

Editors' Introduction

Michael Oakeshott was appointed Professor of Political Science at the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1951. Soon thereafter he established an annual course on political thought. We do not know what topics he took up at first. Teachers of political thought often focus on canonical works, and Oakeshott may have begun this way. His course was aimed at undergraduates new to the subject, and for such students the most suitable materials are the 'classics' – texts that have, for one reason or another, outlived their original contexts. Such texts, Oakeshott at one time thought, are especially suitable for teaching how politics can be understood historically or philosophically.¹

Oakeshott's lectures, we are told, 'laid bare the subtleties of Hobbes and Hegel, Mill and Green' and 'were packed with students from all disciplines' across the LSE.² 'Running from Plato to John Stuart Mill', the course soon 'became more or less the centre of gravity in that vast school'.³ But later the focus seems to have shifted from texts to contexts. The last version of the lectures, which we present here, is a study of ideas in relation to their contexts, not a study of texts. Nor is this study of contexts a continuous story; it is an exploration of four particular contexts, the political experience of the ancient Greeks, the Romans, the medieval Europeans, and modern Europeans – 'different peoples, at different times, in different intellectual and physical circumstances, engaging

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- [1] Michael Oakeshott, 'The Study of "Politics" in a University', in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, ed. T. Fuller (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991).
 - [2] Robert Grant, *Oakeshott* (London: Claridge Press, 1990), p. 19.
 - [3] Noël O'Sullivan, 'In the Perspective of Western Thought', *The Achievement of Michael Oakeshott*, ed. Jesse Norman (London: Duckworth, 1993), p. 105. John R. Parr, who attended the course around 1960, records that Oakeshott gave separate lectures on Plato, Aristotle, St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Locke, Burke, Bentham, and Mill.

in politics in different ways and finding different things to think about it'.⁴ The result is a study of the political thought of these peoples, not a tour of the classics.

Those who attended the lectures remember their intellectual substance and vivid presentation. Oakeshott had something to say and could say it well. 'The course showed with what sureness of touch he married a commanding vision of the various styles of doing politics in the Western world, their vocabulary and idiom, with the requirements of an undergraduate audience, generally new to this kind of subject'.⁵ A former student describes Oakeshott as a 'polished, stylish lecturer' whose 'lectures (delivered from very full notes) were invariably well constructed, and interesting'.⁶ Others confirm that he preferred lecturing from a detailed script, which he would then abridge or embellish as the occasion required.⁷ 'He raised his voice sufficiently to be heard by everyone' but 'he did not project it forcefully or vary his tone very much; perhaps he disdained any oratorical devices'.⁸ Maybe so, but he knew that lectures are performances. 'A particular feature was the opening of the lecture. Other lecturers traditionally walked down the centre aisle of the theatre, but Oakeshott had found a mysterious back entrance that enabled him to appear through the curtain behind the lectern, greeted each time by a storm of applause'.⁹ Reading the lectures, one can imagine Oakeshott at his podium and enjoy, vicariously, the experience of being among his audience.

For Oakeshott, that audience was emphatically one of listeners, not readers. During his lifetime, Oakeshott would not agree to publish the lectures. But the typescript shows evidence of revision with an eye to publication. Several of the medieval chapters, for example, break from the pattern of short paragraphs crafted to be spoken, and seem to have been done after Oakeshott retired in 1968. That he allowed the lectures to survive amongst his literary remains is further

[4] 'Introduction', p. 33.

[5] Elie Kedourie, 'A Colleague's View', in Norman, pp. 99–100.

[6] Russell Price, 'A Choice and Master Spirit', in Norman, p. 29.

[7] Grant, *Oakeshott*, p. 19; Kenneth Minogue, Introduction to *Morality and Politics in Modern Europe: The Harvard Lectures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. xii.

[8] Price, 'A Choice and Master Spirit', p. 29.

[9] Noël O'Sullivan, 'Perspective of Western Thought', p. 105.

evidence that he was not decisively opposed to their surfacing posthumously.¹⁰ Fortunately, they are a pleasure to read – crisp, cogent, clear, and engaging. Although they do not contribute directly to current scholarship, the lectures fully merit inclusion in a series of his selected writings. Oakeshott's readings of the historical scholarship and classic texts offer views on Greek, Roman, medieval, and modern political thought that students and teachers will find illuminating and stimulating. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly in the present context, they shed new light on Oakeshott's own thinking. They do so not least because they enrich our picture of his self-conception as a teacher as well as a scholar of political thought. The aim of this introduction is, therefore, not only to give some idea of the content of the lectures, but also to indicate how they relate to the rest of his work. The first lecture is particularly worthy of close attention, after which we shall look in turn at each of the four periods he discusses.

Oakeshott's Introduction (Lecture 1)

Oakeshott declared in his opening address that the course was intended as 'an historical study'. Coming from a man with an abiding interest in the nature of historical inquiry, those words were more loaded than usual, and it will pay us to attend to them. Since the 1920s, Oakeshott had been revising his view of history as a distinct mode of theoretical understanding, and we are entitled to see this view as presupposed in his description of history as 'a mode of thought in which events, human actions, beliefs, [and] manners of thinking are considered in relation to the conditions, or the circumstantial context, in which they appeared'.¹¹

This was a subtle way of alerting his audience to what we might call his 'one-damn-thing-after-another' view of the historical process. His philosophy led Oakeshott to conceive of historical events as related to one another only by other events. Any attempt to reveal the overarching unity in historical events, anything like Hegel's argument that the whole

[10] Oakeshott 'put no restrictions on what was to be done with his papers when he bequeathed them to Shirley Letwin'. Timothy Fuller, 'Editor's Introduction' in Michael Oakeshott, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. ix.

[11] 'Introduction', p. 31.

human past was the story of the development of freedom, lay beyond the remit of historical knowledge. Hence his remark to his students that 'I cannot detect anything that could properly correspond to the expression "*the history of political thought*"', an expression that he mercilessly dissected at length elsewhere.¹²

It is also worth underlining that Oakeshott was challenging any version of the belief that a clear direction of 'progress' was visible in the history of political thought, aiming thereby to cut across traditional distinctions between 'left' and 'right' in the interpretation of the history of political ideas. Hegelian, conservative, liberal, Christian, socialist, and Marxist thinkers have all entertained a belief that history was necessarily moving in a certain direction, but this was not the kind of view that Oakeshott thought a historical analysis of politics could support.

Such beliefs were usually inspired, in Oakeshott's view, by the assistance such grand narratives offered in furnishing justifications of particular courses of political action. They were part of the subject matter facing anyone concerned with political thought, but the aim of historical inquiry was to study them, not engage with them on their own terms. And in these lectures, Oakeshott's approach was anything but partisan. Anyone coming to them expecting a blast of polemic on the issues of the day will be disappointed; it took over two-thirds of the course to get to the modern world, and the first half was devoted entirely to Greece and Rome.

