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Symposium on David McIlwain's *Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss: The Politics of Renaissance and Enlightenment*

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Introduction

CHRISTOPHER ADAIR-TOTEFF

This special issue of *Cosmos + Taxis* is devoted to David McIlwain's recently published book *Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss: The Politics of Renaissance and Enlightenment* (2019). This journal has been fortunate to have an international group of scholars to comment on McIlwain's book. Timothy Fuller, Stephen Turner, Wendell J. Coats, and David Schaefer represent the United States, Luke O' Sullivan is in Singapore, Scott B. Nelson is in Austria, I am living most of the time in Germany, and David is in Australia. I think that an international approach is important especially in regards to Strauss—a German who lived in briefly in France, then in England before moving to the United States. As Stephen Turner suggests below, Strauss never felt fully at home in the United States. It is to McIlwain's credit that he appears quite attuned to the nuances in Strauss' writings as well as to those in Oakeshott. Both Strauss and Oakeshott have their share of detractors, and it is a point for McIlwain and the contributors to this special issue that they have sought to understand Strauss and Oakeshott on their own terms rather than seeking to castigate them for not being modern enough. Both Oakeshott and Strauss were familiar with the history of western philosophy, so this issue has references to many of the major figures: Plato, Augustine, Hobbes, Rousseau, Kant, and the Neo-Kantians are all represented here. Plus, many modern thinkers, including Carl Schmitt, J. P. Meyer, Friedrich Hayek, and Richard Rorty. Some of the contributors have focused almost exclusively on McIlwain's book whereas some others have used it as a point of departure. But I believe it safe to say that all of the contributors have found much to ponder in his book on Oakeshott and Strauss. I think it also rather safe to say that readers of this special issue will also find much upon which to reflect.

Rather than offer a brief overview of the chapters, I will close with a note of thanks. Thanks to all of the contributors who not only wrote penetrating analyses of McIlwain's book but managed to do so in a timely manner and under the extreme circumstances of the Covid pandemic. Thanks also to McIlwain for agreeing to participate in this special issue. Finally, thanks to Leslie Marsh for entrusting me the task of shepherding this special issue.

Paradoxes of the Modern Moral Imagination: Reflections on Contemplation and Action

TIMOTHY FULLER

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By "moral imagination" I mean, following Charles Taylor, "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations . . . shared by large groups of people . . . that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy."[1]

More specifically, I focus here on the modern moral imagination which informs modern thinking on human relations, and I want to start by considering Thomas Hobbes's observations in his Introduction to the *Leviathan*:

> But there is another saying not of late understood, by which [human beings] might learn truly to read one another, if they would take the pains; and that is *nosce teipsum*, *read thy self* . . . to teach us that for the similitude of the thoughts and passions of one man to the thoughts and passions of another, whosoever looketh into himself and considereth what he doth, when he does *think*, *opine*, *reason*, *hope*, &c, and upon what grounds, he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts and passions of all other men upon the like occasions . . . He that is to govern a whole nation must read in himself, not this or that particular man, but mankind, which though it be hard to do, harder than to learn any language or science, yet when I shall have set down my own reading orderly and perspicuously, the pains left another will be only to consider if he also find not the same in himself.[2]

This sets a direction for the modern moral imagination down to the present day. Let us notice all that Hobbes is saying to us: 1) The thoughts and passions are basically similar from one person to the next; 2) By introspection into one's own inner being one can imagine the basic pattern of reasoning and passion which is common to human beings and thus infer how others are likely to respond in similar circumstances; 3) At the level of governing a nation this knowledge is essential because the task of governing extends far beyond our close personal relations—indeed governing requires a certain kind of impersonal or de-personalized relationship to all subjects of the commonwealth;

1 Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Duke University Press, 2003, p. 23

2 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by Michael Oakeshott. Blackwell's Political Texts, 1946, Intro

4) At the same time, since there is no fundamental difference in these patterns between the rulers and the subjects, there is 5) basic similarity of insight among all human beings; 6) what distinguishes one human being from another is the relative ability accurately to grasp the basic structure of human conduct by bracketing one's idiosyncrasies, foibles and particular goals; the office one holds does not distinguish one's basic humanity; 7) Hobbes, in the *Leviathan*, claims to have worked out in detail what this basic similitude is and the test of his argument is for the reader to consider whether Hobbes has expounded the fundamental character of human relations "scientifically," that is, in detachment from merely personal preferences and goals.

At the heart of Hobbes's thinking thus is the prototype of the modern moral imagination which emphasizes not mere self-interestedness—the aspect of Hobbes's thought we most commonly discuss—but also the capacity to enter into the views of others by inference from the universal basic structure of thought and emotion. We thus arrive at the thought of enlightened or rational self-interest, the conscious and disciplined pursuit of one's interests by which we take account of our inevitable implication in the unavoidable presence of others who are similarly self-interested and capable of disciplining their pursuits in the same way. Reflection on our experience leads us to conclude that our desire to set ourselves apart from, or above, others will be frustrated if we do not learn to behave in a "moral way." The moral way is the disciplined way of enlightened self-interest, which the individual learns through reflection on experience. What we acquire is the practice of self-regulation. We imagine the inner life of others according to the basic similarity of one to another in the common human condition. It is in learning how to discipline our self-interestedness that we demonstrate moral imagination. As Michael Oakeshott says, following Hobbes, "moral activity may be said to be the observation of a balance of accommodation between the demands of desiring selves each recognized by the others to be an end and not a mere slave of somebody else's desires."[3]

Hobbes sets the stage for the further development of the modern moral imagination. Subsequently, Adam Smith and David Hume, for instance, will emphasize the instinct of sympathy, the capacity for pity at the sight of others' pain. The moral imagination allows us to identify ourselves with others even though we must be individuals who are always for ourselves. The combination of self-interestedness with sympathy defines the modern moral imagination. Out of it we imagine and systematically describe a spontaneous civil association of innumerable voluntary transactions governed by a rule of law which permits the growth of wealth and the projection of an ideal of infinitely expanding prosperity. Consider also Immanuel Kant's project to achieve perpetual peace through the expansion of the republican and commercial order to all the world. The movement from Hobbes to Kant and beyond brings to sight the two great aspirations of modernity: perpetual peace and ever-expanding prosperity.

What appears to many to be Hobbes's pessimism about the human condition is nearly the opposite of the truth. Hobbes thought he had outlined the basic science of human conduct which, to the extent we learn it, makes it possible for us to transform human relations along the lines further developed in the movement from Locke to Smith and Hume, to Kant and beyond. These later writers work out the basis for confidence that the spontaneous order enabled by enlightened self-interest is not reliant for its stability on massive coercive power in central governments. Rather, it promises a more enduring stability than that maintained by coercion. The hope of progress in human relations was fostered by the development of this new political science, gradually to expand beyond the commitment to establishing the right internal order for the modern state to the further commitment to realize that order on a universal scale through what Kant was to call the "cosmopolitan point of view."

Kant's essay—"An Old Question Raised Again: Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing?"—advocates a "predictive history," a philosophy of the future not of the past which is to be achieved by "widening" one's view of future time; it is a kind of prophetic history. How is this possible? Only, Kant says, if we commit ourselves in advance to goals which certify the dignity and enlightenment of humanity. That is, we must adopt ideals for the future which are worthy in themselves and then act towards the future under their inspiration. To the extent that already in his time Kant could see republics, what we now call liberal

3 Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, *New and Expanded Edition*, Liberty Fund, 1991, p. 502

democracies, coming into being, he could imagine a federation of republics to promote a world of perpetual peace, a world in which war would cease to exist.

Given the sorry record of human history how can we believe in, or summon the energy to work for, these ideals? Kant's answer is that nothing less is worthy of a being that wishes to achieve true dignity and happiness. Here the moral imagination projects a moral transformation in the human condition. We must imagine our perfection and then gather the resources to pursue that perfection. We need, Kant says, "moralized politics" rather than "political morality."

Kant means by political morality the expedient calculation of self-interest we associate with Machiavelli. By moralized politics Kant means transforming enlightened self-interest to include the goal of a perfected human condition. This goal builds into enlightened self-interest the motive of transforming self-interest, no matter how rationally pursued, into that higher virtue to which enlightened self-interest in the past seemed to be a barrier. Instead of being content with enlightened self-interest, we need to pursue the equation of our self-interest with the well-being of all humanity. This is to say that human beings have the capacity to construct their own vision of perfection and then find ways to make the vision a material reality in human relations. We incorporate the ideal end-state into our self-interest. The science of conduct in Hobbes is to be perfected in the moral idealism of Kant through which the solution of the internal ordering of states will be expanded to resolve the conflicts among the states of the world.

Kant fully recognizes and admits that the plausibility of the path to perfection is hindered by the record of past history. But if human beings are genuinely free in the sense that they can make their ideals for themselves, they can thereby inspire themselves to strive unceasingly to make the ideals reality. We must believe that a worthy goal will not remain abstract, but will be fully realized in practice. Properly devised moral theory will not remain abstract but will, over time, be put into practice. We must become the cause of our own advance to completing the enlightenment project. In order to do this we must achieve a cosmopolitan point of view in which we regard humanity as a whole and not only our local identity. This is to extend Hobbes's original insight for the possibility of a commonwealth—the internal cosmopolitanism of the subjects committed to the state through subscription to a system of laws—to the possibility of a universal commonwealth composed of states who see the similitude of the thoughts and passions in each other. It is as if the idea of the social contract which became the dominant orientation in the liberalization of domestic politics will be extended to the creation of an international social contract.

The emergence of this ideal in Kant's time, which he thought the great revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries incarnated, is for him the sign of progress because the new ideals of individual freedom, peace and prosperity are coming to be the only legitimate ideals human beings can entertain. Their validity does not lie initially in their historical plausibility but in their intrinsic appeal to beings who seek dignity and affirmation in their own terms, and who believe that what their reason tells them is right determines the direction that their public activity will take.

There is a latent moral disposition in the human race which at this moment in history is coming to sight. Whatever the failures of the French Revolution might be, the expressed ideals, the project of social reformation, reveals the destiny of the human race to which we must commit ourselves. Perpetual peace will replace perpetual conflict. Living in hope for the heavenly kingdom will be transposed into a project to use self-interest to transform ourselves into an existence beyond self-interest. This is the apex of the modern moral imagination. Kant sees himself at a revelatory moment in which the moral disposition of the human race begins to reveal itself fully, to be formulated as a project for the future which, he thinks, cannot disappear. Contingent events cannot derail the moral direction. Kant says: "The human race has always been in progress toward the better and will continue to be so henceforth. To him who does not consider what happens in just some one nation but who has regard to the whole scope of all the peoples on earth who will gradually come to participate in progress, this reveals the prospect of an immeasurable time—provided at least that there does not, by some chance, occur a second epoch of natural evolution which will push aside the human race for other creatures . . ."

Under these conditions, the active life overtakes and supersedes the contemplative life as understood by the ancients and the medievals. It is no longer the life outside the cave that is primary, but rather the task to reorganize the life within the cave. The quest for the transcendent must be given material realization immanently in the world.

As the sense of duty to what ought to happen expands, it "will also extend to nations in their external relations toward one another up to the realization of the cosmopolitan society," increasingly resistant to "the mockery of the politician who would willingly take the hope of man as the dreaming of a distraught mind." And offensive war "which constantly retards this advancement" will be renounced altogether.

If the modern moral imagination is preoccupied with proving that we are free in the sense that we can determine our future for ourselves in service to the ideals of peace and prosperity, bolstered by the confidence science and technology impart to it, it is, nevertheless, attended by haunting questions: Is it possible that we can advance materially and decline spiritually? What is the foundation for our idealism, or is there any such thing? From the first appearance of the modern moral imagination there has been an accompanying, dissenting theme. Michael Oakeshott has described this modern dialectic: "Modernity" constitutes itself in the dialectic of what Michael Oakeshott calls the "politics of faith" with the "politics of skepticism." One could call this the internal dialectic of the modern moral imagination.

The skeptical theme is the residual legacy of the Classic/Christian heritage of western civilization which, in refusing to subscribe to Kant's predictive history of the future, remembers and contemplates the past record of the corruption induced by the acquisition of power. As Oakeshott puts it:

> In the politics of faith, the activity of governing is understood to be in the service of the perfection of mankind . . . human perfection is sought precisely because it is not present . . . [and] is to be achieved by human effort, and confidence in the evanescence of imperfection springs here from faith in human power and not from trust in divine providence . . . man is redeemable in history . . . [and] the chief agent of the improvement, which is to culminate in perfection, is government.[4]

Moreover,

> One of the characteristic assumptions, then, of the politics of faith is that human power is sufficient, or may become sufficient, to procure salvation. A second assumption is that the word 'perfection' (and its synonyms) denotes a single, comprehensive condition of human circumstances … Consequently, this style of politics requires a double confidence: the conviction that the necessary power is available or can be generated, and the conviction that, even if we do not know exactly what constitutes perfection, at least we know the road that leads to it.[5]

By contrast, the politics of skepticism expresses "prudent diffidence" in recognizing politics as a necessary evil. The politics of skepticism "expects human conflict . . . seeing no way of abolishing it without abolishing much else at the same time . . . [and thus] to be sparing of the quantity of power invested in government."[6]

"Modernity" constitutes itself both in rejecting its Classic/Christian heritage, acknowledging that heritage only insofar as it is made the preamble to our present, and yet also in its failure to rid itself of that heritage which irritatingly reminds us that the ideal picture of our future opposes the actual structure of reality as we have always experienced it, and as we have experienced it most dramatically in the twentieth century of total war and holocaust. Kant is perfectly aware of the opposition and, in fact, endorses departure from dwelling on the reality of the historical record. For him the construction of ideals for the future

4 Michael Oakeshott, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism*, Yale University Press, 1996, pp. 23-24

5 Oakeshott, op.cit. p. 26

6 Oakeshott, op. cit. p. 33

is the sign of human freedom, freedom understood as liberation from what traditionally was understood to be the natural reality, justified by a claim to knowledge of the only imaginable future for man. This is an eschatological interpretation of history, since Kant, having accepted the view that man is a historical being and thus constantly becoming, cannot accept that this becoming has no point or end state. In this, he anticipates, and tries to refute, what will be the Nietzschean critique that man as historical being has no goal, or only arbitrarily imposed goals stemming from the desire to disguise from themselves meaninglessness or nihilism.

The neo-classical political philosopher, EricVoegelin says, responding to what has happened in history since Kant wrote, "The eschatological interpretation of history results in a false picture of reality; and errors with regard to the structure of reality have practical consequences when the false conception is made the basis of political action."[7]

According to Voegelin, there are two inescapable facts: First, what comes into being will go out of being; second, the mystery of human historical existence cannot be solved. By contrast, what Voegelin calls the Gnostic claimant to final knowledge asserts that human beings can make something that will not end because they know what that goal must be. This assertion seeks to escape the ordeal of conscious existence by imagining the end of history. Modernity blends the vocabulary of utopian idealism into the language of everyday life, putting merely prudential action on the defensive. Kant's critique of "political morality" depends on our accepting that we are in fact in the process of transcending the structure of reality as we have always known it. The implication of a "moralized politics" is that we can use politics to bring politics to an end, perhaps even, as we have seen in our time, justifying Machiavellian means in the name of pursuing Kantian goals. The danger, that abstract idealism will rationalize the most extreme Machiavellian means, is a well known feature of the past century.

As Voegelin further remarks: "In classic and Christian ethics the first of the moral virtues is *Sophia* or *prudentia*, because without adequate understanding of the structure of reality, including the *conditio humana*, moral action with rational co-ordination of means and ends is hardly possible. In the Gnostic dream world, on the other hand, nonrecognition of reality is the first principle. As a consequence, types of action which in the real world would be considered as morally insane because of the real effects which they will have will be considered moral in the dream world because they intended an entirely different effect. The gap between intended and real effect will be imputed not to the Gnostic immorality of ignoring the structure of reality but to the immorality of some other person or society that does not behave as it should behave according to the dream conception of cause and effect."[8] One result is the obsessive search for the individual or group that has wickedly conspired against the project to attain the ideal condition. The liquidation of that individual or group, or at least the reform of their thinking, will be necessary in order that progress toward the ideal may continue. Needless to say, there is no consensus on whom to name as the source of our failure so far to have purified the moral condition.

The modern moral imagination exemplifies a profound dialectical tension between the philosophy of the future and the Classic/Christian inheritance. The defeat of Soviet Communism indicates the emergence of a new dialectical balance involving a resurgence of what Oakeshott called the "politics of skepticism" against the "politics of faith" or political utopianism. But although the most virulent form of this utopianism may have been defeated, many of the milder, less extreme forms survive and pervade the vocabulary of contemporary politics, and other virulent threats seem to be forming.

This is the "post-modern" condition, a situation of declining confidence in the enlightenment claim for a philosophy of the future. This uncertainty is accompanied by aggressive bewilderment about alternative ways of imagining ourselves. The loss of confidence in political utopianism understandably issues in the feeling that we are losing meaning in life because we have put so much faith in politics as the practical locus of meaning. This modern departure from the Platonic, Aristotelian and Biblical understanding that politics is an instrument in the service of that which transcends the mundane makes us reluctant to return—

7 Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, University of Chicago Press, 1968, p. 166

8 Oakeshott, op. cit. p. 169

or leaves us believing there is no path of return—to that which we have spent several centuries dismantling. The modern critique has been both effective and yet unsuccessful. Hannah Arendt describes our situation as "between past and future," and, like Heidegger, argues for "thinking," or the non-calculative use of our rational faculty to open ourselves to the fullness of Being, to rescue ourselves from the modern version of the Sysiphean ordeal. The insight here is that we cannot cure the loss of self-confidence by projecting yet a new and different imagined future, but we cannot, at least not yet, endure resubmitting to that which we thought we had overcome.

Michael Oakeshott urges openness to the "voice of poetry in the conversation of mankind." The voice of poetry is an alternative to, but not a substitute or replacement for, the scientific/technological voice. The voice of poetry is also not a political voice. The poetic voice is a different way of imagining our world, disclosing possibilities which the voices of science, technology and politics obscure. For him, the poetic experience is to move about among images which evoke delight and encourage contemplation. Poetry is not about "fact" or "not-fact" nor about events of which we inquire when and where they took place. "Where imagining is 'contemplating', then, 'fact and 'not-fact' do not appear."[9] Poetic images in contemplation

> provoke neither speculation nor inquiry about the occasion or conditions of their appearing but only delight in their having appeared. They have no antecedents or consequents; they are not recognized as causes or conditions or signs of some other image to follow, or as the products or effects of one that went before; they are not instances of a kind, nor are they means to an end; they are neither 'useful' nor 'useless' . . . Moreover, the image in contemplation is neither pleasurable nor painful; and it does not attract to itself either moral approval or disapproval. Pleasure and pain, approval and disapproval are characteristics of images of desire and aversion, but the partner of desire and aversion is incapable of being the partner of contemplation.[10]

In short, Oakeshott's poetic experience offers a release for a time from the interminable project to perfect ourselves in perpetual peace and ever-growing wealth. He proposes a kind of residual element of contemplation in the form of temporary and momentary releases from our time-boundedness. The project is in principle interminable because there is no guarantee against falling back into war, nor insulation from the failure of material wealth to assuage spiritual longing. Oakeshott allows for a glimpse of the transcendent in the momentary release in contemplation of the poetic voice. He is stoic, but he at least hints at a more comprehensive moral imagination which, while it need not abandon modern accomplishments, would recognize their subordinate and incomplete character.

It is an irony not lost on modern thinkers from the 17th century forward that nature has produced out of herself a being whose identity is constituted in opposition to nature herself, as if nature purposely creates her own dialectical opposition. At least Bacon, Rousseau, Kant and Hegel saw this. In her well-known work, *The Human Condition*,[11] Hannah Arendt reflects on this at length. In the final section of that work, "The Vita Activa and the Modern Age," she says

> The increase in power of man over the things of this world springs . . . from the distance which man puts between himself and the world, that is, from world alienation.[12]

Whereas the *vita contemplativa* or contemplative life seeks reconciliation with the world even as, through the intellect, it looks beyond the world towards the divine source of all being, the *vita activa* or active life seeks to remake the world in order to be at home with a world of its own choosing. As she goes on to say,

9 Oakeshott, RIP, p. 509

10 Oakeshott, RIP, op. cit. p. 510

11 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd edition, University of Chicago Press, 2018

12 Arendt, op. cit. p. 252, fn 2

> Under modern conditions, not destruction but conservation spells ruin because the very durability of conserved objects is the greatest impediment to the turnover process, whose constant gain in speed is the only constancy left wherever it has taken hold.[13]

Modern science has taught us that the world is not as it appears to be to common sense observation, that "man had been deceived so long as he trusted that reality and truth would reveal themselves to his senses and to his reason if only he remained true to what he saw with the eyes of body and mind." The resolve, then, to doubt the validity of received wisdom penetrated every aspect of life in the form of suspicion of any claim to knowledge not grounded in the methods of modern science: "if neither the senses nor common sense nor reason can be trusted, then it may well be that all we take for reality is only a dream."[14] In religion, "If there was salvation, it had to lie in man himself."[15] Man "is confronted with nothing and nobody but himself."[16] What we have in common, as we have already seen in our consideration of Hobbes, is the structure of our minds which allows us to reckon together even when we start from very different initial experiences of the world. Whatever can bind us together, then, must be something to which we have agreed because it simultaneously permits us to interact with a certain confidence that we share what Taylor called a "social imaginary," and yet also at the same time to retain our freedom to express our understanding in terms congenial to our sense of being selves, individuals among other individuals. But this also means that there will be, must be, adjustment and readjustment through time. We may posit comprehensive ends or goals—indeed we often do –but what we will actually experience is perpetual encounter with the distance between "what is" and what we imagine the world "ought to be."

Arendt calls this the great reversal in which contemplation no longer rules action, but action rules contemplation:

> The fundamental experience behind the reversal of contemplation and action was precisely that man's thirst for knowledge could be assuaged only after he had put his trust into the ingenuity of his hands . . . truth was no longer supposed to appear, to reveal and disclose itself to the mental eye of a beholder, there arose a veritable necessity to hunt for truth behind deceptive appearances. Nothing could be less trustworthy for acquiring knowledge and approaching truth than passive observation or mere contemplation . . . knowledge concerned only what one had done himself . . . that it could be tested only through more doing.[17]

This meant the victory of *homo faber*, man the maker or fabricator. But as we have seen in our earlier reflections, the appeal of visions for the future—visions which we have made for ourselves because it appeals to us—runs up against what actually happens in historical experience which repeatedly disappoints the vision where the attraction of the image lacks the power to remake the material substance or to imprint upon it the order we have conceived for it.

We are reminded, therefore, of what radically time-bound creatures we are. Adopting the vocation to remake the world was, and is, the catalyst for remarkable and unprecedented achievements but also remarkable and unprecedented upheavals and destruction. One of the tasks of political philosophy in our time is to adopt a critical stance towards the great reversal, to engage in the Socratic task of not knowing what everyone claims to know, to think against the age while fully aware of its character. This is, in short, to comprehend the modern moral imagination without succumbing to its seductions.

13 Arendt, op. cit. p. 253
14 Arendt, op. cit. p. 277
15 Arendt, op. cit. p. 279
16 Arendt, op. cit. p. 280
17 Arendt, op. cit. p. 290

Two Paths from Neo-Kantianism, Two Political Consequences

STEPHEN TURNER

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David McIlwain's book, *Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss: The Politics of Renaissance and Enlightenment* (2019), is a fascinating account of two key and complex thinkers, their relations and mutual criticisms, and of what we may take to be two radically different accounts of the history of political thinking and of Western political life itself. It is also a survey, necessarily selective, of the vast secondary literature, especially on Strauss; a literature which is contentious and often puzzling, as Strauss himself is. And it is laced with shrewd observations. My comments are partly complementary, but partly in tension with the text. They are only suggestive, but they provide a different perspective on the overall relation between the two thinkers.

There is a sense, not often preserved in the style of writing on political philosophy that the book exemplifies, that all philosophy is local. Philosophy does not operate only in texts, but in verbal dialogue and personal asides—in the talk of philosophy students and their most telling interactions with their teachers, which illuminate the texts themselves. At the time of both Oakeshott's and Strauss's intellectual formation, this generic fact about philosophical education co-existed with a style of philosophy in which the history of philosophy could be and would be brought into play in philosophical discussion. But the history was nevertheless refracted through the local sensibility and present concerns, and used as a local weapon. Hobbes' familiar comment that "The praise of Ancient Authors, proceeds not from the reverence of the Dead, but from the competition and mutual envy of the Living" is perhaps harsh, but is close to the same thought (Hobbes 1651, Review and Conclusion p. 395).

One aspect of the contrast between Strauss and Oakeshott McIlwain does not explore, but which is in a sense philosophically fundamental, is the divergence between their relations to neo-Kantianism. Both were brought into philosophical consciousness in the period Hans-Georg Gadamer described as the "dissolution of neo-Kantianism" ([1976] 1981, p. 40), and indeed in the later part of this period when there were a few hard-core neo-Kantians, like Heinrich Rickert, still prowling the halls, but their successors ruled German philosophy. Each may be said to have rejected neo-Kantianism, though there was not much left to reject. But like the other rejecters, they carried more than a little neo-Kantianism in their philosophical DNA. They nevertheless took different paths from neo-Kantianism, with different results.

The simple story is that they both rejected it. But as McIlwain shows in his discussion of their divergent interpretations of Hobbes, there is always an interesting prob-

lem with rejections: the rejections are never as complete as the rejecters imagine or intend. There is always a trace of dependence on the tradition being rejected. What this trace might consist of, or whether it is more than a trace, amounting to a secret continuity, is a potential matter of dispute, as it was in the case of Hobbes' relation to the classical tradition.

ESCAPING NEO-KANTIANISM

The two basic strands of neo-Kantianism, the Marburg version best represented by Hermann Cohen (2018), and the "Southwest" version represented by Kuno Fischer (1887), differed in a decisive way that is relevant to the relation of Oakeshott and Strauss. Both strands were concerned with the conceptual character of experience, which is what made them Kantian. But both were also concerned with difference—differences between forms of thought, such as law and physics, but also, crucially, with the problem of relativism, which obsessed the neo-Kantians and which they invented many ways to avoid or overcome. The obsession was justified: neo-Kantianism led to relativism.

The tragedy of neo-Kantianism was that it was self-defeating. It began with the idea of affirming the validity of various organized fields of concepts, from theology to history, by showing the necessary presuppositions of each. It ended with a multitude of systems of philosophy which defined the domains differently and attributed conflicting presuppositions to those domains it attempted to analyze. The lesson that one could get the same laws of physics using different mathematical presuppositions killed the neo-Kantian project in physics. The sheer diversity of systems and solutions to the problem of relativism killed the rest of it: the point of the project was to get the presuppositions that were uniquely necessary.[1] What they got was the opposite of uniqueness: a multitude of philosophical systems each working in a different way.

Strauss was not only exposed to this as a student at Marburg, where the legacy of Cohen was still strong, but by his *Doktorvater* Ernst Cassirer who attempted to salvage the project in his philosophy of symbolic forms, the idea of which was to preserve the Kantian notion of the necessary presuppositions of experience by locating them in a symbolic realm which individuals accessed partially, thus keeping the realm non-relativistic, but allowing individual difference, and insisting that such things as knowledge of causality depended on a prior concept of cause located in this symbolic realm. Strauss simply repeats this argument, in simplified form (See Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, [1953] 1965, pp. 89–90; see also Burns 2015, p. 104) This is far from a dead idea even today: a current form is the idea that causal relations are "normative," along with the rest of thought (Rouse 2002).

What survived the debacle of neo-Kantianism was the idea that presuppositions were necessary for thought, though not the idea of presuppositions that were themselves necessary. This idea morphed into enframings, epistemes, conceptual schemes, paradigms, the new realism, and Carl Becker's "climates of opinion" (1932): all this justified Foucault's comment that we are all neo-Kantians now. Whether these survivals are coherent is an open question. The concept originally depended on a notion of "logic" as something other than a matter of formal relations, holding in a netherworld of non-psychological experience-forming concepts. Strauss did not emancipate himself from this generic survival of neo-Kantianism, which was the necessary basis of his critiques of social science for the supposed unstated assumptions he attributed to it.

1 Beiser paraphrases Cohen as follows: "How do we know the a priori? How do we distinguish this mode of knowledge from its opposite, from a posteriori knowledge? The immediate answer is that the distinctive feature of the a priori is absolute universality and necessity, which is distinguished from the comparative universality and contingency of a posteriori knowledge. Absolute universality admits no possible exceptions, whereas relative or comparative universality does" (2018, p. 65). Divergent claims about what was presupposed, in short, undermined claims about absolute universality and necessity.

One sees the importance of non-textual, oral moments, in Strauss's own reflections on the , such as in his paper on "Philosophy as Rigorous Science" (1971), when he recounts comments by Husserl on the neo-Kantian tradition, which Husserl says starts at the top, while he starts at the bottom, and mentions the idea of the foundation of the foundation. By the top, he meant the governing presuppositions of an existent body of thought. By the bottom, he meant the conditions for the possibility of thinking at all. This is a crucial insight into the Weimar era philosophical muddle, which was formative for both Strauss and Oakeshott.

Neo-Kantianism was followed by *Lebensphilosphie*, which was a revolt against the idea that the experience of life, constantly changing and varying, could be characterized in terms of its constitution by concepts, which were by definition timeless and rigid, placed in and defined by the conceptual logic of their relation to other concepts. *Existenzphilosophie* was an attempt to characterize the experience that lay beyond rigid concepts; the ontological turn was a related attempt to discuss what is—though in both cases it was acknowledged that there was no such thing as direct access to real experience, now thought of as flowing and disordered, and only accessible through flawed enframings or arbitrary decisions. This was a description of a philosophical situation which one wanted to escape. Strauss also wanted to escape. The logical positivists did so by dumping the idea of conceptually ordered experience in favor of raw data, and the Kantian idea of logic as conceptual connections in favor of logic as pure formalism.

By Strauss' own testimony, he considered Heidegger to represent "present-day philosophy in its highest form" (Strauss and Klein 1970, np). The thing he wished to free this philosophy of was a particular thing it "presupposes" namely "the so-called historical consciousness." And he took it as his responsibility to "understand the partly hidden roots of that consciousness." But this was a critical task: what was his own alternative to Heidegger and the radical relativism it implied?

The answer can be seen in the phrase "soiled fragments of the pure truth" (Strauss 1953, p. 124). Cohen had defended Judaism from the common nineteenth century Protestant view that it was a primitive religion: prior to and lower on the evolutionary scale than Protestantism. His defense was framed in terms of the idea of a future evolution in religion toward a rational religion, in which the irrational elements of each religion would be washed away and their distinctive contribution would be preserved. The Jewish contribution was to be the idea of atonement, and the *Noahide*: particularly the idea of a responsibility to the stranger. The general idea of religious differences being overcome through a process of contact and rationalization was in the air: Émile Durkheim had alluded to it in the conclusion to *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* ([1912] 1915); his early death left his successor Celestine Bouglé to complete the task of writing up the idea.

Philosophically, this was a solution to the problem of relativism that bedeviled neo-Kantianism. Everyone was both right and wrong, but we did not know yet which parts were right and which wrong. But it depended on a certain optimism about progress, progress toward a universal culture, that the Great War destroyed. By the time Strauss was developing philosophically, a great pessimism—well represented by Spengler, had taken hold. Strauss thus found another language for speaking of difference: one that not only replaced the notion of progress or future evolutionary convergence but turned it upside down, so that the history of philosophy could then be seen as regress, a from the classical "living in accordance with nature" thinking he attributed to the classics into the shards of the enframings revealed by Heidegger's account. This implied a method: a distinctive, natural right or classical, way of dealing with difference and therefore of defeating relativism. By treating difference in terms of doxa, doxa as soiled fragments of the pure truth, and difference as something from which we can ascend through philosophical dialectic to the truth, we could overcome the obvious empirical and historical fact of radical disagreement.

Oakeshott took a different path out of this problematic. Experience, in the most comprehensive sense of the word, was his central concept. In his notebooks of 1931, writing about sex, he wrote "What we want is experience, not knowledge about the facts. …What is dangerous, deadening, monstrous, is knowledge *in place* of experience" (2014, p. 207). This was the lesson of *Lebensphilosophie*. In *Experience and its Modes* (1933), he divided the totality of experience, the province of philosophy, into modes—not so different from what Eduard Spranger did about the same time in his *Lebensformen* (*Types of Men*) ([1914] 1928), from

whence Wittgenstein took the term "forms of life." Oakeshott preserved something of the notion of presupposition in the term "platforms" in *On Human Conduct* (1975). These were never absolute, always temporary. There was no escape from relativism or historicism, but the problem lost its spiritual punch: both were mundane features of all thought, not a surprising and disturbing discovery about the instability and non-necessity of our deepest presuppositions, as it was for the neo-Kantians. This was not a new thought for Oakeshott: already in his notebooks of the 1920s he mention's, in relation to theology, Vaihinger's philosophy of "as if" and notes the close relation (but differences) between dogma, hypothesis, and fiction (2014, p. 129).

