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The past decade has seen Eliot's reputation recede to its lowest ebb of the century. The postmodern attack on the pillars of modernism has managed at times to spare Virginia Woolf for her blurring of traditional gender roles, Joyce for his delight in sheer wordplay, and even, in critical tours de force, the unlikely pair of Pound and Lewis on the shaky basis of their disruptive styles.¹ Eliot, however, as the primary spokesman and symbol of that against which literary postmodernism has defined itself – modernist high culture – has been refused almost all amnesty. His claim to establish enduring criteria of value was, to pose the complaint in the language of these antagonists, a futile attempt to legitimate his narrative by reference to a metadiscourse.² Further, as one of the progenitors of the New Criticism, the primary theoretical whipping boy of deconstruction, he has been systematically indicted on the related charge of being a particularly unabashed advocate of “logocentrism.” Indeed, he seems at times to have been doubly annoying to such critics precisely because he is so obviously self-indicting. Deconstructive techniques are hardly necessary to lay bare the implications of lines such as these:

And the light shone in darkness and
 Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
 About the centre of the silent Word.
 (“Ash-Wednesday,” V)

Superbly confident in his blindness, he lacked even the glimmer of insight that might have led him to encode his epistemological bad faith.

The case against an elitist, absolutist Eliot has been carried on most recently in the name of a multiculturalism that takes issue sharply with him as the chief modern apologist for a hereditary canon of Western literary classics. A growing cultural diversity in England and even

more obviously in the United States, coupled with the perceived need to amplify the voices of long-standing marginalized groups, made Eliot's insistence on the tradition seem an obvious exercise in oppression. No one seemed to remember or, if they remembered, to care that Eliot had immersed himself in Buddhist literature and philosophy during his Harvard years: he learned Sanscrit, read the sacred writings of the Buddhists, worked his way through the philosophy with James Haughton Woods, and took a final year-long course from Masaharu Anesaki. As it turned out, it was a cultural diffidence rather than a cultural disdain that caused him in the end to leave Buddhism for less exotic studies: he came to realize that as an outsider he could never know in his bones what it felt like to be a Buddhist. Moreover, even the most cursory glance at Eliot's appraisal of the English canon reveals that he was aggressively revisionary. The Romantics were radically devalued; Dryden was advanced at the expense of Milton; Donne and the Metaphysicals were given a sudden centrality; *Hamlet*, arguably the most indisputable of canonized texts in the English tradition, was criticized for failing to provide an "objective correlative" of Hamlet's grief: Shakespeare, unable to cope with his material, had overreached himself. While it is true that Eliot pushed this version of the canon with insistence – at his worst with an arrogant high-handedness – the complaint that he was the provincial and rigid champion of a received body of wisdom is essentially groundless.

The one merit of these cases against Eliot, misguided and overstated as they often are, is that they at least are open to the idea that extraliterary concerns might have shaped his work in ways generally unacknowledged previously. Typically, almost all attempts to place the work of Eliot in a larger intellectual context have looked to the poetic tradition. In his immediate past, affinities are found with Laforgue, Baudelaire, and various other French symbolists; earlier, with the Metaphysicals, whom he revived, or with Dante, whom he regarded as Christian Europe's culmination. His critical writings are taken to be epiphenomenal of the poetry (Eliot himself, late in life, said they were no more than this), colored perhaps by his ambivalent relationship to Matthew Arnold's essays on poetry and culture. But such studies, even when valuable, as they often are, tend to obscure what I perceive to be the thoroughgoing nature of Eliot's political commitment.

Simply put, it seems to me that from beginning to end, Eliot's work, including both the poetry and the prose, was shaped by a

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political vision inherited from French reactionary thinkers, especially from Charles Maurras. Even in the few excellent studies that deal with the political dimension of Eliot, his profound indebtedness to this larger tradition is given little more than passing notice, and certainly not presented as the major force in his intellectual life.³ The failure of most other scholarship to acknowledge the centrality of Eliot's political agenda is not surprising since Eliot himself tended to camouflage it prior to his famous pronouncement of 1928 in which he declared himself to be a "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion" (if we substitute Catholic for Anglo-Catholic, this is a verbatim echo, *fifteen* years later, of the *Nouvelle Revue Française's* accurate description of Maurras's beliefs) and even afterward was less than straightforward about its dominating influence on his thought. Before 1928 he tended to portray himself as one dedicated to a poetic revolution; after 1928, as one dedicated to a religious restoration.

