

# The Ellul Forum

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

## *Propaganda & Ethics*

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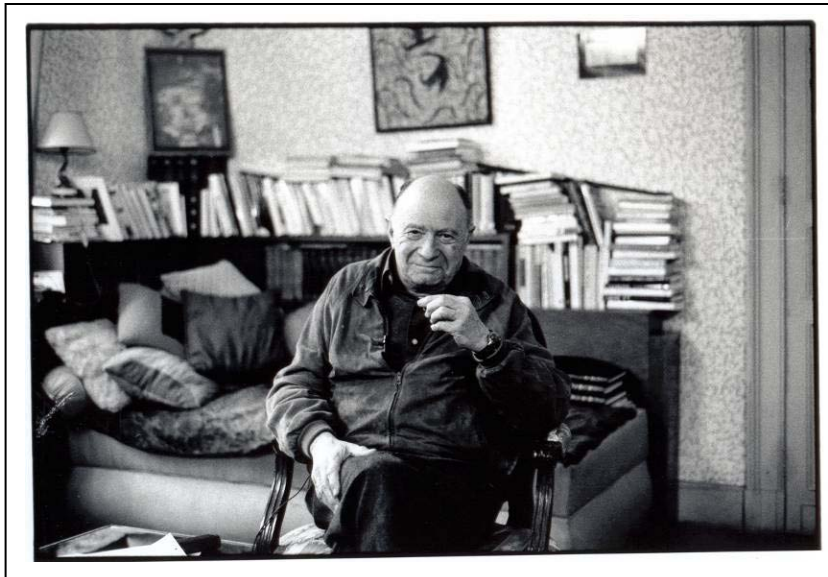
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*“Propaganda seems therefore to be, as is the case for most technical elements, a purely neutral instrument in itself, and one which therefore can be used for any kind of cause—a ‘good cause’ such as peace or the reconciliation of classes or Christianity, an ‘evil cause’ such as militarism, revolution, or atheism. In reality, nothing is further from the truth!*

*“No technical instrument is neutral; it carries its own logic within itself and . . . the most beautiful ideal, once it is carried by propaganda, is modified in its very essence and nature.”*

**-Jacques Ellul**

“The Ethics of Propaganda” (1981)

# **The Ellul Forum**

**For the Critique of Technological Civilization**

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# *From the Editor*

*Propaganda* was the first of Ellul's books I ever read, now more than three decades ago. It was required reading then for students of communications and it hasn't yet been surpassed. *Propaganda*, along with *The Technological Society*, and *Political Illusion*, has always been one of the critical foundations of his sociology of the modern world.

Ellul's programmatic little 1948 manifesto, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, already devoted a brilliant chapter to "The Problem of Communication" (which inspired IJES President David Gill's column on p. 23 below). Ellul followed his original publication of *Propagandes* (1962), with many other studies of communication, including an 83-page article on public relations, information, and propaganda in *L'Année sociologique* (1963), *Histoire de la Propagande* (1967; re-viewed in this issue of the *Ellul Forum*), and *The Humiliation of the Word* (1981, ET 1985; also re-viewed in this issue). *Humiliation* is of particular interest in that it adds a theological counterpoint to the sociology of communication.

In 1981, Ellul wrote an essay on the "Ethics of Propaganda" for *Communication*, a small, theory-oriented journal that is no longer published. This essay circulated among communication scholars, but not much beyond. We are delighted to give it a wider circulation here as our lead article. It is not an easy read, partly because of the rather wooden literalism of the translation, and partly because of Ellul's long, complex sentences. But it is full of challenging, illuminating insights and observations and well worth our study.

Randal Marlin, whom we also welcome as a new member of our IJES Board, is an expert on propaganda and communication studies. He translated (and published as a pamphlet) Ellul's essay on *FLN Propaganda in France During the Algerian War* (Ontario, Canada: By Books, 1982), which Ellul had handed to him in person during his 1979-80 research year in Bordeaux. Prof. Marlin's re-view of Ellul's *Histoire de la Propagande* and his major paper on "Problems in Ellul's Treatment of Propaganda" are two major gifts to this issue of the *Forum*. Marlin's appreciative but critical back-and-forth with Ellul's ideas is exactly the sort of constructive conversation Ellul loved and the sort of thing the *Ellul Forum* is all about.

Also in this issue, Prof. Jay Black provides a superb introduction to the larger context of propaganda studies over the past century, and shows us where Ellul fits in this tradition. Russell Heddendorf re-views Ellul's *Humiliation*, and J. Wesley Baker and David Gunkel review important new books in communication and media studies in this issue.

Our next (Fall 2006) issue of the *Ellul Forum* has "politics" for its main theme. Our world could use some helpful insight on this topic and we know a great figure to get us started on our reflections. Issue 39 in Spring 2007 will focus on Ellul's ethics. Your contributions and ideas are always welcome.

This Spring, in addition to Randal Marlin, we are delighted to welcome Dr. Virginia Landgraf (ATLA, Chicago) and Prof. Mark Baker (Mennonite Seminary, Fresno) to our IJES Board of Directors.

*Clifford G. Christians, Editor*

*editor@ellul.org*

# The Ethics of Propaganda

*by Jacques Ellul*

*This article first appeared in Communication, 6 (1981): 159-175. Translated from the French by D. Raymond Tourville.*

At first glance, the question of ethics and propaganda, or of "the ethics of propaganda," seems to be readily resolved: there is no morality in the propaganda game, and therefore it serves no purpose to render a moral judgment on propaganda. It belongs to one of those closed and impenetrable areas where ethics loses its rights. To declare that "to make propaganda" is wrong is irrelevant: the propagandist does not concern himself with such judgments and the propagandee lives with the fact that what his leader or his group says is not propaganda. Ethics in a moral or philosophical sense is strictly without power in this politico-social activity, and a positive or negative judgment can in no way change this fact. Yet, one can quickly enough realize that this very fact raises a certain number of difficulties.

Propaganda does indeed obey a certain ethic, not taken in the moral sense, but rather as a rule of behavior. Moreover, it, itself, in short constitutes a morality for crowds, for peoples, for groups, for classes, for nations. Finally, and this is the most important fact, it appears more and more that what propaganda builds in man cannot be destroyed by the experience of facts, contrary to what has been normally believed or falsely proven. All this leads me to unveil the ethical criteria which I myself use to underscore the amorality of propaganda.

## **Propaganda Is a Morality**

Propaganda obviously obeys a certain number of working rules. I have studied it as a technique. But as is the case each time one is dealing with a technique affecting men, it can no longer be a question of purely abstract and mechanical rules as if one were dealing in techniques to change a physical or chemical environment. One has to take into account the specific reactions of its being on the one hand and of the human being on the other. In other words, even though for the propagandist or the publicist it is simply a question of applying seemingly rigorous and technical methods, this whole procedure must take on an ideologico-moral appearance, because man does not react in a neutral manner: he cannot admit to being or consider himself simply a manipulated object: in order for him to believe, to follow the desired path, he must receive a satisfaction which is moral in nature.

Thus, in itself, propaganda doesn't follow an ethic, but it is obliged to use one and to build one. As a system of intervention, it is purely practico-formal; as an integrated part of social reality, it needs to have a content of a moral nature, which in no way means that it obeys its content. But

it must carry it and have it assimilated. Nor can it be only an ideological content. It is not only a question of the person who is being swayed receiving ideas, an interpretation of the world: in addition, he must be convinced that he himself, his party, his class, his nation are right, that they represent Good and Justice. It is this conviction that is decisive and which effectively sways man into the field of propaganda.

We are, in this situation, in the presence of one of the conditions required for the efficacy of propaganda, and there is no recurrence of this "good" to propaganda itself. Consequently we must now eliminate a prior question: propaganda seems therefore to be, as is the case for most technical elements, a purely neutral instrument in itself, and one which therefore can be used for any kind of cause—a "good cause" such as peace or the reconciliation of classes or Christianity, an "evil cause" such as militarism, revolution, or atheism. In reality, nothing is further from the truth! No technical instrument is neutral; it carries its own logic within itself, and I have already shown in *Propaganda* that the most beautiful ideal, once it is carried by propaganda, is modified in its very essence and nature. In reality, a positive "ideal" has no meaning unless man personally accedes, conquers, and adheres to it through deep conviction and becomes himself a germ of this truth. Otherwise, he is nothing more than a robot, "beyond dignity and freedom," which removes all positive value to this adherence, and by this very fact, to the ideal to which one adheres. For if one adheres to an ideal in such a manner, this means that one could accept any other content, and could uphold, with the same conviction, the opposite ideal.

If, therefore, we are sure that a cause is just, not by measuring it against an infinite ideal, or against some absolute reigning in an Empyrean, but rather in the exact measure in which its supporters themselves are just, and where their own justice renders the cause itself just (and not the reverse), then all propaganda action, which tends to make man act without even being aware of his actions and aware he has chosen, destroys in itself justice and good.

But we are obviously here at a crossroads: 1) Either we consider humanity as a simple means to a superior action, and it is therefore legitimate to manipulate it, to modify the human brain, to artificially produce behavior—but this means that one obeys some sort of in-human truth, which is in no way a guarantee that this truth is super-human (and if it is super-human we have but two choices: either it is unknown to us, and this is what was called the way of negative theology, or it has come down to our level of comprehension, and that is what biblical theology calls the Word (of God) and incarnation); 2) Or one considers that truth can only be human, but in this case, it implies that the

particular truth in question cannot be transmitted by means of manipulation, nor by treating man as a pure object, but only by a voluntary adherence. In other words, one can in no way disassociate the means of propaganda from what it claims to carry. It is a particular example of the great debate over "the ends justifies the means," or "the means corrupt the end," a debate accentuated by the fact that, here, the object upon which the means act is man.

I am certainly not going to take up the entire problem again here, but rather point out the conclusion I reached a long time ago (in *Presence of the Kingdom*): that is to say, that the end never justifies the means because there isn't a differentiation in nature between the two, but, on the contrary, a continuity: that is to say, that no abyss exists between the means and the point to which these means lead us, but rather that the end is the exact result of the means used. In other words, violent means will produce a violent situation and never one of peace. Unjust means will produce an unjust regime and never one capable of exercising justice, and corrupt means will bring about corruption of the final result.

There is, therefore, no distinction to be made between the instrument, that would be neutral, and the cause, which would be good or not good. The instrument participates in the cause, and the latter is shaped by the instrument. To the extent that propaganda rests on a contempt for man viewed as an object to shape and not as a person to respect, this signifies that the cause defended by propaganda implies a de-gradation of man, the impossibility of his acceding to his majority, to his personal responsibility, and that propaganda is evidently a negation of a freedom, either natural, acquired, or to be acquired. Now, propaganda cannot be anything other than what it is: an instrument of manipulation to obtain an objectively conforming behavior (orthopraxy). That is to say, that it obeys, exclusively, principles of efficacy, technical rules of a psychological or sociological nature, the usage of instruments which are themselves techniques.

It is, therefore, necessarily part of the means that corrupt the ends. It cannot be subordinated to anything but its own end, which is efficacy. Propaganda, in reality, includes in itself both the "apparatus" and "techniques" of propaganda and the message which is transmitted. For it is very evident that in addressing men, it carries a message. It is not merely a signal (although at times it can be reduced to this!). But this message can only be chosen, calculated, combined in relation to and with respect to the efficacy of the complex apparatus. In other words, even if the message is apparently noble and generous, it is integrated into a whole which rests on the one and only concept of "man as object." Propaganda can have no other reference point, no other external value to which it could be subject and from which one could judge it. It is nothing less than its end integrated into its means. And that is why there is no way to make an ethical judgment on it, and those that one could formulate have no common measure with its reality.

### **Propaganda Creates An Ethic**

But here we touch upon a new dimension of the problem: propaganda itself creates a morality, an ethic, a

certain type of wished-for behavior. It furnishes man with a criterion for good and evil. This is therefore a rather new situation with respect to traditional societies. We are out of the normal framework of reflection on morality, both the one suggested by Bergson as well as that of Max Weber, the "morality of responsibility—the morality of conviction." We are in the presence of the making of an artificial and ideological morality, and I mean by that a morality which imposes itself upon a group of humans who have not chosen it; neither was it developed slowly through usages and customs, trials and errors, uncertainties and choices, nor was it passed on from generation to generation by a slow cultural transmission, but rather as a whole of systematic behaviors obtained by rapid and active technical means (from whence comes the great difference from the "reproduction" of morality through the flow of the generations), and always with a totalitarian goal, that is to say, encompassing all of man, leaving no latitude of choice nor any field undetermined, which would be completely destructive to propaganda.

