RECOVERING POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss

The Politics of Renaissance and Enlightenment

DAVID MCILWAIN

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David McIlwain
Department of Modern History, Politics
and International Relations
Macquarie University
North Ryde, NSW, Australia

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Series Editors' Preface

Palgrave's *Recovering Political Philosophy* series was founded with an eye to postmodernism's challenge to the possibility of a rational foundation for and guidance of our political lives. This invigorating challenge has provoked a searching re-examination of classic texts, not only of political philosophers, but of poets, artists, theologians, scientists, and other thinkers who may not be regarded conventionally as political theorists. The series publishes studies that endeavor to take up this re-examination and thereby help to recover the classical grounding for civic reason, as well as studies that clarify the strengths and the weaknesses of modern philosophic rationalism. The interpretative studies in the series are particularly attentive to historical context and language, and to the ways in which both censorial persecution and didactic concerns have impelled prudent thinkers, in widely diverse cultural conditions, to employ manifold strategies of writing—strategies that allowed them to aim at different audiences with various degrees of openness to unconventional thinking. The series offers close readings of ancient, medieval, early modern and late modern works that illuminate the human condition by attempting to answer its deepest, enduring questions, and that have (in the modern periods) laid the foundations for contemporary political, social, and economic life.

We are pleased to offer in David McIlwain's *Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss: The Politics of Renaissance and Enlightenment* the first book-length comparison of Oakeshott and Strauss.

McIlwain understands that neither Oakeshott nor Strauss is properly understood as mere political conservatives, and he attempts to elucidate key insights of each by comparing and contrasting some of their central

reflections and insights. He finds Oakeshott to be, in his articulation of a politics of "renaissance," indebted to the biblical tradition of freedom and creation *ex nihilo*, with Strauss, on the other hand, seeking to revive classical rationalism by bringing it into fruitful confrontation with that biblical teaching.

While Oakeshott and Strauss were both aware of the tension between the radicalness of theory and the moderation that is appropriate in practical life, and sought to avoid the political extremes of fascism and Nazism, they both recognized the need to face the very real shortcomings of liberal modernity and to address those shortcomings through the elevated role of the university, which, they hoped, could both foster genuine freedom of the mind and enhance political moderation—in Oakeshott's case, through the "conversation of mankind" and in Strauss's, through the dialogue of the great thinkers. A major obstacle to such education, for both thinkers, is the historicism of Collingwood and Heidegger, and McIlwain reveals how Oakeshott and Strauss came to contrasting understandings of the historical and practical character of political thought while seeking to preserve philosophy from historicism. To this end McIlwain examines Strauss's principle of esotericism and Oakeshott's endorsement of a similar principle in interpreting the philosophy of Hobbes.

It is in Oakeshott's engagement with Strauss on Hobbes that McIlwain finds the most substantial common ground, and then divergence, between the two thinkers. He shows not only that Strauss's early book on Hobbes, which recovered the moral basis and genesis of Hobbes's teaching, influenced Oakeshott's development as a thinker, but that the Hobbes chapter of Strauss's *Natural Right and History* forms a response to Oakeshott's "Introduction to *Leviathan*," especially when taken with what McIlwain calls Oakeshott's rejoinder, in "The Moral Life in the Writings of Thomas Hobbes." McIlwain concludes, however, that while Strauss detected the origins of modern technological thinking in Hobbes, Oakeshott understood Hobbes as securing a non-substantive civil autonomy for a Renaissance individuality. McIlwain deepens our understanding of this difference by examining the two thinkers' engagement with Alexandre Kojève. Strauss, he notes, shared Kojève's interest in Heidegger's interpretation of the "Call of Conscience" and its connection with the state of nature doctrine in Hobbes and Hegel, yet disagreed with Kojève on the relationship of the philosopher to political history. McIlwain then explains how Strauss's discussion of the role of death in the political philosophy of Hobbes, and its influence on Hegel, informed Oakeshott's understanding of "life from

the standpoint of death." In this context McIlwain constructs a unique comparison of *Kojève and* Oakeshott, clarifying the premodern and religious elements in Oakeshott's description of a poetic self and setting this against *Kojève's universal and homogeneous state*.

Finally, McIlwain examines Strauss's explication of "the theological-political problem" in light of Heidegger's radical historicism and intriguingly presents Strauss as reinterpreting Heidegger's religious anticipation of a "meeting of East and West" as a philosophical re-encounter with the Bible as "the East within us." McIlwain finds Oakeshott, by contrast, elucidating an account of the subtle relationship between a skeptical political theory of neutral civil authority and a conception of poetic individuality, one that moves between mythology and political theory, combining the thought of Hobbes and Augustine—leading McIlwain to describe Oakeshott's theory as participating in an almost "religious" intensity of self-completion. McIlwain thus finds the heart of the difference between the two thinkers in the question of the passions, and whether they are guided and elevated by reason as *eros* (Strauss), or require the autonomy of will and artifice to reach their full virtuosity (Oakeshott).

Waco, TX — Timothy W. Burns
Austin, TX — Thomas L. Pangle

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Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss are primarily known for their conservatism, but their true significance as thinkers is more to be found in their radical commitments to the highpoints of human achievement. 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. These projects would find their expression in politics but, as this study will demonstrate, "conservatism" is far too narrow a term to characterize the politics of renaissance and enlightenment.

In referring to the politics of renaissance and enlightenment I have sought to avoid the limitations of an approach that would position Oakeshott as a partisan of modern thought against Strauss as a proponent of a return to the situation of classical thought. While both engaged in the creation of memorable intellectual myths and legends, Oakeshott and Strauss refused to reduce the possibilities of the human mind and the cycles of history to simple narratives of progress and decline. It is not the case that Oakeshott embraced modern pluralism without exception or that Strauss was nostalgic for an ancient "natural law."

While Strauss argued that the ancient philosophers required renewed consideration, he acknowledged that modern thinkers had also upheld the aims of philosophy. Strauss fostered the ongoing possibilities of

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enlightenment in identifying the philosophical significance of Heidegger, a man whom he considered the most radical of the historicists of modernity. The ancient philosophers were aware that the ultimate ground or substratum (*hypokeimenon*) of the intelligible causes observable in the cosmos was unknowable. This awareness informed the Socratic turn to speeches in order to rationally confront a problem which cannot be settled by science. Strauss intimated that this openness to the ultimate problem and mystery of being had once again become a possibility for philosophy in the epoch of Nietzsche and Heidegger.

It is similarly restricting to cast Oakeshott as a "modern." Oakeshott expressed great foreboding about the impetus which modern technology and ideological politics had given to societal mobilization. He had also witnessed the tendency of modern pluralism to decline into a scramble for economic gain that betrayed the achievements of the renaissance figures he celebrated. While it has been argued that Oakeshott advocated "a particular kind of modernist individualism,"[1] he did not place its emergence within any account which might subsume the self in a rational achievement of "modernity" and his skepticism of such rationalist accounts makes it possible for Oakeshott to be described with perhaps equal plausibility as a critic of the Enlightenment.[2] Oakeshott's individuality was not the neutral thing of modern liberal utopias, implying rather the poetic and, in the broadest sense, religious achievement of a self. Though its rebirth in Western Europe may be traced to the nominalism of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, its achievement was for Oakeshott as fragile as the individual human being. While the main emblem of this individuality is the artistic passion of the Renaissance, it remained contingent on such heritage as the Judaic tradition of the will, the Roman legal tradition, and an attitude of "political skepticism." The coming together of these traditions was threatened by a consciously progressing modernity, and Oakeshott avoided Hegel's "Gnostic" account of political history in favor of the continued importance of Augustine whose political thought he introduced to students as "the *pax Romana* seen *sub specie aeternitatis*."[3]

Yet these distinctions are complicated by the fact that, from the metaphysical perspective, both Oakeshott and Strauss appear to be undeniably modern. In rejecting the dualism of a supersensible realm, both men reworked the premodern strands in their thought toward the inspiration and desire to achieve completion and a kind of transcendence in this world. Nevertheless, Oakeshott and Strauss inherited opposing attitudes toward this transformation, reflected in the contrast between what

I refer to in this study as the "German" and "English" responses to theory and practice and the experiences from which the German Jewish Strauss and the English Christian Oakeshott approached the problem of historical identity.

Indeed, it has been suggested that one of the most significant questions on which readers of Oakeshott must reflect is whether there can be "any absolute breaks in the seamless web of historical change."[4] Oakeshott relied on "a kind of quantitative sameness" within the changing historical identity of Christianity.[5] This sense of merciful continuity was the antithesis of Strauss's experience of an inexorable break in the Jewish nation and religion with modernity. For Oakeshott—in the words of Andrew Sullivan—"a tradition of religious belief is extraordinarily fluid, resting in no way upon the primacy of the prior, even if, [as in Christianity,] the doctrine has long been that the prior was articulated by an incarnate Godhead."[6]

In starkest contrast, Strauss's early adherence to political Zionism reflected his keen awareness of the impossibility that the religious life and identity which had nourished and protected premodern Jews might be recovered and continued. As Michael Zank has phrased it, the question facing Strauss was, "How [is] a return to Judaism possible if the world of the ghetto [is] irretrievably lost, while modern Judaism (even if transposed to Palestine) [is] inextricably European?"[7]

As this predicament makes clear, these religious inheritances of both Oakeshott and Strauss intersected with the question of national tradition. In their separate ways each man perceived that in modernity, a "German" dedication to theoretical radicalness stood against a practical "English" conservatism. Oakeshott wrote of "that love of moderation which has as frequently been fatal to English philosophy as it has been favourable to English politics."[8] Oakeshott's understanding of historical Christianity bears an obvious relation to this English response to modernity which, after his sojourn in London and Cambridge, Strauss would speak of as "[t]his taking things easy, this muddling through, this crossing the bridge when one comes to it." Strauss was impressed by a society that had managed to preserve something of the classical outlook. "Whatever may be wrong with the peculiarly modern ideal," he wrote in the draft of a lecture while his land of birth faced the British in 1940, "the very Englishmen who originated it, were at the same time versed in the classical tradition, and the English always kept in store a substantial amount of the necessary counterpoison."[9]

Opposing this English *phronesis* was a German *mania* most apparent in the brilliance of the German critique of modern civilization, a critique which nevertheless threatened to break disastrously upon practical life as an extreme form of political nihilism. Developing their ideas in the inter-war period, Oakeshott and Strauss would each find themselves influenced by and forced to respond to the cultural and intellectual achievements of the German mind.

Oakeshott and Strauss embodied something of both of these national inheritances and intellectual outlooks. Strauss has been recognized as an Anglophile,[10] while Oakeshott has even been called a "German thinker" for his close attention to the thought of that country.[11] Oakeshott studied in Germany in the early 1920s and, like Strauss who was involved in the Jewish *Wanderbund*, even participated in the *Wandervögel* movement.[12] Oakeshott followed the developments in German theology and historical inquiry and was aware of the break which modernity represented when viewed in these terms. However, these complementarities are only a rewarding aspect to what remains a portrait of contrasting approaches. For while Oakeshott enjoyed a familiarity with German thought beyond that which is often found in Anglo-Saxony, it is noteworthy that the scholar who called him a "German thinker" finds ultimate significance in Oakeshott's thought as "the response of an English intellectual to the challenge of the critique of modernity made by his continental-minded fellows."[13] While Oakeshott's response would incorporate some powerful aspects of this critique, it remains important to reflect on the defining and divergent positions of Oakeshott and Strauss on the political and religious questions posed by modernity while recognizing this sympathy for each other's national backgrounds.

These political and religious questions formed into a challenge that Strauss called the "theologico-political problem" and which Oakeshott understood as "the single and continuous" problem of religion and political life.[14] These problems have a permanent relation with what Timothy W. Burns has identified as "the link between justice or the moral life and the erotic longing for immortality."[15] In the moral life (the practical world in which Oakeshott's self seeks completion), the Good is what is morally chosen. In theoretical terms (as Strauss's philosopher understands the problem), the Good is what is rationally defensible.

The theologico-political problem of the philosopher is closely related to the permanent tension indicated by another of Strauss's formulations, "the City and Man"—the philosopher's heteronomous position between

the life according to reason and the necessity of a political life among non-philosophical human beings.[16] The religious significance of this is apparent in the fact that "the [philosophical] question of God or gods initially comes to light in relation to the city"; thus, this political problem "remains at the core of every society."[17]

This problem gains a further layer of complexity with the inheritance of Judaism. The philosophical contributions of Jews have come in three great moments—the classical Greek, the medieval Judeo-Arabic, and the modern or Germanic.[18] In working to recover classical and medieval rationalism, Strauss was faced with the entanglement of Judaism and philosophy with the German mind: "The emancipation of the Jews in Germany coincided with the greatest epoch of German thought and poetry, with the epoch in which Germany was the foremost country in thought and poetry." As Strauss noted, this fact prompts the inevitable comparison of "the period of German Jewry with the period of Spanish Jewry."[19] Maimonides had preserved Judaism and the philosophical way of life during the Spanish period and Strauss became committed to a similar project in the German epoch. As I will explore, however, the challenge of the German mind presented unique complications.

Oakeshott emphasized the historical dimension of the Christian religion in attempting to identify a religiosity supportive of the moral sentiments of individuality. As mentioned, Oakeshott rejected teleological understandings of history such as Hegel's, recognizing them as "counterfeit myths" akin to the heresy of Pelagianism in privileging knowledge over faith.[20] Convinced by the historical argument of Albert Schweitzer that Jesus of Nazareth was an apocalyptic prophet, Oakeshott understood the delay in the expected end times as an early moral challenge surmounted by Christianity. Augustine was the most significant theologian involved in the transference of the Kingdom of God into a supernatural heavenly realm. Modern theologians in turn had been forced to respond to the collapse of this dualism. For Oakeshott, the promise of eternal life must give way to a mortal religion in which the *cursus ad mortem* recognized by Augustine is relieved and redeemed through intermittent access to a poetic otherworld. Platonic dualism is replaced with the moral and artistic challenge of being—as Elizabeth Corey has characterized it, "unworldly in the world."[21] Oakeshott deemed poetic self-expression "all that can, in the end, survive of the Platonic conception of *theoria*."[22] It will be instructive to recall that while Strauss spent the months before his death restudying Xenophon's pursuit of *sophia*, Oakeshott occupied his final years with

religious questions, rereading Augustine and pondering this poetic sense of "salvation."[23] Although Oakeshott was reconciled to the fact he could never complete the writings on religion which he envisaged, as Andrew Sullivan has argued, the key to the sympathetic comprehension of Oakeshott's final description of the moral conduct of a self in *On Human Conduct* is to recognize a religion in which "both poetry and practice meet their consummation."[24]

While the close identification of Strauss with philosophy will not be a controversial aspect of this study, the suggestion of a religious orientation in Oakeshott's thinking *is* likely to be treated with skepticism. My approach begins with the early questions which were never put aside by Oakeshott despite a process of development. Oakeshott's early writings, collected by Timothy Fuller in *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life* (1993), are a reminder of this consistent basis of his thought. A Christian civilization transfigured by renaissance was the background to his description of the moral conduct of a self within a civil order. While the language of politics often predominates, Ian Tregenza has observed that much misinterpretation of Oakeshott's thought stems from a failure to perceive "the essentially religious nature of his entire project."[25] Andrew Sullivan, one of the first close readers of Oakeshott to have recognized religion as "a key to unlocking his thinking as a whole," has characterized this project as a "theologico-political treatise."[26] As I will argue in this study, Oakeshott's theologico-political efforts were directed toward the renaissance of an immanent Augustinianism and the individuality which it supports.

My argument may be seen to run contrary to that of Terry Nardin in *The Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (2001). Nardin emphasizes the primacy of philosophy for Oakeshott as "the quest for unconditional understanding" from which religion is "ultimately a distraction." For Nardin, the religious desire to "escape the world" is precluded by Oakeshott's denial of supernatural immortality. Therefore the enactment of a self must take place in an "always contradictory and invariably mortal" world of action.[27] Nardin chooses for the most part not to engage in a debate with the secondary literature, given that his "purpose is to understand Oakeshott's philosophy, not to endorse or dispute what others have said about it."[28]

I would suggest that Nardin's concern with the philosopher *qua* philosopher need not exclude a reading which finds Oakeshott to be seeking the poetic-religious completion of a self. Oakeshott accepted a kind of philosophical monism while attempting to provide it with an immanent

religiosity which might still offer an escape that was not "eternal" in the future-oriented sense of religious dualism. As Robert Grant has described it, Oakeshott's "'Salvation' or 'heaven' was not a future reward for good behaviour, but a spiritual dimension accessible here and now to a person already moved by love, and thereby attuned to it."[29]

Nardin has more recently characterized Oakeshott as a "moralist" and a "theorist of morality."[30] The cold term "theorist" does not quite chill the passion of the word "moralist." As Strauss observed, the moral life and the religious life are closely connected, and "the moral man as such is the potential believer."[31] While Oakeshott did not submit his intellect to otherworldly belief, the moral life (and not the life according to reason) remained his abiding concern.

Oakeshott's understanding of theory also reflected his unorthodox moral and religious outlook. His "Hegelian" philosophizing was skeptical from the very beginning, being founded in British Idealism.[32] Reading Hegel through Bradley, Oakeshott avoided the speculative logic of German Idealism. As Stuart Isaacs has explained, "By taking Bradley's notion of the 'Absolute' as experience, and associating it with Hegel's view that this is knowable, Oakeshott stood Idealism on its head."[33] Oakeshott's interest in Hobbes did not require a break with this solipsistic viewpoint as he combined the skepticism of Hobbes with the immanence of Hegel stripped of his "Gnostic" and "Pelagian" teleology. In philosophical as well as moral terms, Oakeshott was very much, as some have detected in his praise of Montaigne, an "Augustine come again to confound both Gnostics and Pelagians."[34] In filtering his favorite modern thinking through this skepticism and historical contingency, Oakeshott achieved what Timothy Fuller has called a "transposed Augustinianism."[35]

In the case of Strauss's priorities and development, any interpretation must take a position on what he referred to as his "change of orientation." Strauss directed his readers to his 1932 critique of Carl Schmitt for the moment of his turn toward a new awareness of the potential for a recovery of the classical philosophical worldview.[36] The diverse inquiries which led Strauss to be able to reinterpret this tradition are carefully considered in the Martin D. Yaffe and Richard S. Ruderman edited volume *Reorientation: Leo Strauss in the 1930s*.[37]

Despite Strauss's conscious turn, it is going too far to claim that Strauss's three early books on Spinoza, Maimonides, and Hobbes were written by "the pre-Straussean Strauss."[38] Allan Bloom, who offered this

characterization, admitted that Strauss's intellectual development was "a continuous, deepening process"—an assessment he later reinforced in describing Strauss's *oeuvre* as "a unified and continuous, ever deepening investigation."[39]

I have followed Daniel Tanguay's *Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Autobiography* (2007) and David Janssens's *Between Athens and Jerusalem* (2008) in seeing Strauss's early Zionist concerns as a unifying theme, even as breakthroughs, setbacks, and detours mark the path of his investigations. Janssens cites a letter from Hans Jonas, one of Strauss's early colleagues from the Heidegger circle, to the effect that "Strauss came to Heidegger with his questions fully formed"—an assessment supported by a number of other European readers of Strauss, including both Strauss's contemporaries and later students of his thought.[40]

The importance of Heidegger to my interpretation of Strauss requires careful justification. Aware that his own thought could be tainted by the association, Strauss confronted the reality that Heidegger was the culmination of the German mind and that whatever remained essential in philosophy must be disentangled from his thought. Strauss could therefore not be oblivious to the partial insight available from Heidegger's "radical historicism." For this reason, I have engaged with William H. F. Altman's controversial study *The German Stranger: Leo Strauss and National Socialism* (2012). While the most detailed study of Heidegger's influence on Strauss is Richard L. Velkley's *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy* (2011), Velkley does not closely examine Heidegger's impact on Strauss's understanding of Judaism, nor does he pursue the hint which Thomas L. Pangle has taken up in perceiving that there is a "global historical task implicitly assigned to us all by Leo Strauss."[41] While Altman claims to detect anti-Judaism at the heart of Strauss's project, I view Strauss's unique treatment of the two "roots" of Western civilization in terms of his recovery of an esoteric and "non-Western" Platonism and a philosophical understanding of the significance of the biblical tradition—"the East within us, Western men."[42] I argue that Strauss's subtle guide for the regeneration of Western civilization is in fact a powerful response to Heidegger—preparing an alternative ground on which to face the global historical task which remains in his wake.

The Structure of This Study

Chapters 2 and 3 take up the conventional identification of Strauss and Oakeshott, demonstrating the superficiality of Procrustean characterizations of them as political reactionaries. This involves a critique of Perry Anderson's grouping of Strauss and Oakeshott with Carl Schmitt as *katechon* or "restrainers" of the "end times" (which Anderson argues Schmitt interpreted as democratic or proletarian sovereignty). I reveal instead that Oakeshott and Strauss were closer to classical republicans in their practical politics, and that Strauss's rediscovery of philosophical friendship and Oakeshott's celebration of friendship as the emblem of intrinsic worth both imply 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 (considered in Chaps. 6 and 7). To the extent that conservatism enjoys an affinity with this form of political moderation, we will arrive at the truth contained in the popular view of Oakeshott and Strauss.

This political moderation also underpinned a defense of liberal education. Insisting on the elevated role of the university, Oakeshott and Strauss both emphasized the intrinsic value of liberal education. Chapter 3 considers the effects of vocational training and social mobilization on Oakeshott's pessimism about the universities and reflects on the figures of Heidegger and Churchill in elucidating Strauss's hope that "it may again become true that all liberally educated men will be politically moderate men."[43]

Chapter 4 moves beyond this conventional terrain to examine the divergent ideas of Oakeshott and Strauss on historical questions. While Strauss's deep and abiding interest in the problem of history and theory is well known, Oakeshott's early training as a historian and his interest in the identity of Christianity also prompted him to investigate history in philosophical terms. Oakeshott perceived the interaction of modernity with biblical thought, suggesting the interdependence of the Judaic inheritance and the German mind. As he observed as early as 1928, "this belief in history has, since the eighteenth century, become part of our normal *Weltanschauung*, this peculiarly Hebrew belief, which had little or no counterpart in Greek culture, has been westernized."[44] Oakeshott developed this observation in *Experience and Its Modes* (1933), 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."[45]

Consideration of these problems provides the fuller context for Oakeshott and Strauss's divergent interpretations of the history of political thought. In their readings of Hobbes, considered in Chap. 5, each would become aware of the other as a powerful obstacle to his own interpretation. Oakeshott approached Hobbes as an antidote to Locke and "the plausible ethics of productivity" while Strauss connected Hobbes with Locke and the modern market society. The importance of Hobbes for each thinker prompted them into powerful insights about the meaning of modernity and the nature of the problems facing Western civilization.

Chapters 6 and 7 trace the implications of these contrasting histories of political thought from Hobbes and Hegel to Nietzsche and Heidegger. The connection between Hobbes and Hegel and the consequences for later thought is an important part of the background to Strauss's recovery and defense of Platonism beyond the doctrine of the ideas. For Oakeshott, the problem of finitude bequeathed to us by modern metaphysics required the reinterpretation of premodern religious responses to eternity and mortality.

The close attention paid to Hegel in Strauss's *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (1936) reflected Strauss's discussions with Alexandre Kojève about the connections between Hobbes and Hegel (while in Paris in the early 1930s). The indirect influence of these interactions on Oakeshott also suggested the somewhat eccentric step of placing Oakeshott's thought in confrontation with Kojève. This reveals why Oakeshott's thought required the infusion of premodern inheritances, while clarifying his alignment with poetry and individuality against a modern thinker committed to philosophy and universality. As Allan Bloom pointed out in recommending careful consideration of Kojève's philosophy, "More common-sensical but less intransigent writers would not teach us nearly so much."[46]

Chapters 8 and 9 draw together the themes of the earlier sections in contemplating the relation of religion and the problem of eternity to the moral and the philosophical life.

Aware of the significance of religion Strauss looked to a deeper knowledge of a biblical tradition which he considered "the East within us." Thinking through Heidegger's problem of Being Strauss realized that the biblical tradition, radically reinterpreted, could help to recall the wonder and mystery of the ground of rationalism, providing a response to Heidegger while continuing the vital problem which is at the foundation of Western thinking.

For Oakeshott religion implied the possibility of momentary encounters with the "eternal" and it was the limited role of political theory to describe and secure the autonomy for these fleeting moments of practical consummation. Oakeshott described a "City of Man" framed in skeptical, non-substantive terms, providing a civil order in which individual men and women may conduct themselves in the spirit of an "Augustinian God of majestic imagination."[47]

Oakeshott's politics of renaissance and Strauss's politics of enlightenment present two of the most vivid expressions of the alternatives in confronting the reality of finitude in an epoch in which the security of religious belief has grown as doubtful as our reliance on the solutions offered by political science.

Notes

1. Edmund Neill, *Michael Oakeshott* (New York: Bloomsbury), 33.
2. See Roy Tseng, *The Sceptical Idealist: Michael Oakeshott as a Critic of the Enlightenment* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2003).
3. Michael Oakeshott, *Lectures in the History of Political Thought*, *Selected Writings, Volume II*, ed. Terry Nardin and Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2006), 334.
4. Timothy Fuller, introduction to Michael Oakeshott, *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, ed. Timothy Fuller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 16–17.
5. Cited in Fuller, introduction to *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, 15.
6. Andrew Sullivan, *Intimations Pursued: The Voice of Practice in the Conversation of Michael Oakeshott* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2007), 185.
7. Michael Zank, preface to Leo Strauss, *Leo Strauss: The Early Writings (1921–1932)*, ed. Michael Zank (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), xi.
8. Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), 196.
9. Leo Strauss, "German Nihilism," ed. David Janssens and Daniel Tanguay, *Interpretation* 26, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 372.
10. Steven B. Smith, "Leo Strauss: The Outlines of a Life," in *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, ed. Steven B. Smith (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 22–23.
11. Efraim Podoksik, "Oakeshott in the context of German Idealism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Oakeshott*, ed. Efraim Podoksik (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 275.
12. "This was an informal student movement dedicated to nature-worship, camping out, and (according to DH Lawrence) 'free love'. Though very

much of its time and place (Weimar Germany), it also embodied a traditional vein of German Romanticism, harmless enough and even valuable in itself, which the National Socialists were later to exploit." Robert Grant, *Oakeshott* (London: The Claridge Press, 1990), 13. See also Michael Zank, introduction to Strauss, *Early Writings*, 3.

13. Efraim Podoksik, *In Defence of Modernity: Vision and Philosophy in Michael Oakeshott* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2003), 32–33.
14. Leo Strauss, "Preface to *Hobbes Politische Wissenschaft*," *Interpretation* 8, no. 1 (January 1979): 1; Michael Oakeshott, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism*, ed. Timothy Fuller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 81.
15. Timothy Burns, "Leo Strauss and the Origins of Hobbes's Natural Science," *The Review of Metaphysics* 64, no. 4 (June 2011): 831 n. 25.
16. Richard L. Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy: On Original Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 170 n. 30.
17. Steven B. Smith, *Reading Leo Strauss: Politics, Philosophy, Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 125, 193.
18. Michael Zank, "The Heteronomy of Modern Jewish Philosophy," *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (2012): 99.
19. Leo Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 226.
20. Fuller, introduction to *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, 20.
21. Elizabeth Campbell Corey, *Michael Oakeshott on Religion, Aesthetics, and Politics* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 23.
22. Michael Oakeshott, "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind," in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*: new and expanded edition, ed. Timothy Fuller (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991), 516 n. 13.
23. See, for instance, his letter to Patrick Riley in 1988 cited in Riley's "Michael Oakeshott, Philosopher of Individuality," *The Review of Politics* 54, no. 4 (Fall 1992): 664 n. 45.
24. Sullivan, *Intimations Pursued*, 194.
25. Ian Tregenza, *Michael Oakeshott on Hobbes: A Study in the Renewal of Philosophical Ideas* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2003), 10.
26. Sullivan, *Intimations Pursued*, 178, 197.
27. Terry Nardin, *The Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (University Park: State University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 66, 194.
28. Ibid., ix.
29. Robert Grant, review of *Notebooks 1922–86*, by Michael Oakeshott, *History of Political Thought* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 799.

30. Terry Nardin, "Oakeshott as a Moralist," in *The Place of Michael Oakeshott in Contemporary Western and Non-Western Thought*, ed. Noel Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2017), 56–72.
31. Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 140.
32. David Boucher, "Oakeshott in the context of British Idealism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Oakeshott*, 267–268.
33. Stuart Isaacs, *The Politics and Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.
34. Glenn Worthington, "Michael Oakeshott and the City of God," *Political Theory* 28, no. 3 (June 2000): 377. See Michael Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 241.
35. Timothy Fuller, "The Work of Michael Oakeshott," *Political Theory* 19, no. 3 (August 1991): 330.
36. Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 257.
37. Martin Yaffe and Richard S. Ruderman (eds.) *Reorientation: Leo Strauss in the 1930s* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
38. Allan Bloom, "Leo Strauss: September 20, 1899–October 18, 1973," *Political Theory* 2, no. 4 (November 1974): 383.
39. Bloom, "Leo Strauss," 383 and Allan Bloom, "Leo Strauss," in *Giants and Dwarfs: Essays 1960–1990* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 235.
40. David Janssens, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Philosophy, Prophecy, and Politics in Leo Strauss's Early Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), 5.
41. Thomas L. Pangle, "Preface to the Chinese edition of *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*." https://www.academia.edu/14554942/Preface_to_the_Chinese_Edition_of_The_Rebirth_of_Classical_Political_Rationalism_An_Introduction_to_the_Thought_of_Leo_Strauss (accessed November 8, 2016).
42. Leo Strauss, "An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism," in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 44.
43. Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 24.
44. Michael Oakeshott, "The Importance of the Historical Element in Christianity," in *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, 69.
45. Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes*, 105.
46. Allan Bloom, introduction to Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols and ed. Allan Bloom (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), xi.
47. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 324.

CHAPTER 2

Political Moderation and Practical Conservatism

Conservatism is a political disposition and neither Michael Oakeshott nor Leo Strauss was primarily concerned with politics as a practice. Both men are, however, routinely discussed as major figures of twentieth-century political conservatism and the basis for this persistently held opinion must be explored in any comparison of the two thinkers. At the same time, the pitfalls of a too ready or superficial acceptance of this approach are obvious and it is noted that a reader as perceptive as Richard L. Velkley maintains that it is a great mistake to link Strauss with the kind of Atlantic conservatism which comes to mind in the phrase "rationalism in politics."[1] Velkley speaks from a position of greater familiarity with the complexities of Strauss's philosophical relationship with political conservatism and, while Oakeshott's celebrated midcareer essays collected in *Rationalism in Politics* may give the impression of adherence to a mainline political conservatism, they in fact express a far more unorthodox viewpoint and cannot, at any rate, be considered Oakeshott's final word.

While Oakeshott and Strauss both subscribed to a form of political conservatism, "it is not at all inconsistent," as Oakeshott once asserted, "to be conservative in respect of government and radical in respect of almost every other activity."[2] Daniel Tanguay implies a related truth about Strauss in declaring that, outside of his "circumstantial alliance with conservatism" in political terms, "[t]here is not the slightest trace [in his thought] of a radical conservatism based on an unconditional adherence to the past and to tradition."[3]

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There is an obvious affinity between Oakeshott's endorsement of the First Marquess of Halifax's exposition of a "doctrine of moderation" in *The Character of a Trimmer* and Strauss's awareness of the need to keep on hand modernity's "necessary counterpoison,"[4] while emphasizing that practical political wisdom is moderation. As Timothy Fuller has argued, "To seek the fitting middle ground is Oakeshott's practical political counsel, not his relentless, subversive, philosophic engagement to dissect the alternatives without concern for what their practitioners may or may not do."[5] Strauss would note that Socrates, while a radical theorist, "was a very conservative man as far as the ultimate practical conclusions of his political philosophy were concerned."[6]

The uncontroversial wisdom of political moderation is akin to recommending the controversial political disposition of conservatism—the commonsense position of a sailor balancing against capsizing winds or a doctor countering a progressing poison. Universal and equal participation in renaissance and enlightenment has not been demonstrated in any human society. Rejecting modern theories of historical teleology and anthropological perfectibility, neither Oakeshott nor Strauss could support the modern "Enlightenment" which, despite its origins in claims to a greater realism, idealized a radical popularization of what has always been a demanding and elevated calling. Strauss and Oakeshott both perceived that the university, as the traditional home of liberal education, is the primary venue for the conservation of the highest traditions among the Western ways of life—a position certain to be attacked as elitist in the decades when a self-described "counterculture" was brewing on the campuses, but which is no more than a continuing confidence in the perennial possibilities of Western civilization—(possibilities which seemed to have been lost for "throne and altar" conservatives who had known only their world in retreat as the old kings departed). It also spoke of an optimism and ambition beyond the reactionary nihilism of a younger generation on the Right which had implicitly embraced the logic of its mortal enemies on the Left.

Despite the leisurely and aristocratic origins of liberal education and the conservative disposition with which it is associated, it is unconvincing to cast Strauss and Oakeshott with either the *ancient régime* traditionalists and counterrevolutionaries, or the apocalyptic revolutionaries of the Right. It is also inaccurate to portray them as the precursors to the so-called neoliberalism of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan or their purported economists, F. A. Hayek and Milton Friedman. At a distance

from political and economic policymaking, the conservatisms of Oakeshott and Strauss formed around cultural high points which are deeper and more permanent than the political revolution which appeared in full force in eighteenth-century Europe under the banner of "Enlightenment." Their approaches aimed to reestablish the distinction between theory and practice which that revolutionary movement seeks to overcome.

The emergence of these positions, peculiar as they are in accepting the tensions between two very divergent strands of the Western intellectual character, has not yet been widely taken up in the history of ideas. One of the most important attempts to associate the conservatisms of Oakeshott and Strauss to date comes from the Marxist historian Perry Anderson, whose comparative readings allow the outlines of these positions to be traced, in spite of his polemical intent.

Amid the Intransigent

A little over a year and a half after the death of Michael Oakeshott in December 1990, Perry Anderson expressed surprise that the passing of the man he deemed "the most original thinker of post-war Conservatism" had not received more notice. Anderson's article "The Intransigent Right at the End of the Century," first appearing in the *London Review of Books* as a review of Timothy Fuller's expanded edition of Oakeshott's *Rationalism in Politics* in September 1992, attempted to capitalize on this oversight by offering an interpretation of Oakeshott's contribution to political thought within a narrative of intellectual influences leading back to the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt.[7] Coming a few years after Heinrich Meier's landmark study of the intellectual relationship between Schmitt and Leo Strauss,[8] Anderson attached Strauss to this grouping of the "intransigent right," adding the classical liberal political economist Friedrich Hayek, presumably for the necessary dose of "neoliberalism."

Tariq Ali later told Anderson that when he had mentioned the essay to Edward Thompson, the grand old man of the Left had complained, "Oakeshott was a scoundrel. Tell him to stiffen his tone."[9] But whatever Thompson's specific objections may have been,[10] Anderson's essay is stern enough. From a point of superficial familiarity with the work and reputations of this group—Oakeshott, Strauss, Schmitt, and Hayek—it is difficult not to sense the lingering specters of Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, Adolf Hitler, and "neoliberal capitalism." However, while his tendentiousness is never far from the surface, Anderson's essay is a serious

exploration of the links between the four thinkers and a useful foundation from which to investigate the plane on which the practical conservatism and radical thought of Oakeshott and Strauss might be set in a more adequate comparison.

Anderson is accurate in perceiving that these two men are among the most intellectually sophisticated in advancing non-Left ideas in the twentieth century and beyond, although it may be that his New Left siege mentality amid the advances of "neoliberalism" at the end of the Cold War causes him to exaggerate the degree to which their ideas have been "heard in the chancelleries."[11] Less forgivable is Anderson's eccentric conclusion that the four can be gathered under Schmitt's appropriation of the New Testament word *katechon*. (From Paul's Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, the *katechon* is the "restrainer" of the lawless end times of the Antichrist.) Anderson's Procrustean categorization is quite unfair to Oakeshott, Strauss, and Hayek, each of whom celebrated individual human achievements of intellectual and cultural enlightenment and renaissance. Even considering the more narrow and secular sense in which Anderson interprets Schmitt's use of the term as seeking to "restrain the risks of democracy," it does not do justice to the breadth of thought which the essay surveys. But thankfully, Anderson does not allow this maladroit conclusion to blunder into to the center of the discussion, and it is only a slight exaggeration to suggest that the main substance of the essay is the intellectual parallels between the work of Oakeshott and Strauss. This reading has the happy consequence of relegating both the apocalyptic imagination of Schmitt and the mundane economic concerns of Hayek to a kind of exoteric window-dressing for the benefit of Anderson's more superficial and ideological readers. But as we will see, the presence of Schmitt and Hayek does come to offer an additional lesson in political judgment.

Carl Schmitt had impressed the young Strauss as a firm, but polemical, critic of modernity. Schmitt's project may be seen to represent the tendencies of "German" radicalism where they have gone off course into the realm of politics proper. Though Schmitt was by no means an Anglophobe as Nietzsche had been and as some of his contemporaries on the German Right no doubt were, his definition of politics was aimed squarely at what he perceived to be the contemptible outcome of the Anglo-Saxon world order, with its futile parliamentarianism and evasion of life-and-death decisions. Hayek, who in starkest contrast worshipped the English common law traditions even more reverently than Oakeshott and held to a

traditionalist conservative "organic" view of social order, acknowledged that his "mind had been shaped by … two decades of middle life spent in Great Britain."[12] Unfortunately, however, he allowed these influences and sympathies to form into a creedal summation of "English" moderation which careened toward self-contradiction. Though he was aware of "the unpalatable truth that it is Germany whose fate we are in some danger of repeating,"[13] he would build on polemical ground like Schmitt.

This is only to provide the rudimentary outline of Strauss's memorable assessment of Schmitt's concept of politics as merely "liberalism with a minus sign."[14] In the same vein, and despite his essential sympathy with Hayek's broader aims, Oakeshott was forced into a devastating assessment of Hayek's critique of social engineering, calling it no more than a "plan to resist all planning." Such a stance "may be better than its opposite," Oakeshott allowed, "but it belongs to same style of politics."[15] To adapt Strauss's phrase, it is planning with a minus sign. The approaches of Schmitt and Hayek were, in the words of Joseph Conrad's Professor in *The Secret Agent*, "counter moves in the same game."[16]

Not alive to this aspect of the problem, Anderson can only allege a lack of intellectual generosity in Oakeshott's criticism of Hayek.[17] Oakeshott, like Strauss with Schmitt, was obliged to take a consistent theoretical perspective rather than giving in to the temptation of forming a superficial alliance on the plane of political partisanship. As Strauss had written in *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, "pure, unpolluted knowledge is never, except accidentally, polemical; and pure unpolluted knowledge cannot be gained from 'the concrete political existence,' from the situation of the age."[18]

Anderson does, however, identify Oakeshott and Strauss's concern with "the vocation of philosophy" which he considers to be, with some exaggeration in the case of Oakeshott, "the supreme endeavour of human understanding, and one so uncompromisingly radical that it could never consort directly with politics." The tension between philosophy and politics—between "a metaphysics of scandal and a pragmatics of convention," as Anderson terms it—is indeed handled very differently by Oakeshott and Strauss.[19] Both men understood the fundamental problem of politics and philosophy. Amid the risks philosophy poses to moral life its radical endeavor demands individual excellence and elevation—it cannot become the common property of a demotic multitude and the easy basis of popular sovereignty, an Enlightenment fantasy which forms the basis of Anderson's rejection of Oakeshott and Strauss and his associating them with Schmitt's project of radical political enmity. As I shall explore in the

following chapter, Oakeshott and Strauss both turned to versions of the mixed regime of classical republicanism to solve this political problem.

For Oakeshott, science and philosophy allow a few to wake from the "common dream" of their civilization and become fully conscious of their situation and circumstances. However, his ultimate affirmation of the poetic character of human conduct is intimated in his understanding that for the majority this would mean being "awake in a profound darkness" only to be experienced as a "dreadful insomnia." While the "common dream" is only ever the product of certain supremely poetical human beings, Oakeshott appeared to exempt himself from such company in allowing that "we whose participation in the dream is imperfect and largely passive are, in a sense, its slaves."[20] This dream constitutes a civilization, and for most, including Oakeshott himself, it is rational to accept its terms of civility. It follows from this that where Oakeshott refers to "rational conduct," he does not mean the imposition of theory in human life—as Steven J. Wulf has clearly explained, for Oakeshott "conduct is rational when it exemplifies or coherently extends an idiom's existing manners; and it is irrational when it observes an idiom's manners loosely."[21]

Strauss meanwhile identified the break which separated modern abstract concepts from the "natural" world of phenomena available to classical philosophy, drawing his conclusions from an opposing perspective to Oakeshott's. While Strauss would rediscover the importance of political moderation, he recognized with Heidegger that humans have become forgetful of the mystery of Being. They have lost their openness to the permanent *aporia* which face human beings considering the question of their existence and the cosmos. As Richard L. Velkley has argued, Strauss and Heidegger "agree that philosophy is the intransigent facing of the questionableness of Being, of a sort that few human beings can undertake, much less sustain, in its purity."[22] Oakeshott put forward the nearest thing to a poetic equivalent of this attitude in celebrating "*negative capability* (which Keats attributed to Shakespeare), the power of accepting the mysteries and uncertainties of experience without any irritable search for order and distinctness."[23] The common problem which these positions seek to respond to, and the divergent solutions which they point toward, reflects the quarrel of poetry and philosophy:

> From the very beginning of the European tradition, both poets and philosophers have spoken of the illusory, dreamlike character of human life. In general, the poets have lamented the insubstantiality of this dream,

> whereas the philosophers have taken it as a necessary, even trivial consequence of a higher or deeper truth.[24]

In their awareness of this dreamlike finitude and evanescence, both the poets and the philosophers represent wakefulness amid the slumber of a more conventional multitude, an observation which introduces a definite hierarchy and standard of excellence.

The merest hint of aristocracy is of course anathema to Anderson and the Left. Anderson is led by his methodological assumptions to assess worldviews in economic terms. Yet as a historian of ideas, he is able to overcome this dogmatism in recognizing the Nietzschean provenance of Strauss's insistence on an order of rank. Although Strauss would come to define this anthropological view in Platonic terms, there can be little doubt that he continued to subscribe to the maxim "all rare things for the rare."[25] The philosophical way of life demands a rarely encountered "mating of courage and moderation"[26]—a formulation which implies the correct relationship of theory to practice and which additionally provides a ready definition of conservatism in the practice of politics.

The logician John Searle once quipped that reading Nietzsche is like drinking cognac—a sip is good, but you don't want to drink the whole bottle.[27] Strauss, however, was not advocating "rolling the classics round the tongue like old brandy"[28]—two suggestions which are far from the spirit in which he paired daring and philosophical *mania* with conservatism and practical moderation. Oakeshott came closer to handling the ostensible contradiction of such inspired sobriety in another of his reflections on the political character of the English in pointing out that, unlike the French and German intellectuals who had been enraptured by the ideas of the French Revolution, the English were "[s]timulated instead of intoxicated by the abstractions & perfections it asserted."[29]

Though Oakeshott was also influenced by Nietzsche, Anderson perceptively notes that Jacob Burckhardt played the corresponding role in Oakeshott's thought, allowing him to assert a rank order which is more historically contingent, having its high point in the revival of classical ideas in the Renaissance rather than in the ancient world itself.[30] While the contrast of Burckhardt and Nietzsche may helpfully illuminate the basis of Oakeshott and Strauss's definitions of enlightenment and renaissance, it emphasizes a difference which is perhaps more of sentiment than substance, for the "aristocracy" which Oakeshott celebrated in poetic terms may be no less "natural" than the unequal capacity for reason which informs Strauss's division of philosophers and non-philosophers.[31]

Paul Franco has presented Oakeshott as having sought to "promote the widest possible individuality."[32] But as will be explored in later chapters, Oakeshott's political theorizing was more about allowing those who are capable of the *deepest* individuality to set the tenor of conduct in a political association, creating an informal regime in which poetic self-expression becomes the highest human achievement. This is one of the senses in which Oakeshott's thought aligned with classical republicanism. What prevented a man from excellence was "not his 'circumstances', but his character"—even if "character" has an inescapable element of historical inheritance.[33] Oakeshott nowhere asserted that everyone might enjoy "this man's art, and that man's scope"—only that they may come to admire the achievements of others rather than resenting them, with the record of the recent centuries suggesting that resentment is a constant and dangerous possibility of political life.

Along with those capable of being free and self-created within the possibilities of a civilization, Oakeshott's worldview implies the existence of a decent, though lesser, character who labors to respect this aspiration to true freedom, while perhaps personally incapable of it. As with Strauss's allowance for a persistent human nature incapable of the heteronomous life of the philosopher, a political order may recognize these differences in the form of mixed regime.

In concluding this critical discussion of Anderson's essay, I note that what first appeared as an eccentric or even pernicious choice of thinkers has ultimately revealed an additional aspect of the tension between radical thought and practical life. These respective tendencies would have historically contingent appearances in modernity as the character of the "German" mind and the "English" way of life. Anderson's approach unwittingly brings out these national tendencies through the consideration of two who would push them to their programmatic extremes (Schmitt and Hayek), alongside two who respected the tension which they represent and responded to this predicament by endeavoring to preserve the character of each where it is appropriate (Oakeshott and Strauss).

As a young German who became an émigré in the English-speaking world and who may have once sympathized with some of the radical politics of interwar Germany, Strauss was well qualified to address this problem. Oakeshott, a patriotic Englishman who had studied in Germany and acknowledged the superiority of German thought alongside the country's basic political immaturity, is his perfect counterpart. From here we may examine this tension in the historical circumstances of modern Europe.

In the Vocabulary of Modern European Politics

In September 1929 Leo Strauss turned 30. It was only a month before the Great Crash. As he would later indicate, the Nietzschean wave of his youth had passed over him.[34] Although traces of his early political leanings would remain until he found England in 1934, this turn would prove to be clear and permanent—from around his 30th birthday Strauss began to find coherence in a life of philosophical radicalism and political moderation. This was out of step with the Germany of the time where politics were about to enter their most critical and dangerous phase. Yet Nietzsche himself had understood the kind of intellectual path which must be taken by those like Strauss. Such a one is "called" to a great intellectual task but is not rushed by this sense of great responsibility. "He takes his time, he has plenty of time, he gives no thought whatsoever to being 'finished and ready'—at the age of thirty one is, as regards high culture, a beginner, a child."[35] Strauss, who would not teach a seminar until he was nearly 40 and not find the relief of tenure at a great school until his 50th year, remains a powerful example of this kind of elevated patience.

The result of the Weimar experiment had been clear as early as 1925 with the death of Friedrich Ebert and the election of Paul von Hindenburg to the presidency, an event which prompted loud and violent celebrations throughout the republic.[36] For those who had stood as close to events as Strauss, there had never been a "Golden Age of Weimar." The republic had known civil disturbance and hyperinflation before Gustav Stresemann regained a measure of control in 1924. Its constitution would provide for only a few more years of often competent government in the shadow of an aging Prussian aristocrat who was the embodiment of the old regime.[37] When the Weimar constitution finally proved unwilling to defend either itself or those of its citizens whose survival in hindsight had depended on it, Strauss became indignant about the future of the Jews in Germany—those who had more than any others been thrown into jeopardy by this failure of liberal constitutionalism.

Strauss was not the kind of naïve and tragic political optimist who would rely on Hitler's hatred of the Jews being only a temporary and opportunistic election ploy. He was well aware that the Jews had been declared naturally inferior by the National Socialist movement. With his friend Jacob Klein, he would come to see this as its defining and essential tenet. Vowing to seek no vain charity in an abominable new order, Strauss turned to classical *imperium* against a modernity which had handed the

fate of his own kind to a hateful dictator. As he wrote to his friend Karl Löwith in a now well-known and much debated letter in 1933:

> The fact that the new right-wing Germany does not tolerate us says nothing against the principles of the right. To the contrary: only from the principles of the right, that is from fascist, authoritarian and imperial principles, is it possible with seemliness, that is, without resort to the ludicrous and despicable appeal to the *droits imprescriptibles de l'homme* to protest against the shabby abomination. I am reading Caesar's *Commentaries* with deep understanding, and I think of Virgil's *Tu regere imperio … parcere subjectis et debellare superbos*.[38]

The perspective which Strauss expresses here, turning from political realism to sharp defiance, cannot be simply characterized. Yet it is clear enough that he is pondering how to confront the menace Nazism posed to the Jews. Despite this, the letter has become the basis of a number of attacks by those keen to associate Strauss with those on the German Right who would join the Nazi movement.[39]

The phrase *parcere subjectis et debellare superbos* brings to mind the foreign policy of Augustus Caesar, and would remain one of the foundations of Strauss's political moderation. Consistent with this, the letter is an insistence on the conservative anthropological position expressed with some pardonable indignation. Long after the bravado of "fascist, authoritarian and imperial principles" fell away, the echo of the line from Virgil could still be heard in a number of places in Strauss's writings and there can be little doubt that it remained his ideal of statesmanship and the exercise of political authority.[40]

The counterpart to this line is a modified fragment of Livy which came via Machiavelli and which Strauss would aim at the politically immoderate Martin Heidegger—a philosopher "who lacked the courage to face the issue of Tyranny" and a man who would fall in with the mob which crawled obsequiously to its new masters while tyrannizing the newly vulnerable (*et humiliter serviebant et superbe dominabantur*).[41] As Strauss was coming to understand, political philosophy supplied the counterexample of Socrates who, as the master of dialectic, could expose the vanities of intellectual pride.

