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     CIVILIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS:

ELIOT, DESCARTES, AND THE MIND OF EUROPE

                                                       Between the idea

                                                    And the reality . . .

                                                    Falls the Shadow

*The Hollow Men* [1](file:///Users/jewelbrooker/Library/Containers/com.thelawbox.osxwpd/Data/Caches/1995%20Civilization%20&%20Discontents,Mod.Schoolman/" \l "en_1)

    In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929), Freud extended his work with disturbed individuals to analysis of groups.  He was stimulated in part by a disjunction he had noticed between culture and happiness.  Civilization has increased our wealth and extended our powers, but it has not brought happiness.  In an attempt to explain the paradoxical coalition between progress and misery, Freud put civilization on the psychoanalytic couch.  His conclusion was that the precondition for civilization and the development of institutions is repression of instinct, especially of the drive to rape and murder.  Built on such a foundation, civilization is inherently unstable and generates uneasy ambivalence.  Freud's underlying metaphor, of course, is that civilizations have minds, minds that can become ill.  And "under the pressure of civilizing trends," he argues, "civilizations become neurotic" (Freud 69).

Freud's analysis of the modern malaise in *Civilization and Its Discontents* is one of a string of analyses based on an analogy between individuals and civilization.   He himself had tried to work out the analogy in *Totem and Taboo* in 1912, but well before that, other philosophers and social scientists had discussed the modern situation in terms of a breakdown of the mind of Europe.  Such analyses were in the air, so to speak, in the later decades of the nineteenth-century.  Nietzsche became one of the first major thinkers to analyze the history of culture in psychological terms and to treat cultural changes as an evolution of "mind."  Brooding on classical times, the Renaissance, and the nineteenth century, he concluded that Western culture in the nineteenth century had gone insane.  "Not only the reason of millennia, but their madness, too, breaks out in us" (Nietzsche 77).  Sociologists such as Emile Durkheim and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl analyzed social history into blocks comparable to biological and psychological stages.  Sir James G. Frazer traced the evolution of the modern mind from magic to religion to science in his monumental *Golden Bough* , arguably the single most influential work on modern art and literature. [2](file:///Users/jewelbrooker/Library/Containers/com.thelawbox.osxwpd/Data/Caches/1995%20Civilization%20&%20Discontents,Mod.Schoolman/" \l "en_2)

    Artists also used the metaphor of the mind of Europe.  Paul Valéry, for example, constructed a careful analogy between post-war Europe and an individual suffering from anxiety. [3](file:///Users/jewelbrooker/Library/Containers/com.thelawbox.osxwpd/Data/Caches/1995%20Civilization%20&%20Discontents,Mod.Schoolman/" \l "en_3)  T. S. Eliot, whose work is in focus in this paper, also understood history and culture in terms of mind, referring in various writings to the primitive mind, the Greek mind, the medieval mind, the seventeenth-century mind, the modern mind, the mind of England, the mind of Europe, and so on.  He understood the crisis of modernity as a mental crisis, a disorder which originated primarily in seventeenth-century France in the innovations of Descartes.  Eliot diagnosed the condition, both in individuals and in culture, as subjectivity, as an imbalance in the modern psyche related to an exaggeration of the importance of mind.  The malady, which manifested itself in Descartes, spread to infect all of Europe and with modifications was transmitted to subsequent generations, including Eliot's own.   Eliot was conscious of the Cartesian cancer from the beginning of his career as an artist, and he worked tirelessly to counter its ill effects in his own life and work.  This motive was one of the driving forces in his intellectual life, evident in his early poetry, his philosophical studies, and his literary criticism.  When in the mid-twenties he turned to Christianity, he was motivated in part by the anti-Cartesian thrust of orthodox understanding.

Eliot early grasped the nature of the modern malaise, early understood that the problems of modernity are related to the way the modern mind works.  His first substantial poems, especially "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "Portrait of a Lady," and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," are portraits of mental states such as anxiety, paranoia, and schizophrenia in both individuals and their culture.  His graduate studies in philosophy deepened his understanding by focusing in a technical manner on the social sciences, particularly on social psychology.  His surviving seminar papers show an in-depth grasp of issues in cultural psychology, and his seminar with Josiah Royce at Harvard University specifically addressed the problem of interpreting the primitive mind.