It is indeed a question of morality, since, based upon this infusion, man is going to judge what is good and evil; he is going to choose his conduct (but it is simply a question of a choice programmed by his conviction which allows no hesitation on the behavior to be followed, the whole concept having been integrated). But it is a morality with roots neither in personal experience, nor in the past, nor in thought; it is a purely artificial morality, created and diffused outside any context of conviction. The conviction is produced by the system. And it is an ideological morality insofar as the behaviors demanded result from ideological choice.

There is a comparison with religion to be made here. A religion supposes a faithful adherence to certain truths, and this adherence brings with it certain actions, a certain practice. "Christian faith" must translate into "works." In the same manner, political ideology (nationalist, communist, fascist, etc.) or economic ideology (of productivity, of profit, of profit-earning capacity) require certain behaviors: sacrifice for the cause, consumption, work, etc. These are narrowly determined by the ideology one was successful in implanting. There are no choices, there is no distance, much less than in the religious domain, where, even in non-liberating and inveigling religions, the distance between God and the faithful brings about the possibility for the latter to choose certain behavior patterns rather than others. In propaganda, the exact identity of the group ideology and of its behavior excludes any deviations. And we arrive thus at the conclusion announced in the beginning: it is by nature impossible to render a significant moral judgment from the outside on the work of propaganda which is itself a creator of a new type ethics.

We are, therefore, in the presence of a dilemma comparable to the one in which Kautsky had trapped Bernstein, when the latter was making a critique of Marx: Marx created a new *Weltanschauung*, a global conception. To be able to make a useful criticism of it, one has to situate oneself within the system or vision. It is in applying Marx's method that one can criticize it; it is by using its own premises and its own system as a point of departure that the criticism can become meaningful and efficacious. If not, if

one situates one-self in a different perspective, for example religious or liberal or idealist, one can say what one wants to, it would in no way begin to touch Marx's system. That is why philosophical objections based on a dualist or idealist perspective could in no way modify Marx's thought, just as criticism based on a liberal economy as a starting point simply had no common measure with the goal of a socialist economy: therefore, the entire procedure was useless.

It is exactly the same in this case for propaganda: it constitutes a psycho-political universe, it unleashes an "imaginary" (in the strongest meaning of modern thought) producer of myths and a reconstitution of the universe for whomever adheres to it, which means that if one situates one's self in this universe (for example, in the consumer world, when it is a question of that commercial propaganda known as advertising) and the criticisms that one can make will surely be heard and efficacious, but they will simply add to the reproduction, the reinforcement, and the growth of propaganda. They will bring about a greater interiorization of the imperatives and the rules of conduct, but, of course, no revision of the morality of the propaganda. On the other hand, if one situates oneself on the outside, one can make a very accurate, judicious, and exact moral (or intellectual) critique but which will never begin to touch any structure erected by propaganda, whether on the psychological or sociological level.

Morality and ethics have no power over the results of propaganda action because the latter makes the propagandee live in an ethical rather than in a political or economic universe; these indeed are the realities of the matter, but propaganda has as its goal to hide this reality within an ideological discourse which acts as a justifier because it is moral. To the democrats, Hitler affirmed unceasingly that national-socialism permitted access to a superior type of democracy, one that was more total, more egalitarian, etc. And reciprocally, a "capitalistic" morality has never touched a Soviet. We have witnessed religious conversions which are of another kind. And if there is at the moment a challenge to the universe of Soviet propaganda, this can happen only through the intermediary of those who, having been in this universe, have left it (by conversion) and can speak the exact language which is appropriate, but which has nothing to do with an ethical language: it isn't starting with morality, but rather, on the one hand, with the facts that were revealed (a typically Marxist process!), and on the other hand, with the opposition of one religious attitude to another. The cases of Solzhenitsyn, Maksimov, Sakharov, Vlasov, A. Zinoviev, Yuli Daniel, Sinyaysky, etc., etc., are precisely characteristic of this.

### **The Useless Experience**

There is an affirmation often proposed in these domains, namely, that faced with the facts, propaganda is useless, and that its results are quickly destroyed. It suffices to make known the facts. But it is precisely propaganda that prevents the facts from being perceived as such. The unveiling to which I alluded can only be brought about by those who have been through this universe.

But there is another aspect of the problem which I would like to discuss: that is the renewal of those who are

taken in by propaganda, the continual apparition of new generations for whom the experience of their elders is of absolutely no use. And this is a moral problem; in a universe which tends towards anomie, no values are passed from one generation to the other, and by this very fact no experience of the preceding generation is validated in the eyes of the succeeding generation. We have made political mistakes and would like to have our sons profit from the lesson learned from our mistakes. That is impossible; our discourse goes unheard because it is not inscribed in a commensurate ethical universe, and we see them going down the same paths we did. We can't spare them their mistakes. Popular wisdom has long said: each generation must experience things for themselves. But in a traditional society, this is limited. In our society of global and accelerated changes, this attitude is disastrous, and yet now it is even more widespread than before. I shall take an example relative to propaganda bearing on this triple phenomenon: confrontation of propaganda and fact—the impossibility of transmitting experience to a new generation—the innocence of this new generation given over to propaganda.

The example is the relation of the young people in France to communist propaganda. The young people of my generation, in the years around 1930, were extremely seduced by marxism, by the success of the revolution, by the fantastic accomplishments of the USSR, by the criticisms leveled against the weaknesses of democracy and the injustices of capitalism, and finally by the fact that communism seemed to be the only valid answer to fascism. We were completely sensitive to the communist propaganda and an entire generation drew nearer to the Party.

Then a number of experiences frightened us. First of all, there were the Moscow trials of 1936—the trials in which we saw the great ones whom we had learned to admire, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and subsequently Bukharin himself, condemned to death in trials which immediately appeared to us as scandalous and deceitful. It was absolutely unbelievable to have accused these men of complicity with capitalism, and to have brought them to the point of accusing themselves.

Now during the same period, we experienced other events just as upsetting: the frightening attitude of the Spanish communists toward the anarchists during the Spanish war. It has been said, but it can never be said enough, that Franco's best ally was the Spanish communist party. For the true resistance by the Republic was led by the anarchists. But the communists have such a hatred of the anarchists (and also of the socialists) that, during the war, they preferred to attack the anarchists from behind and resolve the differences between them by violence, rather than help them fight against the fascist rebellion. Now, all those who took part in the republican resistance were able to see this. We came out of these experiences desperate and hostile toward communism.

One last experience: the German-Soviet treaty of 1938 by which, in reality, Stalin left Hitler free to attack Europe. Curiously, there was a progression in the influence of these facts: the trials left the communist mass indifferent; it, in fact, accepted the explanations and believed the propaganda. The anti-anarchist activity upset only those who

participated in the war; on the other hand the "pact" provoked a great crisis in the entire party, and countless members left. Be that as it may, the men of my generation, after this triple experience, could be lucid and would never again be entrapped by communist propaganda.

This wasn't to be, for everything was renewed: the war and the Resistance, the fraternal cooperation with the communist resisters, their heroic actions, the admiration. Older people such as myself remained more distrustful, but powerless; we saw the young people in their twenties enter into an entirely new relationship with the Communist Party: to speak to them of our experience in 1935-1939 meant nothing to them.

Buried memories: what could these do against an all new and fresh propaganda, both by word and example; we were making moral judgments, and if one had to draw the line, we were the ones who were not to be trusted. We suspected these pure heroes of sinister designs. When the Liberation came, these young people, moralized by the propaganda and the actions, refused to see the "mistakes" the communists were guilty of (massive executions without trials, liquidation of the rightist underground by the communist underground), and, when Tito committed the abominable treason of having the real leader of the Yugoslav resistance, Mihailovic (who was clearly anti-communist), arrested and shot, the young people accepted without flinching the idea that this man, who had reorganized the Yugoslav army as early as 1941, and engaged in the resistance a year before Tito, was a traitor and was in the pay of the imperialists. One had to be forewarned as we were to see, simply to see, what was happening.

Now this young generation of the resistance knew in turn some psychological shocks which, for many, led them to abandon the illusions of their youth and of the resistance: the worker's revolt in Berlin in 1953 against the Soviet regime, the Hungarian and Polish revolts of 1956, and finally the revelations of Khrushchev to the XXth congress. What shocks, what disillusiones. Many in turn dropped out of the party. The astonishing thing was that it wasn't a complete rout. That shows the weakness of fact against the morality acquired by propaganda, for in all these cases it is a question of a recuperation by morality: communism committed errors, but it was the only one to defend the poor and oppressed, to want liberation of peoples; therefore all that was critical of the party was a betrayal of these poor.

This propaganda argument, apparently superficial, but playing on the moral sentiment also created by propaganda, reached even intellectuals such as J. P. Sartre; and one can find the same explanations that were given in 1938 on the legitimacy of the proletarian revolution, on the threat of imperialism which is the true menace to mankind, and which is responsible for the riots in Berlin and Hungary: the USSR having done nothing more than to limit itself to respond and to protect peoples who had been wronged by a handful of traitors.

It is remarkable to see how little propaganda renews itself. It is exactly the same moral and justifying discourse which was used in 1938, in 1956, in 1968: morality and virtue are integrated in the propaganda which appears simply to make them explicit. And all will soon be

erased by a new generation, for those who were twenty in 1958, for example, the events of the last ten years were totally unknown to them; the only thing left, for example, in France was the evidence of the Algerian war where the Communist Party became once again the protector of the poor, of the colonized, the evidence that the theory of Lenin on imperialism was correct, and that the only abomination was capitalism: propaganda had digested the facts.

But in turn, this new generation of pure and innocent militants, who saw everything through images furnished by the party, received a profound and double shock: the revolt of the young people in 1968 and the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Faced with the young people's revolt, the French Communist Party took an attitude of extreme harshness, of condemnation, and this was in perfect conformity with the attitude it had always held with respect to anything which might have an anarchist orientation. The Communist Party fears being overwhelmed from the left; it prefers to ally itself with the reactionary right than to allow a leftist and spontaneous revolution to take place. Lenin always condemned leftist tendencies (a childhood disease of communism) and worker spontaneity, for which he had a profound distrust.

But it was difficult for the hard-core militants of the French Communist Party not to be sensitive to the call of the revolution, to the vigor of the slogans and to the authenticity of youth in the streets, who seemed capable of overthrowing the power structure. There was at that point a very strong tension, and the discipline of the party had a most difficult time imposing itself, exactly as in 1938 or in 1956. And even more so, since at the same time the hope of a "socialism with a more humane appearance" was suddenly shattered by the Soviet invasion. It seemed totally unjust to prevent Czechoslovakia from choosing its own way and the argument of a "menacing imperialism" seemed to be miscarrying.

However, in spite of many criticisms and a few rejections, the Communist Party remained stable, and in no way changed its line and propaganda, and decided in favor of a purely formal "disapproval" of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. These "disapprovals" are part and parcel of the "integrated propaganda" to valorize morally the subsequent resumption of contact. The French Communist Party continues to affirm itself in the "general line" with a purely formal divergence. But the militants are disturbed. Nevertheless, from 1970 on, there is no more discussion; the whole affair is dead.

Except for the appearance of Solzhenitsyn. And here we are in the presence of a moral phenomenon of great importance: we have just shown that facts change nothing in the attitude produced by propaganda. The most evident facts submitted to a moral judgment, contrary to all moral norms, are completely helpless faced with their reinterpretation by propaganda. Or more exactly, on the one hand, for adults, we note a certain instantaneous puzzlement, certain questions which arise, which for an insignificant minority mean a rejection and an abandoning of the party; but for the majority, the explanation will produce a situation of moral justification and of sufficient satisfaction. On the other hand, we are dealing here particularly with the new levels, the new

generation, and the problem here is simply to obliterate, to have disappear into a continuous history, without contradiction, the facts which had caused the scandal and the moral judgment.

Propaganda has, therefore, as its essential task, to reproduce innocence from generation to generation (in both meanings of the word: ignorance and non-moral culpability). And it can do this precisely insofar as the generations succeed each other, while the apparatus of the party, which makes the propaganda work, remains constant and the party, as in the USSR, believes that communism has eternity in front of it to win the battle. What will bring about the real crisis of the intellectuals and of the leaders of the French Communist Party will not be the fact itself, but the publication of books whose time has arrived (contrary to Kravehenko's), in a favorable climate, and, especially, supported by a remarkable propaganda, which is going to require certain moral questions, heretofore completely hidden by propaganda., to be asked.

