

**The Dialectics of Modernity and Tradition:
Eliot and Adorno on Individualism and
the Differentiation of Spheres**

Dr. Amr Amin Elsherif

Lecturer of Cultural Studies and Literary Theory

Faculty of Arts, Damanhour University

amr.elsherif@art.dmu.edu.eg

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Abstract:

Modernity comes as a revolution against tradition in order to establish knowledge on a rational ground and set the individual free from its authority. Nevertheless, there is a strong anti-modern return to tradition among many modernist thinkers and writers. Both T. S. Eliot and Theodor W. Adorno formulate the relation between modernity and tradition in dialectical terms. This article argues that Eliot, on the one hand, forms the relation in a positive dialectical way to contain modernity through return to tradition. This imposes its parameters on modern rationality and recreates the same kind of hegemonic society against which modernity revolts. Adorno, on the other hand, analyzes the negative dialectical reversion of modern rationalism against itself and its liberatory potential which subjects all fields, including tradition, to its domination. Rather than imposing one on the other, this study proposes an unreconciled, non-coercive form of coexistence in a pluralistic culture in order to move beyond this impasse. Instead of subjecting one to the other, each may provide a critical perspective on the other.

Keywords: T. S. Eliot, Theodor W. Adorno, Modernity, Individualism, the Differentiation of Spheres, Negative Dialectics, Tradition.

جدل الحداثة والتراث: إليوت وأدورنو عن الفردية وتمايز مجالات القيمة

د. عمرو أمين الشريف

مدرس الدراسات الثقافية والنقد الأدبي بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها
كلية الآداب، جامعة دمنهور

مستخلص

جاءت الحداثة بسعيها لتأسيس المعرفة على أساس عقلاني وتحرير الفرد من السلطوية كثورة على التراث. إلا أن ذلك قام بتحفيز تيار مناهض للحداثة يسعى لاستعادة التراث بين العديد من الكتاب والمفكرين الحداثيين. والسبب في ذلك هو حالة الخواء الروحاني وتفسخ وحدة المجتمع اللتين أدت إليها العقلانية الحداثية. نظر توماس ستيرنز إليوت وثيودور أدورنو للعلاقة بين التراث والحداثة على أنها علاقة جدلية. تسعى هذه الدراسة لإثبات أن إليوت قام بتشكيل العلاقة على أنها جدل إيجابي لكي يحتوي الحداثة عن طريق التراث. على العكس من ذلك، قام أدورنو بتحليل الجدل السلبي للعقلانية الحداثية وسجل انقلابها لنقيضها، إلا أنه أصر على تحليل التراث تحليلاً عقلانياً. من خلال إثبات تحول كلا من التراث والحداثة لشكلين مختلفين من السلطوية، تسعى هذه الدراسة لتقديم شكل من أشكال التعايش المشترك يحطم هيمنتها، دون فرض أي منها على الآخر في مجتمع تعددي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ثيودور أدورنو، إليوت، الحداثة، الفردية، تمايز مجالات القيمة،

الجدل السلبي، التراث.

“Modernism is a reaction against the modern.”**Louis Menand**

The late modern return to tradition is neither a purely aesthetic phenomenon nor an expression of a personal attitude by some thinkers nostalgic for the past. It comes out of a genuine need in modern societies for the unity and sense of direction which tradition endows. In other words, it is a reversion to fill in the void brought about by the dialectical reversal of modern rationalism. The dialectical formulations of modernity and tradition in T. S. Eliot's and Theodor Adorno's critical writings show some kind of negativity or lack on each side that requires the other. What is at stake is not only aesthetic creativity but the fate of rational knowledge and the freedom of the individual which modernity stresses and his need for sense and guidance which tradition provides.

Eliot tries to sublimate modernity into tradition in order to contain what he regards as the adverse effects of the former by the latter. He, on the one hand, offers a positive dialectical concept of the relation to integrate the modern as a moment of tradition. When this attempt fails, he stresses the opposition in order to marginalize the modern. Adorno, on the other hand, does not try to gloss over the difference. The essences and governing principles of modernity and tradition, rationalism or the coordination of reason and the world versus the “pregiven” into which one is born, are irreconcilable. “Tradition is opposed to rationality” (Adorno, “On Tradition” 75). In spite of their opposition, modernity itself is formed in traditional culture and comes as a reaction against it. Moreover, “to imagine the absence of tradition in modernity, on the other hand, is naïve” (Adorno “On Tradition” 75). The negative dialectical understanding of the relation shows awareness of some kind of negativity in each that requires the other – its opposite – without synthesizing them into unity. Adorno's analysis of the Enlightenment shows not only the failure of modernity to attain its goal but also the rationalist exclusion of any ultimate sense or goal from life; this leads to the return to tradition in many modern thinkers including Eliot himself. The non-coercive

negative dialectical conceptualization of both tradition and modernity may help create, as this study hopes to do, a place for the former in the latter without reducing the difference between them or absorbing one into the other. This article exposes, in the first part, some of the categories in which modernity and tradition stand opposed to each other. It focuses on two modern categories *inter alia*, namely individualism and the differentiation of spheres, which Eliot seeks to reverse into their traditional forms while Adorno intends to maintain. In the second, it traces the development of Eliot's concept of tradition and situates it within his overarching modernist project to prove that it is formulated in a positive dialectical manner to overcome the challenge which modernity poses to tradition and integrate the former as a moment of the latter. Containing the liberatory potential of modernity through tradition, which Eliot enlarges to encompass culture in general, recreates the conservative society it has revolted against. In the third part, the article examines the negative dialectical development of modernity in order to trace its reversion against itself and its rational principles. If both tradition and modernity turn into forms of domination, the article seeks, in the conclusion, to explore a possible form of coexistence that does not impose one on the other and frees both of their hegemonic potentials.

