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Michael Oakeshott and the Traditionalists: Philosophy and Conservative Ideologies

Lin Tsui

Abstract

This thesis has two main objectives. The first is to provide a new understanding of Michael Oakeshott's intellectual development, both political and philosophical. The second is to assess his place in post-war conservatism through using his works as a framework in which to interpret the political thought of various traditionalists associated with the Conservative Party.

Part I analyses Oakeshott's philosophy in its own right without considering whether he is a liberal or a conservative. I argue that his political philosophy and general philosophy must be treated separately because of their different implications for politics, and because of the different purposes and speed of their subsequent transformation. I contend further that Oakeshott's political philosophy is more strictly philosophical in claiming that the political philosopher contributes most to society when he remains loyal to his calling and refuses to address current affairs. By contrast, Oakeshott's general philosophy centred on the modes of experience was an offshoot from his early political philosophy, though it acquired a life of its own, and was for the most part polemical within the wider intellectual and political context in which it developed. It is only in Oakeshott's late works that his general philosophy again became sensitive to the needs of his political philosophy, which had already undergone repeated revisions. Consequently, it is incorrect to argue, as the leading Oakeshott scholar Efraim Podoksik did, that as early as *Experience and Its Modes* Oakeshott's general philosophy defended plurality and individuality by breaking with the tradition of holism and dialecticism in British Idealism, with his political philosophy following suit much later.

Part II then considers three traditionalists, Kenneth Minogue, Roger Scruton, and Peregrine Worsthorne, to illustrate the fruitfulness of this framework.

First, it shows that rejecting the interpretation of Oakeshott's works as predominantly a form of liberal individualism does not, pace Andrew Gamble, entail regarding his political thought as unambiguously conservative instead. This becomes clear in both Minogue's and Scruton's versions of conservatism; the tensions between them elucidate the significant contrasts between Oakeshott's late and early political philosophy, respectively. This makes it difficult to regard Oakeshott's thought as straightforwardly conservative, and is less interesting than understanding Oakeshott by reference to conservative intellectuals, and *vice versa*.

Second, Part II evaluates the extent of Oakeshott's influence on the development of conservatism. In keeping with Oakeshott's late political philosophy, Minogue's conservatism emphasises that the freedom of choice in the moral life of the individual should not be confused with impulse but focuses instead on the satisfaction of desires and the constitution of one's moral identity. Though he became more concerned with the permissive society in his late years, which goes beyond the influence of the late Oakeshott, Minogue never went so far as Scruton who argued that it is social institutions which give freedom its meaning and the individual his moral identity. On the other hand, notwithstanding this similarity with the early Oakeshott's Idealist theory of the State, Scruton's conservatism is distinctive not in virtue of its Hegelianism but in its revival of the concept of corporate personality for which Oakeshott had no sympathy. In relation to public debates, both Minogue's late and blatantly political works and Scruton's political pamphlets concerning education policy further emphasise the limits of Oakeshott's political thought.

Finally, Part II shows that Worsthorne's claim that his defence of the traditional ruling class and the notion of *noblesse oblige* was inspired by Oakeshott's "Rationalism in Politics" and "The Masses in Representative Democracy" represents yet another distinctive reading of Oakeshott. This combines Oakeshott's general and political philosophy, not to defend the New Right, whether neo-liberal or neo-conservative, but the aristocracy of One Nation Toryism. The example of Worsthorne emphasises that even focusing narrowly on Oakeshott's more politically relevant writings and his later development of political philosophy does not result in a uniform sense in which he can be regarded as a conservative.

Against the prominent commentators on Conservatism Mark Garnett and Kevin Hickson, the thesis concludes that while Oakeshott's philosophical works appear aloof from practical politics and defy conventional ideological classifications, they are nevertheless essential to understanding the diverse forms of political thought associated with the Conservative Party in post-war Britain.

Michael Oakeshott and the Traditionalists: Philosophy and Conservative Ideologies

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2020

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List of Abbreviations

ASI	The Adam Smith Institute
BP	The *Black Papers*
CIS	Centre for Independent Studies
CPJ	Oakeshott, Michael. "The Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence." In *The Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence: Essays and Reviews, 1926-51*, edited by Luke O'Sullivan, 154-83. Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2007. First published in *Politica* 3 (1938): 203-22, 345-60.
CPP	Oakeshott, Michael. "The Concept of a Philosophy of Politics." In *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, edited by Timothy Fuller, 119-37. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. Originally written in 1946 (approximately).
CPS	The Centre for Policy Studies
CPSESG	The Centre for Policy Studies Education Study Group
DPSPP	Oakeshott, Michael. *A Discussion of Some Matters Preliminary to the Study of Political Philosophy*. In *Early Political Writings, 1925-30*, edited by Luke O'Sullivan, 39-138. Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010. Originally written in 1925.
EM	Oakeshott, Michael. *Experience and Its Modes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933.
HG	The Hillgate Group
IEA	The Institute of Economic Affairs
IEAEU	The Institute of Economic Affairs Education Unit
MPME	Oakeshott, Michael. *Morality and Politics in Modern Europe: The Harvard Lectures*, edited by Shirley Robin Letwin. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. Originally written in 1958.
NTBG	The No Turning Back Group
OBC	Oakeshott, Michael. "On Being Conservative." In *Rationalism in Politics, and Other Essays*, edited by Timothy Fuller, 407-37. New and expanded edition. Indianapolis, IND: Liberty Fund, 1991. First published 1962 by Methuen. Originally written in 1956.
OHC	Oakeshott, Michael. *On Human Conduct*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.
PAP	Oakeshott, Michael. *The Philosophical Approach to Politics*. In *Early Political Writings, 1925-30*, edited by Luke O'Sullivan, 141-226. Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010. Originally written in 1928.
PFPS	Oakeshott, Michael. *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism*, edited by Timothy Fuller. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

Originally written in 1952 (approximately).

PP — Oakeshott, Michael. "Political Philosophy." In *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, edited by Timothy Fuller, 138-55. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. Originally written in 1949 (approximately).

SAU — The Social Affairs Unit

SG — The Salisbury Group

SPDCE — Oakeshott, Michael. *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939.

SR — *The Salisbury Review*

THES — *The Times Higher Education Supplement*

TLS — *The Times Literary Supplement*

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Acknowledgements

Chapter 1. Introduction

I. Studying the Traditionalists in British Conservatism

In 1978, the historian Maurice Cowling edited *Conservative Essays*, inviting various academics, publicists, and politicians to sharpen the conservative ideology which had been "blunted by alliance with antitotalitarian liberalism" in their common combat against socialism.[1] What makes this renewal of conservatism remarkable is not its direct influence on practical politics. Certainly, the thoughts of these conservative intellectuals shaped aspects of government policy under Thatcher's Premiership;[2] but for the most part they only created an atmosphere where new ideas gradually became acceptable or at least thinkable. Rather, the distinctiveness of this renewed conservative ideology consists in the wide range of intellectual resources employed in inspiring the conservative imagination. What Cowling, and his followers to varying degrees, aimed to achieve was fundamentally to transform the nature of the then dominant public doctrine, where a public doctrine is construed as a "loose combination of interlocking assumptions about politics, economics, science, scholarship, morality, education, aesthetics and religion which constitutes the basis on which decisions are made about public matters."[3] This indirect way to influence political practice by shaping legitimate forms of public debate exemplifies, no less than direct methods do, the action-oriented nature of political ideologies identified by Michael Freeden.[4]

The advocates of this branch of conservatism are labelled by Mark Garnett and Kevin Hickson as the "traditionalists" in their study of thinkers associated with the Conservative

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[1] Maurice Cowling, "The Present Position," in *Conservative Essays*, ed. Maurice Cowling (London: Cassell, 1978), 21.

[2] Mark Garnett and Kevin Hickson, *Conservative Thinkers: The Key Contributors to the Political Thought of the Modern Conservative Party*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 105.

[3] See n. 1.

[4] Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 105.

party.[5] Aware that many political opinions and decisions are influenced by discussions and movements which are not strictly political, the traditionalists attempted to formulate a conservatism embracing all fields of intellectual pursuit which are relevant to public affairs. Nevertheless, as Cowling admitted, the purely political part of conservatism "can probably survive whether it discusses [these wider concerns] or not."[6] Consequently, the academic analyses of conservative ideology which have been mainly conducted from the perspective of political science or political philosophy, and more narrowly preoccupied with its political aspects, are unable to capture more completely the peculiarity of traditionalist conservatism. A balance of attention is required to compensate for this neglect of the extra-political dimensions of intellectual history.[7]

For instance, in Freeden's research which is more social scientific, the anti-liberal orientation of traditionalist conservatives exemplifies the mirror-image strategy characteristic of conservatism's response to its rival ideologies. Unfortunately, he continues, "being alarmed by the rise of the New Right and incapable of distinguishing between left-liberalism, centrist-liberalism, and libertarianism," these conservatives' stance against liberalism was based on a misperception of its contemporary significance.[8] The actual status of post-war liberal ideologies and the traditionalists' perception of them is a separate set of questions beyond the concern of the present thesis. More important to our purpose is that Freeden understands this strategy as a general way of developing "substantive antitheses to progressive core concepts" and then assigning these antitheses "only adjacent status within the conservative morphology."[9] However, this characterisation does not adequately represent the central place Cowling and his fellows accorded to their anti-liberalism, especially their contempt for liberalism's failure to consider any extra-political issue which

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[5] See n. 2.
[6] Cowling, "The Present Position," 24.
[7] Stefan Collini, "The Identity of Intellectual History," in *A Companion to Intellectual History*, ed. Richard Whatmore and Brian Young (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 17.
[8] Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 399.
[9] *Ibid.*, 336.

"has been dirtied by being handled on the Left."[10] As we shall see in Chapter 6, even the more apparently neo-liberal Kenneth Minogue regarded his own position as conservative for the reason that liberalism fails to take into account the moral depth involved in the individual's freedom of choice. In a study of the broad patterns of ideological thinking across a wide spatiotemporal scope such as Freeden's, it might be inevitable that sometimes a particular case study is pressed into a preconceived mould; and this, despite the analyst's efforts in delineating that mould according to what can be gleaned from a detailed historical examination of diverse manifestations of conservatism. Surely Freeden recognises the importance of including "major thinkers from all fields that create socially oriented discourse."[11] Nevertheless, it seems that his ambitious pursuit of a general theory of ideologies prevents him from embarking on such an enterprise thoroughly to avoid oversimplification and overgeneralisation.

On the other hand, Noël O'Sullivan's analysis exhibits the incompleteness of the more philosophical approaches. In his outline of the redefinition of conservatism during the 1970s, he distinguishes between various versions of the New Right, where Roger Scruton is singled out to represent one among these versions. Since Scruton was associated with Cowling in relation to the Peterhouse Group at Cambridge, and their link can be further attested by Scruton's contribution to Cowling's edited volume mentioned earlier, O'Sullivan's interpretation of Scruton as representing the reformulation of the organic version of conservatism is merely a partial description of the traditionalists' ideological activities. As Chapter 7 will make clear, the distinctiveness of Scruton's conservatism does not consist in his Hegelian account of freedom, but in his revival of corporate personality against the background of English jurisprudence. The partial nature of O'Sullivan's account reflects his own philosophical position, which is strongly influenced by a more liberal understanding of Michael Oakeshott's political philosophy. Consequently, Scruton's emphasis on the

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[10] Cowling, "The Present Position," 23.
[11] Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 119.

centrality of national identity attracts O'Sullivan's attention and criticism most. This leads to the evaluative comment that "the Tory version of the New Right creates an unresolved tension between the [Oakeshottian] ideal of civil association … and the desire … for an organic national identity not only sensitive to the dead and the unborn, but ultimately giving meaning to life."[12] Here Freeden's call to lay more emphasis on the consumption of ideologies as opposed to their production is apposite.[13] In this case, what interests an analyst of ideologies are not only the questions concerning the actual intention lying behind Oakeshott's published and unpublished works as a whole, but no less importantly the reception of Oakeshott's ideas by his contemporaries and in particular the uses the traditionalists made of his political philosophy in renewing the conservative public doctrine. Following this advice, Chapter 9 will show how Peregrine Worsthorne, contrary to O'Sullivan's normative judgment, contended that it is precisely Oakeshott's account of the moral life of the individual which provides the foundation for the Tory defence of the historical continuity in the social and political life of Britain.

Finally, Garnett and Hickson's account of traditionalist conservatives illustrates the vices of confining one's attention to the more strictly political aspects of their ideological endeavours. For example, in this account, Oakeshott occupies a peripheral place, and is called into play only occasionally to throw light on some features of other thinkers who are more substantially discussed. Garnett and Hickson makes this decision because "Oakeshott's contribution was more to conservatism as a political philosophy, rather than the ideology of the Conservative Party."[14] Therefore, it is unsurprising that when their analysis turns to "the traditionalists,"[15] there are no reference to any of Oakeshott's writings. However, this thesis will demonstrate that Oakeshott's philosophical works, though primarily academic and aloof from current affairs, is an essential context in which to understand not only where the

[12] Noël O'Sullivan, "Conservatism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, ed. Michael Freeden, Lyman Tower Sargent, and Marc Stears (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 302.
[13] Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 104.
[14] Garnett and Hickson, *Conservative Thinkers*, 6.
[15] *Ibid*., 105-20.

traditionalists emulated him, but also where they went beyond his influence.

In brief, an ideological analysis of the traditionalists' development of post-war conservatism cannot limit its sources of material to the texts concerned with contemporary political events. It has to take into consideration the nature of conservative undercurrents in other fields, not primarily or necessarily political, since the 1920s. This includes their relation to the contemporary ideational and practical contexts, whether this relation is intended by the thinker under investigation or is discerned with the help of historical hindsight; and, more specifically, their transformation at the hands of the traditionalists to deal with the burning political issues of their time. Attention to these matters are important to give a more accurate picture of this specific form of conservatism which acquired a distinct shape from the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century.

II. Methodological Considerations

The above brief survey of existing literature about traditionalist conservatism might appear to be a critique of the flaws in other approaches which paves the way for a new framework of research. No such pretensions are intended. If the nature of this study differs from existing ones, it means not so much that it is superior to them as that the present author is interested in a different set of questions. The chief one is how intellectual currents in areas not necessarily or directly related to practical politics may nevertheless provide a context in which an underflow of ideology took shape, changed itself, and then emerged in a form with a more immediate bearing on contemporary political life. Therefore, this section deals with a number of considerations about method arising out of this research question.

It is perhaps easier to begin with the methods this thesis will not adopt. The first one is instantiated by Kieron O'Hara's efforts in the modernisation of Conservative ideology for the sake of tackling issues in contemporary politics. The main thrust of studies of this kind is to make conservatism relevant to current affairs such that it can rally electoral support for

the party. For example, the appeal to public reason is precisely a strategy to reach a wider audience which has not been generally sympathetic to more extreme or ambitious versions of conservatism.[16] However, this move amounts to the exclusion of what O'Hara called the "metaphysically" inspired forms of conservatism from the potentially broader ideological family.[17] While the demarcation of ideological boundaries and the self-identification with a delimited line of ideological tradition are common activities of the ideologue,[18] such practical appraisal evidently finds no place in a scholarly analysis. Had we accepted this approach, we would not have been able to include Oakeshott's Idealist philosophy and Scruton's Hegelianism in our analysis of conservatism.

Secondly, the sort of philosophical articulation and criticism of conservatism provided by Ted Honderich is not adequate for the purpose of this study, either. As Freeden has already pointed out, the method of philosophy tend to exhibit the syndromes of imposing a straw man, a slippery slope, or a strict dichotomy on the ideology into which it enquires;[19] but even the most rationally constructed belief-systems inevitably "contain components based on extra-rational preferences."[20] It is these preferences that prevent an ideology from falling into extremes which are either philosophically indefensible or practically unfeasible; and it is the interaction between these preferences and the ideological position at which a thinker finally arrives that interests the analyst of ideology. In other words, it is pointless to criticise by the criterion of philosophy a political doctrine which does not pretend to be a philosophical theory, though such exercise as what Honderich did may have some value of its own *qua* philosophy.

More importantly, the anachronistic nature of the philosophical method, which often consists in relating and comparing different thinkers' arguments abstracted from the original historical context, is overconfident in its efficacy as an "intelligent inquiry of a logical,

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[16] Kieron O'Hara, *Conservatism* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), 18-19.
[17] *Ibid*., 197-98.
[18] Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 110-11.
[19] *Ibid*., 38.
[20] *Ibid*., 30.

persistent and systematic kind" without the need to rely on a prior historical understanding.[21] For instance, Honderich's examination of Oakeshott's attitude to change proceeds by understanding at face value a passage from one of his post-war essays, extracting from it some propositions, and finally providing a logical critique of their mutual inconsistency and a judgment of their insufficiency for a definition of conservatism.[22] As such, it bypasses a plethora of questions which have to be answered before any sound criticism can be produced: Is Oakeshott an ideologist? Is the ideology he advocated a conservative or a liberal one? Are there continuities and discontinuities between his early and late writings? What does he intend to do in that essay if it is not to provide a clear delineation of conservatism? What is the significance of this piece of writing in relation to the then dominant intellectual discourse and political events? How is his view interpreted and utilised by his conservative followers? and so forth. This illustrates how much is condensed in a judgement or characterisation of a thinker or of a body of thoughts, which is beyond the specialist philosopher's imagination.[23]

Nonetheless, this does not preclude the possibility of normative evaluation of an ideology under discussion; nor is the result of the historical portrayal of the development of an ideology irrelevant to such a philosophical task. As Gerald Gaus comments in relation to Freeden's distinction between ideologising and ideology analysis, sooner or later the second-level enterprise of interpretation will involve normative engagement with the object of interpretation in the first-level exercise of ideology production. What is important is that this process should not begin too early in the interpreter's attempt to understand the ideology in question, and that he should employ his normative commitments to make it more intelligible rather than reveal its flaws.[24] Thus, if with the help of an intellectual historian's work we are informed of the coarseness of the dichotomy between romantics and utilitarians in F. R.

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[21] Ted Honderich, *Conservatism: Burke, Nozick, Bush, Blair?*, 2nd ed. (London: Pluto, 2005), 5.
[22] *Ibid*., 15-18.
[23] Collini, "Identity of Intellectual History," 14.
[24] Gerald Gaus, "Ideology, Political Philosophy, and the Interpretive Enterprise: A View from the Other Side," in *Liberalism as Ideology: Essays in Honour of Michael Freeden*, ed. Ben Jackson and Marc Stears (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 194-95.

Leavis' thought,[25] a dichotomy which has been appropriated by Scruton in the battle against the liberalism of his time, our priority is not to criticise the inappropriateness of Leavis' and Scruton's practical history or the invalidity of their theoretical distinctions. Instead, the primary task is to describe the extent to which these ideologues succeeded in transforming the patterns of political argument at the time, and explain how, in spite of or even because of this ideological distortion, this success was achieved.[26]

Further considerations concerning the selection of case studies and the use of source materials will throw into clearer relief the methodological nature of this thesis than a mere designation of it as a piece of intellectual history of British conservatism. The most fundamental question concerns the choice of thinkers who in self-classification either did not welcome the label "conservatism" or were ambivalent to it. Obviously, the justification of this choice must go beyond the traditionalists' interpretation of them as a conservative or at least as thinkers whose works are suggestive of conservative ideas. The first move towards such a justification is offered by Freeden's loosening of the tight correlations between ideologies and political parties in the British context.[27] When a thinker under question held reservations about the conservative label, the analyst of ideology may appeal to the usage of that label common in that time to probe into its meaning, which often carries overtones related to party politics. Consequently, the thinker's denial of membership in conservatism as an ideology associated with the Party may after all be compatible with an identification of the patterns and forms of his political thinking with conservative ideology proper. Freeden's further contribution consists in his recognition of the non-existence of absolute ideological boundaries.[28] The most a researcher can hope to achieve is to strike a balance between "the self-definition of an individual professing to adhere to an ideological family,

[25] Donald Winch, "Mr Gradgrind and Jerusalem," in *Wealth and Life: Essays on the Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1848-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 392.
[26] Unfortunately, Leavis and other thinkers like T. S. Eliot lies beyond the scope of this thesis due to the limitation of time and space.
[27] Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 24.
[28] *Ibid*., 87.

the understandings of other contemporaries concerning that individual's place in the family, and the interpretation by the scholar both of the concrete evidence and of the diachronic tradition currently held to constitute that family."[29] Of course, he must recognise that the tradition as it exists in the concrete manifestations of ideologies is far more fragmented than its counterpart categories adopted in academic analysis.[30] It is in this spirit that Oakeshott's philosophical works are examined in the first part of this research.

Secondly, this thesis concurs with Freeden's view that the main unit of ideology analysis is not an individual thinker. However, the present research does not share his anti-elitist attack on the overemphasis in the past on the "Great Men" at the expense of vernacular patterns of ideologies produced and consumed by ordinary people.[31] Rather, the "individualist" approach is rejected here because our interest in individual thinkers is more focused on "what is shared and disputed with others—assumptions, expressions, arguments—not on an idea that can be treated either as self-sufficient or, in any meaningful sense, strictly singular."[32] This applies equally whether we are concerned with thinkers and philosophers who unquestionably occupy a place in the pantheon of an ideology, or with journalists and publicists utilising day-to-day events as opportunities for influencing public opinions and sentiments, or finally with those figures lying somewhere between these two extremes. In research practice, this means that the configuration of ideas in a single political philosopher may tell us more about the way theoretical ideas were put to work than Freeden estimates,[33] provided that the chosen philosopher can be placed in the relevant context of the dissemination and exchange of ideas with other thinkers. As the following chapters will illustrate, it is difficult to treat Oakeshott's philosophical account of the moral life of the individual as a "self-sufficient" or "strictly singular" idea if both Minogue and Worsthorne were influenced by this idea but developed their own reasonable interpretations thereof

[29] *Ibid*., 103-4.
[30] *Ibid*., 114-15.
[31] *Ibid*., 119.
[32] Collini, "Identity of Intellectual History," 12.
[33] Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 107.

which are mutually contradictory. In any case, as Freeden also concedes, the analysis of ideology is no less agent-based so that in his own study the criteria of selecting thinkers for case study consists more in their usefulness for illustration than in the availability of their ideas to the general public.[34] From this perspective, Garnett and Hickson's individualist approach to the study of conservative ideologies can be legitimated.[35] More importantly, it is in this way that this research justifiably chooses Oakeshott, Minogue, Scruton, and Worsthorne, and places them in the context of the New Right movement and the intellectuals of various think-tanks associated with the Conservative party.

Certainly, it is a commonplace to say that we have to understand a text by invoking its relevant context. The crucial point is that how the context is chosen depends on a prior understanding of what the text is meant to do and the specific questions the historian asked about it. Apart from paying attention to the details of tone, register, implied readership and the like, Stefan Collini's view of the task of intellectual history as one of characterisation is very helpful here. To characterise a thinker, a group of intellectuals, or an ideological movement, is to observe which ideas and arguments are characteristic or symptomatic of a historical period and which are original or anomalous therein. Consequently, the questions asked about them will also be different.[36] For instance, in his early general philosophy, Oakeshott insisted on the logical independence of philosophy, practice, history, and science, as well as their irrelevance to one another.[37] If put in the context of British Idealism, this doctrine appears to be just another metaphysical system typically produced by a philosopher reared in that intellectual background. Nevertheless, taking Oakeshott's development of this system in his post-war essays into consideration as well, it becomes clear that these essays exhibited the ideological force of his general philosophy unrivalled by similar post-war critiques of totalitarianism.

[34] Ibid., 106.
[35] Garnett and Hickson, *Conservative Thinkers*, 5.
[36] Collini, "Identity of Intellectual History," 14.
[37] Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), 5.

The above example raises the question of intentionality in interpretation. Whereas Oakeshott did intend his *Experience and Its Modes* to be a continuation of the Idealist tradition in philosophy, it is unclear whether its ideological significance was apparent to him. That an interpretation can go beyond the thinker's recognition is, according to Freeden, entirely legitimate so long as the analyst knows what he is doing and does not pretend his result to be an interpretation of what the thinker intended to do.[38] The main way to warrant the legitimacy of such interpretation is the evidence of the circulation and consumption of the thinker's ideas by his contemporaries. Therefore, in this case, if Oakeshott's philosophical views find frequent expression in his reviews of books and other writings that are more directly engaged with practical politics, the ideological interpretation proffered earlier will acquire some degrees of reasonableness and credibility.

A balance between primary and secondary sources is an essential evil. The need to cultivate familiarity with a concentrated body of first-hand historical documents makes reliance on second-hand accounts inevitable when the historical context being invoked contains the intellectual development of other ideologies or the sequence of contemporary events which may shed light on the conservative ideology under interpretation. To give a final example, in the evaluation of Scruton's practical support of parental choice in education whose apparent neo-liberal overtones diverges from the Hegelian impression of his political philosophy, or Worsthorne's defence of aristocracy on paternalist assumptions, it would be beyond the scope and limitation of this thesis to examine all the relevant primary sources in liberalism and socialism. The reasonable alternative is to rely on relevant accounts provided by other scholars.

As this section would have made clear, methodological discussions are vacuous without citing concrete examples of pertinent research in support. Therefore, we turn now to the substantial arguments and actual findings of this thesis. The first part examines Oakeshott's

[38] Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 101-2.

political and general philosophy alternately in order to excavate the underlying motivation of his at times asymmetric development in these two kinds of philosophical works. This will clear away the obstacles posed by liberal or conservative interpretations of Oakeshott's ideological position, and paves the way to a more complete understanding of his thought. The second half of this thesis then considers Minogue's, Scruton's, and Worsthorne's versions of conservatism in light of this context. Oakeshott's influences on these thinkers will be discussed, and the distinctiveness of their differing interpretations of conservative ideology will be highlighted. It is hoped that this study can exemplify the power of intellectual history to provide a more balanced portrayal of Oakeshott's place in post-war conservative ideologies against the background of the traditionalists, and *vice versa* a more multi-faceted picture of the traditionalists which deepens their contours with the help of Oakeshott's political thought and other undercurrents inspiring conservative styles of political argument.

Part I

Michael Oakeshott

Chapter 2: Early Political Philosophy, 1924-39

I. Introduction

Unlike his early general philosophy expounded in *Experience and Its Modes* (1933), most of Oakeshott's early writings on and in political philosophy were unpublished during his lifetime. Nevertheless, their importance to a comprehensive picture of his political thought cannot be underestimated. Unless put in the context of the development of his early political philosophy and the difficulties it encountered, the motivation of Oakeshott's early general philosophy and the subsequent alterations he made to it cannot be adequately understood. Thus, this chapter provides a characterisation of the holism and dialecticism in his early political philosophy in contradistinction to his early general philosophy.

