

The truth is not that Roman Catholics kept Aristotle and Luther threw him out; the debates surrounding the appropriateness of Aristotle's ethics belong to the curriculum shifts of the era and not to any one Christian denomination. Aristotle's ethics continued in major Protestant institutions well into the seventeenth century and the rate of replacement tracks with that of Roman Catholic institutions (see Richard Muller, *After Calvin*, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 122–36). In short, the persistent myth of the incompatibility of virtue with Protestantism is due almost entirely to ignorance of the era of Protestant orthodoxy and its university textbooks. Although purporting to redress this lack of attention, Cochran's book unwittingly perpetuates this myth through her choice of sources and assumption that a turn to Stoicism is requisite for bringing Protestants to the virtue table.

The spirit and direction of *Protestant Virtue and Stoic Ethics* are on the right track, but Cochran's imbalance of historical reception and bricolage prevents her from making a much stronger case. Early Protestant theologians are indeed overlooked as resources for virtue ethics, and this will likely remain unchanged until a major work on the ethics of Protestant orthodoxy is completed. It took Annas's herculean synthesis of the ancient tradition to break down Stoic caricatures and something similarly massive will no doubt be required for the late-medieval and early modern virtue traditions as well—both Catholic and Protestant. In the meantime, Cochran's volume is sufficiently insightful and creative to benefit students of moral theology and religious ethics, as well as scholars of virtue ethics searching for new points of entry into debates on, for example, the unity of the virtues and the role of faith in moral progress.

Jacques Ellul, *Les sources de l'éthique chrétienne: Le Vouloir et le Faire, parties IV et V* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2018). 320 pp. €24.00. ISBN 978-2-8309-1649-2 (pbk)

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This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of Jacques Ellul, the French Reformed law professor, social critic and lay theologian (on whom see the obituary in *Studies in Christian Ethics* 9.1 [1996], pp. 140–53). There has been a steady stream of important posthumous publications covering a wide range of subjects, including a fascinating collection of talks and a few hard-to-find journal articles offering biblical and theological reflections on the subject of death (*Mort et espérance de la résurrection*, Olivétan, 2016), and a recent volume of over 600 pages comprising mainly unpublished pieces on the theme at the heart of his ethics—freedom (*Vivre et penser la liberté*, Labor et Fides, 2019). Among these publications, the volume under review stands out as particularly significant for Christian ethics.

Ellul's works of moral theology have gained less attention than his sociological and biblical reflections on specific subjects such as violence, the city and technique. They have also always been a bibliographical puzzle. His introduction to ethics, heavily indebted to Barth and Bonhoeffer, appeared in French in 1964 as *Le Vouloir et le Faire* followed by an English translation in 1969 (*To Will and To Do*, henceforth *TWTD*) but received limited attention in wider Christian ethics. The subtitle of the new 2013 edition,

'une critique théologique de la morale', captures its central argument: morality arises because of the Fall and the Christian is called not to define good and evil but to know and do God's will as revealed in Christ and the biblical revelation. *TWTD* was a prolegomenon to a planned three-part ethic for Christians structured around the theological virtues. The first part—his *Ethics of Freedom*, focused on hope—appeared in three volumes in French between 1973 and 1984 but the 1976 English volume confusingly is a translation of volume 1 and an earlier draft of volume 3. There is a manuscript of over 1,000 pages of his *Ethics of Holiness* focused on faith which awaits publication in French, while the ethics of relationship focused on love was, it seems, never written. However, the appearance in 2018 of *Les sources de l'éthique chrétienne* reminds us how little we sometimes know about the output of prolific writers.

The fifty-page introduction by leading Ellul scholar Frédéric Rognon explains how the text was recently discovered by Bernard Rordorf, a retired professor of theology at the University of Geneva, and then brilliantly sets it in the context of Ellul's corpus of ethical writing. The text's two parts—on the conditions and characteristics of a Christian ethic and then on its content—have only now appeared in print but were written in the early 1960s at the same time as *TWTD* and intended to come after its three parts, so they appear here as Parts IV and V of *TWTD*.