In other words, it is the apparition of a "credible" propaganda which is going to arouse the good moral conscience. It was made "credible" by the personality of the witness. Solzhenitsyn's analysis and testimonial are going to brusquely provoke a crisis of moral conscience among communist intellectuals. But it isn't the discovery of the fact itself (the fact of the existence of Soviet concentration camps has been very well known ever since 1948 at least); it is the impact of the propaganda on a humanitarian and moral base.

Communist intellectuals who have been examining moral problems since 1968 are going to make a critique of what they have lived and believed for more than twenty years. But it is that very generation that experienced the period of the resistance: the innocents of 1940-1944. Their departure from the party, their criticisms, are going to have great repercussions and are going to cause great discussions, but only insofar as it is a question of intellectuals using the media. Their departure is spectacular. But there are large factions of the party which disappear thusly at each crisis. It is estimated that about 70,000 members of the French Communist Party leave it each year. And in times of crisis, such as we have previously mentioned, the figures reach 200,000. We don't speak about these defectors because they are ordinary people, obscure people; they hold no rank, and they are immediately replaced by new adherents, ardent and innocent militants, young people who discover the universe through the truth of communism, and they ignore everything, the trials, the Pact, the Hungarian revolt, and the crushing of Czechoslovakia. And now they ignore everything about Solzhenitsyn: the whole matter is settled. The moral shock caused by his books is over. The party had to become a little more liberal, in appearance, for a few years, and the new intellectuals who now adhere to the party no longer feel the need to critique it; the generation of Gar-audy, P. Daix, etc., is gone.

I have just seen a television program on the Communist Youth Congress. I saw the young innocent faces that I have always seen there, the same enthusiasm, the same absolute confidence in the words of the leaders, the same certitude about the revolution and about the excellence of the USSR, and the same admiration for the revolution of

1917. Everything has disappeared. So much so that the Afghanistan invasion raises for these neophytes, once again, an agonizing problem: how can the country of justice, of the struggle against imperialism, of anticapitalism, conduct itself thusly? A stupor seizes the world: "Never before has this been seen." It has been forgotten that all this has been seen ten times before. And we find anew exactly the same laborious explanations: it's the fault of the Americans who occupy Pakistan; it's the fault of the Pakistanis who are the true aggressors; it's the fault of the rebel minorities; it's the Afghan "people" who have called to the USSR for help. Why bother to make a correct analysis and to invent new arguments since experience shows that this propaganda, in the long run, snuffs out all moral indignation and erases the facts? Yes, there will be a few thousand defectors from the party. And a new generation will appear; they will ignore Afghanistan as well as the rest. In other words, propaganda being strictly anti-moral, spread out over the years, is at the same time creator of a new morality and of a new mental universe founded on instantaneousness, and on the absence of the past.

### **From Ethics to the Amorality of Propaganda**

It is evident that to judge the amorality of propaganda, and the incompatibility between ethics and propaganda, one must admit to the existence of an ethic founded on values; one must construct a certain type of human existence; one must have a certain idea of man. That is why I could say earlier that propaganda is also a conferrer of morality, while at the same time being essentially amoral. To go back to the Marxist-Leninist example, it is evident that if one adopts Lenin's criteria for behavior, one builds a certain morality. Criteria: "All that is favorable to the proletariat in the struggle between classes is good, and all that is unfavorable to it is evil" (the State and the Revolution). And it will justify propaganda favorable to the proletariat, but what we have here is a utilitarianism without values. I am certainly not going to furnish a catalogue of the values by which I was able to appreciate the amorality of propaganda, but rather present the existential attitudes in which I situated myself.

First of all, there is the question of autojustification. Propaganda functions in the following manner: it represents the passage from "there is power" to "it is right and just that there be this power." In other words, it has, in effect, a justifying moral content. Always, even when it is revolutionary and contestant, all propaganda is a process of autojustification (by the denunciation of the other as being evil). It offers justification to the individual adherent as well as being the justification of the group which organizes and diffuses it. But by this very fact, it leads inevitably towards totalitarianism, because, from the moment it is granted that "it is just and good that there be this power," one passes immediately to: "therefore there can only be this power, and all others are consequently unacceptable and to be eliminated."

Each propaganda is by nature totalitarian, and tends to disclaim all pluralism. Now, it appeals to a need, to a request, to a desire of modern man who is looking first and foremost to justify himself, to be justified, to be declared just precisely because he lives in a universe which is very

disputed, because he feels himself being drawn into unjust acts and also because he no longer has the resource of a religious reference, for example Christianity, which was precisely a religion of justification. But the great difference is due to the fact that Christianity never gives a justification as such; it never declares to man that he is just, but only saved, pardoned, justified; and that this is not something acquired but a gift. But modern man, the modern parties, want to be declared just.

### A Threefold Critique

I would say that therein lies my first element of appraisal: All processes of autojustification, at whatever level they might be, appear to me to be false, dangerous, and entrapping. It's the gateway to all the present destruction of values and of ethics. All ethical behavior seems to me to imply a questioning of self, a reassessment, and the acceptance of one's values being questioned by others. It is the price that must be paid both to measure oneself to the value, and to have a possible relation in truth. Here, it is neither a question of auto-criticism as it can be practiced in the communist party (in the Middle Ages it was in the Church) nor of culpability as understood in psychoanalysis. One can very well recognize oneself as a liar or as being vain without living in some sort of morbid culpability. But the self-examination, the examination of conscience (as it was called in the old Christian vocabulary), the acknowledgment of one's faults, and the refusal to search at any cost to be just, seem to me to be constituent elements of any ethical life, of any relationship.

It was first of all based upon my objection to autojustification that I was brought to view propaganda as amoral and leading the propagandee to a dangerous behavior (which fact was verified for all propaganda, included among these advertising, which developed consumer bulimia as a being's justification, with all the dangers that carried at all levels, and which are revealing themselves now, in the area of hygiene or in the economy!).

The second axis of my ethical reflection is closely related to my description of the second paragraph of this article: there is no moral existence unless it be rooted in the past, situated in a continuity—the continuity of one's own life just as much as that of one's group or of the history of one's country. There is no morality of instantaneousness. It is false to think that man is in a zero stage and that at each moment he must choose and make decisions. It would be a freedom like that of Buridan's ass.

Man has no moral existence except with reference to the totality of his experiences, or of those which were handed down to him and from which a "lesson" is drawn; and the "Widsom of nations" is a sort of composite of these reflections. This supposes, therefore, a historical continuity, a recall, a recapitulation, an anamnesis, as the experience occurs, an explanation of what has taken place. I'm not speaking here of the great moral principles and values, but of moral existence. And in the area of faith (Christian), ethical

existence supposes "repetition" (in the Kierkegaardian sense of the term). No morality exists when one pre-tends to situate one's self simply in the present, in the instantaneous.

This was clearly evident when around the 1930's the idea of a morality of "successive sincerities" was spread by Andre Gide, for example, but also by T. H. Lawrence. "When I say this today, I am completely sincere and true, but in an hour, or tomorrow, I shall feel otherwise, I shall understand other things; I shall therefore be able to say and do the opposite and still be just as sincere" (a very serious problem, for example, of fidelity towards the other in the couple). This is the very negation at one and the same time of ethics and or moral existence.

Yet, it is precisely in this state of actuality, of the immediate present, of the obliteration of the words and acts of the past, that propaganda places us. There is no greater obstacle to propaganda than history (continuity of generations) and philosophy (explicative reflection on the experience of events). Propaganda is, therefore, destructive of the possibilities, of the foundations, of the basic premises of ethics. But if I judge it thusly, it is, evidently, because I believe that morality exists only in this process (already mentioned) of rootedness and of reflection or anamnesis.

Finally, the third critical theme, the third criterion of ethics (valid for everyone, for I'm not speaking here specifically of a Christian ethic), is the fact that for me there is no possibility of the building of ethics and moral existence except with reference to others, in dialogue and in reciprocal participation in a common life. All ethics is necessarily an ethics of encounter. One doesn't have a moral behavior alone. And it is the exchange of words which allows me to construct myself on the moral level, while at the same time my words allow the other to behave. Together, we choose an orientation (even if it's a question of breaking off, of separating, of differentiating). Ethics presupposes the interplay of differences without exclusions. It dies when it becomes a rigid law imposed from with-out. The process which permits sociability is the interiorization of the law by the child, but this law is not made up of abstract, objective, anonymous commandments; it can only be acquired and interiorized if there is relationship, dialogue, research together and, first and foremost, between the child and his parents. Relationship to the other is creator at the same time of both personality and moral existence.

Yet, we have seen specifically that propaganda substitutes for this relationship a sort of collectivity, where each person remains completely alone and yet still belongs to a collective mass, where there are no interiorizations of a law, where behaviors stem from an external impetus, from a manipulation of which man re-mains completely unconscious. It is, therefore, by its nature the very opposite of any moral existence; and by this very fact, at least according to the three criteria which I have adopted, it can in no way produce an ethic nor be submitted to an ethic. It is the very opposite of any possible ethic.



# Problems in Ellul's Treatment of Propaganda

*by Randal Marlin*

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That Jacques Ellul is one of the world's leading thinkers in the area of propaganda becomes clearer with each passing decade. Not only has his book, *Propaganda*, stayed continuously in print, but the output of works taking account of his views continues in a formidable stream. What is special about his approach to the subject is the way in which it becomes incorporated into a whole vision of the human being, with all the material and spiritual needs connected with that being. So we find Ellul exploring not just the most extreme and obvious forms of propaganda such as can be found in Nazi tyranny, but also the myths widespread in nominally democratic societies. These myths, of progress, happiness, work, race, the hero, and suchlike, operate on a broader spectrum than merely the political, but they can also diminish human freedom. Witness the person who struggles to keep up payments on the fancy car, which was purchased out of a false sense of the happiness it would bring.

Ellul's most valuable contributions to the study of propaganda include his notion of pre-propaganda, meaning the dissemination and acceptance of certain myths or general assumptions that are especially useful for the purpose of mobilizing human action. Another is his classification of propaganda into eight different types, consisting of two opposed sets of four groupings. The first set readily encompasses what is easily recognized as propaganda: the political, vertical, agitative, and irrational forms. The second set is less readily so recognized: the sociological, horizontal, integrative, and rational forms. Particularly with the movement of deconstruction, it has become clearer over the decades how minds have been manipulated through the use of various strong images, deliberately fostered to create affinities or aversions to some authority, policy, or commercial product. Various symbols create feelings of national pride and serve to integrate a population to the nation-state. Other symbols can fuel hatreds of other people and can foment wars. Ellul has put us on guard against seemingly rational facts and figures when these are presented in a form that does not allow for proper analysis, so that the rational form gives way to an irrational effect in a given audience. Much has already been written in

appreciation of Ellul's contributions to propaganda theory, and as I have intimated his contribution is of immense and enduring value. He has spotlighted the phenomenon of modern technological society, with the self-augmentation of different applications of "la technique" and the misplaced faith in the power of politics, science, law and economic activity to solve our problems. As with all genuinely creative thinkers who deal extensively with difficult subjects, there are problems with his theory, and I believe it will be rewarding to focus on these problems both as a means of clarifying inherent and inescapable difficulties, or as a means of finding solutions where such exist.

The problems fall into two categories. The first is that of interpretation. It is not difficult to find inconsistencies between what he says about the phenomenon of propaganda and the way in which he defines the term. How should we react to these inconsistencies? Is this careless thinking? Can his ideas be re-expressed in ways that avoid inconsistency? The second problem concerns the ethics of propaganda. In a nutshell, he sometimes treats propaganda as amoral, at other times as immoral. Yet he also feels that under some circumstances propaganda cannot be avoided. Can we derive from all that he says about the subject of propaganda some ethical norms and clear guidance as to how one should deal with the pervasive phenomenon of propaganda in our time?

Before attempting to answer these questions it is appropriate to describe the overall purpose and plan in Ellul's writings. He was not an ivory-tower academic. He wrote for general as well as academic audiences, and he seems to have tailored his language carefully to his different audiences, in true rhetorical style. If Ellul had one single mission, it was to liberate his contemporaries and perhaps future readers as well, from the many, sometimes subtle, ways in which human beings are enslaved. In true Christian fashion, he does not divide the world into one evil group that wants to dominate a good group. As Camus wrote, we all carry the plague within us, and if people are enslaved by propaganda, it is partly because they want to be. So he has importantly drawn attention to the fact that the modern human being, cut loose from so many family, religious and community ties, is looking for some kind of security anchor and finds it by fitting in with the mass consciousness shaped by the current media. Ellul's aim is to shake his contemporaries out of the passive frame of mind, and he does this with various tropes of language. To persuade and give dispassionate analysis are two different things, each of which has ethical pluses and minuses. Which should be uppermost will generally depend on circumstances. Because

his writings engage with his readers, tropes suitable for persuasion sometimes take precedence over the philosopher's demands for consistency. Perhaps that is one reason why Ellul preferred not to call himself a philosopher, and seemed to think, like Emerson, that a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds. But if a consistent theory can be constructed which incorporates both the theoretical and pragmatic aspects of his writings, then there will be a better basis for theoretical evaluation of his work.

