EDWARD SAID AND THE RELIGIOUS EFFECTS OF CULTURE

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CHAPTER I

Culture as the transfiguration of religious thought

ARNOLD'S GOSPEL OF CULTURE

Said's work, as exemplified by *Culture and Imperialism*, is affiliated with an English-language tradition of cultural thought that extends backward through Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* to Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*. Matthew Arnold was a man caught between two worlds: the world of traditional Christian belief and the world of modern scientific reason, one dead, the other powerless to be born. In a world where national identity (increasingly racialized) had displaced religion as the center of value and the highest object of loyalty, Arnold was a proponent of cultural criticism as the *Aufhebung* (negation, preservation, and transformation) of religious thought. Through the mediations of T. S. Eliot and the New Critics, in whose work religious themes are prominent, Said appropriates and transfigures aspects of the Arnoldian cultural idea while rejecting others. He joins Arnold in praise of high culture as "the best that has been thought and said," but cannot celebrate culture insofar as it is transfigured religion. Instead, he joins Marx in opposing a wide array of cultural fetishes. If Arnold construes culture as the transfiguration (*Aufhebung*) of religious thought, then Said construes the critique of culture – that is, the critique of transfigured religion – as the premise of all criticism.

Arnold's cultural critique simultaneously negates theological dogma, both popular and philosophical, preserves Christianity's core (its moral truth and existential efficacy), and transforms Christianity from an offense to modernity's scientific spirit to a deferential but skeptical accomplice. The task of religious thought would no longer be that of telling us how the world is, in a cosmological or metaphysical sense, but of how we should live. Culture plays the same role in Arnold's thought that Reason does in Hegel's. Where speculative reason overcomes the divisions of modern society caused by a one-sided rationality, culture

overcomes the divisions caused by industrialism. Arnold wants to restore a unified sensibility, one that is mediated, however, by scientific reason. He longs for a postconventional ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) that provides some level of meaning and consolation in a world shorn of its sacred canopy. This longing bore fruit in Arnold's reconception of religion. On this view, religious appeals to miracles and supernatural verification had lost all legitimacy with the triumph of the scientific world-view. The watchword of science was verification. Arnold argued that religious faith could only be verified[1] experientially by the evidence of the moral law's efficacy in human history. That religion was a "power making for righteousness" was a proposition that Arnold believed was verifiable. Like Spinoza, he believed that religious criticism should be rational, imaginative, and, most important, edifying. In the tradition of Kant, Arnold struggled to reconcile religion and science. This effort was "a daring attempt to steer between the Scylla of logic and Charybdis of semantics." In other words, he sought to satisfy the evidentiary demands of science without reducing religion to a set of meaningless propositions. He sought to specify the proper spheres of religion and science and thus prevent the illicit encroachment of one on the other.[2] Under the regime of modernity, religion could no longer be dogmatic and doctrinaire. It could only survive as a moral sensibility linked to action, that is, as a form of pragmatic moralism.

If Arnold reduces religion to morality, then it is equally true that he amplifies and raises religion to new emotional heights. Religion is "morality touched by emotion," the notion that "Righteousness tendeth to life." Arnold calls this moral notion the natural truth of religion; it is accessible through "natural" reason and is subject, especially in its Christian form, to scientific verification. The natural truth of religion, however, is obscured by extra belief (*Aberglaube*), by beliefs that go beyond strict verification such as popular supernaturalism and theological metaphysics. The object of *Literature and Dogma*, one of Arnold's more self-consciously religious works, is to reassure those who are attached to Christianity and the Bible, but who accept the fact that ideas such as the supernatural and miracles are losing credibility. Reassurance does not mean disguising this fact or engaging in apologetics. On the contrary, miracles and the supernatural have justly and necessarily been discredited and this should be frankly admitted. The loss of the miraculous dimension of human life (understood in Humean terms) is part of the "same natural and salutary process" that destroyed the credibility of witchcraft. Arnold's notion of reassurance concedes all of this, while

affirming the natural truth of Christianity, the notion that righteous conduct promotes life.[3]

Arnold attempts to provide this reassurance by drawing a distinction between a literary and a dogmatic use of language. The former recognizes the metaphorical and poetic character of language, as well as its use-determined meaning. The latter mistakes religious claims for "moves within a scientific language-game."[4] Dogmatists, whether scientists or theologians, the latter of which inappropriately pursue a kind of scientific exactitude, confuse poetic expression with scientific intent. Arnold's critique of the scientific pretensions of religious discourse is similar to Rudolf Bultmann's program of demythologizing. To demythologize "is to reinterpret the biblical mythology so that the essential message of the Bible can be understood for what it is." Liberating the Bible's essential message from an "outmoded world-view" means articulating the moral and existential intentions of the biblical myth in nonmythological terms.[5] Extra belief (*Auberglaube*) represents a mythical, prescientific cosmology whose moral and existential meaning is accessible for moderns only when divested of scientific pretense. To divest is not to discard. Though the product of an outmoded cosmology, the mythopoetic quality of extra belief need not be discarded any more than common and equally outmoded expressions such as "the sun rises in the East and sets in the West." Recognizing the nature of the "language-game," we do not confuse this common-sense claim with physics, with a theory of mechanics. We neither take such a statement to mean that the earth does not rotate on its axis nor that, Copernicus notwithstanding, the sun revolves around the earth. Myth is the poetry of truth. Arnold, accordingly, did not oppose the use of cosmological, metaphysical, or anthropomorphic language in communal worship or personal devotion. What he did oppose was their public role, the claim of speculative validity and scientific verifiability made on their behalf. As the transfiguration of religious thought, culture banishes the extramoral truth claims of religion to a purely private realm. On this liberal Protestant view, the public square is the realm of culture, and scientific verification is the gate keeper.[6]

While Said is silent on this aspect of Arnold's work (his cosmological views), I cannot imagine him disagreeing with much of it. Like Arnold, he thinks that religion is fine when relegated to its proper place, as a properly private affair. Said and Arnold's disagreement turns on the proper relationship between religion and cultural critique. Cultural criticism, as Arnold understands it, is a response to the decline of religion

as a public authority. It is an attempt to reconstruct a viable canopy on sacred ruins. In culture, the cosmological claims of religion are negated, the moral claims preserved and transformed, but the existential claims exhibit a bit of ambiguity. Will culture perform the existential work in Arnold's new world that religion has historically performed? Or must this work be reserved to religion alone? Arnold is not clear on this point. The preponderance of the evidence within his own texts, such as it is, suggests that only religion can adequately do this work. He does suggest at one point, in some indefinite future, that the arts and sciences might displace religion as an adequate motivation for moral conduct.[7] But, on the question of whether science can provide the existential assurance and consolation that religion does, he is often silent. This I think reflects his uncertainty about just how much cultural work science could do, and whether the anxieties and uncertainties associated with a disenchanted world were irremediable.

