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Primary Influences on Ellul's Dialectical Worldview

Before delving into the details of Ellul's thought and works, we must seek to understand Ellul's background and central influences. What sort of family life shaped Ellul? From whom does Ellul derive his foundational ideas? How does he differ from these thinkers? In this chapter I will briefly discuss Ellul's biography as well as three main thinkers who influenced Ellul greatly: Marx, Kierkegaard, and Barth.

Brief Biographical Sketch of Jacques Ellul

Jacques Ellul was one of the first philosophers to devote his entire academic life to researching and writing on the effects of technology. Ellul published over fifty books in his lifetime and hundreds of essays. The common theme throughout all of his philosophical and theological work was technology (or, *la technique*). His first full work on the issue was *La Technique ou l'enjeu du siecle* published in France

in 1954 (*The Technological Society*, 1964), and his last was *Le bluff technologique* in 1988 (*The Technological Bluff*, 1990).[1] In fact, Ellul stated in an 1981 interview, "I have not actually written a wide variety of books, but rather one long book in which each 'individual book' constitutes a chapter."[2] Other philosophers, such as Heidegger and Jaspers, had occasionally written on technology. However, Ellul was the first to focus consistently on technology throughout the entirety of his work.[3]

Ellul was born an only child in 1912 to Joseph and Martha Ellul in Bordeaux. Ellul's father was a nonpracticing Greek Orthodox Austrian, and his mother was a deeply religious Protestant of Jewish descent. Joseph forbade his wife to discuss religion with young Jacques, so that his son might freely decide for himself what he should believe.[4]

As a teenager, Ellul taught German, French, Latin, and Greek lessons in order to financially support his family, which had little money. In his late teens, Ellul underwent two conversions. The first came in 1930 when he borrowed *Das Kapital* from the library while attending the faculty of law. Ellul states, "In 1930 I discovered Marx. I read *Das Kapital* and I felt I understood everything. I felt that at last I knew why my father was out of work, at last I knew

1. *La Technique* was translated into English by John Wilkinson and published as *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage) in 1964. *Le bluff technologique* was translated into English by Geoffrey W. Bromiley and published as *The Technological Bluff* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans) in 1990.
2. Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology and Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1995), 12.
3. For a thorough discussion of the history of the philosophy of technology, with many references to Ellul, see Andrew Feenberg, *Questioning Technology* (London: Routledge, 2000).
4. The biographical information summarized in this section comes from Jacques Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and His Work*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Company, 1981); Jacques Ellul, *In Season, Out of Season: An Introduction to the Thought of Jacques Ellul*, trans. Lani K. Niles (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982); and Andrew Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2002).

why we were destitute. I had finally found *the* explanation."[5] For Ellul, Marx was an astonishing discovery that suddenly explained the reality of the world both personally and universally. He read Marx's works not simply as an economic theory or an exposure of the mechanics of capitalism, but as an entire worldview that encapsulated the progression of history and shed light on his own family life. Later, Ellul would go on to teach university courses on Marx for thirty-five years.[6]

The second conversion was Ellul's encounter with the Christian faith. Ellul recognized early on that Marx's theory did not answer existential questions regarding life, death, love, and so on. At the age of twenty, Ellul embraced Christianity. He considered his conversion very personal and always refused to discuss it in detail. However, in a 1981 interview, he explained,

"I became a Christian in 1932. From that moment on I lived through the conflict and the contradiction between what became the center of my life—this faith, this reference to the Bible, which I henceforth read from a different perspective—and what I knew of Marx and did not wish to abandon."[7] From an early age, Ellul's thought was clearly shaped by Marx and by his Christian faith. These two factors, in combination with his encounter with Karl Barth, which will be discussed later, would shape Ellul's dialectical method.[8]

In 1936, Ellul received a doctorate in law from the University of Bordeaux. The following year he began teaching at Montpellier and the University of Strasbourg at Clermont-Ferrand. In 1940, he was fired because of his open resistance to Marshal Petain's government.

5. Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age*, 5.
6. See Ellul's lengthy discussion of Marx's influence in Jacques Ellul, *Jesus and Marx: From Gospel to Ideology*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).
7. Ibid., 14.
8. Geoffrey Bromiley also maintains this in "Barth's Influence on Jacques Ellul," in *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Clifford G. Christians and Jay M. Van Hook (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 32–51.

