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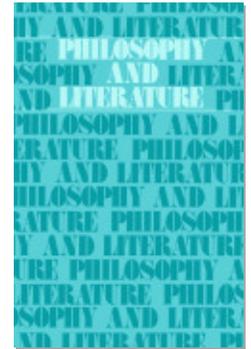
T. S. Eliot: The Critic as Philosopher (review)

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T. S. Eliot: The Critic as Philosopher, by Lewis Freed;
 xix & 272 pp. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University
 Press, 1979, \$11.95.

Since the publication of *Knowledge and Experience* (1964), the influence of F. H. Bradley on Eliot's criticism has been generally acknowledged. Yet not many hard facts have been turned up concerning the precise nature of this influence and its relative importance to the other formative agents of Eliot's critical mind. Lewis Freed's book goes a long way toward filling this critical gap. His purpose is twofold: "first, to show that the critical prose . . . is informed by a definite theory of philosophy, and, second, to show how Eliot transcribes his philosophy without exposing it . . ." (p. xvii). On this view, Eliot's critical theory cannot be explained in terms of personality, nor is it a theory of praxis in the sense of working ideas. Eliot's concept of theory is in line with Bradley's and even Aristotle's, that is, "knowing or understanding for its own sake" (p. 13). With regard to style, Mr. Freed rejects the common assumption that Eliot's language is the language of popular usage or of popular psychology. He argues convincingly that Eliot's critical idiom is to be read on its "own level of abstraction" (p. 37).

After having dealt with these preliminary issues, Freed offers the reader a comprehensive *status quaestionis* of the critical work that has been devoted to the relationship between Bradley and Eliot. With the philosophy as a ready handmaiden, he then sets off to tackle some long-standing assumptions about the nature of Eliot's criticism. Thus he invalidates the assumption that Eliot is an empirical critic by pointing out the degree of systematization inherent in his thought. The controversial image of the mind of a poet as a catalyst is accounted for on the basis of the Bradleyan distinction between (personal) experience and (universal) meaning. Eliot's personal preference for his essays on individual authors rather than for the generalizing essays is seen in the light of a philosophic aesthetics based on the distinction between taste and theory. Likewise the "dissociation of sensibility" is not accounted for historically, but is projected against the background of the Bradleyan distinction between abstract and concrete. These findings lead Freed to posit the existence of "a consistent point of view, and an internal structure" (p. 151) in Eliot's criticism. The principles on which this structure is based are those of Idealist logic. The last two chapters show the applicability of this theory: first with regard to the status of imaginary objects, second in relation to Eliot's critical method, viz., analysis and comparison.

My summary of the book might well do justice to the linear progression of Freed's exposition, but it certainly fails to encompass its overwhelming fund of data and references. Yet it is this very diversity which reveals the book's weakness. One would have liked Freed to devote more energy to dealing with Eliot's theory rather than his style. The latter is too loosely defined (pp. xvii, 192) to provide "continuity of conscious purpose" (p. 176). Thus Freed fails to solve the basic dilemma with regard to such a critical enterprise which Richard Wollheim formulated in an essay published a decade ago: "to admit

bewilderment, or else, overtly or covertly, to reverse the enterprise and to use . . . the criticism as a gloss on, or as a key to, the philosophy." Freed concedes the bewilderment quite overtly: "The style conceals more than it reveals, and what it reveals is open to misconstruction" (p. 192). As to the second point, he has clearly discerned the problem (pp. 150-51) but has dismissed it too readily. While the literary (and philosophically trained) scholar who keeps Wollheim's warning in mind will be indebted to Freed for all his findings, I expect that on closing this book the less specialized reader would have been even more grateful if the author had offered a map to guide him through the labyrinth into which Eliot lures us.

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The Critical Circle: Literature and History in Contemporary Hermeneutics, by David Couzens Hoy; viii & 182 pp.
Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press,
1978, \$12.95.

Although it is not directed exclusively at problems of understanding poetry and fiction, the hermeneutic philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer has important implications for literary theory. In *The Critical Circle*, David Hoy presents a detailed, straightforward study of the bearing Gadamer's views have on the philosophy of literary interpretation. But beyond providing a guide to Gadamer's hermeneutic, Hoy cuts through the superficial polemics and posturing of much current debate in literary theory to reveal the substantial underlying issues which separate Gadamer from such thinkers as Hirsch, Barthes, Derrida, Ricoeur, and Habermas.

Hoy begins with an exegesis of the critical theory of E. D. Hirsch, Jr. Hirsch's insistence on authorial intention as a standard for evaluating critical interpretations is shown by Hoy to fail for decisive reasons. Knowledge of an author's artistic intentions can, by Hirsch's own admission, be arrived at only by an examination of the text for which such knowledge was supposed to provide critical guidance. Moreover, absolute certainty that we have gained such knowledge, Hirsch again is willing to admit, seems unattainable. Hence, authorial intention is held out merely as an ideal criterion to be invoked in assessing competing interpretations; but this is hardly much help, since what we know about such intentions can be constructed only in the process of interpretation itself (p. 33).

Hirsch and Gadamer may concur that a text must be treated by the critic as an historical product, but that is about as far as the agreement goes. For Gadamer, the work of art is not an object which possesses a single historically determined meaning, but is rather thought of as an historical creation which has its own continuing career. The critic is thus less a subject responding