The Idea of Humanism According to T.S. Eliot

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THE IDEA OF HUMANISM
ACCORDING TO
T. S. ELIOT

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM AND METHOD
OF THE THESIS

When one approaches the concept of humanism with the intention of subduing it and caging it within the bars of philosophic definition, he finds that he is battling a formidable adversary. The concept of humanism is an elusive one; one that almost defies definition. All persons of liberal education have some general idea of what humanism means. But the concept itself is necessarily vague, with the result that no two thinkers, apparently, have ever explained it in exactly the same way. All agree as to its simplest, most generic notes. But beyond that they reach such extremes of difference as that of T. S. Eliot, who maintains that it is the non-dogmatic handmaid of dogmatic religion, and Irving Babbitt, who claims it as the modern alternative to the dogmatic religion which he considers obsolete.

The problem of working out a satisfactory definition of humanism is further complicated by the fact that it is surrounded by a whole relationship of other concepts equally vague. Such concepts, for instance, are those of culture, civilization, literature, and liberal education; all of which are understood
easily enough in a general and therefore vague manner, but which are also incapable of universally satisfactory definition.

In the present thesis it is proposed to discover what Thomas Stearns Eliot means by the term "humanism." Thus limited in its meaning, humanism is both more easy and more difficult to analyze and define than is humanism more generally understood. It is easier to define because the definition need not be universally satisfactory. It is to be the definition of humanism as T. S. Eliot gives it piecemeal throughout his prose writings, whatever other critics may happen to think of that definition. It should be noted, however, that even here we cannot expect too much, for Eliot himself says in so many words that the concept of true humanism is necessarily vague.¹ One suspects that he would be rather impatient with any attempt to reduce humanism to philosophic definition.

Humanism as understood by Eliot is more difficult of analysis than humanism in general, first because of Eliot's mental attitude, and secondly because of his approach to humanism in his prose writing.

Of Eliot's mental attitude it may be said that char-

acteristically it is excessively cautious.

Mr. Eliot feels answerable to tradition for every judgment he makes: but this accepted responsibility, while it gives his criticism weight, sometimes makes it curiously timid. Thus if his enthusiasms are never wild, his understatements sometimes are... In these instances Mr. Eliot's caution becomes mechanical, and functions where it is not needed and has no meaning.\(^2\)

Again:

Eliot's mind still shows signs of old habits of scepticism. Sophisticated, disillusioned, enlightened, and converted in turn, he has come through his mental trials with a bit of the scepticism peculiar to each of these stages of development. He is too smart to commit himself, or too wary of disappointment..., or too religious to run the risk of hasty and dangerous conclusions; so that he is evasive of definitinn, prefers several negative circumlocutions to one clear affirmation of his mind, clings to understatement, suspects enthusiasm, and... too often takes refuge in the phrases and attitudes of the sceptic....\(^3\)

The result of all this "introspective indecision of... T. S. Eliot," as Allen Tate calls it,\(^4\) is of course that it is difficult to pin Eliot down to a definite statement. Too frequently he makes a statement only to emasculate it later, as

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4 Allen Tate, Reactionary Essays, Scribners', New York, 1936, 205.
if by way of afterthought, by qualifying it so strictly or inserting so much of doubt into it as to render it almost no statement at all.

Of Eliot's approach to humanism in his prose writings it is to be said that it is negative, or at best oblique. The reason for this is in part the caution and scepticism spoken of above. For the rest the reason is the manner in which humanism enters the writings of Eliot. Most of what he says about humanism Eliot says in criticism of the so-called "New Humanists" of America, notably Irving Babbitt and Norman Foerster. The only extended treatment of humanism which he gives in his writings occurs in three essays: "The Humanism of Irving Babbitt,"5 "Second Thoughts about Humanism,"6 and "Religion without Humanism,"7 each of which is written in criticism of the "New Humanism." Isolated observations on humanism, and extended treatments of allied topics are scattered throughout his writings, but never does Eliot give more than a sentence or two to humanism except in criticism of Babbitt and his fellows.

Despite these difficulties, however, it is possible to

5 Selected Essays, 383 ff.
6 Ibid., 393 ff.
reduce Eliot's ideas on humanism to a positive definition. In reading the prose works one can see, if he looks for it, Eliot's notion of humanism in the large looming in the background of his critical pronouncements. By attending carefully to his statements on humanism and allied subjects, one can bring that looming idea into sharper focus. An attempt to do this will be made in the remainder of the thesis.

Briefly, the method that will be followed in finding the answer to the question: "What does T. S. Eliot mean by humanism?" is this. All of Eliot's prose works will be examined and all the statements that have a bearing on his theory of humanism will be noted. These statements will be analyzed in the light of their contexts, in the light of each other, and in the light of the whole of Eliot's thought. The main work of the thesis shall have been finished when, out of all that Eliot says on the subject, a definition of humanism can be synthesized. After that work has been done it will remain to see what he thinks with regard to several ideas closely related to humanism but not entering directly into its definition. Throughout the thesis Eliot will do the talking as much as possible, and commentators will be called on only when what they have to say sheds new light on what Eliot says himself. It should be borne constantly in mind that it is Eliot's idea of humanism that is being sought. If Eliot cannot give it to us, no one can.

For a more complete understanding of humanism in this
limited sense, however, it will be of great help to consider the topic in its more general aspects. This will be done in a brief survey of the vagaries of humanistic thought from ancient times to the present. This historical survey will be made in the chapter immediately following this. In subsequent chapters Eliot's definition of humanism will be extracted and explained, and the important matter of the relation between humanism and religion will be dealt with.
CHAPTER II

A BRIEF HISTORICAL SURVEY OF HUMANISTIC THOUGHT
FROM ANCIENT TIMES TO THE PRESENT

Humanism may be defined in broad terms as a philosophy of life which envisions as its goal the perfection of human life achieved through the harmonious development and exercise of all of man's faculties. Depending upon the view taken of the perfection of human life, differing forms of humanism may strive for a life that disregards anything supernatural and is thought to be completed on this earth; or it may strive for the fullest cooperation with supernatural forces. In the latter humanism, life on earth would be considered a preparation and a proving ground for the life to come. It is not the purpose of the present chapter to say which humanism is correct. But it is well to realize from the outset that, because of the extreme breadth of its comprehension, the concept of humanism is a difficult one to lay hold of, and one therefore whose history it is not easy to trace.

...The word humanism is ambiguous. It is clear that whoever uses the word brings into play at once an entire metaphysic, and that the idea we form of humanism will have wholly different implications according to whether we hold or do not hold that there is in the nature of man something which breathes an air outside of time and a personality whose profoundest needs surpass the order of
the universe.¹

The history of humanism as we know it in our western civilization begins in ancient Greece. Although there were other civilizations which antedated the Greek by thousands of years, it is only with the Greek and its descendants that our culture has anything like complete continuity. Our own attainments in art, our philosophic thought, our political theory and practice, our very language, are heavily indebted to ancient Greece. The history of the western nations, the group to which, "physically and intellectually, we belong...begins with the Greeks.... By begins I mean not only the temporal commencement, but also the ἀρχή, the spiritual source" from which our culture still draws its vital strength.²

It cannot be denied that our culture is indebted to other nations yet more ancient than the Greek. Nor can it be denied that the culture of ancient Greece was very different from our own in many respects. These differences are as nothing, however, when compared with the vast differences between our culture and the cultures of those other ancient peoples. Each of the modern western nations feels that even Greece and Rome are

¹ Jacques Maritain, True Humanism, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1938, xii.
² Werner Jaeger, Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture, Oxford University Press, New York, 1939, I, xv.
in some respects fundamentally alien to herself: the feeling is based partly on blood and sentiment, partly on organization and intellectual outlook, partly on historical distinctions. But there is a gigantic difference between that feeling and the sense of complete estrangement which we have when we confront the oriental nations, who are both racially and intellectually different from us; and it is undoubtedly a serious mistake in historical perspective to separate, as some modern writers do, the western nations from the Greeks and Romans by a barrier comparable to that which divides us from China, India, and Egypt.

There is no Greek word from which our word "humanism" is directly descended. The same is true of the Latin tongue, although it is true that the word humanitas took on something of the meaning of our word "humanism" in Cicero's later writings. As a matter of fact, it was not until 1832 that this precise word was used in English, and there was a lapse of almost fifty years before it appeared a second time in English literature.

But while there was no word in ancient Greece from which our own "humanism" is directly derived, the concept certainly was there.

From our first glimpse of them the Greeks, we find that man is the center of their
thought. Their anthropomorphic gods; their concentration on the problem of depicting the human form in sculpture and even in painting; the logical sequence by which their philosophy moved from the problem of the cosmos to the problem of man...; their poetry, whose inexhaustible theme from Homer throughout all the succeeding centuries is man, his destiny, and his gods; and finally their state, which cannot be understood unless viewed as the force which shaped man and man's life—all these are separate rays from one great light. They are the expressions of an anthropocentric attitude to life, which cannot be explained by or derived from anything else, and which pervades everything felt, made, or thought by the Greeks....

The Greeks...realized the universal laws of human nature. The intellectual principle of the Greeks in not individualism but humanism....