In November of 1919, just as Eliot was concluding his formal study in philosophy and the social sciences, he first articulated a theory of the "mind of Europe."  In trying to explain his notion of "tradition," he notes that "the mind of Europe . . . is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing en route , which does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsmen" ( *SE* 6).  Eliot is clearly using an evolutionary model of mind--the "descent of the artist" can be traced at least back to European pre-historic cave artists.  For most moderns, the primitive elements are submerged deep in the unconscious.  What distinguishes the best poets is not that they participate in the collective mind (everyone does), but that they do so consciously, with a "perception" of the past in the present, with an "awareness" that "the whole of literature . . . has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order."  Poets should cultivate the "historical sense," that is, "a perception not of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" ( *SE* 4).  Eliot's use of an evolutionary model in which the remote past is imagined to have receded into the collective unconscious is evident in his 1921 review of Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps.*He remarks that " *The Golden Bough* can be read in two ways: as a collection of entertaining myths, or as a revelation of that vanished mind of which our mind is a continuation" ( *Dial* 71, October 1921, p. 453).  This "historical sense," a retrieval into consciousness of the past, a realization of the simultaneity of the pre-historic and, say, Tennyson, can only be acquired by great effort.  But in the end, such an effort protects a writer from the provinciality of time, the view that modern is best, that modern artists live in the best of all possible worlds.  For the artist, the collective mind is more important than the individual mind.  "The mind of Europe--the mind of [one's] own country" is "much more important than [one's] own private mind" ( *SE* 4).

In the early 1920s, Eliot's reflections on the mind of Europe become more specific.  The mind of Europe, he argues in 1921, is schizophrenic.  In his review of H. J. C. Grierson's anthology of Metaphysical poetry, he says that between the time of Donne and the time of Tennyson, "something happened" to the "mind of England."  "In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered" ( *SE* 247).  Before this disaster, in the prelapsarian days of the unified sensibility, feeling was "directly and freshly altered by . . . reading and thought . . . there [was] a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling" ( *SE* 246).  In his analysis, then, the mind of Europe fell apart in the seventeenth century, with the Enlightenment and the Romantic reaction against it representing the fragments of a schizoid cultural psyche.  He continues this analysis over the next decade, arguing in his 1932-33 lectures at Harvard that the English mind has been "deranged" since the time of Shakespeare.  The problem is "a splitting up of personality" into intellect and feeling ( *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* 84, 85).

Eliot's most detailed and philosophically precise analysis of the mind of Europe is contained in his 1926 Clark Lectures at Cambridge University, recently published as *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry* .  His main topic in these lectures is the evolution of the European mind from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries.  His plan, announced in a preface, was that these lectures were to constitute the first part of a trilogy having as an overall title *The Disintegration of the Intellect* .  As explained in the lectures themselves, this phrase is roughly equivalent to "dissociation of sensibility," used a few years earlier in the Grierson review.  The disintegration of the intellect is a collapse of the mind of Europe into two separate components, thought and feeling, or intellect and sensibility.

By 1926, Eliot had been thinking for more than a decade about the mind of Europe and had long associated the seventeenth century with a decisive moment--the dividing line between the medieval and the modern minds, the medieval relatively unified and the modern increasingly schizophrenic.  One of the great values of the Clark Lectures is that they clarify Eliot's understanding of the modern mind by providing a more comprehensive view than that suggested by his published essays.  In these lectures, Eliot describes the medieval mind, then the crisis that shattered it, and finally, the modern mind.  He declares unequivocally that the chasm separating the medieval and modern minds was opened by Descartes.  Cartesian dualism, "a true Copernican revolution, . . . marks the real abyss between classic scholastic philosophy and all philosophy since" ( *VMP* 80).

Eliot's analysis of the European mind points to Descartes' *Meditations* , particularly to the first and second, but also by implication to the third.  In the first meditation, Descartes explains the Cartesian method, the approach that forms the foundation for all of his thought.  His avowed purpose is "to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations" (Descartes 76).  Descartes begins by devoting himself "sincerely and without reservation to the general demolition of my opinions" (Descartes 76), regardless of where he got them.  Noting that "the senses deceive," he resolves to reject everything he has learned "from the senses or through the senses" (Descartes 76), and noting that received traditions and doctrines are often without logical foundation, he resolves to reject all preconceived beliefs, including belief in the existence of God.  His principle is: "anything which admits of the slightest doubt I will set aside just as if I had found it to be wholly false" (Descartes 80).  But the Cartesian method goes beyond systematic doubt.  Descartes argues that all problems should be analyzed into their smallest constituent parts and then reconstructed using only elements that cannot be doubted.  It is instructive to remember his work in geometry, for in his quest for certainty, he takes geometry as his paradigm.

