philosophical system usually represents a single dimension of logically inter-related
things. If one steps outside that system, one usually has to make a break with logic. However,
scholars do it all the time, usually because they do not want to accept a philosophical system as a
whole. In this case, they critique it from the standpoint of something that is a common
denominator with another system, or from the standpoint of commonly accumulated and
recognized experience of actual life, something we like to call “common sense.” A good example
of this would be an atheist who refuses to argue about the existence of God by using a
theological system of reference, or an anti-fascist, criticizing naziism from outside its own
conceptual reference system. Such arguments are based on weaker logical connections, but at
least they rely on common points of reference. After all, we, being all human, have similar life
experiences. These experiences embodied in the notions of practicality, tradition, common
practice, personal experience, common sense, or credibility, all provide a reference basis for
criticizing something from outside its own analytical dimension.
Whatever the reasons are for not accepting somebody else’s analytical “dimension,” it is sure strange for the *same* analysis to switch analytical dimensions. What purpose would that serve? Indeed, if one decides to engage a certain problematic, the inclination would be to resolve it directly. Indeed, if a patient goes to a doctor with a pain in his side, the doctor is expected to try to cure it before resorting to saying something like, “Oh, well, don’t worry, we all die at some point.” There can be, of course, an extra-dimensional way of radical solutions. By using another medical metaphor, it would be perfectly reasonable for the doctor to amputate an inflamed limb if no other cure is still possible, or to isolate a person with an incurable infectious decease as a way of protecting others. Avoiding the circumstances where a problem occurs or, better yet, ignoring it altogether (a head-in-the-sand “solution”) is the most common way of resolving problems “extra-dimensionally.” One or the other, a dimensional shift in treating a problem is usually a result of some sort of analytical crisis, in both science and real life.

Ellul understood the value of this aspect of analytical organization. Indeed, when he described the differences among philosophy, his sociology, and the common “scientific” sociology, he compared them to different depths of the ocean: most fundamental and least-changing things (philosophy) happen at great depths, and then there are things much more dynamic but still fundamental at lesser depths (his sociology), and, finally, things that are always in flux and respond to any movement of the air (common “scientific” sociology, focusing on fads and meaningless current news).

However, one of the analytical problems with Ellul’s "technique" is that it develops and lives in a separate, self-contained dimension, a reality completely separated from our human reality in its causality, goals, and operation. We live in our human reality, where we get
existential problems from technique, but no matter what we do, we will never make a dent in technique as it is protected by an inter-dimensional firewall. Technique is autonomous from us, it is neutral to our social action and our ethics, and yet it controls them.

On the ethical plane, technique can be seen as a realm of the demonic. Certainly, the demonic seems to benefit from it as technique replaces our ethical ideals by idolatry of consumerism. However, Ellul expressly defines technique as impervious to our ethics. In terms of human ethics, technique is ethically neutral. This is exactly the source of its autonomy according to Ellul. The only ethic that technique recognizes is its own ethic, based on a single value of efficiency. Only efficiency matters to technique because only efficiency serves technique's own interests of self-augmentation. Only what is efficient is "good" for technique, and only what is inefficient is "bad" for it. Thus, technique cannot be "demonic" either, certainly not in terms of human ethics.

On the social plane, technique supposedly manifests itself through our social phenomena, such as the modern state, propaganda, and consumerism. However, again, it is expressly defined as extra-social, an entity that exists above and outside all social phenomena, like an alien controlling our life but being completely impervious to any social action as if it existed in a different dimension altogether. All we can do about it is withdraw from politics completely and most affirmatively lest we somehow play into the hands of technique by simply participating in the real world’s life. Thus, a socio-political suicide is the only option. However, even that does not really matter, because technique is omnipotent anyway. All we can do is make ourselves morally superior, and feel better for that, through our futile self-sacrificial battle against technique within our inwardness.
This dimensional inconsistence between the a-social origin of technique and the social effect of the problem it presents creates a completely barren field for social theory. Indeed, we may just as well decide to stop building and investing for that reason that the sun will burn out in the long run, and humanity will die out anyway. A similar problem would exist for ants, contemplating if they should continue building anthills in view of a constant danger of human construction work going through them.

A correct and more logical option would be, of course, to isolate the social problems presented by technique and engage them sociologically similar to what other critics of reason did. Or, since technique has a material origin, like, say Marx’s capitalism, it could have been engaged by eradicating its material base, the source of its strength, again as a result of a social reform. One way or another, technique needs to be placed on the same plane where we address problems it creates. Instead, it is outside our reach, and all we can do is purify ourselves in the hope of a better world.

Ellul understands the one-sidedness of his one-dimensional world of technique. However, he seems to want it that way so that we do not have any illusion about the scope of technique’s dominance. He admits that there is still a non-technical world, represented by traditional lifestyle, local culture, remnants of history, and non-commercialized art. Nevertheless, he expressly puts all of this outside the scope of his analysis, saying that all of this quickly becomes a thing of the past and therefore is not essential for his sociology. His focus is only on the dominant that controls the future.

However, without some kind of a meaningful existential dialectic mutually connecting the realm of technique and the social world, Ellul’s technique loses sociological relevance,
becoming nothing more than a decorative backdrop (as frightening as it is!) for our social reality.

NON-DIALECTICAL PERSON IN DIALECTICAL WORLD

Ellul believed that a social theory should be evaluated by its prediction of future events. If we apply this criterion, we get a strangely contradictory picture. On one hand, it can be argued that Ellul’s belief in living one’s ethics has been confirmed by spectacular examples of social change. The closest approximation of the Ellulian social actor in our political world appears to be a direct-action activist: a figure fighting for her cause outside “the system,” acting on her ethical imperatives in an uncompromising manner in the political world. Indeed, the success of direct-action movements, such as those led by Gandhi and King, the antiwar movement of the Vietnam War era, the color revolutions in successor republics of the Soviet Union, and, more recently, the events of the Arab Spring, all demonstrate that an idea can mobilize direct action that can overwhelm any political power.

On the other hand, the Ellulian ideal of social action does not seem to square with a widely accepted proposition by Otto van Bismarck that “politics is the art of the possible.” Indeed, how do we build a coalition, as we often need for a movement to win, without deal-making and compromise that go against one’s ethical ideals? Ellul’s ethics reject synthesizing, and yet politics appears to be nothing other than synthesis of contradicting positions. If so, Ellul’s non-dialectical actor is trapped in a dialectical political world. What is the theoretical and practical outfall of this seeming predicament?
The thrust of Ellul’s theory is to resolve this paradoxical relationship between ethics and politics. Logically, there are a number of ways of doing it. Introducing a possibility of dialectical synthesis between them would certainly be one. Separating politics from ethics as strictly a craft could be another. Ellul has chosen to do it by letting ethics subsume politics. His politics ontologically became a part of ethics, and there is no politics for him outside ethics.

Is this ontological fusion an asset or a liability? Dialectically speaking (no pun intended!), it can both. Ellul laments lack of teleological concerns in the modern world of politics. But let us model a politician, preoccupied with moral direction as completely as Ellul proposes. This thought should lead us back to Plato’s Allegory of the Cave.

Ellul’s politician is much like a person who managed to get out of Plato’s Cave to see the world for what it really is. His greatest desire now is to go back to the Cave and explain to everyone there that the world of the Cave, the only one they know, is one of illusion. The question is how the politician can do this without being killed or at least deposed by those who cannot handle the truth and prefer to live in their imaginary reality. It seems like the art of doing it is exactly what we mean by “being political,” in common vernacular, and that is why Bismarck’s characterization for the art of politics has become so popular.

Politics cannot be reduced to missionary work as Ellul envisions it. However, even missionary work can be done in different ways. In Ellul’s world feeding oneself to the lions appears to be the only alternative. It has certainly proven its effectiveness for the spread of Christianity. But missionary work can also be a study of the human nature, appealing to what is more convincing, and being cunning with those resisting your cause.69

69 A famous Russian philosopher and Orthodox missionary, Andrey Kurayev, known for his eccentric statements, once publicly used the characterization “the art of the possible” for missionary work.
Ellul’s way is one of an anarchist-minded protestor who knowingly lets herself get arrested and jailed in the hope of making her cause publicized and ultimately so popular that a change is bound to follow. It often works. But then our teleologically oriented activist seems to invariably run into the famous Che Guevara dilemma: What do you do when your cause, advanced by direct revolutionary action, finally prevails, and now you need to address matters of administration that require political to-ing and from-ing? Ellul himself lived through a similar disappointment after the end of World War II, when he needed to make a transition from being a member of the French Resistance to running for a municipal office. In Christian history, such transformation is epitomized by the transition from the catacomb period to the age of the Church’s dominance.

For any activist going from the streets to politics of actual implementation of their demands, Ellul’s advice seems to be of little guidance. Moreover, as history demonstrates, the leaders who are most inspiring and successful in the revolutionary stage of their action much too often become ineffective and disappointing for their supporters after they enter office of their newly established government.70

Influenced by Kierkegaard, Ellul suffered from the Kierkegaardian impatience for the cynicism of religious and social institutions and for philosophizing detached from praxis of one’s ethical principles. However, this impatience translates into angst over appeal to join God and yet not being able to do it due to inherent human limitations, angst over our inherent and seemingly unavoidable schizophrenia with which we project ourselves onto reality as gods and animals at

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70 Idealists like Zviad Gamsakhurdia of Georgia and Viktor Yushchenko of Ukraine are just a couple of recent examples.
the same time: we know what God wants, and we have the ambition to be like Him, but we are unable to fit the bill, no matter how hard we try.

This desire of making politics “truer,” better anchored in ethical considerations, is reflected in the communitarian ideal of politicians being close to their community, the communist ideal of direct democracy (“Soviets”), and the anarchist ideal of federation of municipalities, an echo of the nostalgia for Greek polis. And yet, the impatience of a practitioner of one’s ethics can also mean exactly what Ellul dreaded most: violence and despotism of an unbridled dictatorship, the worst expression of which came from nowhere other than a teleologically obsessed political movement: fascism.

So, how do we resolve the paradoxical relationship between politics and ethics? Can we avoid the angst of an ethical “non-dialectical” person trapped in the “dialectical” world of politics?

TRIVIALIZATION OF MATERIAL REALITY

Ellul’s eschatological view of history presumes a dialectical relationship between God’s reality (“the Word”) and “the world.” In Ellul’s system, largely built on the materialist philosophy of Marx, the world functionally is equivalent to Marx’s material reality. However, unlike for Marx, Ellul’s philosophy of history is eschatological. It is driven by a “dialectic,” based on an unresolvable contradiction between God and the world, one that follows logically from the concept of Otherness of God.

71 We have to qualify that materialism of Marx’s philosophy did not necessarily control all aspects of his philosophy. David Walsh noticed this and explained very well in his book. Walsh went as far as to call it a “mistake to view Marx a materialist.” See Walsh, The Modern Philosophical Revolution, 5.
In this dialectical relationship between the Word and the world, God’s reality plays ontologically a primary role and effectively subsumes the material reality of the world. Thus, the unresolvable dialectical relationship between the two realities, determining the course of history, is based on spiritual interaction of God and person, and not on dialectics imbedded in material reality itself, something Barth would call Realdialektik.

Trying to engage social problematic within this system, we run into a dilemma: should we project extra-ethically the course of history of material reality and, if so, how? Indeed, once we take a teleologically sound course of action in response to the Word, we must follow the imperatives of the material reality. So, how do we avoid ending up completely helpless in the physicality of our world of shopping, driving, and perhaps even voting (although Ellul, of course, would not approve of it!)?

To Ellul, this dilemma is a trivial one. According to him, the less we follow the imperatives of our material existence, the less we cooperate with technique and get closer to God. However, this trivialization of material reality is pregnant with a logical contradiction: If we must treat our materiality strictly through the eyes of divinely informed teleology, how can we implement that very teleology without knowing the reality?

Ellul tries to resolve this dilemma by resorting to a subjectivist approach of Kierkegaard: We get that knowledge directly from our subjective experience. Thus, no separate “knowing” in a sense of essentialist system-building is needed. However, here again, Ellul contradicts himself: In order to make sense of that experience, one needs to structure it in some sort of organized conceptual framework. Ellul himself becomes testimony of this by meticulously creating elaborate definitions and classifications of social phenomena.
To paraphrase the famous saying of Marx about society, if one lives in material reality, one cannot be free from material reality. This takes us back to Ellul’s dialectics. He would not have to face this dilemma, should he avoid the ontological fusion of “spiritual reality” and “material reality” by condemning the material reality to the status of an absolute and unchanging realm of the demonic. Should he admit at least a modicum of ethical neutrality for his material reality, for example in its *properly* instrumental aspect, the closure would have been avoided.

What Ellul seems to have done by this fusion is make his theology subsume his sociology. He argues that there is an unresolvable dialectical relationship between them, and they correct each other. However, for that to happen, his sociology should become more than a database of facts for his theology. It should acquire an independent ontological basis. The ontological fusion of the two leaves his sociology with a number of unresolved epistemological questions. If we can only trust God, and our direct “life” experience in fear that science (including social science) is poisoned by technique, how can we develop any kind of sophisticated theory that we need to promote and direct social action? Where does the *collective* knowledge, necessary for such social action, come from? How do we measure our praxis against reality if reality is uniformly poisoned by technique?

According to Ellul himself, no sound social science is possible without being based on dialectics. He seems to be good proof of that. To make ethical choices, one must know what the choices are about. Without knowing “the world” one cannot use the message of “the Word.”
THEOLOGICAL DUALISM

Logically, another alternative of resolving the paradoxical relationship between ethics and politics, besides Ellul’s, is to separate ethics and politics as completely independent realms. Based on this approach, the inclination is to critique Ellul for trying to bring to power a Philosopher King with all dubious implications thereof. Indeed, should we endow the Pope with secular power? Of course, Ellul was against organized religion and gave an “equal opportunity” treatment to both the state and the church, and yet the broader question remains the same: Can theology offer a resolution for social ills?

It is easy to say “No” as it appears to be the implicit answer of our modern civilization. However, as Ellul aptly demonstrated, this answer comes at a cost: abandoning values is destructive for our world. So, how can we resolve the paradox and yet preserve a more meaningful teleological orientation for our political world? Here I would like to look for an answer in Ellul’s theology and see whether its potential for the resolution of the paradox was not realized because of its own limitations. In other words, can Ellul’s dilemma be resolved on his terms, that is, theologically?

Ellul’s theology paints a dichotomous reality of good and evil, where the concepts of good and evil include phenomena that do not lend themselves to such characterization as ethical categories. This dichotomization includes technique, state, politics, law, and violence, each of which is a totalizing unchanging ethical absolute of evil. As Kenneth J. Konydyk said in his critique of Ellul's view on violence

There is no area of life exempt from his [Christ's] headship, no domain which is not to be brought under his rule. This implies, I think, that no aspect of life—government, education, economics, business, or whatever—is irredeemably evil. While evil permeates them all, no Christian ought to withdraw from any if he wants to lead a life of discipleship. There are necessary and proper
functions which institutions in each area should carry on. All the mainstream branches of Christianity have held that the state is necessary and legitimate, ordained by God for good, and assigned certain functions which it appropriately exercise. Furthermore, it is proper and even desirable for Christians to serve in this institution . . .

To put his [Ellul's] view somewhat paradoxically, a truly Christian statesman could not be a good statesman.  

Konyndyk explains Ellul's position by his quasi-Marxian view of "necessity" and by his "identification of necessity with separation from God:" If a Christian emulates Joshua (fighting) and not Moses (holding hands up in blessing during a battle), he shares the violent ways of the world and thus fails to exercise his God-given freedom of ethical choice.  

Konyndyk's critique is to the point. However, it seems more convincing that Ellul's totalizing demonization of modern institutions is not a function of his view of "necessity" but a function of his interpretation of "Otherness of God." To him, it is obvious: The world fallen out of grace of God is cursed, and its material reality is a cursed one. Thus, Satan rules it and attaches his character to it. This is even true of nature. Nature is cursed, too, by death and violence as part of the cursed world. Its stewardship by God has been replaced by the stewardship of cursed humankind taking it on a path of complete destruction by technique. The cursed aspect is the sole focus of Ellul’s analysis of the world. What is not cursed in it is not of interest to him as it does not define the world’s destiny. Moreover, any temptation to deny the cursed nature of the world creates a temptation to doubt the Otherness of God, a key element of Ellul’s Christian dogmatics.

It is normal for theology to focus on the struggle of good and evil and in that sense to see reality through a prism of their dichotomy. However, the ontological content of this dichotomy

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72 Kenneth Konyndyk, "Violence" in Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays, 265.
73 Ibid., 266.
depends on what we see as “good” and "evil." In other words, they find their specific “human” meaning in our ethically informed ontological decisions. Our first inclination is to label specific things "good" or “evil” as a matter of simple characterization: This thing is good, and that one is evil. However, this locks us in an inflexible ontological relationship with the things so labeled. It appears to be a wiser course of action to limit ourselves to a simple recognition of the existence of good and evil without necessarily proceeding to identifying social phenomena as such. In order to develop sound sociology, we do not have to go witch-hunting picking “evil” social phenomena, just like we no longer pick witches out of the human ilk. Such simplistic approach can be academically limiting.

What seems to be a more yielding theological proposition is that good and evil manifest themselves dialectically in all social phenomena. Indeed, God did not only curse Adam. He also gave him a world to live in, a place created by God as a manifestation of Love for His pet creation. That Love, and not only the Love of God expressed through Christ, attaches a divine aspect and its mystery to the world. Thus, every social phenomenon is from God and Satan at the same time as they manifest two dialectically inter-related manifestations of good and evil. Therefore, every social institution, including government for example, can be properly deemed a gift from God that we can use or misuse, depending on our teleological orientation. The “good” use, of course, is a function of consistency of our ontology with the ontology of the creator. On a high level of generality, we deliver the potentiality of God’s goodness in His gift of our material reality by using it in accordance with its intended purpose. We can differ in opinion about what that purpose is, but the teleological orientation is ensured by the very attempt to align this use with the phenomenon’s ontological meaning coming from God. Put simply, God rejoices when
things are done according to their inherent place and measure. Satan rejoices when an ontological shift occurs, and things are used not for their intended purpose, thereby destroying the inherent harmony of God’s world and destroying the potentiality of God’s goodness. Conceptually, Aristotle expressed this in his idea of the golden mean. Everything has a right measure, and when we divert from it, the harmony of God’s creation is upset, and evil occurs.

So, what will happen with Ellul’s dualism of good and evil if we apply this principle to his theology of social phenomena? Let us assume that Ellulian concepts of technique, state, politics, law, and violence are not loci of evil. Instead, good and evil work their way in each of them universally across all social phenomena. It would not be dissimilar from how they are commonly deemed to work within the soul of each human being.

Dialectic in this theological construct is, in fact, from God. God as creator of the world, including dialectics, does not need to be subject to the laws of dialectics, just like He does not need to be subject to the laws of physics. However, the world created by God is dialectical. Ellul’s mistake from the standpoint of dialectics is that he turned the world into absolute Hades, an underworld, a sewage of the heaven, which logically means that the only theologically developed social “solution” that is possible is a complete withdrawal from the worldly into the inwardness with the exit door completely shut.

As a result of phenomenological conversion of Ellul’s theology into a dialectical one, it would lose its closure and become more receptive to the laws of Hegelian dialectics. The principles of good and evil would remain absolute, but the phenomena within which they operate would become subject to change as a result of realization of human freedom that comes from God. Thus, change attained within the inward spiritual quest of individual persons would have a
chance to express itself in social phenomena that would no longer be captives of their assigned ethical meaning on the plane of struggle of good and evil.

CONCLUSION

My interest in Ellul began from a great impression he made on me by his criticism of our technological society with its objectification of people and nature. Inspired by his message of re-focusing on values, I decided to write a dissertation about his theory. Ellul is a practical theorist. Therefore, the main question he asks himself is “What is to be done?” In this study, I am trying to be consistent with this focus on practical implications of his theory. Consequently, the purpose of the study is to find out how well Ellul answered it.

So far, I have found out that, as typical for the paradigm of “Radical Orthodoxy,” theology for Ellul is a way to approach burning sociological issues. It is consistent with his dual focus on theology and sociology in the hope that they complement each other and, by Ellul’s own admission, keep each other in check. Despite that Ellul tried to keep them separate, we clearly see their mutual influence, including in his method.

The way Ellul tried to transform society and resolve modern crisis is by restoring values to their proper teleological authority. Thus, his sociology effectively is about ethics. However, it is a practical moral philosophy, and its purpose is to use ethics not only as the end but also as the means of social transformation. By trying to make ethics the means of social change, he ran into a paradoxical relationship between ethics and politics. Indeed, how do we apply principles of high ethics to politics that we now commonly define as an “art of the possible,” a world of negotiation, compromise, cunning, strategy, manipulative tactics, and sudden attacks on
unsuspecting political opponents? Ellul saw this as a logical problem, and thus he designated everything political as a world of the demonic, something to avoid at all costs. Instead of using political means, he wanted to effectuate social change by ethically motivated direct social action, the closest historical approximation of which we saw in the movements of Gandhi and King.

Nevertheless, the paradox remained. Even direct action must address practical issues of organization, coordination, government approvals, and coalition building. Moreover, once direct action wins, it steps right in the middle of politics “at its finest.” Thus, a social transformation is not likely without practice of politics. If so, then the revolution, intended by Ellul, does not seem possible without resolving the paradoxical relationship between ethics and politics. Consequently, to help Ellul’s theory to reach its goal to become a theory of action, we need to resolve the paradox.