At that time, Ellul and his wife, Yvette, moved back to Bordeaux. Later that year, the Germans arrested Ellul's father; Yvette was also targeted because she was born in Holland but carried a British passport. Ellul and his wife then escaped from Bordeaux into the Martres countryside for three years. During this time, Ellul pastored a small church of peasants and supported his family by growing corn and potatoes and tending sheep.[9]

In 1944, Ellul and his family returned to Bordeaux once again, where he served a two-year stint as deputy mayor. Three years later, he accepted a post at the Institute of Political Studies in Bordeaux—a position he would maintain until his retirement in 1980. In 1990, Ellul's wife died and in 1994 he passed away.[10]

Marx

It might be surprising for some to read Ellul's writings and find that Marxist themes permeate nearly all of his work. As one of Ellul's earliest intellectual influences, Marx played a significant role in Ellul's thought throughout his career. In Ellul's words,

> Thus, for me, Marx was an astonishing discovery of the reality of this world, which, at that time, few people condemned as the "capitalist" world. I plunged into Marx's thinking with an incredible joy. . . . As I became more and more familiar with Marxist thought, I discovered that his was not only an economic system, not only the profound exposure of the mechanics of capitalism. It was a total vision of the human race, society and history.[11]

This is not to say that Ellul is a Marxist. Ultimately, he accuses Marx of slipping into ideology and of making unfounded assumptions

9. For the history of Ellul's life, see Goddard, *Living the Word*.
10. Ibid., 37.
11. Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age*, 5.

about the nature of history and society. Ellul is also, of course, quite critical of Marx's strictly materialistic interpretation of reality. Still, it would be difficult to overstate Marx's immense influence on Ellul. Therefore, in order to fully grasp Ellul's theology and philosophy, one needs to understand Marx's thought—particularly his prophetic critique of capitalism and his dialectical understanding of history. This crucial familiarity with Marx is neglected in much of the secondary scholarship on Ellul. In the following, I will discuss some central themes and their relation to Ellul's methodology and overall worldview, beginning with Marx's theory of history.[12]

The Dialectical Movement of History

Marx viewed history as moving in a linear direction. His historical materialism, one of the most contentious aspects of his thought, holds that material and economic forces determine individual and collective consciousness in a dialectical manner. For example, the economic sphere first shapes how individuals view the world, giving them a framework and value system; then, this value system is projected by the individual onto reality in order to make sense of it. This projection furthers harmful social and cultural spheres of class structure, as well as values and historical consciousness.[13]

Capitalism is a logical outcome of this dialectical process. According to Marx, history progresses in a dialectical manner back and forth through six successive stages of greater and lesser freedom. The first stage was a primitive form of communalism. With its lack of rigid class structure, the democratic nature of ancient tribes, and shared property, this era provided relative freedom to the individual.

12. A helpful work on Marx's understanding of history is Gerald Cohen, *Marx's Theory of History: A Defense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
13. See ibid., 28–55.

Eventually, this communalism gave rise to ancient societies that were heavily dependent on slaves. As illustrated in ancient Greece and Rome, this second stage included a strict class structure and was often totalitarian rather than democratic. Furthermore, these slave-based societies introduced the notions of private property and imperialism to the Western world.[14]

Feudalism necessarily followed primitive communalism and slave-based societies. This stage in history is seen quite clearly in the so-called Dark Ages and the medieval period of European history. It was during this era that slavery waned and aristocratic and theocratic regimes began to dominate. According to Marx, feudalism was a type of "proto-capitalism," and it gave rise to the industrial-technological revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and concurrently to the rise of capitalism.[15]

The phase of history in which we are now living is the capitalist stage. For Marx, capitalism is an economic system motivated primarily by profit. As the driving force in the capitalist system, the need for greater profit gives rise to the production of more and more artificial needs. With the rise in artificial needs comes the rise in competition and the exploitation of the working class. For both Marx and Ellul, capitalism necessarily leads to less freedom and to the dehumanization of the individual. In Marx's view, however, capitalism will eventually break down and move into the next two successive periods of history: socialism and communism.[16]

