

April 29, 1945, indicating not only their loyalty to Hitler and Germany but also their suicidal intentions, which were carried out. Thus the reader of the diary is richly aided as he makes his own interpretation and evaluation of Goebbels and his account of the last days of National Socialist Germany.

Reviewed by HENRY M. ADAMS

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## *Jacques Ellul's Bad Dream*

**The Betrayal of the West**, by Jacques Ellul, translated from the French by Matthew J. O'Connell, *New York: The Seabury Press, 1978. ix + 207 pp. \$9.95.*

M. JACQUES ELLUL had dreamed a bad dream. He has envisioned the end of things—things once held precious and dear by a noble civilization. But, as when recollected in the aftermath, the *dramatis personae* of this nightmare appear as vague, shadowy images and formless specters, though nonetheless haunting in their menacing powers. Ellul lashes out at these dark and sinister elements and summons them to his judgments. There are the new primitivists whose siren call would tempt us back to an innocent nature and unshackle modern man from the suffocation of civilized restraints. The irrationalists, lurking everywhere, rediscover body language and do away with rational discourse. The Third World, betraying the great hopes of the naive, gives us savagery without nobility and projects new tyrannies upon the world. Cynics and power-worshippers prevail on the Left. Utopian dreamers perfect the art of managerial despotism and override all freedoms. And the “intellectuals,” vaguest and most awesome demons of all, spell our doom with the fallacies of their pens. For among this group especially lurks that “self-destructive rage” that year by year corrupts and tarnishes “the great western venture.”

But our dreams have always something to do with reality. That Ellul cannot refine and sharpen the slippery symbols of his little treatise by no means certifies that he is speaking of meaningless issues. The cause that he defends is a real one and worthy of his effort, and this pensive and prolific scholar here accentuates the positive. The West is being betrayed and Ellul rises to defend it. He is no Sir Gowan and expects no great victories, though. The West is doomed by the irrevocable contradictions of its own history.

To be sure, Ellul is no blind apologist. Readers familiar with his works know him as a penetrating critic of our technological society and the political apparatus erected under its auspices. Nor does Ellul disregard the awesome controls inflicted on the world by the West's pursuit of power. Accepting this sad fact of history, Ellul retaliates with a capsule summary of the barbarisms of the non-Western world. What is more decisive, he believes, is the fact that reforms and revolutions that inspired the elimination of historic abuses—for instance, foot-binding and the subjugation of women—were Western inspirations. For revolution is a uniquely Western way, and “nowhere in the world . . . has there been a revolution, not even in China, until the western message penetrated that part of the world.” The West has taught the world; the world rises against the West only because it has been a good pupil.

Ellul looks at the rest of our globe and sees amidst its turmoil the quest for freedom and liberty. And in these great concerns the unique contribution of the West is bearing its fruit. For “it was Christianity that did away with the ideas of destiny and fate.” The Greeks had assured the dominance of reason and the unquenchable drive of intellect. But the Western formula is really completed only when we add the special emphasis of discipline and self-control. The careful pursuit of these qualities alone made possible the gains of reason and freedom. Ellul brooks no romantic talk of spontaneity and natural human goodness and perceives in our modern Dionysian illusions the decadence of Silenus. Around these passages the conservative strains of Ellul's sentiments are most pro-

nounced. He yearns for the disciplining effect of reason, but fears its uncontrollable quest for efficiency and mechanical precision. Reason itself needs the discipline of myth and symbol; it must humble itself beside the mystery of the supernatural. It was Christianity then that provided the last special ingredient of the Western psyche. Agape now merged with Eros and their peculiar, fragile, precarious balance, their dialectical tension, has fashioned the Western experience and the great achievements that describe it. Ellul thus greatly fears all unreflecting liberationist philosophies. The new morality of "instantaneous desire" is next of kin to that hatred of reason that accompanies the new upsurge of primitivism and recalls Rousseau. And Ellul warns: "The man who is free with the conscious deliberate freedom for which the West stands cannot be a man of utter spontaneity, a man utterly unfettered." The West stands for "the subtle, infinitely delicate interplay of freedom and reason."

Conservative thinkers from Edmund Burke to Irving Babbitt have built on this kind of perspective. But Ellul's narrative goes on to a confusing admixture of terminology and prescription that compromises his traditionalism. The West, he believes, failed to preserve the critical balance that sparked its genius. Reason cannot long live with dialectical tension. It must eliminate by assimilation. Christ did not die on Calvary; he died slowly as the will to intellectual domination consumed all. Modern man has mastered creation and has no further need of providence; Christianity has been domesticated; modern theology despises the once awesome gap that marked the sacred from the profane, the natural from the supernatural, and gave the Western imagination its necessary and sustaining sense of mystery. This, for Ellul, is the internal death the West has suffered. But the external death is even more decisive.