The holism and dialecticism of Oakeshott's early political philosophy are stronger than those of his early general philosophy. While all the intermediary institutions of our social life are necessary stages in the logical progression from the individual to the State, the various modes of experience are historically contingent and mutually independent such that it is not strictly essential to go through all of them in order to arrive at the Absolute. On this basis Efraim Podoksik argues that Oakeshott abandoned his early adherence to unity and teleology as soon as he published *EM*, with his political philosophy following suit much later in *On Human Conduct* (1975). I disagree with this interpretation because it fails to take Oakeshott's early political philosophy seriously enough.

In the following exposition, I shall point out the ambiguities in Oakeshott's claim that political philosophy, as a purely academic pursuit, is irrelevant to practical life. On the one hand he insisted that philosophical concepts such as the State have nothing to do with their counterparts in everyday politics such as the nation-states; on the other hand, he was prepared to use his philosophical analysis to evaluate to extent to which a particular state or government approaches to the idea of the State. The neat distinction between political

philosophy and practical politics follows from Oakeshott's application of the modal separatism in his general philosophy to his philosophy of politics. However, the price proved unaffordable in that the political concepts cease to be political and become purely logical once their link with our experience of political life is severed. Oakeshott's subsequent revival of the dialecticism concerning modes of experience in British Idealism thus represents an attempt to repair this link. Consequently, contrary to Podoksik's view, Oakeshott's motivation for developing his general philosophy was not meant to lead his political thought towards modernity, but to solve, in different ways, the different problems left behind by his political philosophy at successive stages of his intellectual development.

During this exposition the substantive conclusions in Oakeshott's early political philosophy will also receive detailed examination. This paves the way for our later evaluation of the extent to which these propositions are left intact, qualified, or discarded in his late political philosophy. Again, contrary to the dominant interpretation, I shall argue that the influence of his early political philosophy persisted as late as in *OHC*. I also consider his presentation of these philosophical ideas to the public in ordinary language. This is one of the rare occasions on which Oakeshott based his views about the philosopher's role in society on his own philosophical conclusions concerning the place of government and law in the State. Just as his delineation of the logical presuppositions of the various modes of experience exerts a normative force regarding what an enquiry should be if it is to qualify as a certain mode, Oakeshott's political philosophy is relevant to practical politics in a similar way. Nevertheless, his political philosophy is doubly relevant to practical politics. By touching upon every institution in our social life, its subject matter naturally includes the social function of the philosopher, about which his general philosophy can say nothing substantial. From modal separatism the most that one can deduce is that the philosopher's task is the academic pursuit of truth rather than the interference with political affairs. However, this does not explain how the philosopher can contribute to our corporate social life. With the help of the universal context of the State in his early political philosophy,

Oakeshott was able to claim that the philosopher, as part of the social whole, contributes the most to its end precisely by being true to his own calling; which is to represent the self-consciousness of society, and to express in the purest philosophical idiom its spirit without losing the anchorage of our common sense understanding thereof. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, this conception of philosophy guided Oakeshott's political thought throughout his intellectual journey.

II. An Idealist Theory of the State

Written in 1924, "The Cambridge School of Political Science" represents the very beginning of Oakeshott's life-long attempt to construct a political philosophy. This article provided an energetic and trenchant critique of the Historical Tripos at Cambridge, which the young Oakeshott had just endured with contempt. In opposition to the existing course design, he suggested that political philosophy should be the proper discipline to be studied therein.[1] Although he had not yet carried out the actual task of creating such a philosophy, certain features of his conception of the nature of political philosophy and the scope of its subject matter can already be discerned at this early stage, guiding his subsequent construction of political philosophy.

Oakeshott contended that, limited to the study of political institutions, the curriculum failed to consider what human beings' most satisfying life is.[2] This defect reflected the dominant understanding of politics. Too often, he argued, the State was misidentified with its government so that the consequent analysis was concentrated on the narrow questions concerning different forms of government, to the neglect of other more important aspects in our political experience. However, the discussion about the constitution of government makes sense only if we know what the ends of government are. The meaning and value of

[1] Michael Oakeshott, "The Cambridge School of Political Science," in *What Is History? and Other Essays*, ed. Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2004), 50-51.
[2] *Ibid*., 51-52.

government itself, in turn, can only be understood by placing it in the still wider philosophical context of the State, or the whole of human beings' social life.[3] Therefore, in overemphasising the quantitative and classificatory investigation of governmental institutions, the then current Historical Tripos deprived students of the opportunity to study political philosophy and made the examination of government pointless.[4]

This wide conception of the scope of political philosophy's subject matter is based on a strong version of holism absent from Oakeshott's early general philosophy. To be sure, in this piece of writing the comments on the nature of philosophy applies equally well to both political philosophy and general philosophy. An example is the claim that philosophy is concerned with reasons rather than causes, with the grounds of belief rather than its origins.[5] Nonetheless, this equal applicability does not hold in the case of holism. The holism here results not only from the relentless attempt to understand everything in its wider context until the process reaches the most comprehensive context (the State) which cannot itself be turned into a text awaiting something more complete to supersede it; it is much stronger and has a different foundation. After all, the sceptical impulse, in the original and ancient sense of the term *skepsis* (investigation), also features in Oakeshott's early general philosophy. As we will see in Chapter 3, in *EM* each of the modes of experience has to be understood from the perspective of philosophy which, being experience without arrest, modification, or presupposition, is ultimately identified with the Absolute. By contrast, in his early political philosophy Oakeshott made another claim in addition to the essential reference to the whole: whether one begins from the individual or from the State, the political philosophy resulting therefrom will be the same.[6] In this intellectual journey the political philosopher will have to take account not only of "the institutions which are called governmental, but will attend also to those, of far greater importance in our social life, such as the family, the school,

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[3] *Ibid.*, 53-54.
[4] *Ibid.*, 54-56.
[5] *Ibid.*, 56-59.
[6] *Ibid.*, 59.

marriage, war, property and the rest."[7] The starting point of one's philosophical investigation does not matter because all these social institutions are indispensable steps in a complete political philosophy. By comparison, in the general philosophy of *EM* the emergence of the various intermediary modes of experience is historically contingent. This means that they, unlike the various institutions in social life, are not logically necessary to the Absolute. Oakeshott could have directly arrived at the unqualified experience of philosophy without being bothered to say anything about its imperfect modes, in a way which is ruled out by his early political philosophy.

This difference between the strong and weak versions of holism in Oakeshott's early political and general philosophy might at first sight appear scholastic in the negative sense of the term. However, as later chapters will make clearer, these minute details are not distinctions without significance. In Chapter 5, we will observe how different readings of Oakeshott's changing conceptions of political philosophy entail incompatible understandings of the manners in which his political philosophy is relevant to practical life. Here it suffices to note that one of the dominant interpretation of Oakeshott's works, by Podoksik, as a liberal defence of modernity which gradually eschews unity and teleology will be seriously qualified if the fortunes of holism and dialecticism (to be discussed further below) in Oakeshott's general philosophy are significantly different from those in his political philosophy.

Oakeshott's complaints about the Cambridge curriculum also contain another important view about the nature of philosophical enquiry concerning its relation to political practice. Towards the end of the article in question, he stated that "it is not the aim of a philosophical study to guide the practice of men."[8] Again, this insistence on the separation of political philosophy from practical politics might seem to be the same in Oakeshott's early general philosophy. Nevertheless, a closer look reveals that the manner his political philosophy,

[7] *Ibid*., 59-60.
[8] *Ibid*., 66.

though categorially independent from political practice, can still be practically relevant, is more complicated than the way in which his general philosophy discloses its practical overtones.

Certainly, there is a pattern of prescriptive implications common to both Oakeshott's early general philosophy and political philosophy. In the former case, it will be noted in Chapter 3 that his philosophical examination of the postulates of the various modes of experience, contrary to his own disclaimers, does have normative consequences about how the actual enquiry in each of the modes ought to proceed (provided that the enquiry in question is to qualify as properly belonging to that mode). A similar relation also holds in his early political philosophy, between the philosophical examination of a specific political concept and how the actual political institution ought to behave if it is to fall under that concept adequately (to be developed in more detail later).

However, the practical consequences which follow from Oakeshott's early political philosophy is more complex because political philosophy is relevant to practical life in an additional and more subtle way of which no comparison can be found in his general philosophy. In concluding his critique of the Cambridge curriculum, he rhetorically asked "'whether an early habit of reflection, although obtained by speculative sciences, may not have its use in practical affairs,'" and answered: "were such a school built up as I have indicated a wiser generation of citizens and leaders would issue from our walls."[9] It is easy to underestimate the significance of these apparently youthful and zealous remarks and conclude that Oakeshott in the main still adheres to the separation of political philosophy from practical politics. It is equally erroneous, as Paul Franco is, to take this belief in the practical relevance of political philosophy as an immature expression of the early Oakeshott, from which he shifted away within just a few years and to which he henceforth never returned.[10] The next section will show that as late as in 1939 Oakeshott still believed firmly

[9] *Ibid*., 66.
[10] Paul Franco, *Michael Oakeshott: An Introduction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 32-35.

in the valuable contribution made by the study of political philosophy to the whole society. At this stage, suffice it to note that the argument there builds on the conclusions reached in his early political philosophy. In particular, the political philosopher maintains and renews the society's self-consciousness precisely by remaining loyal to his occupation in the social whole, which means to refrain from applying his philosophical conclusions to political practice. Oakeshott's general philosophy cannot provide a parallel with this form of argument not only because its subject matter is the nature of the various modes of experience instead of the political or social life of human beings (which is not a mode). It is also because, as will become clear in Chapter 3, Oakeshott's general philosophy eventually fails to provide any substantive conclusion about the Absolute, and thereby provides nothing on the basis of which the practical role of the philosopher in the broader social context could be positively said.

In order to understand more thoroughly the relation between political philosophy and practical politics as Oakeshott conceived it, we have to leave his brief sketch of what a complete political philosophy should look like and proceed to observe how in his subsequent works he actually performed the task he had earlier appointed to political philosophy.

The first brief attempt appeared in a 1925 essay entitled "Some Remarks on the Nature and Meaning of Sociality." What makes this piece belong to Oakeshott's writings on political philosophy is, as its title suggests, the specific concern with the subject matter of political philosophy. "Sociality" is but another name for the essential characteristics of the State, or statehood. This essay is noticeable because it contains some statements which exemplify very well the ambiguous relation between philosophy and practice in Oakeshott. For instance, he stated that if "a society be what I have contended that it is, and if patriotism may be taken as a complete devotion to the ends of our society, our state, then to me patriotism is the motive which should guide us in all our actions. And not only this, but that it is the motive

which does rule in our minds insofar as we are truly members of our state."[11] What is the meaning of these statements? What is the logical status of the modality of "should" here? Do these statements express a purely philosophical view or a normative judgment of practical life? Commentators who focus their interpretation of Oakeshott on his cultural identity and political orientation tend to regard passages like this one as providing information about his personal attitudes in practical life. George Feaver, for example, understands this passage to be a passionate expression of the young Oakeshott's love of England,[12] as opposed to a detached exposition of the logical relation among the concepts of society, state, patriotism, individual, action, and so forth. However, if we consider Oakeshott's later clarification of what he was doing in making statements of this kind, the answer may not be a simple either-or.

The most significant writing in this regard is *A Discussion of Some Matters Preliminary to the Study of Political Philosophy*. According to Luke O'Sullivan, it was written in 1925 as Oakeshott's Fellowship dissertation at Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge.[13] This book-length treatise contains some of Oakeshott's boldest and clearest statements about the form which a complete political philosophy should take and his actual exposition of its themes in detail. By way of argument, he reiterated many claims about the general nature of philosophy which we have already examined above. For example, the holistic nature of philosophy is formulated here in terms of the incessant pursuit of the true definition of things rather than of words. In this process, to arrive at a better classification of the characteristics of a thing under investigation means to achieve a more satisfactory understanding of the whole of that thing, which will finally reach the climax of a comprehensive understanding of the whole universe.[14] Again, although practice was yet to be systemised in his general

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[11] Oakeshott, "Some Remarks on the Nature and Meaning of Sociality," in *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, ed. Timothy Fuller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 60-61.
[12] George Feaver, "Being English: The Conservative Witness of Michael Oakeshott," in *The Meanings of Michael Oakeshott's Conservatism*, ed. Corey Abel (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010), 228.
[13] Luke O'Sullivan, preface to *Early Political Writings, 1925-30* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010), vii.
[14] Oakeshott, *A Discussion of Some Matters Preliminary to the Study of Political Philosophy*, in O'Sullivan, *Early Political Writings*, 47.

philosophy as a mode of experience logically separated from philosophy, it is repeatedly stressed that "the philosopher never desires to change things, but to understand them."[15]

More importantly, the features which distinguish Oakeshott's political philosophy from his general philosophy at this stage received a sharper expression here. First, the delineation of the scope of political philosophy's subject matter is spelt out in plainer terms than the mere reference to the State as the most complete philosophical context. In particular, after rehearsing the view that the proper concern of political philosophy is the real and essential nature of the State,[16] he further explained in a Hobbesian fashion that the State refers to the political life which "involves the permanent cessation of this struggle, either for life or luxury, which enables us to enter into a moral relation with men."[17] Secondly, the holism peculiar to his early political philosophy is made evident less by the comprehensiveness of its attention to all forms of social institutions than by its philosophical necessity. In his own words, not only does the attempt to theorise the political life have to "avoid the elementary errors of those who look for its truest and most characteristic expression in government rather than in friendship, in law rather than in moral sensibility, in ownership and rule rather than in religion and culture."[18] More crucially, "[n]ot until every element of our social life receives a like treatment shall we have a political philosophy worth the name."[19]

From this point onwards, Oakeshott ventured into unexplored territories in political philosophy. He offered a specific account of the State and the self as well as the theoretical identity between the two. On this basis he then considered the place of government in such a comprehensive philosophical context. This is where a further distinctive feature of Oakeshott's early political philosophy can be discerned, namely its dialecticism.

In the chapter on the State, for example, the argument proceeds in an Hegelian manner in the sense that it begins with the elementary grounds of statehood latent in all human

[15] *Ibid*., 68.
[16] *Ibid*., 49.
[17] *Ibid*., 59.
[18] *Ibid*., 60.
[19] *Ibid*., 68.

associations, namely the universal will of human beings to live the "good life."[20] The next step is to overcome the incomplete, partial or abstract nature of these intermediary associations. The supersession of one social institution by another does not cease until it finally arrives at the most complete, comprehensive or concrete conception of this principle of human association, that is, the State as the whole and the most satisfactory of social experience which human beings are capable of living.[21] This dialecticism strengthens the holism peculiar to Oakeshott's early political philosophy even further. That all the intermediary social institutions are necessary to the State is no longer a brute fact about a truly complete political philosophy; the necessity is explained by the logical unfolding of the State, beginning from those forms of social life where the principle of statehood is the most dormant and proceeding to those more manifestly expressive of this principle. In addition, as Chapter 3 will show, this dialecticism is absent in or even denied by Oakeshott's early general philosophy. This observation, again, does not merely grow out of a scholastic interest in unimportant details, but will significantly influence our understanding of why Oakeshott later altered his conception of political philosophy. Here it is sufficient to point out that, contrary to most commentators' interpretation, what is notable is not that Oakeshott qualified this dialecticism of social institutions in his late political philosophy, but that he replaced it by the dialecticism of modes of experience which had been rejected from the outset in his early general philosophy. The motivation for this move was to clarify the relation between our practical experience of political life and the philosophical investigation of politics in terms more than their mutual separation in logic.

In this regard, the chapter on the State also provides passages of argument which are susceptible of the misunderstandings typical of the case of patriotism mentioned above. Examining these arguments will help us understand the ambiguities in Oakeshott's view that political philosophy is irrelevant to practical politics. For instance, in elucidating the

[20] *Ibid.*, 79.
[21] *Ibid.*, 81.

characteristics of the State, he asserted that "a state is not only a cultural association, but a cultural unit, … it possesses more than a mere unity of action; it must have some degree of unity of purpose."[22] Here, as elsewhere, he was very careful to add a disclaimer whenever the foregoing argument appears to suggest political recommendations, lest they should easily invite misdirected moral objections. Regarding our attitude towards actual human associations (a particular state as opposed to the State), he said that "it is the object of a theorist to discover the truth about this relationship, and not to give guidance for a practical attitude."[23] The relationship here refers to the logical fact that the idea of the State incorporates not only unity of action but also unity of purpose. Therefore, when confronted with the kind of mixed society advocated by T. S. Eliot and other members of the Moot meetings during the 1930s, where the aim was not to cultivate a shared belief but merely to promote common action by both Christians and non-Christians alike, the philosopher would in this instance judge that this kind of association falls short of the idea of the State. In other words, the degree of statehood embodied by this mixed society is not the most satisfactory form of life which human beings can enjoy. The philosopher would further add that in making this judgment there is no intention to improve or alter the existing conditions of association. Nevertheless, one may justifiably doubt whether saying that it is not the most satisfactory experience to live in a mixed society does not by itself amount to a normative judgment. The doubt would be even more reasonable if no disclaimer of practical intentions were provided and the context of the argument were not straightforwardly philosophical (see the next section).

This ambiguity in the relation between political philosophy and practical life characterises the chapter on the self as well. Here the argument embodies the strong holism in Oakeshott's early political philosophy, and can more easily invite grave misunderstandings and misguided moral objections. He began the discussion by rehearsing

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[22] *Ibid*., 78.
[23] *Ibid*., 79.

the contention that, wherever we begin our enquiry, a comprehensive view must finally lead us to what is ultimately real in experience.[24] After developing his arguments about the abstract nature of what is apparently individual (i.e. the everyday selves including you and I) and overcoming its contradictions, Oakeshott concluded that "we have arrived at the conception of self as a unity of characteristic experience; those experiences, its 'concrete filling,' are none other than its society; and its society is its State. The self is the State; the State is the self."[25] Again, he was aware of the kind of criticism coming from writers preoccupied with practical politics. Thus, he immediately denied that there is any degree of the enslavement of the individual by the state implied in the previous philosophical conclusion.

Unfortunately, Oakeshott's reason for rejecting this sort of misunderstanding is not very persuasive. He argued that the usual criticism concerning the totalitarian states uses the concept of the state (in lower case) in a legal and practical sense which has nothing to do with the subject matter of political philosophy, namely the State (in upper case). Consequently, this kind of criticism in effect falls outside the philosopher's proper concern.[26] Although this defence takes advantage of philosophy and practice's mutual irrelevance to each other borrowed from Oakeshott's early general philosophy, here it seems to be ineffective in the face of the holism and dialecticism peculiar to his early political philosophy. One could in principle clarify that the complaint is about the oppression of the individual by *government*, and that the practical reformer is interested in what insight political philosophy could provide in this matter. Although Oakeshott's political philosophy is mainly concerned with the State, it does not thereby neglect questions about government. On the contrary, in accordance with his own conception of political philosophy, it must deal with those questions and demonstrate how the government gives place to the State and is thus understood in the

[24] *Ibid*., 85.
[25] *Ibid*., 108.
[26] *Ibid*., 110-11.

total context of the State.[27]

This is not the end of the matter. For, Oakeshott could counter that, even in this new formulation of the practical reformer's question, the subject matter is still a particular government in practical and legal issues, not the *idea* of government in philosophical investigation. What is wrong with the common misidentification of the State with its government consists not only in the conflation of two distinct concepts, but also an additional conflation of two logically mutually independent forms of enquiry. As such, it is confounding to notice that Oakeshott himself in the end allows his political philosophy to make judgments about a particular government in the same way our hypothetical philosopher above judges the mixed society to be falling short of the idea of the State: "[i]n so far as a government commits blunders, denies its own essential nature, it becomes so much less than government."[28] Ironically, this could have been a satisfactory response to our hypothetical practical reformer's queries.

What are we to make of this internal discrepancy of Oakeshott's early political philosophy? I think that the way in which he insisted on the irrelevance of political philosophy to practical life was immature. This doctrine is directly borrowed from his early general philosophy. When it is transplanted to his early political philosophy, the result seems unacceptable. If political philosophy cannot say anything relevant to our actual political life, then it is difficult to understand the motivation for pursuing such an academic investigation. In other words, it is no longer clear whether the concepts like the individual and the State dealt with in this political philosophy is political rather than purely logical. As we will see in Chapter 3, this doctrine eventually led Oakeshott to subsume political philosophy under his early general philosophy in *Experience and Its Modes*. On the other hand, as Chapter 5 will explain more fully, the difficulties of this doctrine may be the main reason why Oakeshott later renewed his account of the nature of political philosophy. There he put more

[27] *Ibid*., 116-17.
[28] *Ibid*., 122.

emphasis on the importance of showing how the conclusions reached in political philosophy are based on the gradual supersession of our pre-theoretical understanding of political life. In this manner he avoided severing the link between political philosophy and our actual political experience and restored the original rationale for studying political philosophy, which does have something to say about contemporary politics without qualifying its own academic independence from practical concerns. More importantly, this revival of the philosophical progression between modes of experience in British Idealism in Oakeshott's late political philosophy runs counter to the current interpretation of his works as a move away from holism and dialecticism in which his political philosophy followed the footsteps of his general philosophy. It also paves the way for our interpretation where the main purpose of Oakeshott's exercise in general philosophy was to deal with the problems left unsolved by his earlier political philosophy.

Before concluding this section, it is worthwhile examining how Oakeshott utilised the substantive conclusions in his early political philosophy to understand the nature of government and law. This will be useful to our later comparison between the propositions preserved in his late political philosophy, and those subsequently discarded or significantly revised. Moreover, his philosophical view on government and law is also essential to our attempt, in the next section, to understand the additional, peculiar way his political philosophy becomes practically relevant by implying a social role for the philosopher.

The chapter on government and law begins with a logical deduction of the nature of all actions from what has been said on the philosophical ideas of the State and the self. Since the State is the social whole, it follows that the action of the State is the action of the social whole. Furthermore, since the State is the self and *vice versa*, all individual action is State action in so far as it contributes to the end of the State or the unity of purpose in the whole of social life. Consequently, "[a] father bringing his son up to appreciate poetry is thereby performing an action of the State, while a nation waging an unnecessary war is working

against the ends of the State;"[29] or, more generally, with J. S. Mill's terminologies adapted for Oakeshott's own purpose, "there is no action so intimate or so personal that it can be called a self-regarding activity in contradistinction to a State-regarding activity."[30]

With the idea of action clarified in relation to the State and the self, the discussion then proceeds to understand government and its action, law, in this philosophical context of the whole. With regard to the question of government's intervention in social problems, Oakeshott argued that "[i]t is just because government is interested in these things, just because in its universal will it desires their accomplishment, that it leaves untouched that which its touch would mar."[31] The meaning of this statement becomes clearer in the account of law as the government's means to contribute to the end of the State. After distinguishing between direct command and permissive legislation,[32] he asserted that "[a] law commanding us to 'be moral' (that is, realize in our lives the moral standard roughly accepted by our society) would be one contradicting the very principles of legislation."[33] Taking sexual morality as an example, he made the observation that the maintenance of its high standard was made more difficult by overcrowding. While it is beyond the province of law to raise its citizens' moral standards (which belongs to the role of other social institutions and ultimately to the State), it does not follow that law, as no less a part of the State, is not concerned with this activity of the social whole. Rather, in contributing to the end of the social whole, the commands issued by law has to fall under the logical scope of what law can do. Consequently, "it is because government has this problem so nearly at heart that it refuses to interfere in this manner. Yet it is no passive spectator, but a hinderer of hindrances, a creator of conditions. Its commands, with regard to sexual morality, take the form of, 'be sufficiently housed.'"[34]

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[29] *Ibid*., 119.
[30] *Ibid*.
[31] *Ibid*., 121.
[32] *Ibid*., 120.
[33] *Ibid*., 123-24.
[34] *Ibid*., 124.

The Bosanquetian phrase of "the hinderer of hindrances" marks the philosophical nature of Oakeshott's approach here. This implicit emphasis on the philosophical (as opposed to practical) meaning of the terms he was employing helps him to clear away tempting misinterpretation of the philosophical conclusions he reached, that is, the identification of might with right. If the scope of what law can do were vulgarised in the sense of the ability of law to enforce its command by sheer power, then the proposition that "might is right" would appear scarcely different from a support of the then rising totalitarian regimes in practical politics. This is why here the scope of law should be strictly understood in the logical sense. Nevertheless, as should have been obvious by now, in demarcating sharply the boundary between philosophy and practice, these philosophical propositions are not thereby prevented from playing a normative role in judging the extent to which actual governments and legal institutions approximate to their ideational counterparts in philosophy.

It might seem ill-justified to take Oakeshott's early unpublished writings so seriously. As Podoksik remarks, the philosophical views expounded in *SPP* is rather unoriginal as well as unOakeshottian in the sense that the mature position established in Oakeshott's later works departs from almost all of these holistic and teleological conclusions in his early political philosophy.[35] However, the degree to which Oakeshott abandoned his early conclusions in political philosophy is exaggerated. As Chapter 5 will explain further, it is true that in *OHC* law is no longer understood in terms of a specific order or command; instead it is defined as a set of conditions or general rules to which the individuals subscribe in pursuing their own chosen substantive ends. Nonetheless, even if the detailed analysis of law is different, the philosophical conclusion that might is right, and the holistic tendency of reconciling apparently distinct concepts, remain. The scope of what law, as the agent of government, can do is still logically defined by the role of government, though the latter is now understood differently after the universal context of the State recedes from the vision of Oakeshott's late

[35] Efraim Podoksik, *In Defence of Modernity: Vision and Philosophy in Michael Oakeshott* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2003), 47.

political philosophy. Similarly, the theoretical identification of the State with the self is also preserved in *OHC*, although in the absence of the State this proposition now holds between *civitas* and *cives*; and, since *civitas* and *cives* is arrived at by dialectically progressing from the connection between civil association and the individual in political history, this proposition presumably also holds between the unelaborated theoretical counterparts of enterprise association and the individual manqué (transformed into the anti-individual).