14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Marx intentionally did not give a detailed description of socialism and communism, due to his belief that historical progress would ultimately determine what form each would take. He did, however, describe socialism and communism as the two successive stages of history immediately following capitalism. Socialism, for Marx, was characterized by the social ownership of private property. Communism was characterized by the complete abolition of private property and socioeconomic class distinctions. See "Communism" and "Socialism" in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. Tom Bottomore (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

While Ellul does not adopt Marx's deterministic view of history's next stages, he expands on and develops Marx's critique of capitalism. For Ellul, it is not only capitalism that leads to the loss of freedom and dehumanization, it is also *technique*. Perhaps the most important concept in Ellul's work, technique refers primarily two aspects of modernity. First, it refers to the modern mindset guided by a desire for greater efficiency, instrumentality, and control. Second, technique refers to the technological milieu of contemporary industrial society. Overall, technique is the pernicious force underlying modern forms of capitalism, socialism, and other economic systems. As the foundation beneath our values and intellect, technique leads to grave alienation. (More will be said about technique in a later chapter.)

Technique aside, Marx's theory of history—in which freedom varies between time periods—influenced Ellul greatly.[17] As we will see, this is echoed in Ellul's view that history and reality are comprised of what he called necessity (the realm of technique) and freedom (the realm of the spirit). Furthermore, Marx's dialectical view of history ends in freedom: a classless, stateless society. Similarly, for Ellul, history ends in universal salvation and redemption for all, the ultimate freedom. Alongside Marx's view of history, other aspects of his philosophy were also of key significance for Ellul: namely, Marx's theories of alienation and ideology, which drive his critique of capitalism.

17. Some thinkers, such as Karl Popper, are primarily occupied with the falsification of Marx's theories; see Popper's *Hegel, Marx, and the Aftermath,* vol. 2, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971). Ellul is not concerned with this approach. See Ellul's discussion of Marx's claims in Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (London: Marshall, Morgan, & Scott, 1989), 89–103.

Alienation and Ideology

It is important to realize that for Ellul, Marxism is not to be confused with Soviet or French communism. These forms of communism, according to Ellul, are ideologies that have strayed far from the work of Marx.[18] Authentic Marxism, in Ellul's view, is a philosophy that unites with the poor and works to overcome ideology and alienation. Siding with the oppressed and exploited is a hallmark of Ellul's work, as it was with Marx. Both agree that the capitalist system necessarily oppresses and exploits. Furthermore, it causes individuals to live in a state of alienation.[19]

Marx understood alienation to be a state of being in which individuals were separated from their true nature, others, the fruit of their labor, the means of production, and the natural world.[20] More importantly, the essential characteristic of alienation is a lack of freedom. Marx states, "Just as alienated labor transforms the *free* and self-directed activity into a means, so it transforms the species life of man into a means of physical existence."[21]

For Marx and Ellul, one of the consequences of the capitalist system—which is itself a consequence of technique—is alienation, that is, a loss of freedom.[22] Individuals no longer have the choice to work or not, to pay their bills or not, to get involved in politics or not; the choice has been made. They are necessarily involved in a system that excludes freedom. This does not mean that freedom is unobtainable. For Ellul, capitalism—or any other economic system—can coexist

18. The influential Frankfurt School philosopher and Marxist, Erich Fromm, argues in favor of this line of thinking. See his excellent book, *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York: Continuum, 2004).
19. See Ellul, *Jesus and Marx*.
20. See Marx's "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" in *Marx's Concept of Man,* ed. Erich Fromm (New York: Continuum, 2004), 73–151.
21. Ibid., 85; italics added.
22. Ellul states, "We must recognize the truth in Karl Marx's observation that money in the capitalist system, leads to alienation," Jacques Ellul, *Money and Power*, trans. LaVonne Neff (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), 20.

with freedom, but only if one lives a life according to the Spirit, as a follower of Christ.[23] (This will be explained in further detail when we specifically discuss Ellul's theology.)