Oakeshott was equally keen to impress upon his students that he was not offering a 'scientific' history of imagined 'causes' and 'effects'. 'The geographical conditions of ancient Greece, or the institution of slavery, or their religious beliefs, did not cause the Greeks to think about politics in the way they did'. Such considerations he described as contextual, not causal. That is to say, he thought of historical relations as carrying mutual implications rather than strict entailments; hence the analogy of the dry stone wall that he used to characterise them elsewhere.¹³ This is entirely consistent with his

[12] Michael Oakeshott, 'Political Thought as a Subject of Historical Enquiry', *What is History? And other essays: Selected Writings*, vol. I (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2004), pp. 403–21.

[13] See Michael Oakeshott, *On History and other essays* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 94.

long-held view that history could make no claim to be 'scientific' in the manner of the natural sciences.

Another important qualification concerned the meaning of the adjective 'political' in the expression 'political thought'. This should not be taken to mean, Oakeshott emphasised, that there was a special kind of thought with an exclusive subject matter, 'politics'. Politics, like other human activities (Oakeshott instanced bringing up children, building houses, and banking as examples), could itself become a subject for discussion. When and if this happens, the questions people ask could either be directed to devising 'appropriate courses of action' and 'reasons for recommending them', or aiming 'to understand, to make more intelligible, to interpret, or to explain'.

So far as Oakeshott was concerned, there was a clear distinction between practical and theoretical approaches to politics. He was presupposing a certain conception of political activity in which politics are not natural to human beings but pretty much a necessary feature of any complex society not ruled in an entirely arbitrary fashion. For politics to appear, however, certain conditions must obtain. The existence of societies of language-using humans that provide the rudiments of existence but yet have no politics worth speaking of was perfectly intelligible. Put simply, politics was not a 'primordial' activity like eating or sleeping, but something that emerged gradually and imperceptibly over a long period.

Not only did 'politics' need a community of human beings, then; it also needed a community in which there were differences over 'common customs or rules of conduct'. Societies must have some way of dealing with disagreements over their arrangements before 'politics' could appear. This had the further consequence that politics required that the rules of a community 'must be understood by the members...to be capable of being determined by human deliberation and action'.

This was vital, Oakeshott thought. If it were really believed that 'the ruling authority itself, the law and the instruments of government, are all utterly unalterable – not merely difficult to change, but by their nature incapable of being changed' – there would be nothing to talk about. It is the essence of politics to be 'concerned with deciding between alternative courses of action and with instituting change... and persuading or inducing those who have the authority to

act to make certain choices and not others'. If these things are held to be impossible, there can be no politics.

Behind these beliefs lay something like the view (and here Oakeshott may have learnt from Hegel) that humanity was unique in being able to acquire a 'second nature' through history and education. Only this could explain how political communities were brought into being. He shared, in other words, Hegel's sense of the historicity of human experience, and it indelibly coloured his view of how politics should be studied.¹⁴ Even the philosopher would be unwise to ignore history, on the view Oakeshott was putting forward.

The relevant period was roughly the last three thousand years. Only during that time, Oakeshott claimed, had 'associations which provide in a significant degree the conditions for political activity' been in existence. Furthermore, he was explicit that 'politics' was 'in the main, a European invention'. No doubt accusations of Eurocentrism cannot be entirely forestalled on this point, even allowing for the qualificatory 'in the main', but Oakeshott was not tub-thumping: he immediately went on to describe politics as 'Europe's somewhat embarrassing gift to the world'. Moreover, he did not see anything like three thousand years of continuous European political history, as he explained elsewhere. Politics had emerged but 'often been submerged, or half-submerged, again' in European history.

Oakeshott's division of his subject into four 'relatively self-contained' eras of political thought was partly intended to reinforce this point. He wanted to emphasise the discontinuity between these 'memorable passages', as he called them; to his mind, for example, Greece and Rome had been very different, and labelling them both as examples of something called 'ancient' politics without further qualification was simply misleading. This attitude mirrors the historiography of the 1960s at large, which was increasingly sceptical in tone; in the history of science, for example, a similar insistence that the transitions from ancient to modern science were not part of a single story of progress, that Aristotle was not to be understood simply as an erring Galileo, was becoming widely accepted.

[14] For Oakeshott's account of Hegel's political theory see *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 256-63.

Oakeshott's attention to language also reflected wider historical and philosophical trends, such as the 'linguistic turn' in philosophy and the humanities that took place in the 1950s and 1960s. There was no set of words that was inherently 'political', no political language simply as such. Moreover, one always had to ask whether the words one was interested in were uttered 'in the service of political decision and action' or whether those who used them had in mind an 'explanatory' enterprise not directly connected to some practical course of action. In either case, one is usually dealing with words belonging to a complex vocabulary. One reason Oakeshott singled out the periods he did was that he believed that each had produced its own distinctive complex of political words, and he devoted considerable time to identifying the terms he felt were most characteristic of the period in question. When he turned his attention from these constituents of practical speech to 'political theory', he made clear that he was not discussing theories of how to act more effectively in politics, but suggesting historical and philosophical explanations.

In his philosophical writings Oakeshott always argued for a categorical difference between practical and theoretical (scientific, historical, philosophical) activity, and it was this insistence that lay behind his admonition that 'we should do well to avoid confusing practical political beliefs and arguments' with 'attempts 'to explain political activity, either historically or philosophically'. To help his students grasp the difference, he offered the distinction between religion and theology, between 'beliefs, sentiments, and longings' and 'a system of abstract ideas'. The analogy is not perfect, because theology, in the end, remains the servant of religion, while Oakeshott did not see history and philosophy as shackled to practice. The main point was to warn students that they should distinguish between 'a writer like Machiavelli or Locke and a writer like Hobbes or Hegel'.

In subsequent lectures, however, Oakeshott gives surprisingly little attention to individual writers. Indeed, those lectures compose a history of political thought remarkably free of political thinkers; only Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas are deemed worthy of lectures of their own (Plato and Aristotle each get two). No modern thinkers, not even Hobbes or Hegel, probably the modern political thinkers Oakeshott most admired, got their own. Perhaps this was

because he felt that the contributions of modern political thinkers largely reformulated ancient and medieval ideas in the face of new problems, amounting to little more than old wine in new bottles. However that may be, even those thinkers he did discuss at length individually were always presented as philosophers whose political thought was part of a more general world-view embracing religion, ethics, science, and much else. As we shall now see, for Oakeshott the key to the history of political thought lay in the contextual approach.

Greek Political Thought (Lectures 2-10)

In referring to the 'political experience' of the ancient Greeks, Oakeshott distinguished between 'what actually happened' and 'what the Greeks themselves came to believe had happened'. These things might coincide, but they by no means always did so, even though Oakeshott believed the Greeks were right to recognize themselves, as he believed we must still recognize them, as 'the inventors of "politics"'. It did not matter for his purposes whether or not the Greeks' 'awareness of their own politics' coincided with the truth; the important thing was that this awareness had provided a 'myth or legend' that sustained their 'confidence in themselves'. As he saw it, the emergence of the *polis* around 1000 BCE was followed by the emergence of a narrative in which the Greeks told themselves a story of a union of tribes, the result of which was not itself a tribe but a self-consciously novel form of association.