In *On Human Conduct* his political theory described the antinomies within a specific tradition: the West. Rather than philosophical alternatives, the antinomies were between the ideal expressions of practical orientations which resulted from intrinsic ambiguities or contradictions in the tradition itself in which an element of each of the antinomic pairs was preserved, at the level of practice, in the other member of the pair: one cold not have one without a tincture at least of the other. Ironically, Strauss—who dismissed Weber's antinomic examples as dilemmas which could be easily resolved on the practical level—made an antinomy, between Athens and Jerusalem, fundamental to his thought: between the theology of the denial of God and the philosophy of the denial of philosophy. But this was not a practical antinomy faced in political experience, like Oakeshott's and Weber's: it was a stark and ungroundable existential choice between fundamentally incompatible alternatives.

This points to a basic difference in their approach to the Heideggerian problem of the inadequacy and falseness of all enframings, and its implications for any politics based on one. Oakeshott never leaves the world of experience, though he includes religious experience. He has no interest in the best regime, or a return to the roots of the western tradition in order to either save it or overcome it. For him, experience, the tacit, and the contingent choice of platforms or as if mental constructions had priority over, and a continuous life beyond, explicit theories, which were abridgements. There was no such thing as the higher rationality: there was only the continuing intellectual quest for coherence, a task that could never be completed, and like politics itself, was not directed to a final end.

To theorize is to arrest the ongoing flow of experience, to produce an enframing that is inherently limiting, but at the same time revealing. To philosophize in the sense of producing the right theory of something in the world of experience was to produce an abridgement rather than the whole truth. Nothing could be farther from Strauss and the idea that one could synthesize the results of these enframings and return to the unfragmented source of political philosophy and put the shards back together. For Oakeshott, in a political crisis, "salvation" can only come from the unimpaired resources of the tradition itself (1962, p. 126), and not from "a model laid up in heaven" (1962, p. 127). But they are both responding to the Heideggerian problem. Oakeshott gives a path around it; Strauss embraces it and seeks not so much to resolve it as to preserve the promise of resolving it through the return to "nature," in a sense that Heidegger had already ruled out.

POLITICS

One of the merits of McIlwain's book is that it recounts some of what is jarring about both Strauss and Strauss's thought. I can add to and confirm his discussion by reference to these non-textual moments. Strauss certainly did flirt with fascism. In conversation, J. P. Mayer, unprompted, told me of meeting Strauss in a library in Germany, presumably in Berlin, and Strauss telling him that he regarded Mussolini's fascism as a model for a solution to the problem of politics. Mayer, to whom I will return, is a useful contrast case. He also wound up in London, became close to Tawney, was a Jew, but on the Left: as the archivist for the SPD (Social Democratic Party) he had discovered the early Marx manuscripts and edited them, and was welcomed in England by the Labour party. But his thought developed in a different direction from Strauss's, and the difference is revealing.

At the end of his wartime book on Weber *(*[1944] 1956*),* and after forming friendships with R. H. Tawney, a prominent Christian Socialist Christopher Dawson, and T. S. Elliot, his editor at Faber, who was producing *Christianity and Culture* (1949) at the time, J. P. Mayer commented that: "Weber had only a glimpse of the underlying values of the west—in spite of the *Protestant Ethic*." Mayer took these underlying values to be Christian even if secularized, and said that Weber "failed to understand that these values inherent in and interwoven with Western world were not yet destroyed by the impact of rationalization…" 1965, p. 105). One must ask whether this lack of understanding is equally true, or more true, of Strauss. As I will explain, I take this to be a significant issue, and indirectly but importantly connected to Oakeshott as well.

Stanley Rosen once startled me by commenting that Strauss and Marcuse, whom he also knew well, "didn't know what country they were in." He went on to say that Strauss and Jacob Klein would rush from his seminar to watch "Gunsmoke" and "Perry Mason" on television, and analyze them in terms of the categories of Aristotle's *Poetics*. They even followed Raymond Burr to "Ironsides," which they were less enthusiastic about. Whatever Strauss absorbed about the United States was limited by the fact that he could, and did, continue to live in an academic and personal extension of the German Jewish milieu they had left. I grew up in this milieu myself. As a young child I was cared for by a Jewish couple from Hamburg who had barely escaped. Adjustment to American life was difficult. The husband, Theo, had taken a job with a jewelry maker, but could not adjust to the casualness of his American co-workers who left diamonds unattended on the bench to go to lunch. This was a level of social trust he could not comprehend or adapt to. The émigré experience was different for intellectuals, but also, in many cases, separated them from these kinds of shocks and allowed them to ignore the "country they were living in"—a country they had been trained in Germany to despise and condescend to.

Much of the secondary literature on Strauss discusses the ways he changed. But he understood the world through concepts and in the light of prior experiences that effectively precluded his understanding the country he was living in. What were the formative experiences? Edward Banfield tells about Strauss discussing, in class, his father's dealing with the peasants who went to him to sell grain.

> Strauss's father, an orthodox Jew, was a prosperous grain merchant. Once, illustrating the thought that a man's demeanor may be an artifact of a bargaining strategy, Strauss told how as a boy he watched his father deal with the peasants who came to his office to sell their grain. The merchant held a newspaper before his face while a peasant stood first on one foot and then on the other before him. After a rather long wait he suddenly lowered the paper and announced the price in a take-it-or-leave-it tone (Banfield 1991, p. 493).

Just telling this story implies a certain tone-deafness, or worse, both on Banfield's part and on Strauss's. The scene recalls the Mississippi custom of the settle, in which cotton grown by sharecroppers was weighed, and the powerless producers were cheated and kept in debt. The view of the world in which this was an acceptable bargaining strategy is not liberal, and is devoid of aristocratic honor as well, not to mention Cohen's focus on Noahide. Yet it is a world which Strauss approved of. He recalled as a child hearing of pogroms in Russia, He comments that

> At that time it could not happen in Germany. We Jews there lived in profound peace with our non-Jewish neighbors. There was a government, perhaps not in every respect admirable, but keeping an admirable order everywhere; and such things as pogroms would have been absolutely impossible ([1962] 1997, p. 313).

Admirable order everywhere, profound peace assured by it: this was a good enough state, even the best of possible actual states, given Strauss's own view that no actual state could overcome its contradictions, and that imperfection was the intrinsic feature of all states.

It is important to see how this connects to his political philosophy. As Robert Howse has argued (2014), on the basis of the texts, Strauss was a "man of peace." But the peace he sought in politics was intercommunal peace. He thought there was no such thing as genuine assimilation for Jews. He had no use for the idea of Christian Europe in the sense of T. S. Eliot or Christopher Dawson: a largely tacit inheritance that existed not in formal religion but in, as Henrik DeMan put it, explaining the ethical impulse behind socialism, a precapitalist disposition grounded in their social experiences, "which can only be understood with reference to the days of feudalism and the craft guilds, to Christian ethics, and to the ethical principles of democracy," which DeMan thought had "traced deep furrows" of affect in the European working man ([1927] 1984, p. 39). This idea of the West did not apply to Jews, who lived under the law—something explicit, and the product of revelation and study, not experience. Perhaps out of revulsion against Heidegger's idea of *Bodenständigkeit* (attachment to the soil or rootedness) and its implied alternative, Jewish deracination, Strauss was equally dismissive of the idea of deeply rooted pre-political conditions for liberal democracy and modern freedom. For him, liberalism did not grow organically out of Anglo-Saxon individualism, as Alan Macfarlane (1978) and many predecessors back to Edward Augustus Freeman, would have had it. It grew out of a philosophical error.

What the story about his father together with his praise of a state which produces admirable order reveals is a particular political model: intercommunal peace between groups that do not share a morality or culture, ruled by order-keepers who also do not share their morality or culture. The morality needed for such a state is the morality of the admirable order-keepers of the state. In this case it was: rule by incorruptible Prussian bureaucrats recruited from the impecunious nobility, for whom honor mattered above all, and who had no morality in common with the people they administered over and whom they looked down upon and distrusted. This was indeed a political model admired by many other people, most consequentially by Woodrow Wilson. It proved not to be the safe harbor for the Jews that it seemed to be at the time. But only because it succumbed to democracy. This was Strauss's formative political life lesson.

Philosophizing on the basis of this experience took some odd paths. Was Strauss's idea of returning to classical natural right as a justification of this political ideal more or less determined by his membership in the *Bildungsbürgertum*? Returning to the classical Greek philosophers was utterly conventional for this class. Even Marx studied Democritus and Epicurus for his dissertation. The tyranny of Greece over Germany, discussed by Butler ([1935] 2012), extended to politics. Jellinek, Weber, Schumpeter, and countless others took their bearings from ancient politics. There is no surprise here. Nor was Strauss's affection for Plato. His childhood political model was an imperfect approximation of Plato's Republic.

When one takes the step of returning to the classics, one is more or less compelled to justify it by ignoring the facts of culture, or tradition, and the tacit that undergird explicit political usages and practices. Strauss objected to Collingwood for pointing out that "Plato's *Republic* is not a statement of timeless truths about the nature of politics, but rather the expression of the Greek ideal of the polis" (Collingwood 1946, p. 229; cited at Strauss 1952, p. 575; Culp 2015, p. 153). Yet he also contended that the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides are shaped (and marred) by the "substantialist" and "humanist" presuppositions characteristic of the "Greek mind" of their authors (ibid.). As one commentator explains, "Strauss contends, to the contrary, that a more careful attention to these authors would show that what Collingwood mistakes for an expression of a "Greek ideal" or a tendency of the "Greek mind" is in fact a reflection of the properly philosophic motivations of the author in question (see Strauss 1952, p. 569, for example)" (Culp 2015, p. 153).

But Collingwood had a point. The moral and political vocabulary of the Greeks differed in significant ways from our own, and generated philosophical problems for them that differed from the problems ours, and had a tacit affectual background that is inaccessible to us but obviously quite unlike our own. Oakeshott would have been on the same page: for him concepts had a history, and political concepts referred to actual political realities. J. P. Mayer drew a related lesson. He became a historian of the French lib-

erals of the nineteenth century, and was for many years the editor of the *Oeuvres complètes* of Tocqueville, whose *Democracy in America* ([1835] 2003) was focused on its novel democratic culture. Mayer also quoted Taine, to make the point that

> Underneath institutions, charters, written laws, the official almanac, there are the ideas, the customs, the character, the condition of classes, their respective position, their reciprocal sentiments; in short, a ramified network of deep-seated, invisible roots beneath the visible trunk and foliage. It is they which feed and sustain the tree. Plant the tree without roots, it will languish, and will fall at the first gust (Mayer [1961] 1979, p. 78).

Mayer's reaction to emigration was the opposite of Strauss's: he became a student of, admirer of, and participant in the British political culture he had adopted. People like Strauss, in contrast, like the Frankfurt school, exuded barely concealed contempt and isolated themselves in the conveniently available Germanic bubbles. The fact that during Strauss's time at the New School the French refugees could not stand dealing with the Germans and created an alternative institution is revealing. There was a parochialism to these emigres that Strauss never shed.

To return to these texts of Oakeshott and Strauss today nevertheless raises the Straussian question of which is true? For Oakeshott, there is no truth of the sort Strauss discusses. Moreover, we are, in relation to the Greeks, in the same situation as Strauss was: we don't know what country we are in. We can concoct a sense of the Greek mind from the texts, but this can never be more than an attractive hypothesis. Strauss consistently accused other interpreters of doing just this. But of course he did exactly the same thing. Our cognitive and epistemic limitations, conditioned at least in part by the historical circumstance of our experiences, including our outside the text philosophical interactions and the common knowledge we share with our contemporaries but not with the historical figures we study, assures this.

We can have dialogue, but it is dialogue with our own creations out of Plato, not with Plato. Understanding is a prerequisite for judging truth. And if we think this is about their truth, we need to remind ourselves that we have produced their errors and inconsistencies through our own interpretations, which are bound to our own world. Collingwood grasped this:

> The living past of history lives in the present; but it lives not in the immediate experience of the present, but only in the self-knowledge of the present. This Dilthey has overlooked; he thinks it lives in the present's immediate experience of itself; idea of history ([1939] 1970, p. 174)

So did Oakeshott: "The past is a certain sort of reading of the present" (1962, p. 150). Strauss promises to overcome this kind of historicism, which is to say he promises to overcome the cognitive limitations inherent in being human. But does he? Or does he just produce the same kind of blinkered readings of the texts he accuses others of doing?

Strauss ridiculed Sabine's *History of Political Theory* ([1937] 1973) as a history of error. Sabine, a distinguished philosopher, who wrote the textbook as a parallel to those by Frank Thilly ([1914] 1957) and Charles Ellwood (1938), according to a kind of formula in which chapters provided context and explained the criticisms and how they informed later thinkers, implicitly told a story of intellectual and political progress. But Sabine was not the victim of a teleological doctrine of progress of the kind that Strauss made a show of rejecting. His notion of "progress" was that things that once made sense no longer made sense in new circumstances, and that the critics of the great thinkers of the same era often had a point. It was, instead, Strauss himself who taught the history of political thought as a history of error. The error was falling away from classical political philosophy toward liberalism. Like Marcuse's "On Tolerance" (Marcuse et al. 1965), he turned the tables on liberalism, and insisted that it was liberalism that was intolerant, and that the modern liberal demand for tolerance can turn into a "ferocious hatred of those who have stated most clear-

ly and most forcefully that there are unchangeable standards founded in the nature of man and the nature of things" (Strauss 1959, p. 439; quoted in Burns 2015, p. 97).

But this affirmation of "those who have stated … that there are unchangeable standards" was not a political theory: it was an epistemic claim to the effect that there was, or might be, a discoverable natural "right" or good that the classics had at least pointed to. This was the stick he used to beat his opponents with. The "political" part of the doctrine was that the contingent claim that the putative truth in question was accessible only to a philosophical elite. This produced a nice catch-22: to fail to grasp this showed that one was not of this elite. But not only was Strauss unable to impart this truth, it is questionable that he even believed in it. Public or exoteric doctrine was one thing, and oddly, the doctrine of esotericism was his exoteric doctrine. But there is more than a hint, in his admiration for Heidegger and the careers of such followers of Heidegger as Levinas, that the hidden truth was that there was no hidden truth. And that this truth, the truth that could not be revealed, is what distinguished philosophy from religion.

His "philosophical" position was thus a dogma about dogma, a meta-dogma, rather than a substantive "truth" of any kind. How does this qualify as political philosophy? Only in an indirect way, through the doctrine of esotericism, which is why it has proven to be attractive to a variety of political persuasions. A Harvard law professor told me that they taught their students that judges were policy-makers, that the lawyers who believed in the letter of the law and the rule of law were rubes, and that they, unlike the rubes, had access to a higher morality. Ronald Dworkin believed something similar, and defended it in his philosophy of law (2011). This is disquietingly close to the teaching of Strauss that existing political regimes were based on false premises, but were worth supporting as feeble, but safe and harmless alternatives to the unachievable best regime. This, needless to say, is an exercise in cynical reason.

Whether the cynical contempt for public truth that led the Bush administration into the war in Iraq derived in some way from Strauss is not a question I can resolve. But I can recognize elite cynicism about the premises and affections that make up ordinary people's understanding of the political order. Strauss didn't invent it. But to the extent that he justified it, he is an authoritarian rather than a conservative, or, put differently, the regime he preferred was not the American founding, but the peaceful regime of his childhood, which could not depend on a common morality, and required authority.

A FINAL NOTE

The theorists of post-traditionalism, such as Anthony Giddens, grasped that, on the one hand, communal traditions which preclude assimilation persisted in "post-traditional" society[2], and that the problem of post-traditional society was to find a new kind of accommodation that acknowledged this but at the same time produced intercommunal peace. Liberal tolerance was too weak, too dependent on assimilation to a common culture, and too inconsistent with most of the communal traditions that needed to be pacified, to suffice. Strauss's solution we have seen. Oakeshott's account of political change was to see any crisis as a crisis within a tradition, and any solution as one within the unimpaired resources of the tradition.

Is post-traditional multi-cultural society at best one with a democratic deficit and a managed public sphere, which secures peace through a combination of authority, administrative wisdom, and concessions to the claims of unassimilable communal groupings, who are "empowered" or disempowered in accordance with the higher morality of the elite? Is the tropism to this kind of illiberalism a sign that the time of liberalism is finally over? Or are there unimpaired resources of the political tradition that would allow for a non-authoritarian, non-administrative solution to the problem of intercommunal relations? This is the question that the political thinking of both Oakeshott and Strauss sensitize us to, without answering.

2 A point Strauss himself forcefully made in "Why We Remain Jews" ([1962] 1997).

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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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Political Philosophy versus Poetic Individuality: A Response to David McIlwain's *Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss: The Politics of Renaissance and Enlightenment*

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Leo Strauss and Michael Oakeshott are widely recognized as two of the leading conservative political theorists of the twentieth century. One of the many virtues of David McIlwain's fine book is that he appreciates that the conservative label is only partly applicable in each case.[1] Both Strauss and Oakeshott were "radical" thinkers, in the literal sense of aiming to uncover the deepest roots of our contemporary intellectual and cultural predicament, even as they were conservative, that is, moderate or anti-utopian, in their practical political stances. And for both, the life of theory, rather than political activism, was primary.

There were other important areas of agreement between the two men, as McIlwain brings out. Both appreciated the practical moderation engendered by England's traditional political institutions—even while acknowledging a tension between that moderation and the radicalism that a commitment to philosophizing requires. Both admired Winston Churchill as an exemplar of the political greatness that England's free institutions might sometimes generate. Both championed an older idea of liberal education, aimed at pursuing the truth (through the study of classic books) for its own sake, rather than chiefly for any utilitarian, let alone partisan, aims. Each thinker appreciated the need to defend liberal political institutions against the threats posed by twentieth-century totalitarianism (of the left and the right), and opposed the "universal homogeneous state" espoused by Strauss's erstwhile friend, the Hegelian-Marxist Alexandre Kojève. And both—in common with the philosophically profound, but politically dangerous, Martin Heidegger—saw the threat to human freedom constituted in our time by the empire of technology, as well as by the attendant rise of the "last" or "mass man" warned against by Heidegger's antecedent Friedrich Nietzsche.

Nonetheless, there were major differences between Strauss's and Oakeshott's scholarly enterprises that McIlwain points out but sometimes, in his endeavor to provide a balanced approach, understates. The most important difference that I shall highlight concerns the extent to which they conceived and practiced the project of interpreting the writings of a great thinker as entailing the recovery, to the extent possible, of the author's *own understanding* of what he was saying, as opposed to reinterpreting a classic text in such a way as to conform to the scholar's own views. Strauss, I contend, consistently adopted the former approach, as a propaedeutic to developing his own reflections, while Oakeshott repeatedly favored the latter. For this reason, I believe that Strauss offers a better guide to the understanding of philosophic texts—and therefore of their implications for human life today—than Oakeshott does.

OAKESHOTT ON HOBBES

I shall demonstrate this point first by focusing on key aspects of Oakeshott's interpretation of the writings of Thomas Hobbes, the thinker with whom he was most closely identified. It should be noted, at the outset, that the initial published encounter between Oakeshott and Strauss was an extremely generous, and largely favorable, review that Oakeshott wrote of the first book by Strauss to have been published in English, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (Oakeshott 1937; Strauss 1936). But the focus of that review was chiefly on Strauss's contention that Hobbes's political philosophy was based on his observation and study of human nature (including the study of history, most importantly Thucydides' *History,* which he had translated), rather than (as the then-regnant scholarly consensus held) on the materialistic physics he set forth in other writings. While questioning the evidentiary basis of Strauss's interpretation, Oakeshott appeared open to it. Only briefly in the review did Oakeshott allude to what would become a major element of his own subsequent Hobbes studies, the claim that Hobbes was more indebted to the "Stoic-Christian tradition," and hence less fully a revolutionary thinker, than Strauss maintained (Oakeshott 1937, p. 144). As McIlwain points out, in his next treatment of Hobbes's thought, which became the chapter on "The Crisis of Modern Natural Right" in his 1953 book *Natural Right and History,* Strauss appears to respond to Oakeshott's position (without naming him), when citing the view of "present-day scholars" who question Hobbes's originality, some even "com[ing] close to suggesting that he was one of the last Schoolmen" (Strauss 1953, p. 167). In that chapter Strauss aims to elaborate the authentically novel, transformative character of Hobbes's teaching.

It is somewhat curious, in view of what McIlwain terms Oakeshott's "later emphasis on the continuities of Hobbes's thought" with that of his predecessors, to note that only two years prior to his review of Strauss's book, Oakeshott, in a 1935 survey of recent Hobbes studies, had warned against the "danger" of the "at least, semi-medieval portrait" that they offered of Hobbes's thought, since there could be "no doubt that Hobbes's writings do represent a profound revolution in European thought, . . . [and] that he was one of the most original of philosophers" (p. 110, n. 14, citing Oakeshott 2007). In other words, in the period when he published his Strauss review, McIlwain's own fundamental position was not far from Strauss's own. By contrast, in his 1960 essay on "The Moral Life in the Writings of Thomas Hobbes," as McIlwain points out, Oakeshott adopted a reading that "was almost diametrically opposed to Strauss's" emphasis on Hobbes's condemnation of pride, embodying "the war-avoidant attitude of the bourgeoisie," and providing the decisive ground for Locke's more prudent presentation of the grounds of modern liberal society (p. 89).

In contrast to Strauss, Oakeshott went so far as to "trac[e] Hobbes's conception of pride to Augustine," who "had distinguished between the just pride in emulation of God" and "the vainglorious pride born of contention with God." (This despite the fact, I note, that in Chapter 15 of *Leviathan* Hobbes specifically identifies pride as a violation of the ninth "law of nature" aimed at promoting peace, since it tends to weaken people's disposition to obey established authority, while in no way limiting his condemnation to its "vainglorious" form.) McIlwain suggests that the change in McIlwain's emphasis "may have been partly a reaction to Strauss's privileging" of Hobbes's break with earlier thought (p. 89 and 110 n. 14; Oakeshott 1975, p. 123).[2] But more fundamentally, as McIlwain observes, Oakeshott "wished to recall liberal modernity to a foundation of magnanimous pride and Renaissance individuality," believing that the "rediscovery" of that foundation would provide conditions whereby society's "lions," that is, "those citizens who were capable of a rich inner life of high sensibility and adventurous self-expression" (such as he himself evidently aspired to achieve) would "come to predominate" and "set the pattern" of many "public practices" (p. 108).

In further pursuit of his enterprise of turning Hobbes's timid, egalitarian, acquisitive human being into one guided by a spirit of aristocratic liberalism, Oakeshott redescribes the fundamental passion that Hobbes makes the foundation of obedience to civil authority, the fear of violent death, as a fear of "dishonourable" or "shameful" death (Oakeshott 1991, pp. 306, 343), a qualification that Hobbes nowhere adds.[3] In that connection, whereas Hobbes states that in motivating men to obey the "covenant" obliging them to obey a sovereign, the fear of punishment is the passion to be reckoned on, since the alternative, "pride"

in keeping one's word, is "a generosity too rare to be presumed on," given most men's inclination to pursue "wealth, command, or sensual pleasure" (Hobbes 1994, pp. 87-88), Oakeshott, as McIlwain points out, "seized on some relatively secondary points" in *Leviathan* that he maintained "gestured toward a crucial but deliberately understated role for the noble character" in the original "establishment of the contract" by which men are obliged to civil obedience, notably Hobbes's reference to the source of the "relish of Justice" lying in "a certain Noblenesse or Gallantnesse of courage, (*rarely found*), by which a man scorns to be beholden for the contentment of his life, to fraud, or breach of promise" (p. 106; Hobbes 1994, ch. 15 [my emphasis]; Oakeshott 1991, p. 350).

But aside from Hobbes's explicit denial that such nobility is commonly found, the issue of whether noble individuals might have initiated the social contract is quite beside the point. As McIlwain acknowledges (p. 105), "Hobbes had not lingered over the details of how a covenant of mutually authorized wills might actually be achieved in the state of nature," precisely because (I observe) he *denies* historicity to that condition as a universal situation (Hobbes 1994, ch. 13, p. 77), and therefore has no need to explain how a social contract could have been agreed to in it. Just as the state of nature is simply a hypothesis designed to illustrate *why* government is needed (by imagining a bare-bones situation without any artificial restraints on our conduct) and what its true purpose must be (to protect us from the consequences of anarchy), the notion of a contract is meant as an intellectually explanatory hypothesis, not a historical account.

Yet in order to avoid the consequences that Hobbes demonstrated to follow from his account of the state of nature, Oakeshott found himself compelled to espouse an interpretation that as McIlwain acknowledges will "appear overly ingenious, if not disingenuous," except to those who assume that Hobbes (for unexplained reasons) stated it "esoterically" (p. 106). In his wish to restore "liberal modernity" to what he wished to see as its true foundation in "magnanimous pride and Renaissance individuality," in an epoch (our own) "in which liberal society had declined into narrow-hearted acquisitiveness" (p. 108), Oakeshott not only took unjustifiable liberties with Hobbes's text, but came to dismiss with vehemence those who maintained a contrary view. So contemptuous was Oakeshott of the economic acquisitiveness that beset modern liberal society that, as McIlwain observes, he dismissed the Canadian political theorist C. B. Macpherson's book *The Theory of Possessive Individualism,* which Strauss cited for its agreement with his Hobbesean interpretation of Locke, "in one of his most uncivil footnotes," calling Macpherson's "reduction of the unfolding of Renaissance individuality 'into a history of so-called market-society capitalism'" as "a notorious botch,'" even remarking (in words that must have been directed at Strauss, as McIlwain observes, no less than at Macpherson) that anyone who believed such claims "is capable of believing anything" (p. 108; Oakeshott 1975, p. 242, n. 1).[4] (Aside[5] from other difficulties, we wonder how Oakeshott managed to shoehorn Hobbes, who published his writings in the mid-17th century, into the Renaissance.)

Still another oddity in Oakeshott's interpretation of Hobbes's argument, noted by McIlwain, is his insistence, in response to Strauss's emphasis on the philosopher's "dry atheism" (which helped keep his reputation from being redeemed until well after Spinoza's was), that Hobbes "died in mortal fear of hellfire"—an assertion for which he offers no textual support, and which is contradicted by what Strauss observed was the "optimistic and worldly tenor of Hobbes's writings" (pp. 102-3; Strauss 1959, p. 171; Oakeshott 1991, p. 291). As McIlwain astutely observes, whereas Hobbes had explicitly dismissed fears regarding an afterlife as "old wives' tales," Oakeshott needed "to discover some kind of religious sensibility in Hobbes to ensure that the non-substantiveness of his civil association [that is, its lack of directedness towards some positive, unifying goal] could still be guided by the virtuous idiom of conduct characteristic of those noble individuals capable of the kind of rich and generous inner life" that Oakeshott would subsequently term "self-enactment" (p. 103).

Simply put, Oakeshott was again guilty of rewriting Hobbes to make him say and believe what Oakeshott wished he had held, rather than what he actually wrote. As McIlwain observes, "Oakeshott's 'Hobbes' may have been more indicative of [his] 'retaliation' against the kind of 'rationalism' which the actual seventeenth-century Hobbes was advancing," given Oakeshott's determination, for polemical reasons of his own, to place Hobbes's moral teaching in the "medieval tradition" of Stoicism and Christianity rath-

er than view it as a critique of Aristotle's "theory of the passions" (pp. 94-5). Indeed, in contrast to Strauss's repeated emphasis on the need to understand a serious author's thought as he understood it himself, rather than quickly assuming that we readers grasp it better than he did, Oakeshott, as McIlwain points out (p. 100), in his Introduction to *Leviathan*, suggested that Hobbes's failure to appreciate his indebtedness to a "tradition" would have required him to see "the link between scholasticism and modern philosophy which is only now becoming clear to us."

Instead of taking seriously Hobbes's claim to be the true founder of political science, McIlwain explains, Oakeshott "maneuver[ed] to depict" that science in a "quainter, more imprecise, and (almost) medieval sense," lying somewhere "between medieval and modern science" (p. 98).[6] But as Strauss remarked in the essay in which he cites Hobbes's barely concealed atheism, "[o]ne cannot ignore Hobbes"—that is, the real Hobbes rather than a softened, imaginary, traditional one—since he "ushered in" "the modern type" of social doctrine, focused on power (culminating in Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power), "with impunity," lest we lose sight of the grounds of our own commonly held beliefs (Strauss 1959, p. 172). In contrast, Oakeshott's unsubstantiated attribution of religious dread to Hobbes, just to ground his own wished-for vision of noble Christian souls informally guiding a liberal society, can only blind us to our situation.

In the end, while McIlwain acknowledges the likelihood "that Strauss's reading of Hobbes shows Oakeshott's reading to be (at certain points) untenable," but that Oakeshott may not even have intended "to provide a merely textually faithful commentary" on Hobbes's writing, he understates the difficulty by downplaying the significance of this difference, holding that the more "profound divergence of Strauss and Oakeshott" concerned "the implications of modern morality for political life and the relation of this political problem" to what Strauss (1953, p. 323) referred to as "the status of 'individuality' in modern thought" (p. 109). For Strauss, unlike Oakeshott, the process of dissecting the grounds of our present crisis began with a meticulous effort at reconstructing its true intellectual sources, as well as the classical alternative to them.

More needs to be said here about two interrelated aspects of Oakeshott's position: (1) the nature of his "non-substantive" vision of political society whose tone is nonetheless set by aristocratic lions, including its unacknowledged Kantian foundation, and (2) his vision of the noble, "self-enacting" individual who is to flourish in, and supply guidance to, that society.

OAKESHOTT'S QUEST FOR "SELF-ENACTMENT"

With reference to the first of these points, McIlwain explains that "Oakeshott recognized that human society is perennially drawn toward 'the unity of politics and religion'" and hence would always stand in need of "skepticism" to "recall political activity from the religious 'frontier,'" since "only when the City of Man is viewed in these skeptical, non-substantive terms" does "the autonomy required for moral conduct becom[e] possible," just as (in Oakeshott's understanding) the religious believer "is not only necessarily left to subscribe to his obligations as best he may but can do so only in self-chosen actions, in contrast to a divine Will to which he must submit" (p. 178; Oakeshott 1975, p. 158). In support of his notion of political skepticism, in the sense of anti-utopianism, Oakeshott cites Augustine, while acknowledging that he was hardly a skeptic when it came to religion. But in reality, Oakeshott's conception of a non-substantive politics (p. 178), in which government abstains not only from prescribing adherence to particular religious doctrines, but also from directing citizens to specific morally preferred modes of conduct, in the name, not of civic peace (as with Hobbes), but of morality itself, reflects the underlying, if indirect, influence of Immanuel Kant (see p. 180 on Oakeshott's belief that the compulsion of law seems "the very negation of morality [understood as self-chosen actions"]; also p. 190 for reference to Oakeshott's endeavor to steer a course between Kantian and Hegelian conceptions of morality, as described by Terry Nardin). Oakeshott found an interpretation of Hobbes that "identifies moral conduct with prudentially rational conduct" based on fear to be "unacceptabl[e]" (p. 105)—despite this being the way that Hobbes in fact defines morality in the opening

paragraph of his treatment of the subject: "those qualities of mankind that concern their living together in peace and unity" rather than conflict (Hobbes 1994, p. 57).