At no point did Strauss accept the kind of naïve anthropological position (associated with Marx and attributed to Rousseau) from which human beings freed of society and necessity are understood to revert to a kind of natural goodness and innocence making the existence of bullies like

Heidegger inconceivable. Nor did Strauss accept what he deemed its precursor in Hobbes's "untrue assumption" that the human in a state of nature "is thinkable as a being that lacks awareness of sacred restraints or as a being guided by nothing but a desire for recognition."[42] While it may be that justice can be achieved only in some form of political society, this is not the same as understanding that all notions of justice are unnatural and merely the artificial constructions of positive law. Strauss may have been convinced by a teaching which he attributed to Machiavelli (a lesson equally available from Plato): "Morality can exist only on an island created or at any rate protected by immorality."[43] There is no contradiction in this if we realize that morality of the political kind may not be, in the final analysis, the true matrix of human goodness. Though the letter to Löwith appears to leave Strauss veering toward Mussolini as Caesar's modern epigone, he would shortly recall himself to a more authentic approximation of the ethos of ancient Rome, a political order he found when he crossed the English Channel in 1934.

The German Character

In England during the 1930s, Michael Oakeshott, like Strauss, understood the significance of fascism and National Socialism, movements he distinguished carefully between. Oakeshott frankly declared the fascist judgment on liberalism too perspicacious to ignore, even allowing that the fascist critique of liberalism's "moral ideal" of economic productivity was "well-founded."[44] The radical new political ideas propounded by the fascists had at least some temporary coherence and plausibility, making them a formidable challenge to both modern liberalism and the more traditional and medieval parliamentary form of government. However, Oakeshott identified a particularly dangerous and peculiarly German strain of radical political thought in National Socialism which made it a separate threat from fascism.

Oakeshott would address this problem with unusual bluntness as a serving British officer in 1943. In an essay he chose not to publish during his lifetime, "On Peace with Germany," Oakeshott turned his mind to the eventual reckoning which must take place with a materially defeated, but perhaps ideologically unrepentant, Germany. He argued that the threat from National Socialism would likely survive the defeat of Hitler's regime, declaring that whatever that nation might come to offer the world in even the most optimistic postwar scenario, "it [would] not begin to replace

what Germany ha[d] taken from mankind." "Who is this enemy?" Oakeshott asks pointedly in the essay. "I believe it to be the character of the German people; I believe that what we have to protect ourselves against, because it is an enemy of our civilization, is the German character." The doctrine of National Socialism was only "a rehash of ideas and ambitions current in Germany for more than a century, combined with a new method of realizing those ideas and ambitions in the world." Oakeshott understood it to be the reflection of a resentment which "springs from a civilized mind corrupted by envy. It is the expression of that infantile megalomania which seeks to redeem its own sense of inferiority by the destruction of the world."[45] It was the most virulent form of mass reaction against the morality of individuality and, like Strauss who would warn in 1949 that Germany might yet impose the "the yoke of its own thought" on the victorious powers,[46] Oakeshott did not believe it could be overcome through a merely political triumph.

Oakeshott's analysis of National Socialism is a vehement and far-reaching condemnation of the German character. It was, however, preceded by the assessments of the more self-aware of the Germans themselves. The historian Theodore Mommsen, having once been an admirer of the Iron Chancellor, would come to the conclusion that "the injury done by the Bismarck era is infinitely greater than its benefits. The gains in power were values which the next world-historical storm might destroy, but the subjugation of the German personality, of the German mind was a misfortune which cannot be undone."[47] Strauss could confirm what this mindset had paved the way for in his own reflection on Germany in 1943, declaring that the Nazis had "convinced a substantial part of the German people that large scale and efficiently prepared and perpetrated crime pays." Strauss recalled the common Bismarckian assumption of German student debate in the 1920s that "a country whose policies are not fettered by moral considerations is, other things being equal, twice as strong as a country whose policies are fettered by moral considerations."[48]

According to Strauss, this Machiavellianism had penetrated to the heart of German thought long before Bismarck. On the theoretical plane, Fichte and Hegel had revived Machiavelli in defense of the particularity of the German fatherland in the nineteenth century—a fact noted approvingly by Carl Schmitt in *The Concept of the Political*.[49] This Machiavellian strand in German thought had dovetailed with the "decisionist" mood of the atheistic Right. From this perspective, the point at which Max Weber's social

science arrives at the necessity of an unflinching choice was not only the precursor to the resolute willing of Heidegger and the earnest decision of Schmitt, but looked back to the formidable German to whom legend has ascribed the words, "Here I stand. I can do no other."[50]

Oakeshott also considered Luther "more truly representative of his people" than Bismarck, signifying a more deeply rooted pathology in the German character.[51] The reaction of Luther against the Renaissance is a founding event in the resentment which would build into the all-abiding sentiment of the "mass man" and the "anti-individual," an analysis which reminds us of Nietzsche's reading of this moment in which he declared that the Germans, and Luther in particular among them, "destroyed for Europe the last great harvest of civilization that Europe was ever to reap—the *Renaissance*":

> This monk, all the vindictive instincts of a failed priest in him fulminated in Rome *against* the Renaissance…. Instead of grasping with profound gratitude the tremendous event which had taken placed, the overcoming of Christianity in its very *seat*—his hatred grasped only how to nourish itself on this spectacle. The religious man thinks only of himself.—What Luther saw was the *corruption* of the Papacy, while precisely the opposite was palpably obvious: the old corruption, the *peccatum originale*, Christianity, *no* longer sat on the Papal throne! Life sat there instead! the triumph of life! the great Yes to all lofty, beautiful, daring things!… And Luther *restored the Church*: he attacked it… The Renaissance—an event without meaning, a great *in vain*!—Oh these Germans, what they have already cost us![52]

Oakeshott, unlike Nietzsche, continued to believe that renaissance was an ongoing possibility within the terms of the present civilization. He did not look to a philosophy of the future to provide life-giving truths. For Oakeshott, the internal renovation of the "common dream" was not yet a lost cause. While recent centuries may have offered a tale of resentment and decline, Oakeshott's English perspective allowed for a kind of encouragement which Nietzsche could not have enjoyed in middle Europe. It would also be Strauss's arrival in England in 1934 which would provide the crucial seasoning to his political views. England would offer Strauss an empirical example of justice with the sword; a firm rule of law and political authority exercised in a spirit of moderation. England would demonstrate to Strauss that an approximation of classical republicanism was still possible in the modern world.

Leo Strauss's first impressions of England when he arrived to begin his study of the Hobbes papers are strongly suggestive of the beginnings of a lifelong Anglophilia, a fondness which would later be strengthened and confirmed by the wartime statesmanship of Winston Churchill.[53] As he later told one of his closest students, this pleasant culture shock began when a British customs official said "excuse me" before blowing his nose. Such politeness would have been unimaginable in a German official.[54] While Strauss's enthusiastic letters to friends on the continent remarked on the civility and sobriety of English society, of more political relevance is his sense of the country's equanimity in the great responsibilities of *imperium*. Strauss found 10 Downing Street a mere townhouse and the understatement of it impressed him, especially in contrast with the brittle self-image of German power protesting itself in the imposing edifices along the Wilhelmstrasse.[55] As he would reflect decades later, alongside Britain and the United States, Germany "could have laid down the law for the rest of the earth without firing a shot" in 1913[56]—instead it had engaged in a struggle for power with the Anglo-Saxons. The outbreak of another war between Britain and Germany in 1939, by which time Strauss was resident in New York, would only deepen the political lesson which England offered Strauss and which informed his mature political stance.

Strauss's own appreciation for British conservatism is nowhere more apparent than in the sensibility which allowed him to perceive that "muddling through" is the encapsulation of a manly political wisdom rather than an expression of resignation and frustration:

> This taking things easy, this muddling through, this crossing the bridge when one comes to it, may have done some harm to the radicalism of English thought; but it proved to be a blessing to English life; the English never indulged in those radical breaks with traditions which played such a role on the continent. Whatever may be wrong with the peculiarly modern ideal: the very Englishmen who originated it, were at the same time versed in the classical tradition, and the English always kept in store a substantial amount of the necessary counterpoison.[57]

This was in tune with Oakeshott who himself acknowledged "that love of moderation which has as frequently been fatal to English philosophy as it has been favourable to English politics."[58] Oakeshott's own philosophy was only intermittently radical and his politics often irredeemably English. As one who was more partial to the poetic character of human conduct, he was aware that he could never completely devote himself to "the painting

of its grey upon grey" and that he in some sense embodied this distinction between "English" life and "German" thought. Strauss was in his turn aware of the "German" temptation to live by the radicalism demanded in theory and would look to classical philosophy to avert its dangers. As this "German" characteristic is inimical to the moral life of political society, the "English" tendency is detrimental to the philosophical way of life.

The recovery of the Socratic-Platonic position was one of the philosophical "solutions" to this problem which could alternately be spoken of in terms of German radicalism and English reserve. As Strauss explained, while Socrates was conservative in his application of theory, "Aristophanes pointed to the truth by suggesting that Socrates' fundamental premise could induce a son to beat up his own father, i.e., to repudiate in practice the most natural authority."[59] A daring and *mania* leading beyond moderation is as ambiguous in the world of action as it is necessary for the life of the mind.[60] This may imply that philosophy as such can never provide comfort for conservatism, for as Stanley Rosen would note, "there is no coherent philosophical defense of moderation as moderation, or what might be called 'good-natured and liberal muddling through.'"[61]

This is essentially the somber theme of Strauss's 1941 lecture on "German Nihilism." The lecture is Strauss's statement of a personal lesson of English conservatism extrapolated onto a whole generation of young German radicals. The boldness of Strauss's lecture which, like Oakeshott's wartime statement on the German character, would go unpublished in his lifetime, stems from its separation of Hitler's regime from the infinitely more sophisticated intellectual milieu of the interwar German Right. Strauss claims that if they had only had more patience and moderation, many of these earnest young people would have appreciated the affinity of Churchill's declaration of Britain's "Finest Hour" in 1940 and Spengler's celebration of Rome's "grand hour" at Cannae.[62] German intellectuals who had drifted from Nietzsche to Hitler in the interwar years might also have become something more akin to "British" conservatives or classical republicans, if they could have been made aware of the "Roman" grit and fortitude still possible in civilized men. Like Socrates, Strauss sought to convert wild youth to moderate ways. But Strauss had once been something close to a wild youth himself and not all would appreciate the authenticity of his discovery of moderation.

There was, however, an additional factor which impeded Strauss's full embrace of British conservatism. Hannah Arendt is said to have jibed that the young Strauss had found himself racially excluded from the political

movement which was his true ideological home.[63] If there is even a scintilla of truth in this insinuation that Strauss was inclined toward some aspect of National Socialism, it would be relevant only with regard to his political development. As the cultural critic Clive James wrote of Thomas Mann: "One of his many reasons for hating the Third Reich was that it forced him to be a better man than he really was."[64] Though Strauss may be accounted a superior character (Stanley Rosen, for instance, insisted that Strauss's critics not overlook "the sweetness of his nature"),[65] there is probably little question that the complete rejection of the Jews by the Nazis prompted Strauss into a reflection which ultimately produced in him a higher level of political wisdom. There is also evidence of a more specific impact which the experience of exclusion on the basis of claimed primordial identities had on Strauss.

This is revealed anecdotally in a 1940 lecture on German interwar philosophy where Strauss recalls an English acquaintance who returned from Germany struck by the German "longing for their tribal past." Strauss was wary of Teutoburg Forest; to reject modern civilization from the position of barbarism is not the same as challenging it from the viewpoint of classical thought. The difference is the same as that between vandalism and reasoned argument. Strauss therefore condemned "the most crude, unintelligent, the most ridiculous" form of the despair over the conditions of modern civilization (he had also written and crossed out the adjective "petty-bourgeois"), while comparing this "longing for the Teutonic past" with "its most enlightened form" (the longing for ancient Greece) and noting that it was Nietzsche who had described this nobler form of homesickness in German thought. Nietzsche, who believed himself the descendant of Polish nobility and who must have disappointed German nationalists with his dismissal of the Teutonic tribes as louts and thugs, was aware that Germans of high culture had aimed to find a bridge back to this classical "homeland."[66] This vision was infinitely preferable to Strauss, for whom allusions to a Teutonic past were reminiscent of Hitler's takeover of German nihilism.

In his review of C. H. McIlwain's *Constitutionalism Ancient and Modern*, which also dates from the beginning of the 1940s, Strauss was keen to emphasize the refutation of a view associated with the nineteenth-century German jurist Otto von Gierke, which traced the freedom of the Northern Europeans to "the woods of Germany" and the Germanic tribes recorded by Tacitus. Strauss wondered "whether [McIlwain] goes far enough in opposing this 'romantic' view" which regards constitutionalism

as a growth of the native soil and pointed out that the political science of Aristotle and the ancients would have been impossible if constitutions were understood in this way. For the ancients, disregarding organic development, the "blueprint" for a constitution was commensurate with actually existing constitutions.[67]

This argument had obvious implications for how Strauss would regard the English constitution, which came to the surface in his discussion of Edmund Burke at the conclusion of *Natural Right and History*. For the ancients, a constitution could approach nature as a conscious "contrivance of reason"—a plan in accordance with the natural order. For Burke, as Strauss read him, a constitution must come about "through the imitation of natural process" and without reflective reason, a view which connects Burke to the contemporaneous emergence of free market economic theory.[68]

In Oakeshott's lectures on the history of political thought given at the London School of Economics in the 1960s he suggested that a state might be regarded as neither "artificial" nor "natural" but merely historical, suggesting a modern alternative to the primordial and organic view of constitutions.[69] Oakeshott's understanding of historical change specifically ruled out the notion of the "organic" or "evolved" as anything other than a metaphor.[70] But Strauss argued that even the non-historicist sense of the historical, which still referred for Burke to "the local and accidental," must be seen in hindsight to have contributed to the diminishment of reason (which Strauss identified as the basis of a crisis in Western civilization).[71]

While it bears emphasizing that Strauss was not concerned to produce a work which advanced the practical politics of the American conservative movement, this argument implied that Burkean conservatism, experiencing resurgence in United States in the 1950s, would be insufficient in meeting this crisis.[72] Tendencies such as the "living constitution" interpretation of the supreme law would have only confirmed Strauss's fear that "organic" understandings of constitution were all too likely to assume a hue of disastrous innovation in the United States. While the English constitution is beloved of British conservatives, it is telling that among Americans it has been progressives such as Woodrow Wilson who have found it an important model.

This problem aside, however, it is clear that the British *imperium* had replaced whatever Mussolini might have potentially provided the Jews and others made vulnerable to those who viewed statecraft as a gang plots its robberies. By 1942 Strauss was already looking ahead to the coming peace

and warning that "you cannot throw power out of the window without facing the danger of the first gangster coming along taking it up." This pre–Cold War Strauss already realized "the existence of civil liberties all over the world depends on Anglo-Saxon predominance."[73] The missing middle of the Virgilian quotation which Strauss had used to underscore the bravado of the earlier quoted letter to Karl Löwith suggests the nuance in "Roman thought"[74] which Strauss had discovered in England and "English" moderation,[75] and which in a time of war recalled him to the arts of peace (*hae tibi erunt artes; pacisque imponere morem*).[76] Like the English, and therefore unlike the Germans, "one must have learned for a very long time to spare the vanquished and crush the arrogant."[77]

Strauss had in mind the political wisdom of Englishmen like Winston Churchill who, at the conclusion of the South African War, advised the Cabinet to extend equal rights to the defeated Boers. "Do not let us do anything," the young Churchill cautioned his fellow peacemakers, "which makes us the champions of one race and consequently deprives us for ever of the confidence of the other."[78] In contrast, Germany, which had done most to amplify the plight of the Boers in European public opinion, learned the least from the conflict in the longer term, envisaging increasingly vindictive settlements to its own wars. In 1919 Churchill would once more stand against the public mood (*superbe dominabantur*) and the sentiment of his prime minister in advocating a generous peace with the vanquished Germans so that they might be able "to build a dyke of peaceful, lawful, patient strength against the flood of red barbarism flowing from the East."[79]

Yet in arguing that Strauss adopted an outlook shaped by British conservatism from 1934 onward, it is necessary to again face Richard L. Velkley's objection to the association with Oakeshott's critique of political rationalism. Indeed, if Strauss were genuinely attached to British conservatism then he should not only demonstrate some kinship with the essays in *Rationalism in Politics*, but should perhaps have written something like them.

On a superficial level, the fact that Strauss did not come to pen any essays resembling Oakeshott's of the midcentury is explained by his emigration to the United States. Susan Shell has pointed out that "America's thinner classical soil" would not allow for the complacency in which the English continued to enjoy their longstanding tradition of the "classical ideals."[80] However, the deeper answer to this question once again returns us to the characteristics identified in this chapter as "German" theory and "English" practice.

In the simplest terms, the English Oakeshott was far more assured of the stability and self-sufficiency of the realm of practice, a priority which would inform his alignment with poetry and religion. Oakeshott considered the practical world, with its historical traditions and practices, to be potentially impervious to the world of theory. Strauss, however, could not write flowing essays affirming these practical ways of life because he understood the modern world to be already the creation of theory. His focus was not on a *practical*, but a *theoretical*, tradition, and in *Natural Right and History* the reader is guided through its progressive radicalization. In contrast, Oakeshott viewed the main landmarks in the theory of politics as marking the primary and secondary reactions to changes in practice, as is indicated in the third part of his *On Human Conduct* and in the essay, "The Masses in Representative Democracy" (1958). Central for him is the appearance of a high individuality at the beginning of the Renaissance, a profound change in practice which would be co-opted by those who succumbed to the temptation of ever-expanding technological mastery and economic productivity and go on to elicit resentful reaction from those either frustrated by their material circumstances and the mental demands of free competition, or incapable by temperament and character of living up to the original majestic challenges of individuality.

Progressivism and Liberalism

Oakeshott and Strauss inevitably stand apart from the popular currents of contemporary debate. This is a source of understandable frustration for those who would like to see Oakeshott's and Strauss's thought considered in the mainstream. Accordingly, Steven B. Smith has argued that Strauss was a Cold War liberal whose true contemporaries are Isaiah Berlin, Lionel Trilling, Walter Lippmann, and Raymond Aron.[81] Paul Franco has meanwhile suggested that Oakeshott was a liberal pushing beyond the deontological-communitarian impasse of post-Rawlsian political theory.[82]

Both Oakeshott and Strauss could be included in Oakeshott's praise of Hobbes as one who, "without being himself a liberal, had in him more of the philosophy of liberalism than most of its professed defenders."[83] Furthermore Strauss understood that if "we are friends and allies of democracy" we cannot also be its flatterers.[84] Related to this is Oakeshott's lament that liberalism so often exhibits an inability to identify moderate friends to its Right, while associating promiscuously with radicals on its Left.[85] This probably explains Paul Franco's puzzlement over the fact that

"it sometimes seems that Oakeshott spends more time criticizing those with whom we might expect him to have something in common [i.e., the liberals] than he does in criticizing the socialist or collective 'enemy.'"[86]

While Perry Anderson sneered at Strauss's tracing of liberalism back to the ancient sense of the word (as in *liberal* education),[87] both Oakeshott and Strauss understood liberal education to be the highpoint of Western civilization. While Oakeshott would likely have agreed with Strauss that it "will always remain the obligation and the privilege of the minority,"[88] the hope remains that the example of the few could inspire others to avoid the spiral into mass society.[89] Liberal democracy does not prevent us from "cultivating our garden or setting up outposts" of excellence with the aim of preserving the perennial gifts of high culture and learning.[90]

In contrast with this hopeful vision, however, the "progress" toward a global technological society, masquerading as a "liberal" world order, poses a grave threat to the true forms of enlightenment and renaissance. Cold War liberalism takes on a continuing significance when understood against this background. Strauss argued that contemporary "progressivism" perceives its "progress" to be toward the "universal and homogeneous state"[91]—a conclusion that influential contemporary political scientists have not shied away from.[92] For Oakeshott, technological progress meant that the once scarcely imaginable projects of political collectivism were becoming a frightening possibility.[93] Given the alternatives available amid the Cold War there was a brief coincidence in which the conservatism of Oakeshott and Strauss could appear to link arms with the progressivism of the West. With the end of that confrontation, however, we are able to once again draw these distinctions in a clear light. How Oakeshott and Strauss nourished their own forms of liberal education and understood these in terms of the classical republican or mixed regime is the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

1. Richard L. Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy: On Original Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 11.
2. Michael Oakeshott, "On Being Conservative," in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*: new and expanded edition, ed. Timothy Fuller (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991), 435.
3. Daniel Tanguay, *Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Christopher Nadon (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 86–87.

4. Michael Oakeshott, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism*, ed. Timothy Fuller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 122–123; Leo Strauss, "German Nihilism," ed. David Janssens and Daniel Tanguay, *Interpretation* 26, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 372.
5. Timothy Fuller, introduction to Oakeshott, *Politics of Scepticism and the Politics of Faith*, xviii n. 21.
6. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 93.
7. The essay reappears as the first chapter of Perry Anderson's *Spectrum: From Right to Left in the World of Ideas* (London: Verso, 2005).
8. Heinrich Meier, *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: The Hidden Dialogue*, trans. J. Harvey Lomax (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
9. Anderson, *Spectrum*, 187.
10. It would be ironic if the author of *The Making of the English Working Class* intended to object to Oakeshott's personal conduct in terms of bourgeois morality. Cf. Robert Grant, "The Pursuit of Intimacy, or Rationalism in Love," in *A Companion to Michael Oakeshott*, ed. Paul Franco and Leslie Marsh (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2012), 15–44.
11. Hayek's work may have had some direct political influence, especially after his receiving the 1974 Nobel Prize for Economics, but the claim is less convincing in the case of the remaining three thinkers.
12. F. A. Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), vi.
13. F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*: Text and Documents: The Definitive Edition. *The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek*, ed. Bruce Caldwell (London: Routledge, 2014), 58.
14. Anderson, *Spectrum*, 7.
15. Michael Oakeshott, "Rationalism in Politics," in *Rationalism in Politics*, 26.
16. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 1993), 58.
17. Anderson, *Spectrum*, 18.
18. Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, trans. E. M. Sinclair (New York: Schocken, 1965), 351.
19. Anderson, *Spectrum*, 11–12.
20. Michael Oakeshott, "*Leviathan*: a Myth," in *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2000), 160–161.
21. Steven J. Wulf, "Oakeshott's Politics for Gentlemen," *The Review of Politics* 69, no. 2 (March 2007): 266.
22. Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy*, 12.
23. Oakeshott, "Rationalism in Politics," 6.

24. Stanley Rosen, *The Mask of Enlightenment: Nietzsche's* Zarathustra (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 245.
25. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), 71.
26. Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* (New York: Free Press, 1959), 40.
27. Gary Kamiya, "Falling Out With Superman," *The New York Times*, January 23, 2000.
28. Brian Barry, cited in Thomas L. Pangle, introduction to Leo Strauss, *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), x.
29. Michael Oakeshott, *Notebooks, 1922–86, Selected Writings, Volume VI*, ed. Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2014), 316.
30. Anderson, *Spectrum*, 9–11.
31. "We are so ready to consider everything as a construction & therefore as subject to the exercise of the human will, that we forget that we live in a world in that not everything can be changed, & possess natures whose characters cannot be wholly recreated." Oakeshott, *Notebooks*, 331.
32. Paul Franco, *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 346.
33. Michael Oakeshott, "The Masses in Representative Democracy," in *Rationalism in Politics*, 378.
34. Leo Strauss, Letter to Karl Löwith, June 23, 1935, cited in Susan Shell, "To Spare the Vanquished and Crush the Arrogant: Leo Strauss's lecture on German Nihilism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, ed. Steven B. Smith (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 171.
35. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), 75.
36. Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (London: Pan Books, 2001), 83.
37. Leo Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 224–225.
38. Leo Strauss, Letter to Karl Löwith, May 19, 1933, cited in Shell, "Leo Strauss's lecture on German Nihilism," 186.
39. John P. McCormick, "Post-Enlightenment Sources of Political Authority: Biblical Atheism, Political Theology and the Schmitt–Strauss Exchange," *History of European Ideas* 37, no. 2 (2011): 175–180.
40. Shell, "Leo Strauss's lecture on German Nihilism," 188–190. See also Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 278.

41. Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny: Corrected and Expanded Edition, Including the Strauss-Kojève Correspondence*, ed. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 213. Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 116.
42. Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 192.
43. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 255.
44. Michael Oakeshott, *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe* (London: Basis Books by arrangement with Cambridge University Press, 1940), xx–xxi.
45. Michael Oakeshott, "On Peace with Germany," in *What is History? and other essays*, ed. Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2004), 166–167, 171, 181.
46. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 2.
47. Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dictatorship*, trans. Jean Steinberg (London: Penguin, 1973), 33–34 [parenthetical German removed].
48. Leo Strauss, "The Re-Education of Axis Countries concerning the Jews," *The Review of Politics* 69, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 535 [footnotes removed].
49. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 66.
50. Robert Howse, *Leo Strauss: Man of Peace* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 84, 90.
51. Oakeshott, "On Peace with Germany," 179.
52. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ*, 197–198.
53. Steven B. Smith, "Leo Strauss: The Outlines of a Life," in *Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, 22–24.
54. Seth Benardete, *Reflections and Encounters: Conversations with Seth Benardete*, ed. Ronna Burger (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 35.
55. Leo Strauss, Letter to Alexandre Kojève, January 16, 1934, *On Tyranny*, 223.
56. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 2–3.
57. Strauss, "German Nihilism," 372.
58. Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), 196.
59. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 93.
60. Strauss, *City and Man*, 229.
61. Stanley Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 138.

62. Strauss, "German Nihilism," 363. See Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 28.
63. Elizabeth Jung-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 98.
64. Clive James, *Cultural Amnesia: Notes in the Margin of My Time* (London: Picador, 2007), 453.
65. Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 108.
66. Leo Strauss, "The Living Issues in German Postwar Philosophy," in *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, ed. Heinrich Meier (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 116. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 225–226.
67. Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy*, 271–272.
68. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 314–315.
69. Efraim Podoksik, "Oakeshott in the context of German Idealism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Oakeshott*, ed. Efraim Podoksik (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 288.
70. See Michael Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 106–111.
71. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 314 ff.
72. Steven J. Lenzner, "Strauss's Three Burkes: The Problem of Edmund Burke in Natural Right and History," *Political Theory* 19, no. 3 (August 1991): 377.
73. Leo Strauss, "What Can We Learn from Political Theory?" *The Review of Politics* 69, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 518.
74. Leo Strauss, Letter to Karl Löwith, May 19, 1933, cited in Shell, "Leo Strauss's lecture on German Nihilism," 186.
75. Ibid., 185–188.
76. *Aeneid* 6.851–853.
77. Strauss, "German Nihilism," 373.
78. Quoted in Martin Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life* (London: Pimlico, 2000), 177.
79. Quoted in Gilbert, *Churchill*, 423.
80. Susan Shell, "Leo Strauss's lecture on German Nihilism," 190.
81. Steven B. Smith, *Reading Leo Strauss: Politics, Philosophy, Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 15.
82. Paul Franco, *The Political Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
83. Michael Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," in *Hobbes on Civil Association*, 67.
84. Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 24.

85. Michael Oakeshott, "The Political Economy of Freedom," in *Rationalism and Politics*, 385.
86. Franco, *Political Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott*, 157.
87. Anderson, *Spectrum*, 9.
88. Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 24.
89. See Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy*, 38.
90. Ibid.
91. Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, v–vii.
92. Alexander Wendt, "Why a World State is Inevitable," *European Journal of International Relations* 9, no. 4 (2003): 491–542.
93. Oakeshott, *Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism*, 45–67.

CHAPTER 3

Liberal Education and Classical Republicanism

"Liberalism" is one of the ambiguous terms in which the contingencies of practical politics represent themselves. Indeed, as Michael Oakeshott noted, "the identity of 'Liberalism' hardly exists before a reflective historian has got to work. And by then its 'identity' and its 'history' have become indistinguishable."[1] In its conventional understanding, in its alliance with democracy, liberalism is often seen as the strongest political inheritance of the West. Yet there is nothing inevitable about the coalition. There is a continual risk that mass democracy will subsume the careful cultivation of liberal education within a democratic or mixed constitutional regime. For both Oakeshott and Leo Strauss it was the universities where liberalism might be preserved as liberal education. As I will argue in this chapter, it is on this basis that we may truly call Oakeshott and Strauss liberals, whereas in the previous chapter I suggested that they displayed, in practical and political terms at least, the dispositions of conservatives. These two identities are reconciled in the classical republican tradition of political theory, a tradition in which (despite their distinct approaches) we may situate many of the political ideas of both Oakeshott and Strauss.

Oakeshott and Strauss recognized the universities as the place from which liberalism must be defended as liberal education. However, a common political concern cannot be allowed to obscure the substantial differences between the two on what actually constitutes a liberal education. Strauss's interpretation of liberal education took him back to

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Socrates and antiquity, a tradition he recovered via the foremost Arabic and Jewish philosophers of the medieval Islamic world. For Strauss, the very precariousness of philosophy in these conditions contributed to the elevation of the life of the mind.[2] Oakeshott's perspective on liberal education, by contrast, bears the mark of Christendom. Beginning in the twelfth century, the scholars of Western Europe began to rediscover the learning of antiquity and, for Oakeshott, present-day liberal education dates from this renaissance in thought. Despite this medieval emphasis, he was also in continual contact and confrontation with the tendencies of modernity and his conception of liberal education has been called modern in its emphasis on plurality.[3] This would provide a starting point in explicit contrast with the Socratic approach of Strauss's liberal education. For Oakeshott, "Learning begins not in ignorance, but in error."[4]

The vaguely Hegelian ring to this formulation also implies the importance of history for Oakeshott's view of liberal education. This forms the major point of contrast between the positions of Oakeshott and Strauss more than does the difference over the origins of the tradition of liberal education. The integral place of history for Oakeshott reflects his tracing of the tradition of university education back to the Christian scholars of the twelfth century. However, despite this medievalism, the modernity of Oakeshott's position is equally apparent in his understanding that learning is the process by which we become human—"none of us is born human; each is what he learns to become." From this perspective, the only thing which an expression like "human nature" might signify is this very engagement of learning itself.[5]

Needless to say, this presents a clear point of contrast with Strauss's revival of a worldview in which the discovery of "nature" and by that discovery, the realization of the conventionality in the practices of political life, is the central fact of the philosophical side of liberal education. While Strauss would have been able to agree, at least in a popular sense, with Oakeshott that liberal education is a process of self-realization, the "universal" life of the philosopher, and not that of a diversity of individuals, is the true destination of such a process for Strauss. From the perspective of this priority, Oakeshott represents a poetic viewpoint which implicitly denies that "virtue is knowledge." For Strauss the life of the philosopher is the only way of life which is not a particular way of life. For Oakeshott, however, all human lives are expressions of particular ways of life.

In different ways both men acknowledged that the liberality of liberal education implied the leisure of a free human being and their concern for liberal education also involved the defense of the leisure of contemplation and the pursuit of non-utilitarian knowledge. While technology has made possible the extension of leisure to greater numbers of people as an effective goal of politics, neither Oakeshott nor Strauss was prepared to accept the intellectual consequences of such a technological society and furthermore both pointed out that the tenor of such a society was apt to marginalize liberal education in ideational terms even as it made it more possible or egalitarian in material terms. By the early 1970s, Oakeshott was ready to conclude that the world might have entered "a dark age devoted to barbaric affluence."[6] However, he had observed as early as 1949 that "[a] world moved by the plausible ethics of productivity is willing to endow the universities [only] in order that they may cooperate in the good work of carrying the 'crisis' a step further."[7] Liberal education requires the acceptance of leisure and is at odds with an ethos of total mobilization of society for practical gain.

Liberal education requires the virtue of munificence. For Oakeshott, liberality and liberal education imply an attitude to resources which might be decried as wasteful when viewed from a practical standpoint.[8] For him, the word "liberal" indicated an education which is "liberated from the distracting business of satisfying contingent wants."[9] While liberal education may represent—for the most of those who experience it—no more than "the gift of an interval" or "moment" of escape or emancipation from the demands of the practical realm,[10] it is nevertheless a moment which is of defining importance for the self.

This anti-technological theme was even more powerful for Strauss and was allied to his refusal to provide any egalitarian justification for liberal education. Given the problems of a technological world society, the realm of freedom in which liberal education exists is only an island amid continuing necessity. When forced to face this question most explicitly in his confrontation with Alexandre Kojève (a French Marxist convinced that educators must justify their intellectual activity through its contribution to historical progress) Strauss put forward a Nietzschean response, couched in an idiom which was equally appropriate for the Socratic-Platonic tradition, explaining that the highest reaches of the human mind justify the leisure of the philosopher in offering a secular "theodicy."[11] Strauss, who understood pessimism as the doctrine that ours is not, as Leibniz had reasoned, the best of all possible worlds, derived his own optimistic worldview from such philosophical achievement.

In addition to the priorities of ancient thought Strauss's position was saved from the implications of Nietzschean political irresponsibility by what he had learned of British life. In a presentation in the 1950s, "Liberal Education and Responsibility," Strauss drew his American audience's attention to the rather bleak and procedural echo of the word "responsibility" which at its best is only a modern substitute for what the ancient world would have understood by "virtue." Having provided this context, with typical humor he explained a more genteel term which he had no doubt encountered in England during the 1930s:

> There is a kinship between "responsibility" thus understood and "decency" as sometimes used by the British: if a man ruins himself in order to save a complete stranger, the stranger, if British, is supposed to thank him by saying, "It was rather decent of you."[12]

In no sense did Strauss envisage liberal education to be aimed solely at creating such gentlemen, no matter how pleasant and civil they could make the interactions of daily life. Yet having come from a nation which had provided a liberal education to young men like Marx, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, this quality of decency or responsibility did indeed recall something classical which had been cast aside in the development of modern forms of education, more so among the Germans than the British (who had kept their hands on modernity's "counterpoison"—especially in places such as Oxford and Cambridge).[13] Strauss's position, which was at first glance Nietzschean, takes on a more Socratic aspect.

For Oakeshott, gentlemanly civility was closer to the final aim of liberal education than it was for Strauss. For Strauss, civility and decency, while characteristic of gentlemen, were also important qualities in the philosopher which had been neglected in the modern world with the skewing of thought toward the mindset of those concerned with practical activity such as slaves and others who are not free. It is necessary to recover decency if human beings are again to approach the universality of thought. Oakeshott believed it was more especially a habit by which human beings could learn to speak among a plurality of voices, or listen carefully during a period of learning. Yet Strauss touched on a point of coincidence in suggesting that for him, "liberal education consists in learning to listen to still and small voices and therefore becoming deaf to loud-speakers."[14]

Heidegger with the Soul of Churchill

Strauss called liberal education both "a training in the highest form of modesty, not to say humility," and "a training in boldness."[15] Nietzsche said something comparable of the superhuman, describing him as being a "Roman Caesar with the soul of Christ."[16] Strauss's mature assessment of Nietzsche political influence was highly critical. Although he allowed that the philosopher had preached the blond beast while "certain of the tameness" of his contemporaries, Strauss noted that Nietzsche had "used much of his unsurpassable and inexhaustible power of passionate and fascinating speech for making his readers loathe, not only socialism and communism, but conservatism, nationalism and democracy as well." 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.[17]

One of those who would embrace the "irresponsible political options" left open by Nietzsche was Martin Heidegger. The importance of Heidegger to Strauss is difficult to overstate. Strauss's doctoral supervisor, Ernst Cassirer, was widely perceived to have been profoundly outthought and outperformed by Heidegger in their debate at Davos in 1929 and the conclusions which Strauss reached in the aftermath of this historic clash remained with him all his life. In his most explicit discussion of Heidegger in 1956, Strauss would offer a plainspoken assessment of what his thought had meant for liberal democracy here and now, stating that "[a]ll rational liberal political philosophic positions have lost their significance and power." In complete awareness of the dangerous implications of this fact, Strauss frankly reflected: "One may deplore this, but I for one cannot bring myself to clinging to philosophic positions which have been shown to be inaccurate."[18]

Though he expressed high regard for Bergson, Collingwood, Husserl, and Whitehead, Strauss believed that Heidegger was the one great thinker living in his own time. This was, incidentally, a further misfortune for liberal democracy though Strauss could not but acknowledge the importance of his thought. Heidegger was both a towering intellect and a decidedly unpleasant person; the tenor as much as the direction of his thought had prepared the way for National Socialism and in a manner far more immediate and deliberate than Nietzsche's irresponsible preaching. If it was Nietzsche who had been, as Strauss called him, the "stepgrandfather" of fascism, Heidegger was some closer, blood relation.

The advent of National Socialism had provided Heidegger with his moment of tyrannical power. He would abandon his thrusting vision in the lean and chastened years after the war in leaving the fate of the civilization in the lap of the gods. This was Heidegger's famous "Turn" toward a final submission and receptiveness (*Gelassenheit*). Even in these years, however, he could still proclaim an essential core of National Socialism which contained, as he had written in the 1930s and approved for publication in 1953, its "inner truth and greatness."[19] For Strauss, Heidegger was a thinker whose books were the carefully chosen gifts for his brightest students, and at the same time one whose hand could not be shaken by any self-respecting Jew or, indeed, by any friend of the Jews. In Strauss's succinct judgment, offered in a letter to his friend Gershom Scholem, Heidegger was a "phenomenal intellect inside a kitsch soul."[20]

But as Heidegger's soul was revealed as a Black Forest snow dome, another man's began to appear as one of Turner's great *Snow Storm* canvasses. In January 1965, Strauss paused to remember the scene in 1940: "The tyrant stood at the pinnacle of his power. The contrast between the indomitable and magnanimous statesman and the insane tyrant—this spectacle in its clear simplicity was one of the greatest lessons which men can learn, at any time."[21] The tyrant was Heidegger's *Führer*; the statesman was Strauss's political hero, Winston Churchill.

Noting the "death-fixated kitsch" which overlay the German *Schutzstaffel*, Michael Burleigh has quoted Himmler frankly acknowledging that the type of man which his "brotherhood" was attempting to develop was "not going to be created in a generation; for that a nation must have a more fortunate 300–400-year history as a master race behind it, as is the case with England."[22] If we can sift the grain of truth in this statement from Himmler's sinister worldview, Churchill's ancestors were indeed part of such a history. John Churchill, the First Duke of Marlborough, was victor over the French, most famously at Blenheim in 1704, and one of the greatest of British generals. Raised in the expectation of political and military greatness of his own, Winston Churchill received the full public school education which prepared him as a gentleman and member of the English aristocracy. This education in manners, bearing, and sensibility was the result of centuries in perfecting the creation of a ruling class and the successful products of this schooling often emerged as impeccable gentleman, their privileged position and assured self-estimation balanced by an earnest sense of duty which countenanced the possibility of total sacrifice. It cannot be forgotten, however, that two of the most

notorious English renegades from liberal democracy—Oswald Mosley the fascist and Kim Philby the communist—were the recipients of an education in the ways of the gentry to which those of a more egalitarian age cannot hope to approach or imitate.

Churchill himself sensed that this kind of education would be insufficient for the kind of greatness he aspired toward. As a young officer cadet he began feeling that his education in military matters at Harrow and Sandhurst had been "purely technical" and he yearned for what he termed the "mental medicine" of an education "more literary and less material." As he expressed to his mother, "my mind has never received that polish which for instance Oxford or Cambridge gives. At these places one studies questions and sciences with a rather higher object than mere practical utility. One receives in fact a liberal education."[23]

Three months before he turned 21, in the summer of 1895, Churchill embarked on his own study of history, economics, and sociology. He also read Plato and lamented that he had not mastered Greek and Latin.[24] While this course of reading and reflection contributed to the erudition which was to become one of his most important qualities as a statesman, it also allowed him to achieve a greater sympathy for those outside his own social set.

Churchill's self-imposed regime of liberal education supplied that moderation which could otherwise be subsumed by the entitlement and disdain which often marked the products of the elite schools. Churchill expressed his gratitude that books like Seebohm Rowntree's *Poverty: A Study in Town Life* had helped him to consider "the slum, the garret and the gutter" and "contemplate the extreme of poverty." By this and other efforts at expanding his sympathies Churchill moved toward a position of political moderation, coming to envisage a political party or coalition of parties which would govern from the middle and which would be, as he described it, "free at once from the sordid selfishness & callousness of Toryism on the one hand & the blind appetites of the radical masses on the other."[25]

As Strauss's ideal of statesmanship, Churchill was one of those who offered the "political reflection" of the philosopher's virtue.[26] The classical philosopher, as Strauss would remind his friend Alexandre Kojève, "combines the understanding of the pure theoretician ('sophist') and of the statesman."[27] When Strauss explained to his students that the "spectacle" of the English statesman, in contrast with the German tyrant, was "one of the greatest lessons which men can learn," he outlined with a modern

example exactly where modern philosophy falls short of its ancient counterpart and hinted at a tradition which still nourished liberal education. The cultivation of the human soul and its intimation in the greatest statesmen was further evidence that the ancients deserved to be reheard. A figure like Churchill demonstrated that the magnanimity of the ancient Greeks remained a possibility in modern times.[28] Strauss felt it was reasonable to hope that "it may again become true that all liberally educated men will be politically moderate men."[29]

Liberal education, which, in its most practical or political form is the preservation of the idea of greatness in a mass society, requires more than theoretical virtuosity. Only as the witnesses to great human souls would learners be able to understand the reflection of the cosmos in the human being and perceive the rationality in the leisure of thought amid a continuing realm of necessity. This greatness involved remaining aware of the attitude of those who were practically concerned with politics. This is a perspective more in the spirit of the "enlightened statesman" like Churchill and thus "not the attitude of the detached observer who looks at political things in the way in which a zoologist looks at the big fishes swallowing the small ones, or that of the social 'engineer' who thinks in terms of manipulating or conditioning rather than in terms of education or liberation."[30]

Such an approach was typified by those who had embraced late modern relativity while continuing to think of themselves as allies and supporters of the ongoing aims of "liberalism." Strauss approached Nietzsche in identifying, as Laurence Lampert has elegantly paraphrased, "a good natured credulity based on faith in modern democracy and modern science" which comes at the expense of "the mistrustful spirit, the cold suspicion" characterizing premodern thought.[31] The consistent application of their philosophical position would leave these modern political scientists ready "to give advice with equal confidence and alacrity to tyrants as well as to free peoples."[32]

Heidegger was not, however, simply a negative lesson of the soul for Strauss. He was a crucial part of Strauss's vision of liberal education in that he, more than any other thinker, revealed that the modern tradition could not be simply bypassed on the way to an ancient tradition. The crisis of late modernity was characterized by the loss of all authoritative traditions, including the Socratic one which Strauss was seeking to revive. For this historical reason scholars are to become conversationalists to an unprecedented manner. Strauss's notion of a conversation might be assumed to be

only superficially comparable to Oakeshott's better known metaphor of "the conversation of mankind." Yet its necessity arose for much the same reason in Strauss's reconstruction of liberal education as it did as in Oakeshott's view of the possibilities for interaction among the representatives of modes of experience. It was the loss of authority and the plurality of modern thought which suggested both the importance of humility in the listener and the civility of the conversationalist. Strauss's conversation, as the dialogue of great minds, a dialogue necessarily carried out by moderns,[33] is both called forth and hampered by the specter of historicism—the modern delusion that the thought of separate epochs is incommensurable. Strauss argued that we must become aware of our shortcomings as judges of past thought to the same extent to which we presently believe ourselves to be aware of the contradictions and disagreements between the "monologues" produced by these philosophers of the past. Not as "impresarios and lion-tamers" but as "attentive and docile listeners" must we approach the greatest minds of the past in liberal education and "listen to the conversations of the great philosophers."[34] Socrates had pursued the dialectic which Strauss defined as "the art of conversation or friendly dispute."[35] But without the same access to the original political phenomena, those who would pursue liberal education in the modern world cannot simply imitate the Socratic approach.

Here Strauss must be defended from the criticism that his conversation was "de-historicised"—an example of a "single argument across the centuries in search of perennial truth."[36] As will be explored more fully in the next chapter, Strauss was well aware of the deep problems posed by historicization of concepts and opinions. As the basis for the necessary historical studies,[37] the conversation or friendly argument must begin from the "quarrels" which are still accessible to modern human beings and which, properly conducted, may perhaps recover the ground of original opinions: the quarrel of ancients and moderns, the quarrel of poetry and philosophy, and indeed the quarrel of belief and non-belief, or the theologico-political problem which was Strauss's own entrance to the life of inquiry. While Strauss encouraged the impression that each of these quarrels or disputes is finally resolvable in truth, the multiplying relations of problems they involve and the tensions which they indicate are deep and complex enough as to constitute a lifetime's conversational engagement for the greatest of philosophers, let alone the merely competent student or scholar. Philosophy itself is a "never-to-be-completed concern with one's own good" and Socrates had "spent his life in the unending ascent to the idea

of the good and in awakening others to that ascent."[38] Disputation, rather than systematizing, was for Strauss most characteristic of this philosophic way of life, and as he noted, "[d]isputation is possible only for people who are not concerned with decisions, who are not in a rush, for whom nothing is urgent except disputation."[39]

Mankind as Learning and Conversation

Oakeshott's metaphor of conversation began from a similar realization to that which prompted Strauss's use of the term. However, it was at once more central and final in his thought on politics generally and liberal education in particular. This would seem to suggest that Oakeshott was a modernist, or even a postmodern relativist, yet he was also careful to find the intimations of the conversational metaphor in the late-medieval world where the pre-Baconian atmosphere was more favorable to the universities and the tradition of liberal and non-utilitarian education. Although Strauss had said that careful listening to the conversation between the great minds is liberal education, he had also outlined the complications inherent in such an apparently simple definition. For Strauss, this way of learning was a modern compromise made possible by both an increasing awareness of the contemporary crisis and the rediscovery of a path toward the recovery of ancient philosophy to which his own studies, however modestly he presented them, pointed his students. Strauss's only significant act of practical politics was directed toward establishing and defending these "outposts" at which the highest achievements of mankind could be preserved.[40] While Oakeshott was equally realistic about the modern situation, allowing that there were only "[f]ragments of an educational engagement" remaining,[41] his notion of the conversation was not so much a noble improvisation or response to historicism but was drawn from an actual description of how undergraduate education proceeded in the medieval universities of Western Europe.

Oakeshott's 1972 essay, "Education: The Engagement and Its Frustrations," reads in a similar manner to his more overtly political and historical essays like "The Masses in a Representative Democracy" (1958) and "On the Character of a Modern European State" (1975). The central part of the essay is a historical survey of the threats to the medieval tradition of liberal education as modernity became fully fledged in the thought of Francis Bacon and his allies in the seventeenth century. These men of the new science began to redefine education in favor of the view of

knowledge as power and the progressively sophisticated management of "things." "Things, not words" was a serviceable motto for those who wished to abolish the idea of school and return to the supposedly uncluttered mental state of the first men.[42]

After the technological assault on liberal education in the name of the new science, the eighteenth century brought the rearrangement of the educational "system" to fulfill the "social" requirements of the new modern states of Western Europe.[43] Just as the masses would enter the political arena to the great cost of the morality of individuality which had emerged in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, so too would modern governments begin to pressure the universities to respond to the mass tendencies of society and participate in the process of "socializing" men and women, turning them into efficient "members of a single, all-inclusive 'society.'"[44] As in his more explicitly political essays, Oakeshott identified the problem not in the achievement of social mobility, but rather in the resentment of those who have convinced themselves that they have nothing to learn from the long tradition of liberal education, except perhaps the negative lesson of the identity of those past vestiges which must be overcome or transformed. While the universities of the late 1960s offered a renewed example of this phenomenon, Oakeshott was referring not to the so-called counterculture of that era, but to an army of often industrious, technically minded, and professional men and women who, though admirably responsible in their public and private lives, were taking a disastrous toll on liberal education through their demands for useful training. "In the past a rising class was aware of something valuable enjoyed by others which it wished to share," Oakeshott noted in 1949. But these new entrants to the universities were fired with the belief that the "characteristic virtues" of liberal education could be cast aside in the name of the grim modern sentiment, "knowledge is power."[45]

While Perry Anderson accused Oakeshott of downplaying the role of war in the making of the European states,[46] these writings on education show that he was only too aware that the fear of having to conscript technically ignorant and incompetent soldiers was a major impetus for the implementation of mass education by the European states of the early modern period.[47] The broader issue of social mobilization remained a concern in Oakeshott's own time and it is revealing of the tenor of his practical politics and how closely it interacted with his thinking on liberal education. Reviewing a book on university education which appeared during the years of the socialist government of Clement Attlee, Oakeshott

decried this enthusiasm for peacetime mobilization which had gained such a powerful hold over the imagination of postwar politicians:

> [W]ar offers the least fruitful opportunity for profitable change: war is a blind guide to civilized life. In war, all that is most superficial in our tradition is encouraged merely because it is useful, even necessary for victory. … Not only is a society which has just emerged from a shattering war in the worst possible position for making profitable reforms in the universities, but the inspiration of war itself is the most misleading of all inspirations in such an enterprise.[48]

Oakeshott resisted this perspective of wartime, believing that it was precisely the attitude which represented "the makings of a genuine crisis in the universities."[49] It justified his own warlike metaphors through which he argued that these attacks on liberal education constituted nothing less than an "invasion" by those who had capitulated to the modern fixation on collective, utilitarian achievements in general and the professionalization and "socialization" of education in particular.