The Opposition between Modernity and Tradition:

The Enlightenment has released such a powerful dynamic in European society and intellectual life that modern forms of life and the sources of the legitimacy of knowledge and action differ greatly from premodern ones. It sets reason as the criterion of judging the validity of knowledge, ideas, social practices and policies which replace tradition and the institutions that guard and hand it down, *tradere*, and which derive their authority from it. The Enlightenment has been conscious of the tense relation between the authority of reason and adherence to tradition or what is handed down from the past since Immanuel Kant has formulated it as "man's exit from self-incurred immaturity" which he defines as "the inability to make use of one's own understanding without the guidance of another" (Kant,

“What is the Enlightenment?” 58). As immaturity is related to guidance by authority, modernity is defined as a state of maturity in which one autonomously determines true knowledge, moral action and correct judgment by reason (Owen 7). Modernity is, hence, a state of autonomy or self-determination which enables the individual to direct himself rationally without guidance or control by authority. Individualism, taking the political form of liberalism, comes to pose a threat to both authority and the unity of society. Whether shaped by Protestantism or romanticism, the category of the individual is a product of modernity *par excellence* (Marody 131). The opposition between using reason autonomously and being guided by another is related directly to the opposition between modernity and the tradition inherited from previous ages which renders it “impossible for ... [modernity] to broaden its knowledge ... to cleanse itself of errors, and generally to progress in enlightenment” (Kant, “What is the Enlightenment?” 61). Maturity as a state of rational autonomy sets the modern self-determining individual against tradition. As opposed to a state of immaturity, modernity sees itself as a “radical break” with all preceding history (Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* 6). The legitimacy of the break and the new start depends on the possibility of grounding knowledge and action on a rational basis that guarantees the validity of knowledge free from the unprovable ideas of tradition.

Contesting the value of tradition as a source of authority requires rational rules according to which the individual can steer himself. The three Kantian critiques function as the “handbook of reason” which defines “the conditions under which the use of reason is legitimate in order to determine what can be known, what must be done, and what may be hoped” (Foucault 38). Limiting the knowable to what can be experienced poses a great challenge to tradition, a large part of the authority of which depends on what is received from the past and can in no way be verified by experience. Rationalism, on the other hand, gives power to the individual not only in determining what is true according to rational criteria as opposed to passively receiving it from the past but also in deciding what is moral or immoral. When ethical behavior is no longer

dictated by tradition, it becomes incumbent on the individual to determine moral action rationally. The *Critique of Practical Reason*, for instance, introduces the rational criterion of universalizability according to which an action is considered moral if it can be repeated an infinite number of times in different places. This categorical imperative or rational rule of practical reason helps the individual determine his course of action on his own without appeal to any traditional authority. By aiding man to think rationally for himself, the differentiation of the spheres of knowledge, action and judgment enhances individualism. By the same token, this universal individualism runs counter to all traditions which have their biases. Modernity, thus, poses challenge to tradition not only by limiting knowledge to what can be proved but also by rationally empowering the individual and crossing the limits of any tradition.

Prior to modernity, tradition has been the most important source of value, meaning of life, definition of phenomena, parameters of acceptable behavior and social bond (Gross 20). Without the shared definitions and habits, the social bond would disintegrate and values would become unstable. Following tradition becomes a guarantee that one is in tandem with a way of life that has been tested and tried for hundreds of years which provides both guidance and existential security. Tradition also provides answers to the ultimate teleological questions which cannot be verified by experience.

Due to the fact that tradition preexists the individual, it passes its interpretations of the world as natural. "Tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence" (Heidegger 43). This holds true regarding both the form of society shaped by tradition and the view of the natural world handed down from one generation to the next. To the modern mind, social order and the natural world belong to two different realms. The medieval mind does not recognize this division. The nobility has regarded their social privilege as a reflection of their biological superiority and taken the social order to reflect the "world's natural order" (Dewald 2). In a society which recognizes only class identification, the category of the individual cannot exist. "The category of tradition is

essentially feudal” (Adorno “On Tradition”, 75). Coming from the Middle Ages, tradition passes medieval concepts and social formations as natural in contrast to modern society which, formed by conscious human action whether in the form of revolution or gradual reform, seems artificial or man-made. This provides grounds for condemning modern society as unnatural and endows anti-enlightenment political movements, like fascism, and conservative elitist reactions, like Eliot’s, with fake legitimacy licensing the restoration of a presumed natural order. Tradition, therefore, passes not only the concepts of medieval society as natural but also its class structure and helps maintain this form of society. This is why Eliot finds “graded society” or “society with a class structure” to be “the natural society” (Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* 120-1). In order to maintain itself, society must also keep its tradition. Tradition and class society are, hence, mutually reinforcing. Modernity, on the other hand, is allied with the “denaturalization of the human world” (Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* 115). The natural world is not taken to support any form of social organization. Human society should be established on a rational basis. When the social order is considered a reflection of the natural, it is also presumed to be natural and immutable. The attempt to change it seems not only unnatural but also an offense against the divinely ordained order. Uncoupling the social and natural orders in modernity leads to the conclusion that, since no form of society can be regarded as natural, more than one social and political system can be legitimate. This leads to the multiplication of worldviews none of which can claim to be natural or eternal. Consequently, social and political systems multiply and develop departing, thereby, from tradition. Just as they endow the individual with freedom, multiplicity and progress deprive any of the newly developed systems of the claim to naturalness and the individual of the security and stability which the idea of living according to the natural and divinely ordained way endows.

Against the presumed naturalness of time-honored values and inherited definitions and tested ways of life, or of the past as the only source of a credible vision of the world, modernity directs the mind

to the objective world and therefore regards any vision that derives its authority from tradition as an obstacle to the attempt of the mind to offer a rational understanding of the world. Enlightenment thinkers “despised the exponents of tradition, who substituted belief for knowledge and were as unwilling to doubt as they were reckless in supplying answers” (Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 1). Traditional ideas and interpretations of phenomena stand between man and nature and prevent the “match between the mind of man and the nature of things” (Bacon in Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 1). Rationalizing the world does not produce a unified worldview to replace the objective substantive reason which accepts the existence of an objective rational order but leads to the creation of subjective formal reason which, by contrast, does not regard certain ideas as true, actions as moral and forms as beautiful but rather determines the formal rules by which one can judge the veracity of knowledge, ethicality of action and beauty of form (Habermas, “Modernity: An Unfinished Project” 45). Rationalization means that each phenomenon should be treated according to its own logic not against it.