### Consistency of Definition and Interpretation

I turn now to the problem of consistency, starting with the problem of definition. An example is the following: Ellul defines "propaganda" as a "means of gaining power by the psychological manipulation of groups or masses, or of using this power with the support of the masses" (Larousse, *La Grande Encyclopedie*, 1975, p. 9888), yet his discussion of the phenomenon of propaganda appears to extend the boundaries of the concept so-defined. It's not clear, for example, that sociological propaganda is always disseminated for the specific purpose of manipulating the masses to acquire or maintain power. This may be one reason why he distances himself, in *Propaganda*, from the project of defining the term., saying in the Preface "I will not give a definition of my own here" (xii).

Some of his statements about propaganda have definitional implications that are at odds with both his stated definition and some of his discussions of the subject. He writes: "Propaganda must be total" in a context where he is not just saying that propaganda will be more effective if it is total. For he continues with "The propagandist must utilize all of the technical means at his disposal..." and "There is no propaganda as long as one makes use, in sporadic fashion and at random, of a newspaper article here, a poster or a radio program there...." (9). My point is that psychological manipulation of the masses can be partial in its means and in its effect and still contribute to the gaining of power, thus satisfying the definition. I think most of us would concede, for example, that Michael Moore's documentary film *Fahrenheit 9/11* can be viewed in some of its aspects, as propaganda (even though it exposes a lot of propaganda on the "other side," and might on balance be better described as counter-propaganda).

The principle of charity in interpretation requires us to look for the best possible resolution of apparent contradictions. One explanation is that Ellul operates with different understandings of "propaganda" in different contexts. He himself has allowed that "propaganda" has a broad and a narrow sense (xiii). He also makes reference to "extreme propaganda" (11) when he refers to Nazi or Soviet propaganda. So it makes sense that when talking about the impact propaganda has on the human psyche, he should have in mind propaganda that is pervasive. A second reason why he should make statements about the necessity for propaganda being total is that he has his eye on the ever-expanding political and commercial public relations specialists, spin-doctors, advertisers and the like. As with "la technique" generally there is an inherent expansionist tendency.

So there is an Aristotelian and Hegelian component

to his definition, one which looks organically at a phenomenon, projecting how it will develop according to its inherent nature. Its nature is such that it is impelled toward total domination of the human psyche. This explanation is also applicable to another oddity in Ellul's treatment of propaganda: his claim that modern propaganda is totally different from persuasion in previous centuries. Surely, it might be said, Aristotle's treatment of rhetoric deals with some of the basic ideas governing propaganda as well. Differences there surely are, but they are not "total." Not so, on this interpretation of Ellul. There really is a striking difference, in that the ancient rhetorician might want to praise a person or promote a policy, but was not bent on reconstituting another person's whole mind. By contrast, modern technological society shows a remarkable convergence of the political, ideological and commercial as Disney takes over the news and McDonald's engages in myth-making, as its Ronald character rivals Santa Claus for recognition by young children. Were it not for the power of the Internet I suspect that the whole myth about saving Private Jessica Lynch might have gained acceptance instead of being repudiated as it was in the end.. Art and entertainment have become commercialized and politicized. Ellul was right about the direction in which propaganda was headed.

On this interpretation, Ellul does not have to deny that devious presentations, sly presentation of facts an imagery, are propaganda. All he needs to say is that while these are usefully designated as manifestations of propaganda, they don't reveal propaganda in its essence, which is expansionist and totalitarian. Put another way, one might consider misleading presentations aimed at gaining power over large audiences to fit the definition of propaganda as commonly conceived, but in saying this an important reality about propaganda becomes, to use Heideggerian terms, covered over. In trying to uncover the truth about propaganda, Ellul looks more profoundly into the phenomenon as it has existed with the advent of modern industrial civilization.

Other questions connected with Ellul's definition remain, but are not especially difficult to resolve. Are propagandists necessarily power hungry? For Ellul it is important to distinguish between the Christian message as propounded by crusaders seeking wealth and glory, from that disseminated by monks at Cluny who believed their message would lead to liberation of souls from slavery to false values. The latter is not propaganda for Ellul. Other propaganda theorists would demur, either because they accept a definition according to which propaganda is value neutral (thus including both) or because they believe that sincerity and belief in an influence as liberating is not sufficient to disqualify persuasive communication from being propaganda (thus also including both, but not by reason of value neutrality). The case of the sincere Nazi can be adduced. My attitude on these questions joins Ellul's where he observes (xii) that there is simply no agreed upon definition of propaganda. How one defines the term, explicitly or implicitly, may vary according to the context and circumstances of a given communication. A person should use the word with caution. One who describes certain

materials as propaganda, meaning it in a neutral sense, may convey the wrong message to an audience that believes propaganda is inescapably tied to wrong-doing.

### **On the Ethics of Propaganda**

More formidable still is the question of the ethics of propaganda, about which Ellul again seems to have had views of contradictory import. Propaganda is opposed to human freedom. On the face of things, this should make it wrong. Yet Ellul appears in places to accept that propaganda is amoral. It isn't immoral, it just is, he claims. Supporting this position is his view that propaganda is necessary in the modern world. Without, so far as I know, him spelling out the reasoning, there are philosophical arguments that can support this position. If we follow Kant and his "ought" implies "can," along with its modus tollens that "cannot" implies that there is no "ought," (meaning for example that I'm not obliged to jump into deep water to save a drowning person when I cannot swim) then necessity frees us from a moral obligation. If I have no option but to engage in propaganda then I can't be blamed for doing so.

This view is very problematic, both as an interpretation of Ellul's overall considered view, and as an account of the truth about the ethics of propaganda. For example, Kant's stated views about lying might lead us to question whether "we have no option" when it comes to engaging in propaganda. It is hard to accept that Ellul would dissociate propaganda completely from morality. He has made it clear that propaganda, considered in its entirety, is deeply antithetical to human freedom. So one would think that a proper ethical stance should not be to dismiss it as amoral, but rather to expose it and thereby detoxify its pernicious effects. Since propaganda on one side of an issue generates counter-propaganda on the other side, any foray into it should be governed by principles akin to those applicable to so-called just wars. "Dirty hands" ethics requires one to limit such activity to the minimum necessary to accomplish a just objective, and to seek at the same time to offset the bad effects of one's own norm-violations when the opportunity arises.

In my conversation with Ellul (in 1980), he appeared to agree with this. As an example, he thought that the French government might have offset Nazi propaganda in France in the late 1930s by subsidizing those Leftist publications in France that were foundering with the victory of Franco. These publications were the natural rallying grounds for anti-Nazi feeling in France and with help would have kept alive an important source of opinion formation there, and provided greater support for resistance to Hitler during the period of the "phony war" before the May Blitzkrieg. Supporting groups who freely express themselves would be less intrusive on freedom than the government directly imposing its own viewpoint upon the public. In calculating the effects of a government engaging in propaganda, one would need to factor in the likelihood of a discounting effect if the source of this propaganda were to be known to the public. The result of this factoring would likely be a need for an increase of propaganda to counter that discounting.

How then do we account for his statement that propaganda is amoral? The resolution to this exegetical question can be convincingly found in his article, "The ethics of propaganda: propaganda, innocence, and amorality" (*Communication* 6 (1981): 159-175; reprinted in this issue of the *Ellul Forum*), where he makes it clear from the beginning that he thinks propaganda is profoundly related to morality, or more precisely (I would add) to immorality. At the conclusion of that essay, he sketches the nature of ethics and moral existence, maintaining that these are only possible "with reference to others, in dialogue and in reciprocal participation in a common life. All ethics is necessarily an ethics of encounter." Ethics requires the "interplay of differences without exclusions" and it "dies when it becomes a rigid law imposed from without." Yet propaganda "substitutes for this relationship a sort of collectivity, where each person remains completely alone and yet still belongs to a collective mass, where there are no interiorizations of a law, where behaviors stem from an external impetus, from a manipulation of which man remains completely unconscious." (174-5). So propaganda appears to be the antithesis of morality. Why not, then, call it immoral?

One answer to why he chooses not to treat propaganda as simply immoral is connected to the definitional question dealt with earlier. If we think of propaganda as something total and pervasive, which in its essence, in Ellul's view, it is, then we need to take into account that it incorporates its own moral system. It becomes an ideological system impervious to critique from without. If we compare it to a legal system it is like the basic norms which form the constitution. The constitution can be changed, but legally only within the structure and norms provided by the constitution itself. The system which propaganda imposes, bearing in mind that the propaganda is total, contains its own morality with it, whether we speak of Communism, Nazism, or any other highly propagandized societies, whether theocracies or technique-dominated liberal and commercial democracies.

That being the case the propagandized system cannot be effectively criticized on the basis of moral philosophies which do not accept the premises of that system. It would be like going to a court of law in the United States and arguing on the basis of Soviet legal practice. To take another pertinent analogy, the propaganda system is like one of Kierkegaard's three spheres of existence. Within each sphere the argumentative base cannot be effectively argued against from the standpoint of one of the other spheres. The aesthete's ideological framework is insulated from the ethical, and the ethical from the religious. One is tempted to say that the relation to Kierkegaard's spheres of existence is not just analogical: propaganda institutes its own ethical sphere. Even a theocracy when established by propaganda negates true faith, which in its essence involves free embracing of beliefs. One recalls Kierkegaard again, and his statement that the truth established by 10,000 yelling men becomes by the means of its dissemination the very opposite of truth.

This account seems to me one way to satisfy the exegetical problem. Ellul believes propaganda to be the reverse of morality, but he can call it amoral insofar as he

recognizes that like absolute monarchs and God it is above the law which it imposes. This or that propaganda system is in play, with the consequent morality that it establishes, and any critique based on opposing values will simply not get a hearing, assuming it could even find a way of expressing itself. (If I may be permitted a political aside here I notice that in the presidential debates the idea that the United States should forgo any claim to Iraq's oil so as to prove the purity of its intentions in invading Iraq simply is not raised. The underlying premise of the need for continued U.S. dominance of the world is not subject to debate.)

But this is not the whole story. Traditional thinking about immorality links us with intentional wrong-doing, the deliberate transgression of moral norms. There is room also for wilful blindness, recklessness and negligence. But so-called invincible ignorance has been held to remove the stigma of guilt. Ellul's message is often to the effect that we are deceived, not necessarily through our fault, about the effects of technology ("la technique" more precisely) and of propaganda on ourselves. So that would be a different reason for treating propaganda as amoral. But it is not a reason that can persist in cases where invincible ignorance turns into wilful blindness, and Ellul's efforts help to bring about such a transformation.

When we come to pass from the exegetical question to the substantial question about the ethics of propaganda, then I believe we need to make adjustments to the Ellulian account. We do have freedom of expression, though it is curtailed or devalued by many different influences coming from concealed sources. Among the competing propagandas we still have the freedom to pursue our different faiths with their spiritual and moral messages. From that moral dimension, we can indeed treat propaganda as antithetical to morality, and immoral for that very reason. As Ellul himself says, echoing St. Augustine, the good end does not justify the bad means; rather the means chosen tells us something

about the ends and are not to be separated from those ends (recall also Camus on this point).

If we return to the idea that not all of what we term propaganda is total, and that what goes by that name does not always exclude respect for the freedom and integrity of the other, then we have a basis for evaluating each propaganda exercise in its context on a case-by-case basis. What Ellul would have us do is think about the danger of, for example, shortcuts to persuading mass audiences, and to concentrate on the phenomenon of propaganda as a whole, in the context of modern technological society.