The concept of alienation is of primary importance in Ellul's principle work on ethics, *The Ethics of Freedom*. Ellul observes that alienation is found throughout the Judeo-Christian Scriptures as well as human history. According to Ellul, alienation is a type of slavery. This is not a literal conception of slavery, as was the case with the ancient Israelites or in ancient Greece, but a spiritual and psychological state of being. He explains, "Alienation means being possessed externally by another and belonging to him. It also means being self-alienated, other than oneself, transformed into another."[24] This alienation is experienced at a subjective level and, for each individual, is unique.[25]

For Ellul, there are three common factors involved in alienation, which characterize the state of being in the realm of technique. First, there is a loss of autonomy. This is seen clearly in the necessary involvement of individuals in society. As stated earlier, there is no longer a choice to be part of the economic, political, or technological systems; one is already involved. Second, true knowledge has been replaced with ideology, or false consciousness. Evidence of this is found in various religious and political ideologies that abundantly flourish—often without question—in many sectors of society. Finally, individuals are no longer able to think for themselves. Following the first two factors involved in alienation, many have lost the ability to think critically and analytically.[26]

23. A full account of this is found in Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).
24. Ibid., 24.
25. For a fuller discussion of the subjectivity of alienation, see Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, chapter 1.
26. Ibid., 29.

All of these factors are related to another significant concept in both the writings of Marx and the work of Ellul: ideology. As stated earlier, ideology is false consciousness, or a lack of true knowledge concerning reality. Moreover, ideology is an inherited, unquestioned, unchallenged belief system. It is the opposite of self-reflection or self-examination, and is a blind, dogmatic faith in a particular system of thought. Two spheres of society where ideology is the most common are the political and the religious.[27]

What is the solution to alienation and ideology? For Marx, it will come from the revolution of the proletariat and the next stages of history. For Ellul, alienation and ideology can only be overcome by submitting to the Spirit. Through Christ, one can live in the world, but also be free of the necessities that are forced on the individual. Ellul's conception of freedom through Christ will be explained in detail later. For now, it is imperative that we recognize the vital influence of Marx upon Ellul. This is a central key to understanding Ellul's philosophy and theology. For brevity's sake, we will leave our discussion of Marx by reminding the reader of the three primary ideas that Ellul takes from Marx: his critique of capitalism, his concept of alienation, and his theory of ideology. These are crucial to Ellul's sociological and philosophical discussions of technique.

Kierkegaard

In contrast with Marx, Kierkegaard's relation to Ellul is far better known and documented.[28] This is partly due to the "safe" nature of Kierkegaard among evangelical Protestants, who seem to be Ellul's

27. Ellul discusses ideology at length throughout *The Ethics of Freedom*.
28. For a discussion of the relationship between Kierkegaard and Ellul, see Vernard Eller, "Ellul and Kierkegaard: Closer than Brothers," in Christians and Van Hook, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays*, 52–66.

primary readers. Kierkegaard is viewed in this light because he had relatively little to say about politics and economics, which are controversial and touchy subjects with many evangelicals today. As Marx had a great influence on Ellul's *sociological* hermeneutics, Kierkegaard had an immense influence on his *theological* hermeneutics.[29] Concerning Kierkegaard, Ellul states, "I was captivated by Kierkegaard because what he said went straight to my soul. Quite abruptly I realized that reasoning with the intellect alone and reasoning based on living experience are simply worlds apart. My passion for Kierkegaard . . . has remained with me throughout my life."[30]

Kierkegaard was the essential dialectical thinker. Throughout nearly all of his work, he continually emphasizes the dialectical relationships between various aspects of reality, including objective and subjective truth, time and eternity, God and humans, Christendom and Christianity, the crowd and the individual, and so on. Kierkegaard understands dialectic to be a necessary theoretical tool for understanding the world and one's place in it. Further, he sees reality as being constituted by opposing dialectical categories of existence (e.g., faith and reason, eternity and time, etc.), which require the individual to constantly live in an existential tension.[31]

29. According to Ellul, he read every work of Marx and all of Kierkegaard's writings. These were the only two authors about whom he could say this. See Goddard, *Living the Word*, 16.
30. Ellul and Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics*, 54.
31. Many of the distinctions that Kierkegaard made, Ellul updates and revises. For example, Kierkegaard's distinction between Christendom and Christianity is updated in Ellul's work *The Subversion of Christianity*. Also, Kierkegaard's distinction between time and eternity is utilized uniquely in *Reason for Being*.