The humanistic culture of the Greeks evolved slowly, its development stretching over the five-hundred-year period that separates Homer from Plato. During the fifth century before Christ the Greek civilization was thoroughly permeated with a humanistic coloring, and it was in the closing days of this golden age that the humanistic theory reached its sublimest height in the Platonic writings.

We find a strong interest in man and in his development as man even in the Iliad, for centuries the chief educa-

5 Jaeger, I, xxiii.
tional instrument of the Greek world. Each of the heroes in the tale of the Trojan war is a hero only insofar as he achieves the ideal set before him as the proper goal of his endeavor. The ideal proposed is on a much lower plane than that proposed by the more fully developed Greek humanism. It is an ideal largely confined to the physical level. It is "strength and skill... and above all...heroic valour." It is true that this connotes much that is above the mere physical, for such an ideal would appeal only to a mind characterized by a certain nobility; but the emphasis upon the physical is undoubted. Indeed the crowning glory of the Iliadic hero was victory in battle and the glory and fame that were the expected result of such a victory.

We of the Christian era may find it rather difficult to understand how fame could stand so high in the Greek's scale of values. Yet stand high it did.

...The Homeric man estimated his own worth exclusively by the standards of the society to which he belonged. He was a creature of his class: he measured his own arete by the opinion which others held of him...

Homer and the aristocracy of his time believed that the denial of honor due was the greatest of human tragedies.

The reason for this love of honor reveals another
facet of the early Greek character and shows a further goal towards which he struggled. The Homeric Greek believed that in attaining fame he achieved a sort of "supra-personal" existence which survived his mortal life and gave rich meaning and purpose to that life. Hence the tragedy of a denial of justly won fame.

This desire for fame is a result of the ennobled self-love which was another virtue for which the early Greek strove. Indeed, all of his striving was regulated by this noble self-love, which urged him to make the most of himself and to achieve the brightest possible fame. The self-love made him "Reach out towards the highest...nobility," and caused him to perform acts of moral heroism. It made him "ready to sacrifice himself for his friends or his country, to abandon possessions and honors" in order to achieve nobility, fame, and the sort of life after death that fame ensures.

The Odyssey was written some time later than the Iliad. In this work we find an addition to the ideal proposed to the Greek hero. In the Odyssey there is still much made of courage and physical prowess with its attendant honor and glory, but over them is placed cleverness and intellectual skill. "The

10 Ibid., 8.
11 Ibid., 11.
Odyssey constantly exalts intellectual ability—especially in its hero, whose courage is usually ranked lower than his cleverness and cunning."12

The more fully developed humanism of the Greeks, that which the humanists of the Renaissance tried to recreate, began to appear in the works of the Sophists. In the teachings of these variously estimated men, there burst into full flower the humanism that had so long been swelling in the bud. For they were the first to make "comprehensive culture"13 the conscious goal and ideal of their teachings. Protagoras, the greatest representative of the Sophistic school, clearly had a humanistic goal in mind for his educational system.

Protagoras' claim that cultural education is the centre of all human life indicates that his education was frankly aimed at humanism. He implies that by subordinating what we now call civilization—namely technical efficiency—to culture: the clear and fundamental distinction between technical knowledge and power on one hand, and true culture on the other, is the very basis of humanism.14

The Sophists wished to shape and mould man's soul in accordance with the form of his true nature. They believed that men were usually capable of being shaped and moulded, and that

12 Ibid., 4.
13 Jaeger, II, 300.
14 Ibid., 297.
the evil man was out of the ordinary. They

started with an optimistic belief that
man's nature is usually educable, and is
capable of good; men with unfortunate or
evil dispositions were, they believed,
the exception. 15

The effect which the Sophists had upon the Greece of
their day was a brilliant one, although they themselves were
not always entirely admirable men. Their resemblance to the
humanists of the Renaissance is striking.

...They created an atmosphere of compre­
hensive culture far more alive and stimu­
lating and purposeful than even that of
the Pisistratean age.... They strongly
resembled the literati of the Renaissance
both in their intellectual arrogance and
in their independence.... Hippias of
Elis...was a perfect uomo universale.16

The contribution of the Sophists to the progress of
humanism was this, that through them the theory and the ideal
of culture, consciously formed and sought for, came into exis­
tence and was established upon a rational foundation. However,
their work lacked thorough-going completeness, and it remained
for Plato to work out the highest and truest form of Greek hu­
manism.

The ideal that Plato had in mind for man is explained

15. Ibid., 304.
16 Ibid., 294.
by a figure that he uses in his *Republic*, proposing the allegory to illustrate the complicated inner structure of human nature. He pictures man, or more precisely man's soul, as being composed of three things: a many-headed monster, a lion, and a man. What we usually think of as man is only an outward covering which encloses those three dissimilar and independent things, and makes the three of them seem a unity with no conflicts involved. The monster with his many heads, wild and tame, is man as a creature of desire. The lion is man as an emotional being, feeling courage, anger, excitement, shame. The true man, the "man in man," is the intellectual part of the soul. It is this "man in man" that Plato's humanism wishes especially to develop, so that it may keep the other two (which are one in their opposition to it) under proper control. Thus harmony will reign in the soul, the harmony which Plato identifies with the all-embracing virtue of justice.\(^\text{17}\)

This is Plato's contribution to humanism: the express concept of the dual nature of man.

Humanism is based on this distinction between man the individual as given by nature and man the higher self. It was Plato who made it possible for humanism to have this philosophic distinction.\(^\text{18}\)

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\(^{17}\) Republic, 445a.  
\(^{18}\) Jaeger, II, 195.
It is, of course, in this also that Plato's doctrine differs from that of the Sophists. Indeed, he offered it as a direct challenge to the Sophists.\textsuperscript{19} For the Sophists took no cognizance in their essentially optimistic educational theory of a part of man which is constantly exerting a pressure down and away from the high, austere ideal which Plato envisioned for him. For them there was to be no curbing of the desire for pleasure except when there appeared the danger of its completely upsetting the "harmony" of man's life. For them pleasure was naturally of greatest importance in life, for beyond the bounds of life they saw at best uncertainty, and at worst an eternity of longing for the life that had been lost. According to Protagoras, man was the measure of all things. But man himself was measured, as it were, by death, a hard, inevitable, starkly final fact which even the Sophists could not explain away. "Everywhere death is seen closing up the avenues of success and prosperity,"\textsuperscript{20} so every drop of happiness must be wrung out of success and prosperity while there is time. This is not to say that life should be an orgy of unbridled sensual pleasure. No, important as the senses were in the Sophist scheme of things, they were not the only things that mattered. To his love of bodily excellence the Greek united "a love of, and re-

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 277.
\end{flushleft}
spect for, the things of the mind."21 Man was to live a full human life, bridling his passions only when they were becoming so strong as to rule his life completely and destroy its harmony.

Plato looked above and beyond this purely human view of life to the great vistas of life lived in pursuit of a divine ideal. At the highest peak of his humanistic theorizing Plato says in opposition to Protagoras that God is the measure of all things,22 and that man should look at Good itself (which he identifies with God) in order to use it as the pattern after which he forms his own being.23 Indeed, he is to become eventually assimilated to God24 and thus to achieve enduring happiness and the highest destiny which is possible to him as man.

It would be wrong to suppose that the ordinary Greek of Plato's day or after followed him through all his philosophical reasoning and arrived with him at the contemplation of the Good. The average Greek probably reached and remained at the Sophist level of humanism, not making life a mere animal process,25 although unconscious of the dualism within himself,26

21 Ibid., 144.
22 Laws, 716c.
23 Republic, 540a.
24 Theaetetus, 176b.
26 Ibid., 112 f.
and placing a heavy emphasis upon sense life. The humanism of the ordinary Greek dispenses with the need for a deity, a future life, and a purely spiritual world. It is not essentially inconsistent with these beliefs, and they have often been found in union with it; but it can do without them. Abolish them for the Greek, and he would still live the same life as if they were there.

In general, the "Greek on the street" knew that life might give a "qualified happiness" to anyone. The common citizens of golden-age Greece are a homely, genial people...too simple to be intellectualists or hedonists, too human to be materialists, prizing highly the common virtues and pieties, but not so idealistic as to undervalue good looks, 'comfortable means,' public funerals, and statues at Delphi; inclined to a dark view of the world, yet able to enjoy it, and living in kindly simplicity the happy life of the 'natural' man.

The Roman contribution to humanistic theory was slight as far as theoretical development is concerned. Three things, however, were contributed by the Romans. First, they prolonged the life of humanistic thought by taking over to a greater of lesser extent the humanistic culture of the Greeks.