In the second meditation, Descartes presents his central concept, a position that follows inevitably from his insistence on universal and systematic doubt.  Having determined that the external world and everything in it must be set aside as merely probable, he tries to rescue from this abyss "one thing, however slight, that is certain" (Descartes 80).  He wants to find, as Archimedes did, one fixed and unshakable point and then use it to construct a world.  In what is perhaps the most famous one-liner in philosophy, he concludes that the one thing that cannot be doubted is the doubting self.  " *Cogito ergo sum* ."  (Descartes 82)  " *Je pense donc je suis* ."   His Archimedean point, from which he will spin out everything else, is the thinking self in the process of thought.  But Descartes does not stop with the "*cogito* ."  He moves to step two in the Cartesian method, that is, to analysis of the one thing he has accepted as certain--in this instance, to the "I" in the *cogito* .  Crossing from epistemology to ontology, he asks "what am I?" and concludes that the "I" can be analyzed into two parts, body and mind.  Of these two very different parts, one--the body--can be doubted, and thus must be rejected.  Descartes moves from " *cogito ergo sum* " to " *sum res cogitans* ," reaching a striking conclusion:  "I am, then, in the strict sense, only a thing that thinks, that is, I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason--a thinking thing" (Descartes 82).

Descartes' conclusions in the first and second meditations are at the heart of Eliot's analysis of modernity.  Eliot argues that Descartes is part of a shift in the mind of Europe, a disastrous "diversion of human inquiry from ontology to psychology."   Descartes precipitated, claims Eliot, a revolution

when he clearly stated that what we know is not the world of objects, but our own ideas of these objects.  The revolution was immense.  Instead of ideas as meanings, as references to an outside world, you have suddenly a new world coming into existence, inside your own mind and therefore by the usual implication inside your own head.  Mankind suddenly retires inside its several skulls ( *VMP* 80)

In this passage, Eliot explains why he believes Descartes effected a revolution.   First, he mentions epistemological dualism, that is, the position that the world is sharply divided into subjects and objects, with the subject or knower having no access to the object of thought.  Descartes constructs an abyss between the two, and then, despite repeated efforts, he  fails to raise a bridge to reconnect them.  Second, Eliot deplores the subjectivity resulting from Descartes' refusal to accept the existence of the object.  What the knower knows is not, as had been previously supposed, an object in a world of objects, but an idea inside his own head.  Instead of the outside world, there is a new world coming into existence inside one's head.  And third, Eliot here maintains that this epistemology leads to solipsism by imprisoning individuals within their several skulls.  Eliot also deplores psychophysical or mind/body dualism.  He quotes from the *Meditations*one of several passages in which the father of modern philosophy claims that he cannot be sure that his body really exists.  Descartes maintains that all he can say for sure of his body is that it is an idea in his mind.  "I . . . do not find that from this distinct idea of corporeal nature, which I have in my imagination, I can derive any argument from which there will necessarily be deduced the existence of the body" ( *VMP* 81).   Eliot, in uncharacteristically blunt language, dismisses Descartes' argument: "This extraordinary crude and stupid piece of reasoning is the sort of thing which gave rise to the whole of the pseudo-science of epistemology which has haunted the nightmares of the last three hundred years" ( *VMP* 81).

In his third meditation, Descartes tries to prove the existence of God.  He needs to do so, for in insisting on systematic doubt and in positing the self as the only reality, he has backed himself into a solipsistic corner that makes science theoretically impossible.  In order to redeem a world outside the self, he posits God as a sort of guarantor that the world exists.   He begins, as he must, with consciousness, for that is the only certain reality.  His argument, in brief, is that God exists because people have a clear and distinct idea of perfection, of God as perfection.  Such an innate and universal idea must have been caused, and since the cause must contain at least as much reality as its effect, the cause must be perfection itself.  Perfection itself can only be defined as God, and thus God exists.  "The idea of God which is in us must have God himself as its cause" (Descartes 75).  The existence of this idea is proof of the existence of God, for God would not have given people this idea unless he really existed.  He would not play tricks on humans, for that would contradict the innate idea of perfection all human beings have in their minds.  It was instantly pointed out to Descartes that this was a blatant example of circular reasoning (see the objections and answers concluding the *Meditations* ), but he persisted in maintaining that he had proved the existence of God.  Pascal, a contemporary of Descartes' and a major influence on Eliot, sums up the third meditation when he says: "In all his philosophy [Descartes] would have been quite willing to dispense with God, but he had to make Him give a fillip to set the world in motion; beyond this, he has no further need of God" (Pascal 23).  Cartesian theism turns out to be a virulent and highly contagious atheism.

