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THE SOCIAL CRITICISM OF T. S. ELIOT: CONSERVATIVE, CLASSICIST, CATHOLIC, AND EUROPEAN

DPHIL IN HISTORY

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DEDICATED TO PETER AND JOANNE,
WHO NEVER STOPPED LOVING,
NEVER STOPPED PRAYING,
NEVER STOPPED PAYING.

AND TO MY BELOVED WIFE, SARA,
THE ORIGINAL DR HUNT.

WITH THANKS TO GOD.

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SHORT ABSTRACT

This DPhil Thesis provides the first systematic and academic study of T.S. Eliot's social criticism since the publication of Roger Kojecký's 1972 landmark study, *T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism*. It provides a comprehensive portrait of T.S. Eliot as a social critic, connecting the political, social, cultural, and religious strains of his thought, while accurately placing him as a thinker within his political, social, cultural, and religious contexts. It challenges many of the prevailing scholarly representations of his work: namely the over-identification of his social criticism with his later or 'mature' works (such as *The Idea of a Christianity Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*) and the misidentification of them as the direct product of his participation in The Moot discussion group. By contrast, this thesis relocates the primary nexus of Eliot's social criticism within the influential period of his *Criterion* editorship, and constructs alternative classifications, chronologies, and genealogies regarding his content and influences. This thesis also disproves many of the false claims and insinuations made about his work, such as its supposedly anti-Semitic and anti-democratic tendencies. What emerges from our comprehensive review is a social criticism animated and dominated by Catholic social thought, conservative anti-statism (tied to a tory respect for 'Church and state'), classicist-inspired moral and literary standards, and a Eurocentric concern for the cultural and political inheritance of Christendom. To that end the thesis is divided into three chapters with the first providing a biographical study of Eliot as a social critic; the second examining the content of his social criticism during the *Criterion* period; and the last clarifying the relationship between his later works and The Moot discussion group.

LONG ABSTRACT

This DPhil Thesis provides the first systematic and academic study of T.S. Eliot's social criticism since the publication of Roger Kojecký's 1972 landmark study, *T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism*. It provides a comprehensive portrait of T.S. Eliot as a social critic, connecting the political, social, cultural, and religious strains of his thought, while accurately placing him as a thinker within his political, social, cultural, and religious contexts. It challenges many of the prevailing scholarly representations of his work: namely the over-identification of his social criticism with his later or 'mature' works (such as *The Idea of a Christianity Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*) and the misidentification of them as the direct product of his participation in The Moot discussion group. By contrast, this thesis relocates the primary nexus of Eliot's social criticism within the influential period of his *Criterion* editorship, and constructs alternative classifications, chronologies, and genealogies regarding his content and influences. This thesis also disproves many of the false claims and insinuations made about his work, such as its supposedly anti-Semitic and anti-democratic tendencies. What emerges from our comprehensive review is a social criticism animated and dominated by Catholic social thought, conservative anti-statism (tied to a tory respect for 'Church and state'), classicist-inspired moral and literary standards, and a Eurocentric concern for the cultural and political inheritance of Christendom. To that end the thesis is divided into three chapters with the first providing a biographical study of Eliot as a social critic; the second examining the content of his social criticism during the *Criterion* period; and the last clarifying the relationship between his later works and The Moot discussion group. Below is a more detailed exposition of the content in each of the chapters.

I. CHAPTER ONE

The first chapter provides an introduction and overview to T.S. Eliot's life and career as a social critic. It places the critic within his own historical context, charting his rise from an obscure philosophy student to one of the leading British intellectual voices of the mid-twentieth century. It assists readers with situating Eliot's social criticism alongside his other literary and cultural accomplishments, contextualising the subsequent chapters which explore the actual ideas and themes that characterize Eliot's social criticism. From this chapter the argument is first introduced that Eliot's ideas were animated by his identification with and participation in various classicist, conservative, Catholic, and European networks and traditions.

It outlines the social, professional, and intellectual milieus in which Eliot operated, providing us with a better portrait of the networks and circles that helped comprise public intellectual life in Britain during the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. It also broaches questions of chronology and characterisation, disputing certain biographical and historiographical claims made about Eliot in the secondary literature. Among these are Stefan Collini's treatment and periodisation of Eliot's career as a social critic; unwarranted associations with the conservatism of Russell Kirk, Christopher Dawson, and Charles Maurras (with more on Maurras in the next chapter); along with derogatory comparisons of Eliot's social criticism in relation to his other modernist contemporaries. In so doing, this chapter builds the foundation for a new and more accurate intellectual biography of Eliot as a social critic. It likewise provides the necessary biographical groundwork to enable us to eventually place Eliot's social criticism and Eliot as a social critic within their proper historical

context and intellectual genealogy, and to respond to and engage with scholarly views about his criticism.

II. CHAPTER TWO

In this chapter we explore the interwar decades of the 1920s and 30s, which were the most formative and productive period for T.S. Eliot as a social critic. In these years the output of his prose significantly eclipsed that of his poetry, as his attention turned increasingly (but not entirely) from creative composition to religious, cultural, political, and related themes (regarded collectively as his social criticism). Likewise, the topics he investigated and the conclusions he reached would later manifest themselves as central components of his later social criticism, namely in the works *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948). In that sense, the original and central locus for Eliot's social criticism lies not in The Moot, a discussion group he is associated with that met from 1938 to 1947, but instead from 1922 to 1939 as the founding editor of his influential literary magazine, *The Criterion.* This claim is central to understanding the formation and intention of Eliot's overall social criticism, and its importance shall be explored in a subsequent chapter.

More specifically, this chapter provides biographical and chronological information that contextualises the magazine's history and Eliot's role as its editor. It explores the concepts and issues that Eliot engaged with as a social critic and engages with various perspectives taken by historians and critics from the secondary literature. This chapter shall advance the claim that Eliot conducted his social criticism primarily as a public moralist, and that his thought can be categorized in both its inspiration and outlook as broadly classicist, conservative, Catholic, and continental/European. It positions Eliot within a mainstream

tradition of intellectual thought contiguous with contemporary political, cultural, and religious issues—a claim that runs contrary to critics who characterize Eliot's ideas as esoteric and isolated from the main currents of interwar thought and culture. Furthermore, by re-establishing *The Criterion* as the original nexus for Eliot's social criticism, a magazine that commanded considerable respect and influence, the audience and perceived impact of his work can be properly contextualised to an extent that goes underappreciated when exclusively considering *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture.*

The general outline of this chapter is divided between an analysis of Eliot as a social critic and a review of his social criticism. Those sections that focus on Eliot as a critic examine his various guises as a man of letters, Christian social philosopher, and public moralist. They also provide some historical perspective on the political, cultural, and religious context in which Eliot was operating as a social critic. The next sections of the chapter investigate the scope of his social criticism, and thematically categorize his criticism as classicist, conservative, Catholic, and European. This part of the chapter also reviews the content of Eliot's criticism in relation to his predominant areas of editorial comment: romanticism and liberalism, economics, psychology, political theory, Charles Maurras, decline, and Church and state. The final section of this chapter provides a retrospective review of noteworthy criticisms from secondary literature and finishes with a general conclusion.

Topics that fall outside the scope of this chapter include Eliot's literary criticism, poetry, and drama. Nor does this chapter attempt to review the contributions made by others to *The Criterion.* Eliot's participation in The Moot and his later works of criticism will appear in the next chapter.

III. CHAPTER THREE

Having established the centrality of *The Criterion* to T.S. Eliot's criticism and surveyed the core components of his social criticism from that era, this final chapter addresses the last and supposedly 'mature' stage of his work and challenges prevailing scholarly views about the nature and extent of Eliot's relationship with The Moot discussion group. It explores and outlines both the *Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, establishing the thematic and conceptual continuities existing between his earlier and later criticism, which has previously been missed or undeveloped in Eliot studies.

This chapter argues that Eliot's later work is not 'mature' or even separate from his earlier criticism, but instead represents a continuation from his earlier and larger body of work. To substantiate these claims this chapter details both the continuing classicist, conservative, continental, and Catholic nature of his criticism, while also deconstructing the role and influence of The Moot discussion group in relation to the *Idea* and *Notes*. This contests previous scholarly views which regard Eliot's relationship with The Moot as inherently positive, generative, and cordial. This chapter develops an alternative thesis regarding Eliot and The Moot, revealing it as far more temporally limited, temperamentally combative, and less influential than previously surmised. The outcome of these arguments is a unique and new treatment of Eliot's later social criticism, reorienting his work away from the marginal confines of The Moot and placing it back within the mainstream of mid-century British political, cultural, and religious thought. Furthermore, it brings to completion the first systematic, intellectual biography of T.S.

Eliot as a social critic in fifty years: engaging with half-a-century's worth of scholarly critiques and hopefully bringing his social criticism before a new audience.

INTRODUCTION

'Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires,

Old fires to ashes, and ashes to earth.'

~T.S. Eliot, *East Coker*

The poetry of T.S. Eliot remains, at present, in-print and relatively popular, but his prose—particularly his 1920s-40s social criticism on political, cultural, economic, and religious matters—is viewed with suspicion, disapproval and even denunciation by some literary scholars and academics.[1] As Peter Scott has written, 'Few of those who admire Eliot have done so for his social and political criticism…. [Sometimes] they are simply unread, or seen as gratuitously problematic, and a hindrance to the survival of Eliot's reputation.'[2] Some have even accused Eliot (and/or his social criticism) of anti-Semitism and proto-fascism—to say nothing of the fact that he was white, male, and privileged. There are others, however, who would disagree, not merely with the merits of such claims, but with the failure of many in their field to understand his work within its historical context. Likewise, in our current climate of toppling statues and cancelling speakers, when yesterday's icons all too easily attract today's iconoclasm, the need for serious and rigorous historical research into such matters becomes even more important, not merely because Eliot's literary import and cultural impact warrant considered assessment, but also as a point of historical principle, to ensure that academic rigour is applied on both sides of a debate.

[1] S. Collini, 'The European Modernist as Anglican Moralist: The Later Social Criticism of T.S. Eliot', in M.S. Micale and R.L. Dietle (eds.), *Enlightenment, Passion, Modernity: Historical Essays in European Thought and Culture* (Stanford, 2000), 208.

[2] P. Scott, 'The social critic and his discontents,' in *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot*, ed. David Moody (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 60-75.

The purpose of this thesis is not to argue that Eliot's social criticism was correct, but to correctly understand it: both the critic and his criticism, in themselves and in relation to mid-twentieth century thought and culture, as well as engaging with the secondary literature surrounding his criticism. As Jeroen Vanheste has observed, 'Eliot research has become politicised, mainly focusing on social, political and ideological issues...'[3] The fact that such a systematic review has not been undertaken in the past fifty years, especially as Eliot studies fractures along politicised lines, speaks to its present need. Furthermore, since then new and substantial archival and epistolatory materials have become available, including more of his colossal correspondence and The Moot Papers. Fortunately, intellectual historians are well equipped to investigate matters of authorship and audience, texts and contexts, ideas and ideologies—revealing in the process new insights into the nature and nuances of a fascinating era, spanning both the Interwar and Second World War periods. Indeed, it is an era that has itself become more politicised during and after Brexit: coloured as it often is by retrospective and reductionist fixations about Britain's finest hour and island glory. But as we shall see in the chapters to come, there is more to this period than meets the public eye: animated as it was by porous intellectual networks and interconnected clusters that were drawn from both left and right, traditional and modernising, religious and nonreligious, British and European.

The research for this work has revolved around several questions and themes. The first and perhaps most important question has been one of characterisation: in responding to claims that Eliot's social criticism was inherently authoritarian, proto-fascist, theocratic, anti-Semitic, or anti-democratic, I have sought to define and categorize the precise nature and origin of his ideas. From this I have developed the argument that Eliot's social

[3] J. Vanheste, *Guardians of the Humanist Legacy: The Classicism of T.S. Eliot's Criterion Network and Its Relevance to Our Postmodern World* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 5.

criticism can be divided into four distinct and continuous themes, namely conservativism, classicism, continentalism/Europeanism, and Catholicism.* A portion of this thesis is therefore dedicated to substantiating these thematic characterisations, charting their influences, origins, and arguments. To do so has required a complete survey of Eliot's social criticism, from *The Criterion* magazine beginning in the 1920s, to the conclusion of his career as a social critic after his 1948 *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture.* It has likewise been necessary to determine an appropriate timeframe for my inquiry, not merely covering Eliot's active years as a social critic, but those years and stages most applicable to the development of his work, including his post-graduate education, along with some commentary on his post-criticism years.

An additional question has surrounded periodisation. As most scholars focus exclusively on what is referred to as Eliot's 'mature' social criticism—*The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948)—which are typically treated in tandem with (or reference to) The Moot discussion group**, it is essential to explore whether this period represents the totality (or even the primacy) of his social criticism or not. In exploring this question this thesis has developed an alternative and unique hypothesis, which not merely includes the *Criterion* period (1922-39) but contends that it comprises the most important period of Eliot's social criticism. This is not just because it first established and elucidated every major component of his criticism, but also because his social criticism was central to his editorship of the *Criterion*, which was itself an essential component in his rise to becoming a prominent intellectual figure during the

* Catholicism is not used synonymously with Roman Catholicism in this work, but instead is recognized as a conscious term of theological identification employed by certain subsets within Anglo-Catholicism, including by Eliot. The implications and nuances of using this term to describe Eliot's social criticism will be explored.

** The Moot was an interdisciplinary, largely Protestant discussion group chaired by J.H. Oldham. It met routinely from the late 1930s to the mid 1940s to discuss, among other things, the relationship between religion, society, modernity, and the state. Members included T.S. Eliot and the sociologist Karl Mannheim.

Interwar period and beyond. As such, the idea of there being a 'mature' period in Eliot's social criticism—especially one over-identified with the comparatively peripheral Moot discussion group—is displaced in favour of a more expansive and heterogenous periodization of his work, intertwining it with both Britain's establishment milieu and a much broader national audience than in Moot-centric treatments.

In researching questions of characterisation and periodisation, questions about influence and affiliation have also arisen. In Eliot's case, it has been necessary to explore what exactly 'influence' entails, and the extent to which being influenced by an idea (or an intellectual) implicates his own ideas and intellectual legacy. This is necessary in detailing and disentangling some of the claims made about Eliot's ideas regarding anti-Semitism, pro-authoritarianism, and being anti-democratic. For instance, both Ezra Pound and Charles Maurras undoubtedly influenced Eliot's own life and thought, and both were either fascist or fascists-of-a-kind. But does this (as it is often argued) implicate Eliot as a fascist or a fascist-sympathiser? To what extent does being inspired by a fascist (or more accurately inspired by certain non-fascist aspects of a fascist's life and thought) associate one person with the other?

In a similar manner, this thesis questions the extent to which The Moot discussion group and its members can be said to have influenced Eliot (as is near-universally argued), when it is clear from private correspondence that he increasingly held the group and its members in low esteem? Does the fact that Eliot communicated with this relatively obscure group about some of his pre-existing ideas prove the group's agency or impact on him? As we shall see, there is no short answer to these questions, not least because his relationship with the group was far more complicated than most scholars have assumed. Nor is it merely a semantic inquiry, as Eliot's associations with The Moot have all too often resulted

in the relegation of his social criticism to academic obscurity and historical irrelevance. But as this thesis shall demonstrate, both the social critic and his social criticism rightfully belong within mainstream thought and culture in Britain during the 1920s, 30s, and 40s: which not only dignifies Eliot's intellectual activities (which are often regarded by critics as wasteful in comparison to his poetic career), but as a corollary confirms the legitimate place of classicist, conservative, continental, and Catholic ideas within conventional (as opposed to peripheral) intellectual life in the mid-twentieth century.

In addition to these central research questions, several topics are variously explored in this work. These include debates about modern secularisation trends in Britain, differences in denominational perspectives on matters of church-state-and-society, the intellectual anatomy of modernism, and the place of journals and periodicals in British intellectual life. Other topics also include Thomism and mid-century political thought, theological exchange between Anglo-Catholicism and Roman Catholicism, education and the state, as well as issues related to both fascism, communism, totalitarianism, democracy, capitalism, and centralised planning. Naturally, in writing an intellectual biography of T.S. Eliot as a social critic there is more than passing mention to his drama and verse, but these are not central to the interests of this thesis. In a similar manner, there are numerous intellectuals, writers, and poets included in this study, ranging from Jacques Maritain and Virginia Woolf to Karl Mannheim and Isaiah Berlin—but persons are only included in so far as they relate to Eliot's life and thought as a social critic. Nor does this work cover every topic of general interest to Eliot scholars, among them gender and sexuality—not because they do not merit investigation—but simply due to the limited scope and specific focus of this investigation. There is no comment, therefore, on things like James Miller's 'outing' of homoerotic elements in Eliot's literary works or Michael Hastings' popular play (and subsequent film) about Eliot as a failed husband. That said, there is some interaction with

views akin to those raised by Lyndall Gordon who, in the words of Vanheste, portray 'Eliot's life as that of a man whose main character traits were intolerance for the masses, misogyny and anti-Semitism.'[4] Where such topics do relate to Eliot's social criticism they are included, but in most instances this thesis has limited itself to what is present in and pertinent to his social criticism, not on what is absent.

As mentioned, this is the first comprehensive treatment of Eliot's social criticism to be produced in the last half-century. In 1972 Roger Kojecký published his landmark study, *T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, which was itself based on his Oxford DPhil thesis. It is a seminal work of scholarship in the field of Eliot studies and has been invaluable to my own efforts, but it has nevertheless become dated. Since its publication more of Eliot's letters have been collected and published, providing important insights into his actual (rather than ostensible) attitude toward groups such as The Moot and individuals such as J.H. Oldham and Karl Mannheim. This is significant, as many scholars, following Kojecký's lead, have assumed a positive relationship between Eliot and this group, when in fact the opposite (or something far less positive) was true—but this could only have been uncovered and corroborated by access to more of Eliot's private letters and The Moot's collected papers.

Fortunately, materials that were unavailable to Kojecký are now available to us. So, too, Kojecký's work was published before revisionist waves of scholarship introduced or expanded inquiries into his various prejudices. As such, this has diminished the timeliness of *T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism* for modern readers, but its lacunas provide a clear path forward for any new intellectual biography. This is also true of the many articles and essays that have expanded our understanding of Eliot in relationship to things like Anglican

[4] Vanheste, *Guardians of the Humanist Legacy*, 5

social thought, Britain's 'men of letters' tradition, modernism and social credit, periodic and journalistic networks, the role of the public intellectual, and emerging concepts of elites. Unfortunately, there still remains many volumes of Eliot's correspondence to be published. As of writing, publication has only reached the ninth volume (1939-1941) and many of his remaining letters are scattered in various archives on both sides of the Atlantic. Personal access to some of these archives was hampered by the coronavirus pandemic, although the Houghton Library at Harvard helpfully provided digital scans of Eliot's January 29, 1945, letter to Mary Trevelyan. The library of King's College, Cambridge, has likewise been helpful in providing me with a digital copy of T.S. Eliot's 'Letter to John Hayward,' dated 13th March 1945. I am likewise indebted to the archivists at New College, Edinburgh, and Northwestern's Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collection. I have also quoted from two unpublished letters ('Letter to Herbert Read,' dated 3rd April 1943, and 'Letter to Herbert Read,' dated 18th September 1942) which were originally quoted in Jonas Kurlberg's doctoral thesis and belong to Professor David Kettler's private collection.

The general outline of my thesis is divided into three distinct chapters. The first chapter provides a biographical overview to Eliot's life and career as a social critic. It places him within his own historical context, charting his rise from an obscure philosophy student to one of the leading British intellectual voices of the mid-twentieth century. It assists readers with situating his social criticism alongside his other literary and cultural accomplishments, contextualising the subsequent chapters which explore the actual ideas and themes in his social criticism. The first chapter also outlines the social, professional, and intellectual milieus in which Eliot operated, providing us with a better portrait of the networks and circles that helped comprise public intellectual life in Britain during the

1920s, 30s, and 40s. Eliot's interactions with The Moot are not explored in depth, as they are attended to in chapter three.

Instead, this first chapter broaches questions of chronology and characterisation, disputing certain biographical and historiographical claims made about Eliot in the secondary literature. Among these are Stefan Collini's treatment and periodisation of Eliot's career as a social critic; unwarranted associations with (or allegations about) the conservatism of Russell Kirk, Christopher Dawson, and Charles Maurras; along with derogatory comparisons of Eliot's social criticism in relation to his other modernist contemporaries. This first chapter introduces a central claim of this work: that Eliot's social criticism was defined by his commitment to and participation in classicist, conservative, continental and Catholic traditions. It likewise provides the necessary biographical groundwork to enable us to place Eliot's social criticism and Eliot as a social critic within their proper historical context and intellectual genealogy, and to respond to and engage with scholarly views about his criticism.

The second chapter explores in greater depth the interwar decades of the 1920s and 30s, which were the most formative and productive period for T.S. Eliot as a social critic. In these years the output of his prose significantly eclipsed that of his poetry, as his attention turned increasingly from creative composition to religious, cultural, political, and related themes (regarded collectively as his social criticism). Likewise, the topics he investigated and the conclusions he reached in this era manifested themselves as the central components of his later social criticism, namely in the works *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948). As such, the second chapter provides biographical and chronological information contextualising the magazine's history and Eliot's role as its editor. It explores the concepts and issues that Eliot engaged with as a

social critic and engages with various perspectives taken by historians and critics from the secondary literature. This chapter advances the claim that Eliot conducted his social criticism primarily as a public moralist, and that his thought can be categorized in both its inspiration and outlook as broadly classicist, conservative, Catholic, and continental/European. It positions Eliot within a mainstream tradition of intellectual thought contiguous with contemporary political, cultural, and religious issues—a claim that runs contrary to critics who characterize Eliot's ideas as esoteric and isolated from the main currents of interwar thought and culture. Furthermore, by re-establishing *The Criterion* as the original nexus for Eliot's social criticism, a magazine that commanded considerable respect and influence, the audience and perceived impact of his work can be properly recognised and to an extent that goes underappreciated when looking exclusively at *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture.*

The third and final chapter addresses the last and supposedly 'mature' stage of Eliot's work and challenges prevailing scholarly views about the nature and extent of his relationship with The Moot discussion group. It explores and outlines both the *Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, establishing the thematic and conceptual continuities existing between his earlier and later criticism, which have previously been missed or undeveloped in Eliot studies. This final chapter argues that Eliot's later work is not 'mature' or even separate from his earlier criticism, but instead represents a continuation from his earlier and larger body of work. To substantiate these claims this chapter details both the continuing classicist, conservative, continental, and Catholic nature of his criticism, while also deconstructing the role and influence of the Moot discussion group in relation to the *Idea* and *Notes.* This contests previous scholarly views which regard Eliot's relationship with The Moot as inherently positive, generative, and cordial. This chapter develops an alternative thesis regarding Eliot's relationship with The

Moot, revealing it as temporally limited, temperamentally combative, and less influential than previously surmised. The outcome of these arguments is a unique and new treatment of Eliot's later social criticism, reorienting his work away from the marginal confines of The Moot and placing it back within the mainstream of mid-century British political, cultural, and religious thought.

Lastly, a brief conclusion ends this work, providing summaries of preceding arguments and offering reflections for possible 'next steps' in Eliot scholarship. In doing so it brings to completion a fresh systematic, intellectual biography of T.S. Eliot as a social critic: engaging with half-a-century's worth of scholarly critiques and hopefully bringing Eliot's social criticism before a new audience.

Naturally, in a thesis of this length innumerable sources are used and numerous scholars are cited. On matters of general biographical interest, I have primarily engaged with P. Ackroyd's *T.S. Eliot* (1984) and L. Gordon's *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* (1999), both of which have provided helpful information but perpetuate unfair characterisations about Eliot's social criticism. More broadly, both the *Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot* (1994) and *The New Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot* (2017) have been helpful in providing varied and diverse perspectives on different facets of Eliot's life and work. This is especially true of the latter, edited by J. Harding, as his own works on Eliot (*T.S. Eliot in Context* (2011), *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-war Britain* (2002) and editing *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot*) are insightful and contribute towards a more nuanced appreciation of Eliot's place within mainstream British thought and culture. In charting Eliot's intellectual development during his formal studies, I have benefited from studies made by W. Skaff in *The Philosophy of T.S. Eliot from Scepticism to a Surrealist Poetic 1909-1927* (1986), and P. Gray's *T.S. Eliot's Intellectual and Poetic Development 1909-1922*

(1982). Though my own interpretation of Eliot's intellectual trajectory differs to varying degrees from these authors and especially from Skaff regarding Eliot's interest in F.H. Bradley's monistic philosophy, their work has been immensely helpful.

The sections of my thesis focussing on *The Criterion* have, as mentioned, profited from Harding's work. This extends to many of the essays published in his edited collections, most notably including J.X. Cooper's 'T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism,' A. Trexler's 'Economics' and M. Levenson's 'The Role of the Intellectual.' In a similar manner, J. Vanheste's *Guardians of the Humanist Legacy: The Classicism of T.S. Eliot's Criterion Network and Its Relevance to Our Postmodern World* (2007) was instrumental in assisting my understanding of Eliot's classicism, as was his essay on 'The Reconstruction of the European Mind: T.S. Eliot's Criterion and the Idea of Europe.' Without these works it would have been considerably more challenging to place Eliot's varied interests and output within the broader context of interwar intellectual networks. This is likewise true of the mammoth editorial efforts made by Harding, R. Schuchard and A. Cuda in publishing the volumes of *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot.* Their editorial and introductory commentaries enabled me to access the entirety of Eliot's *Criterion* writings and to place them within the wider frameworks of his literary criticism, professional career, and personal life. This is also true of the tireless work of J. Haffenden in editing the unending volumes of Eliot's correspondence, enabling me to integrate Eliot's published writings with his previously unpublished attitudes and insights regarding them.

On topics relating both to religion and Eliot's own religiosity, B. Spurr's *'Anglo-Catholic in Religion' T.S. Eliot and Christianity* (2009) has been an essential resource: both in furnishing insights, but also as a foil, as we differ explicitly on matters related to Eliot's Unitarian upbringing and implicitly (to an extent) about the nomenclature of Eliot's self-described

religious orientation. M. Grimley's *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State Between the Wars* (2004) was an outstanding resource in helping me to place Eliot alongside contemporaneous efforts in contiguous topics, just as his essay 'Civil Society and the Clerisy: Christian Elites and National Culture *c.* 1930-1950' provided indispensable insights into twentieth century revivals of medieval concepts of civil society. About mid-twentieth century religion in Britain more broadly, I have benefitted from A. Hastings' *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1990* (1991), C. Brown's *The Death of Christian Britain* (2006), P. Coupland's *Britannia, Europa and Christendom: British Christians and European Integration* (2006) and J.C. Wood's *This is Your Hour: Christian Intellectuals in Britain and the Crisis of Europe, 1938-49* (2019). The latter has been a source of particularly fruitful disagreement regarding the historical legacy of The Moot. On this topic I have also engaged heavily with the work of J. Kurlberg, M. Reeves, P. Williamson, K. Clements, and K. Robins.

In connection with both The Moot and Eliot's later social criticism, S. Collini's brilliant works on him as a social critic, public moralist, and intellectual have been invaluable, even if they have sometimes been a source of dispute in my own work. In particular, I have taken issue with his division of Eliot's social criticism into an explicitly mature period and one that is implicitly immature; his periodization regarding public moralists; his weighting of The Moot's importance to Eliot; and his characterisation of Eliot's relationship with Mannheim. In addition to Collini, I have critically engaged with several 'dissenting' or 'revisionist' scholarly works, such as M.T. Edwards' *The Right of the Protestant Left: God's Totalitarianism* (2012), A. Kenneth's *T.S. Eliot & Ideology* (1995), P. Scott's 'The social critic and his discontents' (1994), C. Ricks, *T.S. Eliot and Prejudice* (1994), as well as with ideas proposed in A. Julius' *Anti-Semitism and Literary Form* (1995). This engagement has been supplemented with extensive reference to constructive works by J. Kurlberg, such as 'The

Rebirth of Christendom: The Moot (1938-1947) as a Modernist Revitalization Movement,' and 'Resisting Totalitarianism: The Moot and a New Christendom' (2013), which was coupled with insightful material from S. Ellis' *British Writers and the Approach of World War II* (2014).

The result, as stated, is the first systematic study of T.S. Eliot's social criticism since the publication of Roger Kojecký's 1972 landmark study, *T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism*. It provides a comprehensive portrait of T.S. Eliot as a social critic, connecting the political, social, cultural, and religious strains of his thought, while accurately placing him as a thinker within his political, social, cultural, and religious contexts. It challenges many of the prevailing scholarly representations of his work: such as the over-identification of his social criticism with his later or 'mature' works and the misidentification of them as the product of his participation in The Moot discussion group. By contrast, this thesis relocates the primary nexus of Eliot's social criticism within the influential period of his *Criterion* editorship, and constructs alternative classifications, chronologies, and genealogies regarding his content and influences. It also disproves many of the false claims and insinuations made about his work, such as its supposedly anti-Semitic and anti-democratic tendencies. Instead, what emerges from this comprehensive review is a social criticism defined by Catholic social thought, conservative anti-statism (tied to a tory respect for 'Church and state'), classicist-inspired moral and literary standards, and a Eurocentric concern for the cultural and political inheritance of Christendom. It is a social criticism that not only fit within its historic milieu but reveals mid-century Britain to be more diverse and dynamic than is often assumed by many Eliot scholars: one that is animated by porous networks and interconnected clusters drawn from both the left and the right, traditional and modernising, religious and nonreligious, British and European. Indeed, it is hoped that this study persuasively encourages us to regard both the 'era' and

its 'icon' as deserving of our continued attention and fruitful engagement, however different and potentially unpalatable they may prove to some contemporary perspectives.

CHAPTER ONE: ABSTRACT

This chapter provides an introduction and overview to T.S. Eliot's life and career as a social critic. It places the critic within his own historical context, charting his rise from an obscure philosophy student to one of the leading British intellectual voices of the mid-twentieth century. It assists readers with situating Eliot's social criticism alongside his other literary and cultural accomplishments, contextualising the subsequent chapters which explore the actual ideas and themes that characterize Eliot's social criticism. From this chapter the argument is first introduced that Eliot's ideas were animated by his identification with and participation in various classicist, conservative, Catholic, and European networks and traditions. It outlines the social, professional, and intellectual milieus in which Eliot operated, providing us with a better portrait of the networks and circles that helped comprise public intellectual life in Britain during the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. It also broaches questions of chronology and characterisation, disputing certain biographical and historiographical claims made about Eliot in the secondary literature. Among these are Stefan Collini's treatment and periodisation of Eliot's career as a social critic; unwarranted associations with the conservatism of Russell Kirk, Christopher Dawson, and Charles Maurras (with more on Maurras in the next chapter); along with derogatory comparisons of Eliot's social criticism in relation to his other modernist contemporaries. In so doing, this chapter builds the foundation for a new and more accurate intellectual biography of Eliot as a social critic—something that has not been done in half a century. This chapter does not extensively address the particularities of his social criticism, however, as that is reserved for the following chapter. Nor does it elaborate on Eliot's involvement with The Moot discussion group and his two books associated with that group—*The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*—as these will be addressed in chapter three. Instead, this chapter provides the necessary

biographical groundwork to enable us to eventually place Eliot's social criticism and Eliot as a social critic within their proper historical context and intellectual genealogy, to respond to and engage with scholarly views regarding his criticism.

CHAPTER ONE: LIFE OF THE CRITIC

At the apogee of his career, T.S. Eliot maintained an influence and stature that few have enjoyed hitherto or thereafter. In 1948 he was awarded both the Order of Merit and the Nobel Prize in Literature, primarily in recognition of his services as a poet. Though he was not alone amongst literary figures to be seen on the cover of *Time Magazine* or heard on the BBC, the fact that 14,000 people attended his lecture 'The Frontiers of Criticism' in 1956 at the University of Minnesota is indicative of his unique and iconic status amongst mid-twentieth century 'men of letters', moralists, and public intellectuals.[5] By contrast, the preceding interwar decades of the 1920s and 30s were a period of ascent for Eliot as he cemented his position as a public figure—not only in poetry, but in literary criticism, social commentary, and religious thought.

In 1922 Eliot published in the first edition of *The Criterion* his modernist magnum opus, *The Waste Land*, which was followed by noteworthy poems such as *The Hollow Men* in 1925 and *Ash Wednesday* in 1930. These achievements notwithstanding, Eliot's rising reputation amongst the literary establishment of the interwar years was as much the product of his seventeen-year editorship of *The Criterion* as his authorship of these outstanding (but comparatively few) poems. The magazine, which was praised by George Orwell as 'possibly the best literary paper we have ever had,'[6] served as a launching pad not only for works by writers as estimable as Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster, D.H. Lawrence, and James Joyce, but functioned as a lattice for Eliot's development as a critic and as a platform and network for his social criticism. As Jason Harding wrote, 'it was widely held in London literary circles that [Eliot's] *Criterion* commentaries were often an eloquent and authoritative response to

[5] Vanheste, *Guardians of the Humanist Legacy: The Classicism of T.S. Eliot's Criterion Network and Its Relevance to Our Postmodern World*, 5.

[6] G. Orwell, 'As I Please' in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Volume 3* (London: Penguin, 1993), 197.

contemporary issues.'[7] Indeed, '[though] its circulation was always small, *The Criterion* really did become something of an establishment journal… representing the institutional consolidation of a revolutionary artistic moment, and [lasts] as a valuable record of intellectual thought between the wars.'[8] The fact that these commentaries were principally concerned with cultural, political, religious and economic matters, rather than restricted to literary topics, foreshadows a major theme of this chapter: that Eliot's non-literary criticism occupied a central role within and in relation to his position as an internationally regarded 'man of letters'. Indeed, Joseph Schwartz has argued that *The Criterion* was essential to Eliot's ascendancy to cultural authority, and his social criticism as its editor was inseparable from the identity of the magazine.[9] As such, Eliot's criticism was far from an ignored or eccentric element of an otherwise productive and mainstream career, but a central (if sometimes contentious) component of his status as a leading figure in mid-twentieth century intellectual and cultural life.

This was also true of Eliot's later social criticism in his 1939 book, *The Idea of a Christian Society*, and his 1948 book, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*; both of which germinated in substantial ways from Eliot's editorship of *The Criterion.* These works (which will be discussed later) also performed comparably in sales when compared to many of his other published works from this period, including his poetry. Indeed, their publication not only coincided with the apex of Eliot's critical and poetic career—culminating in the aforementioned Order of Merit and Nobel Prize in Literature—but provide us with important dimensions and instances of his national role as a leading man of letters and public moralist.

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[7] J. Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-war Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 227.
[8] Ibid, 228.
[9] J. Schwartz, 'Eliot's Idea of the Christian Poet.' *Renaissance-Essays on Values in Literature* 43, no. 3 (1991), 215-217.

That is not to suggest that his eventual status as an icon of the English language and a canonical critic of the twentieth century was a linear and always well delineated progression. As we shall see in the following biographical sections that comprise this chapter, the road to becoming an esteemed and preeminent social critic traversed several geographical, personal, and intellectual landscapes. His journey ranges from locations like Harvard and Paris to social sets such as his Bloomsbury friends and Faber colleagues, from mental states of alienation and asceticism to intellectual interests in Thomas Aquinas and Jacques Maritain. From these biographical sketches we shall construct an outline of Eliot's personal and public life as a social critic, equipping us to better assess the content of his social criticism in chapters two and three. Likewise, we will examine along the way the historiography surrounding his social criticism, both curating and contesting how other historians and scholars have located his work in the intellectual history of the mid-twentieth century. From this process a comprehensive portrait of T.S. Eliot as a social critic shall emerge: one that not only connects the political, social, cultural, and religious strains of his thought, but accurately places him as a thinker within his political, social, cultural, and religious contexts. Furthermore, this is the first such longitudinal and comprehensive review of his social criticism attempted since the publication of Roger Kojecký's 1972 landmark study, *T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism*. Naturally, the field of study has moved in the past fifty years, evolving in scope and interest, with new publications and scholarly arguments to engage with—creating an exciting opportunity to reinvigorate the study of his work, and hopefully reviving interest in both the scrutiny and substance of his social criticism for another generation to come.

Early Years

Born in 1888 to Henry Eliot and Charlotte Stearns, Thomas Stearns Eliot was the youngest and sickliest of their seven surviving children. Suffering from a congenital double hernia, he was often prevented from socializing with other children and consequently spent a great deal of time inside reading. But housed as he was in a large, well-to-do household in St. Louis—with an industrious and successful father to furnish his library, and a poet and schoolteacher for a mother to cultivate his interests—the young boy made the best of it. In particular, he enjoyed reading books about untamed wildernesses and episodic sojourning, such as Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer.[10] The young Eliot also had his nurse, Annie Dunne, to keep him company. The two were emotionally close and enjoyed discussing proofs of God's existence. Dunne, a devout Roman Catholic, was the first to introduce the young boy to mass: the memory of which remained with him for a long time, percolating by his own admission into adulthood, despite the countervailing influence of his family's close associations with Unitarianism.[11]

The family's close connections with Unitarianism can be traced back to Eliot's paternal grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot. Born in Massachusetts in 1811 and distantly related to Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, William Greenleaf was educated at Harvard Divinity School before moving to Missouri. Once there he became a leading Unitarian minister, educator, and benefactor: co-founding Washington University in St. Louis and the city's art museum and public-school system. Most notably, Ralph Waldo Emerson admired his elocution and even dubbed him 'The Saint of the West'.[12] But try as he might, the saint (and now father) was unable to make a minister of his son, Henry, who instead enlisted with a commission in the Union Army (without seeing action) and later became

[10] J. Worthen, *T.S. Eliot: A Short Biography* (London: Haus Publishing, 2009), 9.
[11] P. Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984), 21.
[12] A. David Moody, *Tracing T.S. Eliot's Spirit: Essays on his poetry and thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3.

president of a prosperous brick laying company. As a result, Eliot's upbringing was less ministerial (and perhaps less severe) than his father's, although the family continued to be religiously observant and socially connected within Unitarianism. In fact, most of Eliot's childhood summers were spent on the Massachusetts coast, hobnobbing as a family with leading figures in the Unitarian establishment, which included prominent personnel from Harvard University.[13] But the strongest impression from these summer pilgrimages appears to have been geographical rather than theological. For the longest remembrance and most lingering influence were the marine rock formations of Cape Ann, which resurfaced as 'The Dry Salvages', and not Unitarianism's liberal christology, soteriology, epistemology, and anthropology—which were repudiated in one form or another across Eliot's later poetry and prose (and most resolutely of all in his social criticism).

That is not to suggest that Eliot was unable to appreciate the Unitarianism of his childhood. He continued to admire (and in some ways embody) into his adulthood Unitarianism's 'skepticism, emotional reserve, and intellectual integrity', approving of what he dubbed their 'austere grandeur'.[14] Likewise, as Barry Spurr has suggested, Unitarianism's dedication to social action and education were abiding influences in Eliot's social criticism, most notably in *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*.[15] But a commitment to social action and education were hardly the sole preserve of late nineteenth century Unitarianism. Instead, as we shall see throughout the course of this thesis, the philosophical and religious influences in these and other works of social criticism were primarily conservative, Catholic, classicist and continental (i.e., European) in origin. The example of fellow Anglo-Catholics, for instance, who banded together in forums such

[13] Ibid.
[14] W. Skaff, *The Philosophy of T.S. Eliot From Scepticism to a Surrealist Poetic 1909-1927* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 9.
[15] B. Spurr, *'Anglo-Catholic in Religion' T.S. Eliot and Christianity* (Cambridge: The Luttworth Press), 12.

as the (unofficial) Chandos Group and its more official counterpart *Christendom*, uniting social action and education in tackling economic inequality and social upheaval, was considerably more important to Eliot's social criticism than childhood memories of his grandfather's civic contributions. Whether the Unitarian shade of Eliot's youth coloured his poetry to a greater extent than its marginal impact on his social criticism is not within the remit of this study to answer. That said, the claim I have advanced here is a minority one within the secondary literature. But it may be that the majority view has evolved as the product of the ever developing and bifurcating nature of academic interest in Eliot, with each new publication excavating different access points into Eliot's life and thought. This has certainly been witnessed in successive waves of scholarship which include (but are not limited to) interests in Eliot and America, Eliot and anti-Semitism, and more recently Eliot and women. The upshot, therefore, may be a tendency to defer to specialised studies in areas of interest or complexity which are situated outside of one's own primary concerns. But with respect to Eliot and Unitarianism, its influence on his social criticism should not be exaggerated. Instead, as the rest of this chapter demonstrates, there were far greater influences afoot in the years ahead.

HARVARD, PART I

Eliot's philosophical education began in earnest with his enrollment at Harvard in 1906. Before that he spent some unremarkable years at Smith Academy in St. Louis, which had been founded by his now-deceased (but still well-remembered) grandfather, followed by a year at Boston's Milton Academy in 1905. In neither school, however, was there any intimation of the social criticism that would follow, although a few poems and short stories began emerging as early as 1904. But for our purposes there is comparatively little to examine from this period apart, perhaps, from noting that Eliot regarded his time at Milton

(in hindsight) to have been marked by a degree of positivity and promise—suggesting that his subsequently dour state of mind was, unlike his double hernia, not altogether congenital. [16] Indeed, during Eliot's undergraduate degree at Harvard—which was sufficiently eclectic in its activities and electives to place him on academic probation—he was noted for his charm and sociability.[17] As a freshman he lived in private, fashionable digs in a bourgeois quarter of town known as the Gold Coast and was described by his classmate, Conrad Aiken, as 'dapper… and not a little waspish.'[18] Eliot was also a member of various social clubs and literary societies, including the literary *Signet*, although he became more involved with the university's literary magazine, the *Harvard Advocate*, eventually joining its board and making numerous contributions.

Thomas Stearns was no William Greenleaf, and the Harvard of 1906 was not the Harvard of 1831. For one thing, Eliot's cousin, Charles William Eliot, was now President of Harvard College and the Unitarian ethos of the university had already passed its highwater mark. Furthermore, the modernising curriculum changes instituted by Eliot's cousin enabled him to study a broad range of courses from across different faculties (none of which appear to have included the Harvard Divinity School). In time he settled on a course of studies resembling comparative literature, but he took classes in everything from poetry and philosophy to languages and literary criticism in the process. Then, having completed his BA in three years, he remained for a fourth to take an MA in English Literature. As a corollary, he studied under several eminent faculty members in various departments. This included the humanist academic Irving Babbitt and the philosopher George Santayana, both of whom contributed to his emerging philosophical orientation and his future capacity

[16] T.S. Eliot, R. Schuchard, and J. Harding eds *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. Volume 4, English Lion, 1930-1933.* (London: Johns Hopkins Press, 2015), XIV.
[17] R. Bush, 'Eliot, Thomas Stearns (1888-1965), poet, critic, and publisher.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 16 Dec. 2020.
[18] R. March eds *T.S. Eliot: a symposium from Conrad Aiken* (London: PL Editions Poetry London, 1948), 21.

for social criticism (not least as both were themselves important cultural and political critics).

The importance of Santayana to Eliot's social criticism is minimal but illustrative. It was during Eliot's master's that he took graduate seminars with the esteemed poet and philosopher, who served as a contemporary, (albeit) non-religious prototype for Eliot's future self-designation as a 'man of letters'. And though an atheist, Santayana's emphasis on morality and history as instrumental to the development and understanding of social, religious, artistic, and rational ideals resonated with Eliot's own frame of mind.[19] For even as a student, Eliot sought (as he would in his poetry) to ground existence—both quotidian and mystical, corporate and personal—in an anthropologically rich, metaphysically robust, and non-progressive framework.[20] In fact, he would do just this on a socio-political level in his 1939 *The Idea of a Christian Society*, situating national norms within supra-national values and traditions; and at a socio-cultural level in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, delineating the spheres of both society and the state in the promotion and transmission of cultural norms. But the influence of Santayana should not be overstated. By their own admission they never 'got on' and according to Peter Ackroyd, 'Santayana was always somewhat dismissive of Eliot's "thought."'[21] Instead, Santayana's importance resides in the fact that he (along with others like Babbitt) helped to steer Eliot away from non-skeptical views of human progress and a-historical frameworks.

Irving Babbitt, by contrast, exerted a more lasting influence on Eliot's life and thought. Described as a forceful moralizing presence and a staunch advocate of classical ideals,

[19] P. Gray, *T.S. Eliot's Intellectual and Poetic Development 1909-1922* (Sussex: The Harvesters Press, 1982), 86-92.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot*, 35.

Babbitt taught him (or 'discipled' as Eliot described it) from 1909-10 in 'French Criticism of the Nineteenth Century'.[22] In actual fact, however, Babbitt's instruction ranged far beyond the confines of French criticism, spanning politics and culture, religion and philosophy, classicism and ethics. Remembered now for his intellectual contributions to American conservatism, in Eliot's day the smart and senatorial looking Babbitt was nearing the apotheosis of his career. Having recently published *Literature and the American College*, which criticized contemporary academia for abandoning the classical ideals of disciplined reason and moral development in favor of the naturalism and romanticism of Rousseau, which indulged in sentimentalism, utopianism, and majoritarianism; and still fourteen years from publishing his famous *Democracy and Leadership*, which translated many of these criticisms into the social, cultural, and political sphere of modern politics, Babbitt was a powerful and inspiring figure during Eliot's Harvard years. Indeed, the two continued to correspond until Babbitt's death in 1933: with Eliot eulogizing him as one of the wisest men he had ever known and still publicly promoting his work as late as 1955.[23]

Babbitt was most associated (and even synonymous) with the New Humanist school of thought. Born from the literary criticism of Babbitt and Paul Elmer More (another life-long friend of Eliot), it emerged in the 1910s and 20s as a leading interdisciplinary, classically minded approach to cultural and political criticism. New Humanism was defined by its devotion to concepts of order, authority, and ethical strenuousness, which it regarded as necessary in response to humankind's dangerous proclivity for emotionalism, selfishness, narrow-mindedness, brutishness, and evil.[24] Blaming Rousseau and the Romantics, Babbitt's New Humanism criticized 'reliance upon instinct, intuition, and spontaneity [as] irresponsible, misleading, and destructive because man's nature is not entirely good, as

[22] Spurr, *Anglo-Catholic in Religion*, 108.
[23] Ibid, 105.
[24] Skaff, *The Philosophy of T.S. Eliot From Scepticism to a Surrealist Poetic 1909-1927*, 12.

Rousseau posited. [Instead], private vision and emotional impulses require discipline, restraint, and intellectual enlightenment before they can be trusted to lead to personal fulfilment and social stability.'[25] Such arguments (indeed, this entire frame of mind), were highly attractive to Eliot. It is no surprise, therefore, that Eliot describes his intellectual activity from this period as gravitating almost exclusively around (or in relation to) Babbitt.[26]

In time, Eliot would also adopt and adapt these ideas into his own literary criticism, most notably arguing for a 'disinterred' classicism over and against John Middleton Murry's emotive romanticism. Likewise, his influence can also be seen in Eliot's social criticism, most notably in his editorial remonstrations against the romantic-inspired liberalism of 'doing as one likes,' as well as in both *The Idea* and *Notes*, theorising about what forms of intellectual discipline (among other things) would be needed to bring about social stability. But it is important to note the limitations of this influence. For one, Eliot was not the kind of student who accepted every idea that he entertained—including those that absorbed him—but was already as an undergraduate exhibiting a unique, varied, and discriminating intelligence. This would remain the case throughout his career as a social critic, never once losing his independence of mind, whether to classicism, conservatism, or Catholicism. Secondly, Eliot began to dissociate himself from Babbitt's humanism as early as 1927 and in earnest from 1928, which, as we shall see in the next chapter, coincided with his religious conversion, and marked the first and most important crystallization of his social criticism. From that point, the intellectual differences between them caused a much deeper divide between their respective positions.

[25] Ibid, 16.
[26] J. Haffenden eds *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 6: 1932-1933* (London: Faber and Faber, 2016), 797.

Writing in *The Criterion*, Eliot would later criticize Babbitt's humanism (while always maintaining the highest respect for Babbitt himself) as 'alarmingly like [the] very liberal Protestant theology of the nineteenth century... [like] Protestant theology in its last agonies.'[27] He meant that Babbitt's rejection of religion's role in determining and inculcating moral standards had impaired his humanism, relying instead on 'insufficiently stringent' and 'unauthoritative' measures such as 'ethical mindedness' and 'inner checks' to counterbalance human imperfection—the very imperfections that Eliot traced to original sin. As such, Eliot commented doubtfully about the 'coherence' of this system, including its lack of a 'philosophical technique' and a metaphysic for life.[28] In short, as much as it might provide a measure of intellectual rigour, Eliot believed Babbitt's humanism lacked the religious foundations needed for true emotional restraint—without which, rational 'disinterestedness' would diminish, since emotional prejudices and passionate enthusiasms would undermine it.[29] Nor was this belief purely intellectual, but one that (in his own words), was 'convinced of the reality of the Christian supernatural order and of the operation of the supernatural in the world.'[30]

In 1910, however, such outcomes were not yet in the offing. Instead, Babbitt helped inspire his young protegee to spend a year doing postgraduate study at the Sorbonne in Paris, before returning to undertake a PhD in philosophy at Harvard. This proved to be a momentous year. Once there he experienced his first full emersion into the intellectual life of a world-class city: enjoying in Paris what he would later embody in London. There intellectual life whirled around resident intellectuals like Émile Durkheim, Paul Janet, Pablo Picasso, and Henri Bergson—just as much of London's literary and intellectual life

[27] Spurr, *Anglo-Catholic in Religion*, 108.
[28] Ibid.
[29] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 13 (Oct 1933) 115-20.
[30] Ibid.

would come to rotate around Eliot and his friends, which included the likes of Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster, and John Maynard Keynes. Fortunately, Eliot (then twenty-two) made friends with a fellow lodger and medical student named Jean Verdenal, which enabled him to delve deeper into the city and university's intellectual life. This included their attending Henri Bergson's lectures on the progressive evolution of consciousness, a doctrine to which he fleetingly assented but was disabused of upon returning to Harvard in 1911. More enduring, however, was his newfound interest in the politically conservative, religiously minded, neo-classical literary critic Charles Maurras.

Irving Babbitt had turned Eliot onto Maurras before leaving Harvard and although their social acquaintance in Paris was slight, their intellectual association lasted many years. Eliot would later credit Maurras as an important influence in his own conversion to Anglo-Catholicism and an important ally with respect to literary classicism—but the exact nature of their connection on political matters is a topic that still divides critics and historians. This is not least because it deals with sensitive questions around anti-Semitism and fascist sympathies, but this is a subject that we shall explore in much greater depth in the following chapter, making it unnecessary to further explore the matter here. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that people like Maurras and Bergson, along with Paris's chapels and basilicas, artists and poets, helped to make France (and by extension, Europe) a place of abiding interest. In 1928, Eliot confided to Herbert Read that he felt more of a 'Frenchman than an American,' though as we shall soon see, he later became 'more an Englishman than a Frenchman.'[31] It was, however, a central component of his personal and poetic psyche and it remained an abiding element of his social criticism: orienting him toward the political,

[31] R. Bush, 'Eliot, Thomas Stearns (1888-1965), poet, critic, and publisher.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 Sep. 2004.

social, cultural, intellectual, and religious currents in Europe at a time when many in England desired to disengage from the continent.

HARVARD, PART II

During much of the period Eliot was penning poems like *'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'*, *'Portrait of a Lady*, and *'Rhapsody on a Windy Night'* he was also beginning work on his PhD in philosophy. As before, he was surrounded by the university's illustrious faculty, which included William James, Josiah Royce, George Santayana, and a visiting Bertrand Russell (who would come to play a significant role in Eliot's early years in England). His doctoral studies included substantial coursework in Indian philosophy and Sanskrit, although this had little impact on his future social criticism, despite a great deal of influence on his poetry. More important was Eliot's transition away from Bergson's concept of an a-historical selfhood toward the historically-minded hermeneutic of Josiah Royce, who maintained that the definition of an individual could only be determined in relation to an accessible public history.[32] This would later manifest its influence in Eliot's conceptions of tradition, culture, and religion, which he viewed as working in tandem to provide historically-grounded frameworks for individual and societal flourishing (believing, for instance, that neither politics nor economics could flourish without theology and ethics, which were themselves historically-grounded disciplines and partly existed embedded in the culture and traditions of peoples).

This transition can be traced back to Eliot's participation in Royce's 1913 seminar which, among other things, explored 'The Problem of Christianity' from a dual philosophical and historiographical lens. Royce argued that genuine knowledge depends upon interpretative

[32] Gray, *T.S. Eliot's Intellectual and Poetic Development 1909-1922*, 98.

processes and that legitimate interpretation only occurs through various acts of community corroboration. According to Piers Gray, Royce esteemed the practical method of natural science and the ideal expression of the Early Church as characteristic examples of legitimate interpretative knowledge.[33] This was important for Eliot's theological development, having previously lacked an alternative theoretical framework for his unorthodox mystical experiences, which he claimed (without elaboration) to have had while at Harvard—experiences that were difficult to place or even legitimize under Babbitt's influence, since their spiritual, non-religious nature was dangerously individualistic and romantic in nature. Thanks to Royce, however, Eliot was able to situate (at least provisionally) his own personal, spiritual experiences alongside a historical interpretative tradition, dignifying and elevating them into a communal sphere of knowledge in the process—without which, it is difficult to say whether he would have been in as strong a position to convert to Christianity in the 1920s.

The most important influence from this period, however, was not Royce, nor even Babbitt, but F.H. Bradley. For Bradley and his skeptical, Hegelian-inspired, neo-realist critiques of Bergson were the subject of Eliot's doctoral thesis, which he finished in 1916 during his (then temporary) time abroad, which was based at the University of Oxford. Bradley, who had an intensely stoic, stern, and self-possessed aura, was the first philosopher to win the Order of Merit (which undoubtedly added to Eliot's appreciation of his own OM), and was a major voice in British philosophy, especially before Russell's analytical approach undermined both his eminence and his ideas. According to William Skaff, Bradley's philosophy was essentially 'monistic', as it 'asserts that the ultimate nature of reality is one unified whole, composed of all the various aspects or appearances of our world.'[34]

[33] Ibid, 143.
[34] Skaff, *The Philosophy of T.S. Eliot: From Scepticism to a Surrealist Poetic 1909-1927*, 12.

Furthermore, it was 'idealistic' because 'appearance', which he defined as the world as we know it, was in actual fact 'reality' decomposed, 'separated by the mind into objects and persons, space and time; because the world is thus created by the mind, Reality is said to consist of ideas.'[35] Likewise, Skaff argues that Eliot was attracted to this because 'the tendency to unify, to establish and then resolve a dialectic was in fact an essential quality of Eliot's mind.'[36] This is no doubt valid, though it could also be argued that his attraction to Bradley's monistic notion of the absolute was a reiteration of his religious impulse, which, beginning with Unitarianism, would eventually reside in his Catholicism.

Interestingly, the aging Bradley and the upstart Eliot were both situated at Merton College, though Eliot refrained from seeking him out from awkward deference. Indeed, it was especially interesting given that years later Eliot would still lionise Bradley as 'the man who broke the authority of Mill… and the man who restored the rank of Britain amongst philosophers.'[37] He also honoured Bradley in 1927 with a flattering review of his *Ethical Studies*, wherein he lauded Bradley for teaching the author everything he knew about prose writing.[38] In fact, he freely admitted in 1930 to Paul Elmer More 'that I am a Bradleian; and that my thought and my belief may be more deeply influenced by Bradley than I know.'[39] Nevertheless, the exact import of Eliot's doctoral dissertation on F.H. Bradley is difficult to determine. At least, it is in conjunction with his social criticism.

In terms of his poetry, Eliot's work on Bradley's neo-realist conceptions of knowledge and experience significantly formed his own philosophy of consciousness, bearing fruit in his

[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 3 (Oct 1924), 1.
[38] T.S. Eliot, 'For Lancelot Andrewes' in *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot, Volume 3, Literature, Politics, Belief, 1927-1929* (London: Johns Hopkins Press, 2015), Xxiv.
[39] T.S. Eliot, 'Letter to Paul Elmer More, August 1930' in V. Eliot and J. Haffenden eds *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 5: 1930-1931* (London: Faber and Faber, 2014).

poems from this period, many of which were about insanity, disconnection, dislocation, and reality. This is especially noticeable in such poems as *Sweeney Among the Nightingales* and *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*.[40] Similarly, in Eliot's literary criticism he attempted to emulate Bradley's search for an all-encompassing absolute—in this instance a canon of historically certified, critically bona fide literature—in his attempt to define the relation of the individual talent to tradition. That is, to produce a standard of literature that assists in standardizing our understanding of literature itself.

Similarly, Bradley's impact on Eliot's overall intellectual identity was substantial. For one, Eliot's skeptical nature was further equipped with additional theory and terminology via Bradley's skepticism. Eliot learned from him the seemingly unlimited extent to which knowledge-claims could be dismantled, theories of correspondence deconstructed, and academic pretensions discredited—the latter being on particular display in his later criticism of psychology, economics, and the pseudo-scientific claims of the social sciences (all of which shall be explored in the next chapter). But this skepticism also brought Eliot closer to religious commitment. For having studied Bradley, Eliot became convinced that his epistemological nihilism opened the possibility of religious faith.

The logic behind this idea was that if everything can be invalidated by extreme skepticism and consequentially nothing is certain, then everything rests on a degree of belief—thus liberating religious faith from its previous burdens of proof. As Eliot would later observe, 'wisdom consists largely of scepticism and uncynical disillusion, [both of which] are useful equipment for religious understanding.'[41] That is not to say that Eliot converted (or even reverted) to religion at precisely this time, but within ten years of completing his

[40] Bush, 'Eliot, Thomas Stearns (1888-1965), poet, critic, and publisher.'
[41] Ibid, 399.

dissertation he had, and it is difficult to imagine him doing so without Bradley's influence. As Eliot's own social criticism and literary classicism avowed, he would presumably have disallowed emotion and enthusiasm to cloud his rational judgement and obscure his moral standards—even though the next ten years would have plenty of both. But thanks to Bradley, Eliot now had a rational approach for navigating the ostensible irrationality of faith, which in turn enabled Eliot to carve out a religious sphere intelligently and rationally within his social criticism.

Eliot's interest in Bradley—like his inclinations for banking, bowler hats, and beautiful suits—has seemed to many as old fashioned in comparison to his modernist contemporaries. In a decade when Bertrand Russell published *Principia Mathematica* and Ludwig Wittgenstein began his own philosophical career; when Virginia Woolf wrote *The Voyage Out*, E.M. Forster published *Howard's End* and J.M. Keynes was attending the Versailles peace conference; Eliot's interest in Bradley and British Idealism does seem at first glance rather out of step. That is to say, Bradley's philosophy was shaped in contradistinction to earlier 19th century notions of empiricism and utilitarianism, which differed in orientation from early 20th century analytical philosophers, many of whom rejected metaphysical speculation in general and Bradley's monistic view of interconnected reality in particular.[42] In that sense, Bradley was more Victorian than Edwardian. Indeed, Bradley's most important work, *Appearance and Reality*, was published the previous century in 1893 and his reputation as a first-rate philosopher had already taken considerable damage in the early 1900s via G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell's analytic philosophy. In fairness, this was true of most if not all metaphysical and abstract-based idealistic philosophies in Britain, as

[42] G. Stock, "Bradley, Francis Herbert (1846–1924), philosopher." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. 23 Sep. 2004.

philosophical approaches using formal logic and linguistic analysis became ever more popular.

That said, while there is some merit in this accusation, claims about Eliot being too old fashioned can easily be overdone. In fact, Eliot's founding role in modernism and his interest in Bradley suggests that the roots of modernism were more varied than has sometimes been given credit. As discussed above, Bradley's neo-realist conception of knowledge and experience informed Eliot's philosophy of consciousness, which had a major impact on much of his early poetry. Likewise, the eclipse in Bradley's reputation did not mark the end of British idealism. During Eliot's time at Oxford a second wave of British idealists were already active and influential. Among these were Harold H. Joachim, who taught Eliot during his time at Merton, along with A.E. Taylor and J.M.E. McTaggart. In fact, Eliot's near contemporary at Oxford, R.G. Collingwood, was deeply influenced by Bradley, which is significant given Collingwood's impact on twentieth century aesthetics, history, and political philosophy.[43] To suggest, therefore, that Eliot's interest in Bradley was already out-of-touch by the 1910s (just as his interest in Matthew Arnold would be dismissed as hopelessly old fashioned in the 1930s and 40s[44]) is to misread the currents of intellectual history as they were unfolding contemporaneously.

It should be noted, however, that Bradley had a less discernible (or direct) impact on Eliot's social criticism as such. Bradley's influence can be seen in Eliot's later critique of Matthew Arnold (his nineteenth century pre-cursor as a man of letters and poet-cum-social-critic), where he criticized Arnold's notions of 'right reason' and 'best self' as lacking Bradley's

[43] R.F. DeVall, "Collingwood, Bradley, and Critical History." *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 11, no. 3 (2017), 378.
[44] A Kirsch, *Why Trilling Matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 95.

consistency, unity, and depth.[45] Eliot likewise lauded Bradley's 'European' vision[46], just as his own social criticism sought to situate Britain within a wider European cultural ecosystem—but his Europeanism predates Bradley's influence and its scope also far exceeds him (as we shall come to see). But it remains difficult to trace any direct influence beyond this with respect to Eliot's social criticism. Indeed, it is a most telling fact that when Eliot re-read his doctoral thesis on F.H. Bradley decades after completing it, he admitted that it was now unintelligible to him.[47] So while we can affirm the general importance of Bradley in relation to Eliot's intellectual development, it would be unwarranted to concur with Skaff's claim that the major aspects of Eliot's 'mature' thought were adumbrated in his dissertation on Bradley.

To do so would require massive amounts of content written on conservatism, classicism, Catholicism and Europe, all of which form the major foundations and primary orientations of Eliot's social criticism, but none of which appear widely in his dissertation. Nor was Peter Ackroyd correct in claiming that to understand Eliot's prose it was necessary to understand Bradley.[48] For this cannot be so when even Eliot himself could not always comprehend his own dissertation on him. Rather, what we can discern from this period—from Babbitt as well as from Bradley, along with others like Santayana and Royce—are the emergence of certain intellectual impulses that will feature heavily in Eliot's social criticism, namely, a desire for literary, intellectual, cultural, and religious order. But germination aside, the maturation, formulation, and articulation of these ideas as a coherent body of social criticism was not the business of a doctoral student, but the work of an emerging poet, city banker, literary editor, and public intellectual in London.

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[45] T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), 452.
[46] R. Schuchard, J. Formichelli, and F. Dickey, 'Introduction' in The *Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. Volume 3, Literature*, Politics, Belief, 1927-1929 (Baltimore: Project Muse, 2014), xxv.
[47] Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot*, 333.
[48] Ibid, 49.

ENGLAND

Still two years away from completing his dissertation, Eliot left Harvard in 1914 on a year-long Sheldon travelling fellowship in Europe. In the long run, this trip effectively lasted half a century since he never returned permanently to America. In the short run, however, his time abroad began with a summer seminar in Marburg, Germany. But this was very short indeed, as the opening salvos of the First World War were being fired within weeks of his arrival. As an American (and therefore neutral), Eliot was not obliged to leave Germany. But as an anglophile with plans to study in the autumn at Merton College with Harold Joachim (Bradley's colleague and successor), Eliot beat a hasty retreat to his new home, spending the rest of the summer in London before matriculating in Oxford. While in London he enjoyed a spirited reunion with his Harvard classmate Conrad Aiken, who had taken the liberty of showing Eliot's poetry to Ezra Pound. The latter was favourably impressed, which would lead to a seminal collaboration between them. Indeed, it produced *The Waste Land* and, in the process, initiated a revolution in modern poetry—but the fame and influence that would one day be his was not yet apparent. In fact, between 1914 and 1921, his prospects for a prominent career seemed highly precarious.