Arnoldian culture is the disenchantment and reconstitution of the Christian gospel. Culture is neither vulgar curiosity nor "an engine of social and class distinction, separating its holder, like a badge or title from other people who have not got it." On the contrary, culture is a quest for total perfection through knowledge of those things that concern us most: "the best which has been thought and said in the world." This knowledge is "a stream of fresh and free thought" that flows across our common ideas and habits.[8] As Raymond Williams observes, this concept of culture belongs to a tradition that is distinctly English, which extends from Burke through Coleridge and Carlyle to Arnold.[9] In part a moral concept, culture is a humanitarian impulse, a desire to diminish and overcome human error, confusion, and misery, "the noble aspiration to leave the world better and happier than we found it."[10] Said shares this aspiration. He is part of the tradition of cultural thought that Williams describes. For those associated with this tradition, cultural critique is not a scholastic affair, where several degrees of abstraction separate theory from the transformation of ordinary practices. On the contrary, cultural criticism should make the world a better place.

Among the attributes of the tradition of perfection through culture is its distinctive missionary character. Arnold describes culture as the harmonious development of our many-sided humanity and the general development of every part of society. It is a "disinterested endeavour after man's perfection," which Arnold describes as "making reason and the will of God prevail." Culture is the desire to make manifest the

Socrates in every man's breast. Arnold regards this broad, inclusive, and dynamic view of culture as a craft, as a form of soul-making or soulcraft. The purpose of culture is not the production of esthetic objects, but the cultivation of human spirits as works of art. Culture is neither a marketplace nor a museum, neither commodity nor possession, "not a having and a resting but, a growing and becoming." It is a bulwark against the market morality of industrial society, the inexorable leveling down of virtue and intellect. Horrified by the economic liberalism of his day, Arnold looked on in disgust as royal subjects were transformed into mindless consumers, pursuing an endless array of goods. Arnold regarded this kind of behavior as mechanistic: "machinery" being a trope for the modern idols of science, technology, and the market. Religious institutions, especially those that he called "hole-and-corner" churches, and the scientific pretense of theological dogma (as opposed to the natural truth of religion) are also part of the machinery of modern industrial society. According to Arnold, they help make modern society ugly and stupid.[11] Like Coleridge before him, Arnold believed that an acquisitive, rigidly stratified, and technological society could lose its soul within its own machinery, if it did not promote social forms of beauty and value.

But note well, his critique of industrial society has none of Marx's revolutionary desire. Where Marx discerned the "laws" of historical materialism, Arnold saw a dialectic of Hebraism and Hellenism.[12] From this perspective, the ugliness and stupidity of industrial society is the result of an imbalance of morality and intellect in social life. The leading idea of Hebraism is conduct and obedience. Hellenism, in contrast, is the desire "to see things as they really are." Arnold refers to these governing ideas, respectively, as "strictness of conscience" and "spontaneity of consciousness." Hebraism is a single-minded pursuit of perfection through morality that is characterized by the willingness to "sacrifice all other sides of our being to the religious side." It is the enemy of the Arnoldian concept of totality – that is, "the harmonious perfection of our whole being," and the development of our many-sided humanity. Hellenism, in contrast, falls short of totality because of its moral laxity and susceptibility to moral anarchy. Hebraism and Hellenism are broad social tendencies that represent our moral and intellectual impulses respectively. "At the bottom of both the Greek and Hebrew notion is the desire, native in man, for reason and the will of God, the feeling after the universal order, – in a word, the love of God." Although the means are different, the goals of both are the same, which is to promote human

perfection.[13] While no age is totally lacking in evidence of Hebraic and Hellenistic tendencies, each age tends to be dominated by one or the other. Arnold discerns this tale of two cities, this dialectic of Athens and Jerusalem, in the relations of ancient Israel and classical Greece, medieval Christianity and Renaissance humanism, the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment.

He regards Hellenism as progressive, as having the spirit of modernity on its side. This spirit demands Hebraism's acquiescence, for want of such, modernity has about it "a certain confusion and false movement." In Arnold's scheme of things, Hebraism is little more than a form of resistance, a sometimes atavistic drag on the historical utopianism and anarchy of unfettered liberty.[14] Arnold notes a sense of uneasiness, what we might call the Pauline spirit of gravity, that pervades Hebraism. This inability to be at ease in Zion is produced by an awareness of the power of sin and evil, which insinuate themselves into the highest aspirations, best intentions, and purest will. In contrast, Hellenism has a Socratic spirit that is oblivious to sin as an obstacle to human perfection. Its hallmark is a naïve, free play of intellect. While Hellenism appears to embody all the essentials of the totality or sense of plenitude that Arnold longs for (spontaneity of consciousness, a free play of the mind, and respect for the harmonious development of our many-sidedness) it lacks Hebraism's self-restraint and strictness of consciousness. It is inadequate to the task of repressing multileveled anarchy and so is destined to play the role of cultural superego for an indefinite time. In culture, the utopianism of Hellenism and the all-encompassing moral claims of Hebraism, both of which are conducive to anarchy, are negated, preserved, and transformed, even as their separation in thought and action is overcome.