The opening words set out Ellul's stall clearly: for a Reformed Christian there can be no other point of departure or norm for an ethic for Christians than Holy Scripture. This leads into a clarification of what this means for him and a survey and rejection of alternatives. Here Ellul risks losing readers as he falls into his sweeping rhetorical and polemical style, swiftly dismissing the approaches of large swathes of Christian ethics which look to the church or human nature or philosophy. For those who persist, the remaining seven chapters of Part IV each explore a characteristic of his ethic for Christians.

Reflecting his early involvement in French personalism and his debt to Kierkegaard, Ellul begins with a call for an ethic for the person whom Scripture addresses and personalises by God's Word. This leads to the stark claim that 'we must accept that there is no Christian social ethic' (p. 78; translations are the reviewer's). It is important this is not misunderstood: Ellul's corpus (and this volume) shows he is clear that Scripture speaks to us about matters traditionally viewed as part of social ethics and he is emphatic in his rejection of individualistic and dualistic approaches to ethics. His second characteristic of an ethic for Christians is, in fact, that it is 'commune', a term he prefers to 'de la communauté' or 'ecclésiastique' to show that it is about life shared in common as persons are always in relationship. A common critique of Ellul's writing is his apparent lack of interest in the church but the discussion here offers the basis for an Ellulian ecclesial ethic and an interesting dialogue with Hauerwas's famous words two decades later that 'the church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic' (Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*, SCM, 1984, p. 99).

The strongly Christocentric nature of Ellul's ethic is highlighted by his identifying its third characteristic as 'immédiate' and he firmly rejects mediating categories such as middle axioms, orders of creation, and (in most detail) the language of values: Christ alone is mediator between God and humanity in the ethical realm. His strong doctrine of the Fall—'that which we see here has no common measure with that which came from the hand of the Creator' (p. 102)—is prominent in his vociferous critique of other

approaches. However, he also offers here one of his fullest accounts of an ordering of the fallen world through the institutions which humans form (another is in his five-volume legal textbook *Histoire des Institutions*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1955–) and, following Bonhoeffer's language, of the divinely given mandates in relation to those institutions that enable humans to live. He thereby opens up interesting dialogues with later writers, for example, with O'Donovan's different Christocentric conception of creation order that also takes serious account of the Fall.

The longest of the seven chapters on characteristics is his defence of 'une éthique spécifique', a call for a distinctive Christian ethic. Ellul returns to one of the central themes and biblical texts in his corpus (Rom. 12:1-2) to emphasise non-conformity arising out of new creation and faith in Christ and to sketch features of Christian distinctiveness, such as prayerful, revolutionary realism attacking contemporary myths. Again this can be misunderstood as a call for a sectarian ethic of withdrawal but—showing the dangers in selective reading of his work—Ellul proceeds to write of an ethic of contradictions where, because it is impossible to do the good perfectly, compromise and 'dirty hands' are inevitable. Although he is emphatic that such actions must never be morally justified (as he sees occurring in just war theory), there is sadly no exploration of the limits of such paradoxes and compromises for a Christian; each believer appears left to discern them alone in their situation.

The final two characteristics again focus on regular Ellulian themes: an ethic of means and an eschatological ethic. Ethics should not offer ends to be achieved (the Good, Justice etc.) because the end is accomplished by God in Christ. Rather than a teleological ethic, therefore, Ellul offers an ethic of obedience in which we entrust ourselves and all our actions to God, seeking here and now the most faithful (not the most efficient) means to express the gracious work of God. We are seeking neither a return to Eden nor to establish for ourselves the new creation. Rather we are to live in light of God's future through relationship with the living Word of God which brings the divine future into our present and makes our actions into signs and witnesses of it.