The cultural rationalization from which the structures of consciousness typical of modern societies emerge embraces cognitive, aesthetic-expressive, and moral-evaluative elements of the religious tradition. With science and technology, with autonomous art and the values of expressive self-presentation, with universal legal and moral representations, there emerges a differentiation of three value spheres, each of which follows its own logic. In the process, not only do the “inner logics” of the cognitive, expressive, and moral elements of culture come into consciousness, but also the tension between these spheres grows along with their differentiation (Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action I* 163-4).

When knowledge is judged to be true or false, action to be moral or immoral and art to be either beautiful or authentic or not, the rationality of this differentiation of spheres and the resulting

multiplicity of criteria disintegrate the unity of tradition. Traditional knowledge grounded in the authority of the past is not necessarily true by rational standards. In the differentiated spheres, knowledge cannot be judged ethical or beautiful. Action is neither true nor beautiful and art, according to the logic of differentiation, cannot be judged true or ethical. Modelled in accordance with their own logics, true knowledge, moral action and beautiful art necessarily depart from their traditional forms. This explains the huge difference between modern and traditional forms of art and science. Hence, the relation between modernity and tradition is one of opposition not only because the latter depends on temporal continuity while the former regards itself as an epistemological rupture with the past but also because the sources of the legitimation of knowledge, social policy, personal behavior and artistic expression are different. Whereas these spheres are traditionally parts of an overarching traditional worldview, in modernity each phenomenon has to be judged by the criteria of the sphere to which it belongs. Without the rationalization of spheres, knowledge, action and art would have to be judged by criteria which do not belong to their nature. This would result in categorical confusion and, consequently, irrationality.

Rationalization leads to the differentiation of spheres and the disintegration of tradition. One result of the vacuity resulting from the disintegration of a previously unified culture is the diversity of worldviews and multiplicity of social philosophies and policies. The Enlightenment has produced liberalism and socialism – depending on whether history is viewed as developing towards more freedom or equality – which have been challenged by the irrational and anti-enlightenment fascist confirmation of the values of power and purity of race. (Mannheim 12). These different and competing worldviews have existed side by side. While their coexistence is regarded as a chaotic condition by conservatives like Eliot, it is regarded, with the exception of Fascism, as an indispensable condition for liberty the essence of which is the “ability to choose” without being “swallowed up in some vast system” by pluralists (Berlin 112). The multiplicity of worldviews is the objective condition for the freedom of the individual. Without the diversity of social policies, there

would be no objective sphere for the exercise of subjective freedom; i.e. no alternatives for the individual to choose from. The creation of the category of the individual requires departure from tradition. Without such a departure, the space of difference from others which allows for the existence of individuality would not exist.

The need to ground knowledge, action and art on a rational basis leads to a process of rationalization that encompasses not only the different spheres but also social life and human history. During this process which took place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, modernization gained the connotation of future-oriented improvement upon a previous conservative and static state (Anttonen 33-4). All fields from industry to history had to be remodeled on a rational basis. On the social level, modernization as rationalization takes the form of increasing efficiency and productivity. To achieve this goal, capitalism uses science and technology as means of control in the service of a model of production based on Taylorism. The capitalist creation of the assembly line turns society into a huge machine geared towards efficient productivity. Emile Durkheim's analysis of the structure of modern society shows that the different functions performed by its members and the high level of specialized knowledge required for production in different fields lead to the division of labor and disintegrate premodern traditional community. Social relations in premodern societies, characterized by mechanical solidarity, are "founded upon likeness, and unable to tolerate dissimilarity" (Cohen 22). The disintegration of this form of community leads to the creation of the modern form of society characterized by disunity and the coexistence of different social roles and people from different backgrounds playing these roles. Durkheim describes "the integration of difference into a collaborative, and therefore harmonious, complex whole" as the "organic solidarity" characteristic of modern societies (22). While modern society frees the individual from the constraints placed on him by tradition, the development of democracy, the need to manufacture consensus, standardized education and the standardization of behavior that goes with it have started to erode individuality.

The inflow of large numbers of people from different religious denominations, ethnic backgrounds and nationalities which takes place concomitantly with modernization and industrialization requires the neutrality of the state to all belief systems and citizens. In addition to the attitude of hostility to religious bias and discrimination fostered by the Enlightenment, secularism becomes a necessary consequence of modernization, modern organic society and state. This, in turn, renders tolerance an essential policy and value required for peaceful coexistence but poses a threat to the religious element of tradition (Karpov 2).

Eliot's Modernist Project: Integrating Modernity into Tradition

The conservative critique of the Enlightenment confirms tradition and renounces individualism and the differentiation of spheres. Cultural conservatives, like Eliot and Hans-Georg Gadamer, confirm the role of tradition, criticize the idea of autonomy and assert the inseparability of consciousness from its social context (Warnke 91). Since consciousness is shaped by the context in which it is situated, it cannot escape the prejudices, in the sense of prejudgments, of its tradition. Objectivity requires a vision from nowhere which is impossible for consciousness that is always situated in a tradition. Consciousness has a horizon of understanding which encompasses the lifeworld in which it exists. Any text has also a horizon of the lifeworld which produced it. Understanding is a fusion of the horizons of the text and the interpreter (Gadamer 305). Fusion can be interpreted as either renewal of tradition or reconciliation of tradition with the horizon of the interpreter (Warnke 64-72). While both interpretations of the process of fusion retain tradition, reconciliation fits it into the horizon of modernity and renewal maintains it and fits modernity into its horizon.