I believe that the reason he did not take the case-by-case approach is that he was acutely aware of the imperviousness of his audience, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, to arguments based on moral principles. Positivism was still a reigning influence. To reach and affect an audience, appeal to scientific arguments were needed. By claiming to eschew morality, and by setting up propaganda as an amoral phenomenon to be analysed scientifically, he had exactly the right approach to gain a sympathetic hearing. The moral message comes through in that book, though somewhat problematically, and it helps to have his elucidation in 1981 to reinforce that message. It is a message that bears pondering as we confront a world where the leader of a country with the most powerful military weaponry wants to spend huge amounts to expand its technological capabilities while his opponent would like to expand scientific stem cell research to combat illnesses. In neither case are the moral implications thoroughly confronted in the public debate, and the power of various myths, of freedom, progress and the like, appear once again to be uppermost. Without presuming the answers to these policy matters, one can at least recognize the poverty of the discourse in which they are presented to the public.

# Semantics and Ethics of Propaganda

*by Jay Black*

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## Early Approaches to Propaganda

One implication of the term propaganda, when it was first used in the sociological sense by the Roman Catholic Church, was to the spreading of ideas that would

not occur naturally, but only via a cultivated or artificial generation. In 1622, the Vatican established the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, to harmonize the content and teaching of faith in its missions and consolidate its power. As Combs and Nimmo maintained (1993, p. 201), this early form of propaganda was considered by the Church to be a moral endeavor.

Over time the term took on more negative connotations; in a semantic sense, propaganda became value laden, and in an ethical sense, it was seen as immoral. In 1842 W. T. Brande, writing in the Dictionary of Science,

Literature and Art, called propaganda something "applied to modern political language as a term of reproach to secret associations for the spread of opinions and principles which are viewed by most governments with horror and aversion" (Qualter, 1962, p. 4).

Following World War I, R. Wreford (1923) maintained that propaganda had retained its pejorative connotations as "a hideous word" typical of an age noted for its "etymological bastardy" (Qualter, 1962, p. 7). At that time, the forces of propaganda, public relations, and psychological warfare had become inextricably intertwined in the public's mind. Social scientists and propaganda analysts, strongly influenced by models of behaviorism, tended to depict a gullible public readily manipulated by forces over which it had little control (Institute for Propaganda Analysis, 1937; Lee & Lee, 1988). This depiction offended humanists and progressives who feared propaganda as a threat to democracy and saw public enlightenment through education as the best defense against the inevitability of propaganda (see Michael Sproule, 1989 & 1997). In 1929, for instance, Everett Martin wrote (p. 145):

Education aims at independence of judgment. Propaganda offers ready-made opinions for the unthinking herd. Education and propaganda are directly opposed both in aim and method. The educator aims at a slow process of development; the propagandist, at quick results. The educator tries to tell people how to think; the propagandist, what to think. The educator strives to develop individual responsibility; the propagandist, mass effects. The educator fails unless he achieves an open mind; the propagandist unless he achieves a closed mind.

In a 1935 book, Leonard Doob drew a further distinction between education and propaganda by saying that

If individuals are controlled through the use of suggestion . . . then the process may be called propaganda, regardless of whether or not the propagandist intends to exercise the control. On the other hand if individuals are affected in such a way that the same result would be obtained with or without the aid of suggestion, then this process maybe called education, regardless of the intention of the educator. (p. 80).

Harold Lasswell (1927) offered the first attempt to systematically define propaganda to assure some degree of validity and reliability in studies of the phenomenon. Propaganda, Lasswell wrote, is "the control of opinion by significant symbols, or, so to speak, more concretely and less accurately, by stories, rumors, reports, pictures, and other forms of social communications" (p. 627). A year later George Catlin (1936) defined propaganda as the mental instillation by any appropriate means, emotional or intellectual, of certain views. He said the "instillation of views may be animated by no strong sense of moral or political urgency," and that "it may amount to little more

than the distribution of information, public acquaintance with which is advantageous to the institution concerned" (pp. 127-128). The 1930s and 1940s saw propaganda's definitions reflecting social science's struggles between behaviorism (the "stimulus response" model) and a more value neutral stance. At the same time, propaganda was applied to increasingly broad categories of social and political phenomena.

Edgar Henderson (1943) proposed that no definition of propaganda can succeed unless it meets several requirements: (a) it must be objective; (b) it must be psychological, or at least sociopsychological, rather than sociological or axiological; (c) it must include all the cases without being so broad as to become fuzzy; (d) it must differentiate the phenomenon from both similar and related phenomena; and (e) it must throw new light on the phenomenon itself, making possible a new understanding of known facts concerning the phenomenon and suggesting new problems for investigation (p. 71). Given these criteria, Henderson claimed previous definitions fell short, and proposed that "propaganda is a process which deliberately attempts through persuasion-techniques to secure from the propagandee, before he can deliberate freely, the responses desired by the propagandist" (p. 83).

Doob (1948) defined propaganda as "the attempt to affect the personalities and to control the behavior of individuals toward ends considered unscientific or of doubtful value in a society at a particular time" (p. 240). Doob employed propaganda in a neutral sense "to describe the influence of one person upon other persons when scientific knowledge and survival values are uncertain," indicating that "propaganda is absolutely inevitable and cannot be exorcised by calling it evil-sounding names" (1948, p. 244).

### Past Half Century

Following World War II, propaganda was often defined in accordance with constantly shifting perspectives on political theory and the processes / effects and structures / functions of mass communication. Some scholars, such as Alfred McClung Lee (1952), stubbornly held to earlier models of humanity-as-victim when defining propaganda as something that was vivid, emotional, and attempted to override common sense. Increasingly, however, as media and organized persuasion enterprises in and of themselves were seen to have diminished mind-molding influences, definitions (and, we presume, fears) of propaganda softened.

Many of the midcentury explorations of propaganda considered the phenomenon in terms of the totality of persuasive characteristics of a culture or society. More recently, definitions have incorporated concerns about subtle, long-term but difficult to measure media effects. Also, many modern approaches to the subject have allowed that propaganda need not necessarily be deliberately and systematically manipulative of consumers-cum-victims, but may merely be the incidental by-product of our contemporary technological and/or information society.

Terrence Qualter, in his 1962 book on propaganda and psychological warfare, called propaganda

The deliberate attempt by some individual or group to form, control, or alter the attitudes of other groups by the use of the instruments of communication, with the intention that in any given situation the reaction of those so influenced will be that desired by the propagandist. (p. 27)

Qualter (1962) argued that the phrase "the deliberate attempt" was the key to his concept of propaganda, because, as he claimed, he had established "beyond doubt" that anything may be used as propaganda and that nothing belongs exclusively to propaganda. The significance, he said, was that any act of promotion can be propaganda "only if and when it becomes part of a deliberate campaign to induce action through the control of attitudes" (p. 27).

French social philosopher Jacques Ellul (1964, 1965), whose ideas have significantly informed the propaganda research agenda in recent decades, held a sophisticated view construing propaganda as a popular euphemism for the totality of persuasive components of culture. Ellul (1965) saw a world in which numerous elements of society were oriented toward the manipulation of individuals and groups, and thereby defined propaganda as "a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization" (p. 61). Propaganda performs an indispensable function in society, according to Ellul (1965):

Propaganda is the inevitable result of the various components of the technological society, and plays so central a role in the life of that society that no economic or political development can take place without the influence of its great power. Human Relations in social relationships, advertising or Human Engineering in the economy, propaganda in the strictest sense in the field of politics—the need for psychological influence to spur allegiance and action is everywhere the decisive factor, which progress demands and which the individual seeks in order to be delivered from his own self. (p. 160)

Although recognizing the significance of the traditional forms of propaganda utilized by revolutionaries and the heavy-handed types of propaganda employed by despots and totalitarian regimes—"agitation" and "political" propaganda, Ellul (1965) focused more on the culturally pervasive nature of what he called "sociological" and "integration" propaganda. What Ellul (1965) defined as "the penetration of an ideology by means of its sociological context" (p. 63) is particularly germane to a study of mass media persuasion. Advertising, public relations, and the culturally persuasive components of entertainment media are all involved in the "spreading of a certain style of life" (p. 63), and all converge toward the same point.

In a sense, sociological propaganda is reversed from political propaganda because in political propaganda the ideology is spread through the mass media to get the

public to accept some political or economic structure or to participate in some action, whereas in sociological propaganda, the existing economic, political, and sociological factors progressively allow an ideology to penetrate individuals or masses. Ellul (1965) called the latter a sort of persuasion from within, "essentially diffuse, rarely conveyed by catchwords or expressed intentions" (p. 64). He added that it is instead "based on a general climate, atmosphere that influences people imperceptibly without having the appearance of propaganda" (Ellul, 1965, p. 64). The result is that the public adopts new criteria of judgment and choice, adopting them spontaneously, almost as if choosing them via free will—which means that sociological propaganda produces "a progressive adaptation to a certain order of things, a certain concept of human relations, which unconsciously molds individuals and makes them conform to society" (Ellul, 1965, pp. 63-64). In contemporary society this is "long-term propaganda, a self-reproducing propaganda that seeks to obtain stable behavior, to adapt the individual to his everyday life, to reshape his thoughts and behavior in terms of the permanent social setting" (Ellul, 1964, p. 74)

It is significant to point out that those who produce sociological or integration propaganda often do so unconsciously, given how thoroughly (and perhaps blindly) they themselves are invested in the values and belief systems being promulgated. Besides, if one is an unintentional "integration" propagandist merely seeking to maintain the status quo, one's efforts would seem to be *prima facie* praiseworthy and educational. However, when considering propaganda as a whole, Ellul (1981) concluded that the enterprise was pernicious and immoral—a view shared by many but not all other students of the subject. Ellul (1981) argued that pervasive and potent propaganda that creates a world of fantasy, myth, and delusion is anathema to ethics because (a) the existence of power in the hands of propagandists does not mean it is right for them to use it (the is-ought problem); (b) propaganda destroys a sense of history and continuity and philosophy so necessary for a moral life; and (c) by supplanting the search for truth with imposed truth, propaganda destroys the basis for mutual thoughtful interpersonal communication and thus the essential ingredients of an ethical existence (Combs & Nimmo, 1993, p. 202; Cunningham, 1992; Ellul, 1981, pp. 159-177; Johannesen, 1983, p. 116).

Persuasion researcher George Gordon's (1971) eclectic definition of propaganda suggested that most teachers and most textbooks, except those involved in teaching abstract skills, are inherently propagandistic. (In his chapter on "Education, Indoctrination, and Training," Gordon argued that one failure of the American educational system is that there is not enough propaganda in the lower grades, and too much in graduate schools.)

John C. Merrill and Ralph Lowenstein (1971) published the first mass media textbook in the modern era that seriously analyzed propaganda and its employment in media. The authors generalized that from the numerous definitions of propaganda they had read they discerned certain recurring themes or statements or core ideas, among them "manipulation," "purposeful management,"

"preconceived plan," "creation of desires," "reinforcement of biases," "arousal of preexisting attitudes," "irrational appeal," "specific objective," "arousal to action," "predetermined end," "suggestion," and "creation of dispositions" (pp. 221-226). They concluded:

It seems that propaganda is related to an attempt (implies intent) on the part of somebody to manipulate somebody else. By manipulate we mean to control—to control not only the attitudes of others but also their actions. Somebody (or some group)—the propagandist—is predisposed to cause others to think a certain way, so that they may, on some cases, take a certain action. (p. 214)

Notwithstanding the work of Gordon, Merrill, and a few others whose textbooks containing observations about propaganda were published in the 1970s, an honest appraisal of propaganda scholarship shows a void of what Cunningham (2000) called "front-line academic research" between the 1950s and early 1980s. Cunningham (2000) went so far as to call propaganda a "theoretically undeveloped notion" during that period, and lauded the recent Ellulian-motivated resurgence of propaganda scholarship (p. 2). Some of that recent research and commentary (see especially Combs & Nimmo, 1993; Edelstein, 1997; Jowett & O' Donnell, 1999; Pratkanis & Aronson, 1992; Smith, 1989) has painted propaganda with a wider brush that covers the canvas of media, popular culture, and politics, and posits that propaganda need not necessarily be as systematic and purposive as earlier definitions demanded. Indeed, the likelihood of unconscious or accidental propaganda, produced by unwitting agents of the persuasion industry, makes the ethical analysis of contemporary propaganda ever more intriguing.

Consider only a few of the most recent definitions and discussions of propaganda (Cole, 1998). Ted Smith (1989), editor of *Propaganda: A Pluralist Perspective*, called propaganda "Any conscious and open attempt to influence the beliefs of an individual or group, guided by a predetermined end and characterized by the systematic use of irrational and often unethical techniques of persuasion" (p. 80). Jowett and O' Donnell (1999) recently echoed that perspective, calling propaganda "The deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (p. 279). In Smith's (1989) edited volume Nicholas Burnett (1989) defined propaganda simply as "discourse in the service of ideology" (p. 127).