Part V, on the content of the ethic for Christians, falls into two sections. The first is on that ethic's relationship to *la Loi*, where Ellul addresses both Old Testament Law and law within ethics more widely as he explores in detail the classic themes of gospel and law and the fulfilment of the Law and its uses. As often, here he follows Barth (though the editor's helpful notes show he often struggles to find the exact quotes Ellul attributed to Barth in his unpolished manuscript), stressing the unity (but also the distinction) of law and gospel in God's Word, the centrality of Christ, and the character of law as, in the biblical context of covenant, both demand and promise. He also insists on taking Old Testament laws seriously by reading them as God's revelatory Word—in historical context, as a whole, canonically, and related to the gospel—without becoming literalist or legalist. A proper Christian understanding of the Law interprets it in the light of Christ who vicariously fulfils it, in love and as love; he thereby both deprives it of its obligatory character and removes its condemnation of our failure to fulfil it. In the new covenant this fulfilled law becomes promise and is written on our hearts and only on that basis is it a source for an ethic for Christians. In his typical dialectical approach Ellul insists both that 'the law is not the ethic for Christians, precisely because it is fulfilled in Christ'

(p. 210) and that ‘if we want to formulate an ethic for Christians, we must take this law as an ethical expression of the will of God, and therefore translate it in its entirety *into* this ethic’ (p. 215, emphasis original; trans. Rollison; see note at end of review). Thus, turning to the uses of the Law, Ellul describes various aspects of its function for Christians and affirms the Calvinist third pedagogical use as a sort of charter of new life in God’s service, showing us the signs of neighbour-love.

The focused discussion on law leads to the final section’s extended discussion of ethics and theology. This opens with an emphatic defence of the link and essential unity of dogmatics and ethics while critiquing Barth’s identification of the two. This led Barth (Ellul argues here in more detail than anywhere else in his books) to an abstract ethic unrelated to contemporary reality, a failing Ellul sought to rectify in his own ethical writing. Ellul then rejects appeal to Christian principles because ethics has to be open to God’s Word and to changing reality. Examining various principles, he pays particular attention to love and the work of Reinhold Niebhuur and also offers what can be read as a pre-emptive strike against Joseph Fletcher’s *Situation Ethics*: ‘one empties the commandment of the concrete content which it has received in the biblical form and reduces the extreme diversity, plurality, of the message to a single way’ (pp. 276–77). Barth too is here further critiqued for succumbing, especially in his *The Christian Community and the Civil Community*, to a method based on the *analogia entis* which in theory he had rejected.

Ellul’s final chapter offers his alternative method of the ‘analogy of faith’, returning to the centrality of Scripture in ethics. Appealing to the term’s use in Rom. 12:6 and the prophetic gift which upbuilds, exhorts and consoles the church, Ellul argues that ‘the prophet therefore has essentially an ethical function’ (p. 290). Interpreting the faith referred to as the Church’s faith (i.e. Christian confession determined by doctrine and *kerygma*) and explaining the nature of analogy, Ellul presents in effect his hermeneutical approach to Scripture in developing an ethic. This rules out both a narrow literalist focus on specific ethical texts and also subjective interpretation. Instead Ellul argues for the need to consider the specific texts and their meaning and significance in their historical context, the way God’s Word transformed Israel’s institutions and patterns of life compared to surrounding cultures, and also the fixed doctrinal points of Christian faith. There needs then to be the relating of these to our own context. Here we find set out more fully than anywhere else the approach to Scripture which Ellul himself exemplifies in his own extensive writing on ethics and his biblical studies.

Although now over fifty years old, this new volume, like so much of Ellul’s work, stands the test of time remarkably well. It is of contemporary value not only for those seeking new insights into the structure and development of Ellul’s own thought but for its contributions to the task of developing a distinctive, biblically faithful, theological ethic for Christians. In Ellul’s conception, such an ethic is, to quote the book’s closing words, ‘a humble instrument to enable Christians to witness on earth to the authenticity of their true life hidden with Christ in God and to accomplish works worthy of the grace given to them in their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’ (p. 311).

Those wishing to explore this volume further will be glad to know that it is being translated into English by Jacob Rollison to be published, together with a new translation of *To Will and To Do*, by Wipf & Stock in 2020.