The role played by tradition in Eliot's thought can be fully comprehensible when the positive dialectical formulation of the idea is realized and situated, together with its later "re-formulation," in his overall modernist project which aims at containing modernity

(Eliot, *After Strange Gods* 15). Realizing the permeation of modernity by tradition and vice versa, Eliot formulates the relation between them in a dialectical manner. The problem with his dialectical formulation is that it is grounded in the unsubstantiated presupposition that both must necessarily converge. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), Eliot starts by presenting the two categories of the title as opposites; tradition and the individual are opposed to each other only when considered as abstract terms. The first abstract term of the relation is that of blindly following tradition which must be discouraged. (Eliot, *Selected Essays* 14). The other is that people celebrate newness for its own sake and are not interested in what is traditional since it is something they already know. From this perspective, the essence of an artist's vision lies in what is "peculiar" to him not what he shares with others. Yet when this modern "prejudice" is abandoned, it is found that "the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality;" i.e. those which he shares with tradition (14). Here the word "most individual" cannot mean what is peculiar to him alone anymore because it is something he shares with the dead poets. It comes to mean something akin to what is authentic and distinguished in the vision he presents. Therefore, what is "most individual" in the sense that it sets him apart from his contemporaries who are less distinguished because they could not achieve an authentic vision is something which he shares with the vision preserved in tradition. The "most individual" is a concrete synthesis which leaves the abstract opposites behind and combines the authentic vision preserved in tradition and its expression by the individual in a new way.

The abstract terms of another opposition are also empty opposite categories. A work which consists merely in "repetition" is not a new one. "To conform merely would be for the new work not really to conform at all; it would not be new, and would therefore not be a work of art" (15). The opposite possibility, that a work would express a totally new or individual meaning, is impossible. "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone" (15). The two opposite categories are too abstract to materialize in an actual

artwork which makes it easy to sublimate (*aufheben*) the opposition into a synthetic unity. Eliot formulates the “really new” work as a concrete synthesis of what is traditional and what is individual, a modern individual vision of an eternal reality preserved in tradition. “[W]e are hardly likely to find that it is one and not the other” (16). The really new work conforms to tradition since it shares the same vision. Tradition is also formulated in a dialectical way as a dynamic whole consisting of all previous works. As a whole with its own vision and values, it is enlarged a little to encompass the new work. Tradition is, hence, a dialectical whole which absorbs every new work.

From a critical point of view, against the propensity to “dwell with satisfaction upon the poet’s difference from his predecessors” as a thesis and “following the ways of the immediate generation before us” as its antithesis, the proper critical reception of the work is a synthesis that recognizes the presence of tradition in the new work. “We say: it appears to conform, and is perhaps individual, or it appears individual, and may conform” (15-6). Eliot does not offer a cogent argument why the modern individual will necessarily conform to tradition. He merely takes “the necessity that he shall conform” as a principle of “aesthetic” judgment. In order for tradition not to be a rigid category, he mentions that “the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered” (15). Yet, in this article, Eliot does not consider the possibility that a modern work may considerably depart from tradition or consist of revolt against it that the latter cannot encompass it. From a phenomenological perspective, the essence of modern art may consist in revolt against tradition. The artist may “not only deviate from established tradition but be equally pleased to give to his work an explicit note of protest against the time-honored norms” (Ortega Y Gasset 43). The artist may preserve of tradition only what is enough to reveal the change he makes, the protest (22-3). Hence, the traces of tradition may be present but not sublated into synthetic unity. This alternative is totally dismissed by Eliot in this article. The reason why Eliot assumes that the modern individual vision will by “necessity” conform to tradition is that he believes in the existence of an eternal

and unchanging vision of reality preserved in tradition which he calls “the timeless” (Eliot, *Selected Essays* 14). If the modern individual, according to Eliot, can reach an authentic vision, he will conform. This “timeless” vision of truth and values preserved in tradition is the thesis which confirms itself whenever a new work – antithesis – is produced if it is “really new” – the synthesis which preserves it. The dialectical relation is formulated in a positive way by excluding the possibility of radical negativity – i.e. a new work which considerably departs from tradition or consists in protest against it – to guarantee that “the timeless” confirms itself in the synthesis in order to contain any departure from tradition.

Rather than attempting to prove the existence of timeless truth and values or referring the reader to an argument, Eliot implicitly passes another dialectical synthesis by the reader. His resolution of the opposition between the modern and the traditional is a direct allusion to Baudelaire’s definition of modernity. Against the neoclassicist insistence on painting in the traditional Greek or Roman style characterized by pursuit of timeless beauty, Baudelaire defines modernity in a different manner. “Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable” which characterizes the classic (Baudelaire 12). Eliot synthesizes the modern with the traditional through the necessity that the modern writer must acquire knowledge of tradition. “The 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” (Eliot, *Selected Essays* 14). Knowledge of tradition makes the writer aware of his modernity or “contemporaneity” and “place in time” but it also makes him conscious that he expresses “the timeless” in a modern form not something totally different (14). The necessity that the modern must conform to tradition is founded on faith in the existence of timeless truth and values which the modern individual must discover for himself and express in a new form. Eliot’s confirmation of the temporal continuity of modernity and tradition is established on the idea of timeless truth and values. Without it, it is not guaranteed that the modern individual must necessarily conform to tradition.

Moreover, if modernity casts doubt on the idea of timeless truth and values, it can no longer be integrated as a moment of tradition. The dialectical synthetic formulation of the relation on which Eliot's idea of temporal continuity is premised disintegrates. This should not lead to the renunciation of the dialectical formulation of the relation. It only contests the positive nature of Eliot's dialectic which presupposes that every "really new" work must by "necessity" conform to tradition.