Pratkanis and Aronson (1992), in *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion*, used the term propaganda to refer to "the mass persuasion techniques that have come to characterize our postindustrial society," and "the communication of a point of view with the ultimate goal of having the recipient of the appeal come to 'voluntarily' accept this position as if it were his or her own" (p. 8). Media scholar Alex Edelstein, in his 1997 book *Total Propaganda: From Mass Culture to Popular Culture*, said

"old propaganda" is traditionally employed by the government or the socially and economically influential members in "a hierarchical mass culture, in which only a few speak to many" (p. 5). It is intended for "the control and manipulation of mass cultures" (p. 4). He contrasts this with the "new propaganda" inherent in a broadly participant popular culture "with its bedrock of First Amendment rights, knowledge, egalitarianism, and access to communication" (p. 5).

### **Social Psychology of Propaganda**

Scholarly analyses of propaganda tend to focus on either the political or semantic/rhetorical nature of the beast. An equally intriguing set of insights has been offered by social psychologists, concerned as they are with the nature of belief and value systems and the various psychological needs that a phenomenon such as propaganda tends to fulfill. Until recently, philosophers have been noticeably absent from the fray.

Throughout the 20th century, various schools of sociology and psychology (and, recently, the hyphenated pairing of the two) have concluded that propaganda is produced and consumed by individuals with particular sociopsychological characteristics. What Ellul (1965) has described as sociological and integration propaganda has been the focus of their attention, as it is ours.

The past half-century's concerns over media propaganda have been based on the often stated assumption that one responsibility of a democratic media system is to encourage an open-minded citizenry—that is, a people who are curious, questioning, unwilling to accept simple pat answers to complex situations, and so forth. Mental freedom, the argument goes, comes when people have the capacity, and exercise the capacity, to weigh numerous sides of controversies (political, personal, economic, etc.) and come to their own rational decisions, relatively free of outside constraints.

### **Open and Closed Mind**

A growing body of research on perception and belief systems seems to be concluding that individuals constantly strive for cognitive balance as they view and communicate about the world, and that individuals will select and rely on information consistent with their basic perceptions. This holds true for mass media practitioners as well as for their audiences. A *Journalism Quarterly* study by Donohew and Palmgreen (1971), for instance, showed that open-minded journalists underwent a great deal of stress when having to report information they weren't inclined to believe or agree with because the open-minded journalists' self-concepts demanded that they fairly evaluate all issues. Closed-minded journalists, on the other hand, underwent much less stress because it was easy for them to make snap decisions consistent with their basic world views—especially because they were inclined to go along with whatever information was given to them by authoritative sources (Donohew & Palmgreen, 1971, pp. 627-39, 666).

Social psychologist Milton Rokeach (1960), in his seminal work *The Open and Closed Mind*, concluded empirically that the degree to which a person's belief system

is open or closed is the extent to which the person can receive, evaluate, and act on relevant information received from the outside on its own intrinsic merits, unencumbered by irrelevant factors in the situation arising from within the person or from the outside (p. 57). To Rokeach (1960), open-minded individuals seek out sources (media and otherwise) that challenge them to think for themselves rather than sources that offer overly simplified answers to complex problems. Open-minded media consumers seek independent and pluralistic media because they value independence and pluralism—even, on occasion, dissonance—in their own cosmology, interpersonal relationships, and political life. Closed-minded or dogmatic media consumers, on the other hand, seek out and relish the opposite kinds of messages, taking comfort in simplified, pat answers (usually relayed by "authoritative sources"), in conformity, in a world in which the good guys and the bad guys are readily identifiable, in which there is a simplistic and direct connection between causes and effects (Rokeach, 1954, 1960, 1964).

### **Belief Systems and Media Propaganda**

One of the dominant themes in media criticism for much of the past half century or so has been the tendency of media to mitigate against open-mindedness. Recent assessments reinforce the 1922 lamentations of Walter Lippmann concerning the stereotypical pictures in the heads of people, the incomplete reflections of political, economic, and social reality from which individuals make choices and public opinion is produced. If people lack time, opportunity, and inclination to become fully acquainted with one another and with their environment, it is only natural for them to act as Rokeach's (1954, 1960, 1964) dogmatic, closed-minded media consumers—prompted and fulfilled by media whose stock in trade is production of such public opinion-molding propaganda.

There is, of course, an argument that people need media to provide them with predigested views because they can't experience all of life first-hand. By definition, media come between realities and media consumers, and we are certainly not arguing for the elimination of those media. (Some have noted that online media and the Internet may appear to eliminate the mediating, and hence propagandistic, function of traditional media, but that argument falls when one considers that a prime reason to use new media is to pander to self-interest and to reinforce preexisting prejudices.)

The logic of Ellul (1965) is compelling in this regard, as he argued that people in a technological society need to be propagandized, to be "integrated into society" via media. As Ellul (1965) saw it, people with such a need get carried along unconsciously on the surface of events, not thinking about them but rather "feeling" them. Modern citizens, Ellul (1965) concluded, therefore condemn themselves to lives of successive moments, discontinuous and fragmented—and the media are largely responsible. The hapless victims of information overload seek out propaganda as a means of ordering the chaos, according to Ellul (1965). If our nature is to eschew dissonance and move toward a homeostatic mental set, the crazy quilt patterns of information we receive from our mass media would

certainly drive us to some superior authority of information or belief that would help us make more sense of our world. Propaganda thus becomes inevitable.

Most of the foregoing emphasizes the propagandee's belief system, showing parallels between dogmatic personality types and the "typical" propagandee. Not much of a case has been made to maintain that propagandists themselves possess the basic characteristics of the dogmatist, but there is much evidence suggesting that communicators who are intentionally and consciously operating as propagandists recognize that one of their basic tasks is to keep the minds of their propagandeas closed. The conscious propagandists can operate most successfully by raising themselves above their messages and goals, conducting propaganda campaigns as a master conductor plays with an orchestra. (As Eric Hoffer, 1951, reminded us, Jesus was not a Christian, nor was Marx a Marxist [p. 128]). Unconscious propagandists are another matter; they may have unconsciously absorbed the belief and value system that they propagate in their daily integration or socialization propaganda. Their unexamined propagandistic lives reflect a cognitive system that has slammed shut every bit as tightly as the authorities for whom they blindly "spin" and as the most gullible of their propaganda's recipients.

As Donohew and Palmgreen (1971) implied, it appears to be very difficult and stressful for both media practitioners and media consumers to retain pluralistic orientations. If people are not undergoing any mental stress, it may be that they aren't opening their minds long enough to allow discrepant information to enter. This is not to say that stress and strain in and of themselves make for open-minded media behavior. They may just make for confusion and result from confusion. However, if media personnel and audiences never find themselves concerned over contradictory information, facts that don't add up, opinions that don't cause them to stop and think, then they are being closed-minded purveyors and passive receivers of propaganda.

### **Propaganda Revisited**

At this juncture, insights from propaganda analysts, media critics, social psychologists, and semanticists can be amalgamated into reasonably objective insights into the propagandistic nature of contemporary society. The insights can be applied to the producers of propaganda, the contents of propaganda, and the consumers of propaganda.

The emerging picture of propagandists / propaganda / propagandeas and their opposites, as uncovered by the preceding discussions, reveals several definite patterns of semantic/belief systems/ethical/and so forth behavior. Note that on one hand the dogmatist (typical of propagandist and propagandee, and revealed in the manifest content of propaganda) seeks psychological closure whether rational or not; appears to be driven by irrational inner forces; has an extreme reliance on authority figures; reflects a narrow time perspective; and displays little sense of discrimination among fact/inference/value judgment. On the other hand, the nondogmatist faces a constant struggle to remain open-minded by evaluating information on its own merits; is governed by self-actualizing forces rather than irrational inner forces; discriminates between and among messages



and sources and has tentative reliance on authority figures; recognizes and deals with contradictions, incomplete pictures of reality, and the interrelation of past, present, and future; and moves comfortably and rationally among levels of abstraction (fact, inference, and value judgment).

The preceding typologies help lead us to an original synopsis of propaganda, one meeting the criteria laid down by Henderson in 1943. It is sociopsychological, broad without being fuzzy, differentiates propaganda from similar and related phenomena, and sheds new light on the phenomena. In addition, it describes the characteristics of propagandists, the propaganda they produce, and propagandees—something sorely lacking in most other definitions. The synopsis is as follows:

Although it may or may not emanate from individuals or institutions with demonstrably closed minds, the manifest content of propaganda contains characteristics one associates with dogmatism or closed-mindedness. Although it may or may not be intended as propaganda, this type of communication seems noncreative and appears to have as its purpose the evaluative narrowing of its receivers. Whereas creative communication accepts pluralism and displays expectations that its receivers should conduct further investigations of its observations, allegations, and conclusions, propaganda does not appear to do so. Rather, propaganda is characterized by at least the following six specific characteristics:

1. A heavy or undue reliance on authority figures and spokespersons, rather than empirical validation, to establish its truths, conclusions, or impressions.
2. The utilization of unverified and perhaps unverifiable abstract nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and physical representations rather than empirical validation to establish its truths, conclusions, or impressions
3. A finalistic or fixed view of people, institutions, and situations divided into broad, all-inclusive categories of in-groups (friends) and out-groups (enemies), beliefs and disbeliefs, and situations to be accepted or rejected in toto.
4. A reduction of situations into simplistic and readily identifiable cause and effect relations, ignoring multiple causality of events.
5. A time perspective characterized by an overemphasis or underemphasis on the past, present, or future as disconnected periods rather than a demonstrated consciousness of time flow.
6. A greater emphasis on conflict than on cooperation among people, institutions, and situations.

This synopsis encourages a broad-based investigation of public communications behavior along a propaganda -nonpropaganda continuum. Practitioners and observers of media and persuasion could use this definition to assess their own and their media's performance (Black, 1977-1978). The definition applies to the news and information as well as to entertainment and persuasion functions in the media. Many criticisms of the supposedly objective aspects of media are entirely compatible with the aforementioned standards. Meanwhile, because most people expect advertisements, public relations programs, editorials, and opinion columns to be nonobjective and persuasive, if not outright biased, they may tend to avoid analyzing such

messages for propagandistic content. However, because those persuasive messages can and should be able to meet their basic objectives without being unduly propagandistic, they should be held to the higher standards of nonpropaganda. (For what it's worth, persuasive media that are propagandistic, as defined herein, would seem to be less likely to attract and convince open-minded media consumers than to reinforce the biases of the closed-minded true believers, which raises an intriguing question about persuaders' ethical motives.)

## Conclusions

We are not suggesting that the necessity for mediating reality and merchandising ideas, goods, and services inevitably results in propaganda. Far from it. Yet we do suggest that when there is a pattern of behavior on the part of participants in the communications exchange that repeatedly finds them dogmatically jumping to conclusions, making undue use of authority, basing assumptions on faulty premises, and otherwise engaging in inappropriate semantic behavior, then we can say they are engaging in propaganda. They may be doing it unconsciously. They may not be attempting to propagandize, or even be aware that their efforts can be seen as propagandistic, or know that they are falling victim to propaganda. It may just be that their view of the world, their belief systems, their personal and institutional loyalties, and their semantic behaviors are propagandistic. But this doesn't excuse them.

It is sometimes said, among ethicists, that we should never attribute to malice what can be explained by ignorance. That aphorism certainly applies to propaganda, a phenomenon too many observers have defined as an inherently immoral enterprise that corrupts all who go near it. If instead we consider propaganda in less value-laden terms, we are better able to recognize ways all participants in the communications exchange can proceed intelligently through the swamp, and we can make informed judgments about the ethics of particular aspects of our communications rather than indicting the entire enterprise.

It is possible to conduct public relations, advertising, and persuasion campaigns, plus the vast gamut of informational journalism efforts, without being unduly propagandistic. In a politically competitive democracy and a commercially competitive free enterprise system, mass communication functions by allowing a competitive arena in which the advocates of all can do battle. What many call propaganda therefore becomes part of that open marketplace of ideas; it is not only inevitable, but may be desirable that there are openly recognizable and competing propagandas in a democratic society, propagandas that challenge all of us—producers and consumers—to wisely sift and sort through them.

A fully functioning democratic society needs pluralism in its persuasion and information, and not the narrow-minded, self-serving propaganda that some communicators inject—wittingly or unwittingly—into their communications and which, it seems, far too many media audience members unconsciously and uncritically consume. Open-mindedness and mass communications efforts need not be mutually exclusive.