Dialectical Anthropology: Freedom and Necessity

Perhaps the most striking symmetry between the work of Kierkegaard and Ellul is found in their philosophical anthropology. For both thinkers, a human being is a combination of freedom (spirit) and necessity (matter). These are contradictory elements and in constant tension, but they can and must coexist. Throughout his work, Kierkegaard presupposes this relationship, as does Ellul.

In *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* and in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard discusses the four stages or spheres of human existence: aesthetic, ethical, religiousness A, and religiousness B.[32] The aesthetic stage of human existence is characterized by a preoccupation with immediate sensual pleasure and satisfaction. The ethical stage is distinguished by a strong sense of duty and moral obligation to others and oneself. Religiousness A is a spiritual frame of mind found in various cultures that recognizes the divine in nature and oneself. Religiousness B, however, refers specifically to the Christian faith that, in Kierkegaard's view, is unique and only accessible through revelation. For Kierkegaard, at different times in one's life, one may oscillate between these various spheres of existence. The most important feature of these stages is this: all aspects of human existence, from the most banal, to the most spiritual, require a *choice* from the individual. Choice unites the individual with the world; it unites freedom with necessity, the abstract and spiritual with the concrete and material. Kierkegaard views humans as living constantly within this dialectical tension. Humans live on the boundary between freedom and necessity, and through their choices, move in the direction of one or the other, to a greater

32. Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*, trans. Alistair Hannay (New York: Penguin, 1992), 381–591. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragment*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 432–525.

or lesser degree.[33] Kierkegaard explains, "Flesh and blood or the sensate—and spirit are opposites. Thus it is easy to see what it is to be spirit, that it is to will voluntarily that which flesh and blood shrink from most—for spirit and flesh and blood are just as opposite as, to use an old adage, the ends of a sack."[34] We see that for Kierkegaard, humans are made up of two components: spirit and flesh. (In other places he refers to this distinction in terms of transcendence and immanence, or possibility and actuality.) These refer to the paradoxical constituents of human existence—the fact that humans are both immaterial and material. It is important to understand that for Kierkegaard, this is not simply an abstract way of viewing reality. Rather, these are concrete, qualitative categories of existence.[35]

Ellul inherits this dialectical logic from Kierkegaard, and applies it to the realms of technique and the spirit. However, in Ellul's theology, instead of choice, hope is the unifying factor. Furthermore, many additional Kierkegaardian tenets continue to play central roles in Ellul's work. This will become clearer when the details of Ellul's theology are discussed.[36]

Paradox

Another central idea in the work of Kierkegaard that Ellul adopts and develops is the notion of paradox. A paradox is an apparent contradiction, containing a truth. According to Kierkegaard, reality is comprised of factors that are contradictory, yet still coexist.

33. See discussions by Kierkegaard of the stages of life in his *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* and in his *Journals and Papers*, trans. H. Hong and E. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967–1978), volume 4.
34. Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 4:250.
35. A helpful work on Kierkegaard's logical categories is Arnold B. Come's *Trendelenburg's Influence on Kierkegaard's Modal Categories* (Montreal: Inter Editions, 1991).
36. Ellul's fullest account of hope is in his work *Hope in Time of Abandonment,* trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1963).

Humans are excellent examples of paradoxes, being made up of spirit and matter. But for Kierkegaard, the *ultimate paradox* is the "God-man": Jesus Christ. Kierkegaard maintains that Christ is the greatest paradox because he was and is fully God and fully human, immanent and transcendent, temporal and eternal. Following this, Kierkegaard makes the distinction between quantitative logic and qualitative logic. The former refers to a logic which is limited to empirically verifiable results. Qualitative logic, conversely, refers to a type of reasoning which transcends the superficiality of physicalism; it is a logic which recognizes the subjective and often paradoxical nature of human experience—a logic which embraces, rather than dismisses, mystery. Kierkegaard writes, "Christianity entered into the world not to be understood, but to be existed in. This cannot be expressed more strongly than by the fact that Christianity itself proclaims itself to be a paradox. . . . That the Son of God became man is certainly the highest metaphysical and religious paradox."[37] Christ as paradox permeates both Kierkegaard's and Ellul's work. Not only does Christ signify a reality that transcends human logic and thus cannot be discussed fully in human language; Christ also represents the prototype of the dialectical nature of reality. This conception also greatly influenced Karl Barth, who is the third main influence upon Ellul.[38]