The fact that Eliot makes Descartes the centerpiece of an in-depth and sustained analysis of modernity suggests that the poet had been brooding on Cartesian thought for a long time.  He had encountered the father of modern philosophy in his sophomore year (1907-08) in George Santayana's course in modern philosophy at Harvard and continued at least through the period of his dissertation (1916) to struggle with dualism in philosophy.  Descartes, then, was present at the beginning of Eliot's career as a poet and thinker, and although many factors must have entered into Eliot's understanding of modernity, Descartes casts a long shadow over the poet's work.  Major themes in his poetry, his criticism, and indeed in his personal philosophic odyssey can be associated with an early reading of Descartes' *Meditations* .

Eliot's early poems can easily be seen as, in part, a lament over the long shadow Descartes cast over modernity.  The four 1909-11 masterpieces--"Preludes," "Portrait of a Lady," "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"--are all focused on a world in which individuals are torn within themselves and isolated from each other and from God.  They are limited precisely as Descartes claimed individuals are limited.  Prufrock is a "thinking thing," cut off from his senses and experience.  He knows the fog, the ladies, the crab, and the mermaids as aspects of his own imagination, not in themselves.  He cannot know the ladies who come and go, talking of Michelangelo, and they cannot know him.  The young gentleman caller in "Portrait" is also divided within himself, separated by his own thoughts from the languid lady who loves lilacs and Chopin.  He knows he cannot reach his hands across the gulf between them.  The man making his way home after midnight in "Rhapsody" is the same.  Like all the characters in Eliot's early poems, Prufrock, the gentleman caller, and the night walker know their own bodies, other people, and God only as ideas.  These characters classify everything and every being outside the self as objects and then relegate them to the merely probable.  Such subjectivity swallows up the sea and the entire external world: everything is inside, nothing is outside.   Eliot's critique of solipsism in these poems is almost clinical in its precision.

But in these poems, Eliot can also be seen as struggling to go beyond Descartes.  In the first place, although he is analyzing a situation of which he himself is a part, although he sympathizes with these characters, he is clearly critiquing the situation.  He does this by allowing his characters to reveal the hell in which they are trapped, and through irony he allows the reader to see the reason for their entrapment.  They are all cut off by thought, by consciousness; they are Descartes' "thinking things."  They are cut off even from themselves, for anything reaching them through experience or through the senses is not credible.  This too is part of their inheritance from Descartes.  The horror of consciousness, so evident in Eliot's early characters, is the same horror caught by Dostoevski in "Notes from Underground" and by Kafka in "The Metamorphosis."   Prufrock concludes by equating consciousness with disaster--"Till human voices wake us, and we drown"; and the young man approaching sleep in "Rhapsody" concludes by associating waking up with "the last twist of the knife"; the moon, on the other hand, has lost her memory, is without consciousness and thus she winks and smiles and harbors no rancor.

In the second place, Eliot struggles to get beyond dualism in these poems by the way he uses language.  In the Clark Lectures, he defines the highest type of metaphysical verse as poetry "of the first intensity, work in which the thought is *fused* into poetry at a very high temperature."  Such poetry works "to draw within the orbit of feeling and sense what had existed only in thought" ( *VMP* 50-51).  In such poetry, "what is only ordinarily apprehensible as an intellectual statement is translated in sensible form" ( *VMP* 54).  This definition makes it clear that his poetics were in part an attempt to overcome the split between thought and feeling that he saw as part of modernity.  In his early poems, he succeeds brilliantly in using images in such a way that ideas become fused with feeling.  To take just one example, consider the woman in one of the thousand furnished rooms in "Preludes" III:

You dozed, and watched the night revealing

The thousand sordid images

Of which your soul was constituted;

They flickered against the ceiling.

One of the ideas here seems to be the existentialist dictum that existence precedes essence.  This woman's soul consists of the thousand sordid images of the thousand sordid things she has experienced in the streets. This example is one of many in the early poems in which an idea is drawn into the orbit of feeling.  In lines such as these, Eliot re-joins the thought and feeling torn asunder by Descartes.  The poet continued to dance with the Cartesian shadow in all of the poems written before his conversion.  "I can connect / Nothing with nothing," sings one of the Thames maidens in *The Waste Land* , and "Between the idea / And the reality . . . Falls the shadow," chants one of voices in *The Hollow Men* .