27 Ibid., 131.
28 Ibid., 123.
29 Ibid., 158.
30 Ibid., 159.
secondly, they caused it to spread somewhat geographically by carrying it with them in some of their imperial conquests. Thirdly, in some instances they synthesized the thought that had crystallized in the golden age of Greece and previously. A good example of such syntheses are Cicero's treatises De Senectute and Somnium Scipionis, in which the author summons up the old bugbears of the Greeks, namely old age and death, and brings together all that has been written on those subjects in a vain effort to remove their sting. In the Somnium Scipionis following Plato, though freely, he described a...heaven where "all those who have preserved, assisted, or enlarged their fatherland have a special place and enjoy bliss everlasting." The pathway to this heaven is by justice and duty (pietas).31

Speak as he will of heaven, Cicero nevertheless keeps his own desire for glory which is to be won by right performance of duty.32 Moreover, when plunged into grief by the death of his beloved Tullia he tried to console himself with the thought of immortality, but confessed in one of his letters, "omnem consolationem vincit dolor."33

The important point for the present discussion is that these ideas, with all that they imply with regard to the conduct

32 Ibid., 275.
of life, were not original with Cicero. "Plato and other Greeks had worked them over before him."34 The Romans took their humanistic culture from Greece.35

After the complete breakdown of Roman moral life came inevitably the breakdown of the Roman empire. When the barbarians from the north went roaring through Italy, the humanism of the Romans and the Greeks was all but entirely forgotten. Men whose ancestors had been brought up in an atmosphere of leisure and ease found it necessary to work and to sweat and to be constantly vigilant lest their very lives be cut short. The prime tenet in the philosophy of life of most Europeans during the years that have been called the "Dark Ages" was to live—to eat, to sleep, to beget children, to fight grimly against the constant dangers to life. Only in the monasteries which sprang from the seed planted by Saint Benedict was the lamp of learning tended and kept alight. The monks alone preserved the memory of what had been accomplished by the great men of Greek and Roman antiquity. And when conditions in Europe once again favored humanistic study it was to the monasteries that the new scholars had to turn to find the works we now call simply "the classics."

It was the age called the Renaissance, stretching

34 Sullivan, 277.
35 Livingstone, 11.
roughly from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, that saw the first great resurgence of classical humanism. Dante is ordinarily considered the forerunner of Renaissance humanism, for in his work he evinced the new interest in classic literature that was to sweep Italy and much of Europe. It is significant that Dante's guide through hell and purgatory in his *Divine Comedy* is the poet Virgil.

To Petrarch, however, is usually assigned the distinction of being the first humanist of the Renaissance. Petrarch, who lived from 1304 to 1374, was an avid student of the classics and an ardent admirer of the civilization of ancient Greece and Rome. In the company of his disciple and friend Boccacio, and later of Coluccio Salutato, a chancellor of Florence, he studied such classical writings as were available during his lifetime and tried "to realize the spirit of the antique world" which had produced them.36

Many of the classical works we know today, however, were not at hand for the earliest Renaissance humanists to study. But as early as 1430 this state of affairs had been completely changed; for, thanks especially to another Florentine chancellor, Poggio by name, practically all the Latin works now known were collected. Poggio himself found many Latin manuscripts in the

monasteries to which he had access, bringing to light the works of Quintillian and Lucretius, and the first books of the Annales of Tacitus.

The first Renaissance teacher of Greek in western Europe was a man named Manuel Chrysolorus, who began his teaching in 1396. Great impetus to the study of Greek literature was given, strangely enough, by the Mohammedan conquest of Constantinople in 1453. For many learned men, flying before the oncoming infidels, settled in Italy, bringing with them in many instances priceless libraries of Greek manuscripts. Florence, Rome, and Venice were especially enriched in this way.

The humanistic movement of the Renaissance would hardly have enjoyed the golden era of prosperity that was its lot if it had not been for the magnificent encouragement that it received from the ruling families in Italy and from the Popes of the time. In Florence, the undisputed capital of Renaissance humanism, the movement was munificently supported by Cosimo de Medici and later by Lorenze de Medici, called the Magnificent. The Viscontis and the Sforzas in Milan, the Gonzagas in Mantua, the Estes in Ferrara all took the greatest pride in being known as patrons of the new learning and the new culture.

Nor were the Popes outdone by the purely secular rulers of the day. Nicholas V founded the Vatican Library and encouraged its growth so assiduously that eventually it surpassed
all others in the number and value of its manuscripts. He encouraged classical studies also. Among other devices which he used with this end in view, he offered a prize of ten thousand gulden for a complete translation of Homer—a prize which, strangely enough, no one ever won. He brought to Rome as many classical scholars as he could, regardless of their attitude towards religion. Among them was Lorenzo Valla, remembered chiefly as the man who declared the Donation of Constantine a fable; and an infamous man named Marsuppini who, whatever his attainments as a scholar, was so extreme an admirer of the ancient Greeks as to practice their heathen religion.

Other Popes who patronized the new movement were Pius II (frequently spoken of by his personal name, Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini), who was a humanist himself as well as a patron of humanism; Sixtus IV, who reestablished and enlarged the Vatican Library; and the Medici Leo X, under whom humanism had a second Golden Age.

By the time that Leo X died (in 1521), Italian Renaissance had run its course and Italian humanism was about to receive its death blow. The blow fell in 1527 when Rome was sacked. The long years of absorption in gravely important political and religious problems that followed the gutting of Rome prevented humanism from coming back to life in Italy.

Humanism itself, however, was not yet crushed out
of Europe. In Germany it had taken root, though owing to the "religious and moral earnestness of the Germans" it never penetrated so deeply in that land as it did in Italy, nor did it have the same result. The Germans did not go too far in their love of classic beauty and the joys of sense. Moreover, the practical Germans gave humanism a practical turn and made it educational in character to a much greater extent than did the Italians. "School and university reform was the chief aim and the chief service of German humanism." 38

German interest in classic literature began in the fourteenth century under Charles IV, but it was not until a hundred years later that humanism really spread in the land. Aeneas S. Piccolomini was the apostle of humanism at the court of Frederick III, and later the movement was supported by Emperor Maximiliam I and many influential citizens. The famous Johann Reuchlin introduced into Germany the study of Hebrew as a cultural and educational medium.

Strasburg was the first real stronghold of humanistic ideas in Germany. In that city and elsewhere there sprang up societies devoting themselves to the study of the classics. By the year 1520

38 Loc. cit.
all the German Universities had been modernized in the Humanistic sense; attendance at the lectures on poetry and oratory was obligatory, Greek chairs were founded, and the scholastic commentaries on Aristotle were replaced by new translations.39

Two of the brightest stars in the firmament of northern Renaissance humanism were Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas More. Erasmus, "the most brilliant and the most important leader of German humanism,"40 was born at Rotterdam, probably in 1466. Part of his early education he received in a humanist school at Deventer, and part at the monastery in which, under compulsion, he spent what he later called two lost years. Though he felt no call to the religious life, he was forced by necessity and the insistence of his guardians to enter a monastery of the Canons Regular in 1436, where he spent most of his time studying the ancient classics. He was ordained a priest in 1492, and was sent to Paris to complete his studies. He found the scholastic method in vogue there so repugnant that he spent his time wandering about France, the Netherlands, and later, England. In England he met Thomas More, Colet, Latimer, and other famous humanists. Colet urged him to study the scripture as a means of reconciling humanism with Catholicism, and he plunged into the study with vigor.

39 Ibid., 541.
In 1506 Erasmus journeyed to Italy and found himself honored wherever he went by the most distinguished humanists. On his return from Italy he wrote his satire called *The Praise of Folly* in which he mercilessly scourged the abuses in the church. This work was soon followed by numerous others of the same general tenor. Such writings, together with his rationalistic *Paraphrases of the New Testament*, and his immoral *Colloquia*, prepared the way for the Reformation. Indeed, Erasmus was long on cordial terms with Luther, and broke definitely with him only in 1524 when he feared that he was losing the confidence of both the Reformers and the Catholics.

In his declining years Erasmus held aloof from religious controversy and busied himself with editions of the classics and of the Fathers of the Church. He abandoned the system of purely natural morals he had taken up in imitation of the morality of the classic ages, and died "with all the signs of a devout trust in God"—though for some unknown reason without the last sacraments—in 1536.

Opinions of Erasmus differ widely. He cannot be defended without reserve, for he had obviously serious defects of character.

His religious ideal was purely humanistic:

41 Ibid., 513.
reform of the church on the basis of her traditional constitution, the introduction of humanistic "enlightenment" into ecclesiastical doctrine, without, however, breaking with Rome.42

Erasmus was a potent factor in the educational world of his day, for he worked unceasingly for the spread of humanistic learning, and by his influence upon scholars and by his work of editing and translating Greek and Latin authors, he gave powerful impetus to the study of the classics. Indeed, he exemplifies well the good and the bad points in Renaissance humanism. His work upon classic writings, his advocacy of a systematic study of these writings as instruments of humanistic culture, are of undoubted value. But on the other hand his tendency to accept the purely human—and therefore heathen—morality of the ancients, his impatience with philosophic reasoning, and his immoderate attacks upon the church to which scholasticism was devoted, have done great harm.

It is unfortunate that Erasmus could not have shared the piety and devotion to the church which characterized his friend, Thomas More. More was also a man of brilliant intellect, and one devoted to humanism, a soundly Christian humanism. Even while lecturing in law he spent some of his time writing Latin and English verse, and later collaborated with a friend in pro-

42 Loc. cit.
ducing a book of epigrams from the Greek. Always interested in classical studies, he wrote much in Latin, his works being for the most part of a pious nature. It may be said of him, however, that he was interested in living in a soundly humanistic way more than in preaching theoretical humanism to others. To his learning he added wisdom, foresight, tact, kindness, friendliness, wit, and in general a charm that still clings to his memory even after the lapse of centuries. His life and his character were admirably balanced. Compared with More in this respect, Erasmus looks crabbed and almost petty. More's admirable life was crowned with martyrdom in 1535.