If Said is troubled by the ideas of Hebraism and Hellenism, it has much to do with the nineteenth-century tradition of racial thinking of which those ideas are part. The idea of Semitism – Semitic people, languages, and cultures, to which Ernest Renan made pioneering contributions – is often compared invidiously to Greek- and Roman-derived culture. This distinction between Indo-European language users and cultures and Semitic language users and cultures is deeply implicated in nineteenth-century racial thinking, the distinction between Aryan and Semite being only one on a long list. This "racial" distinction is integrally connected to invidious distinctions between religious traditions, between Christians and Jews and between Christians and Muslims. Arnold greatly admired Renan and it is hard to imagine him not being

influenced by Renan in these matters. Arnold's distinction between Hebraism and Hellenism is an instance of what Said calls Orientalism – the invidious distinction between East and West, which I address in chapter 3. But the important thing to ponder now are the fluid relations between Orientialism, racial thinking, and invidious religious distinctions

Arnold's response to intellectual and moral decline, economic stratification, and the ever present threat of social anarchy, is not the liberal ideal of equalizing acquisitive opportunities while leaving the rest to the market. He seeks instead to educate desire through culture, replacing the pursuit of commodities with the cultivation of character. "Through culture," he argues, "seems to lie our way, not only to perfection, but even to safety." Culture is an ark of safety that is inseparable from the state.

> Thus the very framework and exterior order of the State, whoever may administer the State, is sacred; and culture is the most resolute enemy of anarchy, because of the great hopes and designs for the State which culture teaches us to nourish. But as, believing in right reason, and having faith in the progress of humanity toward perfection, and ever labouring for this end, we grow to have clearer sight of the ideas of right reason, and of the elements and helps of perfection, and gradually come to fill the framework of the State with them, to fashion its internal composition and all of its laws and institutions conformably to them, and to make the State more and more the expression, as we say, of our best self, which is not manifold, and vulgar, and unstable, and contentious, and ever-varying, but one, and noble, and secure, and peaceful, and the same for all mankind, – with what aversion shall we not then regard anarchy, with what firmness shall we not check it, when there is so much that is so precious which it will endanger! (Ibid., 204)

This passage is from Arnold's signature work *Culture and Anarchy*, and says much about his anxious desire for a stable social order. *Culture and Anarchy* was written against a background of growing social unrest, including a crisis in England's financial markets, two consecutive years of disastrous agricultural harvests, and an outbreak of the rind pest virus that led to soaring beef and milk prices. Added to this was a severe outbreak of cholera in the slums of the East End of London, which exacerbated what were already depressing conditions. The economic conditions in England were desperate and much of this desperation spilled into the streets in the form of demonstrations and rallies of various kinds, the most important of which was the famous Hyde Park demonstration of 1866. This protest by working-class people and their advocates signified, both literally and figuratively, the transgression of

aristocratic and bourgeois social space.[15] This so-called riot seems rather harmless in retrospect, the price that a democratic society must pay. But to Arnold, it revealed the deep-seated anarchy of the working class and the unwillingness of public officials to act swiftly and brutally to repress disorder.

The Hyde Park demonstration contributed to Arnold's theoretical marriage of the moral authority of culture and the police power of the state. In *Culture and Anarchy*, he developed a notion of culture as the antithesis of anarchy, a collective superego, to speak anachronistically, holding a collective id – with its multileveled anarchy of religion (spirit), body (sexuality), and the body-politic (social class) – at bay. Culture is a bulwark against the apotheosis of science, technology, and market forces in modern industrial society. Arnold's cultural thought is a critique of the destabilizing inequalities created by industrialism, which produced a materialistic upper class, vulgar middle class, and brutalized impoverished class.[16] Like Plato, he favored a form of education that discouraged protest and reconciled people, especially the poorer classes, to their stations in a rank-ordered society. Where education failed, and people were moved to protest openly in the streets, as they were at Hyde Park, Arnold had recourse to his father's brutal wisdom:

> I remember my father in one of his unpublished letters written more than forty years ago, when the political and social state of the country was gloomy and troubled, and there were riots in many places, goes on, after strongly insisting on the badness and foolishness of the government, and on the harm and dangerousness of our feudal and aristocratic constitution of society, and ends thus: "As for rioting, the old Roman way of dealing with that is always the right one; flog the rank and file, and fling the ring-leaders from the Tarpeian Rock!"[17]

Arnold inherited this notion of the draconian state from his father, Thomas Arnold. From Edmund Burke he inherited a religious reverence for society and the state. On this Burkean view, the perfection of our own natures is impossible without civic piety, without the joint dominion of God and the state. It is hard to distinguish the two, as the state is "the source and original archetype of all perfection."[18] Arnold inherited this Burkean mind-set where the state is the necessary agent of human perfection.[19] On this view, culture is inextricably bound up with multiple forms of repression (or character formation) at the apex of which is the state. If culture is a collective superego, then the state is the embodiment of the national ego. It is our "best self" in "its collective and corporate character." Unlike the self-interested ordinary self, it is the incarnation of right reason. The best self has no class loyalties or other parochial

interests that encumber the ordinary self.[20] Arnold's distinction between "the ordinary, empirical self or ego and the true or real spiritual self," has a religious provenance.[21] It is indebted to the New Testament distinction between the carnal and the spiritual man. True religion requires the sacrifice or subordination of carnal desires to spiritual ones. As the collective and, therefore, highest manifestation of our best self, the interests of the state come before those of the ordinary, individual self. The state is a sacred trust, a religious and political entity.