If the holism and dialecticism in Oakeshott's early political philosophy persist, (albeit in a somewhat diluted and deflated form) in his later writings, then the disappearance of the all-encompassing background of the State cannot be appropriately interpreted as a defence of modernity's departure from unity and teleology. As I shall argue in Chapter 5, what disappeared in Oakeshott's revised account of the nature of political philosophy is not firstly the State, but the Absolute in his early general philosophy. Although the Absolute fades away, the dialecticism of modes of experience is revived. Political philosophy now progresses from the practical or historical experience of modern political life to a philosophical examination of their postulated presuppositions. The motivation for this move was to repair the link between political philosophy and practical politics severed by his early general philosophy. Nevertheless, if political philosophy reaches its conclusion not from some concepts which (though less concrete and complete than the State) are already released from their original connection with the spatiotemporal context, but from a pre-theoretical understanding of our social life and political experience, then it is even more difficult to avoid inviting misunderstanding and moral objection when the philosophical conclusions are couched in the terms of the State with a unity of action and purpose. Yet there is nothing wrong about the content of these conclusions so long as they are understood in a strictly philosophical sense. (In *OHC*, even the non-purposeful *civitas* can be said to have an end such that, in subscribing to its formal rules but pursuing their own chosen substantive goals, the *cives* contribute no less to the end of *civitas* than, philosophically speaking, the anti-individuals contribute to the end of enterprise association in pursuing its collectively shared purpose.)

Consequently, it is more probable that Oakeshott refrained from talking about the State because he became more aware of the necessity to speak to one's contemporary audience and to move with the time. Not incidentally, this is precisely the role his early political philosophy reserves for the philosopher.

In particular, it is intriguing to know that such a rather complete philosophical system as expounded in *SPP* seldom reached formal publication during Oakeshott's lifetime. When it did appear publicly, it either forsook any pretensions of being a political philosophy, as in "The Claims of Politics" to be discussed in the next section; or disclosed some of its conclusions only when the occasion called upon them, as in one or two book reviews to be dealt with in Chapter 5. The only exception happened in 1929. In "The Authority of the State" almost every point made by Oakeshott reflects the thoughts expressed in his earlier unpublished writings of political philosophy which we have just examined.[36] As Steven Gerencser correctly points out, as early as in this 1929 article, "[t]he genesis of the concerns that mark Oakeshott's later work is here (e.g. the interest in authority, caution about democracy, dislike of contract theory), but the basis of those concerns is not a quiet reflection on English tradition, but once again philosophical idealism."[37] However, Oakeshott's unreserved style of Idealism could not expect to get a sympathetic hearing. In the correspondences between Oakeshott and a critic, George Catlin, we can see that they were simply talking past each other.[38] A new framework was required to address the old philosophical questions in a way which can engage with the contemporary intellectual context. This better explains why Oakeshott chose not to publish the majority of his early political writings. After all, to say that they are immature presupposes the perspective of his later writings unavailable to him at this stage; and to suppose that the young Oakeshott viewed them as immature cannot do justice to the confident and resolute tone found in some

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[36] Oakeshott, "The Authority of the State," in Fuller, *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, 74-90. First published in *Modern Churchman* 19 (1929): 313-27.

[37] Steven Gerencser, *The Skeptic's Oakeshott* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 53.

[38] George E. G. Catlin, Correspondence, in Fuller, *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, 87-88. First published in *Modern Churchman* 19 (1929): 614.

of his best early writings of political philosophy.

III. The Philosopher's Role in Society

After Oakeshott published "The Authority of the State" in 1929, one searches in vain for any significant piece of writing which revisits his earlier conception of political philosophy or carries out its construction. Paul Franco considers "The Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence" (1938) to be the representative essay in Oakeshott's early writings of political philosophy.[39] However, compared with *SPP*, both what it says about the specific nature of political philosophy (as opposed to what is generally applicable to all branches of philosophy), and the conclusions it actually establishes in such a political philosophy, approximate to the minimal. The large part of this essay is concerned with explaining why the study of politics in other modes of enquiry falls short of a philosophical investigation. This is a theme belonging more properly to Oakeshott's early general philosophy about the various modes of experience.

"The Claims of Politics" stands out against this background. This article appeared in the special issue of F. R Leavis' journal *Scrutiny* in 1939, a medium of literary criticism where one usually does not expect to find academic philosophical contributions. As such, in this article Oakeshott formulated many conclusions in his early political philosophy in a language so ordinary that at first sight it does not seem to be situated in a philosophical context. For example, we may be reminded of the earlier claim that every action of the self is at the same time an action of the State. Here it was turned into a statement capable of being understood by layperson: "no activity is private in the sense of being without its place or context in the corporate social life, and no man who feels it his duty to take a part in the promotion of the communal interests of his society needs consider himself to have failed

[39] Paul Franco, *The Political Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 69-76.

merely because he has not entered the world of politics."[40] Terms which may easily invite misunderstanding, like the "State," were deliberately replaced by equivalent expressions in common sense like "the corporate social life;" and the "political" life, which was used interchangeably with the whole of "social" life in his early political philosophy, is here used in a narrower sense such that their meanings become distinct. Again, Oakeshott argued that participation in politics "is not self-explanatory; its end and meaning lie beyond itself in the social whole to which it belongs, a social whole already determined by law and custom and tradition, none of which is the creation of political activity."[41] Readers of "The Cambridge School of Political Science" will readily discern the distinction between "government" and "the State," even though it is disguised in the vernacular vocabularies of "political activities" and "the social whole."

This is not an innocent paraphrase. The propositions here are more likely to be put in informal language deliberately since Oakeshott knew very well how to communicate his philosophical ideas to the public. Participating in a social science conference held in 1936, he explained the views of his general philosophy thus: "[t]here is a past for every way of thinking: there is neither one pre-eminent past, nor is there any past at all except for some way of thinking. That, of course, is philosophy, and therefore introduces unnecessary complications; it is better, perhaps, to keep to the falsity of common sense and say that history is a certain way of thinking about the past."[42] However, in "The Claims of Politics" Oakeshott's expression of his political philosophy in ordinary terms is more special. First is the ease with which he bases his condemnation of the political fanaticism about participating in "public affairs" upon his political philosophy, as if there were no danger of fallaciously conflating philosophy with practical life. Here the way philosophical conclusions may issue

[40] Oakeshott, "The Claims of Politics," in Fuller, *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, 92. First published in *Scrutiny* 8 (1939-40): 146-51.
[41] *Ibid*., 93.
[42] Oakeshott, "History and the Social Sciences," in *The Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence: Essays and Reviews, 1926-51*, ed. Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2007), 130. First published in *The Social Sciences: Their Relations in Theory and Teaching*, ed. J. E. Dugdale (London: Le Play House, 1936), 71-81.

in normative judgments of political practice is the same as the measurement of the degree to which actual human associations approximate to their corresponding philosophical concepts. As already discussed in the previous section, this does not contradict Oakeshott's logical separation of philosophy from practice; though, probably due to the imminent war, this is one of the rare occasions on which he was so active in engaging with practical issues from his own philosophical perspective.

Nevertheless, this pattern of normative prescriptions is not unique to Oakeshott's political philosophy, but also features in his general philosophy, as the previous example about the historical mode of experience illustrates. "The Claims of Politics" was unprecedented because for the first time Oakeshott applied the substantive conclusions from his political philosophy to deal with the relation between philosophy and practice. In his earlier political philosophy, the reasons he adduced to support the logical separation between philosophy and practice are those about the distinct nature of different types of enquiry, which were to be systemised by his general philosophy in *EM.* "The Claims of Politics," in contrast, tackles this question not in terms of the logic of different modes of experience, but from the viewpoint of the role played by the philosopher in our practical life.

With regard to this feature, Paul Franco comments that "The Claims of Politics" seems to make the relationship between philosophy and practical life closer than what Oakeshott established in *Experience and Its Modes*.[43] Andrew Sullivan makes the even stronger accusation that the practical nature of philosophy implied in this article is explicitly denied in Oakeshott's general philosophy.[44] These comments are not quite correct. When Oakeshott took up the question about the way philosophers can contribute to society without directly participating in politics, he in effect incorporated the position maintained in his early general philosophy. In particular, he asserted that the philosopher is at no advantage over other people in participating in politics because his "integrity and insight cannot be introduced into

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[43] Franco, *Michael Oakeshott*, 78-79.
[44] Andrew Sullivan, *Intimations Pursued: The Voice of Practice in the Conversation of Michael Oakeshott* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2007), 134.

that world without changing their character; and to attempt to introduce them makes a chaos of what is otherwise a restricted but nevertheless ordered view".[45] As will become clear in Chapter 3, this argument expresses very well Oakeshott's warnings against the logical fallacy of *ignoratio elenchi* in *EM*. Consequently, the question is how he was able to assign a practical role to the philosopher against the background of his early general philosophy. The philosopher is not expected "to come out of a retreat, bringing with them some superior wisdom, and enter the world of political activity, but to stay where they are, remain true to their genius, which is to mitigate a little their society's ignorance of itself."[46] As Chapter 3 will also explain, it is difficult to see how the philosophical attitude towards practical life, being an escape from it, can be the symbol of a society's self-consciousness. This is unsurprising, for we noted earlier that the conclusions from Oakeshott's general philosophy by themselves are impotent to establish any positive account of the function of philosopher in society.

It is here that Oakeshott's early political philosophy completes the argument. Government and law, in the context of the State and as parts of it, reject certain ways to interfere with people's lives because they must confine their activities within the defined scope of what they can do. But, instead of qualifying their concern with the end of the State, this logically-imposed restraint precisely expresses their contribution to the whole of social life. In a similar vein, the philosopher rightly refuses to become a politician in disguise "not because they have no part in the promotion of the communal interests of mankind, but because to be free from the world is the condition of their contribution."[47] This is not an isolated conclusion in Oakeshott's political philosophy. As we have noted in the previous section, Oakeshott was to strengthen the link between political philosophy and our pre-theoretical understanding of political life in his modified conception of the nature of political philosophy. As such, in assigning the role of recreating the values of society and sustaining

[45] Oakeshott, "Claims of Politics," 95.
[46] *Ibid*., 95-96.
[47] *Ibid*., 96.

its self-awareness to the philosopher, "The Claims of Politics" marks the point of departure from whence Oakeshott began to revise his views on the task of political philosophy.

IV. Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed characterisation of Oakeshott's early political philosophy, and outlined the arguments to be completed by the subsequent three chapters in the first part of this thesis. We must note that in undermining Podoksik's interpretation of Oakeshott as a defender of liberal individuality in modernity I do not thereby regard him as a representative of conservatism. Certainly, Chapter 7 on Roger Scruton will make Oakeshott's early Hegelianism appear profoundly conservative. Oakeshott's aversion to contractarianism is a case in point, expressed in the claim that the meaning of politics must be understood in the wider context of the social whole or the State, the institutions of which such as law and custom are not produced by government or state. So will his proposition find an echo in Scruton's works that the individual is the State because it is complete only if its meaning and value are successively enriched through property, family, marriage and so forth, as opposed to an abstract individual.

However, I shall argue that what makes Scruton's political thought distinctively conservative is not primarily his Hegelianism in the sense of denigrating the ideas of social contract or unencumbered individual. Rather, the hallmark of Scruton's conservatism is a reworked concept of corporate personality. This concept is rooted as much in nineteenth century German intellectual tradition as the Hegelianism in British Idealism was. Yet it is also one which Oakeshott, despite sharing with Scruton a recognition of the crucial importance of the various intermediary social institutions in political philosophy, was unwilling to take seriously from the very beginning to the end of his academic career. Consequently, the task started by this chapter is the provision of a clean British intellectual background against which the political thought of the various conservatives examined in the

second part of this thesis can be more objectively evaluated. Whether the early Oakeshott by himself is a conservative or not is no longer an interesting question by comparison.

Chapter 3: Early General Philosophy, 1923-38

I. Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have repeatedly contrasted Oakeshott's early political philosophy with his early general philosophy. Yet how he came to a settled position in general philosophy has not been accounted for in detail. This is essential to our interpretation. An overall picture of Oakeshott's general philosophy not only serves as the background against which the peculiar nature of his political philosophy manifests itself. It also enables us to understand how his general philosophy plays a role both in satisfying the theoretical needs of his earlier conception of political philosophy, and in supporting his still earlier ideological criticisms of the contemporary intellectual climate concerning science, religion, morality, and politics.

In the next section we begin from Oakeshott's earliest writings where both the form and content of his general philosophy were still unstable. His position acquired a more definite shape in the more systematic investigation of *The Philosophical Approach to Politics* (1928). In this set of lectures, he found the direction for his general philosophy from a gap in his earlier conception of political philosophy, namely the need to justify the logical separation between philosophy and practical politics. However, *PAP* also contains significant departures from his earlier political philosophy. Here the subject matter is different, the holism qualified, and the dialecticism rejected from the outset. The consequences of combining Oakeshott's political and general philosophy, which are drastically different from each other, are complicated and contradictory. Concerning his general philosophy, this combination results in a new strong holism which incorporates all branches of philosophy including political philosophy into its own sovereignty. Political philosophy can no longer be truly philosophical if it is specifically about politics. On the other hand, the general philosophy in *PAP* implicitly leaves open the possibility of a dialectical progression between

kinds of thinking, which become again indispensable to the concrete knowledge of philosophy. This internal inconsistency motivated Oakeshott's later renewal of his conception of political philosophy which resuscitates the possibility of a political philosophy denied in the subsumption of it by his early general philosophy.

We then analyse *Experience and Its Modes* in this context. Despite his qualification of holism and rejection of dialecticism in general philosophy, Oakeshott did not abandon the Absolute. This abandonment occurred much later after he reconceived the nature of political philosophy and adjusted his general philosophy in accordance with the changes he earlier made to political philosophy. Only this interpretation can explain why Oakeshott made the detour of delineating the logical structure of the various modes of experience even though they are not necessary to our arrival at the most concrete knowledge of philosophy in *EM*. His general philosophy was meant to solve the theoretical problems left by his political philosophy. Although as in *EM* it may sometimes acquire a life of its own, its conclusions are at best provisional. Moreover, they are subject to alteration once they are found to stand in the way of his life-long endeavour to construct a political philosophy which is both truly philosophical and at the same time specifically about our practical experience of political life.

The third section deals with another, more ideological, motivation behind Oakeshott's systematic treatment of his general philosophy. Logically speaking, his general philosophy possesses a far greater potential for intervening with practical discourse than his political philosophy does. Furthermore, in the context of his earliest religious writings and other book reviews, his general philosophy appears more as a polemic against current intellectual tendencies than a serene reflection in the armchair. The fact that this practical undertaking happened even earlier than his exposition of general philosophy for the sake of his earlier political philosophy, shows that Oakeshott rightly deserves a place in the history of British political ideologies.

II. A Philosophy of Modes of Experience

Compared to his early political philosophy, it took Oakeshott longer to give his general philosophy a definite shape. The earliest writings of his general philosophy betray a variety of shortcomings which are absent in those of his political philosophy. He may be dimly aware of the subject matter of his general philosophy, which the first attempts in philosophy of history illustrate very well. In addition, at times the tone is more polemical than meticulous, as in his holistic identification of a complete political philosophy with the whole of philosophy. Finally, some of his judgements were provisional, only to be retracted in later works. The claim that it is poetry rather than philosophy which can lead us to the knowledge of ultimate reality is a case in point. Therefore, in the following intellectual portrait of Oakeshott's early general philosophy, we must pay more attention to the continuities which persist in his various subsequent writings. His changes of opinion will be examined in more detail only if they are relevant to our task of constructing a coherent interpretation.

Delivered in 1923, the talk "History Is a Fable" is the first occasion on which Oakeshott put forward his views in general philosophy. The objective was to distinguish history from both science and art.[1] The logical separation of different kinds of enquiry was to be the main theme in Oakeshott's general philosophy. However, the subject matter of such a philosophy had not yet been clearly defined in this talk. Not until 1928 did he make clear that the task of philosophy of history is neither to discover general laws nor to uncover a plot in past events, but to examine the presuppositions of the historical mode of enquiry itself from the philosophical viewpoint.[2] Oakeshott's conclusions about the logical status of these kinds of enquiry are also unstable at this stage. For example, art was construed as an autonomous mode of enquiry. But it soon gave its place to the world of practice in the lectures on *PAP* disseminated during the late 1920s, before being finally assimilated to the practical mode of

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[1] Michael Oakeshott, "History Is a Fable," in *What Is History? and Other Essays*, ed. Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2004), 40-41.

[2] Oakeshott, "The Philosophy of History," in O'Sullivan, *What Is History?*, 127-29.

experience by *EM* in 1933.[3] Indeed, the conclusions established in Oakeshott's earliest writings of general philosophy are mostly tentative, with his philosophy of history being the glaring exception. The characterisation of historical knowledge as, in Idealist fashion, a knowledge of the past "seen through the spectacles of the present,"[4] is a position to which Oakeshott was to remain loyal in all his subsequent works.

In "An Essay on the Relations of Philosophy, Poetry and Reality,"[5] this tentativeness infects the logical status of philosophy itself. Philosophy and art, named poetry here, are equally subjected to a logical examination concerning their separate claims to arrive at the knowledge of ultimate reality. However, like the logical status of art in "History Is a Fable," the conclusions about the nature of philosophy reached in this essay were quickly reversed in Oakeshott's later writings. In particular, the argument begins by considering the properties possessed by ultimate reality. Then, by reference to these properties, the claims of philosophy and poetry to acquire knowledge of such a reality are evaluated. Throughout the discussion Oakeshott referred to philosophy and poetry as two distinct faculties of the mind, but this talk of mental faculties was to be emphatically rejected in *EM*.[6] Besides, he contrasted philosophy and poetry with each other by a series of dichotomies (disassociation and association, analysis and synthesis, doubt and faith, expression and creation, intellect and intuition, etc.).[7] Yet it is typical of Idealists to reconcile a thesis with its antithesis and supersede their opposition by a more concrete concept. Finally, he concluded that the place of philosophy is secondary to poetry in so far as understanding reality is concerned, although it is assigned two tasks of providing assistance to poetry.[8] The first is to distinguish fancy from imagination, which is reminiscent of S. T. Coleridge's distinction; and the other is to

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[3] Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), 297.
[4] Oakeshott, "History Is a Fable," 42.
[5] According to Luke O'Sullivan's editorial note, this essay was probably written between September 1924 and July 1925 for the application for a fellowship of Gonville and Caius College at Cambridge. Oakeshott, "An Essay on the Relations of Philosophy, Poetry and Reality," in O'Sullivan, *What Is History?*, 115n1. This is roughly the same time when Oakeshott provides us with a settled conception of political philosophy and a more or less complete construction of such a philosophy. See Chapter 2.
[6] Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes*, 21-26.
[7] Oakeshott, "Philosophy, Poetry and Reality," 98-106.
[8] *Ibid*., 107-8.

realise the limitation of philosophy itself and recognise what is beyond the reach of philosophy, which reminds us of Immanuel Kant's critique of pure reason. By contrast, in *PAP* and later in *EM*, philosophy is no longer the handmaiden of any other modes of experience, but the ultimate perspective superseding all of them.

If this essay differs from Oakeshott's other writings in so many respects, it seems difficult to understand the place it occupies in his early general philosophy. Nonetheless, if we focus on the underlying philosophical project instead of the details of the argument or the specific conclusions reached, continuities are still discernible. In particular, if the logical examination of philosophy and poetry is indeed philosophical by nature, and if the fact about philosophy's or poetry's capability to arrive at the ultimate truth can only be ascertained from this philosophical perspective, then it paradoxically turns out that eventually it is philosophy which can reach the truth about ultimate reality regardless of the results of this logical investigation. Consequently, that philosophy is deemed secondary to poetry in this essay does not make this piece of writing so dissonant with Oakeshott's other writings. As Efraim Podoksik points out quite correctly, this essay shares with other Oakeshott's early works in general philosophy the pursuit and affirmation of the Absolute.[9]

However, I do not agree with Podoksik's judgment that by the time of *EM* Oakeshott had already abandoned this pursuit.[10] As we shall see in chapters 4 and 5, this happened much later at the end of the 1940s in his political philosophy, and still later in the 1950s in his general philosophy. Again, this interpretive disagreement concerning when Oakeshott revised his conception of general philosophy is not merely a scholastic controversy. As I shall argue below and in subsequent chapters, Oakeshott's political philosophy is not an outgrowth of his general philosophy such that changes in his political philosophy reflect earlier changes in his general philosophy. Quite the contrary. One of Oakeshott's main motivations for investigating general philosophy is precisely to overcome the philosophical

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[9] Efraim Podoksik, *In Defence of Modernity: Vision and Philosophy in Michael Oakeshott* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2003), 47.
[10] *Ibid*., 45.

difficulties encountered earlier in his political philosophy.

This point is well exemplified by *PAP*. According to Luke O'Sullivan, this is a series of lectures Oakeshott gave between 1928 and 1930;[11] hence it was written after he composed *A Discussion of Some Matters Preliminary to the Study of Political Philosophy* in 1925, already discussed in the previous chapter. There, as we have noted, he rejected possible misunderstandings of the conclusions in his political philosophy by arguing that the concept of a state as it appears in practical discourse about politics has nothing to do with the philosophical idea of the State. This argument depends on a prior account of the logical separation between philosophy and practice. However, the examination of the logical status of various forms of enquiry belongs to the task of general philosophy rather than political philosophy. Therefore, it is reasonable to think that Oakeshott's motivation for composing *PAP* was the need to fill the gap of his argument in political philosophy. As it turns out, setting aside its misleading title, this book-length essay spends much more space on the difference between the scientific, historical, practical, and philosophical ways of thinking about political topics than on the characteristics and the substance of such a philosophy of politics, which had already been elaborated in his earlier writings of political philosophy.

In the process of this philosophical reinforcement, Oakeshott's early general philosophy gradually reveals its difference from his early political philosophy regarding the range of its subject matter and the nature of its holism and dialecticism. First, in Oakeshott's early political philosophy, the nature of philosophy in general is taken as settled so that the primary focus is on the substance of a philosophy specifically concerned with politics. To be sure, in the first chapter of *PAP*, the title also made clear that the motivation of the whole lecture is to understand what political philosophy is. Nevertheless, here the general features of philosophy become the main issue under discussion. In contrast, the delineation of the specific contents of political philosophy now appears to be more a matter of course, readily

[11] Luke O'Sullivan, preface to *Early Political Writings, 1925-30* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010), vii.

derivable from the characteristics of philosophy in general without further ado.[12] This constitutes the first difference between Oakeshott's early political philosophy and his early general philosophy. Whilst the former is heavily concerned with the substance of the conclusions in a philosophical analysis of politics, the latter shifts its attention away from any set of philosophical conclusions to philosophy itself as a way of thinking amongst others. As a consequence, if it still makes sense to talk about the subject matter of such a general philosophy, then it is no longer the political concepts such as the individual and the State together with all the intermediary social institutions, but the various ways of thinking which compete with philosophy for the claim to ultimate knowledge.

Secondly, the sceptical impulse in Oakeshott's early political philosophy is the driving force behind the relentless criticism and supersession of abstract concepts against the background of the concrete idea of the State. In *PAP*, this motivation of philosophical investigation takes the form of exhibiting the partialness of each way of thinking as opposed to the philosophical way. After explaining in ordinary language what abstractness and concreteness mean in philosophy in contradistinction to what they mean in ordinary discourse,[13] the subsequent chapters argue that science, history, and practice are all abstract modes of thinking.[14] In particular, knowledge in these modes could be possible only by making presuppositions which render the knowledge thus acquired short of capturing all aspects of our concrete experience. Furthermore, the logical status of this philosophical critique is also subjected to examination. Oakeshott argued that the only valid critique of these abstract modes of experience philosophy can provide is a critique of their partialness compared to the comprehensiveness of philosophy. Nevertheless, philosophy cannot criticise the content of particular statements made in each mode of experience because philosophical knowledge is essentially irrelevant to science, history, or practical life. Philosophy is not a

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[12] Oakeshott, *The Philosophical Approach to Politics*, in O'Sullivan, *Early Political Writings*, 148-49.
[13] *Ibid*., 154-58.
[14] *Ibid*., 182, 192, 203-4.

guide to the practical world,[15] and logically the same applied to scientific and historical knowledge. Thus, while the scepticism (in the sense of incessant investigation) in Oakeshott's early general philosophy takes a different form than his early political philosophy does because of the difference in their subject matters, it fills the gap left open in his political philosophy's insistence on the mutual irrelevance between philosophical enquiry and practical politics.

In the third place, the holism in Oakeshott's early political philosophy is stronger than that in his early general philosophy. The examination of every intermediary social institution is necessary to a complete theory of the State. By contrast, in *PAP* if a way of thinking is found to be abstract, then "that thinking is not philosophical …. And if it is not philosophical, … it cannot properly contribute to or criticize any way of thinking which deals with the concrete."[16] This logical separation is unique to Oakeshott's early general philosophy. In his early political philosophy, the abstract concepts already contain the seeds of statehood which, far from being logically separate, are preserved and elevated to a higher level of comprehensiveness when those concepts are superseded by more concrete ones. In contrast, when a logical separation obtains between every kind of thinking, it is difficult to see that there is anything from the abstract ways of thinking which philosophy could retain in overcoming their abstractions (save the hollow suggestion that the abstract kinds of thinking also attempt to reach a comprehensive knowledge of concrete reality). This is not a surprising consequence. After all, if the aim of *PAP* is to secure a distinctive place for the philosophy of politics from the other competing kinds of thinking about political issues, then contamination of philosophy by other modes of enquiry should be avoided at all costs. The abstract modes of enquiry are by no means essential to philosophy, and there is no motivation to continue the investigation of any abstract modes should one begin directly from the philosophical way of thinking.

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[15] *Ibid*, 226.
[16] *Ibid*., 160.

Finally, the dialecticism which characterises Oakeshott's early political philosophy finds no place in his early general philosophy. The necessity of all intermediary social institutions to the idea of the State is not a brute fact, but is well explained by the dialectical progression from the most abstract idea where statehood is the most latent to more concrete ideas, until this successive argument reaches the most concrete idea of the State. In *PAP*, however, Oakeshott finds it both difficult and unnecessary to share his Idealist predecessors' ambition to construct a hierarchy in which the various modes of thinking are arranged in accordance with either the temporal order of their emergence in human history or their degrees of concreteness.[17] Similar to the dilution of holism in his early general philosophy, the rejection of dialecticism is quite understandable. If the ultimate objective is to characterise the logical properties of political philosophy or other concrete ways of thinking, it is hardly worth the effort to go through all the abstract modes of enquiry in the order of their historical emergence or degree of concreteness. Since their differing degrees of abstractness appear insignificant before the concrete nature of philosophy, a consideration of some of them is enough for heuristic purposes.