In contrast to the alleged "botch" of "contracting" what he calls "the early years of modern European history" "into a history of so-called 'bourgeois market-society capitalism,'" Oakeshott insisted on tracing the roots of the modern principle of "personal autonomy" at least as far back as the twelfth or thirteenth centuries (Oakeshott 1975, pp. 236, 239-40). He identified the "classic expression" of the supposedly new tendency to view every aspect of life (both practical and theoretical), including even religion, as "an assemblage" of freely chosen "opportunities for self-enactment" as Montaigne's *Essais* (p. 240). But this entire notion of life as a process of self-enactment is not one that I am aware can be found anywhere in Montaigne's writing. (I doubt that the term has any provenance prior to the twentieth century.) Montaigne indeed initially claims that his monumental book is merely a self-portrait meant for his friends and relatives, but the most superficial survey of the work's contents demonstrates the irony of that claim. (See Schaefer 1990, ch. 1, pp. 3-5, 19-22, with the studies by Ballaguy and Marcu cited at n. 43). Nor does Oakeshott display any awareness of the connection between Montaigne's repeated profession of love for liberty and the liberalism of Locke, having claimed that such elements of Lockean liberalism as "democracy, parliamentary government, progress, discussion," and the "ethics of productivity" would have seemed "worse than slavery" to the Périgordian (p. 88; Oakeshott 2007, p. 59; for Montaigne's advocacy of republicanism, scientific progress, free discussion, and economic freedom, see Montaigne 1958, I.3.12; I.22; I.23.85; III.3; III.7.700; III.13.817-18; Schaefer 1990, chs. 3-6, 12-13.). So preoccupied is Oakeshott's Montaigne with self-enactment that he has no concern with political life, or even with philosophizing, at all. (See Coats 2000, p. 17, on the difference between Montaigne's praise of conversation and argument as a means of advancing towards the attainment of truth and Oakeshott's "stylized" view of it as "purged of any purposes" other than delight in the activity itself; Oakeshott 1991, p. 489.) In sum, Oakeshott presents readers with a dilettantish Montaigne who is no less fabricated than his Hobbes. (He even attributes to Montaigne the same terror of death that he wrongly associated with Hobbes [pp. 101-2; Oakeshott 1991, p. 291], when the essayist repeatedly seeks to dissuade readers from such a preoccupation so as to reduce their susceptibility to Christian superstition [Montaigne 1958, I.14.33-7; I.20.; II.6; III.12.802-8; Schaefer 1990, ch. 10]).

In view of Oakeshott's elevation of dilettantism over the concern either with achieving practical political goals or with the pursuit of truth, it is not surprising that his denunciation of the subsumption of "high culture" under an educational system aimed at serving the interests of "the productive masses" lent itself to suspicions of outright snobbery, as McIlwain reports (p. 52). As previously noted, Strauss was at one with Oakeshott in seeking to preserve the ideal of classical, great-books-based education amid the thoughtlessness often found in modern democratic society. But Oakeshott, unlike Strauss, exhibited a curious fixation on the alleged corruption of the medieval ideal of a university through the mere introduction of practical studies. McIlwain reports that Oakeshott was "only too aware that the fear of having to conscript technologically ignorant and incompetent soldiers was a major impetus for the implementation of mass education by the European states of the early modern period" and decried the "enthusiasm for peacetime mobilization" (pp. 51-2): but why should the establishment of widespread, practically-oriented training have constituted by itself a threat to the survival of liberal education? (Would Oakeshott have preferred that British soldiers remain incompetent? Or that ordinary people be deprived of the sort of technical education they needed in order to advance in life and make a useful contribution to society?) In a review McIlwain quotes from the 1940s, Oakeshott observed that "in war, all that is most superficial in our tradition is encouraged merely because it is useful, even necessary for victory" (p. 52); but what was the alternative? (Contrast Strauss's acknowledgment, in the concluding paragraph of his *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, that even the classical political philosophers "were forced to make one crucial exception" to their general opposition to "inventions" that might engender "political or social change": "[t]hey had to admit the necessity of inventions pertaining to the art of war," in this respect providing grounds for Machiavelli's critique of their practical conservatism (Strauss 1958, pp. 298-9). While far from a Machiavellian, Strauss was readier than Oakeshott to acknowledge the necessity of accommodating the realities of practical political life).

For Strauss, unlike Oakeshott, liberal education was far from an exercise in public "self-enactment." To the contrary, while distinguishing, as Oakeshott did, between liberal education and that which is based on "machines," Strauss held that liberal education "shuns the limelight" precisely because it "seeks light," that is, understanding (Strauss 1968, p. 25). And far from regarding the self-enacting gentleman as the exemplar of liberal education, Strauss remarked that "the ultimate justification for the distinction between gentlemen and nongentlemen is the distinction between philosophers and nonphilosophers," and that one of the redeeming benefits of the "increasing abundance" brought about by modern technology is that it made it "increasingly possible to see and to admit the element of hypocrisy which had entered into the traditional notion of aristocracy," which served practically as a mask for oligarchy, with the promise (in the earlier, liberal wave of modern political philosophy) of "abolish[ing] many injustices" (Strauss 1968, p. 21). While Strauss shared Oakeshott's concern for the effects of the reorientation of science towards technology on liberal education in the modern era, his fear was not that the "rearranging" of the educational system to accommodate the demands of modern democracy would endanger "the morality of individuality" (p. 51; Oakeshott 1989, p. 152), but that the severance of science from philosophy—with the former now elevated over the latter—entailed the replacement of "the fruitful and ennobling tension between religious education and liberal education" with "the tension between the ethos of democracy and the ethos of technocracy," culminating in the denial that there can be rational knowledge of what are called "values" (entailing the nondemocratic rule of supposedly neutral "experts"). Consequently, in Strauss's view, "[s]cientific education [was] in danger of losing its value for the broadening and deepening of the human being" (Strauss 1968, pp. 22-3). (Contrary to McIlwain, p. 54, Strauss, unlike Oakeshott, expressed no "desire to free the universities from the practical tasks they [had] been shackled with": it didn't bother Strauss in the least that while housing one of America's leading undergraduate colleges as well as the Committee on Social Thought and other often-distinguished graduate liberal-arts departments, the University of Chicago, where he taught for two decades, also incorporated schools of law, medicine, social work, and business administration—none of which, with the possible exception of the first, had any connection to its liberal arts programs.)

Oakeshott's disparagement of learning that was directed towards practical utility extended much further, as McIlwain recounts, in *On Human Conduct* (1975). In his endeavor to elevate a purely aesthetic, "poetic" mode of conduct over practical considerations of any sort, Oakeshott disparaged the ancient poets because they aimed at "communicating practical and ancestral wisdom." (Contrast Strauss's high regard for the comic poet Aristophanes, on account of his politico-philosophic wisdom: Strauss 1966; and his lengthy study of the Epicurean poet Lucretius, who "restor[ed] the union of philosophy and poetry" [Strauss 1968, p. 134]). Again in contrast, Oakeshott admired the "contemplative delight" with which he maintained "the invading Romans" regarded Greek temples and statues, precisely because they lacked any religious "significance" for the conquerors (Oakeshott 1991, p. 532; compare Nietzsche's scathing judgment of such a view of "culture" [Nietzsche 1980, sec. 4, distinguishing genuine culture that gives meaning to a people's life from mere "knowledge about culture"; also sec. 7 on the consequences of a "historicizing" view of Christianity]). Oakeshott represented the very disposition to regard poetry as offering "a guide to conduct" or a repository of wisdom as misguided: even while acknowledging how the desires and judgments of French and English youth had been shaped, respectively, by Racine and Shakespeare, he denied the presence of any serious thought behind that shaping (Oakeshott 1991, pp. 532-6).

Remarkably, McIlwain observes, the relation of Oakeshott's conception of poetry to his "conservatism" is exemplified by his account of *fishing* "as an activity which may be engaged in, not for the profit of the catch, but for its own sake." Even though even fishing requires "some measure of practical completion . . . Oakeshott believed that a poetic sensibility and conservative disposition prevent play from declining into mere 'recreation' and 'relaxation' from work." But McIlwain properly alludes to the limitation of this outlook, noting that earlier in life Oakeshott had appreciated the truth of the philosopher R. G. Collingwood's observation that "style without substance is dilettantism" (p. 140). It remains unclear to me, however, how McIlwain thinks that the mature Oakeshott succeeded in overcoming the "polemical emptiness of aestheticism" in a way that distinguished his position from the "formalistic dilettantism" of Kojève (who held that

at the end of history, while human beings "would continue to enjoy art despite the disappearance of philosophy [thanks to the universal realization of objective truth] and the human significance of activity," they "would construct their edifices and works of art as birds build their nests and spiders spin their webs," that is, out of mere instinct or habit, without meaning (p. 141).

OAKESHOTT, STRAUSS, AND THE "UNIVERSAL, HOMOGENEOUS STATE"

By comparison with Oakeshott, Strauss, as McIlwain demonstrates in Chapter 6 of his book, took the threat of the universal homogeneous state more seriously, while recognizing (contrary to Oakeshott) its Hobbesian roots. McIlwain perceptively notes the link between Strauss's "first American book," *On Tyranny*, a study of Xenophon's *Hiero,* and his later *Thoughts on Machiavelli,* inasmuch as the *Hiero* in Strauss's account "presents ancient political philosophy at its 'point of closest contact' with the modern alternative" founded by the Florentine. *On Tyranny* occasioned a lengthy review (invited by Strauss) by Kojève, subsequently included along with a response by Strauss when the book was republished. As McIlwain observes, Kojève's challenge to the Xenophontic or classical understanding of tyranny reflected his Hegelian assumption that perfect wisdom was available only at the end of history. And Strauss in turn "understood Kojève'a Hegel to be something of a Hegelianized Hobbes" in that "the triumph of the modern understanding of reason" as Kojève represented it "would be the metaphysical equivalent of the advent of [Nietzsche's] last men," individuals who had fully imbibed Hobbes's position that the only objective human good was self-preservation and hence freedom from conflict, the full achievement of which would require what Kojève himself called "the suppression of opposition" (pp. 118-120).

In opposing Kojève's world-view, as McIlwain notes (p. 128), Strauss believed that "the continuation of politics" and hence of political freedom was inherently linked to the preservation of philosophy. By contrast, as McIlwain subsequently observes, Oakeshott's own reversion to "the mode of poetry" (linked to a supposed "Judaic-Christian-Augustinian tradition") seemed to ignore "the nihilistic implications of … the story of the technological Hobbesian being freed of its practical tasks" in Kojève's vision of humanity's completion (pp. 138-9). How different is Oakeshott's depiction of fishing as an exemplary conservative "ritual" if performed solely for "its own sake" from Kojève's elevation of the "snob" who "transcends his animal nature" at the end of history only by exemplifying a pure "form," "opposed . . . to content of any sort" (pp. 140, 142)?

OAKESHOTT'S "AUGUSTINIANISM"

There remains to be considered what McIlwain portrays as Oakeshott's "Augustinianism," which he represents as the key to understanding Oakeshott's account of "the crucial contribution which Hobbes offered to the moral life" (p. 177). In reality, (see note 2), Oakeshott's attribution to human beings of an innate "moral depravity" that parallels Augustine's notion of original sin, for which civil association is the necessary remedy, flies in the face of Hobbes's denial of any such inherent human sinfulness. He represents government rather as a remedy for the miserable condition in which "nature" has left us (1994, ch. 13, p. 76-77). Moreover, while Oakeshott opposed the Enlightenment project of "displacing" religion, he shared what he believed to have been Hobbes's more limited aims of "remov[ing] religious 'enthusiasm' from politics"—an alliance of "political skepticism … with personal faith" that he claims had been shared by "all *informed* Christians … since the time of Augustine or Paul," if not from Jesus himself (p. 179, emphasis added). (The word I have italicized indicates the question-begging character of the claim.) Yet Oakeshott's advocacy of the separation of religion from public life was motivated neither by Christian piety nor by wishing "to secure a public role for scientific knowledge," but rather, McIlwain explains, "to secure freedom and completion for the self" along with providing "public space for a variety of self-enactments" (p. 181). Where in Augustine's own writings is any such goal stated?

Far from being animated by Augustinian faith, Oakeshott's "self," McIlwain observes, "for[egoes] any supernatural hopes or expectations." McIlwain "use[d] his flexible understanding of the historical identity of Christianity to adapt a *pagan* worldview . . . almost a City of God *contra* Augustine, in which grace is 'reconciliation to nothingness'" (first emphasis mine) (p. 182). While McIlwain maintains that Oakeshott's "celebration" of such assorted "ironic, existential, religious, and poetic heroes" (as he conceived them) as Don Quixote, Montaigne, and Nietzsche makes his seemingly "eccentric" readings more "coherent," by demonstrating that his sensibilities "placed him not in Athens, but Jerusalem" (p. 182), his collection of such models tends rather to blur the fundamental tension between Athens and Jerusalem (a central concern of Strauss's, as McIlwain acknowledges at p. 200) rather than offer greater clarity about either alternative.

For Strauss, neither the choice for philosophy (Athens) nor for faith (Jerusalem) was a matter of personal "sensibility," let alone "self-enactment," while (I observe) an earthly "City of God" was no more faithful to the Biblical tradition than was Oakeshott's reduction of Judaism to "will and imagination," let alone his view of religion as "the willful completion of a self" (pp. 183-4; cf. p. 192, citing Corey Abel's "justified" doubt that Oakeshott's vision of an entirely earthly City of God, unsupported by revelation, left him "in any meaningful sense Christian"). Most important, what McIlwain describes as Oakeshott's concern to ward off the "threat" to "the creative principle" posed by "the Socratic tradition of philosophizing" and his preference for the "solid manliness" of the "cave dwellers" (from Socrates' allegory in Plato's *Republic*) over the quest to transcend the cave of inherited opinion (pp. 185-6) sets him clearly at odds with Strauss's endeavor to revive Socratism.

Not only was Oakeshott, as these remarks indicate, far more a mythmaker than a philosopher; his wish to encourage those who lack the capacity to participate actively in the process of myth-formation "to embrace their position inside the vision of those of greater will and imagination rather than face the 'dreadful insomnia' or 'nightmare' of wakefulness" (p. 184) is radically antidemocratic (despite his ostensible wish to "diffuse aristocracy downwards" on the basis of his idiosyncratic reading of Hobbes, so as to reverse "the servile cast of modern thought" [p. 188]). And it ran directly contrary to what had traditionally been understood as the purpose of liberal education, i.e., the education that equips its recipient to live as a genuinely free human being and citizen, even if not a philosopher (Cf. Strauss 1968, ch. 1). When it comes to Oakeshott's intention to ensure the passive acceptance by most people of the myths created by thinkers like himself, we must ask, *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes*?

While neither Hobbes nor any other serious thinker ever denied the need for political authority to regulate human conduct (cf. Locke's description of law as a "hedge" that defends rather than destroys our effectual freedom: Locke 2019, II.57, pp. 305-6), it is difficult to comprehend Oakeshott's belief (as described by Paul Franco) that "it is Reason, not Authority, that is destructive of individuality" (p. 189). Whatever the value we place on individuality (however that term is understood), the proposition can be accepted only if we identify reason with the narrowly instrumental rationality of Hobbes, an identification that Strauss (following Nietzsche) challenged: there is no way to prove that a life devoted to self-preservation is more rational than one aimed at honor, piety, or wisdom. Despite Oakeshott's endeavor to transcend modern rationalism by subsuming it under poetry, it appears that he, no less than Carl Schmitt (as Strauss demonstrated) in his own reading of Hobbes), remained its prisoner. The result was not only the underestimation of the capacity of philosophic inquiry (as attested by Plato, Aristotle, and their successors) to supply the ground of a meaningful life, but also an exaggeration of the opposition between philosophy and (thoughtful) poetry. As the variety of characters, opinions, and outlooks portrayed in Plato's dialogues exhibits, reason, understood as the unending *quest* for truth, rather than (as with Hobbes or Hegel) the claim to certain knowledge about the whole, in no sense suppresses human diversity, or what Oakeshott preferred to call individuality.

PHILOSOPHY VS. "MYTH-MAKING"

David McIlwain has labored impressively to articulate the rival visions of Strauss and Oakeshott, and their relation to such major twentieth-century thinkers as Kojève and Heidegger, in a thoughtful and balanced way. But in his Conclusion, where he attributes "the genius of both men" to their having provided "a central and defensible place in their thought for traditional inheritances [hence their 'conservatism'] without ever abandoning their commitment to enlightenment and renaissance" (p. 199), I believe he substantially overstates Oakeshott's achievement, by comparison to that of Strauss. Contrary to McIlwain (p. 200), Oakeshott can hardly be said to have achieved a "renewal of Christian religion as a civilizational grounding," given the liberties he takes with Augustine (just as he did with Hobbes), and the manifestly worldly character of his version of Christianity. Even less credible is the criticism McIlwain attributes to Oakeshott of Strauss for "overlooking" "the myth of original sin" in his treatment of Hobbes (p. 201), since (as I have noted) Hobbes espouses no such doctrine. While McIlwain rightly applauds Strauss and Oakeshott for their resistance to "perfectionist and millenarian fantasies," preferring in their *practical* politics a "good-natured and liberal muddling through," it should be noted that even in this respect, Oakeshott was less than fully consistent, since at the conclusion of his essay on "Political Education," he represents his view as an extension of John Stuart Mill's "theory of human progress," suggesting a greater confidence than Strauss expressed in the progressivist "philosophy of history" (Oakeshott 1991, p. 69).

McIlwain plausibly portrays the "opposing visions" of Strauss and Oakeshott as reflecting the millennia-old rivalry (as alluded to in Book X of Plato's *Republic*) between the claims to supremacy of philosophy and poetry (pp. 204-6). What this account omits to consider, however, is how far a genuine renaissance of civilization can be grounded on a process of *mere* myth-making, designed to satisfy a particular thinker's taste for the enhancement of "individuality," as opposed to a *philosophically informed* poetry, as practiced not only by Plato, Aristophanes, Lucretius, and Shakespeare but also (for instance) by Strauss's preferred novelist Jane Austen (p. 202), or by a series of thoughtful American novelists (see Zuckert 1990; also Alvis and West 2000). Contrary to Oakeshott, it is not the function of poetry at its highest to enclose us in a cave, but to extend both our thoughts and our sympathies to the broader world we inhabit while elevating our aspirations. Nor would such an enclosure be conducive to the preservation of the political liberty and constitutional government such as Strauss and Oakeshott both valued.

NOTES

1 All page references that are not accompanied by a source title, as in the above citation to p. 110, are drawn from McIlwain 2019.

2. Already in his 1946 "Introduction to Leviathan," Oakeshott downplayed Hobbes's originality, asserting that his political philosophy instead "reflected the changes in the European political consciousness which had been pioneered" by "theologians of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries" (Oakeshott 1991, p. 278).

3. In this respect it seems to me that Oakeshott's attempt to introduce a concern with honor or recognition as a primary motive underlying the establishment of civil order constitutes a "Hegelian" reading of Hobbes, more than (as McIlwain contends, p. 118) a "Hobbesian Hegel."

4 A sympathetic interpreter of Oakeshott's thought, Wendell John Coats, similarly finds implausible Oakeshott's claim that Hobbes "understood human beings as creatures more properly concerned with honour than with either survival or prosperity" (Coats, 2000, p. 60, citing Oakeshott 1975, p. 125).

5. Strauss's realism also entailed rejecting the utopian (or dystopian) proposal of followers of Kojève for a "world state" as a solution to the problem of war in the atomic age (130; cf. 201).

6. In his Introduction to *Leviathan,* Oakeshott even represents Hobbes as "an ally of Plato, Augustine, Aquinas" (Oakeshott 1991, p. 276).

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Living in the Past: Oakeshott and Strauss on Historical Knowing

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One way to get a sense of what a book is about is to begin at the end. McIlwain concludes *Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss* with the following words:

> To fully assess the opposing visions of Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss we would have to ascend to the spiritual stage on which the towering figures of the philosophic and the poetic traditions find their meaning and completion. We would then be able to determine whether it is the philosophers or the poets who have been, and will again be, the unacknowledged legislators of the unfathomable ground of Western civilization. The enlightenment of this ground may reveal the path to renaissance (p.).[1]

Since this is the upshot of the whole work, it deserves some close scrutiny.

The first thing to note is the assertion that writers like Oakeshott or Strauss exist on some kind of higher level (a 'spiritual stage' that we supposedly need to 'ascend' to). It is important to understand the kind of claim being made here. At a minimum, it is neither historical nor philosophical. For the historian, Oakeshott and Strauss are no different to any other authors. Their texts need to be explained as contributions to debates that were going on at a certain time and place. For the philosopher, likewise, no author enjoys any kind of elevated status. The interest of a text lies purely in the soundness and validity of its arguments, though determining these may itself require some recognition of the context. But neither historians nor philosophers aim to assign any author a place in a spiritual hierarchy of any sort.

The metaphors of height contained in the vocabulary of 'ascent' and 'towering figures' are, in technical terms, *argumenta ad verecundiam*. Such arguments from authority, however, by definition assume what it is that they are trying to prove. Here, McIlwain is simply assuming the existence of a normative hierarchy of some kind that allows us to rank different thinkers. His point is not simply that the meaning of the works of philosophers and poets in general may be established at different 'levels'. In history and philosophy we would normally understand by this only the extent of the context or the degree of reflexivity involved. For historians, meanings may be a feature of the sentence, the paragraph, the chapter, the whole text, or the relation of the text to other texts. Likewise, for philosophers, there can be first-order or second-order levels of argument, and so on.

But meaning, at least in the sense of intelligibility, does not depend on locating the proposition or text at any kind of 'spiritual stage'. The question of the very existence of such stages does not even come up.

What is meant here by 'meaning', though, is not simply intelligibility. What McIlwain has in mind by 'meaning' is significance or value of some kind. Hence his reference to the 'unfathomable ground of Western civilization'. This phrase is far from self-explanatory, but in McIlwain it is a repetition of an idea taken from Leo Strauss. More specifically, it is an idea that Strauss believed that he had found in the Stoic natural law tradition, in Heidegger, and in the writings of Hermann Cohen on Judaism. Strauss, summarizing his understanding of Stoicism, wrote that: 'The unchangeable and universally valid natural law—a part of which determines natural right, i.e. that with which justice . . . is concerned—is the ground of all positive law.' (Strauss 1983, p. 141). Reviewing *Religion of Reason*, he paraphrased Cohen with apparent approval as saying that 'holiness . . . is the ground of God's being' and that in Judaism, 'the true God becomes the ground of morality or more specifically of the virtues' (Strauss 1983, pp. 238, 246).

For Heidegger, on the other hand, Strauss wrote that 'the true ground of all grounds' is 'the fundamental abyss' (Strauss 1983, p. 30). As Strauss saw, this implied that 'Heidegger understands his great predecessors better than they understood themselves'; and Strauss, according to Thomas Pangle (one of the editors of the series in which McIlwain's book appears), regarded Heidegger as '*the* thinker of our age' (Pangle, 'Introduction' to Strauss 1983, p. 25). In other words, Strauss accepted Heidegger's understanding of the history of philosophy as sound, at least in outline, together with Heidegger's diagnosis that modernity was in a state of crisis. But where Heidegger eventually turned to a neo-pagan vocabulary in which the answer to the crisis was to prepare for the return of the gods, Strauss believed that the best response to the crisis was a revival of the tradition of ancient Western political philosophy, especially the ideas of Plato.

As McIlwain correctly observes, the title of Strauss's *Natural Right and History* was a deliberate allusion to Heidegger's *Being and Time*, filtered through Heidegger's later concern with the history of metaphysics itself as the history of nihilism (p. 70). In *Being and Time*, the alleged problem of the concealment of the meaning of Being in the history of Western metaphysics was not yet identified with the growing nihilism of Western civilization which manifested as 'violence and despair' (Heidegger 1991, p. 245). But by the time Heidegger delivered his lectures on Nietzsche in the late 1930s, he had explicitly connected the two themes (Heidegger 1991, p. 205).[2] The history of Western metaphysics simply was the history of nihilism. Strauss's *Natural Right and History*, which recommended that we embark on a 'quest for wisdom' after the manner of Plato and Aristotle, can thus be read as echoing Heidegger in declaring that 'The contemporary rejection of natural right leads to nihilism — nay, it is identical with nihilism' (Strauss 1953, pp. 5, 36).

In this story, the loss of natural right, which was that part of metaphysics which dealt specifically with the problem of justice, had allowed two trends to emerge in modern thought that were responsible for the current crisis. The first was positivistic scientific materialism which took a narrow view of the nature of reason and identified all knowledge with scientific knowledge leading to an ever-increasing emphasis on the technological exploitation of the world. The second was historicist relativism, which made all values simply a reflection of their own time and place, and hence undermined contemporary values. But if social and political order were once more based on principles of natural right, these two trends could potentially be overcome. The key to this was accepting the concept of philosophy Strauss found in Plato, according to which 'Philosophizing means to ascend from the cave to the light of the sun, that is, to the truth (Strauss 1953, p. 12). This conviction that there are timeless universal moral truths that are key to the right ordering of political life determined Strauss's whole approach to the history of philosophy. Thinkers were ultimately to be judged according to whether or to what extent they had grasped or failed to grasp them.

It is this Straussian narrative that informs McIlwain's conclusion that philosophers can serve as legislators of the ground of civilization. It is clear from the vocabulary McIlwain uses that he thinks Strauss was, in essence, correct. In McIlwain's lexicon, Strauss 'recovers' things; he 'realizes' things; he has 'unquestionable insights'; he 'recognizes' things; he 'perceives' things; things are 'revealed' to him (pp. 121, 154–9). Because the Straussian narrative is a version of the Heideggerian one, Heidegger is likewise described as

'uncovering' the possibility of a return to classical thought that Strauss would then exploit, as if this possibility were somehow independently there (p. 69).

This is the kind of language one uses of religious visionaries who have received a revelation, not philosophers or historians who interpret evidence and make arguments. For the historian or the philosopher, however, there can be no 'unquestionable insights', and nothing allows of simply being 'uncovered'. To write as if there are such insights is to have adopted, wittingly or not, a dogmatic stance that is appropriate, if anywhere, in theology and mysticism. It is no surprise, then, that McIlwain describes Strauss's attitude to philosophy as the attempt to create a secular theodicy (p. 43). This is exactly right. But the terms in which McIlwain's conclusion is phrased suggests that he himself endorses this Straussian conception of philosophy.

The main body of the work bears this impression out. As we shall see, McIlwain's Straussian standpoint creates major difficulties, but they are often of a subtle kind, and not always immediately obvious. There is no question that McIlwain knows his subjects well. At least some of the interpretation he is offering is sound, so it is worth dwelling at some length on what he unquestionably gets right. He is certainly correct to reject Perry Anderson's view of Oakeshott and Strauss as members of the 'intransigent right' in the same class as Carl Schmitt (p. 17 ff). His labelling of his subjects might provoke some comment: he wants to position both Oakeshott and Strauss as 'conservatives', when some would be more inclined to regard Oakeshott as a kind of liberal, for example (Franco 1990).

McIlwain, however, is aware of this controversy over how best to classify them, and makes clear that the conservatism he has in mind is of an unorthodox kind (p. 15). Moreover, he notes, again correctly, that in significant respects they shared a common intellectual milieu. In particular, both were deeply engaged with German post-Kantian philosophy. Oakeshott was an admirer of Hegel; Strauss, as we noted, was impressed more with Heidegger. But both Oakeshott and Strauss studied Nietzsche carefully and realized the need for a response of some kind to his radical perspectivalism which informed much twentieth-century postmodernist thought.

McIlwain is also right in saying that both Oakeshott and Strauss were powerfully impressed by the contrast between the English and German political traditions, and felt the impact of this difference personally. Strauss fled Hitler's Germany for England before taking up the position at Chicago which would make his reputation in the Anglophone world. Oakeshott spent time in Germany as a student after the first World War, and signed up for service in occupied Europe during the second. As part of the Allied forces that liberated France, Belgium, and Holland, he saw at first hand the destruction that the war had caused.

Their respective political philosophies can be read as attempts to explain the conditions of political freedom in a way that would rule out totalitarian appeals. For this reason, both engaged with the writings of Hobbes, where they came most directly into contact. Oakeshott was notably admiring of Strauss's *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, writing not one but two pieces on it when it was published in 1937. McIlwain can cite Boyd in support of his own claim that it seems likely that they were reacting to one another's work over an extended period (Oakeshott 1936–7, pp. 364–79; 1937, pp. 239–41; compare Boyd 2008, pp. 690–716). Strauss thought of Oakeshott's 'Introduction' to *Leviathan* as one of his main rivals in interpretation, and Oakeshott in turn was probably responding to Strauss in his post-war essays on morality and obligation in Hobbes.

There is no issue in principle, either, with McIlwain's decision to include a chapter on the relationship between Oakeshott and the Russian emigré Alexandre Kojève, as well as one on the relationship between Kojève and Strauss, even though Oakeshott, unlike Strauss, never interacted with Kojève directly.[3] Kojève's seminars on Hegel at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Études have gone down as a major chapter in the history of twentieth-century French thought (Kojève 1980). They were influential partly for their interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* from a Marxist standpoint, but also because of the subsequent careers of those who attended, including Georges Bataille and Jacques Lacan (Yar n.d). Their shared interest in Hegel makes a plausible basis for a comparison between them.

Indeed, Oakeshott has already been profitably compared elsewhere with other major figures in twentieth-century French intellectual history, including both Jean-Paul Sartre (who assimilated Kojève's emphasis on the struggle for recognition when writing *Being and Nothingness*) and Michel Foucault (Farr 1998; Plotica 2015). McIlwain's argument that because Strauss's handling of the theme of avoidance of violent death in Hobbes was mediated by his reaction to Kojève's reading of Hegel, and Oakeshott engaged with Strauss over the same issue, Oakeshott can be seen as indirectly also responding to Kojève, makes sense.

Even some of McIlwain's more striking claims regarding Oakeshott and Strauss can be defended. He makes the argument that they were not reactionaries, but 'closer to classical republicans' (p. 9). A declared admiration for Cicero's *Republic* makes this a reasonable claim about Strauss, but Oakeshott's criticisms of the modern versions of republicanism put forward by, for example, Thomas Paine and Immanuel Kant, initially make it harder to understand how he too can be placed in the 'republican' camp. For Oakeshott, modern republicanism made the mistake of thinking that a certain constitutional form would in itself be a guarantee of good government, but this was a fallacy.[4] There was no direct relationship between the arrangement of offices in a constitution and the kinds of activities which government undertook. Constitutions in and of themselves could not determine whether the members of a state remained free under the law to decide for themselves how best to live, or whether their aims were determined for them. Oakeshott likewise repudiated Rousseau's version of republicanism, regarding the notion of the General Will (and indeed 'will' in general) as philosophically unsound.[5]

Yet McIlwain finds support in David Boucher's work for his view that Oakeshott can still be said to have had republican sympathies of a kind (Boucher 2005). Boucher disentangled Oakeshott from contemporary republican political theory as practiced by Philip Pettit and others, in which the emphasis is on non-domination. Instead, Boucher associated Oakeshott's republicanism with the idea of the rule of law, which Oakeshott placed at the center of his own theory of civil association in *On Human Conduct*. Oakeshott more than once confessed an admiration for Roman politics, and Boucher points out that *libertas* or freedom was for him one of the key words in the Roman political vocabulary (Boucher 2005, p. 88). This conception of freedom was entirely compatible with the rule of law. Unlike the liberal tradition which tended to see law as a restraint, Oakeshott (like Hobbes) saw freedom as enabled by and only possible under conditions of legality. This position was entirely consistent with a politically conservative orientation that emphasized the importance of the informal, traditional, dimension of a shared membership of a community of rules.

Furthermore, McIlwain's focus on the importance of Christianity to Oakeshott, in order to draw a parallel with Strauss's interest in Jewish thought, has more plausibility than would have once seemed the case. In the scholarship that emerged in the years following Oakeshott's death in 1990, the occasional perceptive scholar like Glenn Worthington recognized the importance religion had for him, but on the whole, the argument made by Terry Nardin that Oakeshott was a philosopher first and foremost seemed to fit the published evidence (Worthington 2000; Nardin 2001). In his early writings in the 1920s Oakeshott showed a strong interest in the problem of the relationship between Christianity and history, and in his late work *On Human Conduct* he discussed the place of religion in moral life more generally, but in between he had little to say on the subject (Oakeshott 1993b, 1975, pp. 81–6).

Though McIlwain says that 'the suggestion of a religious orientation in Oakeshott's thinking *is* likely to be treated with skepticism', subsequent research has made clear that the topic of Christianity was actually of permanent interest for Oakeshott, even though he chose not to publish on it (p. 6; Oakeshott 2014). Towards the end of Oakeshott's life, he wrote to a former student that he would have liked to expand the few pages on religion in *On Human Conduct* into a book in its own right, but had left it too late.[6] So McIlwain is not unreasonable in wanting to emphasize this theme.

The difficulties begin when we start to consider the overall framework of interpretation of which these various elements form a part. The overarching thesis is that 'Oakeshott's desire for a renaissance of poetic individuality would lead him to seek a human understanding of the Judaic tradition of creativity and imagination, while Strauss's aim of recovering the universality of philosophical enlightenment would mean

facing the unintelligibility of the ground of the Greek tradition of rationalism' (p. 1). But McIlwain has again taken this view directly from Strauss. Strauss wrote that 'the broadest and deepest [experiences of Western man] are indicated by the names of two cities: Jerusalem and Athens'. In this narrative, 'Western man became what he is, and is what he is, through the coming together of biblical faith and Greek thought' (Strauss 1967, p. 45). So one thing to realise about McIlwain's mention of 'philosophical enlightenment' is that it refers to the Straussian idea of an ancient Greek Enlightenment, and not to 'the Enlightenment' of the eighteenth century.