Oakeshott's distaste for the modern terms "social" and "society" was pronounced and it is important in understanding his thought.[50] Oakeshott found "social" to be a barbaric and "cant" term which implied that high culture was to be subsumed for the sake of a prejudice in favor of a "rational society," conceived as fundamentally the creation of the productive masses and governments which reflected their interests and organized their efforts. While this stance left Oakeshott open to charges of elitism from an academy already much diminished by the very trends which he observed in his writings on liberal education, he was in fact concerned to preserve a hierarchy of thought, a position which must be distinguished from the separate question of "social mobility." Under no circumstances could the highest peaks of civilization be surrendered to the notion that they were without social meaning for ordinary men and women. This is also the sense in which we can interpret Strauss's memorable maxim offered in the context of the Weimar republic in which he cautioned, "It is safer to try to understand the low in the light of the high than the high in the light of the low."[51]

Oakeshott was equally clear that his insistence on a hierarchy of culture in which the voices of liberal education found the highest place did not exclude the gifted children of any class background from enjoying a liberal education. Kevin Williams, who has conducted the most detailed study of

education in Oakeshott's thought, draws attention to some particularly egregious attempts to characterize Oakeshott as recommending a social, rather than a cultural or educational, hierarchy. They are nevertheless not untypical of the misunderstandings which his thought on education has endured. Oakeshott's metaphor of education as a conversation has even been linked by hostile critics to Stanley Baldwin's and Neville Chamberlain's supposed "conversational diplomacy with European fascism" and to alleged pretensions of Oakeshott to be some sort of "eighteenth-century English gentleman."[52]

This socially fixated critique of Oakeshott's writings on education is only the ironical reflection of the socialization which he himself deplored as an invasion of the universities. Oakeshott identified the education of a ruling class with the *decline* of liberal education in the eighteenth century. Far from aspiring to embody or relive the attitudes of the gentry of this era, Oakeshott noted the narrowness of specializations in the education "system" which were introduced in the eighteenth century, for both the working *and* the ruling classes. Those who attended the elite army classes offered in the public schools of England were being prepared to supply the needs of the nation every bit as much as those lower down the social ladder who found themselves drawn into the increasingly systematic educational infrastructure which had been organized for trade and vocational training.[53] As has already been mentioned, Winston Churchill, who was the recipient of exactly such a special course of preparation for command in the armies of the British Empire, recognized the shortcomings of this kind of education and on reaching adulthood began to rectify them by pursuing his own understanding of a liberal education, primarily a self-imposed course of reading the great or important books. Churchill had understood that even the life of action which he intended to embark upon could be made complete only through an education of this kind, an education which ultimately points beyond the political or worldly life. From the other side of the coin, as a man who chose to remain in liberal education, Oakeshott recognized the same relevance in what could be found in the universities as he conceived of them, describing this as a tradition in which the "would-be scholar" and the "man of the world" shared the same conditions; where ambitions of the mind and other more practical ambitions were nourished together.[54] While accepting that democracy has ensured "the disappearance of anything in the nature of a ruling class,"[55] Oakeshott urged that the universities resist the increasing clamor for practical outcomes and measurable skills in education.

The Mixed Regime

The inescapable irony of the defenses of liberal education offered by Oakeshott and Strauss is that they form effective practical political projects on behalf of liberal democracy. In desiring to free the universities from the practical tasks they have been shackled with, both Oakeshott and Strauss inevitably entered the realm of politics to varying degrees. In insisting liberal education must be leisurely and unmolested, Oakeshott and Strauss attracted the criticism that they were not socially responsible members of the academy. It is for this reason that so many of the more practically relevant aspects of their discussion of liberal education focused on these themes. Both men understood these questions in a manner which was almost, if not entirely, the reverse of a perspective which had been formed by the modern emphasis on the practical realm. Liberal education is self-justifying; it is not required to demonstrate some contribution that it makes to an allegedly higher goal of collective human beings. Oakeshott was keen to deliver liberal education from the public demands of society and to see it nourish individuals of self-assured style and flair. Despite Strauss's commitment to the universals, he was also interested in the survival of defiant nonconformity. The soul of Churchill would not permit him to enter the spirit of "exceptional levity or irresponsibility" which would casually equate democracy with communism, but the mind of a Nietzsche or a Heidegger reminded him that the progressive demands against the privacy of the individual threatened "creeping conformity" and "a very dangerous tendency to identify the good man with the good sport."[56] This kind of mass education was the practical danger against which both Oakeshott and Strauss were fighting but they fought only to restore the balance with the liberal and aristocratic side of a necessarily mixed regime.

In a democratic age the defense of aristocracy is destined to be untimely in the ironic Nietzschean sense of the word: it is untimely for the same reason that its time has come. Nevertheless, Strauss's recovery of political aristocracy, a project inseparable from (but of secondary importance to) his recovery of political philosophy, was a return to classical conceptions of excellence rather than the attempted creation of a Nietzschean superhuman. Strauss arguably gave a clear statement of his own practical political views in his commentary on the political ideas of Thucydides where he described the historian as one who "prefers a mixture of oligarchy and

democracy to either of the pure forms." Thucydides was skeptical and realistic about politics and "it is not clear whether he would unqualifiedly prefer that mixture to an intelligent and virtuous tyranny; he seems to doubt whether a regime superior to these two—aristocracy in Plato's or Aristotle's sense—would be possible."[57]

Strauss likewise found the republican mixed regime to be the most sustainable compromise between the classical regime and the realities of present practice and convention. As Steven B. Smith has pointed out, "Ancient republicanism was still dominated by an aristocratic class called gentlemen (*kaloikagathoi*)—not philosophers in the strict sense but men of inherited wealth and property who are open to liberal education."[58] While this oligarchic aspect of the mixed regime invites understandable criticism—and Strauss is far from suggesting that such problems may be dismissed—his true identification with aristocracy was in the deeper sense in which that term was appropriated by Socratic political philosophy. When translated into the realities of practical politics, however, the *kaloikagathoi* are more those who are found wealthy enough for the exercise of the political virtues. Strauss was well aware that this "implies an insuperable defect in the justice" of aristocracies.[59] But in addition to referring the critics of aristocracy to the philosophical way of life, Strauss countered this modern democratic critique of aristocracy with a reminder of the problems of ancient democratic regimes.

As he intimated in associating Heidegger with the lawless multitude which cowers in the face of the powerful while preying on the vulnerable,[60] the nobility of men like Churchill must be instilled in a society through a wisely constructed mixed regime—a constitution which is designed with due regard to the virtues of the nobility and the concerns of the multitude, allowing them to exercise a wise and constant influence on the republic:

> For one should put in comparison a multitude regulated by laws as they are; and the same goodness that we see to be in them will be found to be in it, and it will be seen neither to dominate proudly or to serve humbly—as was the Roman people which never served humbly nor dominated proudly while the republic lasted uncorrupt; indeed, with its orders and magistrates, it held its rank honorably. When it was necessary to move against someone powerful, it did so, as may be seen in Manlius, in the Ten, and in others who sought to crush it; and when it was necessary to obey the dictators and the consuls for the public safety, it did so.[61]

Strauss considered it crucial to rediscover this ancient wisdom about democracy and the politics of a multitude. At its best, a democratic regime found its footing in the good-natured vulgarity and hearty vigor of the rural folk whom Strauss identified as "the authoritative part" of the audience of the comedies of Aristophanes; "loving the country and its old and tested ways, despising the new-fangled and rootless which shoots up for a day in the city and among its boastful boosters."[62] Democracy is much less stable or noble when it expresses itself more plainly as the rule of the urban poor. As Thomas L. Pangle has reminded us, this economic basis leaves the democratic regime open to "a corruption of justice as the common good of society."[63] As explored above, it is the tendency of such democratic citizenries to view society and education through the lens of economic utility and this comes to corrupt the excellence and liberality of liberal education. This mercenary valuation of the virtues warps them into "a means for acquiring wealth and honor" and fails to "regard virtue as choiceworthy for its own sake."[64] The ancient philosophers were republicans rather than democrats because they were aware of the virtues which flow only from a mind liberated by education, just as they were cognizant of the follies which ensue from the predominance of democracy within a republic:

> Aristotle and the other classics observed that democracy was constantly prone to overestimate and overemphasize those virtues (manly courage, patriotism, piety) that were within the reach of the poor majority, while neglecting those virtues or excellences requiring unusual capacity, education, leisure, and broad political experience.[65]

In tracing liberalism to the ancient world we find it thus inseparable from a critique of the "utilitarian" conception of justice. This realization brings Strauss and Oakeshott into close proximity in terms of practical politics, the significant difference being that Oakeshott affirmed the Western European and ultimately Roman tradition of liberal education (*studia liberalis*), while Strauss evoked the Greek model of liberal education (*paidea eleutheria*). As we will see, this implies a radically divergent understanding of privacy and the individual.

Strauss pointed out that our contemporary understanding of "democracy" is derived from a historicized concept which has already assumed some "elite" tendencies. Modern democracy reflects some of the preference for a regime which is closer to what the ancients would have understood

as a mixed republic, being in reality a mixture of democracy and aristocracy. Strauss noted that voting, which many assume to be the very essence of "democracy," is nevertheless "aristocratic" in comparison with election by lot—the characteristic method of the ancient democracies.[66] It is necessary to examine these prejudices derived from the modern transformation of democracy in relation to the status of privacy and individuality.

Res publica

The natural political phenomena reflect the classical city in which state and society were one. The differences between democratic and liberal or aristocratic virtues are less significant than the contrast between this ancient city, with natural and virtuous ends for its citizens, and the modern civil association as a realm of private choices. It is this latter difference which formed the basis of the quarrel of ancients and moderns for Strauss. For Oakeshott, however, it was not the moderns, but rather the ancient Romans who established first the legal distinction between public and private and thus the republican tradition as the shared concern for what is public (*res publica*), most especially liberty. Oakeshott's identification of this continuity with Roman law is important in understanding his resistance to Strauss's emphasis on the modern break with tradition. Oakeshott believed that the private self has a poetic character separate from anything which might be labeled bourgeois. In emphasizing the Roman legal tradition, Oakeshott was attempting to avoid a narrative in which the privacy of this self is depicted as merely the moral outcome of "possessive individualism" or what Strauss called "the principle of modern political economy."[67] Oakeshott bristled at the suggestion that individuality and privacy could be bundled "into a history of so-called bourgeois market-society capitalism."[68]

Neither fully modern nor ancient, Oakeshott's position has been described by David Boucher as that of "a classical republican of conservative leanings, suitably adapted for the political climate through which it has become modified."[69] The Latin terminology of *On Human Conduct* is a reminder of the republican continuities of Oakeshott's political theory. Oakeshott was aware of the importance which it had continued to enjoy in medieval Western Europe and, as Boucher has concluded, "we may assume that he was unable to exclude many of the thoughts that the language carried with it."[70]

This Roman form of classical republicanism would inform Oakeshott's treatment of the political tradition he termed "Rational Will."[71] While debate has centered on the question of whether Oakeshott steered more toward Hobbes or Hegel, he first returned to the classical republican tradition, a fact which will later allow us to appreciate the fuller significance of the continuity Oakeshott would demonstrate between Hobbes and Augustine.

The preservation of a general freedom within a rule of law is the *res publica* which must find consideration in otherwise private conduct. In his determination to avoid any further blurring of the distinction between public and private beyond this interpretation of the *res publica*, Oakeshott would maintain a respectful distance from Rousseau's *volonté générale* and Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*. Instead he would use this Roman tradition to remedy Hobbes's civil theory, which in starting from the individual will had nevertheless failed to provide "a satisfactory or coherent theory of volition."[72] As the philosopher of authority, Hobbes was for Oakeshott the theoretical counterpart to the Romans whom he celebrated for their practical genius in establishing legitimacy and authority in their political life.[73]

In extending this praise to the political prowess of the Normans, Oakeshott would also provide an intimation of how his British conservatism relates to his republican vision of a rule of law. As an authoritative guide to the freedoms which already exist in a society, law is not derived from a revolutionary application of theoretical principles. The British tradition is closer to republicanism in the classical sense in which "[f]reedom is not an abstraction; it is, as it was for the Romans, embedded in the laws and customs of a traditional way of life."[74]

Oakeshott identified an essential continuity between the classical conception of liberty and the freedoms enjoyed by Englishmen and women. While seeking to ground and prioritize the rights of privacy and individuality, Oakeshott avoided the Hegelian dialectic of history in which an abstract ideal of freedom is progressively realized by the servile consciousness. While for Strauss, the natural virtues of the city pointed beyond themselves to the universality of the rational way of life of the philosopher, Oakeshott's dedication to individuality directed him toward a poetic and religious escape from the more mundane demands of political life. In this sense he diverges from the republican tradition toward the privacy offered by the empire of Augustus. Oakeshott's elevation of the individual is apparent in his assumption that the public

interest is better served by private rather than political pursuits. This is a position which Strauss would have identified in terms of the principle of modern political economy by which "the common good is the product of activities which are not by themselves ordered towards the common good."[75] For Oakeshott, as David Boucher has noted, "the activity of a music-hall entertainer is no less connected to the communal life than that of the prime minister."[76] This tension is significant and is not easily resolved in the claim that Oakeshott may be identified with a classical republican tradition which in fact made very great political demands on its citizens. As well will see, Strauss's philosophical position (as opposed to his ideas about practical politics) also sits uneasily within the republican tradition in that it requires a certain privacy or exemption from political society.

It is in this context that we must consider the meaning of friendship as a potential bridge between the intrinsic value and private significance of liberal education and the public demands of justice and the state. Friendship in this sense can be viewed as a potentially moderating influence on the participatory aspect of republicanism or even understood as the pinnacle and completion of a genuinely mixed regime. As Strauss noted in memorializing his friend Kurt Rielzer, a liberal is ultimately "a lover of privacy."[77] As he was keenly aware, the justice implied by even the most liberal or republican rule of law is inevitably public:

> The tension between justice and what is by nature good comes out most clearly if one compares justice with friendship. Both justice and friendship originate in calculation, but friendship comes to be intrinsically pleasant or desirable for its own sake. Friendship is at any rate incompatible with compulsion. But justice and the association which is concerned with justice—the city—stand or fall by compulsion.[78]

It is helpful to consider this ethos of friendship in approaching the question of how the private pursuit of self-realization or self-mastery implied by liberal education might come to assist and complete the public justice of a republican rule of law. While Strauss seems to have understood this kind of perfect or intrinsically choiceworthy justice to be available only in the "outposts" established by philosophically minded friends, Oakeshott's description of a more open-ended friendship is closely reflective of the civil order he would outline in *On Human Conduct* (and which we will examine more closely in Chap. 9):

> Friends are not concerned with what might be made of one another, but only with the enjoyment of one another; and the condition of this enjoyment is a ready acceptance of what is and the absence of any desire to change or to improve. A friend is not somebody one trusts to behave in a certain manner, who supplies certain wants, who has certain useful abilities, who possesses certain merely agreeable qualities, or who holds certain acceptable opinions; he is somebody who engages the imagination, who excites contemplation, who provokes interest, sympathy, delight and loyalty simply on account of the relationship entered into.[79]

In conclusion, Strauss and Oakeshott shared in a conservative tradition of classical republicanism which reflected their determination to trace liberalism to its premodern sources. However, they arrived at this common recommendation of the mixed regime from antithetical accounts of the status and significance of individuality, which nevertheless left room for each to assert the importance of private forms of association characterized by friendship among non-political individuals. These differences would inform the contrasting manner in which Oakeshott and Strauss understood the possibilities for escaping or transcending political life, suggesting the relevance of the quarrel of poetry and philosophy in developing the comparison between the two thinkers beyond the question of practical politics which we have considered in Chaps. 2 and 3. In concluding this discussion of political orientations it is worth reiterating that neither Oakeshott nor Strauss considered politics to be a complete or satisfying way of life. However, their divergence on the question of the continuity of the traditions of liberal education and classical republicanism has already indicated the nature of the question we must now pursue in turning more explicitly to examine the problem of history.

Notes

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3. Efraim Podoksik, *In Defence of Modernity: Vision and Philosophy in Michael Oakeshott* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2003), 227–229.
4. Michael Oakeshott, "Learning and Teaching," in *The Voice of Liberal Learning: Michael Oakeshott on Education*, ed. Timothy Fuller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 57.

5. Michael Oakeshott, "A Place of Learning," in *Voice of Liberal Learning*, 6.
6. Michael Oakeshott, "Education: The Engagement and Its Frustration," in *Voice of Liberal Learning*, 99.
7. Michael Oakeshott, "The Universities," in *Voice of Liberal Learning*, 126.
8. Michael Oakeshott, "The Definition of a University," *Journal of Educational Thought* 1, no. 3 (1967): 139.
9. Oakeshott, "A Place of Learning," 15.
10. Oakeshott, "Universities," 148.
11. Leo Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 8.
12. Ibid., 10.
13. Leo Strauss, "German Nihilism," ed. David Janssens and Daniel Tanguay, *Interpretation* 26, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 372.
14. Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 25.
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16. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 513.
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19. Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 152.
20. Leo Strauss, Letter to Gershom Scholem, July 7, 1973, cited in Richard L. Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy: On Original Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 178–179 n. 38.
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23. Quoted in Martin Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life* (London: Pimlico, 2000), 55.
24. Gilbert, *Churchill*, 67–68.
25. Quoted in Gilbert, *Churchill*, 146, 152.
26. Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 14.
27. Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny: Corrected and Expanded Edition, Including the Strauss-Kojève Correspondence*, ed. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 274.
28. Steven B. Smith, "Leo Strauss: The Outlines of a Life," in *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, ed. Steven B. Smith (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 23.

29. Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 24.
30. Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* (New York: Free Press, 1959), 90.
31. Laurence Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 125.
32. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 4.
33. Stanley Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 17.
34. Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 7–8.
35. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 124.
36. Robert Grant, *Oakeshott* (London: The Claridge Press, 1990), 115.
37. See Michael Zuckert and Catherine Zuckert, *Leo Strauss and the Problem of Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 34.
38. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 29.
39. Leo Strauss, "Reason and Revelation," in Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, trans. Marcus Brainard (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 148.
40. Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 24. Strauss made two notable, though in comparison minor, forays into practical politics in defending the State of Israel in a letter to *National Review* in January 1955 (an episode to which I will return in Chap. 8) and signing a public letter endorsing President Nixon for reelection in 1972.
41. Oakeshott, "Education," 104.
42. Ibid., 76–80.
43. Ibid., 83 ff.
44. Ibid., 64.
45. Oakeshott, "Universities," 152.
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47. Oakeshott, "Education," 86–87.
48. Oakeshott, "Universities," 133–134.
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50. Oakeshott, "A Place of Learning," 24–25.
51. Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 225.
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60. Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 213.
61. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 116.
62. Leo Strauss, "The Problem of Socrates," in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, 107. See Pangle, *Leo Strauss*, 80–81.
63. Pangle, *Leo Strauss*, 53.
64. Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 12.
65. Thomas L. Pangle, introduction to Strauss, *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, xix.
66. Strauss, *City and Man*, 35.
67. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 315.
68. Michael Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 242 n. 1.
69. David Boucher, "Oakeshott, Freedom and Republicanism," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 7, no. 1 (2005): 81.
70. Ibid., 84.
71. Michael Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," in *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2000), 8.
72. Michael Oakeshott, "Dr. Leo Strauss on Hobbes," in *Hobbes on Civil Association*, 157.
73. Michael Oakeshott, *Lectures in the History of Political Thought*, *Selected Writings, Volume II*, ed. Terry Nardin and Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2006), 176.
74. Boucher, "Oakeshott, Freedom and Republicanism," 92.
75. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 315.
76. Boucher, "Oakeshott, Freedom and Republicanism," 93.
77. Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy*, 260.
78. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 111.
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CHAPTER 4

Historical Interpretation and Philosophical Intention

In moving from practical politics to more theoretical concerns we inevitably confront the problem of history. History stands in the path of all modern thought and was a shared concern of Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss. However, the term itself covers several distinct areas of inquiry from which it is necessary to more clearly define and differentiate their emphases and focuses. History may signify the questions of historiography and historical method, the history of political thought and its traditions, or the insertion of history into philosophy in the form of historicism. Both Oakeshott and Strauss were deeply involved in the question of the history of political thought and the "tradition" of political philosophy viewed from a historical perspective. The confusion of history and philosophy was a major problem for Strauss, though not one neglected by Oakeshott. The question of historiography was of more intrinsic interest to Oakeshott, reflecting not only his overall poetic viewpoint and focus on individuality, but also more specifically his training as a historian and early interest in the historical identity of Christianity. Strauss's concern with this history proper related to his reinterpretation of classical political history in the light of Socratic political philosophy, the rediscovery of which developed out of an intense awareness of himself as "a young Jew born and raised in Germany who found himself in the grips of a theologico-political predicament."[1]

A discussion of Oakeshott and Strauss's engagements with the problem of history is also a necessary preliminary for the comparison of their interpretations of particular political philosophies, which in turn raises the prior

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question of whether a "tradition" of political philosophy can even be said to exist. A consideration of authorial intention will be critical for ascertaining whether there is such a coherent and intentional tradition. As will become apparent in the next chapter, the disagreement of Oakeshott and Strauss on the meaning of Hobbes within the history of political thought requires a fuller context than is allowed if we were to unreflectively adopt the presuppositions of modern thought. Strauss, who was an anti-Hobbesian thinker if ever there was one, stressed that students "must begin with the assumption that Hobbes's teaching [is] true—not relatively true, not true for Hobbes, not true for its time, but *simply true*."[2]

With their cognizance of the importance of history and their careful distance from, or occasional and deliberate adoption of, its various perspectives Strauss and Oakeshott each developed approaches which recognized where historical thinking is unavoidable or necessary in the interpretation of modern political thought while resisting the influence of historicism defined as the belief that modern thought has progressed by rational necessity beyond medieval and ancient thought. Both men understood the need for the historical investigation of ideas while never losing sight of the fact that the hybridization of history and philosophy had, despite the brilliance of its undertaking, come to fatally confuse the separate terms of each inquiry. While each considered himself to be rectifying these misuses of history, their positions are at odds over the final relation between history and philosophy. Oakeshott would celebrate history as an autonomous realm of particularity, establishing the ground for a poetic pluralism which would tend toward a religious completion in his later work. Strauss would redefine the significance of history as the necessary supplement to the universality of philosophy, responding to a valid insight of modern political science which had given rise to the excessive influence of individuality over modern thought.

As this chapter focuses more on the problem of the interpretation of historical texts and the philosopher's intention, it is sufficient at this stage to mention this fundamental point of difference which will be discussed later in greater detail. Oakeshott understood the historical past as "a complicated world, without unity of feeling or clear outline: in it events have no over-all pattern or purpose, lead nowhere, point to no favoured condition of the world and support no practical conclusions. It is a world composed wholly of contingencies."[3] For Strauss, it was the focus of history on "everything accidental" which allowed it to supplement political philosophy. Nietzsche had called Thucydides his "*cure* from all Platonism" as one

who found reason in *reality* rather than in rational and moral abstractions.[4] For Strauss, Plato's priority on internal policy in theorizing an ideal city "at rest" was complemented with the presentation of the "the best city in motion." The philosopher requires the "assistance" of the historian in achieving a complete view through additional accounts of the historical or "particular" city.[5] This would be an example of a "non-historical" and "practical" past for Oakeshott,[6] and this raises further questions which must be considered in the context of political theory. This chapter lays the groundwork for these questions by considering the origins of Strauss and Oakeshott's distinct concerns with history, and how these informed their contrasting accounts of the history of political thought and the interpretation of its texts.

A Young Jew Born and Raised in Germany

Strauss became committed to a "simple, straightforward political Zionism" at the age of 17.[7] This signified nothing more than a firm conviction that the Jews should become as other peoples and command a territory and state of their own. Separate from any cultural or religious claims, political Zionism focused on the need for the Jews to become normalized into the world of politics among the other nations of Western civilization. Often inspired by the call of Nietzsche, many Zionists became conscious of a religious resignation which had handicapped the political position of the Jews in the past. Strauss recalled Spinoza's claim that the Jewish religion had worked to "effeminate" its believers,[8] and in light of Caesar's assessment of the virtuous Belgae, Strauss's youthful admiration for "Roman thought" must have been at least partly as an emblem of a manly counter-spirit. This "simple" political Zionism would not, however, lead to a simple solution for those dedicated to a rationally consistent loyalty to their national and religious inheritance. As non-believers, modern Jews found no security in the faith of their fathers, but nor could they remain Jews in accepting the terms of assimilation into the secular security of liberal society.[9]

Where Oakeshott looked to the flourishing of Western European culture with the influx of classical thought from the twelfth century onward, Strauss's background provided a different perspective on this history. Strauss could appear close to the early modern enlighteners in condemning the society of Catholic Europe as "the kingdom of darkness" and declaring the massacres of Jews amid the Crusades as the "culmination" of

that most "characteristic" action of the Christian Middle Ages. However, the reality of having been born and raised a Jew in Germany precluded an appeal to the modern Enlightenment solution. The position of the Jews in Germany was not destined to be resolved by liberal policies. Instead, as Strauss took care to unflinchingly remind us: "It was annihilated by the annihilation of the German Jews."[10]

Between the kingdom of darkness and the Third Reich, however, the German Jews had generated a renaissance of their own. Interacting with German high culture, the Jewish mind became intertwined with much of what had been understood to be essentially German.[11] The young Strauss detected a process of "inner preparedness for one another of both Germans and Jews" after the French Revolution which explained what he called "the deflection [*Umbiegung*] experienced by the German mind due to the influx of Jewish forces." The Jewish mind had also been Germanized in this process and received "a dose of specifically Christian spirit."[12] As an older Strauss reflected, "the political dependence [of the Jews on Germany] was also spiritual dependence."[13]

Viewed through German eyes as a historical culture, Judaism appeared in the light of this dependence; on its ground of theism, there was no alternative to the impossible return to a no-longer-inhabitable orthodoxy. What had been a daily and unquestioned experience had had its spell broken by this German historical consciousness. Those who would nevertheless take the path of return "must try to do in the element of reflection what traditionally was done unconsciously or naively. Their attitude is historical rather than traditional."[14] Because of this historical attitude (which had also emerged from the Enlightenment critique of religion), the resurgence of theological orthodoxy was experienced as "a profound innovation."[15]

There is an important parallel between this loss of this (traditional) orthodoxy in religion and the loss of the classical (non-historical) intention in philosophy. The historical attitude of return would therefore be crucial in Strauss's recovery of Socratic political philosophy and will be relevant when we consider the charge that Strauss forged a "myth of the tradition."

These are the mere outlines of a complex theological-political predicament. While Strauss's intellectual biographers confirm the importance of this background for understanding Strauss's investigations,[16] Strauss himself directed his readers to this early and persistent concern in an intellectual autobiography which appeared as a preface to *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (1965), the English translation (by Elsa M. Sinclair) of his first

book, *Die Religionskritik Spinozas* (1930). Strauss took the opportunity to update the radical declarations of his introduction to *Philosophy and Law* (1935). This and more obliquely autobiographical writings provide the important context in which to find the meaning of Strauss's distinctive history of political philosophy.

While deeply aware of the role of history in the theological responses to modernity, Strauss was also in close proximity to a powerful philosophical critique of rational liberalism. The triumph of Heidegger over Strauss's simple Nietzscheanism and the neo-Kantian liberalism of his supervisor and mentor confirmed the wisdom of an insight which had first come to Strauss's closest friend, Jacob Klein. He had been more fascinated by what Heidegger had brought to light in his reading of Aristotle than he had been by Heidegger's own thinking.[17] Heidegger's investigations had uncovered the possibility of a return to classical political philosophy at the same time as they had revealed the vulnerabilities of modern philosophy. In viewing the legacy of Western philosophy in terms of a tradition based on the assumption of being as (eternal) presence, Heidegger may also have been responsible for the perception that some of those who followed him would foster a "myth of the tradition" in their own histories of philosophy. Strauss's distinction between the universal intention of philosophical life and the results achieved by individual philosophers is crucial in distinguishing him from Heidegger's historicism and ascertaining what might be somewhat overgrandly called his hermeneutics.

In his eagerness to appropriate the pre-Socratics and what he believed had been their greater openness to Being, Heidegger neglected to trace the full implications of what he had revealed about Socratic philosophy. Strauss followed the Socratics in tracing the theoretical perspective to the discovery of "nature" through the *logoi* rather than from the breakdown of *pragmata* within an original life world. In conjunction with his rediscovery of the Platonism of the medieval rationalists of Spain, he would rededicate philosophy to the "drama" of the Platonic dialogues, discerning an argument in the action which is radically different from the doctrines of the Western or "Christian" Platonism which had been the focus of Heidegger's (and Nietzsche's) critique. There was, however, room for significant misinterpretation of this in that this "historical" return would require a "fusion" of philosophy and historical studies.[18]

The modern historical consciousness has produced an additional layer of convention over the original outlook against which "nature" was discovered. As the first to recognize the philosophical importance of the

original layer of convention for philosophy, Socrates had realized that he must approach his intransigent questioning about the beings from the opinions and belief about phenomena rather than from direct observation and investigation of them. The title of Strauss's *Natural Right and History* (1953) is an apparent reference to Heidegger's *Being and Time*,[19] and both titles may be compared with that of Strauss's *The City and Man* (1964) in suggesting how the historical layer transformed, and then almost completely obscured, the original heteronomy of Athens and Socrates.[20] Strauss produced historical studies of modern thought as part of his "non-historicist understanding of historicism."[21] The most important characteristic of these studies being their skeptical treatment of the modern claim that this historical covering over of the original basis for philosophy means that the presuppositions of ancient thought have been rationally superseded or reflect only "truths" of their time.

The Historical Element in Christianity

Oakeshott was more explicitly theologically interested than Strauss had been in his initial approach to the theological-political problem. As even Terry Nardin, who wishes to place Oakeshott among the philosophers, has noted, "Oakeshott's philosophical historical interest in the idea of historical identity grows out of a religious and then historical interest in the identity of Christianity."[22] Oakeshott was deeply concerned with the historical understanding of Christianity and the impact of modern ideas on its theology. Confronting the profound consequences of Darwinism and other modern scientific breakthroughs was only the most obvious aspect of a concern which extended to other modern developments including the philosophy of Hegel and, perhaps most importantly of all, modern Bible scholarship. With the Germans dominating all of these modernizing currents in theology, the young Oakeshott found himself in a similar milieu of ideas to the young Strauss.

There is, however, an unmistakable falling away in Oakeshott's explicitly Christian publications in the 1930s.[23] Nevertheless, a fundamental continuity is observable in that the main part of Oakeshott's mature thought remains traceable to this early concern with the historical being of Christianity. The problem of modern Christianity was the earliest sustained intellectual interest of Oakeshott, who regularly met with older colleagues to discuss the modernizing strands within the coherent process of change which they understood as Christianity. A religion based on the

events of the life and the death of Jesus can find an identity only in admitting a historical element, and Oakeshott considered this realization the basis for the accommodation of the consciously historical attitude of modernity within the continuous identity of Christianity. However, this modern turn in the religion included a component of Rationalistic reformism contrary to Oakeshott's conservative disposition and this emphasis on continuity required him to carefully distinguish authentic innovation from the products of those he would later term "enemies of our civilization, exponents of a counterfeit myth."[24]

The use of history for religious and political purposes has the potential to confuse the constructions of past experience in the present,[25] and the realization of this practical significance of the historical element in the identity of Christianity spurred Oakeshott into further efforts to define history on its own terms. In *Experience and Its Modes* (1933) Oakeshott described the mode of historical experience as a concern with what survives as evidence of the past from the perspective of its "pastness." The activity of a historian is a markedly impractical focus on "the past for its own sake"—essentially a "dead past."[26]

While it is tempting to dismiss Oakeshott's mode of history as mere antiquarianism, this would be a mistake equivalent to the misinterpretation of Oakeshott's poetic viewpoint as mere aestheticism, a problem to be discussed in Chap. 7. The autonomy of the historical mode is, however, related to the autonomy of the mode of poetry in that creativity and imagination were for Oakeshott the common basis of historical and poetical experience.

The description of history in *Experience and Its Modes* was written at a stage at which Oakeshott still gave a nominal priority to philosophy and he was aware that his view of history would seem inhospitable (if not impossibly demanding) to the practicing historian. But Oakeshott would come to reason that historical and poetical experience both begin in a freedom from practical concerns, establishing these modes apart from moral considerations, and emphasizing the individuality of their creations. History is a creative project to provide coherence to a view of our experience of the past through surviving evidence rather than an investigation of a "real" past outside of the present reality:

> For no fact, truth or reality is, or can be, past. And, at this point, what is satisfactory in historical experience fails to satisfy in experience itself. The world of history is the world *sub specie praeteritorum*; but only by becoming present through and through can this world become an adequate

> organization of experience, and to become this would involve the renunciation of its own specific and distinguishing character.[27]

While the presuppositions of *Experience and Its Modes* forced this conclusion on Oakeshott, his intention may have been to emphasize the vulnerability and fragility of the most autonomous modes of experience. From this perspective, the theoretical incoherence of the modes reflects the danger of theory to the creations of will and imagination.

The common strand in Oakeshott's concern with history, poetry, and religion would once again become apparent in the fact that, while he was not averse to creating his own practical histories (as he would notably do in the third essay of *On Human Conduct*), Oakeshott denied that reason and science could find a coherent place in historical experience. The dependence of history on intelligent "goings-on" reflects the priority of creativity rather than reason (with "rational conduct" referring to intelligently enacted individuality rather than obedience to the universality of reason). The universal and scientific sense of reason applies only to nature and those events which Oakeshott termed "processes."

The autonomy of the mode of history reflects the freedom of the self, a freedom associated with the imagination and providing for "the poetic character of all human activity."[28] The individuality of imagination is destroyed by the universality of reason: "Reason … is destructive of individuality."[29]

Oakeshott was clearly wary of the influence of Enlightenment rationalism on human activity. He was aware that history had been employed improperly to modify conduct through "historical" accounts which claimed to reveal a linear direction and progressive accumulation of human wisdom. Strauss, who defended an earlier form of rationalism as the way of life of the philosopher, shared the understanding that this politicized or *praxis*-oriented rationalism is dangerous to political life, and while some readers of Oakeshott as a historian of political ideas have criticized Strauss as concerned with the practical impact of his inquiries,[30] the true grounds of this comparison remain to be revealed.

Legends and Intentions

Oakeshott expressed a concern that "political thought" is broad enough to include a variety of trivial material in addition to the great works of political philosophy, and the indefinite nature of such an inquiry brought him to the brink of complete skepticism[31]:

> In short, while an historian of Mexico or even of "Platonism" begins with a relatively unpuzzling situation, and an historian of "philosophy" or "chemistry" has some puzzles which he may hope to solve as he goes along, the historian of "political thought" is in a desperate situation. He is at sea in the dark, without compass or sextant. He had much better settle for an historical enquiry about the meaning and use of the expression "reason of state", about the notion of "nationalism" in modern Europe, about "Renaissance Diplomacy", or about Women's Lib.[32]

Considered together with his awareness of a potential contradiction in historical experience, it might be expected that Oakeshott would remain silent on the history of political thought.

In an essay which he left unpublished in his lifetime, "The Emergence of the History of Thought" (1967), Oakeshott referred to "the so-called controversy of the 'Ancients and Moderns' which was the matrix of a new intellectual legend of modern Europe."[33] Oakeshott argued that this "intellectual legend" had been the construction of the followers of Francis Bacon who were determined to make the world anew, denigrating all previous intellectual experience. Oakeshott contrasted this Baconian legend of modernity with the intellectual legend fostered by the humanists, beginning in the twelfth century with the renaissance of Western Europe. These intellectual legends also closely correspond to the moral idioms which Oakeshott perceived to be in permanent dialectical opposition in the history of modern Europe—the morality of individuality and the morality of the common good.[34] Specifically, his idiom of virtuous individuality corresponds with the intellectual legend of "humanism," while the utilitarian "morality" of the common good corresponds to the intellectual legend fostered by the Baconians.

Acknowledging the simplifications they represent as part of "the undertaking to evoke or construct a legendary intellectual past,"[35] Oakeshott nevertheless perceived the importance of viewing the history of political thought in these terms. And in the case of the "Baconian" modernists, these intellectuals and scientists had conceived of themselves as establishing a break with a benighted past and developing a progressive new "tradition" or science of their own. Given that the quarrel of ancients and moderns is itself (and by manifest necessity) a modern quarrel, it cannot be said to rely on any mythological creation of traditions.

In a 1972 essay on modern education, Oakeshott would cite Bacon longing "to erase completely from [his] soul the memory of all knowledge,"[36] and the Baconians indisputably burned with a passionate intensity

against a tradition of thought which they held to be only a hindrance to their new and accumulative science. As Strauss obviously concurred, this (and not a relatively obscure moment of French literary controversy) was the true significance of *la querelle des anciens et des modernes.*[37]

However, Oakeshott's history differed from Strauss's in identifying a tradition of skepticism that was opposed to the spirit of this new science. While Oakeshott sought to identify and isolate the Baconian strand of modernity, Strauss, who preferred the emblem of Descartes (perhaps because of that philosopher's more obvious methodological proximity to Machiavelli and Hobbes), understood the new science as the starting point for a unified Enlightenment project. Had not Hegel said that all philosophizing must take the standpoint of Spinozism in that "[t]he soul must [first] bathe in the ether of one substance in which everything that one has held to be true has perished"?[38]

While these differences are defining and fundamental, 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 political thought through broad designations.

McIntyre reviews Strauss's attempt at the historical explanation of political philosophy in terms of Oakeshott's modal understanding of experience and finds it to be written in the idiom of "practice." McIntyre takes this as a basis for the broad assertion that "for Strauss, the question of the relationship between history and philosophy was not an academic matter, but a practical one with wide-ranging political implications which necessarily called for the intervention of the prophetic professor."[39]

Endeavoring to find a way back from *praxis*-minded historicism to the pure life of *theoria* Strauss realized that the intellectual conditions of modernity necessitated "historical studies" of political philosophy. But he failed to conform to Oakeshott's rigorous and demanding description of the autonomy of the mode of history in conducting these investigations, allowing McIntyre to imply that Strauss sailed off the English-speaking charts and into the murky waters of an interwar Germany where the professors occasionally enjoyed the kind of "adulation" which wiser societies reserve for athletes and movie stars.[40]

McIntyre contrasts what he takes to be Strauss's hermeneutic principles with those of the Cambridge School and Oakeshott's idea of historiography, singling out for particularly strong criticism the principle of approaching texts in sympathy for what Strauss understands to be the philosopher's

intention (as if they may indeed be "simply true"). In his essay on R. G. Collingwood's *The Idea of History* Strauss took the historicist thinker to task for his dogmatic rejection of this principle. Beginning from an unexamined historicist premise Collingwood could not take prehistoricist thought seriously, "for to take a thought seriously means to regard it as possible that the thought in question is true."[41]

McIntyre detects in this an unprecedented obfuscation and posits that Strauss may have succumbed to the "illusion of the geometrical model" or the "constant temptation among philosophers to make analogies between linguistic or conceptual problems and the problems of mathematics." Strauss is accused of philosophizing in the spirit of geometry and McIntyre is there to remind him that "[i]n neither politics nor political philosophy are there axioms similar to those in geometry from which to deduce demonstrable conclusions."[42]

Strauss had echoed Pascal in observing:

> Men are deluded by two opposite charms: the charm of competence which is engendered by mathematics and everything akin to mathematics, and the charm of humble awe, which is engendered by meditation on the human soul and its experiences. Philosophy is characterized by the gentle, if firm, refusal to succumb to either charm.[43]

Strauss elaborated on the need to balance the "scientific spirit" with the "spirit of finesse" in the essay "Social Science and Humanism."[44] Even Paul Gottfried, one of the few who have found McIntyre's Strauss plausible, is prepared to begrudgingly acknowledge that one "limited good Straussians have achieved" is that they "have challenged the study of politics as an imitation of mathematics" in arguing that "human behavior depends on moral and value choices that cannot be reduced to numerical constructs."[45]

McIntyre goes on to declare Strauss unhistorical in his acceptance of "the illusions of real essences," but in recovering the philosophical intention Strauss did not seek an impossible separation of philosophizing from time, nor did he ever imply that this could be achieved through some kind of pseudo-Aristotelian study of essences. Strauss's identified only the permanent problems and the philosopher's intention to spend a lifetime engaging with them in pursuit of the truth. McIntyre is under the illusion that Strauss believed in the philosopher's access the very essence of "justice" and "freedom" rather than the eternal human problems which are

indicated by the persistent discussion and debate of these concepts.[46] Access to these problems had been disrupted by the historical transformation of the original beliefs, opinions, and impressions which had been the starting point for classical philosophy:

> Ideas which have derived directly from impressions can be clarified without any recourse to history; but ideas which have emerged owing to a specific transformation of more elementary ideas cannot be clarified but by means of the history of ideas.[47]

One of Strauss's favorite examples of such a transformation was the process by which the ancient "city" became the modern "state." Men like Rousseau and Nietzsche would attempt to return from the historicized state to the classical idea of the city, only to further radicalize the historicization of the concept. When modern thought culminates in Heidegger, the "ideas" have become purely historical—a complete historicization of thought that is ipso facto the rejection of philosophy in favor of something more akin to existentialism. To recover philosophy it is necessary to achieve "a nonhistoricist understanding of historicism, that is, an understanding of historicism that does not take for granted the soundness of historicism."[48]

In approaching the problem of the philosophical intention it is critical to observe its separation from the exoteric presentation of philosophy. In his study of the relationship of history to philosophy in Strauss's thought, Nathan Tarcov demonstrates the connection between the intention and the political treatment of philosophy. Far from succumbing to the charm of geometrical truths, the Straussian Tarcov proves more capable than McIntyre of Oakeshottian finesse, reminding us that Strauss's instructions for detecting authorial intent "cannot be mechanical or foolproof."[49]

Strauss felt that there is an "irretrievably 'occasional' character" to interpretation, leading him to doubt the very possibility of a universal hermeneutics.[50] To insist on a perfectly verifiable method for the precise interpretation of texts is equivalent to the folly of chancing the survival of philosophy itself on the requirement for the complete truth of one of the great systematic philosophies, be it Spinoza's or Hegel's; it would be to mistake the "fate" of philosophers (to be human, temporal, and in error), for the intention of philosophy (to be "eternal" in truth).[51] Far from requiring novel definitions of "philosophy" and "intention"—as if the waters of Lethe had indeed washed over us—Strauss reminded the students

of philosophy to approach philosophical texts in the spirit of the love of wisdom, rather than to take the perhaps partial achievement of wisdom as evidence against such an intention. The philosopher is aware that in this intention to seek wisdom, as Oakeshott wrote of a similar pursuit, "its reward is not that of achievement but that of having made the attempt."[52]

While McIntyre attributes to Strauss the intention to be a "prophetic professor" and others have claimed that Strauss approached philosophy with "a very practical [political] purpose,"[53] Strauss emphasized the impractical attitude which has always separated the philosophical way of life from the moral and political life of the statesman and the prophet.[54] To the extent that the philosopher has a "purpose" in mind, it is theoretical.[55] This does not, however, discount ambition of a kind, and Strauss endorsed Xenophon's observation that the philosopher is "the only man who is truly ambitious."[56] The theoretical ambition of the philosopher is most complete because it is directed toward the whole and not some part of the whole with its peculiar fate in the "'historical' procession." The intention to provide a theoretical history of theory to sustain the theoretical life is an "unhistorical" aim for the same reason that the theorist's intention is unhistorical.[57]

In what seems to be a partial admission that his critique of Strauss as a "historian" has been misaimed, McIntyre concludes that in his philosophical concern for the history of philosophy Strauss "shares a great deal more with his so-called historicist enemies than he might wish to admit."[58] While this may be true, Strauss encouraged this observation as the beginning of an esoteric interpretation by those who are able and willing to investigate why Strauss seems to have more affinities with the "wrong kind" of thinker than he does with "the right."[59]

Esotericism is thus inextricably linked to philosophical intention and Tarcov does not fail to point out the fact that Oakeshott was one of those who agreed with Strauss on the existence of esoteric hints and exoteric doctrines in philosophical writing.[60] This is significant because it demonstrates that Oakeshott accepted that the philosopher may intend to write for two distinct audiences. Oakeshott understood that there was a tradition in philosophical circles of recognizing those ideas which are to be discussed with other philosophers as "those whose heads were strong enough to withstand the giddiness provoked by [the philosopher's] scepticism." Oakeshott further observed that the "novelties" which appeared from time to time, even on the surface of a philosophical tract, "must be made to appear commonplaces" to a more conventional audience.[61]

All of this appears in the context of Oakeshott's reading of the *Leviathan*, which will be discussed in the following chapter. It will suffice at this point to argue that Oakeshott's defense of the uncertainties of this method was not at all dissimilar to Strauss's understanding of the permanent ambiguities in his own recovered art of writing. Oakeshott admitted that a reading which allows for the presence of an esoteric teaching or hint within a text will not "commend itself to everyone" and "cannot be demonstrated to be true." Such an uncertain manner of interpretation is nevertheless required to explain "discrepancies" in, for instance, *Leviathan*,[62] a masterpiece in which it is more reasonable to judge that the author has left deliberate discrepancies in the text rather than unintended blundering and error.

In lecturing on Locke, Oakeshott reminded his students that the *Two Treatises of Government* had been written in religious terms characteristic of the times. Locke was writing for a public audience "who expected to be convinced by an argument in a theological idiom,"[63] an observation reinforced by more recent scholarship.[64] Whether Locke shared the prejudices of his audience is a separate question for Oakeshott, and one on which he may not have been as skeptical as Strauss.[65]

In approaching texts which were written under the constraints of these conventional prejudices—not to mention the threat of official persecution—rather than entering a realm where no one errs, we would be prudent to adopt an attitude which is skeptical of "blunders as would shame an intelligent school boy."[66] When forced to consider whether a great thinker was closer to a god or a fool, Strauss advised that it is wiser to consider him closer to a god. If this hyperbole is too provocative, one might at least allow that "no careful writer would express himself ambiguously about an important and at the same time thematic subject without good reasons."[67]

Despite the importance of the esoteric-exoteric distinction to his reading of Hobbes on the problem of obligation, Oakeshott did not apply it as frequently as Strauss. This may reflect a difference of focus as Oakeshott was more concerned with the perspective of that "ordinary man who must be spoken to in an idiom and a vocabulary he is accustomed to."[68] Oakeshott does not appear as an obvious historicist because he considered the greatest works of political philosophy to be at least as "eternal" as the civilization to which they belonged. Oakeshott's final view of political philosophy is nevertheless a "historical view" in which this "eternity" is "has been given a temporal or historical dimension."[69] Both his theorizing of

moral conduct and interest in history proper bear this out, and it is in this context that we may understand the observation that Oakeshott's is "a philosophy ultimately written from inside the cave."[70]

That commonplaces change from age to age is itself a commonplace, but Strauss sought to challenge the prejudice that the ideas and problems of the philosophers are the similar product of "historical worlds," "cultures," "worldviews," or indeed "civilizations"[71]; Strauss was committed to philosophy, not historiography—or hermeneutics, which, as he made clear in correspondence with Hans-Georg Gadamer, was not something he felt confident about.[72]

Oakeshott outlined a theory of historical explanation resting on a comparable level of verifiability to Strauss's esoteric-exoteric analysis of the philosopher's intention. When we recall the manner in which Oakeshott appealed to an esoteric strand in *Leviathan* to explain the discrepancies within that text, it becomes apparent that the coherence of a philosophical text and a historical account rely on a similar test of verifiability.