These, then, are the differences between Oakeshott's early political philosophy and his early general philosophy. Given these differences, one may wonder how he can satisfactorily answer the question "What is philosophical about a philosophy of politics?" based on the general philosophy expounded in *PAP*. After examining the various abstract ways of thinking about politics, Oakeshott turned his attention back to the nature of political philosophy which is supposed to be the main topic of this lecture. However, the holism and dialecticism which he attributed to political philosophy are inherited from his earlier writings on political philosophy; that is, they are not deduced from the nature of general philosophy substantially discussed in this lecture. In specifying political philosophy's scope of subject matter, Oakeshott rehearsed that the "first principle was that it does not matter where we start; all

[17] *Ibid*., 159-60.

starting points are equally good for the search for the real thing."[18] This holism is further explained by the reference to the list of topics such a political philosophy should include: the State and the individual, the plurality of wills and desires, rights and duties, and law and morality.[19] As we have seen, this is the holism peculiar to Oakeshott's early political philosophy. Moreover, these concepts are regarded as contradictions to be reconciled and superseded, which again exemplifies a dialectical tendency of argument absent in his early general philosophy. Therefore, his brief discussion of the nature of political philosophy leaves the impression that whatever he says about general philosophy need not apply to political philosophy as well. After all, this is logically consistent since these two kinds of philosophy are concerned with different subject matters.

Nevertheless, towards the end of the lecture, Oakeshott did attempt to apply the newly established conception of philosophy in general to political philosophy. Paradoxically, this results in a new form of holism in his general philosophy because it subsumes political philosophy under its territory. In particular, he argued that a "complete political philosophy does not merely involve a complete philosophy in general, but *is* it."[20] What this proposition means is not that a political philosophy, in order to be complete, has to contain within itself an examination of all other forms of thinking about politics from the perspective of philosophy. In any case, Oakeshott's general philosophy in the first place no longer exhibits the strong holism, where the various abstract kinds of thinking are necessary parts of the philosophical mode of enquiry. Instead, he immediately clarified that all the historically separated branches of philosophy such as ethics, metaphysics, logic, aesthetic, and politics, are not parts of philosophy but are all involved in concrete philosophical knowledge as a whole. However, this amounts to less an enrichment of the substance of political philosophy than a criticism of its limitation of scope. As Oakeshott explained further, "[p]olitical philosophy in so far as it is political, in the end … fails to be concrete thinking;" for, "in so

[18] *Ibid*., 212.
[19] *Ibid*., 212-14.
[20] *Ibid*., 224; italics original.

far as it is *political* philosophy, in so far as it is willing to view things merely in relation to this social whole, it fails to be philosophy."[21] As has been indicated in the previous chapter, the application of Oakeshott's early general philosophy to his early political philosophy severs the link between political philosophy and practical politics. No matter what conclusions are reached in political philosophy it is difficult to see their relevance to political practice. Here it is put more bluntly that political philosophy should not be political at all. *A fortiori*, the concepts like the State or the individual can no longer be understood as political concepts but purely logical ones; and the motivation for engaging in the study of such a philosophy can no longer be the desire to understand our experience of political life but the unconditional pursuit of concrete knowledge whatever it is about. Consequently, although Oakeshott's early general philosophy grows out of the needs of his earlier political philosophy, once established it acquires a life of its own and even supersedes that political philosophy. As we shall see shortly below, this is one of the contexts in which we should understand his publication of *EM*.

On the other hand, suppose that we ignore Oakeshott's grandiose and rather careless holism about a complete political philosophy which incorporates all other branches of philosophy and becomes the whole of philosophy itself. Moreover, suppose that we transplant the dilution and rejection of the holism and dialecticism about kinds of thinking in his early general philosophy to his early political philosophy. It is interesting to observe that the possibility is then left open of repairing the connection between political philosophy and practical life. With regard to holism, we have seen that the examination of the various modes of enquiry is neither necessary nor contributory to concrete thinking or the knowledge of the Absolute. Nonetheless, in discussing the nature of philosophical facts, Oakeshott argued that "[t]he real facts of social life are not the apparent, isolated 'facts' which meet in our ordinary practical experience of social life; the real facts are these abstract facts of

[21] *Ibid*., 224-25; italics original.

ordinary, abstract experience, transformed, seen as they really are and always have been."[22] Why choose practical experience as the starting point from which the philosophical investigation proceeds to more concrete facts? Why not the science of politics or political history? If the holism about various kinds of thinking holds in Oakeshott's general philosophy, then there will be no need to answer this question. Wherever one begins, the destination will be the same concrete knowledge such that the choice can in principle be arbitrary. However, if this holism does not obtain, the choice of our experience of political life as the point of departure demands an explanation to the effect that it is essential to the comprehensive philosophical thinking about politics.

Similarly, concerning dialecticism, we have also shown that there is no connection between the various kinds of thinking such that one can arrive at a concrete fact by logically progressing from one mode of enquiry to another, and finally to the philosophical mode of thinking. However, in further elucidating what is concrete reality, Oakeshott claimed that "it is simply recognizing reality, the reality which is always there, but is usually rejected in favour of some abstract 'fact,' which, though useful, is yet false and unreal."[23] If the dialecticism about kinds of thinking no longer exists, why emphasise that somehow reality has already been latent in the abstract facts of practical experience? In addition, is not the transformation of these abstract experience of practical life into concrete philosophical reality itself an exemplification of dialecticism? As Chapter 5 will demonstrate, these internal inconsistencies between Oakeshott's general philosophy and his earlier political philosophy were to become the motivation underlying his revision of the conception of political philosophy. In that revision, political philosophy's connection with and progression from practical experience is specifically highlighted. More importantly, this change occurred to his political philosophy first, and it is only after the new needs of his political philosophy had become clear that Oakeshott came to renew his conception of general philosophy

[22] *Ibid*., 211-12.
[23] *Ibid*., 212.

accordingly.

In the previous chapter we noted that one of the possible explanations for Oakeshott's not publishing his early writings in political philosophy is not his lack of confidence in the conclusions he reached in political philosophy, but the unsympathetic reception of the Idealist style of his philosophy by his contemporaries. Here is another possible explanation. Oakeshott may be aware that it is much more difficult to get his conception of political philosophy thoroughly right than to provide a settled account of his general philosophy. As a result, though within the context of his early writings his general philosophy arose from an attempt to respond to the needs of his earlier political philosophy, it is the substance of *PAP* that first reached publication rather than that of *SPP*.

This, then, is the background of *EM* published in 1933. The continuities between this book and *PAP* cannot be more obvious. The claim that philosophy cannot provide moral guidance has by now been familiar enough.[24] The definition of philosophical experience as "experience without presupposition, reservation, arrest or modification" also conforms to Oakeshott's earlier conception of philosophy as the most concrete and comprehensive kind of knowledge.[25] Furthermore, in case a mode of experience attempts to make a statement and pretends to belong to another mode or philosophy, then the result is a logical fallacy of *ignoratio elenchi*.[26] This characterisation of the mutual irrelevance among modes of experience, and between philosophy and all other modes, is also consistent with what was said in *PAP*.

The important difference is that in *EM* there is no longer the apparent concern with political philosophy. To be sure, the modes of experience examined are the same as before, including the historical, scientific and practical kinds of thinking. However, here Oakeshott did not consider them as possible candidates for the concrete thinking about politics, but examined them generally as modes of experience for their own sake. This is explicitly

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[24] Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes*, 1.
[25] *Ibid*., 2.
[26] *Ibid*., 5.

confirmed by the assertion that the investigation of the relative abstractness of different forms of enquiry from the viewpoint of the absolute concreteness of philosophy, and the logical relationships among them, is the task of philosophy in general.[27]

As such, one may reasonably wonder where political philosophy fits into this conception of general philosophy in *EM*. It is straightforward that the philosophy of history, the philosophy of science, and the philosophy of practice belong properly to the business of general philosophy. Each of them sets out to excavate the necessary postulates of a certain form of enquiry; that is, to understand the concepts which must be presupposed in every judgment made in that kind of thinking. Since only philosophical experience need not presuppose these concepts and thus be limited by them, the presuppositions of other modes of experience can be recognised only from the philosophical perspective. By contrast, the object of analysis in a political philosophy does not seem to be a specific mode of experience. Indeed, as *PAP* has already made clear, it is a kind of subject matter which can be subjected to all other modes of enquiry, historical, scientific, or practical. In other words, whereas it is unproblematic to talk of the history of the Conservative Party in the twentieth century or the science of economics, to attempt something like a politics of democracy or a politics of free market simply does not make sense. Unlike history, science, and practice, politics is not a *sui generis* world of experience.[28] Consequently, if the task of philosophy is to understand the postulates of these worlds of experience, then it seems that there can be no such thing as a philosophy of politics.

It is unsurprising that this should be an implication of the general philosophy in *EM* since it exactly reflects the ultimate subsumption of political philosophy under general philosophy in *PAP* already mentioned above. In *EM*, Oakeshott first classified the historical, scientific, and practical modes of thinking as determinate arrests in experience. He then

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[27] *Ibid*., 4.
[28] See also W. H. Greenleaf, *Oakeshott's Philosophical Politics* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966), 75; Andrew Sullivan, *Intimations Pursued: The Voice of Practice in the Conversation of Michael Oakeshott* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2007), 133.

explored the question concerning whether there are indeterminate arrests as well. Two factors make ethics an indeterminate arrest in experience and thereby fall short of the experience of philosophy which is without any presupposition or limitation. The first one is that ethics has too often been confused with the enterprise of telling us "what we ought to do and to furnish us with a practical criterion of right action."[29] However, this enterprise properly belongs to the world of practical experience. For ethics to acquire a philosophical status, it has to eschew this undertaking and concentrate on questions about the meaning of the concepts such as "value," "good," "right," and "ought" which must be presupposed in every moral judgment.[30] Unfortunately, even if ethics can confine itself to the philosophical task of clarifying the postulates of our moral judgments, it is still doomed to be less satisfactory than philosophy. For, ethics is limited in its concern with a subset of presuppositions in practical experience alone, and thereby fails to deal with other aspects of the practical world, let alone all other modes of experience. As a consequence, "[a] complete ethics would fall short of the concrete totality of experience" which is the domain of philosophy in general.[31] It can be a concrete kind of thinking, but fails to be comprehensive. The logical status of ethics is thus caught between the various abstract modes of experience and the experience of philosophy; hence the nature of its arrest is called "indeterminate." Although the example used in this argument is ethics, Oakeshott added in a footnote that political philosophy is on a par with ethics in this matter.[32] It follows that political philosophy faces the same fate. Like ethics, it cannot be specifically concerned with our experience of political life only and remain truly philosophical at the same time.

This conception of the subject matter of general philosophy eventually becomes so general that it seems impossible for it to be specifically about anything. As a matter of elementary logic, to express a tautologous truth about everything is to say nothing particular

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[29] *Ibid*., 337.
[30] *Ibid*., 339-40.
[31] *Ibid*., 345.
[32] Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes*, 335n.

about anything. Consequently, Oakeshott's construal of philosophical experience invites much scholarly attention to the question concerning whether the scepticism in *EM* is no longer (or not merely) directed towards the abstract modes of experience, but (also) turned to the Absolute itself. For there is no longer anything which can be said about philosophical experience. It is also worth asking whether the lack of substantial conclusions about the Absolute means the abandonment of it, and whether this supposed abandonment constitutes a departure on Oakeshott's part from his Idealist predecessors.

In the vast array of secondary literature, it is a minority view to take what Oakeshott proclaims about the Absolute in *EM* literally. Paul Franco, for instance, maintains that "Oakeshott … is more Hegelian than Bradleian in this regard. Philosophy as experience without reservation or presupposition is ultimately identified with the absolute."[33] The positive reference to Hegel and the negative reference to Bradley imply that in Oakeshott's works philosophy does arrive at some substantial conclusions. As such, there is no question of Oakeshott's scepticism towards the Absolute or his departure from Idealism. By contrast, most interpreters reject the view that Oakeshott provides any particular conclusion in his general philosophy. As Robert Grant comments, "[e]xperience becomes superfluous, even effectively 'transcendent.' It is at best something whose existence is optionally to be deduced or extrapolated from the empirical, self-subsistent fact of modal relativity."[34]

Podoksik similarly thinks that Oakeshott's sketches about the nature of philosophy "falls short of a comprehensive treatment. No metaphysical doctrine, no table of categories, no thorough analysis of consciousness are found."[35] Nevertheless, he further argued that this is related to Oakeshott's underlying project of defending the plurality of modes of experience against the unity of philosophy itself; for "[t]he excursions into pure philosophy appear more as an introduction, a convenient platform to explore the variety of worldviews,

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[33] Paul Franco, *The Political Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 20.
[34] Robert Grant, *Oakeshott* (London: Claridge, 1990), 42.
[35] Podoksik, *In Defence of Modernity*, 38.

and not as an independent philosophical statement."[36] Consequently, the discontinuity between Oakeshott's early and late writings on philosophy appeared as early as in *EM* where he parted company with his Idealist predecessors.[37]

To make matters more complicated, in the majority camp there is a large group of commentators who maintain that, like most philosophers in British Idealism, Oakeshott's philosophy as experience without presupposition is from beginning to end merely a criterion of concreteness by which other modes of experience is examined. For example, W. H. Greenleaf argues that "[p]hilosophy is not … the construction of a complete system of knowledge on the architectural analogy. It is more like a methodology or way of thinking … it makes no positive contribution to knowledge itself, being content with the examination of what already exists in experience."[38] Moreover, it is added that Oakeshott does not claim that such a criterion is ever actually satisfied by arriving at a set of infallible conclusions in philosophy. In Greenleaf's words, "[i]t is not … that this absolute coherence of concrete ideas is ever actually accomplished (though it must be the criterion of whatever is done)."[39] As a result, as David Boucher argues, the lack of substantial conclusions about the Absolute does not mean that Oakeshott suddenly turned sceptical towards the claim of philosophy to reach knowledge that is universal and certain. Rather, the scepticism in the sense of relentless investigation is always present in Oakeshott's conception of philosophy as a critical activity, with absolute coherence as its aim rather than its already proven accomplishment. Therefore, even if he does not reach any definite conclusions in his general philosophy, Oakeshott cannot be adequately said to have abandoned the Absolute or the school of Idealism from *EM* onwards.[40] Finally, there are those like Steven Gerencser who does not make a final

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[36] *Ibid*.
[37] *Ibid*, 45.
[38] Greenleaf, *Oakeshott's Philosophical Politics*, 13.
[39] *Ibid*., 15. See also J. L. Auspitz, "Individuality, Civility, and Theory: The Philosophical Imagination of Michael Oakeshott," *Political Theory* 4, no.3 (August 1976): 267; Terry Nardin, *The Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 5; Kenneth B. McIntyre, *The Limits of Political Theory* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2004), 14-17.
[40] David Boucher, "Oakeshott in the Context of British Idealism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Oakeshott*, ed. Efraim Podoksik (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 265-68. For more details, see Boucher, "The Victim of Thought: The Idealist Inheritance," in *A Companion to Michael Oakeshott*, ed. Paul Franco and

judgment on this matter, but simply observes that "[a]t times Oakeshott writes as if philosophy can and does achieve this concrete experience, at others as if it were its exclusive goal."[41]

What are we to make of this mess of controversies? First, the question concerning the extent to which Oakeshott moved away from Idealist principles from *EM* to his late philosophical writings is one that need not detain us any further. For one thing, like the question about the degree to which Oakeshott's political opinions could be said to be conservative, the answer depends more upon what we regard as the essential characteristics of Idealism or conservatism than on our understanding of the position Oakeshott in effect holds in his writings. For another, how far Oakeshott remained generally an Idealist is less relevant to our interpretative task in this thesis than his specific attitudes towards the Absolute.

This brings us to the second point, concerning whether the lack of substantial conclusions about the Absolute means its abandonment, and whether there really is such an absence of philosophical conclusions in the first place. I think that the distinction between philosophy as an incessant critical activity (or a criterion of the absolute coherence of ideas) and philosophy as a set of conclusions (or a body of concrete knowledge arrived at in accordance with its own criterion) is a distinction without difference. It is true that already in *PAP* philosophy is regarded more as a kind of thinking than a form of knowledge.[42] Nevertheless, in that context the aim is to discover the distinctive features of philosophical thinking so that the question of "What is the philosophical thinking about politics?" can be satisfactorily answered. This aim is achieved in part by illustrating the properties of other kinds of thinking, and pointing out where they fall short of being concrete. Thus, the differences among various kinds of thinking naturally become the subject matter of Oakeshott's general philosophy. The essential characteristics of philosophy, and the

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Leslie Marsh (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 58-64.

[41] Steven Gerencser, *The Skeptic's Oakeshott* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 26.

[42] Oakeshott, *Philosophical Approach to Politics*, 148.

characterisation of the postulates presupposed by the historical, scientific, and practical modes of experience, are exactly the substantive conclusions reached in his general philosophy.

In *EM* the situation is different because the context of providing a basis for an adequate conception of political philosophy in *PAP* is absent. However, it is not difficult to see that the subject matter of general philosophy is still the same. Concerning the historical mode of experience, for example, Oakeshott argued that only from the philosophical viewpoint, namely from without the historical mode itself, can we ascertain the presuppositions of every judgement made in that mode of experience.[43] If one insists that the conclusions thus reached from the perspective of philosophy are not philosophical knowledge, then there is nothing further to be said. Similarly, the philosophical kind of thinking itself is also subjected to an examination by philosophy in order to figure out its logical features, as we have already seen in Oakeshott's 1925 essay on "the Relations of Philosophy, Poetry and Reality." If one persists in arguing that this exercise of philosophical thinking about philosophy itself does not yield any philosophical conclusions, this response arouses the suspicion that here we are dealing with words rather than with the real thing. In short, whenever there is philosophical, concrete thinking, the conclusions it reaches must satisfy its criterion of absolute coherence; otherwise it is merely a kind of pseudo-philosophical thinking in the very beginning.

Therefore, in the third place, the real issue that matters to our interpretation is whether in *EM* Oakeshott did abandon philosophical experience or the Absolute. We have discussed the dilution of holism and the rejection of dialecticism in the case of *PAP*. With regard to *EM*, these topics have already attracted many scholarly comments. Franco, for instance, recognises that Oakeshott does not follow R. G. Collingwood's footsteps in the hierarchical arrangement of various forms of experience in an order of increasing coherence and concreteness. It does not interest Oakeshott to show how each mode of experience arises

[43] Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes*, 86-88.

from reconciling the self-contradiction involved in the previous one.[44] Franco also notes that the modes of experience themselves are neither necessary nor contributory to the concrete knowledge in philosophy.[45] More sharply, asks Podoksik, if there is no hierarchy among different modes and, unlike Bradley's system, these modes are not essential to the totality of experience, then why should Oakeshott take the trouble of considering these modes of experience if a shortcut to philosophical knowledge is made available by the dilution and rejection of holism and dialecticism?[46] Moreover, in his updated account, Franco also asks rhetorically: "[t]he 'main business' of philosophy is precisely to carry out this critical task of rejection [of the various modes' claim to concrete knowledge] and thus clear the way for … what?"[47] The implied answer is that in the course of Oakeshott's philosophical investigation concrete experience disappears with its importance giving place to those abstract modes instead. To support this interpretation, Podoksik suggests that this departure from the Absolute is illustrated by the pattern of Oakeshott's subsequent philosophical writings:

> After the publication of *Experience and Its Modes* two different paths were open to Oakeshott: the philosophical pursuit of the totality of experience, or an exploration of different abstract modes. In the beginning, Oakeshott tended to choose the former. In a long essay 'The Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence' (1938), and in two drafts about the philosophy of politics written during the thirties and forties, he tried to reflect on the character of the philosophy of law and politics from the standpoint of concrete experience. He diverged somewhat from his radical statement in *Experience and Its Modes*, that an attempt to elucidate ethics or politics from the philosophical point of view would lead to the creation of a pseudo-mode. Yet it was still an explicit attempt to

[44] Franco, *Political Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott*, 20.
[45] Franco, *Michael Oakeshott: An Introduction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 44-45.
[46] Podoksik, *In Defence of Modernity*, 41.
[47] Franco, *Michael Oakeshott*, 43-44.

analyse these different aspects of reality from the philosophical point of view. Later, however, Oakeshott abandoned these attempts.[48]

This, however, gets all the patterns of Oakeshott's thinking wrong. As we noted earlier in relation to *PAP*, the dilution and rejection of holism and dialecticism does not make the discussions about those abstract kinds of thinking about politics superfluous. On the contrary, because the underlying motivation of Oakeshott's general philosophy is to reserve a place for the philosophy of politics from the competing claims made by other modes of enquiry into politics, it is necessary to demonstrate that all the other kinds of thinking fall short of achieving the concrete knowledge which belongs to philosophy's privileged occupation. It is due to the failure to understand *EM* against this context of Oakeshott's earlier political philosophy, the failure to see that his general philosophy arises out of his profound concerns in political philosophy, that the aforementioned interpreters misunderstand his motivation for investigating the various modes of experience which are logically speaking unnecessary after the holism is diluted and dialecticism rejected in his general philosophy.

Furthermore, no matter what is said about the significance Oakeshott attributed to the Absolute, insofar as these modes of experience are still regarded as abstract, incomplete, partial and not totally satisfactory in the logical sense, then he had not abandoned the Absolute by the time of writing *EM*. Its abandonment happened quite later, after he had revised his earlier conception of political philosophy during the late 1930s and 1940s. In other words, changes in Oakeshott's general philosophy in the 1950s again reflect the renewed demands made by his updated account of what a political philosophy should be. This is also a better explanation for the divergencies between these later writings on political philosophy and *EM*. The next chapter will give more discussion about this theme by considering Oakeshott's late general philosophy. In the next section, we examine the

[48] Podoksik, *In Defence of Modernity*, 43-44.

practical messages of Oakeshott's early general philosophy, not, as in this section, in the context of his earlier political philosophy, but in his own contemporary ideological contexts.

III. General Philosophy in Its Ideological Contexts

In the previous chapter we noted that, despite his disclaimers, Oakeshott's early political philosophy does provide us with a normative criterion by which we can measure the extent to which actual social institutions approximate to their corresponding concrete concepts in philosophy. To recapitulate by the example of government: if the actions of a specific government violate its own essential nature, it thereby falls short of the philosophical idea of government and is accordingly less satisfactory than it could have been in our experience of political life. The normative nature of this judgement is not qualified even if it is beyond the concern of philosophy to determine the direction towards which an improvement should be sought in the current government under criticism. This, as Oakeshott would say, is located within the territory of practical reason.

A similar pattern of prescriptive implications is also present in Oakeshott's early general philosophy about the various modes of enquiry. Take the philosophy of history as an instance. Before embarking on the discussion of the essential character of historical statements, Oakeshott unequivocally declared that what follows does not offer any advice as to how history should be written.[49] What does this declaration mean? The only valid critique of the historical mode of enquiry which philosophy can provide is to discover the necessary presuppositions of all historical judgments and find them limiting and partial compared to the all-encompassing and complete experience of philosophy. Besides, it is not the business of philosophy to make or revise particular historical judgments about, for example, how the Holy Roman Empire came into existence and what its fortunes were in the following

[49] Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes*, 88.

centuries. Nevertheless, if philosophy claims that a particular statement, say, of practical history, is in fact not a historical statement at all because it defies the postulates of the historical mode of experience, then undeniably philosophy does have universal implications about the manner in which all genuinely historical statements should and should not be made.[50] The same can be said about science[51] and all other modes of experience including practice.

Consequently, Oakeshott's general philosophy possesses more potential to exercise pervasive judgements about practical life than his political philosophy does. If his political philosophy is suspected of issuing prescriptive judgments, they are at most specific; they will at most claim that a particular government is not so much government as it is something else. In addition, short of providing immediate ends or means to be carried out in political practice, this suspicion is harmless. By contrast, if Oakeshott's general philosophy betrays signs of prescribing how judgments in, say, practical experience, should be made, then the ideological effects are potentially very far-reaching. For a wide variety of current moral, religious, and political arguments will be excluded as confused and self-defeating. As one reviewer of *EM* commented, "it is a rhetorician, not a philosopher," who could write that the historical element of Christianity is a practical past rather than genuine history, and that religion as the highest form of practical life, unlike philosophy, has no claim to ultimate truth and reality.[52]

This difference between general philosophy and political philosophy explains very well the ideological impressions left by most of Oakeshott's essays written immediately after the Second World War. However, this issue must be postponed until Chapter 5 because at this stage of Oakeshott's general philosophy the place of his critique of rationalism was still unclear. To be sure, as early as in 1932, a year before the publication of *EM*, Oakeshott

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[50] This point has been widely acknowledged in secondary literature. For an example, see Podoksik, *In Defence of Modernity*, 96.
[51] *Ibid*., 71.
[52] T. E. Jessop, review of *Experience and its Modes*, by Michael Oakeshott, *Philosophy* 9, no. 35 (July 1934): 359.

published "The New Bentham" in *Scrutiny*, which betrays a tinge of sarcasm about the rationalist genius for "*making* life and the business of life rational rather than for *seeing* the reason for it, for inculcating precise order, no matter at what expense, rather than for apprehending the existence of a subtle order in what appears to be chaotic."[53] This anticipated the main theme to be elaborated in the post-war essay "On Rational Conduct." Yet one may search vainly for any treatment of this or other related topics in *EM*. Presumably, rationalism in politics is a perverted form of practical reasoning. The nearest Oakeshott came to deal with this is his discussions about the intrusion of science and history into the world of practice,[54] which parallels the equally fallacious invasion into science and history by the other two modes of experience in each case. However, as Chapter 5 will explain, these are still different from the critique of rationalism in politics because rationalism in politics is not necessarily formulated in scientific or historical terms but at times in (pseudo-)philosophical terms instead; nor is it a distinct mode of experience even though it may be apparently couched in terms of other modes of experience than practice.

On the other hand, *EM* and some of his other writings around this period had already disclosed its practical relevance if they are put in the context of his contemporary intellectual climate. I am not referring to the question concerning the task left to philosophy itself in an age when the nascent natural and social sciences claimed their territory from their philosophical coloniser, which Franco regards as the motivational background of Oakeshott's early general philosophy.[55] Neither am I talking about the defence of radical plurality in modernity in central European debates, on the basis of which Podoksik argues that Oakeshott is actually a German philosopher.[56] These academic contexts are important in themselves, but not closely relevant to our concern in this thesis. Nor, again, do I have in

[53] Oakeshott, "The New Bentham," review of *Bentham's Comments on the Commentaries*, edited by C. W. Everett, *The Education of Jeremy Bentham*, by C. W. Everett, and *Bentham's Theory of Legislation*, by C. K. Ogden, in *Rationalism in Politics*, 139. First published in *Scrutiny* 1 (1932): 114-31.
[54] Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes*, 311-16.
[55] Franco, *Political Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott*, 14.
[56] Podoksik, *In Defence of Modernity*, 19.

mind the way Oakeshott applied conclusions in his early political philosophy to the characterisation of the philosopher's role in society, which we discussed in the previous chapter. For his general philosophy is about the various modes of experience, not about the whole of social life or the State. What's worse, if "instead of a gospel, the most philosophy can offer us (in respect of practical life) is an escape,"[57] then it is difficult to see how such a philosophy can play any role in the recreation of the values of society or in raising the society's consciousness of itself.