All the features of the tribe – customs, gods, a chief or ruler – were transformed in becoming part of the *polis*. Just as 'Hellas' was the community of Greek-speakers, and not merely an area of the Mediterranean, so the *polis* was more than just a place. A *polis* offered protection, worship, and lawfulness, the 'justice' that Plato was to examine. Most of all, it offered the 'life of talk' that the Greeks believed made them 'superior to all other peoples'. This life was centred in the *agora*, the scene of 'the endless palavers which constitute half of Homer's *Iliad*', where the *demos*, the people, or more accurately, those of the *demos* who were *politai*, citizens, came to settle their own affairs – a privilege they believed was denied, for example, to the Persians.

Aristotle described the relationship between citizens as a kind of 'friendship', a relationship between equals, in contrast to the hierarchy of tribal and family relationships. Oakeshott emphasized that the equality under consideration here was an artificial one; notoriously, Aristotle was anything but a believer in natural equality. The significance of the artificial equality of the *polis* was that it was produced and maintained by persuasion, not force. Greek 'politics' consisted in precisely this process of mutual accommodation through discussion. This was true, Oakeshott argued, even in the early days of the *polis*, when a king or *basileus* ruled. Even though 'the right to speak on public occasions was confined to the king and his immediate counsellors', an assembly of citizens was still called 'to listen to deliberations about policy and about legal judgments, and they were participants in so far as they were there to be persuaded'.

In later times, the Greek cities famously came to know a variety of forms of government. So precarious was Greek politics that the belief arose that 'political forms and arrangements were essentially unstable', in a fashion that was, at best, cyclical, and certainly not progressive. There were, however, characteristic political forms, beginning with aristocratic oligarchies in which noble blood was claimed as a title to rule, but later often involving the dominance of the wealthy. There also emerged democracies in cities like Athens, where the original assembly had been 'transformed into the ruling authority' (always restricted to male citizens, a minority of the inhabitants). And from time to time there were tyrannies, which Oakeshott was careful to distinguish from despotisms. Where a despot was regarded as having no right to rule, the rule of the tyrant was autocratic but regular. The tyrant 'was a man, often a successful magistrate or military commander, who was pushed forward and endowed with authority; either by a shaky oligarchy, as a defender of its threatened privileges, or by a democratic faction intent on dislodging an oligarchy'. He differed from the despot, according to Oakeshott, in that he did not rule for his personal gratification and 'rarely subverted the ordinary laws of the *polis*'.¹⁵

The insistence on this distinction reflects Oakeshott's belief that constitutional issues had an important part to play

[15] 'The Political Experience of the Ancient Greeks', p. 58.

in understanding politics; the phrase 'power politics' he would doubtless have found very under-determined. Not only were power in the sense of force and power in the sense of right distinct from one another, he told his students, the sources of the right to rule had changed many times in the periods he was considering. Sensitivity to such distinctions was crucial to historical and philosophical understanding.

Oakeshott has been criticized for ignoring the violence of ancient history, particularly in the case of the Romans; his admiration of Roman law, for example, is said to have blinded him to the destruction wrought by Roman armies in Gaul and elsewhere as they extended imperial rule.¹⁶ And superficially, it is true that his synthetic style can make things appear so neat and coherent that he is in grave danger of oversimplification. But if one reads carefully, one sees that Oakeshott in fact placed war absolutely at the centre of political history, especially in the modern world. He told his students quite clearly and unambiguously that 'preparing for war, fighting a war, or recovering from a war' had been the norm in modern Europe, and that 'modern governments owe their extraordinary power more to war than to any other single circumstance.'¹⁷ We should not underestimate the radicalism of a view that declared, in a fashion similar to Marcuse at the time, that the technology of power in the modern world could transform the modern state into a police state.

Greek politics was faced with a stark choice that Oakeshott himself was inclined to regard as inescapable, the choice he once described as between 'jaw jaw' and 'war war'. The Hobbesian in him regarded either talk or violence as the only means available of resolving human disputes, and the very existence of politics was at least a victory for talk. He admired the Greeks for having brought into precarious existence a concept of government by persuasion.

Oakeshott may have regarded the assumptions he found reflected in the Greek distinction between political life in the *agora* and the life of the worker in the household or *oikia* as sound, but he did not hide from his students the fact that those fortunate enough to be accepted into the political

[16] See Perry Anderson, review of *Rationalism in Politics*, 2nd edn., *London Review of Books*, 24 September 1992, pp. 7-11.

[17] 'The Generation of a Modern State', p. 373.

sphere as self-determining agents were always a minority. His lectures were conventional in their view that neither Plato nor Aristotle had wanted to defend anything like what we know as modern democratic citizenship.

The lectures were eccentric, however, in dealing with Aristotle before Plato. One reason for this lies in Oakeshott's view that Aristotle had established a 'hierarchical map of human activity' which 'with a few amendments scribbled on it by later thinkers' had provided the 'context of all European political thought for two thousand years'.¹⁸ At the base of this Aristotelian scheme was 'a place for getting a living and carrying on the human species'; next came a 'place for *politike* (the activity of making and sustaining a *polis*)'; and at the summit lay 'the activity of understanding and explaining'. Another reason for treating Aristotle first was that his thinking lay closer to the mainstream of Greek political experience, which it sought to categorize and rationalize, than Plato's effort to reshape that experience in the light of radically different ideas.

Whatever attachment to the Aristotelian framework Oakeshott may have had, it did not prevent him from recognizing that classification, because it 'entails the choice of a principle', is always 'an ambiguous and somewhat arbitrary activity'. For example, Aristotle had arrived at his influential categorization of constitutions into monarchies, aristocracies, and polities by combining the principles of there being one, or few, or many rulers, and of ruling as being either for the benefit of the rulers or the ruled. Aristotle's *Politics*, Oakeshott cautioned, was not to be read as if composed entirely of this sort of logical analysis. Using a phrase he also applied to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, he described it as a 'supremely miscellaneous' work, sometimes philosophical in its use of ideal types, sometimes empirical or quasi-historical in its use of examples, sometimes practical in its effort to diagnose the causes of political failure. Although Oakeshott is slightly inconsistent about the details, it is clear he saw Aristotle as engaged in several different kinds of inquiry.¹⁹ All this is entirely consistent with Oakeshott's own theory of modality, which recognized different forms of knowledge.

[18] 'Aristotle (2)', p. 129.

[19] Compare 'Aristotle (1)', p. 113, and 'Aristotle (2)', p. 116, where first three and then four Aristotelean approaches to politics are distinguished.