How can we do that? How can we resolve a question that seems to have been vexing thinkers over millennia and is now reborn in the context of the discourse of modernity? The natural way to approach it in this study is by looking into it on Ellul’s terms.

Ellul thought of his analytical method as “dialectical.” He was impressed by dialectics of Hegel and Marx. He also looked for dialectics in theology of Barth and Kierkegaard. Therefore, we can apply dialectical logic to the paradox where his theory seems to have stalled in its quest for practical realization. However, dialectics is a natural choice for this occasion not only because Ellul recognized it. Paradox is a category of logical science. It means something is out of logical connection. Therefore, by definition, the resolution of a paradox lies in logic. Furthermore, the paradox in question is about transformative social action. It implies change. Therefore, it seems only appropriate that the type of logic we need is one of dialectics.
Now that we have chosen dialectical logic to deal with Ellul’s paradox, how do we resolve it? It is not a trivial question. Recognizing the value of dialectical logic, important as it is, usually is not enough. First, we must apply the dialectical method correctly. Otherwise, logic will not work, and the paradox will remain unresolved. Secondly, we must abstract those dialectics that really matter for the analysis. The task of this chapter was to take the first of these steps. Thus, its main focus is to see whether Ellul applies dialectical logic according to its rules. We will try to take the second step, the dialectical abstraction, in the next chapter.

Like his mentor Marx, Ellul sees social reality in its historical context. Thus, like for Marx, dialectic of history is the focal point of his dialectical analysis. Ellul’s dialectic of history is eschatological: The process of history is driven by an unsynthesizable fluctuating relationship between God’s Word and the world. This spiritual dialectic finds a resolution on the day of Judgment that ends history. Ellul believes in a revolution but only if it is related to a spiritual transformation. Social revolutions that took place in history ended in nothing, because they were not accompanied by spiritual transformation. They allowed the existing structures to absorb their achievements. In that sense, they only reaffirmed the status quo.

However, Ellul is a sociologist. Therefore, trying to deal with the spiritual crisis of modernity, he takes spiritual transformation to the social plane. By doing this, he runs into an analytical problem: For his spiritual transformation to effectuate a social change, it must play by the rules of the social reality. However, Ellul does not translate his spiritual dialectic into a true social dialectic. Social dialectic for him is something subjectively created by society in the form of a meaningful public discourse exposing the evil effects of technique, a discourse that can restore true teleological concerns. Ellul’s social dialectic is a simple reflection of his spiritual
dialectic between the Word and the world, it does not have an identifiable “objective”
characteristic of representing the social reality itself. Therefore, it is not analytically compatible
with the social reality’s unique "material" aspect.

Ellul rejected the dialectic of class struggle that made Marx’s philosophy of history so
theoretically successful. However, he did not look for an alternative social agency through which
a social dialectic could find a place in his sociology. It is not surprising because in his monistic
view of social reality, there is no room for a synthetic make-up of any social phenomenon that
would suggest a dialectical abstraction pointing in the direction of a social transformation. Thus,
Ellul’s philosophy of history reinforces the paradoxical relationship between the ethical and the
political by failing to suggest its resolution within the framework of sociology.

Ellul’s theory has another related problem that precludes true dialectics. His technique,
which causes the modern social crisis, is placed in what appears to be a protected cocoon outside
the social dimension. Ellul recognizes a material aspect of technique’s existence (as opposed to
the spiritual one) but defines technique so that it is completely outside the reach of social forces
as if it existed in its own self-contained dimension. Indeed, technique by definition is completely
autonomous. Thus, it is not receptive to any social action while, paradoxically, it exercises a full
control over our lives. We do not have autonomy on the social plane vis-à-vis technique, while it
has a complete autonomy over us. In view of the omnipotence and evil nature of technique,
withdrawal into spiritual inwardness is the only action that makes sense in Ellul’s system.
Everything else is useless and only reinforces technique. This dimensional disconnect precludes
any dialectical relation between technique and people. Moreover, any action of any kind in the
material world becomes senseless in view of society being doomed by the curse of technique.
The totalizing pessimism of this conceptualization undermines the “practicality” of Ellul’s advice in view of its hopeless implications for social existence.

By not leaving any room for dialectics, Ellul’s philosophy epitomizes the paradoxical relationship between ethics and politics. Ellul’s social actor is an individual fully immersed in the spiritual struggle, within his inwardness, between the Word and the world. Nothing else concerns him. His spiritual condition subsumes all social aspects of his existence. Any dialecticism within or without that spiritual existence is an unsynthesizable contradiction suggesting that our paradox will never be resolved.

The problem is that Ellul does not want to resolve it. His “error” is intentional. He wants to instill in us a posture of uncompromising defiance against the world of political establishment. Ironically, Ellul suffers from the same “leftism” that the Marxist movement suffered at the time of revolutionary action that Ellul criticized. Any compromise against the principle of radical revolutionary action, any reformism, was “selling out to the bourgeoisie.” It is the opposition that feeds the resolve. Any compromise leads to its erosion.

Thus, Ellul rejected any possibility of autonomy of the material reality. He took it as a threat to the dominance of the spiritual reality. Indeed, he completely trivialized the material reality in his system. The spiritual reality fully subsumed the material one. This begs the question: How can the individuals enlightened by the Word put it to action in the world? To do this, they must know the world. However, it looks epistemically impossible. Indeed, the world is poisoned by technique, and all information coming from it is controlled by technique. Then, how do we apply the Word to a world we cannot know?
So, we are left with a purely theological way of resolving the paradox. But does Ellul’s theology lend itself to a dialectical resolution within theology? It appears that his theology suffers from the same monism as his sociology, thereby not allowing a dialectic that would resolve it. Ellul’s theology interprets the Otherness of God as a dichotomous reality where all social phenomena of political importance — state, politics, parties, law, and violence — are totalizing expressions of technique and therefore are universally evil. They are manifestations of the fallen nature of the world. As such, they are not subject to the possibility of dialectical interplay of good and evil within them. Instead, they are pure and unchanging evil. This approach is academically limiting for a theologically based sociology. Indeed, how can people project their ethical choices on social phenomena if those phenomena are completely unreceptive to such freedom?

In sum, Ellul’s theory focuses on the paradoxical relationship between ethics and politics, but does not attempt to resolve it. On the contrary, it makes it starker and, if anything, less resolvable. Ellul shuts all analytical openings within his methodology that could possibly resolve the paradox. The refusal appears to be intentional. Ellul does not want us to indulge in self-justification towards refusing to undertake ethical transformation. He wants us to take ethics directly to the socio-political plane and completely replace politics with it. This is the only resolution of the paradox he tolerates. And he wants to be perfectly clear about that. Whether this is a “practical” proposition as Ellul wanted it or not is a different matter. We will try to “practicalize” it in the next chapter. However, we must respect Ellul for taking a difficult stand and honestly trying to be an example of living the Word in the world.
Chapter 4. SOLUTION OF ELLUL

In this chapter, I will “practicalize” the theory of Ellul. I will attempt to attack this problem in a pincer movement. On one side of this effort, I will look for those elements in Ellul’s theory that point in the direction of his social ideal. In other words, I will look for Ellul’s utopia. On the other side, I will look for actual historical examples that approximate Ellul’s social ideal in real life.

Analytically, this process will take three steps, each taken in a separate section of this chapter. In the first section, I will consider in practical terms how Ellul planned to achieve his social revolution and what was his utopian society. This analysis will focus on three elements of Ellul’s vision: his concepts of federation, law, and nonviolence. Indeed, it was a non-violent mass movement that Ellul tried to engender with his theory, while a federation, based on law of custom, appeared to be its goal.

The second step of the analysis will be dedicated to “practicalization” of Ellul’s theory. As chapter 3 suggested, the main point of separation of Ellul’s ethics from the real world of social action in flesh and blood is the paradoxical relationship between ethics and politics as he sees them. Therefore, in the second section, I will resolve that paradox. It will be a two-stage process. First, I will repair the logical connection between ethics and politics, lost in Ellul's theory. I will do it by finding a common denominator between Hegel’s dialectical method and the Kierkegaardian conceptualization of mutually exclusive ethical choices (“either/or”). The main point there will be that “either/or” ethical decisions are based on dialectical analysis, whether we are aware of that or not.
Once the logical connection between ethics and politics is restored, I will proceed to the second stage of “practicalizing” Ellul’s theory: showing how ethics operates dialectically in the political process. The focus will be on the role of justice as the principal synthetic expression and the ultimate embodiment of ethics in the political world. Put briefly, it is struggle for justice that makes ethics inform politics dialectically.

The third section will examine the practical value of Ellul’s theory based on actual historical examples. A “dialecticized” version of Ellul’s theory will be tested against non-violent mass movements and social organizations that approximate what Ellul envisioned in his sociology. I will ensure that these social phenomena are not locked in a particular historical circumstance but instead represent a broad array of situations. They will include the Gandhi movement, the environmental movement, and the animal rights movements.

I. ELLUL’S SOCIAL IDEAL

In this section, I will consider what appear to be three conceptual pillars of Ellul’s social ideal: federalism, law, and violence. The main focus of Ellul’s critique of modernity and of his solution to the modern crisis is the ethical condition of an individual person. Therefore, he does not offer a single comprehensive description of his social revolution or his utopia. Indeed, Ellul intended that specifics of social action be developed through a discourse awakened by his social critique. Nevertheless, his writings include elements of a certain forward-looking sociological vision. Here, I will merge these elements into a single, integrated picture of a systemic “solution” proposed by Ellul.
FEDERALISM

When Ellul developed his views in the 1930s, Europe was engulfed in extreme forms of nationalism leading to the rise of fascist ideology. In reaction to that nationalist sentiment, there was a revival of philosophical interest in federalism.\(^1\) Ellul himself once confided that he had “always been a federalist.”\(^2\) But what does this mean? Indeed, as experts on federalism admit, “there is no fully fledged theory of federalism,”\(^3\) and the term itself can “mean all things to all men.”\(^4\)

Ellul himself explained that he was a federalist because for him, “democracy can only function as a real democracy when it is truly direct, hence it can only function in very small units.” He elaborated on why he believed that no democracy can exist without federalism:

It would be possible to have a democracy in each *département* in France, where each citizen would be able to vote directly on matters as they arose. I do not believe in representative democracy at all. Our Western regimes are not democracies in my eyes since the decisions are not made by the people. . . . The leaders [of the Western “democracies”] are not chosen by the people for the reason that they already constitute a political CLASS, in other words it’s always the same people who come back and who support each other. . . . what I am trying to dismantle is the ideology. I will not have anyone trying to convince me that it is the model of democracy. No, that is not what democracy is.

Ellul contrasts the modern Western “democracy” controlled by a political class and ideology to a “truly direct” democracy of ancient Athens where “everything was decided at the ‘Boule’”\(^5\) and “it was the assembly of citizens which decided on the laws that were presented to them.”\(^6\)

Thus, Ellul believed that a federation can accommodate direct democracy better than any other regime, at the very least, because it provides for autonomy of small political units, run by

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5 A council of citizens chosen by lot to manage daily affairs of the city in ancient Athens.
an assembly of its citizens. However, there appears to be more to Ellul’s federalism than its constitutional aspect. Just like Ellul claimed that he was always a federalist, he was equally assertive that he “always stayed faithful to anarcho-syndicalism as it was in the early days of the movement.”\(^7\) Accordingly, Ellul suggested that his federalism was one of the mutualist brand, theoretically developed by the classics of anarchism, most notably, by Proudhon.

What is characteristic of the anarcho-syndicalist vision of federalism is its holistic effect on the individual and society. For Proudhon, federalism is not just about constitutional arrangements distributing and protecting rights and liberties. It is an “‘organic’ conception of the political and social order” where each constituent unit, starting with family, is assured an environment that secures key social values, such as cooperation and justice.\(^8\) The organic aspect of a federalist system ensures healthy communal life, encouraging human creativity and the development of individuals that are enlightened and equipped with civic virtues, making them agents of true democracy.

Besides Proudhon, a value-oriented version of federalism as an organic construct from bottom up was developed by a number of authors who were otherwise very different from him, such as Johannes Althusius and the writers on the Catholic traditions of subsidiarity, most significantly Popes Leo XIII (1891) and Pius XI (1931).\(^9\)

Similarly, Ellul views federalism not just as a constitutional arrangement. It is a communitarian way of living, where the individual is transformed into a meaningful agent of democratic action as opposed to being a pawn in a game of politicians and ideologues.

\(^7\) Ellul, Entretiens, 184; Ellul, Conversations, 120. The French original says: “En ce qui me concerne, je reste fidèle à la vieille conception anarcho-syndicaliste des origines.” (Ellul, Entretiens, 184.)


Federation is necessary for Ellul’s system because this is the only regime that allows ideas, forming at the level of the common person, to translate directly into government (“authority”).

I dream of a balanced society in which any ideologically motivated group [such as environmentalists in this case] would, by virtue of its numbers of followers, be able to stand up to and correct the state power. It is certainly not through the political system that we are going to be able to change the orientation taken by our industry or reduce the hold that technology has on our society.

Politics can solve none of our fundamental problems. If we really want to come to grips with these problems we will have to make a complete change in our life style. We’ll have to give up all things that make our lives easier, and let’s not fool ourselves we will have to go back to frugal ways. It is not at all sure that everyone who voted for the ecologists would be prepared to make all those sacrifices. . . .

. . . Ecology has nothing to gain from being transformed into a political party or running an electoral campaign. According to me, ecology should develop as a counter force but should never indulge in politicking.\textsuperscript{10}

For Ellul, democracy is about the ethical quality of demos: it starts with and depends on the moral condition of the person. His \textit{a priori} for any discourse on democracy is that “political man is above all else a man”

Whether we like it or not, all depends entirely on the individual. Man? I will not venture into the thicket of present-day debates on that subject. Let us simply say: man is an autonomous center of decision, not merely a product of sociological currents which, in confluence, produce a semblance of man. Nor is he a planned product, the result of systematic influences precisely calculated to make him such as to be of the greatest good for society and for his own greatest happiness. Nor is he, finally, an indiscernible fragment—even though potentially full of promise and a future—of the Teilhardian social magma, converging toward some hypothetical mutation.”\textsuperscript{11}

Ellul is adamantly against social engineering of “institutions, rules, organization, and constitutions,” “permitting the reduction of appeals to the individual,” “designed to function even though the people were corrupt, senseless, cowardly, spoiled, egotistical and flabby.” He fundamentally rejects the manipulative aspect of constitutionalism trying to bypass the individual

\textsuperscript{10} Ellul, \textit{Entretiens}, 184-85; Ellul, \textit{Conversations}, 120-21. See also the use and the interpretation of this quote as Ellul's “anarchist” attempt to foster a “reasonable, questioning human person, conscious of her true situation and able to engage in genuine dialogue with other, who is indispensable for true democracy” in Goddard, \textit{Living}, 279.

\textsuperscript{11} Ellul, \textit{L'illusion Politique}, 219; Ellul, \textit{The Political Illusion}, 224-25.
and disregard “the particular nature of man”. Instead of focusing on how “things develop,” he demands focusing on how “I do.”

Unlike traditional constitutionalists, Ellul is not afraid of the uncertainty of human nature. On the contrary, he welcomes “human ‘presence’ and variability.” His hope for true democracy lies with unimpeded work of human reason and its ability to learn. To justify his position, he makes a critical distinction between “rational man” and “rationalistic man.” The fundamental difference between them is in the realm of communication. The “rational man” restores to language its “communicative substance” whereas the “rationalistic man” seeks a “metalanguage” or a “point zero’ in language,” thereby falling into the trap of “mystical and hypnotic” language of propaganda. Thus, “[t]he more that language loses its content and reasonable structure, the more man is delivered to propaganda’s delirium.”

Therefore, what democracy needs is the “rational man” and what it should be afraid of is the “rationalistic” one, invariably a victim of propaganda.

For democracy and man to exist, it is necessary to maintain at all costs the differentiations that spark communication and relationships. . . It must be understood that if adaptation takes place, there will be no more dialogue, as there will be no more differences, i.e., no more reason of communication.

Ellul’s concept of democracy, as centered exclusively around the individual, seems idealistic, and its linguistic justification comes across as obscure unless we try to comprehend it within Ellul's theological system of reference. What Ellul seems to be trying to do is release the “default” potentiality of the individual person as creation in the image of God. Once unimpeded, the human reason is capable of effectuating that image. The instrumentality with which reason

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can do it is language. This is that very language that makes us uniquely human, separates us from the animal world, and unites us with God. To Ellul, saying is doing. Therefore, protecting the language’s “natural” (read: “divine”) aspect is tantamount to protecting our humanity. Unleashing its potentiality as an instrument of reason is equivalent to unleashing human creativity, without which democracy, as the rule of people, is not possible by definition.

Similarly, Ellul’s focus on liberty as an ethical category is far more fundamental than it is for Proudhon. For Proudhon, liberty is a function of social ethics. It is an expression of justice, which results in social peace and organic cohesion of community. For Ellul, liberty is a function of personal ethics. It also leads to democracy but by a different route: it is a guarantee of free ethical choice of an individual person, through which he can achieve the level of moral self-improvement where he can operate as an agent of democracy. However, both Proudhon and Ellul believe that federation is the only form where true liberty is possible.

Another key difference between Proudhon and Ellul regarding their views on federation is how they view it in historical terms. For Proudhon, anarchy manifested in purely organic communitarian federalism appears to be the end of history, where a perfectly balanced social harmony is finally achieved. For Ellul, anarchy is a necessary temporary transition to a higher form of existence. He was apparently influenced by how Marx thought of “socialism”: as a transitional stage to communism, a social purgatory of sorts, where the imperfect society becomes ready for a true utopia of communism, where class differences will be finally settled, and no power or violence will be any more needed. Similarly, Ellul associates anarchy with creating the conditions for a fundamental transformation of individuals to become ready for a true democracy in its deepest and most essential sense, where ethics will completely displace
politics. Anarchy means that people will rid themselves of the damage inflicted on them by the modern focus on “bread and circuses.” Under federation, a community can resist state, negate it, and transform the individual into a truly ethical being.

What Ellul wants to do is put the subjectively driven individual, enlightened and inspired by God, straight into the center of political action. He is that action. It is democracy that is direct and raw. There are no more procedures or processes, agencies or organizations, institutions or arrangements, parties or propaganda, agenda setting or strategizing. There is only buzz of vigorous but peaceful discourse, where human creative potential is released unimpeded, unfrightened and unhhampered on the virtual agora where God is the only chairman and the Bible is the only set of rules.

LAW

Law is the second pillar of Ellul’s solution. It may sound strange, given his negative opinion of it as a technique of the state. However, Ellul does not mean that the modern law should be a solution. The law that will be practiced in his utopian federation is the law of custom. Just as politics is the negative opposite of ethics, and the state—of federation, the modern law is the negative opposite of custom. In Ellul's solution, each of these negatives must be collapsed into its opposite positive, and the law must be collapsed into custom as it was before it was technicized. Ellul envisions three types of action to bring back the law of custom and resolve the modern crisis: (1) segregating the jurists from state and politics; (2) replacing technical laws aimed at "order," with laws focused on "real needs" and "recognized values"; and (3) relying on
the Christians to press for laws protecting the weakest members of society and making the
government accountable for violation of its own laws.

Ellul himself experienced the power of custom for legal solutions at the community level.
In *Anarchy and Christianity* one of his examples of "marginal action" outside the technical
system was his own legal practice in the village where he found refuge during the war. Once the
villagers came to know him as a person and learned that he was a lawyer, they began going to
him for settling disputes and solving problems. He was a justice of the peace, an attorney, and a
notary by popular acclaim. The settlement agreements he prepared were not official, but the
villagers signed them and complied with them as if they were.  

This experience suggested Ellul his theory about the role of the jurists and the law of custom in solving the modern crisis.

As discussed in chapter 2, Ellul argued that the justice aspect of the law resists complete
technicization. He explained that "[t]he function of justice provokes an unending major debate
between the claims of justice and those of judicial technique."

Indeed, it is widely recognized that the discretionary aspect of law is at odds with the
"rule of law," that is, the procedurally rigid application of substantive rules. The liberal legal
scholars promote the rule of law because it limits the opportunities for discretion, thereby
reducing the opportunities for the arbitrary application of the law.  

However, a number of authors who share a communitarian vision, sometimes called “dialogists” (e.g., Hans-Georg
Gadamer, Jürgen Habermas, Richard Rorty, and Hannah Arendt), are suspicious of the rule of
law and welcome the discretion. In the words of Joel F. Handler, "They argue that it is wrong to

16 Andrew Goddard makes this suggestion in Goddard, *Living*, 226.
83-85.
try to govern human relationships through rules, that discretion is not only necessary, but desirable."\(^{19}\)

Ellul takes a similar position regarding the rule of law

We must unmask the ideological falsehoods of the many powers, and especially we must show that the famous theory of the rule of law which lulls the democracies is a lie from beginning to end.\(^{20}\)

He is concerned that the fixation of the modern law on precision and decisional predictability has washed justice out of the law. Indeed, justice makes things unpredictable but technique, with its preoccupation with efficiency, demands certainty. Thus, technique has created a dynamic that is undermining the law's normative and functional aspects, causing their diminution and, ultimately, a demise of the law itself. Put simply, the law gets dissolved in the bureaucratic rule-making.\(^{21}\)

Initially, the justice aspect of the law and the technical aspect (i.e., the "judicial technique") were in "certain equilibrium." That is how it was "in a period of natural law." As the judicial technique developed, the judicial discretion became diminished for the sake of greater order and efficiency. As discretionary authority was replaced by detailed rules, the judicial flexibility, necessary for resolution of "concrete problems," disappeared. Justice, as a factor of unpredictability, could no longer burden bureaucracy. With the loss of justice as the main justification for the law, the new justification was needed. Now it was, “Better injustice than

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 84.  
\(^{20}\) Ellul, Anarchie, 20; Ellul, Anarchy, 16.  
\(^{21}\) Ellul, La Technique, 265-72; Ellul, The Technological Society, 291-300.
disorder."\textsuperscript{22} This evolution of the law had two consequences: (1) law became a "mere instrument of the state"; and, (2) law lost its original normative and functional aspect and thus disappeared.