Said is deeply suspicious of this view. He describes *Culture and Anarchy* as "a very rigorous apology for a deeply authoritarian and uncompromising notion of the State." It would be wrong, he argues, to view the Arnoldian state as a precursor of "Orwell's Big Brother state" or as a precursor of actual dystopian states such as Stalin's Russia or Hitler's Germany. There is no cynicism in his notion of the state as a sacred institution, as our best self, "the repository of our best hopes." But, and this is important, Arnoldian culture is invidiously comparative, competitive, and unabashedly nationalistic: "the people, the nation, the culture and the State he speaks about are his own and are meant to be distinct from those of France, India, or America. Arnold's thought and his rhetoric are stamped with the emergence in nineteenth-century Europe of national sentiment." On his view, some nations or races are more civilized and less provincial than others. While a sharp and unrelenting critic of the English, England stands atop the nations of Europe, which stand astride and look down at the rest of the cultures and nations of the world.[22]

The state is the highest expression of Arnoldian ethical life, just as for Hegel it is the highest manifestation of "objective spirit." But Arnold lacks Hegel's subtlety, and is more susceptible to the crude statist arguments that are often made against Hegel. That Arnold has few qualms about the best self and the brutal use of force that it authorizes against the "not best" is clear. And so, he concludes: the best self through the instrumentality of the executive power will act firmly, clearly, and resolutely to crush public disorder. The Arnoldian state can act with brutal decisiveness, because its conscience is free.[23] Arnold has a Hegelian equanimity before the "slaughter bench" of culture and state. But, as Trilling observes, Arnold lacks Hegel's realism and forthrightness. He wants both "force" and "right" – or, in the pernicious language of Joubert,[24] "force till right is ready." So he retreats "before the brutal question of power."[25] Trilling is probably right. But perhaps this question never arises for Arnold, given his idealistic view of the state. One

commentator sums up Arnold's view of the state as follows: "power tends to make people better, and absolute power to make them perfect."[26] Arnold's view is not quite that sanguine, but he's clearly smitten. As he notes: "The State is of the religion of all its citizens without the fanaticism of any of them."[27] As culture sublates religion as the object of veneration in the public square, organized religion recedes and is confined to the private realm. If culture is the transfiguration of religious thought, then the state, under cover of sacred authority, is the policing function of religion augmented and transformed by culture.

A SAIDIAN CRITIQUE

Said is both fascinated and repelled by Arnold's notion of culture. If Arnold sees a stark choice between culture and anarchy (with culture as that ensemble of authoritative habits and customs, hierarchies, and constraints that hold the chaotic forces at bay), then Said is more ambivalent. If Arnoldian culture is Janus-faced, the "best that has been said and thought in the world" on one side, and on the other side the "Tarpeian Rock," then Said is attracted by the first and repelled by the second. He offers qualified approval of Arnoldian high culture, but rejects Arnoldian state-worship. Against Arnold's idea of culture, he advocates a skeptical, if ambivalent attitude. In contrast to Arnold, and in the interest of human freedom and noncoercive knowledge, he advocates a quasi-anarchic attitude toward cultural authority. Said separates Arnold's idea of culture, understood as "the best which has been thought and said in the world," from its explicit affiliation with the repressive police powers and the ideology-spinning institutions (churches, schools, corporate media, and so on) of the state. *Secular Criticism* is a transvaluation of Arnold's culture–anarchy distinction. Anarchy (often personified by Jonathan Swift, with his satirical wit) becomes Said's preferred metaphor for the disruption and transgression of sacred orders of meaning. Culture becomes a trope for atavistic religioud ideas and commitments such as nationalism, Orientalism, and imperialism. *Secular Criticism* breaks with the gods of nationalism and state-worship, by severing the link between critical consciousness and the politics of identity.

Said's appropriation of Arnold's idea of culture is qualified by his unwillingness to wholly embrace the Arnoldian view (even when that view is separated from the enforcement power of the state) because of its residual religiosity. This residue, which takes the form of nationalism and purist notions of cultural identity, creates an excessive veneration of the state, wedded to strong forms of ethnocentrism and xenophobia. On the

wrong side of this strong delineation between *us* and *them*, "anarchy, disorder, irrationality, inferiority, bad taste, and immorality are identified, then deposited outside the culture and kept there by the power of the state and its institutions." This is not a theoretical exercise in fear-mongering on Said's part. He has specific historical examples in mind: including "Macaulay's famous Minute of 1835 on Indian education" and the utilitarian philosophy of British colonialists. Said quotes Macaulay as follows: "all the historical information which has been collected in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools in England." According to Said, this cannot be dismissed, as Derrida dismisses Levi-Strauss' recourse to the idea of the noble savage, as a case of textual ethnocentrism. He goes on to make the Foucauldian point that words (discourse) and things (nondiscursive practices) are linked and that discourse has ascertainable results. Here Said refers to the imposition of the English language on the people of the Indian subcontinent. The second example is the relationship between utilitarian philosophy and British colonial policy in India. According to Said, there is a strong "us" and "them" element in the philosophy of John Stuart Mill, which effectively justified the repression of Indian people in as much as they were uncivilized and beyond the pale of representative government and the rights of liberty (*WTC* 11–13). Invidious distinctions between us and them, higher and lower, European and non-European are written across the breadth of nineteenth-century European thought. Even a great liberal thinker such as Mill was unable to escape this kind of ethnic and racially dualistic thinking (*WTC* 13–14). Said's revision of Arnoldian cultural thought is also an effort to make good on the cosmopolitan ideal that Mill and Arnold shared. Although it should be said, parenthetically, that Arnold's cosmopolitanism, his concept of the world for purposes of defining the best, did not extend beyond Europe. Arnold's truncated view had much in common with the views of his peers, especially Ernest Renan:

> What gave writers like Renan and Arnold the right to generalities about race[28] was the official character of their formed cultural literacy. "Our" values were (let us say) liberal, humane, correct; they were supported by belles-lettres, informed scholarship, rational inquiry; as Europeans (and white men) "we" shared in them every time their virtues were extolled. Nevertheless, the human partnerships formed by reiterated cultural values excluded as much as they included. For every idea about "our" art spoken by Arnold, Ruskin, Mill, Newman, Carlyle, Renan, Gobineau, or Comte, another link in the chain binding "us" together was formed while another outsider was banished. Even if this is always the result of such rhetoric, wherever and whenever it occurs, we

must remember that for nineteenth-century Europe an imposing edifice of learning and culture was built, so to speak, in the face of actual outsiders (the colonies, the poor, the delinquent), whose role in the culture was to give definition to what they were constitutionally unsuited for. (*O* 227–228)