If it is possible to discern traces of Oakeshott's own thought in his remarks on Plato and Aristotle, it is harder to do so in the treatment of stoicism and epicureanism with which he concluded his lectures on the ancient Greeks. This might seem odd; after all, epicureanism was notoriously associated in the early modern world with scepticism of the sort espoused by his beloved Hobbes, and Oakeshott himself attributed an 'ironic' character to philosophical thinking in *On Human Conduct*. Furthermore, in his personal life, Oakeshott was a rather epicurean character, preferring in his retirement a quiet retreat in the countryside and the company of friends to the bustle of London. Yet there was nothing unusual in his argument that both stoicism and epicureanism were responses to the increasing dependence of the Greek cities on external powers. We might, however, note his suggestion that circumstances to which stoicism was an intelligible response had arisen more than once in European history. Whether this was true of epicureanism, he did not say; perhaps he considered it, like stoicism, a permanent possibility.

Roman Political Thought (Lectures 11–15)

Oakeshott gave only half as many lectures on the Romans as he had on the Greeks, probably because he regarded their achievements in political thought as more practical than speculative; by common agreement, there were no Roman political thinkers of the stature of Plato or Aristotle. He was, however, keen to stress that the phrase 'the ancient world' involved 'one of the most misleading generalizations ever made' insofar as it implied that the Greek and Roman political experiences were indistinguishable.²⁰ Where the Greeks never really discovered how to secure political stability, the Romans excelled at the art of maintaining their state. It is not hard to discern admiration in the description of them as 'a conservative people supremely capable of learning from experience',²¹ or in his claim that if the Greeks were the inventors of politics so far as Europe was concerned, it was the Romans we must thank for our conception of 'law'.

Singling out the transition from republic to empire, Oakeshott argued that the Romans were supremely good at

[20] 'The Political Experience of the Ancient Romans (1)', p. 176.

[21] 'The Political Experience of the Ancient Romans (2)', p. 206.

exploiting the ambiguity inherent in all political speech. It was because of their skill in this that the empire took root, though one may convict him of exaggeration in saying that it did so 'without opposition or serious misgiving'. This belief in the importance of language in politics ensured that an interpretation of Roman history in which socio-economic class was the governing principle found no favour with Oakeshott. Revealingly, given his admiration for Roman politics, he drew the comparison with eighteenth-century England, which, he believed, had also been ruled by 'family connections' and which he elsewhere implied had been the high-water mark of English political achievement.²² To see Roman politics as simply the struggle between plebeians and patricians was to ignore the extent to which 'organizations of opinion about policy' cut across such divisions, just as they had in England. The great Roman families had also been 'organizations of interests', but they had never, in Oakeshott's opinion, been only that.

This emphasis on family separated the Romans from the Greeks, for 'all that is most representative of Greek thought expressly rejected the understanding of the *polis* on the analogy of a family or a household'.²³ But the principle uniting this extended Roman family was not 'engagement in a common enterprise' (for example, the mission of world domination with which Rome is often associated); it was 'respect for the *mos majorem*, ancient customs, and respect for the law'. Much of the strength of this principle was derived from its religious character; for Oakeshott, 'the *populus Romanus* was a *curia* (a religious society) composed of *curiae* (religious guilds)', and Roman politics 'never ceased to have an element of religious ritual.'²⁴

In his account of Roman government, Oakeshott emphasized the distinction between *res publica*, the 'public concern' in which all Romans shared, and the *civitas*, or the Roman state. The belief in a Roman *res publica*, 'the destiny or *fortuna* of the Roman people', had made Rome not only, like Athens, a political community, but also a civil or legal community, 'a community which recognized itself as private individuals or families joined together in the enjoyment of rights and duties

[22] See *Morality and Politics in Modern Europe*, p. 109.

[23] 'Roman Political Thought (1)', p. 211.

[24] 'Roman Political Thought (1)', p. 213.

in respect of one another'. This notion of civil community, he claimed, had not emerged so clearly in Athens as in Rome, but it was essential to 'the sort of community we should be at home in', for the distinction between private and public communities was also crucial in modern political thought.²⁵

The key term as far as Oakeshott was concerned was *lex*. This 'positive and historical' conception of law emerged from older ideas of *fas*, law as imposed by religious duties, and *jus*, law as a kind of moral rule. The significance of *lex* was that it 'stood for a law known to have been made at a certain time and a written down law', the equivalent of a modern statute. In this sense the Romans could be said to have arrived at a conception of sovereign authority that never fully emerged in Greece. 'A "sovereign" authority is not merely one that has no contemporary superior, but one which is emancipated from the past.'²⁶

Roman thought also differed from the Greeks in understanding government as a combination *auctoritas* ('authority') and *potestas* ('legal power', which blended 'leading' with 'administration', in other words, the executive power). Etymologically, *auctoritas* and *auctor* were derived from the verb *augere*, meaning to increase, augment, 'add lustre to'. The *auctoritas* of the *auctor*, then, was that of a founder: Romulus was the *auctor* of Rome, and his *auctoritas* was believed to have been passed down through all subsequent generations. It was, however, the authority of a teacher or adviser, not a commander, and it was, so far as the institutions of Roman government were concerned, located chiefly in the senate, which was thought of as 'composed of *patres*, the "fathers" of the *populus Romanus*'.²⁷

Commanding or ruling required *potestas*, power not as sheer force (*potentia*) but legal powers distributed amongst the various offices of state, each of which bore 'the right and the duty to do certain things'. Not only could 'all the rights and duties which pertained to all the different current officers of state' be subsumed in the concept of the total *potestas* available to government, the *potestas* of an office could be distinguished from the office to which it belonged. 'Thus, Augustus was successively endowed with the *potestas* of a

[25] 'Roman Political Thought (2)', p. 224.

[26] 'Roman Political Thought (3)', p. 245.

[27] 'Roman Political Thought (2)', p. 227.

consul, of a proconsul, of a tribune and of a censor', even though he was legally barred from holding those offices.

The significance of the principate, according to Oakeshott, was not just that an unprecedented amount of *potestas* was concentrated in the hands of a single individual, but that *potestas* and *auctoritas* were for the first time combined. The consequence of this development was that the distinction between the two was blurred; 'the later jurists tended to ignore [it], regarding the will of the *imperator* as supreme, and not worrying to consider very much how he became endowed with this supremacy'. Even then, however, a Roman emperor did not automatically become a despot exercising what the Romans called *dominium*, rule based solely on ownership; Caligula's declaration that 'I can treat anyone exactly as I like' was 'a desperate departure from the traditions of Roman government' that was not typical of a Roman emperor.²⁸

Whatever one makes of this reading of the Roman political vocabulary, it is significant for understanding Oakeshott's own thought; in particular, the words we have been discussing were crucial to his mature political philosophy. The reader of the essay 'On Civil Association' in *On Human Conduct* will immediately notice that it uses many of the same Latin words to denote key ideas, and there is certainly a monograph waiting to be written by someone suitably qualified on their importance in Oakeshott's thought.