The cultural engineering implied by all this moves us toward the "ideology" of my title. Dauntingly, the term itself has been used in such a wide variety of frequently incompatible ways over its nearly two-century history that one of the most valuable recent studies of the subject has despairingly described the dissensus as "a dialogue of the deaf."⁴ While it would seem therefore to be virtually impossible to establish any definition that could pretend to encompass this range of usage, it should nonetheless be possible to at least identify the major axes of the debate and with care to locate a position in relation to them.

Let me then try to establish one such axis by contrasting the classic account of Marx with that of Karl Mannheim. According to Marx's well-known conception, ideology consists of mutually supporting ideas and beliefs that, though derived from a contingent set of economic conditions, nonetheless present themselves "as the only rational, universally valid ones."⁵ Ideology in this sense serves as the tool of the ruling class to legitimize the arrangements from which it derives its privilege, and thus for Marx is an instrument of power in the interest of the oppressor. So powerful, in fact, is the seductive nature of ideology that according to an 1893 letter of Engels to Mehring, it takes in even its creators:

Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, it is true, but with false consciousness. The real motive forces impelling him remain unknown to him; otherwise it

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would simply not be an ideological process. Hence he imagines false or seeming motive forces. Because it is a process of thought he derives its form as well as its content from pure thought, either his own or that of his predecessors.⁶

This false consciousness involves self-delusion in a double sense: in addition to being unaware of their own motivations, the ideologues are ultimately deluded about the march of history, that essential truth that Marx and Engels claimed to know with certainty. On this view, then, ideology is a collective mystification that Marx's scientific analysis seeks to expose.

The Marxist historicizing of ideas provided a starting point for Mannheim in his landmark contribution to the literature of ideology, *Ideology and Utopia* (1929). While openly acknowledging his debt, Mannheim nevertheless took issue with Marx's notion of ideology at what had always been its most vulnerable point: the difficulty in demonstrating how Marx's own theory had attained an Olympian status above the march of history. Pointing to the undeniable fact that Marxism itself had evolved since the master's death, Mannheim – in a move perhaps itself inevitable – historicized the historicizer in claiming that Marx's insights were themselves as much a product of social conditions as those he criticized. Mannheim concludes, consistent with this observation, that there are *no* objective values, merely norms accepted and abandoned by succeeding societies: "There is, then, no norm which can lay claim to formal validity and which can be abstracted as a constant universal formal element from its historically changing content."⁷ The resultant study of ideology, which Mannheim refers to as "the sociology of knowledge," endeavors "to understand the narrowness of each individual point of view and the interplay between these distinctive attitudes in the whole social process."⁸ Mannheim thus abandons the Marxist criterion of truth; instead he speaks of ideas in terms of their congruity with the existing social order.⁹

Although Mannheim's position avoids both the logical problem that shadowed Marx's account and also the Manichaean rigidity that often characterized its practical application, he cannot free himself from the thoroughgoing relativism implicit in his absorption of philosophy in sociology. He finds himself ultimately trapped in what Clifford Geertz has called "Mannheim's Paradox": he would speak from the objective perspective of the scientist while denying that such a perspective is available.¹⁰ Aware of the problem, Mannheim

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tried to rescue his stance by labeling it “relationism,” but this was essentially a distinction without a difference.