Once the law does not have a justice component, it cannot be used against the state and in the end, the state appropriates the law as a form of its own expression.

The state is a law unto itself ("le maître en soi") and recognizes no rules but its own will. When, in this way, technique breaks off the indispensable dialogues between the law and the state, it makes the state a god in the most theologically accurate sense of the term: a power which obeys nothing but its own will and submits to no judgment from without. This godlike will of the state is for modern man the most precise expression of technique.\textsuperscript{23}

The second consequence, the "disappearance" of the law, is a result of its normative and functional degradation. On the normative side, justice is replaced by order for the sake of efficiency. However, Ellul argues that "[e]fficiency is itself order." Therefore, there is "a general transformation of means into ends." The abstract notion of justice, that the law helps the person to fulfill his particular function in society, is changed. Now it is efficiency, not justice, that validates the individual's role in society.\textsuperscript{24}

On the functional side of the law, the attempt of the state to address all issues of government through promulgation of new laws leads to their tremendous proliferation. Every activity, every element of planning becomes law. As a result, the law loses its unique legal domain, its very "being." Everything is now law. The domain is "no longer defined by object or by end, but by method," which is "a triumph of technique" ("une vertu technique").\textsuperscript{25} Thus, the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{22} Ellul, \textit{La Technique}, 265, 267-68; Ellul, \textit{The Technological Society}, 292, 294-95.
\textsuperscript{23} Ellul, \textit{La Technique}, 271; Ellul, \textit{The Technological Society}, 299.
\textsuperscript{24} Ellul, \textit{La Technique}, 271-72; Ellul, \textit{The Technological Society}, 299-300.
\textsuperscript{25} Ellul, \textit{La Technique}, 272; Ellul, \textit{The Technological Society}, 300.
\end{flushleft}
modern law is in a deep crisis, an impasse, from which it cannot recover with the help of a normal legal reform.\textsuperscript{26}

Ellul's philosophy of law is an unusual mixture of legal positivism and his special brand of Christian communitarianism. According to Goddard, he formed his views at the law department of Bordeaux University, which was dominated by the positivism of its recently deceased chief of the constitutional law department, Léon Duguit, who, in turn, was influenced by Émile Durkheim and had views similar to such thinkers as Eugen Ehrlich, Gaston Jèze and Rudolf von Ihering. In the words of Goddard, "This school rejected natural law theories but, rather than relating law to the state, emphasized law's relationship to the wider society within which it functioned."\textsuperscript{27}

However, Ellul did not consider himself a positivist, apparently trying to avoid its anti-normative relativistic cynicism. Instead, he tried to connect the positivist focus on "the concrete" with his own focus on the individual human being. Just like democracy demands the right demos to be a true democracy, and vice versa, the law needs the right people to make it the right law, and vice versa.

It seems to me that the problem [whether legal idealists or legal positivists are correct about the foundation of law] must be addressed on the level of the relationship between people and the law. But only on the condition that this is not an ideal, theoretical, general law but law such as we see it existing concretely in diverse societies and also on the condition that we do not take an abstract, generic humanity but the individual and social person in all his singularity and complexity. . . If I am examining a given historical system of law, and the individuals within that society, what is the relationship which exists between them? It seems to me that precisely in the phenomenon of the lived relationship between people and the law there may be a possible way of getting beyond the doctrinal conflict and developing an explanation of law’s authority.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{26} "Initiales pour l’étude de la relation entre les émeutes de mai-juin 1968 et le droit,” in Archives de philosophie du droit (14): 5-19 as restated in Goddard, Living, 225.
\textsuperscript{27} Goddard, Living, 200.
As a professor of Roman law and history of institutions, Ellul carefully studied the legal systems of the past. The result of that study was his five-volume *Histoire des Institutions*. There, Ellul underscored that one of the law's original functions was to limit the power of the authorities. That is what the laws did in the Greek *polis*.

From a juridical point of view, the laws appeared essentially as the limitation on the power, unlimited per se, of the authority. Thus, the laws are instructions to the magistrates with a view of protecting the citizens from the arbitrary. Therefore, the citizens must know the law: the latter must be published and advertised. This application of the law to the authorities manifests itself in the terminology: the laws are named after the magistrates whose activity they establish or concern.29

Ellul pointed out that for the ancient Greeks, "order" was the opposite of tyranny. This was consistent with their teleological understanding of order, contrary to its modern understanding in terms of power and the violence it ensues. Thus, the law's meaning was in the attainment of order arising from the triumph of justice. Order comes from the law, whose primary purpose is to oppose tyranny on a par with such other forces opposing it as free competition and "struggle" among the citizens.

In the beginning of the 6th century [B.C.E.], the political thought [of Greece] is dominated by research of order: eunomia.30 This order cannot be obtained except by the triumph of the dike, who is not defined but she is personified, deified and illustrated. This dike must be established for everybody. She is the opposite of disorder and violence: this is why the tyranny founded on subjugation is never just according the dike. The tyranny can establish subordination, it is exactly anomie, the contrary of the Eunomia. . . . [Eunomia] is an affair of everybody, not just of the magistrates. Therefore, it is important that everybody be free (with respect to the tyrant or to whom he is indebted) to participate in the Eunomia. Heraclitus is the only one who perhaps considers that the tyranny can be a valid expression of order. However, he insists in that regard on importance of the law that is a true basis of the City and on the importance of contest, competition, struggle between the citizens, which are a condition of life in the City.31

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30 Eunomia is a Greek goddess of law and legislation that personifies order.
31 Ellul, *Histoire des Institutions*, vol. 1, 69, 112. It is curious that Ellul cites Heraclitus, a dialectician, to show the importance of competition between citizens, something he later presented as his principal "social dialectic."
Ellul was preoccupied with the normative orientation of the law, which was related to his intense focus on its theological implications for social life. In his book *The Theological Foundation of Law*, Ellul presents his eschatological outlook on the meaning of the law. To Ellul, all justice comes from Christ. It is justice based on love and grace. God's justice is different from human law as the law is informed by "exigencies of natural man," and yet we are under an obligation to be guided by God's justice. We have a freedom to do it or to disobey His command. However, at the end of the world, Christ will appropriate our law to judge us by its standards.\(^{32}\) Thus, in Ellul's words "No conformism is possible because we know that the totality of law will have to submit to final judgment."\(^{33}\)

The eschatological perspective of law which we attempted to trace has led us to the assumption that this law is embodied in the human situation. Although it does not end with history, law is a part of history. But since it does not end there, it obeys a certain purpose, it has an orientation towards a goal. From the beginning its development is not left to chance. What is true on the level of the covenant and of the judgment is also true on the level of human history. On the human level, law has a purpose. . . [The Christian] is to act not with an ideal, but with a view to the realization of an end and the fulfillment of a function for which law was ordained from its beginning.\(^{34}\)

In this theological context, Ellul developed his sociological solution for the crisis of the modern law. It is based on a "double attitude" of a Christian to law that corresponds to its dual nature where the perfection of divine righteousness must find an expression in the imperfect human law. On one hand, a Christian must "recognize the legitimate exigencies of natural man in regard to his rights and to incorporate them into law." On the other, a Christian must prevent law

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from becoming "the pure product of force,” and ensure "that the just and genuine elements in man's claims do not become satanic."\(^{35}\)

Ellul recognizes the law's potential to be turned from a problem into a solution, from an instrument of the state's dominance into an instrument of resisting it. The Gospels provide the key to it: The law should not be at the service of only the strong. Instead, it should protect the weak.

In his article, "Research on Law and the Gospel," (1981), Ellul criticizes the Marxist legal solution. He argues that "for the Marxists, the law is an instrument of the dominant class destined to ensure and justify its domination. Therefore, it is a means of struggle of the strongest against the weakest, struggle that is material (the system of sanctions) and at the same time ideological (the law attests justice).” He credits Marx in showing how bourgeoisie of the 18th and 19th centuries used the law in this fashion "even through the revolutions" and exposing "the illusion, supported by this law, of justice, equality, etc."\(^{36}\)

Ellul believes that, while "recognizing that his [Marx's] attack is justified," he cannot accept Marx's generalized application of the same principle to all societies and all law: "the law has not always been the consecration of the strongest, nor the result of class struggle, nor a simple ideology.” Even though socio-historical conditions of change, the law remains the same law. Thus, the Christians must oppose putting the law, yet again, at the service of a dominant class, this time the proletariat. The law must not be "an instrument of the installed power (this time a revolutionary one).”\(^{37}\)

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\(^{35}\) Ellul, Le Fondement Théologique du Droit, 77; Ellul, The Theological Foundation of Law, 100-01.


\(^{37}\) Ibid., 134.
According to Ellul, the Christian approach to legal reform must be diametrically different from Marx's: The law "must be recognized as the means of protection of the weakest with respect to the strongest." In order to make the law "the recourse of the weak," three "conditions" must be met, "formulated based on experience," resulting in a judiciary that would be truly independent from the state and the party politics.38

The first condition is that "neither the political power, nor the administration must be the ones who draft the laws and regulations.” Those who draft the law should not be affected by elections based on party affiliations. The chain 'political party—representative chamber of these parties—production of the law' leads to a situation where the state makes its own law. The second condition is a complete independence of the judiciary, whose recruitment, nomination and careers must not depend on political power. A special corpus of financially independent judiciary must be formed that would be "autocephalous" and "self-directing.” The third condition is that "the jurors must get their direction and their value from their function, which is to say that they must cease to be pure technicians of the law and commentators of edicts and arrests, and understand that they are the sole creators of the law.”39

Ellul points out that the third condition is "closely correlated" to the first two, suggesting this is the goal where all three conditions realize their purpose: to restore the law to its historic condition when it was based on custom

There is creation of law not when parliament votes for a piece of legislation or the Council of Ministers issues a decree but when each person performs a juridical act, when each jurist, notary, magistrate passes judgment and writes up a report: that practice of law is able to be effective and

38 Ibid., 135.
39 Ibid., 137-38. For a more expanded review of the three conditions, see Goddard, Living, 225-27.
creative of the law's foundation. It was effectively such for centuries (the law of custom), and it simply needs a little courage to become such again.\(^\text{40}\)

The jurist's vocation is not to consider nuances of the application of the law, created by the others, but to create "the substance of the law" so that it reflects real facts of life and the values recognized in society. The jurist has a two-fold task:

\[\ldots\] [O]n one hand, he has to be one (much more than a politician who obeys ideologies) who detects, at the level of the client, the real needs and, at the same time, the recognized values. He has to take into account these real needs and, at the same time, these values. It is he and only he, who can assume the values of the group \ldots and give them a scope, a juridical value. On the other hand, he has precisely this job to do, which is to translate into juridical terms in the existing corpus these needs and these values. No politician and no administration can do this work. Only a jurist, provided he takes his function seriously, has the ability to do it. However, he has to stop being an official under orders, being a money earner.\(^\text{41}\)

Ellul proposes his legal reform to be a reform of society in general. Disappointed in the Marxist revolutions, he takes Marx's social critique and offers an alternative to Marxism: a social reform based on the Gospels' message. Ellul argues that a legal reform is currently the only way to help the poor. He expressly rejects other alternatives of defending the poor, such as "distribution of social security" or "political action to change society."\(^\text{42}\) This is consistent with his claim that nothing good can possibly come from the state. Acting through the state will only further the state's idolization as the sole caretaker of society.

Two agents are to conduct this battle: on the functional side of the reform, it will be the jurists, unbiased and segregated from the state and party politics. They will ensure that the laws respond to "real needs" and the "recognized values." On the normative side, it will be the Christians who will ensure that the values are correctly identified. First, they are the ones who

\(^{40}\) Cited from Goddard, Living, 227. (In the quote, I used "the law of custom" instead of "le droit coutumier" in the original.)

\(^{41}\) Ellul, "Recherches sur le Droit," 138.

\(^{42}\) Ibid.,
believe in the Gospels and, according to Ellul, "The gospel demands that we engage in a juridical combat."\textsuperscript{43} Secondly, they are the only ones whose judgment is not blinded by egoism

It appears to me that the Christian vocation exists in the measure where nobody else in society seems to be capable of operating other than out of selfish interests. And we rediscover our dual purpose: other people (and groups) look to affirm and defend “their law.” A Christian, on the contrary, must never give priority to his law. Other people and groups are not interested at all in the law of the weak, the poor, and the unprotected, whereas a Christian is one who is not measured by isolated acts of charity or political affiliations but who has understood that the opportunity for the weak is in the recognition for them of the laws that are strict and intractable and in the effective application of these laws.\textsuperscript{44}

As a first step, the Christians must perform as a "social conscience of sorts." While independent law cannot be attained right away, they must demand that at least those that are on the books are observed for the sake of the powerless.\textsuperscript{45}

Thus, Ellul comes to an interesting solution to the problem of modern law. A communitarian thinker, he is against the liberal statist approach to law that tries to limit discretion in pursuit of justice as fairness. However, like many other communitarian thinkers, he must address the downside of discretionary application of law: potential for abuse. Ellul does not seem to be perturbed by this problem. Indeed, the law is already applied abusively due to the monopoly of the state over it. The state creates the laws for itself, and it picks and chooses how to apply it in order to protect its own grip on power. Appeals to “justice” and the whole concept of the rule of law are just a ruse of the system's propaganda.

However, Ellul appreciates the need for a substantive basis of the law. Influenced by legal positivism, he does not believe in natural law. He wants the law to be developed within the framework of three variables: (1) protection from the influence of the state and politics; (2) "real

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 139.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
needs"; and (3) "recognized values." The first variable, protection from the state, is important so that the law regains its normative and functional self. The second variable, "real needs," is what makes the law a "living law" anchored in custom and responsive to social problems, including the one of technique. The third variable, "recognized values," is something that gives the law a teleological orientation.

This brings us back to the issue of dialogical solution to the problem of arbitrary application of the law. Ellul's version of dialogism appears to have similarities to other dialogists. Like Habermas and Rorty, he insists on removing factors distorting communication, such as the state and politicians. Like Arendt, he insists on the importance of debate and its freedom. Like Gadamer, he wants to connect hermeneutics with practical philosophy. However, Ellul's dialogism is also very different because of its Christian orientation.46 The Christian message of selfless service to society is his principal foundation for substantive rationality. One can only see things for what they are if his perceptions are not clouded by egoism and if he chooses Christ for his guidance.

46 For critique of these thinkers on this issue, see Handler, Law and the Search for Community, 85-94.
VIOLENCE

To Ellul, violence is a totally unacceptable proposition. His rejection of violence is as complete as it has been for the Anabaptists or other radical pacifists within the ranks of both the Christians and the anarchists. Thus, Ellul's stand on violence is not original. However, his justification for this position is.\(^{47}\)

There are three reasons for that: One is theological and the other two—sociological. First, violence was condemned and rejected by Jesus. Second, violence manifests the power of the modern state and the crisis it engenders. Third, as a way of government and as a means of resisting it, violence is ineffective and counterproductive.

The second and the third reasons are derivatives of the first one in a typical Ellulian understated inference of the sociological from the theological. However, the primacy of the theological conceptualization is much more pronounced in the case of violence. Indeed, the only book dedicated to the concept of violence is expressly a theological one.\(^{48}\) Moreover, the "sociological" book with the most developed argument against violence also puts it on a theological foundation along with a sociological one.\(^{49}\)

The theological argument is based both on Old and New Testaments. In a stereotypical distinction between them as a book of rules versus a book of standards, one would expect an argument based on the Old Testament to be drawn from its prescriptions, but an argument based on the New Testament to appeal to the spirit of the Book. In a provocative switch, Ellul does

\(^{47}\) Andres Goddard makes this point in Goddard, Living, 310. Goddard also compares Ellul's views on violence such recent thinkers on the subjects as John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas.

\(^{48}\) Ellul, Contre les Violents; Ellul, Violence. To be fair, this book includes much discussion on sociology of violence as well.

\(^{49}\) Ellul, Anarchie; Ellul, Anarchy.
exactly the opposite. By his own admission, he finds it "most embarrassing" that the Hebrew Bible\textsuperscript{50} includes so many recounts of wars.\textsuperscript{51} Trying to compensate for that, he makes his proof that God is a god of Love, basing it on the Old and not on the New Testament, which would be a more common argument.

The thrust of Ellul's theological argument is that God, who is omnipotent, could have consistently used His "power"\textsuperscript{52} in way of threats and the use of force to show that He is a true master. However, God chooses to be gentle as a demonstration of him being love.

Though the biblical God is the Almighty, in practice he does not make use of his omnipotence in his dealings with us except in particular instances which are recorded precisely because they are abnormal (e.g., the Flood, the Tower of Babel, or Sodom and Gomorrah). God's is a self-limited omnipotence, not through caprice or fancy, but because anything else would be in contradiction with his very being. For beyond power, the dominant and conditioning fact is that the being of God is love.\textsuperscript{53}

Ellul argues, "When God creates, it is not to amuse himself, but because, being love, he wants someone to love other than himself." In his cosmogony of the world's creation, he could have unleashed "a terrible explosion of power." However, God chooses to "express himself solely by his Word," showing that he is a "communicative god" ("Dieu pour la communication"). Throughout the Hebrew Bible, He "talks sadly to his people, making no threats," He talks to Moses "as friend to friend," "he puts himself on our human level and limits himself." Ellul rejects the argument of the "theologians who were under the influence of a monarchy" that God "might have insisted on omnipotence by way of limitation" and concludes that "[f]or the most

\textsuperscript{50} Ellul intentionally uses the term "Hebrew Bible" instead of "Old Testament" not "to annex these books and deprive the Jewish people of what really belongs to them." See, Ellul, Anarchie, 13, footnote 1. The footnote does not appear in the original French edition of the book, where the term “Old Testament” is used and not “Hebrew Bible.” See Ellul, Anarchie, 17.

\textsuperscript{51} Ellul, Anarchie, 17; Ellul, Anarchy, 13.

\textsuperscript{52} Sociologically, Ellul defines "power" as to be always "violence." Therefore, the use of the same term "power" in his theological argument suggests a contrast between God’s "power" as the use of force and what we might call His "soft power," i.e., the exercise of influence through suggestive and gentle steering rather than compelling one to comply that would be contrary to freedom of ethical choice.

\textsuperscript{53} Ellul, Anarchie, 38; Ellul, Anarchy, 33.
part, however, the true face of the biblical God is love." Even God's prescriptions in the Hebrew Bible are not prohibitions as if they were in a human law. Instead, these commandments are "the border God draws between life and death," a survival advice of sorts how not to get into trouble: if you shall not kill, you are likely not to be killed. They are also a "promise" of God that it is possible not to kill, and we do not have to do it.

One critical implication of God's love is freedom. "But why freedom?" Ellul poses the question and answers it:

If we accept that God is love, and that it is human beings who are to respond to this love, the explanation is simple. Love cannot be forced, ordered, or made obligatory. It is necessarily free. If God liberates, it is because he expects and hopes that we will come to know him and love him. He cannot lead us to do so by terrorizing us.

This is why Jesus, whose sacrifice was the highest expression of God's love for his creation, was also a testament of the freedom given us by God. Ellul vehemently disagrees with Barth that the fact that Jesus submitted himself to the jurisdiction of Pilate was "a basis for the power of the state." Ellul called such argumentation "astounding."

On the contrary, it is an unveiling of the basic injustice of what purports to be justice. This is what is felt when it is said that in the trial of Jesus all those who were condemned to death and crucified by the Romans are cleared. We thus find here once again the conviction of the biblical writers that all authority is unjust. We catch an echo of the saying of Ecclesiastes 3:16 that 'where the seat of justice is found, there rules wickedness.'

Indeed, by answering some questions with silence, some with accusation of the authorities ("... your power has come and the hour of darkness"), and some with provocation ("It is you who has said so"), Jesus showed anything but respect for the authorities.

54 Ellul, Anarchie, 38-39; Ellul, Anarchy, 33-35.
55 Ellul, Anarchie, 44-45; Ellul, Anarchy, 39-40.
56 Ellul, Anarchie, 44; Ellul, Anarchy, 39.
57 Ellul, Anarchie, 75; Ellul, Anarchy, 65.
58 Ellul, Anarchie, 75-76; Ellul, Anarchy, 66-67.
In this lengthy series of texts relating to Jesus' face-to-face encounters with the political and religious authorities, we find irony, scorn, noncooperation, indifference, and sometimes accusation. Jesus was no guerrilla. He was an "essential" disputer.\textsuperscript{59}

So, what does it make the authorities? Logically, it means that they and all power are from the devil. Ellul believes that it follows both from the implication of Jesus's accusations but also from the literal interpretation of his key statements. According to Ellul, when Jesus said to Pilate, "You would not have the least power over me unless it had been given to you from above; therefore he who delivered me to you is more guilty than you," the phrase "from above" could only mean "from the spirit of evil."