Roman politics was decisively altered not only by the end of the republic but also by the emergence of Christianity. This 'introduced a tension between religion and politics which had never before existed' in Roman experience, and was, Oakeshott thought, an ultimately victorious challenge to the foundational 'myth' sustaining that experience. In his introduction to an edition of *Leviathan* some years before, Oakeshott had argued that the Christian myth of the fall had fuelled the imagination of thinkers from Augustine to Hobbes, and he makes that argument again in his lectures on medieval political thought. The notion that a society requires such a myth if it is to have the cohesion necessary for civil association, however, is one that he never really worked out in detail; it is the source of some unresolved tensions in his thought.

[28] 'Roman Political Thought (2)', p. 236.

In the modern world, as Oakeshott's theory of modality implicitly recognizes, an irreducible plurality of viewpoints is the norm, but this plurality precludes the shared background he believed the Roman and Christian social myths had provided in ancient and medieval times. Hence, the possibility of maintaining the practical analogue of civil association, that is, government through the rule of law, is also adversely affected insofar as this depends on the existence of such a shared background. Yet in his theory of civil association, Oakeshott remarked only that it required the existence of some shared values, without ever really giving his attention either to the means of their generation or the form they ought to take.

Oakeshott could have replied that these were contingent, historic matters beyond the strict remit of political philosophy. But if one seeks outside his strictly philosophical writings for anything like a new 'myth' appropriate to modernity, one finds only the negative view that contemporary societies are united mostly by their acquisitiveness, as in his retelling of the Tower of Babel story.²⁹ Modern nationalist doctrines were similarly incapable of providing the right kind of 'glue' for civil association, as these lectures make clear.³⁰ Again, however, although he appears to have believed (unlike Carl Schmitt) in a form of patriotic sentiment that did not rely for its viability on excluding others, he never worked out this belief in detail.

To return to the lectures themselves, Oakeshott argued that the end of the Roman world could not be precisely dated, but that the universal extension of Roman citizenship throughout the empire marked a significant stage in its decline. The smaller the personal connection with the myth of the original foundation, the harder it became for individuals to experience it as a motivation for action. The Roman world ended, he seems to have thought, because its inhabitants lost the will to defend it – a conclusion reminiscent of Collingwood's remark that civilizations 'die in the night'.

Medieval Political Thought (Lectures 16–22)

Oakeshott extensively revised the medieval lectures around the time he retired, perhaps with an eye to publication, add-

[29] See 'The Tower of Babel', *On History*, pp. 165–94.

[30] 'The Authority of Governments and the Obligations of Subjects (2)', pp. 444–6.

ing a lecture on 'The Medieval Theory of Empire' and considerably expanding his treatment of Augustine and Aquinas. That his respect for medieval political thought matched his admiration of the Romans will not surprise those familiar with his published writings. This respect registered the unpromising beginnings of the medieval world, which emerged from the ruined fragments of the western Roman empire. The connection between the Roman and medieval civilizations was never entirely sundered, however, and in the lectures Oakeshott can be found emphasizing the linguistic and intellectual survivals. The Latin language and the Christian religion were, to his mind, two important bases on which medieval Europe was raised.

Oakeshott saw Christianity as supplying a sustaining 'myth' on which virtually all Europeans could draw for their self-understanding, and from the Latin language those who were literate gained 'a past-relationship with a Roman civilization in terms of which they came to understand themselves'. Oakeshott had made clear at the start of his lectures on Greece that the subjectivity of historical actors was not decisive in deciding what had really been going on at a particular time in history. Nevertheless, what people believed they were doing was still a component of whatever may have been going on, and we must attend to these beliefs when evaluating the place of institutions in the history of political thought. For Oakeshott, institutions were 'patterns of conduct, manners of behaving'.³¹

Early medieval politics characteristically lacked such settled patterns. Oakeshott believed that unlike Greek and Roman politics, medieval European politics began not from tribal associations but from an anarchic host of competing claims to rule advanced by rival 'noble' families. Medieval history was in a sense the history of the formation of institutions, like parliaments, which had no exact earlier equivalents. Despite the chaotic situation that followed the collapse of Roman authority, Oakeshott had no sympathy for the idea that the medieval centuries were the 'dark ages': 'the view that this was a period of European history of even compara-

[31] 'Medieval Political Experience', p. 265.

tive stagnation has nothing whatever to be said in its favour', he flatly declared.³²

A foundational medieval belief was that the right to rule was God-given, in the sense that 'for men to be in subjection to other men, was so remarkable a situation that it could be justified only by supposing that this right to rule came from God.' Christian belief acted, in other words, as a limiting force in medieval arguments about the authority of governments. For Oakeshott, the ideas of absolute monarchy and divine hereditary right are characteristically early modern, not medieval: 'the belief in a hereditary right to rule is one of the signs that medieval politics has come to an end.'³³

He also argued that medieval authority was no more directly linked to ownership than Greek or Roman beliefs about authority had been. Though medieval monarchs were usually amongst the greatest landholders in their kingdoms, it was not because of this that they were considered legitimate rulers. It was a 'great achievement of medieval political thought' to have grasped the distinction between *dominium*, authority in virtue of the lordship that came from ownership, and *potestas*, authority derived from a ceremony of investiture and exercised over vassals acknowledged to have privileges of their own.³⁴

Discussing the Romans, Oakeshott had emphasized that 'the most fundamental of all distinctions in political thought is the distinction between "force" or "violence", and "authority"'; between *potentia*, which is physical, and *potestas* or *auctoritas*, which is mental; between "might" and "right".³⁵ He claimed that, even in its earliest days, the medieval world was never without some kind of law, but that it underwent a process analogous to that which occurred in ancient Rome and which Athens had never quite completed: the creation of a positive law in which the societies concerned emancipated themselves from the binding force of custom.

This process was assisted by 'the penetration of medieval Europe by Roman legal ideas', which Oakeshott described as

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] Oakeshott deleted this remark in the lecture on 'Medieval Government', but see p. 268.

[34] 'The Authority of Governments and the Obligations of Subjects (3)', p. 462.

[35] 'Medieval Law', p. 294.

having an 'ambiguous' quality. While those ideas 'seemed to proclaim an autocrat', they also suggested that the ruler 'owed his position to popular approval and authority'. Moreover, while attributing to government the power of 'remoulding the law of a community', they invoked 'the more familiar notion of rulers owing their authority as law-makers to their subjects.'

That is not to say that medieval government was democratic in the modern sense, any more than Greek or Roman government had been. Oakeshott saw the primary activity of medieval government – the means by which a medieval polity was maintained – as providing justice through a hierarchy of courts, not pursuing policy under centralized direction (one of the distinctive features of modern government). Parliaments, which acted as both 'assistants and critics of royal government', provided 'the medieval answer to the problem of how to reconcile the belief in the fixity of law with the need for legal innovation'.