Humanism never flourished as luxuriantly in northern Europe as it did in Italy. The constant preoccupation with pressing religious battles which was necessitated in the northern countries precluded such deep interest in general culture. Moreover, the sharp cleavage within and between nations in matters of religion tended to make any system of thought which harked back to pagan days a subject to be avoided. It is not surprising then that humanism as an explicit philosophy of life and thought had died by the end of the sixteenth century.

The following is a verdict for Italian humanism which may be applied in greater or lesser extent to the humanism of other nations of the Renaissance:

The chief merit of Italian Humanism,
and indeed of Humanism in general, was that it opened up the real resources of ancient culture and drew from these, as a subject of study for its own sake, the classic literature which until then had been used in a merely fragmentary way.... More influential still, but not to good effect, were the religious and moral views of pagan antiquity. Christianity and its ethical system suffered a serious shock. Moral relations, especially marriage, became the subject of ribald jest. In their private lives many Humanists were deficient in moral sense, while the morals of the upper classes degenerated into a pitiable excess of unrestrained individualism.43

A word should be said here about Rousseau, the French theorist of the eighteenth century. Rousseau postulated as the perfect state for man "a primitive, happy 'state of nature,' a sort of distorted version of the earthly paradise referred to in divine revelation."44 Since man had somehow fallen from that happy state and blundered more and more in his attempts to recapture it, Rousseau urged that man cut away entirely from the mistakes of the past and live again the primitive life of the "noble savage." He held out the hope that the whole field of living could be transformed, and that perfect happiness could be achieved on earth.

Because of the wide influence that Rousseau has had on

43 The Catholic Encyclopedia, VII, 541.
modern education, and because his vague system of education can be put under the broad definition of humanism, he should be mentioned here. But brief mention is enough, because he is apart from the humanist tradition, especially in his advocacy of complete separation of the present from the past.

The so-called New Humanists of the twentieth century next brought humanism into prominence. Irving Babbitt, at the time Professor of French at Harvard, introduced the new system shortly after the first World War. Before long the New Humanism attracted a considerable following, and, as was to be expected, considerable opposition. It flourished for a decade or more; but then, owing to dissension within the ranks of the New Humanists themselves with regard to vitally important philosophical matters, it went into a decline. After the deaths of some of its most eminent proponents, notably Babbitt and Paul Elmer More, the movement ceased to engage the interest of the literary and philosophic world—as a summary inspection of the annual book and magazine indexes will show.

The New Humanism has as its goal the old humanist ideal of the perfection of human life to be achieved by a proportionate and harmonious development of every part of human nature. For standards of perfection it looks to the classical cultures of Greece and Rome and to other civilizations, from which it selects whatever seems worthy of preservation. One of
its tenets is the "nothing too much" of the Greeks, another the "Golden Rule" of Christ. Its basic principle is the rule of restraint, in which the New Humanism is profoundly influenced by the youthful life of its founder, Irving Babbitt.

Born in Dayton, Ohio, in 1865, of rather impractical parents, Babbitt was unguided and undisciplined during his youth, and in later years worked out his own code of self-discipline, the heart of the New Humanist doctrine. Babbitt saw clearly the dual nature of man, that the human being is divided within himself, being drawn towards beauty and goodness on the one hand and towards evil and its ugliness on the other.

The first article of Babbitt's humanist creed was the dual nature of man. He saw clearly that all men are born with desire for beauty, truth, and goodness, which if perfectly combined would result in a perfect order; and at the same time with a tendency to evil, which tendency, if not grasped by the intellect and opposed by the will, results in intolerable disorder.

Thus in its most fundamental principles the New Humanism is opposed to the monist fallacies of naturalism and materialism.

Realizing that the conflict between the two tendencies in man must be won by the more specifically human tendency

if the person is to achieve happiness in a full development of his total manhood, New Humanism looks about for a means of keeping the lower tendency in proper control. It rejects supernatural religion, believing that to be in its own way as alien and improper to man's nature as the gross sensuality of materialism. Seeking to have man lead his life and find his happiness entirely on a purely human plane of existence that lies midway between the natural (or purely sensual) and the supernatural planes, the New Humanists say man's own "higher will" should operate to keep his passions in check. This is the famous "inner check" or "frein vital" of New Humanism.

This primacy of the will in the New Humanism is of great importance. A man's character depends upon the proper cultivation of the will, and his dignity is determined by the constancy with which he exercises his will in governing and restraining his appetites for pleasure and power. Only thus can man achieve happiness, according to Babbitt, for "the good life is not primarily something to be known but something to be willed."47 It is to be noted, however, that the sense in which Babbitt speaks of the will is rather limited. For him the will is exclusively a power of control. Babbitt "has seized upon a

single manifestation of the voluntary in man—the power of con­
trol—and has limited the will to that."48

The reasons for the New Humanist insistence upon the
exclusion of the supernatural from their system of thought are
interesting to speculate upon. Hoffman Nickerson says of Bab­
bitt:

It is strange that so powerful an intel­
lect, deeply concerned with those things
in man which are not animal but specifi­
cally human, so insistent...that for good or
ill "man is...the infinite animal," should
have so persistently shied away from the
idea of God. Perhaps the crudity and bar­
barous taboos of the Bible-worshipping
Protestant sects of his Ohio youth were
responsible; perhaps it was the faint
but unmistakable odour of Unitarian skep­
ticism still clinging to Harvard; it may
have been the bitter hatred of all Chris­
tian things that fills all the official
French universities; perhaps the old Jew
Levi under whom Babbit studied at the
College de France found a way to feed a
racial hatred of the Faith by swerving
young minds towards the bottomless pit
of Buddhism. At all events, there is this
queer gap in Babbitt's thought.49

T. S. Eliot suggests that Babbitt

knows too many religions and philosophies,
has assimilated their spirit too thor­
oughly...to be able to give himself to any.
The result is humanism.50

48 Benjamin Masse, "A Note on Mr. Babbitt's Psychology," The
Modern Schoolman, IX, 49, (March, 1932).
50 Selected Essays, 392.
This point of religion and the supernatural and of their place in life became a stumbling block to the New Humanism. On this point there grew up dissension within the ranks. Paul Elmer More stated that "the sanction of immortality was a necessary adjunct to the humanistic program for the restoration of the moral order, and was bitterly opposed by many of his fellow humanists. T. S. Eliot and numerous lesser critics have attacked the New Humanists on this point, and it seems certain that their criticism has had some effect upon the remaining New Humanists. The New Humanism would seem to have come to the point at which it must abandon its ideal of a life of perfection on the mythical middle plane of pure humanism and accept the necessity of religion, or wither away in sterile theorizing. The New Humanists, including Norman Foerster (their "fugleman" as T. S. Eliot calls him) seem to have come to this realization.

From the New Humanism the transition to the humanism of T. S. Eliot is easy and natural, for it was this very movement which elicited the comments upon humanism in which he reveals his humanistic theory. The history of humanism, extending as it does over almost thirty centuries, inevitably dwarfs any modern man who is viewed against it as a background. Yet

52 T. S. Eliot, Thoughts after Lambeth, Faber and Faber, London, 1931, 12.
there are few moderns who are so significant in the development of this system of thought as Thomas Stearns Eliot. Eliot is important because he takes culture and humanism very seriously, and because his critical powers are acute.

There can be no doubt that Eliot takes culture (and humanism, which, as it shall be shown, is in his mind most intimately related to culture) very seriously. Born in Saint Louis, Missouri, in 1888, and educated in the Middle West and at Harvard, Eliot left the United States in 1911. He studied at the Sorbonne, Paris, and at Merton College, Oxford, and in 1914 took up residence in London, his home ever since. Because he found the cultural life of England more to his liking than that of America, he completely expatriated himself. He entered the High Anglican Church and, in 1927, became a British citizen. He declares himself a classicist in literature, a Royalist in politics, and an Anglo-Catholic in religion.

Eliot's renown and influence both as critic and as poet is surprisingly great considering the comparatively meager output of his pen. His volumes of poems are all slim sheaves, one of them, Ash-Wednesday, containing only sixteen loosely printed pages of text. His prose works, all critical, are also rather small in size. Besides having written these books, Eliot has contributed numerous articles to such magazines as his own Criterion, and to The Hound and the Horn, The Spectator, The
Bookman, etc., and has written prefaces to a number of books. Furthermore, since a man of his stature is in frequent demand as a speaker and lecturer, he has rather frequent opportunity to air his views from the platform, and to set down his speeches in print afterwards. Topics connected with his adoptive church also interest him vitally, and he has a number of small pamphlets on ecclesiastical topics. Most of these articles, prefaces, speeches, etc., have been reprinted, however, in his own collections of his essays. "The volume of work published by Mr. Eliot is exceedingly small in comparison with the influence he has exerted over the younger writers both in America and England."53

The brevity of form which Eliot's criticism takes is misleading. There is a fulness of quality about his work that more than makes up for the scantiness in quantity. Moreover, Eliot is an original thinker.