The relevant context here can be identified from some of Oakeshott's early book reviews. For instance, in 1926, he said that there are some things which can be mechanically described, but that does not mean they can be defined in terms of mechanism.[58] Underlying this view is the distinction, in his general philosophy, between the mode of scientific experience and concrete experience itself. As it should now be understandable, this statement implies an interference with what scientists should and should not say. It is of no use to argue that Oakeshott would certainly prefer to explain that he was merely characterising the form of scientific speech regardless of what the scientists themselves think about their own undertaking. As Maurice Cowling points out, contrary to the appearance of defending scientific experience's own credentials, Oakeshott's writings on science are meant to liberate other modes of experience from its increasing intrusion and domination.[59]

Similarly, in 1927, Oakeshott asserted in a published pamphlet that religion is essentially practical in nature because it is the completion of the moral life.[60] With the help of hindsight, we know that this is an attempt to locate the logical status of religion in the world of practical experience. But, as clarified by several Oakeshott scholars more recently,

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[57] Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes*, 3.

[58] Oakeshott, review of *Science, Religion, and Reality*, edited by Joseph Needham, in *The Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence: Essays and Reviews, 1926-51*, ed. Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2007), 38. First published in *Journal of Theological Studies* 27, no.107 (April 1926): 317-19.

[59] Maurice Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 261.

[60] Oakeshott, *Religion and the Moral Life*, in Timothy Fuller, *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, 44-45. First published 1927 by Bowes & Bowes.

it is Oakeshott's early interests in theological debates that motivate his subsequent *EM*. Ian Tregenza, for example, illustrates how, before receiving any systematic treatment, the modal separatism had already been at work in Oakeshott's attempt to dissociate the historical element from modern Christianity in his earliest religious writings.[61] Corey Abel also argues that Oakeshott's logical separation of the various modes of experience is actually the basis of the practical defence of his own theological position.[62] Furthermore, as Andrew Sullivan contends, already in Oakeshott's early writings on religion we can find implicit clues anticipating his later criticism of rationalism in politics.[63] All of this indicates that, in terms of Oakeshott's contemporary ideological contexts, his general philosophy exerts a much more practical influence than his political philosophy does. In contrast, before he reconceived the nature of his political philosophy, its most relevant context had been the whole history of political philosophy rather than the more parochial concern with the present intellectual fashion.

Writing in 1980, Cowling discerned the practical context of Oakeshott's general philosophy more clearly than any other commentator:

> Oakeshott began to write *Experience and Its Modes* in 1925 at a point at which there had been extensive proliferation of areas of academic study and of undergraduate examinations-subjects in Cambridge during the previous fifty years. In discussing the status of subjects that were being taught, *Experience and Its Modes* provided a felicitous conjunction of moment and man. It was written from inside a new subject. Its combination of explicit philosophy and polemical enmity made it a characteristic manifestation of the climate in which it was conceived.[64]

[61] Ian Tregenza, "Skepticism and Tradition: The Religious Imagination of Michael Oakeshott," in *The Meanings of Michael Oakeshott's Conservatism*, ed. Corey Abel (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010), 3.
[62] Corey Abel, "Oakeshott's Wise Defense: Christianity as a Civilization," in Corey Abel, *Meanings of Michael Oakeshott's Conservatism*, 19-20.
[63] Sullivan, *Intimations Pursued*, 188. See also Tregenza, "Skepticism and Tradition," 15; Abel, "Oakeshott's Wise Defense," 31.
[64] Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine*, 257.

And, enlarging the context even further:

> Separation of the modes of experience was the foundation of the book. It was important not just because it had special reference to errors in England in the present. These errors were explained in Oakeshott's articles between 1925 and 1933, in *Experience and Its Modes* itself, and in many of his subsequent writings. It was not until the middle fifties—and in a sense not even then—that Oakeshott outgrew the need to emphasize his rejection of that combination of naturalism, positivism, rationalism and liberalism of which *Experience and Its Modes* provided a more systematic criticism than is to be found anywhere else among the non-Marxists of the generation to which he belonged.[65]

As we will see in Chapter 5, in the post-war essays Oakeshott shifted attention from his modal separatism to the critique of rationalism in politics. This transition is more closely connected with his perception of the difference between the new intellectual context of the post-war era and the old one of the inter-war years, rather than a theoretical development internal to his general philosophy. In addition, like his early works, this practical impulse in Oakeshott's late general philosophy precedes his more academic attempt to satisfy the theoretical demands of his updated political philosophy via a renewal of his early general philosophy. As such, the pattern of development in Oakeshott's writings further reinforces his place in the history of British political ideologies besides his more widely acknowledged status in the history of political and general philosophy.

IV. Conclusion

[65] *Ibid*., 257-58.

This chapter has emphasised the asymmetry between Oakeshott's early political philosophy and his early general philosophy. In his political philosophy the subject matter is the whole array of social institutions, and the necessity of investigating all of them is explained by their holistic nature and the dialectical progression between them. By contrast, his general philosophy deals with the various modes of experience instead, with their associated holism qualified and dialecticism rejected. The attempted combination of this general philosophy with his earlier political philosophy in *PAP* leads to divergent developments in Oakeshott's subsequent writings. In *EM*, his general philosophy acquired a life of its own and subsumes political philosophy under its scope. Consequently, political philosophy, to become genuinely philosophical, can no longer be political but purely logical. However, Oakeshott's general philosophy did not so much outgrow the context of his earlier political philosophy, as end up being no more than a temporary offshoot from it. As the next chapter will show, when he reconceived the nature of his political philosophy, he highlighted again the connection between political philosophy and our practical experience of politics. His general philosophy at this stage paradoxically contributes to its own subsequent revision in light of the new demands of the resuscitated possibility of a political philosophy which is both philosophical and political. The qualification of the holism about modes of experience makes it possible to single out practical experience as the beginning from which the philosophical investigation of politics moves, though the specific reason for this choice was yet to be clarified. Similarly, the rejection of dialecticism about modes of experience was qualified by considering practical life to be the world of experience in which philosophical truth is already latent, though what is latent was still taken more as something to be superseded than preserved.

This consequence has significant implications for our analysis of *EM*. By placing its origins in the context of Oakeshott's earlier conception of political philosophy, we can understand why, despite having qualified the holism and rejected the dialecticism in his general philosophy, he has to take the trouble of examining the various modes of experience

rather than simply taking a shortcut to the concrete world of philosophical experience. This, in turn, refutes the interpretation which regards *EM* as the point of departure from which Oakeshott abandoned the Absolute in favour of the radical plurality of modes of experience. As we will see in the next chapter, similar to the patterns of development in Oakeshott's early writings, this abandonment arose later first as an adjustment necessitated by the new emphasis on the connection between political philosophy and our experience of political life, before being assimilated back to his late general philosophy.

This chapter has also demonstrated that, apart from the theoretical context of his earlier political philosophy, Oakeshott's early general philosophy must be understood in the context of its contemporary intellectual debates. As Chapter 5 will illustrate, Oakeshott's post-war essays on rationalism in politics primarily reflect his sensitiveness to the changing political milieu which differed from that of the inter-war years. They are only secondarily an internal theoretical development within his earlier general philosophy. This motivation of practical engagement had long been lurking behind Oakeshott's early general philosophy before it received a more systematic formulation in *EM*. In contrast, as the next chapter will demonstrate, even after Oakeshott's late political philosophy strengthened its connection with our experience of political life, and even in those post-war essays which are more overtly concerned with the British tradition of politics, the relevant context of his political philosophy had always been more strictly philosophical than ideological.

Chapter 4: Mature Political Philosophy, 1938-83

I. Introduction

Oakeshott's early general philosophy sharpened the philosophical character of his early political philosophy, at the expense of severing its connection with politics and obliterating its difference from philosophy in general. However, his general philosophy soon acquired a life of its own in *Experience and Its Modes* and left the needs of his political philosophy behind. On the other hand, his conception of political philosophy had not been thoroughly qualified by the hyperbolic claim of his general philosophy to subsume it. Rather, several passages in *The Philosophical Approach to Politics* disclose that the possibility was still left open of making closer the connection between political philosophy and political life. This can be done through reviving the holism and dialecticism about modes of experience rejected in his early general philosophy.

Against this background, this chapter considers Oakeshott's subsequent revision of his earlier conception about the nature of political philosophy. We will examine in chronological order "The Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence" (1938), "The Concept of a Philosophy of Politics" (1946), and "Political Philosophy" (1950). The aim is to show how the rise and fall of holism and dialecticism reflect Oakeshott's continual attempts to rescue his political philosophy's relevance to political activity. Within this context, I argue that his subsequent "political" essays in the mid-1950s are not primarily ideological polemics, but initial preparations for his later construction of political philosophy.

Oakeshott's attempts at a new conception of political philosophy increasingly narrowed the definition of the "political" and limited the scope of political philosophy's subject matter. This is reflected in the "political" essays by the shift of focus from the State or the social whole to the government, and specifically its office and engagement rather than its constitution. This delimitation culminates in the abandonment of the State in *On Human*

Conduct. Understanding the reason underlying this move will render inadequate those interpretations which exaggerate the extent to which Oakeshott departed from his early Idealist positions in political philosophy, and thus regard his late political philosophy as a defence of liberalism. I shall demonstrate that the conclusions of his early political philosophy are preserved in new formulations in his late political philosophy. Evidences include the logical identification of the individual with the State, the existence of the end of the State, and the relationship between law and morality.

This paves the way for my interpretation of the way Oakeshott's political philosophy is relevant to practical life. His affinity to the moral life of individuality is not expressed through his theoretical analysis of civil association. Rather, it is conveyed primarily in his deliberate decision to analyse civil association alone, to leave enterprise association as it is, and to resist the temptation to reconcile their tensions or supersede them by another higher, more concrete concept of the State. The bipolar scheme of civil and enterprise associations does not go beyond the mixture of *societas* and *universitas* in actual states of modern Europe, but in the end faithfully reflect its ambivalences in purified forms. Consequently, the connection between political philosophy and our experience of political activity becomes still closer than before, in a way already presented in "The Claims of Politics."

II. Changing Conceptions of Political Philosophy

1. "The Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence"

It is customary among interpreters to understand Oakeshott's political philosophy as a reflection of his general philosophy. In approaching Oakeshott's early works as a whole, for example, W. H. Greenleaf comments that "Oakeshott's political ideas are very definitely the reflection of a philosophical standpoint, the outcome of a coherent attitude to the world of

knowledge and experience as a whole."[1] Similarly, Steven Gerencser understands the changes in Oakeshott's political philosophy as resulting from the rejection of absolute idealism in his general philosophy.[2] Efraim Podoksik argues further that Oakeshott had already given up holism and teleology in his early general philosophy before revising his political philosophy accordingly in subsequent writings.[3] It is a logical fact that a conception of the nature of political philosophy has to be grounded on a conception of the nature of philosophy in general. Nevertheless, as the previous two chapters have illustrated, it is more adequate to regard Oakeshott's early general philosophy as something tailor-made for his earlier political philosophy, rather than the other way around. This section aims to demonstrate that this is also the case concerning the alterations Oakeshott made to his late political philosophy and subsequently his late general philosophy.

Not long after the publication of *EM*, Oakeshott began to revisit his earlier conception of political philosophy. The first notable attempt was "The Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence." Published in 1938, this article closely resembles *PAP* both in structure and content. The former half focuses on the historical, scientific, and practical approaches to the study of law and refutes their philosophical pretensions.[4] The latter part then gives an exposition of the characteristics peculiar to philosophical jurisprudence, where Oakeshott's earlier general philosophy is still clearly visible. He declared philosophical thought to be "knowledge without reservation or presupposition," and its aim "to define and establish concepts so fully and so completely that nothing remains to be added."[5] Its pursuit is "governed by a radical scepticism with regard to every stopping place … every attempt to limit the enquiry,"[6] so that the task of philosophical explanation is "the relation of its subject

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[1] W. H. Greenleaf, *Oakeshott's Philosophical Politics* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966), 2.
[2] Steven Gerencser, *The Skeptic's Oakeshott* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 65.
[3] Efraim Podoksik, "Without Purpose or Unity: Moral and Social Life in the Thought of Michael Oakeshott," in *The Moral, Social and Political Philosophy of the British Idealists*, ed. William Sweet (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2009), 253.
[4] Michael Oakeshott, "The Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence," in *The Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence: Essays and Reviews, 1926-51*, ed. Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2007), 154-70. First published in *Politica* 3 (1938): 203-22, 345-60.
[5] *Ibid*., 170.
[6] *Ibid*., 172.

to … the totality of experience because this alone is a self-complete context, a context which criticism cannot turn into a text itself requiring a context."[7] Therefore, in terms of subject matter and the sceptical impulse, the conception of general philosophy here is apparently continuous to Oakeshott's earlier writings.

However, when examined more closely, there are several places which represent the beginning of Oakeshott's gradual movement away from the position held in *PAP* and *EM*. In particular, there is a new attempt to reflect on the nature of political philosophy as distinct from general philosophy. In his earlier writings political philosophy had already been subsumed under general philosophy in the sense that it cannot confine its concern to the State and other associated political concepts if it is to be thoroughly philosophical. Consequently, there was no longer any motivation to investigate the nature of political philosophy save as a mere illustration of the characteristics of philosophy in general. Nevertheless, after CPJ Oakeshott increasingly narrowed the scope of subject matter in his political philosophy. The focus on law and civil society in this article reflects the deliberate avoidance of the term "political," which he had been using interchangeably with "social," but which he now sharply distinguished from it. Certainly, he continued to talk loosely about "political" philosophy or the philosophy of "politics" in the next few decades; yet what this term means became ever more precise and limited, before political philosophy finally gave its name and place to civil philosophy in *OHC*.[8] If we take Oakeshott's position in *PAP* and *EM* as already firmly established, then his subsequent changing conceptions of the "political" cannot be properly understood. Consequently, we should regard the writings from CPJ onwards as his repeated attempt to revive the possibility of a political philosophy which is both political and philosophical at the same time, and distinct from philosophy in general. This will enable us to see that the later modifications of his general philosophy were

[7] *Ibid*., 175.
[8] Oakeshott, "The Vocabulary of a Modern European State," in *The Vocabulary of a Modern European State: Essays and Reviews, 1952-88*, ed. Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2008), 263. First published in *Political Studies* 23, no.107 (1975): 319-41, 409-14.

implicitly entailed by the changes he had made to political philosophy.

In CPJ, apart from disparaging the philosophical pretensions of the various approaches to jurisprudence, Oakeshott also examined several accounts of the philosophical nature of political philosophy. Considering the view that the conclusions in political philosophy are a special instance of those in ethics, metaphysics, or philosophy in general which are established beforehand, Oakeshott argued that in this conception "philosophical jurisprudence is philosophical only in a derivative sense, and if it became itself genuinely philosophical it would defeat its own ends, it would return into the general philosophical theory of which it was an illustration and cease to have any evident connection with law."[9] This argument not only reflects his aim to justify political philosophy as a *sui generis* discipline rather than something deducible from general philosophy. It also brings out the difficult dilemma, ignored in his early general philosophy, between a political philosophy remaining genuinely philosophical but irrelevant to politics, and preserving the relevance to its specific subject matter but no longer truly philosophical. That Oakeshott wanted to grasp both horns of this dilemma is shown by his repudiation of another account which construed philosophical jurisprudence as an *a priori* enterprise. He denied that there is any kind of knowledge which is purely *a priori* or does not begin from some experience already understood, no matter how partially and abstractly.[10] The progression between different modes of enquiry implied in this argument again challenges the qualification of holism and the rejection of dialecticism in his early general philosophy. In *PAP*, for example, "[p]hilosophy … needs for its pursuit neither profound knowledge of human nature nor the superficial acquaintance with things in general which is called 'knowledge of the world.'[11] CPJ can thus be regarded as a work of self-critique which characterises most of Oakeshott's writings, especially those unpublished during his life-time.

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[9] Oakeshott, "Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence," 165.
[10] *Ibid*., 166.
[11] Oakeshott, *The Philosophical Approach to Politics*, in *Early Political Writings, 1925-30*, ed. Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010), 226.

Making the connection closer between political philosophy and the pre-philosophical understanding of political life through the progression from the latter to the former, does not mean that political philosophy becomes itself a practical endeavour. Oakeshott remained committed to the belief that political philosophy should not be put in service of current affairs. Distinguishing theory of law from theory of legislation, he maintained as before that "to determine the goodness and badness of a law involves a moral judgment which the philosopher as such is in no better position to give than any other member of society."[12] Likewise, the study of law by the sociology of knowledge is deemed unphilosophical; for the criterion of sociological judgment turns out to be the extent to which legal institutions serve their social functions in the wider spatiotemporal context, which lies outside the appropriate concern of philosophy. More generally, Oakeshott repeated, the conclusions of any other mode of enquiry should not be taken as they are and accepted as philosophical. In his own words, "the notion that it is the business of philosophy to accept the conclusions of special enquiries—history, jurisprudence, physics, etc.—and relate them, unchanged, to 'general philosophical principles'" unjustly plays down the critical role of philosophy.[13] These comments reaffirmed the essential importance of the philosophical transformation of and movement away from those non-philosophical experiences.

The emphasis on this logical progression is the main contribution of CPJ to Oakeshott's programme of revising his earlier conception of political philosophy. When he talked about relating the subject matter of political philosophy to the totality of experience, he did not have in mind the attempt to understand political concepts in the comprehensive context of the State. Rather, he was referring to the procedure whereby "the concepts of science, or common-sense, or practical life are subjected to the revolutionary and dissolving criticism of being related to a universal context,"[14] such that the resulting "philosophical concept …

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[12] Oakeshott, "Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence," 167.
[13] *Ibid*., 168-69.
[14] *Ibid*., 170.

at once comprehends and supersedes the concept given to philosophical enquiry."[15] In Oakeshott's early general philosophy, the various modes of experience have nothing to contribute to philosophy. By contrast, when the connection between political philosophy and the experience of political life is strengthened, the modes provide as the starting point for investigation some truth, no matter how abstract or latent, which is later realised more fully in philosophy.

Moreover, although it is the task of philosophy to subvert the abstract concepts given to it, "it is incumbent upon the philosopher to show as fully as he can how his redefinition is connected with and arises out of the less comprehensive definition with which he began."[16] In other words, because of the strengthened connection with political life, these modes also become necessary stages in the acquisition of philosophical knowledge. In this regard Oakeshott even mentioned a hierarchy of different kinds of explanations, and attributes to philosophy "the authority inherent in its character to judge the relative completeness of all explanations and so make of all explanations a related whole or world."[17] Consequently, both the dialecticism and holism about modes of experience, once rejected or qualified in Oakeshott's early general philosophy, are now revived to cater to the new demands of his political philosophy.

This departure from his early general philosophy sometimes led Oakeshott to abandon talks about the various modes of experience altogether. In previous quotations, the several references to common sense and pre-philosophical experience are a case in point. They do not seem to have a place in the logical scheme of *EM*. Indeed, in the definition of philosophy in CPJ, Oakeshott expressly set aside history, science, and even practice, stating that it "begins with the concepts of ordinary, every-day knowledge; and it consists in an extended, detailed and complete exposition of those concepts, an exposition which is itself a

[15] *Ibid*., 171.
[16] *Ibid*., 173.
[17] *Ibid*., 176.

definition."[18] At this stage it was still unclear whether in Oakeshott's view only the pre-philosophical understanding of politics possessed by ordinary men is the basis for philosophy, or whether the starting point of philosophical investigation also includes the historical, scientific, or practical understanding of politics as well. Being the first step in the direction away from *EM*, the conclusions of CPJ were soon to be elucidated further and revised again. Later it was to became clear that the starting point of philosophy consists primarily in the common sense understanding of political life, with references to other modes of thinking about politics being no more than a flattering lip service paid to his early general philosophy. The holism about modes of experience is thus quickly qualified again. For it does not seem to be necessary to Oakeshott's political philosophy if the connection to be stressed is with ordinary knowledge only, rather than history, science, or practice. Similarly, the dialecticism about modes of experience, as we will also witness at the end of this section, will be significantly qualified when the reference to the totality of experience without presupposition is dropped in favour of an even closer connection between political philosophy and the experience of political life, from which political philosophy begins but which it no longer outrightly contradicts.

2. "The Concept of a Philosophy of Politics"

"The Concept of a Philosophy of Politics" bears a structurally similar title to "The Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence," but its date of composition is disputed among Oakeshott scholars. The editor of the volume of Oakeshott's unpublished writings where CPP is included, Timothy Fuller, judges that it was written around 1946. On the other hand, based on several pages of identical content it shares with CPJ, Gerencser argues that it was written in the 1930s.[19] Without further external evidence, the interpreter can only form his

[18] *Ibid*., 171.
[19] Gerencser, *The Skeptic's Oakeshott*, 68-69.

judgment by scrutinising the texts. If we focus more attention on the differences between these two pieces instead of their similarities, it is more plausible to judge that CPP was written after CPJ was published in 1938.

First, in CPJ there is merely the general reference to law and civil society. In contrast, in CPP the subject matter is much more precise and specified. This fits better with the pattern in which Oakeshott gradually narrowed the scope of concern in his political philosophy. In particular, in CPP Oakeshott regarded political philosophy as "a general explanation of the character of *political* life and activity from the standpoint of its purpose and end, as distinct from merely *social* life and activity."[20] We may recall that in his published writings Oakeshott did not distinguish between the "political" and the "social" until the 1939 article "The Claims of Politics." In that article the conclusions of his early political philosophy were translated into ordinary language without modification of content, so that the "political" activities and the corporate "social" life corresponds perfectly to the philosophical concept of government and the State respectively. By contrast, in CPP the distinction between the "political" and the "social" are meant to highlight a difference which CPJ avoided to make explicit by the general reference to law. Consequently, this comparison favours the case that CPP was written after 1939.

Secondly, in light of Oakeshott's early general philosophy, what was new in CPJ is the examination of a large number of pseudo-philosophical modes of enquiry into law. The refutation of the philosophical pretensions of historical, scientific, and practical jurisprudence had already been established in *EM*. Compared to CPJ, CPP does not mention any of the various autonomous modes of experience, and only those pseudo-philosophical approaches to politics are selected for discussion which more directly exemplify the dilemma between being genuinely philosophical and remaining connected to political life. The purpose of this shift of emphasis is explicitly expressed in Oakeshott's summary of the

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[20] Oakeshott, "The Concept of a Philosophy of Politics," in *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, ed. Timothy Fuller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 120; italics original.

defects common to the various pseudo-philosophical approaches to politics: "[i]t is a philosophy which, for more than one reason, is not philosophical, and one which, if it became genuinely philosophical would cease to have anything to do with politics."[21] As such, this difference from CPJ also matches better Oakeshott's movement away from his early general philosophy for the sake of the new demands in his late political philosophy.

However, it is insufficient to show that CPP was written after 1938. An upper limit is also required. As the next subsection will show, in another unpublished piece of writing entitled "Political Philosophy" (ca. 1949), Oakeshott made many significant alterations to his earlier conception of political philosophy in CPJ and CPP. If we take this into consideration as well, discount the years of the Second World War 1939-45 during which Oakeshott served in the army, and allow some time for these drastic changes of opinions to occur, then Fuller's judgment of 1946 is very reasonable.

Indeed, we can go even further. In CPP's discussion of three pseudo-philosophical approaches to politics, the second is characterised initially as a rationalisation of political life. At this time Oakeshott regarded it as a kind of explanatory enterprise and had not subjected it to his famous critique of rationalism in politics. He began to talk about the rationalisation of political life after he edited the anthology on *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe* in 1939, and did not examine their philosophical defects until he published "Rationalism in Politics" in 1947. Therefore, 1946 is perhaps the only remaining choice of a reasonable date of composition for CPP.

Getting the date of this article right is not only a scholarly point of interest, but also enables us to understand the motivation for the continuous changes Oakeshott made to his conception of political philosophy. First, the delineation of political philosophy's scope of subject matter gives us some clues to the fortunes of the holism and dialecticism about political concepts. In Oakeshott's own words, the purpose of singling out the political from

[21] *Ibid*., 126.

the social is "not to *separate* political life and activity from everything else in human experience and to treat them as if they were *sui generis* and belonged to a world of their own."[22] Rather, it is meant "to *distinguish* political life and activity within the totality of experience; and … to *relate* them to the totality so that they are seen in their place in the totality."[23] Obviously, the holism about political concepts is qualified in this new conception of political philosophy's subject matter. Whereas previously every social institution is under its scope of examination, here the social whole or the State appears merely as the contextual background against which the true subject matter of political philosophy, now distinguished from all other social activities, is to be understood. Thus, even if other fields of human activity still have a place in political philosophy, the focus has been shifted to a specific field called the "political," though what this term denotes must await further clarification in Oakeshott's subsequent writings.

The dialecticism about political concepts is more seriously weakened. In taking all other social institutions as a whole instead of examining them individually, it is no longer clear whether the political philosopher's task remains to be the progression from the less concrete concepts to the more concrete ones. Besides, after distinguishing political life from social life, it is harder to see how the principle of political life, called "sociality" in Oakeshott's early political writings, are already latent in the various forms of social life such that the political life is their logical consummation.

Secondly, that Oakeshott's criticism of the various pseudo-philosophical approaches to politics highlights their common difficulty of being both philosophical and related to politics at the same time, also offers some clues to the way the holism and dialecticism about modes of experience are watered down. The first pseudo-philosophical approach is the same as discussed in CPJ, where political philosophy is regarded as derivative from general philosophy. Oakeshott's criticism of it is also identical, except that in CPP politics is

[22] *Ibid*., 126-27; italics original.
[23] *Ibid*., 127; italics original.

substituted for law: “it would return into the general philosophical theory from which it was, in fact, derived, and cease to have any evident connection with political life and activity.”[24]

The second one is more noteworthy. In CPJ the pseudo-philosophical approach to law maintains that the conclusions reached in the historical, scientific, or practical thinking about law are themselves philosophical conclusions, or at least can serve as the data which philosophy must accept as they are. By contrast, the approach to politics criticised in CPP insists that the facts of political life to which political philosophy must remain loyal are our pre-theoretical understanding of politics. In particular, “by the ‘facts of political life’ is meant the character of political life as it is conceived by the ordinary, commonsense observer, the observer whose mind is yet unlocked by philosophical speculation.”[25] To be sure, Oakeshott’s criticism of approaches of this kind remains the same emphasis on the importance of the philosophical transformation of what is given in experience. Nevertheless, the difference between what is singled out as given has implications for the attempt to overcome the dilemma between being genuinely philosophical and being true to the facts of political life. In CPP it follows that that which political philosophy has to keep connected with is the common- sensical understanding of political experience, not any autonomous modes of enquiry into politics.