This is that all powers and kingdoms in this world depend on the devil. It is also in keeping with the reply of Jesus to the chief priests... that the power of darkness is at work in his trial.\textsuperscript{60}

Needless to say, Christ Himself showed an example of abstaining from using power when he forbade Peter to use his sword during the arrest in Gethsemane, saying, "Any one who kills with the sword will be killed by the sword."\textsuperscript{61}

Thus, according to Ellul, power is repugnant to God. It is contrary to his image and to the very essence of His being. God avoids using it Himself, and he detests its existence in the world. It follows from Him being love. Therefore, using power means being at the service of that who directly opposes love: the devil himself. God warns us that using power is a way to death and, regardless what the "realists" say, He promises us that we need not engage it in the world he designed. Now, what does all this mean for Ellul's sociological "solution" to the modern crisis?

\textsuperscript{59} Ellul, \textit{Anarchie}, 80; Ellul, \textit{Anarchy}, 71.

\textsuperscript{60} Ellul, \textit{Anarchie}, 78; Ellul, \textit{Anarchy}, 69.

\textsuperscript{61} Ellul, \textit{Anarchie}, 74; Ellul, \textit{Anarchy}, 65.
In the modern world, power always means violence. Ellul defines power as violence, and he defines violence broadly enough to include all use of power, including even the "soft power" of propaganda and exercise of ideological influence, considering such violence the worst kind because it controls the thought.\textsuperscript{62} In the socio-political context, he often uses terms "power" and "violence" interchangeably. However, he also conceptually equates the state, especially the modern state, with power and emphasizes that the modern state does not know any means of control other than violence. Thus, resisting power/violence at the service of God necessarily means resisting the modern state.

However, the state must not be paid back in kind: fighting violence can only work if it is done by nonviolent means. For a Christian, this is obvious: Violence is not an option, simply because, as Ellul is convinced, God said so. However, Ellul rejects violence also because of a "tactical motivation": it is ineffective as it is counterproductive. It simply does not work. He cites historical evidence to make his point:

We not only recall the success of Gandhi, but nearer home it is also evident that Martin Luther King did much to advance the cause of American Blacks, whereas later movements, for example, the Black Muslims and Black Panthers, which wanted to make quicker headway by using all kinds of violence, not only gained nothing but even lost some of the gains made by King. Similarly, the violent movements in Berlin in 1956, then in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, all failed, but Lech Walesa, by imposing a strict discipline of nonviolence on his union, held his own against the Polish government. One of the sayings of the great union leaders of the years 1900-1910 was this: Strikes, yes, but violence, never. . . . An authoritarian government can respond to violence only with violence.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{62} Ellul, \textit{Contre les Violents}, 127; Ellul, \textit{Violence}, 98.
\textsuperscript{63} Ellul, \textit{Anarchie}, 16-17; Ellul, \textit{Anarchy}, 12-13. Ellul also makes an example between the violence-based approach of Mandela versus the nonviolent one by Buthelezi in South Africa, saying that the latter is more promising on that account. Despite that the Mandela movement ended up being more successful, Ellul's prediction is arguably correct as by the time of the victory of Mandela's movement, it turned to nonviolent practices and went into history as a pioneering and great example of a peaceful regime change based on a "repent-and-be-forgiven" approach to the former perpetrators of violence.
Feeling the pressure of the "realists" trying to justify violence in some cases, Ellul offers a theoretical proof for his claim. He formulates "inescapable laws of violence," demonstrating that violence is always impractical due to its inherent characteristics.\(^{64}\) The laws are (1) continuity, (2) reciprocity, (3) sameness, (4) "violence begets violence," and (5) the perpetrator of violence always justifies himself and his violence.

The laws underscore the monistic nature of violence in Ellul's system. He \textit{a priori} rejects any classification or distinction in the ethical or the social aspects of violence, seeing it as an incarnation of evil itself:

Violence is hubris, fury, madness. There are no such things as major and minor violence. Violence is a single thing, and it is always the same. In this respect, too, Jesus saw the reality. He declared that there is no difference between murdering a fellow man and being angry with him or insulting him (Matthew 5:21-22). This passage is no "evangelical counsel for the converted"; it is, purely and simply, a description of the nature of violence.\(^{65}\)

Understood broadly, as simply the opposite of love, Ellul's violence operates as an aggregate notion of sin, a concept where his entire ethical and social system merges in one monistic expression that offers \textit{the} answer to all questions of life. It is a focal point of his social "solution" to the modern crisis.

As a result, nonviolence is not simply a rejection of violence. By logic, it assumes a new dimension by operating as a force of love and thus a force of God Himself. Thus, nonviolence rises from simple inaction to an active and positive tool of social reform.

The potential strength of such a monistic formulation of violence is in its simplicity and elegance as well as its tremendous appeal rooted in its firm ethical foundation. However, this

\(^{64}\) For more detail, see a summary of the laws on pp. 102-03 hereof or their original description in Ellul, \textit{Contre les Violents}, 122-40; Ellul, \textit{Violence}, 93-108.

strength is matched with potential weaknesses. Indeed, its monism makes it fraught with theoretical and practical dilemmas. Like any monistic theorization, this one poorly absorbs the inherent complexity of social or even ethical reality that is full of contradictions that do not lend themselves to a simple distinction of good and evil, at least on the ontological level.

Konyndyk criticized this aspect of Ellul's view on violence. According to Konyndyk, Ellul’s characterization of all aspects of the world, such as government, economy, and education, as "irredeemably evil" and denying the Christians "the traditional direct means" of resisting that evil, "reduces specifically Christian action in the world to a form of paralysis." Indeed, if everything in this world is laced with violence, and the Christians cannot participate in violence, then they cannot participate in this world's affairs in any realistic sense. Consequently, how can they change it for the better?

Another issue with Ellul's monistic approach is that his solution operates as a reflection of his monistic diagnosis. His solution suffers from the very problems of the crisis it is trying to solve. Thus, Ellul criticizes technique for turning means, that is, technical solutions, into ends. Ironically, his solution suffers from the same problem. Being an answer to technique, it turns ends into means and vice versa. We can hardly see what nonviolence is, the former or the latter, ending up in a confusion of over-generalizations and over-simplifications that severely hamper the practicality of his theory.

One more example of mirror-imaging of monistically defined problems and solutions is Ellul's concept of totalitarianism. According to Ellul, all modern states are totalitarian. However, Ellul defines violence so broadly that it includes all government action. Ironically, in his critique of totalitarianism, Ellul himself is totalitarian: His broad definition of violence eradicates any

66 Konyndyk, "Violence," 265-67. See also the discussion of the issue in Chapter 3.
ontological distinction between violence and sin, power and sin, and the state and sin. Therefore, it strips the world's reality of ethical complexity by boiling it down to an untenable proposition: Be perfect or be gone. Like Alexander the Great cutting the Gordian knot, Ellul decided to resolve the paradox between ethics and politics by simply destroying its political prong.

And yet, in fairness to Ellul, his complete rejection of violence has a message of tremendous "practical" value: We must not be cavalier about using power. Having power is not equal to a mandate for using it. If we use violence, even for a good cause, somebody invariably gets hurt. And when it happens, the guilt is ours even if we meant well. Thus, the only way not to fall into the sin of violence is to see violence clearly for what it is, without attempting to justify it. If we do it, we will be compelled to repent. Being a nonviolent activist means proving what you preach by personally assuming the suffering required by what you advocate, as done by the followers of Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

II. PRACTICALIZING ELLUL'S THEORY: RESOLVING THE PARADOX

DIALECTICIZING ELLUL

In my critique of Ellul's dialectic, I came to the conclusion that he resolved the paradox between ethics and politics by letting ethics subsume politics. He intentionally rejected a possibility or need to do it through dialectical synthesis, finding it dangerous: It would compromise Otherness of God and open loopholes for self-justification and collaboration with technique. Like Kierkegaard before him, he was afraid of dialectics' destructive potential for
ethics. Indeed, if everything changes, then ethical principles change, too. This fear of moral relativism poisoned the whole interest of Ellul in dialectics and limited his understanding of it.

The downside of this was the loss of a logically based co-existence of ethics and politics within one system except through complete demonization of politics, turning it into an ethical opposite of good. This, of course, makes his system quite unappealing to a practitioner of politics or even to a direct action activist trying to formulate a realistic way of implementation of her radical agenda after being indoctrinated by Ellul himself.

This is why, in order to "practicalize" Ellul, we must try to find an alternative way of resolving the paradox between ethics and politics. But could it be done? Could ethics fit in a dialectical framework of analysis without falling victim to relativistic cynicism, while remaining true to Ellul's important message?

Let us assume, like Hegel did, a complete monism of reality: all is one, similarly to the unity of space, time, matter, and energy in physics. It will follow from this assumption that everything is a continuation of another in a grand inter-dependent structure of the universe. (For the moment, we will ignore the reality's self-learning aspect.)

This reality of most complete and ideal logical interrelation and causality between all things is infinitely unified and infinitely fragmented at the same time. Therefore, all distinctions between its structural elements must dissipate and become superfluous at a certain level of generality. Things will appear uniform and monistic as we zoom out, and they will appear complex as we zoom in. Let us try to resolve all logic-related predicaments of Ellul's method in the framework of this reality.
Within this overall structure of a perfectly logical and ideally inter-related system, every thing can only be understood relative of another, and yet all things together represent one absolute totality. Like two adjacent dots on a curve create a straight line, everything is relative to something else that is bigger, and everything is absolute to something else that is smaller.

Now let us plunge into the currents of changes and transformations. Each can only be noticeable in its temporal and spatial dimension. Indeed, if a house dweller can see a change in a tree in her back yard, her one-time houseguest can hardly do it and can only assume such a change. In her memory, the tree will always remain an unchanging absolute.

However, despite our limited perceptions, we tend to "know" that some things change, and some do not. In this world, nothing is truly permanent, we believe, and yet, we are driven to act as if many things were. This imperative of practicality demands recognition of some "absolutes" and a priori even if we know in our heart that they cannot be permanent in a big scheme of life.

Here, of course, we run into a predicament with ethics: If ethics is not a function of God and is subject to change, can it be taken seriously? Needless to say, theology is immune to this predicament as it places ethics within the purview of God and our relationship with Him. However, even speaking in terms of anthropological science and ignoring the existence of God, an argument can be made about the immutability of our ethical perceptions.

Let us assume that some ethical traits are a part of our nature as a biological species. Then, what difference does it make, from a practical standpoint, if they are truly “absolute”? We can treat them just if they were, because they will not change within the life span of our species. This is where Jesus meets Darwin, and science meets religion. Our "species being,” using Marx's
term for the "human nature," can learn and change its perceptions as a whole, somewhat similar to the Spirit of Hegel. However, certain biological imperatives demand, for our very survival, an unchanging appreciation of an immutable value system.\textsuperscript{67} That foundational value system based on our "human measure" noticed by the Classical Greeks is and always will be "absolute" to us even if we do not bring God into the logical equation as an on-going active force in our lives. This absoluteness survives the test of the dialectical principle demanding that all things be in flux. They can be in flux, indeed, but as a species we will not live long enough to see our ethics change. It is simply a part of us, and therefore we cannot survive it.

Now that we have established the "absoluteness" of ethics in the same metaphysical dimension as the rest of the dialectically structured world, we can try to resolve logically some of the intractable problems of Ellul's method caused by dimensional confusion and unnecessary conceptual monism. To do that, we will revisit the ontology of technique, the focal point of argument in Ellul's sociology.

As I pointed out in Chapter 3, Ellul views technique as an extra-ethical category: Technique's most dangerous aspect is that it is impervious to human ethics, and the only ethics it recognizes is one of its own: where "good" boils down to "efficient," and "bad" means exclusively "inefficient." Technique imposes this value system on us humans. The fallout of this imposition is the idolatry of consumerism, the transformation of the state into the sole caretaker of society, ubiquitous violence, despair, and disappearance of teleological orientation. Put simply, the world based on efficiency is a world where evil triumphs.

As appealing as it is, this argument seems to suffer from logical problems. Indeed, technique is "evil" and "extra-evil" at the same time. It works evil on us and yet, it does not understand what evil is. In fact, evil appears to be better than technique because technique cannot even rise to the level of our human evil. Indeed, in the human ethical system, evil operates in constant interaction with good. Hence, human evil can even be a constructive force, stimulating moral growth in a repenting person. Being autonomous to human ethics, technique does not have this chance. Thus, it is worse than evil, which is a logical impossibility.

This logical problem occurs because in his argument about technique, Ellul seems to engage incongruous problematics. First, it is about the elimination of natural by artifactual and a related problem of elimination of "human" by "non-human." Second, it is about destruction of individual autonomy vis-à-vis the state with its totalitarian suppression of the spontaneous impulse of the human creative spirit. Third, it is about substitution of reflective reason by instrumental reason. Finally, it is about a spiritual battle between good and evil. Ellul brings them all at once into a fray by collapsing them all in one spiritual battle between good and evil.

In each of these problematics, Ellul must functionally equate one prong of each dichotomy to "good," and the other to "evil," thereby a priori depriving them of any functional solution other than the self-purification of individuals. He cannot expand his solutions because of the monistic conceptualization of technique: It can only be either good or evil. What Ellul needs is a leap from this rigid conceptualization to one that allows logically for internal contradictions within technique. This can only be done by Hegelian dialectics.

Just to be clear, I do not advocate extraction of ethics from the consideration of the above problematics. It would be folly. After all, any subject in philosophy is an ethical one. What I am
proposing is a functional liberation of ethics-based analysis from branding every phenomenon as good or evil per se and not seeing the complexity of its ethical fabric. Ethics cannot be separated from reality, just as reality cannot be separated from ethics. There is a "perfect" state for everything. In this sense, ethics is invariably "functional," just as no functionality can be separated from its ethical aspect. However, the complexity of reality must match the complexity of its ethical expression. This begs the question: What about the technical functionality? After all, this is exactly what concerned Ellul. Didn't he appropriately consider it evil and a priori devoid of a teleological orientation?

Logically, the answer is “Yes.” only if we assume that technique is always inappropriately an expression of "instrumental" reason. But what if Juergen Habermas is right that there are appropriate uses of technique, such as in science and inappropriate, such as in art? Then, we are forced to see the ethical aspect of technique as more complex. Technique, in fact, can be both good and bad, depending on its application. As the Greeks argued, there is an appropriate measure to all things, and if we see the ethical reality in that light, things invariably shed their monistic appearance and thus lend themselves to dialectical logic.

So, what about the paradoxical relationship between politics and ethics? In a dialectical world, this distinction seems to be superfluous. Politics has its own ethical meaning that is not always limited only to the imperative of selfless love. While Ellul tries to prove that love supersedes all ethics, he seems to ignore the importance of other ethical considerations that can appropriately apply to politics. In the next module of this chapter, I will try to prove that one such ethical imperative is justice.
DIALECTIC OF JUSTICE

The main problematic considered in this section is whether the ethical theory used in Ellul's project lends itself to a dialectical social solution and, if not, what ethics could have helped him to come to one. Here, I will try to propose a dialectical solution for Ellul's ethical theory in the form of dialectic of justice. The concept of justice, if understood broadly, can become a common denominator connecting modern politics with Ellul's solution of ethics-based social discourse engendering a transformation to his utopian federation.

1. Ellul's Transition to Christocentric Interpretation of Justice

As we have established so far, Ellul's ethics is focused on the individual person or, more specifically, on her inward transformation in direct dialog with Christ. In Ellul's Christocentric approach, any other ethical considerations are a liability. They open a loophole for finding justification not to listen to Christ. According to Ellul, this is dangerous because it automatically opens a door for counsel of trained scholars from organized religion that are at the service of technique.

Ellul did not come to such Christocentric interpretation of the Old Testament right away. In his early years, he viewed Torah as a system of law, setting standards for the human law. However, later in his life, he rejected any idea of inter-relation between God's law of the Old Testament and the human law. He also abandoned all interpretations that would describe divine justice other than as love of Christ. This is evidenced, for example, by his adamant insistence on universal salvation. A god of love simply cannot condemn anyone to an eternity of hell.

Ellul rejected the popular description of the image of God in the Old Testament, which was inherited from the Judaic tradition, as an awesome but merciful judge reminding His people that He, indeed, is God by demonstrations of His awesome power. Instead, He focused exclusively on the concept of divine love. In a way, Ellul Christocentrically collapsed the Old Testament into the New one: Christ is the only true justice and the only law. There is no justice other than one based on Christ's love.

The person of Christ is presented as an example of how to be a renegade, discrediting preconceptions, disrespecting the establishment, and challenging the authorities, even equating them with the work of the devil. Ellul's Christ is a Christian anarchist, radically independent in his ethical standards and autonomous in his spiritual development and self-realization. Needless to say, he is the role model for every Christian, and the Christians are the only consequential agents of social transformation in Ellul's sociology. The social model Ellul is trying to emulate is a loose voluntary federation that seems to operate much like the congregation of Jesus and his disciples.

68 Goddard, Living, 228-31.
69 Ellul, Le Fondement Théologique du Droit, 71; Ellul, The Theological Foundation of Law, 93. On the subject, see also, Goddard, Living, 228, 231-41, 248-57.
Thus, the central dynamic of Ellul's social development occurs at the level of the individual. This suggests that the appropriate locus of any dialectical abstraction would also be at the level of the individual. Indeed, Jesus talks to the person, not to society. With all of this in mind, can we create a dialectically based social theory that requires dialectical abstraction at the social level?

We can assume, of course, like Ellul does, that an aggregate effect of individual ethical transformations can lead to a social result. But does such aggregate transformation not acquire a new, social dynamic that appropriately resides at the level of society, not of the individual? Indeed, a critical mass of individual environmental awareness should translate into a social movement. That movement, in turn, acquires a dynamic of its own, a social dynamic, with its own social dialectic giving rise to a social, not individual, phenomenon. By way of analogy with natural sciences, it is similar to a chemical reaction. At the micro-level, it can be seen as an aggregate of molecular physical transformations. However, it would be theoretically much more fruitful to consider it as a single chemical phenomenon at the macro-level, not as a multitude of physical ones.

If we stay true to Ellul's focus on values and try to make a dialectical abstraction at the social level, what would that be? What value consideration can work as a catalyst of social action translating individual ethical concerns into social action? It appears that the best, and possibly the only, candidate is the pursuit of justice.

Indeed, if we try to look at the Old Testament with the eyes of a political theorist, not a believer, and try to identify its special characteristics that made the New Testament novel comparing to it, we cannot help but noticing its focus on deontological or even consequentialist
message as opposed to the New Testament's focus almost exclusively on the individual virtues. The main concern of God of the Old Testament seems to be the preservation of His people as a whole. He operates on a social plane of normative ethics and outward morality. His focus is maintaining the social and physical order that He created. Indeed, when the Old Testament's God speaks to his people, He usually speaks to them as a group, even when through an intermediary, as was the case with Moses and other prophets. Thus, the Old Testament appears to be concerned more with the "social" order than the individual. This is why God so often uses references to justice in the Old Testament.

References to justice as a foundational ethical principle permeate the Old Testament, including, most notably, the books of Exodus and Leviticus. "Cosmic intimacy with God, entailing universal justice and peace" is considered "the ultimate goal of all nature and history" in Judaism. Jewish messianism is also defined as "the idea of a universal, political realm of justice and peace." Thus, it appears that "justice" (along with "peace") is more prominent in the value system of Judaism than "loving kindness" ("chesed"), which, as an ethical category, seems to be closest approximation of the Christian concept of love.

However, the New Testament also uses justice as an ethical standard, often by implication. Indeed, the message of Christ is socially egalitarian: He loves all people equally. Moreover, it can be argued that His message of love, to treat your neighbor as you want her to treat you, is a converse expression of the same fairness that is manifested in the Old Testament's standard of “an eye for an eye,” only with a proactive initiation, as opposed to a post-factum enforcement of the same ideal of social harmony based on fairness.

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2. **What is Justice**

Thus, justice can be a social expression of the Christian individual ethic, an appropriate common denominator between the Christian ethical standard of love and the normative standard we commonly recognize as necessary for social order in society as a whole. Indeed, according to Michael Slote, Plato, in the *Republic*, "treats justice as an overarching virtue of individuals (and of societies), meaning that almost every issue he (or we) would regard as ethical comes in under the notion of justice (*dikaosoune*)."\(^71\]

John Rawls, perhaps the most recognized authority on justice, also pointed out the dual, individual and social, aspect of justice as an ethical standard. However, his focus is on the social justice. Rawls, defines the "conception of justice" as "providing in the first instance a standard whereby the distributive aspects of the basic structure of society are to be addressed," and he defines "the concept of justice" as "meaning a proper balance between competing claims from a conception of justice as a set of related principles for identifying the relevant considerations which determine this balance." Finally, Rawls also calls justice "a social ideal."\(^72\]

Thus, Rawls emphasizes the distributive aspect of justice, but he also interprets justice inclusively to embrace all considerations that lead to a balance in competing claims. Therefore, even though the primary focus of justice is often property, the distributive aspect of justice can be very broad. In fact, Aristotle, who authored the most commonly recognized formulations of justice, defined it, in the words of Rawls, as broadly as "refraining from *pleonexia*, that is, from gaining some advantage for oneself by seizing what belongs to another, his property, his reward,

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71 Michael Slote, *Justice as a Virtue,* in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2002/entries/justice-virtue/. In the article, Slote also says that the modern usages of "justice" are narrower than Plato's.

his office, and the like, or by denying a person that which is due to him, the fulfillment of a promise, the repayment of a debt, the showing of proper respect, and so on."  