Despite some enthusiasm amongst his modernist contemporaries for *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* in 1915 and again in 1917's *Prufrock and Other Observations*, Eliot had yet to establish himself as a consistent, critical, or even financially solvent success amongst London's upper literary echelons. His mother, Charlotte, wrote to Eliot's then landlord, Bertrand Russell, 'I have absolute faith in his philosophy but not in the *vers libres*.'[49] And Eliot's mother had reason to worry, as poetry was not a highly remunerative career. In

[49] R. Kojecký, *T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), 46.

1916 Eliot had managed to finish his dissertation on Bradley, but he was tragically unable to submit and defend his work at Harvard due to the interruptions caused by the war, which deprived him of his degree. He was likewise unable to find a university teaching position, even though he contributed more than twenty reviews to philosophical journals during this period.

Now in his mid-twenties, Eliot was inexperienced in love, disoriented in geography, short of funds, and soon to become ill-advised in marriage. Despite living in Oxford, he had gravitated heavily towards life in London. His parents had expected him to return to New England to teach philosophy, but Eliot longed (and now believed thanks to Ezra Pound) that he could somehow live the life of a poet. Furthermore, he sought to live that life with one Vivienne Haigh-Wood. She was a twenty-seven-year-old governess from Lancashire, living and working in Cambridge, whom Eliot met in March 1915, and wedded less than four months later. She was described by some at this stage as vivacious, outspoken, and artistic. She came from some money, though not necessarily from as much class (at least not as much as some of Eliot's upper-class contemporaries thought suitable). Still, as Aldous Huxley, then a friend, remarked, 'I rather like her; she is such a genuine person, vulgar, but with no attempt to conceal her vulgarity.'[50] Others, however, had grave concerns about the match. Vivienne's own mother regarded her as mentally unsound, believing her to suffer from 'moral hysteria.' Later, in 1930, Virginia Woolf echoed this observation, writing in her diary: 'Oh – Vivienne! Was there ever such a torture since life began! – to bear her on one's shoulders, biting, wriggling, raving, scratching, unwholesome, powdered, insane, yet sane to the point of insanity, reading his letters, thrusting herself on us, coming in wavering, trembling... This bag of ferrets is what Tom [Eliot] wears round

[50] A. Huxley, 'Aldous Huxley to Julian Huxley, June 28, 1918' in Smith ed. *Letters of Aldous Huxley* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969), 156.

his neck.'[51] Fifteen years earlier, however, Vivienne had seemed to Eliot like a solution to his problems. She adored and encouraged his poetry, provided a genuine pretext for his permanent expatriation and emancipation from his parents, and offered the prospect of conjugal delight—a matter of some importance to the sexually inexperienced. Sadly, it was not a match made in heaven. As Eliot's sister-in-law, Theresa, later reflected, 'Vivienne ruined Tom as a man.'[52] But in 1915 her mental breakdowns, sanatorium visits, suicide attempts, institutionalization, and their eventual separation were still to come—as was a stable income.

In September of that same year Eliot began work as a schoolteacher at Wycombe Grammar School, though by the end of 1915 he had relocated to London to teach at Highgate Junior School. His landlord and friend at the time was Bertrand Russell, and one of his pupils was the future poet, John Betjeman. Yet this was not so propitious as it might sound. Eliot did not enjoy teaching and to make matters worse, indeed, much worse, his wife and landlord were, by all accounts, conducting (with Eliot's knowledge) an extramarital affair.[53] Indeed, this startling ménage à trois appears to have lasted until 1919, when Russell ended both arrangements. But this separation only produced a further decline in Vivienne's mental state and produced additional strain in their marriage. As Evelyn Waugh later commented, it was common knowledge 'that Mrs T.S. Eliot's insanity sprang from her seduction and desertion by Bertrand Russell.'[54] The affair and subsequent aftermath had a determinantal effect on Eliot's own deteriorating health, but from 1917 onwards he found some respite in his new employment at the Foreign and Colonial Department of Lloyds Banks. There he was tasked in the aftermath of the First World War with managing the bank's entitlements

[51] J. E. Miller, *T.S. Eliot: The Making of an American Poet, 1888-1922* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 378.
[52] C. Seymour-Jones, *Painted Shadow: A Life of Vivienne Eliot* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 5.
[53] Ibid.
[54] E. Waugh, and D. Michael, *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, (London: Phoenix, 1995).

to German war reparation debts. Later, in 1923, whilst balancing his role as editor of the newly created *Criterion*, Eliot was made head of Lloyd's Intelligence Department, where he was responsible for composing reports on foreign exchanges and international affairs.

Though he enjoyed this work, as Adam Trexler has observed, 'Eliot was embittered by what he saw as the international struggle carried on by economic means, which demanded that Germany pay for nearly the entire cost of the war, crippling that country's economy for generations to come.'[55] Indeed, Eliot's disapproval of economic considerations devoid from (or not deduced from) ethical imperatives would become a common criticism of capitalism in his editorial commentaries in *The Criterion*. So, too, Eliot regarded the punitive measures brought against post-war Germany as highly deleterious to Europe's fractured sense of collective identity, which was a concern that he would later champion in *The Criterion*.[56] These issues notwithstanding, Eliot's time in finance provided sufficient levels of financial security and professional normalcy to enable him to enjoy some of the most productive years of his life. Furthermore, the experience that he gained in finance later provided him with valuable perspectives on the economic issues of interwar Europe and the great depression, as well as enabling him to interact with the ideas of economists like John Maynard Keynes and C.H. Douglas. That is not to suggest that Eliot was (or thought himself to be) an expert on economic matters, but it did enable *The Criterion* to broaden its scope from literary matters to economics alongside its expansion into politics and religion. This in turn enabled Eliot to engage in social criticism on a more comprehensive level than would have been warranted for predecessors like Matthew Arnold, who had little direct experience with finance and economics.

[55] A. Trexler, 'Economics' in J. Harding (eds) *T.S. Eliot in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 276.
[56] Ibid.

When Eliot left Lloyds in 1925 to join the editorial board of the newly founded publisher Faber & Gwyer (later Faber & Faber), he did so having published many of his most celebrated poems. These poems included *Gerontion* (1920), *The Waste Land* (1922) and *The Hollow Men* (1925). Needless to say, producing these modernist masterpieces was not bad for bankers' hours. More germane to our study, however, was that during this interlude Eliot had cemented his growing reputation as a new literary reviewer and critic of note. As Ronald Bush wrote, this transition heralded his 'conquest of London'.[57]

These reviews and essays were literary in nature, the best and earliest of which were compiled and published in 1920 as *The Sacred Wood.* The topics in this volume ranged from pieces on Ben Jonson and Dante to those entitled 'The Perfect Critic' and 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. Eliot's collection also bore the imprints of important elements of his future social criticism: his classicism's strict regard for objective literary, linguistic, and intellectual standards; as well as his explicit engagement and implicit identification with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, both as a 'man of letters' and as a poet qua literary and social critic, which will factor more significantly in Eliot's treatment of intellectual elites and church-state relations in *The Idea of a Christian Society.* Likewise, Eliot's concept of tradition in relation to individual talent—as an organic process that created a shared sense of historic continuity, produced a unifying and vivifying effect on contemporary letters, generated an evolving and enveloping canon of commanding literature, and in the process formed the 'mind of Europe'[58]—would become a cornerstone of *The Criterion's* interwar attempt to resurrect 'the European Idea' and safeguard Europe's common heritage from a second great conflagration.

[57] D. Rowland, 'T.S. Eliot, 'The Criterion', and Literary Controversy, 1922-1939' (PhD Thesis, UCL, 1997), 291.
[58] T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in F. Kermode (eds) *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), 39.

Though well received, *The Sacred Wood's* influence was greatly assisted two years later by the success of Eliot's epoch defining poem, *The Waste Land*, and again in 1924 when Hogarth Press published Eliot's *Homage to John Dryden*. As noted by Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard, the latter produced an electrifying effect among many young academics. '*Homage*… transform[ed] Eliot's growing reputation for polemic into a new and commanding authority at Cambridge and other bastions of critical taste. Readers familiar with him only as the controversial author of *The Waste Land* now began to recognize Eliot as a serious literary critic, and they returned to his earlier prose with renewed interest and respect.'[59] As F.R. Leavis wrote, who was himself completing a doctorate in Cambridge at the time and later became a leading literary critic and rival editor of *Scrutiny*, '[When] Hogarth Press brought out *Homage to John Dryden* . . . Eliot became the important contemporary critic. It was the impact of this slender new collection that sent one back to *The Sacred Wood* and confirmed with decisive practical effect one's sense of the stimulus to be got from that rare thing, an intelligence in literary criticism.'[60] By this time, however, Eliot had more than just his poetry and literary criticism to augment his rise amongst the literary elite. Now he had *The Criterion*.

THE CRITERION

In the late 1910s and early 1920s London's literary landscape was littered with 'little magazines'. These magazines, as Mark Morrison has described them, were the public face of modernism, creating a 'counterpublic sphere,' limited in their circulation, but transformative in their accumulative effect.[61] Among these many little magazines were journals such as *Arts and Letters*, *The Egoist*, *The Adelphi*, *The New Age*, *The Calendar*, *The*

[59] R. Schuchard, and A. Cuda, 'Introduction' in *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. Volume 2, The Perfect Critic, 1919-1926* (Baltimore: Project Muse, 2014), xxxiii.
[60] F.R. Leavis, *Anna Karenina and Other Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), 177-78.
[61] M. S. Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001).

New English Weekly, and in America *The Dial* and *Poetry*. According to J. Hoffman these little magazines rarely commanded circulations above 2,000 and supported themselves through patronage and subscriptions rather than advertising. They rarely enjoyed a long lifespan, which makes *The Criterion's* eventual seventeen-year run a commendable achievement.[62] Some magazines, like Wyndham Lewis's Vorticist *Blast* perished after only two issues. Nonetheless, these were heady times for many emerging intellectuals and authors. As Roger Kojecký observed, 'This period, when *The Athenaeum*, *Art and Letters* and *The Calendar* were flourishing, Eliot was to look back upon as the "high summer of literary journalism in London in my lifetime"; and with these reviews he would naturally have included the *Times Literary Supplement*, edited by Bruce Richmond for thirty-five years from 1902-37.'[63] It was in little magazines such as *The Egoist* and *The Dial*, along with established journals such as *The Athenaeum* and *TLS*, that Eliot cut his teeth as a critic and completed his apprenticeship before founding his own magazine.

Eliot served as the assistant editor of *The Egoist* from 1917 to 1919 at the encouragement of his friend and collaborator Ezra Pound. This was a strange marriage, however, as Hannah Sullivan has noted: many of his contributions (such as *Tradition and the Individual Talent*) advanced a theory of impersonal criticism, whereas *The Egoist* was resolutely individualist.[64] It is no surprise, therefore, that Eliot—now set in his classical criticism and connected to many of the generation's finest modernist literary figures—wanted to helm a magazine of his own. As Herbert Howarth recalled, 'In his twenties [Eliot] had seen the *N.R.F.* assume leadership in French intellectual life, seen Pound energize *The Egoist* and *Poetry*, assisted *The Egoist*, and watched Murry's brief, brilliant, erratic run as editor of *The*

[62] J. Hoffman, C. Allen and C. F. Ulrich (eds), *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), 228.
[63] R. Kojecký, *T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, 48.
[64] H. Sullivan, "But We Must Learn to Take Literature Seriously': T.S. Eliot and the Little Magazines of Modernism, 1917-1920.' *Critical Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2004): 76.

Athenaeum. All that he observed, and the tantalizing insufficiency of his participation as subordinate or contributor, had made him eager to direct a periodical himself in his own way.'[65] Then in the spring of 1922, he did just that.

Eliot conceived of *The Criterion* (a name given by his wife) as a journal that would provide both a permeant (and hopefully profitable) home for his own literary career, as well as become a bastion for his classicist philosophy over and against romanticism. It was also envisioned as a kind of advance guard for avant-garde intellectuals and authors, although the journal was never exclusively dedicated to modernist content. As Schuchard and Coda have noted, 'In the spring of 1922, Eliot began to call on friends and acquaintances to help him assemble the first issue, reaching out to members of his own circle (including Richard Aldington and Herbert Read), representatives of the previous generation (such as J. M. Robertson and George Saintsbury), and literary contacts in Europe (including Valery Larbaud and Herman Hesse).'[66] Together these figures represent an extraordinary array of intellectual diversity, which would remain a consistent attribute (and occasional criticism) of the journal throughout the 1920s and 30s, however much its editorial orientation subsequently turned (to further criticism) more conservative and religious in the 1930s.

This intellectual diversity was further augmented by a geographically diverse assortment of contributors and translators from Germany, Spain, and France. This was in large measure because Eliot—himself an American who had lived in Paris from 1910 to 1911 and in Germany for a brief period before the war—was not interested in creating yet another parochial journal. Not, at least, in the wake of the First World War. Instead, Eliot

[65] H. Howarth, 'T. S. Eliot's 'Criterion': The Editor and His Contributors.' *Comparative Literature*, 1959, 97.
[66] Schuchard, and Cuda, 'Introduction' in *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. Volume 2, The Perfect Critic, 1919-1926*, xxviii.

envisioned a European (if not an international) journal. One that would help reopen the continent's mental frontiers, resist the deadening impact of nationalism on national creativity, and reconstruct a sense of Europe's common heritage in the service of a new (often western) common intellectual life. In this respect, Eliot believed Britain played a special role. 'To our mind,' he would later write, 'Britain is the bridge between Latin culture and Germanic culture in both of which she shares. But Britain is not only the bridge, the middle way, between two parts of western Europe; she is, or should be, by virtue of the fact that she is the only member of the European community that has established a genuine empire – that is to say, a world-wide empire as was the Roman empire – not only European but the connection between Europe and the rest of the world.'[67] Later, after Eliot's conversion to Anglicanism and his deepening commitment to Catholic spirituality, his vision of a common European heritage would be further universalised: taking ecumenical inspiration from the unity of medieval Christendom and becoming intertwined with an eschatological view of history. It was, in short, a large picture.

According to Eliot, the magazine's original intent was to bring together 'the best in new thinking and new writing in its time, from all the countries of Europe that had anything to contribute to the common good,' and 'to establish relations with those literary periodicals abroad, the aims of which corresponded most nearly to my own.'[68] These other magazines, some of which *The Criterion* collaborated with in cross-publications and prize competitions, included France's *Nouvelle Revue Francaise*, Germany's *Neue Rundschau* and *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, Spain's *La Revista de Occidente*, and Italy's *Nuova Antologia*. It was an audacious scheme and one that was ultimately doomed by the geopolitical deterioration of the late 1930s, but in 1922 it appeared to Eliot as a prospect worth

[67] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Monthly Criterion: A Literary Review*, 7 (Mar 1928), 194.
[68] D. Donoghue, 'Eliot and The Criterion' in D. Newton-De Molina eds, *The Literary Criticism of T.S. Eliot: New Essays* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 38.

pursuing. Still, the magazine made great progress. It was the first in Britain to publish many works by Marcel Proust, Paul Valery, Jacques Riviere, Luigi Pirandello, Ramon Fernandez, Jacques Maritain, Charles Maurras, Henri Massis, Wilhelm Worringer, Max Scheler and E. R. Curtius. This was in addition to domestic contributions from the likes of Ezra Pound, D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster, W.B. Yeats, W.H. Auden, Hart Crane, Stephen Spender, John Middleton Murry, and Wyndham Lewis.

The financial backing for the magazine originally came from Lady Rothermere, wife of Lord Rothermere, proprietor of the *Daily Mail*. Introduced to Eliot by Sydney Schiff, she already liked his poetry and was thereafter willing to back him as an editor. Rothermere pledged to fund the magazine for three years with the general intention that it should serve as a kind of successor to the defunct *Art and Letters*. It would function, Rachel Lehmann-Haupt wrote, as the literary criticism equivalent of caviar.[69] Eliot, however, had little intention of producing a duplicate publication and their relationship frayed as he discovered that her purse strings had their own additional strings attached.

Differences between the editor and patron emerged immediately after the inaugural edition. Eliot had regarded the publication as a success. The first print run of six hundred copies had sold out and was received with widespread praise. The *Times Literary Supplement* commended it, stating, 'If we are to judge by its first number, the "Criterion" is not only that rare thing amongst English periodicals, a purely literary review, but it is of a quality not inferior to that of any other review published either here or abroad.' [70] Lady Rothermere, by contrast, demurred. She dubbed the issue 'dull'. Further disagreements emerged when she requested that he include pieces written by Katherine Mansfield and

[69] R. Lehmann-Haupt, 'The Criterion (1922-1939).' Folio 33, no. 6 (2004): 68.
[70] A. Banerjee, 'T. S. Eliot and the Criterion.' *Sewanee Review* 123, no. 2 (2015): 236.

Gertrude Stein, which he outright refused to do—not only citing his editorial prerogative, but undiplomatically informing her that Stein's writing was 'meaningless' and that she wrote 'nonsense'.[71] In Mansfield's case, Eliot (along with Pound) believed, rightly or wrongly, that she was inveighing against him as editor to Lady Rothermere.[72]

Eliot won these battles, but it proved to be a dispiriting war. The insular and interconnected nature of London's literary and artistic networks often blurred the lines between Eliot's social, intellectual, and professional worlds, making it more difficult to demarcate his professional and personal domains. Lady Rothermere wanted a magazine that promoted individual and important talents, whereas Eliot wanted talented individuals promoting and exploring important ideas. Their arrangement continued, but Eliot was keen to relieve Lady Rothermere of her patronage (and no doubt vice versa). He confided to Pound that he would like to get the magazine off her books and 'into our hands and get the money to run it for a couple of years. It would be,' he effused, 'the thing of our lives.'[73] This did not occur, per se, as the agreement held for all three years. But in 1925, when Eliot left Lloyds to a position at the publisher Faber & Gwyer, *The Criterion* came with him, remaining under the company's auspices for the rest of its duration.

The New Criterion

Whilst at Lloyds, Eliot had received multiple offers of employment. Efforts had been made at Cambridge to recruit him to the English Faculty, by Ezra Pound to fund his career, and by John Maynard Keynes (a Bloomsbury friend) to edit *The Nation and Athenaeum*. In each instance either the term and security or the income offered were too little, and in the case

[71] Ibid, 238.
[72] Banerjee, 'T. S. Eliot and the Criterion', 236.
[73] Ibid.

of Cambridge too remote from London's active literary scene. Eliot was also nominated for a prestigious Research Fellowship at All Souls College in Oxford, which he very much desired, but his poetry was deemed too controversial, and the nomination was unsuccessful. It was nevertheless at All Souls that Charles Whibley (a weekend guest, strident tory, and Eliot supporter) recommended Eliot to Geoffrey Faber (himself an All Souls Fellow) for consideration at his new publishing firm.

As Eliot recalled, 'Faber was looking for a writer with some reputation among the young, who could attract promising authors of the younger generation as well as of our own... He wanted an informal adviser and, in fact, a "talent scout."'[74] This is what he famously got, as the 'Faber Poetry List' became the envy of the publishing world, boasting everyone from W.H. Auden, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and Marianne Moore to Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath, and Philip Larkin. In return, Eliot gained stimulating and stable work in a preferred field, a directorship on the company's editorial board, and was able to introduce and nurture a generation of immensely talented writers and poets. So, too, 'after lengthy negotiations – over changing the title, altering its appearance, rethinking the production and distribution models – Faber & Gwyer agreed to assume joint responsibility for the journal, now retitled *The New Criterion*, and to sponsor Eliot as editor.'[75] The magazine would briefly alternate between publishing as a quarterly and a monthly before settling on the quarterly format, but it otherwise remained consistent in this form (and reverting to its original name) until its cessation in 1939—proving a credit to both its editor and publisher.

[74] Kojecký, *T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, 55.
[75] Schuchard, and Cuda, 'Introduction' in *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. Volume 2, The Perfect Critic, 1919-1926*, xxxiii.

When Faber & Gwyer relaunched *The New Criterion*, Geoffrey Faber encouraged Eliot to advertise 'publicly and openly' that it was edited by him. Before then the magazine's editorship was not widely publicized. Faber also asked Eliot to 'take more account of the average man,' and to focus on 'subjects that might appeal to generally educated audiences.' [76] From an editorial perspective this engendered a greater degree of transparency, so much so, Eliot felt comfortable to explicitly declare in its pages that 'the policy of the paper... is strongly reactionary and anti-romantic.'[77] Elsewhere the magazine was advertised as 'expounding the philosophy of "pure Toryism."'[78] This conservatism, along with his classicism, Catholicism, and Europeanism would come to define Eliot's social criticism during his *Criterion* years (and long afterward). That is not to suggest the magazine was politically affiliated with the Conservative Party, but the philosophical conservatism that Eliot was growing into (and would soon see him declare that he was Anglo-Catholic in religion, a classicist in literature and a royalist in politics) was nevertheless inherently conservative in nature.

The various elements of Eliot's conservatism will be examined later in this chapter, but it should be noted that his position was not, broadly speaking, radically out of step with aspects of the nation's mood and character, even though his was a minority perspective amongst fellow modernists and Bloomsbury types. In 1924, for instance, the nation voted in a massive Conservative parliamentary majority of 412 seats[79], and the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, spoke constantly of the nation as 'Christian England' and endlessly emphasised the importance of religion in national life—not unlike Eliot in *The Criterion* and later in *The Idea of a Christian Society*.[80] Nor was Eliot's conservatism a hindrance to

[76] Banerjee, 'T. S. Eliot and the Criterion', 237.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-war Britain*, 8.
[79] S. Ball, 'Baldwin, Stanley, first Earl Baldwin of Bewdley (1867-1947), prime minister.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sept. 2004.
[80] A. Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1990* (London: SCM Press LTD., 1991), 247.

making regular appearances on the BBC. It may even have been an advantage, enabling him to deliver broadcast talks on literary, cultural, social, and religious topics throughout the tumultuous 1920s and 30s. This was likely due to Eliot's commitment to moral probity, creative excellence, linguistic exactitude, political orderliness, and rational disinterestedness, which were conducive to the operating principles of the BBC under Lord Reith. For it was under Reith that the BBC sought to broadcast 'all the best in every department of human knowledge, endeavour and achievement [in addition to] the preservation of a high moral tone.'[81] There was, therefore, nothing scandalous about his conservatism, either in person or in print. It certainly did not prevent him (or his magazine) from cementing its place in the nation's literary and cultural establishment, and his conservatism became intertwined with his own eventual embodiment of the establishment at the height of his career and subsequent legacy.

To commemorate the magazine's relaunch as *The New Criterion*, Eliot included a restatement of his editorial principles. Published as 'The Idea of a Literary Review', Eliot stated both the errors he sought to avoid, and the standards to which he aspired. A literary review, he wrote, 'may err by being too comprehensive in its selection of contributors, or by being too narrow. Or it may err by including too much material and representing too many interests, which are not strictly literary, or on the other hand by sticking too closely to a narrow conception of literature.'[82] By contrast, Eliot's editorial approach was to document the clearest thought on the most important ideas that he deemed relevant 'not merely [to] literature, but… the interest of any intelligent person with literary taste.'[83] In subsequent issues these topics included everything from censorship to freedom of speech, Church and state, fascism and communism, monetary reform and capitalism, language and

[81] C. Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars, 1918-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 242.
[82] T.S. Eliot, 'The Idea of a Literary Review' in *The New Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 4 (Jan 1926), 1-5.
[83] Ibid.

leisure, conservation and secularisation—and those topics are merely a cross-section from Eliot's own editorials, not the entirety of the magazine itself.

Eliot maintained that 'a review should be an organ of documentation. That is to say, the bound volumes of a decade should represent the development of the keenest sensibility and the clearest thought of ten years.'[84] It was for this reason the magazine reviewed both fascist and communist literature alike, along with religious works by theologians like Jacques Maritain and works critical of religion by intellectuals such as Sigmund Freud. Indeed, *The Criterion's* pages were as diverse as any, engaging with figures as disparate (both intellectually and geographically) as Reinhold Niebuhr and John Maynard Keynes, D.H. Lawrence and Thomas Mann, Leon Trotsky and Karl Barth. In Eliot's own words, 'Above all the literary review – which might be called a review of general ideas… – must protect its disinterestedness, must avoid the temptation ever to appeal to any social, political or theological prejudices.'[85] That is not to suggest the magazine was without social, political, or theological tendencies—it was, like its editor, becoming predominantly tory in temperament, classicist by inclination, and Catholic in sympathy—but these positions formed a basis rather than a barrier for engaging alternative viewpoints, and often within its own pages and across multiple editions.

Eliot's disinterestedness could nevertheless result in some predictable conclusions, such as his repeated criticism of John Middleton Murry's romanticism and gnostic theology. Another was his regular chastisement of George Bernard Shaw for wilfully misrepresenting religion, as in *Saint Joan*, referring to Shaw as someone who 'exhibited intelligence at the mercy of emotion'.[86] But this disinterestedness could also produce

[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Literary Review' in *The New Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 4 (Jan 1926), 5.

surprising results. He defended freedom of speech and inveighed against state-sponsored censorship on numerous occasions, not only in favour (though not with approval) of D.H. Lawrence, but also lesser known and (then) equally salacious works, such as Radclyffe Hall's 1928 Lesbian novel, *The Well of Loneliness.*[87] Eliot did so because his disinterestedness convinced him that art and literature needed protection from political interference in order to develop organically, that standards in art were better judged by fellow artists, and because true censorship needed a moral basis to be justified and that political notions of decency were insufficiently grounded in theology to merit the status of morality.

It is a credit to the overall consistency of Eliot's criticism that despite his conservative political philosophy and his increasingly conservative social circle (which began to include prominent figures in the Conservatives[88]), he could nevertheless be withering in his treatment of the Conservative Party. In 1929, for instance, he wrote that the party has for generations 'had no contact with intelligence,' that it had an 'extremely muddled tradition' and 'has what no other political party at present enjoys, a complete mental vacuum: a vacancy that might be filled with anything, even with something valuable.'[89] Such frankness (whether it was felt to be impartial or not) often extended to venerable institutions such as the clergy and bishops, as well as Oxford and Cambridge.[90] Not even the poetry of his friends and the ideas of those he admired were spared from his disinterested analysis.

[87] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 8 (Sept 1928), 1-6.
[88] Spurr, *'Anglo Catholic in Religion' T.S. Eliot and Christianity*, 181.
[89] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 8 (July 1929), 652.
[90] Spurr, *'Anglo Catholic in Religion' T.S. Eliot and Christianity*, 180.

The editorial principle of disinterestedness, which sought to avoid the temptation of using emotional (rather than rational) appeals to their audience's social, political, or theological prejudices stemmed in large part from Eliot's classicism and Europeanism (two topics that will later be explored at length). As Jeroen Vanheste's work on *The Criterion* suggests, Eliot's classicism necessitated the coexistence of opposite (or at least differing) views within the magazine, as these dialogical and dialectical methods exhibited classicism's 'firm belief in reason as opposed to emotion and in objective truths as opposed to subjective judgements.'[91] In order for conclusions to be conclusive they required arguments, and such arguments required not just interlocutors, but those who could state their arguments with intelligence. As for the European element of his disinterestedness, this stemmed from the practical consideration that in order to discuss continental topics, it was necessary to do so with some detachment, otherwise it was impossible to accurately represent and thereafter interrogate the diverse range of philosophical attitudes existing outside England.[92] This did not prevent Eliot from deriving firm conclusions that were social, political, or theological in nature—nobody has ever accused him of that—but his commitment to reopening the mental frontiers of Europe demanded a level of disinterestedness to do so, otherwise conversation was in danger of being replaced by combativeness, which would render it impossible to intelligently discuss topics of importance.

In certain instances, the magazine's dedication to 'disinterestedly' exploring ideas (often at the expense of taking sides) was seen as problematic by some, as was the case when neither the magazine nor its editor took sides during the Spanish Civil War. Though Eliot did in fact argue for a third, French Catholic-inspired position, which denounced both

[91] Vanheste, *Guardians of the Humanist Legacy*, 44.
[92] J.F. Vanheste, 'The Reconstruction of the European Mind: T.S. Eliot's Criterion and the Idea of Europe.' *Journal of European Periodical Studies* 3, no. 2 (2018): 23-37.

republican irreligion and Franco's Erastian-like subordination of Church to state, his failure to publicly declare his allegiances in an either/or manner left him open to insinuations of fascist sympathy and, according to one scholar, 'to appear morally lazy rather than lofty or disinterested.'[93] It did not help his case that most of the nation's artists and literary intelligentsia were pro-republican. Fortunately for Eliot, the incident did not significantly diminish the magazine's status or his stature, as it continued to be 'regarded as the pre-eminent literary review of the decade'.[94] Nevertheless, his interest in political ideas and discussing views about politics, as opposed to directly engaging in politics, occasionally resulted in an indecorous tone of detachment. 'Discussion was conducted at such a high-minded and theoretical level,' as Harding observed, 'the reader could be forgiven for forgetting the urgency of the practical political issues at stake.'[95] On the other hand, it should be noted that Eliot's intended audience was more than capable of sustained thought and strenuous reading, nor would they have likely depended on a quarterly magazine for the majority of the information and opinions on the subject. They were, after all, drawn from the nation's intelligentsia.

The Spanish Civil War aside, it was the magazine's increasing tendency toward conservatism in political philosophy and Catholicism in theology that received wider comment, especially after Eliot's naturalization as a British citizen and his conversion to the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church of England in 1927. Even then, his 'disinterested' editorial policy remained much the same, which enabled the magazine to navigate the socio-political vicissitudes of the interwar period with considerable (and many thought commendable) consistency.[96] Indeed, Eliot's editorial policy made for a more ecumenical

[93] D. Newton-De Molina, *The Literary Criticism of T.S. Eliot: New Essays. English Literary Criticism: 20th Century* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 28.
[94] Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-war Britain*, 4.
[95] Ibid, 181.
[96] A. Domestico, 'Editing Modernism, Editing Theology: T. S. Eliot, Karl Barth, and the Criterion.' *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 3, no. 1 (2012): 32-33.

magazine than most during the interwar period. *The Criterion's* contributors, reviews, and commentaries spanned the ideological, intellectual, and literary spectrum. '*The Criterion*,' as Jason Harding has observed, 'was a broader and more temperate Church than most during the sectarian literary politics of Auden's "low dishonest decade."'[97] Editorial continuities aside, Eliot's conversion had an immeasurable impact on his intellectual outlook, so much so that we cannot appreciate his social criticism or understand him as a social critic without reference to his newfound and ultimately lifelong religious identity.

CONVERSION

In the years immediately prior to Eliot's conversion, between 1925 and 1927, his overburdened professional life was matched by an overwrought private life. Though he was prone to ill health and had previously spent time in 1921 at a sanatorium in therapy and convalescence, the predominant strain he faced during this period was his wife's increasing mental illness and the mounting toll of their faltering marriage. Vivienne's health had become sufficiently poor (and perhaps her husband's endurance so depleted) that in 1926, after a family trip to Rome (one in which Eliot was seen kneeling before Michelangelo's *Pietà* in St. Peter's Basilica), he took her to Freiburg, Germany, to receive medical treatment. Unfortunately, this only made matters worse, as she became delusional and even more mentally distressed. Then, upon returning to Paris in May, she attempted suicide and was there admitted to a sanatorium. To Eliot's credit, he travelled between Paris and London on a fortnightly basis until the couple returned to London in August. Yet, as Eliot confided to John Middleton Murry that month, 'I am oppressed by a sense of doom.'[98] This was further compounded by the spiritual and moral divergence that Eliot

[97] Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-war Britain*, 5.
[98] T.S. Eliot, V. Eliot, and J. Haffenden, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot. Volume 3, 1926-1927* (London: Faber & Faber, 2012), 243.

felt was emerging between them, which was a shift made even more pronounced by the ascetic and penitential elements of Catholic spiritualty that attracted him. The fact that he was acutely aware of her dependence on him and the mental anguish that he would (and ultimately did) inflict upon leaving her added to the strain.[99]

In the end, Eliot opted for initiating a separation whilst he was visiting Harvard in 1932-33 for the Charles Eliot Norton Professorship. Thereafter they met only once, as she was committed to a mental asylum and remained there until her death in 1947. Eliot, though guilt ridden and anguished, did not wish to be in contact with her (despite remaining in close contact with her family, especially his brother-in-law). In Lyndall Gordon's view, the emotional disturbance and moral anguish of this period was the private genesis for much of Eliot's public moralizing. 'The need to explore, diagnose, and eradicate evil,' she wrote, 'was the prime motive for several great works which all had their origin in the gravest moral crisis of his life.'[100] This was no doubt a possible contributing factor to his moralising, but as we shall see it was quite improbable as the prime motive for his social criticism and activities as a public moralist.

Instead, as other scholars have observed, 'such explanations of this period are not entirely convincing, since Eliot's moral formulations are part of a larger project of Christian renewal that began long before his separation from Vivien.'[101] In much the same way there was always a strong and moralistic component to his classicism. Stefan Collini, in a work about 19th century public moralists, recognised this, indicating that Eliot could be designated as a leading 20th century public moralist.[102] Like his Victorian forbearers, Eliot

[99] P. Ackroyd, *T. S. Eliot* (New York: Penguin, 1984), 201.
[100] L. Gordon, *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* (New York: Norton, 1999), 284.
[101] I. Javadi, R. Schuchard, and J. Stayer, *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. Volume 5, Tradition and Orthodoxy, 1934-1939. The Critical ed.* (Baltimore: Project Muse, 2017), xxxii.
[102] S. Collini, *Public Moralists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 2.

'invoked a particularly strenuous ethic, and gave such moral considerations priority over other concerns, whether personal, political, or aesthetic.'[103] It helps that Eliot described himself as a moralist in print and equated classicism with mankind's moral responsibility toward their present and future state.[104] In a similar manner his classicism found a ready compliment in the 'spiritual discipline, emotional control, and the intellectual harmonisation of sensibility' found in divines such as Lancelot Andrewes and John Henry Newman.[105] Continuities aside, the impact of his conversion was nonetheless as wide ranging as it was lifelong. It had the effect of introducing or further developing a metaphysics for his morality, a theology behind his political theory, an ecumenism to enlarge his Europeanism, an eschatology to direct his understanding of history, and a Catholic spirituality to compliment his classicist sensibility. It was, in sum, a total conversion.

This conversion occurred in June 1927, when, at the age of thirty-nine, Eliot was baptized and confirmed in the Church of England. It was initially a private affair, with the service being held in secret. According to Spurr, the doors of Holy Trinity Church at Finstock (near Witney, in Oxfordshire) were locked and a verger was posted on guard in the vestry as William Force Stead, chaplain of Worcester College, Oxford, administered adult baptism to Eliot at the font. The next day, Eliot was driven to the private chapel of the Bishop of Oxford, Thomas Banks Strong, where the rite of confirmation was performed.[106] Eliot's conversion was unexpected to many, but unlike his similarly secret marriage ceremony, his conversion was not so sudden. As noted by Schuchard, Formichelli, and Dickey, 'hints of his private spiritual search can be found in his early poetry, his study of

[103] Ibid.
[104] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Monthly Criterion: A Literary Review*, 13 (Oct 1933) 115-20.
[105] T.S. Eliot, 'Lancelot Andrewes', *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. Volume 2*, 822.
[106] Spurr, *'Anglo Catholic in Religion' T.S. Eliot and Christianity*, 111.

Bradley's Absolute, his years of immersion in Dante, his acceptance of the doctrine of original sin, and his more recent interest in the sermons of English divines from Andrewes to Donne.'[107] That did not stop admirers and detractors alike from 'demanding how it was, that Eliot the innovator, a mere eight years after gloomily delineating *The Waste Land*... that he, the poetic modernist, could find it possible to take refuge in antique orthodoxy?'[108] Some, like Virginia Woolf, vaguely anticipated his conversion, sensing a shift as early as 1923: 'That strange figure Eliot dined here last night. I feel that he has taken the veil or whatever monks do.'[109] There was even scepticism amongst some fellow communicants. C.S. Lewis, an Oxford don, sniped and ridiculed his conversion, 'characterizing him as a "Neo-Angular": "trying to make Christianity itself one more high-brow, Chelsea, bourgeois-baiting fad."'[110] Then again, Lewis, who was also a fellow convert, detested modernist poetry and suffered from professional jealousies as a would-be poet himself.

Eliot remained undeterred by the disturbance his conversion aroused. It was, after all, no passing fancy. Ever the classicist, Eliot had written to Bruce Richmond, editor of the *TLS*, before his conversion while he was still reading Andrewes that 'this article will be a pretty serious matter for me as I shall have to clear up my mind and try to come to conclusions, in connection with Bishop Andrewes, affecting my whole position.'[111] As he later wrote to his friend Paul Elmer More, 'Most critics appear to think that my Catholicism is merely an escape or an evasion, certainly a defeat. I acknowledge the difficulty of a positive Christianity nowadays; and I can only say that the dangers pointed out, and my own weaknesses, have been apparent to me long before my critics noticed them.'[112] Indeed, it

[107] Schuchard, Formichelli, and Dickey, 'Introduction' in The *Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. Volume 3*, xiv.
[108] R. Kirk, *Eliot and His Age* (Illinois: Sherwood Sugden & Company, Publishers, 1988), 50.
[109] Gordon, *Eliot's New Life*, 5.
[110] Spurr, 'Anglo-Catholic in Religion', 255.
[111] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot. Volume 3*, 209.
[112] T.S. Eliot, V. Eliot, and J. Haffenden, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot. Volume 4, 1928-1929*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2013), 567.

was this recognition of weakness, in the form of original sin, that was so essential to Eliot's conversion in the first place and helped make it so lasting. It would also come to colour much of his social criticism, especially in his scepticism toward the scientific pretensions of social planning and his mistrust of ideological enthusiasm.

Eliot regarded the concepts of original sin and hell as appropriate foils for his post-war disillusionment. Like many in the wake of the First World War, '[Eliot] questioned the survivability of liberal humanism.' [113] The notion that cultural, intellectual, and technological progress could guarantee inherent improvements in the nature of humanity and the communities they inhabited seemed untenable in the light of such carnage. Indeed, he began to doubt the very epistemological grounds for liberal humanism, since he could not see why ethics should be divorced from theology. This was mirrored theologically in his conversion with a pronounced interest and belief in the doctrine of hell. As D.M. Kari has explained, 'the centre of his faith [at conversion] was the belief in, and fear of, hell: "to be damned for the glory of God" [as Eliot wrote to Paul Elmer More on 2 June 1930] seemed to him a literal truth.... He suggested that the prospect of damnation imparted significance to life, which it otherwise lacked: the glory of man was in part "his capacity for damnation."'[114] Similarly, it was the concept of penitence that attracted Eliot to Anglo-Catholicism (or 'The Catholic Church in England' as Eliot called it in *Thoughts After Lambeth*[115]), along with its practice of adoration, its intellectualism and dogma, and its combination of authority and diversity.[116] In much the same way, the belief that culture could disintegrate and a new dark age could ensue, meant that Eliot sought all the more

[113] W. H. Coates and H. V. White, *The Ordeal of Liberal Humanism: an intellectual history of Western Europe* (New York: McGraw-Hill, inc. 1970), 452.
[114] D.M. Kari, *T.S. Eliot's Dramatic Pilgrimage: A progress of craft as an expression of Christian perspective* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 17.
[115] T.S. Eliot, "Thoughts After Lambeth" in *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. Volume 4, English Lion, 1930-1933*, 236.
[116] J.S. Peart-Binns, *Maurice B. Reckitt: A Life* (Basingstoke: The Bowerdean Press, 1988), 147.

to envision and protect the most effective means for cultural transmission and societal flourishing, which in both cases, as with his personal life, became premised on the foundational and fundamental centrality of religious ideas and truths. It is little wonder, therefore, that his commentaries in *The Criterion* were so serious minded about the importance of ideas. Eliot had lived through one world war and was determined to keep the intellectual frontiers of Europe sufficiently open to avoid another—an effort as noble as it was doomed.

Before proceeding onto the next section, it is worth reiterating that Eliot's Catholicism was not merely an intellectual or theological commitment. Eliot's faith found significant expression in the daily observances and spiritual disciplines associated with (a rather devout form) of Anglo-Catholicism. The primary location for such devotion was at St Stephen's Church in South Kensington.[117] Indeed, quite literally so, as the exuberant Revd Eric Cheetham offered Eliot lodgings in the church's presbytery in 1933 and appointed him churchwarden in 1934. While this domestic arrangement lasted until 1940 (which is no mean innings), Eliot remained churchwarden at St Stephen's until 1959 and continued worshipping there until his death in 1965. During this period Eliot was fastidious in his adherence to the liturgical and ascetic obligations of his Catholicism, with 'the climax of Eliot's worshipping week (which included daily private prayer and attendance at weekday Low Masses… was High Mass, late on Sunday morning, at St Stephen's.'[118] Beyond this, Eliot also took a keen and approving interest in the life and practices of multiple religious communities, which found written expression in his affirmation of their role in *The Idea of a Christian Society*.[119] In particular, he attended a number of silent retreats at the Society of the Sacred Mission, which was an Anglican monastery in Kelham, though he also visited

[117] Spur, Anglo-Catholic in Religion, 122.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society*, 48.

the Society of St John the Evangelist near Oxford and the Anglican Benedictines at Nashdom on a number of occasions throughout his life.[120] As such, it is important to remember in the chapters ahead that although Eliot's Catholicism often manifested itself in print in a highly cerebral manner, his faith was by no means exclusively (or even primarily) intellectual in nature. Eliot's Catholicism was both deeply personal and highly integrated into his life – intellectually, spatially, socially, temporally – with the obvious but important upshot that comments in his social criticism about the societal importance of things like intercession, asceticism, redemption and so forth were genuine in both their meaning and intent.

AN ENDING

In January 1939, Eliot observed in the final issue of *The Criterion* that 'only from about the year 1926 did the features of the post-war world begin clearly to emerge – and not only in the sphere of politics. From about that date, one began slowly to realise that the intellectual and artistic output of the previous seven years had been rather the last efforts of an old world, than the first struggles of a new.'[121] In a similar manner, it was only from about the year 1926-27 that the outline of Eliot's religious faith began to emerge, and with it a deepening orientation toward the nature and utility of doctrine and dogma, theology and ethics. In particular, he became highly interested in the generative relationship of religion to culture and Christendom to Europe, as outlined in works (and *Criterion* contributions) by Roman Catholic intellectuals like Christopher Dawson and Jacques Maritain. In a negative sense, Eliot came to believe that one could not maintain culture without religion,

[120] Spur, Anglo-Catholic in Religion, 151.
[121] Kojecký, *T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, 95.

because religion was the source of culture; and in a positive sense, progress in politics required a proper theology, just as economics needed a foundation in ethics.[122]

Naturally, these principles began to be mirrored in the pages and contributions of *The Criterion*, even though, as Eliot admitted, 'it stretched the original framework of a literary review'.[123] The magazine became more associated with essays, books, and reviews by Christian intellectuals like the Neo-Thomists Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson, as well as Christopher Dawson, Karl Barth, P.E. More, V.A. Demant, Martin D'Arcy, and many others. Indeed, the magazine became sufficiently saturated with theologians and religious philosophers that by 1930 Eliot had to defend the magazine from accusations of being 'an exclusive Thomist club,' and 'an organ for the Frenchified doctrine of neo-Thomism.'[124] Eliot defended *The Criterion* against such exaggerated claims, but he nevertheless regarded the magazine's increasing association with Catholic and Christian thought as worthwhile. In the worsening climate of the 1930s, 'intellectuals and writers could no longer stand aloof from contemporary political developments, for "politics has become too serious a matter to be left to politicians."'[125] In much the same way, he came to believe that liberal humanism (or humanism without religion) was insufficient as an intellectual and cultural defence against communism and fascism, in large part because the freedom it espoused was too negative (i.e. content-less) to overcome the powerful appeal of 'positive' ideologies. Just as majority Christian countries like Russia, Italy, and Germany had fallen prey to atheist and pagan ideologies, so too, Eliot feared 'the grave dangers to this country,' in both domestic and foreign affairs, 'which might result from the lack of any vital political

[122] T.S. Eliot, 'Last Words' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 18 (Jan 1939), 269-75.
[123] Ibid, 269.
[124] Domestico, 'Editing Modernism, Editing Theology: T. S. Eliot, Karl Barth, and the Criterion', 20.
[125] Vanheste, 'The Reconstruction of the European Mind: T.S. Eliot's Criterion and the Idea of Europe.' 35.

philosophy, either explicit or implicit.'[126] Given the history of this period and the great conflagration to come, his speculative concern was not unwarranted.

Eliot's concerns continued to mount throughout the mid- to late-1930s. During this period the worsening international situation made it increasingly difficult for the magazine to realise Eliot's original editorial vision and for his social criticism to make further headway. As Vanheste has noted, 'The relative optimism of the 1920s and the Criterion's belief in a revival of the European spirit came to a halt when, in the 1930s, the political developments in Spain, Italy and Germany greatly complicated international intellectual exchange.'[127] This in turn impacted publications from these countries that had reciprocal or likeminded relations with *The Criterion*. The German *Die Neue Rundschau*, the Spanish *Revista de Occidente*, and the Italian *Il Convegno* each had to close or drastically change their editorial policy.[128] As foreign contributions diminished, the magazine responded by dramatically increasing the number of foreign books it reviewed (in conjunction with a general increase in book reviews). But this was no more than a rear-guard action. In the twilight of the interwar years the restrained detachment of classicism was ill-matched against the rise of ideological enthusiasms. Eliot's political philosophy, with its tory emphasis on throne and altar, class and elitism, social order and anti-state intervention, was increasingly overshadowed by the growing demands of re-armament and national defence, and the subsequent growth of economic planning and government control under the auspices of total war. His Europeanism was similarly undercut by militarism and nationalism on the continent and whilst his Christianity remained intact and was even accompanied by a national revival of religious sentiment at the outset of the war, the finer points of theology

[126] Eliot, 'Last Words', 269.
[127] Vanheste, 'The Reconstruction of the European Mind: T.S. Eliot's Criterion and the Idea of Europe', 35.
[128] Ibid.

were soon eclipsed by the looming exigencies of a second great war.[129] In such conditions the mind of Europe was ill-disposed to consider social criticism from any quarter, which left Eliot with little option. 'Go, go, go,' as he told the bird to say in his 1936 poem *Burnt Norton*, 'Humankind cannot bear very much reality.'[130] Go, go, go went *The Criterion.*

It was not until the Munich Crisis of September 1938 that Eliot felt the full weight of personal defeat. For him, the crisis represented the capitulation of liberalism and democracy to the evil vitality of totalitarianism. The negative elements of western democratic ideology had been unable to summon up the positive strength needed to defend (or even agitate) for the continuation of Europe's collective identity, common values, and religious inheritance. The scale of Eliot's disappointment was immense and would later occasion his first full-length work of social criticism, *The Idea of a Christian Society*, which was a culmination of his *Criterion* concerns; but the crisis also marked the end of the magazine's sixteen-year publication. Following Munich, Eliot wrote, 'During the autumn, the prospect of war had involved me in hurried plans for suspending publication; and in the subsequent *détente* I became convinced that my enthusiasm for continuing the editorial work did not exist.'[131]

Looking back, Eliot wrote, 'I have wondered whether it would not have been more profitable, instead of trying to maintain literary standards increasingly repudiated in the modern world, to have endeavoured to rally intellectual effort to arm those principles of life and policy from the lack of which we are suffering disastrous consequences.'[132] But even then, 'such a task would be outside the scope of *The Criterion*, would require the whole

[129] N. Spencer, *The Evolution of the West* (London: SPCK, 2016), 36.
[130] T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems: 1909-1962* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), 190.
[131] Eliot, 'Last Words', 269.
[132] Ibid.

of the editor's time, and probably a more competent editor.'[133] Eliot finished by concluding, 'this is perhaps another indication that *The Criterion* has served its purpose.'[134] Yet the fact that *The Idea of a Christian Society* was only a few months away from creation suggests that however much *The Criterion* was at an end, his career as a social critic was not. Hereafter he became more preoccupied with rallying intellectual effort to arm those principles of life and policy that made life worth living and society worthwhile defending—world war or not.

For the purposes of this chapter, it is neither necessary nor feasible to review the legacy of *The Criterion* in its entirety. There are multiple and commendable works already published on the subject. Some, like Denis Donoghue, have focused on the ultimate failure of the magazine to convert the mind of Europe to classicism.[135] Others, like Jeroen Vanheste credit the magazine with having effectively disseminated its philosophy of European classicism and conservative Christianity, however ineffectual the outcome was in the context of an encroaching world war.[136] Jason Harding echoes this, concluding that even 'if the circulation was always small, the Criterion really did become something of an establishment journal…. Eliot was right to describe his journal as a valuable record of intellectual thought between the wars.'[137] Even in his own time, the customarily hostile critic Geoffrey Grigson conceded in 1939, 'from *The Criterion* next to no English writer of value was ever excluded. We can be grateful indeed to Mr. Eliot. He was Catholic and serious.'[138] And as we shall explore in greater detail in another chapter, as a social critic he was indeed Catholic, classicist, conservative, and European.

[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Donoghue, 'Eliot and The Criterion', 22.
[136] Vanheste, 'The Reconstruction of the European Mind: T.S. Eliot's Criterion and the Idea of Europe', 36.
[137] Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-war Britain*, 228.
[138] G. Grigson, '*Criterion* and *London Mercury*,' *New Verse* (May 1939): 62.

The matter of greatest importance for this chapter, however, is to acknowledge the interrelationships that existed between *The Criterion* and Eliot's social criticism, as formulated in his editorial practices and commentaries, and in turn between *The Criterion* and intellectual life during the interwar period. As Jason Harding explains, 'The Criterion provided Eliot with a public forum from which he could participate in the general cultural conversation: mediating authors and ideas to a variegated field of periodicals and more broadly to highly differentiated organisations and institutions in modern society.'[139] In the next chapter, which explores in greater detail the content of Eliot's social criticism, it is important to remember the context in which he operated as a social critic. Eliot's social criticism might have made him a minority voice amongst his modernist, non-religious, and liberal (or socialist) contemporaries, but he was not on the periphery of interwar intellectual life. In Michael Levenson's estimation, 'His editorship of the Criterion was just as important as the shock effect of *The Waste Land* in securing Eliot's prominence.'[140] In the pages of *The Criterion* his social criticism received considerable attention and noteworthy circulation amongst leading and influential intellectuals. As Eliot's reputation continued to rise throughout the interwar years, it did so in tandem with his role as an editor and his function as a social critic, not despite them.

FRIENDSHIPS, PART I

Eliot's persona in the 1930s as an editor, director, critic, and poet should be set alongside his intense and active socialising. For he was, to borrow from his beloved Aristotle, a social animal. Indeed, the many close friendships, shared associations, and collective endeavours that occupied his post-separation, pre-second marriage years are essential to charting the

[139] Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-war Britain*, 2.
[140] M. Levenson, 'The Role of the Intellectual' in J. Harding edits *T.S. Eliot in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 67.

development and reception of his social criticism. They reveal some of the classicist, conservative, Catholic, and continental nature of his contacts and spheres, effectively mirroring in his social life the intellectual orientation of his social criticism (as will be established in the following chapter). They likewise paint a dynamic portrait of Eliot's engagement with 1930s and early 1940s intellectual networks in Britain: revealing the porous boundaries that existed amongst the nation's intelligentsia, especially with respect to the interdisciplinary nature of religious, political, cultural, and intellectual thought.*

Loosely defined, Eliot's social life (in so far as it related to his social criticism) can be divided between individuals and groups. The former consists of persons that he either corresponded, collaborated, or socialized with on a private, individual basis; while the latter were sets of people he consistently met with for definite (often programmatic) purposes, although this often-included wining and dining—both of which featured heavily in his adult years. Indeed, he was a member of numerous dining clubs, for which admission appears to have been a minimum consumption of five martinis. Fortunately, Eliot was an experienced and enthusiastic drinker: rarely remembered as being the worse for wear. In fact, on numerous occasions he was regarded as much the better for it, since alcohol tended to soften his reserved and decorous manner.[141] Not that 'softening' meant 'soft'. Eliot could become highly animated and even bawdy under the influence of alcohol, especially in the company of close male friends such as John Hayward, Geoffrey Faber, and Frank Morley—who, meeting respectively as Possum, Tarantula, Whale, and Coot—enjoyed evenings throughout the thirties replete with whisky and wily tales. But other friendships could be

* It is unnecessary to go beyond the early 1940s, as Eliot's *Notes* was essentially completed in 1943/44 and its publication in 1948 marked the end of his social criticism. Likewise, he produced little social criticism in the interim.

[141] F. Tomlin, *T.S. Eliot: A Friendship* (London: Routledge, 1988), 87.

just as deep and yet remain deeply sober, which included those he developed with abbots and brothers in religious communities.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Peter Ackroyd styled Eliot as 'a master of disguise or protective camouflage – an "upper-middle" Englishman with his publishing colleagues, Yankee with Yankees and indeed a pillar of the Church with other such pillars. This may help to explain the suspicion entertained by many of his friends that they were being placed in special compartments, never to mingle with those in other compartments, like cells in the honeycomb of his private life.'[142] In much the same way, there were some who vastly overestimated their importance to Eliot (not realising the limited extent to which they were integrated into the rest of his life), which was the case with certain figures from The Moot such as Karl Mannheim and J.H. Oldham and which has extended in kind to the historians and scholars who have written about them (although we shall explore this more in chapter three). As such, the list of contemporary individuals who positively influenced or substantially helped shape elements of Eliot's social criticism is surprisingly slender. This does not, however, include persons who played a role in their capacity as fellow group members in such forums as The Moot and Chandos Group, which we shall address in greater detail in a subsequent chapter. But the list of those who did does include A.L. Rowse, Christopher Dawson, and Jacques Maritain. Each of which, in their own manner, variously highlight the classicist, conservative, Catholic, and continental aspects of Eliot's thought.

Eliot's longstanding and close friendship with the historian A.L. Rowse appears unlikely on first inspection. Rowse (b.1903), who was a Prize Fellow at All Souls and taught at the London School of Economics, was neither religious nor (until later in life) a conservative.

[142] Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot*, 236.

He was an unsuccessful labour candidate on multiple occasions and espoused an idiosyncratically intellectualised brand of communism. Furthermore, as a miner's son with patronising views and minor talents in poetry, the two were not an ostensibly instinctive match. Eliot, however, saw great potential in the man fifteen years his junior, accepting numerous pieces from him in *The Criterion* and becoming close companions via frequent correspondence, shared intellectual circles, and time spent socialising together in London.

In Eliot's own words, written in 1944 to Geoffrey Curtis, 'Rowse is an old friend of mine, and a very touching person: the suppressed Catholic and the rather less suppressed Tory (with a real respect for Good Families), the miner's son and the All Souls Fellow, the minor poet and the would-be politician, the proletarian myth and the will-to-power, are always at odds in a scholarly retiring mind and a frail body.'[143] In return, Rowse regarded Eliot as a mentor and guide in the world of letters and on numerous intellectual matters.[144] This did not stop him from trying to convert his mentor to Labour politics during the first decade of their friendship, but as their mutual friend, Frederick Tomlin, once recalled, 'To [Eliot], Labour was not merely a political party; subscription to it entailed embracing the faith, the doctrine of socialism, and that was to embrace an ersatz religion. One (genuine) religion was enough [for him].'[145] Yet it was precisely this difference of opinion that proved so important for Eliot's social criticism during the latter half of his editorship of *The Criterion.*

Indeed, Eliot, who as noted was tory in sympathy but not as Conservative in politics, once confided to Rowse, who was Labour in politics but becoming conservative in philosophy, that he wished the two of them could form a group or club of intellectuals, 'consisting not

[143] T.S. Eliot quoted in J. Clark, 'Rowse, (Alfred) Lesie,' Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 2004.
[144] Ibid.
[145] F. Tomlin, *T.S. Eliot: a Friendship*, 32.

of people attached to any existing allegiance, but rather of a cross-section of opinion, youngish men of diverse backgrounds and sympathies, having chiefly in common the desire to look at politics present and future, and each individual inspired by a critical dislike of his own party (if he has one). ⁅But⁆ the obvious difficulty is that a few people like yourself are never in London.'[146] Interestingly, though this desire for comradery would not come to pass on this occasion—and though many have mistakenly over-attributed its realisation within The Moot—he would find some semblance of this amongst (an admittedly) older group of men in the Chandos circle.

Many of the contributions made by Rowse to *The Criterion* were classicist in nature. That is not to suggest that they were literary in subject matter, but that they exemplified Eliot's own understanding of classicism as a dispassionate and rational analysis of ideas, with the added view of examining the moral worth and implications of an idea.[147] This was something that he appreciated greatly about Rowse as an individual.[148] Indeed, his essays were often feature pieces in the magazine, which were published alongside contrasting articles like staged battles (as was the case in 'Mr Barnes and Mr Rowse', which was published in July 1929). Elsewhere in *The Criterion* his works were reviewed (such as *Politics and the Younger Generation*, published by Faber & Faber) and he was called upon to review others' books in kind. These contributions were important for Eliot, not least because they upheld the magazine's classicist ideal of objective intellectual cross-examination, but because it was in contradistinction to his ideas that Eliot himself essayed some of his earliest and most explicit formulations against both communism and fascism. So, too, this in turn enabled Eliot to develop his own theories concerning the proper

[146] T.S. Eliot, 'To A.L. Rowse, 7 March 1931' in *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 5: 1930-1931*, 95.
[147] T.S. Eliot, 'To A.L. Rowse, 18 April 1931' in *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 5: 1930-1931*, 95.
[148] T.S. Eliot, 'To A.L. Rowse, 10 February 1930' in *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 5: 1930-1931*, 94.

relations of church, state, and society, before developing them more fully in *The Idea of a Christian Society.*

This foil-like relationship was strongly exhibited via their exchanges in *The Criterion* on fascism and communism. Beginning as early as July of 1928, Eliot had confided to Rowse in a letter that he wanted to examine the intellectual basis of fascism to determine whether it possessed a genuine and desirable political idea. 'The more I read about it,' he wrote to him, 'the more uninteresting it seems, but it might be worthwhile to say even that. What I am trying to do is to find out whether there is any idea in Fascism at all; if not it might be at least worthwhile to say so.'[149] Four months later this endeavour was published as an essay in his magazine and Rowse was invited to respond from a communist perspective. This in turn sparked a longer exchange over the coming year and prompted extending reading in response to Rowse, which culminated in Eliot's most explanatory and declaratory statements on both fascism and communism to date.

Written in July of 1929, Eliot's essay 'Mr Barnes and Mr Rowse' lauded his interlocutors for 'having suggested to me new, and I hope more intelligent, questions to ask.'[150] Eliot also conceded the intelligibility and religious zeal of communism, which he regarded as a formidable (and, he feared, potentially stronger) countervailing force to the democratic spirit. But the essay also outlined several of his most significant objections to it (alongside his critiques of fascism). He argued that both ideologies were equivalent in their manipulative emotionalism, anti-capitalism, and equally lacking a truly original 'idea' of government.[151] In his own damning, classicist terminology he criticised them, saying 'I find in both fascism and communism a combination of statements with unexamined

[149] Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-war Britain*, 182.
[150] T.S. Eliot, 'Mr Barnes and Mr Rowse' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 8 (July 1929), 657.
[151] *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot, Volume 3, Literature, Politics, Belief, 1927-1929*, xxxiv.

enthusiasms.'[152] According to him, 'Fascism and communism, as ideas, seem to me to be thoroughly sterilized. A revolutionary idea is one which requires a reorganisation of the mind; fascism or communism is now the natural idea for the thoughtless person.'[153] Indeed, he regarded both as revolts against capitalism, but regarded neither of them as having penetrated to the bottom of the matter, 'so they are likely to be merely transformations of the present system.'[154]

With respect to communism, Eliot further criticized its materialistic interpretation of history as incompatible with moral notions of value and therefore he pushed Rowse on having sought 'to isolate the rational and ignore the irrational element in communism'.[155] This was significant, not merely from a classicist perspective of failing to dispassionately examine ideas in their essence, but also from a religious perspective. For he believed that in committing themselves to 'unexamined enthusiasms' or emotional biases, communists and communism (along with fascism) had placed politics in the place of religion; yet in his estimation 'neither of these deities seems to me particularly worthy of worship'.[156] As mentioned before, this inference was of tremendous importance to Eliot's social criticism, as his search for a suitable political idea that could function in conjunction with religion led him in the years to come to outline his own theory on the matter: at first tentatively and episodically in *The Criterion* during the 1930s, and then in a more definite and final form in his 1939 book *The Idea of a Christian Society*.

A second friendship, this time with the Roman Catholic historian, Christopher Dawson, and conducted largely through correspondence, highlights the religious (principally

[152] Eliot, 'Mr Barnes and Mr Rowse', 661.
[153] Ibid, 658.
[154] Ibid, 663.
[155] Ibid, 661.
[156] Ibid, 662.

Catholic) nature of Eliot's social criticism in the 1930s. This relationship has received scant attention from most scholars, with Kojecký providing little explanation about his influence upon Eliot—whilst Russell Kirk has made the opposite error by claiming (without substantiation) that 'of social thinkers in his own time, none influenced Eliot more than Dawson'.[157] This title should more likely go to Jacques Maritain or perhaps V.A. Demant, but Dawson's influence was sufficiently important for him to be included here. Indeed, Dawson's biographer, Christina Scott, claims (without reference to sources) that when Eliot was asked in the early 1930s by students in America who was the most powerful intellectual force in Britain, he responded (with what one assumes was immodest exaggeration) Christopher Dawson.[158] Nevertheless, it was Dawson who, more than anyone else, provided Eliot with a historical framework (alongside Maritain's philosophical one) in which the concept of Christendom demonstrated the dependant and generative relationship between culture and religion—or more specifically, of western civilization upon Roman Catholicism, as well as English culture upon Catholicism more broadly.

Christopher Dawson was, as mentioned, a noted Roman Catholic and an eminent cultural historian. Though most of his articles and books were researched and published independently, he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1943 and appointed as the inaugural professor of Roman Catholic Studies in 1958 at Harvard University. Dawson was also a regular contributor to *The Criterion*, having written articles and reviews for the magazine from 1929 onwards. For having read Dawson's 'paper in *Order* with great interest, and also your essay in the new *Dublin Review*,'[159] Eliot commissioned 'The End of

[157] Kirk, *Eliot and His Age*, 300.
[158] C. Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 210.
[159] T.S. Eliot, 'Letter to Christopher Dawson, 19 January 1930' in *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 5: 1930-1931*, 40.

an Age,' which outlined in positive from (though partially in contradistinction to Bertrand Russell) Dawson's Roman Catholic view of the interrelationship between culture, religion, philosophy, and history. This essay, which recapitulated Dawson's 1929 *Progress and Religion* and anticipated his 1932 *The Making of Europe*, argued that religion was the dynamic of all social culture, citing the 'dark ages' as the most culturally fecund period in western history.[160] This view came to be increasingly reflected in both the pages of *The Criterion* and in Eliot's later social criticism.