David Boucher has demonstrated the futility of attempting to force an esoteric teaching from a text in pointing out how easy it would be to dismiss a reading of Enid Blyton's *Noddy and Big-Ears* series which suggested that the characters represent intricate mathematical formulae. This observation is equally valid in reflecting on Oakeshott's standard of truth in assessing historical texts in which, as Boucher's summarizes, "A history must be able to accommodate all the evidence, and stands condemned when contradicted by an alternative account which seems to incorporate the evidence more satisfactorily."[73] Mutatis mutandis, the same can be said of Strauss's approach to interpreting philosophical texts.

As I have already alluded, J. G. A. Pocock complained that, in confronting a Straussian exegesis, he found "a world in which nobody ever makes a mistake or says anything which he does not intend to say; which nobody ever omits to say something which he does not intend to omit."[74] John G. Gunnell made the related claim that the esoteric-exoteric distinction places the Straussian interpretation of philosophical texts "outside the realm of falsification and debate."[75] It should be apparent, however, that these objections spring from the same family of misguided criticisms as John Gray's review of Oakeshott's *On History*, in which he assumed that, lacking a criterion of truth, "we are unable to decide between two coherent but incompatible pieces of historical reconstruction."[76]

Coherence is in fact an entirely logical ground on which to verify the scholarly competence of a reading in which the evidence of a text is

examined and its discrepancies accounted for. Oakeshott reminded us that there is no "past" to which we can look for a historical account to correspond to, but only the evidence which has survived into the present. As Terry Nardin is obliged to explain in the face of a naïve criticism of truth as coherence, the reconstructed historical past "is not whatever the historian happens to think—it is what the historian is *compelled* to think by the pattern of evidence."[77] Coherence is not coherence within the framework of each occasional interpretation, but coherence with the realities of the evidence or text. Indeed, for those who are unable to resist the charm of such terms, this might even be described as the element of "realism" within the coherence theory of truth. While this is not the perspective from which Strauss approached the problem, it is nevertheless a basis on which his philosophical "hermeneutics" may be compared with Oakeshott's account of the activity of the historian.

Contemplation and the State of Nature

While Oakeshott's mode of history implicitly accepts that the "reality" of evidence from the past must limit the freedom of the reconstructions which are possible in present experience, the mode of poetry is unique in that a poetic image may be assessed in terms of its intrinsic coherence, proving poetry to be the most "autonomous" of Oakeshott's modes. In "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind" (1959), Oakeshott revealed his partisanship for poetry in its permanent quarrel with philosophy in describing a pluralistic approach which effectively replaced the apparent priority which philosophy had had in his earlier *Experience and Its Modes*. Indeed, despite the pluralism of "the conversation of mankind," poetry begins to assume the priority which philosophy had at least nominally held for the earlier Oakeshott.

This poetic viewpoint is crucial in understanding Oakeshott's response to the modern Baconian science and its vision of a technological society. Oakeshott would attempt to establish a distance between his mode of poetry and this modern science with its emphasis on "creating" a human culture over against the classical understanding of the cultivation of what nature supplies.[78] 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. The creations of this alternative tradition reflect poetic image-making in that they are fully autonomous and distinguished, "not by reason of their 'universality', but on account of their being recognized as individuals."[79]

While Oakeshott noted the Judaic provenance of this aspect of the Western tradition, Strauss described it in terms of the "anti-Aristotelian science of the seventeenth century [which] rejected final causes." The good life for a human being is not provided by natural reason and thus a human culture must be created against nature. This "shift" was signaled in the modern substitution of "culture" for the ancient "city." In a further instance of the power of this break with the classical orientation, "the state of nature" would no longer bring to mind the "natural" *telos* of human excellence but rather the emergency which human beings face at the beginning of "history." In other words, "the end does not beckon man but it must be invented by man so that he can escape from his natural misery."[80]

Oakeshott would attempt to avoid this progressive understanding of human history and culture by defining history as the product of creativity and imagination. However, in asserting that poetic image-making is all that remains of Plato's "conception" of *theoria*,[81] he would effectively demonstrate his acceptance of Strauss's assessment that the quarrel of the ancients and moderns "concerns eventually, and perhaps even from the beginning, the status of 'individuality.'"[82] The contrasting views of the meaning of history surveyed in this chapter reflect this deeper question of the status and role of "individuality" in exemplifying poetry or supplementing philosophy. This is also part of the background to Oakeshott and Strauss's divergent interpretations of the thought of Hobbes, the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

1. Leo Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 224.
2. Werner J. Dannhauser, "Leo Strauss: Becoming Naïve Again," *The American Scholar* 44, no. 4 (Autumn 1975): 638.
3. Michael Oakeshott, "The Activity of Being a Historian," in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, ed. Timothy Fuller (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991), 182.
4. Cited in Stanley Rosen, *The Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), 280.
5. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 140.
6. Oakeshott, "Activity of Being a Historian," 170.

7. Jacob Klein and Leo Strauss, "A Giving of Accounts," *The College* 25, no. 2 (April 1970): 2.
8. Leo Strauss, "Progress or Return?" in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 230.
9. Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 227–229.
10. Ibid., 226–227.
11. Concepts like "the Jewish mind" already suggest the Germanization of Jewishness and Strauss himself would avoid such terms after he moved away from the political Zionism of his youth.
12. Leo Strauss, "Response to Frankfurt's 'Word of Principle,'" in *Leo Strauss: The Early Writings (1921–1932)*, ed. Michael Zank (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 68–69.
13. Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 227.
14. Strauss, "Progress or Return?" 234.
15. Klein and Strauss, "A Giving of Accounts," 3.
16. Daniel Tanguay, *Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Christopher Nadon (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); David Janssens, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Philosophy, Prophecy, and Politics in Leo Strauss's Early Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008).
17. Richard L. Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy: On Original Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 6.
18. Michael Zuckert and Catherine Zuckert, *Leo Strauss and the Problem of Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 34.
19. Steven B. Smith, *Reading Leo Strauss: Politics, Philosophy, Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 128.
20. Seth Benardete, "Leo Strauss' *The City and Man*," *The Political Science Reviewer* 8 (1978): 2: "The true title of *The City and Man* is *Athens and Socrates*. Strauss' *Socrates and Aristophanes* is its twin."
21. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 33.
22. Terry Nardin, *The Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (University Park: State University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 156.
23. Andrew Sullivan, *Intimations Pursued: The Voice of Practice in the Conversation of Michael Oakeshott* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2007), 177–178.
24. Michael Oakeshott, "*Leviathan*: a Myth," in *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2000), 162. See also Elizabeth Campbell Corey, *Michael Oakeshott on Religion, Aesthetics, and Politics* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 87.
25. Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), 103.
26. Ibid., 106.

27. Ibid., 146.
28. Michael Oakeshott, "The Tower of Babel," in *Rationalism in Politics*, 479.
29. Michael Oakeshott, "Introduction to Leviathan," in *Hobbes on Civil Association*, 67.
30. Kenneth B. McIntyre, "'What's Gone and What's Past Help…': Oakeshott and Strauss on Historical Explanation," *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 4, no. 1 (2010): 65–101.
31. Luke O'Sullivan, *Oakeshott on History* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2003), 254–257.
32. Oakeshott, "Political Though as a Subject of Historical Enquiry," in *What is History*, 421.
33. Oakeshott, "The Emergence of the History of Thought," in *What is History*, 356.
34. Oakeshott, "Introduction to Leviathan," 81.
35. Oakeshott, "Emergence of the History of Thought," 345.
36. Michael Oakeshott, "Education: The Engagement and Its Frustration," in *The Voice of Liberal Learning: Michael Oakeshott on Education*, ed. Timothy Fuller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 76.
37. Strauss, "Progress and Return?" 243.
38. Leo Strauss, "The Living Issues of Postwar German Philosophy," in Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, trans. Marcus Brainard (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 136 n. IV.
39. McIntyre, "What's Gone and What's Past Help," 71.
40. Ibid., 70: "Professors played a quasi-prophetic role in the public life of the German-speaking parts of Europe, a role which is quite foreign to the Anglophone experience of the place of academic life. For example, Martin Heidegger was treated by both his own students and much of the German population with the kind of adulation which is currently reserved for movie stars and professional athletes."
41. Leo Strauss, "On Collingwood's Philosophy of History," *The Review of Metaphysics* 5, no. 4 (1952): 575.
42. Ibid., 81.
43. Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* (New York: Free Press, 1959), 40.
44. Leo Strauss, "Social Science and Humanism," in *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, 3–12.
45. Paul E. Gottfried, *Leo Strauss and the Conservative Movement in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 157.
46. McIntyre, "What's Gone and What's Past Help," 80.
47. Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy*, 74.
48. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 33.

49. Nathan Tarcov, "Philosophy & History: Tradition and Interpretation in the Work of Leo Strauss," *Polity* 16, no. 1 (Autumn 1983): 18.
50. Leo Strauss and Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Correspondence Concerning *Wahrheit und Methode*," *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 2, no. 10 (1978): 5–6.
51. Strauss, "Living Issues of Postwar German Philosophy," 132.
52. Oakeshott, "Tower of Babel," 466.
53. John G. Gunnell, "The Myth of the Tradition," *American Political Science Review* 72, no. 1 (1978): 127.
54. So well versed in the distinction between the philosopher and the prophet was Strauss that he may have been responsible for coining the term "prophetology." See Tanguay, *Leo Strauss*, Chap. 2.
55. Tarcov, "Philosophy & History," 9.
56. Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny: Corrected and Expanded Edition, Including the Strauss-Kojève Correspondence*, ed. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 199.
57. While the methods with which philosophers have employed to defend their way of life politically would be a legitimate subject for history proper, Strauss did not especially wish to publicize them beyond calling attention to their existence. See Arthur M. Melzer, *Philosophy between the Lines: The Lost History of Esoteric Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).
58. McIntyre, "What's Gone and What's Past Help," 86.
59. Cited in Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy*, 121.
60. Tarcov, "Philosophy & History," 17 n. 10.
61. Michael Oakeshott, "The Moral Life in the Writing of Thomas Hobbes," in *Hobbes on Civil Association*, 126.
62. Ibid., 126.
63. Oakeshott, *Lectures in the History of Political Thought, Selected Writings, Volume II*, ed. Terry Nardin and Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2006), 394.
64. Cf. Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke and Equality: Christian Foundations of Locke's Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
65. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 165.
66. Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 30.
67. Leo Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," *Louis Ginzberg: Jubilee Volume. New York: The American Academy for Jewish Research* (1945): 369.
68. Oakeshott, "Moral Life in the Writing of Thomas Hobbes," 126.
69. Paul Franco, *Michael Oakeshott: An Introduction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 80.

70. Steven B. Smith, "Practical life and the critique of Rationalism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Oakeshott*, ed. Efraim Podoksik (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 149.
71. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 12.
72. Strauss and Gadamer, "Correspondence Concerning *Wahrheit und Methode*," 5.
73. David Boucher, "The Creation of the Past: British Idealism and Michael Oakeshott's Philosophy of History," *History and Theory* 23, no. 2 (May 1984): 207.
74. J. G. A. Pocock, "Prophet and Inquisitor: Or, a Church Built upon Bayonets Cannot Stand: A Comment on Mansfield's 'Strauss's Machiavelli,'" *Political Theory* 3, no. 4 (November 1975): 392–393.
75. Tarcov, "Philosophy & History," 16.
76. Cited in Nardin, *Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott*, 148.
77. Ibid., 149. Cf. O'Sullivan, *Oakeshott on History*, 233.
78. Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 3.
79. Michael Oakeshott, "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind," in *Rationalism in Politics*, 512.
80. Strauss, *City and Man*, 42–43.
81. Oakeshott, "Voice of Poetry," 512.
82. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 323.

CHAPTER 5

The Philosophical Intention and Legacy of Hobbes

Hobbes, whose thought was born of crisis, has a habit of reappearing at times of great uncertainty. His thought experienced an upsurge of interest as liberalism faltered in the interwar decades of the twentieth century. Surveying the recent publications on Hobbes in England and the continent in 1935, however, Michael Oakeshott did not find any particular significance in this return to Hobbes. Noting that the great philosopher of Malmesbury had returned to life, Oakeshott paused to wonder why he had ever passed from view, the outlines of Hobbes's shifting reputation apparently offering little to clarify either of these occurrences. "It is a common, if slightly sordid, history," Oakeshott mused, "and perhaps it is difficult to determine which part of it is more sordid, the death or the exhumation."[1] But already among those Hobbes scholars Oakeshott had singled out in his short review the stirrings were to be found of a meaning in this resurrection. Leo Strauss, for one, was clear in his mind about the meaning of the reemergence of Hobbes as the effective founder of liberalism, a doctrine whose foundations he saw crumbling before his eyes. Strauss would state the position most clearly two decades later when he claimed that "Hobbes's doctrine would not be alive, it would not be studied seriously, if the progress of modernity was separable from the decay of modernity. Modernity has progressed to the point where it has visibly become a problem."[2]

This judgment suggests affinities between Strauss's view of Hobbes and the German critique of modern liberal civilization and it is the German

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Hobbes scholarship, more than what was going on in England, which forms the crucial background to Oakeshott's, as well as Strauss's, turn to Hobbes. For this reason, we cannot ignore another German scholar mentioned in Oakeshott's 1935 survey of recent Hobbes publications. Carl Schmitt, then on his way to becoming the most powerful student of Hobbes within Germany and representing a break with an older tradition of Hobbes study in that country, had revolutionary plans for Hobbes that would have important resonances for Strauss in particular.

Oakeshott was clearly conscious of the fragility of liberal modernity and the decline of its ideals in the 1930s. Like Schmitt, he foresaw a role for Hobbes in rectifying the modern liberal state. While in no way attracted to the doctrine overall, Oakeshott granted that the fascist critique of liberalism's "moral ideal" of economic productivity was "well-founded."[3] Oakeshott had also railed against the "paralysing hand" of Locke:

> Locke's "steady love of liberty" appears worse than slavery to anyone who, like Montaigne, is "besotted with liberty." Democracy, parliamentary government, progress, discussion, and "the plausible ethics of productivity" are notions—all of them inseparable from the Lockian liberalism—which fail now to arouse even opposition; they are not merely absurd and exploded, they are uninteresting.[4]

While this criticism of Locke is indicative of Oakeshott's agreement with Strauss on the question of the decline of liberal modernity,[5] his passionate statement of alignment with Montaigne also provides an intimation of the differences which would emerge between Oakeshott and Strauss on Hobbes. Oakeshott would approach Hobbes as an antidote to Locke and "the plausible ethics of productivity" while Strauss would connect Hobbes with Locke and the modern market society (and thus to what Oakeshott would call the "undignified scramble for suburban pleasures").[6]

While Oakeshott's early reviews of Strauss's work on Hobbes reflected his eagerness to join Strauss in examining Hobbes as a moral thinker, his later essay "The Moral Life in the Writings of Thomas Hobbes" (1960) focused on the sources of his profound divergence with Strauss on the actual content and status of Hobbes's moral teachings. Strauss had stated that "Hobbes's last word is the identification of conscience with the fear of death." In other words, fear of violent death is "the origin of the just intention."[7] This radical reinterpretation of conscience would form the

basis for the role of consciousness in Hegel's moral and political thought. More immediately, however, it imbued the moral outlook of the bourgeoisie with universal significance and provided the ground for Locke's more prudent presentation of the modern liberal society. For Strauss's Hobbes, pride was condemned in favor of the war-avoidant attitude of the bourgeoisie. The conscience condemns those who exceed the shared and fearful consciousness of equal vulnerability to death.

Oakeshott's reading of Hobbes was almost diametrically opposed to Strauss's on this point. In tracing Hobbes's conception of pride to Augustine, Oakeshott attempted to separate pride from Hobbes's critique of vainglory. Augustine had distinguished between the just pride in emulation of God through self-knowledge, self-respect, and self-control from the vainglorious pride born of contention with God (which Oakeshott termed "delusive insolence").[8] A just and noble Augustinian pride provided Oakeshott with a link between Hobbes and Montaigne and Oakeshott even identified "a Montaigne-like self-confidence" in the personality of Hobbes himself.[9] Montaigne had evoked a man who, in Oakeshott's words, is "proud enough to be spared the sorrow of his imperfections and the illusion of his achievements." Behind his exoteric address to the rising bourgeoisie, Oakeshott's Hobbes was sympathetic to, and perhaps even dependent on, this courageous Montaignean character who "knows how to belong to himself."[10] Oakeshott singled out Strauss's assertion that Hobbes had consistently denigrated pride as "the only hindrance to our recognizing this [character] as a genuinely Hobbesian character."[11] Oakeshott provided this self-created individual with a lineage stretching back to Augustine and the Judaic tradition of will and imagination. This tradition had found its philosophical expression in late medieval nominalism and Oakeshott traced the skepticism and individuality of Hobbes's philosophy to these developments.[12]

Strauss understood the quarrel of the ancient and the modern philosophers to center on the "the status of 'individuality.'" In other words, the individuality present in the philosophy of Hobbes signified a new tradition in opposition to classical thought. While Strauss did not name Oakeshott, it is clear that he perceived Oakeshott's interpretation as directly counter to his own and in need of rebuttal. Strauss positioned his reading of Hobbes against "[p]resent-day scholars" who had "overlook[ed] the wood for the trees" in missing the revolutionary foundation which Hobbes had given modern political science. Strauss referred in particular to those "who note that he was deeply indebted to the tradition which he

scorned."[13] (In his introduction to the Blackwell edition of *Leviathan* Oakeshott had asserted that Hobbes's philosophy "belongs to a tradition" and that his claims to fundamental originality are belied by a "real indebtedness" stemming from "the link between scholasticism and modern philosophy which is only now becoming clear to us."[14])

From their common determination to consider Hobbes as a moral thinker, Strauss and Oakeshott's contrasting interpretations multiply until they finally appear in their full light as alternative diagnoses of the moral and political crisis of liberal modernity. This crisis, which was so apparent at the time of the return to Hobbes in the 1930s, must be brought to mind when reconsidering Strauss and Oakeshott on Hobbes. In approaching an argument born of this time and place it is important to have that "sensitiveness to the dominant folly of the epoch" which Oakeshott attributed to Hobbes. Hobbes's thought was the product of a civil conflict which might be termed the illiberal folly of his epoch.[15] Strauss emphasized, originally to Carl Schmitt, that it was "[i]n such a horizon [that] Hobbes completed the foundation of liberalism."[16] The bankruptcy of modern liberalism's moral ideal and the weakening of its political will were apparent in Strauss and Oakeshott's time and their questioning of its foundations took place in a world which had been transformed by its ideas.

The Moral-Anthropological Question

The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis was the product of a realization which came to Strauss while reading Carl Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* (a title which Strauss would himself significantly translate in the form of the Socratic question, "What is political?").[17] While pondering the source of the deep problems he had identified in Schmitt's essay, Strauss came to perceive that it may once again be possible to write about Hobbes from outside the structure of which his thought was the foundation—that is, to write about Hobbes without in any sense being a Hobbesian.[18] More particularly, as Timothy W. Burns has clearly described it, the examination of Schmitt's confusion made it clear to Strauss that "the modern attempt to see human evil as bestial and hence innocent evil was inferior to the starting point of Socratic dialectic, wherein evil is seen as moral depravity."[19] While his study of Spinoza directed Strauss toward a fuller study of Hobbes as a critic of revealed religion,[20] Schmitt had unintentionally underlined the continuing possibilities of a much earlier enlightenment.

In *The Concept of the Political* (first published as a journal article in 1927) Schmitt had attempted to assimilate the Hobbesian anthropological position into the counterrevolutionary anti-Enlightenment tradition to which he himself belonged. In his critique of Schmitt's project, Strauss suggested a deep and, in hindsight, strangely obvious problem with this approach. Strauss did not criticize the anthropological focus which Schmitt had continued with consistently from his earlier essays, concentrating instead on Schmitt's assumption that the modern and premodern anthropological viewpoints are compatible.

In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche relates his discovery of the crucial role of the moral-anthropological question, declaring each philosophy to be the confession of a moral stance—the most penetrating question to be asked of a philosophy is what morality it has aimed for.[21] Framing the question more in terms of anthropology, Schmitt had nevertheless very similarly argued that this is one of the central distinctions on which political thinkers may be interrogated.[22] Strauss noticed that Schmitt began to falter when he classified Hobbes with the authoritarians on the basis of his view of the human in its natural state as a "dangerous being." According to Strauss, this judgment completely overlooked the break with tradition which Hobbes had established. In its natural state the Hobbesian human is unquestionably a dangerous creature. However, Hobbes was concerned with the fearfulness of these circumstances rather than their evil—and for good reason. In this state of nature human beings may carry forth horrific projects in perfect innocence. They have a natural right to anything, even one another's bodies. In this situation, rights abound while justice is nowhere present.[23] Strauss calls attention to the novelty of this in his employment of the paradoxical "*innocent* 'evil'"[24]; Hobbes's human is, as Strauss would later stress to his Schmitt-influenced friend, Alexandre Kojève, "a being that lacks awareness of sacred restraints."[25] Some decades later Strauss would reflect that the ancient philosophers had approached the political phenomena "not [with] the attitude of the detached observer who looks at political things in the way in which a zoologist looks at the big fishes swallowing the small ones"[26]—a clear allusion to Schmitt finding political significance in the morally neutral spectacle of "the large fish which devour the small ones."[27] In the anthropology of the ancient philosophers, humans are at first viewed as blighted by moral depravity.

While innocent beasts, Hobbesian human beings already possess the firstlings of a perception about what is right and the capacity to reason from their fearful natural situation toward consent in the establishment of an

artificial order. Far from being an integral part of a natural cosmos, human beings are forced from the beginning to plot their rebellion and escape from nature. At this first realization, as Strauss argued, "reason" and nature are separate.[28] Strauss recalled attending Julius Ebbinghaus's "lively" lectures on Hobbes in the early 1920s.[29] Strauss identified Ebbinghaus as one of the handful of perceptive scholars who was aware that Hobbes's teachings opened up this "second cave" of artificial human culture (beneath and beyond the "cave" of natural opinion in Platonic political philosophy).[30] Strauss encouraged Schmitt to recognize that this modern basis of culture divided him from Hobbes. Hobbes, unlike Schmitt, was determined to define an anti-Aristotelian distinction between political association and nature. While the warlike and existential state of nature appeared to offer support to Schmitt's moral protest against modern liberal culture, by this doctrine Hobbes had positioned his civil philosophy not on one of the extreme wings of the anthropological dispute, but defiantly in the middle. As he declared to Francis Godolphin in the dedication of *Leviathan*, he had written against "those that contend on one side for too great Liberty, and on the other side for too much Authority." In an illiberal age he was still correct in stressing that it is "hard to pass between the points of both unwounded."[31] Whether Hobbes was the progenitor of the modern understanding of human culture and historical progress will be one of the main points of contention with Oakeshott to be explored below. At any rate, in an epoch formed by modern liberal culture, Schmitt had concluded the final section of *Political Theology* (1922) by echoing the great counterrevolutionaries of the nineteenth century who had believed that "in the face of radical evil, the only solution is dictatorship," and that, once freed of the question of legitimacy, authority and anarchy would "confront each other in absolute decisiveness and form a clear antithesis."[32] Strauss himself recalled Schmitt to this earlier work and his assertion that "the core of the political idea is the *morally* exacting decision."[33] As David Janssens has clearly summarized it, the true Schmittian position "is a defense of the moral seriousness of life, threatened with complete extinction by the onslaught of a society focused on amusement and consumerism."[34] In contrast, Schmitt's attempt at a "neutral" concept of politics was dependent on the position of modern civilization.

Schmitt was influenced by Strauss's critique. Having referred to Hobbes as "by far the greatest and perhaps the sole truly systematic political thinker" in the first version of *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt retreated in later editions.[35] But for Strauss, the modern break with the classical

understanding of culture—a break first enacted systematically by Hobbes—had begun to appear clearly and, for the first time, even reversible. He set about observing modern liberal Enlightenment culture from the deserted position of the Socratic-Platonic enlightenment:

> The critique of liberalism that Schmitt has initiated can therefore only be completed when we succeed in gaining a horizon beyond liberalism. Within such a horizon Hobbes achieved the foundation of liberalism. A radical critique of liberalism is therefore only possible on the basis of an adequate understanding of Hobbes.[36]

And while Strauss's language of "a horizon beyond liberalism" has led to the dark suggestion that he was about to embark on a fascist critique of liberalism, fascism—not to mention Nietzsche, the man Strauss would later call that movement's "stepgrandfather"—is well within the horizon of Hobbes and the "philosophers of power."[37] The anthropological horizon from which he would launch his reappraisal of modernity was one Strauss described as being marked by neither the unforgiving brutality of Nietzschean naturalism, nor the mean and resentful spirit which various forms of supernaturalism have given rise to.[38]

Described in such terms, the position from which Strauss would begin his exploration beyond the Hobbesian horizon is similar to that which Oakeshott would identify in Hobbes's thought itself. For Oakeshott, Hobbes was not only a great and systematic thinker, but a profound literary artist of the renaissance of Western Europe which began in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and had continued into Hobbes's own time. Oakeshott contrasted Hobbes and his epoch with the more radical Enlightenment of the Baconians and *philosophes*. Like Strauss, Oakeshott intended to move beyond the natural-supernatural dichotomy. He thus had sufficient cause to welcome the appearance of a study of Hobbes which implied an interpretation of the history of political thought which ran radically counter to his own.

The Moral Foundation

When Strauss arrived in England at the beginning of 1934 he was already known among political scientists for an article on Hobbes which had appeared in *Recherches philosphiques* in April 1933.[39] Dividing his time between Cambridge and London, Strauss also visited Hardwick where he

discovered what he believed to be the earliest evidence of Hobbes's intellectual development. In the summer of 1934, Strauss wrote to a friend that some English professors had taken him under their wings.[40] These men included R. H. Tawney at the London School of Economics and Ernest Barker at Cambridge.[41] Among the Barker circle at Cambridge, Strauss may have met Michael Oakeshott.

The product of this period of study was *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis* (1936). Oakeshott was moved to write an extended review of the book, implying that it had reopened a perspective on Hobbes which he had been waiting for. While signaling his own different viewpoint, he deemed the study to be "the most original book on Hobbes which ha[d] appeared in many years,"[42] praising the pages devoted to the shift from aristocratic virtue to bourgeois morality as "among the most acute and brilliant in his book."[43]

This positive reaction reflected the common aim of the two scholars in attempting to shift Hobbes's philosophy away from the naturalistic approach in which both felt it had long been misrepresented. Strauss had clearly explained why Hobbes must be taken as separate from naturalism. For Hobbes, natural right was "primarily right of man, whereas Spinoza's point of departure is the natural right of all things, and he thus misses the specifically human problem of right." It is precisely the human and moral foundation of Hobbes's thought which allowed him to avoid naturalism and its "annulment of the conception of justice as such."[44]

For Strauss, the source of this foundation was a "new moral attitude." As Oakeshott surmised, this "new" denoted two novelties which Strauss claimed to have detected in Hobbes's thought. The "new moral attitude" was both new to Hobbes in that it constituted a break with the manners of the aristocratic milieu to which he had belonged in the Devonshire household, and it was new to political philosophy in that Hobbes had turned against Aristotle and the method of his *Rhetoric*.[45] Strauss argued that this moral foundation was both the basis of Hobbes's bourgeois viewpoint and the genesis of his political philosophy.

Strauss took Hobbes's scientific presentation of these ideas to be a cover for this moral stance. Strauss's Hobbes was not above sidelong glances at his continental peers, Descartes and Galileo, and under their influence his determination to build a "science" out of his moral outlook became all consuming. Hobbes was thus drawn into the modern scientific revolution. But the basis and genesis of Hobbes's thought remained in the "the moral and humanist antithesis of fundamentally unjust vanity and

fundamentally just fear of violent death."[46] Hobbes was the progenitor of a bourgeois and technological anthropology and Strauss would later refer to a passage which he identified as containing "the nerve" of Hobbes's argument[47]:

> The train of regulated thoughts is of two kinds: one, when of an effect imagined we seek the causes or means that produce it; and this is common to man and beast. The other is, when imagining anything whatsoever, we seek all the possible effects that can by it be produced; that is to say, we imagine what we can do with it when we have it. Of which I have not at any time seen any sign, but in man only.[48]

As Strauss summarized: "man is distinguished from the brutes by the faculty of considering phenomena as causes of possible effects, and therefore by awareness of potentiality and power."[49] Needless to say, this was distant from the classical human being who had had been defined by a position between the gods and the beasts.

Strauss's reading also ran hard against Oakeshott's intentions for Hobbes. Oakeshott was determined to find strands of earlier thought in Hobbes's moral position and he responded by arguing that "Hobbes's theory may not be of the *simple* 'naturalistic' character that it has been supposed to be, but neither is it of the *simple* 'moral' character Dr. Strauss suggests."[50] Oakeshott believed that Hobbes's moral teaching "has its place in the medieval tradition" in exhibiting a Stoic-Christian influence rather than a reaction against Aristotle's theory of the passions as presented in the *Rhetoric*.[51] This anticipated the role Oakeshott would grant to Augustine in providing continuity to the Hobbesian position on pride.

Oakeshott rejected Strauss's technological and *praxis*-oriented interpretation of Hobbes's anthropology. Related to this was Oakeshott's claim that Strauss had neglected Hobbes's connections with Epicureanism in declaring a drastic break with the past. For Oakeshott, Hobbes had effectively systematized Epicureanism out of a scattering of aphorisms.[52]

However, from Strauss's perspective Oakeshott would consistently overlook the link between technology and the politicization of these Epicurean ideas. In the new political "Epicureanism" of Hobbes, in common with the modern science of Bacon and others, human beings are to experience "a liberation from nature, not a liberation to nature" as the original Epicureans had conceived of their own solution.[53] Strauss considered that this initial impetus for the break with classical Epicureanism

had come from Christianity. Strauss, in partial contrast with Oakeshott, emphasized the practical character of Christianity. Under the influence of Christianity the contemplative imperturbability or *ataraxia* of the Epicurean was transformed into an active and public concern with the peace and tranquility of society as a whole.[54] Strauss considered this politicization to represent a decisive break in the tradition of Epicureanism—at any rate, certainly more of a break than Oakeshott allowed for in urging that such "striking differences" not "obscure the great similarity" between Hobbes and Epicurus.[55] Strauss could even quote Burke to the effect that the modern "Epicureans" had become "turbulent." The "political hedonism" and the "political atheism" which had come together in the thought of Hobbes had turned Epicureanism on its head.[56]

Those who have most closely assessed Oakeshott's reading of Hobbes tend to agree with Strauss that the practical and utilitarian ethos of Hobbes's thought cannot be skimmed over as lightly as Oakeshott had done. In surveying Oakeshott's work on Hobbes Noel Malcolm points to a number of passages which reveal Hobbes's affinities with Oakeshott's Rationalist. He concludes that "Hobbes's whole cast of mind was much closer to that of the rationalist—portrayed in Oakeshott's essay, 'Rationalism in Politics'—than Oakeshott seems to have been willing to admit."[57] Ian Tregenza similarly argues that "Hobbes clearly saw his philosophy to be of utilitarian value," noting Hobbes's phrase "utility of practice."[58]

Strauss also identified Hobbes as one of Oakeshott's Rationalists (in almost as many words). For Strauss, Hobbes's practical orientation reflected the defining characteristic of modern thought in general. As he wrote to Eric Voegelin in March 1950:

> [T]he root of all modern darkness from the seventeenth century on is the obscuring of the difference between theory and praxis, an obscuring that first leads to a reduction of praxis to theory (this is the meaning of so-called rationalism) and then, in retaliation, to the rejection of theory in the name of praxis that is no longer intelligible as praxis.[59]

From this point of view, Oakeshott's "Hobbes" may have been more indicative of the "retaliation" against the kind of "rationalism" which the actual seventeenth-century Hobbes was advancing. Considering the polemical nature of the essays Oakeshott was writing at this time (which would later appear as *Rationalism and Politics* [1962]), this criticism may

be close to the bone. At any rate, Strauss and Oakeshott's opposing interpretations on the practical and technological character of Hobbes came to center on some of the most memorable moments of Hobbesian prose.

Hobbes refers to the predicament of mankind, trapped in "a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death … because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more."[60] Oakeshott's treatment of this and related passages of *Leviathan* was informed by Christianity, although not in a simple or traditional sense. Understanding salvation as necessarily "in the world" and available in the present allowed Oakeshott to read Hobbes's civil theory as providing the circumstances for the achievement of felicity as moments of poetic and religious intensity.

This ingenious reading could not be recognized by Strauss who held to the implications of the break which Hobbes had established with antiquity, arguing that it is a mistake to assume that Hobbes's bleak depiction of ceaseless motion is to be redeemed in contemplation and repose. Hobbes had broken with the ancient tradition of *eudaemonia* or *beautitudo*.[61] The only "salvation" or happiness promised by his new political science and its acknowledgment of "endless progress from desire to desire, from power to even greater power" was "positive science as the foundation of technology."[62]

One of the Last Schoolmen

The Hobbes revealed by Oakeshott in his introduction to *Leviathan* is primarily concerned with epistemology.[63] Given that the epistemological revolution of nominalism predates the appearance of modern science by centuries, this allowed a very different Hobbes to step forward out of the Renaissance. Oakeshott distinguished Hobbes from the Enlightenment of the Baconians and *philosophes* and separated him from his scientific contemporaries—Bacon and Descartes, Galileo and Newton. Oakeshott presented Hobbes as having given political expression to the late medieval nominalism which appeared with Ockham and others as the culmination of scholasticism. Oakeshott characterized Hobbes as the political translator of this "theorem," arguing that "the system of Hobbes's philosophy lies in his conception of the nature of philosophical knowledge, and not in any doctrine about the world."[64] Oakeshott also considered Hobbes to have been a profound literary artist who was fortunate in being born in this age marked by the skepticism and individuality which remained as

"the gifts of late scholastic nominalism."[65] Oakeshott associated this circumscribed epistemology with Montaigne's more poetic presentation of skepticism.[66] However, Hobbes was far more consistent and thoroughgoing in combining the poetical and the methodical strands of skepticism which were alive in his epoch:

> Scepticism was, of course, in the air he breathed; but in an age of sceptics he was the most radical of them all. His was not the elegiac scepticism of Montaigne, nor the brittle net in which Pascal struggled, nor was it the methodological doubt of Descartes; for him it was both a method and a conclusion, purging and creative. It is not the technicalities of his scepticism … that are so remarkable, but its ferocity. A medieval passion overcomes him as he sweeps aside into a common abyss of absurdity both the believer in eternal truth and the industrious seeker after truths; both faith and science.[67]

This reading had been foreshadowed in Oakeshott's longer review of Strauss's book on Hobbes where Oakeshott had criticized Strauss's "unduly narrow and too precise" definition of science. Oakeshott was maneuvering to depict Hobbes's "science" in the quainter, more imprecise, and (almost) medieval sense which his reading required. Hobbes's thought was characteristic of the lovely, dark, and deep moment he inhabited between medieval thought and modern science. Hobbes's "science" looked back to the developments in late scholastic philosophy and was "really conceived throughout [only] as an epistemology."[68]

Strauss viewed Hobbes as having stood in "that fertile moment when the classical and theological tradition was already shaken, and a tradition of modern science not yet formed and established."[69] However, for Strauss, Hobbes's haste in establishing a break with this "classical and theological tradition" was one of the most characteristic features of his thought. Hobbes's replaced the traditional primacy of moral obligation with the right of the isolated individual to self-defense.[70] In circumventing discussion of virtue with the assumption that all are driven by fear toward peace,[71] Hobbes put an end to the questions which had inspired the classical philosophers and assured that his affinities would be with thinkers in his future—the most politically significant of which would be Locke and Marx.

Oakeshott wished to present a Hobbes who participated in the past as well as the future. Yet he would most consistently associate Hobbes with Augustine—a thinker of Hobbes's past. The language of Oakeshott's

introduction to *Leviathan*, while undeniably elegant, revealed him struggling with this continuity amid the novelty of Hobbes's achievement. Oakeshott asserted that "the greatness of Hobbes is not that he began a new tradition" in political thought, but rather that he "reflected the changes" which had been "pioneered" in the centuries preceding him. Oakeshott would link Hobbes with poetry and myth in describing *Leviathan* in terms which he believed could apply to "any masterpiece":

> [It] is an end and a beginning; it is the flowering of the past and the seed-box of the future. Its importance is that it is the first great achievement in the long-projected attempt of European thought to reembody in a new myth the Augustinian epic of the Fall and Salvation of mankind.[72]

In this way Oakeshott's Hobbes took shape against Strauss's reading of Hobbes. And while allusive references make it difficult to prove, Strauss's interpretation of Hobbes would also become more explicit in response to the challenge of Oakeshott's reading.

There is no doubt that Strauss read Oakeshott's introduction to *Leviathan*, an essay which became influential on both sides of the Atlantic. Timothy Fuller, who would befriend Oakeshott and become his most dedicated American student, was among those who were immediately impressed by this piece of writing:

> My first encounter with Michael Oakeshott was on a Saturday afternoon in the library of Kenyon College in the fall of 1959 when, with the place mostly all to myself, I found on a shelf the Blackwell's Political Texts edition of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, edited by a certain Michael Oakeshott.… From the first sentence, "Thomas Hobbes, the second son of an otherwise undistinguished vicar…" I was captivated. I read through the whole essay as the afternoon wore on.[73]

Such an enchanter of youth could not have escaped the attention of Strauss, who was himself fishing for brilliant young minds. Strauss cites from Oakeshott's Blackwell edition in his own most important essay on Hobbes, originally published as "On the Spirit of Hobbes' Political Philosophy" (1950),[74] and later forming Chapter V, part A, of *Natural Right and History*. Among other tasks Strauss had set himself in this essay, it is apparent that he intended to respond to all of the significant claims which Oakeshott had made in his introduction to *Leviathan*, most of which built, in any case, on Oakeshott's earlier long review of Strauss's *The*

Political Philosophy of Hobbes. And while Jan-Werner Müller has sounded a wise and sober warning against the temptation to detect *Dialog unter Abwesenden* willy-nilly in the wake of Heinrich Meier's powerful work on the Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss connection,[75] there is nevertheless a sense in which Strauss and Oakeshott become central obstacles to one another from this point in their interpretations of Hobbes. This is apparent in the second paragraph of Strauss's chapter in which he implicitly argued against Oakeshott's attempt to read the main thrust of Hobbes's doctrine as a continuation of philosophical and civilizational currents from the middle ages. In the face of what Strauss suggested was (at best) the eccentric nature of Oakeshott's interpretation, Strauss noted Hobbes's own revolutionary claim to be the founder of political science against an ancient political philosophy which he regarded as "rather a dream than a science." Strauss went on to clarify the one continuity which he would allow for in the political philosophy of Hobbes:

> Present-day scholars are not impressed by Hobbes' claim. They note that he was deeply indebted to the tradition which he scorned. Some of them come close to suggesting that he was one of the last schoolmen. Lest we overlook the wood for the trees, we shall reduce for a while the significant results of present-day polymathy into the compass of one sentence. Hobbes was indebted to tradition for a single but momentous idea: he accepted on trust the view that political philosophy or political science is possible or necessary.[76]

Strauss was referring to the following passage in Oakeshott's introduction to *Leviathan* in which Oakeshott had attempted to reconcile Hobbes's provocative claims of novelty and originality with his own reading which required affinities and continuities with earlier traditions:

> And when he claimed that civil philosophy was "no older than my own book *De Cive*," he was expressing at once the personal achievement of having gone afresh to the facts of human consciousness for his interpretation of the meaning of civil association, and also that universal sense of newness with which his age appreciated its own intellectual accomplishments. But, for all that, his philosophy belongs to a tradition. Perhaps the truth is that Hobbes was as original as he thought he was, and to acknowledge his real indebtedness he would have required to see (what he could not be expected to see) the link between scholasticism and modern philosophy which is only now becoming clear to us.[77]

Strauss did not quite claim that Oakeshott's Hobbes was one of the last of the scholastics, and indeed Oakeshott did not quite claim as much of Hobbes.[78] But Strauss evocation of "polymathy" is ironically redolent of Oakeshott's portrait of Hobbes's approach. Oakeshott had claimed that Strauss had given Hobbes's philosophy "an overly systematic character"—Oakeshott himself viewing Hobbes as "a figure in that period of restless, sometimes distracted, curiosity and activity" before Kant and Hegel showed that professionals could be philosophers too.[79] But Strauss seemed to be reminding Oakeshott that Hobbes had also been working to a coherent plan of action, despite these amateurish appearances. The additional significance of Strauss's point is that the skepticism which Oakeshott detected in Hobbes's supposed continuity with late scholasticism, in fact, masked a powerful dogmatism which would become one of the fatal characteristics of modern political philosophy. In his haste to avoid "the cavils of the skeptics" Hobbes consigned not only the possibility of religious orthodoxy to a benighted past, but also, and at the same stroke, those political opinions which had been the basis of the classical approach to political philosophy.[80] The purpose of the final chapter of Strauss's 1936 book had been to demonstrate the extent to which Hobbes had been oblivious to the true foundation of Platonic political philosophy. In a wider sense, this meant that the *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* had not yet been staged on its true plane and the claims of ancient philosophy could be heard anew.

Strauss went on to attack Oakeshott's specific claims about Hobbes's continuity with the scholastic nominalists. Strauss pointed out that nominalism of the kind which Oakeshott wished to identify in Hobbes was tied to nature in a way which was untenable for Hobbes's "new political science" in which human beings and nature are separated. Ockham and the late scholastics had allowed for the mysterious workings of nature in the formation of general concepts in the intellect—"or that the 'anticipations' by virtue of which we take our bearings in ordinary life and in science are products of nature" (*natura occulte operator in universalibus*). The disharmony between the universe and human consciousness was to be fundamental and total in Hobbes's intended new science and he was compelled to break with these premodern nominalists.[81] Strauss's argument here is uncontroversial and we have it on the authority of Noel Malcolm that Oakeshott "misrepresent[ed]" Hobbes's nominalism.[82]

Strauss also took aim at the poetic and religious tradition Oakeshott had sought to evoke in associating Hobbes with Montaigne and Pascal. Oakeshott had asserted that "Hobbes, no less than others of his time—Montaigne

and Pascal, for example—felt the impact of [existential] fear." Oakeshott had even undercut the solipsistic assumptions of Hobbesian individuality in claiming that Hobbes had "died in mortal fear of hell-fire."[83] Strauss noted of the optimistic and worldly tenor of Hobbes's writings: Why did he not declare with Pascal, *Le silence eternel des ces espaces infinis m'effraie*?[84] Strauss argued that the confident tone reflected Hobbes's vista at the foundations of his new science from which he could see the geometrical outlines of his own promised land:

> "Scientific materialism" could not become possible if one did not first succeed in guaranteeing the possibility of science against the skepticism engendered by materialism. Only the anticipatory revolt against a materialistically understood universe could make possible a science of such a universe. One had to discover or to invent an island that would be exempt from the flux of mechanical causation. Hobbes had to consider the possibility of a natural island. An incorporeal mind was out of the question. On the other hand, what he had learned from Plato and Aristotle made him realize somehow that the corporeal mind, composed of very smooth and round particles with which Epicurus remained satisfied, was an inadequate solution. He was forced to wonder whether the universe did not leave room for an artificial island, for an island to be created by science.[85]

An unfathomable Calvinist divinity had not been Hobbes's overriding epistemological concern in creating his new science. This problem was only an analogue to the problem of a physical-materialist account of the universe. Over the decades, Strauss became increasingly explicit on what he believed to be the well-founded fact of Hobbes's atheism.[86] Hobbes's science answered to the demands of the politicization of this Enlightenment principle while at the same time contributing to the auxiliary aim of a political hedonism which would secure the material attractions of the Enlightenment promise. As the threat from religion subsided into the historical background, the new science would still require a firm foundation against skepticism from physics, with its potentially endless chains of causes (the genetic causal construction of the understanding of universe) implying a nature inscrutable to more than a causal, hypothetical reasoning. What Hobbes occasionally called "right reason" can take no hold on any "nature" beyond these hypothetical imaginings. A break with all understandings of reason which are tied up with the irresolvable issue of the nature of the universe was essential for Hobbes's project. Far from embracing these dark and skeptical beginnings and moving toward a

Montaignean Stoicism, Strauss understood Hobbes to be developing human artistry in an opposing direction, staking the prospects for felicity on the firm foundations of that which is fully intelligible and capable of infinite progress.

Oakeshott's introduction to *Leviathan* had questioned the view that Hobbes had been an atheist and this may even have contributed to Strauss's decision to become more forceful in his assertions on this point. In Hobbes's own time, "when his doctrines were a storm-centre,"[87] alleging that the writer of *Leviathan* was an atheist had been a common and conventional line of attack. But Strauss sought to raise the implications of Hobbes's atheism in a post-Nietzschean environment in which the accusation no longer contained the lightning that it once had.[88] On the contrary, it could even leave the accuser appearing naïve and old-fashioned. It may have even been Oakeshott who would benefit from the liberal prejudice against Hobbes's religious contemporaries in making his assertion that Hobbes (a man who had compared such things to old wives' tales) had "died in mortal fear of hell-fire."[89] On firmer terrain textually, Oakeshott described Hobbes's incorporation of a civil theology based on the view that "[r]eligious belief is something not to be avoided in this world, and is [even] something of the greatest practical importance."[90] It is clear that it was necessary for Oakeshott to discover some kind of religious sensibility in Hobbes to ensure that the non-substantiveness of his civil association could be guided by the virtuous idiom of conduct characteristic of those noble individuals capable of the kind of rich and generous inner life (which in *On Human Conduct* [1975] he would term "self-enactment").

Although Oakeshott may have been correct in perceiving that Hobbes had exposed the existential predicament of human beings, this does not appear to be the side of the coin Hobbes set his focus on, at least in his public philosophy. Far from aiming at a chastened role for human reason, Hobbes foresaw the overawing edifice of an accumulation of knowledge to be built on the unshakable foundations of his new method. This artifice would crowd out, or even replace, the mystery of existence. Whether or not Hobbes privately followed the noble skepticism which Oakeshott celebrated, he must have been aware that it would not supply the stable ground required for his project. The goal of a proscriptive, rather than descriptive, political science drew Hobbes into a dogmatic skepticism perhaps far in excess of his private commonsense. For Strauss's Hobbes, a natural science which affirmed Epimetheus would demand a political science grounded in Promethean art:

> Epimetheus, the being in whom thought follows production, represents nature in the sense of materialism, according to which thought comes later than thoughtless bodies and their thoughtless motions. The subterraneous work of the gods is work without light, without understanding, and has therefore fundamentally the same meaning as the work of Epimetheus. Art is represented by Prometheus, by Prometheus' theft, by his rebellion against the will of the gods above.[91]

A progressive artifice of human culture was Hobbes's most effective response to the skepticism resulting from a physics which pursued an endless series of causes, and a theology centered on an inscrutable worker of miracles.[92] It was not only this, however. Where Oakeshott deemed Hobbes to be responding to "the exigencies of his time" in outlining the implications of his doctrine to the adherents of positive religion,[93] Strauss understood him 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.[94]

The Moralization of Pride

Oakeshott would not engage with Strauss on Hobbes again until 1960 when he took up the question of moral obligation in "The Moral Life in the Writings of Thomas Hobbes." Strauss had taken Hobbes at his word where he asserted in Chapter 14 of *Leviathan* that the first "law of nature" commands "[t]hat every man, ought to endeavor peace, as far as he can hope of obtaining it." Intention is equated with endeavor in Strauss's account of Hobbes theory of obligation and Strauss had firmly declared that "Hobbes's last word is the identification of conscience with the fear of death." While Hobbes had deemed too severe the theological doctrine whereby the "first motions of the mind" might be sins, he had still suggested that it is "safer" to lean in this direction than the other. Strauss argued that Hobbes stood with Kant and the Christian tradition on the conscience and the importance of intentions over the outcomes of actions.[95]

Oakeshott considered this reading to be a paradigmatic attempt to repackage Hobbes as a leveling and collectivizing moralist of the common good, understanding Strauss to have argued that "activity which springs from fear of shameful death and is designed to mitigate that fear alone has the approval of conscience and is obligatory." With conscience creeping

into the picture, guilt attaches itself to all "irrational" endeavors regardless of their outcomes, even if peace might be expected to be among them. If this were the case, Oakeshott argued, it would mean that Hobbes had proposed "a doctrine which identifies moral conduct with prudentially rational conduct: the just man is the man who has been tamed by fear." Oakeshott believed this to be an unacceptable reduction of Hobbes's moral theory.[96]

For Oakeshott, the endeavor for peace was a right which had the additional approval of reason; for Strauss, it was a moral obligation sanctioned by conscience. The details of Oakeshott's argument against Strauss on this point have been carefully illuminated by Jonathan A. Boyd.[97] However, Boyd concludes that the question is a diversion from the real problem between Oakeshott and Strauss. Oakeshott noted that "Hobbes was usually so much more concerned with elucidating adequate motives or 'causes' for what is alleged to be just conduct than with finding adequate reasons for calling it just."[98] As Boyd realizes, Oakeshott would "simply exclud[e] Strauss's claim that Hobbes's account of obligation ultimately rests upon *one reason*."[99] In following Strauss as closely as this significant but partial revision allowed, Oakeshott concluded that "the sufficient *cause* or *motive* for endeavouring peace is found in fear of shameful death: fear prompts reason and reason discloses what must be done to avoid the circumstances which generate fear."[100]

Oakeshott's real divergence from Strauss becomes apparent in his ingenious suggestion that Hobbes had relied on "the moralization of pride."[101] Ironically, Oakeshott would advance this reading by employing some of Strauss's hermeneutical principles against Strauss's own interpretation. Oakeshott found the most fertile ground for this interpretation in the problem of the immediate causes of the coming-into-being of the covenant.