In the wake of poststructuralism with its fundamental aversion to referential theories of truth, the bulk of recent ideological readings of literature have adopted versions of Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge – and have been burdened with the attendant “paradox.” It is difficult to see, for example, how one can simultaneously subscribe to an ethical and epistemological relativism and still vent moral outrage on those who have discriminated on the basis of race, gender, or class. And, of course, the converse – moral approbation – is equally inappropriate. In this regard even as scrupulous and fair-minded a critic of literature in terms of its ideology as Sacvan Bercovitch cannot completely disentangle himself from Mannheim’s dilemma. On the one hand, he acknowledges the necessary partiality of his own view:

And lest I seem to have exempted myself from that [ideological] process, I would like to declare the principles of my own ideological dependence. I hold these truths to be self-evident: that there is no escape from ideology; that so long as human beings remain political animals they will always be bounded in some degree by consensus; and that so long as they are symbol-making animals they will always seek in some way to persuade themselves (and others) that *their* symbology is the last, best hope of mankind.¹¹

But, on the other hand, a few pages later he invokes transhistorical values in praising Whitman and Emerson: “What they did see, when they plumbed the emotional and conceptual ground of the rhetoric, was profound, humane, and exhilarating, a set of beliefs and promises which may rank among the most liberating, most energizing ideas produced by any culture, past or present.”¹² In the end, though, to label the problem “Mannheim’s Paradox” is to suggest a false novelty, for it is really just an instance of the age-old problem of maintaining a coherent relativism, something revealed at least as early as Plato’s dismantling of the Protagorean doctrine in the *Theaetetus*.

But even if one is to move toward a middle ground, away from the extreme positions of Marx and Mannheim, and hold open the possibility of attaining to significant truths without insisting that one is irrefragably in possession of them, the situation does not substantially improve. It requires only the reflection of an instant to ascer-

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tain that anything that might tentatively qualify as ideology must be made up of assertions some of which are true, some of which are false. We might reasonably enough claim that the more false claims an ideology makes, the more likely it is to be pernicious, but this does not help us with a basic definition. This being the case, it seems best to abandon the criterion of truth as something that will offer much help in identifying ideology. When I speak, then, of Eliot's ideology, I am making no claim about the truth or falsity of the positions he holds nor am I claiming that he was deluded because he might have considered them true.

Mention of delusion returns us to the notion of "false consciousness," which entailed, besides a misreading of historical reality, a blindness to personal motivation on the part of those who profited from and propagated an ideology. Marx and Engels, however, don't always faithfully adhere to this view of "false consciousness." At times they imply something more like a conscious conspiracy on the part of the ruling class, and this confusion in their own position about the degree of awareness in the ideologues themselves establishes the points along which stretch the second major axis in the debate over ideology.¹³ The line of debate here may appear partly obliterated since it seems safe to say that among contemporary sophisticated Marxists, few feel comfortable with the starkness of the position that Engels enunciates.¹⁴ Born in the attempt to sort out historical materialism from the *freischwebend* consciousness of German idealism, an idealism that according to Marx and Engels legitimated in turn the false bourgeois glorification of autonomous individualism, their case is driven toward the opposite extreme: an automatism in which ideas are "reflexes" of the material conditions of life.¹⁵

Yet a variety of this position enjoys much currency in the less rigid form of Foucault's theory of discourse. Owing as much to a reading of Nietzsche as to Marx, Foucault posits, as is widely known, a web of cultural practices that enmesh all who live within it as it empowers or marginalizes behavior and shapes consciousness accordingly. So helpless is the individual in the toils of discourse that Foucault – how rhetorically is not always easy to determine – announces "the death of man," the demise of the self. But the problem that bedeviled Mannheim returns to haunt Foucault. How can an "archaeologist" of culture as Foucault fashions himself pretend to the scientific analysis this term would suggest while simultaneously relativizing all knowledge. Further, his work is shot through with a tone of moral disapproval, but if there are no freely choosing selves, who are the

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objects of his implied censure or the moral agents who might bring about change? Neither Foucault nor those who adopted his concept of discourse have provided satisfactory answers.

At the opposite extreme we can place Lenin, who regarded ideology as a weapon of manipulation in class warfare, the more consciously used the better. And because he was willing to consider the proletarian agenda an ideology (albeit in the service of historical truth), he openly admitted to wielding it to advantage himself. With this in mind, he labeled the Communist Party “the conscious avant-garde.”