This began with a marked increase from 1930 onwards in the number of religious and theological books that the magazine reviewed, which, as J. Vanheste has noted, was 'in sympathy [with]… a Christian humanism inspired by authors such as the neo-Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain and the Catholic historian Christopher Dawson.'[161] This included the works of another Roman Catholic neo-Thomist, Étienne Gilson, along with the works of Reinhold Niebuhr and Karl Barth. It even extended to covering certain papal pronouncements and encyclicals, most notably Pius XI on Charles Maurras, but also extending backwards in time to Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris*. A second outcome was the advancement of Dawson's own view that Europe (both as a cultural inheritance and as an intellectual tradition) was the fusion of the Roman Empire, the Catholic Church, and the classical tradition. More specifically, that the Roman tradition provided a sense of territorial unity, the classical tradition a unifying frame of intellectual reference, and the Catholic Church not only a spiritual form of union and cooperation, but also solidified the influence (and confluence) of the other two.

[160] W. Kingston, 'Dawson, (Henry) Christopher (1889-1970), cultural historian.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 September 2004.

[161] J.F. Vanheste, 'The Reconstruction of the European Mind: T.S. Eliot's Criterion and the Idea of Europe,' 34.

This argument became reflected in the magazine's increasing insistence upon and interest in the religious component of their classicist (and increasingly conservative) charge to reconfigure the mind of Europe. Naturally, this was not all due to Dawson's influence, but he was influential nonetheless in helping to shape the editorial interests of the magazine toward his own intellectual arguments: namely that contemporary Roman Catholicism—and by extension Catholicism more generally—was not merely the active agent in the historical development of western civilisation, but remained the essential agent needed to revive and refashion contemporary civilisation. It is no surprise, therefore, that as early as 1931 Eliot was arguing that a 'worthy adversary to communism… must not only [have] a doctrine of the relation of the temporal and spiritual [but] even a religious foundation for the whole of its political philosophy.'[162]

Eliot acknowledged his friend's importance in the prefaces to both *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. In the former, he specifically mentioned Dawson's 1939 book, *Beyond Politics*, while in the latter he thanked him alongside V.A. Demant and Karl Mannheim, writing that 'it is more necessary to note the debt in general, since I have not in my text referred to [him].'[163] While more attention will be given to these specific influences in a subsequent chapter, it is worth noting here that Dawson's *Beyond Politics* was highly germane to Eliot's *Idea*, as both works addressed the role that orders and groups of elites could play in the reconfiguration of national culture and the reconstitution of political leadership in a rejuvenated civilizational context.

In Dawson's case, this meant elites creating and maintaining higher forms of cultural unity within a totalising state: leveraging the growing capacity of the state's apparatus to realise

[162] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 11 (Oct 1931) 65-72.

[163] T.S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1949), 3.

genuine forms of religiously defined human flourishing. For Eliot, this meant organising intellectual and spiritual elites into a religious advisory community (i.e., less formal and more spontaneous that a committee), who could in turn provide insight and comment for both the nation at large and its national leaders as to what collective human flourishing might require or entail.[164] Both agreed that a diminution in religious observance and national sanctity had resulted in a massive disruption (and dereliction) of social order: one rapidly filled by Nazi and Soviet forms of totalitarianism. As Stefan Collini has also observed, both men (along with V.A. Demant) shared a pluralist view of civil society in which guild-like or functionally based social groupings provided a counterweight to central authority.[165] But the major difference between them, however, was that Dawson was less suspicious of authoritarianism as a legitimate form of government, believing democracy to be of limited value, whereas Eliot sought to avoid authoritarianism, however much he was frustrated by democracy's limitations.

This difference began to emerge as early as 1934, when Eliot first disclosed a troubling trend in Dawson's thought. Writing to Bonamy Dobree in March, he confided that 'Dawson [is] showing [an] alarming tendency towards fascism.'[166] Eliot did not expand on the matter, but Dawson himself wrote to Eliot two months later stating, 'I must confess that so far as principles go, setting aside their practices, I have very little quarrel with Fascism. I am sure that the corporate state is the right basis for both a political and an economic solution, [and harmonizes with] the principle of hierarchy and authority.'[167] Eliot objected to this on economic grounds, having already stated his theoretical and moral qualms with fascism in print, writing to him that 'it seems to me that any political authority

[164] See Eliot's writings on the Community of Christians in *The Idea of a Christian Society*.
[165] S. Collini, 'The European Modernist as Anglican Moralist: The Later Social Criticism of T.S. Eliot', 210.
[166] T.S., Eliot, 'Letter to Bonamy Dobree, March 1934' in V. Eliot and J. Haffenden, J. eds *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 7: 1934-1935* (London: Faber and Faber, 2017), 128.
[167] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 7: 1934-1935*, 179.

that we are likely to get through fascism, a "restoration" financed by industrialists, is the last thing to favour the restoration, or the creation, of economic order. It is just as likely to mean the further oppression and exploitation of the lower classes.'[168] This does not seem to have elicited a significant response from Dawson, so it is not surprising that two years later Eliot wrote to a mutual contact, George Every, that 'for a long time [I have] had some misgivings myself about Dawson.'[169] Likewise, when both were present for a discussion in The Moot, which focussed on Dawson's proposal of a totalitarian Christian Order capable of reviving pre-reformation forms of sacralised society—a notion that was in keeping with a widespread and resurgent interest in medieval concepts of civil society, as noted by Matthew Grimley[170]—Eliot was quick to condemn the idea, declaring instead that the best thing a totalitarian state could do would be to abdicate.[171]

This difference of opinion, which occurred amongst friends, did not result in a disavowal of their friendship. Instead, it was quite the opposite, since the two continued to commend many of each other's books in public and they maintained close personal contact in private. Nor is this surprising. For it was Eliot's habit to distinguish between authors and their ideas, as well as friends and their faults—especially if he respected their writing or found something stimulating (even through disagreement) in their work—which was also the case with both Charles Maurras and Ezra Pound. The fact that all three of these talented writers were to a certain extent interested in or associated with fascism was not so fine a distinction that Eliot could not make it in his mind, but it has all too often been a distinction without a difference in the minds of certain scholars and critics.

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[168] Ibid, 180.
[169] T.S. Eliot, 'Letter to George Every, 26 February 1936' in V. Eliot and Haffenden, J. eds *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 8: 1936 -1938* (London: Faber and Faber, 2019), 85.
[170] M. Grimley, 'Civil Society and the Clerisy: Christian Elites and National Culture *c.* 1930-1950' in J. Harris (ed.), *Civil Society in British History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 232.
[171] K. Clements, The Moot Papers: Faith, Freedom and Society 1938-1944 (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 164.

M.T. Edwards, for instance, in *The Right of the Protestant Left* groups Eliot with those promoting a totalitarian approach to fighting systemic secularisation, not so different in its theoretical treatment towards non-Christians than a fascist state.[172] Likewise, Edwards has also stated that before the war Eliot had failed to recognize the 'demonic character of Nazism'.[173] This will be amply disproven in the next chapter, but it worth noting that a number of scholars such as Jonas Kurlberg and Steve Ellis have taken issue with this depiction, contending, as Kurlberg does, that 'it seems simply bizarre to liken the enterprise of New Christendom [to which Eliot has been grouped] to the regime that created Auschwitz, as Edward does.'[174] Still, even those scholars who are sympathetic to Eliot often make the mistake of overly-associating Eliot with the aforementioned figures, writing, as J.C. Wood has in *This is Your Hour: Christian Intellectuals in Britain and the Crisis of Europe, 1938-49* that Dawson and Eliot both sympathised with 'authoritarian politics.'[175] That this is both an oversimplification and ultimately ungrounded should hopefully be made clear over the course of this work.

In addition to Rowse and Dawson, there are other friends who contributed to Eliot's activities and ideas as a social critic. Chief among them was the Anglican Bishop and Lord Spiritual, George Bell, who introduced Eliot to J.H. Oldham (and by extension The Moot), which proved a pivotal (if over-hyped) milieu for his social criticism in the late 30s and early 1940s. Bell also invited Eliot onto a number of advisory committees and panels at events such as the World Conference on Church, Community and State, which provided

[172] M.T. Edwards, *The Right of the Protestant Left: God's Totalitarianism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 9-10.
[173] M.T. Edwards, "God's Totalitarianism': Ecumenical Protestant Discourse during the Good War, 1941-45.' *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 10, no. 3-4 (2009): 285-302.
[174] J. Kurlberg, 'Resisting Totalitarianism: The Moot and a New Christendom.' Religion Compass. Volume 7: Issue 12 (2013: Dec), 527.
[175] J.C. Wood, *This is Your Hour: Christian Intellectuals in Britain and the Crisis of Europe, 1938-49* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2019), 256.

Eliot with a number of formal occasions germane to his critical interests—all of which was in addition to Bell's instrumental role in commissioning *The Rock* and the immensely successful *Murder in the Cathedral.* Lastly, Bell was also a significant figure in the European ecumenical movement and an important ally of the Confessing Church in Germany, both of which complimented Eliot's contemporary contextualising of Christendom as both a theoretical concept and a continuing historical legacy. But the last and most important of Eliot's friends that influenced his social criticism was the French neo-Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain, who not only helped form Eliot's own thinking on a number of subjects, but also serves to further highlight the classicist, Catholic, and continental nature of Eliot's social criticism.

Born in 1882 to Protestant parents, Maritain went on to study the natural sciences at the Sorbonne. In 1901-2 he began attending the philosophy lectures of Henri Bergson, just as Eliot would do so in Paris at the Sorbonne eight years later. Inspired by the professor's ideas about the absolute and emboldened by certain existential insights that he gained alongside his future wife, the couple studied more philosophy and theology together until converting to Roman Catholicism in 1906. It was not until the following year, however, that Maritain became more familiar with the writings of Thomas Aquinas. Thereafter he became increasingly immersed in Thomism and in time became a world-leading expounder of Neo-Thomism.[176] His interests were not solely theological however, as he was also intensely literary, interested in aesthetics, and became deeply immersed in political theory. Indeed, in time his work on natural law and human rights would inform the development of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights[177], the Second Vatican Council, and post-

[176] M. Vatter, "Politico-Theological Foundations of Universal Human Rights: The Case of Maritain." *Social Research* 80, no. 1 (2013): 233.
[177] M. Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: Random House, 2001), Chapter 3.

war Christian Democracy in Europe. But like Eliot, Maritain's early forays in religion and political thought manifested in an initial interest in Charles Maurras's nationalistic and reactionary political Catholicism, though both distanced themselves in different ways from Maurras by the 1930s.

Particular instances of Maritain's influence on Eliot's ideas will be explored in greater detail in the chapters to come, both with respect to *The Criterion* and his later social criticism. But as for the particulars of their friendship, it is difficult to determine precisely when they first met nor how frequently they did so, though it is certain that they met at least once in England at Eliot's club and presumably in Princeton where the Frenchman taught for some time during and after the war and where Eliot visited during some of his American lecturing. The two men also exchanged letters and Christmas cards, but at the core of their friendship was a deep and abiding interest in each other's work.

For Eliot's part, scholars have noted three primary areas in which Maritain impacted his work. The first is the bolstering contribution Maritain's neo-Thomism made in the mid-1920s to *The Criterion's* attempted classicist revival. As Jason Harding has noted in his study of Maritain and *The Criterion*, Maritain's prominence in French literary and intellectual circles provided Eliot's English classicist programme with a larger geographical and intellectual frame of reference.[178] In a similar manner, the Frenchman's neo-Thomistic concept of 'intelligence,' which entailed the apprehension of objective moral standards and ordered systems (in both nature and society), augmented Eliot's classicist programme with a robust and assertive philosophical pedigree. This contributed, Harding contends, to *The Criterion's* mission to revive a pan-European mindset in conjunction with

[178] J. Harding, "The Just Impartiality of a Christian Philosopher: acquis Maritain and T. S. Eliot', in *The Maritain Factor: Taking Religion into Interwar Modernism.* ed. J. Heynickx and J. De Maeyer (2010), 180-91.

a Christian tradition capable of countering the growing extremism of communism, fascism, and Nazism.[179]

The second, which is closely related, was the impetus that Maritain's *Integral Humanism* had on Eliot and his contemporaries. The intellectual historian Matthew Grimley has noted this connection, exploring Maritain's role in transmitting medieval concepts of civil society to British intellectuals like T.S. Eliot and the Moot discussion group.[180] As Grimley observed, this was transmitted in the early 1930s through Christopher Dawson's *Essays on Order* and Eliot's own *Criterion*, though it was cemented and expanded in his landmark 1936 work *Humanisme intégral*, which was subsequently published in English as *True Humanism* in 1938. Drawing on Aquinas, Leo XIII, and Pope Pius IX along with the principles of solidarity, medieval pluralism, and a functional organisation of civil society, Maritain inspired Eliot and others such as Murry and Dawson to consider in greater detail the political, social, and spiritual role that elites or 'clerics' and the 'clerisy' could provide in a non-liberal democratic alternative to the prevailing socio-political frameworks of the late 1930s.[181] Indeed, the release of Maritain's book proved sufficiently stimulating and provocative that The Moot dedicated an entire weekend's debate to discussing its implications for themselves as a potential 'order' or group of 'clerics' and for the nation at large. Maritain's book also pushed Eliot and The Moot to consider how a 'minimum' unity could be accomplished, having advocated for 'an organic heterogeneity in the structure of civil society' enabling 'a society [to] be Christian in its orientation, standards, and values, but tolerant of other religions'.[182] This was of particular interest to Eliot, who believed that a widely held 'idea' of the nation's pre-political, religiously-rooted foundation could

[179] Ibid.
[180] M. Grimley, 'Civil Society and the Clerisy: Christian Elites and National Culture *c.* 1930-1950'.
[181] Ibid, 240.
[182] Ibid, 241.

serve as an organic, medieval-like basis for unity. In fact, it was not long after this meeting that Eliot delivered his lectures in Cambridge on *The Idea of a Christian Society*, noting in his introduction that 'I am deeply indebted to the work of Jacques Maritain, especially his *Humanisme integral*.'[183] A debt that we shall also explore in further detail in subsequent chapters.

Lastly, during the 1930s as many intellectuals became increasingly divided (and damning) over Franco and fascism in Spain during the civil war, Maritain contributed greatly to Eliot's own understanding about the war. This was especially so when it came to demarcating and at times criticising the role that Roman Catholicism and Roman Catholics had domestically in Spain and internationally via commentary, approbation, and even active support. This was noteworthy for Eliot's development as a social critic, as it was among the first significant foreign events involving competing political ideologies that he commented upon and served as preparation for his robust criticisms of both German fascism and English policy in the wake of the Munich Crisis in 1938. Though more attention will be given to what Eliot wrote about the Spanish Civil War in the next chapter, it is relevant to note here that Eliot praised (and emulated) Maritain's refusal to unequivocally take sides in the conflict.[184] Indeed, Maritain had been singled out by Franco's Minister of the Interior, Señor Serrano Suñer, for failing to agree with the popular Catholic view that 'the war of the *Franquistas* is a "holy war."'[185] In Maritain's opinion, which was seconded by Eliot, the effective subordination of the Church to the state under Franco was just as problematic as the irreligion of the republican forces. This was by no means a popular view among Catholic intellectuals who ardently opposed atheistic

[183] T.S. Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society' in *Christianity and Culture* (London: Harcourt, 1948), 4.
[184] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 18 (Oct 1938), 58-62.
[185] Ibid, 58.

communism[186], and Eliot was himself castigated by left-wing intellectuals for failing to declare his allegiance in the survey *Authors Take Side on the Spanish Civil War*.

According to Eliot, the fact that Maritain had been true to his rational ideas about political ideologies rather than inflamed by sectarian passions was precisely what intellectuals ought to be. Indeed, it was a central tenet of his (and their) classicism along with a conservative commitment to safeguarding right relations between Church and state. As such, Eliot hailed 'the independent and courageous position of Maritain' and praised 'the position of M. Maritain' as being 'as "intellectual" a position (as well as being Christian) as anyone could adopt.'[187] Coming from Eliot this was high praise, perhaps even in his own idiosyncratic way the highest form of praise. For the role of a Christian intellectual was meant to be just that: to think through ideas irrespective of emotions and to embody in one's own ideas the truths of one's religion. Nor was this simply a matter of praise from afar. Eliot and Maritain had first met in Paris in 1925 at a dinner hosted by Léon Daudet and had remained on close terms since then, with numerous letters exchanged and infrequent but convivial dinners enjoyed in the decades thereafter.[188] Indeed, Eliot even arranged a private dinner between them with Mannheim and a few other Moot members in the spring of 1939.[189]

This is not to suggest that Eliot and Maritain did not have their differences, especially as their interests diverged (or simply diversified) during and after the war. For Maritain's part, he did not remain in France during the war but instead remained in the United States of America, where he became increasingly interested in the religious foundations of both

[186] B. Doering, 'Jacques Maritain and the Spanish Civil War' in *The Review of Politics*, 44(4), 489.
[187] Eliot, 'A Commentary', Oct 1938, 58.
[188] T.S. Eliot, V. Eliot, and J. Haffenden eds *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941* (London: Faber and Faber, 2021), 501.
[189] Ibid, 130.

the democratic state and human rights—with a particular emphasis on 'human' rather than 'individual' rights, given his personalist philosophy, which would come to influence the papacy's view on human rights as espoused in the Second Vatican Council. In fact, Pope Pius VI presented his 'Message to Men of Thought and Science' to Maritain at the council's conclusion and even sought to ordain him as a lay cardinal, only to be politely rebuffed by the philosopher. This shift in Maritain's preoccupation toward human rights and democratic theory, highlighted in books such as *The Rights of Man and Natural Law* (1943) and *Christianity and Democracy* (1944), became increasingly distinct and separate (though by no means incompatible) with the evolution in Eliot's ideas during the 1940s.

Having benefitted greatly from his friend's classicism and political theory (i.e., *Humanisme intégral*) during the *Criterion* phase of his social criticism, Eliot's focus evolved in *The Idea* towards the theoretical nature of a religiously delineated social and civic society, focussing less (unlike Maritain) on the religious basis of democracy itself. Likewise, in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, Eliot's interest was primarily on defining and disseminating an idea (or ideal) of culture that could function as a kind of social-imaginary (to use Charles Taylor's phrase), serving as both a backdrop for human flourishing and as a safeguard against unwarranted state and media intrusion into the various social, cultural, educational, and religious spheres that together produced culture itself. As such, Eliot's later social criticism focussed more on the specific cultural responsibilities of elites, rather than on general human rights, just as he theorized to a much greater extent about democratic culture than about democracy itself. That is not to say he disparaged or disagreed with Maritain's work, nor that he dismissed the importance of human rights and democracy as such, despite his dissatisfaction with their prevailing liberal iterations. Rather, Eliot's shared interests and friendship with Maritain became less prominent in the later stages of

his career as a social critic, even though his work continued to owe much to the Frenchman's earlier influence on his *Criterion* criticism.

One name that has been excluded from this list of friendships is Russell Kirk. Thirty years Eliot's junior, Kirk's first and most famous book, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Santayana*, was published in England by Eliot at Faber and the two (or perhaps more so the one) struck up an epistolatory friendship of sorts. Published in 1953, Kirk's book was a major success in America and helped found the neoconservative movement. Indeed, its ardent admirers included William F. Buckley Jr. and the two worked closely together in founding the latter's influential magazine *National Review*. There he contributed regular articles alongside Catholic, anti-communist, and libertarian intellectuals like James Burnham, Gary Wills, and Whittaker Chambers. Though Kirk's neoconservatism was greatly influenced by Eliot's conservatism, the same was not true vice-versa and there are important differences and nuances between their ideas. In a similar manner, when William F. Buckley wrote that 'it is inconceivable to imagine, let alone hope for, a dominant conservative movement in America without Kirk,'[190] it should be remembered that Eliot regarded the very same movement as tending 'violently to extremes' and 'substituting one error for another.'[191] In short, Eliot was a conservative in a continuing tory tradition sense of the word, not a neoconservative.

Regarding the two men's differences, though both preferred a class-based society, Kirk rejected the notion of universal human rights and sought to perpetuate 'natural' distinctions, whereas Eliot did not notionally reject universal human rights and was

[190] R. Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (NJ: Regnery Publishing, 2016).
[191] T.S. Eliot, 'Letter to R. Kirk, December 7 1955', quoted in 'Introduction' to *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*, XVIII.

concerned about cultural leadership.[192] Similarly, though both held to the existence of a divine transcendent order and feared the effects of secularisation, Eliot's concerns were often anti-Erastian in nature, fearing that religion would be usurped toward ideological ends (as it was in Nazi Germany), whereas Kirk was more concerned with the absence of religion at both the social and state levels. The two also differed on the nature and basis of human freedom: Kirk emphasising the importance of property and Eliot the possibility of beatitude. Lastly, Kirk's political thought was post-war and Anglo-American in ancestry (drawing on historic statesmen and political practitioners), whereas Eliot drew heavily (though not exclusively) on contemporary French thinkers and gradually elaborated his views in the context of an emerging ideological struggle in Europe.

Such distinctions have not always been well served in the minds of Kirk's American readers, nor for that matter in the pages of his 1972 biography *Eliot and His Age: T.S. Eliot's Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century*, and his 1995 autobiography *The Sword of Imagination.* For instance, Kirk identified the three most important principles of Eliot's conservatism as his 'tragic sense of life', his deference to 'the Hebraic and Christian and classical patrimony of culture,' and lastly that 'Eliot sought to recover the idea of a community of souls, joining the dead, the living and those yet unborn.'[193] As the second chapter of this study shall make plain, this is far too reductionistic. First, Eliot's 'tragic sense of life', though present in his life and thought—as rooted in the concept of original sin and his own personal suffering—was also accompanied by an immense capacity for cultural enjoyment, worldly delight, and religious hope. It must be remembered that his later pessimism is not as pervasive in his earlier social criticism (so long as one does not mistake scepticism for pessimism.) Likewise, while Eliot's classicism drew massively from the

[192] G.J. Russello, 'Russell Kirk and Territorial Democracy,' *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, Volume 34, Issue 4, Fall 2004, 109–124.
[193] B. Lockerd, 'Introduction' in R. Kirk, *Eliot and His Age* (Delaware: ISI Books, 2008), XVI.

'classical patrimony', his conservatism was far more influenced by toryism's tradition of 'throne-and-altar' and Neo-Scholasticism's medieval concepts of civil society. Lastly, as much as Eliot would agree with the Burkeian notion of a social compact transcending generations, his conservatism was far more concerned with the ideological (and even practical) concerns of a waning liberal order and a waxing fascism and communism. As such, when Kirk proclaimed to his readers in the revised edition of *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* that 'if there has been a principal conservative thinker in the twentieth century, it is T. S. Eliot'[194] his understanding and estimation may have been exaggerated by his admiration and misrepresented by over-identification with him.

FRIENDSHIPS, PART II

During the 1930s and 40s Eliot was actively involved in several close-knit intellectual circles, each of which bore an impact on his social criticism: both with respect to its composition as well as its subsequent interpretations and historiographical placement in British intellectual life. Some of these groups have already been mentioned in passing, such as The Moot discussion group, clustered around the ecumenist J.H. Oldham and the Hungarian-born sociologist Karl Mannheim, which met regularly from 1938 to 1944, and the Chandos group, an informal dining club centred around Maurice Reckitt, Philip Mairet, and V.A. Demant, which discussed sociological topics from an Anglo-Catholic perspective and met regularly throughout this period and later into the 1950s. This latter group's activities, which included Eliot, also existed within a network of publications, conferences, and summer schools, varying from the Christian sociological journal *Christendom* and the 1935 book *Faith That Illuminates* to religion and culture seminars housed at St. Anne's in

[194] R. Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (493

Soho and the long-running Anglo-Catholic Summer Schools. But as the members and activities of both these groups are essential to our understanding and placement of Eliot's post-*Criterion* social criticism, his interactions and friendships with their members will be discussed in chapter three in conjunction with our assessment of *The Idea of a Christianity Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture.*

There are, however, certain 'group' friendships associated with the modernist movement in literature that ought to be discussed here. Indeed, the friendships that Eliot is most remembered for are often those he deepened or forged in the 1920s, despite their limited significance to his social criticism. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that Eliot's status as a social critic was augmented in the eyes of some by his modernist associations, not least because it was from these relationships—most notably with Ezra Pound and Virginia Woolf—that the movement derived some of its momentum and masterpieces. These friendships have received significant interest from scholars, some of whom have judged Eliot's later turn toward social criticism as an aberration or deviation from the fruitful associations he enjoyed with fellow modernists.[195] But with respect to his social criticism, this ignores the fact that by the 1930s Eliot had lost confidence in the ability of poetry to resolve complex social issues[196], and instead turned to other activities like committees, conferences, and discussion groups in order to better address and hopefully redress such issues.[197] But to paraphrase Peter Scott once more, not only do many of Eliot's later scholarly admirers avoid his social and political critiques, they find them both unnecessarily controversial and regrettably damnable. Among the scholars who have judged his social criticism in a negative light compared to his productive friendships with

[195] Collini, 'The European Modernist as Anglican Moralist: The Later Social Criticism of T.S. Eliot', 208.
[196] A. Kenneth, *T.S. Eliot & Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 87.
[197] Collini, 'The European Modernist as Anglican Moralist: The Later Social Criticism of T.S. Eliot', 212.

fellow modernists like Woolf and Pound are Peter Ackroyd[198], William Chace[199], Sir Richard Rees[200], Christopher Ricks[201], and Mark Edwards.[202] As such, it is worth clarifying here the limited role and influence that they had on Eliot's criticism within the context of his career as a social critic, while avoiding (however regrettably) an in-depth assessment of their impact on his other intellectual endeavours, ranging from his poetry and drama to his literary criticism and epistolary legacy.

As is well known, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot's friendship began with a flourish. For it was thanks to Pound's influence and contacts that Eliot's early poetry was promoted in literary journals and intellectual circles on both sides of the Atlantic. Likewise, Pound's careful editing and copious excising helped turn Eliot's *The Waste Land* into the twentieth century landmark poem that it became. But these successful collaborations were largely limited to the early 1920s. By 1924, when Eliot had begun his first forays into social criticism and Pound had moved to Italy, the latter was already becoming critical of the former's ideas and endeavours.[203] Nowhere was this more apparent than in his disapproval of the changing approach and orientation of *The Criterion*. For despite his own sporadic contributions to the magazine, Pound regarded it as 'soft' and 'mistaken'.[204] In fact, the two argued within the magazine's own pages over economic matters related to social credit, and religious topics such as Neo-Thomistic social thought, and differed politically over the direction that the western democracies should take against communism. Eliot, for his part, disagreed with Pound regarding both fascism and anti-Semitism (in print as well as in

[198] P. Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot, A Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984).
[199] W. Chace, *The Political Identities of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973).
[200] R. Rees, 'T. S. Eliot on Culture and Progress,' in *Literature and politics in the twentieth century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).
[201] C. Ricks, *T.S. Eliot and Prejudice* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994).
[202] M.T. Edwards, *The Right of the Protestant Left: God's Totalitarianism.*
[203] J. Haffenden eds., *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 6: 1932-1933*, 802.
[204] D. Newton-De Molina, 'The Literary Criticism of T.S. Eliot: New Essays' in *English Literary Criticism: 20th Century.* (Bloomsbury Publishing: New York, 2013.), 39.

private), though their friendship weathered this storm and the tempestuous decades that were to follow, albeit in a diminished form when compared to their halcyon relations of the 1920s.

It is worth noting that if Pound regarded the magazine as soft, he was himself becoming more hardened in his thinking—to the point that he not only became an infamously enthusiastic fascist and anti-Semite, but he broadcast as much and more during the Second World War from his residence in Italy. Pound even continued to make pro-fascist, anti-American radio broadcasts during the country's brief occupation under Germany: proving in the process that his thoughts had not merely hardened, but also had arguably become deranged. That, at least, was the impression made when he was charged for treason by the American occupying forces, as he was ultimately deemed mentally unfit for trial. Thereafter he spent the next twelve years in a medical detention facility in Washington D.C., written to and occasionally visited by Eliot on his post-war trips to New York and Boston. Pound was later released in 1958, thanks in part to the efforts of his personal friends and professional admirers, which included not only Eliot but also Ernest Hemingway, *Esquire*, *The New Republic*, and *The Nation*.

It is not unwarranted speculation, however, to contemplate whether professional motives were at work here since Pound's *Fifth Decade of the Cantos XLII-LI* was published under Eliot's direction at Faber & Faber in 1937 and the desire to help rehabilitate their author's scandalous reputation must have been considered. Indeed, Eliot become embroiled in controversy when the inaugural Bollingen Prize was awarded by the Library of Congress and its jury of Fellows in American Letters (of whom Eliot was one) to Pound's *Pisan Cantos* in 1948. For these had originated while Pound was still interned in American-occupied Italy and were awarded while he remained under inditement for treason due to

his pro-fascist, anti-Semitic broadcasts during the war. The resulting backlash by the public spilled into the press and while a joint statement was made by a committee of the fellows declaring that Eliot had 'neither initiated the award to Pound nor in any way attempted to influence other members to vote for it,'[205] the issue was evidently a sensitive one.

Such considerations, however, ought to be placed alongside Eliot's longstanding habit of disassociating disagreeable things from agreeable people and vice versa. Ever the classicist, he attempted to maintain dispassionate attitudes towards good friends with bad ideas as well as bad people with good ideas (to say nothing of a mixture of the two). Like his attitude towards Charles Maurras, Eliot continued to admire and promote Pound's literary work in the years after the war, though always with the appropriate ethical provisos. As he stated on Pound's seventieth birthday, 'I believe that I have in the past made clear enough my personal debt to Ezra Pound and during the years have also expressed in several ways my opinion of his rank as a poet, as a critic, as impresario of other writers, and as pioneer of metric and poetic language. His 70th birthday is not a moment for qualifying one's praise, but merely for recognition of those services to literature for which he will deserve the gratitude of posterity, and for appreciation of those achievements which even his severest critics must acknowledge.'[206] But with respect to Eliot's social criticism it was in fact due to Pound's self-conscious engagement in public affairs as an artist (and on matters primarily related to economics and social credit within *The Criterion*) that Eliot defined himself in juxtaposition, stating that '[whereas] Mr. Pound is interested in public affairs

[205] T.S. Eliot, R. Schuchard, and I Javadi. *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. Volume 7, A European Society, 1947-1953. The Critical ed.* (London, England: Faber and Faber, 2018), xxv.
[206] J. Haffenden eds., *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 6: 1932-1933*, 802.

primarily as an artist… I am inclined to approach public affairs from the point of view of a moralist.'[207]

This view of himself as a public moralist would come to shape much of his approach to social criticism (as outlined in the next chapter), being repeated in both the lectern and in print on multiple occasions, such as his 1934 *After Strange Gods* (although strictly speaking, this work was not social criticism but literary). Its prominence was partly because it provided a non-technical basis from which to critique interwar economics and politics, and because it aligned with the public's appetite in the 1930s and 40s for religiously grounded (but not necessarily denominationally specific) moral instruction, as was the case with the BBC's popular religious broadcasting unit. Not that Ezra Pound was solely responsible for this designation. Eliot was, after all, a natural heir to the previous century's 'men of letters' cum 'public moralists' (especially Coleridge and Arnold), but Pound nevertheless provided a definite occasion for such a comparison—both during *The Criterion* years and thereafter in *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture.*

The designation of 'public moralist' requires historiographical comment, as Stefan Collini, who has written insightfully and authoritatively on both public moralism and T.S. Eliot, believes that the tradition of public moralists elapsed by 1930.[208] Collini admits, 'its terminal date, in particular, might well be shifted a decade or so in either direction, though obviously a different implication about continuity and discontinuity would be entailed in each case.'[209] But the implications for Eliot are important. As seen before with Eliot and his interest in Bradley, he is too often regarded as old fashioned to the point of becoming atavistic. Yet this does a disservice both to the dynamic and contemporary nature of Eliot's

[207] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 12 (Oct 1933), 120.
[208] Collini, *Public Moralists*, 6.
[209] Ibid.

social criticism, and the existence and receptivity of a national audience, as well as underrepresenting the complexity and diversity of British thought and intellectual life in the mid-twentieth century.

In fairness to Collini, he is honest about the fact that 'in intellectual history, more perhaps than in many other kinds, defining a period by specific dates is artificial and may even suggest a misleading precision. In the present case, I have resorted to dates simply for want of a convenient label to cover period as a whole.'[210] He also admits that 'nor is [this work] written in the systematically analytical mode normally thought appropriate to such issues. Rather, [it] attempts, in different ways, to exercise the historical imagination. That is, to establish a balance between human familiarity and cultural assortment of unusually articulate individuals.'[211] Given the variety of persons that Collini's work studies, which ranges from John Stuart Mill and Walter Bagehot to George Eliot and T.H. Green, there is no single precise definition of a public moralist provided, though he does note that 'one common response… was a conviction that a cultural heritage that was under threat or disappearing had to be rescued and made vital and effective in the present.'[212] Interestingly, though Collini adds the likes of Harold Laski, Arthur Quiller-Couch, T. S. Eliot, J. M. Keynes, Ernest Barker, and F. R. Leavis to his list of 'early twentieth century' public moralists, the fact remains that some of these figures continued to operate as public moralists well after 1930 and even into the second half of the twentieth century. There could also be further additions such as G.K. Chesterton, George Orwell, Malcolm Muggeridge, C.S. Lewis, and Lionel Trilling. Indeed, the latter, who was in many respects

[210] Ibid.
[211] Collini, *Public Moralists*, 1.
[212] Ibid, 55.

as influential a contemporary critic in America as Eliot was in England, explicitly declared himself as a public moralist and continued to do so with great effect long after the 1930s.[213]

In these respects, by virtue of both presence and practice, the insinuation that Eliot was outdated as a public moralist in the 1930s and 40s is difficult to substantiate upon closer inspection. Nor were these figures isolated if noteworthy instances, as the media backdrop in which they operated was still dominated by the Lord Reith's BBC, which was highly sensitive to the dangers of subsiding moral standards, invidious American-style broadcasting, democratised media, and the need to honour the nation's cultural and religious heritage.[214] This matches closely with Collini's portrayal of public moralists as 'critics who believed that the dominant tendencies of contemporary culture represented a betrayal of an earlier England.'[215] As such, it would be unfair to characterise Eliot's role as a public moralist as antiquated, nor even as being the last in a long tradition, but rather he was and would continue to be functioning within an active and diverse tradition at the time of his social criticism.

Returning to the subject of modernist friends, Virginia's Woolf's friendship and collaboration with Eliot should be regarded as largely separate from the latter's social criticism—though to an even greater degree than with Pound. This is important because some critics have used Woolf's reaction to Eliot's conversion and his subsequent social criticism as a measurement for downgrading their social respectability and intellectual credibility. For the two were close both socially and professionally. Eliot published poems and literary essays through Woolf's Hogarth Press, and Woolf contributed literary articles

[213] G. Himmelfarb, *The Moral Imagination: From Adam Smith to Lionel Trilling* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 1.
[214] C. Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 242.
[215] Collini, *Public Moralists*, 371.

to early editions of *The Criterion* and was a close confidant during his troublesome first marriage. Yet, as is often repeated, Woolf was dismissive of Eliot's religious orientation: sometimes mocking and quarrelling with him about his 'priestly' conversion and taking serious issue with the religious turn in his work.[216] As such, some scholars have inflated the significance of juxtaposing Eliot's social criticism and Woolf's corresponding disapproval.

As Stefan Collini observed regarding the secondary literature on the subject, '[Eliot] is represented as an isolated, idiosyncratic figure, attended to only because of his literary eminence.'[217] Likewise, Peter Ackroyd depicts Eliot as 'a prophet in the wilderness,' 'alienated' from the 'majority of the intelligentsia'.[218] Nor is this view surprising when scholars such as Lyndall Gordon credit Virginia and her husband, Leonard, with 'establishing Eliot at the centre of London's literary society'.[219] But for reasons already demarcated earlier in this chapter, it is misleading to do so, as Eliot's own *Criterion* and the social criticism therein played a significant role in consolidating his reputation—not merely within London's literary scene, but atop the nation's intellectual establishment.

Instead, Virginia Woolf's importance to Eliot (apart from as a publisher) resided primarily in their friendship. This was true during both Eliot's tempestuous first marriage—with both couples enjoying convivial (and increasingly consoling) relations—and then throughout the 1930s, in the aftermath of their separation. Likewise, as contemporaries of equal and outstanding literary ability, as well as possessing coinciding professional interests in publishing, the two often found both stimulation and solace in each other's

[216] Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot, A Life*, 220.
[217] Collini, 'The European Modernist as Anglican Moralist: The Later Social Criticism of T.S. Eliot', 226.
[218] Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot, A Life*, 251.
[219] L. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 1.

company. Indeed, Eliot often found more than that: as Woolf's quick wit and sharp sensibility would often take him to task. Woolf drolly chided him, for instance, for 'writer's egotism' when he made comments like 'Coleridge and I'.[220] But she could also be deeply sympathetic, providing him with the kind of sisterly substitute that he often cherished in women: often sensing in him 'an agonized and lonely man, filled with "self-torture, doubt, conceit, desire for warmth and intimacy."'[221] But this level of support had already diminished somewhat by the time of her tragic suicide in 1941, as the Woolfs had relocated permanently to Rodmell in 1940 after their London residence was bombed during the Blitz. Nevertheless, the lacuna that she left behind was enormous. As Eliot confided to John Hayward, Virginia had 'always seemed to me like a kind of member of my own family'.[222] It was, as he wrote to Leonard Woolf after her untimely death, 'the end of a world'.[223]

It is interesting to note that while Virginia Woolf had very little (if any) direct impact on Eliot's social criticism, it was her printing press that first published in 1927 *Coal: A Challenge to the National Conscience*. For the Anglo-Catholic authors of this small book of social criticism, which included Maurice Reckitt, Philip Mairet, and V.A. Demant, would in the following decade become an important social hub and intellectual network for Eliot's own social criticism—indeed, perhaps the most important (if also the least documented). As previously mentioned, Eliot's relationship with these men will be explored in a later chapter. Instead, the purpose of this section has been to clarify the relationship between both Woolf and Pound with Eliot in relation to his social criticism: showing in the process the limited nature of their involvement and arguing that their own negative reactions

[220] Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot, A Life*, 256.
[221] Ibid, 237.
[222] T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. Volume 6, The War Years, 1940-1946* (Johns Hopkins Press: London, 2017), XXI.
[223] Ibid.

towards his social criticism should not be given undue weight when assessing the relevance, importance, and popularity of his social criticism.

THE 1930S, CONTINUED

In the decade concurrent with Eliot's later *Criterion* criticism, he was also heavily involved in numerous associated activities. First among these was his continuing role as a publishing director at Faber & Faber, which continued to house his magazine until its final issue in 1939. Eliot thrived in this capacity, growing increasingly close to his colleagues Geoffrey Faber and Frank Morley, often holidaying with the former and publishing with the latter after Morley's 1933 return to America to become a director at Harcourt. According to Peter Ackroyd, 'a large measure of the eminence and authority which [Eliot] began to acquire in the thirties came from his private role as mentor and publisher of two generations of writers: becoming known, in fact, as "the Pope of Russell Square'."[224] As 'Pope' Eliot cultivated what became known as the legendary 'Faber List' of poets, which eventually included the likes of W.H. Auden, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and Marianne Moore and later Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath, and Philip Larkin. But this was far from his only activity and achievement during this period, as he busied himself with countless broadcasts for the BBC, journalistic articles for *The Times*, and lectures at leading universities.

Broadcasting for the BBC became an important outlet for his social criticism, as he was often invited to talk on various topics, including those related to Church, state, and society. For instance, several months before the landmark 1937 Oxford Conference on 'Church, Community, and State', Eliot, who was an organising member and panellist at the

[224] Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot, A Life*, 222.

conference, broadcast for the BBC 'The Church's Message to the World'. This talk, which was followed by 'Towards a Christian Britain' in 1941, argued for an active role for the Church in tempering the affairs of the world and helping to define the civic and structural identity of states and communities. Speaking in a manner both familiar to his *Criterion* articles and customary to his later book *The Idea of a Christian Society*, Eliot argued in 1937 that developments within those countries under fascist and communist regimes—and the resulting impact on international relations—served to highlight the moral and ideological aspects of Britain's own situation.[225] In his own words, 'it is the Church's business to interfere with the World.'[226] This was, in part, to promote a positive vision for the individual in which structural and societal impediments to a life of sanctity ought to be lessened and that collectively the norms and ideas of the secular state must still be informed and framed by sacred values. But his talk also advanced a more negative cause, namely to counteract what he would later categorize as the Erastian-like 'Germanification' of British public religious sentiment, which he believed was being co-opted towards ideological ends.[227] This was a trend that he felt was made possible by liberalism and secularism's supposedly amoral framework. Though the full measure of Eliot's proposals would be outlined in *The Idea*, the essential gist of his argument was already made clear in his 1937 broadcast. As Eliot stated:

> The Church is not merely for the elect - in other words, those whose temperament brings them to that belief and that behaviour. Nor does it allow us to be Christian in some social relations and non-Christian in others. It wants everybody, and it wants each individual whole. It therefore must struggle for a condition of society which will give the maximum of opportunity for us to lead wholly Christian lives, and the maximum of opportunity for others to become Christians. It maintains the paradox that while we are each responsible for our own souls, we are all responsible for all other souls, who are, like us, on their way to a future state of heaven or hell. And - another paradox - as the Christian attitude towards peace, happiness and well-being of peoples is that they are a means and not an end in themselves, Christians are

[225] Kojecký, *T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, 126.
[226] Ibid.
[227] Ibid, 66.

> more deeply committed to realising these ideals than are those who regard them as ends in themselves. . . . I do not see how [the Church] can ever accept as a permanent settlement one law for itself and another for the world.[228]

In actual fact, the trajectory of Eliot's ideas can be seen even earlier in the 1933 address he gave to Maurice Reckitt's Anglo-Catholic Summer School, entitled 'Catholicism and the International Order'. Intentionally drawing on central themes from Catholic social thought—and drawing conclusions not dissimilar from Maritain's future writing on democracy and human rights—Eliot argued that morality rests upon religious sanction, and the social organisation of the world rests upon moral sanction, and that we can only judge of temporal values in the light of eternal values.[229] Speaking two years before the League of Nations' failure during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War and less than a decade before the devastating outbreak of another world war, Eliot argued that 'a Christian world-order, the Christian world-order, is ultimately the only one which, from any point of view, will work.'[230]

Such a view, it is worth remembering, was by no means strange at the time given that terms like 'Christian civilization' were used by politicians such as Stanley Baldwin, Lord Halifax, and Winston Churchill—though Eliot was himself working from a neo-medievalist and neo-scholastic viewpoint (as correctly noted by Grimley[231]). Eliot was, however, less in the company, as Collini suggested, 'of J.N. Figgis and… the thinkers who stand behind Figgis—Acton and Maitland outstanding among them'.[232] In Acton's case, Eliot's Catholic influences were largely continental (see Maritain and to an extent Maurras) rather than English; his conservatism was (in so far as it was inspired by others) part-

[228] Ibid, 130.
[229] Ibid, 127.
[230] T.S. Eliot, *Essays Ancient and Modern* (London: Faber & Faber, 1936), 114.
[231] M. Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 208.
[232] Collini, 'The European Modernist as Anglican Moralist: The Later Social Criticism of T.S. Eliot', 210.

Burke, part-Maurras, and part-Babbitt; and his anti-Erastianism was inspired by the ecumenical recognition that national churches participate in a global religious body and should therefore not be subordinate to undue parochial control nor permit temporal authority to undermine the church's supernatural orientation. Likewise, as far as Figgis (d.1919) was concerned, though both of them were Anglo-Catholics with a shared mistrust of overweening centralisation, unnecessary state intervention and unwarranted government powers, Figgis, according to Grimley, 'precluded… the churches play[ing] a crucial role in providing common values'[233] to the nation, whereas Eliot, though loathsome of a situation in which churches could only do that, nevertheless placed great importance on churches providing a common moral framework for secular life.

When Eliot lectured to the Anglo-Catholic Summer School he was undoubtedly preaching to the choir, but he certainly did not lack for alternative audiences during the 1930s as his frequent lecturing demonstrated. During these years Eliot spoke at innumerable universities and societies, ranging from Oxford and Cambridge to Harvard and Virginia. Though most of these lectures were on literature and literary criticism, some of them bore the hallmarks of his widening scope of critical inquiry. Eliot enjoyed giving these lectures (not least because the American universities paid well) and in the late 1940s he spent numerous months lecturing at Princeton and Harvard, enjoying the company of friends such as the Maritains and Niebuhrs—even going so far, as one biographer stated, to actually become more relaxed.[234]

The most infamous (and thereafter regretted) incident of this period occurred during Eliot's 1933 lecture series at the University of Virginia, where he spoke on orthodoxy and

[233] Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State between the Wars*, 102.
[234] Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot*, 233.

heterodoxy in literature. These were subsequently published (but never re-reprinted on Eliot's later insistence) as *After Strange Gods: A Primer on Modern Heresy*. Though these lectures have become notorious for their ill-judged remark about the undesirability of having too many free-thinking Jews in a society (a statement that will be examined alongside other allegations of anti-Semitism in the next chapter), they were noteworthy with respect to his social criticism. Namely, because his attempt to delineate pre-literary moral frameworks for the field of literature and criticism ran parallel to his emerging instinct to do the same thing in politics and political theory. In this respect the 1930s witnessed a growing convergence, rather than a divergence, between the different strains of his work: exhibiting a greater degree of continuity across his varied intellectual output and a deeper penetration of themes from his social criticism into those of his literary criticism than would at first be immediately obvious.

It is important to clarify that *After Strange Gods* is not a work of social criticism but literary criticism. This is an important distinction, not least because of its anti-Semitic legacy, but also because this strand of thought is not present elsewhere in his social criticism. Yet Collini and many others have routinely labelled this work as social criticism, and in the former's case, as 'his first (and surely least happy) venture into substantial social criticism'.[235] Perhaps this is because in its opening pages Eliot refers to himself as a moralist and prefaces his address with a brief elaboration on the place and purpose of tradition within a nation's culture, but this is merely a backdrop to what remains in its entirety a fundamentally and explicitly literary venture. Furthermore, not only was the book not a work of social criticism, it would not have been his first substantial foray into the genre either, as this ignores the copious amounts of social criticism published in *The*

[235] S. Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 309.

Criterion, which, as the following chapter will elaborate, was in fact the primary and foundational conduit for Eliot's social criticism during his career.

In a similar manner, numerous scholars, including Collini, have tended to artificially divide and demean Eliot's career in two: with his non-Christian and non-conservative early poetry and literary prose constituting an 'early' period, and a 'later' period, defined by his conservatism and Christianity, and synonymous with his social criticism. In most instances this distinction is made with a corresponding devaluation of his 'later' talents and literary output. In Collini's own words, '[After] his formal conversion to Anglicanism in 1927… [marking] his later career… there is the fact—and it surely is a fact, not merely a statement of aesthetic preference—that his later work on the whole lacked the intensity and sharpness of his best criticism, especially that written between, say, 1919 and 1923.'[236] He also wrote 'It is well known, of course, that in the second half of his career Eliot elaborated a variety of… views as part of his increasingly conservative social criticism,'[237] which as he stated elsewhere, 'tended, as we might say, adapting actors' slang to 'corpse'.'[238] Apart from very much being an 'aesthetic preference', the tendency to demean and disassociate Eliot's social prose from his literary prose by arbitrarily dividing the 'good' into an 'early' period and the 'bad' into a 'later' one, does a fundamental disservice to the integrity of any intellectual biography.

This arbitrary division has made it much easier for scholars to dismiss his social criticism (which few literary scholars enjoy) as a deviation or aberration from the 'real' or 'celebrated' Eliot, when in actual fact his output and career are more accurately depicted as an evolving portfolio rather than a linear progression (or deterioration). Given that his social criticism

[236] S. Collini, *The Nostalgic Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 41.
[237] Ibid, 30.
[238] Collini, *Absent Minds*, 324.

begins firmly within his *Criterion* period (which chapter two shall explore in detail), which dates from 1922 to 1939, and given that he continued to produce works of immense literary merit throughout the 1930s and 40s (ranging from *Murder in the Cathedral* and the *Four Quartets* to *The Cocktail Party*), it is difficult to see how such a negative distinction can be maintained. Certainly, the content of his output became more conservative and Christian with time and attracted newer and wider audiences than his earlier literary prose, but there is little evidence of a diminution in quality, nor are there strong grounds for dividing Eliot's career in two.

Even from a chronological perspective, the mid-point in Eliot's literary career would hardly have been either his conversion or his turn to social criticism. For instance, if 1915 and *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* are taken as his beginning and his Nobel Prize the terminus (as he published little afterwards), the midpoint of his career would have been 1931; likewise, if *The Waste Land* in 1922 was the beginning, then 1935 becomes the dividing line. But as Lionel Trilling observed as early as 1940, 'In the imagination of the Left Mr. Eliot has always figured with excessive simplicity. His story was supposed to be nothing more than this: that from the horrible realities of the wasteland he escaped into the arms of Anglo-Catholic theology.'[239] That is not to suggest that a scholar of Collini's standing is guilty of the same thing. Indeed, Collini's work on Eliot has been invaluable to this study and he is a discerning student of the poet's work. But it remains the case that such misunderstandings are still being perpetuated in contemporary scholarship—which again speaks to the need for an updated and comprehensive intellectual biography of T.S. Eliot as a social critic.

[239] L. Trilling, *Speaking of Literature and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 158.

Dating, periodisation, and the failures of *After Strange Gods* aside, the 1930s was a period of fertile and acclaimed creativity for Eliot, with his first major foray into theatre, *Murder in the Cathedral* receiving widespread approval and garnering new audiences for the poet cum social critic. The play, which retold the martyrdom of Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral in 1170, was originally commissioned by Bishop George Bell after a satisfactory debut of Eliot's first pageant play, *The Rock*, in 1934.[240] First performed at the Canterbury Festival in June 1935, the production initially moved to the Mercury Theatre in London, enjoying a highly successful run of over 400 performances before touring around the country. In 1936 the BBC broadcast the play live on television to an admittedly small television audience, which was followed by an immensely successful American tour before returning to London at the Duchess Theatre. The play continued to attract universal adulation and was, according to an article in *The Times*, 'the one great play by a contemporary dramatist now to be seen in England.'[241] Even Queen Mary came to see the West End play in 1937 and it remained thereafter a perennial favourite with a celebrated run at the Old Vic in 1953.[242] For Eliot, the play was a professional triumph as well a personal one. As Lyndall Gordon recorded, 'the success had been good for him: he seemed to be more at ease… Virginia Woolf received the impression that he was at last beginning to work in the way he wanted… as well as being the first major work since separation from his wife, he felt able to go on with a certain amount of confidence.'[243] Yet the mission or purpose of the play was far from being completed, as it was intended as a compliment to his social criticism rather than as a diversion from it—and to that end, Eliot still felt as though his audiences were less aware of the threats posed by authoritarianism (whether

[240] The limited scope of this work means that we shall not explore *The Rock* as an early instantiation of Eliot's *Criterion* concerns about urban sprawl, rural and urban communities, and the parish model (other than to note them here). For an interesting consideration of the play's place amongst Eliot's other works read Hazel Atkins' "Raising "The Rock": The Importance of T. S. Eliot's Pageant-Play." Christianity & Literature 62, no. 2 (2013): 261-82.

[241] Gordon, *Eliot's New Life*, 35.

[242] Ibid.

[243] Gordon, *Eliot's New Life*, 35.

fascist, communist, or even democratic) than they ought to be, which had been a major motif in the play.[244]

In a letter to his brother, Eliot confided the difficulty he felt in conveying to his audiences that the play was intended as a satire on the totalitarian state.[245] Furthermore, the play was also in a general sense an exhortation to the church: to active involvement in the affairs of the world and a responsibility to witness to the powers that governed it—and, if need be, to martyrdom of one sort or another. In this respect, the play encapsulates many of the anti-Erastian themes that he was already elucidating in *The Criterion*, such as in his forthcoming comments on the Spanish Civil War and his previous remarks about the Prayer Book crisis. In a similar manner, the imperative moral tone of both his Catholicism, conservatism, and classicism as expressed in *The Criterion* was not only echoed in the play, but explicitly and vividly portrayed. As Gordon noted, 'Eliot gave here his clearest exposition of his essential political position, which was to attack all forms of political power and rhetoric. He implies that the only way the business of the world ought to be conducted with any safety is on the basis of moral principles that derive from strict belief.'[246] Though Gordon is mistaken about Eliot's attitude toward power, given that his *Criterion* articles were often concerned with defining the limits of state power rather than attacking their legitimacy (as will be explored in great detail in the next chapter), she is correct in noting the central tenet of Eliot's political criticism: morality must come before politics and that morality is rooted in theology.

Interestingly, Eliot did not just have totalitarianism in his sights when he wrote the play. For the four tempters who sought to undermine Becket's spiritual probity are based on

[244] Ibid, 32.
[245] Ibid, 31.
[246] Ibid, 32.

some of the intellectuals whom Eliot criticised in *The Criterion* for doing much the same thing through their ideas. The first of these tempters was based on H.G. Wells, representing the indulgence of liberalism's 'doing as one likes'. The second tempter, which was that of persuasive reason, was based on Eliot's old landlord and sometime friend Bertrand Russell, whom he regarded as preaching an 'enervate gospel of happiness bolstered by popular catchwords of emancipation which… were by now eminently respectable, but what chiefly remains of the new freedom is its meagre impoverished emotional life.'[247] The third was D.H. Lawrence, whom Eliot often criticized for his willingness to engage in open rebellion against the moral norms of society. And the last was based in part on his former mentor and teacher, Irving Babbitt, whom he regarded a 'real' atheist (unlike Russell, whom he regarded as a more derivative, sectarian inspired atheist) and whose humanism posed a genuine threat of producing a substitute religion. In each instance, however, the common theme is contiguous with the general thrust of his *Criterion* criticism: that rival intellectuals and their ideas must be taken seriously and thoroughly understood at their essential level, and only then can sound reason and good conscience (rather than emotional enthusiasm and dogmatic prejudice) rally against their influence and ideas—whether that was in print, poetry, politics, or in this case drama.

From excised material in *Murder in the Cathedral* the origins of Eliot's great 1936 poem *Burnt Norton* arose[248], which was the first of what would become his celebrated poem cycle *Four Quartets*. Like the play that inspired it, the poem explores the realm of human action and meaning within the context of time and eternity. So, too, religious themes and Catholic imagery are central to the poem, although its relevance to Eliot's social criticism is less direct than the play's more obvious commentary on politics and power. In fact, the best

[247] Eliot, source unknown, as quoted in L. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life*, 31.
[248] Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot*, 230.

connection that can be inferred is the fact that *Burnt Norton* was the first long poem where he sought to communicate in speech patterns more comparable to common usage, which marked a revived interest in the social utility of poetry. In this respect, just as *Murder in the Cathedral* dramatized important themes from his social criticism, so *Burnt Norton* poeticised many of the social critic's preoccupations with the need to contextualise both political, public, and intellectual life within a religious framework that recognized the position of time within the context of eternity and the shallowness of human endeavour without the deepening awareness of spiritual realities such as salvation and damnation, beautification and sin, redemption and providence. In both instances, the drive to communicate important themes from the *Criterion* era of his social criticism in a manner that would reach beyond his customary readership were present in the artistic approaches he used in both *Murder in the Cathedral* and in *Burnt Norton*—however dense and idiosyncratically they sometimes remained on both stage and page.

THE 1940S AND BEYOND

No intellectual biography of Eliot's career as a social critic is complete without significant attention paid to either to *The Idea of a Christian* Society, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, and The Moot discussion group, which is commonly associated with the writing of both books. It is for this reason that an in-depth discussion of all three are reserved for their own chapter. That said, both this chapter and the next attempt to situate the most important nexus of Eliot's social criticism in the 1930s and in conjunction with *The Criterion* magazine, rather than with The Moot and these other works, given that this was when most of his ideas found their original expression and their major themes were first adumbrated. In a general sense, his two later books were merely the product of this earlier period. As such, the remainder of this chapter explores Eliot's other activities during the

1940s and the period of relative inactivity that proceeded them, while refraining from examining the aforementioned books and discussion group until later.

The anxieties caused by the gathering storm of the 1930s impacted Eliot both personally and professionally and continued to do so long after the decade passed. Indeed, the demoralization of yet another world war seems to have had an enormous impact on the tenor of Eliot's thought. Beginning with the dispiriting effects of the Munich Crisis and the alarming rise of quasi-religious propaganda at the outset of the Second World War, Eliot became deeply concerned about the state of Britain's prospects, not merely because it needed defending against a much stronger belligerent, but also because of his misgivings about much of what they were defending.

Writing at the end of the 1930s, Eliot admitted to feeling 'humiliation' and the need for 'personal contrition, humility, repentance and amendment'.[249] This was due to the demoralising revelations he experienced after the loss of the Sudetenland to Nazi Germany, believing it had introduced 'a doubt about the validity of our civilization. [Because] we could not match them conviction for conviction, [and] we had no ideas with which we could either meet or oppose the ideas opposed to us. Was our society,' he pondered, 'which had always been so assured of its superiority and rectitude, so confident of its unexamined premises, assembled round anything more essential than a congeries of banks, insurance companies and industries…?'[250]Eliot then went even further by claiming that 'The term "democracy"' as it was popularly and propagandistically bandied about, 'does not contain enough positive content to stand alone against the forces [we] dislike—it can easily be transformed by them. If you will not have God (and He is a jealous God) you should pay

[249] Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society*, 51.
[250] Ibid.

your respects to Hitler or Stalin.'[251] In short, as the decade darkened so did Eliot—or rather, his earlier concerns about the sustainability of secular liberalism became sufficiently acute as to evolve into binary prognostications.

Professionally, this growing sense of despair helped prompt Eliot to publish precisely those ideas he had spent years developing in *The Criterion*: that is, the ideas of a society that he felt would be worth defending. But the fact that such a society did not exist in actuality did not prevent him from doing his part during the war. Eliot served as a weekly firewatcher on Tuesday nights atop Faber & Faber's roof (which was itself later bombed without casualties). But the toll of the late-30s and early 40s weighed heavily on Eliot's shoulders: sometimes manifesting in emotional dejection, sometimes through increasing cultural pessimism, and more often than not through heightened bouts of illness and exhaustion. Already feeling depressed in the aftermath of shutting *The Criterion*, Eliot had admitted to 'a depression of spirits so different from any other experience of late years as to be a new emotion'.[252] But confiding to John Hayward in April 1942, he wrote that the Blitz and Woolf's death had also combined to depress him to an even more surprising degree.[253] Indeed, such was his deteriorating mood that it seeped into intellectual outlook, perhaps showing the limitations of his own classicist predilection for non-emotive (or even anti-emotive) reasoning.

Nowhere was this more apparent than in Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, most notably in the penultimate paragraphs where he projects a barbarous, fallen future not unlike the dark ages after the collapse of Rome—only to pull himself back from the brink at Philip Mairet's editorial instance, writing thereafter that 'the previous paragraph

[251] Ibid.
[252] Eliot, 'Last Words.'
[253] T. S. Eliot, 'Letter to John Hayward,' April 1942.

is to be considered only as an incidental flourish to relieve the feelings of the writer…'[254] Fortunately, Eliot was not left entirely alone to his feelings during this period, but instead found a measure of intellectual and social comfort in the various discussion groups that he attended. As before, this included fortnightly dinners with his close friends at Chandos, but now included The Moot discussion group, which began meeting for weekend gatherings in April 1938, thereafter meeting roughly three times a year until 1944. But even at the high-profile Malvern Conference, convened by the Archbishop of York William Temple in 1941 to discuss religion and social order, Eliot's pessimism seeped into his remarks on education, not merely outlining the challenging task of safeguarding education from unwarranted statism, but that such conferences as Malvern were themselves unlikely to achieve much—which was a markedly dimmer view than he held about such gatherings earlier in the 1930s.[255]

In addition to attending some of The Moot's periodic meetings and developing the essays and chapters that would eventually form his *Notes*, Eliot's other activities from a social criticism perspective during the war consisted mainly of editorial assistance to *The Christian News-Letter*. The 'CNL', founded in 1939 and edited by J.H. Oldham, was a weekly periodical featuring articles and essays drawn from the editor's various circles: namely the Council of the Churches on the Christian Faith and the Common Life (CCFCL) and later the Christian Frontier Council (CFL), with additional and sporadic material harvested from members of The Moot. At its apogee, the CNL enjoyed upwards of as many as 10,000 readers and is regarded by historians such as J.C. Wood as an important historical artefact of the ideas being circulated in The Moot.[256] These focused on issues associated with creating a 'middle way' between laissez-faire capitalism and centrally planned

[254] Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, 185.
[255] K. Asher, *T.S. Eliot & Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 87.
[256] Wood, *This is Your Hour: Christian Intellectuals in Britain and the Crisis of Europe, 1938-49*, 13.

totalitarianism; reversing secularising trends in society, culture, and education; and, early on, creating a vanguard or order of intellectuals to help disseminate these ideas and advance their cause in strategic areas and offices. The news-letter was not limited to these subjects however, as it also carried numerous topical, ecumenical, and war-related content, albeit from a mainly Protestant perspective.

Eliot served on the CNL's editorial board from its inauguration but tried to disentangle himself from his responsibilities following his early departure from The Moot in 1941 (ending his near-consecutive streak of attendance, with only perfunctory attendance at one meeting in 1942 and a second in 1943). This reticence emerged from his growing dissatisfaction with both The Moot, Oldham, and the publication. This shift in his attitude will be explored in a later chapter, but of particular relevance here is Eliot's Catholic distaste for what he describes as Oldham's relentless Protestantism—not to mention a poet's dislike for Oldham's supposedly deteriorating prose style.[257] The Protestantism that Eliot referred to was Oldham's—and by extension The Moot's—supposedly deficient commitment to Catholicism (due in part to 'theological imprecision' and his eagerness for pan-Protestant but non-Catholic world-wide ecumenism) in addition to a general disregard for Catholic social teaching.[258] By extension, Eliot became highly critical of Oldham's *Christian News-Letter*, feeling that he had trapped him into helping edit it.[259] In 1945 Eliot referred to it as an irrelevant publication and criticized it as inexorably Protestant, dubbing it in a letter to John Hayward as the 'Anti-Christian News Letter'.[260]

[257] Kurlberg, 'The Rebirth of Christendom: The Moot (1938-1947) as a Modernist Revitalization Movement,' 190.
[258] Spurr, '*Anglo-Catholic in Religion' T.S. Eliot and Christianity*, 189.
[259] Ibid, 193.
[260] T. S. Eliot, 'Letter to John Hayward,' dated 13th March 1945, HB/L/12/1/24/F397.