Eliot's literary criticism can also be read in terms of his attempt to get around Descartes.  His doctrine of the unified sensibility, most conspicuously, is a repudiation of Cartesian dualism.  But other celebrated Eliotian notions are also strongly anti-Cartesian.  In his quest for certainty, Descartes began by rejecting all received opinions, all tradition, all authority.  His method collapses all hierarchy into the self.  It also de-temporalizes human existence by cutting off the past.  Eliot considered the Cartesian approach to be deeply harmful, particularly for artists.  In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," he calls into question the Cartesian method of universal and systematic doubt.  Brooding over the extraordinary situation in which modernity has placed the poet, he posits a monistic theory of tradition AND the individual talent as a contrast to the dualistic tradition OR the individual talent, associated on one side with the Enlightenment and on the other side with high Romanticism.  He argues for the "historical sense," a conscious re-connecting of the past and the present.  The historical sense, "indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year . . . involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence, . . . compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with . . . the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his country" ( *SE*4). Eliot's notion of impersonality, articulated in the same essay, runs directly counter to Descartes' concept of the imperial self.  The self is not the only reality and should not be the heart of poetry.  What happens in "poetry is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" ( *SE 10* ), and in a argument that would be nonsense to a Cartesian, Eliot maintains that "what happens is a continual surrender of [the poet] as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable.  The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" ( *SE 6-7* ).

The notions of tradition and impersonality are, of course, part of Eliot's reaction against Romanticism.  And his reaction against Romanticism is a reaction against Descartes, the fountainhead of pure subjectivity.  The link between Descartes and Romanticism is explicit not only in the Clark Lectures, but in remarks scattered throughout Eliot's work.  For example, in his debate with Middleton Murry in the mid-twenties, Eliot protests Murry's conflation of metaphysics and psychology.  He numbers Murry among those Romantics who take a "Cartesian point of view . . . and build a moral hierarchy . . . on the fact of *one's own existence* as the primary reality."   Like Descartes, Middleton Murry posits "personality as the ultimate, the fundamental reality in the universe" ( *Criterion* IV.4 [Oct. 1926]: 754-55).  Eliot expresses a preference for classicism, here as elsewhere associated with an understanding of reality that takes "something outside" the self as a reference point.  In another essay on Middleton Murry's aesthetics, Eliot discusses Murry's exaltation of intuition and his depreciation of reason, concluding that "Here, of course, [Murry] is following Bergson in a tradition which derives from Descartes" (*Criterion* VI.4 [Oct. 1927]: 344).

Finally, it is clear that Eliot's prolonged meditation on the legacy of Descartes is part of the confluence of evaluations that led to his conversion, to his return to one of the more orthodox strands in Christianity.  Eliot came to think of Descartes in tandem with Pascal, another French mathematical genius who lived at the same time.  In his introduction to Pascal's *Pensées* , Eliot notes Pascal's contrast between the " *esprit de géométrie* " and the " *espirt de finesse* ," and applies it to the two scientists.  In Descartes, the "esprit de géométrie is excessive," whereas in Pascal, the " *esprit de finesse* ," of proportion and grace, predominates.  Pascal, in Eliot's view, was the most balanced of men, exemplary in his "just combination of the scientist, the *honnete homme* and the religious nature with a passionate craving for God."  He brought not only the mathematician's "mind to conceive" but also the artist's "sensibility to feel the disorder, the futility, the meaninglessness, the mystery of life and suffering" ( *SE* 367, 368).  Pascal, then, manifests the fusion of passion and intellect, of humility and doubt, that Descartes lacks.  One of the striking connections between Eliot's antipathy to Descartes and his conversion to Christianity has to do with mind/body dualism.  Descartes' ideas de-carnate mind, that is, they separate the body (and the cluster of values/ experiences associated with it) and throw it away.  Pascal and Eliot, on the other hand, accept incarnation--specifically, the fusion of flesh and spirit in the personhood of Christ--as a profoundly true but inexplicable fact.   In Eliot's early poems, including *The Waste Land* , the most powerful myth is the myth of the dying God, taken primarily from Frazer.  But in 1927, Eliot accepts a religious position that has as its central doctrine the Incarnation, and in his later work, including *Four Quartets* , the myth of the dying God is superseded by mystery of the incarnate Christ.  "The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation" (" *The Dry Salvages* ," V).  The Incarnation becomes the center not only of Eliot's religion, but also of his poetics.  In the Christian story, the Word becomes flesh; in Eliot's poetry, words become art as imagination re-connects body and spirit.