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# Re-Viewing Ellul

## Jacques Ellul, *Histoire de la Propagande*

Presses universitaires de France (Que sais-je?), 1967.  
2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1976. 128 pp.

### Reviewed by Randal Marlin

Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

This immensely useful, highly compact historical study of propaganda somehow never made it into English translation, but perhaps that situation will one day be remedied. The book is a classic, in the sense that one can revisit it thirty years later and still find insights newly applicable to changing historical circumstances. His earlier *Propaganda* shared this feature and continues to sell well today, more than 40 years after first publication. Ellul's *Histoire de la Propagande* was published in 1967 by P.U.F. as part of its *Que Sais-Je* series, with a second edition appearing in 1976. The series put a premium on highly concise, well-organized writing and Ellul delivers superbly well.

The book spans a European time frame from Ancient Greece to World War I, giving us many stimulating and sometimes provocative judgments along the way. As he defines propaganda for purposes of his study, it involves the sum of methods used by a political or religious power (he doesn't include commercial communication) with a view to obtaining ideological or psychological effects. Was Greek tragedy propaganda? It might have helped mould Hellenic identity and thereby shape political power, but he sees it as more existentially than politically motivated. Pisistratus on the other hand qualifies as propagandist with his false news, creation and exploitation of victim status, and portrayal of himself as under Athena's special protection -- an early version of "God on his side."

He traces propaganda from Roman imperial times through the rise of Christianity to the development of the nation state, the French revolution, and the post-revolutionary need to address the general population. Propaganda in the fullest sense he links to the arrival of modern means of mass communication and the ability, first seen in the Soviet Union, of sustained and more or less total control of communication by a centralized body.

Ellul is very careful to distinguish politically motivated discourse and action, which he includes as propaganda, from that which is driven by religious or other motivations. Some crusades were the result of propaganda, others not. Histories can be propaganda, as when the history of a crusade was written in such a way as to stimulate another.

What is freshly relevant? In a passage with uncanny resemblance to what some people see transpiring in the current U.S. situation under President George W. Bush, Ellul writes how Rome originally appealed to other peoples not only by its administrative efficiency, but also by virtue of its democratic and liberating character, its overthrow of tyranny, and its goal of making people responsible for themselves. But just at the time when Roman virtues were fading and freedom disappearing, the myth about these things was expanding. In my moments of pessimism I also anticipate that Ellul's sharp observations about Inquisition propaganda may have special application in years ahead, if they have not already done so.

## Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*

Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985. xiii, 285 pp.

Translated by Joyce Main Hanks from

*La Parole humiliée* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1981)

### Reviewed by Russell Heddendorff

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In this book, Ellul returns to a theme first presented in *The Presence of the Kingdom*; communication loses the meaning it had in Creation as it is dominated by the technical. This is because words are humiliated as they are devalued by media and people are denied the truth they were promised. Gradually, these broken promises have led to a broken humanity.

The dominant influence of technology in our modern world has led to this confusion of reality and truth. The meaning of Creation is inverted as we come to believe that truth is found in the image rather than in the word. For this reason, we give priority to seeing the image rather than hearing the word. The result has been "the triumphal progress of the image and the regression of the word in our society."

Ellul does not intend a complete condemnation of images. Rather, his concern is for the distortion of the place images have assumed in modern communication. Words have been "humiliated" by images when they are considered necessary for the proper interpretation of the word. Thus, we affirm the belief that a picture is worth a thousand words. Although Ellul tries to distance himself from the role of a prophet, his understanding clearly anticipates the increased influence of technological control of images and, consequently, the control of people who accept the reality conveyed by the image.

Ellul claims the unique value of language lies in truth which is created by the word and is not limited by public opinion. For this reason, the word has iconoclastic and paradoxical power while the image becomes idolatrous as it conforms to opinion. There is no mystery in the image and the Wholly Other no longer exists. Ultimately, there is a struggle between “religions of sight” and the “proclamations of the Word”, a struggle which favors the former in a culture controlled by technology.

With this struggle, Ellul returns to the important distinction he makes in his work between “created reality” (the Word) and “constructed reality” (the image.) It is a struggle between the artificiality of man’s work expressed in culture and the transcendent quality found in God’s work expressed in dialogue. And it is in the paradoxical quality of language that the Word “is true to itself when it refers to Truth instead of Reality.”

It is as “the Creator, founder, and producer of truth” that the word finds its most important expression and provides the speaker with a “call to freedom.” This freedom is possible because the second most important characteristic of the word is that it is paradoxical; it always falls outside of accepted opinion and calls that opinion into question. It is this paradoxical quality which produces the final characteristic of the word; the fact that it is mystery whenever it transcends the assumptions about God or the person and we hear an “echo, knowing that there is something more.”

Ellul reminds us that the struggle between image and word is not new; for centuries, the Church has allowed sculpture and glass to arouse religious imagination. But the intended mystery has been replaced by efficacy as images replaced the word in piety and theology. Paradoxically, the Church, as an institution, stimulated the humiliation of the word and the negation of Christian faith. With an emphasis on visible reality, “the illusion of images becomes our ultimate reference point for living.”

This illusion has become so dominant in our culture that “the image-oriented person” now relies on an intellectual process that depends more on emotion than reason. Facts are grasped because of intuition, not logic. Consequently, reality is defined in terms of the image so that “whatever is not transmitted audiovisually does not matter.”

Ellul is characteristically hopeful despite the pessimism he brings to the problem of modern communication. The image and word may be reconciled but not with any reliance on technology. Rather, there must be an iconoclastic spirit which separates the image from any claims to truth. Further, language must remain open; “it must remain susceptible of being newly filled with unexpected content.” In this way, language “permits a continual adventure.” And it is in this adventure that Ellul finds the hope that will move us to a genuinely religious dialogue of man with God.

## In Review

### *Perspectives on Culture, Technology and Communication: The Media Ecology Tradition*

**edited by Casey Man Kong Lum**

(Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc., 2006).

**Reviewed by J. Wesley Baker**

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The thought of Jacques Ellul is most often ignored in the fields of communication and media studies. The few references to him in that literature tend to be dismissive, writing him off as a pessimistic technological determinist based upon a reading of the most familiar of his sociological analyses. It is refreshing, then, to find a group of communication and media scholars who consider Ellul to be “one of their own” and who have a good grasp of the whole of his work—sociological and religious. In this collection of essays, edited by Professor Casey Man Kong Lum of William Paterson University, Ellul is embraced as one of the seminal thinkers whose writings contributed to the development of media ecology as a way of understanding media. This embrace is not

surprising when one considers that the eclecticism in sources and unorthodoxy in methodology which leave Ellul at the fringes of media scholarship mirror media ecology’s “pulling together like-minded ideas and theories from disparate academic disciplines under one roof” (pp. 22-23) in a conscious “revolt against . . . the dominant paradigm in communication” (p. 25).

Lum is among a small group of scholars uniquely positioned to write and edit a volume on media ecology because of his work as a graduate student at New York University with Neil Postman (to whom he credits the naming of the approach) and his close involvement in the development of media ecology as a branch of communication studies in its own right (he was one of the five founders of the Media Ecology Association). His introductory chapter, “Notes Toward an Intellectual History of Media Ecology,” provides both an introduction to the approach and a history of its development. Since this “intellectual tradition” largely developed through the Media Ecology program at NYU under Postman, it may be unfamiliar to those who are unfamiliar with that program. Lum’s essay thus provides an important contribution in chronicling the emergence of media ecology. “This book was conceived,” Lum explains, “to give the readers a general historiographic framework for understanding some of the issues, theories, or themes, as well as some of the major thinkers behind them that define the paradigm content of media ecology as a theory group and an intellectual tradition” (pp. 38-39).

Lum’s introduction is followed by twelve chapters that “focus on a short list of media ecology’s foundational thinkers and

some of the key theoretical issues they share” (p. 39). Postman’s important contribution is recognized in a chapter that publishes remarks he originally delivered as a keynote address to the first convention of the Media Ecology Association. The next set of chapters tend to follow the same structure: provide a “brief intellectual biography” of one of the theorists, then explain the “themes or theories” of that writer and how they contribute to the media ecology tradition (p. 40). Mumford, Ellul (covered in two chapters), Innis, McLuhan, Postman, Carey, and Worf and Langer each receive this treatment. The next two chapters are more integrative as the organizing principle changes from intellectual biographies to communication epochs—Orality & Literacy and Typography. In a short final chapter, Lum describes the current state of the media ecology tradition and suggests future directions for it as a theory group.

The rationale for two chapters on Ellul illustrates the degree to which the media ecologists (unlike most other media scholars) understand Ellul’s dialectic approach. Randy Kluver of Nanyang Technological University in Singapore focuses on Ellul’s sociological works while Ellul Forum Editor Clifford Christians examines how those sociological works relate to his theological writings.

Although Kluver concentrates on the sociological works, he does not present the kind of limited reading of Ellul that comes from those who have read only those works. His explication of la technique and propaganda are informed by a solid understanding of Ellul’s theology and his citations include the less read works in which Ellul more explicitly describes what he is about and how his works are in interplay. While Kluver’s review will go over familiar ground for most readers of *The Ellul Forum*, it is refreshing to find such a well-informed and balanced approach to Ellul finding circulation to a wider audience. His section “Criticisms of Ellul and His Work” clearly lays out four common criticisms of Ellul and thoughtfully counters each. He points out the adverse effect the clash in methodology and orientation between the “social scientific bent” of the field and Ellul’s “humanistic, critical approach” has on an understanding of Ellul (p. 111). Kluver also rejects the characterization of Ellul as a pessimist and a technological determinist by drawing from the religious works in which Ellul argues that a “realistic” view from outside the technological system provides an opportunity for hope. Kluver is weakest in dealing with the criticism that Ellul’s negative treatments of la technique “don’t correspond with our positive responses to technology” (p. 111). Here he tries to extrapolate a position from his assumption that “Ellul, undoubtedly, made use of the best medical technology he could when he was ill” and that he “used the modern media system to disseminate his own writings” (p. 111). Kluver’s argument would be bolstered by some statements from Ellul that suggest a tentatively positive view of the potential of “micro-computers” and the networked communication they provide for local groups of citizens. If networked personal computers could be used for decentralized decision-making, Ellul suggested, they could be “a tool which will allow the society to transform itself.” (Interestingly enough, Ellul makes this assessment in an interview published in *Etc.*, *A Review of General Semantics*, in 1983—when Postman was serving as editor.) Kluver’s “Suggestions for Further Exploration” provide suggestions that resonate with the Forum’s purpose of “carry[ing] forward both [Ellul’s] sociological and theological analyses in new directions.”

While Kluver provides an overview of Ellul’s thought, Christians plumbs the depths of the personal and intellectual roots that inform that thought. His essay and Kluver’s, he notes, enable “readers of this anthology to evaluate Ellul in the terms he himself has specified” (p. 119). Christians chronicles how Ellul’s conversion first to Marxism and shortly thereafter to Christianity set up the sociological and theological poles for his dialectic to be

dealt with in counterpoint and never reconciled. He then develops Ellul’s “theology of confrontation” in *The Meaning of the City* (which served as a counterpoint to *The Technological Society*) (p. 120). From there Christians moves to the impact of Karl Barth’s neo-orthodoxy on Ellul, with its theme of freedom and “biblical dialectic” of “both the No and the Yes of God’s word over the world” (p. 124).

The depth of Christians’ work in human intellectual history are revealed in his discussion of Ellul’s development of la technique and the triumph of means. Here Christians looks to Galileo as the figure that establishes the materialist assumptions of modern science which privilege empiricism as the test of truth, severing science from philosophy and “relegat[ing] all supernaturalism to the fringes of human experience” (p. 126). Christians then develops in much greater detail what Kluver had time to only touch upon—the “revitalization” (p. 128) that a religious perspective makes possible. But Ellul’s Christian understanding of the effects of the Fall sets up yet another dialectic—between “necessity” and “freedom” (p. 131). In order to break free of the triumph of the means and necessity, desacralization of la technique is necessary. Once again, what Kluver introduces Christians is able to develop more thoroughly—those who “attack Ellul’s pessimism fail to realize that his vigorous desacralization is but one element in a larger perspective, the first step in a longer journey” (p. 133). Christians ties together the threads developed over the course of the essay to show how they offer a hope that such desacralization is possible through a “spiritual reality” (p. 133).