Arnold's idea of culture did not embrace Europe's Asian, African, or West Indian colonies. Nor is it clear that it included the English working class, given his lifelong ambivalence toward the "masses." The "ours and theirs" distinctions that Arnold and his peers drew were bolstered, according to Said, by the human sciences, social-Darwinism, and high cultural humanism. It is hard to know how "ours and theirs" distinctions can be avoided, even under the best of circumstances, and Said is no help in understanding how they might be. The following passage does succeed, however, in putting a finer point on what he thinks is at stake:

Most modern readers of Matthew Arnold's anguished poetry, or of his celebrated theory in praise of culture, do not also know that Arnold connected the "administrative massacre" ordered by Eyre with tough British policies toward colonial *Eire* and strongly approved both; *Culture and Anarchy* is set plumb in the middle of the Hyde Park Riots of 1867, and what Arnold had to say about culture was specifically believed to be a deterrent to rampant disorder – colonial, Irish, domestic. Jamaicans, Irishmen, and women, and some historians bring up these massacres at "inappropriate" moments, but most Anglo-American readers of Arnold remain oblivious, see them – if they look at them at all – as irrelevant to the more important cultural theory that Arnold appears to be promoting for all the ages. (*CAI* 130–131)

Said brings this train of thought to a head with the following:

The idea of culture itself, as Arnold refined it, is designed to elevate practice to the level of theory, to liberate ideological coercion against rebellious elements – at home and abroad – from the mundane and historical to the abstract and general. "The best that is thought and done" is considered an unassailable position, at home and abroad. (*CAI* 131)

Said fears the exclusionary power of culture, especially when wedded to the repressive power of the state. Under this description, culture constitutes a church–state in which the "others of culture" (colonized people, the poor, and delinquent) are grouped under the rubric of anarchy. In contemporary British and American scenarios, this means "blacks" and the underclass, or Palestinian "terrorists" and Islamic fundamentalists. They replace English working-class democrats, middle-class philistines, and aristocratic barbarians as the enemies of culture and vectors of anarchy. But Said's relation to Arnoldian cultural thought

is not as simple or unambiguous as this. For all his suspicion of high cultural humanism, Said remains a high cultural humanist. Like Arnold, he fears the vulgarity of popular culture, but there is an important difference. Where Arnold has an aestheticized fear of multileveled anarchy, Said fears the loss of the ideology-critical function of high culture. Arnold fears anarchy; Said fears conformity. Said's view conforms to that of the Frankfurt School theorists, especially Adorno, who regard a thoroughly commodified popular culture as depoliticized, if not in complicity with capital. The colonization of high culture ("the best that has been thought and said") by a market-driven popular culture and, consequently, the production of mass conformity, is what Said resists. If I were to draw a sketch of this resistance, it would have the broad outline of the "Frankfurt School" and its details would bear the stamp of Theodor Adorno.

Said describes his views as follows: "My cultural biases are on the whole tinged with conservatism, as the sheer weight in my text given over to the masterpieces of high modernism amply testifies" (*B* xiii). As outlandish as this claim might seem on first reading, especially given Said's well publicized involvement in leftist politics, he is a cultural conservative of sorts. I say "of sorts," because terms such as conservative tempt us to dredge-up associations and commitments that are wrong where Said is concerned. Anyway, if the left can be characterized in terms of a split between an older left that views politics in terms of the state and its ideology-producing institutions, and a newer left that views politics primarily in cultural and rhetorical terms, then Said sits skillfully if uncomfortably between the two. With respect to this newer left that is preoccupied with culture and the politics of difference, Said is a "conservative." He believes that there are "Arnoldian best-that-is-thought-or-said touchstones," and that we should give an account of how they are constructed, where they came from, and why they are authoritative (*ME* 60). It would be wrong to suggest that Said is uninterested in cultural politics and difference. His interest, however, is of a decidedly high-brow variety. Said wants to displace the Eurocentric canon by introducing non-European classics into the *agon* of humanistic discourse. But he otherwise appears committed to a fairly rigid distinction between high and low culture that is often associated, in a pejorative way, with modernism. Said is part of a long history of leftist intellectuals who wed a political and economic radicalism with a high-brow disdain for popular culture, especially its religious forms. As *Musical Elaborations* shows, Said cannot think critically about popular culture without reaching reflexively for his "Frankfurt School Reader."

BEYOND ARNOLD, THROUGH ADORNO

There are undoubtedly several ways of getting at Said's Marxist view of cultural critique as the criticism of transfigured religion. Perhaps none is more appropriate than his Gramscian gloss on Adorno's music theory. In "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," Adorno argues that there has been a decline in musical taste led by a thoroughly commodified popular music. Alluding to Marx's famous description of fetishism in *Capital*, Adorno argues that the exchange-value of music displaces its use-value, the worship of money displaces the appreciation of art. As in all forms of fetishism, the social character of a product is obscured, appearing as an alien, objective entity. Human subjectivity and creativity are externalized and objectified and become other, God. Human powers are misrecognized as divine power, which inhibits ideology-critique. Fetishized music inhibits ideology-critique in the same way that religion does. Thus the rebelliousness and subversiveness of precapitalist forms of music, under the regime of capital, have been domesticated and placed in the service of commercial success. Music is no longer a revolutionary and unruly attack on the cultural privileges of the ruling class, but has degenerated into a depoliticized "handmaiden" of consumerism. Depoliticization results from the vulgarization of art, from mindless repetition and irrelevant consumption.