Nevertheless, Strauss's notion that what went on in the 'classical' period of Greek history constituted an 'Enlightenment' transparently depended for its existence on a prior interpretation of the intellectual history of eighteenth-century Europe as itself an 'age of reason'. Strauss's view of ancient Greece was thus already refracted through a romanticized understanding of Europe's own past in which Greece was a place of gleaming white marble statues literally standing as metaphors for the pure reason that modernity had finally revived. Well into the twentieth century, any evidence to the contrary had to be literally scrubbed out (Jenkins 2001). But even before the nineteenth century closed, this image of the ancient Greek world had already been subjected to fierce criticism by Nietzsche, who set out to 'dismantle the artful edifice of *Apolline culture* stone by stone' (Nietzsche 1999, p. 22).

The Birth of Tragedy emphasized that the cult of Dionysos, in which the terror and horror of life were given their due, had as much to do with ancient Greek life as the serene worship of Apollo.[7] But the idea of the Greek Enlightenment nevertheless survived into the early twentieth century. Edmund Husserl was a noted exponent of it, and gave it a major role in his account of the 'Crisis of European Man' (Husserl 1965, p. 155).[8] From a modern perspective, however, the twin claims that the idea of a Greek Enlightenment is typically used to support, the claim of Western uniqueness, and the claim of the existence of a single continuous entity called 'Western civilisation', have both come to seem highly dubious to historians and philosophers alike.

To contemporary scholarship, the various ancient cultures appear much more similar to one another than Husserl claimed. All combined rational and (what look to us like) proto-scientific elements with a religious mythology. This is not to deny that they differed in content and emphasis from one another, but rather to say that, structurally, their rationalistic thinking about empirical and mathematical subjects took place mostly in the context of the ethical imperatives imposed by a normative cosmological hierarchy. Traditional China no longer (or once more) appears to us as not different in kind from ancient Greece in this respect (van Norden 2017, p. 19).[9] If we still want to talk about a 'Greek Enlightenment' at all, then we must concede that there was likewise a Chinese Enlightenment, an Indian one, and so forth. The phenomenon of human beings in the ancient world emancipating themselves from the immediate demands of survival and developing intellectual and cultural lives was a generalised one.

The specific differences of the West, Rémi Brague has argued, were due to the discontinuity between its past and its present being more linguistically marked than elsewhere: 'the lettered Chinese were experts in Chinese letters; in Europe, on the contrary, one studied the classics of two *other* civilizations, and of an otherness that was sometimes painfully felt' (Brague 2002, p. 123).[10] But it remains true that the modern West has little or no direct relationship to ancient Greece; it is doubly other to itself, having divorced itself from both its ancient and its medieval roots.

McIlwain, though, ignores all the modern scholarship that has thrown the old Eurocentric genealogy of the Greek Enlightenment into question (Chakrabarty 2000, p. 5).[11] He simply accepts Strauss's declaration that 'Athens at its peak' was defined by 'reason', whereas 'Jerusalem', or the culture of the Old Testament, was defined by 'revelation' (Strauss 1967, p. 55). Paraphrasing Hermann Cohen, again in a way that suggested approval, Strauss wrote that 'What we owe to Plato is the insight that the truth in the first place is the truth of science.' The Hebrew prophets on the other hand, 'precisely because they lack the idea of science and hence the idea of nature . . . can believe that men's conduct towards one another can undergo a change much more radical than any change ever dreamed of by Plato' (Ibid.). Again, in the light of modern scholarship, all of this is disputable, to say the least.

The notion that Plato had any concept of 'science' in a modern sense is contentious enough by itself, but even if we accept it for the sake of argument, the opposition of Platonic science to Hebraic revelation raises further issues. For one thing, Plato was much more given to thinking in terms of revelation than Strauss cared to admit. Strauss discounted any element of revelation in Plato on the grounds that 'The Platonic teaching on creation does not claim to be more than a likely tale'; but he discounts the mystical nature of the vision of the good received by the philosopher-ruler, which stood higher than all the truths of mathematics (Strauss 1967, p. 54).[12] Similarly, Strauss underplayed the rationalist element of prophetic Hebraic culture. Mathematical astronomical calculations, for example, were a feature of Jewish life (Geller 2017, pp. 393–400). These were not intended as scientific investigations in the modern sense; they were used in the context of religious belief. However, once again, this is if anything not a source of difference from Greek thought, but a similarity. Astronomy and astrology shaded into one another in both cultures.

Strauss did acknowledge that there were 'Greek counterparts to the beginning of the Bible', such as Hesiod and Parmenides. In other words, he did not try to pretend that Greek culture was wholly rationalistic (Strauss 1967, p. 53). He was far too learned for that, and was certainly capable of some astute observations. His remark that for Plato 'the cosmic gods are accessible to man as man—to his observations and calculations—whereas the Greek gods are accessible only to the Greeks through Greek tradition' goes a long way to clearing up the apparently paradoxical attitude to the gods in the *Republic* that lead Plato sometimes to write of divinity in a reverential manner and at other times to argue that the gods are to be, quite literally, kept off the stage altogether (Strauss 1967, p. 54). But in the last resort, the relationship that Strauss saw between Athens and Jerusalem was one of 'fundamental opposition' (Strauss 1967, p. 55). Unfortunately for Strauss and his contemporary followers, this claim simply does not stand up.

Modern work on the intellectual history of ancient and medieval thought has made clear how untenable (and outdated) the Straussian story really is. Far from there being a 'tension' in Greek thought with Biblical tradition, Christianity was able to swallow large chunks of Platonism more or less whole. Augustine's journey from Platonism to Christianity was in many respects a very small step indeed. What eventually proved indigestible in Greek thought for Christianity was not strictly its rationalist element, in the sense of the Platonic fascination with geometry, or the Aristotelian emphasis on logic. Mathematics and mysticism already co-existed quite happily in the Pythagorean roots of Platonism itself. Rather, it was cosmology that gradually became a problem.

This, though, was true only in the very long run indeed. To begin with, and for many centuries thereafter, Christianity adopted the Platonic-Aristotelian world-picture, with its attendant theories of the heavens, without finding it in fundamental tension with the account of creation in Genesis. It took more than a millennium before the problems raised by the effort at mathematical description of observed astronomical motion began to cause this synthesis to splinter. Even then, the problems first emerged as the ironic consequence of the effort to vindicate the geocentric cosmos, not to overturn it. They did not become acute until the age of Galileo.

Moreover, in the ancient world, Christianity had presented itself, one could say, in explicitly 'rationalist' terms to the Greeks and Romans. It too claimed to be a 'philosophy', albeit the true one; and by this time, centuries after what Strauss considered as the high point of Greek philosophical rationalism in the era of Plato and Aristotle, pagan philosophy in the early centuries of the Christian era was itself heavily infused by mystical and astrological themes that left it very open to the idea of a figure who was half-man, half-god, and promised eternal life. Each of the main schools had their canonical sages with supernatural powers; Jesus was not so different.

Emphasizing the untenability of Strauss's account of the history of ancient thought is important in this context because McIlwain uses it as the background for his reading of both Oakeshott and Strauss. Oakeshott is made to stand for Jerusalem, and Strauss for Athens. In effect, they are treated as emblems or types who exemplify the different tendencies Strauss identified. It is this approach, in which Strauss becomes an actor in his own mythos, that is behind all the serious defects of the book. Seeing Oakeshott as seeking a renaissance based on the Judaic tradition relies on making far too much out of passing remarks.

It is true that Oakeshott referred to a 'Hebrew belief' in history in one of his early papers on the history of Christianity, but when McIlwain says that he 'observed [this] as early as 1928' it implies that this was a constantly held opinion (Oakeshott 1993b, p. 69; McIlwain, p. 9).

On the contrary, when Oakeshott referred to 'history' here, he was in fact talking about what he would later call the 'practical past' in distinction from historical understanding. So, rather than it being the case that 'Oakeshott developed this observation in *Experience and its Modes*', as McIlwain claims, Oakeshott was rejecting his own earlier formulation. In 'noting that the concern with the past, long characteristic of Christians, had been transformed in modern times from a practical or traditional concern into a "specifically historical interest"', what Oakeshott was actually saying was that that view of history found in Christian belief was not history *at all* in the modal sense of the term that he was now concerned with.

This point is worth dwelling on, because as McIlwain rightly says, Oakeshott and Strauss held 'divergent interpretations of the history of political thought' that reflected very different conceptions of the nature of historical knowledge itself (p. 10). As a mature thinker Strauss noted that the Bible contained material that could be described as 'historical'. In particular, he observed that 'the Bible contains . . . many sections that, on the basis of the distinction between mythical (or legendary) and historical, would have to be described as historical' (Strauss 1967, p. 48). Now, Strauss defined history here as simply 'accounts of events' and separated history from myth in terms of 'the Greek distinction between mythos and logos' that he argued was 'alien to the Bible' (Strauss 1967, p. 46). However, the idea that the Bible contains 'accounts of events' in the same sense as historiography was, as Strauss himself recognized, already being called into question in the early modern era by thinkers like Spinoza.

As Strauss put it, 'From the point of view of the Bible, the "myths" are as true as the "histories"' (Strauss 1967, pp. 46–7). But for Oakeshott the problem was not, as Strauss claimed, that from the historical point of view 'the biblical account is in important respects not authentic but derivative'. Historians, Oakeshott argued, were not in the position of deciding simply whether to believe or disbelieve their sources. The question of the truth of particular sections of the Biblical text, or of the Bible as a whole, was orthogonal to understanding it in historical terms. For Oakeshott, then, an important distinction that Strauss never drew was that between the practical implications of the recognition of the historicity of the Bible, where belief was indeed an issue, and the understanding of the Bible in historiographical terms.

Now in practical understanding, for Oakeshott, the use of types in relation to the past is common. But on his account of the logic of historical thought, everything must be grasped in terms of its specificity. For Oakeshott, presenting thinkers as representatives of traditions, in the manner that McIlwain wants to use him to stand for Jerusalem and Strauss to stand for Athens, is a characteristic of practical understanding. That is not to say the use of types or classifications is inherently illegitimate. But in a historiographical context, it is inevitably a reductive form of understanding.

McIlwain is thus keen to exploit whatever references he can find to Hebraic thought or Jewish tradition in Oakeshott in order to present him as standing for 'Jerusalem' in the Straussian dyad, but the truth is that such references are very rare. The other notable instance is in the Introduction to *Leviathan*, where Oakeshott distinguished three main traditions of political philosophy in Western thought. These were said to be Reason and Nature, Will and Artifice, and the Rational Will. The greatest representative works within each of these traditions were supposedly Plato's *Republic*, Hobbes's *Leviathan*, and Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, respectively. 'Israel and Islam' were mentioned as sources of inspiration for the Hobbesian tradition of Will and Artifice, though Oakeshott argued in fact that this second tradition 'springs from the soil of Greece' and only later incorporated other elements (Oakeshott 2000 [1975], p. 8).

On this particular point, McIlwain argues, probably correctly, that Oakeshott's position was influenced by Oxford philosopher Michael Foster's *The Political Philosophies of Plato and Hegel*. Foster argued that there was a 'metaphysics of will implicit in the Judaic doctrines of the Creation and the Law', and that Roman and Judaic ideas about law resembled one another insofar as both conceived of law as posited (and therefore as willed) rather than as a reflection of a natural order, as in Greek thought (Foster 1965 [1935], pp. 120 n. 2, 138). But although it is true that Oakeshott allowed this typology of three traditions, includ-

ing a Jewish-influenced tradition of Will and Artifice, to stand when he republished the Introduction to *Leviathan* in 1975, he never made use of it elsewhere at any time after the late 1940s.

Even in the immediate post-war era, Oakeshott, despite his clear admiration for Hobbes, clearly regarded the Hegelian tradition of the Rational Will as more satisfactory than the partly Hebraic tradition of Will and Artifice. In the tradition of the Rational Will, Oakeshott wrote, 'the truths of the first two traditions are fulfilled and their errors find a happy release'. But McIlwain wants to argue that in his subsequent work, Oakeshott 'would seek to rectify the "Rational Will" tradition through this corrected understanding of the Judaic contribution to political thought' in his subsequent writings (p. 138). This is a double distortion, since Oakeshott never again mentioned the Rational Will, and also showed no serious later interest in the Jewish intellectual tradition, either in his notebooks or in his published work.

McIlwain can reply by making the point that Strauss raised in relation to Spinoza in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, that 'the truth, or the seriousness, of a proposition is not increased by the frequency with which the proposition is repeated' (Strauss 1988, p. 185).[13] But while this is certainly true in principle, to assume that an author seriously holds a proposition simply because they do not repeat it frequently is an evident fallacy. In this case, there is every reason to think that the overall tripartite classificatory scheme that Oakeshott put forward in his Introduction to *Leviathan* was superseded.

In Oakeshott's later lectures on the history of Western political thought, he replaced this typology with the idea of successive Greek, Roman, medieval, and modern political experiences that were all distinct from one another. Specific thinkers did not personify traditions persisting through time from one era to the next, but had to be understood in terms of the context in which they wrote. Moreover, *On Human Conduct*, by far the most comprehensive statement of Oakeshott's mature political philosophy, only mentions the Jews as victims of religious persecution (Oakeshott 1975, pp. 222, 279). Discussions of Israel, Hebraic philosophical tradition, or Judaic thought are notable by their absence; nor are there any hints that we should look for them between the lines.

Ironically, as McIlwain is well aware, in his Introduction to *Leviathan*, Oakeshott was partly 'employing some of Strauss's hermeneutical principles against Strauss's own interpretation' (p. 105). Oakeshott argued that in *Leviathan* 'there appear (not side by side, but almost inextricably mixed) a theory of moral obligation at once original and consistent with the other philosophical novelties to be found in them, and another account of moral obligation the vocabulary and general principles of which are conventional' (Oakeshott 2000 [1975], pp. 121–2). Hobbes, in other words, had 'run together two strikingly different (and at some points contradictory) accounts of moral obligation' in a way that seemed deliberate to Oakeshott.

Hobbes did so, according to Oakeshott, because he knew that the conclusion to which his reasoning lead him, that obligation was entirely the creation of the will of the sovereign, was at odds with what most people actually believed, namely that the obligations of the civil law were expressions of a normative cosmological order. Since Hobbes wanted people to be persuaded by his argument above all else, he deliberately engaged in what Oakeshott called 'artful equivocation'. It is worth noting that Oakeshott, at least when he wrote the Introduction, seems to have endorsed Strauss's view that this practice had in fact been widespread in the history of political thought. 'Numerous' thinkers had done likewise, including Plato, Machiavelli, and Bentham (Oakeshott 1993b, p. 126). But Oakeshott acknowledged that in the absence of any other evidence, his argument was not conclusive: 'in the nature of the case it cannot be demonstrated to be true.' It was at best a plausible hypothesis.

Since McIlwain's aim is to portray Oakeshott and Strauss as representing the opposing principles of Athens and Jerusalem, he has no need to try to reconcile Oakeshott's and Strauss's account of Hobbes and recognizes that Oakeshott turned Strauss's own interpretative principles back against him. Here, in fact, he is following Jonathan A. Boyd's analysis of the different interpretations of Hobbes offered by Strauss and Oakeshott. Boyd has argued that one of Oakeshott's key aims in writing 'The Moral Life in the Writings of Thomas Hobbes' was to rebut the argument that 'Hobbes was a moralist of the common good, the chief proponent of which he perceived to be Strauss' (Boyd 2008, p. 716). Boyd argues, however, that Oakeshott's

interpretation was not merely alternative to Strauss's, but that it was demonstrably superior, even though it was also indebted to it.

Oakeshott's account of Hobbes's theory of obligation noted a distinction in Hobbes between endeavouring, which involved bodily action, and intending, which was purely attitudinal (Boyd 2008, p. 698). Our obligations could justly apply only to our endeavours, as there is no way for anyone else to reliably know of our intentions. Strauss failed to observe this distinction in Hobbes, and so his view that for Hobbes intentions themselves could be obligatory lead him to an account in which obligations could exist apart from sovereign authority. This, however, is precisely what we have seen Oakeshott arguing that Hobbes did not really believe. Boyd argues that if Oakeshott is correct, Hobbes only offered this as a view for public consumption on pragmatic grounds.

Since, moreover, our most important intention or aim in life is to avoid the fear of violent death, Strauss was led to the conclusion that obligation was entirely a matter of self-interest based on fear. This was the attitude that he thought had defined the bourgeois liberal culture of the modern West of which he believed *Leviathan* was the harbinger. While Oakeshott agreed that the thought of a violent death was a powerful motivation, he also believed that for Hobbes there were at least some people for whom their sense of their own integrity was more important than their own life. Such people did not regard themselves as obliged by fear of violent death to create the sovereign but by their own desire for a society in which they could continue to live with integrity. This is why Hobbes's passing mentions of 'pride' in his explanation of how the social contract was possible assumed great significance for Oakeshott. As Boyd points out, pride could motivate a magnanimous contempt for injustices such as rule-breaking in the Hobbesian commonwealth which would help to sustain as well as create it (Boyd 2008, p. 711).

The limitation of Oakeshott's interpretation, as we have already noted, was that it tended to reduce his account of modernity to a clash between character types. In his essay on 'The Masses in Representative Democracy', he treated 'individuality' as a recurrent historical phenomenon that was liable to emerge in any era. Following the nineteenth-century historian Jacob Burkchardt, who was a colleague of Nietzsche's at Basle, Oakeshott claimed that 'Italy was the first home of the modern individual who sprang from the break-up of medieval communal life.' As the experience of individuality began to become a topic of philosophical reflection, it was Hobbes who was 'the first moralist of the modern world to take candid account of the current experience of individuality.' But although Oakeshott stated that 'Human individuality is an historical emergence, as "artificial" and as "natural" as the landscape', the story he told was one in which generic types and explanations predominated. Individuality emerges typically 'as a consequence of the collapse of a closely integrated manner of living' (Oakeshott 1961, p. 152).

In the modern European case, it was the end of the medieval world and the beginning of the Renaissance that precipitated the development of an individualistic ethos and culture. For a period (Oakeshott singles out the seventeenth and eighteenth century), this morality and way of life carried the day. The morality of individuality created a form of government appropriate to itself (the kind of state that Hobbes thought would suit the magnanimous type of character). But the very success of individuality precipitated a resentful reaction by those who could not or did not want to embrace it. What the creation of modern democratic government in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed, which tended towards populism and plebiscitary rule, was a 'final release' for the mass man 'from the burden of individuality: he was told emphatically what to choose.'

Seen in context, Oakeshott's essay belongs to the broader post-war effort to find an explanation for totalitarianism. His account of the individual *manqué* in rebellion against individualism resembles the notion of an 'authoritarian personality' put forward by Theodore Adorno, for example. When Oakeshott wrote of the representative of popular government who 'has drawn up his own mandate and then, by a familiar trick of ventriloquism, has put it into the mouth of his electors' so that 'as an instructed delegate he is not an individual, and as a "leader" he relieves his followers of the need to make choices', it seems plausible that he was alluding to Hitler and Mussolini. But for our purposes what is crucial is that, as with his interpretation of Hobbes, Oakeshott was elsewhere critical of this whole approach to interpreting the past, at

least insofar as it was supposed to be a genuinely historical one. He himself admitted that he was breaching the boundaries of historical reason in his account of the character of the modern European state when he resorted to character types as part of his explanation (Oakeshott 1975, p. 323).[14]

Read against Oakeshott's late writings, an essay like 'The Masses in Representative Democracy' was pitched at a different, lower, level of abstraction than the chapter 'On Civil Association.' If, as Michael Freeden has argued, political thinking can take place at a variety of levels, with political theory in the strict sense being a concern with the conditions of political concepts themselves, as distinct from justificatory arguments phrased in general terms, or quasi-propagandistic efforts at legitimation, then while 'On Civil Association' is a genuine piece of political theory, 'The Masses in Representative Democracy' deserves to be classed as itself ideological rather than historical (Freeden 2014, p. 15).[15]

This distinction matters, because Oakeshott's theory of historical understanding decisively separates him from Strauss. McIlwain appreciates this point, and tries to address it. In particular, he discusses Kenneth B. McIntyre's comparison of Oakeshott and Strauss on the topic of historical explanation (McIntyre 2010). McIntyre contrasts Oakeshott's 'defense of the autonomy of historical explanation and . . . elaboration of the character of historical contextualism' with Strauss's attitude to history, which he argues in Oakeshott's terms is 'primarily a practical one' that 'yields a concern with a legendary or mythical past constructed primarily to address contemporary political problems'.

It is this position that McIlwain needs to try to rebut. His main argument is that Strauss did not in fact think that philosophers had access to 'the very essence' of concepts like justice and freedom. Rather, Strauss's concern was with 'eternal human problems' (p. 75). According to McIlwain, 'while some readers of Oakeshott . . . have criticized Strauss as concerned with the practical impact of his inquiries' into the past, 'the true grounds of this comparison' of their attitudes to the historical past is 'revealed' to be their shared critique of rationalism (p. 72).

The first issue is that of Strauss's attitude to eternal problems. McIlwain's response begs the questions of whether there are such problems, and if there are, whether they can be thought of historically. It is not clear that 'freedom' or 'justice' have been anything like 'eternal' problems for human beings. At best this seems an exaggeration: they have been a concern for a few thousand years of the human past. Even if one were to admit there is a class of eternal problems and that freedom and justice belong to it, however, it seems plausible that the meanings of 'freedom' and 'justice' have changed profoundly. But this is what Strauss cannot admit.

Moreover, McIlwain's attempt to argue that Strauss in effect made a distinction between form and content in relation to the question of 'eternal human problems' does not accord well with at least some of the things that Strauss himself said. McIlwain could point to Strauss's claim that 'Philosophy is essentially not possession of the truth, but quest for the truth', for example (Strauss 1957, p. 344). But this does not fit with some of Strauss's other statements. In discussing Collingwood's philosophy of history, for example, Strauss wrote that a truly historical re-enactment of Plato's thought 'means to understand Plato's description of the simply good social order as a description of the true model of society with reference to which all societies of all ages and countries must be judged' (Strauss 1952, p. 575). This does not sound as if Strauss thought Plato had simply identified an eternal problem. Plato's answers, rather, were presented as a standing reference point for judgment.

Strauss also declared in the same essay that for a historian 'to take a thought seriously means to regard it as possible that the thought in question is true', which also does not seem to support McIlwain's interpretation. As McIntyre points out, Strauss asserted more than once that we should consider whether the writings of great authors are 'simply true', even if we don't know what those truths are, and their teachings cannot be considered true in their totality (p. 81 and n. 44). But as McIntyre also emphasizes, it is not at all clear what it would mean for an ethical or metaphysical view to be 'simply true' (Strauss 1965 [1953], pp. 19–20).[16] If the term 'simply true' means something like 'unconditionally true', or 'true out of relation to all other propositions', it is, to say the least, contentious, and possibly even incoherent. But Strauss did not elaborate.

Another point against McIlwain's reading of Strauss is Strauss's injunction that we should take seriously the idea that there were 'things known to the thinkers of the past' that modernity has forgotten. This was clearly a claim by Strauss that there could have been substantive knowledge about political truths that ancient thinkers enjoyed which has now been lost, and not only about the form of 'eternal problems' (Strauss 1952, p. 579). There might be explanations for this discrepancy, of course. Some of Strauss's interpreters have argued, for example, that he too was an esoteric writer along the lines we have discussed (Frazer 2006, pp. 33–61). McIlwain hints at this view, but does not develop it in detail (p. 77).

For Oakeshott, however, taking a thought seriously in a historical context did not mean primarily engaging with or recovering its truth. Rather, it entailed understanding the thought in question as, like all historical identities, contingent in nature. The historical question was how a given thought, or philosophy, had arisen. The truth, whether construed as soundness or validity, of a thought might be of interest insofar as it contributed to further change (or failed to), but it was not the aim of historical inquiry to pronounce on the truth of a thought as such.

To assess McIlwain's claim that Oakeshott and Strauss were both critics of rationalist interpretations of the past, we can turn to Strauss's critique of the historicism that he believed Collingwood's philosophy of history represented. For Strauss, the kind of view that Collingwood's philosophy of history represented was one for which history 'attempts to understand the various cultures or peoples exactly as they understand or understood themselves'. Culture, however, was really the unintended result of a concern with 'the Truth', (Strauss 1967, p. 46, capitalized in the original). The problem with Collingwood's position, Strauss argued, was that it introduced a covert form of progressive relativism.

The historicist goal of re-enacting past thought treated it as necessarily specific to a given context, but historicism failed to acknowledge its own historicity. 'The alleged insight into the equality of all ages which is said to make possible passionate interest in the thought of the different ages, necessarily conceives of itself as a progress beyond all earlier thought' (Strauss 1952, p. 574). Now Strauss could have been right to the extent that, as a matter of fact, modern writers have sometimes been guilty of implicit self-congratulation because they enjoyed a perspective on the past that other cultures lacked. But this does not entail that it is obvious, as Strauss claimed, that a progressive relativism is necessarily intrinsic to the historical perspective.

The historical standpoint seems equally compatible with the purely sceptical outlook with which Oakeshott associated it. Incidentally, Oakeshott argued explicitly at the end of his final discussion of the philosophy of history in *On History* that the absence in earlier eras of Western history of an authentically historical perspective was itself a contingent matter (Oakeshott 1983, p. 118). There was nothing that had stopped Aristotle, for example, creating a philosophy of historical understanding in principle. Oakeshott's point was not that there were already examples of historiography in ancient Athens. Even if there had not been, Aristotle might have asked himself in principle what form a theoretical perspective on contingent events could take. If other tendencies in Aristotle's thought had in fact precluded such a line of questioning, and modernity was recognized to have created such a philosophy when ancient thought had not, these matters were themselves differences for historians to investigate, but nowhere in Oakeshott's work was there any suggestion that modernity's achievement in doing so constituted any kind of claim to superiority, as Strauss believed.

The element of truth in McIlwain's argument is that Oakeshott did agree with Strauss's negative critique regarding the problem of intentions in historical interpretation. Strauss asserted that the key question for historicist interpretation was that of understanding the intentions of an author, and that this was problematic (Strauss 1952, p. 581).[17] One of the difficult features of Collingwood's philosophy of history, as has often been noted, was the notion that the historian seeks to re-enact past thought, because this raised the problem of how one could know that this goal had been successfully carried out. It seemed to require access to mental phenomena that, even if they were treated as existent, were no longer accessible.

Ironically, however, Strauss's own view seems to have been that those he considered great authors were great precisely because they had a total control of meaning. McIntyre draws attention to Strauss's claim

that 'in a book in the strict sense there is nothing that is not intended by the author' (Strauss 1967, p. 53; McIlwain, pp. 81–82). As McIntyre points out, though, Strauss 'offers no real explanation of what he means by intention' (p. 78). Moreover, as McIntyre also notes, this claim depends on a view of language that is entirely unsustainable. No author is exclusively in control of meaning, which is a feature of language independent of the consciousness of the individual writer. It is impossible to avoid saying more and other than what one means on any and all occasions; even if the intended meaning is successfully conveyed, other meanings may go along with it, regardless of what the author intends.

Oakeshott, like Strauss, was explicitly critical of the attempt to tie historical meaning to intention (Oakeshott 1952, pp. 276–77). The historical events that historians inferred from evidence might include some reference to intention as part of the process of research, but an historical event as he conceived it was nobody's experience. Indeed, an authentically historical understanding of a set of past events was something that no-one who actually participated in them could have by definition. Even if someone who had participated in events later wrote a history of them, they would effectively have to treat themselves in the third person, and regard their own memories as just one more piece of evidence, to be studied not for their credibility as testimony (as might be the case in legal proceedings) but with respect to the question of how such a representation of events had arisen. Oakeshott wanted to insist on the distinction between what he called the practical past of lived experience (which he was happy to accept as a feature of a Heideggerian phenomenology of the lifeworld in which we necessarily occupy a futurally-oriented present) and the theoretical, historical, standpoint (Oakeshott 1983, pp. 20–27).

Oakeshott's philosophy of history, however, did not enjoin historians to treat certain thinkers as special, or to presuppose that they wrote in a certain way. We have seen that he was prepared to entertain something like Strauss's argument in favour of the view that a certain thinker had an esoteric doctrine, but he did not elevate this into a principle. As McIntyre puts it, 'historians are quite aware of the possibility that past writings are written in code, but whether or not it is so is an historical question easily handled by normal means of contextual analysis' (McIntyre 2010, p. 82). More generally, Oakeshott was arguing for a difference between two things that Strauss effectively treated as synonymous, namely, historicity, which he took to refer to the inherent temporality of experience, and historicality, which he defined in effect as the theoretical investigation of past historicity. These, Oakeshott insisted, were not the same thing, even if historicality was itself subject to historicity, so that, for example, there is a history of historiography.

Strauss's solution to the problem of progressive historicist rationalism was to replace it with another story of the same kind, whereas Oakeshott's distinctions allowed him to liberate historical interpretation from the kinds of psychological and progressive arguments that Strauss found problematic without needing to resort to the 'reverse whiggism of [Strauss's] tale of the declension of political philosophy from a prelapsarian state of Platonic bliss to its current wallowing in the slough of Heideggerian despond' (McIntyre 2010, p. 86). Oakeshott's distinctions were the basis of what McIntyre finds 'a consistent, coherent, and for the most part compelling account of the logic of historical explanation.' On the other hand, McIntyre argues that 'Strauss's work offers very little to those who are interested in the logic of historical explanation, other than a series of unsupported assertions concerning intentionality and an obscure and poorly constructed argument about the connection between philosophy, politics, and esoteric writing' (p. 100).

Even if McIlwain's attempt to defend Strauss fails, it is to his credit that he has not simply ignored scholars like Boyd and McIlwain who have compared Strauss unfavourably with Oakeshott. On the whole, however, he ignores most of Strauss's contemporary critics. There is no discussion at all of the most devastating recent critique, mounted by Adrian Blau. Blau argues (like McIntyre) that Strauss naively assumes the possibility of what Blau calls 'perfect speech', typically 'analyses similarities, but not differences', and is guilty of 'overstating the certainty of inferences, and only citing evidence which fits a claim' (Blau 2012, p. 145). While Blau acknowledges that Strauss was 'superb at spotting odd disparities' in texts, Strauss was too quick to assume they were deliberate.

Strauss, Blau notes, 'thinks dichotomously: a writer either intends every detail or is deeply inept.' But this dichotomy is a false one. Even great philosophers can be ambiguous and make mistakes. Strauss also

made contentious interpretative assumptions, for example that 'hidden arguments are often central—the middle example, or an idea in the center of a chapter' (Blau 2012, p. 147). This, however, was entirely arbitrary, and in effect licensed Strauss to find esoteric meanings wherever he was so inclined. Again, while Strauss was right to think that interrogating an author's silences on a topic could be a useful line of inquiry, he was wrong to assert, as he did with Spinoza, that such silences can be assumed to have been deliberate in the absence of other evidence (Blau 2012, p. 149).

The most serious problems with Strauss's work, according to Blau, relate to his numerological approach. Strauss saw significance in the fact that the three chapters in Machiavelli's *Discourses* which start with quotations from Livy are each exactly twenty chapters apart, but Blau points out that the simplest explanation of this is simple randomness (Ibid.). As with Strauss's approach esoteric meaning more generally, the point is not that numerological explanations are always wrong. It is unlikely that it is purely the result of chance that Machiavelli's *Discourses* has the same number of chapters as Livy's *Histories*, Blau concedes. But it is far too easy to concoct baseless readings. As a methodological *reductio ad absurdum*, Blau offers his own prophetic numerological interpretation of Hobbes according to Straussian principles in order to 'prove' that *Leviathan* and *Behemoth* include a foretelling of Beethoven's future career (Blau 2012, p. 153).

There is, of course, nothing as ridiculous as this in Strauss himself, or in McIlwain. Blau's point is rather that a combination of interpretative naivety and philosophical dogmatism, where dogmatism means that certain ideas go unquestioned, tends to result in exaggerations, distortions, and misrepresentations in an effort to vindicate a pre-determined point of view. Unfortunately, these tendencies are clearly visible in McIlwain's handling of Oakeshott. For example, early in *On Human Conduct*, Oakeshott compared his own conception of understanding with Plato's, using a re-telling of the myth of the cave in the *Republic*. The myth of the cave was also significant for Strauss, who as McIlwain points out, interpreted modern culture as a 'second cave' (p. 92).