In 1931, a few years after his conversion, Eliot confirmed in some incidental remarks that reflections on Descartes had indeed been part of his complicated journey of faith.  In a discussion of Pascal, Eliot mentions how crucial it is for any thoughtful person to face unflinchingly the demon of doubt and then to integrate his skepticism into his faith, as Pascal did, or reject faith altogether, as Descartes did.  Eliot mentions Descartes here as a negative example and, in a footnote, refers the reader to Jacques Maritain's "brilliant criticism of the errors of Descartes from a theological point of view"  (Eliot, in Pascal xviii).  Maritain, like Eliot, associated Descartes with the most problematical aspects of modernity.  In an extended essay written in 1932, Maritain focuses on "angelism," the deep and inextricable heresy at the heart of Descartes' work.  "Angelism" refers to angelic epistemology, or how angels know, how they gain knowledge.  Human epistemology, according to Aquinas, must be understood in the context of ontology, that is, how one knows is determined by what one is.  Humans are "rational animals," transitional forms partaking of both matter and spirit, body and mind.  Human epistemology is similarly compound--that is, it involves not only the mind, but also, and necessarily, the five senses, the body.  Angels, on the other hand, are pure spirit, and accordingly, angelic knowledge is independent of experience and of the world of matter; it is, moreover, intuitive as to mode and innate as to origin.  These are precisely the three claims that Descartes makes for human knowledge; it is independent, intuitive, and innate.  Like Eliot, Maritain argues that the consequences of this confusion, namely solipsism and atheism, are disastrous on both the individual and the cultural level.

Eliot, like Maritain, associated Cartesianism with a crack-up in the mind of Europe and, certainly by 1927, would have agreed with the theologian that angelism "remains the secret principle of the break-up of our culture and of the disease of which the apostate West seems determined to die" (Maritain 79).  Eliot's analysis of the mind of Europe includes specific case studies.  Persons associated with the medieval mind include Aquinas and Dante; those associated with the transitional period include Descartes and Donne; and persons associated with the modern mind include Nietzsche, Matthew Arnold, Henry Adams, John Middleton Murry, and I. A. Richards.  But also and of special interest, the modern mind, the mind most illustrative of the relation between civilization and its discontents, is the mind of Eliot himself.  He is intensely aware that he himself suffers from the common disease, that the disease of modern culture is his disease as a cultured and educated modern man.  This self-critique, evident in all of his early work, intensifies the poignant melancholy of his portraits of Prufrock and others; moreover, the unflinching nature of this self criticism underwrites and to a degree substantiates the cultural critique.  In a romantic age, he once said, one can be classicist only in tendency; and in a psychological age, one can try to avoid the consequences of psychologism, but in the final analysis, it is impossible to remove oneself from history.   Eliot's analysis of the mind of Europe--articulated in his prose, demonstrated in his verse--is his own version of civilization and its discontents, in part a reading of intellectual history, but more important, a confession of his personal and cultural limitations.  The paradox, one often noticed in art, is that in realizing his limitations he transcends them.  Prufrock will never speak to the ladies, but Eliot will always speak to the reader.

**FOOTNOTES**

[1](file:///Users/jewelbrooker/Library/Containers/com.thelawbox.osxwpd/Data/Caches/1995%20Civilization%20&%20Discontents,Mod.Schoolman/" \l "enbody_1): All quotations from Eliot's poems are from *The Complete Poems and Plays*

[2](file:///Users/jewelbrooker/Library/Containers/com.thelawbox.osxwpd/Data/Caches/1995%20Civilization%20&%20Discontents,Mod.Schoolman/" \l "enbody_2): Eliot studied Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl, and Frazer at Harvard.  See Piers Gray, *T. S. Eliot's Intellectual and Poetic Development: 1909-1922* .

[3](file:///Users/jewelbrooker/Library/Containers/com.thelawbox.osxwpd/Data/Caches/1995%20Civilization%20&%20Discontents,Mod.Schoolman/" \l "enbody_3): See Paul Valéry, "Letters from France:  The Spiritual Crisis." *Athenaeum* (11 April 1919): 182-84.