Now although one would certainly not want to link Eliot with Lenin in almost any other regard, they do both share this belief in the ability of a highly conscious elite to shape a culture for the masses. Moreover, they have a common source in Georges Sorel, who, much like Ernst Jünger in Germany, showed the strange ability to appeal to both the left and right.¹⁶ Equally impatient with the decadence of modern society and timeserving politicians who did no more than pander and tinker, Sorel called for a cleansing revolution that would bring about a new “way of life.” In his most influential work, *Reflections on Violence* (1908), a book read by both Lenin and Eliot, Sorel insisted that this apocalyptic vision could be realized only if the masses could be galvanized with “myths.” These myths are symbolic representations of deeply felt needs to change the world: “The myths are not descriptions of things, but expressions of a determination to act.”¹⁷ Emotionally self-referential, they are thus impervious to external falsification. This characteristic in combination with a myth’s profound – and primarily irrational – ability to unite and mobilize a community of believers allows Sorel to compare modern revolutionary myths with religion.

Eliot’s attention was directed to Sorel, most likely by T. E. Hulme, who translated *Reflections* in 1916 and provided an introductory essay in which he lauded Sorel’s distaste for liberal optimism as evidence in support of his own obsession with Original Sin, the metaphysical basis for his – and with his help, Eliot’s – classicism.¹⁸ Eliot reviewed Hulme’s translation, and ten years later when he supplied the readers of the *Criterion* with six essential texts of the modern classical mind, he listed, along with works by Maurras and others, Sorel’s *Reflections* and the posthumously gathered writings of Hulme, *Speculations*, which includes the essay on Sorel.¹⁹

While rejecting Sorel’s call to violence (and here is where Eliot and Lenin part company radically), Eliot is obviously much im-

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pressed with Sorel's conception of myth as an indispensable tool for the renewal of a society. Following Sorel's lead, he typically refers to communism in the pages of the *Criterion* as a masterfully crafted naturalistic myth and underlines the need for those on the right to create a powerful countermyth.²⁰ And it is in these terms that Eliot thinks of his own project: a classical, later Christian, revival. Where he differs importantly from Sorel, however, showing in this respect a greater debt to the French reactionary tradition, is in the conviction that his myth is based on the natural order of things. The dimly articulate feelings of the mass respond to the myth, but for Eliot and the right they cannot be its source or justification. Not only, then, will the myth be shaped from above, but as he learns from Maurras especially, this inevitably entails certain concealments and displacements. It is, then, as a conscious manipulator of myth taken in its politicized Sorelian sense that I consider Eliot an ideologue, a working definition that has at the very least the advantage of growing out of Eliot's own understanding of what he was doing.

With this definition in mind, a brief overview of Eliot's ideological commitment would run as follows. As a young man he adopts from Charles Maurras and the long tradition of French reactionary thought an advocacy of "classicism." This term, in France, embraced the whole range of antagonisms to the Revolution of 1789 and was commonly understood to do so. It aligned one against romanticism (believed to be the spiritual sickness that spawned the Revolution), democracy, and Protestantism. This opposition was organized in behalf of the Latin tradition in literature, as well as royalism, Catholicism, and a rigidly hierarchical social organization culminating in hereditary aristocracy. In Maurras's version this was colored by suspicion of the Teuton and hostility toward the Jew, the first only marginally participating in Latin culture, the second parasitic upon it. Maurras articulated this position eloquently and ushered it into the new century in a copious outpouring of books, articles, and pamphlets on a range of topics: literary criticism, political theory, religion, economics, and comparative culture. What I propose to argue is that the Maurrasien inheritance provided Eliot with a dominant intellectual framework that he retained throughout his life. This is not to say that no change occurred over a career that spanned half a century; after Maurras's condemnation by the Vatican in 1926, Eliot worked feverishly to realign the component parts of this ideology, subordinating everything to religion. But as he wrote to Paul Elmer More in 1936, "I am very happy you like the essay on Religion

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and Literature . . . I think that what appears to another person to be a change of attitude and even a recantation of former views must often appear to the author himself rather as part of a continuous and more or less consistent development.”²¹ It is this continuity in Eliot’s thought that I will be stressing.