Here again the difference between Oakeshott and Strauss was instructive. Whereas for Strauss both caves, Platonic and modern, were places from which at least those who could ought to be seeking to escape, for Oakeshott Plato had been mistaken to dismiss cave-knowledge as 'nescience'. Where Plato saw a form of understanding 'so minimal that he is disposed to write it off', Oakeshott found 'a conditional understanding of the world, valuable so far as it goes, and indispensable in the engagements of practical life' (Oakeshott 1975, p. 27). Platonic theoretical knowledge was not a substitute for the knowledge of the cave-dwellers in the way that Plato imagined, even though it enjoyed a greater level of self-consciousness.

What Oakeshott never does anywhere in this account, however, is to say how much he 'admired the solid manliness of the cave dwellers', a view that McIlwain attributes to him without any textual support whatsoever (p. 185). This is presumably McIlwain's rendering of Oakeshott's description of the cave-dwellers as 'sagacious and knowledgeable persons', but Oakeshott's account is not gendered, and does not relate to the ethos of the cave dwellers. It exclusively addresses the adequacy of practical knowledge for its own purposes. 'Manliness' is, however, the subject of a book by another Straussian, Harvey Mansfield, in which the quality of *thumos* or spiritedness described by Plato is represented as a mostly male endowment that defies scientific understanding (Mansfield 2006). Whatever the merits of Mansfield's work (and there are doubtless real issues to do with the idea of a gender-neutral society that he sets out to criticize), it belongs to the context of American neo-Straussianism, for which a concern with the alleged creeping corruption of American character has been a dominant theme. McIlwain foists it, wholly groundlessly, onto Oakeshott, who in reality had nothing to say on the subject.

An interpretative nadir is reached when McIlwain supports his claim that 'Oakeshott would attempt to establish a distance between his mode of poetry and . . . modern science' with a footnote—to Strauss (p. 80, n. 78). In the same passage, McIlwain asserts, giving no textual references whatever, that in Oakeshott's later writings, 'poetry begins to assume the priority which philosophy had at least nominally held', and that 'Oakeshott distinguished science based on the use of Greek reason in the analysis of natural causes and Judaic creativity through the freedom of human will and intelligence'. These are major claims, but they are made without any evidence.

The closest that we come is a reference to 'The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind' in which Oakeshott argued that the subjects of poetic discourse were individual, whereas science was concerned with universals. This much is correct, but the attribution to Oakeshott of a contrast between Greek rationality and Judaic creativity is entirely McIlwain's own invention. It is presumably based on Oakeshott's discussion of the traditions of Reason and Nature, Will and Artifice, and the Rational Will that we reviewed above, but that discussion occurred in an entirely different context, and as we saw, was not repeated. It certainly played no role in what Oakeshott had to say about aesthetic experience.

McIlwain's approach to interpretation, then, is often authentically Straussian in a way that does him no credit. His work is repeatedly beset by the same kinds of distortions and misrepresentations that critics such as Blau have highlighted in Strauss himself, and which explain why Strauss has not, outside a small inward-facing circle of admirers, been taken seriously by the great majority of historians and philosophers as a contemporary interlocutor for over half a century. To be fair, contemporary philosophers tend to ignore both Oakeshott and Strauss, at least so far as the Anglo-American analytic community goes. Both are conspicuous by their absence from leading philosophy journals.[18] As for the history of philosophy, the *Routledge History of Western Philosophy* devotes only a single mention to either thinker across all three volumes for the twentieth century (Parkinson and Shanker 1993–9). Their admirers have some grounds for thinking that this does them a disservice with respect to their historical importance. Both thinkers played a more considerable role in the intellectual life of their times than this lack of coverage would suggest.

If one were to make an argument for the continuing relevance of either, however, it is easier to make the case for Oakeshott. The modern contextualist approach to intellectual history associated with historians such as Quentin Skinner and J. G. A. Pocock began at least in part from an explicit rejection of Strauss's approach to historical interpretation. Oakeshott's analysis of the logic of the new contextualism, on the other hand, is still considered relevant by practitioners of intellectual history, and indeed superior to Skinner and Pocock's own efforts to provide a philosophical account of their approach (Thompson 2019, p. ix).[19] Oakeshott's theory of civil association and the rule of law also find contemporary defenders amongst scholars whose primary interests are not in his work (Dzyenhaus 2015, p. 236).[20] Strauss, on the other hand, is championed only by his devotees.

We began at the end; let us finish at the beginning. On the first page, the volume declares itself to be part of a series on 'Recovering Political Philosophy'. The premise of the series, that a study of classic texts can 'help to recover the classical grounding for civic reason', simply takes for granted that reason can have a ground in the first place, classical or otherwise. The editorial preface also simply asserts that the meaning of postmodernism was a 'challenge to the possibility of a rational foundation for and guidance of our political lives'. This is, at best, an oversimplification. The real motivation for postmodernism was a recognition that Nietzsche had been correct in arguing that all traditional Western foundational conceptions of reason descended from Plato were insupportable. Oakeshott was actually at one with postmodernism in realizing the need for a more pluralistic account of rationality, as witnessed by his re-telling of the story of Plato's cave. That is another reason why at least some of Oakeshott's thought remains relevant. But this was something Strauss rejected, because he was in thrall to a nineteenth-century German story about the lost unity of the now intellectually and morally fragmented West.

This story has long been exposed for the Romantic myth that it is, and it now only appeals to believers. McIlwain's vocabulary of spiritual stages and towering figures marks his book as fundamentally a work not of intellectual history but hagiography. It is erudite but naïve: where it should be sceptical, it is fundamentally uncritical. It leaves unquestioned various dogmatic positions that do not bear scrutiny, and misreads and fabricates in order to support them. This approach was characteristic of Strauss himself, whose contemporary appeal is now restricted mostly to an audience that seeks a vindication of beliefs, often religious in nature, already held on other grounds.

Indeed, McIlwain's main reference points, it is fair to say, are themselves Straussians who venerate Strauss as a figure with the answers to the problems of modernity. The other series editor for this Palgrave volume, it is worth noting, is Timothy Burns, who, like Pangle, is closely associated with the study

of Strauss. McIlwain cites them both extensively, along with other notable American Straussians such as Steven B. Smith, who thinks that the aim of scholarship should be to 'preserve modernity from its self-destructive inner tendencies' (Smith 2016, p. xii). But Strauss's contemporary followers, in their eagerness to share 'the Truth' with us, to correct our failings, and to exhort us (to 'manliness', for example), have repeatedly mistaken the lectern for a pulpit.

Those who imagine that they too would enjoy a view from towering heights will doubtless appreciate following McIlwain through his eminently readable pages; the book will surely be enthusiastically received and heaped with praise by the converted. Unbelievers, on the other hand, who have no need for a theodicy and do not want philosophers like Strauss (or Oakeshott, though he had no predilections in that direction) to legislate for them, will experience the kind of sympathetic embarrassment occasioned by witnessing a brave but doomed attempt to revive one of the twentieth century's definitively outmoded fashions.[21]

NOTES

1 Unless specified, all citations refer to McIlwain 2019.

2 'The essence of nihilism *is* historically as metaphysics'.

3 Strauss and Kojève knew one another well in Paris in the early 1930s; see Strauss 2000.

4 'Kant approved of a republican constitution because he believed that a government of this kind would automatically pursue peace; and Tom Paine approved of a democratic constitution because he believed that a democratic government would confine its activities within the limits he approved . . . But both Kant and Paine were in error, not merely in respect of their empirical expectations but in respect of the logical relations between the constitutions and the pursuits of governments' (Oakeshott 1993, pp. 9–10).

5 'what is called "the will" is nothing but intelligence in doing', and '*respublica* cannot be acknowledged to have authority . . . on account of being identified with . . . a so-called "general" will' (Oakeshott 1975, pp. 39, 152).

6 Michael Oakeshott to Patrick Riley, 28 February 1985, Oakeshott archive, LSE 15/2/6.

7 Nietzsche (1999, p. 21) argued that 'Dionysiac music . . . elicited terror and horror' but that at the same time it enabled a 'complete unchaining of all symbolic powers' and held out the promise of 'the destruction of the veil of maya, one-ness as the genius of humankind, indeed of nature itself.'

8 'an extraordinary teleology . . . innate only in our Europe . . . is most intimately connected with the eruption (or the invasion) of philosophy and of its ramifications, the sciences, in the ancient Greek spirit.'

9 van Norden points out that 'when European philosophers first learned about Chinese thought in the seventeenth century, they immediately recognized it as philosophy'.

10 Emphasis in original. Brague broadly agrees with Strauss's argument that European culture is the product of a 'fecund and even constituent conflict' between pagan and Judaeo-Christian culture (p. 26) but does not make the claim that ancient culture contains lost insights in need of recovery and argues that it is ultimately Christianity that supplies the form though not the content of contemporary European culture.

11 See for example: 'an entity called "the European intellectual tradition" stretching back to the ancient Greeks is a fabrication of relatively recent European history'.

12 Plato, *Republic,* 517d, where noetic knowledge is said to be the study of the divine.

13 The passage is quoted in both McIlwain 2019, p. 106 and Boyd 2008, p. 712.

14 'the temptation remains to seek a more general explanation of this ambivalence [in the character of a modern European state] than a historical understanding can provide'.

15 Freeden argues for a 'crucial triple distinction between the practice of political and ethical philosophizing, constructing political theories, and engaging with the social world'.

16 'Once all metaphysical and ethical views can be assumed to be, strictly speaking, untenable, that is, untenable as regards their claim to be simply true, their historical fate necessarily appears to be deserved.'

17 'The guiding question of the historian who wants to use Herodotus, for example, must become, for some considerable time, the question as to what question was uppermost in Herodotus' mind, i.e., the question of what was

the conscious intention of Herodotus, or the question regarding the perspective in which Herodotus looked at things'.

18 A search of the top thirty-five philosophy journals according to the Leiter report (https://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2018/11/best-general-journals-of-philosophy-2018.html) shows only the *Review of Metaphysics* has featured articles on Strauss since 2000. Oakeshott does not appear to have figured in any of them at all.

19 'the most comprehensive, critical analysis of the logic of this new historical attitude was Michael Oakeshott's'.

20 Dzyenhaus calls Oakeshott's essay on 'The Rule of Law' in *On History* possibly 'the most important contribution on its topic since . . . the Second World War'.

21 I am grateful to Linh Mac for comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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Middle Voices: F. A. Hayek

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David McIlwain's *Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss: The Politics of Renaissance and Enlightenment* is a veritable symphony of voices. It reads as a duet between Oakeshott and Strauss, with thinkers as diverse as Alexandre Kojève, Martin Heidegger, Saint Augustine, and Thomas Hobbes providing additional harmony (or dissonance, as the case may be). The topics range from the age-old tension between philosophy and poetry to conservatism and moderation to antiquity and modernity to nihilism and notions of a world state and much else besides. One almost needs to be Nietzsche's cultured man of well over thirty years of age just in order to appreciate it (p. 23). I fear that by Nietzsche's own estimation I am but a beginner and scarcely talented enough to add much to the picture McIlwain has painted.

But I have not lost courage. And if I am not a painter, I am at least musical enough to accentuate one of the many voices in McIlwain's work, whose counterpoint in the conversation of mankind might reveal a bit more about Oakeshott, Strauss, and conservatism in our time. I refer to Friedrich von Hayek, who makes an appearance in Chapter 2 of McIlwain's book, alongside Oakeshott, Strauss, and Carl Schmitt as the *katechon* (pp. 17-18). The term, of course, is not McIlwain's. He draws on Marxist historian Perry Anderson's grouping of these four arch-conservatives. McIlwain is sensitive to facile efforts to discredit thinkers by associating them with Carl Schmitt, and I can sympathize with him when it comes to similar efforts to denigrate Hayek.

Much as some see Strauss as providing the intellectual backing for neoconservatism, such is Hayek's relation to neoliberalism, where the terms are less significant for their content than for their usefulness in silencing unwanted voices. One has the impression when it comes to these matters that people like Strauss and Hayek are criticized because they are seen as conservatives *tout court* and that this underlying conservatism serves as a pretext for pairing the thinker with whatever ideological current is fashionably disreputable. This goes some way to accounting for how Hayek and the Austrian School of Economics are responsible for the disease of neoliberalism and globalism on the one hand, as well as the opposed disease of right-wing populism on the other (e.g. Wasserman 2019).

Far be it from me to join the chorus of critics. I should like rather to probe a little more deeply Hayek's contribution and see if this duet can be transcribed for a trio. Hayek is interesting because he shares with Oakeshott and Strauss a certain scepticism of democracy and a certain conservatism, but more than the other two Hayek finds himself more firmly ensconced in modernity, albeit not unaware of some

of its pitfalls. Although not rooted in an idea of friendship, Hayek's conservatism too lays "the ground for a politics which refutes, at the one extreme, the violent and existential particularity of Carl Schmitt, and at the other, the brutal and homogenizing universality of Alexandre Kojève" (p. 9).

To begin with, we might consider the aristocratic theme in Oakeshott, Strauss, and Hayek. McIlwain observes that "[t]he merest hint of aristocracy is of course anathema to Anderson and the Left" (p. 21). One can perhaps see why when we read a little later that "Nietzsche had urged his readers to shoulder the greatest of political tasks but had provided them with little guidance beyond the call for a radical aristocracy. It was for Strauss little wonder that Nietzsche's thought had prepared the way for National Socialism" (p. 45). Part of the task of these conservative thinkers might be understood to be how to recover a proper and non-Nietzschean sense of aristocracy in a democratic world (p. 54).

For, indeed, democracy has come to be conflated with socialism or social democracy or anything deemed desirable, such that it increasingly fits the criteria for a weasel word, which is what Hayek had called the term "social" in his day (Hayek would have sympathized with Oakeshott's distaste for the modern terms "social" and "society".) (p. 52; Hayek 1989, pp. 114-119). Scepticism about democracy seems so taboo that it is easy to forget just how widespread this scepticism was amongst some of the greatest thinkers in history. One needn't refer to Karl Marx, "the father of communism," or Friedrich Nietzsche, "the step-grandfather of fascism" (Strauss 1962, p. 24), both of whom were suspicious or even blatantly opposed to democracy, to illustrate the point. Even clear-sighted and honest defenders of democracy have been willing to sound its faults; indeed, McIlwain notes that liberalism and democracy do not necessarily harmonize (p. 41). And as Strauss proclaimed, "[w]e are not permitted to be flatterers of democracy precisely because we are friends and allies of democracy" (Strauss 1962, p. 24). The more liberal critics of democracy tend to fall into this camp as well. Alexis de Tocqueville famously warned of the dangers of the tyranny of the majority. The US Founding Fathers too were wary of democracy. In *Federalist 63*, for example, we find that checks and balances on power apply no less to the people themselves, who,

> stimulated by some irregular passion, or some illicit advantage, or misled by the artful misrepresentations of interested men, may call for measures which they themselves will afterwards be the most ready to lament and condemn. In these critical moments, how salutary will be the interference of some temperate and respectable body of citizens, in order to check the misguided career, and to suspend the blow meditated by the people against themselves, until reason, justice, and truth can regain their authority over the public mind? What bitter anguish would not the people of Athens have often avoided if their government had contained so provident a safeguard against the tyranny of their own passions? Popular liberty might then have escaped the indelible reproach of decreeing to the same citizens the hemlock on one day and statues on the next (Hamilton et al 1788, p. 404).

Publius' reference to the instability of Athenian democracy is interesting when one considers that Strauss advocates returning to the wisdom of the ancient Greeks as an antidote to modernity. Good government and the position of the philosopher can be threatened by the incomprehension and vacillations of *hoi polloi*, but it is also noteworthy that

> democracy is the only regime other than the best in which the philosopher can lead his peculiar way of life without being disturbed: it is for this reason that with some exaggeration one can compare democracy to Hesiod's age of the divine race of heroes which comes closer to the golden age than any other (Strauss 1987, p. 63).

Strauss was not a liberal, at least not in the modern sense, but he may have been able to appreciate certain aspects of democracy as well, or at least he may have wrestled with problems that made him more ademocratic or nondemocratic rather than antidemocratic (Gewen 2020, p. 110). As McIlwain reminds us, Strauss

also knew that even our modern democratic regimes contain an element of aristocracy insofar as we are called to vote for whoever we think is best (p. 57).

As for Hayek, he fully subscribed to the potential for conflict between liberal ideals and democratic ideals, particularly when the latter are not limited by the former. In some respects, though, Hayek's proposals could be more democratic than our systems today. For example, in criticizing the politics of his day as catering excessively to interest groups, he suggested that we might get

> a more representative sample of true opinion of the people at large if we picked out by drawing lots some five hundred mature adults and let them for twenty years devote themselves to the task of improving the law, guided only by their conscience and the desire to be respected (Hayek 1982, p. 375).

In any case, democracy for Hayek is mainly a means, not an end. But this doesn't mean that Hayek wasn't concerned later in life about what he saw as the precipitous decline of confidence in democracy:

> [E]ven a wholly sober and unsentimental consideration which regards democracy as a mere convention making possible a peaceful change of the holders of power should make us understand that it is an ideal worth fighting for to the utmost, because it is our only protection (even if in its present form not a certain one) against tyranny (Hayek 1982, p. 349).

In some respects, democracy is also beneficial as a means for the peaceful transition of power. Finally, it raises the public's general level of understanding of public affairs (Hayek 1960, pp. 172-174). On this last point Hayek may have hit a note of excessive idealism, but his optimism reverberates in Strauss' comment about how the ideal democracy is a universal aristocracy (Strauss 1961, p. 4).

With this being said, what does it mean to preserve aristocracy in a democratic age? For Oakeshott and Strauss it seems closely tied to the need to preserve liberal education, an education pursued for its own sake (p. 54). It also seems linked to the need to defend the individual against the group or the "mass man", as Oakeshott called him (Oakeshott 1961). Hayek was no less attuned to the dangers to individuality posed by mass conformity and the need for individuals to engage in intellectual pursuits for their own sake. It is precisely this honest pursuit of knowledge that allows for the advancement of civilization. This cannot happen if thinkers are beholden to the opinions of the masses:

> Advance consists in the few convincing the many. New views must appear somewhere before they can become majority views. There is no experience of society which is not first the experience of a few individuals . . . It is because we normally do not know who knows best that we leave the decision to a process which we do not control. But it is always from a minority acting in ways different from what the majority would prescribe that the majority in the end learns to do better (Hayek 1960, p. 176).

In fact, this notion was so crucial for Hayek that he considered it a duty of the political philosopher, who would always stand at a tangent to the prevailing opinion of the time:

> There is, in fact, never so much reason for the political philosopher to suspect himself of failing in his task as when he finds that his opinions are very popular. It is by insisting on considerations which the majority do not wish to take into account, by holding up principles which they regard as inconvenient and irksome, that he has to prove his worth. For intellectuals to bow to a belief merely because it is held by the majority is a betrayal not only of their peculiar mission but of the values of democracy itself" (Hayek 1960, p. 181).

Hayek's celebration of the individual thinker who thinks freely and is protected from the pressures of politics and public opinion would find its most interesting formulation in the structural reforms Hayek proposed in *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (Hayek 1982, pp. 441-461). In that late work Hayek traces some of the problems bedeviling modern democracy to the legislative branch, which, in his view, had relegated the actual task of legislating to administrators and bureaucrats while the legislators themselves were trapped in an endless cycle of fishing for votes. Hayek therefore proposed that the vote-catchers make up the Governmental Assembly which would carry out governmental tasks, subject to the control and criticism of an organized opposition prepared to offer an alternative government.

The other body would be the Legislative Assembly, tasked not with pursuing particular ends, but with outlining the principles and laws, applicable to all, by which the common good is secured. Election to this body would be free of restrictions on the basis of sex, property, or class, because the Legislative Assembly's primary task is laying down universal rules of just conduct, which are open to debate by everyone, since they are not based on interests but on opinion, and everyone is capable of forming an opinion on what is just. Hayek does, however, exclude career politicians (e.g. members of the Governmental Assembly) and those who have been unemployed for most of their lives, indicating that eligibility to this office would depend strongly on a candidate's accomplishments outside of politics and who have proved themselves before their peers in the ordinary business of life. This is not just Hayek's preference for the private sector speaking, but also his conviction that only those with experience of life will be in a position to formulate those general rules of conduct. Although he does not phrase it in these terms, Hayek would be inclined to agree with Oakeshott's assertion that politics is not meant for the young, precisely because the virtues of youth tolerate less easily what they view to be abominable and those formalities that appear to lead to error (Oakeshott 1962, p. 436). Thus the Legislative Assembly would be composed of individuals elected at age 45, serving 15-year terms, without any possibility of re-election, with 1/15 of the body replaced every year. After their term the legislator would be given a pension until retirement and the opportunity to take up an honorific but neutral position as a judge—all of which is designed to insulate the legislator from political influence. The legislators would enjoy the leisure necessary to think deeply and debate about all enforceable rules of conduct within their purview, such as private and criminal law, principles of taxation, regulations of safety and health, regulations of production or construction, the framework for a functioning competitive market, the law of corporations, and much else besides.

Hayek's proposal can be understood as an enhancement of the mixed regime and its separation of powers. All three accept that a division between classes within society is not only inevitable, but even desirable. However, the types of division they are willing to accept—not to mention those they are willing to endorse—differ. Oakeshott favoured a hierarchy of culture, but this was not the same thing as advocating for a social hierarchy (pp. 52-53). Similarly, Strauss was not unaware that the oligarchic nature of the mixed regime would and should invite criticism. Yet, as McIlwain writes, "[w]hen translated into the realities of practical politics . . . the *kaloikagathoi* are more those who are found wealthy enough for the exercise of the political virtues" (p. 55). As for Hayek, while he acknowledged the desirability of a cultural elite that advances civilization, he was not particularly fazed by the practical inseparability of a cultural elite and the wealthy (Hayek 1960, pp. 184-196). In fact, for Hayek, a cultural elite required people of independent means who could afford to turn their attention beyond material matters. To be sure, this could produce a great deal of ostentatious waste, but Hayek considered this the price of freedom and progress. Moreover, it was fundamentally no different from the wasteful consumption of the lower classes:

> Quantitatively, the wastes involved in the amusements of the rich are indeed insignificant compared with those involved in the similar and equally 'unnecessary' amusements of the masses, which divert much more from ends which may seem important on some ethical standards. It is merely the conspicuousness and the unfamiliar character of the wastes in the life of the idle rich that make them appear so particularly reprehensible. It is also true that even when the lavish outlay of some men is most distasteful to the rest, we can scarcely ever be certain that in any particu-

> lar instance even the most absurd experimentation in living will not produce generally beneficial results. It is not surprising that living on a new level of possibilities at first leads to much aimless display (Hayek 1960, p. 195).

The task before Hayek, then, was challenging indeed: "It may indeed prove to be the most difficult task of all to persuade the employed masses that in the general interest of their society, and therefore in their own long-term interest, they should preserve such conditions as to enable a few to reach positions which to them appear unattainable or not worth the effort and risk" (Hayek 1960, p. 186). Hayek had to find a way to lock in the successes of liberalism and capitalism without letting them pave the road to socialism—an effort viewed with a dose of scepticism by Schumpeter, who, reviewing Hayek's famous *Road to Serfdom*, wrote:

> The principles of individual initiative and self-reliance are the principles of a very limited class. They mean nothing to the mass of people who—no matter for what reason—are not up to the standard they imply. It is this majority that the economic achievement and the liberal policy of the capitalist age have invested with dominant power. Excepting intellectuals and politicians, nobody has changed his ideas. It is the people whose ideas count politically that have changed. This is why the old road has been abandoned. And in this situation there is no point in appealing to *Cicero* or *Pericles*, whose individualism blossomed in societies whose very basis was slavery, or to Benjamin *Franklin*, who spoke for a small body of hardy pioneers every one of whom cheerfully faced the alternative of getting on or perishing and some of whom did not scorn a profitable deal in slaves (Schumpeter 1946, p. 305).

Schumpeter concludes his review by pointing out that someone who does not even buy into Hayek's political sociology will fail to be convinced by Hayek's argument even if he agrees with Hayek's economics or cultural preferences.

Schumpeter was not the only one to notice that Hayek may share more in common with his intellectual opponents than he cares to admit. This leitmotif resounds in Strauss's indirect criticism of Hayek and Oakeshott's direct judgment of Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*. In *City and Man*, Strauss notes if we exclude the West's superiority when it comes to civil liberties and political freedoms, "the continuation of the metaphysical crisis would appear in plain view so that '[b]eings who look down on us from a star might find that the difference between democracy and communism is not quite as great as it appears to be'" (p. 166). As for Oakeshott, he observed that Hayek owed more to the rationalist mindset than he cared to admit—"planning with a minus sign", as McIlwain says (p. 19; Oakeshott 1962, p. 26).

It is worth probing a bit more these differences between Oakeshott and Hayek, if for no other reason than they *appear* to operate in very much the same intellectual universe. Some of the resemblances are indeed genuine. Both are British, although Hayek leans into his Britishness in a way that only an immigrant can. McIlwain succinctly sums it up by saying that Hayek "allowed these influences and sympathies to form into a creedal summation of 'English' moderation which careened toward self-contradiction" (p. 19). Both Oakeshott and Hayek support individual diversity. They find freedom in the preference for slow and steady changes. They both see private property as key to freedom. They do not believe that society has a purpose. And when Oakeshott stoops to speak about "the mundane economic concerns of Hayek" (p. 18), he sounds just like the Austrian himself:

> The third object of this economic policy is a stable currency, maintained by the application of fixed and known rules and not by day-to-day administrative tricks. And that this belongs to the political economy of freedom needs no argument: inflation is the mother of servitude (Oakeshott 1949, p. 406).

Inflation enables governments to lower their debt burden and has the same addictive properties as a drug: once we rely on its stimulating effect, we are committed either to more inflation or to pay for it with a recession (Hayek 1960, pp. 455, 465).

Where they differ is perhaps where they might at first glance appear to be most similar, namely, in their qualms with rationalism in politics. Their differences on rationalism are what place Hayek firmly within "the political revolution which appeared in full force in eighteenth-century Europe under the banner of 'Enlightenment'," which is to be distinguished from the "deeper and more permanent" cultural high points that characterize the conservatism of Oakeshott and Strauss (p. 17). As a highly educated man himself, Hayek was certainly not unaware of the cultural high points of Western civilization. Indeed, it was precisely in the interest of defending such high points that he endorsed people of independent means (Hayek 1960, p. 192). He is reputed to have said only half in jest that "a minimal government was one that provided three things: national defence, law and order, and a state opera" (Gray 2015). And, in a late unpublished interview, he said that it was in reading Schiller, Goethe, and the other great German poets that he came to his liberalism (Hayek 2010, n. 4, p. 2).

Where Oakeshott and Strauss might identify the beginning of the modernistic hubris with the Enlightenment, Hayek draws the line within the Enlightenment tradition itself, and particularly with the later generations of the 19th century who enthusiastically carried the Enlightenment's optimism and methods beyond their limits. If Strauss places the transitional point at Machiavelli or Hobbes, Hayek places it at Saint-Simon or Comte, with Hegel—so important to Strauss and Oakeshott—relegated to a footnote to Comte (Hayek 2010, pp. 285-304). Because some of Strauss' interlocutors are Nietzsche, Hegel, and Heidegger, he identifies the crisis of his time in metaphysics (pp. 153-171). Hayek's interlocutors are not from the German historicist tradition, but rather scientists gone wild, and hence he espies the crisis of his time in scientism. Hayek's understanding of scientism encompasses many dimensions. It refers to the "slavish imitation of the method and language of Science," involving "a mechanical and uncritical application of habits of thought to fields different from those in which they have been formed" (Hayek 2010, p. 80). Hayek's gripe is with the application of the methods and enthusiasm of the natural sciences to the social sciences. For Hayek, the social sciences "are concerned with man's actions, and their aim is to explain the unintended or undesigned results of the actions of many men" (Hayek 2010, p. 88). These explanations are aided with recourse to what acting people think they are doing. Hayek almost sounds a phenomenological note when he says that tools, for example, "cannot be interpreted to refer to 'objective facts', that is, to things irrespective of what people think about them" (Hayek 2010, pp. 89-90). Explaining social phenomena in purely physical terms would confine us to less than we know about the situation; ironically, by avoiding subjective elements and confining oneself to "objective facts", a scientistic researcher makes the mistake he wishes to avoid—namely, he treats "objective" and whole phenomena as facts, when they might be no more than "vague popular theories" (Hayek 2010, p. 118). Scientism, then, is quite *un*scientific. This objectivist tendency in scientism leads to other errors, such as an emphasis on quantitative phenomena over qualitative, the conception of the objective possibilities of production (i.e. if all knowledge dispersed among people could be mastered by a single mind, and if this mastermind could make all people act as he wished, then certain results could be achieved), and the habit of thinking in terms of the objective needs of people, which typically amounts to someone else's views about what people ought to want (Hayek 2010, pp. 114-116).

This sort of perspective encourages people to view social problems as engineering problems (Hayek 2010, p. 156). All that is required to sweep aside the free individual is a strong state to engineer society to its liking. But where Hayek would differ from Oakeshott, for example, is on the question of technology's role. McIlwain writes:

> The technological state subjects its citizens to the utilitarianism of the anti-individual. In dismissing individual autonomy it abandons the essential aspect of morality in treating a mass of individuals as a single rationally directed whole (p. 191).

Allergic as Hayek is to a single rationally directed whole, he would maintain that individuals remain free to choose how they respond to an increasingly technological society.

In this respect, Oakeshott, who is poetic and has his sights set higher than Hayek's, is more pessimistic than the Austrian economist. McIlwain writes that:

> [w]hile Oakeshott was swift in dismantling the view that the appearance of individuality is inextricable from the context of bourgeois market society, he was aware that a part of the renaissance of Western civilization had been squandered in the less elevated centuries which followed the *Quattrocento*; even to the point of expressing the concern that we may have entered 'a dark age devoted to barbaric affluence' (p. 181).

Hayek was obviously not so harsh on the market order and affluence. He could draw a line from Comte straight through to Marx and Freud, who, in his view, were the primary purveyors of superstition in the 20th century. Where Oakeshott's civilization was partially depreciated by "barbaric affluence", for Hayek this affluence was the happy result of a society that had disciplined itself to adhere to "the special kind of spontaneous order by the market through people acting within the rules of the law of property, tort and contract" (Hayek 1982, p. 269), or what Hayek would call "catallaxy". By contrast, Hayek's civilization was threatened by the ideas

> of a planned economy with a just distribution, a freeing ourselves from repressions and conventional morals, of permissive education as a way to freedom, and the replacement of the market by a rational arrangement of a body with coercive powers (Hayek 1982, p. 507).

Interestingly, these ideas correspond to Raymond Aron's three myths of the Left (Aron 1955, pp. 43-44).

One way to preserve civilization is through liberal education. Hayek sees the humanities as responsible for teaching people to understand

> the individual as part of a process in which his contribution is not directed but spontaneous, and where he assists in the creation of something greater than he or any other single mind can ever plan for (Hayek 2010, p. 165).

And although he doesn't often dwell on the theme, Hayek is as aware as Oakeshott of the dangers inherent to an overly pragmatic mindset in education and politics. He bemoans the change in the early 19th century where Greek and Latin were sacrificed on the altar of mathematics and the natural sciences:

> Thus a whole generation grew up to whom that great storehouse of social wisdom, the only form indeed in which an understanding of the social processes achieved by the greatest minds is transmitted, the great literature of all ages, was a closed book. For the first time in history that new type appeared which as the product of the German *Realschule* and of similar institutions was to become so important and influential in the later nineteenth and the twentieth century: the technical specialist who was regarded as educated because he had passed through difficult schools but who had little or no knowledge of society, its life, growth, problems, and values, which only the study of history, literature, and languages can give (Hayek 2010, p. 176).

Most of the time, however, Hayek ends up viewing civilization less frequently in terms of its inexhaustible artistic achievements, and more often in terms of its securing individual and economic freedom through rule of law, respect for tradition, and advances in material prosperity. And with this lowering of our sights, it is perhaps no surprise that later in life Hayek's defence of capitalism as the foundation of our civilization is ultimately based on an evolutionary view of man. Without outlining Hayek's ideas pertain-

ing to the evolution of our morals, which he sees as between instinct and reason, it is enough to cite Hayek's conclusion regarding the relation between the extended order and our evolved morality:

> The extended order depends on this morality in the sense that it came into being through the fact that those groups following its underlying rules increased in numbers and in wealth relative to other groups. The paradox of our extended order, and of the market—and a stumbling block for socialists and constructivists—is that, through this process, we are able to sustain more from discoverable resources (and indeed in that very process discover more resources) than would be possible by a personally directed process. And although this morality is not 'justified' by the fact that it enables us to do these things, and thereby to survive, *it does enable us to survive, and there is something perhaps to be said for that* (Hayek 1989, p. 70, italics in original).