Hobbes's had not lingered over the details of how a covenant of mutually authorized wills might actually be achieved in the state of nature. The scope for force and fraud provided shaky ground on which to build any trust in mutual covenants (and there is obvious room to doubt whether the Leviathan could ever come about by covenant alone, even considering the relevant differences between collective and individual arrangements). Noting this possible gap in Hobbes's account, Oakeshott seized on some apparently secondary points and argued that they gestured toward a crucial but deliberately understated role for the noble character in the establishment of the covenant. In addition to the "self-interest instructed by

reason" which Strauss had held to be obligatory, Oakeshott claimed to have discovered a more generous motive in "the nobility which is too proud to calculate the possible loss entailed in obedience to a 'sovereign' who lacks power to enforce his commands."[102]

Hobbes had revealed what (to those of more illiberal times) would have been considered evidence of his own cowardice. Declaring himself "the first of all that fled" civil war in England, he celebrated Sidney Godolphin who had remained to fight for his cause and had been killed in battle. The late Mr. Godolphin was more fondly remembered for leaving 200 pounds to Hobbes and must be included among those discussed in Chapter 15 of *Leviathan* where Hobbes acknowledges "[t]hat which gives to humane Actions the relish of Justice, is a certain Noblenesse or Gallantnesse of courage, (rarely found,) by which a man scorns to be beholding for the contentment of his life, to fraud, or breach of promise."[103]

Even with the movement away from aristocratic virtue which Strauss had demonstrated in Hobbes's writings, this passage had made its way into the later *Leviathan*. This was an isolated positive statement of the virtues of pride and courage, but as Jonathan A. Boyd has pointed out,[104] Strauss was himself known for advising readers not to overlook the wood for the trees in such instances. As Strauss wrote in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*:

> Only a minority of readers will admit that if an author makes contradictory statements on a subject, his view may well be expressed by the statements that occur least frequently or only once, while his view is concealed by the contradictory statements that occur most frequently or even in all cases but one; for many readers do not fully grasp what it means that the truth, or the seriousness, of a proposition is not increased by the frequency with which the proposition is repeated.[105]

Oakeshott was aware that his argument would appear overly ingenious, if not disingenuous, to those who could not accept esotericism.[106] Resigned to the limited proof he could offer for his reading, Oakeshott proceeded to argue that those who were "careless of the consequences of being bilked" would honor a covenant of trust with their lives. Being "proudly careless" of their own rights, these men could take the first and decisive steps in the establishment of a common power. Oakeshott considered Godolphin to be emblematical of those on whom this covenant of wills might depend while its authority was not yet awesomely apparent.[107]

Strauss had not overlooked this passage of *Leviathan* and returned to it several times. In his initial interpretation he offered that "Hobbes allowed himself to be carried away by the authority of Descartes," having come under the influence of the theory of *générosité* which he had encountered during the composition of *Leviathan*.[108] Oakeshott doubted the coherence of this argument in Strauss's own terms, pointing out that it was uncharacteristic of the single-mindedness and "exaggerated consistency" of Strauss's overall vision of Hobbes. For how could such a programmatic philosopher be "capable of momentarily adopting a strange doctrine under the immediate influence of Descartes"?[109]

Strauss would return to this "passion of generosity" in a review first published in the mid-1950s in which he chided Raymond Polin for "overlook[ing] the three-fold reference in the *Leviathan* to generosity as a passion inciting men to justice."[110] However, almost a decade later, at the beginning of his essay on Machiavelli in *History of Political Philosophy*, Strauss attempted to foreclose the problem by arguing that a reading (such as Oakeshott's) which placed significance on this "generosity" as a cause of peace could only be plausible "at first glance." Strauss considered such a reading to be ruled out by the remainder of the passage in which the magnanimity demonstrated in "appearing not to need to break [one's word]" was deemed "a generosity too rarely found to be presumed on, especially in the pursuers of wealth, command, or sensual pleasure, which are the greatest part of mankind." Strauss concluded that Hobbes had left no doubt that "[t]he passion to be reckoned upon is fear."[111] In other words, the conscience is based in fear of death and not in a majestic and self-restraining pride.

Oakeshott had argued that the greater part of mankind need not be the part of mankind which Hobbes's covenant relied on initially, nor that part which must at all times be "reckoned on." Oakeshott suggested that "it is not because pride does not provide an adequate motive for a successful endeavour for peace, but because of the dearth of noble characters." Nobility may, therefore, still be "a necessary cause of the *civitas*" and even the most vital one in its initial stages and defense.[112]

Given his determination to associate Hobbes with Augustine and Montaigne, it seems likely that Oakeshott was using this founding moment of the covenant—effectively the founding moment of liberalism—to assert a society-wide role for the noble character capable of a "morality of individuality." This is the moral idiom which corresponds to the civil theory Oakeshott would later outline in *On Human Conduct*. Oakeshott

wished to recall liberal modernity to a foundation of magnanimous pride and Renaissance individuality. This was necessary in an epoch in which liberal civil society had declined into narrow-hearted acquisitiveness.

One of Oakeshott's purposes in reinterpreting Hobbes on civil association was to counter arguments (such as those of Strauss) that individuality in a modern civil society represents a public disregard for virtue. Far from being a merely non-substantive association, as free for the "lion" as the "ox" (Oakeshott would privately characterize this vision of Isaiah as "[t]he tame world of universal mediocrity"),[113] Oakeshott believed that the rediscovery of the true moral foundation of liberal modernity and the civil association would allow for the conditions whereby the more generous and noble "lions"—being those citizens capable of a rich inner life of high sensibility and adventurous self-expression—would come to predominate (in tone, if not in number) and set the pattern of many of the public practices. However, this picture was underpinned by that poetic and religious understanding of Hobbes which was challenged by Strauss's depiction of him as an atheistic technologist.

In the winter of 1964 Strauss taught Hobbes's *Leviathan* and *De Cive* in conjunction with C. B. Macpherson's *The Theory of Possessive Individualism*. As he explained to the class, he had a "simple" reason for choosing this secondary text: "Hobbes and Locke belong together. The accepted view—the nasty Hobbes and the nice Locke—is too superficial."[114] In other words, Macpherson's argument supported what had been, for an American audience, the most controversial thesis of Strauss's *Natural Right and History*. A review of Macpherson's book would also receive an important place in the last collection of essays Strauss prepared for publication, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (1983).

Macpherson referred briefly to Oakeshott in *Possessive Individualism* and in return Oakeshott gave Macpherson short shrift in one of his most uncivil footnotes, declaring that the reduction of the unfolding of Renaissance individuality "into a history of so-called bourgeois market-society capitalism is a notorious botch." In a characterization which must also be seen to touch on Strauss,[115] he further asserted that "anyone who believes that Frère Jean des Entommeurs or Parini were 'possessive individualists', or that it was of such persons that Pico della Mirandola, or Montaigne or Hobbes or Pascal or Kant or Blake or Nietzsche or Kierkegaard wrote is capable of believing anything."[116] And although none of these figures (other than Hobbes) was mentioned by Macpherson, this grouping reminds us of the degree to which poetic and

religious life mixed harmoniously with theoretical contemplation for Oakeshott.[117] Oakeshott refused to grant the practical orientation which was the basis for Strauss's understanding of Hobbes as the founder of modern liberalism.

In conclusion, the partial dialogue between Oakeshott and Strauss further reveals their contrasting positions on the continuing viability of the foundations of modernity. Strauss understood the modern conscience to equate with the bourgeois evasion of political life and its attendant possibility of violent death. For Oakeshott, these bourgeois values had obscured an original Hobbesian foundation which had relied on 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. It may be that Strauss's reading of Hobbes shows Oakeshott's reading to be (at certain points) untenable. That Oakeshott "unearthed (or, bluntly put: invented)" a Montaignean character in the writings of Hobbes may be difficult to deny.[118] But perhaps Oakeshott had not intended to provide a merely textually faithful commentary. Oakeshott constructed his interpretation from reasonable speculations on the occasional aristocratic intimations which Hobbes may have furnished for exactly such a reader as Oakeshott. Strauss's focus on what the bourgeois and the scientific readers would take away from Hobbes may not, in the final analysis, be in contradiction with this, pointing less to a disagreement over Hobbes and more to the profound divergence of Strauss and Oakeshott on the implications of modern morality for political life and the relation of this political problem to "the status of 'individuality'" in modern thought.[119] In moving to compare Strauss and Oakeshott with the intransigent modernist Alexandre Kojève, I aim to make this problem of theory and practice more explicit in understanding its different treatment in their thought.

Notes

1. Michael Oakeshott, "Thomas Hobbes," in *The Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence: Essays and Reviews 1926–51, Selected Writings*, Volume III, ed. Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2007), 110.
2. Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* (New York: Free Press, 1959), 172.
3. Michael Oakeshott, *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe* (London: Basis Books by arrangement with Cambridge University Press, 1940), xx–xxi.

4. Michael Oakeshott, "John Locke," in *Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence*, 59.
5. Oakeshott would argue that rationalists and political economists had "bewitched liberalism by appearing to solve the problem of individualism when they had really only avoided it." Michael Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," in *Hobbes on Civil Association*, 67 n. 116.
6. Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," 78.
7. Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 25.
8. Michael Oakeshott, "The Moral Life in the Writing of Thomas Hobbes," in *Hobbes on Civil Association*, 130–131.
9. Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," 10.
10. Oakeshott, "Moral Life in the Writing of Thomas Hobbes," 128.
11. Ibid., 130.
12. Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," 61–62.
13. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 166–167.
14. Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," 14. Oakeshott's later emphasis on the continuities in Hobbes's thought may have been partly a reaction to Strauss's privileging of the conscious break Hobbes had established with earlier thought. In his 1935 review of recent Hobbes literature Oakeshott had written, "If there is danger ahead [in Hobbes's scholarship], it lies in the exaggeration of the, at least, semi-medieval portrait with which this recent work presents us. For there can be no doubt that Hobbes's writings do represent a profound revolution in European thought, there can be no doubt that he was one of the most original of philosophers." Oakeshott, "Thomas Hobbes," 117.
15. Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," 7.
16. Leo Strauss, "Notes on *The Concept of the Political*," in Heinrich Meier, *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: The Hidden Dialogue*, trans. J. Harvey Lomax (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 119.
17. Leo Strauss, "The Living Issues of Postwar German Philosophy," in Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, trans. Marcus Brainard (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 127.
18. Leo Strauss, "Preface to *Hobbes Politische Wissenschaft*," *Interpretation* 8, no. 1 (January 1979): 2.
19. Timothy Burns, "Leo Strauss and the Origins of Hobbes's Natural Science," *The Review of Metaphysics* 64, no. 4 (June 2011): 823.
20. Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, trans. E. M. Sinclair (New York: Schocken, 1965).
21. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), 37–38.
22. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 57.

23. I owe this formulation of the state of nature to Aleksandar Pavković.
24. Strauss, "Notes on *The Concept of the Political*," 109.
25. Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny: Corrected and Expanded Edition, Including the Strauss-Kojève Correspondence*, ed. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 192.
26. Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy*, 90.
27. Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*, 58 n.
28. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 42–43.
29. Jacob Klein and Leo Strauss, "A Giving of Accounts," *The College* 25, no. 2 (April 1970): 3.
30. Leo Strauss, Letter to Gerhard Kruger, October 15, 1931, *The Strauss-Krüger Correspondence: Returning to Plato through Kant*, ed. Susan Meld Shell (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 29.
31. Thomas Hobbes, "The Epistle Dedicatory," *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (London: Penguin, 1985), 75.
32. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 66.
33. Cited in David Janssens, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Philosophy, Prophecy, and Politics in Leo Strauss's Early Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), 139.
34. Ibid., 139–140.
35. Meier, *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss*, 35.
36. Leo Strauss, "Notes on *The Concept of the Political*," 119.
37. Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy*, 172.
38. Janssens, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 130.
39. Leo Strauss, "Quelques Remarques sur la Science Politique de Hobbes à propos du livre récent de M. Lubienski," *Recherches philosphiques* 2 (April 1933): 609–622.
40. Leo Strauss, Letter to Alexandre Kojève, June 3, 1934, *On Tyranny*, 227.
41. Strauss arrived in England with a reference from the French historian Henri Sée—an acquaintance of Tawney. Tawney managed to secure for Strauss a temporary post at Cambridge (where he would meet Barker) and would later help him find more permanent positions in the United States. See S. J. D. Green, "The Tawney–Strauss Connection: On Historicism and Values in the History of Political Ideas," *The Journal of Modern History* 67, no. 2 (June 1995): 256.
42. Michael Oakeshott, "Leo Strauss on Hobbes," 142.
43. Oakeshott, "Leo Strauss on Hobbes," 147.
44. Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 28–29.
45. Oakeshott, "Leo Strauss on Hobbes," 143–144.
46. Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 27.

47. Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy*, 172 n. 2. See also Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, vii.
48. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (London: Penguin, 1985), III, 96.
49. Leo Strauss, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 230.
50. Oakeshott, "Leo Strauss on Hobbes," 153.
51. Ibid., 154.
52. Ibid., 157–158.
53. Michael Zuckert and Catherine Zuckert, *Leo Strauss and the Problem of Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 34.
54. Daniel Tanguay, *Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Christopher Nadon (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 39–40.
55. Oakeshott, "Leo Strauss on Hobbes," 154.
56. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 169.
57. Noel Malcolm, "Oakeshott and Hobbes," in *A Companion to Michael Oakeshott*, ed. Paul Franco and Leslie Marsh (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2012), 230.
58. Ian Tregenza, *Michael Oakeshott on Hobbes: A Study in the Renewal of Philosophical Ideas* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2003), 49.
59. Leo Strauss, Letter to Eric Voegelin, March 14, 1950, in Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence Between Leo Strauss and Eric Voeglin, 1934–1964*, ed. and trans. Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1993), 23.
60. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XI, 161.
61. Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 4–5.
62. Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, 210.
63. Tregenza, *Michael Oakeshott on Hobbes*, 66.
64. Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," 27.
65. Ibid., 62.
66. Ibid., 26.
67. Ibid., 11.
68. Oakeshott, "Leo Strauss on Hobbes," 151–152.
69. Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 5.
70. See Devin Stauffer, "Reopening the Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns: Leo Strauss's Critique of Hobbes's 'New Political Science,'" *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 2 (2007): 223–233.
71. Ibid., 152.
72. Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," 62.
73. Timothy Fuller, "Encounters with Michael Oakeshott," *The Michael Oakeshott Association*, accessed October 16, 2016, http://www.michael-oakeshott-association.com/pdfs/conf01_commem_fuller.pdf.

74. Leo Strauss, "On the Spirit of Hobbes' Political Philosophy," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 4, no. 14 (October 1950): 405–431.
75. Jan-Werner Müller, "Re-imagining *Leviathan*: Schmitt and Oakeshott on Hobbes and the problem of political order," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 13, nos. 2–3 (2010): 319–320.
76. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 166–167. In addition to Oakeshott, Strauss may have had John Laird in mind. See John Laird, *Hobbes* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1934), 57: "In matters of metaphysics, it is permissible to suggest that while Hobbes's voice had all the modernity of the new mechanics, his hands—that is to say, his technique—were scholastic, and even Aristotelian. In ethical and political theory, however, voice and hands were both medieval."
77. Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," 14 [footnote removed]. Oakeshott, "Thomas Hobbes," 117.
78. Having already traced Hobbes's "rationalism" to late scholasticism, Oakeshott asserted that Hobbes was "a scholastic, not a 'scientific' mechanist." However, for Oakeshott this was not the defining aspect of Hobbes's significance as a philosopher. Ibid., 19.
79. Oakeshott, "Leo Strauss on Hobbes," 156.
80. Timothy W. Burns, "Editor's Introduction: Leo Strauss' Recovery of Classical Political Philosophy," in *Brill's Companion to Leo Strauss' Writings on Classical Political Thought*, ed. Timothy W. Burns (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 4.
81. See Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 164–175.
82. Malcolm, "Oakeshott and Hobbes," 221.
83. Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," 76.
84. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 175; Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy*, 181.
85. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 172.
86. Tanguay, *Leo Strauss*, 110.
87. C. B. Macpherson, "Suggestions for Further Reading," in *Leviathan*, ed. Hobbes, 65.
88. Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy*, 170–172.
89. Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," 76.
90. Ibid., 75.
91. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 117.
92. In the interests of the comparison with Oakeshott I have reduced the complexity of Strauss's analysis of Hobbes's epistemological problems. See Timothy Burns, "Leo Strauss and the Origins of Hobbes's Natural Science," *The Review of Metaphysics* 64, no. 4 (June 2011): 823–855.
93. Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," 50–58.

94. Leo Strauss, *Hobbes's Critique of Religion and Related Writings*, trans. and ed. Gabriel Bartlett and Svetozar Minkov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 93–94.
95. Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 23–25.
96. Oakeshott, "Moral Life in the Writing of Thomas Hobbes," 99–101.
97. See Boyd, "Lion and the Ox."
98. Cited in Ibid., 703.
99. Ibid.
100. Oakeshott, "Moral Life in the Writing of Thomas Hobbes," 127.
101. Ibid., 128.
102. Ibid., 107.
103. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XV, 207.
104. Boyd, "Lion and the Ox," 712.
105. Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 184–185. This passage is cited by Jonathan A. Boyd in "Lion and the Ox," 712.
106. Oakeshott, "Moral Life in the Writing of Thomas Hobbes," 99.
107. Ibid., 137, 140.
108. Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 56.
109. Oakeshott, "Leo Strauss on Hobbes," 156.
110. Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy*, 196.
111. Leo Strauss, "Niccolò Machiavelli," *History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 298.
112. Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," 32.
113. Michael Oakeshott, *Notebooks, 1922–86, Selected Writings, Volume VI*, ed. Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2014), 403.
114. Leo Strauss, "Seminar in Political Philosophy: Hobbes' *Leviathan* and *De Cive*," Session II, delivered January 8, 1964 at the University of Chicago (Leo Strauss Center, University of Chicago).
115. Although Strauss understood that "the Renaissance as such was an attempt to restore the spirit of classical antiquity, i.e., a spirit wholly different from the capitalist spirit." Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 60–61 n. 22.
116. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 242 n. 1.
117. Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," 4: "For, any man who holds in his mind the conceptions of the natural world, of God, of human activity and human destiny which belongs to his civilization, will scarcely be able to prevent an endeavor to assimilate these to the ideas that distinguish the political order in which he lives, and failing to do so he will become a philosopher (of a simple sort) unawares." (The qualification "of a simple sort" was new to the 1975 version of this essay for *Hobbes on Civil Association*.)

118. Müller, "Re-imagining *Leviathan*," 324. This boldness extended to the text itself, and Oakeshott's 1946 edition of *Leviathan* "was a reworking of the original on an almost Molesworthian [i.e., extensive] scale." Noel Malcolm, *Thomas Hobbes: Leviathan, Volume 1: Editorial Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), 303.
119. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 323.

CHAPTER 6

Leo Strauss and Alexandre Kojève on Tyranny and Theory

As Leo Strauss's first American book and the first he had written in English, *On Tyranny* (1948), was at once a clear and meticulous elucidation of an ancient dialogue and the moment of founding for a new approach to the history of political thought aimed at those who had experienced the mediocrity of prevailing methods. "Those youths who possess the intellectual and the moral qualities which prevent men from simply following authorities, to say nothing of fashions,"[1] must take the risk of going against the orthodoxy and redirecting the nascent nobility of their indignation toward the more coherent calling of philosophy. *On Tyranny* is a work in which these more immediate aims of political philosophy rub shoulders with the fine attention to detail and profound erudition of a genuine philosophical investigation.

The title *On Tyranny* reminds the reader of Machiavelli's reference to Xenophon's dialogue, and this prompts further consideration of *The Prince* and its relationship to *Discourses on Livy*, a connection which is mirrored in the links between *On Tyranny* and Strauss's *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (1958). Strauss argued that the *Hiero* presents ancient political philosophy at its "point of closest contact" with the modern alternative—it is precisely this confrontation which brings out the opposition between the teachings of the classical tradition originated by Socrates and a modern political science whose true founder is Machiavelli.[2]

Strauss's study brought to life a dialogue which had been obscured by the modern methods and he relished the chance to demonstrate the

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subtlety and brilliance of an ancient writer who had been cruelled by the forgetting of the art of writing. Xenophon's reputation had suffered the condescension and mockery of his intellectual inferiors, a fact which delighted Strauss. As he wrote to his friend Jacob Klein while he was mastering the Xenophon corpus in 1939, this determined ancient philosopher "had had the guts to dress himself up as a fool and thus endure through the ages."[3]

For the French edition, which would appear in 1954 as *De la Tyrannie*, Strauss had secured and responded to a long philosophical review of the original study by his friend Alexandre Kojève. Stepping through much of Strauss's ambiguity to present a stark case for modern thought, Kojève confronted Strauss with what he asserted was the untenable solipsism of the Socratic-Platonic treatment of the problem of theory and practice and argued that historical verification provides the solution to the problem with its intersubjective certainty.

Kojève considered Hegel to be the highest exemplar of philosophy, the absolutely wise exponent of the synthesis of the historically affirmed "universalism" (*logos*) of philosophy and the secularization of the Christian principle of "homogeneity" (or the assimilation to a common and equalitarian human culture). Rational "recognition" is the basis of this universal and equalitarian ("homogeneous") enlightenment and the politicization of philosophy. The self-consciousness achieved by the "Slave" is the beginning of what will finally become a complete and circular discourse of historical experience.[4] As Stanley Rosen noted, this claim is theoretically attractive, "not simply because of its audacity, but because of its compelling critique of incomplete discourse."[5] As this Hegelian discourse must succeed the actual, it was no surprise to Kojève that Xenophon had not arrived at the legitimate basis for philosophical tyranny: "He had not seen 'tyrannies' exercised in the service of truly revolutionary, political, social, or economic ideas."[6]

Strauss understood Kojève's Hegel to be something of a Hegelianized Hobbes and this will mark an important contrast when we consider Oakeshott in comparison with Kojève in the next chapter. As we will see, Oakeshott attempted almost the reverse project of a Hobbesian Hegel. Strauss's own Hegelian reading of Hobbes had been influenced by discussions with Kojève in the early 1930s and reinforced by *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*—Kojève's lectures and notes on Hegel's *Phenomenology* published in the same year as *On Tyranny*—which Strauss had read as soon as he had had a chance over the summer break in 1948. His subsequent

letter to Kojève had contained high praise and deep criticism, but Kojève had been apparently undaunted by Strauss's concerns. If anything, his reply revealed that his private vision of the world state was only bleaker:

> In the final state there naturally are no more "human beings" in our sense of an historical human being. The "healthy" automata are "satisfied" (sports, art, eroticism, etc.), and the "sick" ones get locked up. As for those who are not satisfied with their "purposeless activity" (art, etc.), they are the philosophers (who can attain wisdom if they "contemplate" enough). By doing so they become "gods". The tyrant becomes an administrator, a cog in the "machine" fashioned by automata for automata.[7]

Kojève's irony was legendary and Robert Howse, a present-day admirer of the French Hegelian, suggests that he "toyed with these notions, in a rather flippant manner, more or less teasing or taunting fashionable intellectuals worried about Nietzschean 'last men.'" In Howse's own provocative vision of a world state, those who still claim to remain politically unsatisfied are equated with "skinheads" as "social problems to be addressed by policemen, social workers, and psychiatrists." Over time, these "socially superfluous" deplorables are replaced by "a world of metrosexuals."[8]

But Kojève was far from flippant about the iron will which was required for completing the world state. As an upper-middle class Russian youth who had come to look favorably on the October Revolution, he nevertheless fled the country fearing "thirty terrible years" to follow the introduction of communism.[9] He remained a lifelong admirer of Stalin, a man whose death would leave him feeling as though he had lost a father.[10] Kojève never forgot the world of the pre-Hobbesian horizon and was convinced that only a Napoleon or a Stalin was capable of bringing it universality and homogeneity, transforming ghetto Jews into citizens and peasant Ukrainians into collectivists. Kojève was, as one of his students implied, free of that "middle-class fear of the violent and repressive nature of truth."[11]

Strauss recognized this intransigent consistency in Kojève. While hardly one of Howse's fashionable intellectuals,[12] Strauss could still recognize that the triumph of the modern understanding of reason would be the metaphysical equivalent of the advent of the "last men."[13] As Strauss had long understood from the purge required to achieve even the limited enlightenment necessary for Plato's city-state, world-wide and total

enlightenment would necessitate the use of force.[14] Holding his nerve in this regard, Kojève had maintained his commitment to "the suppression of opposition, or a discourse that is 'homogeneous' in its acceptance of a single universal criterion of rationality."[15] But for Strauss *logos* could be made "homogeneous" only through its transformation into an ideology simple and memorable enough to be "repeated by millions of parrots" and primed for a cultural revolution in which the streets would echo with "the savage noise of the loudspeakers."[16] (For much the same reason Michael Oakeshott had called Marx "the German ventriloquist.")[17] This ideology is not in fact *logos* but only brute power seeking to justify itself. Strauss implied that the best that can be said of such ideologies is that they are might's tribute to right.[18] Far from a golden age of equalitarian political satisfaction, this ideological triumph would usher in what Strauss called, in a pointed reference to the non-Kojèvian Hegel, "a planetary Oriental despotism" which would reduce political participation to "a tiny minority" conspiring in "sordid" palace coups.[19]

Strauss held Kojève's published lectures on the *Phenomenology* to be of great importance, finding them to provide "the only real commentary, at least on large parts of the book."[20] He told Kojève that none living but Heidegger had made such a bold and coherent case for modern thought as he had.[21] Strauss would reaffirm this compliment in sending some of his most gifted students to Paris to benefit from personal interaction with Kojève. One of these students would go on to conclude that "the deeper and more persuasive teaching [of Kojève's lectures] is that the pursuit of self-consciousness, wisdom, and happiness terminates in unconsciousness, silence and subhuman contentment."[22]

Strauss also shared a deep interest in this Heideggerian theme and was equally moved by the vision of a technological world night, himself envisioning this in terms of a mass culture of "no leisure, no elevation, no withdrawal; nothing but work and recreation; no individuals and no peoples, but instead 'lonely crowds'."[23] However, Strauss and Kojève's shared involvement with Heidegger's thinking went deeper than this critique of a planetary society. Both were impressed by Heidegger's interpretation of "the Call of Conscience" in Section 57 of *Being and Time*. Strauss had initially recognized it as grounding a natural understanding of religious experience, revealing the experience of security to be primordial and the presence of God as a secondary interpretation.[24] Kojève also adopted Heidegger's insight that the Call is Death, but reinterpreted it historically to reflect the Slave's response to the terror of

death, the passion that Hegel called a fear of "the absolute Master." "By this fear," Kojève emphasized, "the slavish Consciousness melted internally; it shuddered deeply and everything fixed-or-stable trembled in it."[25] As Timothy W. Burns has explained, Kojève refashioned this as "a two-part call, first a call to the Slave's consciousness of himself as changeable, and second, a call to the slave to attain through his self-transformation the autonomy he sees in the Master."[26] In Kojève's reworking of Heidegger, the Call of Conscience drives the historical process by which the Slave will eventually find dignity and autonomy as a citizen of the universal and homogeneous state, surmounting the fear of death by the risking of life in a revolution to overcome the historical Master who stands for this absolute power.[27]

One way of understanding the debate between Kojève and Strauss is to begin with Heidegger's interpretation of the Call of Conscience as the background to the confrontation. Kojève's secularized post-Christian reinterpretation of the Call via Hegel then competes for coherence with Strauss's "political" correction of the Call through the "Eastern" Platonism he had recovered from the medieval rationalists of the Islamic and Jewish worlds, al-Farabi and Maimonides.[28] Heidegger's opaque yet insistent teaching is of the authenticity *Dasein* discovers in obeying the final authority of death—an outlook which springs from the same poetic origins as the belief in revelation which Heidegger had set out to overcome. It is the death of Socrates, stripped of its comforting mythologies and doctrines, which Strauss recovered as the foundation of political philosophy. Socrates faces death with equanimity; without hope and without fear. This is because, as Montaigne recognized, he approaches death not as an awful god, but as an ordinary expression of nature, even as a playful and ironic counterpart to nature's *eros*.[29]

Strauss's philosophy preserved the power of death, although not in the "existential" sense of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Philosophy is rather "graced by nature's grace."[30] This is essentially Strauss's definition of *eros*. The tension between *eros* and the world of convention is itself, for Strauss, "as little tragic as the death of Socrates."[31] In other words, the *eros* of philosophy overcomes the tragic element in ontological finitude: Socrates laughs, but never weeps.[32] Strauss thus challenged the view, accepted since Hegel's time even by such self-conscious anti-Christians as Nietzsche, that Christianity had deepened the soul of man.[33]

Kojève's secularization of Christianity required the weeping Christ. His post-Christian atheistic philosophy may have been in its element in Third

Republic France amid the revival of interest in Hobbes led by Joseph Vialatoux and René Capitant,[34] context which will be important to keep in mind when we turn to the comparison with Oakeshott's treatment of Hobbes and Hegel. For Kojève, state and society replace God at the completion of history when there is no surpassing the collective consciousness of the citizens of the world state.[35] The historical progress of reason through the "day-to-day political action" of statesmen, inspired by the ideas of philosophers as they are mediated by intellectuals, is the process by which human beings "could *definitively* replace" theology.[36] In Kojève's reading of Hegel "the *Destiny* of every Theology, of every Religion, is, in the final analysis, atheism."[37] While Hegel's thought found a reality in the Christian notion of God and unfolded through "theological" formulas, "in the deepest sense, [his] philosophy is nevertheless radically atheistic and non-religious."[38]

This atheism is, as Kojève noted in linking Hegel's *Phenomenology* with Heidegger's *Being and Time*, "ontological finitude."[39] "Thus," as Kojève outlined explicitly, "the 'dialectical' or anthropological philosophy of Hegel is in the final analysis *a philosophy of death*."[40] Heidegger allowed us to see through Hegel's metaphysical analysis. In interpreting Hegelian Spirit as completely anthropogenic, Kojève rejected an eternal *logos* which realizes itself through time, in favor of the radical finitude of Heidegger's account of *Dasein* (with thought understood as coeval with human history, but in the non-Heideggerian sense as the negation of nature).[41] The Kojèvian self appears less as an assimilation of the infinite through a discourse of circularity and more as a radical finitude, bounded by *Nichts*.[42] Kojève thus revealed Hegel as the forerunner of Nietzsche and Heidegger in introducing the idea of death into theology and conceiving of Death conquering God rather than God conquering Death.[43]

In looking forward from Hegel to Nietzsche and Heidegger, however, it is also necessary to look back from Hegel to Hobbes and Machiavelli. We must account for Strauss's insistence on reminding Kojève of the debt he owed to the founders of modernity. Strauss considered this lineage to be crucial in comprehending Kojève's "Hegelianism," which he in fact deemed "a synthesis of Socratic and Machiavellian or Hobbian politics."[44] This synthesis formed what Strauss (facetiously) declared "the miracle of producing an amazingly lax morality out of two moralities both of which made very strict demands on self-restraint." From the perspective of its political influence, however, Strauss was firmly convinced by this "synthesis," warning that Kojève had provided the justification for acts "to which

he himself would never stoop."[45] Strauss would echo this judgment in lamenting Machiavelli's philosophical underachievement, suggesting, "What is greatest in him [personally] cannot be properly appreciated on the basis of his own narrow view of the nature of man."[46]

Machiavelli, like Kojève, had emphasized politics, whereas Xenophon had never neglected philosophy. Xenophon's political works are inseparable from his Socratic writings. *Hiero* is a theoretical treatment of tyranny, while "the *Education of Cyrus* describes how an aristocracy can be transformed by the lowering of the moral standards into an absolute monarchy ruling a large empire." Strauss noticed that, while apparently idolizing Xenophon, Machiavelli fails to refer to any of his Socratic writings: "While Machiavelli is greatly concerned with Cyrus, he forgets Socrates."[47]

In drawing attention to "Machiavellian or Hobbian politics" Strauss also reminded his audience that Kojève was concealing the Hobbesian ground of his "Hegel." Almost two decades earlier in *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (1936) Strauss had cited the passages from Hegel's *Phenomenology* in which the basis of Hegel's moral and political thought in Hobbes's state of nature is most apparent, even tantalizing some of his readers, including Michael Oakeshott,[48] with the half-promise of a collaboration with Kojève on this connection.[49] Strauss's "Restatement" found him once again protesting that Kojève "knows as well as anyone living" of this basis.[50] But Strauss's original German manuscript of *Hobbes Politische Wissenschaft* had also contained a hint (which did not survive translation) in which he indicated that the "connection" or distinction between Hobbes and Hegel is revealed in Hegel's early writings. Turning to Kojève's lectures with this clue in mind, we find him quoting from Hegel's essay, "On the Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law" (1802/1803):

> This negative-or-negating Absolute, pure freedom, in its appearance (*Erscheinung*) is death; and through the faculty (*Fähigkeit*) of death the Subject [= Man] shows himself (*erweist sich*) as [being] free and absolutely elevated (*erhaben*) above all constraint (*Zwang*).[51]

In this early essay Hegel had launched a critique of an unnamed Hobbes for founding a bourgeois morality, which had removed sacrifice from moral and political life. Despite the violence of the state of nature Hobbes may be regarded as the founder of liberalism in that his doctrine is oriented away from the state of war and the possibility of death. Hegel reasserted

the role of death in providing moral seriousness to a civil society which otherwise forgets itself in the everyday life of individuality and sensuous materialism. The terrifying possibility of violent and sudden death must recur in order to maintain what is human: "Just as the blowing of the winds preserves the sea from the foulness which would be the result of a prolonged calm, so also corruption in nations would be the product of prolonged, let alone 'perpetual' peace."[52]

Perhaps wary of Strauss's unmasking of Carl Schmitt on a similar question,[53] Kojève preferred to leave his speculations on Hegel's debt to Hobbes to a letter to Strauss in November 1936 in which he also appraised Strauss's book on Hobbes, finding it so "compelling" that it must be accurate. "Admittedly, I do not know Hobbes," he added—an exaggeration, but serving to discourage Strauss from the idea of collaborating in a publication on the problem. Kojève acknowledged, however, that "Hegel undoubtedly takes Hobbes as his point of departure."[54]

As the above quote from "Natural Law" implies, Kojève's interpretation of Hegel is defined by the emphasis he places on the origins of the historical dialectic in the clash of consciousnesses and the revelation of human being in the fear of death. It was on this point that Hegel most emphatically and fundamentally followed Hobbes in privileging the consciousness of the one whose will is broken before death. In Hegel's *Phenomenology* the initial outcome of this struggle or confrontation is represented as the lord and the bondsman. Hegel had reasoned that self-consciousness must arise from its existence for another self-consciousness, that it is "recognized" by another self-consciousness:

> The relation of both self-consciousnesses is in this way so constituted that they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle. They must enter into this struggle, for they must bring their certainty of themselves, the certainty of being for themselves, to the level of objective truth, and make this a fact both in the case of the other and in their own case as well. And it is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained; only thus is it tried and proved that the essential nature of self-consciousness is not bare existence, is not the merely immediate form in which it at first makes its appearance, is not its mere absorption in the expanse of life.[55]

Hegel adapted this from Hobbes who had laid the groundwork with the retreat of modern political science into the consciousness. Consciousness emerges as vanity and turns into fear during the struggle between two

parties from which a despot emerges, "which signifieth a *Lord* or *Master*, and is the Dominion of the Master over his Servant":

> And this Dominion is then acquired to the Victor, when the vanquished, to avoyd the present stroke of death, covenanteth, either in expresse words or by other sufficient signes of the Will, that so long as his life, and the liberty of his body is allowed him, the Victor shall have the use thereof, at his pleasure.[56]

In other words, each man having fought initially not for the death of the other, but for the subjection of the other to his own imaginary view of himself, desire turns to hatred (i.e., the desire for recognition becomes hateful vengeance) prompting the fear of death to overcome the weakest willed of the parties, bringing him to consciousness of himself as a mortal being. As Strauss summarized:

> In this way natural man happens unforeseen upon the danger of death; in this way he comes to know this primary and greatest and supreme evil for the first time, to recognize death as the greatest and supreme evil in the moment of being irresistibly driven to fall back before death in order to struggle for his life.[57]

Hegel made this consistent in realizing that mortal being implies historical being and an atheistic ontology (just as an unalterable Substance or cosmos implies "theism").[58] Hegel historicized Hobbes with rationality and freedom achieved through servitude rather than by reasoning from passionate desire. Ever mindful of the potential for political propaganda,[59] and recognizing this historical radicalization of Hobbes on Hegel's part, Kojève rhetorically improved on Hegel in translating bondsman (*Knecht*) into French as *Esclave*, a step which also had the effect of associating Kojève's Hegel with Nietzsche's concept of a slave morality.[60] Hobbes himself had distinguished between the "Servant" who is obliged to his Master for "corporeal liberty" and "Slaves" who "have no obligation at all; but may break their bonds, or the prison; and kill, or carry away captive their Master, justly."[61] Kojève's decision to use the word "Slave" and Strauss's characterization of Hobbesian man as "a being that lacks awareness of sacred restraints" suggest that they were agreed that this was a more consistent understanding of the anthropological basis of modern moral and political thought.[62] The alienation from natural standards, which this view of human origins implies, would have powerful consequences, with Strauss

noting that Hobbesian man "stands in the same relation to the universe as Marx's proletarian to the bourgeois world: he has nothing to lose by his rebellion, except his chains, and everything to gain."[63]

However, in presenting rational authority readymade, Hobbes had presumed that the transformation of nature and the enlightenment of the humanity could be accomplished without servitude and therefore without "history." For Kojève's Marxist Hegel, "the fear of death is not enough to lead man 'to reason'." Death remains Master as the Slave works "in and out of fear" on the long march of reason toward enlightenment.[64] What this would mean for the modern understanding of freedom had already been expressed in a single grand sentence of Hegel's: "It was not so much *from* slavery as *through* slavery that humanity was emancipated."[65] In his lectures on Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, delivered in March 1965, Strauss offered this sentence as containing, at least in one sense, "the whole lesson of Hegel's philosophy of the mind." The man who had "lost his nerve" became the "origin of all higher culture." Strauss deemed Hegel's pronouncement to be "a great sentence, and surely in need of profound consideration."[66]

On the basis of this Hobbesian foundation some close readers of Kojève's lectures have claimed to have detected more of Hobbes than Hegel.[67] H. S. Harris found "only Hobbes in Hegelian jargon, decked out in the very latest intellectual Paris fashions of the 1930s."[68] Stanley Rosen, who had been a student of both Strauss and Kojève, was only a little less emphatic, arguing, "It is only a slight overstatement to say that the only point on which Kojève was a genuine Hegelian is one which holds equally good for Hobbes."[69]

Hegel had joined Hobbes in affirming that that fear of death has (what Kojève termed) "a positive value" which serves to elevate the consciousness of the slave.[70] As Strauss noted, just as important was the fact that Hegel would also follow Hobbes in "reasoning from his experience of man"—a premise which insisted on being "defended against misconceptions of man which arise from vain opinions about the whole."[71] This priority of Subject—and in the beginning, solipsistic consciousnesses—is opposed to the classical worldview in which the healthy soul is understood to be in harmony with a greater whole in the form of a city-state and, looking beyond that, the cosmos or natural universe (Substance) itself. Concerned to defend his new political science from the vain opinions or prejudices of revealed religion, Hobbes turned away from this natural

view, which was deemed suspect and vulnerable in that it had preceded the threat which revelation poses to philosophy.[72]

Hobbes departed from all opinion (and thus the grounds of the Socratic dialectic) in determining that "the names of Vertues, Vices … can never be true grounds of any ratiocination."[73] In politicizing Epicureanism, Hobbes discarded the classical idealistic and contemplative orientation to construct what Strauss would term a "political hedonism"[74] with, as Hobbes famously put it, "a foundation, as passion not mistrusting, may not seek to displace."[75] In turning to what accords with the passions (fear) and finds applicability in all situations, Hobbes ensured that history would acquire a new and more essential place in philosophy.[76] For Hegel, in a much grander and more explicit sense, it is history which finally reveals what passion or *Geist* ("not mistrusting") affirms to be actual and rational. In this manner, Strauss argued, "Hegel continued, and in a certain respect radicalized, the modern tradition that emancipated the passions and hence 'competition'."[77] His emphasis on the bondsman's consciousness continued the pacifistic-humanitarian orientation of modern political science, for despite the difference in emphasis between the Hobbesian fear of death and the Hegelian desire for recognition, "in principle to Hegel just as much as to Hobbes the consciousness of the servant represents a higher stage than the consciousness of the master."[78] While Hegel recognized that Hobbes's supposedly scientific anthropology was no more than a description of the bourgeoisie and their exemption from warfare, Hegel's own understanding of history and its grounding in the slavish consciousness of death would come to work against this insight as his philosophy of history was propelled by the instincts of the bourgeoisie. For this reason, while Hegel would have been opposed morally to a world state as the triumph of the bourgeoisie, a world state is the certain outcome of what Strauss was careful to call "Hegel's *fundamental* teaching" with its basis in a consistent Hobbesian political science.[79] Hegel had observed that the freedom of a state often dies when its citizens are free not to die for their state.[80] Unlike Hobbes or Kojève, Hegel had believed that the citizen would continue to be challenged and educated by the fear of death. For the young Hegel as much as the Hegel of *Philosophy of Right* the final and permanent overcoming of the possibility of violent death by Kojève's revolutionary worker would be more degrading than the initial avoidance of death by the Hobbesian man, being without any historical significance or further human possibility. But as Steven B. Smith noticed,

Kojève is more consistent than his great predecessor on this point in describing a world state in which war and revolution are no longer conceivable and thereby acknowledging that "Hegel's idea of history tends to undercut his insistence on the necessity, and even nobility, of war."[81] With the absolute right to guard one's own life Hobbes had "destroyed the moral basis of national defense." Kojève must be accounted more explicit than Hobbes and more consistent than Hegel in reaching Strauss's conclusion that "[t]he only solution to this difficulty which preserves the spirit of Hobbes' political philosophy is the outlawry of war or the establishment of a world state."[82]

The City in Motion

Strauss considered the continuation of politics to be essential to human freedom and the pursuit of wisdom. The modern denial of human nature had led to fantastic hopes and visions of a world state or confederation of peaceful and brotherly republics, whereas the classical philosophical position of Socrates and Plato had been founded on the nature of human beings in the *polis*, leading to the conclusion "that there will be wars as long as there will be human beings."[83] While this is a bleak assessment from the perspective of modern political science, in refusing to politicize their knowledge the ancients understood themselves to be preserving the possibility of enlightenment. It was in this sense that Strauss attempted to remind Kojève of philosophical *eros* while acknowledging his (and Machiavelli's) unquestionable insights into political success, reflecting the priority of foreign policy in modern political science. In *Thoughts on Machiavelli* Strauss conceded that this problem is significant enough to partially militate against the classical focus on the Good. Political survival involves maintaining the capacity to respond to the potentially vicious motives and actions of others and can therefore be seen to favor the technological innovation and audacity of the moderns over the technological conservatism and moderation of the ancients. Strauss agreed that the ancient philosophers "had to bow to the necessity of defense or of resistance."

> This means however that they had to admit that the moral-political supervision of inventions by the good and wise city is necessarily limited by the need of adaptation to the practices of morally inferior cities which scorn such supervision because their end is acquisition or ease. They had to admit in

> other words that in an important respect the good city has to take its bearings by the practice of bad cities or that the bad impose their law on the good. Only in this point does Machiavelli's contention that the good cannot be good because there are so many bad ones prove to possess a foundation.[84]

In addition to this important passage in *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Strauss added a long paragraph to *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* on the primacy of foreign policy.[85] This Machiavellian insight led Strauss to perceive the limitations of Plato's priority on internal policy in his ideal city "at rest" and to argue that it must be supplemented by the political history of Thucydides and his presentation of the "the best city in motion." Because "motion" implies particular circumstances which are not implied in "rest," the city in motion is necessarily an individual or "particular" city, and thus the philosopher requires the "assistance" of the historian in achieving a complete view.[86] While this may be seen as a shortcoming in Socratic-Platonic philosophy, from Strauss's perspective it is to the advantage of the ancients that they could look to supplement philosophy rather than simply overturning its priorities in favor of an enhanced status for "motion" and the "individual" as modern thinkers such as Machiavelli and Hobbes would do (at least to a large degree) on the basis of this insight.[87] While modern thought risked veering toward an existential poetry which rejected reason, ancient philosophy could appropriate the historical focus on the particular without yielding in any essential sense in its quarrel with poetry.

The crisis created by a global technological culture suggests that modern "audacity" and progressivism must be forced to confront and debate once more with ancient "moderation" and conservatism. In the sense that it is supplemented in response to such developments, Strauss's philosophy is ironically more historically "advanced" than Kojève's, which, with its more reckless attitude to large-scale political violence, recalled its interwar, pre-atomic origins.[88] Strauss believed that with the exponential advances in potentially destructive technologies and the relative failure of the modern normative sciences, modern humanity had become "a blind giant."[89] Denying that this situation should be regarded complacently, he acknowledged that it is the inescapable horizon of the present. The "Machiavellian or Hobbian" decision of modern philosophy for "audacity" in the conquest of nature led to this crisis and it is "our duty to act virtuously and wisely in it."[90] While reasserting the philosophical point of view of the ancients, Strauss did not neglect the modern political situation in warning that "immense military power" was the "only restraint" which held back

the global expansion of communist tyranny.[91] However, realizing that great wars are no longer humanly possible in an atomic age,[92] Strauss never succumbed to a temptation which would prove too powerful for a prominent contemporary liberal follower of Kojève who looks for a silver lining in the mushroom cloud:

> [T]ruly global memories, such as 9/11, are becoming possible for the first time. Further painful global memories in the future—a regional nuclear war?—could therefore be a source of universal integration. Much like Hobbes' retrospective argument for the state, these memories would constrain the system's degeneration, making a move back toward anarchy less attractive than a move forward to a world state.[93]

Rather than viewing the emergence of technological threats within the progress of the modern political project as separate from the moral and political objections to modern political science, Strauss indicated that it was necessary to follow the connections between Machiavelli's failure to communicate a fully human sense of "the sacredness of 'the common,'"[94] Hobbes's "untrue assumption that man as man is thinkable as a being that lacks awareness of sacred restraints," and the subsequent reduction of history to a story of human beings "guided by nothing but a desire for recognition."[95] It is in this sense that Strauss found himself in an epoch in which "[a]ll rational liberal philosophic positions have lost their significance and power."[96] As we will see in Chap. 8, rather than abandoning reason for the kind of nihilism this observation might suggest to some, Strauss looked to recover Socratic rationalism while adapting the unquestionable insights of late modern philosophy.

Notes

1. Leo Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 204.
2. Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny: Corrected and Expanded Edition, Including the Strauss-Kojève Correspondence*, ed. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 24–25.
3. Leo Strauss, Letter to Jacob Klein, February 16, 1939, cited in William H. F. Altman, *The German Stranger: Leo Strauss and National Socialism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 506.

4. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols and ed. Allan Bloom (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 75–76.
5. Stanley Rosen, *G. W. F. Hegel: An Introduction to the Science of Wisdom* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2000), 272. In the footnote attached to this statement Rosen refers to the "hypnotic" quality of Kojève's system.
6. Alexandre Kojève, "Tyranny and Wisdom," in Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 139.
7. Alexandre Kojève, Letter to Leo Strauss, September 19, 1950, in Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 255.
8. Robert Howse, *Leo Strauss: Man of Peace* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 72–74.
9. Mark Lilla, *Reckless Minds: Intellectuals in Politics* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2001), 118.
10. Waller R. Newell, "Kojève's Hegel, Hegel's Hegel, and Strauss's Hegel: A Middle Range Approach to the Debate about Tyranny and Totalitarianism," *Philosophy, History, and Tyranny: Reexamining the Debate between Leo Strauss and Alexandre Kojève*, ed. Timothy W. Burns and Bryan-Paul Frost (New York: SUNY Press, 2016), 247.
11. Stanley Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 193.
12. In 1935 Strauss congratulated Kojève for embracing his sterner views of the Parisian *philosophes* and warned him once more against slipping into the life of the café philosopher. Leo Strauss, Letter to Alexandre Kojève, May 9, 1935, in Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 229–230.
13. Leo Strauss, Letter to Alexandre Kojève, September 11, 1957, in Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 291.
14. Leo Strauss, *Hobbes's Critique of Religion and Related Writings*, trans. Gabriel Bartlett and Svetozar Minkov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 154.
15. Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 16.
16. Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 196.
17. Corey Abel, "Oakeshott's Wise Defense: Christianity as a Civilization," in *The Meaning of Michael Oakeshott's Conservatism*, ed. Corey Abel (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010), 28 n. 15.
18. Strauss considered ideology to be evidence that man needs right and that he is aware that "not everything is permitted." Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 129–130.
19. Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 208, 210.
20. Cited in Timothy W. Burns, "The Place of the Strauss- Kojève Debate in the Work of Leo Strauss," in *Philosophy, History, and Tyranny*, 18–19.