Eliot's formulation, so far, may suggest that the fusion of the horizon of the modern individual and that of tradition is one of reconciliation in which the modern individual conforms and tradition changes slightly to accommodate the new work. Nevertheless, through acquiring the historical sense and gaining "consciousness of the past," the individual undergoes a process of "depersonalization" through which art approaches the objectivity of science. "What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (17). The individual's expression of any individualistic vision must be surrendered to reach a subjective expression of the objective vision of the "timeless" preserved in tradition. If not, the work cannot be integrated into the Western tradition of literature. The "extinction of personality" and surrender to the objectivity of the timeless show that the fusion of the horizon of the modern individual and that of tradition is a form of renewal in which the latter confirms itself. Eliot's dialectic of tradition and modernity is a positive one in which the thesis and antithesis are bound to be sublated in a synthetic unity that preserves tradition. Early in the article, Eliot rejects the modern "prejudice" held by critics and readers in favor of "dwell[ing] with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors" and confirms the value of conformity to tradition – another prejudice – as an aesthetic criterion (14). According to this criterion, a work which departs from the objectivity of timeless truth and values cannot be part of tradition and must be excluded. Eliot's dialectic of tradition and modern individuality is formulated in the first place as a positive

one in a conservative attempt to contain the dissenting individualism of modernity.

In *After Strange Gods* (1933), Eliot enlarges the boundaries of tradition to encompass what is referred to today as culture – a word he finally came to use in 1948. Tradition is defined as “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’” (18). It is also defined as “a way of feeling and acting which characterizes a group throughout generations” (31). This “re-formulation,” to use Eliot’s word, is not a total departure from the earlier concept because tradition is part of culture and the latter is handed down from one generation to the next (Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* 122). Yet while the ideological function and hegemonic nature of tradition are implicit in the former article which sets it as an aesthetic criterion, here it becomes explicit. The effect of the lack of tradition on writers is “extreme individualism” (Eliot, *After Strange Gods* 34). The role of tradition is “to re-establish a vital connexion between the individual and the race; [to aid in] the struggle, in a word, against Liberalism” (48). The goal is to combat all individualistic and pluralistic tendencies in a society “worm-eaten with liberalism” (12). Tradition safeguards the unity of society against modern individualism which manifests itself in romanticism (Eliot, *Selected Essays* 21), modernism (Eliot, “Experiment in Criticism” 609), humanism (613) and liberalism (Eliot, *After Strange Gods* 21-2). The reason why Eliot reformulates tradition as an overarching cultural framework is not only his awareness that many of the values expressed and preserved in literary tradition belong to culture as a whole but also his increasing consciousness that the coherence of literary tradition cannot be maintained without the “uniformity of culture” (Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* 33). Modern literature and society are detrimental to tradition and need to be framed by a unified culture the values of which should be preserved and transferred to the next generations by tradition. The function of tradition as a guide to the individual sets it in direct opposition to the

concept of autonomous self-determination which characterizes intellectual modernity according to the Kantian formulation.

In *After Strange Gods*, a book which attempts to hold on to the dialectical formulation of tradition though it lacks much of the finesse of the earlier article, Eliot discusses the appearance of another and more modern literary tradition. He first refers to this tradition in “Experiment in Criticism” (1929) where he writes that one cannot offer a purely formal criticism of writers like George Eliot, Matthew Arnold or Thomas Hardy for it would be very lacking. The possibility that there could be two traditions of literature is rejected by Eliot. “And the last thing I would wish for would be the existence of two literatures, one for Christian consumption and the other for the pagan world” (625). The dilemma for Eliot is that he cannot accept the values of the modern secular tradition – whether it is humanist, positivist, liberal or Marxist – yet he cannot exclude these writings as if they were not part of the Western tradition. The old dialectical formulation of tradition as a whole consisting of parts, constantly modified by the addition of the new, can neither contain nor exclude modern liberal ideas. The only solution is to introduce an extra-literary standard by which literature must be judged. “Tradition by itself is not enough; it must be perpetually criticized and brought up to date under the supervision of what I call orthodoxy” (67) by which he means “Christian orthodoxy” (Eliot, *After Strange Gods* 21). Yet the need for a non-literary standard to judge artworks means that tradition can no longer be regarded as the dialectical totality of written literature the standards of which are determined by the whole-part relation and that it has become a limited frame exclusive of difference. When the whole is no longer determined by the parts but by a non-literary standard, literature and art lose the status of an autonomous sphere with its own logic, values and criteria and have to be judged by the standards of the religious totality to which they belong. If differentiation is the hallmark of modernity, tradition guided by orthodoxy reunifies the spheres and reverses modern autonomy.

The pole opposed to tradition guided by orthodoxy is “heresy” which Eliot uses to describe any individualistic departure from tradition (45-53). “What is disastrous is that the writer should deliberately give reign to his ‘individuality,’ that he should even cultivate his differences from others; and that his readers should cherish the author of genius, not in spite of his deviations from the inherited wisdom of the race, but because of them” (35). Eliot uses tradition as a criterion to condemn and exclude Ezra Pound’s interest in Confucian wisdom (44), Irving Babbitt’s cosmopolitanism (44), Matthew Arnold’s humanism (48), W.B. Yeats’s nationalism (48) and D. H. Lawrence’s “sick spirituality” (65) as pursuits of strange gods; in short, to exclude any modern departure from Christian Orthodoxy as untraditional and heretic. By now, Eliot sees modernity in a purely negative light. He quotes Charles Peguy’s condemnation “[l]e monde moderne avilit,” the modern world demeans, to which he adds “and it can also corrupt” (9). When Eliot’s early positive dialectical formulation is no longer sufficient to contain the negativity of modernity due to the development of a modern liberal tradition, he resorts to orthodox Christianity as a criterion to exclude “Liberalism, Progress and Modern Civilization” which he regards as heresies (66). Tradition, guided by orthodoxy, becomes a powerful ideological tool for marginalizing all forms of modern individualism as dissenting and heretic views.