There is probably no writer of our time who has said more things about the art of literature which are at once new and incontrovertible than Mr. T. S. Eliot.... With every subject he has attempted he has only made a beginning, said a few pregnant or subversive words, and stopped.... This impression of incompleteness is largely misleading. It is only when one tries to

discover what essential aspect... has been left untreated in Mr. Eliot's essay that one realizes how nearly complete it is.... In one way Mr. Eliot is the most complete critic of our time.54

T. S. Eliot is a critic to be reckoned with. It will worth while to see what he has to say of humanism.

CHAPTER III
THE GENERIC NOTE OF ELIOT'S HUMANISM: CULTURE

In one of his essays written in criticism of the New Humanism, Eliot attempts to "distinguish the functions of true humanism from those imposed upon it by zealots." He lists these functions under eight numbers. Although he states, characteristically, after giving it that "the list is not exhaustive or defining, but consists merely of qualifications which occur immediately to my mind," it will be worth while to give it here in full, because it contains in germ all that he has to say about humanism.

I. The function of humanism is not to provide dogmas, or philosophical theories. Humanism, because it is general culture, is not concerned with philosophical foundations; it is concerned less with "reason" than with common sense. When it proceeds to exact definitions it becomes something other than itself.

II. Humanism makes for breadth, tolerance, equilibrium and sanity. It operates against fanaticism.

III. The world cannot get on without breadth, tolerance, and sanity; any more than it can get on without narrowness, bigotry and fanaticism.

1 Selected Essays, 400.
2 Ibid., 401.
IV. It is not the business of humanism to refute anything. Its business is to persuade according to the unformulable axioms of culture and good sense. It does not, for instance, overthrow the arguments of fallacies like Behaviourism: it operates by taste, by sensibility trained by culture. It is critical rather than constructive. It is necessary for the criticism of social life and social theories, political life and political theories.

Without humanism we could not cope with Mr. Shaw, Mr. Wells, Earl Russell, Mr. Mencken, Mr. Sandburg, M. Claudel, Herr Ludwig, Mrs. MacPherson, or the governments of America and Europe.

V. Humanism can have no positive theories about philosophy or theology; all it can ask, in the most tolerant spirit, is: Is this particular philosophy or religion civilized or is it not?

VI. There is a type of person whom we call the Humanist, for whom humanism is enough. This type is valuable.

VII. Humanism is valuable (a) by itself, in the "pure humanist," who will not set up humanism as a substitute for philosophy and religion, and (b) as a mediating and corrective ingredient in a positive civilization founded on definite belief.

VIII. Humanism, finally, is valid for a very small minority of individuals. But it is culture, not any subscription to a common programme or platform, which binds these individuals together. Such an "intellectual aristocracy" has not the economic bonds which unite the individuals of an "aristocracy of birth."

3 Ibid., 400 f.
From a study of this list two things are at once apparent: in the mind of Eliot the genus of humanism is general culture. Secondly, to continue the attempt to give a strictly philosophical definition, the specific difference of humanism is found in its function.

Culture has a high place in Eliot's scale of values—perhaps too high a place. "Culture," he says in one instance, "is not enough, even though nothing is enough without culture." Of the nature of culture, however, Eliot nowhere commits himself to a clear statement. Most of his remarks on culture occur in his essay "Arnold and Pater," in which he is chiefly concerned with showing that Arnold, and Pater after him, had confused and exaggerated notions of culture, making of it a substitute for religion. This point, and for that matter the whole essay, is strongly reminiscent of Eliot's censures of the New Humanism of Babbitt and Foerster. Indeed, he states it as his opinion that Arnold and his culture-cult is a forerunner of what is now called [New] Humanism."6

Although culture is something "specifically religious" as he tells us in another place, it is not to attempt to

4 Ibid., 399.
5 Ibid., 346-357.
6 Ibid., 348.
supersede religion. It is the property of an "elite of thought, conduct and taste," who recognize the public and private responsibility of patronage of the best that is made and written."9

While "national" culture is something at which "you cannot...aim directly," in the individual it should be the product of an education expressly directed towards it as a goal.11 In commenting on a remark of Foerster which he quotes, he specifies somewhat the educational program that will produce culture in the individual, and in so doing he sheds light on his own idea of it.

"Greek sculpture..., Homer, Sophocles, Plato, Aristotle, Virgil, Horace, Jesus, Paul, Augustine, Francis of Assisi, Buddha, Confucius, Shakespeare, Milton, and Goethe": for culture these are the sorts of authority to which we may properly look... This is the best possible background.12

From his context it is obvious that Foerster in compiling the list which Eliot quotes looked upon Jesus and Paul as merely human philosophers whose teachings were to be accepted only insofar as they were approved by man's reason, and not on any

8 Ibid., 77.
9 Ibid., 40.
10 Ibid., 39.
11 Ibid., 77.
12 Selected Essays, 398 f.
divine authority. For his purpose Eliot accepts the list and approves it as a list of teachers of culture, though from what he says elsewhere it is clear that he does not join Foerster in his unbelief.

In Eliot's mind, therefore, culture is a sort of mental wealth amassed through culling for oneself the finest in the experiences available to man. It is the wealth that is acquired through wide and thorough acquaintance with the good, the true, and the beautiful, as they are manifested in the lives and teachings of great and wise men, and in art and nature. It is real wealth, however, only if stamped with the discipline of religion and philosophy. A man possessed of culture is able, thanks to long and intimate association with what is genuinely fine, to recognize in any surroundings what is truly noble and in harmony with the best in human nature. He knows truth, goodness, and beauty well enough to recognize them upon sight. Moreover, he is impelled to choose what is true, good, and beautiful, thanks to that same intimate association with it, for that association has taught him the surpassing value of what is fine and noble.

To sum up briefly: In Eliot's mind culture is an attitude of mind, conditioned by philosophy and religion, which enables man to recognize and impels him to choose, whatever is good, true, and beautiful.
Thus far Eliot on culture. There remains the further question of Eliot's views on the relation of culture to humanism, but of that we shall speak after we have completed our formulation of the definition of humanism as understood by Eliot. The discussion of that further problem will shed additional light on Eliot's notion of culture in itself.
CHAPTER IV

THE SPECIFIC DIFFERENCE OF HUMANISM:
ITS FUNCTION

We have seen that the generic note of humanism in the mind of Eliot is culture. Now we come to an investigation of its specific difference, its function.

The function of humanism we may look at under four aspects: first, the function itself; secondly, the object upon which humanism functions; thirdly, the manner in which it functions; and finally, the reason for which it functions. Eliot speaks more of less explicitly of each of these four aspects at least briefly.

The function of humanism as Eliot understands it is criticism. It is to "persuade according to the unformulable axioms of culture and good sense.... It is critical rather than constructive."1 "It is essentially critical...."2 Although humanism is not to stumps for any particular body of philosophic or religious dogma, it is clear that its criticism is intended to lead to an acceptance of the cultured and sensible opposite of what has been rejected under fire of its criticism and per-

1 Selected Essays, 400.
2 Ibid., 385.
suasion. In this sense, at least, the criticism is positive and constructive. A humanism purely destructive in its criticism would be a false humanism. "If you find examples of humanism which are anti-religious..., then such humanism is purely destructive [and false], for it has never found anything to replace what it destroyed."3

The object upon which humanism functions—that which it criticizes—is really civilized life in its multiple manifestations. Humanism

is necessary for the criticism of social life and social theories, political life and political theories.... It can ask:... Is this particular philosophy or religion civilized or is it not...? Humanism is valuable as a mediating and corrective ingredient in a positive civilization founded on definite belief.4

Again, "philosophy...science...and religion depend upon humanism to preserve their sanity."5

Social and political life and theory, science, philosophy, and religion—all come under the tolerant scrutiny of humanism to be criticized. The whole life of man is the object of the functioning of humanism.

3 Ibid., 387.
4 Ibid., 400.
5 Humanism and America, 110.
The manner in which humanism functions is described by Eliot in the intriguing phrase already quoted: "according to the unformulable axioms of culture and good sense." 6 Again, "it operates by taste, by sensibility trained by culture." 7 Furthermore, its criticizing must be done "in the most tolerant spirit." 8

What Eliot is driving at here is made more clear if one keeps in mind other points in his list of the functions of humanism. In that list he says:

Humanism... is concerned less with "reason" than with common sense. When it proceeds to exact definitions it becomes something other than itself....