As an aside, it ought to be noted that Eliot's distaste for Oldham's brand of Protestantism was not exclusive to Oldham and The Moot. That is not to suggest that he disliked all Protestants and Protestantism, but there is no denying that he positioned his own Catholicism closer to Roman Catholicism than much (if not all) of Anglicanism, to say nothing of Methodism, Lutheranism, Presbyterianism, and other Protestant denominations. Though Eliot did not comment publicly or at length on his criticisms of Protestantism, his participation (alongside V.A. Demant) in the drafting and signing of the 1947 report *Catholicity*: *A Study in the Conflict of Christian Traditions in the West* for the Archbishop of Canterbury is nevertheless illuminating. For instance, the report highlighted Protestantism's contribution to the fragmentation of Christendom and voiced frustration that 'Protestants [have] never been able to agree on a positive statement of their common convictions.'[261] Based on Eliot's prior (and inherited) interest in totalising systems and philosophical absolutes from F.H. Bradley and his criticism in *The Idea of a Christian Society* that Britain lacked positive ideological convictions, it is no surprise he took issue with the Protestantism's lack of coherent and comprehensive dogmas. By contrast, he found those very things in Catholicism, which the report he co-drafted defined as 'certain facts whose existence and authority Christians acknowledge: the Catholic Church, the Catholic Creeds, the Catholic Faith, the Catholic Sacraments.'[262]

Returning to Oldham, what frustrated Eliot the most was that he felt 'played' by 'artful' Oldham to continue serving on its editorial board long after he wished to do so, which included a stint as editor in chief while Oldham was on holiday in August of 1940.[263] This was a common occurrence, however, as Eliot was prone to overcommitting from politeness,

[261] G.F. Fisher, E.S. Abbott, and T. S. Eliot, *Catholicity: A Study in the Conflict of Christian Traditions in the West, Being a Report Presented to His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1947), 10, 20.
[262] Ibid, 9.
[263] Ibid.

which often led to exhaustion and repressed bitterness. But in this instance Eliot took the opportunity to remind readers of sentiments he had previously expressed in both *The Criterion* and *The Idea*, that 'what people want from their statesmen, whether they know it or not, is not merely energy, efficiency and ability, but a right sense of values.... I do not believe that any statesman today in this country would command popular support whose mind and feelings were wholly detached from that obscure basis of Christian thought and emotion which is still integral with the people's ideals.'[264] In 1948 he would make a similar point in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, advocating for the role religion and values played in the creation of culture and vice versa: making the point that neither popular politicians nor rational policies were by themselves the solution for national rejuvenation. He did not make the same point twice in the news-letter, however, as he learned from the incident not to moonlight for Oldham again.

Eliot's last attendance at The Moot was in June 1943. By that same year he had already written the essays that would effectively comprise *Notes* and had published them as a series in Mairet's *New English Weekly*. Though *Notes* would itself not be published until 1948, which was the same year that he won the Nobel Prize in Literature and was awarded the OM by 1943 Eliot's social criticism had effectively run its course. Though Eliot remained active on the BBC's advisory board for religious programming and occasionally attended the 'Centre for Christian Discourse' at St. Anne's House in Soho, his interest in formulating new ideas waned considerably from early 1943 onwards. At St. Anne's for instance, Eliot and Mairet conducted a weekly discussion group, 'Toward the Definition of Culture', but he found these burdensome and lacklustre, confiding to his friend Mary Trevelyan that he always came back depressed from their meetings.[265] This is possibly because he was only

[264] Kojecký, *T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, 145.
[265] Spurr, '*Anglo-Catholic in Religion*', 190.

attending the centre as a courtesy to Gilbert Shaw (a fellow Moot member) and because a number of his friends, including Mairet, Demant, and Reckitt were also involved. Likewise, he was a busy man during the war, as he was still a fulltime director at Faber in addition to his broadcasting and lecturing for the British Council and volunteering his time with London-based American servicemen.

Lastly, Eliot's time and attention were also needed for composing the remainder of his *Four Quartets*, with *Burnt Norton* first appearing in February 1941, *The Dry Salvages* in September of the same year, and *Little Gidding* in September 1942. These were then collected and published along with *East Coker* as the *Four Quartets* in 1943, which are widely regarded as some of Eliot's best and most popular poetry (as well as his last). Indeed, according to Ackroyd, Eliot was 'left with an agreeable sensation of vacancy and after the appearance of 'Little Gidding' in the autumn, he did not expect to do any serious intellectual work during the winter'.[266] This was accompanied, however, by a depressing belief that the British might lose the war and that there was little point in doing more work in the interim.[267] Fortunately for him (and the country), the war was not lost, but even in the years following its conclusion a sense of foreboding stalked him. For even though Eliot had never been more famous nor so revered in the public eye, his personal life was increasingly hampered by ill-health (such as his successive bouts of bronchitis in 1951) and a glum pessimism about world affairs. Nor was this pessimism alleviated by the allied victory in 1945, as Eliot was immediately concerned about Russia's strategic position and ideological intentions in Eastern and Central Europe, as well as being concerned about the moral condition of England and America after the war. The private details of his mood

[266] Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot*, 266.
[267] Ibid.

and outlook from this period are difficult to ascertain, however, as he did not publish much on the matter and his letters from this later period have yet to be published.

Eliot's concern about Britain's post-war condition is not unexpected given that his reservations from the 1930s about totalitarianism had been magnified during the war due to the significant increases in centralised authority that occurred in both Britain and America. He likewise expressed concern about the growing emphasis on efficiency among the victors and warned in a 1946 broadcast that the spiritual organisation of Europe was being forgotten at the expense of its economic and political reorganisation.[268] Furthermore, Eliot was concerned about the moral position of post-war Germany, which he felt was in a sense even less moral than before, given that German culture was being disowned by many in the war's aftermath and that whatever restraining and ennobling effects it had before the war would be lost hereafter. The upshot for Eliot was that European culture itself now appeared even more vulnerable in the wake of victory than it had been during the interwar period. Likewise, efforts made by UNESCO and others to institutionalise culture along with ideological attempts to weaponize it for the new cold war were deeply unpalatable to Eliot. To him, the war for European security had been won, but the battle for its culture and tradition had evidently been lost. This was a bitter blow for one who had been fighting for it since the early years of *The Criterion*. The 1948 release of *Notes* was, therefore, more than any other piece of his criticism an (already thwarted) cry of increasingly feeble protest.

These concerns coalesced to produce the worst state of depression that Eliot had ever experienced, admitting once more to Mary Trevelyan in 1950 that 'I have never in the whole of my life felt so deeply depressed. It is worse than in 1938 - not at the thought of

[268] Ibid, 272.

war but of what lies behind it.'[269] In such circumstances, it is not surprising that Eliot wrote no more social criticism, but instead focussed on writing for the stage, penning *The Cocktail Party* in 1949, *The Confidential Clerk* in 1953, and *The Elder Statesman* in 1958. The one substantial and lasting bright spot from this last period of his life was his happy marriage to the much younger Valerie Fletcher in 1957, which brought both real and lasting satisfaction to his life and work.[270] The two remained joyfully married until T.S. Eliot's death in 1965, where after he was honoured with a stone floor in Poet's Corner at Westminster Abbey. The words written on it were inscribed from his poetry but spoke also to the heart of his social criticism: that 'the communication / of the dead is tongued with fire beyond / the language of the living.'

CONCLUSION

Sometime before his death in 1965 Eliot had planned to review his social criticism. He intended to entitle it *Criticizing the Critic*, but unfortunately, he never embarked on this endeavour. Indeed, Eliot did comparatively little in the years after he won his Nobel Prize in Literature. Since then, his poetry has continued to enjoy canonical status, nor has his literary reputation been entirely tarnished by claims of anti-Semitism, pro-fascism, or more recently, his attitude toward women (largely based on biographies about his first marriage)—not even by Tom Hooper's disastrous cinematic maladaptation of the Eliot-inspired *Cats* by Andrew Lloyd Webber. Eliot's social criticism by contrast has suffered immensely in the intervening years: partly because of changing social contexts, deepening secularisation, trends in academic ideology, and shifts in literary and intellectual taste. As Peter Scott observed, 'Few of those who admire Eliot have done so for his social and

[269] Spurr, '*Anglo-Catholic in Religion*', 55.
[270] Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot*, 291.

political criticism…. [Sometimes] they are simply unread, or seen as gratuitously problematic, and a hindrance to the survival of Eliot's reputation.'[271]

But as Roger Kojecký aptly observed, 'any opinion of Eliot's social criticism will depend largely on individual attitudes towards Conservatism.'[272] For there is no doubt that much of what Eliot had to say was conservative in nature: not least his insistence on religious standards for civil and political society, his distrust of state intrusion into society and culture, and his unrepentant belief in the importance of class distinctions (from a cultural perspective) and the necessity of cultivating elites and conserving elite institutions—all of which will be explored in greater detail in the following chapters. Likewise, the further contemporary times move away from Eliot's historical era (not to mention Kojecký's), the more reconstructive work historians must do to help readers understand the criticism that Eliot produced in his own era and in turn the critical appraisals his work has received since then. But the fact that few literary scholars have done this additional work is a significant reason why Eliot's social criticism has been so often misunderstood and misrepresented both presently and retrospectively within intellectual history.

This chapter has introduced the idea that in addition to his conservatism, Eliot's classicism, Catholicism, and continentalism (i.e., Europeanism) ought to be added to the list of defining features regarding his social criticism. The purpose of the next chapter is to elaborate how these central themes were adumbrated during the most vital period of Eliot's career as a social critic, which was through his editorship of *The Criterion.* This in itself advances a new argument about Eliot's social criticism: that the 1930s rather than the 1940s, and *The Criterion* rather than the *Idea* and *Notes*, were the true nexus of Eliot's

[271] P. Scott, 'The social critic and his discontents,' 60-75.
[272] Ibid, 224.

social criticism. So, too, it will place his criticism much more centrally within the heart of Britain's establishment journals, institutional high-culture, and leading intellectual circles in this period, as opposed to the more peripheral (but still popular) reception of his later works of social criticism and their connections with The Moot, which have resulted in mistaken views describing his social criticism as atavistic, idiosyncratic, and irrelevant.

To complete this intellectual biography of Eliot as a social critic the third chapter will advance the argument made in the second: demonstrating the development of Eliot's later social criticism as an extension of the foundational work done in his *Criterion* criticism. In the process a portrait will emerge in which both Eliot as a social critic and Eliot's social criticism become de-centred from its historical associations with The Moot discussion group and recentred instead within a vibrant, multi-nodal network of popular interests and national endeavours spanning British conservatism, Catholicism, classicism, and continentalism. To that end this chapter has sought to provide an overview of Eliot's life and career as a social critic so that by the conclusion of this work it will be possible not only to place his social criticism within the wider context of his other work, but also position Eliot more properly within a much better delineated historical context—revealing in the process a more accurate and integrated view of Britain's religious, intellectual, political, and cultural life during in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s.

CHAPTER TWO: ABSTRACT

The interwar decades of the 1920s and 30s were the most formative and generative period for T.S. Eliot as a social critic. In these years the output of his prose significantly eclipsed that of his poetry, as his attention turned increasingly (but not entirely) from creative composition to religious, cultural, political, and related themes (regarded collectively as his social criticism). Likewise, the topics he investigated and the conclusions he reached would later manifest themselves as central components of his 'mature' social criticism, namely in the works *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948). In that sense, the original and central locus for Eliot's social criticism lies not in The Moot, a discussion group he is associated with that met from 1938 to 1947, but instead from 1922 to 1939 as the founding editor of his influential literary magazine, *The Criterion.* This claim is central to understanding the formation and intention of Eliot's overall social criticism, but its importance shall be explored in a subsequent chapter, as the primary focus of this chapter is to explore Eliot's social criticism in relation to *The Criterion.*

More specifically, this chapter provides biographical and chronological information that contextualises the magazine's history and Eliot's role as its editor. It explores the concepts and issues that Eliot engaged with as a social critic and engages with various perspectives taken by historians and critics from the secondary literature. This chapter shall advance the claim that Eliot conducted his social criticism primarily as a public moralist, and that his thought can be categorised in both its inspiration and outlook as broadly classicist, conservative, Catholic, and continental/European.* It positions Eliot within a mainstream tradition of intellectual thought contiguous with contemporary political, cultural, and

* Catholic and Catholicism are not used synonymously with Roman Catholic or Roman Catholicism. This distinction shall be elaborated on in the chapter.

religious issues—a claim that runs contrary to critics who characterize Eliot's ideas as esoteric and isolated from the main currents of interwar thought and culture. Furthermore, by re-establishing *The Criterion* as the original nexus for Eliot's social criticism, a magazine that commanded considerable respect and influence, the audience and perceived impact of his work can be properly contextualised to an extent that goes underappreciated when exclusively considering *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture.*

Topics that fall outside the scope of this chapter include Eliot's literary criticism, poetry, and drama. Nor does this chapter attempt to review the contributions made by others to *The Criterion.* Eliot's participation in The Moot and his later works of criticism will appear in the next chapter.

The general outline of this chapter is divided between an analysis of Eliot as a social critic and a review of his social criticism. Those sections that focus on Eliot as a critic examine his various guises as a man of letters, Christian social philosopher, and public moralist. They also provide some historical perspective on the political, cultural, and religious context in which Eliot was operating as a social critic. The next sections of the chapter investigate the scope of his social criticism, and thematically categorize his criticism as classicist, conservative, Catholic, and European. This part of the chapter also reviews the content of Eliot's criticism in relation to his predominant areas of editorial comment: romanticism and liberalism, economics, psychology, political theory, Charles Maurras, decline, and Church and state. The final section of this chapter provides a retrospective review of noteworthy criticisms from secondary literature and finishes with a general conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CRITERION CRITICISM

THE CRITIC

During the *Criterion* years, Eliot characterized his role as social critic with various designations. Occasionally he described himself and likeminded others as 'Men of Letters', 'Men of Culture', and 'Men of Ideas'. In these instances, he was often and deliberately channelling the spirit of Matthew Arnold—the great Victorian social critic par excellence—in order to remind his audience of their responsibilities. In Eliot's view, such persons (not actually restricted to men) were the last remnants of a cultural aristocracy: one that needed to fight against the deterioration of their domain, whether that was in journalistic standards in an age of mass media, or maintaining moral and imaginative agency 'before the demagogy of science'.[1] Later, in the late 1930s to mid 1940s, his conception of a cultural aristocracy would be updated (though not transformed) to the terminology of elites, discussing with members of The Moot such as Karl Mannheim about their role in providing leadership in wartime and post-war society. This would manifest itself in Eliot's idea of 'The Clerisy', a term borrowed from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in his book *The Idea of a Christian Society*.[2] This clerisy was envisioned as an elite community of religious clerics and lay persons, each possessing extraordinary intellects and spiritual gifts, capable of collectively influencing 'the conscious mind and the conscience of the nation'.[3] This was, in essence, both a class-based view on intellectual leadership, and a classicist view, with leadership tendered by platonic-like philosopher-saints, using their influence to frame and inform society's cultural and spiritual life.

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[1] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 2 (Apr 1924), 231-35.
[2] This could be mistakenly associated with the term 'clerc', which Eliot used on several occasions in *The Criterion* as a French substitute for the English term 'intellectual'. These terms are not directly linked.
[3] R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 34.

In addition to being a man of letters, culture, and ideas, Eliot was a self-described moralist. In this respect his social criticism was predicated on the importance of theology to political philosophy, and ethics to politics and economics. 'I am inclined to approach public affairs from the point of view of a moralist,'[4] he wrote, later declaring 'I hold that it is ultimately the moralists and philosophers who must supply the foundations of statesmanship, even though they never appear in the forum.'[5] On this, Eliot was adamant. 'We are constantly being told that economic problems cannot wait,' he wrote, for instance, '[but] it is equally true that the moral and spiritual problems cannot wait: they have already waited far too long.'[6] Eliot believed that it was the duty of moralists and philosophers to supply the positive foundations of statesmanship—creating a form of intellectual, moral, and religious capital—which might also serve as a framework robust enough in content and conviction to match the 'pagan' enthusiasms of fascism and the material determinism of Marxism. This was something he would later attempt to do in outline form with *The Idea*, whilst the *Criterion* era witnessed his earliest attempts at addressing these issues in a more incremental manner.

In practice, Eliot's moralism usually emerged through his editorial inquiries into the ethical or theological principles behind a given policy, state of affairs, or course of action. When, for instance, Ezra Pound criticized Eliot over his failure to fully adopt social credit, Eliot, though sympathetic, responded that as a moralist he could not commit himself to any economic viewpoint that was restricted to economics alone.[7] In a different instance, Eliot eulogized A.R. Orage as a fellow moralist literary critic. 'He was that necessary and

[4] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 13 (Oct 1933), 115-20.
[5] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 12 (July 1933), 642-647.
[6] Ibid.
[7] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion*, 14 (Oct 1934), 86-90.

rare person, the moralist in criticism,' Eliot wrote, 'not the inquisitor who tries to impose (his) morals upon literature, but the critic who perceives the morals *of* literature, and who recognizes that intellectual dishonesty, laziness and confusion are cardinal sins in literature.'[8] Indeed, Eliot's moralism was not dissimilar from his classicism: they both promoted exactitude in thought, precision in language, probity in action, and sustained order against the entropic effects of original sin. Furthermore, operating as a moralist enabled him to remain on safe (though not necessarily easy) terrain: as he was himself quick to disclose his own limitations in the practical realms of politics and the elaborate theories of economics. This suited him well, as his argument was never that moralists had themselves to be politicians or economists, merely that moralists had an obligation to understand politics and economics and furnish them with an intelligible and effective moral framework in which human flourishing could plausibly occur.

Lastly, Eliot sometimes described himself and others as working in the capacity of a 'Christian social philosopher'. This term was invariably used in a favourable manner. Terminologically, its three-barrelled phrasing neatly signified and encapsulated the position's religion, realm, and role in one. Intellectually, it dovetailed with many of Eliot's critical concerns. The doctrines and dogmas of Eliot's Catholicism complemented the strict standards of his classicism's anti-emotionalism and intellectual order. They also provided a metaphysical structure for his philosophical views: providing a transcendent timelessness, a venerated tradition, and a supra-rational basis for what might otherwise be historically contingent arguments. In Eliot's own words, 'You cannot arrive at a Christian social philosophy, any more than you can arrive at a communist one, merely by looking into your heart and writing. You need a knowledge of the whole history of Christianity up to the Reformation, and in particular some acquaintance, for instance, with the views of

[8] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion*, 14 (Jan 1935) 260-64.

Aquinas.'[9] That is not to suggest that Eliot entirely subsumed his classicism into Catholicism. The two remained distinct in their spheres of application and commanded differing degrees of adherence and loyalty, but the ease with which Catholic concepts such as orthodoxy and heresy (as deployed in his 1934 lectures *After Strange Gods: a primer on modern heresy*, on moral and immoral fiction) entered into his classicist vocabulary demonstrates the compatibility of the classicist and the Christian social philosopher.

The social in 'social philosopher' was also accurate in delineating his realm of inquiry, which was typically and intentionally broad and generally in keeping with the parameters of forerunners such as Matthew Arnold and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Furthermore, Eliot regarded the question of what constitutes 'the good life' to have inherent social applicability, and by extension, political importance. Yet this was not a question that could be answered by politicians or academics in secular disciplines, as he regarded this as an essentially (and exclusively) ethical and religious question. There were, however, matters that economists, political scientists, sociologists, and theologians were better equipped to address in their related fields, which Eliot, though well-read, did not feel qualified to pronounce on. That is why he preferred to comment on these subjects as a moralist and in a generalist manner, particularly when they intersected with social and cultural life. In this respect he admired some of the contributions made by writers such as de Maistre and Burke, Coleridge and Newman, as each of them in their own way had been able 'to consider the ideas of class, of property, of nationality not according to current or local prejudices, but according to permanent principles.'[10] Eliot was, by contrast, suspicious, even in his enthusiasm for thinkers like Charles Maurras, who divorced the social utility of religion from its spiritual necessity and its 'regard for politics as a "science" independent of

[9] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 13 (Jan 1934), 270-78.
[10] Ibid.

morals'.[11] For a Christian social philosopher, this was something Eliot was unwilling to condone.

As a Christian social philosopher, Eliot was perhaps most qualified in philosophy, having completed (but not submitted) his doctorate in philosophy from Harvard with a year abroad at Oxford. But in his role as a Christian social philosopher he was well positioned to pursue a 'disinterred' examination of ideas and first principles: providing intellectual capital in the form of political philosophy and a right theology, which he hoped could be used by statesmen and influencers in the process of cultivating a more principled Christian society. In keeping with this view, Eliot referred to others such as V.A. Demant in England, Jacques Maritain in France, and Reinhold Niebuhr in America as fellow Christian social philosophers. Interestingly, both Maritain and Niebuhr, whom Eliot knew personally and published, enjoyed considerable success as Christian social philosophers. In fact, far from being shunned because of their religious status, their respective ideas found sizable and influential audiences.

Reinhold Niebuhr, for instance, who taught at Union Theological Seminary in New York, was one of America's leading public intellectuals throughout the 1930s, 40s, and 50s.[12] Like Eliot he graced the cover of *Time Magazine* and later advised multiple presidents and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1964. His philosophy of Christian Realism, which emphasised the impact of original sin on progress and geopolitics, was foundational to American foreign policy during the Cold War.[13] In 2009 *The New York Review of Books* described Niebuhr's *The Irony of American History* as 'the most important

[11] T.S. Eliot, 'The Literature of Fascism' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 8 (Dec 1928), 280-90.
[12] S. Erwin, *The theological vision of Reinhold Niebuhr's The Irony of American history: 'in the battle and above it'* (Oxford: Oxford theology and religion monographs, 2013).
[13] R. Niebuhr and R. McAfee Brown, *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

book ever written on U.S. foreign policy'.[14] Other influential books such as *Moral Man and Immoral Society* and *The Nature and Destiny of Man* further cemented his place as the greatest public theologian in America, and in private as a formative influence on key foreign policy figures such as George Kennan, Hans Morgenthau, and Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.[15]

So, too, Jacques Maritain's French neo-Thomistic political philosophy was immensely influential during the interwar and post-war period. His theory of 'integral humanism', which argued that humanism without religion was incapable of cultivating comprehensive freedom and growth, whether for individuals or communities and states, was an influencing force behind the European Christian Democratic movement and on papal views expressed at Vatican II.[16] His notion of integral humanism and its corresponding view that natural rights originated in natural law was deeply influential in the development and drafting of the U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[17] It is worth noting, therefore, that for each of these so called Christian social philosophers, neither their religious affiliation or their doctrinal positions prevented them from achieving considerable attention and influence. Though both were regularly featured in *The Criterion*, their work was just as commonly reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement* during the 1930s.[18] Maritain, for instance, was reviewed in the *TLS* more than twenty times between 1928 and 1950—no mean feat, let alone for a Christian social philosopher. Together these three figures provide a window into vibrant transatlantic networks of religious and political thought. It was one that commanded large audiences and significant influence. It

[14] B. Urquhart (March 6, 2009), 'What Can You Learn From Reinhold Niebuhr' in *The New York Review of Books*. Retrieved January 8, 2020.
[15] M. Brown, *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*, 'Introduction'.
[16] M. Caciagli, 'Christian Democracy' in Ball, T., & Bellamy, R., (eds) *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 165-180.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Domestico, 'Editing Modernism, Editing Theology: T. S. Eliot, Karl Barth, and the Criterion', 33.

also existed alongside a growing global ecumenical movement, which would witness the emergence of international institutions and worldwide advocacy—and this was certainly a milieu in which Eliot can be placed.

As with Maritain in France (and later New York) and Niebuhr in America, Eliot's Christian social philosophy was not preached at home before an empty church. Much has been made of the secularisation of England and when it began. Some, like Hugh McLeod note the beginning of a per capita decline in religious observance dating as far back as the 1880s.[19] Others, as Jeremy Morris has noted, have pushed the chronology of decline forward from the early nineteenth century to the 1880s, then to the 1900s, and then to the interwar period.[20] More recently, and with less emphasis on ecclesiastical criteria and more on religion as expressed in social mores and personal iterations of religiosity, Callum Brown has pushed the definitive date of decline as recently as the 1960s.[21] There is no denying, however, as Peter Clarke has observed, that 'measured as a proportion of the English population aged fifteen years and over, the established Church fell from its peak of 12% in 1910 to 10% by 1940 and around 7% until the 1960s… and thereafter suffering their sharpest decline'.[22] Nevertheless, the nation enjoyed a religious renaissance of sorts in the later 1940s and 1950s, experiencing the largest per-annum growth since the eighteenth century whilst also maintaining robust levels of Church affiliation[23] (even if Church attendance itself was in overall decline), which coincided with Eliot's 'mature' works of social criticism.

[19] See D. H. McLeod, Class and religion in the late Victorian City (London, 1974).
[20] J. Morris, 'The strange death of Christian Britain: another look at the secularisation debate.' *The Historical Journal*, 46 (4), 967.
[21] C. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2009), 172-173.
[22] P. Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990* (London: Allen Lane, 1996), 161.
[23] Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 165.

Furthermore, the late interwar period was one in which institutional expressions of religious sentiment was both common and actively promoted. As Ross McKibbin wrote, 'The great majority of the English almost certainly thought of England as a Christian nation and most believed themselves (one way or another) to be Christian.'[24] This belief was reflected not only in the largely sustained rates for so-called hatches, matches, and dispatches that the Church still performed, but was also represented by a dramatic upsurge in the late 30s and early 40s of Christian imagery and religious language in both political rhetoric and in concepts of national identity.[25] This was evidenced in everything from the use of national days of prayer and the creation of a religious broadcasting unit at the BBC, to the centrality of the 'Christian nation' in the speeches of Stanley Baldwin and the prominence of 'Christian civilization' in Churchill's 'Finest Hour' broadcast. Indeed, it was a Conservative tactic throughout the 1930s to utilize the notion of England as Christian: partly to court Nonconformist votes in the wake of the Liberal Party's collapse, and partly because it enabled them to develop a broad anti-socialist national consensus developed around moral identity rather than class-based antagonism.[26] The Conservatives also adopted (in Baldwin's case, not insincerely) the nomenclature of national Christianity because it appealed greatly to women, as they represented the largest share of churchgoers, as well as the largest new voting demographic since their recent enfranchisement.[27] Yet it was not all top-down. As Keith Robbins attested, this period witnessed, 'a widespread willingness' amongst the public to define the nation's collective identity as that of a Christian civilization.[28] So when Eliot wrote as a religious social critic, a Catholic moralist, or as a Christian social philosopher, it was not into a void but rather against a backdrop of

[24] R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951*, 272.
[25] Spencer, *The Evolution of the West*, pp. 35-36.
[26] Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State between the Wars*, 128.
[27] G. Gorer, *Exploring English Character* (London: The Cresset Press, 1955), pp. 242-243.
[28] K. Robbins, 'Britain, 1940 and 'Christian Civilization,' in Beales, D., and Best, G., eds *History, Society and the Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 299.

religiously permeated cultural and national life. In this respect, *The Criterion* fit very much within its context.

THE SCOPE OF ELIOT'S CRITICISM

Eliot was not prone to making regular programmatic statements about his social criticism. *The Criterion's* contributors represented a wide range of intellectual and political viewpoints, which was an intentional move by the editor to attract the broadest and most intelligent articulations of differing views in order to foster equally thoughtful debate. Despite this, he exercised his editorial prerogative to frame such debates towards certain tendencies he condoned. In 1924 he stated these with reference to T.E. Hulme's formula: 'classical, reactionary and revolutionary'.[29] As Michael Levinson has noted, these terms are not as contradictory as they might appear. 'They reflect the subtle and demanding relations of past and present in Eliot's public address, a call that was neither for revivalism nor for a slowing in the pace of change. He consistently held that the only way to live up to tradition was to engage radically with the present, and to do so in the name of "classical" and "reactionary" values.'[30] Once Eliot had converted and with the addition of his already established commitment to fostering a European intellectual identity, his social criticism became centred on the concepts (or tendencies) previously stated in this chapter: namely classicism, conservatism, Catholicism, and continentalism.

There were occasions, however, when the naturally cautious and somewhat pedantic editor could be highly specific about what he considered the most important issues at hand. In one instance, he stated, 'The two most serious long-distance problems we have, apart from

[29] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 2 (Apr 1924), 231-25.
[30] Levenson, 'The Role of the Intellectual' in J. Harding edits *T.S. Eliot in Context*, 67.

the ultimate religious problem, are the problem of Education and the problem of the Land – meaning by the latter the problem, not merely of how to grow enough food, but of how to obtain a proper balance between country and town life.'[31] These were indeed matters of great importance to Eliot's criticism and neatly encapsulated the all-encompassing trilemma of how people should live in relation to the divine above them, those beside them, and the land underneath them. Indeed, this trilemma will feature throughout the following catalogue of his criticism, as well as in both *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. But these hardly represent the totality of the topics that received his editorial comment. To better understand the content of Eliot's criticism, therefore, it is necessary that we survey its scope. What follows is a thematic catalogue of his editorial commentaries, which comprise the sinews of his social criticism during the interwar period. These range from his views on finance and psychology to questions of war and peace. Thereafter, we shall excavate the overriding concepts and concerns of his classicism, conservatism, Catholicism, and Europeanism, examining their origins, influences, and nuances before concluding with a reflection on certain critical arguments from the secondary literature about Eliot's social criticism.

I. Romanticism and Liberalism

In Eliot's early social criticism, he consistently wrote against the literary romanticism of his friend and sometime colleague John Middleton Murry and his magazine, *Adelphi*. This was more than a mere literary matter for Eliot, as he regarded literature as possessing moral and social dimensions that influenced social mores.[32] According to Schuchard and Cuda, 'The argument, as Eliot characterizes it… hinged upon the question of how to

[31] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 17 (Apr 1938) 478-85.
[32] T.S. Eliot, "Romantic' and 'Classic" in *T.S. Eliot: Selected Prose* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1953), 31.

discern the source of intellectual and spiritual authority. The romantic finds an indubitable truth and authority within himself; the classicist, in an institution or set of ideas outside of himself.'[33] The upshot between these epistemological positions was, Eliot wrote, between those who 'make *man the measure of all things*, and those who would find an extra-human measure'.[34] In more colloquial terms, he stated in *The Function of Criticism* that it was the difference between doing as one ought and 'doing as one likes'.[35]

In literature, Eliot regarded tradition as just such an extra-human measure. He did not mean by tradition an unquestioned deference to the past, 'following the ways of the immediate [or a far removed] generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its "success".'[36] Instead his sense of tradition 'involves, in the first place, the historical sense… [which] compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional.'[37] Eliot's tradition was one of organic development and elite curation—not something to be meddled with by legislation and educational planners (as we shall later see), nor divorced by the ever changing fancies of literary sentiment and individual taste, which he regarded as inherently emotive rather than ultimately intelligent.

[33] Schuchad, and Cuda, 'Introduction' in *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. Volume 2, The Perfect Critic, 1919-1926*, xxx
[34] 'Mr. Read and M. Fernandez: A Review of Reason and Romanticism: Essays in Literary Criticism,' in *The New Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 4 (Oct 1926), 751-57.
[35] T.S. Eliot, 'The Function of Criticism' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (October 1923).
[36] T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1950).
[37] Ibid.

This was the line that Eliot held on literature and romanticism, although its highwater mark was in 1927. Thereafter the issues of romanticism and classicism were increasingly subsumed into discussions of theology and political philosophy, with classicism and Catholicism on the side of order, authority, and tradition; and romanticism coupled with liberalism and secularisation, representing various iterations of solipsistic thought and 'doing as one likes'. This would also be discussed in The Moot, as both Murry and Eliot were founding (if ultimately disaffected) members of the group. Before then, and still in the 1920s, Eliot further criticized romanticism on moral grounds for its individualist social philosophy. He associated romanticism with 'doing as one likes', following one's 'inner voice', and embracing what comes 'naturally'. In his opinion this obscured the important moral question, 'which is *not* what comes natural or easy to us, but what is right?'[38] In his estimation, if the Romantics were correct and the chief end and *summum bonum* of humankind was to honour their authentic inner voice, 'why have principles?'[39] Needless to say, the moralist was not impressed with this view of life and derisorily dubbed it 'Whiggery'.

Drawing a connection between romanticism and whiggery with Whigs and whiggish liberalism was also intentional on Eliot's part. He regarded liberalism, whether it was theological, political, or philosophical as dangerous (though not necessarily damnable) because it often eroded the positive (i.e., realised and constructive) heritage of tradition, metaphysics, religion, and order with the negative (i.e., unrealised or unconstructive) promises of indeterminate liberty and interminable progress. Since Eliot believed that no amount of liberalism could indelibly reverse the malignancy of original sin or realise the eschatological promise of utopia, he was deeply suspicious of liberalism (especially when

[38] Eliot, 'The Function of Criticism'.
[39] Ibid.

coupled with mass media) whenever it was uncoupled from vital forms of religion and tradition, as well as intellectual critique and operational devolution (as expressed in his 'mature' criticism's scepticism of state planning).

This belief became most pronounced in the late 1930s, when Eliot feared that liberalism's mediocrity, vacuity, and self-satisfaction might capitulate before fascism's pagan enthusiasm for blood and soil, or communism's dialectical confidence and proletarian egalitarianism.[40] In his view, summarized by Javadi, Schuchard, and Stayer:

> Liberalism, the cultural heritage of the nineteenth century, had prepared the way for totalitarianism by destroying traditional social habits of the people, by dissolving their natural collective consciousness into individual constituents, by licensing the opinions of the most foolish, by substituting instruction for education, by encouraging cleverness rather than wisdom, the upstart rather than the qualified, by fostering a notion of *getting on* to which the alternative is a hopeless apathy.[41]

It should be stated that Eliot did not place all the blame at the doorstep of liberalism, let alone romanticism, but he did see in the nation's present difficulties the rotten fruit of neglected duty—of not only doing as one likes, but as was the case with Munich, letting others do as they please. Eliot wished to defend democracy, which he emphatically but not enthusiastically respected, as well as protect national sovereignty, innocent life, religion, and culture; but apart from these things he lamented that there was precious little left in England to morally defend. 'Our society,' he wrote in 1939, 'which had always been so assured of its superiority and rectitude, so confident of its unexamined premises, [now appears to be] assembled around nothing more permanent than a congeries of banks, insurance companies and industries… and a belief in compound interest and the maintenance of dividends.'[42] This pessimism did not stop Eliot from doing his part during

[40] Eliot, 'Last Words'.
[41] I. Javadi, R. Schuchard, and J. Stayer, 'Introduction' in *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. Volume 5, Tradition and Orthodoxy, 1934–1939. The Critical ed.* (Baltimore: London, England, 2017), xx.
[42] T.S. Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society' in *Christianity and Culture* (London: Harcourt, 1976), 51.

the war, as he served as a fire warden throughout the Blitz; but his criticism was not unwarranted in the wake of the Munich Crisis, nor, as we shall see, was it the product of sudden and apoplectic concern.

II. Economics

The interwar years were a period of considerable economic activity, turmoil, and transformation. This era witnessed the rise and fall of national currencies, devastating economic depressions, the introduction of largescale tariffs, revolutions in economic theory, and the post-war economic deterioration of Germany and its pre-war resurgence. In Britain it witnessed the reintroduction and subsequent abandonment of the gold standard, dramatic labour strikes and the introduction of labour politics into parliament, and the country's continued transformation from an agrarian to a manufacturing and then consumer-based society.[43] Many of these events were of interest to Eliot, not least because he began this period working in Lloyds Bank's Colonial and Foreign Office Department and then directed the bank's (admittedly slender) Intelligence Department. Likewise, it was during his seven-year stint at Lloyds that Eliot began studying economics and reading classic economic texts.

Though Eliot became well-read in economics, he never claimed more than a layman's understanding of the subject. He was often highly self-deprecating. As he wrote in *The Criterion*, 'When I read, say, an economic article in *The Referee*, or any of the numerous productions [about social credit] of Major Douglas and his disciples, I am confirmed in my suspicion that conventional economic practice is all wrong, but I can never understand enough to form any opinion as to whether the particular prescription or nostrum proffered

[43] A. Trexler, 'Economics' in J. Harding eds. *T.S. Eliot in Context*, 275.

is right.'[44] He nevertheless regarded economics and political economy as sufficiently important by 1931 to include it regularly in the topics discussed and the books reviewed by the magazine.

Like politics and theology, Eliot declared that economics was 'no longer to be ignored by literary critics'.[45] In 1932, for instance, he personally reviewed books like *Can Governments Cure Unemployment?* by Sir Norman Angell and Harold Wright, *Poverty in Plenty* by J.A. Hobson, *Money and Prices* by Augustus Baker, and *This Unemployment* by Rev. V.A. Demant. In Eliot's own estimation, 'none of these books would, I believe, be considered quite orthodox,'[46] but it was admittedly a time of widespread economic upheaval and varied if not radical theorizing. As Adam Trexler has explained, 'During the interwar years, economic radicalism in Britain could not be confined to either the political right or left. In the Labour Party, ameliorists sat uncomfortably alongside revolutionary Marxists. Liberals ran the gamut from ardent social reformers (even Fabian socialists) to those who warned against any economic interventions.'[47] Likewise, there were serious divergences amongst Conservatives, ranging from defenders of aristocratic privilege to radicals calling for redistribution of land to empower the poor.[48] As such, Eliot was far from alone in exploring alternative economic arguments and reading unconventional economists (in addition to mainstream economists like John Maynard Keynes). Indeed, not to do so would have been a conspicuous omission given the troubled economic times of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Nor, as we shall see, was Eliot the only religious intellectual to do so.

[44] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 10 (Apr 1931), 481-90.
[45] Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-war Britain*, 185.
[46] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 11 (Jan 1932), 268-75.
[47] Trexler, 'Economics' in J. Harding eds. *T.S. Eliot in Context*, 281.
[48] Ibid.

Questions of political economy also featured in the work of many Christian intellectuals, sometimes as an extension of social justice or in relation to political thought and intellectual history. Figures included liberal Anglicans like Ernest Barker, Principal of King's College London and then Professor of Political Science at Cambridge, and A.D. Lindsay, Master of Balliol College. William Temple, the future Archbishop of Canterbury (1942-1944), was heavily involved on the social justice side of economic discussions; and his friend, R.H. Tawney, was a leading economic historian, a respected social critic, an influential member of the Labour party, and one of the key figures of early Christian Socialism in the United Kingdom. Other Christian Socialists actively involved in economic discussions included Maurice Reckitt, Philip Mairet, and V.A. Demant, each of whom Eliot became close with during the 1930s through his increasing collaboration with Mairet's *The New English Weekly*, Reckitt's *Christendom* journal, and the Anglo-Catholic Summer School. Indeed, some of these figures would in fact play a significant role in the development of his later social criticism, but that is a matter for later discussion.

For now, it is sufficient to note that in the interwar period it was common enough practice for religious intellectuals to comment on economic issues and to do so with sizable public audiences and sometimes to highly meaningful effect. There were several networks and institutions that facilitated such activities, which ranged from publications and periodicals to conferences and committees. Many of these were organised by J.H. Oldham and William Temple, and usually received ample coverage in leading newspapers. Temple's 1924 Conference on Politics, Economics, and Citizenship (COPEC) was especially noteworthy as it was an important milestone in the eventual creation of the welfare state—a term later coined by Temple in print[49]—as the conference marked a shift in the church's attitude

[49] A. Hastings, "Temple, William (1881–1944), archbishop of Canterbury." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep, 2004.

toward large-scale social reform and general provision for the populace. Though Eliot was not present for COPEC, he became involved in these movements in the 1930s: joining R.H. Tawney on the economics panel of the Oxford 1937 Conference and attending with Oldham the 1937 Life and Work Conference in Edinburgh.

The most prominent economist related to Eliot's criticism, both in print and in person, was his fellow Bloomsbury associate John Maynard Keynes. Eliot was already familiar with his work before they met in the early 1920s, having read *Economic Consequences of the Peace* in relation to his work and even recommended it as interesting reading to his mother.[50] The two subsequently met at the behest of their mutual friend, Virginia Woolf, who had recommended to Keynes that he appoint Eliot as the literary editor of his newly acquired and well-respected magazine, *The Nation*. The timing was not propitious, however, and Eliot had to decline the offer, but from this emerged a cordial friendship and a long correspondence.

Eliot admired Keynes tremendously, writing in the latter's obituary, 'his was a very exceptional intelligence…No achievement, either in theoretic economics or in public life, could have caused surprise… he would become a great statesman and a great man.'[51] Eliot also admired how 'he foresaw the consequences of bad economics [in the Treaty of Versailles] corrupted further by political passion and expediency, and the consequences were realised'.[52] This closely approximated to Eliot's future appraisal of the nation's position between the Munich Crisis and the beginning of the Second World War. Yet he was not a Keynesian. Despite Eliot's admiration for Keynes, *Economic Consequences of the*

[50] V. Eliot eds *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 1: 1898-1922* (London: Faber & Faber, 1988), 353.
[51] T.S. Eliot, 'John Maynard Keynes' in *The New English Weekly*, 29 (16 May 1946) 47-48.
[52] Ibid.

Peace was the only book by him that he actually read.[53] This is not because Keynes was a liberal. 'Certainly, he remained always a Liberal,' as Eliot confessed in his obituary, 'but he was singularly free from the intolerance of those who believe themselves emancipated; and he tended to free himself from the emotional prejudices of Liberalism.'[54] Instead, the likely reason is that Eliot approached economics from the standpoint of a moralist, contenting himself with the general outline of theories and trends, leaving more detailed analysis of Keynes' ideas (as well as those of other economists) to the many book reviewers he commissioned at *The Criterion*. In 1927, for instance, the magazine celebrated Keynes's *The End of Laissez-Faire* as a 'masterly summary of political thought,' and in 1931 published articles on his *Essays in Persuasion*.[55] That, and Eliot was able to consult personally with Keynes as a friend on economic matters that interested him, such as C.H. Douglas's theory of Social Credit.[56] Thus, as is often the case, one does not need to read a book when they can talk with the author.

Social Credit was indeed something that interested both Eliot and his friend Ezra Pound. The concept, developed by C.H. Douglas, was a response to widespread observations (dating back to John Ruskin and William Morris) that 'inadequate wages, high unemployment, disparity between the rich and the poor, industrial waste, inferior disposable goods and warfare brought about by competition for market were all endemic to capitalism.'[57] Douglas believed that it was not in the nature of profitable businesses (let alone unprofitable) to pay their workers sufficient salary for them to collectively gain financial control of the means of production. Similarly, he believed that banks controlled the monetary supply through credit and would be unwilling to engage in wealth

[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-war Britain*, 195.
[56] T.S. Eliot, 'Letter to John Maynard Keynes, 5 April 1934' in *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 7: 1934–1935*, 137.
[57] Trexler, 'Economics' in *T.S. Eliot in Context*, 279.

redistribution as it would endanger their profits, which, together with the intransigence of businesses, would ensure the perpetuation of a class system within capitalism. His solution was to create a form of social credit that augmented people's purchasing power through a national dividend and compensated price mechanism. Douglas theorized that this would result in an 'aristocracy of producers, serving and accredited by a democracy of consumers.'[58]

The theory was immensely popular in the 1920s and was the most important diagnosis of under-consumption during that period, though traditional economists were divided on the matter and few considered the theory feasible—a view that was seemingly vindicated by its failed application in the Canadian Province of Alberta. That was in 1935, however, and initially the theory seemed to make sense of Eliot's own experience at Lloyds, where he observed that banks created credit through cycles of lending, which enabled them to control production. [59] Eliot also consulted Keynes about the theory, who expressed a modicum of sympathy, but nevertheless withheld his confidence and approval.[60] In the end, his interest did not last long into the 1930s. The most favourable endorsement that Eliot was able to muster, which was that he was friendly to the theory, was produced in response to an attack (both in the pages of *The Criterion*) by Ezra Pound that he had become increasingly ignorant of and calloused toward Social Credit. Nor was this charge wholly unwarranted, as the magazine had recently reviewed a book by Douglas as 'an extravagant and pretentious book'.[61] Eliot was also on the record stating that he found Douglas's *Economic Democracy* 'fearfully difficult and obscurely written'.[62] Nor did the minutiae of technical economic theory interest him as the decade progressed. In the shadow of a

[58] C.H. Douglas, *Credit Power and Democracy* (London: C. Palmer, 1920), 95.
[59] Trexler, 'Economics' in *T.S. Eliot in Context*, 279.
[60] Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-war Britain*, 196.
[61] Ibid, 190.
[62] Ibid, 189.

looming world war and the rise of totalitarian regimes, the economic anxieties of the depression years began to pale in comparison. Eliot's attention turned accordingly.

It must be added that Eliot's interest in economics, though real, was likely stunted by the fact that as a self-professed religious moralist, he neither believed in nor desired a predominantly economic solution for the various inequities of the interwar period. He was also suspicious that whatever the nostrums of capitalism, communism, or fascism, the temptation to concentrate power into the hands of the select (and corrupted or corruptible) few would forever beset such systems.[63] It was for this reason that in 1935 he advised the Assembly of the Church of England to consider 'the fundamental moral laws founded on Christian theology when examining social and economic problems'.[64] Ethics, as he liked to say, came before economics. This did not prevent him from citing specific grievances against capitalism. Eliot was outspoken in his criticism of allowing financial considerations to undermine the preservation of the countryside and imperil the physical existence of historic churches and cultural institutions in the City of London. Like many, Eliot believed 'the present system does not work properly,' as 'it is imperfectly adapted to every purpose except that of making money; and even for money-making it does not work very well, for its rewards are neither conducive to social justice nor even proportioned to intellectual ability'.[65] That, and 'it is well adapted to speculation and usury, which are the lowest forms of mental activity; and it rewards well those who can cozen and corrupt the crowd'.[66] From this it is clear that Eliot was no friend of unregulated industrialism, laissez-faire capitalism, and the heady world of finance.

[63] T.S. Eliot, 'Mr. Barnes and Mr. Rowse' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 8 (July 1929) 682-91.
[64] Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-war Britain*, 193.
[65] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 11 (Apr 1932), 467-73.
[66] Ibid.

There were, however, two significant restraints to his economic radicalism. The first was a deeply held suspicion toward the scientific pretensions of economic planners. The second was a conservative hesitancy to ameliorate class-based economic injustices at the expense of eradicating a class-based social order. As each of these elements will feature significantly in other (forthcoming) sections of my doctoral thesis I shall refrain from developing them in full here. For the purposes of this chapter, it is enough to note the following.

First, Eliot greatly respected the pure sciences, but had little respect for pseudoscientific pretensions in the social- and soft-sciences such as psychology, economics, and sociology. That is not to imply that he did not respect these disciplines, but he remonstrated against them in *The Criterion* for depending on pseudoscientific jargon and 'believing that "science" will take care of the thought and the style'.[67] This was essentially a classicist critique of style and substance, but it was also a democratizing argument. Eliot maintained that important debates relevant to public welfare were being purposefully obscured by the scientific pretentions of experts, who were intentionally making topics of popular import too complex to be discussed by the general public. 'The trouble with the Science of Economics to-day,' he wrote, 'is that it appears in a form which very few people, if any, can understand it…. I am not deprecating the importance of Economics, but on the contrary elevating it. We need more and better Economics. We need another Ruskin.'[68] In the meantime, 'Political Economy boasts itself as a science as Physics is a science; and Physics is too busy with its own job to stop to repudiate the claims of Economics.'[69] As a minor concession, Eliot admitted, 'in fact Economics *is* a science, in the humane sense; but it will never take its due place until it recognizes the superior "scientific" authority of Ethics'.[70]

[67] T.S. Eliot, 'Grammar and Usage' in *The New Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 5 (Jan 1927), 121-24.
[68] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 10 (Jan 1931), 307-14.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.

Idealist as this was, Eliot was realist enough to know this was unlikely to happen soon, if at all.

Given this, Eliot feared that artists, men of letters, politicians, and even the clergy (not to mention the public) were in danger of being lobotomized before 'the demagogy of science'.[71] This was made all the more troubling by the fact that pure science—and by extension economic pseudoscience—portrayed itself, according to Eliot, as something 'unfettered by moral principles'.[72] As Trexler has noted, 'this was evident in the way economists described economic mechanisms, which were central to their scientific models of the economy, [but] masked the moral choices facing real people and which demanded a reinterpretation of the human motives at work in the economy.'[73] It is no surprise, therefore, that Eliot's classicist and religious moralism restrained his economic radicalism, as he was unprepared to endorse an economic solution if it obscured a more systemic moral problem. This would likewise become a prominent feature of his later social criticism, as he was equally as sceptical of state and central planning.

Second, Eliot's economic radicalism was tempered by certain traditional tory instincts. The first was to limit the encroachment of the state into unnecessary spheres of governance and control, which he feared would be inevitable in the face of large-scale economic reform and social welfare. Relatedly, the second was that he wished to preserve the nation's organic class-based structure, not in an economic sense, but culturally, believing that diversity rather than uniformity was essential to cultural vitality. In both instances he feared that over-assertive, top-down, centralised economic reform and management would negate true individuality and social cooperation, subvert traditional social and political

[71] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 2 (Apr 1924), 231-35.
[72] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 10 (Jan 1931), 307-14.
[73] Trexler, 'Economics' in *T.S. Eliot in Context*, 283.

authorities (such as the monarchy or the church), and, if invested with enough power, could even result in a kind of democratic totalitarianism. These concerns were expressed more emphatically in his later criticism, especially in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, but they were present enough in a germinal form in *The Criterion*. He criticized, for instance, both Soviet Communism and Italian Fascism, because they used command economies to reshape political and cultural forces.[74] He also railed against parliamentary attempts to legislate rural life, especially in economic matters, stating, 'I believe that the real and spontaneous country life – not *legislated* country life – is the right life for the great majority in any nation.'[75] Likewise, Eliot wrote against government proposals for the funding of a National Theatre.[76] This was not because he was against the promotion of the arts, as he was deeply sympathetic to the financial plight of artists, but he feared that such measures were in danger of unleashing unintended and harmful consequences. These consequences included state co-option of art for propaganda purposes and economic interests dictating artistic licence. It is likely that Eliot's fears were overstated, but in light of how states used artistic propaganda in both the Second World War and Cold War, as well as the impact of investment and advertising on broadcasting content, his concerns were not unfounded.

Eliot's conservative fears about unintended consequences were central to his hesitation regarding forced change and central planning. 'The measures intended to do one thing,' he wrote, 'without leading to another thing, may ultimately implement that other thing which they intend to make unnecessary.'[77] In this instance he complained that it was not for the government to mandate what constituted national culture and feared the deadening influence this would have on genuine artistic production. 'What should be produced in the

[74] Ibid.
[75] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 17 (Apr 1938), 478-85.
[76] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 17 (Jan 1938), 254-59.
[77] Ibid.

way of music and drama,' Eliot warned, would 'depend upon what the people is willing to have imposed upon it, and upon what the eight Commissions think that the people ought to see and hear.'[78] In this respect he maintained a zero-sum view of cultural formation, arguing, 'The more the State takes over, the less will be the private initiative.'[79] The fact that it was also the government's wish to make culture more accessible over the wireless to rural and economically impoverished regions did not convince Eliot. Instead, he noted with contempt that 'leaders in the mechanical amusement industry supported the proposed measure'.[80] He feared that behind such industry enthusiasm was the desire to monetize culture. 'I hope you see some point in my calling the Commission to be set up if the Music and Drama Bill is passed, a "National Investment Board" of the Arts.'[81] This fear would also re-emerge in a similar guise early in the Cold War, when Eliot became distrustful of government motions to promote culture abroad as though it was a weapon to be used in the national arsenal.

It is important to note, however, that Eliot was not libertarian so much as he was cautious and sceptical towards political interference in public and private realms. He was not anti-statist nor an outright minimalist when it came to conceding government prerogatives. Instead, he believed strongly in devolution, as he was hugely admiring of regional diversity and local tradition; and he also held to a Catholic form of subsidiarity, maintaining that matters ought to be decided by the smallest, lowest, or least centralised competent authority. As such, he could concede 'there are of course many more matters in the modern world than ever before, in which a central government must exercise its authority over the whole country: a parish cannot be allowed to neglect its sanitation, or its insect pests, or

[78] Ibid.
[79] Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 17 (Apr 1938), 478-85.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.

its control of its part of a river, because that would cause injury to its neighbours.'[82] So, too, with respect to finance, he acknowledged that 'in the banking system – which is a form, and perhaps the most important form, of government – some mediation has to be found between central authority and local independence'.[83] With respect to economic planning, therefore, Eliot maintained that 'it has its legitimate application, [so long as it is limited] by a rigorous selection of elements within restricted limits of time'.[84] It was not clear in his editorials from *The Criterion* what these were, only that economics should not supplant ethics, that intervention not be so audacious that its outcomes became unforeseeable, nor its impact on national diversity produce regional and cultural uniformity, and lastly that financial and political interests should not intrude upon or co-opt the nation's cultural life nor displace its cultural guardians.

III. Psychology

The subject of psychology often appeared in Eliot's editorial commentaries. Overall, he had mixed attitudes about psychology as a field. In the mildly affirmative, he wrote 'the chief use of psychology (apart from curing people, if it does) seems to me to be to restate old truths in modern jargon which people can understand; and if psychology helps people towards truth which they cannot apprehend when put in simple theological language, so much the better.'[85] Likewise, Eliot had himself sought psychological assistance at one point in the 1920s during a period of physical exhaustion and emotional strain. On the other hand, he was critical of the 'pseudoscience' he detected in social psychology and criticized the social commentators who employed 'mystical' concepts like 'collective neuroses' and

[82] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 8 (Apr 1929), 377-81.
[83] Ibid.
[84] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 11 (July 1932) 676-83.
[85] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 11 (Apr 1932) 467-73.

'herd mentalities' as 'one of the most disquieting superstitions of the day'.[86] This frustration was most apparent when Eliot reviewed works by Sigmund Freud, and in particular *The Future of an Illusion.*

Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*, published in 1928, was a psychological inquiry into the nature and origins of religion, as well as a speculation on its future as it underwent further scientific scrutiny. As one might expect, Eliot did not much care for Freud's assertion that religion was an extension of the Oedipus Complex and that religious dogmas 'are not deposits from experience of end products of cogitations, they are illusions, fulfilling the oldest, most powerful, most pressing desires of the human race'.[87] Freud went on to claim that in such illusions, which essentially serve to mitigate (or mask) the disorderly and often disappointing vicissitudes of life, religion was the pretext wherein 'fear of the perils of life is allayed, the appointment of a moral world order guarantees fulfilment of the demand of justice that has so often remained unfulfilled within human culture, while prolonging earthly existence by means of a future life provides the spatial framework within which such wish-fulfilment shall occur.'[88] The major thrust of Eliot's response was that Freud had stated that illusions need not be errors, per se, but then blithely treated the illusion of religion as an error for the rest of the book, and did so without proving that this was the case.[89]

Eliot argued that 'Freud is not concerned with the truth of religious ideas, or with the reality of religious "objects"; yet I fail to understand how they can be illusions in a "psychological" sense without being illusions pure and simple. Such a distinction… is much

[86] Ibid.
[87] S. Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (London: Penguin Group, 2008), 36.
[88] Ibid.
[89] T.S. Eliot, 'Freud's Illusions: A Review of *The Future of an Illusion*, by Sigmund Freud' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 8 (Dec 1928), 350-53.

too fine for my reason to grasp. Indeed, I am not sure that it is not too fine even for Freud himself.'[90] This distinction was important to Eliot. Both his classicism and Catholicism were preconditioned on notions of intelligibility and exactitude: either religion was an illusion and should be treated as both irrational and erroneous, or it was intelligible and warranted, in which case religion was both non-illusory and rational (even if it contained elements that transcended rational verification). This framework was central to Eliot's social criticism because the role that religion had within his moral and political thought were premised on eschatological and soteriological claims. These claims were binary in nature: either religious truths were merited and required their inclusion in the architecture of human activities, or they were erroneous and had no moral claim on the political structures and social activities of humankind. It was for this very reason that Eliot would ultimately distance himself from some of his key predecessors and contemporaries, such as Matthew Arnold, who valued religion but subordinated it before culture, and Charles Maurras, who upheld the church's social utility but did not recognize its spiritual authority.

Eliot also criticized Freud for his confidence that science (especially psychoanalysis) contained no such illusions and would in time liberate society from religious delusions[91]—an argument that Eliot's Moot associate, Michael Polanyi (himself a celebrated scientist), would demonstrate with devastating effect in works such as *Personal Knowledge* and *Science, Faith and Society*. This criticism was also in keeping with Eliot's attitude toward certain forms of economic planning and many stances taken in the social sciences, because it evidenced an unwarranted optimism in the ability of science (let alone pseudo-science) to ascertain both omniscience about humankind and the omnipotence to reengineer human nature. In Eliot's worldview there were certain mysteries that would forever transcend

[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.

human fathoming, and certain limitations, such as original sin and the unattainability of utopias, that would never be overcome. Yet, despite these disagreements, the most important criticism that he levelled against Freud was not religious in nature, but terminological and cultural. It had to do with Freud's use (and apparent abuse) of the term culture.

Though it might seem odd that Eliot would not take a greater interest in the religious dimension of Freud's book, he was greatly interested in the topic and definition of culture, about which he would later write an entire book. Indeed, though he often deprecated himself in religious matters as little more than a layman or churchwarden, as a leading poet, editor, publisher, broadcaster, and man of letters, he confidently believed that culture was firmly within his wheelhouse. Indeed, it is interesting to see here, almost twenty years before publication of *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, the future Nobel laurate already grappling with the concept and definition of culture in contradistinction to Freud. In Freud's words:

> ⁅By⁆ Human Culture I mean all those respects in which human life has raised itself above animal conditions and in which it differs from the lives of beasts…. It includes on the one hand all the knowledge and power that men have acquired in order to master the forces of nature and win resources from her for the satisfaction of human needs; and on the other hand, it includes all the necessary arrangements whereby men's relations to each other, and in particular the distribution of the attainable riches, may be regulated.[92]

Eliot found this definition 'oddly inadequate and even circular'.[93] To begin, he did not think it helpful to define human culture as 'all those respects' in which human life differs from animal or brutish life, without first asking in what ways is the human different from the animal. Likewise, he was unsure whether in Freud's definition of culture, the word 'includes' knowledge and power, means 'equals' or 'depends on' power. 'If knowledge and power win

[92] Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, 8.
[93] T.S. Eliot, 'Freud's Illusions: A Review of *The Future of an Illusion*, by Sigmund Freud', 350.

resources from nature for the satisfaction of human needs,' Eliot reasoned, then surely 'what we want to know is precisely what are human needs, before we can know much about culture.'[94] Freud's definition implies that human culture becomes manifest (or is derived through) political and economic organisation, 'which does not get us very far; and if that is all there is to culture and civilization, culture and civilization do not amount to much'.[95] Eliot, by contrast, would later state in *Notes* that culture is derived from religion and represents the many things that make life worth living—though it would take further readings in anthropology and Christopher Dawson's work for this view to become cemented.

Eliot also criticized Freud's view of culture on other grounds. He argued that by stating natural man was anti-social and that culture must be defended against the individual, 'this leads [Freud] to the view that culture and civilization are always "imposed" upon the many by the few – which is only intelligible if we continue to restrict culture to the maintenance of law and order, and not altogether true at that.'[96] This notion of culture as being imposed on the many by the few will become an important foil in Eliot's later book about culture. There he will define culture, not as an exclusively top-down operation, but also as bottom-up and side-to-side. Culture, as he was already beginning to argue, was the composite creation of diverse regions, interests, classes, outlooks, and practices, undergirded by the religion of whatever society from which it emerges. In its totality culture was too complex to be entirely comprehensible, too localized to be easily reproducible, and too organic to be legislated and developed by the state or embodied and transmitted by a single group (or new class) of elites across subsequent generations, rather than through family, community, church, region, class, and school. In this sense, culture, à la Freud, was not to be imposed

[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.

on the many by the few, but more often protected from the few by the many. For the few who felt their quasi-scientific theories entitled them to disrupt the vital and organic forces that enabled human culture to flourish were the very forces that culture had to be protected from. This does not mean Eliot was against elite groups enacting cultural leadership, but it was to be done in conjunction with the dynamics of culture and religion left intact. It was not to be co-opted and reengineered through the scientific hubris of technocratic planning and bureaucratic management—or in this instance Freudian psychoanalysts.

IV. Political Theory

Eliot was much less concerned with actual politics than with political theory. In his commentaries he occasionally remarked on elections, political speeches, and bills before the commons, but his commentary was generally dismissive of all the major political parties and most politicians. There was one politician, however, who consistently aroused Eliot's ire: Winston Churchill. Indeed, Eliot never spared a chance to criticise Churchill, stating at one point that 'we dislike using the term "Tory," because such public men as Mr. Churchill and Lord Birkenhead are called Tories.'[97] Elsewhere, Eliot quipped, 'Beyond a certain point, degrees of inferiority are indifferent; and in this sense there can be nothing appreciably worse than the style of Mr. Churchill.'[98] But Churchill baiting aside, the topics that most interested Eliot in politics centred around questions of Church and state, democracy and monarchy, fascism and communism.

Eliot's philosophical background was focussed on the idealism of F.H. Bradley, but he took great interest in political philosophy, personally reviewing or commissioning reviews on

[97] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 9 (July 1930), 587-90.
[98] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 8 (Apr 1929), 377-81.

the subject in countless works for *The Criterion*. This was in large part because he viewed political theories (not unlike theological or literary theories) as instrumental framing devices for institutional identities and creating shared presuppositions or parameters for intellectual discourse and inquiry. In examining such theories, he looked to understand three essential components: 'an economic doctrine, a wisdom (Sophia), and an enthusiasm'. [99] He was most critical of those theories that substituted ethical or philosophical considerations with concepts of economic determinism, and those which failed to scrutinize their own 'enthusiasms', by which he meant they neglected to recognize their own unexamined biases.

When, for instance, Eliot reviewed Harold J. Laski's *An Introduction to Politics*, which stoutly defended liberal democracy, he criticized the author's theoretical complacency. As Eliot observed, Laski believed that 'no state will realise the end for which it exists unless it is a democracy based upon universal suffrage in which there are not only freedom of speech and association, but also a recognition that neither race nor creed, birth nor property, shall be a barrier against the exercise of civic rights.'[100] Yet this did not satisfy Eliot. 'For what end *does* the state exist?' he asked, 'And why should *not* race, creed, birth and property, any one or more of them, be a desirable barrier? And what are *civic rights*? It is just these questions which we want answered in an "introduction to politics"; and we must admit that there is more than one possible answer to all of them.'[101] This was partly him playing devil's advocate, but he was not being pedantic.

This was, after all, 1931. Nations like Italy, Spain, Germany, and Russia had witnessed or would soon witness massive alterations in the anatomy of their state, wherein the purpose

[99] Eliot, 'Mr. Barnes and Mr. Rowse'.
[100] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 11 (Oct 1931), 65-72.
[101] Ibid.

of the state was becoming less concerned with serving the collective, than with the collective serving the state. He believed that this was not a suitable time for democratic complacency or supposedly self-evident claims about liberal democracy. In these nations civic rights and universal suffrage were being actively undermined or destroyed. They would even need defending in the decade to come in England, Europe, and around the world. For Eliot, mounting such a defence required a widespread intellectual willingness to re-examine the foundations of democratic and liberal identity: recognizing in the process that ethics and theology preceded economics and political theory. Not to do so was to remove the moral and metaphysical basis that had previously made democracy both desirable and conscionable. It did not surprise him, therefore, that when conditions worsened in 1939 and 1940, there was a massive resurgence of religious rhetoric in Britain: the nation's preference for democracy was not enough to warrant national sacrifice; democracy had to be seen as an intrinsic moral good, and religious rhetoric was capable of sanctifying it accordingly. Disinterested as before, Eliot would be as critical of unexamined religious enthusiasm as he was of non-religious democratic enthusiasm.