Parliaments not only gave advice, Oakeshott claimed; they also embodied the principle of consent. This is obviously a controversial point, but a very important one given the tendency of political theorists to regard consent as an early modern, usually Lockean, concept. In arguing that 'the feudal principle that a man's rights may not be altered without his consent' was 'already there in the organization of a feudal society', Oakeshott was detaching consent from its exclusive association with modern liberal democratic thought. Indeed, he claimed that it was often derived by medieval thinkers themselves from their reading of Justinian's Institutes, for example in the statement that *quod omnes tangit, ad omnibus approbetur*, or 'what touches all must be approved by all'. Similarly, 'representation' becomes not a modern notion, but a medieval one; thanks to the feudal hierarchy of reciprocal obligations, 'the possibility of one man "representing" others and both speaking and consenting on their behalf presented no puzzles or difficulties. Men "represented" others long before anyone began to think about "representation", or to talk about a principle of representation'.³⁶

Before we leave the medieval lectures, we should note how Oakeshott handled the two thinkers in this period to whom he devoted entire lectures, Augustine and Aquinas.

[36] 'Medieval Parliaments', p. 315.

As Christian thinkers, both believed in a 'natural law' that was in fact divine in origin and 'absolute in its authority, above kings and emperors'. Refined by successive generations, it became 'much more speculatively satisfactory than the older notion that made law must not conflict with the ancient customs or that what was Roman was good.'³⁷

Christian natural law, being theologically inspired, also departed from ancient, particularly Aristotelian, thought, in regarding political community as by no means 'natural' to human beings. In early Christian thought, government was no more than a regrettable expedient, necessary only until the imminent onset of the last days. Augustine, writing when this particular apocalyptic expectation had begun to subside, provided a 'sanctification of the imperial Roman government', of the '*pax Romana* seen *sub specie aeternitatis*', which saw some positive virtue in civil order, even if it was only a shadow of heavenly justice. The Hobbesian inspiration for Oakeshott's reading of Augustine is visible in his description of the *pax* of the earthly city as 'an unmistakable mitigation of the war of all against all which would otherwise spring from the unhindered self-preference of each man.'³⁸

Augustine, as a man with urgent practical problems to solve, was engaged in a different kind of thinking than Aquinas, whose main aim was to reconcile Christian and Aristotelian thought in the light of Aristotle's rediscovered writings, which provided 'an explanation of human character, human activity, human virtue which seemed to conflict radically with the accepted Christian one'. To bring Christian and Aristotelian thought together, Aquinas had to modify the relationship between grace and humanity's earthly existence so that the two were no longer sharply opposed in the manner that Augustine had described. Political life could once again be seen as in some sense 'natural' to human beings. Though not the 'total' activity it had been for Aristotle, it ought nonetheless to be free from 'ecclesiastical control or supervision'.

The education necessary for salvation was a matter for the church, but the care of subjects, 'the protection of their rights and the custody of their laws', was in civil hands. Oakeshott's interpretation of Aquinas's writings on the *lex civilis*

[37] 'Medieval Law', p. 294.

[38] 'Medieval Political Philosophy (1): Augustine', p. 335.

reveals once more his ability to find his own political philosophy reflected in the ideas of earlier thinkers. He not only read Aquinas as arguing that 'the relation of civil to natural law...is the negative relationship of a rule which lays down what seems to be convenient in the circumstances to a principle which gives no specific guidance but must not be rejected' – an argument analogous to his own account of the relationship between law and a broader moral code – but saw the positive conclusions of Aquinas' *prudentia politica* as very much in line with his own.

We may conclude this section by quoting Oakeshott's summary of Aquinas' political creed. That 'not all sin can conveniently be made punishable as crime; that what cannot be abolished except at too great a cost must be tolerated; that the expectations of subjects (even if they are not manifestly just expectations) must not be peremptorily overridden; that the *lex civilis* is not an instrument of "salvation" but only of *civilitas* and *bene vivere*; and that to correct an evil in a manner which may destroy the *fides* (mutual trust) and the *amicitia utilis* (bonds of affection) which hold society together, is political suicide' were all Thomistic conclusions compatible with his own views on civil association and the rule of law.³⁹

Modern Political Thought (Lectures 23–33)

Enough has been said to support the view that modern Europe, to Oakeshott's mind, was best understood as following the often divergent paths laid down in the medieval period. Although he acknowledged that the modern state enjoyed a 'sovereign' combination of exclusive secular and religious authority in a way no medieval monarchy had ever done, Oakeshott nevertheless saw it as built 'of materials got from the ruins of a medieval castle and a medieval abbey'.⁴⁰ Rather than emphasize the discontinuities between medieval and modern politics, he preferred to stress the continuities; rulers of modern states were just 'thinly disguised prince-bishops' or 'godly princes'. The Reformation in particular had allowed earthly monarchs to acquire the authority previously wielded by the church.

In the forging of this new combination, there slipped in a confusion between *jurisdictio* and *gubernaculum*, the activities

[39] 'Medieval Political Philosophy (2): Aquinas', p. 358.

[40] 'The Generation of a Modern State', p. 375.

of ruling and of pursuing policy, first in legislation and then in 'specifically judicial processes', that made the modern state an ambiguous entity and explains why the modern 'policy' state continually threatened to become a 'police' state. The confusion was fueled by the exigencies of war, warfare being the arena of policy in which the end is most easily taken to justify the means.

These conflicting tendencies at work in modern European politics were already obvious in the attitude of early modern rulers to the diversity that Oakeshott believed had been typical of medieval societies. Both 'the disposition to generate solidarity by destroying diversity' and 'the disposition to generate solidarity by containing diversity' could be seen at work, but the former was more usual; guild, ghetto, and gypsy alike felt its impact.

Persecution was, in other words, nothing new; the goal of a racially homogenous state, like the mono-confessional state, was at least as old as the sixteenth century. There was, Oakeshott implies, continuity between Spanish efforts to purge the kingdom of Muslims and Jews (1492, which marked both the fall of Granada and the expulsion of the Jews, is a symbolic date) and Hitler's Aryan project. There was class persecution too: 'The aristocrat exiled because he conflicted with the desired solidarity of a state is a familiar figure in modern European history, from the fifteenth to the twentieth century.'⁴¹

Why, then, did the sovereign state, which had the potential to produce a singularly repressive form of government, draw so much support? Oakeshott's answer was that only a 'sovereign' state offered emancipation from the hindrances of medieval society. Given the obvious dangers of such a state, compounded by the ever-increasing material power it could wield in addition to its legal sovereignty, an urgent question quickly became 'How can a government be constituted so that it may safely be trusted with "sovereign" authority?'