In *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939), Eliot refers to modernity as negative and Christianity as positive not in the dialectical sense of thesis and antithesis but in a qualitative sense (20). The reason is that liberalism leads to the disintegration of the social bond and the introduction of non-Christian modes of conduct. People should not be exposed to “a Christian and a non-Christian alternative at moments of choice” (24). This is why he defines the “Christian community” as one in which “there is a unified religious-social code of behavior” (27). This pursuit of a culture unified by religious orthodoxy does not make space for a non-religious system of valuation. This is why Eliot takes the “differentiation” of spheres which occurs in advanced societies as a result of functional

complexity to be a sign of the “disintegration of culture” (97-8). In *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (1948), he writes:

Religious thought and practice, philosophy and art, all tend to become isolated areas cultivated by groups in no communication with each other. The artistic sensibility is impoverished by its divorce from the religious sensibility, the religious by its separation from the artistic; and the vestige of *manners* may be left to a few survivors of a vanishing class... (98).

Eliot’s passion for unity does not make him see differentiation as rationalization and freedom from the dogmatic constraints which hindered the progress of science until the dawn of modernity. It is only the rationalization of science that allows it to proceed according to its own criteria and liberate itself from the restrictions of the medieval mind. Whereas Habermas sees the differentiation of spheres as “cultural modernity’s specific dignity,” Eliot finds in it nothing but impoverishment (Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* 112). “[T]he political, the philosophical, the artistic, the scientific, are separated to the great loss of each of them” (Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* 110). He sees differentiation in a purely negative way and uses tradition guided by orthodoxy to reverse it.

Eliot’s modernist project is a blueprint for the reunification of spheres and the creation of a culture unified by a Christian framework into which the individual would be absorbed. He finds modern society inimical to Christianity for two reasons; first, industrial society is geared towards increasing productivity and achieving efficiency. It is organized in a materialistic way that turns population into a body of producers and fosters only “the values arising in a mechanized, commercialized, urbanized way of life” (Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* 49). Second, the material success of modern industrial society invites individuals from different backgrounds to come to urban centers. “Less industrialized” societies are “less invaded by foreign races” (Eliot, *After Strange*

Gods 17). The coexistence of people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds requires a public policy that is neutral to all religious faiths and tolerant of difference. In short, it necessitates the secularization of the state, education and the public sphere. In modern secular society, there are two prospects for religion; either to fit it into secular culture or to reverse modern secular industrial culture gradually into the religious frame. The first form of society would alienate people even more from religion and tradition (Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* 17). As for the form of society suitable for religion, Eliot has the “idea, or ideal, of a community small enough to consist of a nexus of direct personal relationships;” the same kind of premodern community based on similarity and dismissive of difference as Durkheim describes it (25). Eliot has the “parish” as a community unit in mind. For “this unit must not be solely religious, and not solely social; nor should the individual be a member of two separate, or even overlapping units, one religious and the other social. The unitary community should be religious-social, and it must be one in which all classes, if you have classes, have their centre of interest” (24). In this simple society, the differentiation of spheres would be reversed. In its stead, there would be the “social-religious-artistic complex” characteristic of premodern societies which “we should emulate upon a higher plane” (49). This “complex” is the set of principles which judge knowledge, behavior and art not by their internal logics but by the unified standards of orthodoxy. It forms the nucleus or center of a system which unifies all the spheres, functions as the cultural framework for society and excludes all different social and political views such as liberalism and socialism. Since it judges all knowledge, morality and art by the criteria of tradition, it would preclude the emergence of different ideas and perpetuate this community which would be characterized by mechanical solidarity and have neither need nor tolerance for people from different backgrounds. In what is perhaps his most parochial and racist book, Eliot defines the community shaped by this “complex” as follows:

The population should be homogeneous; where two or more cultures exist in the same place they are likely either

to be fiercely self-conscious or both to become adulterate. What is still more important is unity of religious background; and reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable.... And a spirit of excessive tolerance is to be deprecated (19-20).

In this socio-religious unity, people would not have conflict of loyalties between religion and the modern state which Eliot calls “pagan” and their actions would be guided by a religious code (Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* 10). In this “positive culture,” Eliot believes, “the dissidents must remain marginal, tending to make only marginal contributions” (36). This unified culture turns into a tightly-knit harmonious system which marginalizes the dissenting voices that tradition cannot exclude due to the development of modern secular humanism with its own tradition, values, social policies and political views. Like all systems, it is intolerant of difference. Eliot’s reaction to the threat modernity poses to traditional culture is so extreme that it excludes individualism and the differentiation of spheres to maintain unity no matter how exclusive, oppressive and potentially violent it may be. Although Eliot later renounced *After Strange Gods* as the work of “a very sick man,” his reaction against modernity remained essentially unchanged at least until 1948 when he wrote *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (Gardner 55). Though not easily detectable in the beginning, the potentially oppressive nature of Eliot’s unified culture is implied in his early positive dialectical attempt to contain modernity in tradition. His ideas of containing individualism, the reunification of spheres, temporal continuity, return to a society characterized by mechanical solidarity, deprecation of tolerance and desecularization of culture are conceived as reactions against modernity. They are the general features of a project aiming at absorbing it into tradition.

The Dialectical Reversal of Modernity:

The differentiation of spheres as the hallmark of modernity is a product of rationalization. The attempt to judge any of the three spheres by criteria which do not belong to it, whether by mistake or through unification, would bend it against its logic and result in categorical confusion. Eliot's pursuit of dedifferentiation would appear to Adorno as an instance of the regression to irrationalism characteristic of modernity as a result of its failure to provide the individual with a telos for his existence.

From a rational point of view, the problem with modernity is not differentiation but rather the usurpation of the differentiated spheres by instrumental rationality which turns reason into an instrument of control geared towards self-preservation (Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* 111). Objective reason, directed towards phenomena and dealing with each according to its own nature, has been replaced by instrumental reason which recruits everything as an instrument in the service of the subject. The Greek word *Logos* means order, mind and word in the sense that there is a rational order in the world which can be understood by the mind and expressed in language (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 412-3). In this ordered universe, man's goal is to fit into the universal order. This sense of reason changes with the shift to the Roman world in which reason becomes *ratio*; a word which still preserves the sense of calculative mentality which measures means to achieve ends (421). This instrumental concept of reason regards and employs everything as a means or an instrument to achieve human ends. Instrumental reason, which comes into existence with the first human attempts at self-preservation, seizes control of the modern mind and the three differentiated spheres. This is how modern rationality starts its reversion towards irrationality.