In terms of presenting an intellectual biography of Ellul, Kluver and Christians combine to provide a full and rich understanding of him. Kluver provides more of an overview and summary, while Christians develops this understanding in a way that is often limited to volumes that are dedicated exclusively to a study of Ellul. In terms of making connections between Ellul and the development of the media ecology analysis, Kluver is much more specific. Christians deals with Ellul’s connections with Mumford and McLuhan briefly (and often on general points rather than the media in particular; see esp. pp. 119 & 126-127) and provides an even briefer discussion of Postman and Innis (p. 134). Kluver, on the other hand, has a section headed “Ellul and Media Ecology” (pp. 106-110) in which he does much more to explicate the connections. He identifies three points of connection between Ellul and McLuhan, Postman, Innis, Mumford and Ong. The first is agreement on “the ubiquity of media and its necessary degeneration into propaganda” (p. 108). The second is the common “emphasis on technology as the defining characteristic of modern society” (p. 108). The third is “the issue of the word, or the means of different technologies of communication” (p. 108), which Kluver develops in some detail. The difference in the directness of connections to media ecology is also reflected in the conclusions at which each of the two authors arrive. While Kluver bemoans the “absence of response to Ellul” (p. 114) by media scholars and suggests specific ways in which Ellul’s analysis could be incorporated into media scholarship today, Christians concludes more generally, arguing that “Ellul’s explicitly Christian framework” (p. 135) “must meet the standard of religious diversity to be credible” (p. 136).

The essays in this volume suggest the opportunity for Ellul scholars to find a sympathetic and interested audience among media ecologists. One disappointment is that that has not already occurred to a greater degree. Amidst all of the discussion of Ellul, there is only one reference to an article from the Forum—and that was an article dealing with Mumford, rather than Ellul—even though articles that could inform a greater understanding of Ellul’s thought and analysis have appeared in the Forum. Conversely, I don’t recall having read anything in the Forum that indicated the

degree to which Ellul's ideas form a part of this school of media studies. It is to be hoped that the essays in this volume will help encourage further dialog and provoke continued scholarship that accomplishes the Forum's goals.

## ***Digital Matters: The Theory and Culture of the Matrix***

**by Paul A. Taylor and Jan Harris**

(Routledge, 2005), 210 pp.

**Reviewed by David J. Gunkel**

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*Digital Matters: The Theory and Culture of the Matrix* is one of those books where the title says everything. In the first place, *digital matters* is a deliberate oxymoron, pregnant with ambiguity. It denotes, on the one hand, a concern with the subject matter of digital technology and culture. And in indicating this, the phrase inevitably calls to mind the essential immateriality that has been the subject of so much theorizing about new media technology and computer systems. Being digital, as individuals like Nicholas Negroponte have argued, is all about a transformation from the antiquated culture and slow-moving economy of atoms—large, heavy, and inert masses—to a new world of weightless and ephemeral bits of information that circulate through global networks at the speed of light.

On the other hand, *digital matters* can also be interpreted in a much more literal and material sense. In this way, the title names the inescapable and often ignored material circumstances (e.g. the working and living conditions of individuals involved in chip manufacturing, the unequal distribution of and access to information technology, the environmental impact of toxic waste from discarded IT components) that make the digital and its utopian promises of immateriality possible in the first place. *Digital Matters* is a book that not only plays on this double meaning but, most importantly, demonstrates how and why the material conditions of digital technology do in fact matter for all things digital. In this way, the book identifies and critically examines techno-culture's *im/materiality*, a neologism introduced by Taylor and Harris in order to name and give expression to this complex issue.

Second, the subtitle deploys and trades on the polysemia that has accrued to the word "matrix." Clearly the immediate reference for many readers will be the Wachowski brother's cinematic trilogy, not just because of the films' popularity but also because of the numerous academic books and articles that have offered interpretations of the narrative's social and philosophical significance. *Digital Matters*, although employing these pop-culture materials as a recognizable point of departure, does not mount a direct critical assault on the film and its interpretations. Instead Taylor and Harris address the trilogy indirectly by investigating the larger cultural and theoretical matrices that already inform, animate, and structure the im/material ideology that is articulated by this particular techno-myth.

For this reason, *Digital Matters* understands and deploys "matrix" in the full range of its multifarious meanings, including: environment that shapes, supporting structure of organic form, signal transposition, and the place of reproduction. Understood in this way, Taylor and Harris's investigation can be categorized as an innovative and more sophisticated articulation of *media ecology*, where media technology does not just frame new social

environments but innovations in technology are also situated in and informed by a socio-cultural matrix that already shapes and informs technical developments. In other words, *Digital Matters* tracks down and examines both the social and cultural material in which digital technology has developed and the very real social and cultural environments that this immaterial information helps to create.

In order to get at this, Taylor and Harris marshal an impressive array of theorists, many of whom are not usually considered part of the official pantheon of cyberstudies and new media technology. Instead of concentrating on the work of self-stylized techno-theorists like Lev Manovich, Nicholas Negroponte, N. Katherine Hayles, et al., Taylor and Harris turn their critical eye toward Jacques Ellul, Martin Heidegger, Friedrich Kittler, Michel de Certeau, and Walter Benjamin. This is not just an exercise in "old school" theorizing. Instead Taylor and Harris demonstrate how these thinkers' ideas already structure our understanding of digital technology and how they might be repurposed to introduce innovative methods for critically rewiring the matrix of our technological present. Consequently, *Digital Matters* does not simply apply, for example, Ellul's work to digital technology, but opens up a critical dialogue between Ellul's theorizing and contemporary media *praxis* that has the effect of transforming both. In the final analysis, *Digital Matters* is a remarkable book that pushes the envelope in new media theory. It should be of interest to anyone concerned with media, technology, and contemporary theory.

## **International Jacques Ellul Society**

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

**P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705, USA**  
**[IJES@ellul.org](mailto:IJES@ellul.org) Tel/Fax: 510-653-3334**

The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

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# The Word of Jacques Ellul

by David W. Gill  
President, International Jacques Ellul Society

“In the sphere of the intellectual life, the major fact of our day is a sort of refusal, unconscious but widespread, to become aware of reality. Man does not want to see himself in the real situation which the world constitutes for him. He refuses to see what it is that really constitutes our world. This is true especially for intellectuals, but it is also true for all the people of our day, and of our civilization as a whole” (*Presence of the Kingdom* (1948), p. 99).

We live in a world of shadows and myths, Ellul says, oscillating back and forth between the particular and the general, both of which poles are detached from reality. On the one hand, there are particular phenomena, “facts,” which come at us like a tsunami. News bites, slogans, bits and pieces of information, survey numbers, a flood of images: this is our normal environment. But it is a world of shadows because these “facts” have no connection to a past or present, and rarely are they verified by our own lived experiences and relationships. In fact, they are a distraction and substitute for lived experiences and relationships.

But people cannot navigate through this flood of images and shadows without seeking some kind of interpretive help. Our psychological survival requires it. And this is where the “explanatory myth” comes in. Ellul mentions the popular post-WWII “bourgeois myth of the Hand of Moscow” (exhibited in the American McCarthy era) and the “Fascist myth of the Jews,” among others.

In today’s USA, the myth of “the Liberals” (the source of all evil) is embraced by millions; the myth of the “Religious Right” is embraced by others. The myths of technological salvation, of consumer happiness, and of global free market capitalism have great power alongside the myths the advertising and entertainment industries play on. The myth provides a ready-made, simple framework for evaluating all bits of information that one encounters.

One of the most remarkable insights of Ellul’s *Propanda* is that propaganda does not just foist lies and falsehoods on its target audiences. It mobilizes its audiences to embrace and act upon accepted “facts” and the orientation of their mythologies. Propaganda plays on prejudices, it doesn’t just create them.

We need to remember Ellul’s challenge to the intellectual classes here: this vulnerability to drowning in shadows and being misled by myths is not just a problem of

couch potato cable television watchers, Google-happy celebrity gossip addicts, and check-out counter tabloid purchasers. It is not just a problem for dazed worshippers listening to ranting Elmer Gantrys.

Propaganda is everyone’s challenge, including IJES members and friends. So Ellul writes that “the first duty of a Christian intellectual today is the duty of awareness: that is to say, the duty of understanding the world and onself . . . in their reality” (*Presence of the Kingdom*, p. 118). And this challenge is certainly not confined to Christians.

Ellul gives us a fivefold strategy to get past the blur of shadowy images and the lure of dehumanizing explanatory myths. *First*, he says, is “a fierce and passionate destruction of myths.” “Myth-buster” is our first role. It’s about raising critical, uncomfortable questions, questioning authority, leaving the “Amen Corner” of our own enclaves, profaning what has been exalted to sacred status in our society, and fulfilling a more critical/constructive role.

But we must not be satisfied with an exclusively negative stance and strategy. The *second* move is “the will to find objective reality, to discover the facts of the life led by the people who surround me” (p. 119). Not shadows, not abstractions, but reality. The will not just to deconstruct and demythologize but to penetrate past the shadows and myths to reality---that’s the second step.

*Third*, this reality of our civilization must be grasped on the human level. We don’t just seek to understand what life is like for a generic “neighbor” but for our actual “neighbor Mario,” Ellul writes, a man with flesh and blood, a face and a name. The implications are very clear: let’s get out of our ivory towers and spend time with the people. Let’s get to know our actual neighbors, the people we work with, our students, even those we may think of as our enemies. Any time any of us prefers to treat a colleague through a stereotype or image, rather than actually get to know that person through two-way conversation and common experiences, we are yielding to the veil of ignorance, which begets fear, which begets conflict . . .

The *fourth* part of Ellul’s counsel is to look at “present problems as profoundly as possible . . . to find, behind the facts presented to us, the reality on which they are based . . . the true structure or framework of our civilization” (p. 121). Ellul sometimes used the metaphor of the ocean: the surface waves can be so mesmerizing that we fail to look at the great maincurrents below which are the real drivers in the occurrence of storms and surface events.

Faithfully reading “McNews” or watching the bits or pieces of CNN/HNN, or similar activities, isn’t going to take us to the deeper awareness of social reality. Among the strategies are reading more history, seeking longer, deeper analyses of topics, learning other languages and listening to what others outside of our linguistic, cultural, philosophical, vocational enclave have to say. It’s about depth, breadth, and comparative perspectives. It takes time and reflection.

This is where Ellul’s writings have such a brilliant and unique impact: he takes us toward an understanding of the maincurrents of our civilization (concerning technique, the state, propaganda, the sacred, etc.) and also in biblical studies (dialectic, the city, money, hope, freedom, etc.).

The *fifth* element is an “engagement (or act of resolute commital” (121). We are not done when we write our books or give our speeches. We must act upon the truth in the reality of our neighborhood---or we are still part of the problem.



# Resources for Ellul Studies

## **www.ellul.org & www.jacques-ellul.org**

The IJES web site at [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org) contains (1) news about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, (4) a complete index of the contents of all *Ellul Forum* back issues; and (5) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The new French AIJE web site at [www.jacques-ellul.org](http://www.jacques-ellul.org) is also a superb resource.

## ***The Ellul Forum CD: 1988-2002***

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

Back issues #31 - #36 of *The Ellul Forum* are available for \$5 each (postage and shipping included).

## **Cahiers Jacques Ellul**

### ***Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne***

An essential annual journal for students of Ellul is *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, edited by Patrick Chastenet, published by Editions L'Esprit du Temps, and distributed by Presses Universitaires de France. Send orders to Editions L'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Postage and shipping is 5 euros for the first volume ordered; add 2 euros for each additional volume ordered.

Volume 1: "L'Années personnalistes" (15 euros)

Volume 2: "La Technique" (15 euros)

Volume 3: "L'Economie" (21 euros).

Volume 4 (forthcoming): "La Propagande" (21 euros).

## **Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works**

by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. \$87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the

most valuable. Visit [www.elsevier.com](http://www.elsevier.com) for ordering information.

## **Librairie Mollat---new books in French**

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

## **Alibris---used books in English**

The Alibris web site ([www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com)) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

## **Used books in French: two web resources**

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

## **Reprints of Nine Ellul Books**

By arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of several Ellul books originally published by William B. Eerdmans can now be purchased. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: *The Ethics of Freedom* (\$40), *The Humiliation of the Word* (\$26), *The Judgment of Jonah* (\$13), *The Meaning of the City* (\$20), *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* (\$19), *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* (\$28), *The Subversion of Christianity* (\$20), and *The Technological Bluff* (\$35). *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul* translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

Have your bookstore (or on-line book dealer) "back order" the titles you want. Do not go as an individual customer to Eerdmans or Ingram/Spring Arbor. For more information visit "Books on Demand" at [www.eerdmans.com](http://www.eerdmans.com).

## **Ellul on Video**

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

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.