It could not be answered, Oakeshott argued, without some view of the kind of institution a state was. Manifestly, it was not a 'natural' one. 'A modern European state was so empirical a construction, was so manifestly a contingent collection

[41] 'The Generation of a Modern State', p. 380.

of human beings, that to seek a "natural" unity in it would seem to deny its most notable feature'.⁴²

But if the state were admitted to be in some sense artificial, a variety of responses were still possible. For some, it was like a joint-stock company; indeed, the popularity of the very term 'association' as a description of a human community gathered under the aegis of a state indicated that the medieval world was ending. The influence of economic analogies was far reaching, to the point that Oakeshott thought it had 'come to supersede all others in importance'. The dominant view was that a state was an association united in 'the exploitation of the natural resources of the world' – an 'economy' or a 'factory'. Arising first in a religious context in the writings of authors such as Bacon, only the materialism had survived.

It is easy to see how this understanding of modern European political thought was transposed into the scathing metaphor of the Tower of Babel mentioned above, but in the lectures Oakeshott avoided breaking into a tirade, only noting that a third understanding had become increasingly widespread: one that took the state to be neither natural, nor artificial (in the sense of being entirely the product of design), but the historic product of innumerable choices. Thinkers such as Ferguson, Hume, Burke, Vico, and Hegel viewed the state as, like the European landscape itself, 'a blend of "nature" and "art", a blend of the "necessary" and the "chosen" ...in which the "given" and the "made" are indistinguishable'.⁴³

Oakeshott clearly felt himself closest to this strand of thought, describing as it did a state that is 'neither a god to be worshipped nor a formless chaos to be merely endured' but 'something for which we are conditionally responsible'.⁴⁴ It is therefore worth examining his remarks on how such a state had been thought to generate authority. He argued that questions like 'Why ought I to submit?', 'What would absolve me from my duty to submit?', and 'By what authority does a ruler rule?' employed 'the logic of right' rather than 'the logic of fact'.

[42] 'Interpretations of the Modern European State (1)', p. 414.

[43] 'Interpretations of the Modern European State (2)', p. 426.

[44] 'Interpretations of the Modern European State (2)', p. 427.

The searches for an original contract or divine endowment that were so prominent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries at least recognized that questions like these must be answered with reasons that point to an ultimate source of the right claimed.⁴⁵ The answers may make reference to a shared framework of legal rules, but they must not be reducible simply to the existence of sufficient force to ensure compliance. Oakeshott summed this up succinctly by saying ‘Power does not have “reasons”; “right” does not have a cause’.⁴⁶ That is, the questions have to do with why I *ought* to obey, and to force me to obey without also having the right to use force would violate their terms. Although, as Hume had long ago remarked, lawful government supervened on force, it was not the product of force; although authority tended to generate power, the reverse was not the case. A qualitative shift was required for the move from might to right.

A cogent argument in terms of right can always be rejected, even if it cannot be refuted, but at this point, as Hobbes also believed, civility has broken down and we are in imminent danger of violent confrontation. Authority was so important because it was the only possible ‘cohesive’ belief about government. Oakeshott’s argument admits that everything governments *do* is controversial, but insists that for there to *be* government at all, it must be possible to disagree with a policy but still acknowledge the government’s right to carry it out.

The confusion between power and authority, Oakeshott felt, lay at the heart of the direction modern politics had taken. Until ‘quite recent times’, most claims to authority were in religious terms, but Europeans had ceased to share a Christian worldview that made them tenable. More modern claims to rule – for example, by virtue of membership of the proletariat or of an ‘enlightened’ elite – nevertheless used the same narrative structure in the speculative philosophies of history they created for themselves. For both Marxist and *philosophe*, the past was oppression and the future deliverance.

The belief in ‘progress’ could be said to share this structure, and it has sometimes been regarded as a characteristic liberal belief. But that a regime is ‘progressive’, cannot, on

[45] ‘The Authority of Governments and the Obligations of Subjects (3)’, p. 466.

[46] ‘The Authority of Governments and the Obligations of Subjects (3)’, p. 456.

Oakeshott's view, confer authority (though it may win approval), for authority cannot stem from anything government does. This is why he told his students that 'what is called "Liberalism", in its general or European sense' had 'systematically obscured' the problem of authority.⁴⁷ The remark is all the more striking because Oakeshott himself can, as he acknowledged, be read as locating his own political philosophy in the liberal family. The lectures, then, reinforce the view that the complex theory of civil association in *On Human Conduct* is best understood as an effort to dispel this obscurity for the benefit of liberalism. It is certainly true that he persistently singled out the writings of English Whig and liberal authors like Locke, Bentham, and J.S. Mill as suffering from it.

For Oakeshott, a more promising liberal answer to the problem of authority, one that observed the 'logic of right', was that authority derived from popular consent. That left undetermined what was to count as consent or how to assess it, but it was at least an answer couched in the correct terms. The logical incoherence of merging the discourses of authority and policy had not, however, prevented episodes of despotism. In the French and Russian revolutions, for example, governments had used their authority to pursue some goal – overthrowing feudalism or destroying the bourgeoisie – in which all were obliged to participate.

Insofar as governments had imposed such goals, however, they suppressed the identity of a modern European state as an association in terms of the rule of law, one in which individuals were to be left to their own devices unless these caused a disturbance of the peace. The final lectures were devoted to this subject, focusing on the confusion between a government confined to 'providing the conditions in which its subjects may pursue their own chosen and various ends', and one dedicated to 'organizing its subjects in the pursuit of a single, premeditated end or purpose'. This is the distinction presented in *On Human Conduct* as an omnipresent and definitive tension between 'civil' and 'enterprise' association. In the lectures Oakeshott spoke of 'telocratic' and 'nomocratic' forms of government, but the distinction is the same.

[47] 'The Authority of Governments and the Obligations of Subjects (1)', p. 433.

In a telocratic, goal-oriented state, activities are 'permitted only in relation to the chosen end and only in so far as they contribute to this end'. Even art becomes 'an adjunct of policy'. This view finds, at bottom, no difference between communism and fascism, and one must acknowledge that asserting the fundamental identity of these supposedly starkly contrasting ideologies of 'left' and 'right' remains controversial. Oakeshott's reply was always that 'left' and 'right' were categories of practical politics wholly inappropriate for detached theorizing; one of the virtues of his approach is its ability to cut across them.

Oakeshott focused in particular on what happened to law in a government undergoing a telocratic drift. Legality 'is recognized to have no independent virtue, but to be valuable only in relation to the pursuit of the chosen end.' It is subordinated, that is, to the pursuit of whatever is held to be the 'common good' or 'social purpose', which is always 'a substantive condition of things'. Ceaseless technological and industrial advance had only encouraged the faulty inference that because a government had the power to pursue an overarching policy, it therefore should. Oakeshott saw this view of government as an ultimate explanation of European colonialism and imperialism, even going so far as to say that 'in Europe, it may be recognized as governing a European "state" as if it were a colony.'⁴⁸ He also thought that in the twentieth century, the telocratic perspective had continuously infiltrated the notion of the 'welfare state', a confusion made possible because the nomocratic view he favoured also acknowledged an obligation to provide for those unable to provide for themselves.