This point is indirectly confirmed by Oakeshott’s criticism of the third approach to politics, which is essentially our practical reasoning in political activity. In his own words, “philosophical theory does not, in practice, arise from discontent with the present organization of society, or dislike of the ends which a particular society seems to be setting for itself.[26] Therefore, when Oakeshott emphasises the importance of political philosophy being related to political life, it is not to be understood as a move which renders his conception of political philosophy any the more practical. It is the connection with our ordinary understanding of politics that political philosophy must establish or restore.

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[24] *Ibid*., 122.
[25] *Ibid*., 123.
[26] *Ibid*., 125.

It is useful to recall that granting a privileged status to the practical understanding of politics as the starting point of political philosophy requires an explanation if the holism and dialecticism about modes of experience had already been rejected in Oakeshott's general philosophy. The temporary revival of this holism and dialecticism in CPJ, in turn, was accompanied by an ambiguous but harmless definition concerning the kind of understanding which provides the starting point for political philosophy. It is harmless because, provided that all modes of explanation are made a related whole or a world, the philosopher will arrive at the philosophical understanding wherever he commences his investigation. Similarly, if the relative abstractness of each mode of experience can be specified and ordered in a hierarchy from the philosophical viewpoint, then the philosopher can know how to proceed from whichever mode, and the exact mode to which he is to proceed. Consequently, when the holism and dialecticism about modes of experience hold, it does not matter whether the starting point of political philosophy is located in any particular mode of experience. In contrast, CPP sets all these problems aside. There is no mention of the various modes of experience, let alone the holism which makes all of them a related whole. Accordingly, the point from which political philosophy departs is neither practical reasoning nor any other mode of experience, but simply pre-theoretical common sense about political life. Therefore, the dialecticism is remarkably watered down which supersedes the abstractions of one mode of experience after another without a definite direction or order, though the reference to the Absolute or the totality of experience still makes philosophy subversive of abstract modes of understanding.

Some early commentators on Oakeshott's works do not discern that this gradual transformation of his views about the nature of political philosophy has consequences for his general philosophy as well. Greenleaf, for instance, argues straightforwardly that Idealism in general, and Oakeshott's version in particular, "does not proceed *a priori*. A merely closed system of logically connected elements having no contact with or reference to empirical reality will not do at all, for it would be abstract. …. The system of ideas …

must be concrete, that is, take account of the facts of experience, none of which can be conjured away from the universe."[27] However, as we have seen earlier, it is precisely the overemphasis on the concrete whole that leads to the subsumption of political philosophy by general philosophy, hence severing the link between political philosophy and its specific subject matter, political life. Others are more sensitive to Oakeshott's implicit worries about the lack of connection with ordinary knowledge in his early works. Robert Grant, for example, points out that "[w]hat still needs to be explained, and not by reference to some transcendent reality or quasi-transcendent Absolute, but in its own, local terms, is the everyday, intermediate world of experience. … some such suspicion, while there from the start, seems increasingly to have come to the fore in Oakeshott's thinking …. He has not, however, ceased to be an Idealist; he has merely jettisoned the Absolute."[28] Unfortunately, how this concern about keeping philosophy related to common sense leads to changes in Oakeshott's conception of philosophy has not been correctly clarified in more recent interpretive efforts made by Oakeshott scholars.

In particular, as Paul Franco misleadingly claims, in Oakeshott's early works "[p]lace and time are irrelevant to philosophy."[29] However, this spatiotemporal irrelevance has nothing to do with Oakeshott's insistence that philosophy is independent of practical life. To see this point, consider contemporary political philosophy in the analytic tradition. Its method of research is strictly speaking independent of the spatiotemporal context, and its conclusions are mostly meant to be universally valid. Yet it is highly motivated by normative issues in practical politics and the potentiality of improving them through the application of those conclusions. By contrast, what Oakeshott strived to do in his renewed conceptions of political philosophy is to find a way in which political philosophy arises out of its particular social and political contexts, but nevertheless remains logically separated from practical reasoning in politics. It is therefore a mistake, as made by David Orsi, to think that the

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[27] Greenleaf, *Oakeshott's Philosophical Politics*, 8.
[28] Robert Grant, *Oakeshott* (London: Claridge, 1990), 27.
[29] Paul Franco, *Michael Oakeshott: An Introduction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 50.

ahistorical nature of Oakeshott's early philosophy prevents it from being practically tied to a specific space and time.[30]

On the other hand, though Franco correctly points out that Oakeshott "eventually abandoned the ahistorical view that time and place are completely irrelevant to political philosophy,"[31] it is no less confusing to think that political philosophy was made more practical after Oakeshott appointed the task of recreating the values of his society to the philosopher in "The Claims of Politics."[32] According to Oakeshott's view in that article, it is not the job of the political philosopher to come out of a retreat and apply his philosophical insights to the practical reasonings in political life; but to remain where he is, keep being true to his own profession, and maintain the self-consciousness of the society to which he belongs. Oakeshott's subsequent writings on the conceptions of political philosophy are precisely the attempts to show how it could be possible for political philosophy to arise from its spatiotemporal context, and simultaneously guard its genuinely philosophical nature against the pollution by the temptation to misunderstand and misapply it to practical politics.

It is useful to summarise our argument so far. CPJ's attempt to restore the connection between political philosophy and political life results in an overemphasis on the holism and dialecticism in general philosophy. The problem inherent in this overemphasis is passed over by the more general reference to law. CPP's main contribution is a more specified scope of the subject matter of political philosophy. Once the definition of the "political" is narrowed, the holism and dialecticism about political concepts is significantly weakened. In hindsight, the disappearance of the State or the social whole makes Oakeshott's political philosophy more closely linked with political experience, for the dialectical progression stops at the tensions between the ideal types of civil association and enterprise association which are in turn extrapolated from the political history of modern Europe. To explain this refusal to go

[30] Davide Orsi, *Michael Oakeshott's Political Philosophy of International Relations: Civil Association and International Society* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 29-34.
[31] Franco, *Michael Oakeshott*, 50.
[32] *Ibid*., 79-80.

further in the philosophical investigation requires a parallel modification of the holism and dialecticism in his general philosophy. In CPP, the importance of the various modes of experience is replaced by the common sense, ordinary understanding of politics in order to make even closer the connection between political philosophy and political experience. Nevertheless, there is still the reference to the Absolute or the totality of experience. This cannot do justice to the fact that the philosophical character of political philosophy now consists more in the movement away from pre-theoretical understanding about politics than in the arrival at a comprehensive context of the State. Therefore, the next step is to remove the Absolute in his general philosophy for the sake of the changes in his political philosophy brought about by the attempt to delimit the definition of "politics."

3. "Political Philosophy"

How these changes in political philosophy finally led Oakeshott to jettison the Absolute in his general philosophy can be observed in the unpublished piece entitled "Political Philosophy," which Fuller dates between 1946 and 1950. If we compare the content of this essay with Oakeshott's book reviews around this time, especially the metaphorical figure of ascending a tower,[33] it is reasonable to judge that this piece was written after he read J. D. Mabbott's *The State and the Citizen* and reviewed that book in 1949.[34] More importantly, taking into consideration the patterns of Oakeshott's writings in the late 1940s, it is evident that the role of PP is to take stock of his earlier attempts to revise his general philosophy for the sake of the new demands made in his new conception of political philosophy.

We have seen that Oakeshott's emphasis on the connection between political philosophy and our common sense understanding of political life became increasingly highlighted in CPJ and CPP. However, the tensions between this emphasis and the position

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[33] Oakeshott, "Political Philosophy," in Timothy Fuller, *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, 142.

[34] Oakeshott, "The State and the Citizen," review of *The State and the Citizen*, by J. D. Mabbott, in Luke O'Sullivan, *Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence*, 256. First published in *Mind* 58 (1949): 378-89.

he held in his earlier general philosophy had not been made explicit. In PP the purpose is unequivocally to rebut his earlier claim in general philosophy: in order to be thoroughly philosophical, political philosophy has to go beyond its confined attention to the State or the social whole, investigate all other questions of philosophy the answers to which it has to presuppose, and finally become submerged by philosophy in general. The following passage is an important evidence of this rebuttal that deserves a fuller quotation:

> The enterprise in philosophy is to spread one's sails to the reflective impulse; in political philosophy it is to do this starting from a mooring-place of political experience. But if this were all, the thread which attaches political philosophy to political activity would be tenuous and soon broken—indeed, it would be the avowed purpose of political philosophy to break it. And the thread once broken, and the mooring-place soon out of sight and out of mind, political philosophy on the high seas of reflection would be indistinguishable from philosophical enterprises emanating from other ports of origin—from religious, from scientific or from artistic experience. But this is not quite all that is to be said. If to break the thread that attaches it to its mooring, if to remain unencumbered by our allegiance to what was first perceived or to what was perceived at a lower level, is the first task of philosophical reflection, there is a second and not less significant task—to explore and to record that process of mediation by which the scene at one level passes into the scene at another and higher level. … Political philosophy, then, may be said to be the genuine, unhindered impulse of reflection, setting out from a political experience, and keeping faith with the original experience, not by continuous conformity to it, but by reason of an unbroken descent.[35]

It may be noticed that here in PP philosophy is no longer associated with the most concrete

[35] Oakeshott, "Political Philosophy," 153.

definition of things, the totality of experience, or the comprehensive context which cannot be turned into a text itself requiring yet another context to comprehend its meaning. In contrast, in CPJ and CPP references to a related whole or the universal context are fairly frequently made, with several pages devoted to explaining that philosophical concepts or definitions are characteristically new, categorical, affirmative and indicative.[36]

The new development of general philosophy in PP follows quite naturally from the new conception of political philosophy. We have seen that political philosophy is political not in virtue of being identified with a set of political conclusions or accepting them as they are, but in virtue of a connection with political experience from which it dialectically springs. Likewise, neither is political philosophy philosophical in virtue of being identified with a set of philosophical conclusions, but in virtue of the dialectical impulse to depart from whatever is temporarily arrived at and accepted. Therefore, the importance of keeping political philosophy connected with political experience eventually led Oakeshott to trim his earlier conception of general philosophy. In PP he made it clear that it is no longer profitable to take the philosophical nature of political philosophy as consisting in detecting "the permanent character of political activity," or recognizing "the activity in politics in its place on the map of the intelligible universe," or even determining the meaning of political experience in its context; these characterisations are replaced by the emphasis on philosophy as a relentless activity of dialectical understanding.[37] In the metaphor of ascending a tower, "[t]here is no top to this tower, or at least the philosopher has no means of knowing whether or not he has reached the top,"[38] so that "he is a philosopher not in respect to something he achieves at the end, but in respect of his predisposition towards the ascent."[39]

With the Absolute fading away, the specification of political philosophy' subject matter can only be preliminary and unstable, to be revised and superseded as the philosophical

[36] Oakeshott, "Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence," 172-74; Oakeshott, "Concept of a Philosophy of Politics," 129-31.
[37] Oakeshott, "Political Philosophy," 151.
[38] *Ibid*., 143.
[39] *Ibid*., 144.

investigation proceeds. "Politics," said Oakeshott casually, "are the means by which the institutional expression of approval and disapproval is adjusted to the gradual shift of judgment, and the means by which the integrity of the methods of satisfaction is preserved."[40] This is by far the most precise definition of the "political" Oakeshott had offered, and he was to refine it as he became increasingly versed in the political experience of modern Europe.

However, after the aim to relate political activity to the totality of experience gives place to the persistent dissatisfaction with whatever conclusions are temporarily reached, it is no longer clear whether the holism and dialecticism about political concepts still survive in this new conception of political philosophy, and if they do survive, to what extent. Judging from Oakeshott's review of Mabbott's book, it is safe to say that at this stage he still adhered to the conclusions in his early political philosophy: examples include the concept of the individual and the concept of the State leading to the same dialectical destination[41] and the philosophical identity between the individual's action and the State's action.[42] As we shall see later, as the State gradually recedes into inscrutable background in Oakeshott's late political philosophy, the holism and dialecticism do not so much disappear as become enshrined again in the ideas of civil and enterprise associations and their corresponding associates, the individual and the anti-individual; though, of course, this has moved far from the ambition to construct a political philosophy by attending to those institutions which are "of far greater importance in our social life, such as the family, the school, marriage, war, property and the rest."[43]

As to the holism and dialecticism about modes of experience, the metaphor of the tower provides clearer clues to Oakeshott's revised position.[44] The relative heights of different

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40 *Ibid*., 146.
41 Oakeshott, "The State and the Citizen," 256.
42 *Ibid*., 257.
43 Oakeshott, "The Cambridge School of Political Science," in *What Is History? and Other Essays*, ed. Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2004), 59-60.
44 Oakeshott, "Political Philosophy," 143.

kinds of enquiry are unimportant in distinguishing philosophy, whose unique feature is the peculiarly radical transformation of the view seen after ascending from the previous level of understanding. Therefore, the holistic task mentioned in CPJ of assigning varying degrees of concreteness to the various modes of experience and relating them as a whole, loses its point. Moreover, Oakeshott finally clarified that every kind of enquiry including philosophy itself begins from the ground floor of common sense, so that the dialectical procedures are present in every mode of enquiry. But philosophy is different not because the philosopher is "prepared to go on where the others are content to stop,"[45] not because, as in *EM*, he proceeds from any other modes of experience and goes beyond them till it can go no further. Rather, while every kind of enquiry begins from common sense, in philosophy what is identified in common sense is not merely preserved and made more intelligible, related, and wider in the next level, but also transformed into another thing in that level.

It is time to take stock of our argument in this section so far. The emphasis on the connection between political philosophy and political experience results in the abandonment of the Absolute as the defining hallmark of philosophical activity. This abandonment will in turn make political philosophy and political experience closer than before, especially through the emphasis on the preservation of political experience in the course of philosophical investigation. After all, if the Absolute can no longer serve as an intelligible conclusion which philosophical activity ultimately reaches, neither does it make sense to say that philosophy is a radical subversion of common sense or a thorough transformation of ordinary knowledge. Furthermore, if the Absolute is inscrutable, taking it as the aimed criterion instead of the final product makes no difference: either way the direction towards which philosophy moves has already become opaque. The next section will show that eventually Oakeshott did not live up to this qualified task he himself set to political philosophy. In *OHC*, the theoriser of politics occupies a different plane of understanding

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[45] *Ibid*.

than other approaches to understanding politics, but this plane does not seem to be higher or more transformative than other ones. Consequently, the theoretical exposition of the postulates of *civitas* is strictly speaking not a radical subversion of the character of civil association but a distillation thereof, which is likewise extrapolated from the *societas* in the political experience of modern Europe in the first place.

4. Political Philosophy before *On Human Conduct*

After PP, there are many apparently "political" essays paving the way for Oakeshott's late political philosophy in *OHC*. This subsection briefly considers the continuity between these writings, and argues that it is a mistake to excavate any evidence from these writings to illustrate Oakeshott's ideological position vis-à-vis the context of political history.

The first of such "political" essays was probably *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism*, judged by Fuller to be written in 1952.[46] This is a very reliable judgment. As the next chapter will show, beginning in 1947, Oakeshott's critique of rationalism in politics is logically completed by *Political Education* in 1952. This development in his general philosophy does not reflect the changes in his political philosophy which we have just examined. Rather, it is more an exploration of the themes implicit in *EM* than an amendment of the original position, which was not carried out until *The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind* in 1959. Similar to his earliest religious writings associated with his general philosophy, the motivation for this exploration is not primarily philosophical, but arises from the need of a philosophical underpinning for Oakeshott's political polemic against current ideological developments. Between 1952 and 1958, he was preoccupied with constructing a political philosophy in accordance with his revised account of the nature of this academic discipline. Only after this period did the need to revise his general philosophy

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[46] Timothy Fuller, introduction to *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), ix.

according to the demands of his renewed political philosophy become the priority in Oakeshott's intellectual endeavours.

By contrast, there is a view widely shared by commentators that *PFPS* and other similar subsequent writings are a political extension of the development in Oakeshott's general philosophy, that the critique of the politics of faith is continuous with the earlier critique of rationalism in politics, and that this is a transition from the epistemological arguments to moral or political ones.[47] However, if our analysis has been on the right track so far, this interpretation is not quite adequate. Despite apparent continuities, the critique of rationalism and the enquiry into two ideal types of the nature of government have different subject matters, and serve different purposes in Oakeshott's political and general philosophy, respectively.

As the attributed title suggests, *PFPS* sets out to outline the ideal types of the politics of faith and the politics of scepticism extracted from the political experience of modern Europe. In the very beginning, Oakeshott significantly confessed his hesitation about the genre to which this work should belong.[48] It is neither philosophical, nor historical, nor practical, though all of them may seem involved in it. In fact, in light of our previous discussion about the emphasis on the connection between political philosophy and political life, it is not surprising that Oakeshott was reluctant to attribute the starting point of his philosophical investigation to any kind of thinking. This starting point is simply our ordinary, pre-theoretical knowledge of politics, not any mode of experience. Although in *PFPS* he did proceed somewhat from this common sense understanding and gave it some philosophical reflection, Oakeshott began to feel that the term "philosophy" retains an unwanted connotation of something ultimately achieved. This explains his uncertainty about regarding this preliminary comment on modern European political experience as unreservedly philosophical. In other words, the general philosophy presupposed in *PFPS* is largely in line

[47] For example, see Franco, *Michael Oakeshott*, 107-8.
[48] Oakeshott, *Politics of Faith*, 1.

with Oakeshott's earlier development of the conception of political philosophy in CPJ, CPP, and PP.

Concerning the substantive content of political philosophy, as Terry Nardin correctly perceives, Oakeshott began to define "politics" ever more narrowly.[49] This is also continuous with the trend in Oakeshott's thought outlined in the previous three subsections. In particular, the scope of analysis is now limited to government rather than the State, and especially concerned with the office of government instead of the constitution of its authority.[50] This qualification of dialecticism undoubtedly strikes a stark contrast with his early complaint about contemporary literature's unhealthy focus on governmental institutions, to the neglect of the wider social life in terms of which the ends of government should be understood. Nevertheless, a more confined and specific conception of the "political" also enables Oakeshott to distinguish his position from that of his appointed intellectual predecessors such as Locke, Berkeley, Shaftesbury, Halifax, and Hume. In Oakeshott's opinion, it is unfortunate that these thinkers connected the voice of scepticism with the whole field of human conduct when in fact it is appropriate to politics only.[51]

This conclusion paves the way for Oakeshott's famous 1956 lecture "On Being Conservative." He began from the observation that the conservative attitude in general is particularly conducive to attending to general rules of conduct.[52] Political conservatism is then justified locally and contingently by the fact that the British people traditionally understand the activity of governing as primarily a matter of upholding such non-substantive and non-instrumental rules.[53] Any other argument appealing to natural rights or the Natural Law is rejected not because they are flawed, but because they are not necessary.

OBC has a long pedigree of being acclaimed as perhaps the most ingenious and unusual

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[49] Terry Nardin, *The Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 227.
[50] Oakeshott, *Politics of Faith*, 2-3.
[51] *Ibid*., 122.
[52] Oakeshott, "On Being Conservative," in *Rationalism in Politics*, 421. First published 1962 by Methuen.
[53] *Ibid*., 423-24.

defence of conservatism in twentieth century political thought. In contrast, more recent commentators, such as Efraim Podoksik, argue that its nature is essentially philosophical rather than ideological.[54] While agreeing that this and other apparently political essays are not primarily practical, we must be careful about the sense in which it is understood as philosophical. Stuart Issacs, for instance, points out that the concepts of law, tradition, pursuit of intimations, etc. appearing in this essay are not political at all, but have their origins in Oakeshott's early general philosophy. In his own words, "[t]he mistake should not be made of taking what is being said here as a 'political' statement in favour of a kind of 'conservatism.' Rather, this is a philosophical understanding put forward on the basis of a theory of human action and knowledge."[55] However, this view ignores Oakeshott's earlier efforts in restoring political philosophy's connection with political life without compromising its genuinely philosophical character. The alleged continuity between Oakeshott's early general philosophy and OBC is therefore spurious. Besides, in light of Oakeshott's newly acquired uncertainty about philosophy construed in terms of the ultimately concrete definition of concepts, it is unfounded to take these concepts as straightforwardly philosophical or logical. Instead, in accordance with his updated account of philosophy as primarily a dialectical movement from ordinary understanding, this essay is philosophical as far as it serves as the point of departure for Oakeshott's late political philosophy. This is the sense in which we should understand why the argument in OBC begins from a common sensical concern "with ourselves as we are,"[56] rather than some foundation of "a theory of human action and knowledge" accepted from the very outset as it is. As before, the continuity between OBC and Oakeshott's earlier writings does not consist primarily in his general philosophy, but in his political philosophy.

Turning to the substantive content of Oakeshott's development in political philosophy

[54] Efraim Podoksik, *In Defence of Modernity: Vision and Philosophy in Michael Oakeshott* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2003), 174.
[55] Stuart Isaacs, *The Politics and Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 149.
[56] Oakeshott, "On Being Conservative," 435.

again, by 1957 it had become clear that these and other arguments extrapolated from our ordinary knowledge of the political experience in modern Europe were in effect a preparation for a political philosophy in the future. "The Masses in Representative Democracy" offers a sketch of the individual, and the individual manqué who fails to live up to the moral requirements of individuality and out of jealousy and hatred turns himself into the anti-individual. If we feel perplexed about the shift of focus from government to individual, we may recall the holism about political concepts in which this is precisely the other route to the same destination. The anti-individual and the individual are simply theoretical correlates of the two divergent conceptions of the office of government examined previously in *PFPS*.[57] With the concept of the State as the totality of political experience having faded away, the philosophical identification of the self with the State is naturally replaced by the theoretical correspondence between the moral life of the individual and the anti-individual, and the nature of the office of different kinds of governments. Again, MRD might be considered as a criticism directed at the totalitarian regimes extending from Oakeshott's earlier critique of rationalism in politics. About the latter and its ideological implications more will be said in the next chapter on Oakeshott's late general philosophy. However, even if the practical significance of this essay could be revealed by his contemporary political context, by itself it belongs more properly to Oakeshott's political philosophy than his general philosophy.

The Harvard Lectures delivered in 1958 made this point even clearer. The second chapter of *Morality and Politics in Modern Europe* incorporates Oakeshott's earlier sketch of the morality of the individual and that of the anti-individual. Its inclusion in a lecture on the history of modern political thought is based on its importance as a context to which "the political reflection of modern Europe may be referred in order to make it intelligible."[58]

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[57] Oakeshott, "The Masses in Representative Democracy," in *Rationalism in Politics*, 363-83. First published in *Masse und Democratie*, ed. A. Hunold (Stuttgart: Rentsch, 1957), 189-214.

[58] Oakeshott, *Morality and Politics in Modern Europe: The Harvard Lectures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 27.

Nevertheless, "moral and political beliefs and sentiments usually develop in interaction with one another. Consequently, they may be used to elucidate one another as text and context."[59] From this it is reasonable to judge that the absence of the State does not make Oakeshott's late political philosophy depart from the Idealist style of argumentation, but only renders its holism somewhat weaker.

With regard to the definition of "politics," Gerencser seizes upon Oakeshott's slip of the tongue that it is "an activity … of determining the manner and the matter of government"[60] and argues that in *MPME* Oakeshott's conception of the "political" still includes both the constitution and the office of government, whereas later in *OHC* the scope is further narrowed to the office of government only.[61] However, if we take into account the actual content of *MPME*, the subject matter of political philosophy is clearly concerned merely with the activity of governing or what the government does. This is continuous with *PFPS* which we have just examined above.

Turning again to the presupposed general philosophy, though he had previously characterised philosophical activity by virtue of its dialectical movement, Oakeshott still kept talking about texts and contexts here in *MPME*, about concrete concepts in his critique of rationalism in politics (to be considered in the next chapter), and about the totality of experience in his lectures on the history of political thought during the 1960s.[62] In those lectures in particular, political philosophy is said to be "an attempt to explain political activity and the experience of governing and being governed by elucidating its place on the map of human activity in general."[63] But these characterisations of philosophy had earlier been set aside by Oakeshott as the secondary or at most derivative features of philosophical activity. This discontinuity can be understood with the help of hindsight provided by *OHC*. In this comparison, Oakeshott's preliminary comments on the political experience of modern

[59] *Ibid*., 27-28.
[60] *Ibid*., 8.
[61] Gerencser, *The Skeptic's Oakeshott*, 144-45.
[62] Oakeshott, *Lectures in the History of Political Thought* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2006), 101.
[63] *Ibid*., 339.

Europe made between the 1950s and the 1960s do not seem to undergo radical transformation in his final philosophical construction of *civitas*. On the contrary, the philosophical exposition in *OHC* appears more like something which parallels the experience of political life. Therefore, in the process of strengthening the connection between his political philosophy and our common sense understanding of politics, it is likely that Oakeshott softened his emphasis on the radical subversive nature of philosophy. As a result, the conclusions of a platform of understanding, denigrated especially in PP, regain its importance in Oakeshott's late political philosophy. The discontinuity in question thus exemplifies the transition from Oakeshott's post-war self-critical essays to the mature position of *OHC*. As the next section will illustrate, this is also the reason why he in the end felt reluctant to pursue the dialectical impulse unceasingly, leaving the theoretical contradictions between civil association and enterprise association as they are, which in turn reflect the differences between *societas* and *universitas* in our ordinary experience of political activity.

This brings us to the related issue of Oakeshott's interest in Hobbes. Many Oakeshott scholars argue that his late political philosophy is heavily influenced by his interpretation of Hobbes, which seriously disparaged the Idealist legacy inherited by the early Oakeshott. Gerencser, for instance, claims that "as Oakeshott turned his attention to political philosophy, his understanding of Hobbes played a strong role in the development of the themes and expression of that political philosophy."[64] In contrast, Kenneth B. McIntyre is the minority who maintains that Oakeshott's essays on Hobbes constitutes no evidence of his departure from Idealism, but should be understood as "manifestations of Oakeshott's historical interest in, and theoretical affinity with, the traditions of modern individualism and nomocracy."[65] Based on our previous discussion, it is improper to take Oakeshott's preliminary observations of political experience in modern Europe as strictly speaking history.