Barth

According to Ellul, one of the most instrumental thinkers to shape his dialectical worldview after Marx and Kierkegaard was Karl Barth. It was through Barth that Ellul discovered a unique way of interpreting the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, a new hermeneutical path that would

37. Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 3:404–1.
38. See Bromiley, "Barth's Influence on Jacques Ellul."

remain a constant element of Ellul's theological work.[39] According to Ellul scholar Patrick Chastenet,

> Barth's thinking enabled Ellul to avoid the "either-or" dilemma of the non-believers, and helped him handle the "already" and the "not-yet," in other words the promise and its fulfillment. But above all, the Swiss theologian enabled Ellul to understand the central idea of the Biblical message essentially formulated in dialectic terms: the free determination of man in the decision of God.[40]

Kierkegaard had already presented a dialectical view of reality that took into account contradictory factors such as freedom and determinism. Barth, however, developed and expanded this dialectic in articulate and insightful ways, which confirmed and encouraged Ellul's dialectical proclivities. Perhaps the most influential aspect of Barth's hermeneutics, however, was his theory of dialectical inclusion.[41]

Dialectical Inclusion

Throughout his work, Barth highlighted theological contradictions and paradoxes. He also worked to demonstrate that in Christianity, every aspect of reality is taken into account. Furthermore, each aspect is related to every other aspect: apparent opposites, such as faith and reason, impossibility and possibility, separation and reconciliation, are all seen as dynamic, interrelated aspects of the whole in Christianity.[42]

Scholar George Hunsinger describes Barth by way of analogy:

39. Ellul and Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics*, 5.
40. Ibid.
41. A thoughtful discussion of dialectical inclusion is found in George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), part 1.
42. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: A Selection*, trans. and ed. G. W. Bromiley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1961), 29–35.

> Like Mozart, Barth preferred to work with sharply contrasting themes resolved in higher unities and marked by regular recapitulations. Themes or fragments of themes, once dominant, are constantly carried forward into new settings where other themes take the ascendancy. Materials are constantly being combined, broken up, recombined, and otherwise brought into contrapuntal relationship. . . . The task of theology, in this view, is to describe as carefully as possible, from many different angles, the network of interconnections which constitute its . . . totality.[43]

This analogy is also applicable to the work of Ellul, with his notable inspiration from Barth. Barth's (and Ellul's) methodology, which seeks to show interconnections and strives toward synthesis, is known as dialectical inclusion.

Ultimately, for Ellul, this approach maintains that all aspects of reality are united in Christ and the Trinity, both of which unite all opposites. Furthermore, for Barth and for Ellul, God and reality can only be fully understood through a Trinitarian lens. This lens is a central hermeneutical tool that Ellul inherits from Barth.[44] Ellul's theology and even his philosophy are guided by this dialectical principle of inclusion, which will be expanded upon in more detail in a later chapter.[45]

It is of the utmost importance to recognize the influence of Marx, Kierkegaard, and Barth on the thought of Jacques Ellul. When the guidance of these thinkers is not recognized, Ellul's work may seem shallow and lacking in foundation. In contrast, a familiarity with Marx, Kierkegaard, and Barth's thought and impact on Ellul will

43. Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 28–29.
44. Concerning Barth's view of the trinity, Hunsinger writes, "As revealed in Trinitarian self-disclosure, God's identity in and with Jesus Christ is ineffaceably mysterious—concealed in the midst of disclosure and disclosed in the midst of concealment. God's self-disclosure is thus at the same time God's self-concealment," *How to Read Karl Barth*, 37. Ellul would most certainly agree with this description.
45. See Jacques Ellul, "On Dialectic," in Christians and Van Hook, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays*, 291–308.

make his work appear coherent and more complete. Furthermore, one must always keep in mind Ellul's conception of dialectic. This is the theoretical framework upon which his entire system is based.