Eliot could be highly critical of democracy. For instance, in 1931 when responding to the prospect of a national government, Eliot wrote that if it 'be admitted that the present system not only does not work well now but probably will never work well again,' an opinion which he held alongside many others at the time, 'then something more stable than an emergency government must be envisaged, before we proceed to so serious a step as the formation of an emergency or coalition government at all'.[102] Yet he had little confidence that such stability was possible. As a moralist, this was due to what he regarded as a lack of 'profound moral conviction' amongst the parties. A coalition government would, in his opinion, unmask the moral element (or lack thereof) that was essential for true

[102] T.S. Eliot, *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 10 (Apr 1931), 481-90.

representative government. As he explained, 'it would mean that a number of eminent politicians of three parties would weaken their prestige by surrendering some of their convictions, or else weaken it still more by admitting tacitly that their convictions were only prejudices or party creeds.'[103] Eliot was willing to grant that global economic instability was indeed an emergency, but he believed that abandoning morally-imbued political theories for political exigency was itself an emergency of greater (if ostensibly less urgent) magnitude. For a government to be truly representative, it had to represent morality, not merely its membership.

Eliot felt similarly discouraged by Labour's proposal to disband the representation of the universities (i.e., Oxford and Cambridge) in the House of Commons, which he regarded as 'the most rational form of representation…. It is amazing stupidity, for the sake of perhaps a slight temporary numerical advantage, to remove just those men who do actually represent something.'[104] This was, no doubt, a staggeringly elitist argument, but it was entirely in keeping with his established views about intellectual leadership—views that he would articulate more fully and forcefully in *The Idea of a Christian Society.* It was also indicative of Eliot's devolutionary and subsidiary political views. Whereas he regarded the universities as essential for generating intellectual capital and providing a rational perspective in parliament, his admiration for rural life and the parish unit led him to value municipal involvement as a greater hallmark of democracy than participating in national elections. 'We are led to believe,' he wrote, 'that a Parliamentary election is the most important occasion on which we may exercise our Right; whereas it should matter much more to us – and we are much more competent to decide – who should manage our own village than who should manage Parliament.'[105] In this sense he was in favour of having

[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.
[105] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' (July 1933).

more participatory government, not less, but that meant more participation at the local level, not necessarily the national.

It should be acknowledged that Eliot was not enthused about the electorate as a whole. First, he believed that because universal suffrage had reduced individual votes to the point of insignificance, which rendered the organs and machinery of government more susceptible to powerful interest groups and invisible oligarchies, this made the government even less representative than before.[106] Second, Eliot maintained that modern democratic culture had deteriorated into a culture of mediocrity. 'We say democracy advisedly: that meanness of spirit, that egotism of motive, that incapacity for surrender or allegiance to something outside of oneself, which is a frequent symptom of the soul of man under democracy.'[107] Both communism and fascism, by contrast, did not lack such martial spirits. This was in fact a major reason why he was so keen to find a political theory that could reinvigorate the nation: to rationally identify its ethical locus and culturally incarnate its theological convictions but doing so without surrendering to the 'enthusiasm' of unexamined prejudice (whether positive or negative), as that would be a return to the emotive epistemology of romanticism. Failing that, Eliot at least wanted the British to recognise the plank in their own philosophical eye: 'By admitting to oneself the existence of the irrational nature of one's enthusiasm, it is possible to erect a kind of continuity between the enthusiasm, the wisdom, or humane knowledge of humanity, and the strict economic doctrine.'[108] Until that happened, Eliot was determined to continue as the gadfly, and did so with great earnestness throughout his 'mature' social criticism.

[106] T.S. Eliot, 'The Literature of Fascism'.
[107] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 2 (Apr 1924) 231-35.
[108] Eliot, 'Mr. Barnes and Mr. Rowse'.

This search for a suitable political theory has sometimes been construed as anti-democratic. William Chace claimed that Eliot 'scorned democratic principles' and found the masses 'repulsive' and 'almost beyond hope'.[109] Likewise, Peter Ackroyd insinuated in his seminal biography that Eliot's social criticism was shrouded in conspiracy, subversion, and pro-authoritarianism.[110] This was not so. Whilst Eliot recognized that 'any disparagement of "democracy" is nowadays well received by nearly every class of men, and any alternative to "democracy" is watched with great interest.'[111] He was himself unwilling to disparage 'the idea' of democracy. 'I cannot share enthusiastically in this vigorous repudiation of democracy,' he wrote, as he still believed that democracy allowed for the greatest spectrum of life and thought.[112] Granted, he did think that there was a balance of powers needed in order to restrain democracy's potential for populism and vulnerability to mass suggestion. 'A real democracy… can only flourish with some limitation by hereditary rights and responsibilities… order and authority are good… and suffrage [should be] conceived [not] as a right instead of as a privilege and a duty and a responsibility.'[113] But in no uncertain terms was he willing to declare, 'democracy is dead,' or ask, 'what is to replace it?'[114] Instead, he wrote, 'the question should be: "the frame of democracy has been destroyed: how can we, out of the materials at hand, build a new structure in which democracy can live?"'[115] From this very question sprung his answer a decade later, once again with the publication of *The Idea of a Christian Society*. For having failed to precisely find the political theory he was looking for, he began to theorize for himself how democracy and diversity could be coupled with intellectual leadership and religion to create a more robust, defendable and positive society.

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[109] W. Chace, *The Political Identities of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973), 132.
[110] Ackroyd, *T. S. Eliot*, 257.
[111] Eliot, 'The Literature of Fascism', 545.
[112] Ibid, 546.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.

With *The Idea* still a decade away, Eliot remarked that 'it is a matter of great regret that England has no contemporary and indigenous school of political thought.'[116] Eliot had examined the literature of foreign alternatives such as communism and fascism, but in both instances regarded neither of them as viable nor ideal political theories. In a familiar tone he stated, 'What I find in both fascism and communism is a combination of statements with unexamined enthusiasms.'[117] In fact, he found them to be strikingly similar in their stated anti-capitalism and 'mingling science with feeling'.[118] Writing in 1929, Eliot remarked that fascism appeared to worship nationalism, whereas communism worshipped internationalism, but demurred by stating that 'neither of these deities seems to me particularly worthy of worship. The wise man will pay due respect to both, the fanatic to one.'[119] He nevertheless stated that forced to decide between the two, 'I confess to a preference for fascism in practice, which I dare say most of my readers share... I believe that the fascist form of unreason is less remote from my own than is that of the communists, but that my form is a more reasonable form of unreason.'[120] This was not meant as an endorsement, however, but a reflection of the fact that between a regicidal and atheistic communism promulgating world revolution and the Italian fascists, who had just ratified the Lateran Treaty with the Roman Catholic Church, Eliot preferred the fascist poison (or 'unreason') to the communist. Furthermore, at the time of writing, events like the Abyssinia Crisis and the rise of Nazi Fascism were still some years away. Yet he was still highly critical of Italian fascism, noting, for instance, in 1931, that its political theory was both 'artificial and ridiculous'.[121] It was, as he previously wrote, 'unreason' all the same.

[116] Eliot, 'The Literature of Fascism', 548.
[117] Eliot, 'Mr. Barnes and Mr. Rowse', 660.
[118] Ibid, 659.
[119] Ibid, 662.
[120] Ibid, 664.
[121] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 11 (Oct 1931) 65-72.

Intellectually, Eliot admitted that he found Marxism to be the more formidable alternative. 'I have no quarrel with Marx's "materialistic interpretation of past history,"' he confessed, 'which is intelligent and within limits very illuminating.'[122] Eliot was even willing to admit that 'no one who is seriously concerned can fail to be impressed by the work of Karl Marx…. His power is so great, and his analysis so profound, that it must be very difficult for anyone who reads him without prejudice on the one hand, or without any definite religious faith on the other, to avoid accepting his conclusions.'[123] Furthermore, Eliot could sympathize with communism's popular appeal: as its diagnosis of economic struggle and political oppression appeared to be verified by common observation; because Marxism seemed to be the most or even the only 'scientific' theory in contemporary politics; and lastly that communist zeal mirrored the kind of pleasurable emotions that were traditionally associated with religion.[124]

Eliot's problem with it was chiefly as a religious moralist because he regarded materialist interpretations of history as incompatible with moral desire and prone to immoral excess. As Eliot wrote, 'This historical conception seems to me incompatible with *value*; for if all these things are bound to happen then there is no reason for preferring any state of things to any other, either earlier or later.'[125] He elaborated on this, stating 'I can see no reason why the theoretical communist should desire anything, since what he desires is bound to give place to something else. But if communism is *desirable*, then the materialistic interpretation of history does not matter a fig one way or the other… I believe, that is, that *any* interpretation of history being a selection, is preceded by a valuation, which is a postulate and cannot be justified rationally.'[126] In Eliot's opinion, the materialist atheism of

[122] Eliot, 'Mr. Barnes and Mr. Rowse', 659.
[123] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 11 (Apr 1932), 467-73.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Eliot, 'Mr. Barnes and Mr. Rowse'.
[126] Ibid.

Marxism was not in fact rational or scientific, as it accorded timeless values to a process that negated transcendent valuations, which in his estimation made it less of a philosophy and more of a religious creed. 'It is exactly in its religious development,' Eliot stated, 'that Communism seems to me to collapse and to become something both ludicrous and repulsive.'[127] Nor did he consider it possible to adopt the one without the other.[128] A Marxist in thought was a Marxist in religion: a line of argument that he deployed against John Middleton Murry for attempting to reconcile Christianity and Communism.[129] For an orthodox moralist like Eliot, moral desire had to point to something beyond history and into eternity, which rendered communism anathema. He could not endorse a religion without religion.

Not surprisingly, Eliot refused to take sides during the Spanish Civil War. Writing in *The Criterion* a few months after the war's commencement, he observed that 'the victory of the Right will be the victory of a secular Right, not of a spiritual Right, which is a very different thing; the victory of the Left will be the victory of [its] worst rather than of the best features.'[130] This hesitancy also reflected the fact that the civil war had an extra geopolitical dimension, as both sides were supported by their ideological counterparts on the continent. This further deterred Eliot from taking sides, since he recognized the threat that German fascism represented to his cherished Europeanism (having already lost collaborative ability with a number of *Criterion* associates), and he was equally wary of the Soviet Union, which he presciently warned was capable 'of a universal Russian imperialism, an imperialism more grandiose than anything heretofore achieved, or ever harboured in the imaginations of "imperialist" nations'.[131] Instead, Eliot attempted to draw attention to the 'deterioration of

[127] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary', April 1932.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.
[130] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 16 (Jan 1937), 289-93.
[131] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 16 (Apr 1937), 469-74.

political thinking' that was occurring as media outlets and intellectuals alike put 'pressure on everyone [to declare allegiances]… to accept one extreme philosophy or another'.[132] This was seen as all the more significant as the geopolitical situation on the continent was worsening and the United States was still absorbed in isolationism, which put Britain in an increasingly precarious situation. This was made worse by the fact that it had not yet (to Eliot's satisfaction) developed an indigenous political theory capable of withstanding the advancing enthusiasms of fascism and communism. This meant that Britain's ability to provide a *via media* of cultural and strategic balance on the continent, which was a central element of his Europeanism, was becoming further jeopardized.

'The present danger for us, as individuals in this country,' Eliot wrote during the Spanish Civil War, 'is that the precarious balance of ideas in our heads may be upset by one or the other extreme view.'[133] In his opinion the press was contributing to this danger 'by simplifying the issues in very different and very imperfectly understood countries, by resolving emotional tension in the minds of their readers by directing their sympathies all one way, and consequently encouraging mental sloth'.[134] It was a quintessentially classicist argument, denigrating emotional enthusiasms because they degraded objective and rational analysis. This was not motivated by pedantry, however, because he firmly believed that when the media used emotional manipulation to mould public opinion and obscure rational analysis (as was being effectively accomplished in both Russia and Germany), they were endangering the balance of power at home and abroad. As he wrote in 1928, 'The more individuals there are in a nation who can think intelligently and independently, the less inclined for war that nation will be. And the more uniform public opinion is in any

[132] Eliot, 'A Commentary', Jan 1937.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.

country, the more stereotyped in prejudice, the more dangerous will that nation be.'[135] In the words of George Orwell, Eliot was apprehensive about groupthink destabilizing the geopolitical situation.

Eliot's position did not endear him to the literary left in England. It did not help that he had responded 'neutral' in the highly visible questionnaire, *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish Civil War*, which aroused speculation amongst some that he was covertly pro-Franco. More accurately, his neutrality was evidence of his consistent appeal to 'disinterestedness'. It was also a hallmark of his Anglo-Catholic toryism. For it was Eliot's belief that a cherished and constructive relationship between Church and state was the defining feature of an otherwise inconsistent tory tradition. 'For such a Toryism not only a doctrine of the relation of the temporal and spiritual in matters of Church and State is essential,' he believed, 'but even a religious foundation for the whole of its political philosophy.'[136] Without this foundation there was little interest in the political theory of fascism (let alone communism). In fact, such a theory was impossible to condone, because fascist regimes demanded ultimate allegiance to the leader and to the state apparatus. This directly contravened the religious conscience, which owed its ultimate allegiance to divine authority. As such, any state or political theory lacking in a properly defined relationship between Church and state was irreconcilable with Eliot's religious and political thought. It was for this reason (amongst others) that he could never sympathise or associate with fascism, and it was for this reason that he pressed home the importance of the relationship between Church and state in domestic political theory, because without this religious foundation, 'nothing less could engage enough respect to be a worthy adversary for Communism'.[137]

[135] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 8 (Sept 1928), 1-6.
[136] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 11 (Oct 1931), 65-72.
[137] Ibid.

V. Charles Maurras and *Action Française*

There was a time, however, when one foreign political theory succeeded in attracting Eliot's attention, which was that of Charles Maurras and his *Action Française*. It was a significant if limited association, but it has had an immense if retrospective impact on how scholars view Eliot's life and work.

Charles Maurras (b. 1868), a Frenchman, was, like Eliot, a leading literary critic, poet, and author. They both shared an immense respect for monarchy, conservatism, classicism, and the Roman Catholic Church. They had been a match made in Paris, whilst Eliot was a visiting student at the Sorbonne. Maurras was by then a prominent intellectual figure in France and his newspaper, *L'Action Française*, and extra-parliamentary leagues such as *Camelots de Roi* were agitating (sometimes peacefully, sometimes violently) for widespread resistance to the republican regime and restoration of the monarchy under Prince Philippe, Duke of Orléans. Though Eliot did not approve of the violent side of Maurras's *Action Française*, he esteemed the movement's monarchism, elitism, sense of hierarchy, and their leader's literary style and anti-romanticism.[138] Some of its notable members included Leon Daudet, Louis Dimier, Pierre Lasserre, Georges Bernanos, and future *Criterion* contributors like Henri Massis and Jacques Maritain. The latter left the movement in 1926, citing its policy as 'nationalistic to the point of anti-Semitism, and monarchist to a point to which the Duc d' Orléans himself did not [join them.]'[139] In 1910, however, and for years to come, the full extent and extremism of this movement was still immaterial, and long before Maurras' collaboration with Vichy during the Second World War, Eliot had already

[138] Kojecký, *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, 62.
[139] Ibid, 61.

selectively learned (or more often, merely admired) all he would from the man and the movement.

This included Eliot's introduction to Catholic social philosophy. Thanks to Maurras' pro-Catholic vision (he was not himself religious) for a resorted, traditional, pre-revolutionary order—in John Xiros Cooper's words, an order reinstated with ancient hierarchies, stable social identity, and clear lines of authority, privilege, and duty[140]—Eliot became more familiar with Roman Catholic theology and Roman Catholic political theorists like Joseph de Maistre and eventually the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas.[141] Maurras also maintained that traditional social forms should be restored in accordance with the statutes of natural law. This emphasis on natural law was important for Eliot, both spiritually and theoretically, as it later inclined him toward Jacque Maritain's neo-Thomistic integral humanism, which had a lasting impact on the development of his own political theory. It was through Catholic notions of natural law that it became possible to theorise a religious but non-theocratic state: one in which political structures and cultural norms were pre-disposed to religious notions of human flourishing but were not themselves dependant on the authority of the Church for their enactment and perpetuation. This was important to Eliot, because as theocentric as his political theory was, he was not interested in constructing a theocracy that would replace either the monarchy or representative democracy.

Lastly, Eliot's monarchism was strengthened by Maurras' own royalism. As Kojecký noted, 'Eliot did value… the way monarchism was regarded [by Maurras] as a viable political

[140] J.X. Cooper, 'T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism' in J. Harding ed. *The New Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 149.
[141] Kojecký, *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, 64.

philosophy.'[142] Though Eliot's monarchism was not prominent in his *Criterion* social criticism and was essentially muted by the time of the abdication crisis of 1936, it was nevertheless a notable feature of his public image after he announced in the 1927 preface to *Lancelot Andrewes* that he was 'royalist in politics'. For Eliot, the appeal of the monarchy was that kingship traditionally recognized the sovereignty of something timeless above the temporal sphere. This appealed to his classicist and conservative sensibilities as it provided a transcendent framework for order and standards. Likewise, after his conversion, the religious elements of the monarchy were appealing, as it symbolised the social order as subordinate to a spiritual order: authority did not come from within an individual but was invested from above them.[143]

This was also in keeping with Eliot's view of citizenship and suffrage, as it emphasised 'privilege, duty and responsibility'.[144] This view was an essentially reactionary argument against the levelling impact of mass culture on democratic participation, which he thought had resulted in a national ethos of entitlement and mediocrity: one in which the populace expected to be served by those above them, rather than collectively serving something beyond them. Reactionary though this was, Eliot regarded it (perhaps ironically) as a truly revolutionary idea; more radical, he thought, than either communism or fascism. 'If you talk to [a man] about the divine right of kings… he will retort either with open derision [or] hearty giggles…. This idea, is, as an idea, whether true or false, revolutionary; and a really revolutionary *idea* is only to be divined by the laughter it evokes.'[145] But it was this idea, in tandem with his anti-Erastian ecclesiology, that served as an important bulwark against the potential appeal of fascism. To him, a monarch embodied a nation, whereas a

[142] Ibid, 63.
[143] Ibid, 64.
[144] Eliot, 'The Literature of Fascism'.
[145] Eliot, 'Mr. Barnes and Mr. Rowse'.

fascist government subsumed and subordinated a nation to the machinery of the state.[146] In Eliot's estimation, 'Fascism and Royalism are fundamentally incompatible'.[147] As such, he regarded himself and fascism to be equally incompatible.* Eliot does not elaborate beyond this however, in no small measure because, as he admitted to Charles Smyth in 1932, the exact details of his royalism had 'always been unformulated in my own mind'.[148]

Much has been made of Maurras and Eliot. Their relationship features heavily in the literature surrounding Eliot and his purported fascism. But with respect to political theory, the aforementioned was the full extent of Maurras' influence on Eliot. In many instances, there were corresponding British influences to outweigh the French: Christopher Dawson for Charles Maurras, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge for Joseph de Maistre. The early regard that Eliot felt for Maurras and *Action Française* was significant for a time, but also circumscribed throughout the *Criterion* period and increasingly thereafter. Eliot did translate and publish Maurras's 'Prologue to an Essay on Criticism' in *The Criterion*, but this is to be weighed against the fact he published more by Julien Benda, a famous French philosopher and novelist, who wrote scathing critiques of Maurras' classicism and politics. From this we can see that the influence Maurras had, not only on Eliot, but within *The Criterion*, was limited in scope and depth compared to what is sometimes suggested.

It should nevertheless be noted that Eliot did come to the defence of Maurras in 1926 when Pius XI condemned *Action Française* and placed some of his works on the Index of Forbidden Books. This had occurred because some in the Roman Catholic hierarchy, such

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[146] Ibid.

[147] Kojecký, *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, 69.

* Curiously, J.N. Figgis, the Anglo-Catholic political theorist and theologian (1866-1919) is neither a presence nor an acknowledged influence in the life and thought of Eliot. This is surprising given Eliot's early interest in royalism and Figgis's ideas about the divine right of kings, as well as their shared interest in social pluralism. Further research would need to be undertaken on this matter in order to provide a full and proper explanation as to why this is the case.

[148] Eliot, *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. Volume 4, English Lion, 1930-1933*, xx.

as Cardinal Andrieu of Bordeaux, became unsettled by Maurras' agnostic utilisation of Catholics and Roman Catholicism for ideological ends without due regard for Roman Catholicism's wider interests nor the centrality of papal authority—essentially favouring nationalism over Roman Catholicism.[149] In one of his commentaries, Eliot tried to clarify Maurras's position by stating that royalism, not nationalism was the movement's animating principle, and that under Maurras's influence he had been drawn closer to Catholicism, not further away. Despite this, Eliot was quick to remark that he did not regard Maurras's political theory as suitable for England (given the agnostic implications), but argued that it was a worthwhile example of the type of political thinking that acknowledged the importance of order, tradition, and venerable authority.[150]

Ironically, Eliot wrote that if the nation is preserved in time to come 'from a sentimental Anglo-Fascism, it will be [thanks] to some system of ideas which will have gained much from the study of Maurras'.[151] The irony was that eleven years later, in 1939, the *Action Française* was revived and became a collaborationist movement in Vichy France. When Eliot learned in 1940 of Maurras' collaboration with Marshal Petain he wrote in the *Christian News-Letter* that whilst the Frenchman's literary abilities were still commendable and that as a political thinker he had 'made, in his time, considerable contributions,' there were obvious reasons for disapprobation.[152] Eliot observed that Maurras had always been myopic in his political theory, disregarding the importance of economics and was preoccupied by France at the expense of understanding foreign affairs.[153] He also noted—this time without reservations—the condemnation made by the pope had not been misguided. 'I defended the *Action Française* when it was put upon the index,' Eliot explained,

[149] D. Gwynn, "The 'Action Francaise' Condemnation.' *New Blackfriars* 7, no. 80 (1926): 682-85.
[150] T.S. Eliot, 'The *Action Française*, M. Maurras and Mr. Ward' in *The Monthly Criterion*, 7 (Mar 1928) 195-203.
[151] Ibid.
[152] T.S. Eliot, 'An Issue of the *Christian News-Letter*' in *Christian News-Letter*, 44 (28 Aug, 1940), 1-5.
[153] Ibid.

'my *particular* defence may or may not stand: but I believe now that the Pope understood its tendencies better.'[154] This was no slight admission.

Eliot has since been criticized by scholars such as Peter Scott, Peter Ackroyd, Robert Crawford, Noël O'Sullivan, and Kenneth Asher for his association with Maurras, and Maurras has featured prominently in associating Eliot with anti-Semitism and proto-fascism. Some have mistakenly stated that Eliot failed to ever denounce Maurras.[155] This is not the case, however, as he wrote in no uncertain terms that Maurras had propagated 'a heresy which asserted that only one form of government, the monarchical, was compatible with Catholicism… [and for] a dangerous intolerance… [toward] Jews, Protestants and Freemasons.[156] It should be further understood that for Eliot, writing as a religious moralist, condemnation for heresy was the severest form of censure possible.

Eliot did not condemn him as a fascist, because he did not believe that he was one—not least because collaboration was a different category of disapprobation. In his opinion, 'it is misleading to term Maurras a "Fascist". He had formulated his own political philosophy long before "Fascism" was ever heard of.'[157] Nevertheless, the breach was final and had been widening long before, as the highwater mark of his interest in Maurras had already come and gone in the early 1930s—long before Hitler had cemented his power, or the Italian racial laws of 1938 had taken place. It is necessary to recognize, therefore, that the time and arena in which their intellectual exchanges had occurred was in a decidedly less radicalized and comparatively unmenacing period of the interwar years. 1930 was not 1940, and the association between the two is more selective and complex than is often suggested,

[154] Ibid.
[155] Asher, *T.S. Eliot & Ideology*, 53-59.
[156] Eliot, 'An Issue of the *Christian News-Letter*' in *Christian News-Letter*, 44 (28 Aug, 1940), 1-5.
[157] Ibid.

as evidenced from our previous observations about *The Criterion*. This will also be shown in a later chapter regarding Eliot's *The Idea of a Christian Society*.

VI. Decline

According to Jason Harding, Eliot's *Criterion* espoused an alarmist cultural pessimism.[158] This states in specific terms what Stefan Collini has inferred in general, when he wrote that early 20th century public moralists were often prompted into 'a profound cultural pessimism' by 'anxiety about the techniques employed in advertising, the potential power of new media like film and radio, and a wider unease at the cultural consequences of greater social inequality.'[159] It is not within the scope of this chapter to assess whether such pessimism was the case for the entire magazine, but with respect to Eliot, his 'profound' or 'alarmist' pessimism about the worsening state of affairs in Europe certainly appears vindicated by the terrible onset of the Second World War. Domestically, however, there is something to Harding's claim, as there is a persistent strain of pessimism in his cultural criticism. This was not an all-pervasive pessimism—he could be highly enthusiastic about literature, heritage, religion, rural-life, music, and film—but his classicist punctiliousness and tory elitism did produce a pessimistic response to what he regarded as declining standards in areas such as language, journalism, and education.

It is impossible to chronicle every quibble that Eliot made about the use and abuse of the English language. Such was his censure that 'if they were written down every one,' as it says in the King James Bible, 'I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the

[158] Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-war Britain*, 4.
[159] Collini, *Public Moralists*, 370.

books that should be written.'[160] So far as his social criticism is concerned, the abuses that he most protested against were those which impaired thought and obscured meaning. The major culprits were often newspapers and 'soft-science' academics, but he could be equally critical of ecclesiastics and the church. Interestingly, Eliot believed that 'language is probably in a healthier condition among the lower classes of society – who do not really read newspapers at all – than it is among the middle and upper classes. For among the latter, language can only be maintained if it is the vehicle for thinking; and recent events seem to indicate that language is more and more used for every other purpose except thought.'[161] He went on to claim that 'thought, it may be said, has taken an unsatisfactory refuge in mathematical symbols, and language is chiefly employed for the purpose of publicity.'[162] The former complaint, as previously stated, was in keeping with Eliot's other criticisms of 'scientific jargon' as replacing independent, intelligible, and demonstratable thought. Likewise, the latter criticism extended to publicity in the form of national self-promotion, which he often found contradicted the catholicity of his own views about pan-European identity and Christendom.

For example, Eliot criticized the phrase 'English Civilization', partly because it obscured its continental and Latinate influences, and partly because 'when we say "civilization", [we speak] of it as something which we possess and not as something towards which we are merely aiming.'[163] In his opinion this was engendering the same kind of liberal and democratic self-satisfaction that was failing to inoculate the country against the real menace of totalitarianism abroad and the much-needed moral inventory to be conducted at home in order to face it. This criticism extended to economic terms like 'standard of living',

[160] R.P. Carroll, P. Stephen, *The Bible: Authorized King James Version* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), John 21:25.
[161] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Monthly Criterion: A Literary Review*, 6 (Dec 1927) 481-83.
[162] Ibid.
[163] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 16 (Oct 1936) 63-69.

which he complained was a catchword with scientific pretensions of objectivity and materialist presuppositions, which reduced existence to quantifiable measurements without regard for immaterial factors. Eliot wrote:

> What *is* our standard of living? Is it overcrowding in a small and unsanitary house, or overcrowding in a large and sanitary and cheerless workmen's dwellings? Is it shrimps for tea, or a gramophone or a wireless set? Is it the dole, or thirty-five shillings a week on the land? Is the British working man, in other words, very much better off than the French or German or Italian working man; and if so, are the ways in which he is better off ways in which it is *good* to be better off? We only ask these questions; suggesting that they are not so simple as they may appear; for the true 'standard of living,' at all events, raises moral and spiritual, as well as economic questions… [And] as for the 'standard of living' of the more affluent class, it seems at present to involve long weekends, and golf, tennis, and motoring on Sunday. The Roman empire left behind it at least a few ruined temples, aqueducts, and walls; one is sometimes inclined to wonder whether the British will leave, for the future archaeologist, anything better than the traces of innumerable golf courses, and a number of corroded fowling-pieces, scattered like primitive arrow-heads, over the desolate wastes of Scottish moors.[164]

Other such words and phrases included 'cultural progress', which Eliot considered undefinable on the grounds that change was always endorsed by some and denounced by others. Nor did he consider it a useful phrase unless matched with a moral metaphysics, thus providing some form of invariable standard by which to measure progress.[165] Eliot was equally critical of how 'democracy' was used as a widely malleable but enduringly popular term, employed by some to justify essentially non-democratic activities by rousing the enthusiasms of the many. Though he did not regard the term as disposable, 'because it is sacred to the British mind,' he nevertheless warned that 'it will continue to be used by people whose activities are really directed towards one kind of oligarchy or another – the kind of oligarchy you happen to prefer will always be the one which is "democracy."'[166] This refrain would be further repeated in *The Idea*, when Eliot warned 'the term

[164] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 10 (Oct 1930), 1-4.
[165] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 17 (Oct 1937), 81-86.
[166] Ibid.

"Democracy" is at the height of its popularity. [But] when a term has become so universally sanctified as "democracy" now is, I begin to wonder whether it means anything, in meaning too many things.'[167] Such warnings were made, not because he was against democracy, but because he thought it was reasonable to clarify what it was that electorates would be voting on, and what countless innocents would be fighting and perishing for. It was, in fact, an inherently democratic argument.

Eliot believed that the mainstream press participated in and sometimes precipitated the declining standards in language and thought. As the editor of an important but comparatively diminutive literary journal, Eliot's criticism of the major newspapers was no doubt compounded by professional biases of his own. His criticism was nevertheless consistent with his longstanding distrust—not of popular culture—but against the artificial, manipulated, or needlessly legislated elements of mass culture. The same was true of his attitude toward consumerism whenever it thoughtlessly followed official tastemakers, which in the world of information and opinion were often the mainstream newspapers.[168] Interestingly, Eliot was not critical of the BBC, which was likely due to its Reithian broadcasting code and because Eliot was himself often included in its programming. The issue, according to Eliot, was not merely that of a newspaper reader consciously or unconsciously allowing a publication to provide them with their opinions, but worse, 'the reader allows his paper to select what is important and to suppress what is unimportant, to divert his mind with shallow discussions of serious topics, to destroy his wits with murders and weddings and curates' confessions, and to reduce him to a condition in which he is less capable of voting with any discrimination at the smallest municipal election, than if he could neither read nor write.'[169] As before, this concern sprang both from his classicist philosophy,

[167] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society' in *Christianity and Culture*, 11.
[168] Vanheste, *Guardians of the Humanist Legacy*, 230.
[169] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 9 (Jan 1930), 181-84.

which prized open and rational inquiry, but also from conservative emphasis on subsidiarity, which stressed the importance of local and municipal democratic participation. In his view, the national press was guilty of fostering a mass culture in which localised matters were trivialized or subordinated to nationalised and sensationalised topics that had little relevance to the quotidian but important aspects of everyday citizenship.

In the case of the Spanish Civil War, Eliot chastised newspapers for simplifying the complexities of the conflict, which he considered tantamount to misinformation. 'One might think, after perusing a paper like *The New Statesman*, that the elected Government of Spain represented an enlightened and progressive Liberalism; and from reading *The Tablet* one might be persuaded that the rebels were people who, after enduring with patience more than one would expect human beings to be able to stand, had finally and reluctantly taken to arms as the only way in which to save Christianity and civilization.'[170] Domestically, Eliot was equally critical of *The Times* for promoting the view that 'politics has nothing whatever to do with private morals, and that national prosperity and the greatest happiness of the greatest number depend entirely upon the difference between good and bad economic theories.'[171] This over-dependence on theory would feature heavily in his later criticism of Karl Mannheim's theories about planning in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. In both these instances, the root issue was moral and spiritual as much as it was philosophical or sociological, as he believed that no materialist-based theory of human activity could account for (or engineer) the immaterial components of life and culture. Such components ranged from the unconscious nature of how culture was formed amongst disparate regions and distinct classes, to the roles of prayer and providence in history. To ignore or remain ignorant of such things, Eliot feared, was to enter into a devastating loop of planning for

[170] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 16 (Jan 1937), 289-93.
[171] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 10 (Jan 1931), 307-14.

the unplannable and legislating for what could not be legislated: neither of which could replace those elements of life that were beyond their reach but could have immeasurably stultifying and devasting effects on them.

Eliot's concerns about the present state of society were not abated by the prospects of education. Here too, he sensed decline. It would not be until later, in various addresses and essays, that Eliot would map the entirety of his mind on education, but his opinions on the matter were by no means absent from his commentaries in *The Criterion.* Apart from religious issues, he stated that education was 'in the long run the most important problem of society'.[172] As one might expect, Eliot had a problem with how society viewed education. 'We seem nowadays,' he wrote, 'to be committed to the task of giving some sort of education to everybody. [Yet] education is a training of the mind and of the sensibility, an intellectual and an emotional discipline. In a society in which this discipline is neglected, a society which uses words instead of thoughts and feelings, one may expect any sort of religious, moral, social, and political aberration, and eventual decomposition or petrification.'[173] This line of argument was Eliot at his most classicist, conservative, and Catholic.

This line of argument was also Eliot at his most elitist, as it was not until the 1950s that he recognized the wisdom and humanity of providing universal education from infancy to early adulthood. It is important to note, however, that Eliot regarded education and instruction as two different things. He regarded instruction as either vocational and technical, or as preliminary and general, such as teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic. He was in favour of publicly available instruction.[174] What he resisted was the notion of

[172] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 13 (July 1934), 624-30.
[173] Ibid.
[174] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 11 (Oct 1931), 65-72.

expanding elite education to the masses on the grounds that it was desirable to have a unique cadre or class of people educated in a particular tradition and set of values that predisposed them to aristocratic-like ideals of public service and intellectual leadership. The fact that this elite system had accrued over centuries was important to Eliot. As he would argue in both *The Idea* and *Notes*, elite leadership was important, but he preferred it to be formed by a kind of natural cultural selection and meritocracy, rather than an elite appointed via bureaucratic expertise and 'scientific' technique. The transmission of education, like culture, necessitated the inclusion of the family, community, church, region, class, and school. It was the business of all interested parties, not merely the government.

Furthermore, Eliot was adamantly against legislated or engineered uniformity, and he feared that the urban, post-industrial, politicised, and scientific tendencies of authorities would threaten the independence of national and regional ways of life. Criticising the educational and political philosophy of Harold Laski, Eliot wrote, 'So far as we have "rights," every man or woman has the right to be educated to *some* useful function in the community; but what is meant by education must differ greatly in kind. But Mr. Laski speaks as if education varied only in degree, and as if it was all directed towards one end: voting for the best candidate.'[175] In this respect Eliot was suspicious of 'democracy' usurping the goals of education (and even instruction), as though the primary purpose of any pedagogy was to create model citizens.

Eliot resisted using 'education as the framework of democracy', not because he was against democracy, but rather because he favoured instilling the values of democracy as the outcome of a good education, not installing them from the outset as doctrines to be indoctrinated. Like his later theory of culture, neither democratic virtues nor education (as

[175] Eliot, 'A Commentary', October 1931.

a manner or way of life) could be programmed or mandated simply by aiming directly at them but were instead a composite outcome of a complex and gradual process of development that came about by focussing on those things that made life worth living. In much the same way Eliot was critical of the 1944 Education Act, which actually included provisions for religious education, because he believed that this was another instance of the government usurping something (in this case religion) in order to create social uniformity. [176] Like his conservatism, education was to be an organic process of development, not something mandated from above.

Eliot's own view of education during the *Criterion* years was moralist and classicist, not dissimilar to the platonic ideals of cultivating a love of the true, the good, and the beautiful. As he argued, 'Unless popular education is also moral education, it is merely putting firearms into the hands of children. For education in History is vain, unless it teaches us to extract moral and spiritual values from History; and education in Political Economy is vain, an "unearthly ballet of bloodless categories," so long as it is offered as a pure science unfettered by moral principles.'[177] This was echoed in his criticism of attempts to centralise authority in Oxford and Cambridge away from the colleges and toward the universities, and his criticism of those who thought that science and technology should take precedence at the universities over and against the traditional pre-eminence of the humanities. Eliot took issue, therefore, when the *Sunday Times* wrote that Oxford should be reengineered to be 'less exclusively a pleasant backwater of the humanities and more a place where men and women can get a practical and efficient training for life in all its branches'.[178] In response, he wrote:

> The industrial society recognises nothing so unpractical as 'life'; 'life' is only for 'pleasant backwaters.' But for 'life in all its branches'; that

[176] Chintz, D. and Schuchard, R., *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. Volume 6, The War Years, 1940-1946*, Xxxi.
[177] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 10 (Jan 1931), 307-14.
[178] Ibid.

> means training in 'efficiency,' for one branch then only. It does not mean training in adaptability; but often training for an occupation which the victim may find already over occupied by the time he is trained into readiness to occupy it. It does not mean training for the Good Life, it does not mean any training in the use of leisure, in appreciation and enjoyment; for not everybody is capable of profiting by such training. It means more and bigger and more modern buildings, Graduate Schools of Business Administration on the American model, and something for everybody except those who want an education.[179]

Eliot was highly sceptical, therefore, about benefactions such as Lord Nuffield's, which endowed Oxford with greater resources for medical research. 'Oxford is already as big as it needs to be, or even bigger,' he complained. 'Is a further influx of medical research students, who might have just as well been directed elsewhere, really desirable? And when Oxford is the national and imperial centre for medical research, and able to buy the best brains for this purpose at top prices, will not the Humanities decline there still further?'[180] Ever the classicist, Eliot feared that education as understood 'by most civilized men in all civilization in the past' was at stake, because 'higher education is not research or technical accomplishment however difficult: it is the acquisition of wisdom.'[181] But for someone who had detested his own time at Oxford, this was an ironic and ultimately doomed appeal.

Nevertheless, Eliot feared that by accepting such endowments the university was not only imperilling this classicist principle, but the university's colleges were jeopardizing their own autonomy. In much the same way that Eliot valued devolution and subsidiarity in politics, he also cherished the independence of the Oxbridge colleges. 'The increase of University machinery and activity, as distinct from that of the Colleges, may lead to the necessity of greater centralization of authority, and greater continuity of direction. But a highly organised and centralised institution in a world in which political power, under

[179] Ibid.
[180] Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 10 (Jan 1931), 307-14.
[181] Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 17 (Jan 1938), 254-59.

whatever name, tends to become more autocratic and more comprehensive, is ultimately in a weaker position than is a congeries of almost independent colleges.'[182] He prized such independence because in self-governing colleges it was still possible that there were 'concealed a few men not too busy with research to have time to acquire a little wisdom, and to impart it to such undergraduates as come into contact with them.'[183] That, at least, was his hope.

Eliot often felt as though he was fighting a losing battle, but his rear-guard sentiments became more frequent and more pronounced as his own conservative, classicist, and moralist views on education became increasingly a minority and antiquated view. This would be no more apparent than in the closing paragraphs of *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, wherein he lamented in a tone similar to his commentaries, 'There is no doubt that in our headlong rush to educate everybody, we are lowering our standards, and more and more abandoning the study of those subjects by which the essentials of our culture… are transmitted; destroying our ancient edifices to make ready the ground upon which the barbarian nomads of the future will encamp in their mechanized caravans.'[184] Though Eliot himself was quick to acknowledge the hyperbole in this statement, Jason Harding was right to argue that latent within much (though not all) of his social criticism was an alarmist cultural pessimism.[185]

This pessimism sometimes extended even to matters that Eliot was enthusiastic about, such as conservation. In this respect Eliot found the National Trust's conservation efforts to be both laudable and lamentable. The former, because it preserved the country's natural

[182] Ibid.
[183] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 17 (Jan 1938), 254-59.
[184] T.S. Eliot, 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture' in *Christianity and Culture* (London: Harcourt, 1976), 185.
[185] Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-war Britain*, 4.

character; the latter, because it did nothing to prevent the conditions that endangered it. 'The existence of such an institution as the National Trust and the present necessity for its existence,' he wrote, 'seems to me to imply some pretty drastic criticism of contemporary society; and we should like all the people interested in the preservation of "beauty spots" to investigate a state of society in which beauty spots have to be preserved.'[186] Likewise, even if the National Trust were successful in preserving important areas of the countryside from urban and industrial encroachment, 'if this cannot be preserved *alive*,' which would entail arresting or reversing the impact of thoughtless economic growth on rural communities and natural ecosystems, 'then it is of small good that the land should be dotted with little museums of scenery'.[187] In a similar manner he questioned the morality of maintaining historic buildings primarily because they were of 'historical interest'. 'Old buildings are dead,' Eliot argued, 'in so far as we put them to a different use than that for which they were intended. If Christianity disappeared, it would be more sensible to destroy all the churches in England than to preserve them as monuments.'[188] Like his classicist interpretation of tradition, his conservation was not about resuscitating the deceased, but introducing the living to the long-lived: bringing the present into greater awareness of the continued presence of the past and revitalizing the opportunities for collaboration and regeneration therein.

Eliot was not actually in favour of destroying old churches and he promoted the preservation of many London churches in the pages of *The Criterion*. But his sentiments were, as noted, in accord with his previously stated theory of tradition, which was in keeping with both his Catholicism and conservatism: namely that certain spheres of life, including religious faith, were not the ultimate preserve of the state and should not be

[186] Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion*, 14 (Oct 1934), 86-90.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Ibid.

continued via the artificial respiration of state intervention (or in this instance, conservation), but instead should be respected by the state and allowed to develop in accordance with an unbroken organic tradition. Decline, therefore, could not be wholly combatted by committee or prevented by parliament. It was also the responsibility of intellectuals to investigate the ideas associated with decline and deliberate on what could be enacted socially and culturally, publicly and privately, to reverse such trends and theorize alternative frameworks for national rejuvenation. Indeed, this was the motivation (and *The Criterion* his preparation) that would lead to Eliot's participation in a widening network of enterprises throughout the 1930s and 1940s, such as the 1937 Oxford Conference on Church, Community, and State; The Chandos Group (with its overlapping Christian Sociologists and Christendom members Reckitt, Demant, and Mairet); as well as J.H. Oldham's Moot discussion group. In this respect, pessimistic as Eliot was about various forms of decline, he was nevertheless active in re-envisioning how these trends could be counteracted with fresh (if historically inspired) thought and networked collaboration.

VII. Church and State

Like many other Anglo-Catholics. Eliot identified primarily as Catholic and secondarily (but nor disparagingly) as Anglo-Catholic. As he wrote in 1939 to *The Church Times*, 'I should prefer to call myself a Catholic without qualification.'[189] But he did not identify as Roman Catholic, however, despite certain affinities, nor as Protestant, which he regarded as radically individualistic (not unlike romanticism). Indeed, Eliot was not above making the occasional swipe at Protestants in his commentaries. But his views on Protestants were not as important in this period as they would be during his years in The Moot. For it was

[189] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941*, 31.

during those years, when meeting with Protestant group members in close proximity and over an extended period of time, that he found himself temperamentally and theologically at odds with them, which became a contributing factor to his withdrawal from the group. Roman Catholicism, by contrast, was highly appealing. According to Kojecký, Eliot even admitted that had he settled in Paris rather than London, he would be Roman Catholic rather than Anglo-Catholic.[190] This is not surprising given the Roman Catholic influences that undergirded much of his spirituality and doctrinal outlook.

The initial influence of Charles Maurras has already been noted, which first introduced Eliot to Roman Catholic theology, natural law, and Catholic political theorists like Joseph de Maistre and eventually the philosophy of Augustine, Aquinas, and Maritain. It was, for instance, from Augustine that Eliot derived his conception of Christian political eschatology: one in which progress toward universal beatitude was encouraged but neither expectant nor imminent, and where temporal citizenship was counterbalanced and superseded by a celestial citizenship—and in both instances were anticipated in our *becoming* but not yet realised in our *being*. As Eliot wrote, 'The Christian view is, I think, essentially dualistic. The City of God is at best only realisable on earth under an imperfect likeness: ἐν οὐρανῷ ἴσως παράδειγμα ἀνάκειται.*'[191] This was a recognition both of the salvific purposes of the divine working in and through—but ultimately beyond—time, as well as the corrosive impact of original sin on human structures and behaviour. Eliot elaborated on this, writing:

> We must believe, first, that the human race can, if it will, improve… that it can improve both its material wellbeing and its spiritual capacities. We must also have a conception of a perfect society attainable on earth. And we must also admit the inadequacy of these ambitions and ideals. We must say that man, however he is improved by social and economic reorganisation, by eugenics, and by any other

[190] Kojecký, R. *T. S. Eliot's social criticism*, 219.
* Translation: perhaps there is a pattern of it laid up in heaven.
[191] Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion*, 14 (April 1935), 431-36.

> external means possible to the science of intellect, will still be only the *natural* man, at an infinite remove from perfection.[192]

To hold such a view, however, Eliot believed that it was necessary to be well versed in Roman Catholic history and tradition, thought and culture. 'You cannot arrive at a Christian social philosophy, any more than you can arrive at a communist one, merely by looking into your heart and writing. You need a knowledge of the whole history of Christianity up to the Reformation, and in particular some acquaintance, for instance, with the views of Aquinas…'[193] The fact that one did not have to read beyond the Reformation was evidence again of Eliot's dislike for Protestantism, though he was more than willing to recognize the legitimate contributions made by Protestants such as Hooker, Andrewes, and Coleridge, as well as to review new works by Protestant theologians like Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr.

Eliot and Niebuhr were in fact on friendly terms, socialising occasionally in both London and New York and sharing over the decades a number of mutual friends such as W.H. Auden, Jacques Maritain, and Karl Mannheim.[194] According to Anthony Domestico, Eliot greatly appreciated Niebuhr's theology of history—namely that it is under God's judgment and providence, emphasizing humanity's sinful nature and its need for grace, while highlighting the continuous conflict between love and justice—which certainly correlates with much of Eliot's own developing thought on culture in relation to providence and eschatology (as typified in his later sentiments about cultural disintegration and the role of the church in a new dark age).[195] As for Barth, Eliot's interest was less personal than professional, as the Swiss theologian's neo-orthodoxy proved a fruitful subject for *The Criterion's* various book reviews, especially in relation to certain aesthetic and philosophical

[192] Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion*, 12 (Oct 1932), 73-79.
[193] Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion*, 13 (Jan 1934), 270-78.
[194] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941*, 70.
[195] Domestico, "Editing Modernism, Editing Theology: T. S. Eliot, Karl Barth, and the Criterion', 34

questions. In Domestico's assessment these questions revolved around "the relations between revelation and reason, between epiphanic and everyday experience? What role does reason play in religious belief? How does this belief affect our reading and writing of literature? Most crucially, how can we balance an acknowledgment of language's brokenness with a desire to express truth?"[196]

Though Eliot was a keen student of Catholic social thought, he was neither an expert nor a strict devotee. In the first instance, he admitted in 1927 (perhaps too modestly), 'My knowledge of Aquinas is slight: it is limited to the accounts of Gilson and de Wulf, to two volumes of extracts, one prepared by Professor Gilson and the other by M. Truc, to two or three books by M. Maritain and modern Dominicans, and to the new edition of the *Summa* published by Desclée. Only nine volumes of this edition have yet appeared, and in these nine volumes I have only read here and there.'[197] In the second, he was disinclined to adopt an entire system of thought as his own, since his inclination was more often to synthesise the best of various systems throughout history. There was nevertheless an important link between his own thought and that of (neo-)Thomism. As Vanheste has argued, Eliot was deeply impressed by Maritain's linking of classicism and Thomism, which was based on 'the rejection of subjectivism, materialism and utilitarianism and the striving for a revival of an intelligence that differs from scientific rationalism'.[198] In such a linkage Eliot found a venerable tradition in which faith and reason were united, just as his own thought found harmony between Catholicism and classicism.

It was also thanks to neo-Thomists like Maritain that groups associated with Eliot became increasingly interested in medieval concepts of civil society. During the latter stages of his

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197 Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion*, 6 (Oct 1927), 340-47.
198 Vanheste, *Guardians of the Humanist Legacy*, 149.

editorship he met with other Anglo-Catholics, such as Maurice Reckitt, V.A. Demant, and Philip Mairet, to discuss Christian Sociology, which, as Ross Terrill has explained, 'was a school of thought that rejected… the secular, industrial, sociological reality behind religious decline and sought a new Christian Sociology of essentially medievalist character to bring cohesion and vitality back to religion and society'.[199] In a similar manner, The Moot would also discuss political theories associated with medieval concepts of civil society, attempting, in the words of Philip Coupland, to theorize 'the renewal of the relationship between political power and moral authority symbolized by Christendom'.[200] This also included their consideration of the role that medieval clergy (not unlike Eliot's clerisy) had played as intellectual elites in the construction of sacralised social frameworks. In this respect Eliot was far from alone in being influenced by Roman Catholic and medieval concepts of cooperation between church, state, and society.

There were additional Roman Catholic influences on Eliot's Catholicism, which included his high regard for Dante, affinity for Julian of Norwich, and his own spiritual, conceptual, and linguistic usage of askesis (or asceticism), purgatory, and hell. This was reflected in his social criticism and political thought when he stated that 'the only hopeful course for a society which would thrive and continue its creative activity in the arts of civilization, is to become Christian. That prospect involves, at least, discipline, inconvenience and discomfort: but here as hereafter the alternative to hell is purgatory.'[201] Yet for all these influences, Eliot chose not to become Roman Catholic. There were a number of reasons for this decision. First, despite Eliot's love of cohesion and harmony, he was less enthusiastic about uniformity, especially when imposed by a monolithic hierarchy. This might at first seem

[199] R. Terrill, *R.H. Tawney and His Times* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973), 265.
[200] P. Coupland, *Britannia, Europa and Christendom: British Christians and European integration* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 10.
[201] T.S. Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', 19.

contradictory given the authoritative and declaratory nature of Eliot's own criticism, but as his editorship of *The Criterion* demonstrates, he valued divergent opinions both as embodying a form of catholicity but also as a necessary component of constructing a dialogical epistemology: one in which evolving truths were investigated and articulated through constant inquiry and debate.

Second, as much as Eliot valued the Thomistic synthesis of faith and reason, he did not regard as essential (or necessary) Pope Pius X's 1914 pronouncement that the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas was indispensable to the teachings of the Catholic Church. By contrast, Eliot was drawn to the rational tradition of the Church of England that favoured open inquiry, but also had not dispensed with tradition, orthodoxy, and hierarchy.[202] According to J. Kuin, Eliot favoured the Anglo-Catholic via media 'between Papacy and Presbytery'.[203] This also suited Eliot's notion of England and Englishness, which he depicted as a *via media* between liberty and discipline, individual responsibility and obedience, active cooperation and passive reception—a middle way, for the English, 'which can only be found, if with hesitation and difficulty, through… the Catholic Church in England [i.e. The Anglo-Catholic wing of the Anglican Church]'.[204] Lastly, since Eliot had emigrated to England and had become a naturalized citizen, and because he was now a member of the establishment and increasingly embodied much of the nation's history, culture, and geography in his writing, it was only natural that he found the Church of England more in keeping than Roman Catholicism with the customs and traditions of his island home. Still, he regarded himself as Catholic (rarely using the epithet Anglo-Catholic)

[202] Vanheste, *Guardians of the Human Legacy*, 148.
[203] Ibid, 128.
[204] T.S. Eliot, 'Thoughts After Lambeth' in *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. Volume 4, English Lion, 1930-1933*, 232.

and referred to his native Anglicanism as the Catholic Church in England.[205] Naturally, for Eliot, such distinctions were of immense significance.

It is possible that there was also a political dimension that influenced Eliot's denominational choice. Whereas Eliot regarded 'Toryism as essentially Anglican,' he believed that 'Roman Catholicism, which in our time draws its greatest support from America, is more in harmony with Republicanism.'[206] As one indubitably wedded to his Toryism and to the traditional structures of parliamentary democracy, to Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and to the monarchy, Eliot was likely not inclined to adopt a religious system at odds with his political tendencies. This did not prevent him working alongside Roman Catholics like Maritain and Dawson, just as Eliot was able to do so with Protestants like J.H. Oldham (for a time), because as much as Eliot viewed the domestic relationship of Church and state through the prism of Toryism and Anglicanism, he recognized that in a western context the issue dwarfed denominational differences. 'We are really up against the very difficult problem of the *spiritual* and the *temporal*,' Eliot wrote, 'the problem of which the problem of Church and State is a derivative. The danger, for those who start from the temporal end, is Utopianism; settle the problem of distribution – of wheat, coffee, aspirin or wireless sets – and all the problems of evil will disappear. The danger, for those who start from the spiritual end, is Indifferentism; neglect the affairs of the world and save as many souls out of the wreckage as possible.'[207] He stated this elsewhere as a dispute between secularists and anti-secularists, 'between those who believe only in values realisable in time and on earth, and those who believe also in values realised only out of

[205] Ibid.
[206] T.S. Eliot, 'Political Theorists' in *The Monthly Criterion: A Literary Review*, 6 (July 1927) 69-73.
[207] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 14 (Jan 1935), 260-64.

time'.[208] Eliot's response was to 'begin from both ends at once'.[209] Hence his emphasis on Toryism and Anglicanism, Church and state.

For Eliot, the association of (Anglican) Church and (Tory) state required the former to engage in the temporal life of the nation, avoiding indifferentism; and for the latter, to 'maintain a definite and uncompromising theory of Church and State, [otherwise] Toryism is merely a fasces of expedients'.[210] This view stemmed from his belief that apart from an enshrined and positive relationship between Church and state, Toryism as a political theory lacked vital continuity. 'This is not to say that there is no thread of continuity in Toryism,' he clarified, 'but the thread runs through the "inarticulate and instinctive"; and Toryism is never quite justly represented by Bolingbroke, or by the Conservative philosophy of Burke, or by the daring innovations of Disraeli. And if there is one idea, however vague, by which Toryism may be tried, it is the idea, however vague, represented by the phrase "Church and State'."[211] Eliot further stated that 'for such a Toryism not only a doctrine of the relation of the temporal and spiritual in matters of Church and State is essential, but even a religious foundation for the whole of its political philosophy.'[212] As this relationship was not enshrined in other native political theories to the same extent and with as much history as in Toryism (notwithstanding the convictions of Eliot's many Christian Socialist contemporaries), there was little else that Eliot felt he could work with—nor anything else that could 'engage enough respect to be a worthy adversary for Communism'.[213]

[208] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 16 (Oct 1936), 63-69.
[209] Eliot, 'A Commentary' (Jan 1935).
[210] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 11 (Oct 1931), 65-72.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Ibid.

It is important to remember that Eliot was referring to Toryism as a political theory, not as a political party. 'The only hope is in a Toryism which, though not necessarily distinct from Parliamentary purposes, should refuse to identify itself philosophically with that "Conservatism" which has been overrun first by deserters from Whiggism and later by businessmen.'[214] In time, Eliot would become closer with certain political conservatives, tempering some of his aggrievement, but during the *Criterion* years his interest in conservatism was philosophical, not political. That is not to say he necessarily aligned with other contemporary philosophically included conservatives, though he and Michael Oakeshott were similar in their resistance to social engineering, collectivism, and state planning.[215] But Eliot's goal was that of determining the ideas upon which the nation could build the corresponding practices, attitudes, and structures to bring about greater human flourishing. It was not to advance one political party's agenda before another.

Eliot was an anti-Erastian, however, and highly protective of the church's autonomy: 'As I have said already, the Church of England can no longer be, and must no longer be, a National Church in the old nationalistic or in the old Erastian way. The high power it may seem to have lost was either a bad power, or an obsolete power, or the shadow of a power.'[216] For this Eliot was glad, as it reduced the incentives for taking orders to reasons of vocation, and diminished the social advantages of religion, which was advantageous as 'Christian morals gain immeasurably in richness and freedom by being seen as the consequence of Christian faith, and not as the imposition of tyrannical and irrational habit.'[217] In fact, the harder the burden of faith the better, as he believed 'You will never attract the young by making Christianity easy; but a good many can be attracted by finding it difficult: difficult

[214] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 11 (Oct 1931), 65-72.
[215] K. Minogue, 'Oakeshott, Michael Jospeh (1901-1990), philosopher." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 Sep. 2004.
[216] Eliot, 'Thoughts After Lambeth', 238.
[217] Ibid, 226.

both to the disorderly mind and to the unruly passions.'[218] Furthermore, such difficulty was commensurate with the difficulties of the age. Eliot believed that faith in the modern world already presupposed a level of asceticism, not least because it was in direct contradiction to the governing impulses of contemporary ideologies.[219]

According to Eliot, 'The World is trying the experiment of attempting to form a civilized but non-Christian mentality. The experiment will fail; but we must be very patient in awaiting its collapse; meanwhile redeeming the time: so that the Faith may be preserved alive through the dark ages before us; to renew and rebuild civilization, and save the World from suicide.'[220] As such, Eliot felt that the Universal Church was more definitely set against the world than at any other time since pagan Rome.[221] This did not stop Eliot from being active in such a world, but it did make him suspicious of supporting structures of power that disavowed all religious influence and hesitant to support disestablishmentarianism, however cautious he was about the encroachment of Erastianism. This also helps explain the appeal of medievalist and neo-Thomistic ideas of civil society and church-state relations, as these represented a once-viable but still fruitful template for modern consideration: one that might appeal in a continuing period of widespread nominal attachment to religion but could do so without necessitating individual saintliness from ordinary citizens.

Eliot's anti-Erastianism was most notable in theological matters and nowhere was this more prominent during his *Criterion* editorship than during the 1927 Prayer Book controversy. In short, the controversy, which was of national importance, occurred when

[218] Ibid, 230.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Ibid.
[221] Ibid.

the House of Commons twice blocked the Church of England from revising the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, which, according to the 1919 Powers Act, required parliamentary approval on the matter. The impasse was made all the more unpalatable for Anglicans as many of their opponents in the House of Commons were not in fact members of the Church of England but were either Protestants of a different denomination or were themselves not religious.[222] In Eliot's opinion, this controversy highlighted the necessity of elite leadership, because it demonstrated both the limitations of public and political understanding on religious matters, as well as their eagerness to nevertheless meddle in such matters. This conviction would in turn be represented in Eliot's later idea of the clerisy, which he envisioned as providing non-binding but nevertheless authoritative reflection and instruction on issues related to national religion and the relationship between Church and state.

Eliot's criticism was not limited to the public or the politicians during the Prayer Book controversy. Indeed, his most incisive criticism was against the Church regarding its own rationale for revision. They had explained in a preface to the *Revised Prayer Book* that its revision was a response to the shifting demographics of the country, the development of contemporary language, and the changing power dynamics within the nation. According to Eliot:

> The Preface reads like a rather embarrassed apology for change: everything is changing, so the Prayer Book must change. 'Far and wide the country has yielded place to the town, and the growth of knowledge has given to millions instead of thousands new means of earning their daily bread'. That may be so; but what connexion have these economic phenomena with the revision of a Prayer Book; and if they are connected, are they connected *rationally*? 'With the rise of numbers has come also a shifting of power from the few to the many.' A shifting of power, certainly; but is it from the few to the many? or from demagogue to demagogue? And what, again, has Universal Suffrage (now approaching its consummation) to do with revision of a

[222] J. Maiden, *National Religion and the Prayer Book Controversy, 1927-1928*. (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2009), 1.

> Prayer Book? The editors continue: 'in religion as in all else truth is not prized less highly because it is no longer fenced on any side'. But when fences are down the cattle will roam…. [and] they will cease to belong anywhere.[223]

This dour assessment was darkened by Eliot's belief that despite widespread interest in the affairs of the church, whether amongst the populace, press, or parliament, which together made it appear 'that never was there such a lively interest in the Church as to-day,'[224] the real state of the Church was far more parlous. To that end he cited 'opinion in the Church is divided to the point of disruption, the lack of funds for ordinands, the anomalous and often humiliating relation of Church to State, the insurrection of what is popularly called the new morality; and the patent fact that the majority of Englishmen and women are wholly indifferent to the obligations of their faith, even when they have not quite repudiated it.'[225] Such was his pessimism that he believed these 'signs may seem to point towards collapse or superannuation'.[226] From earlier in this chapter we know that Eliot was too premature in his pessimism about religion's place in the nation's common life, as there were still widespread and meaningful forms of religious devotion throughout the public and in the establishment and intelligentsia, but his pessimism does underscore the urgency with which he sought to theorize an alternative political structure: one that could work with varying levels of public religiosity, precisely because its precepts and wisdom were imbedded into the architecture of state and society. Indeed, between the end of *The Criterion* and the delivery of *The Idea of a Christian Society* as lectures only three months passed—a delivery made possible because *The Idea* was the outcome of *The Criterion.* It served as his own answer to his previous questions about Church and state, society and culture, decline and revival, fascism and communism, democracy and liberalism, classicism and romanticism.

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[223] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 5 (May 27), 187-90.
[224] Eliot, 'Thoughts After Lambeth', 238.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Ibid.

IN RETROSPECT: A CONCLUSION

To echo Peter Scott once more, Eliot is now remembered as a poet and forgotten (or considered forgettable) as a social critic. Indeed, his social criticism is regarded by many scholars as a millstone around his legacy and reputation. Yet Roger Kojecký, the leading authority on Eliot's social criticism, has astutely observed that much of Eliot's work has been dismissed or denigrated on political grounds, and the importance and resonance of his social criticism has been obscured by later generations of literary scholars less familiar with the intellectual history of the interwar period.[227] By contemporary standards, Eliot appears hopelessly out of step with literary and intellectual standards, but during the interwar period he was in step with strong and well represented networks of religious, conservative, and cultural thought. During the interwar period, whilst his legacy as a poet was being cemented, his place in the public eye as a social critic was not so easily disassociated from his poetry, nor as negligible as many literary scholars and unsympathetic biographers have portrayed. Based on the findings of this chapter it can only be said that a 'disinterested' review of Eliot's *Criterion* social criticism reveals it not 'as gratuitously problematic' but a thoughtful and revealing window into the multifaceted and dynamic nexus of interwar culture, politics, and religion. From our own post-Brexit and post-Trump vantage point it is also interesting to note how a conservative and religious agenda favoured greater cultural and intellectual integration between nations, not less.

[227] Kojecký, *T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, 224.

In Michael Levenson's estimation, 'His editorship of the Criterion was just as important as the shock effect of *The Waste Land* in securing Eliot's prominence.'[228] Nor did his prominence place him in a position of solitary eminence, as though his criticism made him an idiosyncratically alone and intellectually isolated figure, totally at odds with the entirety of the interwar intelligentsia (see Ackroyd[229], Chace[230], Rees[231], Ricks[232], and Edwards[233]). Instead, *The Criterion* and its many contributors operated in a complex and multivariate network of associated publications, groups, and gatherings. This reveals a cross-section of intellectual life in the interwar period that is more varied in its sources, voices, networks, and audiences than is commonly supposed and reveals the porous boundaries that could exist between modernist and traditional frameworks, religious commentary and public affairs, political thought and contemporary literature.

This period also marks the longest phase of Eliot's social criticism and witnessed early formulations for many of the central themes in his later works. This in turn helps to relocate Eliot's social criticism before a much wider and more sustained audience than is suggested either by his participation in just The Moot or the publication of *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. It likewise repositions his social criticism more centrally within his career and public persona, given the importance of *The Criterion* to his reputation and the inseparable nature of his social criticism from his *Criterion* commentaries. From this we can gain a broader appreciation both for the anatomy of Eliot's influence, but also the nature and role of public and religious moralists in early to mid-twentieth century in Britain.

