

Eagleton on Aesthetics and Ideology

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At the beginning of *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* Terry Eagleton admits that he is not a philosopher.¹ A severe critic of this book will be inclined to judge the thinking it contains very unsatisfactory. It is commonly loose, vague, superficial, prone to cliché and empty rhetoric, schematic, inconsistent, reductive, and, apparently, more concerned with political correctness than with truth. The kind of discussion that Eagleton gives to the philosophers that he offers to consider is not uniform: in the case of some he engages quite closely with their views, and seems genuinely interested in what they have to say; in the case of others, he seems to dismiss their views sarcastically as merely the reflections of social or economic circumstances. Marxists have always considered political interventions in the form of writing or composition as operating at different levels: at one extreme there is theory with pretensions to scientificity; at the other extreme there are slogans for chanting at rallies or for storming the barricades; in between come pamphlets, newspaper articles and leaflets. Marxists are supposed, like eighteenth-century poets, to suit their discourse to the context of its composition. By this standard Eagleton has committed a sin against decorum. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* is a pamphlet, masquerading as theory. But, four hundred and fifteen pages is too long for a pamphlet.

Ideology: An Introduction is superior to *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*.² It is argumentative, and frequently perceptive, and its rhetoric is that of racy and colourful illustration, not the flamboyant legerdemain of the former book. Nonetheless, even *Ideology: An Introduction* is not adequately theoretical. It still evinces a tendency to lump together things which should be kept separate, and it often fails to explore thoroughly connections which ought to be made. Even though Eagleton is manifestly thinking about his topic, he seems mesmerised by conceptual counters that have gained the status of heresies in the Marxist tradition: economism, historicism, humanism, empiricism, idealism, essentialism, and so forth. Instead of subjecting these to a theoretical critique, he erects them in his mind as barriers, delimiting the area in which he may move. Generally, he does not attempt to organize systematically the observations and

deductions he makes about his topic. If *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* is a pamphlet, *Ideology: An Introduction* is a series of essays, rambling at leisure through the country explored by the 'ideologists' and their critics, and treating us *en route* to a wealth of insights that a man of wit, sensibility, sense and learning—and a political activist, to boot—is capable of providing. But if, in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, it is impossible to pin Eagleton down to anything very definite, in *Ideology: An Introduction* it is all too easy to pin him down to any number of positions. The problem is that one does not know how they are all to be related to one another. *Ideology: An Introduction* is, in short, eclectic.

In this paper I am not, on the whole, concerned with the adequacy of Eagleton's interpretations of the various thinkers from Baumgarten and De Tracy to Habermas and Lacleau and Mouffe with whom he is concerned. What I wish to do is to clarify just what Eagleton offers to perform in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, to analyse the difficulties he gets into, and, by reference to *Ideology: An Introduction*, to explain those difficulties as the result of Eagleton's trajectory as a post-Althusserian Marxist. Eagleton's difficulties are, in their own way, symptomatic of the general crisis of Marxism, not just in practice, but in theory.

To what sort of inquiry is Eagleton offering to contribute in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*? Well, it certainly isn't aesthetics, at least not as that term is generally understood. It would not be unfair to say that, generally, Eagleton displays no interest at all in the philosophy of art and natural beauty, nor is he interested in the history of this subject. He is, on the whole, not concerned with whether any aesthetic doctrines are true, probable or even just illuminating. He is not interested in the relation of such doctrines to works of art or objects of beauty. What he is interested in is 'the aesthetic' as ideology: 'the category of the aesthetic', he says, 'assumes the importance it does in modern Europe because in speaking of art it speaks of ... other matters too, which are at the heart of the middle class's struggle for political hegemony.'³ Exactly what this implies I will examine below. For the moment I will only note that Eagleton finds the category of the aesthetic politically ambiguous:

The aesthetic is at once ... the very secret prototype of human subjectivity in early capitalist society, and a vision of human energies as radical ends in themselves which is the implacable enemy of all dominative or instrumentalist thought ... If it offers a generous utopian image of

reconciliation between men and women at present divided from one another, it also blocks and mystifies the real political movement towards such historical community.⁴

Eagleton evidently sees himself as a moderate, taking up the middle ground against both liberal humanists and other bourgeois thinkers, who take the aesthetic at face value as a discourse about art and beauty, and those on the political left who dismiss the aesthetic as bourgeois ideology. For Eagleton bourgeois aesthetics is bourgeois ideology, but it still retains some value; but not, apparently, as aesthetics.

Before we go any further, we must ask: does Eagleton dismiss aesthetics—as the theory of art and beauty—as a misconception, and substitute the aesthetic as ideology as the only valid way of regarding aesthetics? Or, does he accept aesthetics as theory in principle, and only offer to examine it from another angle, viz. aesthetics as ideology? It is difficult to answer this question with any certainty, and it looks as though Eagleton has not made up his mind about it. On the one hand, there are places where he refers to the possibility of a radical aesthetics or a revolutionary aesthetics,⁵ and he praises Lukács' theory of realism as a contribution to Marxist 'criticism'.⁶ On the other hand, throughout the book he generally ignores the question whether any of the aesthetic doctrines that he is expounding are true or not. He certainly gives the impression that he regards the question of their truth-value as of no importance. This impression is confirmed by casual comments that the aesthetic has always secretly been the political,⁷ and that the work of art is the 'type' of human autonomy and hence 'politically charged',⁸ by the assumption that models of the work of art are implicitly models of political organization,⁹ and by the endorsement given to Benjamin's theory of allegory, in which, apparently, anything can come to signify anything else.¹⁰ Benjamin's theory seems to be the implicit justification for Eagleton's treating aesthetic doctrines not as aesthetics but as ideological disguises for other (social, political and sometimes ethical) interests.

If Eagleton thinks that aesthetics is not a theoretical concern in its own right, he is wrong, and he is wrong in accordance with principles that he himself acknowledges. He admits that the genetic fallacy is a fallacy, that to ascribe to a doctrine its historical conditions is logically distinct from assessing its truth-value.¹¹ He also admits that an ideology is not necessarily all falsehood, that ideological discourses can contain true statements.¹² But, if he were to take these principles seriously, he would be obliged to consider the substantive claims made about

art and beauty by the philosophers, whose opinions he generally tends, at least in tone and manner, to dismiss. I think it is not a coincidence that Eagleton's attitude to aesthetics as theory is ambiguous and obscure. Aesthetic philosophy is one of the aporias of Eagleton's thought, one of those areas where his thinking is baffled and frustrated by its own oppositions and contradictions. This particular aporia is connected to his whole attitude towards bourgeois philosophy, and what for him constitutes a Marxist critique of thought. I shall return to this issue at the end of this paper.

The Aesthetic as Ideology

Eagleton is concerned with the aesthetic as ideology. We immediately wish to know what he means by the terms, 'the aesthetic' and 'ideology'. What exactly is being connected here? To take 'the aesthetic' first. The meaning that I have assumed so far—the philosophy of art and beauty—is irrelevant. Eagleton is thinking more specifically of concepts which he takes to be typical of the whole range of aesthetic philosophies, concepts which designate characteristically important areas for aesthetic thought to play upon, or concerning which to make claims. In their verbal form as they appear in Eagleton's text these concepts seem to be many. I will list what I take to be the more important, as I have unsystematically recorded them. The aesthetic may be said to pertain to: human subjectivity; the body; sensation and perception; the affections or the heart; sensibility; the work of art as an end in itself; self-determination; the rich, all-round development of human capacities; the introjection of abstract reason by the life of the senses; self-referentiality; the mediation of sense and reason; the unity of subject and object; the identity of content and form; the Imagination; spontaneous understanding; spontaneous feeling; disinterestedness; the lived dimension of sensory experience; the reconciliation of sense and spirit; the unification of reason and sensuous pleasure; pleasure; the unity of discipline and spontaneity; giving the law to oneself; self-actualisation; social harmony; self-creation; being an end in oneself; delight in oneself; self-hegemony; bringing form out of chaos; custom, habitus and the social unconscious; semblance, meaning, error, deception, simulation, delusion, self-delusion; play, dream, myth, scene, symbol, fantasy, representation; bodily sensations and imaginings inherently signifiatory and symbolic and inseparable from figure and fantasy; the harmony of the particular and the universal;

and the whole which is the interrelations of its parts.¹³ (The obvious comment on all this is that aesthetics clearly shares common interests with other forms of thought; Eagleton would say that that is exactly his point; however, such a response would only be a half-truth.)

Now for ideology. Ideology is variously described as: involving the introjection of the law; encoding emotive attitudes relevant to the reproduction of social power; involving performative discourse; involving universal subjective responses; mystification and legitimation; involving the identity of subject and object; feeling at home in the world; thought which conceals its limits by eternalization and universalization; being a matter of sensuous representation; being primarily a matter of feeling; felt certainty; being incarnated in everyday life; both pertaining to feeling and requiring social practices; mediating between the affective and the practical; being a matter of signs, images and representations; involving the semiotic mark of an erased violence; self-delusion; being at home in the world.¹⁴ (All these notions associated with ideology or the ideological come from *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. In *Ideology: An Introduction*, chapter one, we are given sixteen definitions of ideology, which are subsequently reduced to six; in chapter two we are given a further three definitions of ideology, and six definitions of what are called ideological strategies. In addition, there are innumerable further formulations of ideology throughout that book.)

In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* Eagleton does not offer to explain how all these meanings and associations of the term, 'the aesthetic', and all these meanings of 'ideology' are related to one another; which makes it a rather confusing book to read. The meanings of 'the aesthetic'—most of them—can be reduced to three, which in turn can be shown to be related to one another. The three meanings are:

- (i) pertaining to the body, sensibility, feelings and imagination
- (ii) giving the law to oneself
- (iii) being an end in itself

(i) organizes all those concepts which set the body over against the mind, or the sensibility, feelings or imagination over against reason.
(ii) organizes all those concepts that concern the mediation of reason and the non-rational (the sensuous, the affective, the imaginary, the bodily), especially in so far as this mediation is seen as an informing of the non-rational by the rational (whether as law or understanding).
(iii) organizes all those concepts that have to do with self-realisation, self-creation, self-determination and the unity of subject and object in which it is assumed that the self or subject is the end in view of the

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process designated by the concept. These three meanings or concepts can now be related to one another in the order: (i), (ii), (iii). That is to say, we begin with (i) by positing the non-rational (the sensuous, affective, bodily, etc); we move to (ii) in which we posit the informing of the non-rational by the rational; and we then see (ii) as an essential component of (iii), in so far as (iii) is taken to deal with human subjectivity. Thus, introjecting the law of reason within the non-rational side of human nature is seen as an essential component of human self-determination, self-realisation, subjecthood. This is why at the beginning of *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* Eagleton says, 'what emerges ... in the late eighteenth century is the curious idea of the work of art as a kind of *subject*',¹⁵ and why he says, in a passage I have already quoted, 'the aesthetic is ... the very secret prototype of human subjectivity in early capitalist society, and a vision of human energies as radical ends in themselves'.¹⁶

The situation with all the meanings of the term 'ideology' is more complicated, because some of the meanings are primary and some secondary. The primary meanings can again be reduced to three, which in turn can be related to one other:

- (i) pertaining to sensuousness or feeling
- (ii) pertaining to the introjection of the law
- (iii) pertaining to the reproduction of social power

These can now be related in the movement, (i), (ii), (iii). We first posit human sensuousness, and affectivity, the non-rational side of human nature; we move to (ii), the introjection of the law within this non-rational side of human nature; and then we see this process in the context of and necessary to (iii), the reproduction of social power. We now have what is essentially Louis Althusser's theory of ideology, a theory of the constitution of human subjectivity by which human beings become subjected to the system of social power in which they are to live by being constituted as apparently autonomous subjects freely obeying the laws that they have introjected.¹⁷ (All the other meanings of 'ideology' are secondary in that they refer to contingent processes which may or may not be involved in the general ideological constitution and reconstitution of human subjectivity (e.g. mystification, legitimation, etc) or to the result of that process of constituting human subjectivity, viz. feeling or being at home in the world.)

It will now be obvious why Eagleton wishes to see 'the aesthetic' as ideology: 'the aesthetic' designates symbolically the constitution of human subjectivity by certain processes; 'ideology' designates at

the level of theory the constitution of human subjectivity by exactly the same processes in the interest of the reproduction of social power. In other words, 'the aesthetic' gives us two thirds of what is covered by the term 'ideology', but it gives it to us as symbol or image or type, whereas the theory of ideology gives it all to us as theory. 'The aesthetic' is an oblique, symbolical discourse waiting to be translated into scientific knowledge by Louis Althusser, or rather by Terry Eagleton in Althusserian mode.¹⁸

This is the place to emphasise something which is implied by this account of Eagleton's project, and which is crucial. The aesthetic is not just *an* ideology. There have been various ideologies in history, for example, Christianity, chivalry, the doctrine of *laissez-faire*, fascism, etc. The aesthetic is not co-ordinate with all these, it is not just another ideology to add to the list. It is rather a symbol, image or type of ideology itself, of what it is (according to Althusser) for anything to be ideological. It is the symbolic equivalent of the abstract concept of ideology.

I flatter myself that I have explained all this a good deal more clearly than Eagleton does. In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* he works out this (let us say) analogy between the aesthetic and ideology in an extremely confusing manner. The thesis cannot be explored methodically from the standpoint of theory, because Eagleton is committed to arranging his material historically. As a result we pass from one conjunction of the aesthetic and ideology to another conjunction, in which the terms mean something different, to a third in which they mean something different again, and so on. Sometimes the terms repeat themselves, but not in any apparent order. It is as though we had two networks of flashing lights, one called the Aesthetic and the other called Ideology. At any given moment a light will be flashing on each network, but to any observer the order in which the lights flash, and the pairings between them, will be incomprehensible.

Excursus on Historical Materialism and the History of Ideas

There is one aspect of Eagleton's thesis which deserves special mention: viz. the relationship he postulates between the aesthetic and the fact/value problem. Eagleton sees the philosophical problem of the disjunction between facts and values as arising from the transition from pre-bourgeois to bourgeois society. Briefly, as society makes this transition, values—norms, duties, goals—cease to be customary or to be seen simply as the will of God. They become free-floating,

and philosophers search for some way of grounding them in reality, or else, like Hume and his descendants, insist on the impossibility of so grounding them. Eagleton suggests that the two most popular ways of dealing with this problem are to assert either that values are ends in themselves, or that values are founded in sensibility, feeling or intuition. And Eagleton notes that these ways of characterising values are analogous to the ways in which aesthetic philosophy during the same period has characterised the work of art. On the basis of this analogy Eagleton suggests that a problem in ethics has been 'aestheticized' (why the concepts of being an end in itself, and of being founded in sensibility or intuition should be considered as essentially aesthetic, such that they bestow an aesthetic character on any other concepts with which they come into relation, is not clear; but I will return to this matter later).¹⁹

This issue of the aestheticization of the fact/value problem provides a useful occasion for assessing the merit of Eagleton's kind of discussion. What Eagleton is offering is an historical-materialist explanation for the origin of certain ideas widely disseminated through society, a Marxist history of ideas. In this particular case, the grounding of the ideas in historically specific social conditions seems to me convincing, so far as it goes. The unreflective habit of taking for granted a value as custom, and the reflective habit of associating values with the will of God really were undermined (though not totally abolished) by the development of a modern contractually-based society, and by the retreat of Christianity before the liberal-rationalist currents of thought of the Enlightenment. Moreover, as Eagleton explains, during the same period the work of art was dissociated from specific social functions (those of religious worship, glorification of the state, patronage, etc) and became a commodity to be bought and sold on the market. In these conditions, it becomes possible to reflect upon the work of art as something that does not receive its value from religion, the state, one's patron, etc., and to theorise that value in some other way, the obvious ways being that either the work of art is an end in itself, since we no longer use it for anything else, or that its value is related to our feelings about it, since our possession of it essentially involves enjoyment.

But what Eagleton seems not to recognize is that to see a problem in the matrix of its historical conditions is not to dissolve the problem. As the doctrine of the genetic fallacy, suitably varied, states: to ascribe to a problem its historical conditions is logically distinct from solving the problem. In the case of the fact/value problem Eagleton

writes as though the problem is just an illusion, a figment that will disappear with the transition to a communist society. Similarly, for him the problem of aesthetic value is just a mystified form of the general problem of value, and of no independent theoretical interest. Eagleton treats both these problems as merely historical and sociological phenomena. In this respect, Eagleton's book is very old-fashioned 'vulgar Marxism'. It refuses to recognize that some human activities that are not economic or political have any interest in their own right, or any essential character of their own. It reduces those activities to the symptoms or passive effects of the socio-economic base of society and/or its political superstructure, and its procedure is to translate whatever is aesthetic, or religious, or moral, or philosophical into terms that are either economic or political (this does not imply that all statements made by aestheticians, priests, moralists and philosophers can be taken at face value).

The Two Halves of Eagleton's Project

So far I have only dealt with one half of Eagleton's project in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, that is, the examination of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century aesthetics as ideology (in the way that I have explained above). The other half of Eagleton's project is to trace the development of what may be called 'aestheticized philosophies', especially the philosophies of ethics and politics. The first half of *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* is concerned with the aesthetic as ideology, whereas the second half of the book is mainly concerned with these aestheticized philosophies (the chapters on Benjamin and Adorno complicate the situation even more by seeming to treat radical aesthetics as aesthetics, and not just as ideology). The confused reader is compelled to ask, how are these two interests related to each other? There is, unfortunately, more than one answer to this question. One answer is that some of these aestheticized philosophies, those of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Heidegger, are also aestheticized ideologies, by which I mean that they are philosophies of 'life' or of experience which can act as ideology (in Althusser's sense) by offering a world view that can constitute someone's subjectivity right down to the roots of their lived experience. Because they involve lived experience, subjectivity, sensibility, etc, etc, Eagleton sees them as 'aestheticized'. A second answer to the question is that some of these aestheticized philosophies are, in Eagleton's view, materialist, and take their starting-point, according to him, in the human body

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(Schopenhauer, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger), and since, as we know, the aesthetic is associated with the human body, this is another reason for thinking of these philosophies as aestheticized. But, neither of these reasons, nor both of them together, is what really holds the book together. And here we come to a curiosity in the structure of this book. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, like any other book, has to be read forwards, but it has to be *understood* backwards. The secret of *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* is in the last chapter.

Eagleton's starting-point is the displacement of Marxism in the academy by post-structuralism and post-modernism. He sees this as involving the aestheticization of ethics and politics, and the production of a cult of style, surfaces, pleasure and technique.²⁰ He takes Foucault as the proponent of an aestheticized ethics, derived from Nietzsche's, which endorses an aristocratic cultivation of personal excellence, a self-production by means of self-discipline, self-realisation by the introjection of the law.²¹ And this ethics displaces politics: 'society is just an assemblage of autonomous self-disciplining agents, with no sense that their self-realisation might flourish within the bonds of mutuality'.²² Lyotard is taken as the proponent of an aestheticized politics, aestheticized in the sense that Lyotard grounds politics in intuition, which Eagleton evidently identifies with sensibility. And with this politics goes a rejection of totalizing grand narratives such as Marxism, and the endorsement of a bland pluralism, which is indistinguishable from liberalism.²³ It is clear that Eagleton organizes his understanding of what Foucault and Lyotard represent by means of the basic conceptions that he has inherited from Althusser's theory of ideology, the conceptions of sensuousness and sensibility, of the introjection of the law, and of the constitution of subjectivity. By means of these notions he can interpret post-structuralism and post-modernism as the latest phase in a history of the relationship between aesthetics and ideology that extends back to the beginnings of bourgeois society. Post-structuralism and post-modernism are to be 'placed' in a Marxist perspective on the development of capitalism. Or, to use post-structuralist terminology, Eagleton is offering to write the genealogy of post-structuralism and post-modernism. This involves Eagleton looking at those philosophies which are the ancestors of post-structuralism (Heidegger, Freud, Nietzsche, and behind Freud, Schopenhauer; Eagleton also traces some connections between post-structuralism and the Frankfurt School); it also involves his looking at eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aesthetics in order to establish the ideological connection

between aesthetics and bourgeois society, and in order to give the term, 'aesthetic', all the meanings he associates with ideology, for without those meanings it will be impossible to describe the life-philosophies of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche et al. as 'aestheticized' philosophies.

The fundamental problem with this procedure is that none of the concepts that Eagleton wishes to use is essentially aesthetic. Many of them belong to the organicist mode of thought, and so originate in nature-philosophy. They are part of the general nineteenth-century revolt against the mechanical. Others of Eagleton's concepts belong to ethics, metaphysics or epistemology. Eagleton wishes to suggest that in the bourgeois period aesthetics has provided the model for ethics and politics. The relationship is in truth the very opposite. In the development of modern aesthetics philosophers have had to draw on concepts which are either common to all sorts of inquiries (like form and content) or which originate in more systematically developed branches of philosophy (sensation and perception, sense and reason, ends and means, freedom and necessity, subject and object, etc.). It now becomes obvious that the connection that Eagleton establishes between 'the aesthetic' and 'ideology' is no more than a tautology: the concept of end-in-itself when used in aesthetics is identical with the concept of end-in-itself when used in the theory of ideology. Well, it certainly is. And so, Eagleton's offer to find the secret of the aesthetic in ideology, or the secret of ideology in bourgeois society in the aesthetic, turns out to be an empty rhetorical gesture. The issue of the book's merit must turn upon two things: the cogency of the historical explanations of the social origins of ideas, and the quality of the critical commentary on the aestheticized philosophies. I will merely say that generally the historical explanations are unconvincing (some of them are so crude as to be ridiculous), and that the criticism offered of the aestheticized philosophies seems to me perfunctory.

Eagleton's Problems

To view Eagleton's motive in writing *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* as a desire to reaffirm Marxism against post-structuralism and post-modernism is too simple. Marxism itself for Eagleton has become problematical. The deficiencies of the Second International led to historicist and humanist Marxism; the deficiencies of historicist and humanist Marxism led to structuralist Marxism; the deficiencies of structuralist Marxism have now produced the phenomenon of 'post-

Marxism'.²⁴ And it is of no use, apparently, going back behind the Second International to Marx's own writings, since, as Eagleton offers to show, some of Marx's most important ideas have themselves become problematical.²⁵ Eagleton is trying to fight an enemy with an army so badly damaged as to be on the point of collapse.

Beneath the post-structuralist, radical feminist and deconstructionist jargon the core of Eagleton's thought is still located within the problematics of Louis Althusser's structuralist Marxism. But Althusser's theoretical reformulation of Marxism, especially its theory of ideology, has now become profoundly problematical for Eagleton. It would not be too much to say that it is a trap that all through these books he is struggling to get out of. And behind Althusser there is the even more problematical figure of Freud. Eagleton is generally thought of as a Marxist, but I should like to suggest that Freud's thought has a far more powerful influence on Eagleton than Marx's. The problems are these. The concept of the human subject is ambiguous. It can denote either a free autonomous individual, or (as in Althusser's thought) an individual that has been subjected to an external ideological power so that it is constituted as an apparently free but really dominated subject. Althusser accepts the general validity of Freud's theory of the unconscious, and sees the unconscious processes of infancy as intertwined with the ideological processing of society, as understood according to his own theory of ideology.²⁶ Eagleton develops this hint by connecting Freud's theory of the development of the ego and the superego with the processes of ideological subjection. The formation of the superego is the process by which the law of society is introjected within the affective side of the human subject.²⁷ But, this combination of Freudian ego-psychology and Althusserian theory of ideology makes it very difficult to explain how human subjects can either rationally criticise the ideological view of the world that has been imposed upon them, or find the desire to rebel against a social order to which their ideological processing has subjected them. Behind these problems there lies the ambiguity of a materialist philosophy of the body: on the one hand, the body with its desires and pleasures can be seen positively as the site of freedom and happiness against the oppressive tendencies of an instrumentalist reason; on the other hand, it can be seen negatively as an irrational, anarchic and dominating power standing over against the impotent human self as its terrible Other. Eagleton does not explicitly pose this problem, but it torments him all the way through both books.

His ways of struggling to get out of this trap are many, various and incoherent. Remaining within Althusser's problematic, he posits that the ideological processing of individuals is contradictory, that individuals are constituted both as passive, obedient subjects, and as free autonomous subjects. With Lacan Eagleton posits a relative autonomy of human desire, such that total subjection never *quite* takes place. With the late Freud Eagleton holds that the good moral values of mutuality, gratitude, love, etc. are grounded in the socio-biological relationship of infant and adult (how this notion is to be related to the rest of Freud's thought which is causing the problem is unclear). With Norman Geras Eagleton asserts that Marx had a theory of general human nature and basic needs, which presumably are to provide the stimulus to an understanding of and resistance to alienation. With Habermas Eagleton posits an essential rationality implicit in the processes of human communication. With Gramsci Eagleton finds that the consciousness of the exploited classes is a mixture of what comes to them from the ideas of the ruling class and what is derived from their own experience. Finally, Eagleton adduces the evidence of rape-crisis centres and picket-lines to prove that, well, people do actually resist oppression.²⁸ In brief Eagleton has no solution to his problem, and this is disguised by the fact that he has any number of solutions to his problem.

Beneath the problem with Althusser, beneath the problem with Freud, beneath the problem with materialism in general, there is an even more basic problem with Marxism: on the one side Marxism threatens to collapse into liberalism; on the other side Marxism threatens to collapse into post-structuralism. By this I mean that Marxism shares certain notions with the liberal humanism that Eagleton wishes to reject (e.g. positivism, humanism, a classical doctrine of truth), and other notions with the post-structuralism that Eagleton also wishes to reject (a rejection of the concept of disinterestedness, a tendency to regard ideas as the effects of unconscious motivations). How to preserve reason and theory without lapsing into positivism? How to preserve objective truth without lapsing into liberal-minded disinterestedness? How to preserve interestedness without lapsing into aestheticized egoism? How to preserve desire without abandoning Marx for Nietzsche? Eagleton is out of his depth with these problems because he is not a theoretical thinker. It is commonplace in Marxist epistemology to oppose dialectical thinking to eclecticism. Eagleton is undoubtedly an eclectic. I said earlier that Eagleton's attitude to aesthetics as theory

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is ambiguous and obscure, and that aesthetics is an aporia in Eagleton's thought. It is so, because it concentrates his problems within itself, problems of truth, interest and desire. In part of his mind he wishes to reject bourgeois aesthetics as just bourgeois ideology. In another part of his mind he is struggling to preserve common-sense notions of truth, objectivity and knowledge. But, if he followed out the implications of this realism-tendency, it would take him back towards a realist theory of art such as Lukács espoused, and this would require him to make a rather more serious dialectical critique of bourgeois aesthetics as aesthetics. At present, his subjugation to Louis Althusser and structuralist Marxism is apparently holding him back from this.

Eagleton, and other Marxists generally, have a great deal of thinking to do.

Notes

- 1 Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Oxford, and Cambridge, Mass., 1990. Hereafter *IA*.
- 2 Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, London and New York, 1991. Hereafter *II*.
- 3 *IA*, p.3.
- 4 *IA*, p.9.
- 5 E.g. *IA*, p.119, and chs 12 (on Benjamin) and 13 (on Adorno).
- 6 *IA*, p.325.
- 7 *IA*, p.207.
- 8 *IA*, p.226.
- 9 E.g. *IA*, chs 12 and 13.
- 10 *IA*, pp.326–327.
- 11 *II*, p.140.
- 12 *IA*, p.94; *II*, pp.221–222.
- 13 *IA*, pp.9; 13; 13; 13, 19–20; 34; 34; 36; 36; 42; 65; 103–104; 128; 126; 133; 136; 151; 162–163; 173; 196; 207; 237; 238; 238; 242; 242; 243; 247; 252; 253; 253; 254; 256; 262; 262; 347; 347.
- 14 *IA*, pp.41; 94; 94; 95–96; 97; 123; 123; 87; 82–83; 99; 137; 144; 145; 145; 145; 235; 281; 301.
- 15 *IA*, p.4.
- 16 *IA*, p.9.
- 17 Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)' in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, tr. Ben Brewster, New York and London, 1971, pp.127–186. See also 'Freud and Lacan' in *Lenin and Philosophy*, pp.189–219.
- 18 Cf. 'The aesthetic is in this sense [Eagleton is discussing Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Smith] no more than a name for the political unconscious: it is simply the way social harmony registers itself on our senses, imprints itself on our sensibilities'.

IA, p.37. 'Like the work of art, the human subject introjects the codes which govern it as the very source of its free autonomy, and so comes in Althusserian phrase to work "all by itself", without need of political constraint', IA, p.41. 'From one viewpoint, the aesthetic is the ideological', IA, p.99.

These are all comments made *en passant*. Eagleton does not seem to realise the extent to which the equation of the aesthetic and the ideological underlies his whole book.

- 19 IA, pp.8–9, 34, 40–41, 52, 62–66, 80–81, 367–368, 382–383.
- 20 IA, pp.372–384.
- 21 IA, pp.384–395.
- 22 IA, p.393.
- 23 IA, pp.395–401.
- 24 IA, p.384.
- 25 IA, pp.217–230, 274.
- 26 Louis Althusser, 'Freud and Lacan' (see note 17 above).
- 27 IA, pp.269–277.
- 28 IA, pp.376–377, II, pp.38–39, 42–43, 46, 144–145, 222–223; II, pp.144–145; IA, pp.284–285, 410–411; IA, pp.409–410; IA, pp.403–408; II, pp.36–37, 118; II, pp.39, 42.