21. Leo Strauss, Letter to Alexandre Kojève, August 22, 1948, in Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 236.
22. Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 103.
23. Leo Strauss, "An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism," in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 42. See also Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* (New York: Free Press, 1959), 38.
24. See Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, trans. Marcus Brainard (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 45–51.
25. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 21.
26. Burns, "Place of the Strauss-Kojève Debate in the Work of Leo Strauss," 19.
27. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 20–21, 53.
28. Strauss made reference to this common background in the final words of his "Restatement." However, the significance and status of this paragraph (which was removed from the first American editions) is ambiguous.
29. Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, 48–49, 51 n.
30. Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy*, 40.
31. Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 207.
32. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 61.
33. Burns, "Place of the Strauss-Kojève Debate in the Work of Leo Strauss," 31.
34. See Luc Foisneau, "Authoritarian State Vs Totalitarian State: *Leviathan* in an Early Twentieth-Century French Debate," in Leviathan *Between the Wars: Hobbes's Impact on Early Twentieth Century Political Philosophy*, ed. Luc Foisneau, John-Christophe Merle, and Tom Sorell (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2005), 77–94.
35. Kojève, "Tyranny and Wisdom," 161.
36. Ibid., 175.
37. Alexandre Kojève, "Interpretation of the General Introduction to Chapter VII [The Religion Chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*]," trans. Ian Alexander Moore, *Parrhesia* 20 (2014): 29.
38. Alexandre Kojève, "Hegel, Marx, and Christianity," trans. Hilail Gildin, *Interpretation* 1, no. 1 (1970): 22.
39. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 259 n.
40. Alexandre Kojève, "The Idea of Death in the Philosophy of Hegel," trans. Joseph J. Carpino, *Interpretation* 3, nos. 2/3 (1973): 124.
41. Richard L. Velkley, "History, Tyranny, and the Presuppositions of Philosophy," in *Philosophy, History, and Tyranny*, 258–259.
42. Cf. Rosen, *G. W. F. Hegel*, 164 and Steven B. Smith, *Hegel's Critique of Liberalism: Rights in Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 163.

43. Kojève, "Death in the Philosophy of Hegel," 155.
44. Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 192.
45. Ibid., 191.
46. Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 291.
47. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 291. Strauss's contrast with Machiavelli in this regard is striking. Socrates is named at least 12 times in *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, and after *On Tyranny* Strauss's work on Xenophon was focused on his Socratic writings.
48. Michael Oakeshott, "Dr. Leo Strauss on Hobbes," in *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2000), 158.
49. Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis*, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 57–58. See also 20–22.
50. Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 192.
51. Cited in Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 247.
52. G. W. F. Hegel, *Outlines of a Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox and ed. Stephen Houlgate (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 307.
53. Leo Strauss, "Notes on Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*," in Heinrich Meier, *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: The Hidden Dialogue*, trans. J. Harvey Lomax (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 91–119.
54. Alexandre Kojève, Letter to Leo Strauss, November 2, 1936, in Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 231–234.
55. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baille (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2003), 107.
56. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (London: Penguin, 1985), XX, 255.
57. Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 20–21.
58. According to Kojève the clarification of this aspect of Hegel's philosophy had been achieved by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 259 n.
59. Kojève, "Hegel, Marx, and Christianity," 42.
60. Lilla, *Reckless Minds*, 135.
61. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XX, 255.
62. Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 192.
63. Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 125 n. 2.
64. Alexandre Kojève, Letter to Leo Strauss, November 2, 1936, in Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 232.
65. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. John Sibree (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001), 426.
66. Leo Strauss, "Seminar in Political Philosophy: Hegel's *The Philosophy of History*," delivered March 9, 1965 at the University of Chicago. Leo Strauss Center, University of Chicago.

67. However cf. Patrick Riley, "Introduction to the Reading of Alexandre Kojève," *Political Theory* 9, no. 1 (February 1981): 46–47 n. 188.
68. H. S. Harris, "Review: *The End of History: An Essay on Modern Hegelianism*," *Dialogue* 24, no. 4 (December 1985): 742.
69. Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 15–16.
70. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 47–48.
71. Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy*, 180.
72. Strauss, *Hobbes's Critique of Religion*, 26.
73. Cited in Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 153.
74. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 168–169.
75. Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic: Part I, Human Nature, Part II, De Corpore Politico*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 19.
76. Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 150; Strauss, *Hobbes's Critique of Religion*, 161–162.
77. Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 192.
78. Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 57.
79. Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 192 [emphasis added].
80. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 307.
81. Smith, *Hegel's Critique of Liberalism*, 164.
82. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 197–198.
83. Leo Strauss, "Jerusalem and Athens," in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 167.
84. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 298–299.
85. Heinrich Meier, *Political Philosophy and the Challenge of Revealed Religion*, trans. Robert Berman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 105 n. 156.
86. Strauss, *City and Man*, 140.
87. See Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 323.
88. A more moderate expression is provided in Alexandre Kojève, *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right*, ed. Bryan-Paul Frost and trans. Bryan-Paul Frost and Robert Howse (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).
89. Leo Strauss, "Progress or Return?" in *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, 239.
90. Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy*, 311.
91. Strauss, *City and Man*, 5.
92. See Howse, *Leo Strauss*, 153.
93. Alexander Wendt, "Why a World State is Inevitable," *European Journal of International Relations* 9, no. 4 (2003): 523.
94. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 293.
95. Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 192.
96. Strauss, "Heideggerian Existentialism," 29.

CHAPTER 7

Michael Oakeshott and Alexandre Kojève on Play and Practice

Michael Oakeshott's elevation of creativity and the poetic imagination provided for a defense of traditional practices which did not rely merely on an appeal to "time out of mind." But as Efraim Podoksik has pointed out, Oakeshott's privileging of an "unreflective, poetic-like mental activity," in opposition to what he termed "Rationalism" (a technical, calculative, and utilitarian attitude), also "invited accusations of irrationalism and 'revulsion' from thought."[1] This dichotomy is particularly notable in "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind" (1959), an essay later collected in *Rationalism and Politics* (1962) in which Oakeshott described the mode of poetry. Oakeshott indicated that he intended this essay as a "belated retraction of a foolish sentence in *Experience and Its Modes*" in which he had declared the lives of the artist and the religious mystic to be the most "thoroughly and positively practical."[2] In his new understanding, far from belonging completely to the practical mode, art and image-making were closer to the *opposite* of practice. Emancipating poetic expression and image-making from practice, however, brought with it new and probably unforeseen problems, not the least of which was the question of the relation of poetry and religion.

As I will argue, it is from this direction that Oakeshott would ultimately provide the foundation for his mature view of moral experience in a civil association, a summation which would undo some of the pluralism of the "conversation of mankind" for a position in which a poetic religiosity achieved a final and distinct priority. It is necessary to clarify some of the

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shortcomings of a dichotomy which Oakeshott would rectify in this final statement of the relation of poetry to the moral life and religion in *On Human Conduct*. In that final great work Oakeshott would bring his defense and celebration of poetic practice toward the immanent religious necessity that remains for finite beings confronting their own "reconciliation to nothingness."[3]

In delineating the premodern element in this reconciliation it is helpful to compare Oakeshott with his contemporary Alexandre Kojève, whose post-Heideggerian interpretation of Hegel centered on his recognition that "[a]cceptance without reserve of the fact of death, or of human finitude conscious of itself, is the ultimate source of all of Hegel's thought, which does no more than draw out all the consequences, even the most ultimate, of the existence of this fact."[4] Oakeshott and Kojève share an affinity as unorthodox "Hegelians" influenced by that philosopher's connection to Hobbes. Kojève followed Hegel more closely in taking Absolute Knowledge to be actualized in the unity of historical experience at the realization of the universal and homogeneous state. For Kojève the finitude of human being is redeemed through participation in this final and rational *Geist*. This stands in strong contrast to Oakeshott's reinterpretation of the Absolute as the experience of individual moral selves related to other selves within a practice of civility. However, the collapsing of the divide between theory and practice in Kojève's philosophy does lead to an emphasis on the practical world, which is comparable to that of the unity or continuity of the self's experience for Oakeshott in which "[t]hought is not simply a particular form of experience; it is ultimately inseparable from experience."[5]

Oakeshott's treatment of Hobbes and Hegel can also be read, in contrast with Kojève's intransigent philosophical modernism, as a moderate and poetic absorption of philosophical *mania*, evoking premodern continuities, which for Kojève had been negated by history. Oakeshott was aware of his participation in "that love of moderation which has as frequently been fatal to English philosophy as it has been favourable to English politics,"[6] and there is no doubt that he carried an "understandable [English] prejudice" against those who would "in general terms interpret the history of the world or of Europe."[7] As explored in Chap. 4, this skepticism is related to the contingency he wished to establish in the processes of human intelligence and the connection between autonomy, which Oakeshott would assign to the mode of poetry, and his purified modal description of the activity of the historian. Oakeshott treated both

of these activities as performed for their own intrinsic worth and meaning, separate from the standards of science and the demands of practical life. For this reason Oakeshott's defense of history for history's sake is as open to misunderstanding as his related description of the mode of poetry, which can read as an unfashionably late rehearsal of *l'art pour l'art*. However, it is only in keeping hold of this strand of "willful" autonomy and its moderation of rational *praxis* that we may approach the center of Oakeshott's thought.

Oakeshott found Hegel's version of what he termed the "Rational Will" tradition to be deficient because it failed to properly recognize the creative basis of the will. This led to a false dialectic and rational teleology based in Greek reason rather than representing the true basis of the contingency and autonomy found in the Judaic tradition of will. Hegel had consciously displaced this Judaic tradition for reasons that Stanley Rosen has outlined:

> Hegel detaches Christ from the Jewish tradition, and presents him as a *necessary historical consequence* instead of as a miraculous discontinuity in human history. The detachment of Christ from the Jews is necessary for the conceptualizing of Christ. The Jews lack *Logos*, and this is related to their inability to externalize the spirit of God in plastic form. The Jews are political slaves; they have no vision (according to Hegel) of God as spirit present within daily life, but conceive of him only as the unreasonable, jealous, and *absent* Jaweh.[8]

This is also the point at which Oakeshott may be distinguished most clearly and unmistakably from the "Athenian" (and "Gnostic") Hegel in turning toward Hobbes (and ultimately Augustine and "Jerusalem"). For Oakeshott, "Greek thought, lacking the conception of creative will and the idea of sovereignty," could not account for the autonomy of human history, which must rather be traced to the "the political ideas of Roman civilization and the political-theological ideas of Judaism." As he further clarified, "the Roman conception of *lex* and the Judaic-Christian conception of will and creation … contained seeds of opposition to the Rational-Natural tradition, seeds which had already come to an early flowering in Augustine."[9] While this was more or less the argument of Michael B. Foster in *The Political Philosophies of Plato and Hegel* (1935),[10] Oakeshott had long been aware that this tradition represented the absorption of a "peculiarly Hebrew belief, which had little or no counterpart in Greek culture."[11]

While Oakeshott cannot be said to simply align with what he called the "Will and Artifice" tradition on this basis, (he had after all found it unsatisfactory in its treatment of volition),[12] he would seek to rectify the "Rational Will" tradition through this corrected understanding of the Judaic contribution to political thought.

It has been argued that Oakeshott's "rare criticism of Hobbes" (on volition) signaled his own more Hegelian "reconstitution of Hobbes's civil philosophy."[13] However, this deficiency in Hobbes distracts from Oakeshott's affinities with the Will and Artifice tradition, a tradition which leads beyond Hobbes and back to Augustine and Jerusalem. As comparison with Kojève will serve to clarify, Oakeshott's "reconstitution" of Hobbes would draw more fundamentally on Augustine's religious thought than Hegel's philosophy of death.

In *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (1936) Leo Strauss had argued that it was Hobbes who had initiated the crucial "emancipation of passion and imagination" through his assertion of "the impotence of reason."[14] In direct opposition to this view, however, Oakeshott claimed that "the displacement of Reason in favour of will and imagination and the emancipation of passion were slowly mediated changes in European thought that had gone far before Hobbes wrote"—as far back in fact as Augustine.[15] In developing the religious depth of this tradition, Oakeshott provided a more coherent and satisfactory theory of the will, steering away from the polemic dichotomy of some of the essays in *Rationalism and Politics*. His characteristic emphasis on historical continuity would reach its greatest creative tension where this Judaic-Christian-Augustinian tradition was melded with a renaissance of pagan and classical ideas. Outlined in *On Human Conduct*, this amounted to a "terrestrialization" of Augustine not much less radical than Kojève's revolutionary account of an existentialist Hegel.

The Limits of Aestheticism

It is arguably only with the reconciliation of poetry and practice in *On Human Conduct* that Oakeshott overcame the polemical dichotomy of "serious" practice (with its tendency to decline into "Rationalism") and "playful" poetry (this "Rationalism" again with a minus sign in front). This reconciliation is achieved with the acknowledgment of the problem of eternity. Oakeshott was cognizant of the close but indefinite relationship between poetry and religion in the concern with the transience of

earthly existence,[16] and it is only in this culminating work of civil theory that the religious sensibility available in momentary escape from practice is reconciled with the existential *amor fati* in the mortality waiting at the end of the mode of practice. This achievement is evident in Oakeshott's turning away from the merely delightful image in haunting celebration of beauty shared with time in "reconciliation to nothingness."[17] Resolution and acceptance in the face of death, a fate which is otherwise the emblem of all frustrations of the practical desires, is a part of the process of self-completion.

For Kojève, committed to the notion that human beings overcome their nature through history, the failure to satisfactorily address the self's individual encounter with eternity would leave him facing the absurdity of a completed discourse at the end of which the playful ironist can only spin a bottle choosing to be, by turns, "a *fainéant* god, a philosophical administrator of automata, or a potential Japanese snob."[18] This intimation of the nihilism ushered in with the completion of practice was itself Kojève's ironic statement of resolute acceptance of the outcome of human history. Seen from this perspective, it could be said that it is Oakeshott's mode of poetry that ignored the nihilistic implications of what is effectively the story of the technological Hobbesian being freed of its practical human tasks.

Oakeshott's mode of poetry already implied some degree of mastery of nature, being incompatible with the "primordial condition of the race when death was close [and] leisure was scarce."[19] Related to this problem is Oakeshott's demotion of the ancient poets to the practical mode.[20] Their epics and lyrics are disqualified from "poetry" because they were written with the intention of communicating practical and ancestral wisdom. The mode of poetry was established through emancipation from such practical considerations, the release of language from utilitarian significations, and the uprooting of culture from its original context. (In a revealing sentence Oakeshott noted how "the invading Romans were provoked to contemplative delights by the temples and statues of Greece because for them they had no religious-symbolic significance.")[21] This liberated poetic mode of experience draws on sounds which are formed as in childhood when we may sometimes create "an heroic language of our own invention."[22] While Oakeshott identified the Renaissance and the sixteenth century as the key moment of emergence, his aestheticism is more suggestive of Pater and the nineteenth century.[23]

The sense in which this view of poetry is related to Oakeshott's conservatism is apparent in his characterization of fishing as "an activity which may be engaged in, not for the profit of the catch, but for its own sake." Approached in this manner, "the activity has become a ritual."[24] While some measure of practical completion is clearly necessary for this playful attitude to be attained, Oakeshott believed that a poetic sensibility and conservative disposition prevent play from declining into mere "recreation" and "relaxation" from work. If the practical orientation of "work" is allowed to dictate the meaning of this rest, then "the real gifts of art and poetry and of all the great explanatory adventures of mankind are lost."[25]

The desire to avert this dominance of practice through asserting the autonomy of the mode of poetry was also reflected in Oakeshott's treatment of theory, where he concluded that image-making and poetry is "all that can, in the end, survive of the Platonic conception of *theoria*" (that "what Plato described as *theoria* is in fact aesthetic experience").[26] In this poetic image-making the image is pure artifice and the activity is performed for its own sake (or for "delight"). As he wrote in a posthumously published essay, "Work and Play," "Poetic imagination is not a preliminary to doing something, it is an end in itself."[27] The unity or continuity of the image and the activity of image-making is poetry and delight. The image is not the imitation of appearances (themselves the imitations of ideas as it was supposedly for Plato in his quarrel with the poets); it does not express a truth beyond or outside of itself and cannot fall short except in its own aesthetic terms—as the experience of delight in making, which is continuous with the delight of beholding. This self-delighting language of poetry is one in which "the words are themselves images and not signs."[28]

In attempting to oppose practice's domination of leisure and aesthetic experience Oakeshott may have achieved only a polemical reversal of Rationalism. At any rate, the mode of poetry would prove unstable in this form. There is evidence to suggest that the limitations of a pure aestheticism had earlier been apparent to Oakeshott. In *The Principles of Art*, a book which was well received by Oakeshott,[29] R. G. Collingwood had noted that "subject without style is barbarism; style without subject is dilettantism." He had concluded that "[a]rt is the two together."[30] Oakeshott had demonstrated his prior awareness of the balance of style (the image) with subject (the character) in an essay on Shakespeare's Shylock.[31] Unrestrained by the requirements of a Procrustean mode of poetry, Oakeshott came closer to articulating the significance and

meaning of poetry in this *juvenilia*. For the greatness of Shakespeare's art is in the truth of his characters—as much, if not more than, in the delight of his images, as inextricably weaved as these threads unquestionably are. The image of Cleopatra on the barge is delightful, and one of the highest moments of Shakespearian lyricism, but it is the inner depths of her character which secure *Antony and Cleopatra* as a masterpiece.[32] Yet while Oakeshott would resolve the polemical emptiness of poetic aestheticism, for Kojève, a formalistic dilettantism would remain as his ironic final word.

The Limits of Snobbery

In the first edition of his Hegel lectures, Kojève had suggested that our post-historical species would continue to enjoy art despite the disappearance of philosophy and the human significance of activity:

> [F]or since Man himself no longer changes essentially, there is no longer any reason to change the (true) principles which are at the basis of his understanding of the World and of himself. But all the rest can be preserved indefinitely; art, love, play, etc., etc.; in short, everything that makes Man *happy*.

In the second edition, however, Kojève acknowledged that, following Hegel's logic consistently, "it would have to be admitted that after the end of History, men would construct their edifices and works of art as birds build their nests and spiders spin their webs."[33] In other words, the disappearance of philosophy would usher in a bestial state of post-nature mirroring the inhuman state of nature from which *Homo sapiens* had emerged.

A 1958 trip to Japan was Kojève's pretext for a reconsideration of this circularity. Since the appearance of the first edition of his lectures in 1948, Kojève had traveled widely and had been behind the Iron Curtin, in addition to experiencing life in the capitalist states. Nothing he had witnessed of Eastern communism or Western liberalism had dissuaded him from Heidegger's assessment that they were, "seen metaphysically, both the same".[34] It was only in Japan that Kojève could claim to have discovered a society that had arrived at the end of history and avoided this inhuman metaphysics of technology.

Japan had enjoyed 250 years of peace as a closed society after the end of feudalism. In this post-historical setting "snobbery" had persisted with

artistic rituals such as Noh drama, flower arrangement, and tea ceremonies. For Kojève, these formalized practices had a meaning not apparent in the institutions of Western high culture (which continued to "perform musical concerts after the fashion of frogs and cicadas" for a "high society" which, by comparison, reminded Kojève of "a bunch of drunken sailors").[35]

In demonstrating the continuation of high culture in terms of the "Hegelian" doctrine of recognition, Kojève fashioned a response to the Nietzschean objection to the end of history as the world of the last men—a challenge Leo Strauss had repeated in a letter of September 1957.[36] In the first edition of his Hegel lectures Kojève had affirmed the essentials of Nietzsche's claim about the last men in explaining that humanity and human freedom are sustained in "progress or creation, namely, 'revolutionary' negation of the given." Revolution meant the necessity of violence and the attendant risk of death.[37] But Kojève now introduced the snob who transcends his animal nature by "negating the 'natural' or 'animal' given" not to transform it through violence into new historical content but by becoming opposed "as a pure form to himself and others taken as 'content' of any sort."[38] This allowed for something like a Nietzschean *pathos* of difference out of a pure snobbery reflecting what might be termed "the merely subjective preference for an upper class."[39]

As implied in Chap. 6, there is a tendency to sweep Kojève's theoretical puzzles under the carpet of his irony. The Kojèvian vision, stripped of its overt revolutionary violence, is described by two of its contemporary proponents as the eventual achievement of "the hyper-liberal goal of the full replacement of the rule of men by the rule of law." In the "final order" human beings are satisfied by "recognition in work and love in the family" and dignified with rights and duties supporting these roles and relations.[40] For all the curiosity of Kojève's footnote as a depiction of humanity at the end of history, however, it does suggest a deficiency in this modern attempt to solve the problem of justice and freedom in the final global state—a problem which Kojève had already identified in the impossibility of attaining or sustaining freedom in "a 'tolerant' State, which does not take its citizens seriously enough to guarantee them their political right to death."[41]

Despite the unrivaled brilliance with which Kojève revealed Hegel as a philosopher of death,[42] the implications of modern political science would prevent him from convincingly addressing this question. Oakeshott would also have to consider the role of death in political life in describing a poetic religion which might enrich the life of private individuals.

Poetry in Politics

In a letter to his colleague John Watkins in May 1963 Oakeshott attempted to define the role of death in the philosophy of Hobbes. The publication of Oakeshott's notebooks has confirmed that Strauss's discussion of death in Hobbes informed Oakeshott's understanding of "life from the standpoint of death."[43] Strauss himself had explained to German friends in a letter of May 1935 that his work on Hobbes had been conceived with an emphasis on the "deep connection" between Hobbes and Hegel.[44] Given the degree to which this point was sharpened by discussions with Kojève in Paris, this implies the indirect influence of Kojève's Hegel on Oakeshott. As Oakeshott outlined to Watkins, "the central point" for Hobbes is not death *per se*, but violent death and the dread of being killed by another human being—Hobbes understood man as reasoning from this aversion to shameful and dishonorable death, which "signifie[s] failure in the 'race' for precedence which constitutes human life—failure, not in competition with the natural world, but in competition with other human beings."[45]

Despite this description of Hobbes in more Hegelian terms of honor and struggle Oakeshott did not attempt to obscure the basic fact of Hobbes's death-avoidant doctrine. Oakeshott adopted this basis for his own civil theory. As Elizabeth Corey has perceived, in following Augustine and Hobbes, Oakeshott argued that it is religion which must "convince people of the futility of all that they normally value—reputation, achievement, and material goods."[46] Hegel argued that it is war and its attendant possibilities of death and the destruction of property which, as opposed to "edifying sermonizing," raises the moral life in a state to its full height.[47] On this point Steven B. Smith concluded (in language which brings to mind Oakeshott's civil theory) that for Hegel, "The ethical significance of war resides, then, above all in its ability to raise us above the level of mere civil association with its rootedness in material possessions and interests."[48]

Oakeshott did advance (in at least one instance) an economic rationale for the civil association, recommending Henry C. Simons's argument for prompt demobilization in his essay, "The Political Economy of Freedom" (1949). Simons had reasoned that the creative forces unleashed by demobilization compensate for the risk involved, leading to "the springing up of a revitalized and more effectively competitive economy … more able to withstand future wars."[49] On the whole, however, Oakeshott avoided materialistic argument in defining and defending his civil theory from the perspective of poetry and religion.

But Oakeshott was also not entirely oblivious to the poetic "greatness" and "glory" of a statecraft which has potentially intimate ties to warfare.[50] As explored in Chap. 5, he seized on the relative silence of Hobbes on the problem of establishing an initial covenant and interpreted him as depending on "a certain Noblenesse or Gallantnesse of courage," rarely encountered, but manifested in the poet and soldier Sidney Godolphin. Oakeshott's Hobbes relied on the courage and earnestness still to be found in men of this quality. Such men are "careless of the consequences of being bilked" and able to honor a covenant even in the state of nature.[51]

Hobbes had allowed that a timorous or sensuous fellow might justly refuse to fight against the enemy "when he substituteth a sufficient soldier in his place: for in this case he deserteth not the service of the Commonwealth."[52] Combining this concession with Oakeshott's speculation, we might envisage an affable figure who is not overly distressed at the thought of being drafted into the place of a Falstaffian rogue. At any rate, we have already noted that Oakeshott "unearthed (or, bluntly put: invented)" a Montaignean character in Hobbes's *Leviathan*.[53] This man is "proud enough to be spared the sorrow of his imperfections and the illusion of his achievements, not exactly a hero, too negligent for that, but perhaps with a touch of careless heroism about him." Oakeshott elevated the brief outlines of this Hobbesian gallant into Montaigne's ideal of one who "knows how to belong to himself."[54] This capacity to be sustained by one's own character and to cherish others of a similar disposition may be accompanied by "an aristocratic recognition of one's own unimportance, and a humility devoid of humiliation."[55]

The poetic continuity which Oakeshott developed between Hobbes and the Renaissance aimed at preserving a character who finds no likeness among the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, this Montaignean political figure was not yet consistent with the non-instrumentalism of the mode of poetry. In moving away from the dichotomy characteristic of *Rationalism in Politics*, Oakeshott allowed for the mixture of formal and instrumental intentions which would be necessary for political activity under even the most *laissez-faire* dispensation. In addition to the distinction between performances for their own sake and activities performed for a substantive reason, Oakeshott came to recognize forms of conduct between these two categories.[56] In terms of Oakeshott's civil theory, this would mean that a Godolphin-like figure could achieve vital political goals for the commonwealth in a solitary poetic spirit of non-substantiveness. To the extent that this nobility may run counter to the neutral requirements of

civil peace, however, we wonder whether Godolphin is not more reminiscent of Shakespeare's Hotspur, or the heroes who are brought to mind in the encouraging reminder that "[t]here will always be men (*andres*) who will revolt against a state which is destructive of humanity or in which there is no longer a possibility of noble action and of great deeds."[57]

Oakeshott does not look beyond Godolphin and Montaigne to a Socrates. Instead, his young gallant is redeemed from the caricature of the warrior by a poetic passion. It is the completion of the self rather than the worldly achievements that may follow as a consequence that is important in this poetic worldview. For Oakeshott then, it is only a small step from the historical seriousness of Godolphin to the post-historical questing of a Spanish *hidalgo*, "a character in whom the disaster of each encounter with the world was powerless to impugn it as a self-enactment."[58] This example can be seen to flesh out the abstraction of Oakeshott's assertion that "'play' is not merely or directly opposed to 'serious' activity; its relationship to ordinary life is that of an ironical companion."[59] In finding a way to describe the interplay of poetic and practical experience in this manner, Oakeshott discovered a coherent presentation of the completion offered in religion. As Andrew Sullivan perceived, the central place that religion would then find in Oakeshott's account of the moral life makes sense of "the otherwise perplexing aridity of his account of politics."[60]

Religious Reconciliation

Oakeshott's reconciliation of poetry and religion is given brief but beautiful expression in an important part of the first essay of *On Human Conduct* (pp. 81–86). While he never repudiated the aestheticism of the *Rationalism in Politics* period (a fact which leaves some ambiguity in his final position),[61] these few pages redefined the assumptions of his original conception of a mode of poetry as a reaction against the domination of life by practical considerations. They provided both a renovation of the view of poetry which he had advanced in *Experience and Its Modes* and a movement away from the completely autonomous mode of poetry described in *Rationalism in Politics.*

The tone of this pivotal section of *On Human Conduct* is redolent of Montaigne and Shakespeare. It is the final profundity achieved by a lifetime's reflection on a problem which more than any other seems to have fascinated Oakeshott from his earliest days as a scholar. His description of the "ordeal of consciousness" recalls something of an alternative Hamlet

who has been allowed to grow old and becalmed in prose and is characteristic of the highest moments of Oakeshott's style:

> A human condition is but rarely recognized as one of totally unrelieved agony, a "city of dreadful night"; but its commonly felt dissonances are disease, urgent wants unsatisfied, the pain of disappointed expectations, the suffering of frustrated purposes, the impositions of hostile circumstances, the sorrows of unwanted partings, burdens, ills, disasters, calamities of all sorts, and death itself, the emblem here of all such sufferings.[62]

In these pages of *On Human Conduct* religious experience appears tinged with poetry, belying the previous modal separation. In Oakeshott's culminating vision, as Terry Nardin notes, "Religious experience may acquire a poetic dimension, but it does so without shedding its practical character."[63] The poetic character of human conduct—of a conduct so true to itself that it reaches the level of expressing this religious sensibility—is Oakeshott's final and primary sense of poetry. As Elizabeth Corey explains it, "When conduct exhibits, as it sometimes does, a true unity of manner and motive, it may be said to partake of a poetic character."[64] Poetry and religion return to complete the mode of practice in the form of momentary escapes to a poetic contemplation of beauty as part of the resolution to embrace *un voyage au bout de la nuit*.[65]

The final contrast between Oakeshott and Kojève is a complete one. Just as he had turned the Hegelian Absolute on its head in interpreting it as the experience of a self, Oakeshott would take a radically alternative view of human reasoning and its intelligible actions. From this perspective, history is "not an evolutionary or teleological process" but rather the result or record of "the unceasing articulation of understood responses to endlessly emergent understood situations which continues until [a self] quits the diurnal scene."[66]

Oakeshott's emphasis on "the poetic character of all human activity"[67] involved a rejection of the idea that practice might be better fulfilled in something higher or more enduring than the self (while leaving open the idea that the self may imagine its own ironical counterpart in the spirit of delightful conversation). From Oakeshott's perspective, Kojève committed an *ignoratio elenchi* in appropriating the mode of science with its causal reasoning from natural processes for a discourse in which "all who participate in the construction of [a] rational world of conceptual images of invoking universal acceptance are as if they were one man." While

failing to reflect the contingency of individual and intelligent "goings-on," this homogenization implies, as Oakeshott realized, "the exclusion of whatever is private, esoteric, or ambiguous."[68] Such a "monopoly" leads to the presumption that dissenting voices must be suppressed, having "convicted [them] in advance of irrelevance." For Oakeshott, this is the very definition of "barbarism".[69]

Despite the pluralism of Oakeshott's "conversation" among contingent human modes of life, however, mortal finitude of the self tempered and enriched Oakeshott's account of play. In describing the mode of poetry Oakeshott had already sensed that, in conversation, "the playfulness is serious and the seriousness in the end is only play."[70] In *On Human Conduct* the seriousness of religion would give substance to the levity of poetry as the playfulness of poetry lightened the solemnities of religion.

We are inevitably reminded of Kojève's personal motto—"Human life is a comedy; one must play it seriously."[71] But there is an unbridgeable gulf between Kojève's existential insouciance and Oakeshott's poetic religiosity and perhaps it may be found in the firm limit on the human appropriation of the Judaic tradition of will and imagination that is inherent in its genesis. Oakeshott acknowledged the permanent restraints on human knowledge and power and the publication of his notebooks reveals him balancing the creativity and imagination of the autonomous human will with the truth of reason and nature as that which "cannot be wholly recreated":

> We are so ready to consider everything as a construction & therefore as subject to the exercise of the human will, that we forget that we live in a world in that not everything can be changed, & possess natures whose characters cannot be wholly recreated. We would rather destroy and recreate than adapt. But adaption belongs much more to fallible human character and judgment; it is more in accord with our actual powers. We are not "gods."[72]

"Who plays?" asked Kojève. "The gods"—was his consistent answer. For Kojève, "the gods have no need to react and so they play. They are the do-nothing gods." Once again, Kojève was ironical but not misleading. He had nowhere else to go. After all, as he declared, "I am a do-nothing and I like to play."[73] But the gods that might be imagined in Oakeshott's poetic vision are not "World Controllers" bored with the predictable workings of a society completely accounted for in an encyclopedic discourse. On the contrary, as Andrew Sullivan perceives, Oakeshott

envisages a relationship of conversation between God and men "whose mutual interest is sustained by their estrangement." In other words, "the love of God for man is somehow connected with man's contingency and disobedience."[74] Oakeshott's poets may imagine a God who has allowed his human images to enjoy the radical sovereignty that underpins the spontaneity and delight of his own acts of creativity. In eschewing judgment in favor of stimulating difference this relationship also invokes Oakeshott's understanding of friendship (discussed in Chap. 3). In these ways Oakeshott recovered religion as both the poetic escape from practice and the reconciler to human finitude. Religion offered him completion in a mortal world, reflecting the continuing relevance of his early definition of religion in *Experience and Its Modes*:

> Religion, indeed, as I see it, is not a particular form of practical experience; it is merely practical experience at its fullest. Wherever practice is least reserved, least hindered by extraneous interests, least confused by what it does not need, wherever it is most nearly at one with itself and homogeneous, at that point it becomes religion.[75]

As we will see in Chap. 9, Oakeshott returned to medieval religious thought for the more religious Hobbes and less "Gnostic" Hegel which he would find in Augustine, a move which may be seen to contrast with Strauss's insistence on the novelty of Hobbes's "emancipation of passion and imagination." While Strauss traced creativity's encroachment on philosophy to Hobbes, he was also fully aware of the ancient poetic tradition and its quarrel with philosophy. At the conclusion of his commentary on Aristophanes's *The Clouds* Strauss observed that Socrates would have rejected the path of the poet's gods—"he would not have taken them as his model because of their childishness as shown by their indifference to learning."[76] Strauss would instead revive the philosophical understanding of a god in his renewal of Socratism.

Notes

1. Efraim Podoksik, "The Voice of Poetry in the Thought of Michael Oakeshott," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63, no. 4 (October 2002): 731–732.
2. Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, ed. Timothy Fuller (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991), xi; Michael Oakeshott,

Experience and Its Modes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), 296.

3. Michael Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 84.
4. Alexandre Kojève, "The Idea of Death in the Philosophy of Hegel," trans. Joseph J. Carpino *Interpretation* 3, no. 2/3 (1973): 124.
5. Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes*, 10.
6. Ibid., 196.
7. Michael Oakeshott, "Review of N. Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History* (1936)," in *The Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence: Essays and Reviews 1926–51, Selected Writings, Volume III*, ed. Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2007), 137.
8. Stanley Rosen, *G. W. F. Hegel: An Introduction to the Science of Wisdom* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2000), 221–222.
9. Michael Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," in *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2000), 61–62.
10. Wendell John Coats Jr., *Oakeshott and His Contemporaries: Montaigne, St. Augustine, Hegel, Et al* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2000), 42.
11. Michael Oakeshott, "The Importance of the Historical Element in Christianity," in *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, ed. Timothy Fuller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 69.
12. Michael Oakeshott, "Dr. Leo Strauss on Hobbes," in *Hobbes on Civil Association*, 157.
13. Paul Franco, introduction to Oakeshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association*, ix.
14. Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis*, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 161.
15. Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," 62.
16. Michael Oakeshott, "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind," *Rationalism in Politics*, 540–541.
17. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 84.
18. Stanley Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 106.
19. Oakeshott, "Voice of Poetry," 488.
20. While "demotion" denotes a hierarchy foreign to the "conversation of mankind," the polemical dichotomy of *Rationalism and Politics* is already suggestive of the final priority of a poetic religion in *On Human Conduct*.
21. Oakeshott, "Voice of Poetry," 530–532.
22. Ibid., 539.
23. Elizabeth Campbell Corey, *Michael Oakeshott on Religion, Aesthetics, and Politics* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 120.

24. Michael Oakeshott, "On Being Conservative," in *Rationalism in Politics*, 417.
25. Michael Oakeshott, "Work and Play," in *What is History? and other essays*, *Selected Writings, Volume I*, ed. Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2004), 313.
26. Oakeshott, "Voice of Poetry," 516 n. 13.
27. Oakeshott, "Work and Play," 312.
28. Oakeshott, "Voice of Poetry," 527.
29. Michael Oakeshott, "Review of R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (1938)," in *The Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence*, 184–186.
30. Cited in Podoksik, "Voice of Poetry in the Thought of Michael Oakeshott," 722.
31. Corey, *Michael Oakeshott on Religion, Aesthetics, and Politics*, 104–105.
32. For a similar example, see Paul Franco, *Michael Oakeshott: An Introduction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 131.
33. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. Allan Bloom and trans. James H. Nichols (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 158–159 n. 6.
34. Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 41.
35. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 159 n. 6. "Next to the Japanese," Kojève would quip in an interview, "English high society is a bunch of drunken sailors." Quoted in J. H. Nichols, *Alexandre Kojève: Wisdom at the End of History* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 85.
36. "…was Nietzsche not right in describing the Hegelian-Marxian end as 'the last man'?" Leo Strauss, Letter to Alexandre Kojève, September 11, 1957, in *On Tyranny: Corrected and Expanded Edition, Including the Strauss-Kojève Correspondence*, ed. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 291.
37. Kojève, "Death in the Philosophy of Hegel," 141.
38. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 161–162 n. 6.
39. John Adams Wettergreen Jr., "Is Snobbery a Formal Value? Considering Life at the End of Modernity," *Western Political Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (March 1973): 128.
40. Robert Howse and Bryan-Paul Frost, "Introductory Essay: On the Plausibility of the Universal and Homogenous State," in Alexandre Kojève, *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right*, ed. Bryan-Paul Frost and trans. Bryan-Paul Frost and Robert Howse (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 3.
41. Kojève, "Idea of Death in the Philosophy of Hegel," 141.

42. This brilliant clarity also brings to light a telling inconsistency as Victor Gourevitch notices "Kojève's failure to explain satisfactorily why Hegel couched this [atheistic] part of his teaching in equivocal, i.e., esoteric terms." Victor Gourevitch, "Philosophy and Politics, II" *The Review of Metaphysics* 22, no. 2 (December 1968), 298 n. 2.
43. Oakeshott cites Strauss's *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* at page 16. Michael Oakeshott, *Notebooks, 1922–86, Selected Writings, Volume VI*, ed. Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2014), 287.
44. Letter to Hans-Georg Gadamer and Gerhard Krüger, May 12, 1935, in Leo Strauss, *Hobbes's Critique of Religion and Related Writings*, trans. Gabriel Bartlett and Svetozar Minkov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 161.
45. Michael Oakeshott, "Letter on Hobbes," *Political Theory* 29, no. 6 (December 2001): 834.
46. Corey, *Michael Oakeshott on Religion, Aesthetics, and Politics*, 94.
47. G. W. F. Hegel, *Outlines of a Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox and ed. Stephen Houlgate (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 306, 308.
48. Steven B. Smith, *Hegel's Critique of Liberalism: Rights in Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 159.
49. Michael Oakeshott, "The Political Economy of Freedom," in *Rationalism in Politics*, 404.
50. Oakeshott, "Voice of Poetry," 493–494 n. 2.
51. Michael Oakeshott, "The Moral Life in the Writings of Thomas Hobbes," in *Hobbes on Civil Association*, 140.
52. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (London: Penguin, 1985), XXI, 269.
53. Jan-Werner Müller, "Re-imagining Leviathan: Schmitt and Oakeshott on Hobbes and the problem of political order," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 13, nos. 2–3 (2010): 324.
54. Oakeshott, "Moral Life in the Writings of Thomas Hobbes," 128.
55. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 238.
56. Ibid., 183.
57. Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 209. It is worth noting the degree to which Strauss's position has been misrepresented on this point. Despite his clear preference for the theoretical man and his reminder that the most theoretical of men belonged among the *anthropoi*, one of Strauss's critics resorts to mocking "[t]iny little men with rounded shoulders" and "[l]arger, softer men, with soft white hands which had never held a gun or changed a tire" who yet dared to celebrate manliness. Only a few pages on, this critic reveals why Strauss could never live up to her ideal of masculinity in the example of her "friends" who have been "too tall, too strong, and too

black" for society to handle. Anne Norton, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 63, 70.

58. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 241.
59. Michael Oakeshott, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism*, ed. Timothy Fuller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 110.
60. Andrew Sullivan, *Intimations Pursued: The Voice of Practice in the Conversation of Michael Oakeshott* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2007), 178.
61. Podoksik, "Voice of Poetry in the Thought of Michael Oakeshott," 732. Oakeshott blurred the lines between mortality, poetry, and divinity in such a way that substantial ambiguities will always remain in his worldview.
62. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 81.
63. Terry Nardin, *The Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (University Park: State University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 67.
64. Corey, *Michael Oakeshott on Religion, Aesthetics, and Politics*, 118.
65. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 83.
66. Ibid., 41.
67. Michael Oakeshott, "The Tower of Babel," in *Rationalism in Politics*, 479.
68. Oakeshott, "Voice of Poetry," 507–508.
69. Ibid., 494, 492.
70. Ibid., 493.
71. Cited in Howse and Frost, "Introductory Essay," 27.
72. Oakeshott, *Notebooks*, 331.
73. Cited in Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 106.
74. Sullivan, *Intimations Pursued*, 201.
75. Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes*, 292.
76. Leo Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 33.

CHAPTER 8

Leo Strauss and Socratism After Nietzsche and Heidegger

Leo Strauss identified the vitality of Western civilization in the fertile restlessness created by the tension between its two incommensurable sources, Greek rationalism and the biblical tradition. This defining original situation of the West had prompted the greatest of minds to search for a synthesis of these two elements, and the constant questioning and doubt of each of these mighty attempts to overcome this impasse and resistance constitute the underlying energy and motion of the civilization.[1] This fundamental "negativity" of the West springs out of an unbridgeable gulf. Strauss realized the urgency of recovering a thinking grounded in this awareness in a historical moment when technological darkness threatens to throw it into permanent obscurity.

Strauss became so adept at political philosophy that his profoundest observations often appear as mere platitudes or else are overlooked in the midst of apparently commonplace observations about "Athens and Jerusalem" or "the Ancients and the Moderns." In this sense, his often repeated advice not to "overlook the wood for the trees" is itself a lesson in political philosophy couched in the most innocuous of idioms. However, Richard L. Velkley is right to note Strauss's hint in *Natural Right and History* that he had more in common with the "wrong kind" of thinkers ("writers") than the "right kind."[2] Strauss's sense of the historical scope and destiny of Western thought places him in the company of thinkers like Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, all of whom understood philosophy and the life of thinking to be closely linked with the fate of the West. But

D. McIlwain, *Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss*, Recovering Political Philosophy, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13381-8_8

while alertness to these muted connections is crucial for understanding the true significance of Strauss's thought, it is equally necessary to recognize the points at which Strauss asserted his own contributions as a thinker and stepped apart from this company in presenting his insights on the recovery of the ground of Western thinking.

Strauss realized that the philosophical way of life as classically conceived had not been invalidated by any attachment to an outmoded cosmology but remained viable as the *quest* for a cosmology. In keeping sight of this permanent problem, philosophy keeps its head above the waters of historical flux while avoiding dogmatic cosmological errors. This fundamental and conscious negativity had also prepared philosophy for its encounter with the biblical tradition. Recognizing this preparedness of philosophy (an insight that Strauss earned through the close study of the Islamic and Jewish Aristotelians of the medieval Spanish enlightenment) allowed Strauss to radically distinguish his project from the modern German tradition from which it had sprung. Strauss understood his task as recovering a non-historicist philosophy while remaining alert to the epochs and events that have heralded the historical appearance of the great thinkers who sustain this tradition of philosophy.

Strauss's insight into the ground and vitality of Western thinking developed out of his close reading of Nietzsche and Heidegger in the light of what he had come to understand about Platonism and Plato's Socrates through the "non-Western" tradition of "Western" thought preserved by the philosophers of medieval Spain. Strauss's interpretation of Plato and the meaning of Socrates thus diverged crucially and profoundly from the post-Christian understanding that propelled Nietzsche's attacks on these foundational Western figures.

Nietzsche famously likened the Western spirit to a tightened bow that has built up great flexibility and power through two millennia of tense struggle against the dualistic Platonism of the ideas (and of the Christian religion). For Nietzsche, power seeks out great resistance and opposition. Those philosophers who are able to abide joyfully amid the sovereignty of becoming encounter their great and worthy antagonist in Plato whose dualism represents a reaction against the instability and impermanence of their noble perspective. For Nietzsche, as for the other generals in "Homer's army,"[3] Heraclitus was the emblematic thinker of being as becoming out of chaos and of strife as the origin and procession of all things.

Heidegger's thinking is even more closely associated with Heraclitus and the pre-Socratics. For Heidegger the founding moment of the Western thinking was the raising of the question of Being in archaic Greece, an event which was gifted to the West in the philosophical properties of the Indo-European languages, Greek in particular. Heidegger characterized the essence of the scientific standpoint of these original Western thinkers "as the questioning holding of one's ground [*das fragende standhalten*] in the midst of the ever self-concealing totality of what is."[4] While Nietzsche wished to expose mankind to the stark reality of the underlying Will to Power in order for the highest of them to overcome the reactive second-order thinking of a mass society based on the predominance of the modern ideas, Strauss viewed the noblest part of Heidegger's project to be the "preparing [of] an entirely novel form of *Bodenständigkeit*: a *Bodenständigkeit* beyond the most extreme *Bodenlosigkeit*, a home beyond the most extreme homelessness."[5]

However, Nietzsche and Heidegger's appeals to the deep and primeval forces of the Western mind had themselves served to conceal the basic and powerful reliance of their own thinking on a teaching which is fundamental to the modern technological metaphysics. In *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* Strauss noted, "Originally a liberal man was a man who behaved in a manner becoming a free man, as distinguished from a slave."[6] The effective inversion of this sentence was the one to which Strauss had drawn attention in his lectures on Hegel's *Philosophy of History*: "It was not so much *from* slavery as *through* slavery that humanity was emancipated."[7] For the moderns, as Strauss observed, the man who had "lost his nerve" was at the "origin of all higher culture."[8] This modern understanding of human culture, grounded in Hobbes's fundamental teaching about the passions (a teaching that was itself based in Machiavelli's turning away from theory in favor of that which provides the firmest ground of practice)[9] had been one of the pertinent questions between Strauss and Alexandre Kojève in their quarrel in *On Tyranny*. While Kojève claimed to be a Hegelian sage at the end of historical humanity, Strauss insisted on reminding him that he sat atop the modern technological culture that Nietzsche's Zarathustra had abominated as the safe and commodious realm of the "last men." While Kojève refused to concede as much, he was nevertheless said to hold to the truth of Heidegger's Nietzschean assessment that the United States and the Soviet Union, "seen metaphysically, are both the same."[10]

While Nietzsche and Heidegger had both sought to oppose the deepest ground of antiquity to the spirit of modern thinking, they had, like Hegel, adopted the *praxis*-oriented foundation of Machiavellian or Hobbesian modern science. This fact may explain Strauss's decision to closely engage with his contemporary Kojève's Hegel lectures and his assistance in their intellectual promotion in the United States. These actions were of more significance than the simple support of a friend's work. For in very clearly defining "negativity" as death or the Slave's encounter with death, Kojève brought the clearest illumination to this basic orientation. In facing death the Slave "caught a glimpse of himself as nothingness, he understood that his whole existence was but a 'surpassed,' 'overcome' (*aufgehoben*) death—a Nothingness maintained in Being." In other words, this being is itself the action of negating being through fighting and working (i.e., through forms of *praxis*). "Hence," Kojève could conclude, "the Slave who—through fear of death—grasps the (human) Nothingness that is at the foundation of his (natural) Being, understands himself, understands Man, better than the Master does."[11]

Kojève's importance as a thinker lies chiefly in this emphasis on the centrality of death in Hegel's philosophy. Hegel had described the life of *Geist* (in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*) as that which "maintains itself in [Death]"[12] (*in ihm sich erhält*) and, more generally, modern philosophy had come to understand itself from the position of the most politically effective and commonly shared passion, the fear of death. In assuming this position, philosophy became subject to a political (and essentially unphilosophical) dichotomy of fear and courage. Nietzsche's bid to inject the virtue of courage into philosophy is well known, while Heidegger's definition of *Dasein* (in "What is Metaphysics?") as "[b]eing held out into the nothing"[13] (*Hineingehaltenheit in das Nichts*) is also indicative of this preoccupation with the negativity of death, whether encountered in a glimpse of self-knowledge or experienced as an *abgrund* of existential freedom and its possibility of an authentic life affirmed by resolute *praxis*. In both cases, it meant a falsely high estimate of the virtue of courage and a neglect of what is truly highest—philosophical *eros*.