Because musical works are "played again and again," they "wear out, like the Sistine Madonna in the bedroom." An interminable process of "climax and repetition" undermines our ability to see the whole. We lose, that is, any notion of totality, the ability as listeners to conceive of the whole, to think from part to whole and whole to part. The possibility for critique drops out, creating a critical void. In the place of this absent critique, music becomes a diversion, a consumption opportunity. The fetish character of music, its very *quid pro quo,* lies in the deceptive substitution of the use value of music, or the pleasure it provides, by the exchange value, or the monetary compensation that it brings. Because of this thorough incorporation into a market economy, there has been a decline in musical taste that even "responsible" and "serious" art like European classical music cannot escape. This, in turn, has led to a dangerous erosion of the line between serious and light music, and the loss of the utopian spirit and ideology-critical function of serious music.[29]

In this early elaboration of his "culture industry" thesis, Adorno claims that hand in hand with the fetishized character of music is a kind of commodity listening, in which it becomes difficult to separate listen-

ing from consumption. Fetishized listening has displaced serious musical appreciation and led to a "regression of listening," a degradation, to the point of infantilism and stupidity, of musical taste. Fetishized music blatantly decontextualizes and recontextualizes "reified bits and pieces," destroying the multileveled and complex unity of the work. The whole dissolves into "isolated popular passages." Adorno describes this phenomenon as regression or infantilism. These forms of hearing and listening exemplify if not expose the "neurotic stupidity," sickness, and stultification that fetishized music produces. The ultimate consequence of fetishized music is distraction, the inability to concentrate. "Deconcentration is the perceptual activity which prepares the way for the forgetting and sudden recognition of mass music." Adorno claims that standardized musical products, "hopelessly like one another," inhibit concentrated listening, which becomes unbearable to listeners no longer accustomed to such demands. "They cannot stand the strain of concentrated listening and surrender themselves resignedly to what befalls them, with which they can come to terms only if they do not listen to it too closely."[30]

Adorno's notion of "regression" has psychoanalytic overtones, which is not surprising given his attempt to marry Marx and Freud. Freud's notion of regression, especially in *Totem and Taboo*, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, and *Moses and Monotheism*, centers around the psychosexual development of the individual and the group. On this view, the developmental history of the individual organism (ontogeny), recapitulates the evolution of the species (phylogeny). The neurotic, as Freud observes "regularly presents to us a piece of psychic infantilism; he has either not been able to free himself from the childlike conditions of psycho-sexuality, or else he has returned to them."[31] Children, child races, savages, primitives, and neurotics, including religious people, share a common psychic structure. They are infantile because they have yet to mature or have regressed, religion being the prototypical form of regression. "Most of these infantile neuroses are overcome spontaneously in the course of growing up, and this is especially true of the obsessional neuroses of childhood." For those who do not outgrow such neuroses there is psychoanalytic treatment. Some childhood obsessions, however, persist into adulthood – religion, again, being the prime example. Freud concludes that "Religion would thus be the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity; like the obsessional neuroses of children, it arose out of the Oedipus complex, out of the relation to the father."[32]

This is not a thorough account of Freud's theory of religion, which

goes beyond my immediate purposes, but it is an account of infantilism, wish-fulfillment, and regression in the formation of culture. Adorno's "regression of listening" is homologous to Freud's notion of religion as regressive and infantile behavior. Commodity listening, a metonymy for popular culture, and religion are forms of fetishism. Both distract us from reality (the reality principle) through entertaining diversions (commodity fetishism) or wish-fulfillment. Both "get in the way" of the unmasking activities of science (the reality principle) or ideology-critique. In a late essay entitled "Culture Industry Reconsidered," Adorno recapitulates and elaborates this thesis. Operating from above, the "culture industry intentionally integrates its consumers," effaces the distinction between high and low art and makes the pursuit of cultural objects a function of the profit motive. The culture industry progressively erodes the relative autonomy of art and, as a result, its ideology-critical significance. Cultural objects become commodities entirely, as anything that might exceed or transcend the commodity function is eroded. What appears as new and progressive is merely the masquerade of the eternally same, the changing same, the profit motive. The culture industry is anti-enlightenment in its effects, thus, nature is subjected to progressive, technical domination, which produces mass deception, which fetters consciousness. The culture industry makes "autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves" much rarer.[33]

Adorno's famous essay, his music and esthetic theory as a whole, have influenced Said deeply. Exploring Said's view of music as an elaboration of civil society gives us a clear sense of just how subtle and sympathetic is his reading of European classical music, which can be transgressive of "domination and sovereignty," as compared to his notion of religion, whose cultural effects are disastrous. I do not want to leave the impression that Said follows Adorno without deviation. On the contrary, he proceeds by summarizing Adorno's position into three points from which he then takes his distance. First, he cites Adorno's claim that after Beethoven "music [by which both he and Adorno mean European classical music] veered off from the social realm into the aesthetic almost completely." Said approves of Adorno's claim for the ideology-critical function of modern music, but disapproves when Adorno locates that critical function in the autonomy of music "from the world of ordinary historical reality." Here he gives a Gramscian reading of Adorno, arguing "that music remains situated within the social context as a special variety of aesthetic and cultural experience that contributes to

what, following Gramsci, we might call the elaboration or production of civil society" (*ME* 12–13).

Curiously, on Said's interpretation, "elaboration equals maintenance." Something seems askew here and even mystified, for surely elaboration means more than the maintenance of the status quo. Is elaboration merely the effort by the ruling class to seduce, negotiate, and compel the assent of those whom they rule – is it, that is to say, hegemonic activity? Or are the efforts of the ruling class part of a larger contest between dominant and emergent forms of hegemony,[34] between those forms that one opposes and those that one supports? In this passage, Said appears to elide this important distinction. I cannot imagine that this is what he intends. Fortunately, he gives a fuller description of elaboration in "Reflections on American 'Left' Criticism." There he remarks on the apparently "contradictory but actually complementary" elements of elaboration, which perpetuate an existing world view and transfigure that world view through cultural forms that are themselves a "highly complex and quasi-autonomous extension of political reality" (*WTC* 170–171). I gloss this claim as follows: elaboration is a cultural contest through which society is maintained and transformed by completing social classes. Having said this, and reconnecting with the previous discussion, there is something disturbing about Said's Gramscianism. It should provide, one would think, a finer-tuned ear when it comes to the role of classical music in the contemporary West, especially in comparison to popular forms of music, but these are sounds that Said cannot hear. Thus Said can write the following:

> Music therefore quite literally fills a social space, and it does so by elaborating the ideas of authority and social hierarchy directly connected to a dominant establishment imagined as actually presiding over the work. The awe we feel in the Credo, for example, reinforces the separation between ruler and ruled, and this in turn is made to feel "right" in great outbursts of joy ("et resurrexit," and "hosanna"). (*ME* 64)

Here Said refers to the music of Bach. But is this example of elaboration as the maintenance of civil society truer, more effective, or more compelling than the revolutionary ambitions, with respect to civil society, that are clearly audible in Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit," Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddam," Bob Marley's "Them Belly Full (But We Hungry)," Stevie Wonder's "You Haven't Done Nothin," or the mighty anthem of the Civil Rights Movement, "We Shall Overcome"? I think not. Said's preference for elite cultural forms, therefore, does not

confirm Aijaz Ahmad's claim that he constructs a bourgeois Gramsci so much as gives license to those already disposed to read him that way.