It is not the business of humanism to refute anything.... It does not, for instance, overthrow the arguments of fallacies like Behaviourism.... 9

In other words, humanism does not demand of its opponent a definition of terms and syllogistic proof of the position held. It does not explain the "state of the question," or distinguish or deny majors and minors. That whole type of argument, the fruit of "reason," is outside the scope of humanism. It is in this sense that "humanism... is not concerned

6 Selected Essays, 400.
7 Loc. cit.
8 Loc. cit.
9 Loc. cit.
with philosophical foundations...."10 Rather humanism simply holds up for comparison with its opponent the axioms of culture and common sense--unformulable axioms, it is true, but infallible because they are grounded in human nature itself. Thus Behaviourism would be discredited in the eyes of the humanist not because of any specifically philosophical inconsistencies it contains, but simply because it is, on the face of it, strictly non-sensical. It is true that humanism presupposes philosophical training, and religious and scientific and literary training too; for without the emotional and intellectual discipline given by these studies, as Eliot says, "humanism tends to shrink into an atrophied caricature of itself."11 But when he acts specifically as a humanist, a man does not rely upon the specific facts taught him by these studies incriticizing the phase of life or thought at hand. Rather he makes his criticism in the light of the total educational residue which these studies, together with the whole of his life-experience as a member of the human race, have built into him.

This is an important point, because here we see the difference between the mere scholar and the humanist, between the student who bristles with facts and the really educated man who has assimilated his factual knowledge and made it a part

10 Loc. cit.
11 Humanism and America, ill.
of a genuine personal culture, who has been formed as well as informed. It is here that we see the specifically humanistic value of literary and classical education, which puts the student into contact with the great minds of ages past, and permits him to widen his experience by enabling him to live vicariously the lives of which he reads in fiction and biography. It is here also that we see why, as Eliot insists throughout his works, culture and not mere information should be the end result of true education; and why genuine culture is never really completely finished until the human experience of the individual is ended with death; and why, therefore, genuine education is a matter of a lifetime, a sentence whose period is the tombstone.

It is quite possible that a non-humanist scholar could dispatch a philosophical error with much greater speed and technical eclat than a humanist. The former in that case would have specific facts at hand which would give the lie to error by means of irrefragable syllogistic proof. The humanist, relying on those axioms of culture and good sense, would also dispatch the error to his own satisfaction, but without the resounding clatter of specific philosophic knowledge. This is not to deprecate specific knowledge. Such knowledge is necessary as Eliot insists, but it is not enough. Everyone is familiar with those unhappily talented people who at the drop of a hat spew forth an impressive array of facts upon any given subject and who
thereby efficiently close further discussion of that subject by rendering it apparently superfluous, but who do it with an angularity and awkwardness pitiful to behold. Such persons, much as they may possess in the line of factual knowledge, lack the humanistic attitude, lack culture. Their knowledge is like a newly cast bronze statue freshly set in a garden—glittering, compelling attention, yet offensive because not yet assimilated and blended into its surroundings. Only after the wind and the sun and the rain have clothed it in verdigris, and the plants at its base have grown and clung about it to make it truly a part of the garden, only then will the statue be completely a thing of beauty. In like manner, unless factual knowledge is assimilated and made a part of the whole humanistic mind—and in its assimilation much of that factual knowledge will lose its "formulability"—it will never be completely an asset to its possessor.

An interesting parallel suggests itself here that may be of use in clearing up further the notion of "unformulable" axioms of culture. In every industry, in every field of professional endeavor, experts are governed in many of their actions and judgments by "unformulable axioms." For instance, the pilot of a river steamboat who eases his unwieldy craft into the dock without so much as scratching its finish is one of these. How does he know just when to signal for the shutting off of power? Wind and water conditions may vary at every approach to
the dock, yet every time the pilot docks his boat with the same perfection of result. Obviously, he can do this only because he has had long experience at his post. He is "cultured" in the handling of steamboats, and his signals to the boiler-room are given in accordance with the unformulable axioms that experience has taught him. He could not explain why it is at this moment rather than at the next that the signal is given. It is just the "right moment"; that is all. His steamboat "culture" tells him so.

In much the same manner the humanist is guided by such instincts or unformulable axioms. His long experience with beauty tells him, for example, that this picture is, and that that picture is not, an object of genuine beauty. Perhaps he could not defend his decision against all arguers; yet he would remain convinced because he knows that those unformulable axioms which have unconsciously guided him in his judgment are infallible. He could not explain just why he thinks the one painting beautiful and the other not beautiful. His culture tells him so, but it tells him in wordless language.

To conclude our discussion of the third aspect of the function of humanism, the manner of its functioning, we may say now with somewhat fuller understanding that humanism criticizes civilized life in a cultural manner, or according to the unformulable axioms of culture. The axioms will be provided out of the philosophical, religious, and broadly literary fund of
knowledge and experience that is culture.

The fourth aspect of the function of humanism is the function considered in its proper result or end. In the list of functions already quoted Eliot notes that "humanism makes for breadth, tolerance, equilibrium and sanity. It operates against fanaticism." 12 Elsewhere he says: "Humanism should strive to... reconcile all the parts unto a whole." 13 Again: "Humanism can only be quite actual in the full realization and balance of the disciplined emotional and intellectual life of man." 14

At this juncture we can see clearly the continuity of Eliot's humanism with what has always been recognized as classical humanism. "Breadth, tolerance, equilibrium and sanity" were the ideals towards which Greek and Roman humanism strove, and towards which the Renaissance humanists also looked. The fanaticism against which Eliot's humanism works is the "too much" against which Pindar directed his famous "μη δὲν ἄγαν". 15 Eliot's ideal is much like the aures mediocritas which Horace

12 Selected Essays, 400.
13 Humanism and America, 111.
14 Loc. cit.
advocated.16 For fanaticism after all is merely a lack of proper proportion--too much of a good thing.

Fanaticism understood in this sense is a part of the heritage of original sin. It is possible only because of the disorder among the faculties of man which resulted from the fall. Eliot recognizes this. He has no doubts whether on the one hand as to the imperfection of man in his present state, or on the other as to the possibility of improving him. He speaks of the doctrine of original sin as a "very real and tremendous thing."17 He excoriates the modern New Humanists for whom, because of their "refusal to believe any longer in the radical imperfection of either man or nature..., the problem of evil disappears, the conception of sin disappears."18

The function of humanism, then, is not something rendered superfluous by any supposed perfection of man. Humanism can always find reason for functioning. Furthermore, it can function with the hope of accomplishing with a reasonable measure of success what it sets out to do. Man, strictly speaking, is not perfectible, nor capable of infinite improvement. "There is an absolute to which Man can never attain,"

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16 Carmina, Lib. 2, N. 10, l. 5.
17 After Strange Gods, 62.
18 Selected Essays, 401. Eliot is quoting with approval from T. E. Hulme.
even though he can "apprehend perfection."\textsuperscript{19} He can improve himself, develop his faculties harmoniously and without a fanatical over-emphasis on any one of them. Here is the field in which humanism operates. This is the object of its functioning: to help man to develop himself in an orderly, harmonious, well-proportioned manner.

But fanaticism is not the exclusive bugbear of the individual. Fanaticism of a larger sort occurs as an ailment of all the various branched of society or of society as a whole. And here too humanism has its work of persuasion and criticism to do. A civilization "founded on definite belief" is in acute danger of becoming fanatical and narrow-minded in its attachment to that belief. For such a civilization "humanism is valuable...as a mediating and corrective ingredient."\textsuperscript{20}

Religion, Eliot believes, is of its very nature prone to fanaticism and is in need of the critical services of humanism. Eliot has much to say on this matter. Because of its importance and because of the length at which it must be treated, the question of the inter-relation of humanism and religion has been relegated to a separate later chapter.

Philosophy and science too are in need of the medi-

\textsuperscript{19} Loc. cit.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 400.
ating and corrective influence of humanism if they are to avoid falling into an unharmonious or fanatical development.

Humanism can offer neither the intellectual discipline of philosophy or of science (two different disciplines) .... On the other hand, these other activities depend upon humanism to preserve their sanity.... Without it, science can be merely a process of technical research, bursting out from time to time, and especially in our time, into the sentimental monstrosities like the Life Force, or Professor Whitehead's God.21

Humanism must also reconcile men of different or apparently different and conflicting interests and persuade them to abandon the fanatical quality of the interests which produces conflict.

It is the spirit of humanism which has operated to reconcile the mystic and the ecclesiastic in one church.... It is the humanist who could point out to the theologian the absurdities of his repudiation, acceptance, or exploitation of "science," and to the scientist the absurdities of his repudiation, acceptance, or exploitation of religion.22

Early in the discussion of Eliot's humanism it was pointed out that the genus of humanism was general culture; its specific difference its function. General culture has

21 Humanism and America, 110 f.
22 Ibid., 111.
been discussed, and the function of humanism has been explained under four heads. With that the attempt to formulate the positive definition of humanism as it is understood in the writings of T. S. Eliot is complete. In summary Eliot's definition of humanism may be stated as follows:

**Humanism is general culture functioning as critic** of civilized life in all its aspects, tolerantly judging it in the light of cultural axioms, and striving to bring about the abandonment of all fanaticism, whether in society or in the individual.
A NEGATIVE DEFINITION OF HUMANISM;
THE EXTENT OF HUMANISM;
HUMANISM AND CULTURE.

Since Eliot's treatment of humanism is so largely negative, it will be appropriate and helpful to a fuller understanding of our topic to give the texts in which he tells what, in his mind, humanism is not.