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[228] M. Levenson, 'The Role of the Intellectual' in J. Harding edits *T.S. Eliot in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 67.
[229] P. Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot, A Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984).
[230] W. Chace, *The Political Identities of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot.*
[231] R. Rees, 'T. S. Eliot on Culture and Progress,' in *Literature and politics in the twentieth century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).
[232] C. Ricks, *T.S. Eliot and Prejudice* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994).
[233] M.T. Edwards, *The Right of the Protestant Left: God's Totalitarianism.*

Peter Dale Scott has suggested that Eliot's relative neglect as a social critic has stemmed from misreadings of his social and political writing, which has engendered both perplexity and scandal. It might also be added that many have misconstrued the context in which Eliot was writing, which has made his social criticism appear more controversial or idiosyncratic than is the case when considering the religious and political context of the interwar years. According to Harding, Eliot's 'disinterested' approach as editor of *The Criterion* has left him 'open, in recent decades, to slack charges of "fascism" and "anti-Semitism'."[234] Vanheste has observed a similar pattern, noting 'in recent research Eliot and his Criterion have been attacked for their supposedly antidemocratic and proto-fascist tendencies,' and 'since Julius first published his book on T.S. Eliot, *Anti-Semitism and Literary Form* in 1995, Eliot's supposed anti-Semitism in particular has become a research area of interest.'[235] Like Harding and Vanheste and in keeping with Kojecký, this chapter has argued to the contrary and done so through a comprehensive restatement of Eliot's social criticism during his editorship of *The Criterion*. It has not been the goal of this work to study the magazine in its entirety, but neither should the general principles of the magazine be in doubt.

It should be clear from our previous analysis that Eliot's social criticism does not betray fascist, anti-democratic, or anti-Semitic sentiments. In the first instance, though Eliot was in favour of authority and tradition, he clearly cautioned that 'authority and tradition (especially the latter) do not necessarily suggest Signor Mussolini'.[236] Granted, he stated that between two evils, fascism was preferable in practice to communism, but that was written in 1929, and even then, he spent the next decade looking for a viable, democratic

[234] Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-war Britain*, 6.
[235] Vanheste, *Guardians of the Humanist Legacy*, 5.
[236] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The New Criterion: A Quarterly Review* (Apr 1926), 221-223.

alternative to both fascism and communism. Indeed, Eliot was explicit in his condemnation of Italian fascism long before its foreign aggression in Abyssinia and its mutation into German inspired anti-Semitism. He was also adamantly opposed to German fascism, which he denounced early on as pagan and thoughtless.

Finally, though Eliot was highly appreciative of Charles Maurras as a fellow literary critic and a political theorist (given the Frenchman's commitment to monarchism and Roman Catholicism), he was eventually willing to concede that the pope had been right in condemning elements of his political theory. The fact that it took until news of Maurras' collaboration with the Vichy regime for Eliot to issue his own condemnation is a legitimate cause for criticism, but it is not grounds for inferring fascist sympathy. First, Eliot had coherent reasons for not regarding Maurras as a fascist, and therefore he did not denounce him for fascism; and when he did condemn elements of Maurras' life and thought, he did so in the most damning language a Catholic moralist could use—heresy. Taken together, all these criticisms evolved into to the production of his own political theory, which he outlined in *The Idea of a Christian Society*. As this work was chiefly the product of his *Criterion* quest to find a suitable and indigenous political theory for Britain, there can be little doubt as to his position on fascism, which, as we shall see in a later chapter, was equally as thorough in its denunciation.

The charge of anti-Semitism is difficult to address in relation to *The Criterion* for the simple reason that there is no evidence of its existence within Eliot's commentaries. David Bradshaw has attempted to implicate Eliot as anti-Semitic via the anti-Semitism of C.H. Douglas, the founder of Social Credit, who believed in an international conspiracy of Jewish financiers, but this argument does not withstand cross-examination.[237] Eliot was

[237] Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-war Britain*, 190.

criticised by his friend Ezra Pound for being both ignorant of and unsympathetic toward Social Credit, and Eliot himself declared Douglas's thought to be obscure, unintelligible, and pretentious. There is no evidence of Eliot commenting on Douglas's anti-Semitism one way or another, which is hardly evidence of agreement. Eliot is on record, however, stating that 'as for [Ezra] Pound, I have already made it clear that I do not associate myself with any of his [anti-Semitic] opinions about Jews.'[238] Likewise, *The Criterion* featured works by Jews such as Julien Benda and Friedrich Gundolf, with the latter even providing the leading article in the final edition of the magazine. Karl Mannheim, another Jewish intellectual, also received favourable mention in a commentary, and later became one of Eliot's closest associates in The Moot. It is very difficult, therefore, to locate within Eliot's commentaries any traces of anti-Semitism.

There are other areas of his work, such as in the poems *Gerontion* and *Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleinstein with a Cigar*, where Eliot is undoubtedly guilty of using prejudicial stereotypes, and in *After Strange Gods*, where he stated that with respect to religious uniformity, 'reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable.'[239] These represent the few and unpardonable (but also unrepresentative) instances of anti-Semitism during Eliot's career. It is not the intention of this work to discuss in great depth Eliot's poetry, but so far as *After Strange Gods* is concerned, legitimate accusations of anti-Semitism should be coupled with recognition that his comments (however poorly construed) intended to affirm the place of orthodox Jewish thought in Western intellectual culture. His comment was not meant as an ethnic or religious prohibition, but rather a criticism of what occurs when a large-body of intellectuals associated with a religion create philosophical systems that are no longer

[238] Ibid.
[239] T.S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), 19.

representative of that religious tradition—a criticism that he made against numerous 'free-thinking' Christians in *The Criterion*, such as his friend John Middleton Murry. Indeed, Eliot highly valued the contributions of traditional Judaism, writing approvingly in *The Criterion* that 'for a Jewish poet to be able to write like a Jew, in western Europe and in a western European language, is almost a miracle.'[240] So, too, his close association with 'free-thinking' Jews such as Julien Benda and later Karl Mannheim and Simone Weil should temper unfair exaggerations about the nature and extent of Eliot's singular but still anti-Semitic remarks. He certainly did not regard himself as harbouring anti-Semitic notions, writing to a friend in 1938 that 'I must say, at once, I am naturally sympathetic with any protest against the maltreatment of Jews, whether abroad or in this country.'[241]

During the war Eliot also published multiple statements denouncing anti-Semitism and became increasingly disconcerted about how his objectionable lines in *After Strange Gods* had been further misinterpreted. Writing to Isaiah Berlin in 1952 he stated, 'the sentence of which you complain (with justice) would never have appeared at all at that time [in 1934], if I had been aware of what was going to happen, indeed had already begun, in Germany... I still do not understand why the word "race" occurs in the sentence, because my emphasis was on "free-thinking."'[242] It is likewise important to remember (though not to excuse) that anti-Semitism was more common in the 1930s, both as a part of public life and institutional identities. Harvard University, for instance, along with most of the Ivy League, had strict quotas in place to limit the number of Jewish students admitted. It was not until 1939 that Lionel Trilling became the first tenured Jewish professor in Columbia University's English Department, and it similarly took until 1932 for All Souls College,

[240] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 14 (July 1935), 610-13.
[241] T.S. Eliot, V. Eliot and J. Haffenden eds *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 8: 1936-1938* (London: Faber and Faber, 2019), 999.
[242] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941*, xxx.

Oxford, to admit Isaiah Berlin as their first Jewish fellow.* In such a historical climate the anti-Semitism that Eliot exhibited was not uncommon, nor was it as pronounced and deep-seated as many of his peers.

Lastly, it has been argued by some that Eliot's social criticism was anti-democratic. Chace, for instance, stated that Eliot scorned democratic principles.[243] This is not the case; though, as Harding notes, there is a degree of pessimism that pervades Eliot's social criticism. First, he was pessimistic about the ability of democracy (in conjunction with liberalism) to provide the populace with the moral convictions necessary to withstand fascism and communism. Second, he was often despairing of political parties, whether Conservative, Liberal, or Labour, because he regarded them as too subservient to political exigencies at the expense of political theories. Third, he believed that universal suffrage tended to dilute the value of individual votes, which made it more difficult to dislodge oligarchical interests and entrenched parties. And lastly, universal suffrage and the mass media skewed the interests of the electorate away from the local and municipal level, where citizens could exert more influence, and toward issues at the national level, over which they had less control.

These criticisms, pessimistic as they were, did not amount to a rejection of democracy. As previously noted, whilst Eliot recognized that democracy's popularity was diminishing in conjunction with the rise of various democratic alternatives, he was himself unwilling to disparage the idea of democracy.[244] This was because he thought democracy allowed for the greatest spectrum of life and thought.[245] As such, he asked what could be done at

* It is interesting to note that when Eliot met Isaiah Berlin for the first time in 1935, he wrote to A.L. Rowse that 'I was very glad to meet [him], whom I liked.' (Letter to A.L. Rowse, 4 July, 1935).

[243] Chace, *The Political Identities of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot*, 132.

[244] Eliot, 'The Literature of Fascism', 545.

[245] Ibid.

present to build a new framework in which democracy could thrive.[246] And it was from this very question that his answer sprung a decade later with the publication of *The Idea of a Christian Society*, which theorized how democracy and diversity could be coupled with intellectual leadership and religion to create a more robust, defendable, and positive society.

Aside from these criticisms, others have occasionally been added. Denis Donoghue, for instance, described Eliot during the *Criterion* years as behaving 'like a moral terrorist'.[247] From this study it should be clear, however, that Eliot operated as a traditional religious moralist within a cultural framework still accustomed to religious moralizing, and within a political discourse that continued to use religious identification as an important element of national identity. This applies also to arguments made by John Xiros Cooper and others who overemphasise the discrepancy between Eliot's social criticism and interwar society based on a misreading of the history of secularisation in Britain.[248] Harding offers a more accurate, if slightly unfair criticism, stating that Eliot and *The Criterion* were 'alarmist' and prone to the 'apocalyptic myth of catastrophe'.[249] This is accurate in so far as Eliot often framed contemporary cultural and political developments as the potential onset of a new dark age and imbued his analysis with eschatological significance. Yet this criticism is unfair in so far as the death tolls and cultural devastation of the Second World War (to say nothing of additional fascist war crimes and communist purges) were nothing if not apocalyptic. Given the tens of millions of deaths that were to happen in Europe and around the world from 1939 to 1945, Eliot's concerns in the mid- to late-1930s seem more accurately described as realist than alarmist.

[246] Ibid, 546.
[247] Donoghue, 'Eliot and The Criterion' in *The Literary Criticism of T.S. Eliot: New Essays*, 32.
[248] Cooper, 'T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism',146.
[249] Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-war Britain*, pp.4–6.

A final criticism to consider is Eliot's own: that the magazine failed to create a widely adopted classical standard and resurrect the European idea (also rendered as the 'European mind'). This criticism has been echoed by others such as Harding when he noted that 'the attempt to mobilize a cohort of European periodicals in the defence of a Virgilian penates, for all the heroic grandeur attached to such a project, seems a curiously misguided undertaking. *The Criterion*, with its exiguous circulation, elegiac tone, and lack of realpolitik, could never have established the validity of the "European idea" for those beyond the ambit of its Latinate Catholic tradition.'[250] Whilst it can be argued that much of Eliot's classicism became subsumed into his moralism and his Europeanism sublimated into an ecumenical Catholic spirituality (he was, after all, associated with many who founded the World Council of Churches), both of which fared better in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War—with post-war Britain enjoying something of a religious revival and the success of Christian Democracy in Europe—there is nevertheless some truth in the aforementioned criticism. In literary matters, Eliot's classicism achieved significant influence amongst the next generation of scholars and critics, but his interwar social criticism was eclipsed by the deterioration of geopolitical stability and the ensuing global war. Yet in this respect he was hardly alone as the war impacted the activities of most intellectuals, and he soon adapted to wartime conditions, such as when meeting with The Moot to further discuss issues related to his *Criterion* criticism.

In Donoghue's estimation such failure was inevitable, as 'Eliot himself was not trained or otherwise fitted to act with the full resources of his mind upon the level of high and general principles which he proposed to occupy. He was a trained philosopher, highly competent in the finer points of philosophical idealism. He was a poet of genius. But he was not versed in political philosophy, if by that phrase we mean the discipline of thought we find in

[250] Ibid, 228.

Michael Oakeshott, Hannah Arendt, and Karl Popper.'[251] But such criticism is neither here nor there: not least because many professional political philosophers would be found lacking in comparison to Oakeshott, Arendt, and Popper, and because Eliot (himself a Harvard and Oxford trained philosopher) was more than capable of providing intelligent comment on political theories. Furthermore, associates of his such as Jacques Maritain and Reinhold Niebuhr achieved significant impact in their respective fields with similar levels of education in political philosophy, so it can hardly be argued that his interest and incursion into the area was unwarranted.

In sum, *The Criterion* years provide an important window into Eliot's social criticism, not merely as a precursor to his 'mature' works, but also in their own right, as they represent the longest and most productive period of his career as a social critic. The importance of the magazine as a leading national and transatlantic quarterly also enhances and enlarges the historic audience of Eliot's social criticism, which might otherwise be limited in our memory to the scope and duration of print runs for *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. Instead, we can position his social criticism as a more central component of his identity as a leading man of letters, rather than as an incidental appendage to his otherwise iconic success as a poet. For his role as editor of *The Criterion* and the centrality of his commentaries to his editorship were intertwined in the public reception of the magazine, just as the magazine was itself instrumental in consolidating Eliot's rise in the literary establishment and his place in the national consciousness.

From this period emerges the picture of Eliot as a public moralist: classicist in literature and temperament, conservative (i.e., tory) in political theory, Catholic in theological persuasion, and European in his geo-cultural orientation. The moralist designation is apt,

[251] Donoghue, 'Eliot and The Criterion' in *The Literary Criticism of T.S. Eliot: New Essays*, 39.

not least because Eliot identified himself as such, but also because it was his moralism—with its presupposition of objective moral standards and values—that connected and reoccurred throughout his classicism, conservatism, Catholicism, and Europeanism. Indeed, this moralism was in many respects the culmination of his preoccupation with the 'Absolute', which had first manifested itself during his doctoral work on F.H. Bradley.[252] In turn, this reveals the development of Eliot's social criticism—as opposed to a divergence—as his classicism and Europeanism of the 1920s merge (but do not disappear) with his conservative and ecumenical interests in the 1930s.

Likewise, the objective values of literature from his classicism became accompanied by the objectivity of religious dogmas and incarnated into politics through his emphasis on the objective importance of Church and state. So, too, the centrality of a moral literary tradition within his Europeanism became more deeply associated with the history of Christianity and Christendom, and represented in political thought through an insistence on the organic nature of social and political development. His emphasis as a moralist on the priority of deducing immaterial and objective moral values before proceeding onto planning and implementation was a major element of his political and economic thought: stressing the need to put ethics before economics and theology before politics. The failure to do so was a common feature in his criticism toward declining standards in media, culture, politics, language, and education. Together these elements of Eliot's criticism formed a largely negative portrait of what he considered to be lacking in the nation's political, cultural, intellectual, and religious life. What followed in *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* were Eliot's attempts to introduce a more positive paradigm for potential change.

[252] J.D. Margolis, *T.S. Eliot's Intellectual Development* (Chicago: University of Chicago,1972), xi.

CHAPTER THREE: ABSTRACT

Having established the centrality of *The Criterion* to T.S. Eliot's criticism and surveyed the core components of his social criticism from that era, this final chapter addresses the last and supposedly 'mature' stage of his work and challenges prevailing scholarly views about the nature and extent of Eliot's relationship with The Moot discussion group. It explores and outlines both the *Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, establishing the thematic and conceptual continuities existing between his earlier and later criticism, which has previously been missed or undeveloped in Eliot studies. This chapter argues that Eliot's later work is not 'mature' or even separate from his earlier criticism, but instead represents a continuation from his earlier and larger body of work. To substantiate these claims this chapter details both the continuing classicist, conservative, continental, and Catholic nature of his criticism, while also deconstructing the role and influence of The Moot discussion group in relation to the *Idea* and *Notes*. This contests previous scholarly views which regard Eliot's relationship with The Moot as inherently positive, generative, and cordial. This chapter develops an alternative thesis regarding Eliot and The Moot, revealing it as far more temporally limited, temperamentally combative, and less influential than previously surmised. The outcome of these arguments is a unique and new treatment of Eliot's later social criticism, reorienting his work away from the marginal confines of The Moot and placing it back within the mainstream of mid-century British political, cultural, and religious thought.

CHAPTER THREE: LATER CRITICISM

INTRODUCTION

To use Eliot's own words, *The Criterion* ended not with a bang, but a whimper. No funeral was held for his quarterly review, but he delivered a eulogy of sorts in 1946 to a German audience in a talk entitled 'The Unity of European Culture'. This address was subsequently and fittingly included in the appendix of *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, providing a summation of Eliot's criticism to date, as well as a window into his remaining criticism in the 1940s. This began with a reflection on the magazine's unrealised ambitions to revive 'The European Mind':

> The particular point, however, of my talking about my aims, in relation to a review which has been dead for seven years, is that in the end they failed. And I attribute this failure chiefly to the gradual closing of the mental frontiers of Europe… The blight fell first upon our friends in Italy. And after 1933 contributions from Germany became more and more difficult to find. Some of our friends died; some disappeared; some merely became silent. Some went abroad, cut off from their own cultural roots... What happened in Spain is more confused; the tumult of the civil war was hardly favourable to thought and creative writing; and that was divided and scattered, even when it did not destroy, many of her ablest writers. In France there was still free intellectual activity, but more and more harassed and limited by political anxieties and forebodings, and by the internal divisions which political prepossessions set up. England, though manifesting some symptoms of the same malady, remained apparently intact. But I think that our literature of that period suffered by being more and more restricted to its own resources, as well as by the obsession with politics.[1]

Following this, Eliot restated the collective message from his *Criterion* criticism: that the fate and hope of the western mind, indeed, the western soul, still depended upon a unifying symbiosis between classicism, continentalism, conservatism, and (most importantly) Christianity. In this respect, Eliot's interest in Europe was far more than what Jose Harris

[1] T.S. Eliot, 'The Unity of European Culture,' in *Christianity and Culture* (London: Harcourt, 1976), 194.

hinted at when she wrote that he pictured it 'as a unique treasure-house of both "high" and "popular" culture'.[2] As he wrote:

> To our Christian heritage we owe many things besides religious faith. Through it we trace the evolution of our arts, through it we have our conception of Roman Law which has done so much to shape the Western World, through it we have conceptions of private and public morality. And through it we have our common standards of literature, in the literatures of Greece and Rome. The Western World has its unity in its heritage, in Christianity and in the ancient civilisations of Greece, Rome and Israel, from which, owing to two thousand years of Christianity, we trace our descent. I shall not elaborate this point. What I wish to say is that this unity in the common elements of culture, throughout many centuries, is the true bond between us. No political and economic organisation, however much goodwill it commands, can supply what this cultural unity gives. If we dissipate or throw away our common patrimony of culture, then all the organisation and planning of the most ingenious minds will not help us, or bring us closer together…. But we can at least try to save something of those goods of which we are the common trustees: the legacy of Greece, Rome and Israel, and the legacy of Europe throughout the last 2,000 years. In a world which has seen such material devastation as ours, these spiritual possessions are also in imminent peril.[3]

From this brief recapitulation of his *Criterion* criticism, Eliot reemphasised the importance of classicism for recognizing the content of Europe's cultural patrimony, the conservatism needed to preserve and defend it from various economic and political usurpations, the continentalism required to cherish and cultivate it in common, and the religious framework essential to harmonizing and even improving upon these symbiotic elements—with the solemnising (and even sacralising) recognition that spiritual realities are not additional to natural ones, but permeate all such endeavours. Nor was this the last time that Eliot would put forward this programme, as the hallmarks of his *Criterion* era criticism functioned as both the foundation and form of his later works, *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture.*

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[2] J. Harris, 'A Struggle for European Civilisation: TS Eliot and British conceptions of Europe During and After the Second World War', in Martin Conway and Kiran Klaus Patel (eds.), *Europeanization in the 20th century: Historical Approaches* (2010), 51.

[3] Ibid, 201-202.

These two books are often referred to as Eliot's 'mature' social criticism[4], but as this chapter will demonstrate, this designation belies the creative chronology and continuity between Eliot's earlier and later criticism, as well obscuring fact that neither of the books were responsible for cementing Eliot's reputation as a social critic, which occurred prior to their publication during his *Criterion* editorship. Too often the *Idea* and *Notes* have been treated in dual isolation, disconnected from the most prolific and definitive period of Eliot's social criticism. This has resulted in an overemphasis and misinterpretation of the influence of those groups and networks (mainly The Moot) which Eliot participated in concurrent to the supposed development of these books. As such, the central node for Eliot's criticism has migrated from its rightful place at the centre of interwar journalistic, literary, intellectual, and establishment life to the more peripheral and comparatively hermetic religious sphere of The Moot. In the process, this has not merely distanced Eliot's social criticism from the vital role that it played within his wider career and public persona, but also impoverishes our understanding of the diversity of intellectual life during the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, which, as we have established, operated with dynamic and porous boundaries between modernist and traditional frameworks, religious commentary and public affairs, political thought and contemporary literature.

As such, the purposes of this chapter are twofold. First, it intends to establish and elaborate on the continuities that exist between Eliot's earlier and later social criticism. And secondly, to disestablish the central role and occasion that The Moot has been ascribed in relation to Eliot's later criticism. In doing so, this chapter challenges the vast majority of

[4] Scott, P. 'The social critic and his discontents,' in *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot*, ed. David Moody (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 61; Kearns, C.M., 'Religion, literature, and society in the work of T.S. Eliot' in *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot*, ed. David Moody (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 90.

Eliot and Moot scholarship and provides a more exhaustive study of the matter than has previously been undertaken. It seeks to significantly diminish the status and role of The Moot in relation to Eliot, and even to expose the negative regard in which Eliot came to hold The Moot and many of its members. Finally, this chapter concludes our survey of both Eliot's career as a social critic and the content of his social criticism.

THE IDEA OF A CHRISTIAN SOCIETY*

The Idea of a Christian Society originated as a series of lectures in March 1939 at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. They were delivered in direct response to the Munich Crisis and addressed certain national deficits that the crisis had exposed, although they bore the hallmarks from Eliot's earlier interest in examining the ideas of liberalism, democracy, fascism and communism in *The Criterion*. For having found each of these ideas lacking to various extents, these lectures served as the occasion to clarify and expound his own idea for a new, more robustly religious form of society. But as Eliot confided to A.G. Hebert, 'I need hardly say that I have never in any piece of writing, taken more pains or felt more dissatisfied with the result.'[5] Nor is this a surprise given the decade's worth of gestation that went into this endeavour, but Eliot need not have feared. Shortly after its publication the *Idea* was selling better than his beloved *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (3,500 copies by the end of January 1940 to Cats' 3,005[6]) and receiving sufficiently glowing reviews to please even the usually incredulous Eliot.[7]

* Content from this section draws on work from my unpublished MPhil thesis on T.S. Eliot and The Moot.
[5] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941*, 216.
[6] Ibid, Xli.
[7] Ibid, 351.

It was Eliot's opinion that the Munich Crisis had introduced publicly 'a doubt about the validity of [our] civilization'.[8] He asserted that neither democracy nor liberalism had provided sufficiently substantive values to outdo the forces of fascism and paganism. As a result, 'we could not match them conviction with conviction, [and] we had no idea with which we could either meet or oppose the ideas opposed to us.'[9] In the absence of such values, Eliot feared that the growing wave of religious revivalism—as typified by the Moral Re-Armament Movement (MRA)—was compensating by appropriating religious terminology and enthusiasm in order to rally public support for national and militaristic ends. This concerned Eliot, as he believed that it was precisely by such methods that Nazism had instilled its authoritarian and pagan doctrines about race and nationalism in Germany.[10] 'By gradually adapting our religion to fit our secular aims,' Eliot had warned, 'Moral Re-Armament in my opinion may easily lead to a progressive Germanization of our society.'[11] Naturally, this concerned Eliot as a British citizen, but also as a Christian, as he knew the travails of the Confessing Church in Germany, and he did not wish to see his nation's religion become subservient to nationalistic exigencies—however legitimate Britain's emergency.[12] To that effect, he wrote, 'Everything that remains of clear thinking in this country should be summoned to protest against this abuse of Christianity.'[13] It was to that end he delivered *The Idea of a Christian Society*, which was subsequently published at the outbreak of the Second World War and sold well, running to three reprints in as many months.[14]

[8] T.S. Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', 51.
[9] Ibid.
[10] T.S. Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', 51.
[11] Ibid, 66.
[12] Warren, H., *Theologians of the New World Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 80.
[13] Ibid, 64.
[14] Kojecký, *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, 126.

The *Idea* began with the ultimatum that Britain must choose 'between the formation of a new Christian culture, and the acceptance of a pagan one'.[15] The term 'pagan' was his shorthand for a system of governance and a philosophy of life that pseudo-religiously venerated the state as the principal point of reference and the foremost object of concern in collective and national matters.[16] Put more simply, 'a "pagan society" is one in which the wrong spiritual values are recognised.'[17] According to Eliot, this kind of paganism paved the way for totalitarianism, because it untethered both passion from principle and duty from dogma, removing from the political calculus the notion of the inviolable or sacred, which meant there was little a state could not do.[18] To preclude such a possibility from happening the book proposed a change in social attitudes. This meant less focus on the 'negative' (i.e. content-less) values of democracy and liberalism, and more emphasis on the positive values associated with Christianity.[19] To that end the book suggested a tripartite division of society into the Christian State, the Christian Community, and the (confusingly similar) Community of Christians—all with a view to facilitating, however indirectly or indistinctly, a society permeated by principles of virtue and human dignity, as well as the promise of protected (if not facilitated) religious devotion.[20] Eliot dreamt of a society where 'the natural end of man—virtue and well-being in community—is acknowledged for all, and the supernatural end—beatitude [i.e. saintliness]—for those who have the eyes to see it.'[21]

The idea of having a Christian society did not necessarily entail that the Christian State (i.e., the statesmen) or the Christian Community (i.e., the general population) had to be

[15] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society',10.
[16] Ellis, 'T. S. Eliot, Munich, and the 'Germanization' of Society', 24.
[17] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941*, 360.
[18] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', 14-16.
[19] Ibid, 10.
[20] Ibid, 20.
[21] Ibid, 27.

devout, nor even that consciously religious. 'It is not primarily the Christianity of the statesmen that matters,' Eliot wrote, 'but their being confined, by the temper and traditions of the people which they rule, to a Christian framework within which to realise their ambitions and advance the prosperity and prestige of their country.'[22] Likewise, for the multitudes who formed the Christian Community, 'their Christianity may be almost wholly realised in behaviour: both in their customary and periodic religious observances, and in a traditional code of behaviour towards their neighbours.'[23] Indeed, this is not so revolutionary an idea when one remembers, as Ross McKibbin wrote, 'The great majority of the English almost certainly thought of England as a Christian nation and most believed themselves (one way or another) to be Christian.'[24] Instead, the real rigor was reserved for Eliot's Community of Christians, often referred to as the clerisy (via Coleridge), which was a smaller group of clerics and lay elites, possessing extraordinary minds or unique spiritual gifts.

The Community of Christians was the group—often associated by scholars as a prototype based on The Moot, but in fact more like the later contributors to *The Criterion*—which provided the distinctively religious forms of cultural and intellectual leadership, since it was their responsibility to articulate and disseminate the knowledge and convictions needed to 'form the conscious mind and the conscience of the nation'.[25] Though this group was to be separate from the established church, it was not unlike it, as they functioned like an established brains trust, combining extraordinary intelligence, theological orthodoxy, and spiritual sensitivity. The clerisy of Coleridge was more structured and pedagogical than Eliot's clerisy, which was more nebulous, varied, and consultative. While it was

[22] Ibid, 22.
[23] Ibid, 23.
[24] R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951*, 272.
[25] Ibid, 34.

unclear exactly how this group was to perform its functions, the *Idea* seems to suggest it would be accomplished through persuasive communication rather than through compulsion. This is because Eliot envisioned a representative democracy where both the electorate and the intellectuals kept the state accountable.[26] After all, Eliot's ideal society was aimed against all forms of totalitarianism, regardless of whether it was religious or secular. Furthermore, he was just as opposed to any latent form of democratic totalitarianism—which he feared could occur through overzealous central planning and insidious forms of mass suggestion.[27]

Though the shadow of war was not far from the original lectures, Eliot's central concern, as we have seen, had less to do with the nation's security than with the nation's religion. Likewise, the central focus of the book was not about manipulating the state with Christianity, so much as protecting Christianity from what Eliot perceived as a non-Christian state: 'The problem of leading a Christian life in a non-Christian society is now very present to us… It is the problem constituted by our implication in a network of institutions from which we cannot dissociate ourselves: institutions the operation of which appears no longer neutral, but non-Christian.'[28] According to Eliot, such institutions were non-Christian in the sense that they valued efficiency, regimentation, conformity, uniformity and used art, propaganda, and even religion as modes of social control, 'without respect for the needs of the individual soul'.[29] Since Eliot's society was premised on removing the structural and social impediments to (voluntary) saintliness, i.e. beatitude, it is not a surprise that he wanted to safeguard cultural, educational, and religious autonomy

[26] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', 22.
[27] R. Crawford, *The Savage and the City in the work of T.S. Eliot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 95.

[28] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', 17.
[29] Ibid, 18.

from the growing power of the central government and bureaucratic planning.[30] In fact, that is why his proposed Community of Christians was consultative rather than legislative.

Eliot did not intend to reduce the power of one entity by over-empowering another, as either option would constrain the providential and organic components of cultural and religious growth.[31] That is not to suggest, however, that Eliot expected this solution to be either perfect or final, since he was convinced about the imperfectability of humanity, as inferred from the doctrine of original sin.[32] 'The seeds of decay,' he wrote, 'will be innumerable… since the Kingdom of Christ on earth will never be realised… and the result [of all our efforts] will always be a sordid travesty of what human society should be.'[33] But that did not mean that it was not worth the effort. 'The choice is simple,' he wrote, 'if you will not have God (and He is a jealous God) you should pay your respects to Hitler or Stalin.'[34] The difference between these choices was the difference in outcome between 'a pagan, and necessarily stunted culture, and a religious, and necessarily imperfect culture'.[35] The difference, Eliot believed, was monumental, but the task was not impossible. In a world where Germany could become Nazi, Eliot believed England could become more Christian.[36]

This was Eliot's idea for a Christian society: a vision many critics have associated with The Moot's desire to plan and influence a revolution in religious, cultural, and social life in wartime (and later post-war) Britain. The extent to which The Moot did in fact influence the composition and orientation of the *Idea* is a matter which we shall attend to later in

[30] Ibid, 19.
[31] Ibid, pp. 18-30.
[32] B. Spurr, *'Anglo-Catholic in Religion' T.S. Eliot and Christianity*, 182.
[33] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', 47.
[34] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', 50.
[35] Ibid, 51.
[36] Ibid, 150.

this chapter. For now, we shall proceed with the continuities and developments in this work that originate in relation to Eliot's earlier social criticism. From this examination the reoccurring themes of classicism, conservatism, Catholicism, and continentalism shall re-emerge along with a number of other concerns from the *Criterion* criticism, such as the dangers of mass society, rural degradation, fascism, and Erastianism. This represents a new argument in the literature on Eliot's social criticism, as the origins and contents of the *Idea* (along with *Notes*) have traditionally and almost exclusively been associated with The Moot. So, too, it counters the notion that Eliot's later criticism was more 'mature' than his 'immature' *Criterion* criticism, arguing instead that the two periods are better designated as 'earlier' and 'later'.

Continuation and Continuity

Between the conclusion of Eliot's *Criterion* and the commencement of his Cambridge lectures a mere three months had passed. From a close reading of the text, it is clear that elements of the magazine—from its contents and contributors to its audience—remained etched in Eliot's mind. Indeed, the lectures were explicitly intended for 'that public which is likely to read what [I] write on other subjects.'[37] Given that the lectures had nothing to do with either poetry or literary criticism his mention of 'other subjects' is obviously aimed at his prior *Criterion* audience. In a similar manner, other continuities from the magazine remerge in the *Idea*—ranging from contributors and subject matter to overarching principles—which are detailed below. This will provide a detailed survey of the positive extent to which the *Idea* was conceived of and composed separately from The Moot, with a detailed negative deconstruction of the *Idea's* associations with The Moot to follow at a later point in the chapter.

[37] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', 5.

I. Contributors and Inspirations

Several of the *Criterion*'s contributors re-emerge in various manners and guises through the *Idea*. For example, the familiar names of Christopher Dawson, John Middleton Murry, V.A. Demant, and Jacques Maritain are exclusively mentioned in the preface for being 'owed a great deal'.[38] This is not unexpected given how important each of them was to *The Criterion*. In addition to their own written contributions, each of them had a profound influence on Eliot: Dawson helped catholicise his understanding of religion, culture, and history; Murry's romanticism served as a productive sparring partner for his classicism; Demant's views on economics, Christian sociology, and Anglo-Catholicism stimulated much of his own thought; and Maritain's Neo-Thomism, integral humanism, and medieval concepts of civil society shaped his own political ideas more than anyone else.

Eliot likewise alludes to the contributions made by the Christian sociologists of the Chandos/Christendom group—Reckitt, Mairet, and Demant—who were an important social and intellectual network for Eliot during both the *Criterion* years and long after, as his correspondence from the period attests (indeed, his letters to Chandos members exceeds those of The Moot). For each of them exemplified Eliot's own maxim of putting ethics before economics and grounding politics in theology. As he wrote, 'Relevant to my subject are the writings of the Christian sociologists – those writers who criticize our economic system in the light of Christian ethics. Their work consists in proclaiming in general, and demonstrating in particular, the incompatibility of Christian principle and a great deal of our social practice.'[39] Indeed, these men are mentioned in print as sources of

[38] Ibid, 3.
[39] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', 7.

stimulation as far back as *After Strange Gods*, where Eliot credits 'Mr. Demant and Mr. M.B. Reckitt and their colleagues' for their insightful analysis regarding the decrepitude of modern liberalism.[40] Touchingly, too, these were long and lasting personal friendships. The closeness and compatibility of Eliot's friendship with Reckitt, for instance, which began in the early 30s and lasted until Eliot's death in the 60s, is epitomised in a letter written to Mary Trevelyan, where he mentions his attendance with Reckitt at an open-air Mass at St Anne's, Soho, which they spent huddled side-by-side under Reckitt's umbrella.[41]

When Eliot writes about the Community of Christians it is possible to detect the outlines and inspiration of these former contributors to the *Criterion*. In fact, the very mission of the magazine—to promote the exchange of ideas across national borders and intellectual boundaries, reviving the European mind and reemphasising the Christian soul of Europe—is echoed in Eliot's description of his intended community. 'The Community of Christians' Eliot writes, 'is not an organisation, but a body of indefinite outline; composed of both clergy and laity, of the more conscious, more spiritually and intellectually developed of both. It will be their identity of belief and aspiration, their background of a common system of education and a common culture, which will enable them to influence and be influenced by each other, and collectively to form the conscious mind and the conscience of the nation.'[42] Whilst Eliot's *Criterion* contributors became increasingly theological (and often Neo-Thomist) during the later 1930s, the magazine still maintained a highly varied list of contributors, many of whom were either from a different religion or non-religious and this too is represented in the Community of Christians. As Eliot wrote, 'The mixture will include persons of exceptional ability who may be indifferent or disbelieving; there will be

[40] Eliot, *After Strange Gods*, 13.
[41] T.S. Eliot, 'Letter to Mary Trevelyan,' dated 27th July 1953, quoted in Spurr, *Anglo-Catholic in Religion*, 178.
[42] Ibid, 31.

room for a proportion of other persons professing other Faiths than Christianity.'[43] The rationale for this inclusion was redolent of the inclusivity of the *Criterion*, as 'one may even hope that the mixture may be a benefit to its intellectual vitality.'[44] It is worth noting in passing that such diversity (Mannheim notwithstanding) was not found among the ranks of The Moot, which was overwhelmingly protestant, although despite this the group has often been attributed as the template for Eliot's Community of Christians.

II. Political Ideas

A prominent feature in both Eliot's *Criterion* and *Idea* was his insistence on the importance of political ideas (i.e., a political theory or philosophy). As he wrote in the last issue of *The Criterion*, 'my Commentaries bear painful witness [to] the grave dangers to this country which might result from the lack of any vital political philosophy, either explicit or implicit. For myself, a right political philosophy [has come] more and more to imply a right theology.' [45] Contiguous with this was Eliot's alarm with the Moral Re-Armament movement, which he denounced in both his last *Criterion* commentary and the *Idea* as representing a wrong theology with potentially disastrous political consequences. First writing in the *Criterion*, he warned that 'to use a phrase like "moral re-armament" is to be in danger of betraying the word "moral," of suggesting that Britain should merely invoke "morals" in order to compete with the modern world on its own terms.'[46] While a mere three months later he wrote that 'by gradually adapting our religion to fit our secular aims, Moral Re-Armament in my opinion may easily lead to a progressive Germanization of our society. [As such] everything that remains of clear thinking in this country should be

[43] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', 29.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Eliot, 'Last words,' 662.
[46] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society,' 6.

summoned to protest against this abuse of Christianity.'[47] In neither case did these concerns originate during his attendance at The Moot but instead evolved from his earlier criticism to his later criticism.

Eliot's quest to understand 'what – if any – is the "idea" of the society in which we live? To what end is it arranged?'[48] did not begin in the late 1930s with The Moot but in the 1920s. As far back as 1928 he started examining the intellectual case for fascism, confiding to A.L. Rowse, 'what I am trying to do is to find out whether there is any idea in Fascism at all; if not it might be at least worthwhile to say so.'[49] This quest to understand the quintessential ideas behind fascism as well as communism recurred throughout his 1930s criticism. This was coupled with growing dissatisfaction with liberalism's 'doing as one likes' and democracy's 'meanness of spirit, egotism of motive, [and] incapacity for surrender or allegiance to something outside of oneself'.[50] He regarded them as morally insufficient and intellectually uncompelling, and therefore inadequate to combat the virulent ideas opposed to them. In response, Eliot outlined his own ideas in *The Criterion*: arguing that ethics should precede economics and theology undergird politics, as well as the need to protect and promote classicist, conservative, and Catholic traditions within the context of a shared European community. These arguments then found even more positive expression in the *Idea*, as Eliot attempted to articulate precisely what it was that could match fascism 'conviction for conviction' and to correct for the unfortunate fact that, 'we had no ideas with which we could either meet or oppose the ideas opposed to us'.[51]

[47] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society,' 64.
[48] Ibid, 6.
[49] Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-war Britain*, 182.
[50] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 2 (Apr 1924) 231-35.
[51] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', 51.

Eliot's disappointment with democracy was likewise evident in both the *Criterion* and *Idea*, though in neither of those publications did he express an interest in abolishing it. Quite the opposite, in fact. Far from being anti-democratic as William Chase and M.T. Edwards have claimed, as early as 1928 Eliot made his allegiance clear, writing that while 'the frame of democracy has been destroyed: how can we, out of the materials at hand, build a new structure in which democracy can live?'[52] So, too, the *Idea* is premised on the importance of a functioning, representative democracy.[53] If this were not explicit enough, he made sure to clarify in a letter to Leonard Woolf that 'I am able to accept liberty, equality, tolerance, self-government, compromise, and the influence of public opinion… as goods.'[54] Where he might differ from others, however, was that instead of re-emphasising democracy's framework of negative ends (such as liberty and equality), he wished to promote a positive goal regarding the realisation of spiritual values: namely a democracy of spirit, believing that in a true democratic society citizens should not face systemic or institutional impediments to religious flourishing.

III. Classicism

Just as Eliot's *Criterion* criticism was marked by the four central themes of classicism, Catholicism, conservatism, and continentalism, so they also reappear in the *Idea* with central importance. As noted, Eliot's dissatisfaction with liberalism in the aftermath of the Munich Crisis—for its failure to convert negative liberties into positive convictions—can be traced back to his original classicism versus romanticism commentaries. There he had inveighed against John Middleton Murry's 'emotive romanticism', criticising it for privileging enthusiasm over disinterested morality, which he directly linked with

[52] Eliot, 'The Literature of Fascism'.
[53] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', 22.
[54] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941*, 386.

liberalism's ethos of 'doing as one likes'. So, too, Eliot criticised romantic-liberalism's evaluative capacity, believing that too much was decided by mere arbitrary dislike. This resurfaces in the *Idea* when he points out that terms like 'democracy' and 'freedom' are easily appropriated by totalitarian states, rendering us 'in danger of finding ourselves with nothing to stand for except a *dislike* of everything maintained by Germany and/or Russia'.[55] To wit, he regarded such dislikes as poorly informed rather than intellectually rigorous (as would be the classicist way), as they were largely 'a compost of newspaper sensations and prejudice'.[56]

In much the same way his classicist regard for moral, literary, and dogmatic standards were reincarnated in the *Idea's* protest against Moral Re-Armament's abuse of language and its attempts to harness religious passions towards nationalistic ends. Eliot expands on this in the book's notes, chastising Frank Buchman's MRA movement for abusing both religion and language, 'The Christianity expressed has been vague, and the religious fervour has been a fervour for democracy…. To justify Christianity because it provides a foundation of morality, instead of showing the necessity of Christian morality from the truth of Christianity, is a very dangerous inversion…. It is not enthusiasm, but dogma, that differentiates a Christian from a pagan society.'[57] Similarly, Eliot disparages the movement's abuse of language, stating that 'even allowing that "*moral* re-generation" is intended to represent some milder form of parturition than regeneration, it is a very striking adaptation of the words of the Gospel to declare that unless a nation be born again it cannot achieve national security. The word *regeneration* appears to have degenerated… [and even more so when it] has been replaced by "re-armament."'[58] Clearly, this blend of

[55] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', 15.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid, 47.
[58] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', 65.

moral and linguistic punctiliousness, which had animated his classicist writings in both *The Criterion* and *After Strange Gods*—which regarded the standards of ethics and language as mutually reinforcing—was no less apparent in the *Idea*. From a classicist perspective, it was impossible to have the right religious framework for a society without a correct theological vocabulary, which itself was untenable if theological language was being adulterated by flagrant misuse and co-option. To protect the 'safeguards for the purity or the Catholicity of its doctrine,'[59] Eliot argued that 'everything that remains of clear thinking in this country should be summoned to protest against this abuse of Christianity and of English,'[60] lest it 'easily lead to a progressive Germanization of our society'.[61]

IV. Conservatism

The conservatism that marked Eliot's *Criterion* criticism continued to serve as an important marker in the *Idea*. Drawing on the conservative political thought of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Eliot adapted his concept of the 'clerisy' as the basis for his 'Community of Christians'. Like Coleridge, Eliot believed that an elite should provide institutionalised counsel for those governing the state as well as wider society, and both held a deep appreciation for the parish system as the preferable social unit of society. The two also shared a similar conception regarding the vocation of the church. For Coleridge, 'its main civilizing office is that of persevering, enlarging and diffusing knowledge'.[62] While for Eliot it was the dissemination of true theology. Unlike Coleridge, however, Eliot wished to expand the ranks of the clerisy beyond just 'learned professionals' to include a wide variety of exceptional persons, as well as more spiritually-minded members.

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[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid, 64.
[61] Ibid, 66.
[62] A. Quinton, *The Politics of Imperfection: The Religious and Secular Traditions of Conservative Thought in England from Hooker to Oakeshott* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 70.

Eliot's conservatism also included a Burkeian distrust of abrupt change, overly centralised planning, and disruptive forms of social engineering. Eliot feared that the unintended consequences of such reforms could prove just as detrimental as what they sought to remedy (to say nothing of the intended consequences). As he wrote in the *Criterion*, 'The measures intended to do one thing, without leading to another thing, may ultimately implement that other thing which they intend to make unnecessary.'[63] This sentiment was central to the criticism presented in the *Idea*. For instance, when discussing the question of establishment verses disestablishment, Eliot defended his conservative belief in the important partnership between throne and altar by noting that:

> The Church, once disestablished, cannot easily be re-established, and that the very act of disestablishment separates it more definitely and irrevocably from the life of the nation than if it has never been established. The effect on the mind of the people… is incalculable; the risks are so great that such an act can be nothing but a desperate measure…. and it would be the *creation* of a condition the results of which we cannot foresee.[64]

The origins of this conviction date back to *The Criterion*, where, in 1931, he wrote about the interconnection between conservatism and Christianity. 'Toryism,' he wrote, 'is not only a doctrine of the relation of the temporal and spiritual in matters of Church and State,'[65] but provides the only theological and political foundation for both state and society remotely to even be capable of 'engaging enough respect to be a worthy adversary of [Fascism] and Communism'.[66] In this respect Eliot's *Idea* is unquestionably and inherently Tory in its political philosophy and provides the fullest and most explicit manifestation of his political ideas to date.

[63] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 17 (Apr 1938), 478-85.
[64] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', 40.
[65] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 11 (Oct 1931), 65-72.
[66] Ibid.

V. Christianity

The very name of Eliot's book is indicative of his continuing interest in Christianity. In addition to the explicit sections of his book that are deeply religious in nature which we have covered, as well as the previously mentioned Catholic influences and Catholic regard for the universal Church and catholicity of doctrine, the *Idea* continues his *Criterion* religious criticism in various ways.

Invoking resource depletion, soil erosion, industrialisation, and exploitation of the earth, Eliot warns that 'a good deal of our material progress is a progress for which succeeding generations may have to pay dearly.'[67] In both instances, however, the dangers of disestablishment and environmental degradation are not limited to the phenomena themselves, but instead are linked to deeper metaphysical dangers. The danger of disestablishment is in its fallacious theology, which enshrines 'the deliberate recognition of two standards and ways of life [for the nation]'.[68] In essence, it disavows the notions of human and political telos that Eliot espoused since the *Criterion*. In terms of environmental degradation, Eliot wrote that 'a wrong attitude towards nature implies, somewhere, a wrong attitude towards God, and that consequence is an inevitable doom. For a long enough time, we have believed in nothing but the values arising in a mechanised, commercialised, urbanised way of life: it would be as well for us to face the permanent conditions upon which God allows us to live upon this planet.'[69] This assertion directly builds upon a claim he made in a 1938 *Criterion* commentary, where he stated that '[one] of most serious long-distance problems we have, apart from the ultimate religious problem… is the problem of the Land – meaning… not merely how to grow enough food, but how to obtain a proper balance between country and town life.'[70]

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[67] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', 49.
[68] Ibid, 40.
[69] Ibid, 49.
[70] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 17 (Apr 1938) 478-85.

From a religious perspective, the criticisms outlined in the *Criterion* and *Idea* were intellectually hopeful in so far as Eliot believed that 'it is by returning to the eternal source of truth that we can hope for any social organisation which will not, to its ultimate destruction, ignore some essential aspect of reality.'[71] This was undergirded by a cautious sense of personal hope—which is noteworthy given his reputation for cultural pessimism—as evidenced in a letter to Lawrence Durrell in September of 1939. 'I didn't say I felt hopeless,' he wrote, 'one is not really hopeless until one gives up trying to do anything oneself and gives up wanting to be of use to others who are trying.'[72] But in offering a positive programme of criticism he certainly did not lose his Catholic notions about the imperfectability of human systems and the detrimental effects of original sin. As Eliot stated in the *Criterion* in 1932, 'we must have a conception of a perfect society attainable on earth… [but] we must also admit the inadequacy of these ambitions and ideals. We must say that man, however he is improved by social and economic reorganisation… he will still be only the *natural* man, at an infinite remove from perfection.'[73] So, too, in the *Idea* he cautioned that the positive theory he had outlined—though Christian—was nevertheless inherently imperfect. 'We have to remember that the Kingdom of Christ on earth will never be realised, and also that it is always being realised; we must remember that whatever reform or revolution we carry out, the result will be a sordid travesty of what human society should be… in such a society as I imagine, as in any that is not petrified, there will be innumerable seeds of decay.'[74]

VI. Continentalism

[71] Ibid, 50.
[72] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941*, 109.
[73] Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion*, 12 (Oct 1932), 73-79.
[74] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', 47.

Despite his focus on a British audience, Eliot was no 'Little Englander'. He continued to regard the nation's fate as intricately linked to the cultural, intellectual, religious, and political trends dominating the continent. So, too, he also persisted in his belief that a national Church was dependent upon and beholden to the rest of (a euro-centric) Christendom in matters of both identity and doctrine. First elaborated in the *Criterion*, Eliot's concept of Christendom (as opposed to the universal church) was often used synonymously with the wider European Christian tradition (and most notably Roman Catholicism), as well as the generative inter-relationship between historic Christianity and its intellectual, cultural, and social heritage. As such, though the foreground of the *Idea* was exclusively British, the background was decidedly European. As Eliot attested, 'if what I say in the following pages has its direct application only in England, it is not because I am thinking of local matters without relation to Christendom as a whole.'[75]

In much the same manner the *Idea's* political concerns are presented within a wider, European context. For just as Eliot had previously promoted the possibility of positive exchange between the continent's intellectual networks—to collectively revitalize the 'Mind of Europe'—so the *Idea* also recognised that the reverse was possible. In fact, he feared that the country's porous cultural boundaries with Europe could just as easily contaminate the mind (indeed, the soul) of Britain. According to Eliot 'the current terms in which we describe our society, the contrasts with other societies by which we – of the "Western Democracies" – eulogize it, only operate to deceive and stupefy us.'[76] In his estimation, 'we conceal from ourselves, moreover, the similarity of our society to those which we execrate: for we should have to admit, if we recognized the similarity, that the

[75] Ibid, 37.
[76] Ibid, 7.

foreigners do better. I suspect that in our loathing of totalitarianism, there is infused a good deal of admiration for its efficiency.'[77] The fact that Britain regarded itself (to quote both Baldwin and Churchill) as a Christian nation defending Christian civilization did not convince Eliot that was necessarily the case, hence his concerns about the 'Germanization' of Britain.

Eliot believed that from Britain's negative liberalism 'itself come philosophies which deny it'.[78] The philosophy he refers to is 'authoritarian democracy,' in which passions and enthusiasms displace principles and dogmas, resulting in the unimpeded expansion of state planning and interference to satisfy the insatiable demands of impressionable masses and economic productivity without due regard for the transcendent importance of moral and spiritual authorities. This echoes many of the concerns that Eliot had previously voiced about liberalism in *The Criterion*, such as his warning that it obscured the foundational moral questions, 'which is *not* [about asking] what comes natural or easy to us, but what is right?'[79] This concern was expanded in the *Idea* to encompass 'a network of institutions from which we cannot disassociate ourselves: institutions the operation of which appears no longer neutral, but non-Christian'.[80]

Eliot regarded such arrangements as pagan and the German nation as its high priest (though he feared the same about Russia). That is why he wrote in the *Idea* about 'the fundamental objection to fascist doctrine, the one which we conceal from ourselves because it might condemn ourselves as well, is that it is pagan.'[81] As noted, Eliot had in fact warned as early as 1931 in the *Criterion* that paganism was spreading in the guise of widespread

[77] Ibid, 7.
[78] Ibid, 14.
[79] Eliot, 'The Function of Criticism', 462.
[80] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', 17.
[81] Ibid, 16.

efforts to create a civilised but secular (or non-Christian) mentality.[82] Regarding this as a new and suicidal dark age, Eliot believed that the Church in both England and Europe was more definitely set against 'the world' than at any other time since pagan Rome.[83] The fact that less than ten years later the world was indeed at war not only speaks to Eliot's gloomy prescience but that his views on the matter were not the product of a Moot inspired moment, but the result of more than a decade's worth of observation, analysis, and development.

It was, therefore, in recognition of Britain and Europe's common plight that he wrote the ultimatum that we must choose between a stunted pagan culture and an imperfect religious one.[84] In attempting to save Britain from such a culture, Eliot hoped that after the war Europe may likewise be saved. That is why in 1946 when addressing a vanquished German audience, he solemnised that 'For the health of the culture of Europe… different cultures should recognize their relationship to each other, so that each should be susceptible of influences from the others. And this is possible because there is a common element in European culture, an interrelated history of thought and feeling and behaviour, an interchange of arts and of ideas.'[85] In this respect, though Eliot's original ambitions for the *Criterion* were necessarily narrowed because of the war, the *Idea* (as a post-script to the magazine) still maintained hope that so long as Britain could resist the germanising influences made possible by its common life with Europe, Britain could nevertheless help bring about a revitalised 'Mind of Europe' in the aftermath of the war. 'My last appeal is to the men of letters of Europe,' Eliot said in his address, in a tone reminiscent of both the *Criterion* and the *Idea*, 'who have a special obligation for the preservation and transmission

[82] Eliot, 'Thoughts After Lambeth', 241.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', 14.
[85] T.S. Eliot, 'The Unity of European Culture,' in *Christianity and Culture* (Orlando: Harcourt Inc, 1976), 197.

of our common culture… In a world which has seen such spiritual devastation as ours, our spiritual [heritage] is still also in imminent peril.'[86] In short, the continental-cum-catholic line in his social criticism remained unbroken from the *Criterion* to the *Idea* and thereafter, as we shall see, in his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture.*

VII. Audiences

The conservative, Catholic, classicist, and continental criticisms that continued from the *Criterion* to the *Idea* fit, as mentioned, within the wider circles of public and intellectual discourse during the late 1930s and 40s. It is in this respect that we see most clearly why Eliot was not, as Ackroyd suggested, 'a lonely prophet' in the 'wilderness', communing only with small, closed groups like The Moot, but rather he was a prominent interlocutor in an established and mainstream conversation. Despite being dismissed as idiosyncratic, isolated, and unsuccessful by critics such as Ackroyd, Chace, Rees, Ricks, and Edwards, the *Idea* was in fact a popular success, running to three imprints in as many months.[87] The reason for its success was due both to its relevance and to having a ready audience. As Steve Ellis wrote, 'The subjects Eliot considers—such as the validity of democracy, education provision, the rural-urban relationship, German paganism and the spiritual revival itself—were at the heart of national debate.'[88]

Nor was it uncommon to hear other prominent figures discussing religion in conjunction with economics, politics, and national identity—people such as Arnold J. Toynbee, R.H. Tawney, and A.D. Lindsay did as much. And though Eliot disapproved, the popularity of the Moral Re-Armament Movement, which stressed (among other things) individual and

[86] Ibid, 202.
[87] Kojecký, R. *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, 126.
[88] S. Ellis, *British Writers and the Approach of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 20.

national repentance as part of contributing to the war effort against Germany, was evident in the sheer number of world broadcasts and pamphlets they produced, as well as MRA's book (compiled by H.W. 'Bunny' Austin, Britain's leading tennis champion), which sold over 250,000 copies in the UK.[89] The movement's popularity was especially visible at sports matches, such as when George Eyston, the racing motorist, spoke at half time to a stadium during an Arsenal v Chelsea match.[90] As such, Eliot and others like him were speaking to a rather packed house.

The *Idea's* relevance is further contextualised by the fact that, as Grimley observed, Christianity 'was integral to national identity,' at the time, with 'Anglicanism providing a theoretical underpinning for English civil religion… offering a providentialist account of national history and identity, an organic community, and a religiously sanctioned code of civic obligation.'[91] This was reflected not only in the largely sustained rates for so-called hatches, matches, and dispatches that the Church still performed, but was also represented by a dramatic upsurge in the late 30s and early 40s of Christian imagery and religious language in both political rhetoric and in concepts of national identity.[92] As previously mentioned, this was evidenced in everything from institutionalised religious broadcasting and national days of prayer to prominent uses of religious rhetoric by leading political figures.

'The rhetoric of politics,' as Peter Clarke has noted, 'still had a strong flavour of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer.'[93] Whether it was Snowdon and Lloyd George or Henderson and Lansbury, the varieties of political speech still often mirrored those of

[89] G. Lean, *Frank Buchman: a life* (London: Constable, 1985), 279.
[90] Ibid.
[91] M. Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State between the Wars*, 223, 225.
[92] Spencer, *The Evolution of the West*, 35-36.
[93] P. Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990*, 159.

religious experience and denominational tradition.[94] Eliot was by no means alone in his use of Christian rhetoric, nor was he the only one to talk about the idea of the nation as Christian. This was emphatically the case with Stanley Baldwin, the popular three-time Prime Minister from the period. Baldwin spoke of England as a Christian nation in much the same way that Eliot spoke of it as a Christian society. 'Christian England,'[95] Baldwin declared, 'is a Christian state [that] proclaims... the brotherhood of man, which implies the Fatherhood of God.'[96] 'That was the message,' he told audiences, 'that I have tried to deliver as Prime Minister in a hundred speeches.'[97] Similarly, Lord Halifax, as both Leader of the House of Lords and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, spoke publicly on England as a Christian nation.[98] Granted, for both politicians such talk was a matter of calculation as well as conviction, but that only further demonstrates that Eliot's focus was in keeping with broader conservative rhetoric, and that such rhetoric—which had a rather winning electoral record—appealed to a widespread religious dimension of national identity. As Keith Robbins has attested, this period witnessed, 'a widespread willingness' amongst the public to define the nation's collective identity as that of a Christian civilization.[99] Thus it was neither anachronistic nor irrelevant that Eliot's social criticism was concerned with the interrelationships between church, state, society, and culture—not when it was a common intellectual practice, a popular national subject, and a commonplace aspect of conservative rhetoric.

NOTES TOWARDS THE DEFINITION OF CULTURE*

[94] Ibid, 160.
[95] A. Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1990*, 247.
[96] S. Baldwin, *Service of our Lives* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1937), 165-167.
[97] Ibid.
[98] P. Williamson, 'Christian Conservatives and the Totalitarian Challenge 1933-40', *English Historical Review*, 115 (200), 623-24.
[99] Robbins, 'Britain, 1940 and 'Christian Civilization'. 299.

* Content from this section draws on work from my unpublished MPhil thesis on T.S. Eliot and The Moot.

When Eliot published the *Idea* in 1939, he was already a leading literary figure in the United Kingdom. When *Notes* was published in 1948, Eliot was perhaps the greatest literary luminary of his time, having received in 1947 both the Order of Merit and the Nobel Prize in Literature. In the words of Barry Spurr, '*Notes*… is the work of an internationally-acknowledged sage, addressed to the cultural environment of the post-war world and in the context of what Eliot now directly calls Britain's "apostasy" from the Christian religion—the very term used by John Keble in the Oxford assize sermon on "national apostasy" which launched the Anglo-Catholic movement in the Church of England in 1833.'[100] The national apostasy that Spurr referenced was Eliot's concern that the trends he observed in pre-war Britain—namely the growing size and purview of public institutions coupled with a diminishing awareness of the religious dimensions of life—had done nothing except intensify in the interim.

This concern was exacerbated in the post-war expansion of the welfare state, since it seemed to Eliot as though culture was increasingly regarded as a national resource and commodity to be managed and disseminated by government departments, resulting in cultural distortion and disruption.[101] This concern was previously stated in Eliot's *Criterion* criticism, where he wrote against government proposals for the funding of a National Theatre. As always, his conservativism feared that such measures were in danger of unleashing unintended and harmful consequences. These consequences included state co-option of art for propaganda purposes and economic interests dictating artistic license. Nor were his concerns overstated, having witnessed the co-option of arts and culture in Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, while also witnessing the early signs of cultural conflict

[100] Spurr, '*Anglo-Catholic in Religion' T.S. Eliot and Christianity*, 193.
[101] T.S. Eliot, 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture,' 83-92.

in the emerging cold war. Indeed, Eliot was prescient in his awareness of global trends. Writing to George Every in September 1939, he correctly predicted that 'We might end as minor participants in a struggle between America and Russia: and what may become of anything we think worth fighting for then?'[102]

Notes, in its broadest outline, attempted to define the term 'culture' and chart its relation to related subjects like education and religion, so that the diverse phenomenon responsible for creating and transmitting real culture would not be undermined by modern attempts to artificially develop, manage, and disseminate culture.[103] Eliot defined culture—not in terms of manners or art—but as 'a whole way of life', and in a cumulative sense, those things that 'make life worth living'.[104] This definition was broad but intentional. Eliot famously included in his definition everything from the Henley Regatta and dog races to boiled cabbage and the music of Elgar. [105] This was because he wanted to demonstrate—contra Mannheim—that culture existed in a composite form across different classes and regions, which was too complex to be entirely comprehendible, too localised to be easily reproducible, and too organic to be embodied and transmitted by a group (or new class) of elites across subsequent generations, rather than through family, community, church, region, class, and school. To systematically interfere in this process, such as he believed would happen if a class of bureaucratic elites were authorized to devise and disseminate new cultural values, would damage both the content of culture and its intergenerational transmission.

[102] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941*, 279.
[103] Ibid, Preface.
[104] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941*, 100.
[105] Ibid, 104.

As important as institutions such as the family and community were for transmitting culture in a self-perpetuating manner, Eliot regarded religion as fundamental for its development. 'Culture,' he wrote, was 'the incarnation… of the religion of a people'.[106] Furthermore, Eliot stressed that this part of his definition denoted more than a mere relation between culture and religion, but also less than identifying them as the same. To Eliot, there was a primal, almost mystical association between the two, which itself was shrouded in sub-conscious connections for most people.[107] In essence, culture was the manifestation of religious instincts, however quotidian and unconscious, about what was enjoyable and made life worth living. The fact that such religious instincts could extend over time to practices as unrelated to official religion as Derby Day and dog tracks, was, Eliot said, 'embarrassing'.[108] Indeed, he was aware that his definition was so vague and mysterious as to not be entirely understandable.[109] But he did hope that it was not unusable. In fact, he hoped his definition would be used as a tool for measuring the actual state of cultural progress (or decline) in Britain and identify the conditions which needed to be maintained (or protected) for culture to potentially flourish.[110]

In a similar way, Eliot hoped his definition of culture would prove the impracticality of artificially generating culture and bureaucratically managing it for the purposes of mass social engineering. Not only was culture too complex to be fully comprehended, but it was also too religious to be governed. For Eliot, like Dawson (and unlike Mannheim), the religious dimension of culture was ultimately under the providence of God, not the purview of the state. Indeed, *Notes* was deeply informed by Eliot's suspicion of any attempt by the government to encroach upon traditionally religious domains. That is why Eliot

[106] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941*, 101.
[107] Ibid, 142.
[108] Ibid, 105.
[109] Ibid 103.
[110] Ibid, 89.

denounced as Erastian the 1944 Education Act's provisions for religious instruction in state schools, because he thought religious persons should do religious teaching, whereas the state could more easily manipulate religious instruction to non-religious ends.[111] This concern was previously stated in the *Idea* in relation to patriotism (see Moral Re-Armament) and in the *Criterion*'s criticisms of totalitarian usurpations of religious enthusiasm for ideological solidarity. To clarify, however, Eliot was not against having an established church. There were a variety of historical, social, and theological reasons for this, not least because its absence would have signalled for Eliot the ultimate symbolic rejection of spiritual reality even in domains of secular authority (which, again, was discussed previously in the *Idea* and in the *Criterion*).

In Eliot's mind, the abuse of religion was just as detrimental as its rejection. The primary message of *Notes* therefore (indeed, his entire social criticism) is essentially that both state and society—due to the imperfectability of human nature and human institutions—must rely on the theological guidance of Christianity (even as expressed indirectly through culture) to be properly oriented towards human flourishing and to remain within the proper limits of their temporal authority. So, too, Christianity, and by extension the Church itself, though similarly imperfect, must not be held captive to the state in so far as it belongs to God—a God that Eliot believed was active and powerful in its providential interaction with the world. In this respect, though Eliot was keen to delineate the connection between the vitality of religion and the production of culture, he was just as concerned that the state's growing interest in culture could translate into an unhealthy interest in religion (for the sake of culture), which was unpalatable to Eliot's anti-Erastianism.

[111] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941*, 174-179.

It should be noted that Eliot was as fearful for the disintegration of culture as he was about the misappropriation of religion for secular purposes. In fact, Eliot was highly pessimistic about the fate of both British culture and western civilization. This was partly because of the atomization of artistic, intellectual, religious, commercial, and political elites, which he thought resulted in their estrangement not only from each other, but also from the wider networks of class, region, and culture.[112] One remedy, he suggested, was to have elites engage in real, interdisciplinary, cross-sector friendships, meeting whenever possible in large group settings, thereby allowing the variety and complexity of backgrounds and expertise to be shared. Most scholars attribute this appeal to the influence of The Moot, but as we shall see in a later section, Eliot was in fact a member of other groups more accurately reflecting this description.