The reversion to irrationality is a consequence of the usurpation of modern reason and its three differentiated spheres of knowledge, morality and aesthetics by instrumental reason. Against the conservative attempt to contain modernity and rationality by

tradition, Adorno traces a process of rationalization or enlightenment taking place in history and culminating in modernity starting as it does with eighteenth century Enlightenment. This neither means that tradition is a unified story of continual rationalization nor that it is equated with modernity (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 320).

The usurpation of pure reason – the domain of knowledge – by instrumental reason ruins its claim to know, to gain knowledge of what is different. While modernity and tradition are different, a process of rationalization has been going on throughout history. This process of rational understanding and domination of the world culminates in the Enlightenment which seeks to purge knowledge of myth, superstition and any irrational traditional belief (Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 3). The Enlightenment limits knowledge to the bounds of reason to avoid superstition yet, by the same gesture, it also restricts reason to the natural world; reason cannot think beyond the natural. When Kant indicates the boundaries of pure reason beyond which it cannot reach, he means to make room for faith which lies beyond knowledge. Yet this also means that knowledge is limited to the actual which leads to materialism and positivism. The result should be a totally rational systematic understanding of the world. Having rejected any supernatural explanation of the world, reason accepts only natural explanations of phenomena. Nature becomes a closed system in which any phenomenon is explained by other natural phenomena. This natural understanding of the world limits it to what can be measured in a physical and mathematical way. The scientific mathematization of the natural world renders any new phenomenon part of an equation in which the unknown is determined by the known (Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 18-20). The system of knowledge does not tolerate anything outside it and reduces all difference to the same. It controls nature and denies the possibility of any knowledge other than that which is determined by its standards. Yet this denies the idea of knowledge as recognizing things for what they are on which pure reason is grounded. It paves the way to the technological instrumentalization of knowledge for the sake of controlling nature and manipulating objects. “To grasp existing things as such ... this

whole aspiration of knowledge is abandoned” (20). Pure reason turns against its goal of understanding and into an instrument of control; it becomes instrumental reason. Thus, while pure reason succeeds in freeing knowledge of the superstitions that have permeated it and have been recorded in tradition, it turns into a form of control no less dominating than tradition and myth.

The control of practical reason – the realm of moral action – by instrumental reason ruins human moral agency. The positivist determination and limitation of the nature of knowledge turns against man. “The reduction of thought to a mathematical apparatus condemns the world to be its own measure. What appears as the triumph of subjectivity, the subjection of all existing things to logical formalism, is bought with the obedient subordination of reason to what is immediately at hand” (Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 20). When reason and the possibility of knowledge are limited to the actual, natural and material, this form of knowledge becomes the measuring rod for everything. Man is, consequently, dealt with as a material phenomenon. He becomes subject to the social forces of domination and manipulation. Culture impresses “standardized behavior on the individual” and everything different “is exposed to the force of the collective” (21-22). Man loses the autonomy in the name of which modernity breaks with tradition. In lieu of tradition as a system, it creates another one equally exclusive of difference. In this usurpation of practical reason by instrumental mentality, man turns into a tool in the social machine functioning to increase productivity and efficiency. The modern vision of man as *homo faber* is born out of reducing him to only one of his abilities; the ability to produce (Arendt 135). This vision which judges the success or failure of a person by his productivity and the standardization of his behavior is also consistent with the Taylorist disregard for skill and demand for the limitation of the movement of the worker on the production line to a minimum (Green 167). Yet this modern vision contradicts with the categorical imperative of practical reason according to which a human being should be regarded as an “end in itself” and not used as a means to achieve a goal (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* 72). Due to its usurpation

by instrumental rationality, practical reason dialectically turns against itself. Man gains freedom from the constraints of tradition and premodern society through rationalism only to fall in the modern instrumental vision of man as a tool functioning to increase productivity. In traditional culture and enlightened modernity, man is dominated.

Just like knowledge and moral action, art has fallen under the sway of instrumental reason. Faced with a reality pre-formed by the standards of instrumental reason, art abandons the idea of harmonizing disparate content through form and adopts the readymade forms of culture industry (Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* 112). Since the social world has already been formed according to the needs of the market, the process of forming the artwork is not met with recalcitrant content. Culture industry uses the forms and roles common in bourgeois industrial society. It represents the social world which produced it and thereby perpetuates it. “The industry bows to the vote it has itself rigged” (Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 106). It turns art into a means of entertainment – an instrument – to provide the comfort necessary for workers to resume work. It also creates the homogeneity necessary for the system to keep functioning. “Culture today is infecting everything with sameness” (94). It creates unity, fosters conformity and becomes a total system, leaving hardly any space for individuality (94). Rather than negating the status quo for the sake of a critical vision of society, culture affirms it and confirms the positivist vision. When knowledge, ethics and art are all usurped by instrumental reason, the differentiation of spheres is negated. The whole society and culture become a harmonious system geared towards increasing efficiency, maximizing productivity and boosting profit. Modernity dialectically turns against itself and becomes as dominating and exclusive of difference as tradition.

The idea that “social differentiation and specialization” give rise to “cultural chaos” is refuted by the experience of life in modern society in which people receive the same education, read the same books, watch the same programs and perform similar social

functions as producers and consumers (94). The individual, whom the enlighteners seek to free from domination by enabling him to make use of his reason, comes to fall under domination again. Under the apparent multiplicity which modernity produces, everybody is subject to cultural control. The ability of the individual to choose from a multiplicity of systems and policies is curbed by the fact that the same mechanism of control underlies all different options. Due to the standardization of the systems of education and the monopoly of media and industrial production, people are poured into the same molds.

Under the sway of instrumental reason, the differentiated spheres and the autonomy of the individual are incorporated within the same system. Both tradition and modernity turn out to be total systems. A system hammers everything into shape according to its standards and organizing principles and is, hence, hegemonic. Knowledge, behavior and art are formed and judged by the rules of the system not in accordance with their internal logics. What does not fit into the system has to be coerced against its own logic or excluded.