[64] Gerencser, *The Skeptic's Oakeshott*, 111.
[65] Kenneth B. McIntyre, *The Limits of Political Theory* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2004), 143.

Nevertheless, we can certainly judge that the attention he paid to the texts of political thought, ranging from the *livres de circonstance* and ideological doctrines to the more sophisticated philosophical reflections on politics, is precisely derived from his conception of the nature of political philosophy, updated to be sure, but never the less Idealist. Furthermore, if this effort is contrasted with Oakeshott's youthful, confident remark that "[a] philosopher is not, as such, a scholar" and that "philosophy, more often than not, has foundered in learning,"[66] it is ironical that the political philosophy at the hands of the mature Oakeshott culminating in *On Human Conduct* is not influenced by merely Hobbes' theory as it is, but is indeed founded in learning.

III. The Ideological Image of *On Human Conduct*

The previous long section has provided a fuller picture of the way Oakeshott gradually revised his earlier view on the nature of political philosophy and, after this revision had been roughly settled, his initial construction of such a political philosophy. The next chapter will clarify how Oakeshott adapted his general philosophy according to the needs of his renewed political philosophy. In this section, we deal with his completion of this political philosophy in *OHC*, and search for an adequate interpretation of the practical messages implicit in this book which is at once philosophical, highly sophisticated, and remote from political issues of the day.

The political philosophy in *OHC* has been scrutinised and criticised by a plethora of commentators to the extent that it seems redundant to rehearse all of Oakeshott's arguments and conclusions as he originally presented them. For our purposes, suffice it to say firstly that, in the last of the three long essays composing this book, Oakeshott gives his final version of our ordinary knowledge about the experience of governing and being governed in

[66] Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), 8.

modern Europe since medieval times. The sources of materials include not only the common sensical understanding of politics, but also ideological doctrines which rationalise our experience of political life for either explanatory or practical purposes, as well as the truly philosophical attempts to make our political activity intelligible. Clearly, as such the conclusions reached in this essay fall far short of being purely philosophical (for which we must look in Oakeshott's second essay of *OHC*).

The general thesis of this quasi-historical survey is that the states in modern European politics have always been a mixture of the two extreme poles of civil association and enterprise association.[67] In the former, a state is construed as an association composed of a set of non-instrumental rules of conduct in subscription to which the associates are free to pursue their self-chosen ends. In the latter, a state is taken to be associated for the sake of the collective pursuit of religious, economic, or other kinds of substantial end, from which the content of laws derives and to which the associates are expected to contribute whole-heartedly. Both, however, are ideal types in terms of the office of government, and cannot be unconditionally realised in any actual state because of the contingent factors in human association.[68] The inevitable existence of wars, for example, qualifies civil association's non-purposive nature by introducing the necessity for mobilisation or other national measures of preparation;[69] and a purely enterprise association is inherently unstable against the background of modern Europe when the morality of individuality has been on the rise.[70]

In the second essay, Oakeshott presented a philosophical investigation of the postulates of civil association. Since there is no longer any talk of the complete concept of the State or the social whole, *civitas* is strictly speaking a theoretical concept about what we ordinarily understand as government. Here Oakeshott even abandoned the term "philosophy" which might suggest the kind of experience without arrest or reservation in his early general

[67] Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 320.
[68] *Ibid*., 262, 279.
[69] *Ibid*., 272.
[70] *Ibid*., 317.

philosophy. Instead, in accordance with his new conception of political philosophy as a dialectical activity beginning from and moving beyond the common sense understanding of politics, what makes the conclusions about *civitas* in the second essay theoretical is primarily their progression from the platform of understanding in the third essay to a higher one, and the transformation they have gone through. Furthermore, in this transformation there is almost no coverage on the overcoming of contradictions encountered in the previous platform of understanding. The emphasis is placed on the excavation of the postulates presupposed by the theoretical concept of *civitas*, such as agency, freedom, morality, and so forth. The main task becomes to rid this theoretical concept of those contingent factors which happen to coexist with the government of actual states, but are logically speaking irrelevant or inessential to our understanding of *civitas*.[71] Obviously, this falls far short of the dialectical reconciliation of the tensions between apparently antithetical concepts which radically subverts our ordinary common sense in Oakeshott's early political philosophy.

There is now a general agreement among commentators that Oakeshott's theoretical treatment of *civitas* cannot be compared to Hegel's concept of the State in terms of the latter's scope and richness, and that Oakeshott's interpretation of Hegel in the final essay of *OHC* is a distillation of what is theoretically useful to his own exposition of the lineage of civil association. Paul Franco, for example, notes that "[w]here Hegel sees a linear evolution toward individuality and *societas*, Oakeshott sees a tension between *societas* and *universitas*."[72] Similarly, Podoksik argues that "Oakeshott seems to downplay [Hegel's philosophy's] holistic and teleological aspects, in which the idea of Right reaches its dialectical completion in the system of customs, laws and beliefs of a particular society."[73]

More sensitive to the intellectual context of Oakeshott's writings, James Alexander recognises that one of the reasons for which Oakeshott deems Hegel's use of the word *Staat*

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[71] *Ibid*., 109.
[72] Paul Franco, *The Political Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 210.
[73] Podoksik, *In Defence of Modernity*, 192.

injudicious is the worry about the confusion caused in referring to both the philosophical idea and its contingent counterparts by the same term; nevertheless, the deeper reason is that Oakeshott's exposition is actually a watered-down version of Hegel's position. "For by distinguishing two philosophical conceptions by which he supposed the merely contingent state was to be ideally understood, Oakeshott was declaring that the state itself was not something which could be considered an unconditional philosophical conception—nor, for that matter, was it an unconditional actuality."[74] Based on our analysis in the previous section, this follows quite reasonably from Oakeshott's revised conception of political philosophy. The next chapter will illustrate how this change in his political philosophy brings about similar alterations in his general philosophy as laid out in the first essay of *OHC*. Concerning the fate of the holism and dialecticism about political concepts, here it became obvious that the various social institutions apart from the individual and the government are generally considered at most as a conglomerate of contextual background,[75] rather than the imperfect but necessary stages of dialectical progression culminating in the concept of the State. Comparing this aspect of Oakeshott's political philosophy with that of Hegel's, Alexander clarifies that "even though the state only emerged in the third part of the *Philosophy of Right* it was taken to be the actual precondition of those elements of right which preceded it dialectically, such as property, contract, morality, family and civil society—and it was, in addition, not merely the guarantee of freedom, as it was for Oakeshott, but the substantiality of freedom."[76]

Whilst Oakeshott's skilful manipulation of Hegel and his departure from the latter's philosophical treatment of the State have been demonstrated manifestly by secondary literature, the relation between *OHC* and his early political philosophy has not received a balanced assessment and fair criticism. Exceptions are few. Stuart Isaacs, for example,

[74] James Alexander, "Oakeshott on Hegel's 'Injudicious' Use of the Word 'State,'" *History of Political Thought* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 160.
[75] Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 242.
[76] Alexander, "Oakeshott on Hegel's 'Injudicious' Use," 171.

argues that the individualism in Oakeshott's works are not political nor liberal but have always been philosophical from the beginning to the end of his academic career.[77] More recently Nehal Bhuta recognises in passing that the conclusions about the State are not totally disposed of in Oakeshott's late political philosophy, but at most undergo a process of deflation; that the self and society being mutually constitutive reappears in the mutual constitution of the individual and civil association (and, we may add, of the anti-individual and enterprise association) is an important evidence.[78] We have seen that this mutuality was clearly illustrated in *MPME* and MRD, which is here incorporated into the last essay of *OHC*.

In light of this continuity, Luke O'Sullivan's judgment that the individual is no longer a metaphysical entity in Oakeshott's later works in contradistinction to his earlier ones, can be misleading.[79] Of course, the individual as it is discussed in the last essay of *OHC* is not a theoretical concept. Yet, as we have also noted, neither does it belong to the mode of practical reasoning. When Oakeshott referred to individuality as the dominant form of moral life,[80] he was not recommending it to us as a normative ideal to be pursued in our practical lives, but merely articulating our ordinary knowledge about the actual experience of politics in the past from which he later proceeded to another platform of theoretical understanding. A similar mistake is made by Podoksik when he claims that Oakeshott's philosophical account of civil association is a defence of individuality which purges the tradition of liberalism of unnecessary incoherence.[81] By itself the theoretical analysis of *civitas* cannot entail any prescriptive conclusions concerning practical politics, as Oakeshott had always emphasised. In addition, the proposition that the self is the State in his early political philosophy still holds in the mutual relationship between *cives* and *civitas*. Indeed, were

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[77] Isaacs, *Politics and Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott*, 38.

[78] Nehal Bhuta, "The Mystery of the State," in *Law, Liberty and State: Oakeshott, Hayek and Schmitt on the Rule of Law*, ed. David Dyzenhaus and Thomas Poole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 16-18.

[79] Luke O'Sullivan, "Michael Oakeshott and the Left," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 75, no.3 (July 2014): 488.

[80] Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 321.

[81] Podoksik, *In Defence of Modernity*, 197-98. See also Franco, *Political Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott*, 221-22; Andrew Sullivan, *Intimations Pursued: The Voice of Practice in the Conversation of Michael Oakeshott* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2007), 174-75.

Oakeshott to embark on the task of investigating the postulates of the theoretical counterpart of enterprise association, he would certainly affirm its interrelationship with the corresponding theoretical concepts of anti-individual. Therefore, if there are any practical suggestions implicit in Oakeshott's works, they reside neither in his presentation of our experience of political life in modern history, nor in his theoretical account of that experience. Rather, they are embodied in his deliberate choice to theorise about civil association only and to leave enterprise association as it is, even though the latter is as partially exemplified in modern European states as the former. As we shall see towards the end of this section, this is an important clue to understanding the way Oakeshott's philosophical writings are politically relevant without giving us any practical recommendations.

Related to the issue of individualism is the question of whether in his late political philosophy Oakeshott abandoned the attribution of a substantive end or purpose to the concept of the State in his early political philosophy. Concerning *OHC*, there is a similar confusion in secondary literature about an alleged departure from Idealism on Oakeshott's part. Franco, for instance, argues that in his late political philosophy Oakeshott rejected the teleological implications of a substantive purpose of the State found in his early political philosophy.[82] This early talk of the end of the State is further compared with Oakeshott's late interpretation of Aristotle, where Aristotle's notion of the good life or human excellence is understood as a formal condition instead of a substantive purpose; an interpretation, just as in the case of Hegel, which accords well to Oakeshott's own position in political philosophy.[83]

However, the reference to Oakeshott's view about Aristotle rather than to Aristotle himself should remind us that this formal interpretation applies equally well to the discussion about the end of the State or the social whole in Oakeshott's early political philosophy. There, we may recall, one of the philosophical conclusions is that the action of the individual is the

[82] Franco, *Political Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott*, 101-2, 191-92. For Efraim Podoksik's similar view, see n. 3.
[83] *Ibid*., 223-24.

action of the State in the sense the individual, in performing that action, contributes also to the end of the State. It would be wrong to take this as a version of enterprise association, for this is precisely the kind of misunderstanding which Oakeshott had always hoped to avoid by repeatedly disclaiming any implications of the enslavement of the individual by the State in his early writings. In fact, as one searches in vain for any determinate specification of the nature of the end of the State, such as the religious or economic ones associated with enterprise association, one begins to suspect that this, too, is a formal, philosophical notion awaiting further theoretical explication which has nothing to do with any of the practical purposes pursued by actual instances of enterprise association. For example, in CPP Oakeshott said:

> A philosophy of politics may plausibly be supposed to undertake the task of representing political life as activity in pursuit of some end, and the task of analysing the general concept of an end; but this is quite different from the actual determination of which among many presented ends political activity might choose. And if a genuine philosophy of politics rejects, for example, happiness as the end in political activity, and substitutes 'self-realization,' what it is asserting is not that happiness and self-realization are two possible ends in political activity and that self-realization ought to be preferred, but that happiness is a false analysis of the end actually sought and that self-realization is a true analysis.[84]

Hence, if the mutual constitution of the self and the State is transformed into that of the individual and civil association after Oakeshott updated his conception of political philosophy, we should expect that a similar transformation occurs in the end of the State after the State is replaced by the tensions between civil association and enterprise association.

[84] Oakeshott, "Concept of a Philosophy of Politics," 125.

To avoid further confusion, we may say that the real issue here is about the significance or value of political life. Consequently, what Oakeshott maintains in *OHC* is that it is false to analyse the significance or value of civil association in terms of the existence of any substantive purpose collectively pursued because the true meaning of civil association consists in its respect for the formal postulates of human agency such as freedom. This, if formulated in Oakeshott's early political philosophy, is precisely the "end" of civil association; though from the perspective of the late Oakeshott, this manner of speaking had invited too many irrelevant misunderstandings.

Stressing the continuities between Oakeshott's early and late political philosophy, of course, does not mean overlooking the alterations his position underwent. Although the philosophical task of examining the end of the State continued to occupy Oakeshott's mind in his exposition of the end of civil association, the changed scope of analysis naturally leads to different conclusions. Take his discussion about the relation between law and morality as an example. In Oakeshott's early political philosophy, law as the means of government does not enforce morality not because its content is undesirable, but because its imposition is logically beyond the capability of law. This position is formulated into the proposition that might is right. Similarly, in *OHC* moral right and wrong do not belong to the business of law not because its prescriptions are objectionable, but because its enforcement is incompatible with the philosophical character of law. However, the discontinuities loom larger when we look into the specific reasons supporting this identification of might with right. Earlier, it is precisely because the State or the social whole desires that the morality be enforced that the law of government, as part of the State, refuses to interfere with that to which its interference would be detrimental. As a result, this refusal itself constitutes the contribution made by law to the end of the social whole, namely the maintenance of moral standards. By contrast, after the comprehensive concept of the State is replaced by that of civil association, the indifference of law to morality can no longer be understood as equally concerned with the promotion of moral codes, not least because the collective pursuit of substantive purposes

like this has no place in the true analysis of the end of civil association.

On the other hand, it is true that law, as a part of civil association, contributes to its end by remaining aloof from the advocacy of any particular standard of morality. This end is the moral life of individualism which Oakeshott made great efforts to distinguish from its popular vulgarisations and misunderstandings.[85] Therefore, by confining his theoretical investigation to the concept of *civitas*, Oakeshott does not immediately contradict his earlier analysis of the end of the State. *Civitas* is only a part of our social life. Indeed, the other social institutions apart from it are more properly understood in terms of an analogy to enterprise association. What requires an explanation is not that Oakeshott's account of civil association differs from his earlier exposition of the State; different subject matters of course demand different analyses and conclusions. Rather, what is more important is, again, why in his late political philosophy he chose to focus on government and left all other social institutions untouched. Had he also presented a theoretical discussion of the concept corresponding to enterprise association, it would have been made clear that the law of civil association contributes as much to the maintenance of moral standards through refusing to interfere with them because their enforcement belongs to the logical territory of other social institutions than civil association. As Franco points out, in Oakeshott's rehearsal of his arguments of political philosophy in "The Rule of Law" published in 1983, "[h]is remarks about justice … about the desirability of a civil association's reflecting the moral-legal self-understanding of its members indicate that he does not seek to sever law completely from morality."[86] The impression of a strict separation between law and morality is in part caused by the concentrated attention to civil association in *OHC*. In fact, they are separated from each other only in the limited context of civil association.

It may be countered that, in the absence of the holistic context of the State, law is certainly detached from morality, and even if we take into consideration the unanalysed

[85] See Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 241.
[86] Franco, *Political Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott*, 228.

context of all other social institutions, the logical nature of law in civil association cannot be said to contribute to the end of any enterprise associations because of their contrary attitudes towards the collective pursuit of substantive ends. This returns us to Oakeshott's departure from Hegel. If we can understand the reason behind Oakeshott's reluctance to supersede the contradictions between civil and enterprise associations and the contingently inevitable mixture of them in the actual modern European states, we will also be able to understand the ideological image implicit in his late political philosophy and the way it is conveyed.

In the final pages of *OHC*, Oakeshott reflected on the temptation to go beyond the analysis of civil association. It is acknowledged that the ideal types of civil and enterprise associations are the two poles of understanding the office of government extrapolated from the political experience of modern Europe. Oakeshott took it as an admirable philosophical feat to clarify the theoretical connections among a variety of concepts from the viewpoint of civil association. Nevertheless, it inevitably seems to be only partially connected with the modern experience of government and being governed, which is a mixture of the two polarities. Consequently, to recall the lesson from CPP, the second essay on *civitas* becomes genuinely philosophical at the expense of weakening its connection with the facts of our political life. The third essay is perhaps designed to alleviate the suspicion of this defect by supplementing an account of the fortunes of civil and enterprise associations in our experience of political activity. Yet eventually Oakeshott thought that we should resist the temptation to theorise the tension between *societas* and *universitas* in more general terms.[87] An ideal character of the State, which is a reconciliation overcoming the tensions between civil and enterprise associations, is not mentioned.

More importantly, this refusal to synthesise the theoretical concepts corresponding to civil and enterprise associations is not based on the radical subversion of common sense by which Oakeshott earlier characterised the dialecticism of his philosophy. The argument of

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[87] Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 323.

OHC is not that the political life is ultimately the civil condition or *civitas*; nor did he argue that, if this theoretical account contradicts our ordinary understanding of politics, then so much the worse for conventional wisdom. After the Absolute disappears from the dialectical progression in Oakeshott's conception of political philosophy, it is doubtful to use what is regarded as an incomprehensible whole a criterion at which theoretical investigation aims. Consequently, what is arrived at in the theoretical platform of understanding is no longer more concrete than, or supersedes the contradictions of, the previous platform of understanding from which the theoretical pursuit begins. The next chapter will see how Oakeshott adapted his general philosophy to this demand in his political philosophy in *OHC*. Regarding his late political philosophy, the aim is no longer to overturn our ordinary common sense understanding of political life, but to reveal a much closer connection with it than before.

Unfair appraisals and inappropriate characterisations have clouded this aspect of the late Oakeshott. Franco, for example, criticises that Oakeshott's historical account of the modern political history of Europe fails to meet the postulates in his own account of the historical mode of experience.[88] However, according to our interpretation, the role played by this quasi-historical account in Oakeshott's works is not to serve as an example of historical writing, but to bring into manageable form our pre-theoretical knowledge of politics from which his political philosophy then proceeds. As such, Alexander is wrong to criticise Oakeshott's progression from history to philosophy because of its violation of the modal separatism in *EM*.[89] In any case, his position in *EM* was soon revised for the sake of his renewed conception of political philosophy. On the other hand, McIntyre correctly points out that "in Oakeshott's account of both morality and the character of the modern state, his historical exposition of individuality and nomocracy closely parallels his theoretical account of human conduct and civil association."[90] Nonetheless, he does not explain why this

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[88] Franco, *Michael Oakeshott*, 109-10.
[89] Alexander, "Oakeshott on Hegel's 'Injudicious' Use," 150.
[90] McIntyre, *Limits of Political Theory*, 151.

parallel arises between ordinary knowledge and theoretical conclusions. Finally, Sullivan states more boldly that "Oakeshott's claims are historical and practical, not metaphysical. His argument is a blend of pure practice and rationalism, a blend which he has already formulated as the only adequate method of political thought and action."[91] In opposition to this interpretation, we have noted that in making closer the connection between political philosophy and political life, Oakeshott did not thereby concede any scope for making philosophy more practical.

That Oakeshott's political philosophy can be practically relevant without being directly applicable to our political life has attracted the attention of various commentators. Isaacs, for example, argues that Oakeshott should neither be interpreted as a defender of liberal ideology, nor understood as purely a philosopher. Rather, his works actually express a moral imperative derived from his philosophical epistemology.[92] More concerned with religion, Alexander is inspired by Maurice Cowling's evaluation of Oakeshott in taking Oakeshott's abandonment of the State as analogous to his silence on God, to which the fervour of his earliest political and religious writings represent a stark contrast. The message implicit in Oakeshott's works, therefore, reflects the secularisation of Britain and the retreat of Christianity from public life.[93]

These and other comments capture the practical significance of Oakeshott's political philosophy better, but still fall short of providing the context and the manner in which this political relevance is conveyed. Gerencser is nearer the mark when he correctly perceives that "Oakeshott suggests the possibility that those who live exclusively in the practical world may interact with and even learn much from the philosopher" in retelling Plato's Allegory of the Cave in *OHC*.[94] This passage in Oakeshott's late political philosophy is a continuation

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[91] Sullivan, *Intimations Pursued*, 150; see also Steven B. Smith, "Oakeshott on the Theory-Practice Problem: A Reply to Terry Nardin," *Global Discourse* 5, no. 2 (2015): 325.
[92] Isaacs, *Politics and Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott*, 190.
[93] Alexander, "Oakeshott on Hegel's 'Injudicious' Use," 174.
[94] Gerencser, *The Skeptic's Oakeshott*, 48.

of the theme dealt with in "The Claims of Politics" of his early political philosophy.[95] As we have seen in Chapter 2, in that article the social role of the philosopher is to recreate and maintain the values of the society to which he belongs; and he can succeed in performing this task provided that he does not directly apply philosophy to practical politics as if it were an ideological doctrine, but embarks on theoretical investigations which are genuinely philosophical. In *OHC*, we finally have the opportunity to witness how this can be actually carried out in political philosophy. In relegating the Absolute to the inscrutable background, Oakeshott made closer the connection between theoretical understanding and ordinary knowledge to the effect that theory no longer aims to contradict or subvert common sense. This leads to the expectation that there will be a more intimate parallel between his discussion of civil and enterprise associations and that of *civitas* and the theoretical counterpart of enterprise association. As it turns out, he chose to analyse *civitas* only, setting all other social institutions and the State aside. The motivation of this choice may consist in an aversion to the denial of human freedom exemplified by rationalism in politics, or in an awareness of the death of God and with it the recession of the State. However, as the disproportional attention to *civitas* suggests, the more prominent driving force is more probably Oakeshott's recognition of the importance of individuality as the dominant value of the age in which he lived. Thus, the renewal and maintenance of the moral life of the individual manifests itself through a genuine philosophical investigation which by itself does not quite tell us to emulate the ideal of individualism in conducting our practical lives.

IV. Conclusion

Oakeshott's attempt to reinstate the connection between his political philosophy and our experience of political life is not straightforward. It began with a full-blown revival of

[95] Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 27-31.

the holism and dialecticism about modes of experience. However, he quickly recognised that the point of departure in philosophical investigation is common sense or ordinary knowledge of politics rather than any of the other modes of experience. Consequently, the holism was abandoned again whereas the dialecticism now held only between ordinary understanding and philosophical exposition. This dialecticism was preserved in the new characterisation of philosophy as a radically transformative activity, in contradistinction to his earlier conceptions of it as the concrete definition, the totality of experience, or the most comprehensive context. Nevertheless, this new account qualified the dialecticism again. Without the Absolute as the ultimate aim of dialectical progression, political philosophy was no longer radically subversive, and was thereby brought much closer to ordinary common sense than before. In this context, the "political" essays written after the year 1952 when Oakeshott completed his critique of rationalism in politics, should be understood not as a continuation of his general philosophy and its more immediate ideological concerns, but as a preliminary organisation of our pre-theoretical understanding of political life from which philosophical investigation later commenced.

On the other hand, the holism and dialecticism about political concepts are weakened by increasingly specific definitions of "politics" and increasingly narrow conceptions of the scope of political philosophy's subject matter. Although this could also be understood as part of the effort to relocate the anchorage of political philosophy in the sea of undifferentiable experience, the sharp distinction between the "political" and the "social" lumps all the other social institutions together as the background against which the political life is to be understood. Neither is each of these institutions essential to our holistic picture because of the places they occupy in the necessary stages of dialectical progression. In the absence of the Absolute it is no longer the aim of philosophy to supersede the contradictions between civil and enterprise associations by the highest idea of the State which goes beyond the contingent mixture of *societas* and *universitas* in actual modern European states.

As the concept of the State faded away, the conclusions of Oakeshott's early political

philosophy were reformulated in terms of civil association. Since this is strictly a philosophical concept, it is inadequate to interpret the new formulations as a defence of liberalism. The mutual constitution between the self and the State now obtains between the individual and civil association, and logically speaking between the anti-individual and enterprise association as well. That the action of the self is also a contribution to the end of the State is transformed into the proposition that the end of civil association is the moral life of individuality, with the same transformation applicable to the end of enterprise association and the morality of anti-individuality. Might is always right, but, similarly, the relationship between law and morality in civil association will be different from that in enterprise association, which is again different from the case in the context of the State. While the refusal to go beyond the internal tensions of these new formulations follows from Oakeshott's updated conception of political philosophy, his choice to focus only on civil association does not. This decision is more properly understood as the peculiar manner in which he expressed a renewal and maintenance of the dominant value of individualism in his epoch; the manner, in other words, precisely articulated in "The Claims of Politics" in his early political philosophy.

That Oakeshott's philosophical expression of the moral life of the individual is closely connected with the political experience of modern Europe does not make it any the less philosophical. Despite the ideological force of this philosophical expression, Oakeshott's late political philosophy is not capable of giving clear and unambiguous recommendations about current affairs. This point will become clear in the contrast between Chapter 6 on Kenneth Minogue and Chapter 9 on Peregrine Worsthorne. Whilst Minogue uses Oakeshott's late political philosophy to buttress the economic and liberal side of Thatcherism in the name of conservatism, Worsthorne understand Oakeshott's account of individuality as referring to the aristocratic ideal embodied by Britain's traditional ruling class instead of the clichés of *laissez-faire* mouthed by the middle class. As such, the intellectual portrait of Oakeshott's development of his political and general philosophy serves as the ideal theoretical context in

which different translations of his works into practical politics can be compared and evaluated.

Chapter 5: Mature General Philosophy, 1939-83

I. Introduction

Oakeshott's revision of his conception of political philosophy in the late-1930s and the 1940s may lead one to expect that he would have also adjusted his general philosophy according to the changing needs of his political philosophy around the same period of time. However, this was not the case. Like his early general philosophy, developments in his late general philosophy were in the first place motivated not by the new demands made by his late political philosophy, but by the felt urgency of dealing critically with the political and ideological problems directly or indirectly caused by the Second World War. Of course, Oakeshott was not primarily interested in current affairs, but in the patterns of political argument employed by his contemporaries thinking about those problems. However, even though his response to the intellectual atmosphere of his time is philosophical in nature, its ideological implications are clear and unmistakable. The second section of this chapter deals with this former, polemical phase of the Oakeshott's late general philosophy. I shall argue that many writings associated with his famous critique of rationalism in politics in the late-1940s and the early-1950s are in effect a consistent extension of his early general philosophy. Consequently, it is inadequate to link the content of these works to that of Oakeshott's late political philosophy despite their apparent concern with politics.