First of all, Eliot insists again and again that humanism is not a state of mind or a body of dogma that can stand by itself. This would belie its essentially critical nature. "To exist at all, it is dependent on some other attitude, for it is essentially critical..."1

Again, Eliot insists with constant reiteration that as a result of its dependent nature, humanism cannot be set up as a religion or a philosophy in its own right. "The function of humanism, though necessary, is secondary. You cannot make humanism itself into a religion."2 "The humanistic point of view is auxiliary to and dependent upon the religious point

1 Selected Essays, 385.
2 Ibid., 400.
of view."\(^3\) "Humanism is valuable... by itself, in the 'pure humanist' who will not set up humanism as a substitute for philosophy and religion.... The function of humanism is not to provide dogmas or philosophical theories.... Humanism can have no positive theories about philosophy or theology."\(^4\)

Finally, it "is not the business of humanism to refute anything.... It does not, for instance, overthrow the arguments of fallacies like Behaviourism...;" \(^\text{5}\) it does not "exact definitions." \(^\text{5}\) It persuades, not by syllogistic arguing, but simply by inducing the realization that that of which it disapproves is not in harmony with that which is best in and best for man.

**THE EXTENT OF HUMANISM**

Strange though it may seem, Eliot prescribes a very limited extent to humanism: 
"...humanism is, I think, merely the state of mind of a few persons in a few places at a few times."\(^6\) Again, "humanism is valid... for a very small minority of individuals."\(^7\) Such a restriction of the extent of humanism is surprising in the light of other things that Eliot has had to say. As has been shown, he considers it necessary

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\(^3\) Ibid., 391.
\(^4\) Ibid., 400.
\(^5\) Loc. cit.
\(^6\) Ibid., 395.
\(^7\) Ibid., 401
if religion, philosophy, science, and political and social life are not to become fanatical and lose their sanity. If only few people are humanists, it would seem that most people must be fanatics in Eliot's opinion.

The solution to this problem lies in the fact that in the places in which he restricts humanism so strikingly Eliot is speaking of "pure" humanism only, and not of "less pure" types which would be more widespread. He himself uses this terminology in one of the very contexts in which he limits humanism's extent so severely. A commentator on Eliot's work says of the point in question:

...There are many different grades... of humanism. Suppose we let M represent the common or barnyard variety... Grade M...humanism is flat common sense.... Remembering all that we owe to good human common sense, we must declare that there is certainly such a thing as a humanistic habit: it is the state of mind of many persons in many places at many times.

When Eliot declares that "there is no humanistic habit: humanism is, I think, merely the state of mind of a few persons in a few places at a few times"--he is thinking of grade A humanism, or let's say, grades A, B, and C.8

If this interpretation of Eliot's mind is correct, his judg-

ment on the extent of humanism is much less severe than it seems to be at first sight. "Pure" humanism, in that case, would be the property of a small number; "less pure" humanism the habit of many minds.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF HUMANISM AND CULTURE

The precise nature of the relationship of humanism and culture in the mind of T. S. Eliot is not at first easy to see. The difficulty arises out of the fact that the relationship is such an intimate one that at first it is difficult to distinguish the two. However, if the definitions of the two phenomena are placed side by side, the difference becomes easily apparent.

It has been concluded that culture as understood by Eliot is an attitude of mind, conditioned by philosophy and religion, which enables man to recognize and impels him to choose, whatever is good, true, and beautiful.9 Humanism, on the other hand, is general culture functioning as critic of civilized life in all its aspects, tolerantly judging it in the light of cultural axioms, and striving to bring about the abandonment of all fanaticism, whether in society or in the individual.10 It is at once apparent, then that humanism is,

9 Cf. thesis, 42.
10 Ibid., 55.
briefly, culture in action. Culture is the static accumulation of wealth; humanism is that wealth in the act of purchasing some good. Though there could, conceivably, be culture without humanism, there could never be humanism without culture. Humanism is culture, and is related to it therefore as a specified individual to its genus.

Moreover, the entire activity of humanism depends upon the existence of culture. Humanism would depend upon culture in this way for its activity even in the impossible hypothesis that it could exist without culture, inasmuch as all of its criticizing is done in the light of those "axioms of culture" of which we have spoken so often, and which, obviously would not be available were there no culture in existence to beget and produce them. When humanism comes upon a false philosophic system, or an erroneous judgment in ethics, or a painting or a statue that violates the canons of art, it looks to the fund of training and experience that is culture. There it finds the tastes and sensibilities which rebel against any acceptance of these things, each of which is in some way guilty of "fanaticism." Culture criticizes them—or rather humanism (which is culture in action) criticizes them—and rejects them, even though, perhaps, it could not formulate a water-tight defense of the rejection. Its criticism and rejection is made in the light of broad experience and intimate association with truth, goodness, and beauty. When culture acts in this manner
and to this end, Eliot calls it humanism. Humanism is culture in action, culture exerting a critical influence upon the civilized life around it.
CHAPTER VI

THE RELATIONSHIP OF HUMANISM AND RELIGION

Eliot speaks more frequently of the mutual relationship of humanism and religion than of any other relationship that humanism of its nature acquires. In part this is due to the fact that in Eliot's mind there is grave danger of New Humanism setting itself up as a religion. But it is also due to the fact that of itself this critical relationship is important.

It is necessary first of all to discover what Eliot means by religion when he speaks of it in the contexts presently of interest to us. This is not as easy as perhaps it ought to be. One would expect Eliot to be more explicit than usual on so important a topic, and one which engages his attention so frequently. As a matter of fact, however, it is here that he is more disappointing than anywhere else. Although he is a loyal and ardently active member of the Anglican Church—"that oddest of institutions," as he calls it—he is not consistent even when speaking specifically of that church.

1 Thoughts after Lambeth, 5.
When he speaks of religion in relation to humanism, however, he certainly does not limit the meaning of the word "religion" to Anglicanism. "For us of the western world," he says, "religion is Christianity; and Christianity implies, I think, the conception of the church." (That "I think" is characteristic!) Eliot speaks at some length about the church which he thinks Christianity implies, but because of his lack of theological training and his admitted incapacity for prolonged abstruse thought, it is impossible to arrange his ideas into a self-consistent pattern.

For the purpose of the present chapter it is enough to know that by the "Christian Church" Eliot means a body ruled by a hierarchy which speaks with final authority "in matters of dogma, matters of faith and morals," and which exists for the "glory of God, and the sanctification of souls."

These latter two works form its essential business. Glory is to be rendered to God through the medium of the Church services, and the sanctification of souls is to be effected through the administration of the sacraments. "So long as the sacraments are provided for the benefit of men, and the services for the glory of God, the Church is doing what is its essential

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2 Selected Essays, 391.
3 The Idea of a Christian Society, 47.
4 Ibid., 92.
business."5

 Apparently Eliot does not think of the Church as a divinely established institution. He speaks of the Church of England as not "the creation of a single intelligence," but "the composite production of three hundred minds."6 Nor does he believe in the guidance of the Church as such by the Holy Spirit, for he laments that the Bishops of his own church have almost surrendered "the whole citadel of the Church" in their statement on birth control.7 More strikingly still, he says of the Roman Catholic Church—in his mind a branch of his own and the Greek churches of the one, tri-partite Catholic Church—that

it is in danger of splitting up into various local and political factions which will retain only the name and the observances of Catholicism.8

This is the religion which is in need of the critical services of humanism, because unless the church is criticized it will become fanatical. This is true because "the hierarchy is liable to corruption, and certainly to stupidity" and because "religious belief when unquestioned and uncriticized

5 "What Does the Church Stand For?" The Spectator, CLIII, 560, (October 19, 1934).
6 Thoughts After Lambeth, 24.
7 Ibid., 17.
8 Humanism and America, 107.
is liable to degeneration into superstition." Again, "Any religion, of course, is for ever in danger of petrifaction into mere ritual and habit, though ritual and habit be essential to religion." 

All of this can be avoided, however, if humanism is at hand to point out the absurdities into which religion would otherwise inevitably fall. Religion, he says, "is only renewed and refreshed by an awakening of feeling and fresh devotion, or by the critical reason. The latter may be the part of the humanist." Without the critical services of humanism to save it from itself, religion plumbs the depths of absurdity. For without humanism, he says,

religion...produces the vulgarities and the political compromises of Roman Catholicism; the vulgarities and fanaticism of Tennessee; it produces Mrs. MacPherson.... Religion without humanism produces...religious bigotry.... Religion tends to become either a sentimental tune, or an emotional debauch; or in theology, a skeleton dance of fleshless dogmas, or in ecclesiasticism, a soulless political club. 