In Hayek there is a tension between his Enlightenment love of progress and his acknowledgment of the importance of tradition. His ideas can be seen as a response to what McIlwain describes as the "crisis created by a global technological culture [which] suggests that modern 'audacity' and progressivism must be forced to confront and debate once more with ancient 'moderation' and conservatism" (p. 129). Hayek's answer, not unlike that of the US Founding Fathers, is to ground his ideas in constitutionalism, individual liberty, and economic prudence. On the other hand, one wonders whether his defence of tradition is not played in too rationalistic or scientific a key. Unhinged from Burke's providentialism, Hayek's reverence for tradition for its own sake has little in it to distinguish good from bad traditions. Ironically, he is open to criticism from Austrian School founder Carl Menger, who observed that institutions may contain as much inherited foolishness as inherited wisdom (Menger 1883, p. 12). Or, as the philosopher John Gray has noted:

> In Hayek this whiggish interpretation of history has been secularized in a pseudo-Darwinian idiom. Hayek contends that the patrimony of traditions that a society inherits is a precious repository of knowledge because it consists of practices that have survived natural selection. He postulates an ongoing competition among traditions, customs and beliefs, such that those survive which have maximal utility. Indeed Hayek argues that the history of religion should be understood in terms of the natural selection of faiths and moralities" (Gray 1998, p. 147).

Here we are far from Oakeshott's "religion as both the poetic escape from practice and the reconciler to human finitude" (p. 148).

This tension echoes in some of Hayek's more radical proposals, such as the denationalization of money. (I should add parenthetically that in bringing out this tension I am not questioning the soundness of the proposal itself; indeed, monetary stability may well be better served by transitioning to Hayek's denationalization of money. It is to Hayek's credit that he so painstakingly worked out reforms to the problems of his time, all the while doing as best he could to keep to his principles and avoid succumbing to the pretence of knowledge.) In a revealing footnote at the end of his proposal, he notes:

> It has been said that my suggestion to 'construct' wholly new monetary institutions is in conflict with my general philosophical attitude. But nothing is further from my thoughts than any wish to design new institutions. What I propose is simply to remove the existing obstacles which for ages have prevented the evolution of desirable institutions in money (Hayek 1976, n. 98, p. 228).

What is left unanswered is at what point the institutions presently in place become such a part of our organic evolution that their removal would be artificial and harm our order?

With his evolutionary morality emphasizing survival, the importance accorded to science, and what Oakeshott would consider his rationalist-esque scheme to end planning, does Hayek not share a little something in common with (Strauss's) Hobbes—the one thinker in the "British tradition" of liberty with whom

Hayek found fault (Hayek 1960, p. 111)? McIlwain writes that Strauss's "Hobbes was the progenitor of a bourgeois and technological anthropology" (p. 95), and one cannot help but hear variations of this theme played *sotto voce* in Hayek as well. So too when McIlwain writes that "Strauss understood him [Hobbes] to be engaged in a project of universal enlightenment resting on this artifice of human scientific culture, the progress of which would gradually consign religion to a prescientific epoch" (p. 104). In another sense too Hayek shares in common with Hobbes a certain unwillingness to acknowledge noble and "irrational" motives in man. For this reason Aron was able to point out that Hayek's idea of liberty as individual and constituting non-coercion was not the only type of liberty. Written in response to Hayek's 1960 work *The Constitution of Liberty*, Aron's comment was made against the backdrop of the Algerian War, fought by the Algerians to secure a *national* liberty, even if it meant sacrificing economic advantages (Aron 1961, pp. 639-640). And yet, there is also something of Oakeshott's Hobbes in Hayek, who seems to want to preserve "the magnanimous courage of men who were too 'proudly careless' to require the mere security of their bodies and too profoundly and permanently skeptical to expect the security of a world to come" (p. 109). This is all transposed into a bourgeois idiom of course, but it is an accurate depiction of the entrepreneurial, risk-taking spirit on which the capitalist order depends.

At the end of the day, with a background more strongly influenced by economic concerns, Hayek's pursuits, not to mention some of his conclusions, would differ from some of those of Oakeshott and Strauss. However, Hayek also enjoyed pointing out that "nobody can be a great economist who is only an economist", and that he and his fellow economists had to be "not only devotees of a specialized science but also, in some measure at least, philosophers" (Hayek 1956, p. 123; Hayek 1963, p. 443). As we have seen above, for Hayek, part of the duty of the philosopher was to think freely about those matters that may one day be picked up by the majority. Whether this is indeed the duty of the philosopher or not, I cannot say, but by this standard Hayek was probably more successful than many at speaking to both the prince and the people.

Strange as it may sound, he's not entirely unlike Oakeshott's Machiavelli in this sense. Oakeshott writes, "[t]he project of Machiavelli was, then, to provide a crib to politics, a political training in default of a political education, a technique for the ruler who had no tradition" (Oakeshott 1962, p. 30). In Hayek's case, this technique is not just for the ruler but also for the masses themselves. We might say that this "crib" has something utopian about it. In *Law, Legislation and Liberty* Hayek writes:

> Utopia, like ideology, is a bad word today; and it is true that most utopias aim at radically redesigning society and suffer from internal contradictions which make their realization impossible. But an ideal picture of a society which may not be wholly achievable, or a guiding conception of the overall order to be aimed at, is nevertheless not only the indispensable precondition of any rational policy, but also the chief contribution that science can make to the solution of the problems of practical policy (Hayek 1982, p. 62).

A prudent captain and people still need to know where to sail. And if Hayek's ideas focus less on metaphysics than on legal structures, if they represent a lowering of our sights, they are nevertheless in the interest of securing an order that is most conducive to individual liberty and material wealth and prosperity, which, base as some may think these aspirations to be, are considered desirable by peoples all over the world, whose aesthetic or moral strivings, one might add, we can share in thanks only to the economic nexus (Hayek 1982, pp. 272-273). The liberal's frequent recapitulation that hundreds of millions have been lifted out of poverty, that child mortality, famines, and plagues have all fallen while food production and living standards have risen tremendously (e.g. Gissurarson 2020, pp. 174-175)—all of these might strike the philosopher rightly concerned with the metaphysical problems of our time as missing the forest for the trees, but these advances are nevertheless important to the millions of people who benefit from them and to those who wish to benefit from them, even if in so doing they will be no closer to resolving their metaphysical plight.

Hayek's intense focus on the legal dimension may mean he pays insufficient attention to the political. It is true that some liberals place far too much faith in the power of human reason, science, free trade, etc. to end human antagonisms. Hayek speaks at the end of *Law, Legislation and Liberty* of the "dethronement of politics" (Hayek 1982, pp. 481-485). When one considers how politicized so many matters have become in our own time it is not so undesirable to long for an order that is free from politics. Of course, such an order requires constant tweaking and care; for politics, like the market, is constantly in flux. Hayek's catallaxy is intended to be such an order. And Hayek has no illusions about the fragility of such an order—"the discipline of civilization which is at the same time the discipline of freedom" (Hayek 1982, p. 496). Knowing that nothing, not even Hayek's catallaxy, is free from the threat of politicization does not negate such an order's desirability; for civilization is about moving beyond Schmitt's friend-foe principle (Huizinga 1949, p. 209). As we live in much larger and more complex societies than ever before, it is likely impossible and undesirable to comport ourselves beyond our intimate circle of family and friends according to the same moral sentiments that defined our interaction in tribal communities (Hayek 1982, pp. 291-309).

The dissonance we hear within Hayek's own ideas and in their contrast to those of Oakeshott and Strauss is indicative of a thinker who stands in the middle between progress and tradition, antiquity and modernity. In his conclusion McIlwain suggests that Oakeshott and Strauss provide a coherent philosophical defence of moderation as moderation (p. 200), and I would submit that Hayek does so as well, defending civilization from the excesses of the Enlightenment tradition while retaining what is best in that tradition. The musicologist Charles Rosen praised the chorus finale in the *St. Matthew Passion* by J. S. Bach—a composer equally caught between two worlds (see, e.g., Gaines 2005)—for its (daring and innovative, I might add) use of dissonant middle voices, indispensable to the majesty and richness of the piece as a whole (Rosen 1997). Hayek's voice is a bit like a Bach middle voice, at times dissonant but essential to the harmony of the piece. Not that Hayek would necessarily agree—he preferred Beethoven and Mozart (Johnson 1975, as quoted in Ebenstein 2001, p. 281).

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On Misunderstanding Michael Oakeshott

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INTRODUCTION

David McIlwain has written an extremely intriguing book comparing the oeuvres of the German Jewish American political theorist Leo Strauss and the English philosopher Michael Oakeshott. Regarding the former, McIlwain's book reads as a conventional hagiographical account of Strauss' work,[1] but his reading of Oakeshott is more fascinating as it seems to be an essay in Straussian esotericism which concludes that Oakeshott is best understood as some sort of romantic religious mystic instead of as an English philosopher in the tradition of the British Idealists. My interest lies almost solely in McIlwain's treatment of Oakeshott, and so most of this essay will address what I take to be his eccentric and ultimately unconvincing picture of Oakeshott's work. However, since I did write something about Strauss' conception of historical explanation at some time in the past and since McIlwain has been kind enough to mention that essay in his book, I will spend at least some part of this essay addressing his critique of my critique of Strauss.

The essay that is the subject of McIlwain's critique offers an account of both Strauss' and Oakeshott's conceptions of historical explanation (McIntyre 2010). I chose Strauss as the foil of Oakeshott because Strauss' work on historical explanation offers a particularly egregious example of the defense of a non-historical/practical treatment of the past. Unlike many so-called historians of political thought, Strauss does offer some sort of account of what he takes to be the task of the historian of political thought, but that account is confused, unclear, gnomic, sententious, oracular, and obscurantist. Were I to write the essay again, I would not include a section on Strauss, as he is an uninteresting thinker when dealing with questions of historical explanation. Indeed, Strauss' remarks on historical explanation are so sketchy as to not really even amount to a critical philosophy of history, and his work in the field of intellectual 'history' suggests that he is not so much a bad historian as not an historian at all.[2] McIlwain's account of Strauss' work and his critique of my critique of Strauss have done nothing to change my mind about Strauss' importance (or lack thereof), and, therefore, the greater part of my response to McIlwain's critique of my work will consist of a restatement of my earlier critique of Strauss.

On the other hand, McIlwain's account of Oakeshott's work is quite unusual, though not completely unique. For McIlwain, Oakeshott is primarily a poetic thinker whose work is secretly or esoterically in the service of the superiority of the poetic imagination, an imagination which finds its completion and consummation in religious experience.[3]

I am thoroughly unconvinced by this claim, and, in sections two and three, will explain why. My concern will be with Michael Oakeshott the academic philosopher, not Oakeshott the poet, the religious mystic, the bon vivant, the soldier in WWII, the father, the husband, et al. Indeed, I would suggest that anyone who claims that Oakeshott is primarily a poetic or religious thinker has to ignore the overwhelming majority of the works that he decided to publish during his lifetime.[4] For Oakeshott, poetry is a modally distinct form of experience, and religion is an aspect of practical life, which is another mode of experience. These modes are irrelevant to one another, and, thus, in Oakeshott's terms, it is nonsense to speak of a 'poetic philosopher,' a 'religious historian,' or a 'religious poet'. Santayana may have been both a poet and a philosopher, but, according to Oakeshott's understanding of the two activities, he most certainly was neither a poetic philosopher nor a philosophical poet; Eliot was certainly both a religious man and a poet, but the quality of his poetry has nothing to do with his religiosity; and E. P. Thompson was a Marxist and an historian, but, if he was a good historian, it was in spite of his Marxism, not because of it.

So, what was Oakeshott doing? He was offering theoretical accounts of the various ways that human beings have come to understand themselves and their circumstances. For example, he offers a theoretical account of historical experience (i.e., a logic of historical explanation) which is not a work of historical explanation; a theoretical account of science which is not a scientific hypothesis; a theoretical account of aesthetics which is neither a poem nor a work of art; and a theoretical account of religion which is part of a theoretical account of practical experience or human conduct which is neither a dogma/doctrine nor a practical recommendation of how to succeed in the world. In every one of his published works, he is doing what he takes to be the work of a philosopher; one might criticize it as bad philosophy, i.e. it is incoherent, inconsistent, self-contradictory, illogical, etc., but mistaking it for a poetic or religious statement doesn't even do it the justice of taking it seriously at its own word.

I. STRAUSS

As mentioned above, I am primarily concerned here not to dispute McIlwain's version of Strauss, but to reiterate my own critique of Strauss' various arguments about historical explanation. In the article, I offered three distinct criticisms of Strauss' approach to the history of political thought (McIntyre 2010, p. 69). First, he offers a critique of historicism which confuses and often conflates three different conception of historicism: one, the idea that all ideas are to be understood only as the conditional expression of the temporal situation of a particular age; two, that past ideas have been subsumed and moved past in the process of some sort of progressive history; and, three, the notion that an historical past is an autonomous object of experience and explanation.[5] Second, he suggests that historical explanation should be concerned with understanding the intention of the author, but he never explains what he means by 'intention' or how an historian is supposed to discover that intention. Finally, in his most radical claim, he argues that past 'philosophers' necessarily wrote in an esoteric or hidden way, and that proper interpretation of these philosophers must pursue this esoteric meaning. However, his defense of this method is neither theoretically coherent, nor, in the form in which he explains it, particularly relevant to historical explanation.

The first claim, that Strauss confuses various different sorts of historicism, is less important to my critique of his historiographical methodology than the other two, so I will only remark that it is in his treatment of historicism that his claims about the practical use of the study of past political philosophers is most clearly stated. Strauss writes that, because modernity and the historicism that goes with it has blinded modern human beings to the essence of reality, "the need for natural right is as evident today as it has been for centuries and even millennia;" that "the rejection of natural right is bound to lead to disastrous results;" that "the contemporary rejection of natural right leads to nihilism—nay, it is identical with nihilism;" and that "the inescapable practical consequences of nihilism is fanatical obscurantism" (Strauss 1953, pp. 2, 3, 5). So, the study of the 'history' of political philosophy is a necessary propaedeutic to the study of political philosophy itself. What is needed is a quasi-archeological recovery of the 'teachings' of past political philosophers, and it is the task of the Straussian philosophical historian to recover that past. The study of the

past, however, has, first and foremost, a practical justification in that it ought to lead to better, or, at least, less nihilistic politics in the present.

So, the vital question is, how does one recover the true or authentic teachings of past philosophers? Strauss certainly does not inspire confidence in his answer to this question when he admits that "the epistemology of history is likely to be of vital concern only to certain technicians, and not to men as men" (Strauss 1952, p. 559). In fact, his arguments about the character of historical explanation are rather meager and sketchy at best. They consist primarily of two elements: a claim about the centrality of authorial intention to interpretation and an argument about the connection between political life, philosophy, and the necessity of secret or encoded writing. Strauss writes that "before one can use or criticize a statement, one must understand the statement, i.e., one must understand it as its author consciously meant it," and that "the originator of the doctrine understood it in one way only, provided he was not confused" (Strauss 1952, p. 581 and 1959, p. 67).[6] Strauss is not alone in insisting upon the centrality of authorial intention in the interpretation of past texts. However, he is somewhat unique in that, despite his insistence that intention is the criterion for any correct interpretation, he offers no real explanation of what he means by intention. Indeed, Strauss repeats his invocation of intention throughout his essays on history and political philosophy, but appears to believe that the mere repetition of a few set phrases can adequately replace the explanation of such phrases. An investigation into a person's intention necessarily involves questions like 'why did 'x' do this?' or 'why did 'y' write that?', and answering such questions involves more than the mere repetition, translation, or interpretation of a text, statement, or action. Questions of intention necessarily involve placing statements into contexts in which they can be found to be some sort of answer to a question or placing actions into contexts in which they can be understood as attempted solutions to problems. Strauss's only apparent attempt to elucidate the concept 'intention' is by insisting that "the task of the historian of thought is to understand the thinkers of the past exactly as they understood themselves" (Strauss 1959, p. 67). This elaboration does not clarify things, however. What is the import of the term 'exactly'? It cannot mean the re-enacting of a particular thinker's entire life experiences, which would be quite impossible. It is certainly not related to Skinner's elaborate account of historical intentionality based upon his interpretation of illocutionary intentions and perlocutionary results. It seems that it might involve some sort of quasi-Collingwoodian re-enactment of the thoughts of previous thinkers, but this sort of re-enactment supposes that there is some course of events existing somewhere which could be re-enacted.[7]

Further, the conventionality of language means that the intentions of the author do not completely exhaust the possible meanings of the text. The notion that the writer is in complete control of meaning itself is far-fetched, yet it is central to Strauss's most famous doctrine. Strauss writes that "in a book in the strict sense there is nothing that is not intended by the author" (Strauss 1967, p. 18). This understanding of authorial perfection might seem to be more at home in a fundamentalist religious tract than an essay on historical explanation, but it is deployed by Strauss to support his controversial claim that philosophers necessarily hide the real meaning of their work behind a screen of obfuscation. If the author is in complete control of meaning, any seeming contradiction, incoherence in argument, or factual error must be the result of secret, coded, or, as Strauss calls it, esoteric writing.[8]

Strauss offers three different arguments in support of his thesis that philosophers hide their 'true teachings.' The first is non-controversial, while the second two rely on assertions rather than arguments, and depend upon an unconvincing claim about the distinction between knowledge and opinion. First, Strauss argues that some writers in the past wrote in code, and that some philosophers did so as well. Historians are quite aware of the possibility that past writings are written in code, but whether or not that is the case is an historical question easily handled by normal means of contextual analysis. Second, Strauss claims that there are writers who are so vastly superior to other human beings in terms of their capacity to control meaning that their writing should be taken as if it were logically perfect. The conclusion Strauss draws from this notion is that any contradiction in the work of a 'genuine' philosopher should be taken as a clue to a secret teaching. He avers that "if a master of the art of writing commits such blunders as would shame an intelligent high school boy, it is reasonable to assume that they are intentional" (Strauss 1952b, p. 30). For this

sort of argument to work, either a prior claim to some notion of what makes a writer 'a master of the art of writing' must be argued, and Strauss makes no attempt to inform the reader of any criteria of judgment, or we must accept the authoritative judgment of others as to the question of 'master writer.' Indeed it appears that the sole criterion of whether a thinker is a 'master writer' is Strauss's imprimatur.

Strauss's third argument about esoteric writing is drawn directly from his understanding of the character of philosophy. He posits a radical difference between knowledge and opinion as central to the idea of philosophy, which he then translates into a claim about the inherent and logically necessary opposition between philosophy and the political community. He writes that philosophy is "the attempt to replace opinions about the whole by knowledge of the whole," and "there is a necessary conflict between philosophy and politics if the element of society necessarily is opinion, i.e. assent to opinion [because] philosophy…is…the attempt to dissolve the element in which society breathes" (Strauss 1959, pp. 11, 229, 221).[9] Because society depends for its survival upon the acceptance of 'opinions', 'genuine' philosophers must hide the truth from society behind an exoteric teaching, and must reveal their real teaching only to "trustworthy and intelligent readers" (Strauss 1952b, p. 25). After all, as Strauss reassures us in an earnest rhetorical tautology, "thoughtless men are careless readers, and only thoughtful men are careful readers" (Ibid.). According to Strauss, this esoteric writing constitutes the truly political kind of political philosophy because it consists of defending philosophy in a political way. However, the radical distinction between knowledge and opinion cannot be upheld.[10] To be informed, even at the most elementary level, requires a knowledge of the subject of information which would allow one to be informed (i.e., the knowledge of the particular language in which communication takes place, the knowledge of the particular convention or practice being discussed, etc.). For example, a person who knows a great deal about games will learn a new game easily; a person who is completely ignorant cannot even have an opinion about a game. Indeed, philosophy has often been described as a way of coming to know better what we know already, but unsatisfactorily.[11] However, esotericism plays more of a functional role in Strauss' philosophy than a methodological one. The distinction between exoteric readers and esoteric readers plays a similar role in the Straussian world to the distinction made by Marx and Marxisant thinkers between those afflicted with false consciousness and those blessed with authentic consciousness. Esotericism, like 'false consciousness', functions to shield the doctrine from external criticism, so those who disagree with Marx, et al., are running dogs of capitalism, sexists, and racists respectively, while those who disagree with Strauss' or Straussian interpretations of various thinkers are inattentive readers.

McIlwain's rejects my criticisms and offers various justifications for his decision. His first criticism of my essay is easily answered insofar as he accuses me of misjudging something that was not even the subject of my essay. He writes that "Kenneth B. McIntyre's account of Oakeshott and Strauss on historical explanation is illustrative of the confusion which can result from a failure to observe the common commitment of both men to understanding modern European thought through broad designations" (p. 74). My essay dealt almost solely with Strauss' and Oakeshott's accounts of historical explanation, and, thus, I said little to nothing about each thinkers potted version of the history of political philosophy. Oakeshott's treatment of what he calls the two poles of modern political thought and experience and his three traditions of political philosophy were not the subject of my essay. Neither was Strauss' 'history' of political thought, which moves from the pristine translucence of Platonic philosophy (skipping over all of that Christian mumbo-jumbo, of course)[12] through the decadent three waves of modernity to our present nihilistic and relativist slough of despond. So, my essay "fail[s] to observe the common commitment of both men to understanding modern European thought through broad designations" in the same way that it fails to address Oakeshott's book on horse racing, Strauss' war service, the 'Adam Smith' problem, or the place of fate in Conrad's novels.

His second, and more serious, complaint is that I suggest that Strauss' work on historical explanation suffers from two related weaknesses that T. D. Weldon calls 'the illusion of real essences' and the 'illusion of the geometric model' (1953, pp. 20-30). McIlwain defends Strauss from the second 'illusion' by offering a quote in which Strauss recognizes the temptation to mathematize philosophy. However, Strauss' recogni-

tion that the temptation is there does not excuse his succumbing to it. And, contrary to McIlwain's suggestion, I am not accusing Strauss of being some sort of behaviorist, but, instead, I am criticizing Strauss' inadequate understanding of language, and the two 'illusions' which I attribute to Strauss' are both connected to that misunderstanding. To appropriate Weldon, Strauss seems to believe that "linguistic conveniences ... beget metaphysical entities" (1953, p. 28). So, while it is perfectly reasonable to claim, on the one hand, that the statement 'a triangle is a three-sided plane figure', or, on the other, that the statement 'a cat is a small domesticated carnivorous mammal with soft fur, a short snout, and retractable claw' is, in Strauss' favorite phrase, simply true, it is not at all clear how Plato's *Republic* or Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* could be simply true. The move from the geometrical statement or the essentialist definition (but, of course, cats and mats are not really metaphysical entities) to the generic claims that Strauss makes about philosophy and philosophizing is why it is accurate to claim that Strauss' work suffers both from the illusion of essences and the illusion of the geometrical model. So, I find neither of McIlwain's criticisms of my work particularly convincing, and, thus, though McIlwain finds my interpretation of Strauss inadequate, he gives me no reason to revise it.[13]

II. OAKESHOTT ON PHILOSOPHY

McIlwain's treatment of Oakeshott's work is eccentric in many ways, but one of the primary difficulties in making one's way through it is that the language used to describe Oakeshott's thought is completely foreign to Oakeshott's thought. He treats Oakeshott's work as exemplifying the conflict between Athens and Jerusalem, the theologico-political problem, and the quarrel between poetry and philosophy.[14] Oakeshott mentions none of this in his work, and, as I will attempt to demonstrate, Oakeshott rejects in a fundamental way the notion that these sets of oppositions are in actuality oppositions at all. To appropriate one of Oakeshott's responses to a critic, McIlwain's work "displays [his] disposition *never* to attend to what [Oakeshott] has written but to mistranslate it into terms of [his] own" (Oakeshott 2008, p. 268). Further, McIlwain rarely quotes Oakeshott's most coherent and considered publications, preferring to base his argument on very early articles, essays unpublished during Oakeshott's lifetime, and excerpts from his journals. For example, in a chapter in which McIlwain claims to be offering an exposition of Oakeshott's conception of historical understanding and explanation, he supports his argument with a grand total of two references to "The Activity of Being an Historian," and three references to the chapter on historical experience in *Experience and its Modes*. Only two of these references are full quotations of Oakeshott's writing. There is not a single reference to *On History* at all, despite it being Oakeshott's most extensive and mature consideration of the subject. In fact, there are more quotations from my essay on Strauss and Oakeshott in the chapter in question than there are from Oakeshott's own three published essays on historical explanation (pp. 64-85).[15] Reading McIlwain on Oakeshott is like showing up to see *Hamlet* and finding out that it's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* that's being performed. For these reasons, I will offer a brief overview of Oakeshott's conception of philosophy, and follow with a review of his understanding of aesthetic and religious experience. Along the way, I will address McIlwain's claim that Oakeshott is best understood as poetic and/or religious thinker, instead of what he (Oakeshott) professes to be, which is a philosopher.[16]

Perhaps, it should not be a surprise that McIlwain mischaracterizes Oakeshott's overall project, since he never addresses in any substantive way what Oakeshott thought about the nature of the philosophical enterprise. Oakeshott's thoughts on the character of philosophical activity are scattered throughout his essays, but his most extensive and concentrated reflections on philosophy are found in three works: *Experience and Its Modes*, "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind," and the first essay of *On Human Conduct*. His treatment of the activity of philosophizing in these three different pieces manifests a remarkable degree of continuity in terms of the kinds of questions and concerns which animate his inquiry and in terms of the proper disposition of the philosopher. Oakeshott understands philosophical activity as informed by an unconditional commitment to the interrogation of the conditions of understanding, and

thus maintains that the disposition of the philosopher is fundamentally skeptical toward the world as it normally appears. Philosophy is understood as a kind of mood which draws us away from the various practices in which we normally engage in order to question the logic of those practices. For the most part, it is a second order activity.[17] Thus, there is a distinction between the activity of philosophizing, which is expressive of a disposition toward appearances, and the particular conclusions of philosophers, which, as such, represent a further invitation to reflect on their specific conditions and on conditionality itself. In terms of his own philosophical conclusions, Oakeshott's work manifests a consistent commitment to conceiving various practices or modes of understanding, like history, science, and art, as quasi-sufficient, autonomous, and independent worlds logically unrelated to each other, and in viewing philosophy as a non-normative explanatory activity in relation to the modes. Contrary to McIlwain, all of the modes are autonomous, and none have primacy over the others. Philosophy retains its independence, in part, by examining the conditions of the modes themselves, and, thus, is not subject to any of them. This vision of philosophy as a disposition to investigate the conditions of intelligibility remains relatively unchanged throughout his long life.

In *Experience and Its Modes*, Oakeshott claims that "philosophical experience is…experience without reservation or arrest, without presupposition or postulate, without limit or category; it is experience which is critical throughout and unencumbered with the extraneous purposes which introduce partiality and abstraction into experience" (Oakeshott 1933, p. 347). Philosophy thus understood is not practical, historical, or scientific, but the adjudicator of the character and adequacy of practicality, historical explanation, and scientific explanation. Unlike other forms of activity and understanding, philosophical activity begins with a determination of its own self-reflective and autonomous norms of judgment. Philosophy is, first, an exploration of its own character which issues in a vision of itself which is at one and the same time a provisional conclusion and an invitation to further reflection. Oakeshott claims that *Experience and Its Modes* is an exploration of the idea of philosophy as experience without arrest, presupposition, or modification.

Thus, the tasks that Oakeshott understands to be central to the activity of philosophizing are, first, an exploration and self-definition of a criterion or set of criteria which then inform judgments about the adequacy of our understanding of the world, and, second, a critical investigation of what Oakeshott calls arrests or modes of experience which do not meet the criterion of adequacy. He writes that "I consider it…the main business of philosophy…to determine its own character…[I]t must [also] fall within the task of philosophy to consider the character of every world of experience which offers itself" (1933, p. 83). It is worth noting that Oakeshott focuses on the first of these tasks only in *Experience and Its Modes* and rarely revisits the task of philosophical self-definition again, concentrating his theoretical work instead almost solely on the latter task of investigating the modes of experience.

For Oakeshott, unlike other Idealists, each mode of experience is completely independent of the other modes because of the distinctive presuppositions associated with the mode.[18] He claims that "between these worlds…there can be neither dispute nor agreement; they are wholly irrelevant to one another" (1933, p. 327). The various modes exist as a result of a set of specific presuppositions or postulates which constitute the conditions of the mode itself. The modes do not share the same presuppositions, so it is impossible to move in argument from one mode to another without resulting in what Oakeshott calls "the most subtle and insidious of all forms of error—irrelevance" (1933, p. 76). The *ignoratio elenchi*, or category mistake, is central to Oakeshott's critique of modern attempts to reduce history, art, or practice to science; for any attempt on the part of one mode to regulate or judge other modes is both inappropriate and philosophically unjustifiable. Oakeshott observes that "what, from the standpoint of one world, is fact, from the standpoint of another is nothing at all" (1933, p. 327).[19] For example, historians, when investigating the past, presuppose a past that is inherently different from the present and thus irrelevant to the concerns of, say, a politician or a moralist whose past is constituted primarily by questions of its usefulness and, as such, dissolved into the present. The politician doesn't use historical 'facts' to support an argument, but conceives of the past as a storehouse of ready-made symbols and arguments whose relevance is solely based upon their utility. Or, to offer another example, artists understand metaphor as intrinsically meaningful, whereas, in the world of practice or science, metaphors are useless unless they can be treated more or less as a form of lit-

eral symbolic language. The scientist is not merely appropriating a fixed and finished artifact created by a poet, but instead transforming it into something understandable as an answer to questions about precision, stability, or measurability. Oakeshott's insistence on the complete autonomy of these various modes of understanding is one of the characteristic features of his philosophical work and remains a consistent feature of his theoretical investigations throughout his life.

Oakeshott's next iteration of the character of philosophy appears in "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind," in which he also introduces aesthetic experience as a distinctive mode in itself. Poetry shares the characteristics of the other modes in being autonomous, impervious to the intrusions of forms of experience foreign to it (e.g. the practical, the historical, or the scientific), and irrelevant to the other forms, as well. For Oakeshott, "poetry is a sort of truancy, a dream within the dream of life" (1991, p. 541). However, this is true not only of poetry, but also of historical inquiry, scientific explanation, and philosophy itself. None these are necessary for the continuation of human life, and all can be considered escapes from the 'deadliness of doing'. Here, the primary activity of philosophy involves the exploration both of the conditions constituting the modes of experience and imagining and of their relation to each other. Oakeshott writes that "philosophy [is] the impulse to study the quality and style of each voice [or mode], and to reflect upon the relationship of one voice to another" (1991, p. 491).

During this middle period, Oakeshott also writes essays which support a traditionalist epistemology, and these essays expand upon his elaboration of the distinctive characteristics of each mode of human experience. For Oakeshott, rationality is not a single abstract characteristic of one of the modes or of philosophy itself, but, instead, it is a characteristic immanent within all sorts of practices and within each modally distinct form of understanding. The most important conclusion to be taken from "Rationalism in Politics" and "Rational Conduct" is that rationality is a characteristic which is immanent within practices and varies accordingly, and not an independent or universal quality of a separable human faculty called reason or mind. Therefore, questions about the rationality of ideas or actions are necessarily questions of contextual knowledge and connoisseurship, or of 'knowing how' instead of 'knowing that'.[20] Oakeshott (1991, p. 12) distinguishes between technical knowledge, which is "susceptible of precise formulation," and practical knowledge, which "exists only in use, is not reflective and…cannot be formulated in rules." This practical, or tacit, knowledge consists in knowing how to engage in particular practices like cooking, playing baseball, conducting a scientific experiment, or writing a poem. The character of rationality related to each of these practices is specific to the practice itself, and does not involve a prior cognitive operation, such as writing a recipe for Peking duck, constructing a method or a plan for hitting a baseball, composing a hypothesis about the relation between force and energy, or creating the model of an ideal poem before then engaging in each respective activity. Instead, Oakeshott (1991, pp. 117-118) claims that "it is the activity itself which defines the questions as well as the manner in which they are answered … [A]ctivity … is something that comes first, and is something into which each [person] gradually finds his way: at no time is he wholly ignorant of it; there is no identifiable beginning." As in *Experience and Its Modes*, Oakeshott claims that human beings always and everywhere inhabit a world of meanings, and rationality consists of acting and thinking in such a way that we move from a given world of meaning to a more satisfactory one. Actions always take place within specific worlds and it is the character of these worlds or practices that give meaning to the actions. As Oakeshott (1991, p. 121) observes, "all specific activity springs up within an already existing idiom of activity…[W]e begin with what we *know*…and if we knew nothing we could never begin." Thus, knowledge consists in getting to know something better that we already know, but imprecisely or inadequately in some way. This dialectical conception of knowledge is continuous with Oakeshott's early work.