Even so, Eliot's concerns about culture required more than just group meetings. He feared that much of the damage had already been done by the protracted periods of cultural and democratic destabilisation, first appearing after World War One, but returning with renewed force in the 1930s and World War Two, which he felt had ushered in another era of civilizational disintegration.[113] For that reason, *Notes* has a pronounced pessimism about the likelihood of a new dark age, which in turn demanded an attitude of cultural defense, since Eliot desired to bequeath the last vestiges of culture to future generations. He sought to do so before the present had robbed posterity of its past. [114] That is to say, its wisdom, its heritage, its culture, its religion.

Eliot also held that the difference between classes, regions, denominations, and interests was what was responsible for the creation of cultural content. He called this 'friction' and

[112] Ibid, 98.
[113] Ackroyd. *T.S. Eliot, A Life*, 247.
[114] Eliot, 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture' 185.

likened it to natural friction: for just as heat is created by rubbing objects together, so culture is created by the interaction of disparate social elements.[115] To accomplish this Eliot maintained that each social element strikes a balance between distinctiveness and semi-autonomy on the one hand and participating in and identifying with the whole on the other. 'As in the relation between the social classes and… regions of a country to each other and to the central power,' Eliot wrote, 'a constant struggle between the centripetal and the centrifugal forces is desirable. For without the struggle no balance can be maintained; and if either force won the result would be deplorable.'[116] In a manner similar to other Anglo-Catholics such as V.A. Demant (1893-1983) and Philip Mairet (1886-1975), Eliot used Catholic imagery to help explain his argument by stressing that Christendom should be one in its aspiration for catholicity of doctrine, but divided insofar as doing so required each sect to draw upon its unique history, geography, and culture.[117] 'Christendom should be one,' Eliot stated, 'but within that unity there should be an endless conflict between ideas—for it is only by the struggle against constantly appearing false ideas that the truth is enlarged and… orthodoxy is developed to meet the needs of the times.'[118] In this sense, what was true of religion was true of culture, at least as Eliot's *Notes* defined it.

In much the same way the *Notes*, as Collini observed, also championed a number of older, conservative ideas about the importance of regionalism, rural life, classes, elitist education, and the sanctity and autonomy of the family.[119] This was in large measure because Eliot feared that the kind of society in vogue with planners—classless, urbanized, egalitarian, offering equal education for all—would result in oppressive uniformity, uncultured social

[115] Ibid, 132.
[116] Ibid, 156.
[117] Ibid, 157.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Collini, 'The European Modernist as Anglican Moralist: The Later Social Criticism of T.S. Eliot,' 228.

engineering, and a new form of totalitarian control. That did not mean that by protecting these old institutions a better form of culture could be guaranteed, but Eliot did believe that worse forms of culture would be guaranteed if these were modified to the point of destruction. To that end Eliot recommended social programmes, legislation, and cultural funding be on a selective basis, as opposed to a planned systematic programme.[120] In true conservative and Catholic fashion he cautioned not to do too much, too quickly, 'for we have no notion of what a new civilization would be like… so we are not justified in concluding… that the "new civilization" is itself desirable.'[121] It was better, therefore, to protect what promoted culture by encouraging these various institutions to flourish authentically, than to mistakenly attempt creating a whole new culture.[122] Likewise, by extension, his cultural argument became a religious one, because Eliot believed that one should be a Christian because Christianity was true, and not because, as he warned, 'If Christianity goes, the whole of our culture goes.'[123] After all, by his definition, neither culture nor religion were made by trying to make them; they came about as living responses to those things that made life worth living. That, in short, was one of the central messages in Eliot's *Notes*; nor was it far removed from his vision in *The Idea of a Christian Society* and his long-running criticism from the *Criterion*.

CONTINUITY AND CONTINUATION

As before with the *Idea*, the continuities between Eliot's *Criterion* and *Notes* are causal in nature, rather than correlative, as his earlier criticism provided the basis for his later work. So, too, as previously mentioned, this is a unique argument as most scholars cite The Moot

[120] Eliot, 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture' 92.
[121] Ibid, 90.
[122] Ibid, 91.
[123] Ibid, 200.

discussion group as both the genesis and incubator for Eliot's two 'mature' works of social criticism, neglecting in the process the primary place that his *Criterion* criticism has within his career as a critic and the long lasting, generative nature of his earlier work on his later. These ascriptions range from the vague and unsubstantiated, such as J.C. Wood's assertion that '*The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes towards the Definition Culture* were influenced by Oldham's circle [in The Moot],'[124] to the misleading and inaccurate, such as Peter Ackroyd's statement that at The Moot 'he began to formulate the ideas which he was to express in *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*'.[125]

While claims of this kind—along with a substantial treatment of Eliot and The Moot—will be addressed and deconstructed in the final sections of this chapter, the following section highlights once again the continuity between Eliot's earlier and later criticism. This will demonstrate as before that the core components of his later criticism were largely derivative in nature, having originated from the *Criterion* era of his criticism, as opposed to primarily being the product of The Moot's influence. The upshot (as so many scholars have missed) is that both Eliot's career as a social critic and the content of his social criticism do not belong either on the periphery of his work or on the side-lines of mid-twentieth century British intellectual history. For neither the record of his *Criterion* criticism nor the genesis of his later works (to say nothing of their popular interest) merit the obscurity and obsolescence ascribed to them by scholars and historians such as Ackroyd, Chace, Rees, Ricks, and Edwards.

Much like the *Idea*, the four pillars of Eliot's *Criterion* criticism remerge as central themes in the *Notes*. Both his classicism, Catholicism, conservatism, and continentalism are

[124] J.C. Wood, *This is Your Hour: Christian Intellectuals in Britain and the Crisis of Europe, 1938-49*, 36.
[125] Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot, A Life*, 243.

prominently featured, along with other topics and themes that originate from the *Criterion*. The argument that these four themes comprise the essence of Eliot's social criticism across the entire span of his career as a social critic is unique, as the only other arguments made on this scale are Kojecký's claims about his conservatism and to a lesser extent Spurr's Anglo-Catholic stylisation of his criticism.

I. Classicism

The *Notes* continues the *Criterion's* classicist interest in developing precise definitions for contested concepts and vocabulary. Nowhere was this more apparent than in Eliot's *Criterion* criticisms of Freud's conception of culture. According to Eliot, Freud defined culture as 'all those respects' in which 'human life differs from animal or brutish life', and that 'knowledge and power' were required to 'win resources from nature for the satisfaction of human needs'.[126] Eliot, by contrast, reasoned that 'what we want to know is precisely what are human needs, before we can know much about culture.'[127] According to him, Freud's definition implies that human culture becomes manifest (or is derived through) political and economic organisation, 'which does not get us very far; and if that is all there is to culture and civilization, culture and civilization do not amount to much.'[128] Indeed, this criticism became a central component of his argument about culture in *Notes*, namely that culture could not be mandated by political or economic means without severe disruption to both social fabric and cultural vitality, since culture itself was the accumulative and organic by-product of ungovernable socio-religious interactions.

[126] Eliot, 'Freud's Illusions: A Review of *The Future of an Illusion*, by Sigmund Freud', 350.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid, 351.

In a similar manner, Eliot criticised Freud's conception of culture by noting that when natural man is understood as anti-social by nature and that culture must be defended against the individual, 'it leads [Freud] to the view that culture and civilization are always "imposed" upon the many by the few'.[129] This imposition was precisely the danger that Eliot sought to protect against and though the *Notes* was primarily concerned with 'the few' represented by Mannheim's planning elites, the origins of this concern obviously predated his interactions with Mannheim by some margin. Culture, as Eliot was already arguing in 1928, was not to be imposed on the many by the few but protected from the few by the many. For the few who felt their quasi-scientific theories entitled them to disrupt the vital and organic forces that enabled human culture to flourish were the very forces that culture had to be protected from. This does not mean Eliot was against elite individuals and groups enacting cultural leadership, as typified by traditional 'men of letters' and 'public moralists', but it was to be done in conjunction with the dynamics of culture and religion left intact. It was not to be co-opted and reengineered through the scientific hubris of technocratic planning and bureaucratic management—and certainly not via Freudian psychoanalysts.

Just as there are parallels and developments from the *Criterion* to *Notes* regarding Eliot's classicist approach to culture, so too there are certain affinities between his earlier attempts to define tradition and his later definition of culture. This is first visible in his 1919 essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' where he outlines tradition as a shared sense of historical continuity, organically informing and nurturing contemporary creativity and intellectual vitality. While this foreshadows his concept of culture in *Notes*, which maintains that culture is a historical process of inadvertent development and the by-product of social and religious forces authentically interacting without undue oversight

[129] Ibid, 352.

and predetermination, the most demonstratable similarities between his earlier concept of tradition and his later definition of culture comes from his 1934 lectures *After Strange Gods*. There he wrote that, 'What I mean by tradition involves all those habitual actions, habits and customs, from the most significant religious rite to our conventional way of greeting a stranger, which represent the blood kinship of "the same people living in the same place."'[130] This definition is almost identical in scope and scale to Eliot's definition of culture in *Notes*, which is 'that which makes life worth living… which includes all the characteristic activities and interests of a people: [ranging from] Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, nineteenth century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar.'[131] Likewise, both definitions are premised on the belief that neither tradition nor culture are entirely conscious endeavours, but instead are (and must remain) at least partially the consequence of unconscious and spontaneous interactions.[132] The major difference between them is merely that his concept of tradition represents a living historical record of past culture(s), while culture is the living expression of past tradition(s). They are, in short, both intertwined and interdependent, and they represent a shared genesis and chronology which dates back much earlier than The Moot.

In addition to Eliot's continuing interest with the definition of culture, his *Criterion* concerns about the existence and continuation of intellectual and cultural standards are further elaborated on in the *Notes*. 'The most important question that we can ask,' he wrote in *Notes*, 'is whether there is any permanent standard' for the judgement and comparison of culture and civilisation.[133] Where before in the *Criterion* Eliot had written against

[130] Eliot, *After Strange Gods*, 17.
[131] Eliot, 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture' 104.
[132] Eliot, *After Strange Gods*, 30.
[133] Eliot, 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture' 91.

romanticism and liberalism's solipsistic individualism—using 'man as the measure of all things' and 'doing as one likes', failing to recognise the role of external standards and necessary institutions—the *Notes* transposed and projected the faults of individual literary approaches to national programmes and wider planning trends. In essence, his argument is that just as the individual must recognise that literature is both enriched by and beholden to an organic classical tradition—which is of vital importance given the influence of literature on social mores—so the state and society must recognise that culture is the outworking of an ongoing, organic relationship with religion and cannot therefore be reproduced or reengineered by whim nor without regard for the social destruction that would ensue from its appropriation. To that end Eliot still maintained the importance of a classical education (in addition to theological instruction), writing:

> It is always desirable that a part of the education of those persons who are either born into, or qualified by their abilities to enter, the superior political grades of society, should be… the study of Greek history and Greek political theory, as… it has to do with a small area, with men rather than masses, and with the human passions of individuals rather than with those vast impersonal forces which in our modern society are a necessary convenience of thought, and the study of which tends to obscure the study of human beings.[134]

In a similar manner, just as the highwater mark of Eliot's classicism in the *Criterion* was in 1927 and was thereafter increasingly subsumed (but not abandoned) into his Catholic regard for tradition, doctrine, and dogma, so the *Notes* is also premised on the indispensable and generative classical patrimony of Greece and Rome, but again subsumed under the banner of Christendom: thereby recognising their primacy within the religio-cultural fusion of European tradition, whilst placing additional emphasis on the Catholicism required to sustain both British culture and European civilisation. As Eliot wrote, 'Every sub-culture is dependent upon that from which it is an offshoot. The life of Protestantism depends upon the survival of that against which it protests; and just as the culture of

[134] Ibid, 163.

Protestant dissent would perish of inanition without the persistence of Anglican-culture, so the maintenance of English culture is contingent upon the health of the culture of Latin Europe, and upon continuing to draw sustenance from the Latin culture.'[135]

II. Continentalism

The *Notes'* insistence that British cultural vitality is contingent upon maintaining a relationship with European culture and that European culture should itself remain connected to its own cultural heritage (as expressed in the book's appended address, 'The Unity of European Culture') is the most prominent and explicit invocation of his *Criterion* era continentalism. The fact that such convictions not only continued through the Second World War but intensified is evidence not merely of their importance to his social criticism but also should dispel any associations that Eliot's legacy sometimes has with 'Little England'. As he wrote in the *Notes*, 'while some refuse to admit that any foreign influence can be bad, others assume complacently that English culture could flourish in complete isolation from the Continent… [but this would] be a calamity.'[136]

On the other hand, while Eliot was keen that Britain understand its shared cultural heritage and existence with Europe, he was adamant that they should not take too great an interest in their own culture. Indeed, Eliot believed that too much 'culture-consciousness' was precisely the malady that had afflicted Europe in the 1930s. As he wrote, 'the differences between the several European nations in the past were not wide enough to make their peoples see their cultures as different to the point of conflict and incompatibility: culture-consciousness as a means of uniting a nation against other nations as first exploited

[135] Ibid, 149.
[136] Ibid, 131.

by the late rulers of Germany. Today we have become culture-conscious in a way which nourished Nazism, communism, and nationalism all at once; in a way which emphasises separation without helping us to overcome it.'[137] Instead, Eliot argued that in order for the west to revive itself after the war, it must come to terms with its Christian and specifically Catholic past—an argument reminiscent from his *Criterion* criticism.

III. Catholicism

Employing a highly catholicised interpretation of both a past and present Christendom, Eliot stated that 'when we consider the Western World, we must recognise that the main cultural tradition has been that corresponding to the Church of Rome. Only within the last four hundred years has any other manifested itself and anyone with a sense of centre and periphery must admit that the western tradition has been Latin, and Latin means Rome.'[138] This view was based on both principle and utility. For it was a matter of principle (first outlined in the *Criterion*) that theology (and in turn ethics) must form the basis for all enlightened endeavours, which Eliot alludes to in his complaint that 'modern political thought, inextricably involved with economics and with sociology, pre-empts to itself the position of queen of the sciences'.[139]

According to Eliot, theology was at its best when properly informed by Catholic tradition. As he wrote in the *Criterion*, 'You cannot arrive at a Christian social philosophy, any more than you can arrive at a communist one, merely by looking into your heart and writing. You need a knowledge of the whole history of Christianity up to the Reformation, and in

[137] Ibid, 165.
[138] Ibid, 148.
[139] Ibid, 164.

particular some acquaintance, for instance, with the views of Aquinas.'[140] Eliot likewise regarded the very state of theology in a country as indicative of that country's cultural vitality. As he wrote in the *Notes*, 'the refinement or crudity of theological and philosophical thinking is itself, of course, one of the measures of the state of our culture.'[141] But that did not mean that Protestant cultures could suffice on Protestant theology alone, as Eliot's theories about friction and periphery meant that Protestantism depended on the very thing it protested against.[142] In short, the Catholicism that marked Eliot's *Criterion* criticism was no less pronounced in the *Notes*, which is significant given that The Moot was essentially Protestant in nature: suggesting not merely a continuation in Eliot's social criticism from one period to another, but a recapitulation of his earlier views in conscious contradistinction to The Moot. Indeed, Eliot wrote to John Hayward about the *Notes* being 'full of cracks at Mannheim,'[143] and to Mary Trevelyan, a fellow Anglo-Catholic, that 'my wee book' (i.e., *Notes*) 'is to blow up The Moot'.[144]

Personal and principled vendettas aside, Eliot's *Notes* also placed great store by a catholocentric Christendom on account of its capacity to unite European culture and perhaps even the world. This is partly based on his notion that excessive culture-consciousness results in antagonistic geopolitical relations and that culture by itself cannot sustain international harmony without recourse to deeper bonds of unity. As he wrote in the *Notes*, 'without a common faith, all efforts towards drawing nations closer together in culture can produce only an illusion of unity.'[145] Added to this, Eliot believed that a universal religion 'is at least potentially higher than one which any race or nation claims

[140] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 13 (Jan 1934), 270-78.
[141] Eliot, 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture', 154.
[142] Ibid, 149.
[143] T. S. Eliot, 'Letter to John Hayward,' dated 13th March 1945, HB/L/12/1/24/F397.
[144] T. S. Eliot, 'Letter to Mary Trevelyan,' dated 29th January 1945, HLE/bMS AM/1691.2/45.
[145] Eliot, 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture', 157.

exclusively for itself, and a culture realising a religion also realised in other cultures is at least potentially a higher culture than one which has a religion exclusively to itself.'[146] None of these arguments are new however, as Eliot's *Criterion* criticism was already a seedbed for these later germinations. This is particularly true with respect to the role that religion and theology played within society, governance, and culture more broadly, as well as its emphasis on the 'idea' and 'mind of Europe' being rooted in the Catholic tradition and the framework of Christendom.

IV. Conservatism

The last of the four central tenets from Eliot's *Criterion* criticism reemployed in the *Notes* was his conservatism. As should be obvious by now, Eliot's organic approach to cultural development—along with a caution-laden scepticism about institutional reform and social progress—had a strong Burkean strain (along with other influences previously noted), which first became apparent in the *Criterion*. This continued into the *Notes* most notably in Eliot's views on the family as a central and sacrosanct organ of cultural formation and he described it as such with a typically Burkean formulation, 'when I speak of the family, I have in mind a bond which embraces a longer period of time than this: a piety towards the dead, however obscure, and a solicitude for the unborn, however remote.'[147] This was coupled with a respect for the traditional role of public schools, cultural aristocracy, and religious establishments in the organic development, dissemination, and preservation of cultural norms. This was in part because he doubted that education alone (as outlined and planned in the 1944 Education Act) could be engineered to transmit culture via egalitarian methods and because he believed that culture was produced from diverse frictions (i.e.,

[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid, 116.

classes, regions, denominations, etc.) which would inevitably be eradicated through planning and levelling. The fact that many Conservative MPs voted for the 1944 Act does not diminish the conservative nature of Eliot's argument, as the conservation of traditional social structures and institutional privileges is consistent with traditional (especially 19th century) tory notions of cultural leadership and establishment prerogatives.

As Eliot had pointed out in the *Criterion*, he regarded education and instruction as two different things.[148] Instructional education (such as vocational and technical training) along with teaching in reading, writing, and arithmetic ought to be universally offered. An 'elite education' on the other hand, ought not to be universal in nature as it was important for cultural friction and social structures to have a unique cadre of people educated in a particular tradition and set of values that pre-disposed them to aristocratic-like ideals of public service and intellectual leadership. The idea that such an education not only ought to be available to everyone, but that culture itself could be mandated by the state, enshrined in the curriculum, and transmitted through teaching (without due respect for institutions like class, family, and church) was both ill-advised and impossible to accomplish. Education, as Eliot wrote in both his earlier and later criticism, ought to be primarily concerned with 'acquiring wisdom… the acquisition of knowledge… and a respect for learning'.[149] That is why he defended education against democratic appropriation by Harold Laski in the *Criterion* and against the popular philosopher and *Brains Trust* panellist, Dr. Joad, in the *Notes*—even if, as he wrote in the latter, that 'I am not denying that a democracy is the best form of society.'[150] Instead, Eliot wanted to preclude the danger of unintended usurpations, arguing that whatever the merits of Joad's many progressive ideas[151], 'by

[148] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in in *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, 11 (Oct 1931), 65-72.
[149] Eliot, 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture', 175.
[150] Ibid.
[151] J. Tomes, "Joad, Cyril Edwin Mitchinson (1891–1953), philosopher." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004.

introducing [their inculcation] as [the] standard for education, Dr. Joad, with other writers, is leaving it open to those who believe in some other form of society which Dr. Joad might not like.'[152]

In a similar manner Eliot argued on traditional tory grounds that education needed to be safeguarded from excessive state intervention and social engineering. Just as he had commented with alarm in the *Criterion* that the traditional role of Oxford and Cambridge were being reengineered through large private donations and their influence diminished in the Commons, so he wrote with similar distress about the changing nature of education in the *Notes*. '[What] concerns me at the moment is the question whether, by education alone, we can ensure the transmission of culture in a society in which some educationists appear indifferent to class distinctions, and from which some other educationists appear to want to remove class distinctions altogether.'[153] Without such distinctions Eliot feared mass-society would become both leaderless and increasingly susceptible to the totalitarian impulses of centralised planning and political manipulation. Indeed, this worry was coupled with suspicions that modern technocratic and bureaucratic approaches to education were simultaneously reductionistic and over ambitious. 'There is, in any case,' he wrote, 'a danger of interpreting "education" to cover both too much and too little: too little, when it implies that education is limited to what can be taught; too much, when it implies that everything worth preserving can be transmitted by teaching.'[154] But as before with Eliot's conservative *Criterion* criticism, he was not outright anti-statist.

In this matter we can again see Burke's influence on Eliot with respect to his theory of elites. As Collini has rightly observed, Eliot's own 'fear [of what] one might call the

[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid, 120.
[154] Ibid.

fundamentally Jacobin tendency of the elites,' namely the tendency to reduce all forms of regional and communal variety into a planned and centralised uniformity, was rooted in Burke's own understanding 'that a society governed by an elite who had nothing in common other than their ability and determination to rise to the top would be a society in which no institution or practice would be safe from a levelling rationalism.'[155] Indeed, it was Eliot's undying concern—in a manner almost parallel to Mannheim's 'planning for freedom'—that there must be built into every plan a sense of the un-plannable, mysterious, varied, and ungovernable. This intuition was firmly in keeping with Burke's belief that society was too complex and human nature too imperfect for one generation or group of elites to perfectly plan and manage with a-priori philosophies, which meant that tradition and wisdom were necessary resources for effectively governing society. For that reason, Burke wrote, in a manner later echoed by Eliot when he concluded the *Notes* warning about the pulling down of ancient social edifices, 'it is with infinite caution that any man ought to venture on pulling down an edifice, which has answered in any tolerable degree for ages the common purposes of society.'[156]

V. State Involvement

Eliot had written in the *Criterion* that the state had a responsibility to provide universal access to basic education and advanced instruction, along with a broader recognition that 'there are of course many more matters in the modern world than ever before, in which a central government must exercise its authority over the whole country: a parish cannot be allowed to neglect its sanitation, or its insect pests, or its control of its part of a river, because that would cause injury to its neighbours.'[157] Likewise, Eliot admitted in the *Notes*

[155] Collini, 'The European Modernist as Anglican Moralist: The Later Social Criticism of T.S. Eliot', 225.
[156] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 58.
[157] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*, 8 (Apr 1929), 377-81.

that some state assistance was required in education and culture more broadly, especially in the wake of the Second World War:

> As for the intervention of the State, or of some quasi-official body subventioned by the State, in assistance of the arts and sciences, we can see only too well the need, under present conditions, for such support. A body like the British Council, by constantly sending representatives of the arts and sciences abroad, and inviting foreign representatives to this country, is in our time invaluable—but we must not come to accept as permanent or normal and healthy the conditions which make such direction necessary.[158]

Nevertheless, Eliot's preference for devolution and subsidiarity continued into the *Notes*. Even in matters where he accepted state support he still advised that 'some safeguard [must] be provided, against increasing centralisation of control and politicisation of the arts and sciences, by encouraging local initiative and responsibility; and, as far as possible, separating the central source of funds from control over their use.'[159] This echoed his concerns in the *Criterion* about the dangerous influences and unintended consequences of state funding for a national theatre, given the possible scope for political propagandization and the subversion of artistic licence. Nor did Eliot approve of 'culture' as a political concept or departmental entity, arguing in a devolutionary manner that 'we should do well also to refer to the subsidized and artificially stimulated activities each by its name: let us do what is necessary for painting and sculpture, or architecture, or the theatre, or music, or one or another science or department of intellectual exercise, speaking of each by its name, and restraining ourselves from using the word "culture" as a comprehensive term.'[160]

VI. Mass Participation and Elite Leadership

[158] Eliot, 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture', 169.
[159] Ibid, 170.
[160] Ibid, 170.

In both the *Criterion* and *Notes* Eliot cautioned against unnecessary mass participation in national politics, noting that local political participation was more important for regional vitality and because it was impossible for the public to be sufficiently informed on complex political issues to make a positive impact (though they were more than capable of having a negative influence). This was first mooted in the *Criterion* wherein Eliot observed that 'we are led to believe that a Parliamentary election is the most important occasion on which we may exercise our Right; whereas it should matter much more to us – and we are much more competent to decide – who should manage our own village than who should manage Parliament.'[161] This was then expanded in *Notes* to encompass a wider notion of devolved political participation and localised subsidiarity:

> In a society [such as I have] articulated the practice of politics and an active interest in public affairs would not be the business of everybody, or of everybody to the same degree; and that not everybody should concern himself, except at moments of crisis, with the conduct of the nation as a whole. In a healthy regional society, public affairs would be the business of everybody, or of the great majority, only within very small social units; and would be the business of a progressively smaller number of men in the larger units within which the smaller were comprehended. In a healthy *stratified* society, public affairs would be a responsibility not equally borne: a greater responsibility would be inherited by those who inherited special advantages, and in whom self-interest, and interest for the sake of their families ('a stake in the country') should cohere with public spirit. The governing elite, of the nation as a whole, would consist of those whose responsibility was inherited with their affluence and position, and whose forces were constantly increased and often led by rising individuals of exceptional talents. But when we speak of a governing elite, we must safeguard ourselves against thinking of an elite sharply divided from the other elites of society.[162]

This passage contains within it an obvious recapitulation of Eliot's *Criterion* concerns about the dangers of mass societies, mass media, and the undermining influence they have upon the traditional ruling class. Indeed, though much has been made about Eliot's views on elites vis-à-vis Mannheim, this passage evokes his pre-existing belief in aristocratic

[161] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary'.
[162] Eliot, 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture', 159.

leadership forms. This previously surfaced in the *Criterion* in the form of a cultural aristocracy embodied in the nomenclature of 'public moralists,' 'men of letters,' 'men of culture,' and 'men of ideas'.[163] In a similar manner, when Eliot writes of the governing elite being supported by 'rising individuals of exceptional talents' it harkens back to his previous praise for his friends who were Christian social philosophers like Jacques Maritain and Reinhold Niebuhr, both of whom 'increased and often led' political and cultural networks engaging in politics and political thought. As such, when Eliot promotes aristocratic ideals in the *Notes*, he is more concerned with cultural functions than mere hereditary rights. As Eliot wrote, 'What I have advanced is not a "defence of aristocracy"—an emphasis upon the importance of one organ of society. Rather it is a plea on behalf of a form of society in which an aristocracy should have a peculiar and essential function, as peculiar and essential as the function of any other part of society.'[164]

The fact that 'men' most often meant male (with notable exceptions made for women such as Virginia Woolf and Dorothy L. Sayers) further exemplifies the conservatism of his traditional and paternalistic notions of canonical figures and authoritative leaders—i.e., elites by another name. Nor were these abstract categories, as can be seen in a letter from 1940 explicitly praising 'inherited respectability' and 'special advantages'. As he wrote to Emily Hale, 'this country seems to have quickened into a healthier condition than at any time in the last twenty years. It is a good deal (don't think I say this snobbishly, but in great earnest) just to have a man at the head of things [Winston Churchill] who comes from a good family - to say nothing of his other remarkable personal qualities.'[165] In a similar manner, when Eliot wrote in *Notes* about the need for elites to avoid atomisation through interdisciplinary fellowship and even cross-sector friendships, the genesis for such

[163] See chapters one and two for more information including references.
[164] Ibid, 121.
[165] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941*, xlvii.

ideas were already well established in both his *Criterion* criticism and his personal life. Indeed, the very mission of the *Criterion* had been to bring together 'the best in new thinking and new writing in its time, from all the countries of Europe that had anything to contribute to the common good,' and 'to establish relations with those literary periodicals abroad.'[166]

VII. Clubs and Networks

Eliot was privately active in groups and clubs that stimulated diverse friendships and social relations between leading elites across various sectors. These included The Burke Club and The Club, both of which were exceptionally conservative in nature. The Burke Club, for instance, of which he was a founding member, was composed of leading parliamentarians, journalists, writers, and intellectuals—all of whom were tory.[167] While The Club, which was founded in the eighteenth century and originally included luminaries such as Dr. Johnson, Charles James Fox, and Edmund Burke, maintained a small membership limited to about three dozen members, most of whom were Conservative peers boasting diverse expertise, for the purposes of uninhibited discussion and intellectual exchange.[168]

A third club which was less tory in nature but unequivocally 'establishment' and embodied interdisciplinary relations was the Literary Society. This is exemplified in a gossipy letter he wrote in 1940 to John Hayward: 'I fell into a chair, quite as usual, between Will Rothenstein and Eric Maclagan; but observed to my disapproval that I was the only person in evening dress, except A. A. Milne - who was wearing a double-breasted dinner jacket, and a bird named Alan Lascelles, who was wearing a soft shirt: and you know how strongly

[166] Donoghue, 'Eliot and The Criterion', 38.
[167] Kojecký, R. *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, 151.
[168] Ibid, 152.

I disapprove of both soft evening shirts and double-breasted jackets in winter - and the lower the temperature, the greater my disapproval.'[169] Sartorial condescension aside, this group emphatically adhered to Eliot's belief that 'elites [should not be] sharply divided from the other elites of society,'[170] as each person mentioned represented elites from alternate fields: Rothenstein an artist, Maclagan the Director of the V&A, A. A. Milne an author, and Lascelles the private secretary to King George V. Indeed, based on Eliot's longstanding associations with such clubs it is difficult to countenance Ackroyd and others' suggestion that The Moot represented 'the closest Eliot would come to that association of the best "minds"… and [that] it was through [them] that he began to formulate the ideas which he was to express in *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*.'[171] Instead, it was in association with such clubs (and groups like Chandos)—that long before The Moot and *Notes*—Eliot found and practiced his notion of elite intercommunion. Indeed, according to Maurice Cowling, it was in such settings that 'Eliot played an important part in the circulation of ideas [surrounding]… Toryism and Christianity.'[172]

VIII. Cultural Pessimism and Unintended Consequences

Eliot's pessimism about cultural decline and his fear of ill-fated reforms were as notable and central in the *Notes* as they were in the *Criterion*. Indeed, the very purpose of the *Notes* was to ward off unsound attempts to repurpose culture and to reform civilisation, both of which were partly couched in cautionary language regarding the inability to predict and predetermine outcomes. Just as Eliot warned in the *Criterion* that 'the measures intended

[169] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941*, 390.
[170] Eliot, 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture', 159.
[171] Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot, A Life*, 243.
[172] Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England*, 106.

to do one thing… may ultimately implement that other thing which they intend to make unnecessary,'[173] so he cautioned in the *Notes* against undue reforming and revolutionary zeal:

> As things are, it is normal for anybody who advocates any social change, or any alteration of our political system, or any expansion of public education, or any development of social service, to claim confidently that it will lead to the improvement and increase of culture. Sometimes culture, or civilisation, is set in the forefront, and we are told that what we need, must have, and shall get, is a 'new civilisation.'…. [Such advocates] are convinced that the particular political and social changes which he desires to bring about, and which he believes to be advantageous for society, will, because they are so radical, result in a new civilisation. That is quite conceivable: what we are not justified in concluding, with regard to his or any other changes in the social framework which anybody advocates, is that the 'new civilisation' is itself desirable. For one thing, we can have no notion of what the new civilisation will be like: so many other causes operate than those we may have in mind, and the results of these and the others, operating together, are so incalculable, that we cannot imagine what it would feel like to live in that new civilisation… All that a concern for civilisation can direct us to do, is to improve such civilisation as we have, for we can imagine no other.[174]

Coupled with this was the conviction that not merely was cultural reformation dangerous and potentially impossible—since a vital and healthy culture was the by-product of organic diversity, religio-cultural interaction, and intellectual striving rather than bureaucratic and technocratic planning—but that understanding the limits of planning was just as necessary as determining the nature of culture itself. 'We cannot directly set about to create or improve culture,' Eliot wrote, 'we can only will the means which are favourable to culture… For one thing to avoid is a *universalized* planning; one thing to ascertain is the limits of the plannable. My enquiry, therefore, has been directed on the meaning of the word *culture*: so that everyone should at least pause to examine what this word means to him… Even this modest aspiration might, if realised, have consequences in the policy and conduct of our "cultural" enterprises.'[175] As with Eliot's anti-Erastianism, he believed that culture, like

[173] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' in *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review,* 17 (Apr 1938), 478-85.
[174] Eliot, 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture', 89-91.
[175] Ibid, 186.

religion, should not (indeed, could not) be co-opted by the state because it functioned and developed in mysterious ways.

Yet Eliot remained unconvinced that such remonstrations would be heeded. In the final pages of the *Notes*, he laments the misappropriation and manipulation of education by state planners. He states that whether or not education can improve culture it can certainly degrade it and that worse, this is already occurring under the auspices of universal education which, amongst other things, is hastening the abandonment of those subjects which do (if in part) actually contribute to the generation and transmission of culture.[176] Eliot ended his attack by warning that such methods were not merely tearing down the ancient edifices of the past, but destroying the very foundations upon which the future has to be built, a future which he foresees as increasingly barbarian, mechanised, and nomadic (culturally speaking, if not literally).[177] But as has been the case throughout the *Notes*, the origins of these concerns trace back to the *Criterion*. It was there that he wrote in 1934 with equivalent anxiety about 'giving some sort of education to everybody'.[178] As he continued, 'education is a training of the mind and of the sensibility, an intellectual and an emotional discipline. In a society in which this discipline is neglected… one may expect any sort of religious, moral, social and political aberration, and eventual decomposition or petrification.'[179] Whether or not one agrees with Eliot's analysis is a matter for debate, but the similarity and continuity between his earlier and later assessments of the issue are difficult to deny—nor, as we shall see, were they necessarily dependent on The Moot for anything more than an occasion for elaboration.

[176] Ibid, 185.
[177] Ibid.
[178] T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' (July 1934).
[179] Ibid.

In sum, *Notes*, like the *Idea*, restates much of Eliot's foundational social criticism from the *Criterion*. They are not the direct product of his participation in The Moot or the outcome of his engagement with Mannheim. Nor do they represent the 'mature' phase of his criticism, as they are in many respects an extension of prior criticism from his influential *Criterion* tenure. Instead, these later works ought to be situated within the context of his ongoing output as a social critic. That, at least, has been a central and unique argument from this chapter thus far. The purpose of the next and last sections is to survey and scrutinise Eliot's associations with The Moot itself, deconstructing in the process the erroneous assumptions made by numerous biographers and scholars identifying The Moot as the primary nexus for Eliot's social criticism—a trend that has unjustly isolated his criticism from the mainstream intellectual milieus of mid-twentieth century Britain and beyond.

ELIOT AND THE MOOT*

The Moot discussion group is little known outside of certain scholarly circles. It was a high-level religious discussion group, primarily Protestant and lay, which met on a semi-regular basis in the late 1930s and 40s to envision—but ultimately not enact—a transformation of British society according to theologically informed ideas and accomplished through the influence and planning of elites. This group, convened by J.H. Oldham (1874-1969), a pioneering ecumenist, missionary scholar, and social ethics commentator, first met in April 1938.[180] Oldham held an additional twenty weekend-long meetings until December 1944, after which sporadic meetings continued to occur, but no archival records exist for them.[181] In addition to Oldham, the indefatigable organiser and

* Content pertaining to Eliot and The Moot draws on work from my unpublished MPhil thesis.
[180] Kojecký. *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, pp. 238-239.
[181] K. Clements, *The Moot Papers: Faith, Freedom and Society 1938-1944* , 31.

indisputable leader of The Moot, the next most enthusiastic and noteworthy member was the Hungarian-born German sociologist, Karl Mannheim (1893-1947). According to Keith Clements, the leading expert on The Moot, participation in the group varied between the innermost-core (Oldham, Mannheim, Alec Vidler, H.A. Hodges, Eric Fenn, and Sir Walter Moberly), regular members such as John Baillie, Eleonora Iredale, and Mary Oldham (each of whom attended at least eleven meetings), and finally about fifteen members who attended five times or fewer, such as John Middleton Murry (1889-1957), Sir Fred Clarke, Walter Oakeshott, and Christopher Dawson (1889-1970).[182]

According to archival evidence, Eliot was considered a regular member and frequently contributed written submissions for meetings. In Matthew Grimley's estimation, 'Eliot was a key member of The Moot… [And] many of his discussions with other Moot members like Karl Mannheim… turned on the question of how an elite might be constituted.'[183] Indeed, because of such conversations, which were often related to the formation of elites and transmission of culture, Eliot's social criticism has become inextricably identified with The Moot. His exchanges with Mannheim, his admiration for Oldham, his written contributions to The Moot, and his statements about it have formed the basis of a recurring scholarly script regarding the *Idea* and the *Notes*. It is no surprise, therefore, that in the most recent scholarly publication about The Moot, J.C. Wood not only includes Eliot in The Moot's 'inner circle' but argues that while the group itself had only a marginal direct impact on mainstream intellectual life, 'the views and publications… of prominent and well-connected members received substantial attention in both Christian and secular contexts.'[184]

[182] K. Clements, *Faith on the Frontier: A Life of J.H. Oldham* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1999), 383.
[183] M., Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State Between the Wars*, 206.
[184] Wood, *This is Your Hour: Christian Intellectuals in Britain and the Crisis of Europe, 1938-49*, 19.

The vast majority of scholars not only identify the origin and formation of Eliot's social criticism with The Moot, they believe that Eliot deeply sympathised and identified with the group.[185] So, too, in a number of such works, like those by Ackroyd, Scott, and Asher, The Moot has been represented as a safe haven for Eliot, whom they have depicted as an otherwise isolated and idiosyncratic intellectual—albeit (as Collini points out) of considerable literary eminence.[186] Ackroyd, as previously noted, described Eliot as living in an intellectual wilderness, estranged from the mainstream of intellectual life.[187] According to Ackroyd, The Moot offered Eliot intellectual sanctuary and spiritual community, so much so, that the group became the seedbed and epicentre for his subsequent works of social criticism.[188] Similarly, Peter Scott has argued that embodied in The Moot, 'Eliot finally found a community… where political ideas could be shared and moderated,' and thanks to those discussions, 'The Moot produced Eliot's two major books of social criticism.'[189] In much the same way, albeit with a more sympathetic reading, scholars such as Cleo Kearns described Eliot as developing his social criticism 'in colloquy' with other 'like-minded intellectuals and scholars… in The Moot'.[190] Furthermore, The Moot has been variably described as a 'catalyst,' 'resource,' 'stimulus,' or a 'model' by scholars no less numerous than Reeves, Clements, Kojecký, Robbins, Collini, and Grimley.[191] In short, numerous scholars regard The Moot as essential to the formation and understanding of Eliot's social criticism.

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[185] J. Kurlberg, 'Resisting Totalitarianism: The Moot and a New Christendom,' in *Religion Compass*, Volume 7, Issue 12, 2013; p.519.
[186] Collini, 'The European Modernist as Anglican Moralist: The Later Social Criticism of T.S. Eliot', 226.
[187] Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot, A Life*, 251.
[188] Ibid, 243.
[189] P. Scott, 'The social critic and his discontents,' pp. 70-71.
[190] C.M. Kearns, 'Religion, literature, and society in the work of T.S. Eliot' in *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot*, ed. David Moody (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 91.
[191] W. Taylor and M. Reeves, 'Intellectuals in Debate: The Moot' in *Christian Thinking and Social Order: Conviction Politics from the 1930s to the Present Day* (London: Cassell, 1999), 42; Clements, *Faith on the Frontier: A Life of J.H. Oldham*, 385; Kojecký. *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, 197.

The problem with such views, as the rest of this chapter will demonstrate, is that they do not accurately reflect the historical participation of Eliot in The Moot. In fact, a more detailed examination of archival materials alongside Eliot's personal correspondence on the matter, in addition to a closer reading of the criticism in question, shows that The Moot was neither as positive nor as significant an influence on the original development of Eliot's work as has been traditionally claimed. Instead, as we have established, Eliot's later social criticism was largely the product of almost twenty years' worth of prior development, reflecting sustained engagement with Catholic, conservative, classicist, and continental themes. It was further developed in conjunction with multiple, interconnected networks and groups during the 1930s and 40s, such as his *Criterion* contributors, the Chandos Group and later *The New English Weekly*. Likewise, to purport otherwise, whether intentionally or inadvertently, perpetuates a perception of Eliot's social criticism as disconnected from the mainstream of intellectual life during late-Interwar and Second World War Britain.

It does this by wrongly designating The Moot as the locus of Eliot's work, which unduly associates it with a small, sequestered group of largely peripheral intellectuals. For as one observer has noted, 'What, at the end of the day, did The Moot actually produce…? [With] respect the answer is, not much.'[192] Likewise, as another commented, 'There is little evidence of anyone claiming to speak on behalf of The Moot attempting to bring systematic pressure to bear on politicians or administrators.'[193] As Wood himself admits, while 'the Moot has received some attention, it has largely been ignored in broader studies of British Christian thought or intellectual culture.'[194] As such, many scholars of The Moot, such as Clements and Wood, ascribe to the group a vicarious significance via the authors

[192] Clements, K., *Faith on the Frontier*, 385.
[193] Reeves, 'Intellectuals in Debate: The Moot,' 39.
[194] Wood, *This is Your Hour: Christian Intellectuals in Britain and the Crisis of Europe, 1938-49*, 18.

associated with it: namely Karl Mannheim and T.S. Eliot. This chapter contends otherwise and concurs with an emerging wave of scholarship, championed by Barry Spurr and Jonas Kurlberg, arguing that prior scholarship has been too reliant on incomplete and earlier assessments of The Moot. Likewise, due to scholarly neglect (and issues of availability) the full range of archival and primary-source materials have not yet been fully integrated into our assessment of these matters, resulting in continued misrepresentations of both Eliot and The Moot—to the detriment of Eliot's legacy and the unwarranted inflation of The Moot's.

THE MOOT

The Moot has been described in various ways. Peter Scott, for instance, described it as a Church discussion forum where political ideas could be shared and moderated.[195] In Matthew Grimley's description it was 'a wartime discussion group which considered how society might be reconstructed after the war.'[196] Keith Clements depicts it as, 'one nexus in a web of Christian social and theological enquiry transcending the lines drawn by war.'[197] In his later editorship of *The Moot Papers*, Clements introduces The Moot as a 'group of distinguished intellectuals who, under the leadership of J.H. Oldham, met from 1938 to 1947 to discuss the nature of modern society, the relationship between social planning and freedom, and the role of religiously-based values in shaping society.'[198] Clements' latest description of The Moot is by far the most accurate and encompassing, as it neatly encapsulates the variety of topics discussed, without suggesting there was strict

[195] Scott, P. 'The social critic and his discontents,' 70.
[196] Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State Between the Wars*, 206.
[197] Clements, *Faith on the Frontier: A Life of J.H. Oldham*, 391.
[198] Clements, *The Moot Papers: Faith, Freedom and Society 1938-1944*, 1.

agreement on the programmatic details. For our purposes, it shall be adopted as the most accurate scholarly description of The Moot.

The Moot has been studied for a variety of reasons. As Grimley wrote, 'The Moot is an interesting case-study for students of civil society in Britain because it shows the resurgence in twentieth-century political thought of a medieval concept of civil society.'[199] Likewise, The Moot holds importance for researchers on the 1937 Oxford Conference on Church, Community, and State, which was organised by Oldham and attended by over 400 prominent theologians, churchmen, and lay intellectuals. The conference commanded considerable press attention and was attended by some of the original Moot members. Indeed, The Moot was an offshoot from the conference, devised by Oldham as the nucleus for Christian action toward the transformation of British society. But it has also been studied because of its importance to the life and thought of notable figures like Karl Mannheim and Michael Polanyi (1891-1976).[200]

For Eliot scholars its appeal has been two-fold. First, The Moot's archival records provide insights into the dialogical development (or, at least, articulation) of Eliot's social criticism, as his discursive confrontations with Mannheim over the nature and purpose of elites and planning were highly illustrative. As Collini observed, 'The [Moot papers] contains one of the earliest attempts [by Eliot], made in explicit contrast to Mannheim's usage, to grapple with the concept of culture.'[201] While this is demonstrably not the case, as Eliot used the same logic and language years before to criticise Freud's concept of culture in the *Criterion* and to define tradition in *After Strange Gods*, most commentators have assumed

[199] Grimley, 'Civil Society and the Clerisy: Christian Elites and National Culture *c.* 1930-1950', 232.
[200] P. Mullins, & S. Jacobs, 'T.S. Eliot's Idea of the Clerisy, and its Discussion by Karl Mannheim and Michael Polanyi in the Context of J.H. Oldham's Moot.' *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 6(2), 2006, 147.
[201] Collini, 'The European Modernist as Anglican Moralist: The Later Social Criticism of T.S. Eliot', 220.

or argued that The Moot was vital to the creation of Eliot's two later or 'mature' works of social criticism. Scholars as diverse as Reeves, Clements, Kojecký, Robbins, Collini, and Grimley have variably described it as producing, inspiring, stimulating, developing, catalyzing, resourcing, or embodying Eliot's social criticism. The second reason is that The Moot supposedly reveals a more social, corporate side of Eliot's work, which has otherwise been stylized (or stigmatized) by some as idiosyncratic and isolated from mainstream thought in the period.[202] In order to engage with these arguments, and to ultimately prove that The Moot was less important to the development of Eliot's thought than has been claimed, it will be necessary to first outline the hard evidence for Eliot's participation in The Moot.

There is archival material for twenty-one meetings of The Moot, dating from April 1938 to July 1945. The group continued to meet thereafter, but without recording or saving official minutes and memoranda, and did so until disbanding shortly after the untimely death of Mannheim in January 1947. Some scholars, notably Ackroyd and Scott, have assumed Eliot's continued attendance for the duration of The Moot, while others, such as Wood, fail to note his subsequent non-attendance when introducing his involvement and identification with the group.[203] This is not the case, however, because according to the attendance list in Kojecký's book, Eliot attended meetings 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, and 17.[204] This would suggest that Eliot was present for 11 meetings, with his last recorded visit occurring in June 1943, roughly four years before The Moot itself ended. Kojecký's list failed to record Eliot's attendance at the 5th meeting (September 23rd-24th, 1939) however, which means that he actually attended 12 meetings.[205] This timeline suggests

[202] See earlier references to Ackroyd and Scott.
[203] Wood, *This is Your Hour: Christian Intellectuals in Britain and the Crisis of Europe, 1938-49*, 1.
[204] Kojecký. *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, pp. 238-239.
[205] Clements, *The Moot Papers: Faith, Freedom and Society 1938-1944*, 224.

that Eliot's most active participation in The Moot lasted from April 1938 to January 1941, representing a total of 10 meetings. His later attendance consisted of one conference in 1942, and one in 1943, despite a total of five meetings being held in that period. Eliot likewise failed to attend all three meetings in 1944.

The primary reason for Eliot's absence, as we shall see, was a little-reported but rapidly growing level of dissatisfaction with the group and a strong desire to be disassociated from it. Indeed, many of the other famous names associated with The Moot—the very names that lend its legacy a modicum of lustre—such as John Middleton Murry, Christopher Dawson, and Michael Polanyi all had similarly misleading attendance records. Murry, for instance, left after nine meetings, citing irreparable differences with Mannheim and the direction of The Moot.[206] Christopher Dawson, though semi-active in corresponding with The Moot, only attended three meetings.[207] Likewise, Polanyi, a famous Hungarian-British polymath, only began attending The Moot in June 1944.[208] In each instance their association (as measured by attendance) with The Moot is seldom qualified. Furthermore, given the fact that Eliot already had external contact with many of the group's important members, the notion that Eliot considered The Moot a unique location for intellectual discourse is a problematic claim.

Regarding Eliot's written contributions to The Moot, he made a total of seven submissions during his various attendances (April 1938 – June 1943). These consisted of one paper on social philosophy (985 words long); three sets of comments on papers by Middleton Murry, Mannheim, and Hodges (together totalling 3,465 words); and three circulated letters on various matters (3,445 words). By comparison, in the same period Dawson contributed five

[206] Clements, *Faith on the Frontier: A Life of J.H. Oldham*, 384.
[207] Kojecký. *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, pp. 238-239.
[208] Ibid.

papers, Middleton Murry submitted seven, Mannheim eight, Hodges nine, and Oldham submitted ten—plus a great many letters and comments from all of them.[209] True, Eliot contributed two short papers, three comments, and four letters after he stopped attending, but there are reasons to believe (to be addressed later) that the majority of these submissions were either perfunctory or less significant to Eliot's social criticism than has been traditionally believed.

Though many of Eliot's 1939-1943 submissions bore little importance to his social criticism—with the exception of his 1938 comments on Murry's 'Toward a Christian Theory of Society' paper and his 1939 comments on Mannheim's 'Panning for Freedom' paper, both of which present pertinent (but not original) arguments—there are nevertheless a few gems to be found amongst these contributions. For instance, commenting on Murry's paper, Eliot confesses himself 'surprised to find Matthew Arnold cited as a Christian thinker. I should have thought of Arnold as having somewhat the relation to a Christian, that a boned fowl has to the animated member of barnyard society. This is a matter for discussion.'[210] So, too, it is illuminating when Eliot confesses in a letter to Oldham that he's unsure 'at what moment, on the stage of my own mind, Burke make[s] his entrance,' and when he admits to being 'the laziest' member of the Moot.[211] But on the whole, most of the submissions are not especially interesting. For example, he writes in a 1941 letter to Oldham 'I find that I share Micklem's difficulty about the use of "the Spirit" with a capital and "the spirit" in lower case; and I wonder whether this does spring from a desire to be comprehensive and make room for all the shades of Christian belief and of non-Christian belief of those who show the "awareness" of "spiritual issues".'[212] Indeed, this is

[209] Clements, *The Moot Papers: Faith, Freedom and Society 1938-1944.*
[210] T.S. Eliot, 'Comments on Middleton Murry's Paper,' undated [1938], OA/14/6/21.
[211] T.S. Eliot, 'Letter to J. H. Oldham,' dated 28th August 1943, OA/9/5/15.
[212] T. S. Eliot, 'Letter from T. S. Eliot,' undated [1941], IOE/MOO/50; OA/9/3/23.

but one example of Eliot's tendency to use intellectual quibbling as a form of perfunctory participation.

In terms of Murry's 1938 paper, Eliot's most interesting and germane comments regarded the religious credentials of Murry's proposed Christian state. In a passage foreshadowing both *The Idea's* nomenclature and its arguments about the sufficiency of unconscious Christian behaviour in the general populace and a conscious sense of Christian inspired circumspection amongst politicians, Eliot commented that 'The Christianity of the State is a matter of form: it does not require that the individual constituents should be good Christians, and it does only become a hollow form when the majority of the constituents become positively anti-Christian. And as I suggest that the Christian State is a matter of form, so I suggest that the Christian community is a matter of behaviour, and that it must clearly be distinguished from a community of Christians.'[213] So, too, in his 1939 comments on Mannheim's 'Planning for Freedom', he channels the spirit of his *Criterion*-era classicism and prefigures the *Notes*' obsession with terminological clarity, especially regarding fundamental values, when he wrote that 'I find myself hove down at the end of the first paragraph, by the terms "freedom", "democracy" and "social progress". I want to know what each of these terms means, otherwise we are still moving among words and not among things. And I want to know also: Do these terms represent what people accept as three ultimate values, or is there any value more absolute, in relation to which these values exist?'[214] Apart from these instances, however, there is little from Eliot's written contributions later manifested in either *The Idea of a Christian Society* or *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*.

[213] T. S. Eliot, 'Comments on Middleton Murry's Paper,' undated [1938], OA/14/6/21.
[214] T. S. Eliot, 'Comments on Papers by Mannheim and Hodges,' undated [1939], LM/SEC3.

Eliot's dialogical contributions to The Moot were similarly limited in comparison to other contributors. Though it would be too much to reproduce the entirety of Eliot's spoken comments here, nor even convey the essence of what he said throughout every meeting, it is interesting to note that Eliot's verbal participation in The Moot was significantly less than other major figures associated with the group. A rolling average based on three meetings reveals that Eliot contributed roughly 60 lines of conversation as recorded in the minutes. By contrast, Hodges' rolling average was 84 lines, Middleton Murry provided 151 lines, Mannheim 184, and Oldham contributed no less than 225 lines.[215] The significance of this, as we shall see in a later section, is that Eliot's participation in The Moot, whether written or verbal, in person or in absentia, was by many measurements significantly less than other leading figures in The Moot—a quantifiable difference that has yet to be given a sufficiently qualitative explanation.

Before proceeding onto a large-scale deconstruction of the traditional case for Eliot and The Moot, the remaining hard evidence should be studied. Specifically, this requires an examination of Eliot's relationship within the context of The Moot to J.H. Oldham, Karl Mannheim, and John Middleton Murry—since these figures have been traditionally accorded an influential status in the development of Eliot's social criticism, and their participation in The Moot was largely overlapping. Lastly, we shall also examine the remaining statements that Eliot made about The Moot, some of which have been mistakenly considered as representative of his sympathy and affiliation with the group.

Eliot's friendship with J.H. Oldham was responsible for his participation in The Moot. Having been present with Oldham at the 1937 Oxford Conference, Eliot joined him at the inaugural meeting of The Moot in April 1938. In preparation for this meeting, Eliot wrote

[215] Clements, *The Moot Papers: Faith, Freedom and Society 1938-1944*, pp. 39-183.

a letter to John Middleton Murry stating, 'Oldham seems to me as great a man as I know, [and] there is very little I would not do… if he asked me.'[216] As it happened, it was precisely at Oldham's request that many of Eliot's written contributions to The Moot were elicited.[217] The relationship between Oldham and Eliot dated back to the early 1930s, and they met on a variety of occasions at various forums, often for days at a time at conferences and retreats. Furthermore, Oldham's letter to *The Times* about the Munich Crisis was an instigating factor for Eliot's 'Idea' lectures and was subsequently quoted at length in the published version.[218] Indeed, it was Eliot's sensitivity to their longstanding friendship that kept him a part of The Moot for as long as he was—but there is more on that to come. Traditionally, however, the friendship between Oldham and Eliot has been taken for granted, just as Eliot's affirmation of The Moot (via a letter to Oldham in August of 1943) has been taken at face value. It was in that letter Eliot stated that if The Moot 'has made as much difference to everyone as it has to me, it has justified itself fully.'[219] But as we shall see, there are persuasive grounds for regarding this letter as disingenuous, which is significant given that this letter has been universally accepted as evidence of Eliot's sympathy with and gratitude for Oldham's Moot.

Much has been made regarding Eliot's interactions with Karl Mannheim in The Moot. As interlocutors they certainly challenged and stimulated each another, often contesting (however politely) the nature and purpose of elites (or the intelligentsia) and the role of religion and culture in the construction of state and society. Mannheim's philosophy, known as 'planning for freedom', maintained that a middle way between *laissez-faire* liberalism and stifling totalitarianism was needed in order to address the general malaise

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[216] T. S. Eliot, 'Letter to John Middleton Murry,' dated 8th February 1938, NWE/II/1/33.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society,' 67.
[219] Kojecký, *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, 188.

of modern civilisation. He proposed that elites ought to coordinate the political, social, cultural, and economic forces of modern society toward greater common flourishing, but one that was grounded in a social consensus of basic values and mores: the type previously provided by religion, and thus requiring a re-spiritualisation of society. The outcome would be a self-limiting (i.e., non-totalitarian) coordination of national spheres, with the understanding that such planning was to be guided and limited by the religiously sanctioned civic spirituality that undergirded citizens, society, and elites alike. To do so, however, required that various aspects of religion be made more 'plannable' and thus included in the purview of planning elites.

Collini has noted that much of Eliot's participation in The Moot was in direct response to Mannheim, which, apart from a number of obligatory responses at Oldham's request, is confirmed by the fact that six of his sixteen written submissions were in direct response to Mannheim.[220] It is worth noting, however, that Mannheim's contributions, presence, and influence in The Moot were sufficiently substantial that some scholars (and to an extent, Eliot himself)[221] hold Mannheim and The Moot to be, especially in later years, virtually synonymous.[222] As such, it would have been difficult (if not impossible) to participate in The Moot and not engage with Mannheim. Nevertheless, Mannheim was of some importance in Eliot's engagement with the subject of planning, but it was hardly the first time that Eliot had written on the matter, as should be evident from our survey of the *Criterion* criticism. [223]

[220] Kurlberg, 'The Rebirth of Christendom: The Moot (1938-1947) as a Modernist Revitalization Movement,' 520.
[221] Ibid.
[222] Y. Kudomi, 'Karl Mannheim in Britain: An Interim Research Report.' *Hitotsuabashi Journal of Social Studies* 28, no. 2 (1996): 51.

[223] Kojecký. *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, 195.

Outside The Moot, Eliot reviewed Mannheim's *Man and Society* (1940) and *Diagnosis of our Time* (1943) with ostensible respect (although Eliot's private letters reveal an alternative impression). He also wrote about Mannheim in his article 'The Germanization of Britain' and extensively in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*.[224] That is not to say that Eliot retained as much respect for Mannheim's thought as he did for Mannheim himself, but as he wrote in his 1947 tribute of Mannheim in *The Times* obituaries, '[Mannheim's] talk was always a stimulant to original thought…. His personal charm, and kindly interest in human beings drew [our] association closer together.'[225] Perhaps because of such statements, the subtleties of Eliot's relationship with Mannheim are often lost in traditional interpretations of their friendship, such as in Ackroyd and Asher's work.[226] 'Ever since Kojecký's extensive treatment of The Moot in *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*,' as Kurlberg explains, 'it has become commonplace for Eliot scholars to assume that Eliot had an essentially positive view of The Moot and of Mannheim.'[227] This is also true with respect to scholars of The Moot, as evidenced in Wood's most recent work. It should soon become clear however that Eliot's various frustrations with Mannheim were one of the reasons for leaving The Moot and all but disavowing it.

John Middleton Murry's interactions with Eliot in The Moot have received less attention than Mannheim or Oldham. This might be partially due to Murry's overt departure from the group (unlike Eliot's etiolated absences), which in turn may have diminished his apparent importance to some Moot scholars. It is also possible that unlike Mannheim, Murry and Eliot had a long and storied connection pre-Moot, making their association less Moot dependant. Nevertheless, Murry and Eliot's interactions in The Moot are

[224] Collini, 'The European Modernist as Anglican Moralist: The Later Social Criticism of T.S. Eliot', 219.
[225] The Times, January 25, 1947.
[226] Kurlberg, 'The Rebirth of Christendom: The Moot (1938-1947) as a Modernist Revitalization Movement,' 191.
[227] Ibid.

important given their literary standing, their history of disagreement, and the similarity of their work. Fortunately, both Kojecký and Kurlberg have commented on this aspect of their participation in The Moot, so the subject is not without some level of scholarly engagement.

Interestingly, it was Eliot who recruited Murry into The Moot and it was not long after Murry departed that Eliot (having attended one more meeting) did too. Of particular interest, however, was Murry's paper 'Towards a Christian Theory of Society,' which was examined by The Moot six months before Eliot delivered his own *Idea of a Christian Society*. In Clements' preface to the minutes of The Moot's second meeting, he described Murry's main thesis as 'the primacy [or desirability] of a *Christian Society* over against narrowly conceived understandings of "church" or individualistic notions of "Christian."' [228] Furthermore, in Murry's treatment of the issue he includes extensive reference to Samuel Coleridge and Matthew Arnold, both of whom were of significance in Eliot's *Idea*. Like Eliot, Murry was not in favour of planning or centralisation, nor did he subscribe to Mannheim's exclusively sociological framework for analysing ideas of church, state, and society. Instead, Murry (and Eliot) considered themselves generalist 'men of letters', engaging with sociological issues through integrated philosophical, cultural, literary, and religious frameworks.[229]

Despite these many similarities, there were critical differences between Murry and Eliot (as we have seen throughout their relationship, dating back to earliest era of *The Criterion*). Murry's theory of Church and state identified the two institutions as one, sacralizing them into an inseparable sphere, influenced-at-large by an elite group of Christian academics

[228] Clements, *The Moot Papers: Faith, Freedom and Society 1938-1944*, 67.
[229] Clements, *Faith on the Frontier: A Life of J.H. Oldham*, 384.

and intellectuals called the clerisy. Like Eliot's clerisy, both forms took their name and inspiration from Coleridge's idea of the clerisy, which Coleridge wrote about in his 1829 book, *On the Constitution of the Church and State*. Eliot, by contrast, criticized Murry's clerisy for lacking clerical representation, and in typical anti-Erastian fashion, feared that a fusion of Church and state would compromise the integrity of Christian dogma.[230] As a Catholic, Eliot took issue with Murry's proposed nationalisation of the church, as he feared it would become a nationalistic church, thus jeopardizing its participation in the catholicity of the universal church.[231]

It was in Eliot's criticism of this paper that he first articulated the three spheres of his Christian society, which would later appear in the *Idea*. Here they were employed in an attempt to delineate the appropriate boundaries and interrelationships between Church and state, locality and universality.[232] The influence of Murry's paper on the *Idea* is echoed in the fact that not only does Eliot mention him as influential in the book's preface, he engages with his thought on three separate and explicit occasions in the book.[233] For example, he cites Murry regarding the function and definition of the clerisy, as well as on the danger of a nationalistic church.[234] Thus, in both cases, while Eliot's social criticism developed greater specificity and targeting through his interactions with both Mannheim and Murry, and thus within The Moot, this is not the same thing as being produced or initiated by them. Nor, as we have seen, does it account for the years' worth of intellectual development that preceded their expression in his earlier criticism, which is especially true of Murry from the *Criterion's* very origins.

[230] T.S. Eliot, 'Comments on Middleton Murry's Paper,' in J. Kurlberg 'The Rebirth of Christendom: The Moot (1938-1947) as a Modernist Revitalization Movement' PhD diss., University of Bergen, 2016, p.391.
[231] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society,' pp.42-43.
[232] Eliot, 'Comments on Middleton Murry's Paper,' 391.
[233] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society,' pp. 28, 62, 64.
[234] Ibid, 28, 62.

Interestingly, Eliot never mentioned The Moot in public. Instead, the most concrete public link that Eliot had was his position on the editorial board of the *Christian News-Letter* (*CNL*) which was known by some of its (5,000-10,000) readers as the mouthpiece of The Moot.[235] This position did not last, however, as he resigned from the CNL not long after he stopped attending The Moot (not that any of the members of The Moot were aware that Eliot had little intention of returning). Nevertheless, Eliot is on record in his letters to the group (though not in his letters about the group to non-members) stating his appreciation for The Moot's various merits. Scholars have quoted remarks such as the following: 'This variety [of thought and background] is what has given The Moot its zest, and even its cohesion; it is what… has made this association, over a number of years, and bringing with it an unexpectedly deep and genuine sense of loyalty and kinship with the other members, so very fecundating' and 'one reason why I have found The Moot most profitable to myself: which is that I find in it, not merely an agreement achieved or hoped for, but also significant disagreement.'[236]

Not all of Eliot's written remarks to the group were affirmative, as he had some pointed observations about The Moot's ability to enact the kind of radical agenda many of its members often discussed. As he once observed, 'a group of literary folk [such as them] with Christian propensities presented peculiar difficulties: [namely that] it would be a long time before they got anywhere.'[237] Yet, almost universally, scholars have regarded Eliot's attitude toward The Moot as essentially positive. The Moot is depicted as a space of intellectual stimulation and spiritual camaraderie. It is held to be largely responsible for stimulating Eliot's 'mature' works of social criticism. And, for scholars like Ackroyd and Scott, The Moot is depicted as a haven for Eliot and his social criticism, away (or isolated)

[235] Kurlberg, 'Resisting Totalitarianism: The Moot and a New Christendom,' 519.
[236] Kojecký. *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, 181.
[237] Clements, *The Moot Papers: Faith, Freedom and Society 1938-1944*, 372.

from the mainstream of modern thought. This interpretation is problematic, however, because it too closely identifies Eliot with an obscure, marginal group, meeting in semi-cloistered conditions, circulating self-designated classified memoranda about how to enact radical change based on religious principles—which delegitimizes Eliot's criticism by obscuring its more mainstream connections and content (based in part on its obvious continuity with his earlier *Criterion* criticism). For this reason, the following section aims to de-centre The Moot from its place of prominence in Eliot's work.