Tradition and Modernity in an Unreconciled State:

The restoration of tradition with its hegemonic nature, on the one hand, would recreate a worldview and society no less repressive and exclusive than the ones modern rationality has demythologized and denaturalized. The modern attempt to free reason and the individual from the restrictions of tradition, on the other hand, leads the modern mind, society and culture to fall under the sway of instrumental reason. Tradition, which still survives in many aspects of life, has not been wiped out by modern rationalism. It has merely lost its claim to provide a total vision of life and to be, with the institutions which transmit it and derive their power from it, the sole source of value. Deprived of its hegemony in modernity, tradition provides a different perspective on life. The coexistence of diverse systems without absorbing one into the other by reconciling their differences, as Eliot attempts to do, disrupts their hegemonic

potential and exclusive claims to truth. It provides the multiplicity of worldviews which give the individual the objective diversity necessary for the exercise of subjective freedom. The existence of tradition alongside modern rationality without reconciling them enhances pluralism. It becomes one form of life among others open to the individual without absorbing him. Thereby, it enhances individualism.

The coexistence of tradition and modernity in a state of non-reconciliation may resolve many problems arising from the exclusive domination of any one of them. When modernity is overtaken by instrumental reason, man and society as a whole lose sight of any telos and, hence, of any ultimate meaning for human existence. The objective theory of reason is grounded in the existence of a rational order in the world. The reasonableness of the individual's life is measured by "its harmony with this totality" (Horkheimer 2). Grounded in self-preservation, instrumental reason, by contrast, focuses on the means to achieve subjective ends. Through conceiving of everything as a means, instrumental mentality has turned everything into tools in service of man through technology and set him as the master of the world. Yet it has, by the same token, deprived the world of any objective order into which man can fit. It deprives humanity of telos and, consequently, of sense. This lack leads many thinkers, Eliot *inter alios*, to attempt to restore tradition, many political movements to revolt against modernity and seek to ground themselves in myth, like Fascism and Nazism, and many extremist religious groups to restore religious order by violence. In a society deprived of telos, tradition is required to define the meaning and ultimate end of human existence which instrumental reason cannot conceive of.

Tradition can define the meaning and goal of human existence without absorbing culture and society only if it is continually criticized by modern rationality. One problem with the concept of literary tradition which Eliot employs is the implication that the meaning and values it preserves have been achieved before and that return to the society which produced them is the road to redeeming

the human condition. It places hope in the past and opens the door to all kinds of attempts to restore it. This shapes Eliot's modernism as a reactionary and restorative project. An alternative critical attitude towards tradition would distinguish between the aims and values hoped for and the implication that they have materialized in a past society.

The traces to be found in the material and the technical procedures, from which every qualitatively new work takes its lead, are scars: They are the loci at which the preceding works misfired. By laboring on them, the new work turns against those that left these traces behind That is why works are also critics of one another. This, not the historical continuity of their dependencies, binds artworks to one another (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 35).

The historical continuity of a body of literature carrying a society's ethos – Eliot's model – is not the only way to understand the relation of artworks to each other. Rather than conceiving of the traces of previous artworks in the new work of art as synthesized material confirming the same timeless vision, the negative concept of the relation of artworks to each other provides a different understanding of tradition which recognizes the values and goals aimed at and regards the new artwork as criticism of the claim of previous works that they have been achieved at one point in the past. The new work functions as criticism of the old and, therefore, the present is not made to conform to tradition but the past is judged from a more modern, and presumably rational, perspective. Maintaining the meaning and values of humanity defines the goal of human society and keeps not only the memory of the misfired attempts to achieve them and the past suffering which is inhuman to forget but also the hope that they may be achieved in a future society.

The historical experience of the holocaust as the result of the attempt to establish a homogenous society by purging it of difference and multiplicity has also been preserved in tradition. It bears witness to the atrocities which a society can perpetrate to maintain homogeneity and stands as a warning against the model of

unified society which Eliot advocates. The unity of race, homogeneity of religious background, the relation between blood and land, deprecation of tolerance and free thinking and the attempt to establish society on a shared mythological basis are all ideas shared by Eliot's imagined society and the Nazi state. Without tradition, not only would the historical lesson and the suffering sustained by the victims be lost but the warning against the attempt to establish society on the model of purity would share the same destiny. Tradition provides a perspective from which a critique of modernity can be offered.

The modern vision of man as *homo faber* is based on a reduction of the fullness of a human being to only one of its dimensions; namely material productivity. Through acting as the storehouse of human versatility and possibilities, tradition poses challenge to this reductively mechanical vision dominant in instrumental rationality. The same one-dimensional vision reduces value to exchangeability; only what can be exchanged for profit in the market is valuable. The economic model based on the concept of exchange value becomes the principle of bourgeois society in general (Adorno, "On Tradition" 75). Tradition provides a counterforce to the economic definition of value as something material. It offers another valuation of objects depending on their history and communal role. Knowledge of literary tradition in particular acts as a counterforce to the technological reduction of the concept of knowledge to that which is useable. Knowledge of human experience, different concepts of morality, multiple worldviews and models of beauty may not yield economic profit but present a different model of value. By its mere existence, this model challenges the economic relegation of value to the dimension of exchange.

Hence, the coexistence of tradition and modernity should not take the form of a positive dialectical unification or a coercive imposition of one on the other. They should coexist without reconciling their differences in order to strip both of their exclusive dominance. This allows both to exist as critics of one another and provides the space of difference necessary for individuality. It

challenges the hegemony of tradition and instrumental reason by allowing different logics, criteria and understandings of value to contest each other. By showing that neither tradition nor instrumental reason has the exclusive right to judge phenomena, it makes the need for rational criteria felt and opens the door to the pursuit of rational evaluation of each phenomenon according to the logic of the sphere to which it belongs.

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