Said's second point relates to the contrast between critics like Adorno for whom music is an important subject of analysis and the remarkable musical ignorance of contemporary intellectuals. We can attribute this musical ignorance to the fragmenting effects of modernism and the effects of the culture industry. This is closely related to the third point, which Said takes from his reading of Adorno, what he describes as Adorno's "quasi-neurotic insistence" on the "separate, almost mute, and formally nondiscursive character" of musical art. As Said translates this idea, musical performance is "an extreme occasion, something beyond the everyday, something irreducible and temporally not repeatable, something whose core is precisely what can be experienced only under relatively severe and unyielding conditions." Said does not disagree with Adorno's argument; rather, he supplements that argument by claiming that musical performance bridges the gap between its own practiced and cultivated autonomy and the social–cultural sphere (*ME* 15–18). Again, he uses Gramsci to slightly reconfigure Adorno's basic notion. In this way, he can have his Adornian autonomy and his Gramscian elaboration too. Music is simultaneously a product of the culture industry, resistance to the culture industry, and a progressive elaboration of civil society.

Said's subtle reading of classical music is especially evident in chapter 2 of *Musical Elaborations*, entitled "On the Transgressive Elements in Music." He begins this strange chapter with a stimulating discussion of the relations between politics and ethics, on the one hand, and esthetic and intellectual merit, on the other. Paul de Man's wartime activities, which became the subject of controversy in the 1980s, are his point of departure. How, he asks, should de Man's collaboration with the Nazi occupation during World War II affect the interpretation of his later work? Does it invalidate, contaminate, or otherwise make his work suspect? Or, to take an opposing position, are his collaborationist activities and his later work essentially unrelated, the product, ethically speaking, of two different people? How are we to judge in cases such as this? Said's short answer is that we should be suspicious of de Man's later work. His instincts are to argue for the connection between art, theory, and life but not for their identity. From European classical music and its various "complicities" and de Man's wartime activities, Said *segues* to a discussion of Wagner's music. Said follows Adorno in noting how Wagner's indisputable anti-Semitism is constitutive of his music and,

yet, he argues, its esthetic merit is unimpeachable. Wagner becomes the touchstone for his reading of European classical music as transgressive of culture and as in complicity with culture, even to the point of such abominations as Nazism. Wagner's music is a *Pharmakon*, both poison and cure. While constituted by its coarser realities, such as anti-Semitism, Wagner's music cannot be reduced to them. So, on this point, Said takes his distance from Adorno:

> All retrospective analyses, whether of music or of any other human activity, that judge, theorize, and totalize simultaneously, that say in effect that one thing (like music) = all things, or all musics = one big summarizing result = it couldn't have happened any other way, seem to me to be intellectually and historically flawed, for the same reason that the later work of Foucault, to whom in all sorts of ways I am very indebted, is flawed. (*ME* 49–50)

Besides what I take as an oblique reference to the flaws in *Orientalism*, Said accomplishes several things in this passage. It allows him to put distance between himself and Adorno and Foucault. With Adorno he can affirm the transgressive element in music (what Adorno calls its ideology-critical function) without accepting Adorno's claims for its worldly autonomy. He can explore the effects of the culture industry on European classical music while still arguing for its resistance, as compared to popular music, to the commodifying pressures of market forces. Said rejects Adorno's totalizing account and, with it, Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* and Foucault's account of Western modernity, which are equally cumulative and apocalyptic. This allows him to expose the Eurocentrism and imperialism of "theory," especially its extremely detailed articulation (or scholasticism), self-reflective self-centeredness (or ethnocentrism), fatalism, and esthetic pessimism. Said says that he does not intend to disparage thinkers such as Mann, Foucault, and Adorno

> whose pessimistic brilliance and genuine profundity have dignified so much of contemporary intellectual discourse. I am saying, however, that a secular attitude warns us to beware of transforming the complexities of a many-stranded history into one large figure, or of elevating particular moments or monuments into universals. No social system, no historical vision, no theoretical totalization, no matter how powerful, can exhaust all the alternatives or practices that exist within its domain. There is always the possibility to transgress. (*ME* 55)

On this account, Adorno's esthetic theory must be understood in reference to the encounter between the West and its various others. Essentialism, such as the notion of Western music, is a product of that encounter, an artifact of imperialism. Said's Adornian and post-Adornian notion of music is analogous to what he calls secular

transgression. Here secular has less to do with "irrevocable action against law or divinity" than with movement "from one domain to another, which tests and challenges limits, mixes the heterogeneous, cuts across expectations, provides unimaginable pleasures, discoveries, and experiences." He cites with approval Pierre Boulez' claim that Wagner's music refuses to carry the ideological message that its author intended. Wagner may be a vicious anti-Semite, but his music is more than that and cannot be reduced to his anti-Semitism (*ME* 55, 61).