In Oakeshott's final lengthy consideration of the character of philosophy, he maintains that philosophy is a second order activity consisting, first, in the consideration of the general character of human understanding and, second, in the investigation of the presuppositions or postulates of various specific ways of understanding the world. He writes (1975, p. vii) that:

> philosophical reflection is recognized here as the adventure of one who seeks to understand in other terms what he already understands and in which the understanding sought (itself unavoidably conditional) is a disclosure of the conditions of the understanding enjoyed and not a substitute for it…[Philosophy] may enlighten but it does not instruct.

For Oakeshott, philosophical understanding is of a different conditional quality than common understanding because philosophical understanding is concerned with the conditions which constitute common understanding and is, thus, inherently non-normative. However, unlike in *Experience and Its Modes*, Oakeshott emphasizes the necessary conditionality of even philosophical understanding, and there is no mention in *On Human Conduct* of a criterion of unconditional or presuppositionless experience. Instead, Oakeshott emphasizes the distinction between the activity of philosophizing, which is an unconditional engagement, and the conclusions of such an activity, which are themselves susceptible to further investigation and elucidation. He writes (1975, p. 11) that:

> the engagement of understanding is not unconditional on account of the absence of conditions, or in virtue of a supposed terminus in an unconditional theorem; what constitutes its unconditionality is the continuous recognition of the conditionality of conditions…[and, thus,] the irony of all theorizing is its propensity to generate, not an understanding, but a not-yet-understood.

The philosopher is not engaged in the attempt to reach an understanding of the world which is in itself unconditional or presuppositionless, but is instead unconditionally committed to understanding the general conditionality of all understanding or experience. The philosopher, or theorist, maintains an attitude of sceptical dissatisfaction with understanding because it always rests on conditions which can be further explored. The results of such in an engagement in philosophical reflection (i.e., theories or philosophies) are inherently provisional, or, as Oakeshott puts it, they "are interim triumphs of temerity over scruple" (Ibid.). And, of course, they lose their concrete character when they are detached from the activity which produced them and transformed into sets of doctrines or dogmas. However, nothing that Oakeshott writes suggests that he considers philosophy as a secondary activity to poetry or religion, and his explanation of the imminent character of rationality in human practices is not a denial of rationality, but an elaboration of its variety.

III. OAKESHOTT ON POETRY AND RELIGION

McIlwain's Oakeshott is a man for whom poetic and religious experience is the pinnacle of human aspirations, but, as has been shown above, Oakeshott always considered himself to be a philosopher, and always maintained that the different forms or modes of human experience (e.g. history, science, art, and practical life) are independent from and irrelevant to each other. Philosophy is a second order activity, but it is most certainly not of secondary importance. It is the highest achievement of the human intellect. In this section, I will explore what Oakeshott actually says about poetry and religion in order, once again, to dispel the notion that Oakeshott places a higher absolute value on either poetry or religion.

As noted above, Oakeshott suggests that the aesthetic mode is one of several ways of conceiving the world, and that none of these modes are completely satisfactory nor is any one mode intrinsically superior to the others. Thus, it is perfectly reasonable for a human being to approach the world, at least on some occasions, and consider it in terms of its capacity to delight, entertain, or surprise us. Oakeshott's ways of conceiving the world are independent and irrelevant to each other and thus do not form any sort of hierarchical scale. These modes of experience, which include the poetic/aesthetic, the historical, the scientific, and the practical are co-equals, none having more philosophical validity than the others do. The world of practice is the one that we humans most commonly inhabit, and it is a world conceived under the postulate of its mutability. It is a world of good and evil, right and wrong, and success and failure. The world of history is conceived under the postulate of the unchanging pastness of the past, and it is a world of historical

fact, truth, and falsehood. And the world of science is conceived in terms of the postulate of measurement, and it is also a world of fact, truth, and falsehood, but insulated from historical fact because of the differing postulates of the two.

Oakeshott distinguishes the world of poetry/art/aesthetic experience from each of the other modes and, in so doing, offers his own defense of the autonomy, but not the primacy, of the aesthetic world. His philosophical aesthetics proposes that art or poetry forms its own realm of human experience having nothing to do with practical or moral concerns, historical questions, or scientific claims. The postulate of aesthetic experience is delightfulness, and the world of poetry or art is the world considered in terms of its capacity or possibility for delighting us. This delight is an intrinsic value and points to no other value outside of itself. As Oakeshott (1991, p. 513) notes, in art, "there is no problem to be solved, no hypothesis to be explored, no restlessness to be overcome, no desire to be satisfied, or approval to be won … At every turn what impels the activity and gives it whatever coherence it may possess, is the delight offered." Thus, Oakeshott's work serves the purposes of the literary/aesthetic critic as a negative aesthetics which, like a negative theology that tells us what God is not, provides a modal distinction which rules out the irrelevant concerns of the moralist, the politician, the hedge preacher, the historian, or the scientist.[21]

In addition to ruling out certain kinds of questions and considerations as irrelevant to aesthetic experience, Oakeshott also offers an explanation of the distinctiveness of aesthetic experience which does not limit such experience to the creative artist. For Oakeshott, anything in our experience can become a subject of contemplation in terms of the delight that it is capable of producing. Anything can be conceived as art, including things that would normally be considered moral enormities. For example, incest (Sophocles' Theban plays), pedophilia (*Lolita*), hysteria (*Madame Bovary*), rape (*A Clockwork Orange*), and mental illness (*The Idiot*) have all provided artists with images which, though morally troublesome in various ways when considered in practical terms, continue to delight. Artists contemplate the aesthetic possibilities of seemingly mundane things like peasant boots (Van Gough), houses (Cezanne), goats (Rauschenberg), urinals (Duchamp), pipes (Magritte), colors (Rothko), shapes (Kandinsky), and lines (Mondrian), and composers consider the aesthetic qualities of sounds of all sorts like taxi horns (Gershwin), toy pianos (Cage), birdsong (Messiaen), and donkeys (Mendelssohn).

The contemplation of anything from the morally reprehensible to the unremarkable and mundane in terms of its capacity to delight is possible because artistic expression is not propositional, and, therefore, the world of aesthetic experience cannot logically claim its own superiority to other modes of experience. As Oakeshott (1991, p. 519) notes, "a poetic image can never 'lie' because it does not affirm anything." Unlike the worlds of history, science, and, to a certain degree, practical morality, there are no 'facts' in the world of aesthetic experience. Messiaen may strike a 'false note', but it's not because his composition doesn't accurately reflect the sound of the black-eared wheatear, and Homer may nod, but it's not because he fudges on the body count in one of the battles in *The Iliad*. Thus, it is irrelevant whether 'The sun-comprehending glass … shows Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless,' is an accurate description of the play between sunlight and windows, just as it makes no sense to ask Delmore Schwartz if he really has a 'heavy bear who goes with me, A manifold honey to smear his face.' The criteria of inclusion in art lies not in its correspondence to a factual world or in its capacity to ameliorate the human condition, but in its internal coherence as a work of art.[22] Thus, a poem of two lines might be too long and a novel of a thousand pages might be too short.

Oakeshott's elaboration of aesthetic experience offers a lens through which to view the world aesthetically, but also through which to examine certain objects which present themselves as works of art. These objects often stand out as aesthetic objects because they are 'framed' as works of art.[23] However, Oakeshott's philosophical aesthetics does not offer a critical method, and, in fact, he rejects the notion that his work will be of much practical use to the artist or art critic. His primary concern is distinguishing between various ways of understanding or contemplating the world, and the aesthetic is just one of these ways. To reiterate, Oakeshott himself never makes the claim that the world of delight is superior to any oth-

er world of experience, and Oakeshott's philosophy of art cannot reasonably be understood to be making such a claim.

The other side of McIlwain's poetic Oakeshott is his religious Oakeshott. It seems to me that calling Oakeshott a religious thinker is like calling Shostakovich a composer of film scores or calling Thomas Pynchon a detective novelist. In the two philosophical monographs that Oakeshott decided to have published during his lifetime, he spends around ten pages total in *Experience and Its Modes* out of 330 some odd pages, and he spends 5 ½ pages in *On Human Conduct* out of 350 on the subject of religion. Religion is not mentioned in any of his essays on historical or scientific explanation or poetic expression. When Oakeshott does discuss it in his two books, it is as an aspect, albeit a somewhat significant one, in the world of practical life or human conduct. Insofar as the world of practical life is philosophically or theoretically unsatisfactory (and, for Oakeshott, this is most definitely the case), the world of religious experience is also philosophically unsatisfactory. Nonetheless, I will offer a brief account of Oakeshott's exiguous comments on religion in order to clarify the (relatively minor) place of religion in Oakeshott's thought.

First, Oakeshott maintains in each of his considerations of religion that religious experience is practical experience, i.e. an aspect of human conduct. His understanding of the character of practical experience or human conduct reflects his understanding of the character of philosophy and modality. He conceives conduct as specific performances emerging from and embedded in practices, or traditions, which condition and are conditioned by those performances. These practices are either instrumental or prudential considerations concerned with successful performance, or non-instrumental practices, like morality and language, which condition all performances. Conduct or practical life itself is an effort to alter one's present situation in terms of a preferred situation. However, this new situation inevitably presents problems which call for action, and the necessarily interminable, mutable, and incomplete character of the practical world of experience is evidence of its theoretical inadequacy. Thus, according to Oakeshott, from the standpoint of philosophy, religion offers an ultimately unsatisfactory understanding of the world, while from the standpoints of the worlds of art, history, or science, religion is merely irrelevant. Oakeshott's account of religion does change from *Experience and Its Modes* to *On Human Conduct*, but the change does not affect the theoretical inadequacy of religion as an understanding of the whole of human experience. In *Experience and Its Modes*, Oakeshott (1933, p. 292) characterizes religion as the "consummation of practice," while, in *On Human Conduct*, Oakeshott (1975, p. 81) suggests that "religious faith is…a reconciliation to the unavoidable dissonances of a human condition, … a mode of acceptance, a 'graceful' response." In neither of these characterizations, however, is religion understood as an escape from the practical world, nor is it conceived as resolving the theoretical difficulties inherent in the practical world. As he writes (1933, p. 310) in *Experience and Its Modes*, "not until we have shaken off the abstractions of practical experience, of morality and religion, good and evil, faith and freedom, body and mind, the practical self and its ambitions and desires, shall we find ourselves once more turned in the direction which leads to what can satisfy the character of experience." Further, in writing about religion, Oakeshott is not advocating the adoption of a religious sensibility, but offering a theory of religious faith. As he notes (1975, p. 81) in *On Human Conduct*, "although a faith is an understanding, a theoretical understanding of faith is not itself a faith." Thus, it is an obvious mischaracterization to suggest that Oakeshott is best understood as a religious thinker.

CONCLUSION

To conclude and to return to McIlwain's argument, his refusal to consider Oakeshott's understanding of philosophy and the modal character of experience, and his lack of regard for Oakeshott's epistemological writings explain, at least in part, his contentions that Oakeshott is an irrationalist.[24] Further, this neglect of Oakeshott's own work leads McIlwain to claim that Oakeshott sides with poetry in its dispute with philosophy, and that he is a proponent of Jerusalem in its perpetual war with Athens (pp. 80, 182). Both of these claims are patently false, if, of course, one takes Oakeshott's writings seriously. For Oakeshott, there is no inherent conflict between religion and philosophy, between poetry and philosophy, between science and

philosophy, or between history and philosophy. These are all separate and distinct ways of understanding the world and of making ourselves at home in it. Each is satisfactory in its own way, but irrelevant to any other way of conceiving the world. The exception is philosophy, which is supposed to offer second-order explanations of the unique and distinctive characters of each modal form of experience. Neither religion, which is an aspect of practical life, nor poetry/art can legitimately claim to comprehend the whole of human experience, as both are abstractions. Thus, Oakeshott, as the person who makes these claims, cannot reasonably be understood as primarily a poetic or religious writer. It is baffling how anyone who has read his oeuvre could mistake his work so tremendously. Perhaps, to appropriate Oakeshott's response (2008, p. 274) to an unfriendly critic, McIlwain's primary "concern…is not at all with [Oakeshott's] argument, but with the predilections it revealed."

NOTES

1 For example, McIlwain writes (p. 153) that "Strauss became so adept at political philosophy that his profoundest observations often appear as mere platitudes."

2 I do not think that most Straussians would necessarily disagree with this assessment, since they tend to think of their master as a philosopher first and foremost.

3 There are other writers who have focused on Oakeshott's treatment of poetry and/or religion, but these writers have not gone so far as to claim that Oakeshott himself placed poetry and religion at the apex of human experience, and several of these writers noted, first and foremost, how sketchy and intermittent Oakeshott's various comments about poetry, and, more especially, religion happen to be. See, for example, Tragenza 2010, pp. 2-16; Abel 2010, pp. 17-31; Corey 2012, pp. 134-150, 2006; and Worthington 2003.

4 Oakeshott (1991, p. 60) once wrote that "the sin of the academic is that he takes so long in coming to the point." In the case of Oakeshott the poet and religious thinker, Oakeshott never got to the point at all.

5 McIlwain's account of historicism (p. 70) is similarly confused. He writes that historicism claims that "the presuppositions of ancient thought have been rationally superseded or reflect only 'truths' of their time." These two claims are quite different and have distinctive implications concerning how to explain past thinkers. Further, despite devoting a substantial portion of his book to a thinker (i.e. Oakeshott) who focuses specifically on historical explanation as logically distinct from other sorts of explanation, he neglects this sort of treatment completely.

6 In contrast, G. E. M. Anscombe (1969, p. 36) notes that "a man's intention in acting is not so private and interior a thing that he has absolute authority in saying *what* it is."

7 It is unlikely that Strauss meant to appropriate anything from Collingwood. He wrote an ill-informed and unconvincing attack on Collingwood and Collingwood's posthumously published collection of essays *The Idea of History* in 1952a, pp. 559-586.

8 As Pocock (1975, p. 393) writes, "we enter a world in which nobody ever makes a mistake or says anything which he does not intend to say; in which nobody ever omits to say something which he does not intend to omit… [and] if there are no anomalies…, then everything that Strauss can impute to [an author] as an intention is an intention.".

9 Strauss (1959, p. 227) also insists that "esotericism necessarily follows from the original meaning of philosophy."

10 The radical separation of knowledge and opinion and its manifestation in esoteric writing constitutes one of Strauss's most well-known formulations. He also claims that there is a radical distinction to be made between 'Athens' and 'Jerusalem', or reason and faith. For a compelling critique of Strauss's account of this distinction which convincingly argues that Strauss is mistaken about the character of both 'Athens' and 'Jerusalem,' see Grosby 2008, pp. 239-260.

11 Collingwood (1995, p. 11) writes that "in a philosophical inquiry what we are trying to do is not to discover something of which until now we have been totally ignorant, but to know something better which in some sense we knew already."

12 McIlwain (p. 200), echoing Strauss' general tone concerning religion, claims that "no one can be both a philosopher and a theologian," which would have surprised Augustine and Aquinas. This claim might provide the secret key to McIlwain's claim that Oakeshott is really a poet and preacher. His reasoning might be characterized thusly: Oakeshott is some sort of Augustinian; Augustine was a Christian theologian; theologians cannot be philosophers; thus, Augustine and all Augustinians (including Oakeshott) are not philosophers.

13 McIlwain (p. 75) observes that "Paul Gottfried [is] one of the few who have found McIntyre's Strauss plausible." As far as I am aware, Paul Gottfried, the editor of *The Journal of the Philosophy of History,* and the two external reviewers for the journal are the only human beings to have read the essay before McIlwain found it. Since Gottfried approved and the *Journal* published the piece, I think that my plausibility rating was at 100%, until McIlwain came along, of course.

14 All of these are Straussian tropes, of course (pp. 182, 6, 80).

15 For an explanation of why relying on juvenilia and work unpublished in Oakeshott's lifetime presents a false picture of Oakeshott the philosopher, see McIntyre 2005, pp. 119-132.

16 At various places in his book, McIlwain (pp. 33, 42, 65, 72, 80) claims that Oakeshott's thought is "align[ed] with poetry and religion," that "Oakeshott represents a poetic viewpoint," that Oakeshott has an "overall poetic viewpoint," that Oakeshott posits "the priority of creativity rather than reason," that Oakeshott "reveal[s] his partisanship for poetry in its permanent quarrel with philosophy," etc.

17 In his essay on poetry, Oakeshott (1991, p. 489) calls philosophy a parasitic activity, but this is merely another way of describing it as a second order activity. This understanding of philosophy is not foreign to Hegel or Bradley, and it was the general conclusion of many of philosophers who were contemporaries of Oakeshott (e.g. Ryle, Austin, Wittgenstein, Hampshire, Strawson, Searle, et al.).

18 For a contrasting view, see Collingwood 1924. For a comparison of the Collingwood and Oakeshott on this issue, see also Boucher 1989, pp. 69-89.

19 Ryle (1984, pp. 15-18), argues that a category mistake is at the heart of the wrongheaded conception of the mind/body problem which he calls the doctrine of the 'Ghost in the Machine'. It is possible that Ryle was aware of the emphasis that Oakeshott placed upon the issue of category error in *Experience and Its Modes* and was influenced by it, although there is no public evidence extant. It is certainly the case that Ryle's work had a significant influence on Oakeshott's later work on rationalism.

20 Ryle (1984, pp. 31, 41) argues that "knowing how to apply maxims cannot be reduced to, or derived from, the acceptance of those or any other maxims…We learn *how* by practice, schooled indeed by criticism and example, but often quite unaided by any lessons in…theory." Oakeshott writes (2007, p. 318) a very positive review of Ryle's book, noting that "this is a piece of philosophical writing in the highest class … [which] has something of the vitality and the power of standing on its own feet which belong to the philosophical classic."

21 This claim does not deny that a person might consider a work of art under different categories than the aesthetic. For example, one might consider Fernand Léger's *Contraste de Formes* in a purely practical way, noting that it sold for $70 million last year. Or one might consider it in scientific terms, asking questions about the chemical composition of the paint used, the type of wood used for the frame, etc. And one might consider it historically, observing that it was completed in 1913 at the height of Cubism, and was influenced by the Italian Futurists. None of these, however, contributes to an aesthetic understanding of the painting, which is concerned with the brushwork, color, and contrast, the novel use of chiaroscuro, the return to two-dimensionality, etc. The art historian is the closest to the art critic, and a knowledge of the artistic character of Cubism and Futurism would add something to the aesthetic understanding of the painting, but merely connecting the terms Cubism, Futurism, and Léger would not so contribute.

22 Oakeshott (1991, p. 527) suggests that an artist's aesthetic purposes are "like the Spanish painter Orbaneja, of whom Cervantes tells us: when a bystander asked what he was painting, he answered, 'Whatever it turns out to be'."

23 For example, a urinal in a junkyard usually evokes little more than a cursory glance at a discarded piece of refuse, but a urinal in an art museum titled "Fountain" and marked by the unusual signature 'R. Mutt' screams to be considered as a work of art of some sort.

24 McIlwain writes (pp. 42, 72) that "Oakeshott represents a poetic viewpoint which implicitly denies that 'virtue is knowledge'"; and that "Oakeshott denied that reason…could find a coherent place in historical experience." The claim that Oakeshott is an irrational romantic is central to the writings of the early critics of Oakeshott's work. See, among others, Falck 1963, pp. 60-71; and Raphael, 1964, pp. 202-15.

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David McIlwain's Reply

DAVID MCILWAIN

Firstly, I am humbled and grateful for this sustained attention to my work. I wish to thank each of the contributors, the editor of this edition Christopher Adair-Toteff who has a rare gift for encouraging and organizing intellectual output, and Leslie Marsh and *Cosmos + Taxis* for so generously extending this honor in furthering the discussion of two remarkable thinkers, Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss.

A sympathetic reviewer of the manuscript of *Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss* worried that I might have been "chasing too many hares". This is a justified observation, but I was also conscious to avoid the fixed and tedious dichotomies that jostle their way to the forefront of a comparison of two thinkers. The framework indicated by the title *The Politics of Renaissance and Enlightenment* was intended to be loose enough to be inclusive of a great deal. Nevertheless, it is already, I hope, suggestive of the true nature of the stag hunt.

Luke O'Sullivan suggests that one way through all this is to look to the last lines where I engaged in a poetic flourish about the contest between philosophical light and poetic color. I reflected that it may require a great mind to pin down and assess the true rank of great minds, and I had not attempted any Lilliputian antics. But in echoing Shelley on poets as "the unacknowledged legislators of the world" and quoting Goethe on the "battle of belief of unbelief" I implied that my framework had not been "Straussian," but had been designed to encompass some broad and age-old themes. In terms of political theory, I was dealing with two individuals whose overwhelming concern was their freedom to pursue radical, private endeavors. Individuality is thus an underlying theme. For Leo Strauss, his radical individuality was expressed in a pursuit of philosophy, centered on the question *quid sit deus*. Some urge that Michael Oakeshott should also be understood as a philosopher, but I have described him as a poetic-religious figure—a man who explored and lived the this-worldly implications of *cur deus homo*. Both were aware that privacy and individuality require political defenses. Leo Strauss's decision to revive classical political science and teach its virtues to a generation of young scholars would generate great opprobrium and invite misunderstanding of his true nature. In a not dissimilar manner, the more intellectually solitary Michael Oakeshott's untimeliness amid the progressives and socialists of the English academy led to him being mischaracterized as an isolated flare up of fading reaction. It is precisely this complacency of the progressives about the success and

legitimacy of the modern Enlightenment project that is prologue to understanding the meaning and importance of Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss.

Timothy Fuller has supplied this prologue in tracing the modern moral imagination to the predominant tendencies of the Enlightenment project. It is this foundation of the modern Enlightenment which Oakeshott would seek to profoundly modify and enrich and Strauss to go radically behind and surpass. Fuller pinpoints the aspirations of the modern project as, in effect, Hobbes' politics set in motion, although more familiarly located in Kantian morality and Kant's essay on world government. Fuller names these as "perpetual peace and ever-expanding prosperity." Hobbes defined happiness in terms of progress and Kant construed happiness in moral terms. As Fuller emphasizes, a progressive moral project implies that, "It is no longer the life outside the cave that is primary, but rather the task to reorganize the life within the cave." This cave-bound vision precludes asking those questions that demand a bird's eye view of the situation. For instance, as Fuller suggests, it resists such a simple and sober reflection as, "Is it possible that we can advance materially and decline spiritually?"

Yet this simple and sober attitude is characteristic of the skepticism that the cave once maintained against the intellectuals. Fuller locates Oakeshott in the skeptical tradition, emphasizing the significance of a distinction Oakeshott made, in a work he did not publish during his lifetime, between "the politics of faith" and the "politics of scepticism" (Oakeshott 1996). The cave has the resources for its own critique of those who present themselves as serving its interests through their pragmatic reorientation of the meaning of enlightenment. Fuller names the tension within modernity between this wary skepticism and the utopian "politics of faith" as "the internal dialectic of the modern moral imagination." Terry Nardin (2001, p. 191) makes a related point in *The Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* where he remarks on the similarities between Oakeshott's "language of conduct" and Michael Walzer's social criticism. Like Walzer, Oakeshott values the immanent critique. As Fuller realizes, Oakeshott's skepticism is "the residual legacy of the Classic/Christian heritage of western civilization". Oakeshott criticizes from within Western civilization as a whole rather than just from European modernity or English culture (more specific perspectives that he adopts on occasion). Thus, "The modern moral imagination exemplifies a profound dialectical tension between the philosophy of the future and the Classic/Christian inheritance." This is where Strauss and Oakeshott stand in clear contrast. For Oakeshott, these "Classic/Christian" resources remain available as the tradition from which he recognizes his relationship to the moral conduct that he observes, participates in, critiques, and seeks at times to redescribe. In other words, there is a possibility of renaissance out of the recent domination of the politics of faith. For Strauss, this modern technological project has transformed the cave irreversibly and the resources of commonsense opinion are no longer immediately available. It is necessary to return to the opinions that underlay an earlier effort at enlightenment, one that maintained a theoretical orientation and thus left the cave untouched (beyond the stairway it provided for, and indicated to, the philosophical natures).

Fuller notes the reappearance of Oakeshott's dialectical understanding of modernity in his celebration of "voice of poetry in the conversation of mankind." As Fuller emphasizes, "The voice of poetry is an alternative to, but not a substitute or replacement for, the scientific/technological voice." Oakeshott positions it as the successor to the classical notion of "contemplation" but Fuller indicates the clarification of this aesthetic mode which reveals how completely Oakeshott's understanding of contemplation breaks with the classical understanding, for the "merely present" images of contemplation "provoke neither speculation nor inquiry about the occasion or conditions of their appearing but only delight in their having appeared" (Oakeshott 1991, p. 510).

This is not aestheticism, at least in Oakeshott's own terms, for he does not suggest that this voice should dominate, only that is should complement and balance what has become the increasingly dominant, or amplified, voice of practice and technology. Nonetheless, David Lewis Schaefer has reason to wonder whether this is not the kind of dilettantish "snobbery" that Alexandre Kojève posited as one of the aimless possibilities at the end of history. Fuller sees the voice of poetry as offering "temporary and momentary releases from our time-boundedness." For Fuller, Oakeshott's Stoic outlook "hints at a more comprehensive

moral imagination". But is the hint too subtle and the voice too quiet? Does not "delight" want all seriousness? These questions confront us in the persecution of those whose skepticism seems to obstruct the realization of human perfection. Describing what Eric Voegelin critiques as the Gnostic strain of the Western mind, Fuller notes how its logic veers towards an acceptance that "The liquidation of that individual or group, or at least the reform of their thinking, will be necessary in order that progress toward the ideal may continue." Oakeshott understood this with equal clarity, implying that the compulsory collectivist state that is the outcome of utopian politics carries a presumption of "the authority to exterminate associates [citizens] whose continued existence is judged to be irredeemably prejudicial to the pursuit of its purpose" (Oakeshott 1975, n. 317). Leo Strauss's dialogue with Alexandre Kojève only reinforced to him the centrality of this Stalinist logic in the homogenizing project of the Enlightenment. Kojève propagandized for a future in which "The 'healthy' automata are satisfied (sports, art, eroticism, etc.), and the 'sick' ones get locked up" (Kojève 2013, p. 255). Strauss perceived that modern tyranny is driven by the thymotic part of the psyche and thus is more dangerous and totalizing than the "erotic" tyrannies of the ancient world. He warned that the political science of his own day could not consistently recognize tyranny. A political science worthy of the name should begin with the normative understanding and commonsense from which medical science identifies and treats cancer.

Stephen Turner suggests that the fundamental ground for comparing Strauss and Oakeshott is in the legacy of Neo-Kantianism. Both men came into their own amid the rejection or dissolution of this philosophical movement, and each was shaped to some degree by his response. Turner sees Strauss in particular to be demanding a return to objectivity out of Socratic dialectics, reacting against the culmination of Neo-Kantianism in relativism of different systems, its inability to resolve these differences, its reliance on the Enlightenment project of progress towards a universal culture to overtake this and cover this over, and the connection that this disappointment may have had to the breakdown of German political order and the disastrous consequences of this for the German Jews. Turner's Oakeshott navigates away from the philosophical shipwreck of Neo-Kantianism in terms of his central concept of experience, which theorizing may only momentarily and arbitrarily arrest. This experience he divides into modes. Presuppositions survive as, at most, "platforms of conditional understanding" which do not challenge or even disturb the relativism and historicism of thought. Oakeshott wants to tell us that the civil association provides for the most unrestricted and elevated kind of human experience but he does this by describing antinomies within a specific practical tradition, "between the ideal expressions of practical orientations." Among these are the politics of skepticism and the politics of faith. In contrast, the "antinomy" Turner finds in Strauss (philosophy or faith) is of the nature of a "stark and ungroundable existential choice between fundamentally incompatible alternatives."

Turner refers to Strauss's antinomy, Athens and Jerusalem. But it is an ongoing question whether this can be understood in terms of a dreadful gulf "between the theology of the denial of God and the philosophy of the denial of philosophy." Stanley Rosen presented Strauss as staring at this kind of nihilistic terrain and it may be that, minus the mischief, Daniel Tanguay has given a similar assessment of Strauss's project (Rosen 2003; Tanguay 2007). But it is worth remembering that Strauss had an opportunity to be a professor of religion in Jerusalem and provided a clear statement of his atheism. If America was the Sparta fate had provided, it was still a place for a Greek. In my view, the irrational impasses in Strauss are merely apparent. Note that Tanguay does not follow Strauss because "we no longer possess the certainty that the Socratic laugh can wipe away the tears of repentance, or that Greek serenity can make one forget the henceforth tragic dimension of human existence." For Tanguay, but emphatically *not* for Strauss, "Revealed religion, Christianity in particular, has transformed the human soul in an essential manner" (Tanguay 2007, p. 213).

Even the writer behind *The Antichrist* endorsed this massive concession to the moral-religious world but Strauss, who had become aware (in 1929 or 1930) of how Farabi and his fellow philosophers of the medieval Arabic enlightenment understood and accounted for revelation in political terms, traced a rational path to Platonic political philosophy. Strauss scholars are right to insist on the importance of what Strauss called his "change of orientation" (Yaffe and Ruderman 2014). This was not a political change of

heart, but it led into a new political horizon. Strauss recognized defensive (*negative*) possibilities in a strong state like Mussolini's as the Weimar republic capitulated. However, it is worth reflecting that, at the same time in Roosevelt's America, Progressives and New Dealers championed the reforming (*active*) power of Mussolini's state (Gottfried 1999, p. 66). As a related point in terms of the present day, multiculturalism is indeed corrosive to social trust as Turner's personal example suggests and Strauss, like Marcuse perhaps, was most comfortable talking philosophy with his Old World friends. But Strauss came to America and fostered respect for the New World's constitutionalism while Marcuse came to turn American youth against this heritage—to leave them guilty for the crimes of the Old World and ready for a kind of Freudian Marxism. As for whether Strauss may be connected to the destruction of Iraq, one could more fruitfully speculate on what responsibility the Harvard Law School bears for the destruction of Libya, and what separates "regime change" from "responsibility to protect". Both are variants of the old Wilsonian lie of wars to end war, wars for human rights and democracy. To return to the empirical Strauss, it is fair to say that his political views would remain untimely as he moved from Hobbes to Socrates. He was not welcomed with open arms in Britain as the socialist J-P Mayer was. He was at most welcomed with one open arm, and only for a time. There is a memory that comes down to us of Oakeshott noticing Strauss's "inky fingers" at Cambridge, suggesting a handshake, and suggestive of Strauss's scholarly *Sitzfleisch*.

In the book I reflected on Strauss's favorable impression of Britain but this does not explain the change in his politics. The reason for the change is reflected in the centrality of Hobbes in the book. Put simply, Strauss was a reluctant Hobbesian before he realized that a path to Socratic political philosophy remained open. Strauss as Hobbesian was open to (pre-Anti-Comintern Pact) Mussolini's example, though Strauss as Jew could never have been open to Hitler's Germany as indeed it could never have been open to him. But Strauss leaves Hobbes behind, most clearly in his critique of Carl Schmitt's *Concept of the Political* where he suggests that Schmitt himself would be better to join him on the path to the pre-liberal world of Socratic dialectics. Schmitt was not fully awakened by this critique and continued as a Hobbesian of a kind. As a consistent Hobbesian he had warned Weimar against National Socialism and communism before 1933, and precisely as a consistent Hobbesian he was bound to support the Nazis after 1933 for "such obedience is no Crime: for no man is obliged (when the protection of the law faileth,) not to protect himself, by the best means he can" (Hobbes 1985, Ch. 27, p. 345).

What can be said of Hobbes in another sense is relevant to what Kant meant for both Strauss and Oakeshott. For Hobbes retreats into the consciousness to found his new science on the basis that we know what we make. This is again a large concession to the moral-religious view that Oakeshott celebrates as the tradition of "Will and Artifice". It opposes the tradition that Oakeshott terms "Reason and Nature". But surely it is not resolved as "Rational Will". Oakeshott might have named the Hobbesian tradition "Will and Chaos" and established that it is the cosmos that is denied, this absence covered over progressively, by the artifice of science and technology. At any rate, it is fair to say that Oakeshott welcomed the abandonment of *metaphysica generalis*—a reasoning that "excludes from philosophy the consideration of the universe as a whole . . . [a] method of circumscribing the concerns of philosophy" (Oakeshott 2000, p. 18). It is not difficult to see where Kant's transcendental analytic and reliance on utopian progress fits in, nor why the shock of the Great War lent spiritual force to Heidegger's "existential analytic". Strauss's return to the "relative truth of the contradictory opinions" in this fertile moment does not signify a desire for the "pure truth" of natural law. He rejected the oblivion of the question of being *and* the invitation to look straight into the fierce glare of this question (See Velkley 2011).