Standing in the way of a complete victory for telocracy was the continuing pluralism of modern European states. Communities holding 'a variety of religious and moral beliefs, and 'engaged in multifarious and rapidly changing activities, occupations, and enterprises' were not promising material on which to impose a single 'condition of things'. Since attempts to interfere with 'the freedom to make choices for themselves' were likely to antagonize European citizens, none of the unmistakably telocratic regimes that the twentieth century produced had survived.

[48] See 'The Office of Government (1)', p. 477.

We should note that Oakeshott's 'nomocratic' government is not to be simply identified with the 'minimal' or the 'non-interventionist' state; the distinction he was driving at did not concern the size of government or the frequency of its actions, but their character. A government could employ many people and be vigorously active without forsaking its adjudicatory and peacekeeping role. Historically, governments had often been driven in a nomocratic direction by the clash of two or more telocratic perspectives; the only way to escape the 'civil war of telocracies' which he thought had characterized the seventeenth century was to move towards a 'substantively neutral legal order' that shied away from explicitly promoting one or the other conception of godliness.

This view may perhaps be taken as a reworking of what is sometimes called the history of toleration, underlining the essentially liberal nature of Oakeshott's account. The readings he presented in his closing lecture of Kant, Bentham, and Adam Smith in the light of this history of nomocratic ideas on government only reinforce this impression. Nevertheless, he remained insistent to the end on the ambiguous character of the modern European state, and never resorted to arguing that the nomocratic perspective, which he transparently preferred, would, could, or even should win the day.

It may, to borrow a phrase, be easy to conceive of a better series of lectures on the history of political thought, but it is probably not so easy to write one.⁴⁹ Oakeshott's effort shows him to have been as aware as any Marxist or Foucauldian of the importance of material factors like land ownership or technology, but to have persistently rejected the belief that these were necessarily decisive in favour of an historical perspective to which agency and contingency were ineliminably important. Overall, the lectures are the most successful sustained piece of historical thinking of all his works, in the sense that they stick to the explication of the key terms and institutions of the period in their contexts. While he often drew parallels with later eras in his accounts of the Greek, Roman, and medieval periods, it cannot be said that his treat-

[49] See John Passmore, review of Roger Scruton, *From Descartes to Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 1981), *Times Literary Supplement*, 19 February 1982, p. 182.

ments of them were mainly concerned with their significance for us; their relevance as the source of much of our own political thought and vocabulary is taken for granted, and the focus is on understanding them in their own right.

A Note on the Texts

During his own lifetime Oakeshott made these lectures available to colleagues and friends. It appears that he initially consented to their publication, and then changed his mind, for the photocopies in the Oakeshott archive of the lectures dated 1968–9 on which this volume has largely been based (LSE 1/1/21, folders 2–5) had clearly been prepared with this aim in mind. Each page had been numbered, and a title page and table of contents supplied. However, it was clear that the version at LSE 1/1/21 could not be published just as it stood.

This first effort at publication left some pages absent or misplaced, and there were numerous autograph sheets and marginalia not integrated into the main body of the text. While this volume of the *Selected Writings* was in preparation, a more legible but incomplete set of photocopies of the lectures (covering Greece and Rome only) was deposited at the Oakeshott archive (LSE 19/1). In addition, the editors had access to some slightly earlier versions of the lectures dated 1966–7 which remain in private circulation. In the cases where there were gaps, deficiencies, insertions, etc. in the version at LSE 1/1/21, then, we sought guidance from the alternate versions. The main source of each text is given in a note at the end of each lecture.

It is unknown whether the original MS of the 1968–9 lectures from which both LSE sets were taken survives, but this final series appears not in fact to have differed greatly overall from the versions given in the three previous years, though there are often significant differences of detail. Oakeshott altered the whole of the first lecture extensively, for example. He also entirely rewrote other important parts of the series, including the first three sections of the first Aristotle lecture, the account of Plato's myth of the cave, and the first section of the lecture on 'Medieval Government' (previously given the more specific title of 'Medieval Kingship'). The 1968–9 version also included three lectures on medieval political thought which were either not present in the circulated ver-

sions ('The Medieval Theory of Empire') or appeared in a much more condensed form (those on Augustine and Aquinas) as 'Medieval Political Philosophy'.

In most cases, Oakeshott worked on the 1968-9 version simply by making additions and deletions to the typescripts he had used for the 1966-7 lectures in his own hand, though in case of the 'Introduction' he had an entirely fresh typescript made. In some cases, however, the 1968-9 version contains copies of autograph sheets that were obviously intended to replace sections of the typescript, even though these had not been crossed out. Unfortunately, it is not entirely clear in all cases exactly where the revisions were to begin, and the only solution has been an educated guess based on the context, as in the section on Plato's early life.

Moreover, in all the versions of the lectures, some passages were placed in brackets, the significance of which is not entirely clear. They cannot always be assumed simply to be deletions, as there are also plenty of crossings-out which unmistakably do signify deletions. It seems most likely that the brackets sometimes indicated passages to be omitted if the lecturer was running short of time. Such bracketed passages have therefore been retained here unmarked, on the grounds that the text as it now stands is to be read, and not heard. The deletions themselves have generally been treated as authoritative, as there is no reason to think they were not made by Oakeshott himself, but in a few cases, where the final version of the lectures omitted some passages from the earlier versions that gave a more extended discussion of the same point, these have been retained as they seemed to expand rather than alter the thought involved.

As in volume 1, the aim was to make a good text publicly available rather than attempt a fully annotated critical edition. Transcription was generally unproblematic; some portions of the lectures were in manuscript, others in typescript, but Oakeshott's handwriting remained good throughout his life, and the intentions of his amendments were usually unmistakable. In a few cases, some of the marginalia proved illegible, usually either because the original photocopy had been taken with insufficient care, or because of the poor quality of the copy.

Once more, the general layout of Oakeshott's original text has been retained as far as was consistent with presenting it in an editorially coherent manner. Throughout, where

Oakeshott used section numberings, or inserted section breaks, these have also been retained, but with a consistent and simplified format to produce a more readable text.

Oakeshott's own footnotes and the small number of editorial notes have been kept separate, with the latter appearing as endnotes. These are restricted to giving the location of the version used. In the few cases in which it proved impossible to see exactly where Oakeshott meant to place corrections, additions, or notes, this has been noticed while inserting such emendations amongst his footnotes. In the main body of the text, obvious mistakes in punctuation, spelling and grammar have been silently corrected.

The use of capitals for offices (King or king) in the text was inconsistent, and lower case has generally been preferred here, except for titles held by specific individuals; the popes, but Pope Innocent III. Abbreviations have also been expanded, so that, for example, 'xvii century' becomes 'seventeenth century'. Ampersands have been replaced by 'and', and superscripting has been ignored. The underlinings in the text were so extensive that they have usually not been replaced by italics, except in the case of double underlinings or other instances where emphasis was clearly intended. Double quotation marks have been replaced with single quotation marks except for quotations within quotations. Words and phrases in languages other than English (chiefly transliterated Greek and Latin) have been placed in italics to make them stand out in the text.