Said rejects any "base-superstructure" account of the relation between Western classical music and society. Music, as his nuanced interpretation of Wagner attests, cannot be reduced to "coarse reality" because it not only mirrors but transcends social relations. Music's "transgressive element" is its nomadic quality, its ability to detach from and reattach to various social formations, to alter its rhetoric as the occasion demands. Furthermore, music has flexibility in respect to the gendered-power relations of which it is a part. On this account, Said feels justified in regarding Western classical music as a form of intellectual labor, as an "elaboration" of civil society (*ME* 70). But does not Said bring Adorno and Gramsci together in a peculiar, counterintuitive and, perhaps, impossible way? How is it that Said can rightfully see Western classical music as a form of elaboration, but is incapable of seeing popular cultural forms, especially music in the same light? What do Gramsci's notion of the "national popular," in which popular culture is a site of hegemonic struggle (a complex struggle between the ruling class and subordinate classes for power and influence), and Adorno's "culture industry" thesis have to do with each other? The answer lies in Said's bifocal perspective on culture. He provides a subtle reading of elite culture, which he sees, simultaneously, through Gramsci's populist lens and Adorno's aristocratic lens. In contrast, he loses his Gramscian perspective when viewing popular culture, where he thinks that an Adornian lens is both necessary and sufficient. On this view, popular culture is simply another manifestation of commodity fetishism, an analogue of Marx's "German ideology," whose arch form is religion. It is easy to picture Said writing of popular culture what Adorno did write: "Before the theological caprice of commodities, the consumers become temple slaves. Those who sacrifice themselves nowhere else can do so here, and here they are fully betrayed."[35]

Said's Adornian perspective seems excessively dour and pessimistic where ordinary people are concerned. Said and Adorno construe ordinary people as religious dupes, too easily seduced by the fetishism of

commodities, culture, and the state. They are too easily mystified by ideology; accordingly, they know Madonna, the "material girl," but have not a clue about who the Sistine Madonna is. What better evidence is there of their enslavement by the commodity-gods of the culture industry? I am more than a little wary of the celebration of popular culture in cultural studies, where the Gramscian industry has becomes as prominent, though not as lucrative, as the culture industry that Adorno criticized. Sometimes it resembles that industry. But we need not romanticize ordinary people to see critical potential in their everyday practices. Walt Whitman saw the potential and the warts. But Said is nearly blind to the potential that Whitman saw; he can only see the warts. His Adornian lenses are too thick or not thick enough. Thus the deficiencies of his antireligious rhetoric, which follows the deficiency of his sight – or his lack of insight. His ill-informed and banal use of antireligious rhetoric, though endemic to the academy, lacks the knowledge and intellectual seriousness of critics such Hume and Nietzsche. This uncritical and summary dismissal of what he dislikes as religious, reveals Said's hostility toward religious practices as a site of hegemonic struggle by subaltern classes (the ruled) against the ruling class. Religion is an important site of struggle. It is more important, I would say, than Western classical music for the elaboration of civil society and as a form of ideology-critique. Religious practices are popular sites of ideology-critique and for the elaboration of civil society. If we accord the same generosity in reading that cultural location that Said accords to Western classical music then perhaps we can see what Said does not. What I see are ordinary people making choices under circumstances they did not choose. These circumstances include religious practices shot through with ideological traces that both constrain and enable resistance to unjust social relations, which both trouble and comfort those with vested interests in maintaining those relations.

Interestingly, Said characterizes music and its social relations in a way that some characterize religion:

> To think of music and cultural exoticism in the mid to late nineteenth century (Verdi, Bizet, Wagner, Saint-Saëns, etc.) or of music and politics during the seventeenth and twentieth centuries (Monteverdi, Schoenberg, jazz, and rock culture) is therefore to map an ensemble of political and social involvements, affiliations, transgressions, none of which is easily reducible either to simple apartness or to a reflection of coarse reality. (*ME 41*)

Why does not Said display the same charity in his characterization of religion that he does in characterizing music, where he skillfully suspends

the latter between autonomy from social relations and the simple reflection of them? Is this the only way that he can protect his romantic–individualist interpretation of musical experience as solitude and affirmation from the charge of plagiarism – that is, from the charge that this notion of music borrows freely from common notions of religious experience and that his notion of musical experience is itself religious and theological? What does Said mean when, of Olivier Messiaen's music, he writes: "None of his music that I know fails to produce remarkable pleasures, admittedly local and not theological (for staunch secularists like myself) but always musical and intelligent" (*ME* 99)? Said appropriates religious and theological language of autonomy, privacy, solitude, and affirmation to describe musical experience while using antireligious language to distance what he affirms and baptizes as secular. Do I overinterpret Said here by eliding his distinction between Messiaen's religiousness and the secular pleasures that his music produces? Perhaps. Is this symptomatic of overinterpretations elsewhere? Perhaps. Still, I insist that Said's notion of musical experience sounds much like Friedrich Schleiermacher, William James, and Alfred North Whitehead's views of religious experience. Perhaps it is a displacement of these notions? How ironic if it is.

Culture is a negotiated enterprise a product of consent, accommodation, resistance, and transformation. Primary among these negotiated practices, as even Freud recognized, are religious traditions. Marx also recognized the "oppositional" intent of religious traditions, even if he finally concludes that they are distorted and disenabling. Ultimately, both saw religion as a defect – of psychosexual development or of the prevailing social relations – crying out for psychoanalytic treatment or revolutionary transformation. Neither Freud nor Marx was dialectical enough where religion is concerned. Why should we repeat their errors? Critics should give more attention to what people actually do with their religious traditions, to the diverse relationships that exist between those traditions and political opposition to oppressive social relations. More attention should be given to how religion and politics are articulated, how they actually fit together or do not fit together under specific historical conditions. On this point, Said's analysis seems particularly inadequate. To the extent that Said adds his voice to the reductive and undialectical chorus of antireligious nay-saying exemplified on the secular left by Marx, can he be seen as reiterating the quintessential modern cliché. But let me be clear: this nay-saying is not bad because it is modern but because it is cliché. Clichés put us to sleep and screen out

things that we might otherwise see. Let me conclude by saying that it is precisely on the question of religion and popular culture that Said's Adorno gets the best of his Gramsci. Religious life is just as incomprehensible to Said as Jazz is to Adorno. Here we enter Said's blind spot, which is the blind spot of all Foucauldian-derived cultural studies, and encounter the limits of his conceptual imagination. He sees religion through the language of Marx's *camera obscura* rather than, as with Western classical music, through Gramsci's language of hegemony, negotiation, and consent. Said *cannot* see religion in this light because its exclusion is the very premise of his idea of *Secular Criticism*. If Enlightenment modernity is predicated on a prejudice against prejudice as tradition, then religion is the archetypical form of prejudice. In this respect, Said is merely retelling an old tale, in which the criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism.