Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss on the Individual, Christianity, and Creativity in Thought and Action

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In a spring 2020 review of David McIlwain's 2019 book on Oakeshott and Strauss, I observed that in the face of a world-wide technologically driven millennialism, it was fitting to identify areas of agreement (excepting Hobbes) between the two thinkers in the interest of fostering political moderation. These included subjects such as the difference between philosophy and ideological thought, the importance of classically grounded liberal education, support for republican government, and so on. In that review I cautioned that there were also profound areas of disagreement between the two thinkers which McIlwain had chosen not to emphasize. In this essay I propose to identify those areas in order to make a considered analysis as to how those differences affect the reflective judgments of the two twentieth century thinkers concerning what to conserve and refurbish in the Western cultural inheritance. After constructing this narrative, the idea is then to see how and where it supports, or does not, McIlwain's themes. This seems a fitting focus for an essay in this special issue of *Cosmos + Taxis* devoted to the McIlwain book. The narrative I am about to construct will attempt to link together the three subjects in the essay's title, but they might all be seen as dependent on the first—the status, desirability and effects of the individual as a Western ideal in history and social-legal practice. I shall be trying to focus on the extent to which it depends on Christian ontological assumptions, especially as developed in late medieval philosophy and theology, and how these assumptions in time came to affect Western ideas about the extent to which biblical account of creation and incarnation could modify the Greek rationalist inheritance of especially Plato and Aristotle about the proper relationship between theory, practice and production.

I.

A good starting point for this narrative are Strauss's concluding thoughts in *Natural Right and History* on Edmund Burke's criticisms of the French Revolution and the "Parisian philosophers" (such as Rousseau). The last two sentences of the book fix on the importance of the status of "individuality" in both Burke's critique and Strauss's account of it:

> *The quarrel between the ancients and the moderns concerns eventually, and perhaps even the beginning, the status of "individuality."* Burke himself was still too deeply involved with the spirit of

'sound antiquity' to allow the concern with individuality to overpower the concern with virtue" (Strauss 1953, p. 323, emphasis added).

Let us look at how Strauss develops this idea in the preceding pages, bearing in mind that Strauss and his students typically have viewed Oakeshott's critique of both ancient and modern rationalism as a variation on Burke.

Two main themes are developed in Strauss's thirty page discussion of the ideas of Edmund Burke (as part of a larger discussion on the "crisis" of modern natural right). One has to do with Burke's account of the meaning of the beautiful and sublime, the other on the limited role of conscious intellect in the establishment of constitutional institutions.

Consider first Strauss's concern with Burke's account of the beautiful and sublime in his book on that subject, Burke's only purely theoretical piece of writing. Strauss's major criticism of Burke's view, which he sees as falling within the British "sensualist" school of Locke and Hume, is its estimation of the limits of "theoretic science," and its separation of sensible beauty from its classical association with virtue, order, proportion, etc.:

> *The emancipation of sensible beauty from its traditionally assumed directedness toward intellectual beauty foreshadows . . . a certain emancipation of sentiment and instinct from reason, or a certain depreciation of reason* (Strauss 1953, pp. 312-13, emphasis added).

Strauss goes on to argue that the novelty in Burke's critique of reason reveals itself in the practical implication that constitutions might grow organically, and that the best social order can never be the work of a wise legislator or founder, which is the second Burkean theme Strauss explores in this section.

To summarize the twenty pages of Strauss's analysis of Burke's arguments on the appropriateness of practical wisdom or prudence (over abstract speculation) on political affairs, we might say the following. Although Burke shares with Aristotle recognition of the importance of both prudence and rhetoric in governance and politics, he differs from Aristotle in denying the superiority of the theoretical or philosophic life, operating instead upon more Epicurean assumptions. In Burke's approval of market and other forces in achieving, aggregate, material and social benefits (never intended by any of the particular historical actors) by imputation to these forces, of mysterious, divine providence, Strauss sees "foreshadowed" in Burke the utopian hopes of 19th century progressivism, with all of its "bestial effects" in practice. Strauss calls this process "secularization" or the confused attempt "to integrate the eternal into a temporal context," and says that unawares, Burke (like Kant) is operating on the assumptions of Rousseau's *Second Treatise*, while adding or importing mysterious divine Providence into Rousseau's accidental causation on the genesis of civilization. For Strauss, it is only a short step from there to the eschatological political theories of Marx, once it is decided that the direction of "History" is no longer opaque to the human reason and analysis (Strauss 1953, pp. 312-317). Now this is hardly a novel thesis about the origins of Western millennialism, except that it could more accurately be traced the 17th century Cambridge Platonists who had begun to learn Hebrew and read the "Old Testament" in literal and un-Augustinian ways to divine God's purpose in history to favor the chosen people, and even aid in the realization of divine purposes (which were no longer so mysterious) through political and social action (see Tuveson 1968; see also, Coats 2018, pp. 11-17). But what is the connection between "individuality" and Christianity for *Strauss* since the hope of earthly perfection can be found also in the Hebrew prophets (such as Isaiah) as Strauss well knew? Strauss once said in an exchange with Alexander Kojeve that "modern philosophy is the secular form of Christianity" (Strauss 1959, p. 126). I think what Strauss is saying here is that the biblical emphasis on human beings made in the image of God, with sufficient intelligence and freedom to choose to obey, is only strengthened and exacerbated with baleful political effects in the Christian symbolism of the incarnate *logos*. This occurs over time through (1) its implicit demand for earthly actualization of a perfectionist morality ("Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven"), (2) through its privatizing, so to speak, of God, in each's personal rela-

tionship with an omniscient God of the conscience who knows every sparrow that falls; and (3) through (see Lobkowicz 1967) the prioritizing of private, individual conscience over a community of status roles, to a much greater extent than in either the Greek *polis* or middle-Eastern tribalism (Jewish and Islamic). (Obviously, these tendencies are only accelerated in Protestantism, and its claim for the "priesthood of all believers.") To return to the issue of "individuality", the implication in Strauss's argument about modernity is that Christianity has accelerated the anarchic tendencies in the *ethos* of individual freedom and choice implicit in the biblical (though not Islamic) sacred teachings about human beings being created in the image of God. This is especially so when combined with the promise of secular thinkers, such as Machiavelli and Locke, to provide for the earthly desires and needs (Plato's appetites) of the great majority of people. In brief, Strauss's fundamental objection to the modern emphasis on individual choice and cultivation of individuality for its own sake, is that it is not sustainable over time. Without the religion which generated it, (which is being undermined by the unwise freedom it engenders), the implication is that an *ethos of civility among individuals* is too process-oriented to defend itself successfully against sophisticated and disciplined forms of modern tribalism (ethno-centrism), better able to contain the anarchic effects of the democratic demand for satisfaction of its felt needs.

Before turning to Oakeshott on these themes there is a third to consider--the status and importance of human creativity in both skill and moral balance. The issue here as I see it, is that Strauss thinks that the idea of human creativity derived from biblical account of creation "from things that were not before" is not only politically dangerous, but a philosophic error as well. In a letter to Eric Voegelin, Strauss says the source of "modern darkness" is in the "creative" conflation of the contemplative, the practical, and the productive lives. (Strauss makes a similar critique in his long review of Collingwood's "historicism," or reliance on the making of other men versus direct philosophic engagement with "the things that are," *a la* Socrates). That is, Strauss thinks it a mistake and confusion to conflate the three lives, and then attempt to theorize about the contingent, changeable aspect of reality. (So much for modern science!) By ignoring the historical Plato's politically reformist side including life-threatening trips to Sicily to convert a tyrant to philosophy, Strauss thought his ironic Plato had managed to keep the three lives separate. (Although even here there are problems--consider the cycle of regimes in *The Republic*, a theoretical account of constitutional change, and, hence, merely opinion, not knowledge?) Strauss traces this error especially to the Renaissance thinker, Machiavelli, in the exclusive focus of his political science on efficient causality in the interest of certainty and control, in advance of modern science. (Although one can find the attempt at theorizing the contingent or mutable in medieval writers such as Avicenna and Duns Scotus).[2] Strauss, also, never distinguishes between craft (*techne*) and creation, treating both as simply "making"; nor does he find notable the distinction of Maimonides between *creation ex nihilo* and Plato's cosmic craftsman in *The Timaeus*. So, as we shall see momentarily, Strauss and Oakeshott are miles apart on the bases for practical and productive skill as well as the bases for a balanced morality, with Oakeshott seeing the genesis of modern and millennialist ideology in rationalist overreaching and a failure to appreciate the creative structure of experiential reality.

II.

It makes sense in Oakeshott's case to begin with his account of the structure of experiential reality and work our way back to his views on the individual and individuality and Christianity (which he views as a civilization). Unlike Oakeshott, one rarely finds in Strauss even a brief ontological analysis; he views almost every issue--religious, moral, philosophic--through a political lens, a perspective he says curiously he adopted from the Platonic Socrates (who *does* engage in purely ontological and epistemological analysis in certain Platonic dialogues).

Arguably, the unifying perspective in Oakeshott's corpus is a view about the creative or poetic structure, of experiential reality. This view is implicit in *Experience and Its Modes* (1933) and modified and clarified in *The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind* (1959). It becomes the basis for Oakeshott's cri-

tique of modern rationalism in politics; morality and religion. Let us try to summarize it briefly without distortion.

In *Experience and Its Modes*, Oakeshott presents a rather original account of various "modalities" of experience, saliently, historical, scientific and practical. His view is that each settled pattern of experience (all we have) arises in a similar (and universal) fashion with the form (how) and content (what) of activity arising simultaneously and conditioning one another reciprocally, with neither more essential than the other. To say this differently, every settled pattern of human activity is created in the interplay between a distinctive method and a distinctive subject matter. For example, the historical past, created on the methodical principle of contiguity, is not the same as the practical past, created on the principle of desire and aversion, and it is a category error to attempt to apply conclusions achieved in one such modality of experience to another, because there is no realist "it" out there for Oakeshott (Oakeshott 1933, p. 31). Each method creates or "is correlative to" its distinct subject matter. In the long 1959 essay, "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation Mankind" Oakeshott modified his earlier view that artistic or aesthetic experience was a form of practical experience, and in fact constituted a separate and distinct modality of experience based on the principle of "contemplative delight" (all that can remain of Platonic ideas) and without any practical bearings, except as a relief from the "deadliness" of practical doing. Oakeshott's account of the way in which style and content in aesthetic experience are inseparable is important in conveying the structure of all settled modalities of experience, which is creative or poetic, distinguished from the confused rationalist view that antecedently existing ideas or models can be universally applied to already existing subject matter, or transferred in Cartesian fashion to any new subject matter without irrelevance and loss of both moral balance and practical skill. In my view, Oakeshott implies that aesthetic experience is the key to understanding the poetic structure of all settled patterns of experience, even that of science, (in a fashion similar to Marx's claim that the key to understanding class conflict in all history was first to view it in simplified capitalist form). In making this argument, Oakeshott draws on the views of M. B. Foster about the difference between created objects (and beings), and crafted ones, as developed in late medieval Christian theology and philosophy. It is worth taking a moment to summarize Foster's views here, since they provide a useful way to contrast Oakeshott's general intellectual orientation with that of Strauss.

I offer this summary of Foster's account (Foster 1934) of the difference between the Greek rationalist view (especially Plato's) of craft (*techne)* and the biblical view of creation as it evolved in the thought of *medieval thinkers* such as Anselm, Maimonides, Scotus, and Ockham (but not Aquinas).

On the Greek rationalist worldview, both form and matter are given eternally; the essence of any object is its "detachable" form; matter adds nothing positive to form (*vs.* e.g. the Christian doctrine of the incarnate *logos*, and also Anselm's ontological proof for the existence of God); and both thinking and making are purposive and involve discovering and copying pre-existing forms or models. By contrast, the account of cosmological creation in the sacred Hebrew and Christian texts entails the idea that creation is not purposive in the Greek rationalist sense. That is, it is not directed toward a distinctively conceived and antecedently existing form or end in advance of the act of willful creation, and by implication, in a created being or object (*vs.* a crafted one) there is no intellectually graspable form detachable from its accidental embodiment. Additional implications are that "contingency" is an important aspect of created objects and beings, that is their "accidental" embodiments are not necessitated by, nor can be deduced from, their form or idea. Finally, if something is created *ex nihilo*, there are no degrees of being in it as there are in the Greek idea of substance (*ousia*). This last point has the effect of fracturing the teleological hierarchy of Aristotle and Aquinas, thus paving the way for modern empirical science, a mixture of both Greek rationalism and biblical respect for the mystery of created matter (which can henceforth only be talked about in terms of mathematical probability).

Now, Oakeshott rejects general, covering law explanations as usually irrelevant by way of category error, such as conflating the practical with the historical past, or attempting to pass directly from philosophic[3] to practical issues of politics and religion. Yet he does say that the *ethos* of the individual (i.e. embracing opportunities to choose for oneself as a form of self-enactment), was (1) "translated by Occam into a philo-

sophic theory;" and was (2) converted by Pico della Mirandola from a presupposition of all moral agency, into a living disposition to cultivate the freedom to choose rather than regret it; and (3) received its "classic expression" in Montaigne's *Essais*, especially in Montaigne's own lines that "'it is something almost divine for a man to know how to belong to himself'" (Oakeshott 1975, pp. 240-41).

It is worth lingering a bit over Montaigne's essays, in order to bring out a fundamental difference between Montaigne and Aristotle, about which things may be intelligently done for their own sake, rather than for instrumental or other reasons. (This contrast will also be useful in highlighting another difference between Oakeshott and Strauss over the theory-practice relationship).

As is generally known, at the age of thirty-eight, the minor, aristocratic, occasional negotiator for Henry IV, and two-term mayor of Bordeaux, Michel de Montaigne, retired to his study (whenever possible) to write and revise a three-volume work of essays about himself and his thoughts on a variety of human themes. Arguably the unifying theme of these essays is the attempt to find contentment or psychic harmony through eschewing as much as possible *complicated* instrumental goals and constructing one's life around *mundane* activities which could intelligently be done *for their own sake*, such as friendship and conversation (see Coats, 2004, Chapter 2). And, even where instrumental goals were unavoidable (as in mayoral duties) Montaigne recommended performing them in as ritualistic way as possible, rituals being human institutions most susceptible of performance in the present moment and for their own enjoyment. A recurrent theme in the essays is Montaigne's relation with his own interior life and self-enactment rather than with the public mask; "Montaigne and the mayor of Bordeaux have ever been two" (Coats 2004, p. 19). And Montaigne's reason and justification for this orientation and pre-occupation, is not the explicit scholastic argument that in a created being essence and accident are inseparable, but rather that his interior life is unique and his alone, which amounts implicitly to the same idea.

It is in this idea of doing things for their own sake (individual contentment), that it becomes clearer why Oakeshott refers to Montaigne as the "classic expression" of the *ethos* of individuality. Or, more specifically, in Montaigne's view of which kind of activities can be done for their own sake, and how it differs from that of Aristotle especially. Arguably, Montaigne has drawn upon Augustine's reflections on the incarnation of the divine *logos*, and upon the Trinity of the divine, as the basis for his (Augustine's) criticism of the classical ontological dualism of the Greek rationalists, Plato and Aristotle, and its failure to see that there is nothing inherently corrupting or fatal in *matter*, and hence there is no unbridgeable hiatus in the human being between body and soul, between sense impression and thought.[5] For this reason, in the views of both Montaigne and Oakeshott, there are activities which can be done for their own sake, other than Aristotelian contemplation or *Theoria*.[3] In Augustine's view, time, space, matter and form are not merely hindrances and "causes," but gifts or opportunities for individual enactment and disclosure in the secular realm, and it is toward the meaning of human conduct that the limited powers of a creature of body and soul immersed in time should properly be directed. Here is Oakeshott's own more secular version of this Augustinian (and Montaignian) insight:

> What has to be reckoned with in is an historic disposition to transform this unsought freedom of conduct from a postulate into an experience and to make it yield a satisfaction of its own . . . the disposition to recognize imagining, deliberating, wanting, choosing and acting not as costs incurred in seeking enjoyments but as themselves, enjoyments, the exercise of a gratifying self-determination or personal autonomy (Oakeshott 1975, p. 236).

As for Oakeshott's view of the relationship of Christianity to the *ethos* of individuality, he shares the general view of philosophers from Hegel to Heidegger that the emphasis on an evolving subjective freedom owes its origins to Western European Christian civilization. And even Strauss would appear to agree in saying that modern philosophy is the secular form of Christianity. (Although he later adds into the mix, Aristotle's explicit formulation of the moral virtues.) Yet, Oakeshott's general approach to the genesis of

the *ethos* of individuality is skeptical and mystical--he simply notes that at some point a discernable pattern arose of numbers of individuals choosing to *embrace* as a way of life the freedom postulated in human moral agency. And although Oakeshott in his hyperbolic moods rejects the view that there are any essential themes in an evolving Christian Western European civilization, in our characterization of his thought we note his *contingent preference* for the ideal and practice of the political state as a loose civil association of individuals, each pursuing a unique destiny, *versus* the view of the analogy of the state as a community in pursuit of a common substantive purpose, with the worth of particular individuals bound to their authority, power and status in the achievement of that goal. We have also noted Oakeshott's ontological and epistemological claim (not merely a contingent preference) that (1) the universal structure of all human experiential reality, and its various settled modalities, is poetic or creative, with the form and content of each modality (history, science, practice, and aesthetic experience) arising simultaneously and conditioning, one another reciprocally; and (2) by implication that the creative structure of all experiential reality is discernible most clearly in aesthetic experience; and (3) the blindness of all rationalism, especially modern rationalism, is to ignore that structure in an overestimation of the capacity of conscious intellect to control, at the cost of genuine practical and productive skills, as well as moral balance.[4]

III.

At this point, let us take these thematic summaries of the two thinkers' differences and see what light they shed on McIlwain's themes. McIlwain has written an intellectual history the logic of which is often driven by the concerns of an impressively vast amount of surveyed secondary scholarship from various "camps" or schools of thought. Yet this means that if an issue (such as the Straussian silence on the Romans), has not been discussed in the respectable secondary literature, it is less likely to come up in the book's narrative. I would like to propose a more pointed narrative about Strauss's critique of Western European civilization than the book does (in proceeding as it does incrementally from secondary literature to secondary literature about the two thinkers), and then see if McIllwain's narrative can accommodate my narrative.

In my view, Strauss's comprehensive project (like Luther's, for different reasons) is to *unravel*, so to speak, the Aquinian synthesis of Jerusalem and Athens, so that other more communitarian (Abrahamic) cultures do not have to go through the assimilative Liberal "ordeal of civility." Strauss proposes in justification of this project that it is the *tension* between the two cultures which has provided the vitality of the West (like the taut Nietzschean bowstring or the ancient Stoic *tonos*), and that the West is in the danger of losing that dynamic vitality if either side of that polarity were to collapse. And *tension* is contrasted in Strauss's account with the misguided Roman and neo-Roman attempt at synthesis and harmony of the two inheritances. From the synthetic Aquinian viewpoint, the divinity is revealed to be a mixture of both creative will and intellect; from the Straussian (and Maimonidean) perspective the biblical God of creation cannot be synthesized or harmonized with the Aristotelian *intellective* divinity thinking or contemplating itself. The philosophic life and the life of faith in divine revelation occur in different camps, so to speak, in tension with one another but also open to dialogue over their respective cosmological claims.

Strauss's account of Western modernity and modern philosophy starts with Machiavelli's "anti-theological ire" to overthrow the Aristotelian teleological hierarchy of intellectual and moral virtue which Aquinas completed with the theological virtues (under the Church's guidance and control), and offer in its place more earthy satisfaction to the masses, through more realistic and *lowered* goals. In this account Locke (and Hobbes) were merely secret Latin Averroists serving as Machiavelli's "foot soldiers" to make his project milder and more palatable through commercial provision of more commodious living for the "many." For Strauss, then, it has been the corrupting effects of otherworldly and unrealistic Christian moral perfectionism, which resulted in both a corrupt clerical hierarchy, as well as the immoral Machiavellian counter-reaction to the political and moral vacuum created by centuries of Christian institutions.

How different is Oakeshott's perspective on all of this. For one thing, since he does not share Strauss's view of the political influence of philosophic thought in general, he begins his critique of modernity's excesses by focusing on the intellectual blindness of Bacon and Descartes, (not Machiavelli and Hobbes) and their rationalist and scientific project to remake the world through antecedently conceived "models" with the attendant loss of moral balance and practical skill we have already noted. He sees Machiavelli, for example, as the author of a rationalist manual for governance intended as a crib for new and inexperienced rulers; of Locke as the author of a crib for a new political class; and of Marx and Engels the authors of the "most stupendous" of our political rationalist cribs, intended for the politically inexperienced masses.

Oakeshott also sees one source of individualism in the Roman inheritance in European culture, a subject on which Strauss is largely silent, except for a critical three paragraph review of Charles McIlwain's classic work, *Constitutionalism, Ancient and Modern* (1940). Oakeshott draws upon the Roman and Ciceronian view of the republic as a loose civil association of individuals pursuing their own goals for family and state glory while observing the general requirement to keep faith with "old ways" (*mos maiorum*), in constructing his well known dichotomy between "civil association" (*a`la* Rome), and "enterprise association" in pursuit of a common purpose (*à la* Athens). One cannot help but wonder if Strauss and his students are not silent on Roman and Ciceronian criticism of Plato's elevation of the contemplative over the practical life because it might detract from the rhetorical force of Strauss's account of Christian and later bourgeois influences in his indictment the Machiavellian project. In contrast to Oakeshott, we might also note in passing the Straussian silence on the Roman achievement of a detailed body of legal procedure, forensic rhetoric, and rules of evidence to protect individual rights, and property, in contrast to Athenian judicial practice which tried the accused by huge juries influenced by whatever rhetorical tropes could influence their minds on the day of the trial ("the court of public opinion").

Now, the general concern I have meant to raise is whether David McIlwain's project to find overlapping agreement between Oakeshott and Strauss in the interest of fostering anti-millennialist political moderation must be qualified by their respective differences over the status of the late medieval and modern social, moral and legal achievement of the institution of the individual as the basic social unit, rather than the family, or community or social caste. This institution is arguably the incremental realization over two millennia of the Pauline claim that individual choice is a necessary component of morality, and that the assent of the individual conscience is more important in morality than strict adherence to the letter of the law.

Arguably, this perspective has *replaced* in Western civilization the ancient Platonic and Aristotelian orientation toward justice as based upon the fundamental inequality of human beings in hierarchically ordered communities such as the ancient *polis*; and in its place, slowly substituted a view of the moral equality of all individuals as the basis for justice and all political orderings. In my view, Strauss is explicitly critical of this Pauline project for its unsustainability, and its prejudice toward superior talent, and toward communitarian moralities of social status. Oakeshott, on the other hand, has chosen to cultivate the individualist *ethos* which arose in the conversion of a postulate of moral agency into a way of life, both for its own enjoyment, and its implicit agreement with the Pauline view that coerced morality is a contradiction in terms. So, the question I think is raised (but not answered) by McIllwain's project is whether some of the similarities in certain views of the two thinkers can ever be more than a timely alliance of convenience, given their fundamental disagreement over the importance and desirability of the Western achievement of what the Oxford political philosopher, Larry Siedentop, calls "the institution of the individual," as developed first in canon law and reflection (especially Ockhamite) from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, and repeated (with modifications) in the modern Liberal project from Hobbes, to Locke, to Rousseau.[5] And as a corollary question, can the animating *tension* in Strauss's Jerusalem-Athens polarity sustain itself if the individualist element of the biblical inheritance is discredited by its more corporatist and communitarian elements through two centuries of ubiquitous, reductionist critique of "the individual," slowly effacing public memory of its religious and moral origins? Can Oakeshott's eloquent efforts at recalling the moral aspects of the liberal, individualist *ethos* in the face of these critiques be more than an echo of Hooker's 17th century ded-

icatory remarks that "posterity" may know we did not allow these things to pass away (unnoticed) as in a dream?