3. Innate Sense of Justice and Divine Law

While objecting to it, Ellul himself pointed out that traditionally, it has been thought that people have an innate sense of justice as well as a sense of good and evil. Indeed, it has been supported by a large array of natural law theorists, social thinkers, and anthropologists. That included the classics of anarchism and Marxism who had a great influence on Ellul. Proudhon wrote about it:

Man is an integral part of collective existence, and as such he is aware both of his own dignity and that of others. Thus, he carries within himself the principles of the moral code that goes beyond the individual. He does not receive these principles from elsewhere. They are intimately and immanently part of himself. They constitute his essence and the essence of society itself. They are the characteristic mold of the human soul, daily refined and perfected through social relations.

Similarly, anthropological works have taken the conception of justice, expressed, for example, in distribution of territory, hierarchy, and access to food, as far back as the origin of our species and beyond. It is a universal rule: The more deprived the animal gets of that to which it feels to be rightly entitled, the more assertive it gets about claiming it back. We all have observed how a dog's aggressiveness miraculously vanishes from the instant when it protects its own territory to when it enters the territory of another dog. Konrad Lorenz, an Austrian zoologist, describes changes in confidence of animals protecting their territory, even as "primitive" as the stickleback fish.

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75 Proudhon, *Selected Writings*, 249.
"The basic principle of his fighting," writes Lorenz, "is that my home is my castle." The fighting inclination may be stated with mathematical exactness: it decreases in direct proportion to the distance from the nest. . . . As the panic-stricken neighbor approaches his own castle, his courage returns. Simultaneously, the courage of our own stickleback begins to wane; it is as if, suddenly, he began to wonder how things were going back home. As suddenly the roles are reversed. The pursued neighbor becomes the pursuer. . . . It is a process all but interminable. . . . At last there is no more fight and pursuit. The sticklebacks, weaving menacingly, glower at each other through an invisible wall. A balance of courage—or of cowardice—has been struck.76

This anthropological evidence supports the idea that justice is instinctive, natural, intuitively obvious, deeply ingrained. Even little children, who have just begun to speak and have only rudimentary socialization, settle their disputes by appealing to what is "fair." It was always there, and we all posses a fundamental conception of justice. It is hardwired in our psyche. It is a primordial auto-regulatory mechanism for ordering the lives of humans as social animals and distributing limited natural resources among individuals within most species. Even animals know what is "due" to them and react accordingly when they feel that nature's principle of "fairness" is used against them.

Ellul categorically rejects the existence of an "innate sense of justice" for the same reason he rejects the existence of divine and natural law. He does not want ethical principles to arise from any source other than Christ. Ellul appears to be afraid that any admission that ethics can be sourced from some structural aspect of reality (even a divine one!) will lead to collapsing Christianity into the Old Testament or worse, to its replacement by a purely "sociological" solution in the form of some social programs or socialist institutions. This is why he adamantly insists that there is no justice but the one from Christ, meaning that only love in the name of Christ can be a true expression of it. However, if "justice" is Love then, in Ellul's system of broad conceptualization of violence, Love becomes the ontological opposite of violence.

Therefore, it cannot come from the state, law, or political institutions. Indeed, Ellul believes that their only method of control is "power," which in his system, is nothing but violence. Thus, for Ellul, justice can only exist in opposition to power and the political establishment.

4. **Looking at Justice Dialectically**

The dialectical aspect of the concept of justice was pointed out by social thinkers whom Ellul read in his youth. Both Marx and the classics of anarchism considered the struggle for justice a dialectical engine of history. As Proudhon wrote in a letter to Langlois, justice is a dialectical concept, expressed in what Proudhon calls "balance of antinomies."

> It is quite certain that, like political economy, metaphysics, etc., the science of laws turns on constant antinomies. . . . Justice, in itself, is the balance of antinomies; that is to say, it holds the conflicting forces in a state of equilibrium and *equates* respective claims. 

Even a superficial look at historical evidence demonstrates that justice works as the rallying cry for social action. It has been on the agenda of very diverse movements. It seems to be the most appealing and best-understood slogan for social mobilization. Indeed, it has been on the mind of even most "uneducated" members of most spontaneous actions, such as peasant rebellions, workers' strikes, and ethnic movements. They do not seek or need political theory to understand that they are treated unjustly when it happens to be the case.

Justice is ingrained in religious concepts of all major religious systems. It is something to which we all have been able to relate since birth. It seems that whenever a group of people are set in motion, they talk in terms of justice. Where there is "society,” justice becomes the most

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77 Proudhon, _Selected Writings_, 251.
fundamental principle of its organization. As Proudhon suggested, nothing "social" can ever exist without constant balancing between "just" or "unjust."

When we speak of social dialectics, we usually speak of forces fighting out an institutional change, a change usually defined in terms of the principles of justice. Thus, justice becomes an ethical interface between social groups settling disputes over conflicting interests. In that sense, justice is at the basis of the conceptual framework for making dialectical abstractions sociologically. It is essentially dialectical: it represents the very essence of whether social contradictions have remained unsettled or resolved. "Just society" means one in relative equilibrium, "unjust" means one that is pregnant with social unrest, where "harmony,” peace and order are dangerously lacking. Put simply, any social movement is a movement to restore justice, a "justice movement."

One can object by saying that not every aspect of social life is ruled by distribution, even understood with the all-encompassing complexity of Aristotle's understanding of it. Indeed, if we think of things that define the overall quality of life, such as the natural environment or animal rights, how can disputes over them be translated dialectically into distributive terms? After all, nature or animals cannot come forward before humanity to make a claim of unfair treatment, demanding what is "due" to them. The subjugation of humanity by technique can arguably (at least in some aspects) be a similarly situated problematic.

This brings us right back to where Ellul stands with his ethical theory, illuminating why he is so suspicious of the concept of justice. Unlike Marx or even Proudhon, Ellul fights for the overall ethical quality of humanity. For him, the road to this is not through redistribution of property or another egalitarian agenda per se. He wants us to be more in synch with Christ,
closer to God. So, how can this problem be resolved through a social dialectic? Who will come to the fore to fight out humanity's ethical improvement dialectically?

Social issues always form in a social situation. As it is demonstrated by Robison Crusoe and Friday, as soon as one person sees another, problems arise, and they are usually expressed in terms of justice. Dialectically speaking, any social relation, once formed, inevitably triggers social contradictions. Consequently, "social dialectic" and "social justice" are ontologically related and often fused concepts: struggle for justice works as an expression for social dialectic and vice versa.

5. Is Justice Relevant in Utopian Society?

Now we run into a problem. Ellul wants to take us to a society without distributive disputes, a society of selfless individuals living in Christ. He is afraid that distributive contradictions are contrary to Jesus's message of love. How will we face this theoretical predicament? Will our dialectic of justice apply to utopian societies? Will social dialectic realize itself in a community supposedly devoid of inherent social contradictions: in an ideal monastery, in the utopia of Marx, in a futuristic federation dreamed of by the anarchists and Ellul? Or, similarly, can justice apply to issues that relate to society as a whole, such as technique, and thus do not have a particularly affected class?

Ellul fundamentally does not want to use the concept of justice because it involves violence, be it the violence of a Marxist revolution or that of the state, trying to impose its version of social "harmony." To Ellul, violence is an expression of the fallen nature of the world out of the Communion with God. In fact, the key aspect of his social ideal is reducing violence
by restoring the Communion with God through Christ. However, that can only be done through an *internal* dialectic, if any, within the inwardsness of a person. So, can we resolve dialectically his problematic on the social plane?

Ellul himself proposes a "dialectic" based on the inter-relations of God and the person, "the dialectic of hope." However, we have established that it is not a logically resolvable dialectic. Thus, for our purposes, it is not operational as it does not allow for a dialectical resolution of the modern crisis. Moreover, it is not quite a *sociological* concept either, because it operates on the level of the individual.

How can we resolve this dilemma? Are we completely cornered by Ellul's assumptions so that we do not have any way out to a social theory?

For Ellul, his problematic ultimately boils down to a simple proposition: We are made in the image of God. Thus, our task is simple: to regain ourselves in accordance with that image. Our God is a communicative God. Therefore, being made in His image means being capable of meaningful speech, speech that does not lie, speech that means action. Thus, we should start a new dialog based on that newly regained image. Ellul does not mean a theological discourse. In fact, such discourse could be counterproductive for our subjective knowledge of God. What he means is a discourse on *social* issues instead. However, we must engage those issues through the prism of our divinely inspired inward development. In this dialogue, we will say only what we think. And we will do only what we say. It will be a discourse, based on a true diversity of opinion, not the illusory one that dominates today's politics. And therefore, it will ensure true, not illusory, democracy.
The answer to the problem of adapting Ellul to social dialectic gets us back to the allegory of Plato's cave: As soon as a prophet emerges, one who gets out of the cave and comes back, that prophet becomes a proxy for all who have been deprived of "what is due to them." One does not have to be affected by the plight of those who are owed "what is due to them" to support their fight. Engels, for example, was a rich capitalist, and yet he was a champion of the working class. As soon as such a prophetic voice emerges, others will rally around it, creating a movement of like-minded people, thereby bringing to life a social dialectic by fighting against those who, by ignorance or self-interest, are against their cause. Even in a perfect utopia of selfless individuals, perfect knowledge will never be attained, simply because we are human. Therefore, controversy will always be a part of human discourse. This resolves Ellul's theoretical predicament. He becomes dialectical. His opposition to technique becomes a social solution through a dialectically structured justice movement, not only leading us all the way to his perfect federation but also staying with us for good.

III. "TESTING" ELLUL'S THEORY

The purpose of this section is to consider whether Ellul's theory can be effectively realized in the actual world. I will investigate what in the world of politics proves its strength and "practical" value and to what extent. Is Ellul's theory just a mere utopia, an ethical ideal, or it can be a blueprint for political action?
1. Testing Ellul's Method

It is difficult to test Ellul's theory. Indeed, how can we follow the role of ethics in practical politics? There are major obstacles to such a test. First, as Gandhi pointed out, history keeps little record of potential conflicts resolved amicably, focusing mostly on conflicts resolved by violence. Second, changes caused by ideas are often gradual. They are like sparks growing in number and intensity in the minds of individual people until they gather enough momentum to become a noticeable social phenomenon. Until then, one cannot observe any "success" of an idea, often under-appreciating its potentiality until it eventually causes a noticeable change in the popular perception. Third, any observation of this sort is inherently highly speculative. Public opinion polls and other numerical data are not always available, and even when they are, they rarely reflect the development of an idea over a period of time. After all, Ellul himself opposed quantitative sociology as incapable of producing credible knowledge.

One related problem is defining what constitutes Ellul's approach for the purposes of a practical test. It is a complex theory. However, a multiplicity of variables makes the results unreliable. What are the most essential ones? It appears they can be reduced to these four:

(1) nonviolent resistance to the government and the established perceptions, distrusting conventional politics and acting outside and against the political establishment;

(2) anti-modernity, resisting the imperatives of modern economy and culture, global in nature, while supporting traditional economy and culture, local in nature;

(3) anarchist communitarianism (anti-liberalism); and

(4) advocacy of personal ethical growth.
Finally, we need to define the universe of cases that are relevant for illustrating Ellul's approach. The universe can be loosely characterized by the terms "direct action," "nonviolence," "anarchism," and "civil resistance." In a rough classification for our purposes, it includes: (1) "negative freedom" movements/self-determination and liberation, such as the one led by Gandhi, King, Nelson Mandela, and Wałęsa; 78 (2) "negative freedom" movements/democratization: spontaneous democratization uprisings against abuse of power by governments, such as the Arab Spring, the color revolutions and anti-government demonstrations in the former Soviet Union, the global Occupy movement, and the Tea Party movement; (3) pacifist movements, such as the one against the involvement of the United States in the Vietnam War; (4) anti-modernity movements, such as the anti-globalization movement and environmentalism; (5) "positive freedom" movements/rights: the anti-abortion movements, movements for human rights, religious rights, animal rights, equal rights for women and minorities, rights for children, economic rights for poor people, greater assistance to refugees, and victims of famines and natural disasters, fighting poverty domestically and internationally, supporting and empowering disadvantaged communities and individuals, and "essential" economic rights for all.

I will focus on three cases from this universe. The first case will be action-based: the Gandhi movement as an example of an Ellul-style revolution. Second will be result/utopia-based: the global environmental movement as an example of his utopian "federation" forming in

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78 It can be argued that the movements of King and Mandela were about civil rights, and therefore they fit better in category (5). I admit that they had characteristics of (5) but at a later stage. In the beginning and during their nadir, they were primarily "get-off-my-back" movements against artificially imposed limits on negative freedom in the form of legally required segregation and discrimination. The issue of equalizing social conditions through affirmative action (in a broad sense) came up later, after the movements secured essential legal liberation and appropriate constitutional guarantees of equal rights.
the bowels of the modern technicized world. Third will be *actor-based*: the animal rights movement as an example of "selfless" social action, devoid of any self-serving demands of justice.

2. **Social Action: Gandhi and His Satyagraha Movement**

Gandhi developed a teaching, known as *Hind Swaraj* (literally, "Indian Self-Rule"), remarkably similar in its critical aspects to Ellul's theory. Like Ellul, Gandhi was a practicing politician. However, in contrast to Ellul, who spent most of his life quietly as an academic, Gandhi became a national leader of unprecedented fame and recognition, and his teaching was widely popularized in his country and the West. Moreover, during the Indian struggle for independence, it had programmatic value, not so dissimilar to how Marx's theory was treated in Russia during the Bolshevik revolution and in its aftermath. Thus, Gandhi's *Swaraj* provides us with the best illustration of Ellul's theory in action.

Like Ellul, Gandhi was very sympathetic to anarchism. He recalled later that on his trip to London in 1908, the year he wrote his main work on *Swaraj*, he "came in contact with every known Indian anarchist in London" and that their "bravery" "impressed" him. However, similarly to Ellul, he believed that "violence was no remedy for India's ills."\(^79\) Like Ellul, Gandhi insisted on nonviolent resistance. He familiarized himself with the theories of nonviolent resistance, based on personal ethics, espoused by Leo Tolstoy\(^80\) and Henry David Thoreau.\(^81\) Nonviolent

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\(^80\) Gandhi wrote about the influence of Leo Tolstoy on him: "Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* overwhelmed me. It left an abiding impression on me. Before the independent thinking, profound morality, and the truthfulness of this book, all the books given me by Mr. Coates seemed to pale into insignificance." Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, "Religious Ferment" in Gandhi, *The Gandhi Reader*, 37.

\(^81\) Gandhi himself denied that he was "influenced" by Thoreau, saying that by the time he read Thoreau, his nonviolent resistance in South Africa had already begun. According to Gandhi, he used references to Thoreau to
resistance in the form of civil disobedience to "unjust laws" has become the central element of practical methods advocated by Swaraj. Indeed, the very name of Gandhi has become synonymous with nonviolence. and his birthday, October 2, was voted in 2007 by the U.N. General Assembly to become the International Day of Non-Violence.

However, Swaraj is not only a tactical "manual" for practicing politicians. It teaches that only by perfecting oneself can a person develop and use the "love-force" (or "soul-force") that are required for passive resistance, without which real home-rule is impossible. That would include "observing perfect chastity, adopting poverty, following truth, and cultivating fearlessness."\(^8\)

At the institutional level, home-rule means more than getting rid of the English government in India. It is about getting rid of all "tyranny of either English rule or Indian rule"\(^8\) and replacing it with the form of government based on the traditional communal organization of the pre-industrial India. Gandhi finds Western democracy hollow and superficial, being a façade for disenfranchisement of people, calling parliaments "emblems of slavery,"\(^8\) poisoning minds by modern media, and replacing custom by modern law.\(^8\) Most importantly, it destroys traditional civilization, and substitutes materialistic greed for spiritually defined values. Gandhi idealizes and promotes pre-modern society and its values. He underscores the importance of religious faith, moderate lifestyle, and pursuit of human happiness not through material

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83 Ibid., 117.
84 Ibid., 105.
85 Ibid., 104-05, 109.
prosperity but through spiritual fulfillment, social harmony, and companionship of love that tends to arise naturally in a communal social environment.

Gandhi denies that modern civilization is a "civilization" at all. If anything, it is the opposite of civilization: its effect is to destroy the old civilization of India and create alienation and hatred among people by its litigious legal system, industrial exploitation, and objectification (enslavement) of the human being.\textsuperscript{86} Like Ellul, he finds modernity to be a world of the Satanic, predicted in Hinduism as "the Black Age."\textsuperscript{87}

Gandhi refused to recognize class divisions in society as a driving force of liberation, similarly to Ellul. Indeed, he argued that "Indianness" applies to all classes, castes, and religions equally, and transcends them.\textsuperscript{88} He tried his best to bridge these divisions with his concept of \textit{Swaraj}.

Because of his doctrinal similarity to Ellul, Gandhi's movement is a good case to illustrate potential practicality of Ellul's theory. So, how important was \textit{Swaraj} for India's liberation movement?

There is no doubt that Gandhi's views became very popular in India. They, in addition to Gandhi's leadership, became a catalyst for India's liberation movement. The movement already existed by the time of Gandhi's return to India from South Africa, where he developed his ideas and methods of struggle. However, it was relatively sluggish as the oppositional parties were bogged down in their internal rivalry. The movement was led politically by two parties, and

\textsuperscript{86} On modern courts that should be avoided, on industrial exploitation of women in England, and enslavement, see, e.g., Gandhi, \textit{The Gandhi Reader}, 104-16.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 105.
Gandhi chose to join neither of them, remaining a highly authoritative figure and a moderator for the Indian liberation.

There was a violent strand in India's liberation movement, too, which contributed to Gandhi's statue as a negotiator in the eyes of the British authorities. His initiatives of nonviolent resistance had noticeable success in mobilizing mass action, such as the Dandi Salt March of 1930 and the movement to use local products, especially textiles, thus boycotting English imports. This movement culminated in the Quit India Act of 1942 in response to Gandhi's call for civil disobedience (Satyagraha), demanding immediate independence of India from Great Britain.

There is no doubt that the word of Gandhi had a powerful impact on India's liberation movement. It helped strain the colonialist system of the Great Britain and possibly the global colonialism altogether, leading to its complete collapse in the wake of World War II. It helped mass mobilization and unification of India's diverse population in its struggle against the British rule. It helped profane the British model of development and the moral authority of its institutions in the country.

The undoubtedly successful aspect of Swaraj was its civil disobedience component. As M.V. Naidu wrote in an article about Gandhi's "nonviolent revolution," Satyagraha is a "device" of social action that is particularly fit for a "deadlocked or oppressively inflexible democracy," such as "pre-Gandhian traditional democracies," that could not otherwise accommodate popular demands through traditional channels such as elections, courts, legislation, and media. Thus, when a social movement "finds the judiciary prejudiced, the legislature insensitive, the

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administration immovable, the elections restrictive, the parties closed-minded, the interest group disinterested and the mass media unsympathetic" and thus "a change of justice" is untenable, nonviolent civil resistance may be a perfect option. It is particularly effective in our modern age of the overwhelming technological superiority of the state and the common use of foreign armed forces. Either one is ineffective against a nonviolent popular movement. The use of nonviolence helps avoid many other problems of violent movements, such as violent vengeance, arms race, or a reactionary military government, formed for the sake of preventing further violence.90 Most importantly, we can see in nonviolent movements an "integration of ends and means": "the Gandhian paradigm" is vindicated by the Indian democracy, that, in contrast to the faltering democracies in the similarly situated Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Burma, produced democratic peace and stability.91

Naidu believes that Gandhi's "philosophy of action" was very successful, a testimony of which is "the deep impact of the nonviolent movement in the United States that was inspired, organized and led by King, a devotee of Gandhi" as well as the movement in South Africa against apartheid.92

The argument of Naidu is compelling. However, in its evaluation of successfulness of Gandhi's legacy, it tends to limit it to civil disobedience (Satyagraha). Indeed, if we look at Swaraj, as a model of life, it can be argued that it never had much traction in India or abroad. No non-liberation aspects of Swaraj were visibly adopted on a noticeable scale in India: no alternative economy or a significant social organization were based on its principles despite the popularity of civil disobedience as a political tactic.

90 Ibid., 237-42.
91 Ibid., 242-43.
92 Ibid., 244.
Thus, when it comes to the Gandhi movement, we have a mixed result. Despite that civil disobedience was successful in India and elsewhere in the world in the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, it can be argued that Swaraj was no more than an ideal that gave additional legitimacy to a pre-existing liberation movement. It served as an inspiration and an ideological foundation that boosted the stature of the movement and of Gandhi as a leader. As the movement reached its goal of independence, some of its ideals, such as economic self-sufficiency and non-alignment, were incorporated by the political establishment in India's official policies. However, Swaraj never reached its main goal: instituting a system of government that would be fundamentally different from Western democracy in relying on local communities and promoting self-restraint, moderation, cultural authenticity, and spiritual development of the people.

3. **Utopia: Eco-Settlements and Global Community of Environmentally Concerned**

   Unlike Swaraj, environmentalism clearly produced an alternative lifestyle on a global scale, deliberately resisting modernity. Moreover, there are many ecovillages around the world, especially in Scotland, the Netherlands, and Russia.

   When Ellul was once asked whether an anarchist society could actually exist, he said he did not think so, because today's people were not yet ready to take the responsibilities of a society without any authority. However, he said he believed that experimenting with anarchist society "in small groups" was possible.\(^93\) The theme of "small groups" action recurs in his

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writings, and a good case can be made that the current eco-settlements are an embodiment of such action, dreamed by Ellul.