In recovering the *eros* of Socratic philosophizing Strauss would have to extricate the unquestionable insights of the German mind from this Hobbesian teaching of the power of death. For the privileging of the passion of fear and, in opposition to it as its supposed corrective, an unreflective or instinctive courage, had also led to a profound misunderstanding

of the meaning of Socrates and the erotic nature of the philosophical way of life. Nietzsche had determined Socrates to be the servile element which had disrupted the instinctive and tragic world of the Homeric Greeks and its active and noble Will to Power. For Strauss, in starkest contrast, he was the embodiment of *eros*, the most elevated of the passions (and therefore one of the highest beings). This recovery was foreshadowed in what Strauss acknowledged as Nietzsche's unrivaled celebration of the philosopher, an indication of Nietzsche's true orientation that would set the stage for Strauss's quietly spoken insight that "the philosophers of the future as Nietzsche described them remind one much more than Nietzsche himself seems to have thought of Plato's philosopher."[14]

Socrates over Zarathustra

According to Nietzsche's Zarathustra the Greeks had heard "the voice of [their] will to power" as the commandment to "always be first and outrival all others: your jealous soul should love no one, except your friend." This focusing of the spirit had propelled the Greeks to greatness.[15] Yet this kind insight into the source of the Greek achievement would also draw Nietzsche into the orbit of Hobbes's philosophy of power and the timid and technological spirit which is at its foundation. Strauss realized that the overcoming of this Hobbesian ground required that this Homeric or Pre-Socratic sense of the peculiarly Greek drive (which Strauss himself paraphrased from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as "the full dedication of the individual to the contest for excellence, distinction, supremacy")[16] needed to be understood in its true and noble continuity with what Matthew Arnold had termed the (Socratic-Platonic) Greek "passion for right seeing and thinking."[17]

For Nietzsche, the Homeric instinct of warlike mastery had been exposed to a withering self-consciousness by the un-Greek and plebian ugliness of Socrates and his dialectic:

> With Socrates, Greek taste suddenly changed in favour of dialectics: what really happened here? Above all, a *noble* taste was defeated; with dialectics, the rabble rises to the top. Before Socrates, dialectical manners were rejected in good society: they were seen as bad manners, they humiliated people. The young were warned against them. People were generally distrustful of reasons being displayed like this. Honourable things, like honourable people, do not go around with their reasons in their hand.[18]

Viewing Platonism as proto-Christian, Nietzsche accused Socrates of undermining the Greek achievement (much as in the *Anti-Christ* he would name Luther as the spiteful fellow who had destroyed the Renaissance).[19] Socrates and the Christians had alike sought to sap the confidence and vigor of the noble in supplanting their "table of overcoming" and replacing it with the values of a resentful rabble.

Strauss recognized that, in accepting Homeric courage and mastery as the highest and noblest virtue, Nietzsche had become distracted from the true nobility of the philosopher. However, it bears emphasizing that Strauss affirmed that none had spoken more reverently of the philosopher than Nietzsche and this was more a criticism of the power of Nietzsche's potentially rabble-rousing polemical rhetoric than it was of his philosophy itself. For Strauss, Socrates had further elevated the Greek spirit of contest and distinction in directing it to its highest goal in philosophy's *eros*—"the passion for right seeing and thinking."

Far from this being a resentful revaluation of noble Greek culture, the Socratic turn had contributed to the raising of Western negativity to its full height and power. Having perceived that the Western spirit had become trapped within the Hobbesian horizon, Strauss sought the recovery of this insight against the polemical reassertion of the warlike and Homeric spirit of mastery and physical courage. This had been the source of his critique of Carl Schmitt's reading of Hobbes (examined in Chap. 5). The *daimon* of Socrates provides the perspective that breaks the modern impasse between a Hobbesian conscience counseling political prudence and fear of death and a Heideggerian conscience hearkening to the call of death and the embrace of resolute political action.[20] For while Hobbes taught a conscience that listens to the voice of fear, and Heidegger and Nietzsche seem to have desired the reverse of this spirit in exhorting men to "voluntary death" and "being-towards death" (respectively), the Socratic *daimon* insisted on what Strauss called "self-preservation that is in the service of the highest good." This highest good and highest goal is *eros* directed by *eros*.[21]

Nietzsche had denounced Socrates as life-denying and as one who was unable to face the tragic wisdom that is the true Homeric inheritance of the Greeks and their greatness. As he died, Socrates had shown that he was sick of life in stating that he owed a cock to Asclepius and thus felt that he had been healed of his existence.[22] But Socrates had effectively followed one of Zarathustra's sayings in freely willing death at the right time,[23] when his *daimon* had reminded him (through its silence at the crucial

moment) that at the age of 70 his body could no longer support the philosophical *eros* of his soul.[24] With obvious anti-Christian intent Nietzsche had deemed 30 too young for voluntary death—("at the age of thirty one is, as regards high culture, a beginner, a child.")[25] Through his *daimon* Socrates sensed that 70 was the appropriate age for his sacrifice on behalf of philosophy. Nietzsche, recognizing only life-denying otherworldliness or tragic life-affirming wisdom as the two possibilities of the soul, failed to perceive the significance of what Strauss emphasized was the noble yet not tragic death of Socrates.[26] Socrates had finally denied his bodily existence, but only after 70 years of affirming the highest good that it allowed to his soul. Nevertheless, in his revival of the unrivaled nobility of the individual philosopher and a point of vantage beyond good and evil, Nietzsche had contributed to revealing the path to the recovery of the trans-moral Socratic way of life.[27]

Heidegger and the Ground of Grounds

Nietzche's celebration of the philosopher had reaffirmed for Strauss that philosophy is for those "men capable and willing to live 'under the sky,' of men who do not need the shelter of the cave, of any cave." The natural subject for these natural men is not man, or his historical *Weltanschauung*, but the cosmos.[28] Against this classical view, Heidegger had shown a disturbing willingness to seek a thinking supposedly sprung organically from its rootedness in the soil (*Bodenständigkeit*). This view of culture betrayed the influence of German nationalism and served to distance Heidegger from his more rational arguments about the metaphysical qualities of the Western languages.[29] While Strauss had been as impressed as anyone by Heidegger's intense and powerful questioning when he heard him lecture on Aristotle, the atmosphere of Heidegger's *Being and Time* had revealed to Strauss that Heidegger had allowed his thinking to become dominated by the anticipation of a German revolution to be carried out by National Socialism.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger had described the authenticity of a resolute running forward (unreflectively) into one's fate. Strauss perceived that this "moral teaching" was akin to the ethos of National Socialism and, in the historical context of interwar Germany, led directly to that movement and its goals.[30] Heideggerian resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) and being-toward-death (*Sein-zum-Tode*) were effectively the reverse of the most rational or moral passion of Hobbesian political science, the fear of

violent death. As such, they appeared in the same light as Nietzsche's elevation of the virtue of courage and remained within the horizon of Hobbes and the other English "philosophers of power."[31]

In letters to Gershom Scholem, Strauss identified in Heidegger the peculiarly German phenomenon of a supreme mind attached to a base character,[32] describing him as a "phenomenal intellect inside a kitsch soul."[33] This was the main source of Heidegger's distractions from the calling of philosophy as his "kitsch soul" encouraged him to envisage a philosophy rooted in the soil and culture of his home province and its timber trails. Strauss pointed to a particularly revealing "statement by [Heidegger] from the year 1934 about himself as a Black Forest peasant." In this radio address "Creative Landscapes: Why Do We Remain in the Provinces?" Heidegger had sung the praises of rural life, suggesting that his thinking was nourished by this *Bodenständigkeit*.[34]

Strauss had demonstrated his alertness to these aspects of Heidegger's character and thinking long before speculation about Heidegger's connections to German nationalism and National Socialism became an academic cottage industry. Yet as a German Jew who was adamant in rejecting Heidegger on a personal level, Strauss would find his way past these objectionable aspects of character in order to focus on that part of Heidegger's thinking which remained loyal to the calling of philosophy.

Strauss stated that he did not begin to take a serious interest in Heidegger's philosophy for about 20 years after the events of 1933. Strauss's letters to Karl Löwith at the beginning of the 1950s indicate that it was the collection of essays entitled *Holzwege* (1950) that recaptured Strauss's attention.[35] No longer directed by the immediate political fate of the Germans or the vulgar doctrines of the National Socialist movement, the postwar Heidegger began to reveal the "phenomenal intellect" that was capable of true philosophical insight through a renewed openness to the Western languages as the site and ground of the questioning of Being. While Heidegger's concern with Germans had never been the specifically racial interest associated with the rabble-rousing rhetoric of the Nazi Party, he was prepared to tolerate these views when he felt himself thrown into the historical fate of the National Socialist revolution in the early 1930s. However, as Richard L. Velkley has noted Heidegger was not committed to this *völkisch* position at the level of thought: "Ethnos would mean less than nothing to him if a certain Ethnos had not become the site for Being's breakthrough into the beings."[36]

The postwar Heidegger had been freed from these national political questions and was able to concentrate on the fate of global thinking. He thus found himself at the elevated level from which Nietzsche had surveyed the crisis of nihilism facing Western civilization. But Strauss credited Heidegger with standing beyond this Nietzschean vantage point in finding that the prospects for thinking at the planetary level had been thrown into disarray and darkness (the "night of the world") by the increasing domination of a "technological world society."[37] This was the context in which Strauss understood Heidegger's turn and his new receptive attitude of *Gelassenheit*. In this historical moment (1953) Heidegger chose to republish his "Introduction to Metaphysics," an essay from 1935 that included a reference to the "inner truth and greatness" of the National Socialist movement.[38]

Given this background, it may be startling to encounter Strauss's thought-provoking statement: "One is inclined to say that Heidegger has learned the lesson of 1933 more thoroughly than any other man."[39] Despite the attempt of William H. F. Altman to use this statement to link Strauss to Heidegger's interwar politics,[40] it is a clear example of Strauss's ability to separate the necessary universality of the theoretical life from the inescapable particularity of personal preference.

Gelassenheit meant a turning away from politics to the problem of the gods. Strauss had concluded his "Restatement on Xenophon's *Hiero*" (written during 1949 and published in French in 1954 as a response to Alexandre Kojève's philosophical review of *On Tyranny*) by condemning "those who lacked the courage to face the issue of Tyranny, who therefore *et humiliter serviebant et superbe dominabantur*, were forced to evade the issue of Being as well, precisely because they did nothing but talk of Being."[41] Strauss's decision to remove these sentences from later (English) editions of *On Tyranny* may suggest that he had recognized something that invalidated them. The passage has been reinstated to recent editions of *On Tyranny* by the editors Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth who speculate that Strauss may have omitted the passage because "he had decided to speak out about Heidegger explicitly and at length, and that he wished his public comments to be suitably modulated."[42] Altman unsurprisingly attributes infinitely more sinister motives to Strauss's decision.[43]

I would suggest that Strauss's reason for updating the essay may indeed have been as philosophically significant as Altman suspects it was, and yet without the peculiar significance he claims to have detected. Strauss would speak "explicitly and at length" on the differences between the interwar

and postwar Heidegger in a lecture on existentialism in February 1956. Taking this lecture with Strauss's final statement on Heidegger in "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy" (1971) we may identify where the 1950s Heidegger had negated Strauss's conclusion to "Restatement" precisely by beginning to talk of something other than "Being."

In the "Restatement" Strauss had apparently taken Heidegger to task for ignoring a fundamental problem of political philosophy ("the issue of Tyranny"). This was an especially meaningful charge coming from Strauss in those years immediately after World War Two when the magnitude of the crimes of the Nazi tyranny had still not been fully realized. On closer inspection, however, Strauss is reminding the reader that he and Kojève have remained constantly "mindful" of the "basic presuppositions" of their philosophical quarrel.[44] As Strauss had made explicit earlier in the paragraph, these basic presuppositions concern "the issue of Being." In other words, Strauss was taking Heidegger to task for a philosophical misjudgment rather than a political misstep (although the line from Livy clearly linked this philosophical oversight to Heidegger's political actions). More than two decades later in "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy" Strauss was emphatic that it was not the perspective of political philosophy that Heidegger had learnt to appreciate in the meantime: "Surely he leaves no place whatever for political philosophy."[45]

As Strauss had implied in the "Restatement," a direct approach to Being results in an evasion of Being (or Being's evasion of the thinker). Rather than approaching Being from political questions as Strauss and Kojève had done in their debate in *On Tyranny*, the postwar Nietzschean Heidegger would begin to better appreciate the issue of a world religion and gods as a way to approach the questioning of Being. The Heidegger of *Being and Time* had exulted in an existential atheism under the influence of Kierkegaard, a man whom he would describe in *Holzwege* as "not a thinker but a religious writer."[46] But Heidegger's disappointment in the existential possibilities of resoluteness seems to have awakened in him an awareness of a more philosophical approach to the question of the gods. While Strauss felt compelled to reject Heidegger's turn toward "fantastic hopes, more to be expected from visionaries than philosophers,"[47] he had reason to welcome Heidegger's new openness to the theologico-political problem, even as Strauss could not sympathize with his willingness to adopt aspects of the poetic perspective on the problem. Heidegger had

begun to look beyond the Hobbesian horizon within which he had embraced an ethics of resoluteness.

Nietzsche had implied that, in order to overcome the tyranny of modern ideas, religion must once again come under the rule of philosophy. According to Nietzsche, the modern Enlightenment was in danger of breaking the tensed bow of the Western spirit. Strauss was alive to this and Laurence Lampert describes Strauss's essay on Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* as "show[ing] with great vigor just how philosophy has in fact fallen under the rule of modern religion, heir to the revealed religion Christianity."[48] The atheism that provided the powerful existential atmosphere of Heidegger's *Being and Time* was wholly captive to this modern "religion." Strauss sensed the "German youth-movement aura" of the work,[49] suggesting, in effect, that for all the force of its expression, it did not rise appreciably above the inchoate protests of the young "German nihilists" of that period. These young men had "admitted that all rational argument was in favour of communism; but they opposed to that apparently invincible argument what they called 'irrational decision.'"[50] It is against this background that we may understand Strauss's sense that Heidegger's turning away from *Entschlossenheit* represented a "remarkable maturity."[51]

Yet Heidegger still seemed ready to hearken to a mythological or folkloric vision of this return of the gods. Strauss's refusal to assume this perspective has contributed to the tendency to misinterpret his connection to Heidegger (and to Nietzsche) on the question. Strauss's grounding in the ancient quarrel of poetry and philosophy allowed him to fully comprehend the implications of the stances of these two traditions on the question of the gods. Thomas L. Pangle suggests that Strauss understood Heidegger to have further radicalized Nietzsche's tendency to bring the poetic conception of the gods into philosophy:

> Heidegger and Nietzsche, one might gather, brought into being an unprecedented way of thinking in which philosophy goes over to the side of, and vindicates, the gods—the gods of the poets—and in doing so seeks to transform dramatically the meaning of poet, god, and philosopher.[52]

As would be the case with Nietzsche's insights into the gods, Strauss did not completely reject Heidegger's vision but instead prepared for its Socratic reinterpretation. In the process he would also reveal how these two great thinkers remained philosophical at their core even as they engaged in fundamentally non-philosophical forms of poetic thinking.

Heidegger's key insight into the problem of thinking in a global society involved a return to the question of the languages of Being, an insight that was obviously prone to being interpreted in the direction of poetry and the poetic conception of the gods. Even a reader as brilliant as Richard L. Velkley sees Heidegger (merely) "distorting the nature of radical questioning by identifying it with the stance of grateful dwelling within worlds defined by particular languages and the poetic announcement of gods."[53] Stanley Rosen, whose knowledge of Heidegger and Strauss was equally formidable, was also at a loss to find the philosophical meaning in Heidegger's "recommendation to *Gelassenheit*," finding it to represent a doctrine of "oriental kitsch and gothic etymologizing" in which Heidegger had attempted to transform his role into that of a "quasi-Zarathustran prophet of Being and the pagan gods of the Germanic folk."[54]

Heidegger saw that the fate of thinking (as the questioning of Being) had come to depend on a dialogue between the deepest thinkers of the East and West and their respective languages of Being. Strauss tried to steer this philosophical insight away from mythology while at the same time severing, once and for all, this enduring part of Heidegger's thinking from any association with political action. As Strauss observed in his "Restatement," "it is not war nor work but thinking that constitutes the humanity of man."[55] The dialogue and the dialogue alone is the thing: "That dialogue and everything it entails, but surely not political action of any kind, is perhaps the way."[56]

The footnote that follows this statement further reveals the nature of Strauss's reinterpretation of Heidegger. I am grateful to William H. F. Altman for his scholarship in tracing the references Strauss provided in the footnote, although I certainly do not agree with his conviction that its contents make a "benign" understanding of Strauss's interpretation of the dialogue and its historical significance "impossible."[57] On the contrary, I read Strauss's engagement with this sensitive material in terms of his bid to secure the insight of Heidegger as a thinker and detach it from political action. The risks involved in this project cannot be underestimated and it is precisely in broaching the necessity for this dialogue of East and West that Strauss came closest to "historicism" in affirming the historical events that may lead to the appearance of great thinkers.

Strauss seems to express "a philosophical dependence" on the historical appearance of Heidegger,[58] but Heidegger may have only confirmed the sense of the project Strauss had already partly envisaged in *Natural Right and History*.[59] At any rate, Strauss's daring gaze into the abyss of

Heidegger's thought is a reflection of the boldness that he knew to be required by the present epoch. Thomas L. Pangle, who recognizes that Strauss's turn to Heidegger reflected his awareness of the severity and danger of "the spiritual crisis of our times,"[60] is also one of the few who have realized that there is a "global historical task implicitly assigned to us all by Leo Strauss."[61]

Strauss also shepherded Heidegger's dialogue of the East and West away from its reliance on East Asia by reinterpreting "the Bible [as] the East within us, Western men." This was not to be the Bible understood in terms of its revealed character, but treated trans-culturally as a product of an Eastern language and its tradition of Being.[62] Here Altman takes issue with Strauss's characterization of the biblical tradition as "Eastern" (even as Strauss's formulation is emphatically inclusive of the European Jews as "Western men"), speculating that it may be "because the Bible requires irrational obedience; possibly because the likes of [Hegel] regarded the Jews as oriental."[63] But Strauss's reason for seeing the biblical tradition as Eastern, at least from a trans-cultural perspective, is its language of Being. Greek rationalism has its genesis in an Indo-European language while the Bible is the creation of an Afro-Asiatic language. In reminding the West of its origins in these two houses of Being Strauss was engaged in a project which was, incidentally, quite the reverse of the Nazi attempt to isolate and remove the "Semitic" element from an "Aryan" German culture.

It is in this sense that we may begin to interpret the content of the footnote in "Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy" in which Strauss directed the careful reader to consider the significance of half a dozen passages of Heidegger's German.[64] This footnote points to some of the key sources of Strauss's reinterpretation of Heidegger as he realized that Heidegger was pursuing a Nietzschean project on a global scale in the spirit of philosophy.

The first of these references is to the 1945 lecture *Was heist Denken?* in which Heidegger invoked Nietzsche's parable of the "last men" in the context of a postwar settlement which he believed had resulted in the total and unquestioning acceptance of modern technological metaphysics. In referring to this passage Strauss appears to have been intent on reminding the reader that the crisis of Western civilization—the crisis foreseen by Nietzsche—remains in the wake of Nazism. The destruction of Hitler's Germany may have reinforced the nihilistic tendency of modern culture by unleashing a self-congratulatory complacency among the peoples of the Western liberal democracies. With the onset of the Cold War and the need

for political solidarity among the liberal Western powers against communism, it would become even more difficult to elicit a deep contemplation of the metaphysical crisis of Western thinking. "War" as Michael Oakeshott had observed, "is a blind guide to civilized life. In war, all that is most superficial in our tradition is encouraged merely because it is useful, even necessary for victory."[65] While a sense of political responsibility continued to prompt Strauss into exercises in the rhetoric of Cold War liberalism (most notably in the introduction to *The City and Man*), Strauss cautioned that if we were to truly put aside the unquestionable superiority of the Western liberal democracies in the matters of 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."[66]

In the second reference in the footnote Strauss notes a passage in *Der Satz vom Grund* in which Heidegger implies that the basest and most complacent nihilism of the present epoch may encourage us to expect the appearance of "salvation": "Here we find some backing for the idea that in the most extreme withdrawal of being thinking first brings the essence of being into view."[67] Heidegger once again links the danger of this epoch to the beginning of the atomic age as the effective culmination of a technological metaphysics.[68]

In encountering these passages it is immediately clear why Strauss felt the need to explicitly separate the idea of a dialogue of East and West from "political action of any kind."[69] Robert Howse, a liberal internationalist who has listened to the many hours of seminar recordings which have been preserved from Strauss's years as a teacher, emphasizes "Strauss's vehement remarks in some of his classes about countenancing nuclear war as a form of utter madness."[70] Some of those who studied with Strauss at the University of Chicago had also attended the classes of Albert Wohlstetter, a man whom Howse calls "a *Doctor Strangelove* figure." Wohlstetter applied realist logic in seeking to overturn the absolute norm against the limited use of nuclear weapons—a project of the utmost political irresponsibility that Strauss believed no sane leader could ever contemplate.[71] But in contrast with Strauss's urgency on this question Heidegger assumed a detached air in lamenting the fact that nuclear weapons have deprived war of its metaphysical significance so that (as he notes in the second of the postwar writings cited by Strauss) even world wars "are less and less capable of deciding anything the more technological their armaments."[72]

The fourth reference in Strauss's footnote is to Heidegger's *Einführung in die Metaphysik*. This lecture was given in 1935 and its contents were highly political at that time. Heidegger proclaimed that his metaphysical Germans had become caught "in the great pincers between Russia on the one side and America on the other." The political divisions between those two societies only concealed their mutual dedication to the modern metaphysics of technology for "Russia and America, seen metaphysically, are both the same: the same hopeless frenzy of unchained technology and of the rootless organization of the average man."[73]

The changing world-historical situation and the advent of the atomic age had meanwhile annulled Heidegger's political call to arms. Yet as Strauss cautiously implied, the crisis of the metaphysics of technology remained. It is only with the defeat of National Socialism's nihilistic rebellion against this metaphysics of technology (as Heidegger conceived of World War Two) that the theoretical insight behind *Einführung in die Metaphysik* could be isolated from its association with the most disastrous political actions imaginable.

In the light of Strauss's easily misinterpreted reference to this material it is worthwhile reflecting on Laurence Lampert's claim that "Strauss's great legacy … is compromised by his lack of boldness on behalf of philosophy at a decisive moment in its history."[74] With the utmost respect to Lampert, it is Strauss who arguably proves bolder in refusing the safety of discounting Heidegger completely. For Lampert is ready to discard the insights of Strauss's "great thinker" and "phenomenal intellect" in regarding only the "kitsch soul":

> Heidegger's embrace of Nazism is reasonably interpreted as a logical political outcome of a way of thinking proud to ground itself in resolute loyalty to the blood and soil of Germany. Nietzsche's way of thinking, by contrast, was that of a "good European," grounded consciously on the collected heritage of Athens, Jerusalem, and Rome while warning Europe early of "the insanity of nationalism."[75]

While Nietzsche had considered nationalism outdated and parochial many decades before Heidegger's nationally inspired political action, he had also demonstrated an appreciation of the unique national genius of the Germans: "To practice loyalty and for the sake of loyalty to risk honour and blood even in evil and dangerous causes."[76] Dedicating himself to the trans-moral cause of philosophy, Strauss demonstrated daring in braving

the dangers posed by the prevalent but partial view of Heidegger. For Strauss saw that Heidegger had moved beyond Nietzsche in learning the lesson of 1933: there was now no hope that Europe or the West would assume "the transcendent responsibility of planetary rule" through political action. The necessary culture of a fully human world society and the overcoming of technological metaphysics would instead require deep thinking and preparation. The Western thinker must contemplate the history of rationalism and how rationalism, as the gift of Western languages of Being, became oblivious to the mystery of its ground.[77]

It is in the next reference (to Heidegger's essay *Zur Seinsfrage* in *Wegmarken*) that Strauss directs us to the source of the key insight that he describes in his 1971 essay on the postwar Heidegger as the hope that "[a] dialogue between the most profound thinkers of the Occident and the most profound thinkers of the Orient and particularly East Asia may lead to the consummation prepared, accompanied or followed by the return of the gods."[78] Strauss had provided his own reinterpretation of this "hope" in his 1956 presentation on Heidegger.[79] In doing so he had set about transforming "these fantastic hopes, more to be expected from visionaries than from philosophers" into a problem to be posed to the philosopher. This clarification of the question was testament to Strauss's ability to pierce through Heidegger's mystical obscurity and vatic pronouncements to find the philosophical significance of his insights:

> The deepest root of the West is a specific understanding of Being, a specific experience of Being. The specifically Western experience of Being led to the consequence that the ground of grounds was forgotten and the primary experience of Being was used only for the investigation of the beings. The East has experienced Being in a way which prevented the investigation of beings and therewith the concern with the mastery of beings. But the Western experience of Being makes possible in principle, coherent speech about Being. By opening ourselves to the problem of being and to the problematic character of the Western understanding of being, we may gain access to the deepest root of the East. The ground of grounds which is indicated by the word "Being" will be the ground not only of religion but even of any possible gods.[80]

In penetrating to the core of Heidegger's vision Strauss was able to adapt it persuasively to his own understanding of the theologico-political problem and the fundamental question between Athens and Jerusalem. This involved descending to the "ground of grounds" where the Greek

tradition of rationalism has complete (pre-biblical) awareness of itself as "rest[ing] on something which it cannot master."[81] The philosophical tradition is aware that the ultimate ground or substratum (*hypokeimenon*) of the intelligible causes that are observable in the cosmos is unknowable. This inescapable realization had inspired the Socratic turn to the *logoi* (the orientation that Strauss was seeking to recover), just as it would motivate what Michael Oakeshott embraced as Hobbes's exclusion of "the universe as a whole, things infinite, things eternal, final causes and things known only by divine grace or revelation."[82] For Strauss this meant Hobbes's "neglect of the truly primary question … Hobbes does not question the possibility and necessity of political philosophy."[83] The problem of accounting for the ultimate ground of rationalism—the very ground of grounds at which it encounters "the deepest root of the East"—is a question that cannot be avoided by the philosopher.

The final reference in Strauss's footnote is another that implies the urgency of recovering this question. Strauss directs the reader to the essay *Gelassenheit* and a passage in which Heidegger raises the problem of Being in terms of the loss of the ground that has nourished all the high cultures of the past. While Altman is correct that Heidegger lamented the passing of this national basis of his homeland,[84] the overall orientation of the essay underlines Strauss's sense that the postwar Heidegger had accepted, at least on a philosophical plane, Nietzsche's advice to conservatives that one cannot scuttle crablike to the old "*Blut und Boden*" of a parochial nationalism. The philosopher must conceive, on a global scale, "a *Bodenständigkeit* beyond the most extreme *Bodenlosigkeit*, a home beyond the most extreme homelessness." It was Strauss's intransigent commitment to philosophy that allowed him to see past Heidegger's sentimental provincialism to this ultimate problem and the historical task it implied. In concentrating on revising the dialogue of East and West as the reencounter with the biblical tradition approached in trans-cultural terms Strauss would achieve what even Altman regards as a "brilliant and insightful" reading of the meeting foreshadowed in *Zur Seinsfrage*, a project that is "nowhere" mentioned by Heidegger.[85]

While Heidegger had raised the necessity of confronting the Western language of Being with its East Asian counterpart, Strauss was concerned that the Far East has already slipped its moorings in this "most superficial period" and "succumbs to Western rationalism." With this insight, Strauss effectively added China to Heidegger's Russia and America as sharing in the global metaphysical uniformity of technological thinking. But Strauss

also saw that the recovery of the East from this technological metaphysics could not be tackled or even approached directly by the Western thinker. The West must first seek within itself "its own deepest roots, which antedate its rationalism, which in a way antedate the separation of West and East." Strauss recognized that this ground of grounds was the true question at stake between Athens and Jerusalem and that the Bible as "the East within us" could serve as our access to this deepest level of the problem.[86]

For Strauss, the discovery of nature and its universality is the beginning of philosophy.[87] This discovery is the result of the "decisive" contradictions among the various accounts of the first things. While divine ancestors or divinely inspired lawgivers may have envisaged different ways of life for different cities and peoples, their accounts of the permanent thing or things that underlie these perishable phenomena cannot be reconciled.[88] The Greek "passion for right seeing and thinking" insists on the consistent principle *ex nihilo nihil fit*. However, the Hebrew peculiarity (which Arnold named "the passion for right acting") requires for its own coherence as morality an account of creation *ex nihilo* and "a peculiar nation as its bearer."[89] Strauss's recommendation that Western thinkers confront the Bible in a trans-cultural form as an Eastern experience of Being may suggest that this is the historical moment in which it is necessary to consider Heidegger's *ex nihilo omne ens qua ens*.[90]

However, Strauss takes a step back from the problem of grounding a world religion—a task that calls for a poetic rootedness that is beyond any rootedness thus far known on earth. Even while insightfully developing the vision of a dialogue Strauss is content to suggest that "Heidegger is the only man who has an inkling of the dimensions of the problem of a world society."[91]

Strauss demonstrates a similar reticence in calling attention to his extrapolations from Nietzsche. In the fourth paragraph of "Note on the Plan of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*" Strauss develops Nietzsche's insight "that gods too philosophize." Strauss names Nietzsche's Dionysus (of aphorism 295) a "super-Socrates" and points to places in Plato's dialogues that suggest "Plato could well have thought that gods philosophize."[92] However, 11 paragraphs later Strauss declines to speak of Nietzsche's Dionysus and Ariadne, claiming no knowledge or experience of what they represent for Nietzsche ("I have no access to it"). Strauss nevertheless notes that the matter "has been worthily treated by Karl Reinhardt in his essay 'Nietzsches Klage der Ariadne.'"[93] As Laurence

Lampert notices, "if Strauss had *no* access to this issue he hardly seems to be in a position to judge that it had been 'worthily treated' by Karl Reinhardt."[94] Strauss had affirmed the possibility of philosophical gods but he could not entertain or adopt the poetic (or prophetic) perspective that allowed Nietzsche to speak of the divinity of Dionysus and Ariadne. As Strauss had already touched on the nature of a philosophizing god Lampert suggests (in his later study of Strauss) that it may be Ariadne that Strauss finds inaccessible, if not inscrutable.[95]

Strauss spoke of Nietzsche's Dionysus from the perspective of philosophy so that where Nietzsche spoke of Dionysus Strauss spoke of Plato and Socrates. Strauss's refusal to speak poetically on the subject is frustrating for Lampert, who wishes that Strauss had dared to exercise his imagination as Nietzsche—but also Heidegger—had done in speaking of the gods: "Divinities can always only be imaginary beings and Strauss did not lack imagination."[96] In speaking of Dionysus Strauss had not spoken of imaginary beings but only adopted momentarily Nietzsche's imaginary name for thinkers of the highest rank. Strauss spoke of the highest beings in the cosmos and thereby vindicated the cosmos: the *eros* of the highest beings in the cosmos is directed to the study of the cosmos.

Notes

1. Leo Strauss, "Progress or Return?" in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 270.
2. Richard L. Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy: On Original Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 121.
3. A phrase used by Socrates in the *Theaetetus* to refer to those who argue that all is in flux. See Stanley Rosen, *Plato's* Republic*: A Study* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 361.
4. Cited in Richard L. Velkley, *Being after Rousseau: Philosophy and Culture in Question* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 138.
5. Leo Strauss, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy," in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, 33.
6. Leo Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 10.
7. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. John Sibree (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001), 426.

8. Leo Strauss, "Seminar in Political Philosophy: Hegel's *The Philosophy of History*," delivered March 9, 1965 at the University of Chicago. Leo Strauss Center, University of Chicago.
9. Leo Strauss, "Natural Law," in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, 144.
10. Waller R. Newell, "Kojève's Hegel, Hegel's Hegel, and Strauss's Hegel: A Middle Range Approach to the Debate about Tyranny and Totalitarianism," *Philosophy, History, and Tyranny: Reexamining the Debate between Leo Strauss and Alexandre Kojève*, ed. Timothy W. Burns and Bryan-Paul Frost (New York: SUNY Press, 2016), 247.
11. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols and ed. Allan Bloom (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 47–48.
12. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 454.
13. Martin Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (HarperCollins: New York, 2008), 106.
14. Leo Strauss, "An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism," in *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, 41.
15. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 83–84.
16. Leo Strauss, "Jerusalem and Athens: Some Preliminary Reflections," in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, 148.
17. Cited in Leo Strauss, "Review of J. L. Talmon *The Nature of Jewish History—Its Universal Significance*," in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, 232.
18. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, trans. Judith Norman and ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 163–164.
19. Ibid., 65.
20. Cf. William H. F. Altman, *The German Stranger: Leo Strauss and National Socialism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 213 n. 97.
21. Leo Strauss, "Plato's *Apology of Socrates* and *Crito*," in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, 46.
22. Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, 162.
23. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 97–99.
24. Strauss, "Plato's *Apology of Socrates* and *Crito*," 51–54.
25. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), 75.
26. Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny: Corrected and Expanded Edition, Including the Strauss-Kojève Correspondence*, ed. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 207.

27. Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy*, 49.
28. Leo Strauss, "The Living Issues in German Postwar Philosophy," in Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 137–138.
29. Cf. Ricardo Duchesne, *The Uniqueness of the West* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 441–442, 456–457 n. 31.
30. Jacob Klein and Leo Strauss, "A Giving of Accounts," *The College* 25, no. 2 (April 1970): 3.
31. Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* (New York: Free Press, 1959), 172.
32. Leo Strauss, letter to Gershom Scholem, January 27, 1973, cited in Werner J. Dannhauser, "Leo Strauss in His Letters," in *Enlightening Revolutions: Essays in Honor of Ralph Lerner*, ed. Svetozar Minkov (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), 358.
33. Leo Strauss, Letter to Gershom Scholem, July 7, 1973, cited in Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy*, 178–179 n. 38.
34. See Karl Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, trans. Gary Steiner, ed. Richard Wolin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 215–216.
35. Leo Strauss, letter to Karl Löwith, December 21, 1951, cited in Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy*, 56.
36. Velkley, *Being after Rousseau*, 140.
37. Leo Strauss, "Heideggerian Existentialism," 41–42.
38. Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 152.
39. Strauss, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," 34.
40. Altman, *German Stranger*, 182.
41. Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 213.
42. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth, introduction to *On Tyranny*, xxii.
43. Altman, *German Stranger*, 421.
44. Laurence Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 43 n. 10.
45. Strauss, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," 34.
46. Martin Heidegger, "Nietzsche's Word: 'God is Dead,'" in *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 186.
47. Strauss, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," 34.
48. Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche*, 34.
49. Leo Strauss, letter to Karl Löwith, December 21, 1951, cited in Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy*, 56.
50. Leo Strauss, "German Nihilism," ed. David Janssens and Daniel Tanguay, *Interpretation* 26, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 360.

51. Leo Strauss, letter to Karl Löwith, December 21, 1951, cited in Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy*, 56.
52. Thomas L. Pangle, introduction to *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, 25.
53. Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy*, 161.
54. Stanley Rosen, *The Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), 285, 293.
55. Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 210.
56. Strauss, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," 33–34.
57. Altman, *German Stranger*, 182.
58. Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy*, 139.
59. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 80.
60. Thomas L. Pangle, introduction to *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, xxviii.
61. Thomas L. Pangle, "Preface to the Chinese edition of *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*." https://www.academia.edu/14554942/Preface_to_the_Chinese_Edition_of_The_Rebirth_of_Classical_Political_Rationalism_An_Introduction_to_the_Thought_of_Leo_Strauss (accessed November 8, 2016).
62. Leo Strauss, "Heideggerian Existentialism," 44.
63. Altman, *German Stranger*, 191 n. 43.
64. Strauss, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," 34 n. 3.
65. Michael Oakeshott, "The Universities," in *The Voice of Liberal Learning: Michael Oakeshott on Education*, ed. Timothy Fuller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 133–134.
66. Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy*, 38.
67. Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, cited in Altman, *German Stranger*, 186–187.
68. Ibid., 187.
69. Strauss, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," 34.
70. Robert Howse, *Leo Strauss: Man of Peace* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 153 n. 2.
71. Ibid., 76, 153. Wohlstetter may be closer to the kind of *éminence grise* that a number of Leftist critics have imagined Leo Strauss to be in linking him with all the wars of the "neocons" and Wilsonian internationalists. Altman, in complete contrast, wants to persuade us of Strauss's connection to Carl Schmitt and Heidegger, men who were tireless in pointing to the hypocrisies of Wilsonian wars "to end all war." Clearly, it is not possible that both lines of criticism could be accurate. Of course it is more than possible that both are wide of the mark.

72. Martin Heidegger, "On the Question of Being," in *Pathmarks*, trans. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 321. Cf. Altman, *German Stranger*, 190 n. 39.
73. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 41.
74. Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche*, 184.
75. Laurence Lampert, *The Enduring Importance of Leo Strauss* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 246–247.
76. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 84.
77. Strauss, "Heideggerian Existentialism," 40–44.
78. Strauss, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," 33.
79. David McIlwain, "'The East within Us': Leo Strauss's Reinterpretation of Heidegger," *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (2018), 233–253.
80. Strauss, "Heideggerian Existentialism," 44.
81. Ibid., 43.
82. Michael Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," in *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2000), 18–19.
83. Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis*, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 152.
84. Altman, *German Stranger*, 192–193.
85. Ibid., 191 n. 43.
86. Strauss, "Heideggerian Existentialism," 42–44.
87. Although the biblical tradition may also be seen as representing the discovery of a universal standard (and thus a breaking free from parochial or ancestral standards), its universal standard belongs to the realm of practice or morality ("right acting") rather than theory ("right seeing and thinking"). For an alternative argument, going explicitly against Strauss in claiming to reveal the philosophical nature of the Bible, see Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
88. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 86.
89. Strauss, "Review of J. L. Talmon," 232.
90. Strauss, "Heideggerian Existentialism," 46.
91. Ibid., 43.
92. Leo Strauss, "Note on the Plan of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*," in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, 175.
93. Ibid., 181.
94. Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche*, 57.
95. Lampert, *Enduring Importance of Leo Strauss*, 295.
96. Ibid., 293.

CHAPTER 9

Michael Oakeshott and Augustinianism After Hobbes and Hegel

For Michael Oakeshott the defining aspect of the medieval Western European mind was its dualism between heaven and earth. Augustine's description of two cities, a City of Man and a City of God, was for Oakeshott the highest exemplification of the thought of this epoch and he characterized the Augustinian faith as "at once severe and generous."[1] A sinful and transitory world was compensated for by an everlasting life to come, but this prospect of salvation was balanced by the uncertainties and miseries of the earthly realm and the gift of Divine Grace that could never be truly deserved by fallen human beings.

Modernity arrived with the implicit promise of salvation of a kind in this world. The retreat into the certainties of consciousness seemed to secure for the early scientists the expectation of continual progress toward human perfection. The artificial basis of human culture led to a turning away from nature and the dark beginnings of the species and toward what T. S. Eliot described in his essay on Machiavelli as "the myth of human goodness which for liberal thought replaces the belief in Divine Grace."[2] This was also what Leo Strauss would refer to as Hobbes's "vision of the City of Man to be erected on the ruins of the City of God."[3]

As I shall argue in this chapter, Oakeshott's awareness of the crucial contribution which Hobbes offered to the moral life is best understood in Augustinian terms. In his "Introduction to *Leviathan*" (1946) Oakeshott had asked readers of the masterpiece to consider "whether the gift of civil association to mankind is, in principle, the gift of salvation itself, or

D. McIlwain, *Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss*, Recovering Political Philosophy, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13381-8_9

whether it is something less, and if the latter, what relationship it bears to salvation." In the paragraph which followed he indicated the direction of his own answer to this question, which would later be more fully outlined in *On Human Conduct*, suggesting that, "For Augustine the *justitia* and *pax* that are the gifts of civil association are no more than the necessary remedy for the immediate consequences of the original sin."[4] For Oakeshott, the skeptical politics of Hobbes was similarly a remedy for the physical consequences of the moral depravity of human beings. Compared to Augustine's, however, Hobbes's doctrine was more fundamentally of this world.

Whereas Hobbes would devote a significant part of *Leviathan* to the contradiction inherent in incorporeal substances, Augustine's Christian thought insisted on dualism. Conversely, however, while it is questionable whether Hobbes could be considered a political skeptic given that his new science appears to offer the potentially unlimited promise of progress in technology, Augustine's merely political theory was thoroughly and permanently skeptical. Seen in purely political terms, Augustine's theory is marked by Roman thought and in his "Lectures in the History of Political Thought" Oakeshott recommended that his students understand it as "the *pax Romana* seen *sub specie aeternitatis*."[5] While hardly a religious skeptic in his belief in a world to come, Augustine remained a political skeptic in his insistence on the futility of expecting a political order to overcome the fallen condition of human beings. In clearly outlining the distinct claims of religion and politics Augustine's thought marked for Oakeshott "[t]he earliest triumph of the politics of skepticism."[6]

Oakeshott recognized that human society is perennially drawn toward the "the unity of politics and religion" and that it will always remain "the comprehensive task of scepticism perpetually to be recalling political activity from the frontier of religion."[7] It is only when the City of Man is viewed in these skeptical, non-substantive terms that the autonomy required for moral conduct becomes possible. Without such autonomy, mere obedience would render "morality" meaningless. Oakeshott understood this moral or political autonomy to be the equivalent of the religious situation in which "the 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 himself and his conduct."[8]

As a critic of the modern Enlightenment, Oakeshott opposed the political project of displacing religion. However, he was in agreement with what he understood to be the more limited aims of Hobbes and others "to

remove religious 'enthusiasm' from politics." For Oakeshott, it was only after the success of this limited and skeptical political order that the more turbulent spirits of the Enlightenment came to consider that "the condition was ripe for a more radical attack on the problem." Oakeshott viewed this reckless and failed bid for scientific supremacy as another episode in the "single and continuous" problem of politics and religion[9]—a phrase which underlined the permanence of this "historical" problem.

Oakeshott began from Hobbes's assumption that revelation must be politically neutered. Hobbes had devoted a large part of his major work to establishing this understanding among the public, many of whom were passionately inclined to bring their personal varieties of the Christian religion into political life. For Oakeshott political skepticism allied with personal faith was the political understanding of all informed Christians and people of Christian culture since the time of Augustine or Paul, if not from teachings of Jesus. Rather than adopting what Strauss called "the untrue assumption that man as man is thinkable as a being that lacks awareness of sacred restraints,"[10] Hobbes had merely "made the problem as difficult as possible by assuming persons devoid of obligations."[11] Bacon, not Hobbes, was responsible for modern political enthusiasms and the technological vision of the state, which had become, in Oakeshott's view, "the most serious opponent" to the state understood as free and civil association under a neutral rule of law.[12]

Civil Association

In his theoretical description of a rule of law Oakeshott attempted to find "the middle ground between the alternatives of a moral order in which human law is secondary and a legal order in which justice is secondary."[13] In an effort to avoid legal positivism, Oakeshott focused on a difficult and disputed aspect of *Leviathan* in which Hobbes appears to suggest that the Laws of Nature continue to operate within civil association, providing "standards for evaluating the content of laws issued by sovereign authority to principles governing the promulgation and application of law to particular cases."[14] This form of natural right, which comes into public relevance only in the civil condition, held him only a fingernail's width from legal positivism and Oakeshott determined it to be "no more than the analytic break-down of the intrinsic character of law, what I have called the *jus* inherent in genuine law."[15]

While trying to find the terms of a natural right in the essence of the laws themselves, Oakeshott sought to quell another possible contradiction in his thin conception of collective moral practice. The rule of law must become itself a form of moral relationship appropriate for those who are joined together in citizenship. Given that citizenship is acquired at birth in most cases and that political order is usually preferred to anarchical conditions, the rule of law is experienced as a compulsory condition of human conduct. Political order thus supplies the grounds of morality while seeming to suggest a compulsion which is the very negation of morality (understood as self-chosen actions). It was in addressing this problem that Oakeshott achieved his greatest originality as a political thinker in mediating between the legal and political authority of Hobbes and the moral and rational authority of Hegel.

To clarify this point it may be helpful to briefly introduce an alternative philosophical vocabulary. In his analysis of language, John Searle has defined rule-governed activity in terms of both "regulative" and "constitutive" rules—regulative rules are those which regulate an already existing practice; constitutive rules are those which themselves constitute the essential features of a practice (e.g., the rules of chess).[16] Political order, or the rule of law, is complicated by its participation in both of these categories. Oakeshott's solution is to describe a political order in which the laws are constitutive of the practice of civility, a morality which reflects the skepticism of its citizens about states which are constitutive of any defined way of life. In every other sense this political order consists of regulative rules, the authority of which derives from their coherence in terms of a political order constituted in non-instrumental terms.

Oakeshott's attempt to provide a coherent legal context for individual human agency should be understood alongside his polemical sallies against doctrines and prejudices which favor the social collective over the individual. Oakeshott may have resorted to the terms "civil" and "civility" in order to take aim at what had become the more common but debased terms "social" and "society." In reintroducing an eighteenth-century word which had perhaps fallen victim to the pressures of a mass industrial culture, Oakeshott reminded us that the relations between cives are necessarily civil without requiring that closer attachment suggested by the terms "social" or "communal." Oakeshott defined "society" as "a fanciful total of unspecified relationships."[17] While there may be a Poetry Society with its voluntary membership of likeminded friends and acquaintances, "there is no *ensemble* in which relationships coalesce in the sense that our common

use of the word 'society' suggests."[18] What can be said to exist is neither a society nor a community but "a moral practice, as the *ars artium* of agency"—in other words, agents who tacitly recognize the conditions of association as an authoritative feature of their conduct.[19] Oakeshott was also keen to emphasize the distinction between what he called the "collected" (not "collective") inheritance of the "moral and prudential achievements of numberless individuals."[20]

Oakeshott wished to defend public life from religion not to secure a public role for scientific knowledge and technological progress, but to secure freedom and completion for the self. Responding to Sheldon Wolin's hostile review of *On Human Conduct* Oakeshott denied that civil association was anything approaching a "heavenly city" or "ideal society." It was "not a 'city,'" as Oakeshott pointed out, and "there was nothing whatever 'heavenly' about it."[21] He had rather sought to demonstrate that the designation of permissible or obligatory conduct has tended to destroy the possibilities of inner life, disqualifying the private world of the self for the sake of complete socialization. It is against this prospect that the civil association may be understood, and Oakeshott offered the full panoply of the Renaissance individuality (from which he reminded us of the particularly vivid example of Cervantes, who had "created a character in whom the disaster of each encounter with the world was powerless to impugn it as a self-enactment").[22]

The character of Don Quixote also exemplifies the political folly of attending solely to the full enactment of the inclinations of the self. This is nevertheless precisely that part of conduct which, due to its private and solipsistic qualities, humans cannot look to their fellows to recognize. The self-sufficiency of this enacted self is apparent in Oakeshott's definition of self-enactment as "actions understood in terms of the motives in which they are performed."[23]

However, in embracing public space for a variety of self-enactments Oakeshott also faced the extent to which these individualistic tendencies have been directed toward competitive and transactional "self-disclosures," which have worked to betray the achievement on which they depend. While Oakeshott was swift in dismantling the view that the appearance of individuality is inextricable from the context of bourgeois market society,[24] 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."[25] Oakeshott's civil theory secured

the individual an autonomy which is basically premodern and in opposition to this kind of society-wide dedication to material interests.

While forgoing any supernatural hopes or expectations Oakeshott's self stands in the light of eternity rather than within the worldly horizon of the modern liberal individual. Elizabeth Corey has aptly characterized this as the art of being "unworldly in the world."[26] Oakeshott implied that while the modern science has helped us to overcome supernaturalism, premodern thought must be accounted as superior in responding to the transience of our present condition. For this reason his Renaissance tradition of individuality acknowledged a Christian pedigree or exterior continuity. The Oakeshottian individual emerged from renaissance in the most inclusive definition of the term, stretching back to the epistemological developments of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Western Europe, and it is in this sense that we may understand the willful and creative emphasis for Oakeshott as he drew on the intellectual revolution brought about by Duns Scotus and William of Ockham.

Oakeshott's critique of worldliness dovetailed with his earthliness,[27] and he would use his flexible understanding of the historical identity of Christianity to adapt a pagan worldview in describing a self facing its finitude with poetic "grace"—in this sense, almost a City of God *contra* Augustine, in which grace is "reconciliation to nothingness."[28] This is reflected in Oakeshott's celebration of ironic, existential, religious, and poetic heroes and artistic figures such as Don Quixote, Frère Jean des Entommeurs, Parini, Pico della Mirandola, Montaigne, Pascal, Blake, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard among others. Oakeshott viewed these poetic characters and historical individuals as the true contemporaries of Hobbes and when he is seen as the Hobbesian Augustine which he was, much that may have seemed eccentric in his readings begins to assume a more coherent position. Oakeshott must be approached in the realization that his prioritizing of imagination, creation, poetry, and religious sensibility placed him not in Athens, but Jerusalem.