Strauss once said of Machiavelli's rhetorical strategy that people might not suspect a bold man of being even bolder still. Is it too much to ask if Strauss's comprehensive project may not have been something bolder (1) through his silence on the Roman, medieval and Protestant influence in the creation of the legal and cultural institutions of the individual, and (2) in his reductionist attempts to set Hobbes and Locke against the tradition they helped to generate. That is, not merely to unravel the Aquinian synthesis, but to reorient Western political theory entirely? That is, to move it away *from* the view that Western civilization evolved through pragmatic Roman and neo-Roman efforts to synthesize and stabilize its classical and biblical inheritances, *to* the view that it had always been a dialogue between Athens and pre-Christian Jerusalem, with the Roman and later Christian inheritance simply a footnote to the latter? And if this is only partially correct about the Straussian project, wouldn't some of the areas of agreement between Oakeshott and Strauss developed in David McIlwain's book require to be qualified as simply expedient given their profound differences over the importance of the institution of the individual, as well as over the proper role of conscious intellect and rationalist planning in balanced and skillful morality and law? An exception to this generalization might be their tacit agreement over the importance of prudence (*phroneisis)* in moving from theory to practice in political life, and of liberal education as well.

To rehearse this critique of McIlwain's generally sound, interesting and scholarly thorough book, he declines (prudentially?) to inspect the extent to which Strauss's criticisms of modernity derive from his critique of the effects over time of perfectionist Christian morality (including the Aquinian incorporation of Aristotelian moral virtues), as well as the long-range effects of the Christian symbolism of the incarnate *logos.* In the former case, by Strauss's lights, this moral perfectionism evoked the Machiavellian and neo-Machiavellian (Hobbes and Locke) reaction to it, reducing politics to simply efficient causality. In the latter case, the symbolism of the incarnation (the *logos* become material) led over time for Strauss to both millennialist ideologies and modern empirical science. By contrast, Oakeshott's Hegelian view of philosophy as properly an endeavor of understanding rather than cultural influence, permitted him to treat Christianity as an entire civilization to be historically appreciated for certain of its achievements, in particular what Siedentop calls "the institution of the individual." And as well, for Oakeshott, the excesses of modernity are more attributable to over-estimation of the capacity of abstract intellect and reason to regulate political and social life in a balanced and healthy way, given its blindness to the poetic or creative structure of experiential reality (a failing evident in even Platonic rationalism). To conclude, then, on a summary note of difference: for Strauss the "creative" (the conflation of the theoretical, political and the productive lives) is the cause of "modern darkness;" for Oakeshott appreciation of the creative or poetic structure of reality is an antidote to modern rationalist and ideological disorders.[6]

NOTES

1   Oakeshott's general view of philosophic activity is similar to Hegel's in that it is not a guide to practical activity, except perhaps in a negative sense like Socrates' *daimonion* which told him only when *not* to do something.

2   For development of this theme, see the hundred-odd pages on Augustine in Cochrane 1944.

3   For discussion of this theme see Zuckert and Zuckert 2014, pp. 163-164; for a critical reply see Coats 2019, pp. 71-72. In my view Aristotle is speaking loosely in the *Ethics* when he says on occasion that moral virtue can be for its own sake, intending only to distinguish it from craft and production, not suggest it can be solely for its own sake as in the case of *Theoria.*

4   For development of these themes see my essay "Oakeshott, Strauss and the Romans" in Coats 2019, pp. 66-80.

5   Siedentop provides a detailed summary of medieval canon law and reflection on the individual. He is keen on the distinction between "the individual" (a moral notion) and "individuality" (an aesthetic notion), a distinction Oakeshott does not make. Siedentop also observes that the nominalists such as Ockham began to revise the

Pauline equation of morality and freedom and move toward cultivation of individual autonomy for its own sake. Although Siedentop does not discuss him, this is perhaps why the Swiss medieval scholar Andre de Muralt argues that modernity begins in the 13th and 14th centuries with Scotus and Ockham, a point which neither Strauss nor Oakeshott addresses, although Oakeshott does say that Hobbes was one of the last of the scholastic nominalists.

6   This assertion requires amplification. Neither Oakeshott nor M. B. Foster (whose 1934 *Mind* article Oakeshott drew upon) would have accepted Strauss' definition of creativity in his critique of Collingwood on history, since Strauss never distinguishes between creativity and craft (techne). (Perhaps Strauss never read Foster's article – at any rate, he never acknowledges it.) Also, Oakeshott's view that different modalities of experience create different subject matters would *actually* support Strauss's claim that the three lives should not be conflated, but Oakeshott's broader point is that various modalities of experience arise creatively, i.e., that the form and content of each arise simultaneously, with neither more important than the other, a view which Strauss was too rationalist and anti-nominalist ever to support.

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