If one grants that there is in the Christian church no divine guidance, it may be that the work that Eliot assigns to humanism in the preservation of sanity and orthodoxy in re-

9 Ibid., 105.
10 Selected Essays, 387.
11 Loc. cit.
12 Humanism and America, 107 ff.
ligion is not too large. **Something** must operate as a safeguard of religious truth, and if this is not provided by direct divine supervision of the Church, then it may well be that this important role must be assigned to humanism. Indeed, it is certain that in his confusion of essence with accident Eliot looks to humanism to do the work which, according to Roman Catholic doctrine, will be at the last found to be done by the Holy Spirit Himself or by Christ Himself dwelling forever within His Church. There is no denying that God always except in the rarest instances directs and intervenes in the business of the Church Militant by His operation upon the human ministers of that Church, and that the humanistic attitude which His Providence fosters within them is of vital importance in preserving what He has constituted as the "sanity and orthodoxy" of the Church. To admit all this, however, is a far cry from positing humanism unqualified and unrelated to God's omnipotent directive Providence as the performer of all these essential offices. It may be that Eliot understands humanism in the Church as being the tool which the Holy Spirit uses in guiding the Church, but he gives no inkling of such an opinion in his writing. According to Eliot it is **humanism** that will keep religion from becoming a "sentimental tune or an emotional debauch." It is **humanism** that will keep it from the "vulgarities and fanaticism of Tennessee." It is **humanism** that must come to the rescue of the Roman Church and save it from splitting up
into national and political factions. Surely even according to the Roman Catholic view there is a place, a necessity, for human agency in the preservation of the Church in its true spirit. But to make the human contribution such a vastly important one is to a Roman Catholic an error of the gravest nature.

The disparaging remarks that Eliot makes with regard to Roman Catholicism are the more surprising in view of the fact that he has a number of ideas that are strongly Roman in connotation and historical background. For instance, in the ideal Christian state he would have a Church that "in matters of dogma, matters of faith and morals...will speak with final authority...." He speaks with favor of persons "of either sex electing a life of celibacy," and says that Christians should have "a respect for religious life, for the life of prayer and contemplation, and for those who attempt to practice it," for he "cannot conceive a Christian society without religious orders, even purely contemplative orders, even enclosed orders."14

It may be objected that this whole criticism of Eliot's ideas on religion and humanism is given from a partisan viewpoint—that of the Roman Catholic Church. Such a treatment is

13 The Idea of a Christian Society, 47.
14 Ibid., 60 f.
justified, however, for two reasons. First, Eliot believes that the English and the Roman communions are two branches of the same Church. Presumably then according to Eliot the two communions would agree at least as to the concept of the Church itself. Secondly, in discussing his ideas from the Roman point of view the thesis takes the cue from Eliot himself, for whenever he speaks of Anglicanism or of his own beliefs, he does so with one eye on the Roman view of what he is saying.

With all of these criticisms in mind it still remains for us to see what it is precisely that Eliot believes humanism must do for religion. From the general definition of humanism we know that it will strive to bring about the abandonment of anything that would lead to fanaticism of any sort in religion. This it will do by criticizing the Church whenever it swerves from the direct path to its goal. Since the church exists for the glory of God and the sanctification of souls, the two terms of the great Christian relation are God and man. In general, therefore, there will be two great possibilities of error: one will be to make Christianity too highly spiritual as a result of looking with excessive zeal at the divine term of the relation; the other will be to make it too easy because of an over-emphasis upon the frailty of the human term. Both of these fanatical extremes must be avoided. On the one hand Christianity must not be permitted to become that "skeleton dance of fleshless dogmas" or that "soulless political club" of which he
speaks. On the other hand it must not become "a sentimental
tune, or an emotional debauch." Humanism will have to make
Christians realize that their religion is one which "has prac-
tical results which may be inconvenient,"\(^{15}\) and that it is a re-
ligion in which "thought, study, mortification, and sacrifice... 
have an important part to play;"\(^{16}\) while at the same time this 
same humanism guards against too spiritual or too mystical a
regimen.

Humanism is to do this of course by means of the un-
formulable axioms of culture and good sense which it uses as
criteria of judgment. It is here that we see most clearly the
weakness of Eliot's case. While humanism would be well able to
deal with the non-essential "vulgarities" of a given church,
it would be completely inadequate in the handling of dogmatic
or moral questions except in extreme cases. Humanism would be
enough to tell one that what the "Holy Rollers" look upon as
religion is an emotional debauch. The humanist's culture and
good sense would make it clear to him that the frenzied antics
of such people are unworthy of so dignified a creature as ration-
al man. It would make it clear to him that such antics, far
from bringing sanctity and glory to God, might very well lead
to carnal sin. But in cases not so extreme as this humanism

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 93.
\(^{16}\) Thoughts after Lambeth, 16.
would be an insufficient guide, with the insufficiency mounting as the cases to be handled became more subtle and approached closer to the truth. The reason for this is obvious. The Christian religion transcends the bounds of mere rationality. Unlike philosophy, it contains many truths known to man only because they have been revealed to him by God. Many of these truths are in apparent contradiction to human reason at first glance. No doubt sheer humanism would look upon the doctrine of the Trinity as a notable skeleton in the dance of fleshless dogmas. Even the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on contraception seems too bony to Eliot, for he lauds the Bishops of his own church for their declaration that liberal exceptions should be made in forbidding the practice, although he does not agree with them when they say that the exceptions are to be decided upon by the individual married couples themselves.17

It is clear then that Eliot expects too much of mere humanism when he asks it to criticize the essentials of religion. It can do good work in criticizing the accidentals, which pertain to art rather than to religion, but it has wandered far out of its legitimate field when it begins to judge religious dogma. Humanism as such has no adequate criteria for judging the truths of revelation. While the ideal humanist might be able to deal

17 Cf. Thoughts after Lambeth, 16 ff.
adequately with the problems of philosophy, he would be at a loss to solve those of theology.

There is yet another reason for saying that Eliot errs grievously in calling upon humanism to assay the fundamentals of religion, for in doing so he falls into what philosophers call a vicious circle. As he himself says, he ought not philosophize who does not know the rules of the game of philosophy. As has been shown, humanism according to Eliot is culture in action. Now culture is impossible if one lacks the discipline of the emotions, the need for which is so great that "the world hardly understands what the word means." But this all important discipline "is attainable only through dogmatic religion." So far all is well. The difficulty is that religion will not be able to give this discipline of the emotions unless religion is humanistic, for without humanism it will be a sentimental tune or an emotional debauch. Certainly one learns no emotional discipline through emotional debauchery!

Humanism, then, cannot be what it should be unless it is religious; religion cannot be what it should be unless it is humanistic. Humanism depends upon religion for essential support, religion depends upon humanism for essential support.

18 Selected Essays, 398.
19 Humanism and America, 110.
20 Loc. cit.
Were this unfortunate state of affairs realized, both would collapse at once.

The inevitable conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing discussion is that Eliot seriously mars his humanistic theory by bringing theology into the field. While he wins applause and approval for his theory in general, he cannot ask thinking men to follow him here. He himself is beyond his depth when he speaks of technical theological matters. Even so, one would expect so penetrating a thinker to see that the unaided human powers are inadequate for criticizing matters supernaturally revealed. Such matters are entirely beyond their critical abilities. They can only be accepted humbly and worshipfully from God and believed because of unquestioning faith in the word of Him Who can neither deceive nor be deceived.
CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

It has been concluded that when T. S. Eliot speaks of humanism in his prose works he means general culture functioning as critic of civilized life in all its aspects, tolerantly judging it in the light of cultural axioms, and striving to bring about the abandonment of all fanaticism, whether in society or in the individual.

For the most part this definition is a good one. Eliot is decidedly at one with the age-old tradition of classical humanism which strove for a full and proportionate development of all the powers in man. "Mηδέν ἄγαν" and "No fanaticism" are two ways of saying exactly the same thing. "Sanity, tolerance, equilibrium" merely re-echoes "aurea mediocritas." Eliot, always insistent upon the necessity of respecting and drawing profit from tradition, has a theory of humanism that is for the most part satisfying and immediately appealing to a man of common sense. It has in it the wisdom of the ages. It is illuminated by the strong light of Eliot's critical mind. It is expanded and made to apply to society as well as to the individual. But it also contains a serious flaw.
Eliot's theory of humanism errs by allowing to humanism too wide a field of action. For humanism is simply incapable of criticizing civilized life in all its aspects. As has been demonstrated, humanism is incapable of a thorough-going criticism of religion. Great as are its services to man, humanism must admit its own limitations or it will bring all of its own work to naught by leading man to an attitude of affected independence of the Creator that is religious eclecticism. For supernatural religion is outside humanism's sphere of operation. Humanism is incapable of sitting in judgment upon what is of an origin infinitely higher than human. And inasmuch as Eliot does not admit this fact, he is in the anomalous position of one who sharply criticizes those who make humanism into a religion (as he says the New Humanists do), yet who himself sets humanism over religion by making it the arbiter of religious doctrine and practice—and the second error is worse than the first.

One cannot help feeling an almost poignant regret that Eliot should have erred so in applying humanism to practical life. Sincerely religious man that he is, he is not unaffected by the modern rationalist tendency to make everything submit to the judgment of human reason before accepting it whole-heartedly. One naturally expects more than this from so penetrating a thinker as Eliot.

Nor can one help wondering where Eliot's further
speculations will lead him. In many ways Eliot is strikingly like another Anglican thinker of an earlier age, John Henry Newman. There can be no doubt that Newman was the more profound and incisive thinker of the two. But Eliot's thought may yet lead him also along the path that Newman trod—past the bête noire of Catholic "vulgarity," into the dark night of faith, through the straight way and the narrow gate of humility and submission, into the everlasting light and peace of God's truth. Fiat! Fiat!
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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Thomas J. Diehl, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Jan. 6, 1948
Date

[Signature of Adviser]