The eco-settlements would have made Ellul proud indeed. They adopted a holistic ethical approach not only to the organization of their community but also to their world outlook and personal lifestyle. In many respects, they look exactly like communities that are supposed to give rise to Ellul's utopian federation of enlightened individuals, living in economically self-sufficient communities, withdrawing from the world run by technique, leading a life of personal restraint, moderation, and happiness based in spirituality, not materialism. Indeed, in an article "The Eco-village Challenge" by Robert Gilman, an ecovillage is defined as

- human scale
- full-featured settlement
- in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world
- in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future.

Ecovillages are large enough to be self-sufficient communities but not so large as to be divided by function as modern settlements typically are. Their size ranges from 100 to 1,000 people, the typical example being around 500 people. They try to be self-sufficient, which means they aspire to be independent from the outside world. In their reliance on services that require economy of scale, such as medical services, each tries to create "clusters" and "networks" so that it can be "a fully functioning modern society " albeit a sustainable one. Ecovillages practice environmentally friendly habits, such as "cyclic use of material resources,” "renewable energy sources,” and "the avoidance of toxic and harmful substances.” Ecovillages pursue 'healthy

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94 See mentions of "small groups" in the description of French Resistance, that Ellul hoped would turn into a nationwide revolution after the war, in Chapter 1, and in the description of his ideal anarchist organization in Chapter 1.

human development' of "all aspects of human life—physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual," realized at the level of both the individual person and the community as a whole. Finally, one of their important principles is sustainability, that is, avoiding exploitation of nature or other people, which they achieve through self-sufficiency. In addition to the ecovillages, there is a growing global community of the environmentally concerned that tries to practice a sustainable lifestyle and share the ideals of the ecovillages.

The environmental movement always interested Ellul. There is little doubt that the global environmental movement is a result of the inability of nation-states to address the problem of environmental degradation. Being a global problem, it is best viewed globally. However, global organizations, such as the U.N., do not have adequate resources and power to address it. This presents a dilemma similar to Ellul's technique: The problem and its solution operate in different dimensions. Like technique that created it, the environmental degradation is autonomous and self-augmenting, while modern nation-states are too busy to respond to it, preoccupied with short-term economic prosperity and geopolitics. Both of these interests operate contrary to the environmental concerns. Thus, the chronic inability of the international community to take sufficient measures to allay public anxiety stimulates extra-systemic activism of the global civic community about the issue.

Another reason that the environmentalism is so close to Ellul's vision is its visibly spiritual aspect. Indeed, the problem epitomizes the danger of self-centered preoccupation of the modern world with materialistic imperatives, being blind to an existential danger that is about to consume the humanity and its materialistic paradise. It shows that a short-sighted world devoid of proper teleological perspective can quickly approach the very edge of its doom. The habit of

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96 Ibid.
materialistic objectification makes humankind incapable of veneratory respect, including even respect for nature that is the womb of humankind, its life force and its living environment. This habit as well as the chronic lack of moderation are epitomized by the modern environmental crisis.

So, is the environmental movement a strong case for Ellul's theory? Undoubtedly, yes. It is flatly based on ethical imperatives. It is profoundly and convincingly communitarian and leads to the creation of alternative lifestyle communities, practicing their ethics and determined to fulfill Ellul's dream of social transformation based on spiritual principles. Finally, the movement has created networks of self-governing small groups forming broader organizations from bottom up, very similar to Ellul's mutualist federation. However, it has also demonstrated the limitations of a popular movement that is not sponsored government: contradictory and unclear agendas, lack of momentum and maturity, and selfish motives hiding behind altruistic goals.97

4. **Actor: Animal Rights Activism**

The animal rights movement is profoundly different from the liberation movements, the anti-modernity movements, and even most rights movements because of its purely selfless goal: to protect creatures that are not even human and thus are not poised to defend their interests vis-à-vis humankind. Therefore, this movement is based entirely on an ethical idea and not on a self-serving pursuit of distributive justice. Despite that Ellul does not seem to have been involved in defense of animal rights, the movement provides clear evidence that his model of direct transformation of an ethical idea into a political movement can be effective.

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The animal rights movement tries to extend to animals the human right not to be objectified. It is similar to the argument made by the "deep ecology" movement with respect to nature: All God's creation must be respected and protected against objectification. Disobeying this means siding with Satan.

This idea of extending ethics to animals is relatively novel. It was first formulated academically in early 1970s by a group of fresh graduates of the philosophy program of Oxford University. In only twenty years, it became so popular that it precipitated significant changes in popular attitudes, self-regulation of some industries, changes in mass consumption patterns, and even new legislation. The change in popular perceptions about animal rights turned into a broad vegan movement, now including many millions of people living in most countries of the world. The movement drew attention of the public to the issue of animal suffering, resulting in more humane treatment of animals in the agricultural and meat processing industries as well as limiting their use for lab testing and entertainment.

A number of organizations have been born that now command substantial resources to protect animals from commercial hunts and other violence. They are substantially influenced by anarchist ideology in their agenda and methods. Usually, they blame the state for fostering violence to animals and protecting those committing it. Their principal method of action is direct action, mostly nonviolent, in the form of exposing companies conducting animal tests, such as Proctor and Gamble, interfering with commercial hunts, especially involving whales and other "intelligent" animals, and rescuing animals from test labs and other forms of abuse by government and commercial entities.
The movement proves that Ellul's approach can be successful. Indeed, an ethical idea, no matter how novel, can quickly win the hearts and minds of multitudes of people across the globe, turning into a dominant perception, making headway in politics, and creating new legislation.

5. Corroborating Ellul

So, what can we conclude about the overall success of Ellul's theory in the real world of politics? At the first glance, it appears that in all cases, the movements failed to achieve their primary objectives. The nation-state, the traditional parties, and the propaganda are still there. The Ellulian movements have not made a dent in technique.

Or did they? Granted, none of the movements got rid of the state as such. However, many of them replaced an old and oppressive state with a more democratic one. The nonviolent movements in India, South Africa, and Poland produced lasting results. More recent examples, the color revolutions in the former USSR and the mass protests of the Arab Spring, particularly in Egypt and Tunisia, were successful in toppling governments that had lost their legitimacy after failing to resume meaningful elections.

So, we are facing a situation where Ellul succeeded and failed at the same time. Can it be possible? It can if we explain it dialectically. According to the laws of dialectics, the state, politics and the perceptions of an individual are formed and sustained by contradictory forces, struggling to find the most efficient resolution for their contradictions, both internally and externally. These forces negate each other and then negate their very negation. Everything develops through accommodation of these internal and external pressures, often resulting in a
dramatic qualitative change. Thus, a change made by a social movement may or may not terminate a state or a political system, but it will affect it nevertheless.

We live in what some sociologists call a "post-political" world. This means that new forms of direct action are becoming a pivotal factor in the transformed post-modern order. The "post-political collectivity" in the form of "silent masses" and "neo-tribes" made it impossible to understand these "new modes" of action in individualistic terms as it was done before.  

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, drawing from Baruch Spinoza's idea of "democracy of everyone," characterize our age as a trend to "absolute democracy" to be asserted by the multitude, "emerging as a new political subject." According to them, our world is no longer a world of separate nation-states. Instead, it is a world of a multi-hub single global Empire, an integrated whole, that operates in accordance with a single set of rules. Even its strongest hubs, such as the U.S., cannot digress from those rules any more. The Empire is opposed by a global community of people sharing common concerns of resisting the Empire's pervasive control. These people are united by global networks, primarily Internet. Hardt and Negri call that community "the multitude."

Thus, the modern society is transforming itself into "a postmodern order of Empire," changing the conditions of resistance accordingly. It is no longer about "crowds" and "strikes" as a political factor. Rather, it is about "the multitude" ("a multiplicity, a plane of singularities, an

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open set of relations"), taking the place of the crowd as a new agent of this post-political world. The multitude will finally realize the old aspirations of an "absolute democracy."  

Today's world is marked by a changed role of ethics: the multitude will turn "rebellion into a project of love."

People today seem unable to understand love as a political concept, but a concept of love is just what we need to grasp the constituent power of the multitude. The modern concept of love is almost exclusively limited to the bourgeois couple and the claustrophobic confines of the nuclear family. Love has become a strictly private affair. We need a more generous and more unrestrained conception of love. . . . This does not mean that you cannot love your spouse, your mother, and your child. It only means that your love does not end there, that love serves as the basis for our political projects in common and the construction of a new society. Without this love, we are nothing.101

This is consistent with Gandhi's claim about the omnipotence of "love-force," of which Gandhi's movement itself is a testimony. Looking into Gandhi's theory helps unpack the anatomy of the role of love in a social movement. Gandhi, like Ellul, tried to resolve the paradoxical relationship between ethics and politics, and similarly to Ellul, he came to the conclusion that democracy needs the right kind of demos: In the case of Gandhi, it is people who are capable of personal moral self-rule to be capable of self-government.102 This argument answers the paradoxical problematic stated by Fred Dallmayr in his article about Gandhi: "Can the self rule itself?" without going unruly, so to speak.103 The argument also preserves a connection between ethics and politics, preventing a collapse of politics into ethics: While moral self-rule helps political self-government, self-government helps to nurture self-rule.104

101 Ibid., 290, 292.
103 Dallmayr, "What Is Swaraj?" 103.
104 Ibid., 112.
It follows from the above connection that moral self-rule cannot exist in the absence of self-government without creating significant pressure toward its attainment and, conversely, that self-government cannot exist in the absence of moral self-rule of the populace. And yet, an argument can be made that we have numerous examples to the contrary on both counts while we can hardly find examples in the real world that affirmatively prove Gandhi's claim.

This apparent contradiction disappears if we consider it through the prism of dialectical analysis. What seems to be able to resolve this theoretical predicament is a presumption that ethical claims realize themselves in politics in the form of claims of justice. The conditions for making such claims arise when justice is starkly out of balance. Justice, being a uniform concept, fuses diverse ethical claims into one, operating like a clearinghouse, aggregating an expression of popular discontent in a simple and appealing message.

In the opening sentence of his article about Gandhi, Dallmayr says that "our age seems to be pervaded worldwide by a dominant idea: the idea of "democracy" or at least the aspiration of "democratization." Despite the immense diversity of social and cultural traditions, humankind today seems agreed on the superiority of democracy over any competing alternative." In light of this statement of Dallmayr, it is no surprise that the most common format for settling a dispute with the government and restoring justice in today's world is democratization. A demand of democratization arises in situations of either obvious lack of democracy compared to the standards set in the West, as it was in India or, more recently, in the Arab Spring, or when the government chronically fails to address issues that the populace perceives as highly urgent, as is the case with climate change and animal rights issues. Many of these issues are of global origin, and the national governments are either not interested or incapable of confronting them.

\[105\] Ibid., 103.
This subjectively developed perception of injustice is not limited to "selfish" or "selfless" individuals. In fact, Marxian dialectics helps us find elements of either in every individual. From this dialectical perspective, the rise of ethical behavior occurs situationally, depending on the level of perceived injustice. Of course, that perception is also ethically motivated. Is the argument circular then? No, it is not, because the situational perception of injustice depends on the perception of the "objective" ideal of justice against which the situational justice is evaluated. This fundamental standard of justice changes depending on comparatively developed expectations and the overall ethical standing of the populace.

According to this analysis, Ellul and Gandhi are correct that democracy requires a certain level of ethics. However, we are not speaking of "ethical" individuals, some elite of selfless cadre, useful for leadership as they may be. Rather, we speak of the aggregate sense of ethics, the overall ethical standing of society. In the situational ethics, triggered by a sense of injustice, the difference between "selfish" and "selfless" motivation is blurred. Indeed, each individual resists injustice for "selfish" reasons, but he also does it on behalf of others in the affected group and, in that capacity, he acts selflessly. Moreover, he feels particularly inspired by the selfless side of his effort. The greater the resistance, the greater the sacrifice. The greater the sacrifice, the higher readings are on the ethical gauge of the activists. If resistance is nonviolent, the ethical aspect grows exponentially as does the power of its appeal. The situational ethics and the level of resistance feed each other in a dialectical fury, and in this sense, again, ethics gets dialectically connected to politics.

Most movements, for example, Taksim and the ongoing Ukrainian "Euro Maidan," are amalgams of exactly that: individuals with diverse and often opposite ethical positions (for
example, gay and Islamic fundamentalists on Taksim protesting side by side) united by a common purpose of restoring justice through democratization for themselves and even for their least likely allies. Some movements, like animal rights activists, arguably do not have selfish reasons. Nevertheless, as they endure and become better organized and "professionalized," and funds start coming in, many members acquire a pronounced "selfish" aspect as stakeholders in the movement itself. Ellul lamented this transformation in workers' syndicates (unions) of his day. However, this underscores that the situational "selfish/selfless" dichotomy can be blurred regardless of the cause of the justice movement when viewed dialectically.

This seems to settle the issue for Ellul's revolution, but what about his utopia? What direct action movements usually try to do is either to get their agenda implemented by the system or to democratize the system itself so it becomes supportive of their cause. But what is the "system"? Should it be limited to the state or to a greater number of sectors of society? I will assume, for this part of the analysis, that the "system" is what Meyer and Hinchman describe as a triad of the state, the market, and civil society.¹⁰⁶

Thomas Meyer and Lewis P. Hinchman, in their book The Theory of Social Democracy, point out that democratic theory finds that all functional sectors of society are marked by "asymmetrical relations of command and subordination." On the normative side of this, "[m]any people are "radically dependent on commands of others." This presents a problem of protecting their autonomy, which the state fails to do. On the functional side, the state "runs up against ever more intractable limitations in complex modern societies and starts to contradict its own normative premises."¹⁰⁷ Replacing "political steering" by the state with the steering by civil

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 84, 88-89.
society corrects both problems. On the functional side, it helps optimize the distribution of responsibilities between "subsystems" by assuming those of them that can do better than the state. On the normative side, it fulfills ideals of democracy and self-direction of society. It also fosters "solidarity-inspired civic action," "social self-help," and "aid for their parties," resulting in "social and civic self-reliance."¹⁰⁸

Before, we established a connection between ethics and politics of direct action. Now, the theory of social democracy helped us find the missing link in the connection between direct action and Ellul's utopia by showing how civil society fosters democratization. As I argued before, dialectics does not tolerate a monistic view of the state and politics. The state changes, and it has an appropriate role in each circumstance of history. Whether the state fits that role or not is a different matter. Neither civil society is ideal for each circumstance of history. Both are in a dialectical relationship, constantly pulling a tug-of-war on a great multitude of issues, resulting not only in particular decisions but also in changes in the genetic code of the state and in the nature of democratic politics. While direct action helps the state find its role by putting appropriate pressure on it, it is within civil society that elements of Ellul's utopia are being created every day, presenting incentives and constraints for the government to find its appropriate place away from its overly bureaucratized and overly technicized dehumanizing aspect.

IV. CONCLUSION

Ellul's social ideal is built around direct democracy. He idealizes the democracy of ancient tribes and the one that existed in the Greek polis until the 5th century B.C.E. By his own

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 92-93.
admission, he does not believe in representative democracy at all. In fact, one of his most controversial statements was the characterization of Western democracies as totalitarian "regimes," not unlike Stalin's USSR or Nazi Germany. His alternative is a federation.

Ellul drew his concept of federation from the classics of anarchism—Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin—who emphasized a federation's organic aspect in contrast to the oppressive nature of the modern state. Their mutualist brand of federation was distinguished from Western democracies in two important ways: a constitutional basis in voluntary communities and the importance they assigned to values.

Constitutionally, a federation functions as a direct, not representative democracy. It operates "in very small units" similarly to the democracy in Athens. It develops around a basic community from the bottom up. There is no supervision by an intrusive and manipulative state, no institutions, no organizational technique, no electoral campaigns, no political parties, no class of professional politicians, focusing on their own political survival instead of the interests of the electorate.

Free from the propaganda machine of the modern state, a federation allows meaningful public discourse, critical for "fundamental" issues to be identified and addressed. Such a discourse is necessary for a person to be "an autonomous center of decision," not influenced by stereotypes or controlled by propaganda. For Ellul, democracy is about the demos, and the ethical quality of the demos is decisive for whether democracy is achievable in a given society.

This brings into focus the other critical aspect of a federation: being an environment conducive to the development of social values. Proudhon emphasized justice and cooperation as primary values engendered and instilled by a mutualist federation. For Ellul, the main civic value
is being a free thinker having the courage to suffer for one's opinion. Once people start thinking freely, independently from the idolatry of the state, they will invariably view social issues based on values, the ultimate source of which is Christ.

Thus, Ellul's federation relies on public discourse to sort out normative issues, not the law. Ellul is very concerned that the modern state is increasingly relying on the law for government. He despises the concept of the rule of law, viewing it as a big lie designed to make an impression that the law is still an instrument of justice. However, the modern law is no longer informed by the considerations of justice. The only factor that defines the creation and the enforcement of the modern law is the technical aspect.

The law always had a technical side and a justice side to it. However, the justice side made it too unpredictable to technique. The justice aspect of the law means unpredictable results in the process of adjudication. Unpredictability means inefficiency. Thus, justice as the purpose of the law is replaced by order or, in other words, replaced by the law's technical aspect. No room is left for human judgment. All that is left is regulatory technical detail. Modern law is a compilation of detailed rules, growing in their complexity and precision, covering every possible situation. The law becomes a principle means of government, with which the state realizes its increasingly ubiquitous in intrusive presence, leaving to society no autonomy outside state control. Ironically, the growing complexity and proliferation of the laws is consuming and ultimately destroying the law itself. The law is being deprived of its unique purpose in justice and its unique legal domain and thus is no longer the "law."

To Ellul, the growing reliance on rulemaking by the modern state reflects the growing role of violence for its governance. Ellul finds violence to be the defining modus operandi of the
modern state. Fundamentally, a democracy is not compatible with violence. Therefore, violence by itself is a testimony of lacking democracy in modern governance. However, Ellul's rejection of violence is not limited to the issues of government. He rejects violence as an instrument of social change as well. Violence is as wrong as it is ineffective for any social action.

Ellul finds a Christocentric justification for his position. Not only was Jesus against using violence, he was resisting its use by the state. God's love means freedom, and freedom means suggesting, not forcing a certain course of action. Being essentially the opposite of love, violence is a sociological expression of sin. Ellul tries to turn the theological dichotomy of love versus sin into a sociological dichotomy of nonviolence versus violence.

In this study, I have attempted to resolve the paradoxical relationship between ethics and politics by introducing true dialectics to Ellul's theory. Ellul attempted to resolve it by collapsing politics into ethics, i.e., demonizing politics and presenting it as the opposite of ethics. This rendered his ethics arguably inconsequential on the socio-political plane. The hope of my effort is to "practicalize" this theory and turn it from an ethical prescription of individual self-improvement into a proposition for social change as Ellul himself intended it. It is a two step-process whereby I first offer to dialecticize Ellul's theory and then introduce a social dialectic that would show how an ethical idea can effectuate a change on a socio-political plane. This dialectical solution is designed to break the monism of Ellul's conceptualization without sacrificing his emphasis on values.

The first step proposes viewing politics and ethics through a Hegelian prism: accepting them as manifestations of an infinitely unified and infinitely fragmented ever-changing reality where everything is both "absolute" and "relative" in relation to something else, depending on
the level of generality and scope. In this structurally dialectical reality, we achieve complete
overall monism that logically destroys any monism of its components. This approach, being
consistently dialectical, accepts "absoluteness" of ethical principles and "relativism" of political
anti-ethicism without locking either of them in an a priori proposition. As a result, it allows
breaking an apparently paradoxical relationship between them while accommodating the
intensity of Ellul's focus on values and his critique of modern politics.

Thus, the first step of "practicalizing" Ellul unlocks the closure of his theory by
introducing it to a dialectically structured reality and its dialectically structured knowledge. The
second step is to find a specific dialectic of social change that would reveal how ethics operates
in the political world, as a mover of a given socio-political process. I proposed that if Ellul had
heeded the advice of his teacher Proudhon, he would have recognized justice as such socio-
ethical dialectic. Indeed, justice, personal and social, objective and subjective, effectively
operates as a dialectical interface of all ethics in the world of politics or in any social situation for
that matter. It seems to be in our genetic code as the most fundamental ethical manifestation of
our social actions. In that sense, the dialectic of struggle for justice is the most fundamental
social dialectic of all. Justice is most commonly recognized as a distributive concept. However,
if understood broadly, justice is a standard for a stable resolution of any social relation,
distributive or not. If so, it includes intellectual controversies or even social resolution of purely
ethical imperatives, for example, motivated solely by agape. Thus, the dialectic of justice is truly
universal and applies even in an ideal utopia where distributive controversies are no longer an
issue.
Thus, the last section of this chapter tested Ellul's theory after incorporation of the dialectic of justice. I chose three cases that best illustrate certain aspects of Ellul's theory: his revolution, his utopia, and his social activist. My examples included accordingly the liberation movement of Gandhi, eco-settlements, and an animal rights activist.

I have come to the conclusion that Ellul's theory does work in the modern world. Modernity presents many challenges that cannot be effectively recognized, let alone resolved, within the world of politics, preoccupied mostly with short-term political imperatives. Such issues are "fundamental" in nature, and they usually emerge in the form of an ethical proposition, gathering momentum of support until given the status of a "justice" issue pressed by a direct action movement. All three cases chosen to test Ellul's theory can be said to have proven him right or at least realistic in his expectations.