De-Centering The Moot

Traditional accounts of Eliot's interactions, interest and affinity with The Moot are highly contestable when one investigates Eliot's relationships with its key members and his correspondence regarding the group. Likewise, the group's influence on his later social criticism is more limited when one further explores his relationships with those individuals he explicitly cites as important to his own work. As we shall see below, The Moot was by no means the sole or even the primary network responsible for maintaining the relationships that were important to Eliot's later social criticism. From this reassessment it will become evident that the legacy and historiography surrounding Eliot and The Moot requires a fundamental readjustment. In particular, the importance of relocating Eliot's later social criticism away from the obscure and peripheral margins of Moot studies and placing it back within the mainstream networks and traditions of mid-century theological and intellectual history.

The Moot's membership met on over twenty occasions during its nine-year existence. For most of these meetings, there were formal minutes and memoranda, detailing the discussions and decisions of the group. For some, however, their association with fellow

members either preceded The Moot or existed apart from it, sometimes as independent friendships or as members on forums that were similar but nevertheless separate from The Moot. Naturally, this can blur the line between the interactions of members and the influence they might have exercised upon each another within the context of The Moot, since it is difficult to determine whether to ascribe more significance to one locale or to another. In the case of Oldham, Mannheim, and Murry, for instance, each of them had meaningful interactions with Eliot outside of The Moot.

As previously noted, Oldham and Eliot's relationship pre-dated The Moot by six years. They were heavily involved in the 1937 Oxford Conference together, with Oldham planning it and Eliot participating on the economics panel. Indeed, the conference's theme (Church, Community, and State) was highly germane to Eliot's work on the Christian State, Christian Community, and Community of Christians in *The Idea of a Christian Society*. Likewise, before The Moot had even begun, Eliot had already written about his sincere admiration for Oldham.[238] This is worth remembering when considering the influence of Oldham on Eliot, since the inclusion of Oldham's letter to *The Times* in the *Idea* was by no means dependent on The Moot. Nor were they dependent on The Moot after the *Idea* for further interaction. They served on and attended together a variety of commissions, publications, panels, and groups. The list of these includes membership on the advisory board of the Centre for Christian Discourse, which met at St. Anne's House in London to explore Christianity and contemporary culture; attendance at the Council on the Christian Faith and Common Life (CCFCL), an interdenominational leadership group; inclusion in The Christian Frontier Council, an extra-ecclesiastical action group; the editorial board of the *Christian News-Letter*; a BBC advisory group for religious broadcasting; and

[238] T. S. Eliot, 'Letter to John Middleton Murry,' dated 8th February 1938, NWE/II/1/33.

occasionally dining at the Oxford and Cambridge Club.[239] Clearly, therefore, The Moot was not the sole nexus of their relationship, although it is likely the best documented. Instead, their friendship was already robustly formed (and perhaps at its strongest) in the period preceding The Moot, which should chasten any suggestions that The Moot was necessary for the supposedly fruitful cooperation between the two men.

In a similar but less extensive manner, Eliot also had independent, non-Moot related links to Mannheim. To begin, Eliot first mentions Mannheim's name in a 1932 commentary in *The Criterion* and thanks to Robert Crawford's research we know that Eliot began reading as early as 1937 the essays of Mannheim's that would later become *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction.*[240] Significantly, this means Eliot was familiar with Mannheim's ideas about democratic social planning before their meeting at The Moot. Given that Eliot had already expressed his doubts about such planning in *The Criterion*, it is difficult to agree with Wood that it took until 'the middle of the war [for] Eliot to start finding more fault with planning in general and Mannheim's views in particular.'[241] Disagreements aside, the two also enjoyed privately lunching together in London on an irregular basis.[242] While there is no doubt that in Mannheim's case The Moot facilitated their most frequent contact, the group was not solely responsible for either introducing or sustaining their relationship, nor was it the only medium through which their interactions were conducted. This is important to remember as a counterpoint to those who portray the group as the exclusive mode of exchange between the two men, as well as those who overemphasise the group's incubatory role to ascribe to it increased historical importance.

[239] Kojecký, R. *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, pp. 153, 161, 163, 187.
[240] Crawford, *The Savage and the City in the work of T.S. Eliot*, 229.
[241] Wood, *This is Your Hour: Christian Intellectuals in Britain and the Crisis of Europe, 1937-49*, 138.
[242] T. S. Eliot, 'Letter to Herbert Read,' dated 18th September 1942, HF/8/33.

Eliot and Murry also knew each other before The Moot, having conducted a public literary feud since 1923 about the relative merits of classicism and romanticism. More importantly, by the mid-1930s they became sufficiently friendly, not only for Eliot to invite Murry to The Moot, but for Eliot to write a friend, 'I feel quite happy in the company of Murry [even] after so many years division.'[243] And not only did they have a long history together before The Moot, but it was Murry's *Price of Leadership* (1939) that he cited as a stimulus for the *Idea*, which is related to but distinct from Murry's 5,000 word essay that was submitted to The Moot.[244] While it is clear from a previous point that this essay was in fact helpful for inspiring the categories that Eliot used in the *Idea*, by his own admission, however, Eliot found Murry's non-Moot written material to be more helpful—material he would have read anyway, without The Moot.

Both Murry and Mannheim are mentioned respectively in Eliot's prefaces to the *Idea* and *Notes*. They are not the only names mentioned, and many of the others, like them, have been associated with Eliot via The Moot. Yet, as was the case with both Murry and Mannheim, the connections between Eliot and these figures do not necessarily point to The Moot as the sole or primary nexus for their interaction—be that in intellectual or social terms. Instead, The Moot should be de-centred (though not altogether discounted) in our understanding of the major intellectual sources of stimulation regarding the content of Eliot's work. To date, this is a task that has not yet been done by scholars, but as Kurlberg has rightly pointed out, when it comes to The Moot and the works of its members, 'It is problematic to establish "influence" versus mere correlation of ideas. It is quite conceivable that The Moot members shared a number of predispositions and ideas prior

[243] T. S. Eliot, *Letters of T.S Eliot, Volume 8*, 345.
[244] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society,' 3.

to engaging in this group.'[245] Indeed, this is most certainly the case with Eliot, as the major contours of his criticism (i.e., classicist, conservate, Catholic, and continental) were already formed prior to his later works thanks to their development in and continuation from his *Criterion* commentaries. Neither The Moot nor its members were responsible for their inception, even if they provided an occasion for their reiteration.

Of the four people listed in the *Idea's* preface as figures to whom Eliot's thought owed a great deal—John Middleton Murry, Christopher Dawson, V.A. Demant, and Jacques Maritain—The Moot was not responsible for introducing any of them to Eliot. Similar to Eliot, these figures (and others like R.H. Tawney, A.D. Lindsay, Sir Ernest Barker, and William Temple) were often invited to write and speak on various topics from a religious standpoint across mainstream media outlets such as the *Times* and BBC.[246] Nor was this unusual. As Stefan Collini has observed, 'in the late 1930s and the 1940s… Anglican social thinking enjoyed a markedly prominent place in public debate in Britain.'[247] So, too, according to Philip Coupland, during the war 'Churches enjoyed an access to the mass media which was matched only by the parties of the wartime government.'[248] It was not necessary, therefore, to attend The Moot in order to be able to discuss matters pertaining to church, state, and society. Indeed, the subject was entirely mainstream: it was the subject of BBC broadcasts, books, articles, and was invariably on the tongue of the three-time Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, who talked about 'Christian England' with indefatigable frequency in hundreds of speeches during the 1920s and 1930s.[249]

[245] Kurlberg, 'The Rebirth of Christendom: The Moot (1938-1947) as a Modernist Revitalization Movement,' 53.
[246] J, Kurlberg, (n.d.). 'Resisting Totalitarianism: The Moot and a New Christendom'. Religion Compass. Volume 7: Issue 12 (2013: Dec.), 518.
[247] Collini, 'The European Modernist as Anglican Moralist: The Later Social Criticism of T.S. Eliot', 212.
[248] P. Coupland, *Britannia, Europa and Christendom: British Christians and European integration*, 15.
[249] S. Baldwin, *Service of our Lives* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1937), 165-167.

As detailed in previous chapters, Christopher Dawson's relationship with Eliot also preceded their involvement in The Moot. Dawson, a prominent Roman Catholic historian and social thinker, whose more widely read books won him a Fellowship of the British Academy and later a distinguished professorship at Harvard, only attended three of the group's meetings. The first was its inaugural meeting in April 1938, but he was absent for the second meeting, which is of relevance since this was the meeting where they discussed Murry's 'Towards a Christian Theory of Society'. Granted, Dawson did send a letter to Oldham in his absence outlining his criticisms of Murry's paper, but the letter was neither discussed nor referenced in the meeting.[250] Dawson's next attendance was not until January 1941, which was almost two years after the publication of Eliot's *Idea*. With this information, we can see the inaccuracy of Peter Scott's claim about Eliot, Dawson, and The Moot. Scott, who stated the 'Moot's discussions… which continued from 1938 to 1947… produced Eliot's two major books of social criticism,' wrote that throughout these discussions, 'Eliot was in extended and intimate dialogue with thinkers like the Roman Catholic Christopher Dawson… and John Middleton Murry.'[251] This was most clearly not the case. First, Eliot only attended The Moot from April 1938 to Jan 1943. Secondly, Christopher Dawson was also absent for eighteen of the twenty-one recorded meetings. And, lastly, Dawson was absent from both the second and third meetings, which more than any, were applicable to the ideas that would be explored in Eliot's *Idea*. True, Dawson was undoubtedly influential on Eliot's social criticism, but it was not as a member of The Moot.

V.A. Demant was even less attached to The Moot than Dawson. Demant, who was an Anglican priest, social commentator, and theologian who went on to become the Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at the University of Oxford, was known to

[250] Christopher Dawson, 'Comments on Middleton Murry's Paper,' undated [1938], OA/14/4/32.
[251] Scott, 'The social critic and his discontents,' 71.

many members of The Moot, though he never attended a meeting. He did send the occasional letter and comment, but none before the fourth meeting, which was held a few months after the delivery of the *Idea.* Like Eliot, Demant was Anglo-Catholic in religion and just as concerned with matters of church, state, and society. He was a core member of the Chandos Group and published frequently in Eliot's *Criterion.* The two served together (along with John Baillie and Eleanora Iredale, both fellow members of The Moot) on the economic order panel of the 1937 Oxford Conference. Eliot regarded his friend as 'one of the most profound' thinkers in Britain.[252] In fact, writing to W.H. Auden in September 1939, Eliot praised Demant's *The Religious Prospect* as 'the best book written in England in the last year or two.'[253] It had helped to frame for him the ideas of anthropologists and sociologists in terms of religious applicability—a school of thought self-designated at the time as 'Christian Sociology'—mediating for Eliot a fresh take on the thought of figures such as Maine and Durkheim.[254] This was of relevance to Eliot in both the *Idea* and in *Notes* because it revitalized for him the role of the primitive and its continual influence in the formulation of even modern religious sentiments, which he used as a rationale for the inevitable perpetuation of un-Christian or sub-Christian syncretistic practices in the general population of his proposed Christian society.[255]

The final figure mentioned in the preface of the *Idea* was Jacques Maritain. Maritain, a world-renowned Roman Catholic intellectual and neo-Thomistic philosopher, was highly influential in British Anglican social thought and political philosophy. [256] Though neither a member nor a guest of The Moot, Maritain's thought—particularly his seminal 1938

[252] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941*, 109.
[253] Ibid, 331.
[254] Crawford, *The Savage and the City in the work of T.S. Eliot*, 231.
[255] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society,' Chapter IV.
[256] Caciagli, 'Christian Democracy' in Ball, T., & Bellamy, R., (eds) *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Political Thought*, 165-180.

book *Integral Humanism*—was widely discussed at The Moot.[257] There is a record of Maritain dining with Eliot in London while visiting England, with a few other Moot members present, but as we have seen before, many members met outside of The Moot as friends and colleagues, and not as an extraordinary meeting of The Moot.[258] As is clear from previous chapters, Eliot's ideas were highly influenced by Maritain, as it was primarily through him that Eliot became interested in Aquinas, the papal encyclicals of Leo XIII, and other associated works of Catholic social teaching.[259] These works resourced Eliot in his understanding of balancing local expressionism with participation in universal values and community, and developing a functional and neo-medieval form of social pluralism that sought a middle way between Marxism and laissez-faire capitalism.[260] This was especially relevant in the *Idea*, because on the one hand he wanted to protect the country from Nazi and Soviet-style paganism, while on the other he envisioned a society assembled around something more 'than a mere congeries of banks, insurance companies and industries, and had… beliefs more essential than a belief in compound interest and the maintenance of dividends.'[261]

It was also through Maritain that Eliot discovered his conception of 'minimal-unity,' wherein a reconfigured Christian society provided the shared values and principles that had been eroded by liberalism, and a collective identity that was as particular as nationalism but not as toxic or exclusive, because it was obliged to coinhere within the catholicity of the universal church.[262] Maritain also influenced Eliot's answer to the question of how elites should engage with culture and mass society: namely that the function of each social group should be established and given the requisite support and

[257] Clements, *The Moot Papers: Faith, Freedom and Society 1938-1944*, 126.
[258] Grimley, 'Civil Society and the Clerisy: Christian Elites and National Culture *c.* 1930-1950,' 241.
[259] Kojecký. *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, 131.
[260] Grimley, 'Civil Society and the Clerisy: Christian Elites and National Culture *c.* 1930-1950,' 240-41.
[261] Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society*, 51.
[262] Ibid, 92.

autonomy to flourish in their given vocation.[263] In fact, not only was Eliot's *Idea* deeply indebted to Maritain's Roman Catholic conception of pluralism and integral humanism, Eliot's own Catholicism was indebted to Maritain's Roman Catholicism. For it was in the 1920s that Eliot experienced, 'the stirring of a newly invigorated religious belief, prompted in part by his recent readings in the Thomism of Jacques Maritain.'[264] Indeed, as the timing shows, Eliot had been reading Maritain (and socializing with him in Paris) long before The Moot began to discuss him. In fact, it was thanks to Eliot that much of Maritain's writing was being read in Britain during the 1930s, as it was Eliot publishing his articles in the *Criterion*. It was likely unnecessary, therefore, as one scholar has suggested, that The Moot's discussion of Maritain would have further accentuated his influence on Eliot.[265] As was the case with Murry, Dawson, and Demant, Eliot and Maritain had read and socialized with each other for a long period before The Moot.

In a similar way to the *Idea*, The Moot can be substantially de-centralised from *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. In the preface to *Notes*, Eliot again mentions Christopher Dawson and V.A. Demant as formative influences on his work. As we have seen with both figures, they had a long and extensive relationship with Eliot both before and outside of The Moot. In *Notes*, Dawson's main influence was his work on culture and religion, which, beginning with his 1925 article 'Religion and the Life of Civilizations,' and more fully developed in *Progress and Religion* (which Eliot admired immensely)[266], argued that religion was the foundational basis for culture, rather than the other way around.[267] This argument was clearly echoed in the *Notes* when Eliot asks rhetorically 'whether any culture

[263] Grimley, 'Civil Society and the Clerisy: Christian Elites and National Culture *c.* 1930-1950, 232.
[264] Goldie, *A critical difference: T.S. Eliot and John Middleton Murry in English literary criticism, 1919-1928*, 155.
[265] Kurlberg, 'The Rebirth of Christendom: The Moot (1938-1947) as a Modernist Revitalization Movement,' 313.
[266] C. Scott, *A Historian and His World: A life of Christopher Dawson, 1889-1970* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1984), 92.
[267] Collini, 'The European Modernist as Anglican Moralist: The Later Social Criticism of T.S. Eliot,' 222.

could come into being, or maintain itself, without a religious basis.'[268] Furthermore, Eliot and Dawson shared a number of mutually reinforcing views on the essential importance of Catholic Christendom to the formation of European (and British) culture, the organic nature of society, and the importance of family as the basis of social life—both of which were prominent in *Notes*, and neither of which were dependent on participation in The Moot.[269] With respect to Demant, Eliot, as mentioned, was able to use the insights of Demant as an anthropologist to establish a non-theological basis for the centrality of religion in the propagation and preservation of culture.[270] Not only that, Demant's emphasis on the 'primitive' and 'geographical' assisted Eliot in his defence of agrarianism and regionalism as providing a kind of foil or friction to the centripetal force of urbanization vis-à-vis cultural and national identity.[271]

The third figure mentioned in the *Notes'* preface is Philip Mairet. In a 1940 letter to Emily Hale, Eliot refers to his friend (along with Mannheim and Demant) as the best mind he deals with.[272] Now largely unknown, Mairet was a designer, critic, literary translator, and editor of the *New English Weekly*.[273] Another Anglo-Catholic and a fellow member along with Eliot of the Chandos Group (Maurice Reckitt's largely undocumented predominantly Anglo-Catholic, Christian Sociology discussion group, dating back to the 1920s), Eliot dedicated the book to Mairet. This was partly due to their close friendship, but also because of the remarkable convergence of their economic, social and spiritual enquiries—as sustained over years of conversation and cooperation at the Anglo-Catholic Summer

[268] Eliot, 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture,' 101.
[269] Scott, *A Historian and His World: A life of Christopher Dawson, 1889-1970*, 93.
[270] Crawford, *The Savage and the City in the work of T.S. Eliot*, 231.
[271] Ibid, 192.
[272] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941*, 70.
[273] T. Villis, 'Mairet, Philippe Auguste (1886-1975), draughtsman and critic' *Oxford Diction of National Biography*. 1 June. 2018.http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001 .0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-62992.

School, Chandos, *New English Weekly* (N.E.W.), *Christian News-Letter*, and briefly on the Christian Frontier Council.[274] Indeed, Mairet's *New English Weekly* became something of a home for him after the conclusion of *The Criterion*. In late September of 1939 he confided to George Every that even in the face of the impending war, 'there will be no lack of useful unpaid employment - such as the N.E.W.', whilst admitting that there was 'a scheme of Oldham's which may or may not come to something'.[275] Furthermore, not only did Eliot first print poems from *Four Quartets* there, but he regarded it as the primary arena of his continuing social criticism. It was to Mairet's *New English Weekly* (and not Oldham or the CNL) that he first wrote with concern about Moral Re-Armament and it was in this magazine that Eliot published the essays that would collectively become *Notes*.

Though Mairet is often listed among the names associated with The Moot, his attendance was even sparser than Christopher Dawson's. He attended two meetings, once in January '41 and December '44, and while the latter was an important meeting of The Moot because they discussed Eliot's paper of the function of the clerisy, Eliot himself was not present.[276] The influence of Mairet on *Notes* was most evident—not in any one section—but in occasional shifts of tone. This was most notable in the penultimate paragraph of the book, which Eliot had originally intended to be its closing. In that paragraph Eliot warned of a headlong rush towards universal education and the abandonment key subjects which disrupts the transmission of culture (or rather those parts of culture which can in fact be transmitted via education).[277] It was in this paragraph that he also warned of the destruction being caused to culture's ancient edifices and the damage already being inflicted upon the future (a future replete with 'barbarian nomads' in 'mechanized

[274] Kojecký, R. *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, pp. 150, 155.
[275] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941*, 270.
[276] Ibid, 238-39.
[277] Eliot, 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture,' 185.

caravans'.)[278] But, as private correspondence has revealed, under Mairet's encouragement to take a more constructive, non-apocalyptic tone, Eliot ended the book by stating, 'It is no longer possible, as it might have been a hundred years ago, to find consolation in prophetic gloom.'[279] Instead, he wrote, 'My enquiry has been directed on the meaning of the word culture: so that everyone should at least pause to examine what this word means to him, and what it means to him in each particular context before using it. Even this modest aspiration might, if realised, have consequences in the policy and conduct of our "cultural" enterprises.' [280] The uplifting effect of Mairet on Eliot should not be underestimated, since, as we shall see in Eliot's private correspondence about The Moot, he was more than capable of lowering his estimation of people and things that he once appreciated.

The greatest impact that The Moot had on Eliot's *Notes* undoubtedly came from Karl Mannheim. The two had an interesting if complex relationship. As Eliot wrote to Reinhold Niebuhr following Mannheim's death, 'he was a valued friend. Apart from a personal charm which inspired a warm affection, I was always fascinated by what seemed to me Mannheim's dual personality - I mean, that he always seemed to me to have the heart of a humane and highly civilised liberal and the head of a totalitarian planner.'[281] Though Eliot and Mannheim corresponded and occasionally met outside of The Moot and were already familiar with each other's work before it, there is no denying that the twelve weekend meetings they spent together constituted most of their interactions. Furthermore, it was in large measure a response to Mannheim's ideas about elites that Eliot produced his longest submission to The Moot, 'The Idea of the Clerisy,' although the paper itself did

[278] Ibid.
[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid, 186.
[281] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941*, 70.

not present any fundamentally new ideas on Eliot's part, merely a different target for his criticism.

Nevertheless, Mannheim's influence was apparent in the *Notes*. As Eliot states in the preface, 'my debt to [him] is much greater than appears from the one context in which I discuss his theory.'[282] The theory that Eliot referred to was Mannheim's double conception of culture: that it was both the creation of the elite (or intelligentsia) and that such elites were the primary vehicle for its transmission—via 'social democratic planning' (as opposed to outright totalitarian control)—to the rest of society.[283] As should be clear from the earlier outline of the *Notes*, Eliot maintained in contrast to Mannheim that culture was the domain of every demographic of society and transmitted primarily through the family in conjunction with entities such as schools, churches, and communities. Interestingly, however, Eliot's engagement with Mannheim in the *Notes* is limited exclusively to his *Man and Society*, which was a collection of works from the 1930s, rather than *Diagnosis of our Time* (January 1943), which was based on Mannheim's many essays for The Moot. In this respect, while the background of Eliot's engagement with Mannheim is centred largely within The Moot, the foreground in fact mostly precedes it. This also corresponds with the fact that Eliot was already reading Mannheim by 1937 and in an early letter to J.H. Oldham admits that despite his personal warmth towards Mannheim and their agreement on the nature of the problems facing modern society, he was unlikely ever to be converted to Mannheim's position.[284]

Eliot, it seemed, had already made his mind up about Mannheim's arguments between 1937 and April 1939, well before he began his work on *Notes Towards the Definition of*

[282] Ibid, 171.
[283] Ibid, 109, 110.
[284] T. S. Eliot, 'Letter to J. H. Oldham,' dated 20th April 1939, MS Valerie Eliot.

Culture. In that sense, while it would be accurate to agree with Collini that many of Eliot's contributions to The Moot were direct or indirect responses to Mannheim[285], The Moot itself (including Eliot's engagement with Mannheim) had less direct influence on the *Notes* as it has first appeared. In fact, there is reason to believe that the *Notes* was a direct attack on Mannheim and The Moot itself, directed by Eliot as a deliberate attempt to undermine and discredit the ideas and work of both, as well as implicitly distance himself from the group.

PRIVATE ATTITUDES

The notion that Eliot was in broad sympathy with The Moot and that his works of social criticism emerged in a contributory fashion toward the ultimate goal of planning a post-war revival of religiously inspired social transformation is difficult to sustain in light of Eliot's private correspondence about the group and some of its major members. Indeed, a closer look at Eliot's changing feelings toward Oldham, Mannheim, and The Moot reveals his social criticism to be more combative than collaborative. Scholars such as Kurlberg and Spurr have recognized this, but their findings have yet to become integrated within the wider scholarly understanding of Eliot's criticism and his specific relationship with The Moot.

Collini has described the Eliot-Mannheim relationship as being a 'fruitful disagreement'.[286] What often goes un-described, however, is that it ended (despite feigned appearances otherwise) as an increasingly bitter disagreement and growing estrangement for Eliot. As Kurlberg rightly points out, 'T. S. Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* was written

[285] Collini, 'The European Modernist as Anglican Moralist: The Later Social Criticism of T.S. Eliot,' 218.
[286] Collini, 'The European Modernist as Anglican Moralist: The Later Social Criticism of T.S. Eliot,' 220.

as a polemic *against* Mannheim and The Moot.'[287] In a similar way, it was in large part because of Mannheim that Eliot left The Moot. That is because Eliot strongly associated The Moot with Mannheim: the more central the idea of planning became, the more Eliot's aversion to both waxed and his attendance waned.[288] In a letter to Philip Mairet dated January 1941, which coincided with his last consecutive appearance at The Moot, Eliot expressed his suspicions about the disconcerting influence of Mannheim on The Moot's thinking, and noting derisively that 'there's been a lot of uplift about the place'.[289]

Thereafter he continued to write confidentially to his friends with concerns about Mannheim: that he was not sufficiently understanding of British society, that he overextended the abilities of sociology to grapple with 'living' culture, that Mannheim was fundamentally incapable of fully appreciating religion as a non-religious thinker, and that his version of planning was not only futile but inherently dangerous.[290] Eliot even wrote an article for the *New English Weekly* entitled the 'Germanization of Britain,' in which he admitted that German thought—as embodied by Mannheim—was something that he 'disagreed with violently'.[291] Later, in a letter to John Hayward he wrote about *Notes* being 'full of cracks at Mannheim'.[292] In a similar fashion he wrote to Mary Trevelyan, a fellow Anglo-Catholic, of Mannheim's dominance of The Moot and how 'my wee book' (i.e. *Notes*) 'is to blow up The Moot'.[293] Yet, despite these admissions, Eliot believed he was never able to fully express the depth of his disagreement and disapproval towards his intellectual nemesis—in large part because they were friends. In a letter to Herbert Read he confesses

[287] Kurlberg, 'The Rebirth of Christendom: The Moot (1938-1947) as a Modernist Revitalization Movement,' 52.
[288] Ibid, 193.
[289] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941*, 711.
[290] Kurlberg, 'The Rebirth of Christendom: The Moot (1938-1947) as a Modernist Revitalization Movement,' 197-98.
[291] Kurlberg, 'Resisting Totalitarianism: The Moot and a New Christendom,' 521.
[292] T. S. Eliot, 'Letter to John Hayward,' dated 13th March 1945, HB/L/12/1/24/F397.
[293] T. S. Eliot, 'Letter to Mary Trevelyan,' dated 29th January 1945, HLE/bMS AM/1691.2/45.

to writing 'velvet' reviews of Mannheim's works and admits that he was hesitant to 'wound' Mannheim due to his 'sensitivity' and 'delicate circumstances'.[294]

Though the 'delicate circumstances' referred to are uncertain, it is possible they relate to the fact that it was with Eliot and the members of The Moot that Mannheim—a Jewish émigré—felt most comfortable, estranged as he was from his native land.[295] Indeed, scholars such as David Kettler and Volker Meja have argued Mannheim's relationship with Eliot meant a great deal to the former, as Mannheim often felt otherwise isolated amongst the British intelligentsia.[296] It is even worth keeping this in mind when remembering Eliot's aforementioned tribute to him in *The Times* and Eliot's flattering references to him in his preface of the *Notes*, since both were written in the wake of Mannheim's death. After all, Eliot, who by his own admission suffered from a psychological compunction to be polite, could not countenance potential impoliteness towards a friend (let alone a recently deceased one).[297] This mirrors in many respects Eliot's previously mentioned public utterances regarding both Ezra Pound and Charles Maurras.

What is true of Eliot's attitude toward Mannheim is just as true of J.H. Oldham. When Eliot began attending The Moot, he spoke superlatively about his admiration for him. Yet there was a serious deterioration in his estimation of Oldham. By 1942, for instance, Eliot began to show signs of frustration with Oldham's relentless activities and encroachment on his time, complaining in a letter to Herbert Read about 'inexorable Oldham'

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[294] T. S. Eliot, 'Letter to Herbert Read,' dated 3rd April 1943, HF/8/33.

[295] Kurlberg, 'The Rebirth of Christendom: The Moot (1938-1947) as a Modernist Revitalization Movement,' 197.

[296] D. Kettler, V. Meja, *Karl Mannheim and the Crisis of Liberalism* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1995), 251.

[297] Spurr, *'Anglo-Catholic in Religion' T.S. Eliot and Christianity*, 191.

interrupting and imposing himself on a private lunch meeting with Mannheim.[298] From there relations (on Eliot's end) continued to deteriorate. Of particular relevance is Eliot's Catholic distaste for what he describes as Oldham's relentless Protestantism—not to mention a poet's dislike for Oldham's supposedly deteriorating prose style.[299] The Protestantism that Eliot referred to was Oldham's—and by extension The Moot's—supposedly deficient commitment to Catholicism (due in part to 'theological imprecision' and his eagerness for pan-Protestant but non-Catholic world-wide ecumenism) in addition to a general disregard for Catholic social teaching.[300] In a similar way Eliot became highly critical of Oldham's *Christian News-Letter*, which he felt Oldham had trapped him into helping edit.[301] As early as January 1940 he complained to John Hayward that his 'chief work for the *News Letter* is to keep out bad articles'.[302]

In 1945 Eliot referred to the CNL as an irrelevant publication and criticized it as inexorably Protestant, dubbing it in a letter to Hayward as the 'Anti-Christian News Letter'.[303] Perhaps most frustrating of all for Eliot was the fact that he had been 'played' by 'artful' Oldham to continue serving on its editorial board long after he wished to do so.[304] In time Eliot's growing distaste for Oldham resulted in a desire to distance himself from The Moot, which he referred to dismissively in letters as 'Joe Oldham's Boys'[305] and ' Joe Oldham's old lot'.[306] He also revealed in his letters that just as he was polite with his friend Karl Mannheim (to a fault, he believed), so too the only reason he was still going to

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[298] T.S. Eliot, 'Letter to Herbert Read,' dated 18th September 1942, HF/8/33.

[299] Kurlberg, 'The Rebirth of Christendom: The Moot (1938-1947) as a Modernist Revitalization Movement,' 190.

[300] Spurr, '*Anglo-Catholic in Religion' T.S. Eliot and Christianity*, 189.

[301] Ibid, 193.

[302] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941*, 386.

[303] T. S. Eliot, 'Letter to John Hayward,' dated 13th March 1945, HB/L/12/1/24/F397.

[304] Ibid.

[305] Eliot, 'Letter to Herbert Read.'

[306] Kurlberg, 'The Rebirth of Christendom: The Moot (1938-1947) as a Modernist Revitalization Movement,' 190.

The Moot was out of a polite sense of social obligation. 'The only reason for attending,' Eliot had confided to a friend, 'is that Dr. Oldham would be hurt if he failed to appear.'[307] He did not attend, as has been traditionally supposed, because he found the group to be stimulating and sympathetic. Indeed, as early as September 1939 he refers in private to Oldham's Moot meetings as 'religious argle-bargle'.[308]

The fact that Eliot is regarded as sympathetic toward Oldham's Moot—a group widely regarded as having failed in its ambitions—and supposedly identified with it throughout its duration, shows the extent to which lack of access to Eliot's correspondence has led scholars to fundamentally misjudge their relationship. After all, Eliot had long found The Moot too enamoured with Oldham's desire for action, instead preferring what he coined as pre-political reflection.[309] He also regarded them as too uncritical of Mannheim's 'planning for freedom' and its potentially totalitarian consequences.[310] In fact, Eliot was becoming sceptical about the usefulness of such groups and conferences in the first place, which he began vocalizing in 1941 at the Malvern Conference and later in his 1943-44 letters such as those already quoted.[311] This is further substantiated in a letter Eliot wrote to Murry in 1946, stating that like Murry he had stopped going to The Moot, having found the discussions to be unprofitable in the past few years.[312] Given that Eliot's last attendance was June '43, the timing of his dissatisfaction with Moot discussions coincides roughly with his aforementioned concern in January 1941 that Mannheim's ideas were becoming entrenched in the minds of Moot members. There was, therefore, considerable overlap between Eliot's attendance and disaffection with The Moot—an overlap that he

[307] Ibid.
[308] Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Volume 9: 1939-1941*, 264.
[309] W. Chace, *The Political Identities of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot*, 204.
[310] Kurlberg, 'Resisting Totalitarianism: The Moot and a New Christendom,' 526.
[311] Spurr, '*Anglo-Catholic in Religion' T.S. Eliot and Christianity*, 189.
[312] T.S. Eliot. 'Letter to John Middle Murry,' 4th September 1946. (NEW/II/1/34).

would no doubt be aghast to learn has been mistaken as a period of fruitful camaraderie and like-minded colloquy.

Eliot's most affirming statements about The Moot can likewise be recast with the knowledge that he felt a borderline psychological compulsion for politeness and that from roughly January 1941 onwards he was feeling increasingly at odds with The Moot. In August 1943, for instance, Eliot wrote five letters to Oldham, mostly with comments on a paper by Hodges and other issues, but only one of which was complimentary about The Moot. As quoted earlier, in the letter he recognized their group's diversity in backgrounds and interests, commenting on how it was united by a shared focus on Christianity and Society. This diversity energized and unified The Moot, he wrote. Over time, the group fostered deep, genuine loyalty and kinship among members, creating an enriching experience. He concluded that if the organization has significantly impacted everyone as it has him, its existence is fully justified.[313] Previously, these words have been taken as a highly complementary endorsement from Eliot about The Moot's programme and endorsement identity.[314] But in actual fact, these words were more valedictory than complimentary.

Eliot sent this letter shortly after his last attendance at The Moot (something that he never officially advertised or openly admitted to the group or Oldham). They were also coupled with a warning that he felt himself likely to become a dissident from the group if they pursued too much 'Christian action' or developed a political philosophy of 'planning'.[315] Given that Eliot was mindful not to hurt Oldham's feelings (nor Mannheim's), his compliments about The Moot can be read as a subtle—but also disingenuous—attempt to

[313] Ibid.
[314] Grimley, 'Civil Society and the Clerisy: Christian Elites and National Culture *c.* 1930-1950', 247.
[315] Kojecký. *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, 187.

disengage from The Moot without damaging anyone's feelings. They were, in short, the words of a breakup, not a love letter. Furthermore, Eliot sent these letters after having already broken his continuous attendance streak: having stopped doing so consecutively after January 1941, coinciding with his earlier report of disaffection about Mannheim's ascent in The Moot's discussions and programme. For these reasons, Eliot's positive comments about The Moot should be taken with considerable reservation and qualification (to say nothing of the fact that they are contradicted by his private correspondence). So, too, The Moot's impact on Eliot's *Notes* is far less complimentary and positive than suggested. The fact that he continued to send occasional comments (at Oldham's request) to Moot meetings speaks to the indefatigable courtesy that Eliot often lamented possessing.[316]

Despite the short-lived symbiosis between Eliot and The Moot from April 1938 to January 1941, the overall picture of Eliot's relationship with The Moot is negative. Eliot took issue with the group on religious, political, philosophical, and temperamental grounds. Religiously, the group was seen as too Protestant, often offending Eliot's Catholic sensibilities: in particular, his sense of catholicity and admiration for Catholic social thought. Added to this was Eliot's anti-Erastian concern that closer cooperation between Church and state would undermine the doctrinal and ecclesiastical integrity of the former, while only strengthening the reach of the latter. This concern was based in part on his observations of the 1927 Prayer Book Controversy, which he regarded as demonstrative of the limits of both the public's and politicians' understanding of theology or ecclesiastical matters, but also their eagerness to nevertheless meddle in such matters.[317] Politically, Eliot felt isolated as a conservative: his distaste for planning and state-intrusion, coupled

[316] Spurr, *'Anglo-Catholic in Religion' T.S. Eliot and Christianity*, 191.
[317] Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State Between the Wars*, 141.

with an earnest appreciation of tradition and organic growth separated him from the activism of Oldham and the philosophy of Mannheim.[318] He liked to refer to The Moot and many of Oldham's other groups like the Christian Frontier Council as the 'Liberal Party at Prayer'.[319] In a similar manner to his anti-Erastianism, Eliot far preferred an organic model of development, which translated into an almost libertarian mistrust of anything resembling a systematic, unilateral government intrusion into the spheres of education, culture, and religion.

Philosophically, he had issues with Mannheim's planning and sociological framework, preferring instead to approach the matter from a mixture of lived experience, reflection, a conservative conception of organic growth, and pro-continental hopes for renewed cultural integration. But their differences were also theological. Ultimately, Eliot was against any form of systematic planning because even if such plans included religion, religion was not truly religious without God, and God could not be planned. Furthermore, in his mind, The Moot was too eager for action and too clamorous for influence. Instead, he wanted individuals to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, offering as directed their intelligence and industry according to the various circumstances of their individual contexts. Nor did Eliot believe that any plan could entirely compensate for the effect of original sin upon human behaviour and interaction. Given these many differences, it is no surprise that Eliot drifted from The Moot.

As Barry Spurr and Jonas Kurlberg have argued, previous scholarship's reliance on Roger Kojecký's summaries of Eliot and The Moot has led to a misrepresentation of reality.

[318] S.J.D. Green, *The Passing of Protestant England: Secularisation and Social Change, c. 1920-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 58.
[319] Spurr, *'Anglo-Catholic in Religion' T.S. Eliot and Christianity*, 190.

'Kojecký has been beguiled by the attendance figures from their meetings, and has too often simply concluded, from Eliot's presence, that he supported what the bodies stood for and were doing and saying.'[320] In their defence, it was not until 2010 that The Moot's collected minutes and papers were published. It is also the case that publication of Eliot's letters is progressing slowly, and to date only covers until the end of 1941. There is a case that can be made that from April 1938 to January 1941, Eliot was a willing and occasionally interested participant in The Moot discussion group. His book *The Idea of a Christian Society* derived some benefit from his discussions with John Middleton Murry, but there is no sure evidence to suggest that Eliot's proposed Community of Christians was based on The Moot—not when Eliot had participated in other groups and endeavours before The Moot such as the Chandos Group, Oxford Conference, *New English Weekly*, and his own *Criterion.*

As has been previously argued, the *Idea* was mainly the product of his *Criterion* criticism, which had only ceased shortly before the *Idea's* original delivery in Cambridge. In a similar way, *Notes* does not draw on Eliot's participation in The Moot in a positive way, but negatively. To paraphrase Kurlberg once more, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* was written as a polemic against Mannheim and The Moot.[321] It was not written in a spirit of solidarity or sympathy with The Moot and neither was it a manifesto for what Clements described as the Oldham- and Mannheim-led vision of The Moot becoming a type of 'Order' dedicated to influencing and enacting a new programme of planned social transformation.[322] Since 'The Moot lost the argument,' with the 'Welfare state [emerging] at the end of the 1940s [as] centralised, morally neutral, and avowedly egalitarian,'[323] it

[320] Ibid, 191.
[321] Kurlberg, 'Resisting Totalitarianism: The Moot and a New Christendom,' 52.
[322] Clements, *The Moot Papers: Faith, Freedom and Society 1938-1944*, 14.
[323] Grimley, 'Civil Society and the Clerisy: Christian Elites and National Culture *c.* 1930-1950', 247.

would be wrong to associate Eliot with their Mannheim-inspired vision of a planned state. Instead, whatever the superficial similarities between them, Eliot's social criticism fits in better alongside his Catholic, classicist, continental, and conservative peers and seen as a continuation of his *Criterion* era work.

Conclusion

In so far as Reeves speaks for many, she was wrong when she stated that The Moot was a catalyst for the social criticism of T.S. Eliot. Perhaps she was correct, in a general sense, that the Moot worked because 'Oldham infused it with a sense of loyalty to a group of friends who—however sharply their views differed—shared a common commitment to the rigorous exploration of beliefs and a strong concern with the crisis of their times.'[324] But for that statement to be accurate it cannot refer to the entirety of Eliot's participation in the group. Instead, it must only refer to his early attendance from April 1938 to January 1941—a time when Eliot appears to have largely enjoyed the discussions and was enthused by his interactions with John Middleton Murry about Christian society. But even then, it must be noted that Eliot himself did not credit the Moot with much impact on the *Idea*, but instead referenced several figures that he had interacted with long before The Moot. Nor is there sure evidence to suggest that Eliot's proposed Community of Christians was based on The Moot—not when Eliot had participated in other groups and endeavours before The Moot such as the Chandos Group, Oxford Conference, *New English Weekly*, and his own *Criterion*.

As Kurlberg has written, '*The Idea* was… the result of Eliot's developing social criticism

[324] Reeves, 'Intellectuals in Debate: The Moot' in *Christian Thinking and Social Order: Conviction Politics from the 1930s to the Present Day*, 42.

of the 1930s, most of which can been found in his articles and essays during this period.'[325] One of the unique contributions of this work has been to do just that: detailing his *Criterion* criticism and mapping the migration of its themes and interests in both the *Idea* and the *Notes*. This chapter has likewise demonstrated the non-Moot origins for much of his later work. This includes Eliot's anti-Erastian conception of a robust Christian society, which was the outcome of more than a decade's worth of reflection and rumination prior to The Moot. Likewise, his defence of religious freedom—whether it was aimed against popular and political appropriations of Christian terminology during the late 1930s in an effort to mobilize public morale against Germany, or protecting the relationship between culture and religion lest the latter be co-opted in order to create more of the former—drew inspiration from his earlier conversion and subsequent reading, both of which were heavily predicated on the flaws of liberalism, the reality of sin, and even the prospect of hell. These developments and beliefs were first represented in his *Criterion* social criticism, and the four main strands of his thought (i.e., his conservatism, classicism, continentalism, and Catholicism) are as identifiable in his later work as they were in his earlier social criticism.

In much the same way as Eliot's *Idea*, his *Notes* depended on The Moot for little when it came to inspiring original thought. Though Karl Mannheim and The Moot provided fresh objects for Eliot's criticism, the critic had already formed—at least in embryonic form—a definition of culture similar to that of tradition, a belief in the importance of 'friction' between central and constituent parts, an organic conception of cultural and social growth, hesitancy about state intrusion into cultural spheres and concerns about the encroachment of the state into religious affairs (be that religious education or the creation of culture). But whereas The Moot may have provided some limited inspiration for the *Idea*, it was the

[325] Kurlberg, 'The Rebirth of Christendom: The Moot (1938-1947) as a Modernist Revitalization Movement,' 312.

object of his criticism in the *Notes*. As he wrote:

> It is not a question of assembling into committees the representatives of different types of knowledge and experience, of calling in everybody to advise everybody else… Men who meet only for definite serious purposes, and on official occasions, do not wholly meet. They may have some common concern very much at heart; they may, in course of repeated contacts, come to share a vocabulary and an idiom which appear to communicate every shade of meaning necessary for their common purpose; but they will continue to retire from these encounters each to his private social world as well as to his solitary world.[326]

Instead, Eliot found a greater amount of inspiration and camaraderie with other networked groups and individuals, many of whom were Catholic and (or) conservative. In these groups he was a part of a much broader intellectual milieu, which included national figures, political leaders, and even large sections of the public—a cross section of society which is far larger than the Moot ever influenced or represented.

Whereas The Moot was dominated by Mannheim's theories of social democratic planning, Eliot's intellectual modus operandi aligns more easily within the 'men of letters' and 'public moralist' traditions. This was his preferred method of engagement and had been since the *Criterion*, rendering him unlikely to conform with the sociological methods and mindset of Mannheim. It is no surprise therefore, that Eliot's *Notes* sits more easily alongside other conservative figures such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Edmund Burke, as well as with European thinkers like Jacques Maritain and in relation to Catholic social thought. Given that Eliot's later social criticism exists on a continuum with his earlier *Criterion* social criticism—a period when his popularity and stature grew immensely, not merely as a poet but in conjunction with his editorship and commentaries—it is entirely unwarranted to dismiss or disregard his work as isolated or idiosyncratic, as though it could easily be dismissed by its supposed affiliation with a group as little-known and unaccomplished as

[326] Eliot, 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture,' 160.

The Moot. Yet this is precisely what happens when his social criticism is bifurcated into 'mature' and 'immature' periods: which not only belies creative chronologies and truncates timelines, but also obscures the fact that his reputation as a social critic was successfully forged—not in spite of—but alongside and interwoven with his ascendancy as both a poet and literary critic.

T.S. Eliot's later social criticism, like his earlier work, boasts a substantial, historic, and influential intellectual pedigree. His career as a social critic was an essential aspect of his public persona and a major source of popularity and influence within conservative, classicist, Christian, and continental circles—which were themselves far from peripheral spheres of interest in 1930s and 40s Britain. Indeed, Eliot's social criticism provides useful windows into the overlapping and sometimes conflicting intersections of social criticism, theological reflection, political affiliation, and civil society in Britain during the late-Interwar and Second World War period. The fact that many later scholars and biographers have cooled towards (and even demonised) Eliot's social criticism as either atavistic, idiosyncratic, proto-authoritarian, theocratic or 'worse' reveals the paucity of historical research done on mid-century thought and culture by some of these writers.

It is incontrovertibly clear that Eliot's social criticism fits within the mainstream of British intellectual life from the 1920s through to the 1940s (if not beyond), even if mainstream trends became more secularised later in the twentieth century. For instance, the esteemed writer and critic Raymond Williams saw fit to engage with Eliot's social criticism at length in his immensely popular 1958 work, *Culture and Society*. Though Williams took a different attitude towards culture, regarding it as post-industrial revolution development, he esteemed (as an adversary) Eliot's social criticism as both respectable and important.[327]

[327] R. Williams, Second Thoughts: I - T. S. Eliot on Culture." *Essays in Criticism* VI, no. 3 (1956): 302.

'The Idea of a Christian Society, and Notes towards the Definition of Culture' he wrote, 'are works of substance, not fashion…. If Eliot is read with attention, he is seen to have raised questions which those who differ from him politically must answer, or else retire from the field.'[328] Instead, the real atavism at work are the blithe post-modern assumptions regarding the place, popularity, and cogency of conservatism and religion within twentieth-century British thought and culture. The fact that T.S. Eliot's social criticism is so easily dismissed as 'backward' or even 'menacing' while his poetry continues to be celebrated for its modernism (despite the concurrent nature of their development within his career) reveals just how impoverished and artificial intellectual boundary-making can become. The constituencies of mid-century intellectual life in Britain (and beyond) were more porous and diverse than is often admitted, and Eliot's social criticism provides an important case study to that effect. Far from being a Victorian hangover, Eliot's social criticism demonstrates the extent to which the modern intellectual mind can still be vivified by theological, conservative, classicist, and continental inquiries. Whether one agrees or disagrees with his conclusions is an entirely different matter, but one should not pretend that they had no (or have no) place in the modern era.

[328] Ibid.

CONCLUSION

'We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.'
~T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*

The purpose and intentions of this thesis have primarily been sixfold. First, to provide an updated and equally comprehensive assessment of Eliot's life and work as a social critic as that produced in Roger Kojecký's 1972 landmark study, *T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism*. Second, to respond to claims characterising Eliot's work as inherently problematic (e.g., anti-democratic or anti-Semitic), by conducting an exhaustive review of his published oeuvre and determining its defining intellectual features. Third, to delineate and detail those features—i.e., classicism, conservatism, continentalism, and Catholicism—as expressed in his varied works and within the various networks he inhabited. Fourth, to situate the content of his social criticism within his career as a social critic, relocating our attention away from an exclusive focus on The Moot in the 1940s towards Eliot's editorship of *The Criterion* in the 1920s and 30s. Fifth, to emphasise the implications of this shift, which reveals Eliot's social criticism to be more important, impactful, and popular than previously assumed when fixated on his 'mature' work and The Moot. And finally, to demonstrate in the process some of the intellectual diversity and dynamism in Interwar and Second World War Britain, revealing (with Eliot as a case study) the extent to which intellectual life was animated by porous networks and connected clusters drawn from both the left and the right, traditional and modernising movements, religious and nonreligious groups, as well as both British and European sources.

To that end, Chapter One provided a biographical account of Eliot's life and work as a social critic. Beginning with his earliest years, it charted his growth from a sickly young boy in St. Louis to the eve of attending university, revealing his earliest religious influences, and questioning Spurr's estimation about the impact of Eliot's Unitarianism on his later social criticism. Proceeding onto Harvard where Eliot began his philosophical studies, it explored the moralizing ideas and classicist ideals of Irving Babbitt, which encouraged his student's own trajectory toward a classicist, conservative, and continental social criticism. It also explored Eliot's interest in F.H. Bradley, debating Skaff's claim that the major aspects of Eliot's mature thought were adumbrated in his dissertation on Bradley; as well as refuting Ackroyd's claim that to understand Eliot's prose it was necessary to understand Bradley.

Next, it covered Eliot's resettlement in England, noting the extent to which his work in banking benefitted and shaped his later interests in and formulations about economic policy. The following sections focussed on the creation and growth of *The Criterion*, arguing that his editorial principle of disinterestedness, which sought to avoid the temptation of using emotional (rather than rational) appeals to their audience's social, political, or theological prejudices stemmed in large part from Eliot's classicism and Europeanism. So, too, that despite Eliot's increasing tendency in the 1930s toward conservatism in political philosophy and Catholicism in theology, his 'disinterested' editorial policy remained much the same, which enabled the magazine to navigate the socio-political vicissitudes of the Interwar period with considerable (and many thought commendable) consistency.

This chapter's sections on *The Criterion* are complimented by a segment on Eliot's conversion, arguing that Eliot's preoccupation with the doctrine of original sin was essential not only to his conversion, but also his growing scepticism toward the scientific pretensions of social planning and his mistrust of ideological enthusiasm. This is followed by a section on *The Criterion's* ending, which highlighted the central importance of Eliot's commentaries to the magazine's identity and recognises the magazine's importance to intellectual life during the Interwar period. It also noted the links between the magazine's end and the impetus for *The Idea of a Christian Society*.

The first chapter then surveys the friendships that Eliot maintained in the period between his two marriages, demonstrating both the classicist, conservative, Catholic, and continental nature of many of these. It is noted that this effectively mirrored in his social life the intellectual orientation of his social criticism, as well as revealing the porous boundaries existing amongst the nation's intelligentsia, especially with respect to the interdisciplinary nature of religious, political, cultural, and intellectual thought. A subsequent portion of the chapter then examined the limited extent to which some of his more famous friends, such as Virginia Woolf and Ezra Pound, impacted his social criticism, while also critiquing Collini's representation of Eliot as an antiquated public moralist.

Chapter One concludes with two final sections: one on Eliot in the 1930s and another in the 1940s and beyond. The 1930s section covered his various professional and creative endeavours, paying particular attention to his 1933 public lectures, *After Strange Gods*, and asserting that Collini and others are wrong in designating these as part of his social criticism, as well as being misleading in how they interpret Eliot's inadvisable remarks about 'free-thinking Jews'. On the other hand, this section does argue that a connection existed between his social criticism and his anti-totalitarian play, *Murder in the Cathedral*,

which was both immensely popular and a noteworthy translation of his political thought into the public sphere. Finally, the section on the 1940s and beyond concludes the biographical portion of this thesis and introduces us to many of the groups, networks, and individuals that will be treated in greater detail in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two focusses on Eliot's *Criterion* social criticism, which is divided between an analysis of Eliot as a social critic and a review of his social criticism. The first section focusses on the various guises he adopted as a social critic, such as a man of letters, public moralist, and Christian social philosopher. It noted the historical anatomy of these nomenclatures and highlights the contemporary influence of other such moralists, men of letters, and Christian social philosophers, arguing that these categories of thinkers were far from irrelevant or idiosyncratic at that time. Moving onto the scope of Eliot's criticism, the chapter categorised the primary areas of Eliot's interest: romanticism and liberalism, economics, psychology, political theory, Charles Maurras and *Action Française*, decline, and Church and state. It maintained that from these writings and in this period, Eliot emerged more than anything else as a public moralist: one that was classicist in literature and temperament, conservative (i.e., tory) in political theory, Catholic in theological persuasion, and European in his geo-cultural orientation. The moralist designation is apt, not least because Eliot identified himself as such, but also because his moralism—with its presupposition of objective moral standards and values—is the hermeneutical constant connecting his classicism, conservatism, Catholicism, and Europeanism together. Indeed, this moralism was in many respects the culmination of his preoccupation with the 'Absolute', which had first manifested itself during his doctoral work on F.H. Bradley.

In Chapter Two, *The Criterion* years provide an important window into Eliot's social criticism, not merely as a precursor to his 'mature' works, but in their own right,

representing the longest and most productive period of his career as a social critic. The importance of the magazine as a leading national and transatlantic quarterly also enhances and enlarges the historic audience of Eliot's social criticism, which might otherwise be limited in our memory to the scope and duration of print runs for *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. Instead, Eliot's social criticism can be seen as a more central component of his identity as a leading man of letters, rather than as an incidental appendage to his otherwise iconic success as a poet. His role as editor of *The Criterion* and the centrality of his commentaries to his editorship were intertwined in the public reception of the magazine, just as the magazine was itself instrumental in consolidating Eliot's rise in the literary establishment and his place in the national literary consciousness.

Having surveyed Eliot's career as a social critic in Chapter One and established the centrality of *The Criterion* to Eliot's criticism in Chapter Two, Chapter Three addresses the last and supposedly 'mature' stage of his work and challenges prevailing scholarly views about the nature and extent of Eliot's relationship with The Moot discussion group. It explored and outlined both the *Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, establishing the thematic and conceptual continuities existing between his earlier and later criticism, which has previously been missed or undeveloped in Eliot studies. More specifically, at the beginning of the chapter it relays in Eliot's own words a summation of his criticism as quoted from his 1946 address 'The Unity of European Culture'. In short, that the fate and hope of the western mind, indeed, the western soul, still depended upon a unifying symbiosis between classicism, continentalism, conservatism, and (most importantly) Christianity (as rooted most profoundly, but not exclusively, in the Roman/Latin tradition). As noted, these sentiments not only matched those in his *Criterion* criticism but were also foundational in *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the*

Definition of Culture. Then followed a section describing the main contents and major contentions of *The Idea*, providing clarity about the content of his book as well as the motivation that lay behind it: namely the issues presented by the Moral Re-Armament Movement, which pre-dated Eliot's involvement with The Moot.

Following on from that, the chapter argued that Eliot's original lectures for *The Idea* were not only aimed at his prior *Criterion* audience but were essentially an exercise in extended *Criterion* criticism. This was demonstrated with respect to the intellectuals associated with the work and with the reoccurring and symmetrical emphases placed on political ideas, classicism, conservatism, Christianity (and Catholicism), and continentalism. This was coupled with an equivalent exploration and review of *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* in the next two sections. In outlining the literary and intellectual architecture of *Notes*, this section of the chapter provided details about the essential anti-Erastian nature of this work, arguing that both religion and culture were authentic and organic forces that should not be co-opted by artificial and bureaucratic interventions, as neither culture nor religion was made by trying to make them; they came about as living responses to those things that made life worth living. Next, reviewing the continuity and continuation of Eliot's *Criterion* criticism in his *Notes*, this section explored how classicism, conservatism, Catholicism, and continentalism remained paramount, noting especially how Eliot's conception of culture was first developed—not in colloquy with The Moot and Mannheim—but in *The Criterion* in contradistinction to Freud and later when discussing tradition in *After Strange Gods*.

Chapter Three proceeded next to describe the connections between Eliot and The Moot, reviewing every aspect of their relationship, and upending the scholarly consensus about Eliot's attitude towards it and the contributions made by the group with respect to his social criticism. It took issue with arguments made by Kearns, Reeves, Scott, Clements,

Kojecký, Robbins, Collini and others, while siding with Spurr and Kurlberg—arguing that prior scholarship has been too reliant on incomplete and earlier assessments of The Moot (most notably by Kojecký) and that Eliot increasingly disliked the group and attempted to dissociate himself from it. This segment did so by examining archival records of attendance figures and matching them with Eliot's private correspondence, creating a revised timeline for when and why he distanced himself from the group. In the section on 'Private Attitudes' it is revealed that Eliot's often quoted and ostensibly positive words about the group were in fact a disingenuous attempt to decouple from it and did not in fact reflect his actual feelings about Oldham, Mannheim, and The Moot. It argued that only from April 1938 to January 1941 was Eliot a willing and occasionally interested participant in The Moot discussion group. It further contended that while *The Idea of a Christian Society* derived some benefit from discussions with John Middleton Murry, there was no evidence to suggest that Eliot's proposed Community of Christians was based on The Moot—not when Eliot had participated in other groups and endeavours before (and alongside) The Moot such as the Chandos/Christendom Group, Oxford Conference, *New English Weekly*, and his own *Criterion*.

In a similar way, this final chapter argues that the *Notes* does not draw on Eliot's participation in The Moot in a positive way, but negatively. It was not written in a spirit of solidarity or sympathy with The Moot, and neither was it a manifesto for what Clements described as the Oldham- and Mannheim-led vision of The Moot becoming a type of 'Order' dedicated to influencing and enacting a new programme of planned social transformation. Though Karl Mannheim and The Moot provided fresh objects for Eliot's criticism, the critic had already formed a preliminary definition of culture like that of tradition, a belief in the importance of 'friction' between central and constituent parts, an organic conception of cultural and social growth, a hesitancy about state intrusion into cultural spheres and

concerns about the encroachment of the state into religious affairs. So, too, *Notes* drew heavily upon the classicism, conservatism, continentalism, and Catholicism of his *Criterion* era criticism and far from being positively developed in conjunction with The Moot, the networks that ought to be most associated with his criticism from this period include Chandos, *New English Weekly*, and certain private members clubs.

Taken together, these three chapters present Eliot's social criticism (both in its earlier and later stages) as boasting a substantial, historic, and influential intellectual pedigree. His vocation as a social critic was a vital aspect of his public persona and a considerable source of popularity and influence within conservative, classicist, Christian, and continental circles—which were themselves far from incidental or fringe spheres of interest in 1930s and 40s Britain. Furthermore, Eliot's social criticism provides an important window into the coinciding and sometimes conflicting intersections of social criticism, theological reflection, political affiliation, and civil society in Britain during the late-Interwar and Second World War period. That many subsequent scholars and biographers have disliked (and even demonised) Eliot's social criticism as either atavistic, idiosyncratic, proto-authoritarian, theocratic or 'worse' reveals the insufficient nature of historical research done on mid-century thought and culture by some of these commentators.

This thesis has sought to make it emphatically clear that Eliot's social criticism fits within the mainstream of British intellectual life from the 1920s through to the 1940s, even if mainstream trends became more secularised later in the twentieth century. It suspects that the real atavism lies not with Eliot's social criticism, but with uncritical post-modern assumptions regarding the place and potency of conservatism and religion within twentieth-century British thought and culture. The fact that T.S. Eliot's social criticism is so easily dismissed as 'backward' or even 'menacing' while much of his poetry continues to

be celebrated for its dynamic modernism (despite the concurrent nature of their development within his career) reveals the extent to which artificial boundary-making can become misleading. Instead, the different spheres of mid-century intellectual life in Britain (and beyond) were often far more porous and diverse than is admitted, and Eliot's social criticism provides an important case study to that effect. Indeed, far from representing a Victorian hangover, his social criticism demonstrates the extent to which the modern intellectual mind could still be vivified by theological, conservative, classicist, and continental traditions. Whether one agrees or disagrees with his conclusions is an entirely different matter, but one should not pretend that they have no place in the modern era.

As such, there are various next-steps and further avenues for exploration that this thesis suggests. To begin, the close relationship between Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and his social criticism indicates that a wider review of his dramatic verse could yield some fruitful scholarship. While there are obvious grounds for further examining connections between *The Rock* and Eliot's social criticism given the religious nature of the play and its coterminous date of creation with his *Criterion* criticism, it would be interesting to explore his later plays after the cessation of his social criticism in the late 1940s: once again with a view to determining classicist, conservative, continental, and Catholic themes. This would have been highly interesting and potentially fruitful to do so in this thesis, but it would have expanded the scope of this work beyond its imposed limits.

Given that Eliot's *Criterion* commentaries were inseparable from his editorship of the magazine and the magazine was instrumental in his rise as a public literary figure, it is altogether possible that other connections (both casual and correlative) could exist between his social criticism and poetry, which would boldly rewrite accepted scholarly narratives about the poet and his poetry. Just as this thesis detailed Eliot's intellectual

development at Harvard, Paris, and Oxford in order to track his emerging ideas with respect to his social criticism (such as his classicism, conservatism, and continentalism), so it could be highly productive to place his pre-conversion poetry under a similar light in order to discern any manifestations of these intellectual impulses. Post-conversion, there is scope for similar work being done in conjunction with *Four Quartets*: not necessarily with respect to his Catholicism as that is already a tilled field, but certainly with fresh attention to the potential outworking or expression of his classicist, conservative, and continental convictions. If discovered in both quality and quantity, the bifurcation between Eliot's verse and prose could be further reduced and his social criticism brought even closer to the centre of his career and success. Indeed, a truly complete intellectual biography of Eliot would require studying and integrating the entirety of both his prose and verse to determine just such matters, but this would be a monumental if meaningful task.

As mentioned in this work's introduction, Eliot's poetry and person are increasingly being studied in relation to gender, sexuality, and identity. While this thesis approached his social criticism from the perspective of intellectual history and limited itself mostly to controversial matters related to race and prejudice, an exhaustive study of his social criticism with respect to gender would be especially welcome, as there is undoubtedly scope to explore both the omission of women from much of his work as well as the presence of patriarchal notions in many of his religious and cultural constructs.

Other openings for research include a systematic study of the impact of Eliot's social criticism in America. This would include a more searching review of the relationship between Eliot and Russell Kirk, along with charting Kirk's own idiosyncratic influence on neoconservatism in the United States. It would likewise include research on *The New Criterion*: going beyond the commonalities between it and its namesake and looking deeper

into the magazine's curation of aesthetic taste and political opinion within conservative circles from the 1980s to the present. Continuing with America, another potential route for research would be a three-part case study profiling the friendships and shared impact of Eliot, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Jacques Maritain: as each of them were active social critics with enduring influence and sizable audiences. In that respect a case study could potentially advance many of the arguments made in this thesis about the variegated nature of intellectual life in mid-century Britain, but with a view to a wider trans-Atlantic focus.

Certainly, from a personal perspective, I hope that further research is conducted in my area of Eliot studies. This is partly because I have found his social criticism to be stimulating on an intellectual level—most notably when considering cultural preservation in global and/or capitalistic frameworks, the relationship between ethics and public policy decision making, as well as the challenges of developing social capital between and amongst rival identity groups (both religious and non-religious) in common but increasingly contested spaces—but also on personal grounds. As an admirer of both Eliot's poetry and his contributions to culture, I would personally be saddened to see his reputation unduly tarnished (or cancelled) by unwarranted accusations about his social criticism: a danger that is ever-present in our current climate. That is not to suggest, however, that his social criticism is without fault. It will remain undoubtedly and justifiably problematic to various persons and varied viewpoints. That is why I believe that his work merits wider study by trained academics with a view to understanding it accurately and fair-mindedly, so that, should Eliot's work and legacy diminish in the future, it does so for sound reasons based on sober second judgement (and vice versa). After all, history should not be kind to people. It should be accurate, in so far as historians are able.

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