What is constant, too, is that the political dimension that was the focal point of the Maurrasien compound is advanced almost always *sub rosa* in Eliot. Early in his career Eliot presented classicism to an English audience as nearly exclusively a literary preference, something easy enough to do given general ignorance of the term’s full implication in France. His unwillingness to be more open was due in large part to the fact that he himself – a more scrupulous thinker than Maurras in general – was unsure exactly how the politics, religion, and literature necessarily entailed one another. This difficulty was exacerbated by the fact that he was trying to impose classicism on a traditionally Protestant country (a problem registered in his later reference to Anglicanism as Anglo-Catholicism). Immediately upon the Vatican’s condemnation of Maurras for valuing Catholicism primarily for its political function, Eliot began taking religious instruction in the Anglican faith and was accepted into the communion the following year. Thereafter, though he fought the same antagonists, he engaged them in the name of the Christian commonwealth. Politics led Eliot to religion but he rarely acknowledged the political element that constituted a central part of what he understood – and in his writings intended – by his religion.

The main purpose of my book is not, however, to indict Eliot on the charge of being an ideologue, but to show how that ideology shaped his literary essays, his writing on culture and society, and his poetry and drama. With regard to the poetry and drama this will yield readings that shift the focal point of works such as *The Waste Land*, *Four Quartets*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, and *The Cocktail Party*. Because the connecting link among his various works, both prose and poetry, is ideological – hence obscured – this unity, extending over time and subject matter, has gone almost totally unremarked. The problem of detecting this ideology in the generations he so deeply influenced is even greater, for typically his admirers embraced his work in the terms offered. It is an awfully long jump, for example, from Wimsatt’s essay “The Affective Fallacy” back to the French counterrevolutionary animus against the Romantic cult of personality personified in the individualism and emotionalism of the demonized Rousseau. Yet it is this sort of connection that I believe

to be essential and will be endeavoring to draw in discussing Eliot's impress on the twentieth century.

Thus, although I have learned a great deal from such excellent recent studies of Eliot and modernism as Michael Levenson's *A Genealogy of Modernism*, Sanford Schwartz's *The Matrix of Modernism*, Louis Menand's *Discovering Modernism*, and James Longenbach's *Modernist Poetics of History*, it is with the more specifically political treatment of Eliot that I would place my own work. The line of such scholarship begins with John Harrison's roughly sketched *The Reactionaries* (1967), reaches a much higher level of sophistication in William Chace's *The Political Identities of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot*, and builds successfully on Chace's work in Michael North's *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound*. This last especially, in its placing of Eliot in a broader European perspective, I have found most congenial to what I have attempted to do. Profitable, too, have been Jeffrey Herf's *Reactionary Modernism* (1984) and Russell Berman's *The Rise of the Modern German Novel* (1986), both of which, though they deal with German modernism, have taught me to see ways in which politics intersects with literary culture.

Chapter 1 of my book traces the evolution of French reactionary thought from Joseph de Maistre up to Charles Maurras. Chapter 2 follows Eliot from his contact with these ideas up through the early years of his editorship of the *Criterion* and the writing of *The Waste Land* to the time of Maurras's condemnation and his own conversion. The attempt to recast the classicism-romanticism debate in religious terms – orthodoxy versus heresy – is the subject of Chapter 3. Chapter 4 deals with Eliot's attempt to project a new society based on his ideology, seen most clearly in *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. The *Four Quartets* I treat as a companion piece, the poetic expression of Eliot's highly politicized religious vision. In Chapter 5 I move to the end of Eliot's career, first dealing with the chilling play *The Cocktail Party*, Eliot's major attempt to reach a mass audience with his notion of a Christian order; I then look at the late essays, reading them as attempts to downplay any evidence of a political element in his corpus as he fashions a view of himself for posterity as poet and man of God. Chapter 6 is devoted to the emergence of the New Criticism and what it owes to Eliot's ideology in terms of literary history and theory.