Turner suggests a contemporary ground for the differences between Oakeshott and Strauss, while in a similarly formidable and erudite piece Wendell John Coats, Jr. traces the fundamental differences over creativity and individuality to contrasting interpretations of Greek, Hebraic, and Roman thought. I will focus on the Roman question where Coats identifies one of the clearest points of contention between Strauss and Oakeshott. Strauss observes at the end of *Natural Right and History* that the quarrel of ancients and moderns turns on "the status of 'individuality.'" (Strauss 1953, p. 323). Strauss's comments are made in the context of Burke and may remind us of comments in his "German Nihilism" lecture about "the English"

who, though bearers of the modern ideas, "always kept in store a substantial amount of the necessary counterpoison" (Strauss 1999, p. 372). Strauss fleshes out this earlier statement in noting that "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." This does indeed suggest, as Coats argues, that the differences between Strauss and Oakeshott are stark and deeply embedded. For Oakeshott affirmed the exact reverse of Strauss's observation and sentiment in his pivotal declaration, in the context of Hobbes, that, "It is reason, not Authority, that is destructive of individuality" (Oakeshott 2000, p. 67). This confirms the centrality of the disagreement over Hobbes whom Oakeshott celebrates as securing individuality and a civil association in which "Individuals may be collected together, may be added, may be substituted for one another, or made to represent one another, but can never modify one another or compose a whole in which their individuality is lost" (Oakeshott 2002, p. 65). Coats points out that Oakeshott detected the origins of civil association in the Roman republic and contrasted this tradition with the Greek *polis* which he considered an instance of the opposing pole of enterprise association. Strauss would have agreed that the rationality of the *polis* was in its concern for virtue, but he located the emergence of modern constitutionalism, and thus political individuality, not in Rome, but "in the period in which political philosophers consciously opposed to the ancient (and medieval) doctrines a doctrine which they themselves considered fundamentally novel, that is, in the latter half of the sixteenth and seventeenth century" (Strauss 1959, p. 272). Coats notes Strauss's review of Charles Howard McIlwain's *Constitutionalism Ancient and Modern*, but the question is rejoined in the comparison of Burke and Cicero at the close of *Natural Right and History*: "Above all Cicero made it perfectly clear that the characteristics of the best polity can be determined without regard to any example, and especially to the example of the Roman polity" (Strauss 1953, p. 321). In the notes to an important passage in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* Cicero is subtly compared with Hobbes when Strauss indicates that Cicero speaks for the ancients in implying the natural distinction of philosophical natures (Strauss 1988, p. 34, n. 16). Strauss places Cicero with the classical philosophers according to whom the best constitution is the work of conscious reason and in harmony with nature in that it seeks to fulfill the higher aspirations of human nature. Hobbes, who confesses that he "consider[s] the greatest part of Mankinde not as they should be, but as they are," (Strauss 1988, p. 34, n. 15) is for Strauss "fundamentally novel" and involved in a project that is "consciously opposed" to the ancients. (For Oakeshott, Hobbes reflects "slowly mediated changes in European thought"—his significance is "not that he began a new tradition") (Oakeshott 2000, p. 62).

Coats speculates that what he sees as Strauss's relative silence on the novelties of Roman thought and institutional practice may have been motivated the desire to avoid "detract[ing] from the rhetorical force of [his] account of Christian and later bourgeois influences in his indictment of the Machiavellian project." By contrast, Oakeshott was keen to describe the Roman republic as civil association. As Coats puts it, "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 the book, I endorsed David Boucher's categorization of Oakeshott in terms of Roman republicanism. I also suggested that Strauss might be considered a classical republican when considering his political science, but in the tradition of the Greek *polis*. Does the Roman republic better exemplify virtue and the spirit of antiquity or the raised status of individuality? Socrates is the individual whose way of life was directed by the understanding that virtue is knowledge. One is forced to wonder whether Cato the Younger and his commitment to the *mos maiorum* better answers to the name of virtue or "the institution of the individual". Strauss reminds us that Rousseau revived "the severe accent of Catonic virtue" against the politicians of his day who were concerned with private affairs, with wealth and trade, who were "bourgeois rather than citizens" (Strauss 1953, p. 253). In this sense, and in turning to David Lewis Schaefer's focus on the question of Hobbes, I reemphasize Oakeshott's irritation with C. B. Macpherson's bourgeois Hobbes and a "possessive individualism" which detracted from the rhetorical or mythical force of his presentation of the Roman continuity of the civil association.

David Lewis Schaefer effectively demonstrates that I understated some of the stark differences between Oakeshott and Strauss in the pursuit of balance. I think this is probably fair. In the central chapter on Hobbes, I aimed to develop each interpretation along its own lines and in terms of what I understood to be its own logical coherence. But Schaefer reminds me that correspondence to Hobbes intention ("the author's *own understanding* of what he was saying") cannot be treated as a secondary matter. Schaefer does not fail to notice points at which I implied that Oakeshott's portrayal of Hobbes came close to being disingenuous. For instance, claiming that Hobbes feared fire and brimstone is not even required by Oakeshott's own irreligious religiosity and indeed if Strauss is correct about Hobbes's atheism, then so much else follows. It is not a trivial point. It explains the otherwise strange significance that Alexandre Kojève is given in the book. Kojève aimed to complete Hobbesian atheism and the state that it presupposes. But this means that it is inconsistent to locate anything like a myth of original sin or the myth of the Fall of Man in Hobbes as I still allowed in my conclusion. While I may have given too much latitude to this mythical Hobbes, bringing light to the character of Oakeshott's interpretation does provide for the profound contrast with Strauss that I only gently implied. Carl Schmitt, that other Hobbesian pole in my study, came away from reading Strauss's critique of his Hobbes with his faith that Hobbes was "by far the greatest and perhaps the sole truly systematic political thinker" shaken to the point that he wavered over whether Hobbes was a *political* thinker at all (Meier 1995, p. 36). Schmitt's response to reading Oakeshott on Hobbes in later life was quite different. As he wrote to Ellen Kennedy who had provided *Hobbes on Civil Association*:

> Everything in the book is highly interesting for me, but the greatest thing is the broadcast-talk "Leviathan—a myth" from 1947. These five pages (pp. 150-154) are, sentence by sentence, word [sic] for an encounter for me which I would not have expected from *England* anymore (Quoted in Schmitt 2013, p. 76, n. 5).

Michael Oakeshott's *mythoi* are almost the opposite of Schmitt's and not as anti-democratic as they may appear in my reconstruction. Oakeshott is more concerned with the sovereign individual than the political sovereign, and he refers Christian civilization back to its skepticism of great political projects while celebrating Hobbes for recalling the individual to "his littleness, his imperfection, his mortality, while at the same time recognizing his importance to himself" (Oakeshott 2000, p. 163). In those precious pages which captivated Schmitt, and which, despite their origin as a radio broadcast ("a conversation piece, a flight of fancy") are extremely important for understanding Oakeshott, civilization is described as "a collective dream" (significant in a writer who is anti-collectivist and committed to individuality in all its forms); "the substance of this dream is a myth, *an imaginative interpretation* of human existence". Setting himself against the disenchantment of modernity and the Enlightenment, but in the most civilized and clement manner (again, in complete contrast with Schmitt), Oakeshott deems the role of "philosophical literature" such as *Leviathan* "is not to break the dream, but perpetually to recall it, to recreate it in each generation, and even to make more articulate the dream-powers of a people." Having positioned *Leviathan* as "philosophical literature" and then "literature" merely, Oakeshott refers to "the gift of the greatest literature—of poetry". However, he avoids simply conflating poetry and philosophy, allowing that a work of philosophy will provide "an increase in knowledge; it will prompt and it will instruct." Nonetheless, this distinction is just as soon made equivocal: "In it we shall be reminded of the common dream that binds the generations together, and the myth will be made more intelligible to us" (Oakeshott 2000, pp. 159-60, emphasis added).

Schaefer soberly interjects that Hobbes emphasizes the meanness of nature, not the fallenness of human beings: "He represents government rather as a remedy for the miserable condition in which 'nature' has left us." In the famous Chapter 13 of *Leviathan* to which Schaefer refers, Hobbes illustrates the Natural Condition, and how "Nature . . . disassociate[s]", and that "The desires, and other passions of man, are in themselves no Sin" (Hobbes 1985, Ch. 13, pp. 186-87). The continuities with Augustine and the myths of a Christian civilization are very difficult to sustain in these terms (although Oakeshott points to Augustine's understanding of the Abel episode) (Oakeshott 2000, p. 88, n. 10). Schaefer presses the point that there is

little in Augustine to support the kind of poetic Kantian moral world of the Oakeshottian civil association. As I implied by placing "pagan" and "Christian" in the same sentence (quoted with emphasis by Schaefer), Oakeshott's "collection of such [supposedly poetic Kantian] models tends rather to blur the fundamental tension between Athens and Jerusalem . . . rather than offer greater clarity about either alternative." Here it may be relevant to recall Oakeshott's early interest in the identity of historical Christianity. Many of these ideas are retained in the theory of historical identities given in his late work *On History* in which, as Terry Nardin interprets, "A historical identity, properly understood, is nothing other than its own circumstantial coherence understood as a contiguity of discernable differences" (Nardin 2001, p. 159).

The problem with such a yielding sense of identity is that it makes it difficult to distinguish or regard the importance of intentions. It is helpful in bringing together Don Quixote, Montaigne, and Nietzsche, but less effective in detecting those whom Oakeshott deems "enemies of our civilization, exponents of a counterfeit myth" (Oakeshott 2000, p. 162). The corollary to this is an insight Oakeshott offered in observing contemporary liberalism, where he found an identity that is perfect for his own historical theories (which is why I used his definition at the beginning of my chapter on liberalism) and an ideological movement that displays "ignorance of who its true friends are" (Oakeshott 1991, p. 385). This is the affliction Leo Strauss diagnosed in Carl Schmitt who believed he fought a common enemy alongside Hobbes.

Oakeshott's historical theories are the preoccupation of my two most trenchant critics. Kenneth McIntyre considers my interpretation of Oakeshott "eccentric" for straying outside the boundaries of "Michael Oakeshott the academic philosopher". However, his real concern is with Michael Oakeshott, the historian of political thought, while Leo Strauss he condemns for being "uninteresting" and "not an historian at all."

In terms of the poetic-religious character of Oakeshott's thought, my interpretation of Oakeshott is indeed not unique, as McIntyre allows. It is influenced by Andrew Sullivan's *Intimations Pursued: The Voice of Practice in the Conversation of Michael Oakeshott*. Sullivan has a style and personality thoroughly in tune with Oakeshott's and is well-placed to pursue a thinker who declared, "Not to detect a man's style is to have missed three-quarters of the meaning of his actions and utterances" (Oakeshott 1989, p. 56). Sullivan appreciates how Oakeshott guides the conversation in the idiom of the civilization, "to describe persuasively a character with whom a reader of a particular tradition can identify with; to evoke a personality with whom we can not only feel sympathy, but solidarity." This is how he perceives the immanent perspective Oakeshott adopts, being alive to the manner in which Oakeshott's vision of freedom and individuality "is designed by its rhetorical skill and narrative appeal alone to turn the conversation in a certain direction" (Sullivan 2007, p. 167). More specifically, and serving to explain the often remarked upon unargued character of *On Human Conduct*, Sullivan shows that the modes are not Procrustean beds. What Oakeshott was "unable to argue from his own practical premises" about the superiority of a civil association "he attempted through rhetoric, characterization and metaphor". Sullivan concludes that philosophy and religion are unreconciled in Oakeshott's understanding of human existence, but there remains "the pleasant distraction of the aesthetic, without which the opposition would be unbearable" (Sullivan 2007, pp. 208-209). Poetic-religious individuality and its vital role in the conversation of mankind, both as style and substance, cannot be Oakeshottian for McIntyre because "[the] modes are irrelevant to one another". This places a great deal of weight on the Procrustean reading of *Experience and Its Modes*, a work from which the "voice of poetry" or the aesthetic mode developed as a kind of correction. This demands a consistency that Oakeshott himself could not keep. In fact probably no one has ever written a complete work of history within the terms of the purified mode of the past Oakeshott outlines in that work. The impossibility is suggested in McIntyre's example of E. P. Thompson who "was a Marxist and an historian, but, if he was a good historian, it was in spite of his Marxism, not because of it." This comes near to imputing Oakeshott's conception of the historian's intention to Thompson, whereas we can be quite sure Thompson entered the humanities as all Marxists do, not to interpret the world but to change it. This does not tell us if Thompson was a good or bad historian, and if Marxism is correct then it is necessary for the historian. Marxism has a clear practical aim, but

a practical aim to resist all practical aims also has political and moral implications. What about Michael Oakeshott's intentions on first turning to the activity of being an historian?

Oakeshott's earliest interest in history was stimulated by a practical concern with the continuity of the Christian religion in the modern world. This identity may even be the test and concern of the historical theories Oakeshott worked on from the 1920s to the 1980s. But it is not necessary to locate these continuities in his writings on history, for in a diffused form they pervade all he has to say about practical experience, which at its highest is imbued with a non-practical poetic-religious character. When these intimations are pursued, they reveal a coherent picture of the Oakeshottian project, culminating in what Andrew Sullivan did not leave to a "Straussian" to call a "theologico-political treatise" (Sullivan 2007, p. 197). The theologico-political significance of *On Human Conduct* reflects a commitment to the moral side of life, despite the unbelieving character of Oakeshott's poetic religiosity and his professional activities as a theorist. McIntyre points out that Oakeshott's modal distinctions explicitly disallow for a "poetic philosopher" or a "philosophical poet" which is quite correct. But McIntyre muddies these crystal-clear waters in noting that "McIlwain, echoing Strauss' general tone concerning religion, claims that 'no one can be both a philosopher and a theologian,' which would have surprised Augustine and Aquinas." McIntyre recreates what he thinks must have been my own thinking, concluding that, ergo "Augustine and all Augustinians (including Oakeshott) are not philosophers."

This is a powerful illustration of why it is better to seek the author's own intentions rather than trying to recreate his thoughts and know him better than he knows himself. Augustine did not for a moment forget the struggle between belief and unbelief and of his well-known case against the philosophers in book 19 of *The City of God* I need quote only the opening lines:

> As I see that I have still to discuss the fit destinies of the two cities, the earthly and the heavenly, I must first explain, so far as the limits of this work allow me, the reasonings by which men have attempted to make for themselves a happiness in this unhappy life, in order that it may be evident, not only from divine authority, but also from such reasons as can be adduced to unbelievers, how the empty dreams of the philosophers differ from the hope which God gives to us, and from the substantial fulfilment of it which He will give us as our blessedness (St. Augustine 2015, Book 19, Chapter 1).

In the book I claimed that Oakeshott's own "City of God" offers only a temporal or immanent transcendence in aesthetic terms. Happiness is not found in the philosophical life as it is for Strauss. Strauss keeps the absolute separation of the philosophical life and religion in affirming that the philosophers live in the isles of the blessed. In other words, Strauss could have happily sided with Augustine's adversary Porphyry in accepting that, in every relevant sense, the philosopher must be his own savior. It was in studying the modern theologico-political treatises of Spinoza and Hobbes that Strauss discovered what he recognized as the Platonic understanding of the problem. This recovered understanding of the tradition had implications in terms of the history of thought which are unwelcome to historicists, but not necessarily to Michael Oakeshott. As Terry Nardin points out, in Oakeshott's terms, "Collingwood's argument for the primacy of history (historicism) is as reductionist as arguments for the primacy of science (scientism) or practice (pragmatism)" (Nardin 2016). McIntyre bases his claim that I have provided a "hagiography" of Leo Strauss on my hint that "Strauss became so adept at political philosophy that his profoundest observations often appear as mere platitudes." But Oakeshott may have understood this in terms of his own acceptance of the possibility that Hobbes, like other writers such as Plato and Machiavelli, [has] two doctrines, one for the initiated (those whose heads were strong enough to withstand the giddiness provoked by his scepticism) and the other for the ordinary man who must be spoken to in an idiom and a vocabulary he is accustomed to, and to whom novelties (both in respect of duties and in respect of their grounds) must be made to appear commonplaces… (Oakeshott 1975, p. 126).

Oakeshott goes on to affirm that this practice of esotericism and exotericism "goes back to the beginnings of political speculation and was by no means dead in the seventeenth century." Strauss discerned the differences between its practice in the hands of the Enlightenment philosophers and those at "the beginnings of political speculation", arguing that seventeenth century writers like Hobbes (Strauss notes that he is "thinking of Hobbes in particular"), concealed their views only far enough to protect themselves as well as possible from persecution; had they been more subtle than that, they would have defeated their purpose, which was to enlighten an ever-increasing number of people who were not potential philosophers (Strauss 1988, p. 34, n).

The philosophers who wrote in the tradition of the Platonic understanding of the theologico-political problem did not construct the exoteric appearance of their works with this progressive aim in mind, understanding the distinction between their philosophical initiates and the superstitious multitude to be "a basic fact of human nature" (Ibid). The difference reflects the bold attempt of a modern philosophical movement "to become the master and owner of nature, to conquer chance" (Strauss 1959, p. 55). Strauss does not argue that philosophy has no impact on history and politics. Rather he points out that history and politics do not transform the problems for philosophy. McIntyre is aware of the philosophical intention in imputing it to Oakeshott. But he cannot accept that a highly intelligent man of leisure who writes and considers a work of philosophy would not allow it to go out with errors that might shame even an intelligent high school student (*i.e.*, one of lesser leisure, education, experience, and intelligence than he) without a reason, and that this reason is that he has two doctrines, as Oakeshott was prepared to accept of Hobbes and other great thinkers.

Talk of "great thinkers" and, in more poetic terms of "towering figures", has convinced Luke O'Sullivan that I am involved in the fallacy of *argumentum ad verecundiam*. I would suggest no more so than those who say that Western philosophy is "footnotes to Plato" or that modern philosophy is a For-and-Against Kant. We begin with a commonsense assessment of the great thinkers in our tradition. One is also aware of fashions and prevailing ideologies, but it is less sensible to begin with these. To begin with these latter might lead to *argumenta ad populum*, which seems a danger in O'Sullivan's assertion that Strauss has "[not] been taken seriously by the great majority of historians and philosophers as a contemporary interlocutor for over half a century." What have the intellectuals been taking seriously during this time? I was lectured by a liberal teacher to regard John Rawls as the great thinker who comes around every century or so and whom the twentieth century had been waiting for. Had I any regard for fashions and prevailing ideologies I would have championed the Rawlsian administrative state or the multicultural and anti-European perspectives of which O'Sullivan appraises me. It may be the case that Michael Oakeshott is better attired to move in these fashionable circles, and that Leo Strauss and his students have often been at odds with the predilections of the contemporary intellectual class.

An example of this "political incorrectness" is Harvey Mansfield's book *Manliness*. O'Sullivan believes I have echoed Mansfield in claiming that Oakeshott admired the "solid manliness" of the cave-dwellers in Plato. But Oakeshott sides with men whose conceptions of justice—and even their horsemanship—have been called into question by one whom they soon decide would be better run out of town as a "mountebank" and "imposter". In other words, Oakeshott sides with experience over knowledge in *On Human Conduct*, just as Stephen Turner finds him doing in the 1931 notes he has cited ("What is dangerous, deadening, monstrous, is knowledge *in place* of experience"). In doing so, Oakeshott identifies with the "men of Athens" (*andres athēnaioi*) and "gentlemen of the jury" (*andres dikastai*) who convicted Socrates.

This alignment with the perspective of the cave confirms Oakeshott to be a man of myth, poetry, and the religious life, regardless of the number of pages he devoted to the explicit question of "religion". This is not a "Straussian" framework but a distinction which is age-old. But while Oakeshott's Christian civilization is despised by the intellectuals, his apparent antifoundationalism is *de rigueur*. When only the latter is advertised Oakeshott may travel freely in these fashionable circles and O'Sullivan deems Oakeshott well-positioned to meet this postmodern world:

> Nietzsche [was] correct in arguing that all traditional Western foundational conceptions of reason descended from Plato were insupportable. Oakeshott was actually at one with postmodernism in realizing the need for a more pluralistic account of rationality, as witnessed by his re-telling of the story of Plato's cave. That is why at least some of Oakeshott's thought remains relevant.

Oakeshott was of course claimed by Richard Rorty as a fellow Postmodern Bourgeois Liberal. But Robert Frost compared poetry without meter ("free verse") to tennis without the net and a consistent critic might say the same about antifoundationalist philosophy. Strauss understood Plato through a tradition of the medieval Arabic enlightenment in which the question of foundations (being) is not neglected, nor does it receive a dogmatic answer.

O'Sullivan is aware that the Strauss I have presented is concerned with nothing but these "eternal" problems. These problems developed into explicit discourses that are coeval with urban or political man. The real bone of contention then is historicism, and thus many of Kenneth McIntyre's arguments are echoed over esotericism and historical interpretation (understandably, as I addressed them in the book). But O'Sullivan gets closer to the heart of the issue in scrutinizing this question of permanent problems, raising the questions of whether there are such problems, and if there are, whether they can be thought of historically. It is not clear that 'freedom' or 'justice' have been anything like 'eternal' problems for human beings. At best this seems an exaggeration: they have been a concern for a few thousand years of the human past. Even if one were to admit there is a class of eternal problems and that freedom and justice belong to it, however, it seems plausible that the meanings of 'freedom' and 'justice' have changed profoundly. But this is what Strauss cannot admit.

Strauss's understanding of a philosophical tradition concerned with permanent problems relies on us not taking the conventional appearance of philosophical works as evidence that the problems themselves have "changed profoundly". O'Sullivan notes that Oakeshott accepted that his own appeal to an esoteric doctrine in Hobbes "was at best a plausible hypothesis": "[I]n the nature of the case it cannot be demonstrated to be true." Straussians claim little more for Strauss's hermeneutics. Paul A. Cantor for instance, offers the reminder that "interpretation cannot hope to proceed according to universal and unequivocal rules, which will always yield unambiguous and unassailable results." This is especially the case for an art of writing that provides for distinct audiences and which demands qualities such as "prudence, tact, and judgement". In this case, "One can offer principles of interpretation, but not rules, unless one means *rules* in the sense of *rules of thumb*" (Cantor 1991, p. 270). Some may deplore this and demand a rationalistic crib but, measure for measure, they will have to defend other interpretative methods with such certainty, for instance, that which led to Oakeshott's Montaigne-like Hobbes. Strauss's reading of Plato's *Republic* in terms of the permanent problems of justice and wisdom may be set against the typical historicist claim, "The Republic of Plato is an account, not of the unchanging ideal of political life, but of the Greek ideal as Plato received it and reinterpreted it" (R. G. Collingwood quoted in" Strauss 1952, p. 575). Did Plato intend the *Republic* to illuminate a Greek ideal of justice or the human desire for wisdom? As Ben Johnson wrote of a contemporary who had received and reinterpreted the English ideal of verse drama, "He was not of an age, but for all time!"

On an autobiographical note, it seems to me that every "injustice" that I remember in my childhood was only a variation on something that might have occurred around any campfire in the African savannah. The move from this kin-based private social world to the group-oriented public political life of a city and a state does indeed bring about a new set of human possibilities, including the philosophical life. This fact is probably the source of the impasse between those who consider justice and wisdom to be permanent problems for philosophy and those who believe that profound changes in our political life throughout history have relegated earlier discourse to matters of merely antiquarian or perhaps anthropological interest. I understood the better sections of my book to touch on this kind of problematic. Strauss turns to the historical and linguistic insights of the later Heidegger and records partial but remarkable agreements with them (Velkley 2011; McIlwain 2018). In querying the notion of an Athenian enlightenment O'Sullivan points

out, "The phenomenon of human beings in the ancient world emancipating themselves from the immediate demands of survival and developing intellectual and cultural lives was a generalised one." While philosophy is at first glance unique amid these axial age breakthroughs, this multicultural, or at least transcultural, observation is furthered in noting the peculiar features of the languages of intellectual worlds. Strauss was always curious to hear about how other linguistic cultures dealt with concepts like "nature". While the Greeks raised the question of being clearly, and in a pioneering way,[1] Strauss noticed that the question is also generalizable or transcultural. He seemed to be calling for philosophers out of other cultures, out of the pre-technological or pre-modern roots of these traditions. Those of the Western tradition must assist to the extent that they are capable of understanding the emergence of philosophy as their own tradition of questioning—of foundational questioning. The question of being, Strauss intimated, awaits an insight that may have to emerge from a non-Western tradition of thinking. For the question is not a mere epiphenomenon of the Greek verb *einai*. The uses and prominence of this verb may have encouraged an explicit ontological discourse among the Greeks, just as the epistemological concerns of modern philosophy may have been prompted by, or rather arisen in response to, the biblical tradition and the contingency of its concept of existence (Kahn 2009, pp. 37, 141; see also Burns 2014, pp. 131-156). Strauss hinted that philosophy may have to return to these roots in what are Indo-European and Afro-Asiatic languages of thought in the era of global technology and modern rationalism. Examining the Bible in terms of the question of being could be a first step (Strauss 1989, p. 43).

But to return from global historical tasks to the present matter, it seems to me that argument in the humanities always proceeds on the basis of what is a plausibly coherent explanation of the facts. O'Sullivan finds Adrian Blau's critique of Strauss to be "devastating". But it will be found so only by those who have already ruled out the philosophical art of writing. For these readers, Strauss's method of interpreting philosophical texts "was entirely arbitrary, and in effect licensed Strauss to find esoteric meanings wherever he was so inclined."

Were this the case, Strauss's interpretations would be implausible and incoherent, and surely, at times, absurd. But they are not. Rather than scrutinizing Strauss's alleged methods, one must go to the texts and demonstrate a superior reading.

The appeal to absurdity is made on the problem of numbers. Numerology sounds like a superstition. But nobody wants to dismiss the obvious: Machiavelli's *Discourses* does have the same number of chapters as Livy's *Histories*. For other apparent numerical patterns or significances in Machiavelli Blau finds that "the simplest explanation of this is simple randomness." Indeed, "Such features do not disturb the slumber of those who cannot see the wood for the trees, but act as awakening stumbling blocks for those who can" (Strauss 1988, p. 36). Having allowed at least one number significance in Machiavelli—the number of chapters in the *Discourses*—it may be worth considering the number 26, which is the number of chapters in the *Prince*. For one has now begun to study Machiavelli rather than simply read through his pages.

But after studying Scott B. Nelson's wonderfully generous and informative piece, I am more likely to dive into Hayek's collected works than Machiavelli's. It is flattering to have one's work described in beautiful musical terms, and this aspect of Nelson's contribution serves to remind me (though it should not be necessary) that a concern with the economic basis of political freedom does not imply a lowered cultural gaze. Nelson is correct to situate Hayek as another "middle voice". The two poles of my study, Alexandre Kojève and Carl Schmitt, both made totalizing claims about political life on behalf of sovereigns. Oakeshott and Strauss are "middle voices" precisely because they make claims against totalizing political orders on behalf of the lives of individuals. Although I gave perhaps undue weight to Oakeshott's ungenerous criticism of Hayek in the book, I did imply that Hayek belongs as a "middle voice". In fact, he is the only other thinker that I positioned in these terms. Collectivists who believe in nothing but yielding power and social control to administrative bureaucracies demonize Hayek, but having seen 2020 and especially 2021, we are all Hayekians now, or should be, for certainly we are on the road to serfdom, and some have already spotted the cabins up ahead. "Eco pods," the driver corrects. One keen-eyed youngster has made out some kind of slogan above the gates—"You will own nothing, and you will be happy."

However, on the question of spontaneous order, one would think we have found Hayek's opposite in Leo Strauss who argues the wisdom of an order that is consciously designed by human reason. But Strauss believed that virtue might freely develop in these orders shaped consciously by consideration of human nature. It is important to keep in mind that in practical terms Strauss supported the limited constitutional order. It is furthermore a mistake to assume that, in Strauss's terms, a practical commitment is a lower or lesser one, for it is precisely the limited constitutional order that allows for the philosophical life—the serious meaning of a preference for this regime is that the philosopher's own regime can be founded within it. It does not assert sovereignty over the sovereign individual. This rational regime of the philosopher is the virtuous city in speech.

Nelson notes that in *Law, Legislation and Liberty* "Hayek traces some of the problems bedeviling modern democracy to the legislative branch, which, in his view, had relegated the actual task of legislating to administrators and bureaucrats". This is also a central concern of contemporary Straussian political science.[2] The transformation of the limited constitutional order into the administrative state with its mission to socially engineer complete and total equality of outcomes and to turn every institution, including the universities, into vehicles of this ideology (which Strauss would have called "permissive egalitarianism") is a shared concern. Strauss foresaw a global society with a state apparatus dedicated to "forbid[ing] every teaching, every suggestion, that there are politically relevant natural differences among men that cannot be abolished or neutralized by progressing scientific technology" (Strauss 2013, pp. 211-212). Historical man makes himself. Or, to put it another way, as Alexandre Kojève told Strauss, "If there is something like 'human nature,' then you are surely right in everything" (Strauss 2013, p. 261).

In this context, it is interesting to note that even some of Hayek's least fashionable ideas have been receiving posthumous confirmations. His support of what is now recognized as multi-level selection (group selection) was extremely prescient, especially at a time when the "selfish gene" reigned supreme. Scientists as eminent as Edward O. Wilson are now on the side of this understanding (Nowak et al. 2010). But both Hayek and Michael Oakeshott made their names warning against the continuation of wartime mobilization and social control in peacetime, and group selection may suggest that it has been the pressures of warfare that have driven humans to cooperate and form into large dissociated *political* groups beyond the limited *social* bands of their genetic kin. In short, war may be the cause of our political life, of our "unsocial sociability," reflecting that, in David Sloan Wilson's correction of Kant: "Selfishness beats altruism within groups. Altruistic groups beat selfish groups" (Wilson and Wilson, 2007). Altruistic groups need not mean tightly collectivist units and this rule is consistent with the civil association and successful market relations. This is close to what Oakeshott sets out to establish in his endorsement of Henry C. Simons's insights on demobilization. Releasing the energies of competition and free initiative in peacetime and resisting a permanent war-footing is what best primes a society to withstand the challenges of potential wars and crises (Oakeshott 1991, p. 404). In *The Fatal Conceit* Hayek similarly warns of the error of applying kin-group social logic to large group political situations. Meanwhile Strauss speaks of the political problem of the desire to study the cosmos (with a small group of philosophical friends) amid a political society dedicated to its own laws and conceptions of justice. Oakeshott sees us drawn towards the false comfort and *ersatz* familial warmth of the enterprise association, while our calling is to be true to our own selves in civil association. We are not genetically-programmed to behave in concert as bees and ants are, and are capable of rationality and language as these are not. It is consistent with these human tendencies that Friedrich von Hayek praised a tradition of freedom that had proved itself over many centuries while offering his own rationally conceived plans for an improved legislative order. As Nelson notices, Oakeshott makes his closest approach to Hayek in "The Political Economy of Freedom" where he speaks as "a libertarian in the English tradition" and recognizes that in using the English word "freedom" one invokes a man's right to private property and his "[enjoyment of] a proprietary right over his personal capacities and his labour". This presupposes the freedom to move among potential employers. Far from a statement of "neoliberalism," Oakeshott's description of English liberty is so lacking in ideology that it is as good a summary of the demands of Wat Tyler in the 1380s as it is of the convictions of Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. Oakeshott

deemed *The Road to Serfdom* too ideological and suggested that "a self-conscious ideology" may be more appropriate in "resistance to the tyranny" of a society "deeply infected with Rationalism" (Oakeshottt 1991, p. 26). But that is where we are now, with major Western leaders eerily coordinating behind a single slogan, "Build Back Better" and attentive to proposals for a "Great Reset". In 2021 the most powerful Tory prime minister since Thatcher endorsed the terms of this global enterprise association: "we are building back better together and building back greener and building back fairer and building back more equal and… in a more gender neutral and perhaps a more feminine way." Oakeshott criticized Hayek for providing "A plan to resist all planning". But that is not at all like the wartime lie of "a war to end all wars". In spite of Oakeshott's intention, "A plan to resist all planning" is closer to the spirit of our lost constitutionalism.

NOTES

1 Perhaps reflecting Kahn's view (2009, p. 17) that, in terms of conceptualizing being, "ancient Greek is one of the most adequate of all languages, and that the possession of such a language was in fact a necessary condition for the success of the Greeks in creating Western logic and philosophy—and [he] suspect[s] also for their success in creating theoretical science and rigorous mathematics, but this second thought might be harder to defend."

2 See for instance, Marini 2019. Although not a product of Straussian political science, we should not ignore, Francis 2016.

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