However, such "Ellulian" movements in the end always transferred their agenda to the world of politics, seeking changes in the law as their grand prize. In this regard, their main effort has been toward changing social perceptions to generate enough force for reforming the world of politics, making it hear their voice, and recruiting supporters within the political community, as opposed to overthrowing the political system altogether. Thus, ultimately, Ellul is right that fundamental changes require direct action movements with their typical intense focus on ethics. Nevertheless, we must accept the fact that their ultimate success has depended on their ability to reform the genome of politics, not to hurl it into oblivion.
CONCLUSION

The topic of this study is whether Ellul succeeded in creating a true social theory. I looked at it from the standpoint of his own ambition to become "a new Marx," a social thinker producing a theory that would not only expose the modern crisis but also offer a solution for it. To answer this question, I looked for defining aspects of Ellul's theory and ended up with three characterizations that, once projected onto each other, create a three-dimensional image of Ellul as a social reformer. They are: (1) a direct action theorist; (2) a Christian critic of modernity within the paradigm of Radical Orthodoxy; and (3) a personalist revolutionary. The first one is derived from his sociology whereas the other two are products of his theology. Here, I will present Ellul within the framework of these three characterizations. After that, I will review Ellul's solutions in light of the dialectical method and then discuss the promise of Ellul's theory for a better future.

I. THEORIST OF DIRECT ACTION

Ellul's sociological views formed under the influence of socialist thinkers from two traditions: anarchism and Marxism. Despite that he was more impressed by the theoretical depth of Marx, his sociology reveals greater influences of the classical anarchism of Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin. Ellul borrowed important elements of Marx's analytical method that helped him "diagnose" the modern crisis. Marx inspired him to look for a singular foundational cause underlying the totality of modern social ills. For Marx, it was the capitalist system. For Ellul, it was technique. Like Marx in his analysis of capital, Ellul believed that technique created
an existential crisis that is all-encompassing, deep, and inescapable. It affected the human condition and the social milieu, subordinating both to de-humanizing technical imperatives.

Having borrowed conceptual elements of Marx's diagnosis of the modern crisis, Ellul rejected his solution. The solution of Marxism was a socialist revolution and a dictatorship of the proletariat that abolishes private property of means of production and creates a more efficient economic system, further unleashing productive forces of technology and science. Ellul abhorred both the violence of a Marxist revolution and the technical "paradise" it was meant to create. He thought that Marxist revolutions replaced one form of slavery—to money—by another one—to work. Both were worlds of necessity imposed by technique and, in that sense, as totalitarian as Nazism.

Ellul was much more supportive of the idea of a socialist revolution advocated by the classical anarchists, a "Proudhonian revolution," not a Marxist one. He liked that the anarchists did not pursue a "class struggle" but rather fought against the state as such. They thought of the state as the source of social ills, a Weberian "cold monster" that grew increasingly totalitarian, reducing the autonomy of the person to almost nothing. This message particularly resonated with Ellul as he witnessed the rise of fascism across Europe, including his native France. He became an ardent anti-fascist, and there was no anti-fascist movement in his town in which he did not participate. After the war, he continued his fight, relentlessly trying to expose the state's de-humanizing aspects, hoping to foster a broad resistance to state control of human life.

Ellul's anarchist perception of the state as a universal evil was linked with his anarchist approach to social reform. He rejected the Marxist methods of revolution geared toward seizing political power: either by participation in parliamentary elections or through a revolution led by a
communist party. The anarchist idea of revolution, shared by Ellul, rejected the very notion of using the state or politics as instruments of social change. He believed in an irreconcilable dichotomy between a "true" revolution and politics, arguing that meaningful social changes can only be attained outside the political system. It followed that the only way to achieve them is non-political direct action of the people, opposing the state and its political machine.

This approach to social action is rooted in Ellul's theory of technocratic consciousness, which he calls "technique." The theory is a philosophical foundation of his critique of modernity. What concerns Ellul is that technocratic thinking brought about by technique replaced the teleological orientation of the human reason with a technical orientation.

Ellul thought that quantitative technological advancements led to a qualitative change in our milieu from "social" to "technical." Trying to adapt to the new milieu, we changed our culture, way of thinking, and perception of happiness. Indeed, technology understands only the language of mathematics, which is the language of efficiency. It cannot understand our ethical values and therefore is impervious to them. That leads to technique's autonomy from human teleological decisions. In its relentless pursuit of efficiency, technique has become a self-augmenting force, over which humankind is powerless but whose power over humankind is virtually total.

Efficiency is no longer a means. It is an end. The question "Why?" has imploded into the question "How?" What is inefficient no longer makes sense to a modern person. This leads us to a transition from a human essence of existence, a human "being," to a technical one. For all practical purposes, technology turns us into a machine.
Technique permeated all spheres of life, including politics, giving rise to a "political technique." What makes it particularly pernicious is its fusion with the state. To Ellul, the state is a political form of power, and power equals violence. Thus, the state must always be kept in check. However, the modern state takes its exercise of power to a whole new "technical" level. The normal discretionary operation of government, based in its communal origin, has been replaced by the technical operation of a bureaucratic machine, detached from people and obsessed with procedure and efficiency. Most disturbingly, the state control has become so vast that virtually no aspect of social life—especially the economy—is outside the state's purview. Thus, the public depends on the state for everything, including well-being, leading to deification of the state.

The proliferation and specialization of bureaucracy have become so great that individual decision-making and responsibility vanished. The state has become an autonomous force. Political control of the state is no longer possible. Politicians do not understand what bureaucracy does as they do not possess its specialized knowledge. Moreover, politicians are not even interested in such control. They themselves have become a professional group, whose only preoccupation is keeping their jobs, not serving their electorate.

As the state's functions became ubiquitous, everything became politicized. However, today's politics is no longer about democracy. Its sole function is technical: to legitimize the state. One part of this function is to divert the public attention from issues of social concern to those that support the state. All other issues are ephemeral. They operate as simple distractions of the public opinion. This selection of the issues is carried out through a propaganda machine of
the state that has a monopoly on information. Only facts selected by the political machine are advertised as "important". Thus, the political technique trivializes and subordinates any public initiative toward serious social reforms.

Ellul describes the modern state and politics as a closed totalitarian system, a world of illusory democracy at best. Such a system cannot provide an opening for a meaningful social reform. A resolution of the modern crisis, or even any positive change at all, can only be attained through direct action that opposes and challenges this system. Its goal must be the destruction of the modern state and its replacement with "anarchy."

"Anarchy" can mean different things. To Ellul, it means a social order, a true democracy, where people reclaim their social autonomy from the control of the modern state. Anarchy is not the ultimate goal for the resolution of the modern crisis but rather a key beginning and a necessary transitional step to Ellul's ultimate utopia. Ellul does not give us a clear description of that utopia. Anarchy seems to be an interim period, a preparatory stage before humanity can enter a more advanced social order that demands a greater ethical standing. In many respects, it is akin to the role of "socialism" in Marxism that is needed to prepare for communism.

One of the greatest vulnerabilities of Ellul's theory is the lack of a programmatic piece where he would elaborate on how exactly he wants to achieve his reform. Instead, his focus is on educating the public about the dangers of the modern crisis in the hope of creating distrust of the modern state and spontaneous resistance to it. This approach was suggested by his own experience of fighting in French Resistance during World War II which he hoped would turn into an anarchist socialist revolution, leading to the dissolution of key institutions of the French government, including the Council of Ministers, the National Assembly, and political parties.
Despite the absence of a specific program of social action, I attempted to create a composite version of such a program from different elements of his social thought scattered around his *oeuvre*. They can be organized around three principles developed and advocated by Ellul in his sociology: federalism, legal reform, and nonviolence.

Federalism is the embodiment of Ellul's social ideal. Like other classical socialists, both anarchist and Marxist, he believed in direct democracy, which only federalism can provide. Ellul did not believe in representative democracy and thought of it as a cesspool of trading favors within the class of professional politicians. A historian of institutions, Ellul saw an example of direct democracy in ancient Athens, where all issues were decided by the general assembly of citizens. He hoped to have a similar system in his native France, where in each municipality, citizens would be able to vote directly on all matters. However, Ellul's democracy is not only about voting, it is also about selecting the right issues for it. A direct democracy makes it possible for ideas formed by *any* substantial motivated group, such as environmentalists, to be communicated directly to the government. Ellul called it a "balanced society" because it is ruled by the people, not by special interests.

Ellul's concept of federation is not limited to structural aspects of government. Influenced by the works written on the subject by Proudhon and Kropotkin, Ellul sees a federation as an opportunity to anchor government in the community and thereby refocus it on human values and civic responsibilities, away from modern nationalism and self-centered politicking. To Ellul, federation is a school of civic education and a communicative space for vigorous and value-oriented public discourse, forming enlightened *demos* that can be a foundation of a true democracy.
The second principle of Ellul's social solution is legal reform. A lawyer by academic training and a professor of Roman law in Bordeaux, Ellul ascribes a special significance to the law. Ellul believes that the law is inherently resistant to technicization. On one hand, it has always been a judiciary technique. On the other hand, the law has a justice aspect to it, which makes its enforcement unpredictable and difficult for technique to control. Because of this justice aspect, the law is a potentially effective instrument of resisting the state. This is how it was used in ancient Athens and elsewhere where the law was based in custom.

Ellul is concerned that the modern law has become completely technicized and subjugated by the state. Its justice aspect has been lost as the discretionary adjudication has been replaced by detailed technical rules. Moreover, the legislative process is now controlled by party politics. As a result, the law has become a mere instrument of asserting the control of the state. The state effectively makes the law for itself, and thus the law can no longer be used to protect the public from the state. It protects the powerful and not the powerless.

Ellul proposes a legal reform that is aimed at restoring the justice aspect of the law. He insists on a complete separation of the judiciary from the state and party politics. If the judiciary becomes independent, the law will be responsive to the facts of life and the social values instead of being an instrument of political interests. That way, it will become an effective tool of resisting the state, in the hands of the public. In the meantime, the public should insist that the government at least obey its own rules and keep its own promises under the existing laws.

The third principle of Ellul's solution to the modern crisis is nonviolence. Sociologically speaking, Ellul is a pacifist. To him, violence is wrong, irresponsible, and ineffective. He supports the brand of anarchism that rejects violence completely. He writes about violence in
three contexts. The first context is the use of violence by the modern state. As I said before in this chapter, Ellul identifies the state with power (or force). However, he defines violence broadly enough to include any exercise of power, including even the power of propaganda and ideology. Thus, violence is a signature characteristic of the modern state and its only means of control. The state is essentially an embodiment of violence.

The second context in which Ellul discusses violence is whether it should be used in direct action. Ellul categorically rejects this idea. Citing the success of nonviolent movements of the twentieth century, such as those of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, he argues that nonviolent civil disobedience has proven its effectiveness. Conversely, violent movements, such as the Prague Spring, ended up as failures. The anarchism that does not use violence, such as that advocated by Bakunin, turns to persuasion and sincerely denounces "falsehood and oppression." It enjoys legitimacy and breaks the vicious cycle of violence. Being nonviolent does not mean being passive. It means acting the right way.

The third context for discussion of violence is implied by the first one: Should violence be a part of the mutualist federation, proposed by Ellul? He suggests that some use of violence is unavoidable in the beginning as long as people "covet the same things." This is a more pessimistic view than the one of the classical anarchists, such as Kropotkin. They believed that in the absence of a repressive state, crime will disappear immediately and that no coercion will be necessary in an anarchist federation. Disputes will be resolved amicably in the context of community. Submission to the law will be voluntary, as people will consider it as their own law. Ellul, too, seemed to believe that in a mutualist federation, violence will be minimal.
Despite some differences with anarchism, Ellul's solution is essentially anarchist. Its message is loud and clear: A true social reform will come from nonviolent protests, not from a voting booth in the context of a representative democracy. Our main enemy is the state, and it is only by gaining ground against the state that we can reclaim our freedom. The resistance must be as diverse and total as is the totalitarian nature of the state: it must include, for all of us, using every opportunity to profane the state, discredit all of its actions, expose the true self-serving motives of those in power, protect the weakest members of society against the state, and hold the state responsible for breaking its own laws. By doing this, the enlightened individuals can gradually form a community of like-minded anti-statists that will eventually build the foundations of a mutualist federation of direct democracy with laws based on custom that will foster new responsible citizenship through an open and meaningful public discourse.

II. CHRISTIAN CRITIC OF MODERNITY AND PERSONALIST REVOLUTIONARY

As I wrote in the first chapter, Ellul's theory comprises two parts: sociology and theology. Ellul meant them to be separate. However, my analysis of his thought confirmed that one could not be understood without the other. The sociological and the theological strands of Ellul are integrated indeed. If students of Ellul try to discern the primacy of one over the other, they may end up in frustration: the task seems futile. However, a reader of Ellul cannot escape a feeling that the relationship between the two parts is hierarchical: one providing a cause for the other.

For most part, Ellul's eschatological theology appears to be the fundamental theoretical basis for his sociology. Indeed, it defines his philosophy of history, arguably the most foundational aspect of social philosophy. However, when it comes to Ellul's sociological solution
of the modern crisis, the roles switch, and it is his sociology that appears to have an upper hand while his theology emerges clearly as a theoretical construct built around an idea of social reform. In this study, I went as far as to propose that Ellul's theology is created to be a *sociological* instrument of resolving the modern crisis. In this sense, it transcends the realm of theology but also lets sociology define its purpose: to create, like in the 19th-century hymn, those "Christian soldiers" who, armed with "hope and doctrine," will vanquish technique and deliver us from the bondage of it.

Like Gandhi's *Swaraj*, Ellul's theology has a broad purpose of a practical manual for *all* enlightened individuals capable of seeing the modern crisis: How, based on God's specific instructions, to survive in our perilous world and ultimately change it for the better. In this sense, I have to disagree with Goddard's characterization of Ellul's theology as addressed exclusively to Christians and not meant for others to be understood or used. Yes, the Christians are meant to be the principal agents of change in Ellul's system. However, his theology has a broader objective of explaining to *everyone* the role of the Christians and why that role is pivotal. By analogy with Marxism, Ellul's Christians are assigned the role of the "vanguard" of those social forces that will resist the oppressor while everyone is called upon to join them.

One good piece of evidence of that is the article by Ellul on legal reform that includes his sociology of law, his proposed legal reform, and a description of a specific role of the Christians in that reform as selfless protectors of the disadvantaged members of society, forcing the state, by legal means, to keep its promises to "the weakest." Another illustration is Ellul's book for anarchists, explaining to them how their goals are in synch with the teaching of Christ. Ellul's
theological pieces sometimes may come across as technical theology, but their message is always practical: how Christ's message exposes the modern crisis and helps to solve it.

This direction of Ellul's theology becomes intuitively obvious in light of his personal beginnings as a Christian. He became a Christian at about the same time as he became interested in socialism of Marx and Proudhon. His intellectual development in his youth led him to a personalist organization, led by a Catholic bishop. The goal of the organization was social reform attained through personal ethical growth. Ellul's early participation in Personalism made an indelible mark on his subsequent theoretical development to his unique brand of socially informed theology, later expressed in the so-called Radical Orthodoxy.

Ellul did not belong to Radical Orthodoxy in a technical sense. In fact, it announced its birth much later, in 1999, after Ellul's death. However, Ellul shares the context, purpose, and logic of their thought, which helps us see Ellul's theology as a rebellion against modernity. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, citing Steven Long, Radical Orthodoxy revived the orthodox approach to dogmatics in order to revive "intrinsic and necessary connection between theology and politics," thereby "calling into question modern politics, culture, art, science, and philosophy." Drawing from such theologians as Barth, they took an intractable position on dogmatics exactly to resist the assimilating force of modernity, as a form of protest against any attempt of its justification. For them, theology is an instrument of social action as it is for Ellul.

Similarly, Ellul borrowed the dogmatics of Barth in order to build his theology of a Christian social activist. A critic of Western capitalism, Barth himself believed that a Christian must be politically active and pursue social justice through praxis of the Christian faith. In his dogmatics, he emphasized the Otherness of God from the world and resisted any attempts to
correlate the Bible's teaching with social, cultural, or historical circumstances. He insisted on absolute Christocentricity of the Bible's interpretation, apparently seeing it as a guarantee that Christ's message will not be lost in the intricacies of the biblical exegesis.

Despite his interest in Barth's dogmatics, Ellul needed more for his theology of social action. How can a Christian see the truth in a world completely poisoned by justification of our assimilation by technique? Even if we accept the Otherness of God as a part of reality, where is the guarantee that this Otherness will not be misinterpreted by institutional theologians, lulling us into accepting the world of technique?

Ellul finds an answer in the radical subjectivism of Kierkegaard, who distrusted organized religion, and therefore put the individual, not the Church, at the center of his theology. Kierkegaard believed in the primacy of a person's direct experience with her communion with God. By suggesting the pre-eminence of the inward spiritual dynamic over intellectual understanding of God, Kierkegaard helped Ellul to free the individual from her dependency on the society's point of view and thus free her from the corrupting influence of her technical milieu. According to Ellul, the closure of technique is so complete that we need to "go back to the root," which is the individual human being. Thus, the individual, not society, is "the source of hope."

However, to be the source of hope, the individual must not be a conformist. She must believe in the inerrant word of God and not accept its distortions by the others. In his theology, Ellul himself was an example of such uncompromising approach. Despite Calvinistic and Barthian influences on his dogmatics, he took a fresh look at the Scriptures and jumped straight into the fray of the theological discourse of his day, becoming an original and influential
theologian in his own right. While mediating social discourse with his theology, Ellul challenged traditional theology by looking at it in the context of his critique of modernity.

By paraphrasing a well-known expression about Marx and Hegel, Ellul stood traditional theology on its head by reversing those theological precepts that tended to justify authority or violence, as well as some other well-accepted norms that contradicted his social ideal, including humility, distinction between the Old and New Testaments, just wars, natural law, and the role of the Church in Christian life.

On the question of the Christian duty to respect authorities, Ellul rejects the common interpretation of the Scriptures, asking to pray for kings, saying that it simply means that we must pray *even* for the kings, interpreting the Bible to mean that, of all people, the kings deserve the least respect, not the most.

Similarly, on the question of Christian humility, Ellul reverses its common understanding as humble acceptance of one's earthly circumstances as a will of God, while focusing on inward spiritual development. Ellul agrees that a Christian must submit to the will of God. However, according to his contrarian interpretation of the Gospels, Christ does not mean humility to the authorities. He is a rebel, criticizing, mocking, ignoring, and profaning the establishment. Therefore, Christian humility is not in the acceptance of one's circumstances but in their rejection. Put simply, true Christian humility is being faithful only to the Word of God, which means being an uncompromising renegade in the world.

The most significant doctrine where Ellul breaks with prevalent Christian norms is his view on violence and just wars. As I said before in this chapter, Ellul completely rejects violence on the sociological and the theological side of this issue. God is Love, and thus violence cannot
be His will under any circumstances. Moreover, by showing love, where He could have shown power, God of the Old Testament promises us that one can live in the world without violence. Thus, violence is not only contrary to God's expectation that we practice love, but it is also unnecessary.

A Christian pacifist, Ellul particularly insists that the Christians must have the right grasp of nonviolence because only the Christians, armed with nonviolence as a powerful weapon of social change, can initiate and implement a true social reform.

Influenced by Kierkegaardian brand of Christian subjectivism, Ellul rests all his hopes of social change on the Christian, building his theological system around this remarkable persona: a Christian revolutionary. Only a Christian can be a true revolutionary because he possesses the essential characteristics for resisting the assimilating power of technique. "Radically subjective," a Christian stays tuned to his own inwardness in direct contact with God. Therefore, he is immune to the idolatry of technique. Technique's corrupting influence counts on our self-centered orientation. We fall under its spell because of our selfishness. Being selfless, a Christian can withstand the lure of materialism and the idolatry of the state. Thus, he is capable of finding the true freedom in Christ, from necessities of our world. Therefore, he is most hopeful that a separation from the comforts of the technical milieu means not unhappiness but liberation.

A true Christian is a nonconformist. He challenges the establishment, "asking the right questions," disputing what society deems "self-evident." He can "start from zero" and think differently from society, "questioning even the movement of this society." Not only can he understand social issues, he is not afraid to take a stand on the right side of them. His loyalty is to God alone. And because God Himself is on his side, he is not afraid. He is true: he lives what he
says and does not indulge in justification. Thus, he is best equipped to be an anarchist (read: "direct action activist") exposing the state for what it is and challenging it.

It is interesting that Ellul does not want the Christians to form an organization or "live in closed groups." He does not want them to be "aloof from the world." He argues that the Bible requires them to be in the world. Moreover, he wants them to live normal lives and even participate in all sorts of political parties and work for the government. However, he counts on their resistance, right where are, by challenging the state and profaning it in order to destroy its idolatry in society. He also hopes that the Christians in opposing political entities will speak to each other and thereby re-focus public discourse from the non-issues to the issues of importance.

By living "in" the world and not being "of" it, the Christians become the enlightened vanguard of society that prepares a jailbreak for everyone from their realm of necessity. They are the first-borns of that demos that can be the foundation of a true democracy by bringing real issues of life to the forefront of public attention and thereby cause a revolutionary transformation away from technique.