Athens and Jerusalem

The poetic character of Oakeshott's thinking reflects his fundamentally religious standpoint. Nevertheless, Oakeshott was active as a philosophical thinker, and this has led some to assert his emphatic alignment with philosophy. Terry Nardin, for instance, has pointed to the primacy which Oakeshott gave to philosophy as "the quest for unconditional

understanding" from which religion is "ultimately a distraction." For Nardin's Oakeshott, "All roads lead to Athens, not Jerusalem."[29]

This position is most understandable when considering the early Oakeshott of *Experience and Its Modes* (1933) for whom philosophy was, by definition, the only coherent perspective on experience. However, there are a number of reasons for resisting this interpretation, not least among them the pluralism introduced by the motif of the "conversation" in which "there is no 'truth' to be discovered, no proposition to be proved, [and] no conclusion sought."[30] Oakeshott had welcomed the return to Hobbes (and Strauss's insistence on Hobbes's moral stance in particular) precisely because Hobbes separated human beings from the fatalism of a completely rational account of experience. In understanding why Oakeshott cleaved to Hobbes (and not Spinoza or even Hegel), it becomes possible to detect in *On Human Conduct* (1975) Oakeshott's final orientation toward his peculiar Jerusalem.

A different way of looking at this problem comes to light in examining the grounds on which Oakeshott made his choice for an untimely philosophy. That he first found his way in what was already considered the almost defunct philosophical idiom of British Idealism suggests a defiant spiritualism, which is altogether lacking in his description of philosophical coherence. Oakeshott's elevation of "experience without presupposition, reservation, arrest, or modification"[31] belied a man who was careful to keep on hand the necessary antidote. From this perspective, Oakeshott's modal distinctions protected a kind of mortal, earthly religious virtuosity from a purely rational account of experience. Oakeshott was as concerned by the threat from the Socratic tradition of philosophizing as he was by the more narrow concerns of the positivists of his time. Against Athens, Oakeshott asserted the creative principle—the Judaic will and imagination. However, in bringing this theistic tradition down to earth Oakeshott celebrated the creative freedom of finite human beings and "the poetic character of all human activity." In other words, truly moral, autonomous conduct is to be found in the spontaneity and contingency of an absolutely free will, and expressed in a poetic creation *ex nihilo*: "Nothing exists in advance of the poem itself, except perhaps poetic passion. And what is true of poetry is true also, I think, of all human moral activity."[32]

Oakeshott's interest in "Jerusalem" (as the continuity of Christianity) formed the ground for his early turn to Athens. As Nardin acknowledges, "Oakeshott's philosophical historical interest in the idea of historical identity grows out of a religious and then historical interest in the identity of

Christianity."[33] It may be said that an essentially Christian element remained in Oakeshott's religious thought, assuming that we are convinced by Oakeshott's view of the continuity of historical identities in which, as Ian Tregenza explains, "The concrete expression of Christianity may be completely different today than that of, say, primitive or medieval Christianity, but it is no less Christian."[34] Oakeshott had allowed for the possibility of "an idea or practice" which, "in part at least, runs counter to much that has previously been regarded as Christian."[35]

Religion for Oakeshott implied the willful completion of a self and not the dissolution of the individual's will in its assimilation to the will of God. Through poetry a self may even create an image of itself as a playful or ironic counterpart. Imitation and creation are blurred in this celebration of the completed self and in his notebooks Oakeshott wrote approvingly of the passion of pride in terms of "all manners of being superior to fortune, invulnerable; a 'mortal god.'" This attitude of proud and poetic independence and distain for the yardstick of worldly success is captured in an eighteenth-century French writer's praise of *un cœur stoïque et tendre*[36]—an outlook for inhabiting the present without the expectation of salvation.

This peculiar religious sentiment, both prideful and mortal, may be detected even in Oakeshott's earliest writings on religion. In "Religion in the World" (1929) Oakeshott identified two characters, a "religious man" and a "worldly man." The worldly man is under the illusion of the permanence and stability of the human world in which he lives. He ascribes this false consciousness of eternity to "[t]he earth we tread, the species to which we belong, [and] the history we make." As Oakeshott concluded, "This belief implies what may be described as an external standard of value: things are imagined to have some sort of worth apart from their value in the life of an individual; and consequently, what is prized is success, meaning the achievement of some external result." Religion "is simply life itself, life dominated by the belief that its value is in the present, not merely in the past or the future, that if we lose ourselves we lose all."[37] In 1988, having reread the works of Augustine in retirement in Dorset, Oakeshott described to Patrick Riley his dream of producing "a post-Montaigne, post-Pascal, post-Blake version of Anselm's *Cur deus homo*—in which (amongst very much else) 'salvation,' being 'saved,' is recognized as [having] nothing whatever to do with the *future*."[38]

Religion is the discovery within the practical world of a disposition to present adventure, with momentary encounters with the eternal. The near

contradiction of this drove Oakeshott on his detour through the mode of poetry to the earthly Augustinianism which would resolve this question in the spirit of an "Augustinian God of majestic imagination."[39] However, the outlines of this were, in hindsight, already available in Oakeshott's sense of religion existing "[w]herever practice is least reserved, least hindered by extraneous interests, least confused by what it does not need, wherever it is most nearly at one with itself and homogeneous."[40]

Oakeshott left a strong hint for his readers in warning that "[n]ot to detect a man's style is to have missed three-quarters of the meaning of his actions and utterances."[41] Accordingly, we shall not overlook the fact that Oakeshott employed all his gifts of style in his final utterance on religion. It is also necessary to contrast this with what has been described as Oakeshott's "severe, even self-denying conception of philosophy."[42] Oakeshott's "Athens" is a cold place of exile—not without its astringent satisfactions yet anything but invigorating. Even in his most philosophical work, Oakeshott declared those who are "intent upon what is unlimitedly satisfactory in experience" to be "self-confessed betrayers of life."[43] Because it would be to deny the joy and color of life as much as the less glorious necessities, Oakeshott declared that "no man is merely a philosopher." Oakeshott's characterization of philosophy was notably unsympathetic: "Philosophy is remarkable only because the interests which are extraneous to it are those which engage the sympathies and attention of the majority of mankind."[44]

In his notebooks Oakeshott contrasted his vision of active moral courage with the life of contemplation of classical philosophy, and in *On Human Conduct* he would launch a critique of Plato's allegory of the cave, which advanced his own poetic viewpoint. Oakeshott admired the solid manliness of the cave dwellers and their adherence to commonsense approaches, suggesting that Plato had undervalued the conditional outlook of the cave dwellers in which the world is understood "in terms of identified and named occurrences understood as compositions of characteristics."[45] Combined with his radical recasting of theory as aesthetic experience, this constituted an offensive on behalf of the poetic character of human conduct.

Socrates, as Allan Bloom reminded us, "would prefer to be ignorant as he was than knowledgeable as [the artisans] were. For they were content with their competence and closed to the larger questions."[46] For Oakeshott, invoking the Daoist wisdom of China, the artisan's competence and mastery is a supreme way of practical being and his understanding of "poetry"

reflected the fluent and unselfconscious mastery displayed by the true adepts of meaningful practical activities.[47] From this point of view, the artisan may be said to be more at one with himself than the self-conscious philosopher who is unable live within his own more rationally coherent perspective on experience. While he was careful to distinguish the philosopher from the ideologue and activist, Oakeshott's sympathies were nevertheless consistently with the cave dwellers.[48]

The poetry of the cave is evoked in Oakeshott's view of myth and the "collective dream." Mythmaking, as a foundational aspect of the practical life of a civilization, allows for "the perception (not the solution) of the mystery of human life." Just as Oakeshott would later argue that the cave dwellers should not be discouraged by the philosopher's description of their condition as imprisonment, here he sought to encourage those "whose participation in the dream is imperfect and largely passive" to embrace their position inside the vision of those of greater will and imagination rather than face the "dreadful insomnia" or "nightmare" of wakefulness.[49] The myth structure within which civilized human life is possible requires an element of unconscious belief and Oakeshott assumes this belief as the basis of the moral sensibility of the civilization. Oakeshott implies that poetry is superior to philosophy in that it allows for something approaching a "religious" escape that does not require a breach in this myth structure. As Oakeshott had already intuited in "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind," "Poetry is a sort of truancy, a dream within the dream of life, a wild flower planted among our wheat."[50] This may be contrasted with his interpretation of the "escape" of the theorist from Plato's cave in *On Human Conduct*. On return to the cave this philosopher faces "inevitable defeat" in his quest to replace the shadow-like beliefs of the inhabitants, appearing to these cave dwellers as, at best, a perplexing visitor; at worst, as an "imposter" among them.[51]

Oakeshott's awareness of the implications of this philosophical perspective was reflected in the skepticism of his own efforts at philosophy. Oakeshott began to philosophize from the paradoxical position of a Hegelian skeptic, and it has justly been said of *Experience and Its Modes* that it "reads as if William of Occam had undertaken to redo Hegel."[52] In the introduction Oakeshott declared his debts to Hegel's *Phenomenology* and F. H. Bradley's *Appearance and Reality*, acknowledging that these were the books from which he was "conscious of having learnt most."[53] But while Hegel was given his due as providing the impetus for Absolute Idealism, Oakeshott's more immediate influences were Bradley and the British Idealists. *Experience*

and Its Modes does not read as a theory in actual possession of or in logical range of absolute knowledge and those who have interpreted the early Oakeshott as this kind of Hegelian are clearly misguided.[54] In reading Hegel through Bradley Oakeshott achieved what should be understood as a much more skeptical theoretical position: "By taking Bradley's notion of the 'Absolute' as experience, and associating it with Hegel's view that this is knowable, Oakeshott stood Idealism on its head."[55]

While maintaining his adherence to metaphysical monism, Oakeshott's transformation of Idealism allowed for a solipsistic and skeptical pluralism in coming to center on the self and its modes of experiencing the whole. Hobbes allowed Oakeshott to be a skeptical monist, embracing the earthly or "pantheistic" religious sentiment characteristic of Spinoza's thought while avoiding the annulment of human will implied by his complete account of nature. Oakeshott could then employ the spirit of Augustinian "theism" to shepherd this Hobbesian emphasis on the autonomy of the will, preventing its falling prey to a complete account of *Geist* which would again resolve it into a rational account of the whole. Oakeshott's Idealism thus finds a strong contrast in the German Idealist tradition in which philosophy has the primary and emphatic role, extending its influence into all of the main spheres of practical life. Oakeshott consistently denied the dialectical reconciliation of Subject and Substance in prioritizing the contingency and autonomy of the individual self.

Hobbes and Hegel

The relation between Hobbes and Hegel in Oakeshott's thought is neither simple nor superficial. As already noted, the early Oakeshott appeared to Josiah Lee Auspitz as a Hegel corrected by Ockham. In Oakeshott's understanding, Ockham had "translated" the disposition for human and political individuality "into a philosophical theorem"[56] and was foremost among those Averroists who had formulated the "method of circumscribing the concerns of philosophy" to exclude consideration of "the universe as a whole, things infinite, things eternal, final causes and things known only by divine grace or revelation"—a rationalization which had come to be the basis of Hobbes's philosophy.[57] Rather than viewing Oakeshott in terms of a gradual and inexorable development away from Hegelian absolute knowledge and toward a Hobbesian skepticism, it is necessary to examine a tension which, as Auspitz's formulation suggests, was present in Oakeshott's thinking from the start.

Oakeshott had political as well as philosophical reasons to be drawn to Hobbes. In political terms, Oakeshott recognized the role that Hobbes could play in ennobling the narrative of political individuality. Oakeshott's intention in *On Human Conduct* and the essays collected in *Hobbes on Civil Association* was to "diffuse aristocracy downwards" taking full advantage of the aristocratic possibilities in Hobbes as he "circle[d] back to Hobbes as essentially the inventor of the form of political association fit for such quasi-aristocratic figures."[58] This reversal of the servile cast of modern thought did not reflect a social or aesthetic preference but was rather one of the consequences of Oakeshott's rejection of the historical teleology in Hegel, in which the high take on the experience of the low, a rejection which is inevitable if the absolute is found in the experience of the self and not in the historical experience of a human culture or *Volk*. It also reflected the influence of Michael B. Foster and his association of history with Judaic creation and imagination rather than with Greek reason and nature. It is here that another of Oakeshott's debts to late medieval thought becomes apparent, as this privileging of the will and creative contingency owes its reappearance in Western thought to Ockham and Duns Scotus. This tradition allowed Oakeshott to recover history from Hegel's overlay of "logical necessitation" and abstraction. As Wendell John Coats, Jr. has pointed out, for Oakeshott, "There is never any conflation of the theoretical and the practical, nor any intimation of the practical ever eventually conforming to the outlines of any theoretical deduction."[59]

Paul Franco has made the most determined case for a Hegelian Oakeshott to be found in "the profoundly Hegelian character" of *On Human Conduct* and civil association as a form of *Sittlichkeit*.[60] According to this interpretation, Oakeshott's understanding of a "practice" as the conditional context in which conduct is assessed to be right or wrong presupposes the existence of *das Recht* and therefore allows for a *sittlich* relationship between agents. Noting Oakeshott's frustration with the "dreadfully miscellaneous" character of the *Philosophy of Right*, Franco finds *On Human Conduct* to be Oakeshott's own "purer, slimmed down version" of Hegel's great ramshackle treatise.[61]

After the Hegel passage in *On Human Conduct* (pp. 257–263), the centerpiece of any case for a Hegelian Oakeshott is his conception of the political traditions. Oakeshott presented the Judaic inheritance of "Will and Artifice" within a triadic conception of political thought, together with "Reason and Nature" as the political philosophy of the ancient Greeks, and the modern achievement of the "Rational Will" as exempli-

fied by Hegel's theory of the state. Oakeshott allowed that the adherents of this final tradition "may be excused the belief " that it represents a true synthesis.[62]

Oakeshott had stated this view of the political tradition in 1946 and allowed it to be reproduced without amendment in 1975. However, it was preceded by an even stronger statement in his 1937 review of Leo Strauss's *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* in which Oakeshott agreed with Strauss's claim that Hobbes had replaced a starting point of law with a starting point of will and averring that Hobbes had "never had a satisfactory or coherent theory of volition" and for that reason "lacks something vital to modern thought." Although Oakeshott named Hegel as one of those who had made a profound philosophical effort to rectify this deficiency, he felt that the true union of the teachings of natural law and the will has "not yet succeeded in finding an entirely satisfactory expression."[63] Franco detects in this earlier statement the "programmatic intention" which unlocks Oakeshott's political theory. Combined with Oakeshott's reading of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (which he finds "almost identical" to the theory of moral autonomy which Oakeshott had provided in the first two essays of the work) Franco believes that this reveals Hegel as Oakeshott's philosopher.[64]

Returning to Hobbes as a defender of a morality of individuality, Oakeshott noted that "it is Reason, not Authority, that is destructive of individuality."[65] Franco argues that Hegel's "rational will" is ambiguous enough to be "susceptible" to the interpretation Oakeshott would have to give it in order to conform to this separation of wisdom and authority.[66] While there is the reduced sense of "rational conduct" which Oakeshott identified as intelligent activity (or conduct cohering to an idiom of practice), this modified form of the "rational will" is presumably that "prevailing educated moral sensibility capable of distinguishing between the conditions of 'virtue', the conditions of moral association ('good conduct'), and those which are of a kind that they should be imposed by law ('justice')."[67] In other words, it is rational to will conduct supportive of the rule of law which is the basis of freedom.

Rather than a Rational Will, this could be understood as "the disposition of enough of the associates at any one time to observe [the laws], itself no doubt supported by any appreciation they may have of the long-term value to them in their enterprising engagements of this legal order."[68] Oakeshott presented this formulation as a clarification of Hobbes who had been determined to avoid transcendent values, natural laws, or any other

basic norm which might become "the occasion for profitless dispute" or even "the recipe for anarchy."[69] Oakeshott intended to describe the rational wills of individual selves rather than their collective Rational or General Will. As Oakeshott noted, "Hobbes's individualism is far too strong to allow even the briefest appearance of anything like a general will."[70] If Oakeshott viewed a "general will" as destructive of individuality, we would be unlikely to find anything to approximate it in his own political theory. Nevertheless, Oakeshott was charting a course between the Hobbesian and Hegelian concepts of the will, each of which is the basis of a radically different state. Ludwig Siep has helpfully delineated this difference:

> The state in Hobbes is an artifact; an artful apparatus constructed for the self-preservation of the individual; Hegel's state, on the other hand, is a "communal work," an independent or self-supporting entity or essence demanding that all nonindependent individual moments be put into the service of absolute ethics.[71]

Reflecting this profound distinction, any strongly Hegelian reading of Oakeshott must confront the fact that the practice of civility involves a much less integral arrangement than the *sittlich* relationship, a point which was made by Judith Shklar in her review of *On Human Conduct*.[72] While the notion of a "practice" may be post-Hegelian, the practice sustaining Oakeshott's state suggested to a perceptive Shklar Hegel's abstract right more than *Sittlichkeit*.

Oakeshott's use of Roman vocabulary and legal distinctions lends support to Shklar's interpretation, and in ostensibly addressing the criticism that civil association is hostile to community, Oakeshott only added to the sense that the notion meant little to him in referring to "communities of persons, for the most part strangers to one another."[73] Oakeshott was to use Augustine to eternalize (or de-historicize) Hegel at the stage of the *pax Romana*. Hegel's proposition of abstract right states, "The Self as such, the abstract person, is absolute being."[74] This is the historical moment of Roman Stoicism, an abstract individuality. In describing something similar to this tension in terms of modern thought, Terry Nardin argues that Oakeshott found himself "steering a narrow course between the Scylla of Kantian *Moralität* and the Charybdis of Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*."[75] But Oakeshott was additionally concerned to avoid the ("Gnostic") historical logic of Hegel and the (supernatural) dualism of Kant. A non-historical Hobbes provided a civil theory of authority and

individuality compatible with an earthly Augustinianism representing something arguably closer to a Stoicism or Epicureanism which has been "graced with an intimation of immortality."[76] This rich conception of the self requires as its element the watery, half-moral practice of "civility"—an idiom of practical life nourished under an authority which does not seek to dominate the intellect or conscience.

The City of God

For Oakeshott, Bacon's technological vision of the state represented the very emblem of the false aspiration for a faith in which human beings replace their awareness of permanent moral shortcomings and their need for something like what Augustine would understand as the gift of Divine Grace. 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. Oakeshott referred to this particular corruption of the moral life as "[t]he predicament of Western morals."[77] In Augustinian terms, this Baconian vision involves the violation of the distinction between enjoying (*fruendum*) and using (*utendem*), leaving its servants ignorant of intrinsic good and the poetic spirit in which it may be approached or embodied. The creative principle which is attached to the disposition of enjoyment for its own sake is further alienated in the progressive narrative of history which underpins this kind of society. For this reason Oakeshott welcomed the individuality of Western Europe without confining its meaning or expression to a particular historical moment or larger factor beyond the individual self. Oakeshott took from Augustine a perspective which, as Wendell John Coats, Jr. explains, "respect[s] the creative aspect of human conduct by preserving so far as possible the original form in which an actor disclosed and enacted himself."[78]

In Oakeshott's Augustinianism these pilgrim selves may draw on those poets and artists of the Renaissance whom Oakeshott dignified above the theologians as "the true custodians of the dream."[79] This elevation went hand in hand with apparently subtle modifications in the vocabulary of Christianity in Oakeshott's final realization of a "self-understanding" in the spirit of "an Augustinian God of majestic imagination."[80] This led to a transformation in the understanding of grace in particular. As Glenn Worthington argues:

> Augustine's faith in an uncreated creator (whose love for his creation is mysterious to that creation) is not … available to Oakeshott, who maintained that all experience is mediated by the human subject. Oakeshott's skepticism at those who assume the perfectibility of humanity is not balanced by a faith in an external ordering principle. His world is open ended and uncertain; there is no prospect of divine grace or salvation beyond the mortal constructions that humanity creates for itself.[81]

Oakeshott was not searching for an island of geometric certainty against the inhuman flux or seeking a bastion of otherworldly faith.[82] What he described was rather an earthy, present, and transient City of God. But in following Hobbes, Oakeshott left little room for revelation and Corey Abel is justified in questioning whether thinking as skeptical as Oakeshott's can be said to remain in any meaningful sense Christian—surely, to be Christian "we need God and we need his becoming a man."[83]

Abel suggests that Oakeshott's Augustinianism can really be spoken of only in the context of a civilization. When understood in terms of "Christianity as a civilization,"[84] Oakeshott's writings on myth and poetry acquire greater coherence with his religious thought. Considering that for Oakeshott some of the highest moments in Western civilization seem to have been the reemergence of classical and pagan ideas in periods of renaissance, we are reminded of the merciful flexibility of Oakeshott's "Christian civilization," a designation which overlaps with the particularities of the "cave" or "common dream." Oakeshott referred to "that idiom of Christian faith" "transformed" by the "European religious imagination" into something rich and strange, which would eventually produce, among other things, the ironies of Cervantes.[85]

Oakeshott endeavored to preserve the myth of this civilization by transforming the dualism of nature-supernature into the earthly "dualism" of noble versus base conduct within a unity of experience.[86] The publication of Oakeshott's notebooks has contributed a fuller picture of this naturalized "dualism," which sought to bring together the themes of religion, love, and death. Reviewing the notebooks, Oakeshott's biographer Robert Grant has explained how the young Oakeshott ("a fervent Christian, of an innocently Franciscan stripe") matured into this earthly Augustinianism:

> He came later to believe, with St Augustine ("my great man", he told me), that the temporal and the eternal were not successive but simultaneous orders of being. "Salvation" or "heaven" was not a future reward for good

> behaviour, but a spiritual dimension accessible here and now to a person already moved by love, and thereby attuned to it. Being spontaneously virtuous, such a person would need no moral constraints. "Love, and do what thou wilt" was the Augustinian motto of Rabelais's Abbey of Thelema, celebrated in *On Human Conduct*.[87]

In attempting to link the authenticity and intensity of religious life with the modern and mortal standpoint of Hobbes, Oakeshott was also not so distant from Heidegger (who had also sought finitude in Augustine in adapting the *cursus ad mortem* as being-toward-death).[88] In his Bradleian insistence on the experience of the self, however, Oakeshott managed to avoid the consequences of focusing on the wider historical fate of a culture. Far from embracing the self-conscious anxiety of finitude, religion for Oakeshott offered an underserved and grateful respite from such a condition—a reconciliation within the ordeal of existence. The concept of "sin" is illustrative of how Oakeshott separated himself from the bravado of existentialism. For Oakeshott realized that "in recognizing wrongdoing as a sin we deprive it of its fatality without lessening its enormity; we create a refuge from the destroying Angst of guilt."[89]

We are reminded that the loss of the distinction between "crime" and "sin" is the moral heresy implied in the equation of the state with the enterprise association. This is also central to the significance of self-enactment and its relation to conduct in terms of self-disclosure. Although there is no simple and direct correspondence between self-enactment and the morality of the individual,[90] self-enactment and Oakeshott's City of God only become visible in the experience of individual human beings. Bourgeois individualism is as far from the City of God as the utilitarian and collectivist ethos by which men are merely cogs in a machine, valued, tuned, fixed, or removed on the assessment of their contributions to its overall function. Those who have internalized such standards as a measure of their own worth, whether to measure the value of their own achievements or to find meaning in their participation in something "greater than themselves," embody the moral degeneracy of liberal theory as it was critiqued in the late nineteenth century by Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche.[91]

Although Oakeshott seems to have wished to preserve some ambiguity around the role of religion in his theory of human conduct, he did affirm that neglecting "religious belief" would leave his account "inexcusably incomplete."[92] This religious belief signified something less indeterminate

and more intense than the mere context of a Christian civilization however evergreen its continuity, and something more otherworldly than poetry however broad-leaved its definition. I have noted Elizabeth Corey's appropriation of Peter Brown's phrase "otherworldly in the world" to refer to this seeming paradox. While Corey expresses deep sympathy with the religious and aesthetic sentiments which pervade Oakeshott's writings, she ultimately wonders whether it is possible to find the eternal in such a pared down account of "belief." Corey refuses to gloss over the fact that "Augustine's view entails a graceful acceptance of human limitations, limitations that may yet be remedied in a life to come." Without such belief, or the hope which it inspires, how can Oakeshott endurably transcend his skeptical politics?[93]

Leo Strauss was known to cite Lessing's incredulity about the question of belief: "Believe! Believe! How I wonder what that word means!"[94] And we may continue to ponder how convincingly Oakeshott navigated the passage between the momentary bliss offered by the imagination and the hope and security found in the experience of belief.[95] Some of the most vivid examples of moral practice and self-enactment seem to have been inspired by, and enthused with, genuinely theistic religious faith (the conviction that God is external to even the highest reaches of the human self). To seek this level of intensity in the moral life of a human being without such spiritual support may be to make demands which are too great to underpin the self-enactments of more than a heroic handful. The words with which Harold Bloom assessed Walter Pater's aestheticism might be used, almost as appropriately, for Oakeshott's theologico-political vision. Bloom concludes that "you need to be a poet of genius and a moral titan fully to sustain it."[96]

Oakeshott's thought is, of course, no mere aestheticism but his conversation does call moral titans to the table. For Oakeshott, human life was imagined in terms of "evanescence and mutability" and human conduct could at most be "graced with an intimation of immortality." But Oakeshott believed that we may encounter eternity in these moments, and that our deepest felt self-enactments may be compared to engaging in a conversation with eternity—we cannot, however, become eternal. What awaits the most religious and the most poetic of us is our "reconciliation to nothingness." Fittingly for a thinker who melded medieval and Renaissance viewpoints in bringing Augustine together with Hobbes, Oakeshott leaves us somewhere between a "God of majestic imagination" and that other master, Death.

Notes

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3. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 175.
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8. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 158.
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14. Richard Friedman, "Michael Oakeshott and the Elusive Identity of the Rule of Law," in *The Intellectual Legacy of Michael Oakeshott*, ed. Corey Abel and Timothy Fuller (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2005), 176.
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17. Michael Oakeshott, "Talking Politics," in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*: new and expanded edition, ed. Timothy Fuller (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991), 450.
18. Ibid., 449.
19. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 88.
20. Ibid., 87.
21. Michael Oakeshott, "On Misunderstanding Human Conduct: A Reply to My Critics," *Political Theory* 4, no. 3 (August 1976): 362.
22. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 241.

23. Ibid., 70. See Elizabeth Campbell Corey, *Michael Oakeshott on Religion, Aesthetics, and Politics* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 118.
24. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 242 n. 1.
25. Michael Oakeshott, "Education: The Engagement and Its Frustration," in *The Voice of Liberal Learning: Michael Oakeshott on Education*, ed. Timothy Fuller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 99.
26. Corey, *Michael Oakeshott on Religion, Aesthetics, and Politics*, 23.
27. The distinction is George Santayana's. Corey, *Michael Oakeshott on Religion, Aesthetics, and Politics*, 23.
28. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 84.
29. Nardin, *Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott*, 66.
30. Michael Oakeshott, "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind," in *Rationalism in Politics*, 489.
31. Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), 2.
32. Michael Oakeshott, "The Tower of Babel," in *Rationalism in Politics*, 479.
33. Nardin, *Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott*, 156.
34. Ian Tregenza, "Skepticism and Tradition: the Religious Imagination of Michael Oakeshott," in *The Meaning of Michael Oakeshott's Conservatism*, ed. Corey Abel (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010), 13.
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36. Michael Oakeshott, *Notebooks, 1922–86, Selected Writings, Volume VI*, ed. Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2014), 426.
37. Michael Oakeshott, "Religion and the World," in *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, 31, 34.
38. Patrick Riley, "Michael Oakeshott, Philosopher of Individuality," *The Review of Politics* 54, no. 4 (1992): 664.
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40. Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes*, 292.
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42. Steven B. Smith, "Practical life and the critique of Rationalism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Oakeshott*, ed. Efraim Podoksik (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 149.
43. Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes*, 321.
44. Ibid., 310–311 n.
45. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 27.

46. Allan Bloom, "Interpretative Essay," in *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 322.
47. See Wendell John Coats, Jr. "Michael Oakeshott as Philosopher of 'the Creative'," *The Place of Michael Oakeshott in Contemporary Western and Non-Western Thought*, ed. Noël O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2017).
48. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 30.
49. Michael Oakeshott, "*Leviathan*: a Myth," in *Hobbes on Civil Association*, 159–160.
50. Oakeshott, "Voice of Poetry," 541.
51. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 27–30.
52. Josiah Lee Auspitz, "Individuality, Civility, and Theory: The Philosophical Imagination of Michael Oakeshott," *Political Theory* 4, no. 3 (August 1976): 288.
53. Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes*, 6.
54. See David Boucher, "Michael Oakeshott in the context of British Idealism," in *Cambridge Companion to Oakeshott*, 268.
55. Stuart Isaacs, *The Politics and Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.
56. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 240.
57. Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," 18–19.
58. Jan-Werner Müller, "Re-imagining Leviathan: Schmitt and Oakeshott on Hobbes and the problem of political order," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 13, nos. 2–3 (2010): 326.
59. Wendell John Coats, Jr., *Oakeshott and His Contemporaries: Montaigne, St. Augustine, Hegel*, Et al (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2000), 44–45.
60. Paul Franco, *The Political Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 6, 159.
61. Ibid., 209.
62. Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," 7–8.
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64. Franco, *Political Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott*, 87, 206–210.
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68. Ibid., 157.
69. Ibid., 160.
70. Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," 66.

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72. Judith Shklar, "Purposes and Procedures," *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 September 1975: 1018.
73. Oakeshott, "On Misunderstanding Human Conduct," 366.
74. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 454.
75. Nardin, *Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott*, 190.
76. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 73 n. 1, 85.
77. Oakeshott, "Tower of Babel," 487.
78. Coats, *Oakeshott and His Contemporaries*, 32, 35.
79. Oakeshott, "*Leviathan*: a Myth," 161.
80. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 324.
81. Glenn Worthington, "Michael Oakeshott and the City of God," *Political Theory* 28, no. 3 (June 2000): 377.
82. Michael Oakeshott, "On Being Conservative," in *Rationalism in Politics*, 410.
83. Corey Abel, "Oakeshott's Wise Defense: Christianity as a Civilization," in *The Meaning of Michael Oakeshott's Conservatism*, 25.
84. Ibid., 27 ff.
85. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 85 n.
86. Coats, *Oakeshott and His Contemporaries*, 30.
87. Robert Grant, review of *Notebooks 1922–86*, by Michael Oakeshott, *History of Political Thought* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 799.
88. See William Blattner, "Authenticity and Resoluteness," *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger's* Being and Time, ed. Mark A. Wrathall (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 331 n. 21.
89. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 83.
90. Worthington, "Michael Oakeshott and the City of God," 391–392.
91. Ibid., 394.
92. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 81.
93. Corey, *Michael Oakeshott on Religion, Aesthetics, and Politics*, 44.
94. Stanley Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 112.
95. Corey, *Michael Oakeshott on Religion, Aesthetics, and Politics*, 228.
96. Harold Bloom, *Yeats* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 24. Cf. Oakeshott, "Religion and the World," 33.

CHAPTER 10

Conclusion

I began this study by taking seriously the conventional view that Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss are important twentieth-century conservative voices. From there I steadily introduced the countervailing suggestion that Oakeshott and Strauss share commitments and themes with more radical thinkers and that the significance of their thought is more to be found in their engagement with the politics of renaissance and enlightenment, recognizing and respecting the permanent tension, which Strauss called the "theologico-political problem" and Oakeshott understood as "the single and continuous" problem of religion and political life.

In the final analysis, however, there is perhaps no essential contradiction between the meaning of their conservatism and these radical concerns. The genius of both men is manifest in the fact that they provided a central and defensible place in their thought for traditional inheritances without ever abandoning their commitment to enlightenment and renaissance. In affirming the permanent problem of religion in political life Oakeshott and Strauss are men whose thought was framed from the beginning by the irreducible place of conservatism within the moderation that is essential to wisdom. When a perceptive reader of Strauss finds him betraying a Nietzschean mission through a timid and conservative style inappropriate for the radicalness of his epoch,[1] he has perhaps failed to consider that Nietzsche's abandonment of moderation involved a condemnation of his own Germans quite at odds with the spirit in which Strauss carried forward his abiding concern for his Jewish people. This is reflected in the fact

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that rather than seeking to tear down the axial figures of Western civilization, Strauss discovered an argument in the "drama" or action of the Platonic dialogues, which achieved much of what others would sift for among the fragments of the pre-Socratics. When read alongside Strauss's discovery of the trans-cultural or philosophical significance of the biblical tradition, this equates to a new foundation for—or rejuvenation of the roots of—Western civilization.

Similarly, for all the audacity of Oakeshott's renewal of Christian religion as a civilizational grounding, taking on ideas promiscuously from skeptical classical and Renaissance sources, there is no turning against this fundamental inheritance in Oakeshott's writings. Oakeshott could accomplish much of what Nietzsche was aiming for without unleashing a destructive passion against his own civilization. The thought of Oakeshott and Strauss forces us to reconsider, on a higher plane, whether Stanley Rosen was correct in asserting that "there is no coherent philosophical defense of moderation as moderation, or what might be called 'good-natured and liberal muddling through.'"[2]

It is perhaps a higher form of "muddling through" which is called for in facing up to the fact that modern civilization has failed in its implicit promise to resolve what Goethe called the grand theme of human history, *der Konflikt des Unglaubens und Glaubens.*[3] Given that no one can be both a philosopher and a theologian, Strauss instructed us to take the part of "either one or the other, the philosopher open to the challenge of theology or the theologian open to the challenge of philosophy."[4] Oakeshott's poetic evocation of this higher "muddling through" encouraged us to "prefer the road to the inn, ambulatory conversation to deliberation about means for achieving ends, the rules of the road to directions about how to reach a destination." While Strauss affirmed that the ceaseless tension at the heart of Western civilization must be lived in the perpetual quarrel of philosophy and belief, Oakeshott envisaged an Augustinian God of poetic imagination desiring "convives capable of 'answering back' in civil tones" and engaging in an eternally delighting conversation.[5]

Oakeshott's "Augustinianism" is found in his willingness to continue this conversation rather than in any adherence to an orthodox "theological" position. The myth which sustains this conversation must be perpetually recalled, recreated, and revised by poets and artists who are of course, human. Oakeshott was never carried away by the desire to assert this secularization—he never proclaimed these artists "all-too-human." Instead he noted that Hobbes's renovation of the civilizational myth had involved an

Averroist exclusion of theological or cosmological questions. Some of those whom Oakeshott called the "slaves" of this artifice or poetic dream are likely to become aware of a vast and impersonal universe, both troubling and wonderful, and one in which, as the realization of their mortality reminds them, they hold no permanent place.

Oakeshott did not attempt to completely exclude this radical and final homelessness and it is clearly a part of "the ordeal of consciousness." Oakeshott was aware that the Hobbesian human being "belongs to no order and has no obligations." But rather than seeing this as the necessary beginning of a scientific culture, Oakeshott perceived it as a great regeneration of the myth of original sin by which human beings became separated from their original home and "the source of peace and happiness."[6] From Oakeshott's perspective, Strauss overlooked this heritage in judging Hobbes to have been driven by "[t]he attempt to make man absolutely at home in this world." Strauss would have responded to this by questioning the meaning of the deliberate absence of any Eden-like state of peace and plenty in Hobbes's retelling of the "myth."[7] Strauss condemned Hobbes's project as having "ended in man's becoming absolutely homeless"[8]—an assessment which suggests Heidegger's importance.

Strauss was not overawed by Heidegger. He sifted the philosophical insight from Heidegger's first steps toward "preparing an entirely novel form of *Bodenständigkeit*: a *Bodenständigkeit* beyond the most extreme *Bodenlosigkeit*, a home beyond the most extreme homelessness."[9] As a Jew who was fully aware of the irreducible element of conservation which such an inheritance demands, Strauss came to discern that the Jewish problem as a human problem defines the crisis manifest in the coming of a world state. It was precisely this understanding of the basis of the Jewish nation that informed the political aspect of Strauss's rejection of Alexandre Kojève's claim that modern philosophy provides a basis for the supposed universal justice of a global order. Strauss implied that our deep consideration of the implications of this problem, especially where it finds a parallel in the permanent separation of theory and practice,[10] might sustain the roots of the vital confrontation of "Athens" and "Jerusalem."

Strauss's Jewish problem as a human problem has the same formidable continuity as that which Oakeshott found in the identity of the civilizational myth. Even the establishment of the modern state of Israel, an event which would appear to be a break in the two thousand year exilic existence of the Jews, Strauss accepted only as "the most profound modification of the Galuth which has occurred, but is not the end of the Galuth: in the

religious sense, and perhaps not only in the religious sense, the state of Israel is part of the Galuth." It is not the solution, but only a notable occasion of a problem which is coeval with mankind. "In other words," Strauss concluded, "human beings will never create a society which is free from contradictions. From every point of view it looks as if the Jewish people were the chosen people, at least in the sense that the Jewish problem is the most manifest symbol of the human problem insofar as it is a social or political problem."[11] Strauss and Oakeshott, standing against all perfectionist and millenarian fantasies, imbued "good-natured and liberal muddling through" with a transcendent and paradoxical virtuosity.

Each man had the good taste and the wisdom to avoid striking the pose of the nihilist or existentialist. Both refused the temptation of "gloating in the heroism of the ability to stare back at the Gorgon's head of—absolutely nothing."[12] Strauss had praise for those who enjoyed a natural preference for Jane Austen over Dostoevsky, deeming them readier for the subtle and "pious" presentations of the ancient philosophers[13]; Oakeshott declared Hobbes to have been engaged in something not dissimilar to the project which occupied the twentieth-century existentialists, while avoiding that movement's "exaggerated display of emotion and [its] false suggestion of novelty."[14] While Hobbes may seem out of place in the Renaissance "existentialist" tradition which this implied, it is of more enduring importance that Oakeshott has drawn attention to the fertile nothingness or transcendent skepticism behind some of the greatest minds in the Western tradition, centuries before the appearance of the base nihilism and mundane relativism which Strauss attributed to the failure of a project which began most substantially with Hobbes.

Strauss used the phrase "fertile nothing" in reconstructing the attitude of the German nihilists "from the point of view of the nihilists themselves."[15] Strauss's portrait of these young Germans is not as sympathetic as Oakeshott's definition of Keats's notion of negative capability,[16] yet must be understood as the background to his later coining of the *reductio ad Hitlerum*.[17] As a young man who had hung on every word of Nietzsche, the philosopher he would later term the "stepgrandfather" of fascism, Strauss was conscious of himself as a mind which had emerged in an intellectual setting from which many earnest young Germans of lesser judgment had reduced themselves to Hitler. Strauss was more receptive to the postwar writings of the greatest "Nietzschean" of his time (Heidegger). In returning to the comparison with Oakeshott and the English mind, and to the moderation and the magnanimity which characterized that tradition at

its best, we may return to the similarities between Keatsian negative capability and Heideggerian *Gelassenheit*.[18]

Keats based his concept on the mind of Shakespeare (Shakespeare having been notably influenced by Montaigne), and this reminds us that while Oakeshott may have been overreaching in attributing it to Hobbes, there was undoubtedly a "fertile nothing" from which the great thinkers and defining geniuses of this pre-scientific epoch announced themselves. When Strauss discerned from the postwar Heidegger that we may look to "the East within us, Western men", he had in mind the elusive or hidden emergence of being. To reapply Oakeshott's characterization of the spiritual shallows of Rationalism, no "irritable search" will bring this process into presence.[19] Strauss's Jewish heritage provided him with an enduring reminder of this elusive ground of becoming in the biblical tradition. Oakeshott's civilizational "dream" inspired him to discover the uncontrollable mystery in the skeptical creativity of the Renaissance thinkers and artists of Western Europe, interpreted within a tradition of the inscrutable willing of an Augustinian God.

The problem of being is shared across the traditions which underpin Western civilization. Stated another way, the ground of Western thought is radically mysterious, as both Strauss and Oakeshott affirmed in their own ways. Approached from this direction, it seems that it may indeed be the case that there is no politically responsible ("good-natured and liberal") manner of describing or evoking this fertile nothingness or "being as fecund becoming."[20]

Laurence Lampert has identified this "ontology/cosmology that runs esoterically through the philosophic tradition … [as] an ontology that recognizes the sovereignty of becoming and that can be labeled, if simplistically, a process monism."[21] Strauss's presentation of the tradition was Platonic in affirming the permanence of a tradition of questioning being. This implies a minimal ground of knowledge, even if only as knowledge of a permanent ignorance that is itself a fertile nothing reflecting the cosmological question. Strauss's Platonic political philosophy also reflected his awareness of the tragic consequences of the Nietzschean presentation of the philosopher's position, an experiment in truth which had resonated most with the non-philosophical multitude, unleashing a kind of Heracliteanism for the people.

This is not to say that Strauss was a Nietzschean in Platonic garb. For Strauss's recovery of philosophical *eros* was both a rejection of synthesis and a refutation of the modern tradition of self-knowledge won from the

confrontation with the nothingness of death, the account of the servile origins of self-consciousness that had bewitched the modern mind from the time of Hobbes. While Nietzsche had viewed Socrates as a base and servile impostor amid the noble vision of Plato, for Strauss Socrates was the very antidote to this popular and servile tradition that even a man of Nietzsche's temperament had continued. For Nietzsche it was only through the experiences of slaves and priests that humanity had become "interesting." As he declared, "The history of mankind would be far too stupid a thing if it had not had the intellect [*Geist*] of the powerless injected into it."[22] We do not require the word *Geist* to realize the obvious kinship of this statement with the pronouncement of Hegel, considered in Chap. 6: "It was not so much *from* slavery as *through* slavery that humanity was emancipated."[23] In each case the origins of high culture are traced to the timid being which suffers a failure of nerve in the face of death and must learn "freedom" as something abstract and technological. As Strauss had asked pointedly in linking the Anglophobic Nietzsche to the Englishmen Bacon and Hobbes, "Was not the 'Will to Power' so appealing because its true ancestry was ignored?"[24]

In an ironic reflection of the fundamental teaching of modernity which he himself adopted, Nietzsche declared that "Plato is a coward before reality, consequently he flees into the ideal." The Platonic dialogues were thus "boring" to Nietzsche.[25] As Strauss suggested, it is easy to confuse the dialogues with treatises which treat "not human beings but *logoi*, assertions with their accompanying reasoning." In other words, *eros*, as the dominant passion of Socrates, is so elevated in its aim that it is liable to be invisible to those who have already misdirected their gaze in assuming that tragedy is the highest expression of passion. In this way the philosopher's *eros* may be easily distinguished from the driving passions of modern thought, including the Will to Power.

This is in fact the central contention of philosophers in their quarrel with poets, a context in which I have situated the comparison and partial dialogue of Strauss and Oakeshott. Strauss allowed that poetry "ennobles passion and purifies passion." But Strauss identified the tragedy of poetry in the fact that it "does not know the end for the sake of which the purification of passion is required."[26] Strauss reminded us that Socratic self-knowledge excludes the tragic: even as knowledge of ignorance it is the highest self-knowledge—and therefore the highest virtue or happiness—of the human being.

Strauss noted the parallel between the Socrates of *Clouds* and Don Quixote.[27] Socrates's obliviousness to the human things in Aristophanes's comedy has a tragic counterpart in Heidegger's single-minded focus on being. Strauss is most clearly a Platonist in understanding that without psychological insight or self-knowledge, philosophy would remain subject to a range of comic and tragic adventures. This is in turn an appropriate point on which to conclude the comparison of Strauss's Socratic presentation of the universal, enlightened way of life with Oakeshott's Augustinian evocation of a particular, potentially quixotic, renaissance of individuality.

Strauss realized that Socratic philosophy or *eros* "could appear as Sisyphean or ugly" when viewed without proper consideration of the philosophical intention.[28] From the point of view of poetry, Oakeshott celebrated Cervantes for "creat[ing] a character in whom the disaster of each encounter with the world was powerless to impugn it as a self-enactment."[29] Strauss had been convinced by Plato that the poets had depicted only the imperfect characters, leaving Plato himself to narrate the perfect life of *eros*, the theoretical life. But for Oakeshott this self-enactment, as the highest form of human conduct or practice, only appears quixotic or disastrous to one who is insensitive to the poetic sentiment which infuses it and drives it toward completion.

Oakeshott believed that Hobbes had seen in man "the greatness of great passion."[30] No substantive purpose, no matter how lofty, could redirect these passions toward a single goal without reducing or compromising their true majesty. This passionate pride (emphatically distinguished from the vain and ultimately timorous ambitions of collective man) was experienced and enacted in "all manners of being superior to fortune, invulnerable; a 'mortal god.'"[31] In this way an individual may live as though an eternal God—capable of foreseeing all that is necessitated by reason and natural beings but happily unable to account for the mishaps, poetry, and adventures of willful and artistic human beings—might remain eternally delighted by the "conversation" with his godlike mortal creations. This vision implies friendship rather than hierarchy between the two, and indeed, the poets or "mortal gods" must themselves "make gods" in their own image. In Oakeshott's conception of the Christian tradition this has been a God who has seen fit to create a world "composed of self-employed adventurers of unpredictable fancy."[32] These surprising "adventurers" so beloved of this Augustinian God are reminiscent of that true friend whom Oakeshott described as "somebody who engages the imagination, who excites contemplation, who provokes interest, sympathy,

delight and loyalty simply on account of the relationship entered into."[33] This relationship is one of mutual self-completion and for Oakeshott it is the inexhaustible variety of images that supports the vital creative tension. Contemplation is a contemplation of these images and Oakeshott referred to "the delight offered and come upon in this perpetually extending partnership between the contemplating self and its images."[34]

Oakeshott imagined godlike selves creating interesting counterparts while Strauss contemplated Nietzsche's assertion that the gods philosophize while delivering Socrates from the Nietzschean critique.[35] Like Oakeshott, Strauss recommended an eternal conversation with godlike friends. For Strauss, however, these friends need not be imagined; they are the philosophers and great thinkers who have achieved immortality through their *logoi*, the first and paradigmatic example of whom is Plato's Socrates. In short, "the philosophers of the future as Nietzsche described them remind one much more than Nietzsche himself seems to have thought of Plato's philosopher."[36]

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.

Notes

1. Laurence Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 184.
2. Stanley Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 138.
3. "[T]he conflict between unbelief and belief." See Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 107 n. 35.
4. Leo Strauss, "Progress or Return?" in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 270.
5. Michael Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 324.

6. Michael Oakeshott, "*Leviathan*: a Myth," in *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2000), 160–161.
7. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 150 n. 24.
8. Ibid., 18.
9. Leo Strauss, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 33.
10. See Ibid., 232: "…'the passion for right acting' as distinguished from 'the passion for right seeing and thinking,' requires a peculiar nation as its bearer."
11. Leo Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 230.
12. Michael Zank, introduction to Leo Strauss, *Leo Strauss: The Early Writings (1921–1932)*, ed. Michael Zank (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 27.
13. Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny: Corrected and Expanded Edition, Including the Strauss-Kojève Correspondence*, ed. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 185.
14. Oakeshott, "*Leviathan*: a Myth," 163. On the false novelty of the problem of death in modern philosophy see Timothy W. Burns, "Philosophy and Poetry: A New Look at an Old Quarrel," *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 2 (2015): 326–338.
15. Leo Strauss, "German Nihilism," ed. David Janssens and Daniel Tanguay, *Interpretation* 26, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 363.
16. Michael Oakeshott, "Rationalism in Politics," in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays:* new and expanded edition, ed. Timothy Fuller (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991), 6.
17. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 42.
18. Nathan A. Scott Jr., *Negative Capability: Studies in the New Literature and the Religious Situation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), xiii.
19. Oakeshott, "Rationalism in Politics," 6.
20. Laurence Lampert, *How Philosophy Became Socratic: A Study of Plato's* Protagoras, Charmides, *and* Republic (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 417.
21. Laurence Lampert, *The Enduring Importance of Leo Strauss* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 234.
22. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Kieth Ansell-Pearson and trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 17.
23. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. John Sibree (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001), 426.
24. Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy*, 172.

25. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), 117–118.
26. Leo Strauss, "The Problem of Socrates" in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 180, 183.
27. Ibid., 119.
28. Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy*, 40.
29. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 241.
30. Michael Oakeshott, "Introduction to *Leviathan*," in *Hobbes on Civil Association*, 78.
31. Michael Oakeshott, *Notebooks, 1922–86, Selected Writings, Volume VI*, ed. Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2014), 426.
32. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 324.
33. Michael Oakeshott, "On Being Conservative," in *Rationalism in Politics*, 416–417.
34. Oakeshott, "Voice of Poetry," 513.
35. Leo Strauss, "The Problem of Socrates," ed. David Bolotin, Christopher Bruell, and Thomas L. Pangle, *Interpretation* 22, no. 3 (Spring 1995): 324.
36. Leo Strauss, "An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism," in *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, 41.

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