Reason must operate as an external principle, which Ellul in his several works has labeled *technique*. For whereas Western man's earlier alienation was first political (18th century) and then economic (19th century), it is now described as a spiritual alienation that springs from the complete rationalization of all

spheres of our lives. Ellul's language is thoroughly Marcusean. Technical alienation has absorbed political and economic alienation. "Technique has thoroughly permeated the structure of the state and the economic structure; political power and the economy continue to be causes of alienation, but in the form now of the technized state and the technized economy." Furthermore modern alienation is amorphous. Man feels dispossessed of himself but cannot articulate the cause of his alienation. A pervasive breakdown of personality describes the prevailing condition. For this reason, Marxist revolution, and all its shrill mimics, have become irrelevant. The revolution, Ellul insists, "must take place within man himself and not his structures."

Now Ellul has reached a critical juncture. Who can save the West? Radical opposition of some kind is required if the technological superstructure is to be undone. Some brave spiritual movement must rally the necessary strength to avert the fallen personality, recover the individual freedom that rational technique has quietly extinguished. Ellul looks leftward for a sign of help. The Left, he says, was once the real bearer of the great Western tradition, its authentic voice, "the promise of the world's future," nothing less! And now his anger rises. For the Left (one of the most amorphous of all the specters in this volume), has betrayed the West. It has gorged itself on outmoded symbolism, staid formulas, and meaningless rhetoric. To the Left all problems are political ones and demand political solutions. But the political has been assimilated by the technological system. The Left strives merely to take over that system and is drunk with power. The more it resorts to political strategy the more it builds itself into the structure and the less revolutionary it becomes. Ellul is righteously indignant: "It is a fact that the Left no longer makes any claim to be revolutionary. It has buried the revolution and is calmly getting ready to take and keep power . . . its function in modern society is to prevent the revolution." And so it betrays the West, which has always advanced by revolution.

Ellul has offered a Marcusean diagnosis of

our ills, but rejects a Marcusean prescription for their cure. For he sees no help in a radical reconstruction of thought. The appeal to ideology, the recourse to absolutist concepts, the exercise of the utopian imagination—these will avail nothing. To his credit, Ellul will not be fooled. He describes the utopian mentality as the quintessential exercise of reason and technique. In its passion for the managed society it epitomizes the megalomaniac worship of efficiency. The Utopian's ultimate hope is education, and he will teach us even how to make love. Our contemporary public schools now bring the death of sexuality, depriving love of mystery, romance, and dream. Rational eros, the quest for power, has conquered agape and absorbed all.

Ellul is thoroughly pessimistic; he sees no way out. *The Betrayal of the West*, building on the insightful diagnoses of Ellul's other works, weaves an outline of history that closes in on itself with impending doom. Ellul's dialectical mind has afforded him many perceptive glances at the modern situation. His *The Technological Society* (1964) illustrated the collectivist tendencies that transcend the political and ideological divisions of the twentieth-century world. *Propaganda* (1965) superbly diagnosed the dilemma of modern mass politics and warned that even honest democracies face unavoidable tyrannies in their efforts to govern. And *The Political Illusion* (1967) described the modern obsession with politics and popular solutions to our problems. Politics has consumed man's imagination and all else is uninteresting. And so goes the crisis of the West. But it must be asked of Ellul, who so skillfully describes the external machinery of our world, whether he has not too easily surrendered the entire human spirit to it, and whether his vision is not too narrowly Western. Has not Ellul too facilely joined to the predictable and efficient world of technique, which he so dreads, the radical and dynamic freedom of the human spirit? He who calls for the internal revolution despairs to look within for the means of its realization. He looks only to the Left, from whence cometh little help. But the right use of reason that Ellul cherishes must be combined with the right use of imagination,

one that is disciplining and conducive of self-mastery. Instead, Ellul wants to find help from a radical tradition that seized the expansionist imagination of Rousseau and put it to work in the arena of politics. Ellul overlooks the insights of a Western conservative tradition shaped by its classical and Christian ingredients, a tradition that might effect some melioristic way through the genuine nightmare that modern technology has set upon us. Drawing so heavily as he does on the literature of modern sociology, Ellul offers us little help in effecting the spiritual transformation that would save us. What Ellul's analyses consistently lack is an adequate philosophy of human nature. There is much in the Western tradition, which he feigns to uphold, that quite escapes his attention. One hastens to add that there is much in the Eastern tradition too.

Reviewed by J. DAVID HOEVELER, JR.

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## *A Faustian Pact?*

### **American Higher Education 1945-1970:**

**A Personal Report**, by Nathan M. Pusey, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978. 204 pp. \$10.00.

DR. NATHAN PUSEY was president of Lawrence College from 1944 to 1953, and of Harvard University from 1953 to 1971. Subsequently, until 1975, he was president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. With the perspective of a long and distinguished career of academic leadership, Dr. Pusey has written an account of what he considers the more important developments in higher education in a period of phenomenal change. He argues that the time from the end of World War II to about 1970 "constituted a definable and notable period in the history of higher education," and one which "has claims to be considered the most creative yet experienced in the on-going development of higher education in the United States." It