Ellul does not tell us exactly how the Christians will effectuate the change. He was much more ambiguous about it than Marx, whom he tried to emulate. This contributed to the impression that his theory was just a prophecy of doom and not a prescription for solution. When criticized for that, he said his task was to expose the crisis so that others can do the rest. This suggests that, consciously or subconsciously, he thought that, like Marx was followed by Lenin, a practitioner, who developed a theory of revolution, those awakened by Ellul's theory will follow him in his footsteps and develop a plan of revolutionary action. However, late in his life he became more cognizant of that critique and tried to include bids of practical advice in his
oeuvre. Those bids are relatively scarce. However, by way of simple induction, one can build from them a fragmented picture of Ellul's probable solution, whose sociological aspects I mentioned in the preceding section. So, how does the Christian revolutionary fit in that sociological paradigm?

We know that Ellul does not want the Christians to live in groups. Instead, he wants them to be among the people. By analogy with Marxism, this is close to the tactic of the Communist Parties to mingle with the masses in order to educate them and raise them for a revolutionary movement. However, Ellul is against social action by means of political parties. An opponent of organized religion, he does not want Christians to work through institutions of the Church although he mentions that the Church, were it not corrupt could play a positive role by reminding the state and society of the ethical implications of their actions.

If follows from Ellul's theory that the Christians will be a catalyst of public awareness of the dangers of society's addiction to materialism and the idolatry of the state. Their organizational role appears highly uncertain. We can imagine that it could be similar to what they did during the catacomb period of Christianity in the Ancient Rome: spreading the Word of God and sacrificing themselves to prove their point, until all of Rome became Christian.

A modern example of this phenomenon can be the environmental movement. Ellul followed the French ecologists with great interest. He liked that they propagated the idea of a "complete change in our life style," something he himself taught in his books, calling for sacrifices and "frugal ways." His advice to them was not to form a political party and not to engage in electoral campaign or otherwise "indulge in politicking" but to "develop a counter force" to the political system.
Thus, Ellul envisioned that the Christians will educate the public while mingling with it, creating a critical mass of opposition to the government in society, thus creating the right conditions for successful direct action. However, he did not want them to limit their efforts to raising public awareness. He wanted them to challenge the state here and now, right where they are. They must "think globally" while "acting locally." While not participating in politics, they must challenge the state at its own game, so to speak, by holding it responsible for the broken promises to the "weakest" members of society through the existing legal system.

In summary, we can see that Ellul's theology was largely a function of his sociological ideas build on anarchist opposition to the modern state. Ellul turned it into an ideology of social change, not dissimilar to the way Marx created his philosophy that became a theoretical foundation for a proletarian revolution. We can see clearly a fusion of Ellul's anarchist ideal of direct action with his ideal of a Christian revolutionary who can carry it out, a nonconformist with the ethical principles, the motivation, and the resolve to fight for deliverance of all of us lost in the maze of the modern technical milieu.

III. ELLUL'S SOLUTION IN DIALECTICAL LIGHT

Ellul's resolve not to participate in politics creates a predicament for his solution. Indeed, how can his revolutionaries realize his dream of building his utopian federation based on direct democracy if they completely abstain from politics? Sooner or later, they must turn to some sort of administrative activities, and they are inherently political. This brings into focus the eternal paradox between ethics and politics, with which political philosophy has always struggled. It is in the inherent dual orientation of politics as "ethical" and "pragmatic" at the same time.
Ellul resolved this paradox by declaring politics totally unethical. Conventional politics is a world of the demonic. It is about self-interest, deception, and power based exclusively on violence. Thus, to be ethical, any social action must be in complete opposition to the political world. In essence, it must limit itself to direct action, similar to the one propagated by anarchism. Put simply, "good" politics is no politics, which essentially means that Ellul resolved the paradox between politics and ethics by collapsing politics into ethics.

Ellul designed his moral philosophy to be a practical one. So, is there a way to connect it with the world of politics and thus "practicalize" it? Since a "paradox," by definition, is a case of a missing logical connection, I decided to investigate whether Ellul missed something in the way of logic. Since Ellul's theory is about social transformation, the right kind of logic appeared to be dialectical and not linear. Ellul himself valued dialectical logic highly and thought that no serious social science could do without it. Thus, my quest in this study has been to see how Ellul's theory applied the dialectical method.

It is interesting how the very structure of Ellul's oeuvre reflects the paradox. Indeed, the dual nature of Ellul's theory, composed of sociology and theology, is by itself an illustration of how difficult, if not impossible, it is to reconcile politics and ethics. Ellul himself thought the two branches of his thought are not reconcilable and that they are in an unsynthesizable dialectical relationship to each other, like two electrical poles with sparks flying between them.

This gives us a key to the way Ellul viewed dialectic. For him, dialectic is not about synthesis, as it is for Hegel and Marx. It is about enduring tension between two opposites, performing as a dynamic force of life, breaking stasis and creating healthy controversy, through which the truth can be found, resulting in spiritual growth. Ellul thinks of Marx's dialectical view
of history as unnecessarily limiting the world of possibilities for an individual, denying him the freedom that can be attained in the process of connection with God.

Ellul's view of dialectic is dialogical. It is not an organizing principle of material reality as it is for Marx. Rather, it is the structure of the communicative relationship between God and the person. Because of God's Otherness, God's Word is in inherent tension with the fallen world. It is through that tension that God participates in human history. History is a function of the exercise of God-given freedom of ethical choice, which, in turn, depends on whether society opens itself to a communicative relationship with God.

On the sociological plane, it means that society must organize itself so that it would encourage diversity of opinion to prevent social stasis that leads to dominance of ideologies, idolatry of the state, and totalitarianism, which is the signature of the modern crisis. Ellul does not believe that the modern world is a result of "progress." He thinks of progress not in material terms but as a spiritual advancement. Therefore, according to him, the modern world is a historical regression. This leads him to reject the Marxist view of history as a cyclical progression to ever-higher realization of human potential. With this denunciation, he denounces Marx's view of dialectic as well.

The problem with Ellul's approach is that what he believes is a "social" dialectic is essentially an inward spiritual dynamic of an individual person that informs his dialogue with God. Ellul's "revolution" is a spiritual event when the person wins over his own dependency on "bread and circuses" and decides to live a spiritually rich life. Ellul does not explain how that spiritual transformation translates into a social transformation. A social transformation requires a social dialectic. However, for a social dialectic to exist, two social forces must engage each other
in a dialectical relationship, like, for example, social classes in Marxism fighting for adjustments in a social superstructure. Instead, Ellul offers us a general idea that society needs a dialogical framework that can accommodate a meaningful public discourse, a framework that he calls "social dialectic."

The reason why Ellul could not offer a social dialectic that could replace Marx's dialectic of class struggle is his monistic view of social phenomena that oppose humankind on its way to spiritual progress. Ellul's views technique, the state, and the world of politics not as interacting groups of people pursuing conflicting interests but as uniform and faceless spirits that are essentially incarnations of our own sins. Such conceptualization does not permit a dialectical opposition within these phenomena, leaving no opening for a theory of social transformation, except by accepting a possibility of their total demise or triumph, either of which renders the theory superfluous and practically unyielding.

Another methodological problem of Ellul's analysis is that he places technique and society in different analytical dimensions without proper logical connection between them. Technique is an expression of technocratic consciousness. It is our consciousness that it represents. Thus, technique is us. In Ellul's theory, technique is essentially an expression of sin. Thus, it is not an integral part of, us but we are inherently susceptible to it due to our natural weaknesses. However, if technique is our sin, why is it completely autonomous from us so that we are absolutely helpless against it? And conversely, if we assume for the sake of the argument that technique is indeed autonomous from us, then why are we not at all autonomous from technique? Either way, be technique "sin" or "technology" in the conventional sense of the term, Ellul made certain that we cannot compromise with it. The analytical fallout of such totalizing
conceptualization is an inevitable stalling of any attempt to project our relationship with technique into the future, let alone see any possibility of its resolution.

Finally, Ellul's theory creates yet another barrier for applying social dialectics to it by collapsing the material reality into the spiritual one. Ellul's dialectic of history relates to the relationship between the Word and the world. In his sociology, Ellul treats "the world" largely as Marx treats material reality in his. However, unlike in Marxism, Ellul's dialectic of history is not based on internal dialectics of the world. His dialectic of history is eschatological: History is resolved on the Day of Judgment. Until then, we decide the course of history by either obeying God's will or disobeying it.

In this system, humankind's freedom of choice could allow for a historical dynamic, giving rise to true social dialectic. However, Ellul decisively precludes such a possibility. Unlike Barth, who recognizes the existence of dialectics as an organizing principle of reality itself, Ellul does not allow for such a possibility. He does not identify any dialectic of history, autonomous from the dialectical relationship between the Word and the world, trying to emphasize the crucial importance of obeying the Word of God for the course of human history. Thus, he lets the spiritual reality subsume the material reality, which begs the question: How can we make historical projections for our material reality on its own terms apart from purely ethical generalizations? Moreover, even when we know and appreciate the Word, how can we exercise our ethical judgment in the world unless we study its own internal logic?

The solution to Ellul's predicament that I proposed in this study was twofold: First, to break the closure of his monistic ontology by "dialecticizing" it, and second, to identify a fundamental social dialectic that would connect ethics and politics in a single dialectic. The first
step was to introduce the Hegelian dialectic to Ellul's system by assuming that the world is completely dialectical, which is a world that is infinitely unified and infinitely fragmented at the same time, a world where all structural elements are in constant motion, striving to resolve dialectical contradictions between each other and within themselves. Such a structure suggests complexity of the social phenomena described by Ellul, including technique, the state, and the world of politics. Indeed, each of them constantly evolves in response to internal and external imperatives, realizing their potential for both good and evil.

As a second step, I proposed that Ellul's system would have gained if Ellul had adopted Proudhon's notion of justice as a fundamental mover of history. A broad ethical concept, Justice operates as an aggregator of diverse ethical claims on the political scene, expressing them in a unifying and intuitively understandable manner. Once these conflicting claims reach a critical mass, they create social forces that cannot be resisted, effectuating social change, not dissimilar to the cycles of history as described by Marx. Thus, the concept of justice operates as a conceptual expression for both ethical claims and their political resolution, which in turn leads to new ethical claims in a continuous cycle of resolutions.

Proudhon himself saw dialectic as a "balance of antinomies" rather than their synthesis. It was he who suggested to Ellul the analogy between dialectics and electrical poles generating sparks between them. Proudhon saw justice as an "objective" justice, a characteristic of society in the state of balance tantamount to harmony. However, the existence of such objective justice implies its reflection in the minds of people as "subjective" justice, which, in turn, implies their understanding when the "objective" justice is out of balance, creating claims of its restoration.
Whether it occurs through a synthesis or not does not change the point Proudhon appears to make: Claims of justice give rise to social dialectics.

Dialecticizing Ellul's world and the introduction of dialectic of justice could, indeed, practicalize Ellul's theory. The paradox between ethics and politics would be resolved without destroying its political prong. It would bring ethics and politics to the same fight of "good" and "evil" across both planes. Indeed, today's hardliner within the government can turn into a softliner tomorrow, reversing the role of the state on a key issue of major ethical implications, as happened in South Africa, where the state turned on a dime after a "spiritual transformation" of its leaders on both sides of the issue, peacefully reversing its course from an "oppressor" to a "liberator" of the country from apartheid and its fallout.

Moreover, dialectic of justice renders the barrier between "selfish" and "selfless" claims superfluous. If a selfish claim of justice is well-founded, it invariably has a potentiality of selflessness in a group context. After all, my selfish interest in pursuing justice for myself also means taking a stand for all who are disaffected by the injustice in question. Standing up for "my" justice selfishly, I stand up for that of the similarly situated "others" selflessly. The very logic of living a vita activa in this sense leads to the spur of spiritual interest, automatically creating a push for spiritual development by virtue of simple participation in a fight for social justice. Politics of justice is always a spiritual experience. It transforms people. This is what happened to the participants of the Gandhi and King movements as well as those who gathered on Tahrir and Taxim Squares: The very participation in a nonviolent movement led them to a spiritual transformation.
So, is the message of Ellul lost in such an adaptation of his theory to the "real" world? Ellul saw the paradox, and by all appearance, he only wanted to reaffirm it. He intentionally refused to resolve it because he was afraid it would create openings for self-justification he despised most. Ellul did not want us to compromise, explaining our unwillingness to live pure lives by "practical" considerations. To him, there is no greater "practicality" than living the Word in the world. Any alternative means assimilation by technique, destruction, and death. Therefore, he rejects "synthesizing" for a purpose: He does not want it to destroy the triumphant dominance of the Word over any other considerations.

However, Ellul can rest assured that the dialectic of justice does not threaten his principled stand for ethical purity in politics. What it does is "democratize" his theory by finding elemental presence of his enlightened Christian in every person, not just a select "spiritual" elite. It recognizes human faces within the monolith of government bureaucracy, helping see the opportunities to transform institutions of the state through them. It realizes the potentiality of technology to be not only at the service of the government Goliath but also assisting the anti-government David, as Julian Assange and Edward Snowden reminded us. There is a reason that the Arab Spring was called "Facebook Revolutions." Thus, Ellul's Christian still stands tall, an iPad in his hand, looking for opportunities to help the "weakest" members of society and keeping the state in check.
IV. BUILDING A BRIGHT FUTURE: A CASE FOR ELLUL

What is the practical merit of Ellul's theory? Is it a realistic picture of our slide into a technological dystopia? How valuable is the solution that he offered? Did he realize his ambition to lead us into the future?

Ellul's description of our social reality is dark indeed. There is a reason he has been often accused of pessimism. If one reads his sociological works without paying attention to his theology, one is bound to feel as though the world is near the end. Ellul himself admitted this once in interview:

Without God, my work would have an eminently tragic meaning. It would have driven me to taking the same way out as Romain Gary: suicide. I describe a world with no prospects but I have the conviction that God accompanies man throughout history.¹

This characterization may suggest that his solution to the modern crisis lies in theology and that his sociology simply does not offer one. Otherwise, we must find a connection between the two that would be convincing not only to believers but to his secular students as well.

One need not be a believer to feel angst about the course of modernity. Its most common occurrence is in relation to the environmental degradation that seems to be out of control. As William Ophuls points out,

The viability of an industrial civilization that lives by exploiting nature is now threatened by the emergence of ecological scarcity. . . . These problems, together with the laws of ecology that underlie them, generate a closing circle of scarcity that is making it ever more difficult and expensive for us to continue to "develop" economically as we have in the past. . . . modern government is failing. . . The reason is straightforward, albeit unpalatable: the fundamental premises of modern polity are false and unsustainable. It is our most basic and cherished principles--individualism, liberty, materialism, rationalism, or, in short, the whole set of liberal-democratic values that we inherited from the Enlightenment—that are the direct and proximate cause of the failure.²

¹ Ellul, Entretiens, 40; Ellul, Conversations, 22.
Ophuls argues that "money is all that matters" in the modern civilization. Nature is essentially "a mere resource," "enslaved" and mercilessly destroyed by our "megalopolitan economies," leading us to an existential abyss and threatening the very institutions that we cherish.\(^3\) He contrasts the Western approach to nature with traditional societies such as the Balinese:

\[\ldots\] the Balinese receive the Earth as a precious gift and with careful labor turn it into sustenance for body and soul, into the basis for a way of life widely admired for its aesthetic and spiritual depth.\(^4\)

Ophuls's argument, secular as it is, suggests that the environmental degradation results from our materialistic tendency to objectify, which, in turn, is a function of spiritual impoverishment.

Objectification, which Ophuls calls "enslavement," is almost universally recognized by critics of modernity (going back to Proudhon and Marx), who, like Ophuls, emphasized its universal character that extends beyond the objectification of nature but includes religion, culture, art, animals, and, most importantly, people themselves. Objectification is a result of respecting money alone and therefore being disrespectful toward everything else. Thus, it is a function of disrespect. It is therefore only logical that Ophuls suggests that the modern environmental crisis is in the lack of "ecological maturity," a result of losing social values that include "reverence, respect, caring, mutuality, reciprocity, interdependence and the like."\(^5\)

Respect, in turn, appears to be a function of humility. Indeed, only by realizing one's own limits can one realize one's ability to respect. Those limits include, first and foremost, the limits of one's knowledge. The appreciation of such limits has been recognized by many philosophers

\(^3\) Ibid., 100.
\(^4\) Ibid., 101.
\(^5\) Ibid., 273-74.
as a sign of wisdom, including most famously Socrates and Berdyaev. Thus, when humility gives rise to true respect, it acknowledges the mystery of the object of respect, the existence of something we could—and perhaps should—never know about it. We start seeing God, speaking metaphorically if not literally, in all of His creation. In other words, we are not capable of surviving in this world unless we recognize the mystery of things around us, most notably of nature.

This is congruous with Ellul's critique of technique. Technique demystifies everything but itself. Therefore, it deprives us of our ability to respect anything but itself. In the end, our spirituality is limited to idolatry of technique, idolatry that essentially is anti-spirituality. Thus, the self-esteem that the philosophy of humanism has been trying to instill, without a spiritual foundation, turns into a form of suicidal narcissism. This supports the case Ellul is trying to make: The causes of our social crisis are within us: They are in the displacement of our lost spirituality by the narcissistic culture of consumerism.

So, how can we remedy this situation, if at all? What can restore spirituality in us? Ophuls believes that it should be a new community-based type of polity instilling a new "moral code" that is "fundamentally ecological in spirit." The moral code should "judge our acts according to their effects on society as a whole and over the long term," which essentially means we must start thinking teleologically or, in other words, in terms of reflective and not instrumental reason. Assuming that Ellul's technique is an expression of instrumental reason, the

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6 Berdyaev wrote that only with humility could one see the truth.
7 We truly respect something when we respect it out of appreciation of its inherent value and not of its value to "us." In other words, that means respecting something simply for its existence and not for its existence for "us."
8 Ophuls, Requiem, 271.
proposition by Ophuls can also mean that to get out of the crisis, we must concern ourselves with existential questions and not with efficiency.

Ophuls's argument also brings up an interesting question about the causal relationship between the ethical standing of an individual and the moral standing of the polity. It is expressed in Ellul's concept that a true democracy cannot exist without the right *demos*. The issue seems to be a chicken-and-egg problem of sorts: How can the polity instill the right ethics when it is still based on a system run by selfish interests? Ellul resolves this by disconnecting the individual from her environment and connecting her with God. So, too, does Gandhi in his *Swaraj*: Gandhi expects that a community-based home-rule (his new type of polity) will arise from individuals practicing individual moral "self-rule", based on religious practices of ascetic behavior.\(^9\)

God or not, Ellul, Gandhi, and Ophuls agree that love becomes a mover of politics in the post-modern world. It is on Ophuls's list of those virtues that we need in order to survive the environmental crisis, while for Ellul and Gandhi, love is both a weapon of struggle against the irresponsible *Ancien Régime* and a tool for construction of a new responsible polity. Thus, both God and its twin concept of love turn from an ethical ideal into a practical instrument of survival.

It may sound odd. Indeed, loving is about "giving." It is inherently an ascetic, selfless deed. "Practical," on the other hand, is about "getting." However, "giving" and "getting" merge as we move from myopic short-term considerations to a truly teleological approach taking into account the interests of society "as a whole and over the long term," as Ophuls proposed for surviving the environmental crisis. After all, God Love created the world so that we could live happily in it. In that sense, He is a "practical" God. If we do not turn away from Him by falling

\(^9\) Dallmayr, "What Is *Swaraj*?" 112.
into indiscretions of greed and observe the "user manual" He gave us, we will be safe. We, as humans, have a "human" measure for all things, and we must not forget about this in our pride.

Love is a powerful force of direct action. It can instantly mobilize activists in great numbers. This is what made Hardt and Negri predict that the "post-modern order" will be one when a rebellion for democratization will be "a project of love."

Gandhi and Ellul insisted that direct action must be based on love and both vehemently rejected violence. Gandhi called it "love force" or "soul force," an opposite of "physical force."
The rules for Satyagraha required "harboring no anger" and defending your opponent (nonviolently) with your life if anyone, including your comrade, insults and assaults him. Gandhi wrote

Passive resistance, that is, soul-force, is matchless. It is superior to the force of arms. How, then, can it be considered only a weapon of the weak? Physical-force men are strangers to the courage that is requisite in a passive resister. Do you believe that a coward can ever disobey a law that he dislikes? . . . a passive resister will say he will not obey a law that is against his conscience, even though he may be blown to pieces at the mouth of a cannon.10

These peaceful tactics of civil disobedience turned out to be effective, and ultimately victorious, leading India to peaceful liberation. On the other hand, the recent Ukrainian Euromaidan protests have shown how going from peaceful protests to violence erodes a movement's base and creates counter-movements, let alone justifying the use of violence by the government.

Thus, we see that Ellul is neither a dreamer nor an idealist. His spiritual solution is not detached from realities of our post-modern world. On the contrary, it offers a novel understanding of our problems and our political reality, an understanding that we can take deep

10 Gandhi, "Indian Home Rule," 114.
into the twenty-first century. The reasons why Gandhi's model of "nonviolent revolution"
has become so effective in "deadlocked or oppressively inflexible democracies," mentioned by
Naidu, largely apply to Ellul's theory, too.

Ellul’s intense focus on ethics turned out to be a great asset for our age when material
prosperity works as a smokescreen covering profound problems that urgently need to be
dressed. Without a spiritual compass, one does not seem able to see through today's
propaganda and popular stereotypes. Ellul helps us reflect on our current condition and provides
us with effective theoretical tools to build a better society. Therefore, we can say that he fulfilled
his ambition to become "a new Marx" for our time.
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