Oakeshott completed his critique of rationalism in politics by his inaugural address *Political Education* in 1952. As we have noted in the previous chapter, after this he began to conduct investigations about the experience of political life in modern Europe. In 1958, he delivered of a lecture entitled 'Morality and Politics in Modern Europe,' which represents a recapitulation of the results of this enquiry and serves as the starting point for his later construction of a political philosophy. Based on these publication dates, it becomes intelligible that Oakeshott first incorporated the requirements of his revised conception of

political philosophy into his general philosophy in *The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind* in 1959. This is the time when the position in his late general philosophy began to depart from those held in his early works, not for the sake of responding to the central political issues of the time, but in order to reflect changes in his opinions about the nature of political philosophy. This latter, more philosophical part of Oakeshott's late general philosophy will be the main theme in the third section. I will focus on the internal coherence between his general and political philosophy in *On Human Conduct* published in 1975. Passages from his 1983 essay "On History" will be cited in support or for clarification where it is necessary. We will observe that the uncertainties about the starting place of political philosophy reflect very well the equivocations and ambiguities concerning the logical status of, and the interrelationship among, different levels of understanding. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the extent to which Oakeshott's late general philosophy serves its purposes, the most important of which is to maintain a close connection between political philosophy and the experience of political life.

II. The Critique of Rationalism in Politics

1. Rationalism as a Manner of Practical Reasoning

After *Experience and Its Modes* was published in 1933, it seemed that there was for a moment no more motivation to conduct further investigations in Oakeshott's general philosophy. His keen interest in theological debates lost its momentum, which had shaped many aspects of his early general philosophy. Moreover, it was not until 1938 that he began to revisit his conception of political philosophy, whose new demands on his general philosophy became more manifest only after the late-1940s. This lack of attention to general philosophy in the mid-1930s is further testified by the publication of *A Guide to the Classics, or, How to Pick the Derby Winner* in 1936, a book about horse racing.

Nevertheless, the year of 1939 is notable, when "The Claims of Politics" appeared in formal publication and emphasised the social function of the philosopher. This might lead us to expect that soon Oakeshott would have revised his general philosophy accordingly. In the same year he responded, probably reluctantly, to an invitation by his senior colleague Ernest Barker to edit a selection of readings. This anthology was meant to enable the general reader to understand 'The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe,' where the task Oakeshott attributed to the philosopher is still to understand political ideologies (we are conveniently using this shorter term in accordance with Oakeshott's understanding of it as social and political doctrines) rather than recreate them. Edmund Neill argues that these two works in 1939 do not show any real consistency.[1] Placed in our interpretive framework, it becomes clear that they belong to different types of Oakeshott's writings. The former is a rehearsal of the conclusions of his early political philosophy, and also suggests the direction towards which his subsequent revisions of the nature of political philosophy should move. The latter is the beginning of his systematic effort to understand practical politics with the help of his early general philosophy. An adequate interpretation of Oakeshott's works must go beyond the observation that they are inconsistent with each other. It must try to understand why the changes of opinions in his general and political philosophy, though not synchronised at this time, nevertheless followed one after the other.

Viewed from hindsight, Oakeshott's short introduction to this anthology of contemporary political ideologies is his first attempt to diagnose the phenomena of rationalism in politics in a manner more theoretical than the brief glimpse given earlier in his 1932 article on "The New Bentham." The aim of *SPDCE* is to identify the logical status of the political ideologies then gaining wider currency in practical politics, and to place them in the context of his general philosophy. Ideologies are evidently not themselves philosophies in Oakeshott's understanding of that academic pursuit, and "it would be a

[1] Edmund Neill, "Oakeshott, Modernity, and Cold War Liberalism," in *Michael Oakeshott's Cold War Liberalism*, ed. Terry Nardin (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 45.

mistake to be disappointed because they are not what they do not pretend to be."[2] Nonetheless, they are frequently connected with philosophical ideas. What, then, should genuine philosophers do with them? In Oakeshott's opinion, "it would be a mistake to dismiss these social and political doctrines on account of the inadequacy of the philosophical ideas or systems with which their apologists have chosen to ally them" (xvi). The underlying reason is that, since these political ideologies strictly speaking do not belong to the category of philosophy, it is pointless to criticise the content of the philosophies appropriated by them in their own undertakings. Even if the philosophical ideas thus appropriated were by themselves perfectly sound, the political ideologies appropriating them would be no less defective from the philosophical point of view. The real question concerns the purpose and nature of such appropriation. Therefore, "the most useful service the philosophic critic can perform is that of freeing these social and political doctrines from the encumbrance of these largely parasitic philosophical and pseudo-philosophical ideas" (xvi). It is not difficult to observe that this argument is an example of the philosophical critique of *ignoratio elenchi* championed by *EM*. More importantly, it is also a plea for understanding ideologies from an adequate perspective which provides the relevant criterion of their success or failure, a perspective obscured by their unnecessary and unfortunate connection with philosophy.

If political ideologies are not philosophies, what is their place in the universe of our experience? Generally speaking, political ideologies are employed in practical reasonings, which Oakeshott regards as a relatively new phenomenon in the way political decisions are made. Their ubiquitous presence is evidence that "nobody now expects a hearing who does not exhibit some anxiety to act on principle, who is not prepared to explain his conduct in some terms other than those of mere personal inclination."[3] What, then, is the logical status of these principles within the practical mode of experience, which are used both to motivate and explain political undertakings?

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[2] Oakeshott, introduction to *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), xv.
[3] *Ibid*., xi.

Here, Oakeshott's view was more implicit than his unpublished lecture notes written after the publication of *SPDCE*. In the introduction to this anthology, the logical nature of five currently fashionable ideologies are noted only in passing. Representative Democracy or Liberalism, for instance, contains "a more comprehensive expression of our civilization than any of the others."[4] Similarly, Catholicism is recognised as "the repository of an element of profound importance in the European tradition."[5] Again, Communism, in spite of its scientific and philosophical pretensions, "has its connexions with the past, and, as a doctrine, it is certainly not what some of its professors pretend—related to the past only by reaction."[6] Even in the case of newcomers, their relation to the existing social and political conditions are stressed. Fascism, for example, is more than "an elaborate and verbose expression of the spirit of *fregarsene*;" it becomes understandable if we take into account the situation where "some people after a period of peace or humiliation should be persuaded that life without *la gloire* is an ignoble thing."[7] Finally, National Socialism is not merely the invention of the Nazi Party, but, "in form and content, can be seen in many respects to exhibit the temperament of the community in which it prevails, and to belong to a tradition in German social and political thought."[8] In these characterisations of the logical status of political ideologies, the terms to be made famous by Oakeshott later, such as "rationalisation" and "abridgement," do not appear, though the same message is successfully conveyed. It is in Oakeshott's unpublished lecture notes that he explicitly affirmed that "this rationalisation, this setting down in language of abstract ideas, of the relationships and institutions of a society is the beginning of a social and political doctrine,"[9] that "it is something which follows upon a high degree of institutional and legal organization in a society, rather than

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[4] *Ibid*., xviii.
[5] *Ibid*., xix.
[6] *Ibid*., xx.
[7] *Ibid*., xxi.
[8] *Ibid*., xxii.
[9] Oakeshott, "The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe," in Luke O'Sullivan, *What Is History?*, 151.

precedes and guides that organization,"[10] so that "its essential character is to be a rationalization of the life of an existing society."[11] However, at this stage of Oakeshott's thought there was no substantial critique of the logically abstract nature of political ideologies, as opposed to the traditions of conducting politics already existing in a society. That is the project he was to undertake after the Second World War.

W. H. Greenleaf once remarked that "Oakeshott's … attack on rationalism is not, as some have imagined, a new critique simply aroused or conditioned by circumstances in the period since 1945."[12] This is true if we are talking merely about Oakeshott's interest in, and his use of, the idea of rationalism. This idea can be traced back to his 1932 article on Jeremy Bentham's rationalist mentality; and even the rejection of a fixed conception of Christianity and the concomitant defence of a living form of religious life in his earliest theological writings can be understood as a precursor of his later critique of rationalism in politics. Nonetheless, it is only after the publication of *EM* in 1933 that the embedding of his analysis of political ideologies in general philosophy became possible. Furthermore, this further development of his early general philosophy is not a revision based on the needs of his renewed conceptions of political philosophy. Judging from the ideological potential of his early general philosophy, it is indeed surprising that Oakeshott had not embarked upon the task of attacking rationalism in politics after placing it in the framework of his general philosophy in 1939. The reason that he did do so only after 1945 is that he eventually found new ideological targets to attack from the vantage point of his general philosophy.

On the other hand, commenting specifically on *SPDCE* George Feaver contends that "we can detect in this prewar collection of documents an implied alignment between 'Representative Democracy' and Oakeshott's subsequent discussions of the 'politics of scepticism,' and then 'the politics of individualism,' and ultimately, of 'civil association.'"[13]

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[10] *Ibid*., 153.
[11] *Ibid*.
[12] W. H. Greenleaf, *Oakeshott's Philosophical Politics* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966), 46.
[13] George Feaver, "Regimes of Liberty: Michael Oakeshott on Representative Democracy," in *The Intellectual Legacy of Michael Oakeshott*, ed. Corey Abel and Timothy Fuller (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2005), 136.

However, Oakeshott's preparations for the actual construction of a political philosophy in line with his revisions of the view about the nature of such a philosophy during the late 1940s, began only after his *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism* was composed in 1952. As we will see towards the end of this section, this is also the year when Oakeshott completed his critique of rationalism in politics. In 1939, his conception of political philosophy was still undergoing continual revisions without reaching a settled position. It is unlikely that at this time he had already taken his insights into practical politics to be the preliminary of his later political philosophy. Therefore, if Oakeshott appeared to reveal a preference for Representative Democracy and Catholicism in his editorial introduction to *SPDCE*, it has less to do with his later development of political philosophy, than with his subsequent ideological attacks on rationalism in politics and his defences of the tradition of political conduct which the British people had until recently inherited from their unique and exceptional past.

2. Critique of Rationalism in General

1947 was the year when Oakeshott, having returned from military service, entered another battlefield, this time ideological. Already in the early pages of "Rationalism in Politics" war had been declared upon almost every political project of the time: national self-determination, the Reunion of the Christian Churches, the selection of civil servants on the sole criterion of personal abilities, the Beveridge Report, the planned society, the Education Act of 1944, and so forth.[14] The disease that had infected contemporary politics across all party lines and moral persuasions is that of rationalism. Nevertheless, since rationalism was not particularly tied to political affairs but had been present in every field of human conduct, Oakeshott's critique had to begin in a very general manner. "Every science, every art, every

[14] Oakeshott, "Rationalism in Politics," in *Rationalism in Politics*, 11. First published in *Cambridge Journal* 1 (1947): 81-98, 145-57.

practical activity requiring skill of any sort, indeed every human activity whatsoever, involves knowledge."[15] In this knowledge Oakeshott distinguished between two different but inseparable components. "Technical knowledge" refers to the knowledge of technique, which can be formulated into explicit rules and thus can in principle be written down in books, can be deliberately learned, and the rigidity of which gives the appearance of certainty. By contrast, "practical knowledge" is flexible and exists only in use, which can be learned only by practising the activity under discussion, and whose spontaneity makes it seem full of imprecisions.[16] With the help of these distinctions, Oakeshott contended that rationalism is the strong assertion that there is strictly speaking no practical knowledge, that all knowledge in the end is technical knowledge.[17]

What was Oakeshott doing here? What is the place of these comments in relation to his general philosophy? First, the topic dealt with here should not be confused with the practical world of experience as characterised in *EM* because it is confined to the world of morality and politics only. The distinction between technical and practical knowledge, in spite of the label of "practical," is applicable to all modes of experience in Oakeshott's general philosophy. It is a corollary that any subsequent criticisms of rationalism will also be relevant to historical, scientific, and practical activities, and indeed all kinds of human conduct whatsoever. As a result, the scope of this critique is in effect very far-reaching. This point is widely recognised by Oakeshott scholars,[18] some of whom even go further to stress the link between this analysis of rationalism and Oakeshott's early general philosophy.[19]

Nevertheless, while emphasising the continuity we must avoid confusing this analysis of rationalism in every mode of experience with Oakeshott's earlier critique of *ignoratio*

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[15] *Ibid*., 12.
[16] *Ibid*.
[17] *Ibid*., 15.
[18] Greenleaf, *Oakeshott's Philosophical Politics*, 47n; Robert Grant, *Oakeshott* (London: Claridge, 1990), 47; Kenneth B. McIntyre, *The Limits of Political Theory* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2004), 53. For an exception, which I think is mistaken, see Steven B. Smith, "Practical Life and the Critique of Rationalism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Oakeshott*, ed. Efraim Podoksik (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 136.
[19] Paul Franco, *The Political Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 128-29; Stuart Isaacs, *The Politics and Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 77.

elenchi, as some commentators mistakenly did.[20] This brings us to our second point. The aim of this 1947 essay is to understand how particular judgments are actually made in a specific form of human activity. This is a theme which, though having a place in *EM*, had so long remained untouched. Take the world of practical experience for example. The encroachment of science and history on practical judgements is recognised to be either not science or history but practical reasoning disguised in scientific or historical masks, or genuine science or history which are irrelevant to practice but misused in practical reasoning.[21] However, the obtrusion of science and history, though committing the logical fallacy of *ignoratio elenchi*, at least tells us how, in their conception, practical judgements are to be made. If they are ruled out as illegitimate, what should we put in their place? Unfortunately, Oakeshott had been primarily occupied with clarifying the necessary postulates of each mode of experience, which can inform us of the essential nature of, say, all practical judgments, but by itself gives no account of how particular judgements are made. Seen in this light, rationalism in politics is an account, though defective, which fills this gap in Oakeshott's early general philosophy. As a rationalisation of existing political practices, its logical status is from the very beginning purged of any non-practical element. Thus, if there are any logical defect of rationalism in politics, they do not reside in its invalid appropriation of arguments from other modes of experience. In any case, this appropriation is not necessary to its purposes and has already been dealt with by the the critique of *ignoratio elenchi*. Rather, the defect consists in the guidance of political conduct through the rationalisation of traditional political practice. The same can be said of the rationalisms in history, in science, and in all other modes of experience.

However, beyond this basic characterisation of the claim of rationalism, "Rationalism in Politics" offers us little philosophical critique of it. Most of its pages are concerned with the intellectual history of this disposition of mind, as well as the contingent circumstances

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[20] Grant, *Oakeshott*, 30, 54; Terry Nardin, *The Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 90.
[21] Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), 311-16.

in which they came to infect politics. Yet the practical effect of this essay is never the less limited. For it may provide hardly any consolation for the rationalists to be told that this historical outline is strictly historical and has nothing to recommend in practice when they are portrayed as the politically inexperienced and uneducated to whom ideological book-learning came as a rescue.[22] As Paul Franco rightly points out, "[t]hese essays … transformed Oakeshott from a well-regarded Cambridge don into a major public intellectual."[23] It is therefore not an exaggeration to say that, like his early general philosophy, Oakeshott's development of his late general philosophy arose firstly from the need to critically respond to his contemporary intellectual atmosphere. It was not until this urgent task of ideological raid had been completed that he could concentrate on putting his updated conception of political philosophy into practice and revise his general philosophy according to its new requirements.

3. A Positive Account of Rational Conduct

"Tower of Babel" (1948) is concerned with the same theme of rationalism, but now applied to morality rather than politics.[24] Oakeshott made the contrast between the moral life of spontaneous habit of affection and conduct and that of reflective application of ideals and principles. But there was not much advance in the philosophical critique of the latter save the accusation of the corruption brought about by the rationalistic cast of mind. In the same year, however, Oakeshott's book review of Hans Morgenthau's *Scientific Man Versus Power Politics* revealed that he came to recognise the direction in which such philosophical critique is to proceed. Whilst he shares Morgenthau's opposition to rationalism in politics, he thinks that such rationalism will necessarily fail not because man is in part irrational;

[22] Oakeshott, "Rationalism in Politics," 28.
[23] Paul Franco, *Michael Oakeshott: An Introduction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 11.
[24] Oakeshott, "The Tower of Babel," in *Rationalism in Politics*, 465-87. First published in *Cambridge Journal* 2 (1948): 67-83.

rather, and in accordance with his views on "The New Bentham," the traditions of human conduct, though having the appearance of irrationality, are actually perfectly rational and capable of being understood by reason. It is the distorted and limited conception of what is rational given by the rationalists that has to be reconceived.[25] The task, therefore, becomes that of explaining the sense in which human conduct can be rationally understood; or, in the context of his early general philosophy, showing the way particular practical judgements are actually made which is distorted by the rationalists.

This is what "Rational Conduct" set out to achieve in 1950.[26] After rehearsing the features of rational conduct as the rationalist would have it, such as the premeditation of ends and the formulation of problems admitting of conclusive solution,[27] Oakeshott went on to stress that this rationalistic account "has adherents in every department of life."[28] Consequently, if the critique of rationalism in politics is sound, the rationalism in all other fields of human activity will also collapse. The nature of this critique is philosophical because it is not concerned with the practical desirability or undesirability of such an account of rational conduct. Rather, it demonstrates the incoherence inherent in this conception of what is rational, and thereby the impossibility of finding any actual examples of rational conduct falling under this misconception.[29] As such, this critique has to be distinguished from the attempt to explore the irrational elements in human behaviour, which makes sense only if we accept the rationalist's account of reason in the first place.[30]

In the first stage of his argument, Oakeshott pointed out that practical judgment necessarily involves the assessment of current opinions and is related to a particular spatiotemporal context, which makes it impossible to yield a mistake-proof answer settled

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[25] Oakeshott, "Scientific Politics," review of *Scientific Man Versus Power Politics*, by Hans J. Morgenthau, in Timothy Fuller, *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, 106. First published in *Cambridge Journal* 1 (1948): 347-58.

[26] Oakeshott, "Rational Conduct," in *Rationalism in Politics*, 99. First published in *Cambridge Journal* 4 (1950): 3-27.

[27] *Ibid*., 102-3.

[28] *Ibid*., 107-8.

[29] *Ibid*., 109.

[30] *Ibid*., 114-15.

once and for all.[31] He anticipated the rationalists' response that, surely, if all these contextual factors are taken into account as the premises in the application of rational principles, then the point of this criticism would remain moot.[32] Thus, Oakeshott has to show that these contextual factors cannot be all taken into consideration in advance because they will appear only on the actual occasion of doing the activity. He must further show that making appropriate judgments on these occasions cannot be wholly based upon the so-called rational principles, but require something larger than that. Accordingly, the second stage of his argument insists that these principles can be derived from the traditions of performing an activity only with the help of hindsight, rather than *vice versa*.[33] Moreover, the ability to identify a particular problem, the acumen to recognise specific factors as relevant and others as irrelevant, and the connoisseurship in which adequate judgement about what to do next is swiftly made, all of them depend upon a familiarity with a traditional way of doing things.[34]

In this philosophical argument, the framework of Oakeshott's early general philosophy is still preserved. The terms of "abstract" and "concrete" are a case in point. That they are still used in the philosophical sense can be seen from the way they are used to describe a particular activity and a tradition of activity, respectively. To use one of Oakeshott's favourite illustrations as an instance, it can only invite bafflement in the layperson to say that a cook's engagement of devising a new dish is possible because of his "participation in the concrete activity [in this example, cookery in general] in relation to which his particular engagement is an abstraction."[35] Even though what Oakeshott said is actually good sense, from the philosophically unsophisticated cook's perspective, cookery as a whole certainly appears much more abstract than how to devise a particular dish in a concrete setting. Yet, of course, he knows perfectly well that every step of his cooking is inspired by the culinary tradition to which he belongs; which part of the meat should be used and how it should be cut, what

[31] *Ibid*., 116.
[32] *Ibid*., 117.
[33] *Ibid*., 118.
[34] *Ibid*., 119.
[35] *Ibid*.

range of spices and condiments should be applied in its marination, in what order and for how long, which ingredients mix well with one another and how their flavours can develop and sufficiently infuse the sauce, and the masterly execution of all these, will certainly reflect the knowledge he acquired in learning how to cook in that tradition if the result is not to turn out neither fish nor fowl. However, after Oakeshott took seriously the implications of his updated conception of political philosophy for his general philosophy, he ceased to talk about the contrast between the abstract and the concrete, not least because philosophy is no longer construed in these terms and the Absolute no longer serves as the aim or even the criterion of philosophical investigation.

For the time being this idealist context still remained, especially in the final stage of Oakeshott's argument in "Rational Conduct." Here we are no longer talking about whether a particular activity is rational or not, but brought to the conclusion that "an activity as a whole (science, cooking, historical investigation, politics or poetry) cannot be said either to be 'rational' or 'irrational' unless we conceive all idioms of activity to be embraced in a single universe of activity."[36] From this comprehensive, philosophical point of view, the customs, traditions, institutions, and laws which the rationalists regard as irrational and attempt to replace by their reason, are in fact the repository of rational knowledge; to use his philosophical language, "they are the coherence."[37] Furthermore, if we look back and consider all the rationalistic political programmes, it is undeniable that they were at least actually carried out to some degree. Since they are actual, they must be possible; and they are possible simply because, ultimately, they are not determined by abstract principles alone. Rather, despite the denial on the part of their advocates, they are also guided by the traditions of political conduct in a particular community. Again, the practical overtones of this philosophical argument cannot be neglected. The sweeping message conveyed to the rationalists and their "captive audiences" is that all of their programmes in politics are, after

[36] *Ibid*., 122.
[37] *Ibid*., 126.

all, no better than what they deem to be irrational. In other words, it is they who are talking in self-contradictions and should learn from those whom they despise as being in short supply of rational principles.

4. Ideological Application of the Critique

The critique of rationalism culminates in Oakeshott's Inaugural Lecture at the London School of Economics, *Political Education*. The philosophical language persisted, as in the announcement of the aim to understand an activity as a concrete, self-moved whole.[38] The criticisms of empiricist and rationalist understanding of politics were similar, arguing that they are logically impossible and therefore cannot serve as a satisfactory account of political activities.[39] Oakeshott's positive account also remains unchanged: political judgement is not infallible, is vulnerable to error, and the pursuit of intimations can be corrupted by the pursuit of power. Again, the effect of this philosophical argument is practical, as a book review's designation of it as a conservative ideology testifies.[40]

Whilst no new philosophical arguments seemed to appear in this critique of rationalism in politics, there was nevertheless a theme which had hitherto appeared only incidentally in Oakeshott's book reviews: the defence of the political tradition of the British people. This task of seeing what is rational in the tradition of an activity follows quite naturally from the argument against rationalism. There had been, for example, an insistence on the traditional understanding of parliamentary government, and especially of the role played by the Opposition, which was in danger of being transformed by the Labour Party into despotism and tyranny because more decisions were uniformly made within the Party before they were debated in Parliament.[41] "It is, and always has been, the business of the Opposition to

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[38] Oakeshott, *Political Education*, in *Rationalism in Politics*, 46, 52. First published 1951 by Bowes & Bowes.
[39] *Ibid*., 46-56.
[40] "Tradition in Politics," review of *Political Education*, by Michael Oakeshott, *The Times Literary Supplement*, June 1, 1951, 341.
[41] Oakeshott, "Contemporary British Politics," review of *Labour Marches On*, by John Parker, and *The Case*

oppose, to criticize, to expose foolishness, corruption and mismanagement wherever they lie hidden. It is required neither to make constructive suggestions nor to have an alternative plan. And, in general, it may be said that a disunited Opposition is as necessary as a united government."[42] More importantly, this understanding need not be justified by recourse to some immutable Nature, but has always been exemplified in the political experience of the British people.[43] At first sight, this critique is philosophical in nature and dictates no particular action to be pursued, which is the business of practical judgment instead of philosophy. Nonetheless, it does have political lessons to teach by revealing the rationality of traditional habits of conduct and the unsatisfactoriness of rationalistic abridgements of foreign experience.

Again, there had been a criticism of the pale simulacrum of *laisser-faire*, which obscures our understanding of what freedom was in the past and has been since then. Here the derisive tone of practical criticism is unmistakable in the sentence commencing "as every school boy used to know,"[44] implying that the ignorance of current politicians is worse than uneducated pupils. In place of the misleading phrase of *laissez-faire*, Oakeshott clarified that "[t]o know that unregulated competition is a chimera, to know that to regulate competition is not the same thing as to interfere with the operation of competitive controls, and to know the difference between these two activities, is the beginning of the political economy of freedom."[45]

In *Political Education*, Oakeshott for the first time explained this difference unambiguously via the distinction between attending to and making legal arrangements.[46] It is used to illustrate what the pursuit of intimations means in the context of politics, where

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for Conservatism, by Quintin Hogg, in Luke O'Sullivan, *Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence*, 210-13. First published in *Cambridge Journal* 1 (1948): 474-90.

[42] *Ibid*., 210-11.

[43] *Ibid*., 218.

[44] Oakeshott, "The Political Economy of Freedom," review of *Economic Policy for a Free Society*, by Henry C. Simons, in *Rationalism in Politics*, 403. First published in *Cambridge Journal* 2 (1949): 212-29.

[45] *Ibid*., 403.

[46] Oakeshott, *Political Education*, 45.

politics is understood to be the activity of seeking coherence and balance in the existing legal framework of rights and duties.[47] This may seem to anticipate many themes in *On Human Conduct*, but here it is mainly a practical defence of the customary way of doing politics in Britain. After all, at this stage of Oakeshott's thought, he was still unable to incorporate this insight into a comprehensive political philosophy. The conception of political philosophy to which he gave outward expression in *Political Education* was still in tune with his early general philosophy. It is "to consider the place of political activity itself on the map of our total experience," and cannot contribute to the task of pursuing the intimations.[48] Judging from what we have seen in the previous chapter, this view did not reflect the radical changes Oakeshott had made to his conceptions of the nature of political philosophy earlier in the late-1940s.

Therefore, it is inadequate to interpret Oakeshott's works from the late-1940s to the mid-1950s as a transition from epistemology or logic to morality and politics, as many interpreters have done.[49] This is unexpected because even Oakeshott himself once made clear that the denunciations of rationalism is not the main topic in *OHC*, which is concerned with "something else."[50] Whilst the critique of rationalism in politics belongs to the development of his general philosophy for polemical purposes in relation to contemporary tendencies in political argument, the "political" writings after 1952 left the temporary ideological fervour behind for the sake of constructing a political philosophy, which cannot directly apply its conclusions to current affairs without distorting its own meanings. Whereas the flaw of rationalism can be found in every mode of experience the exposition of which is at the same time an ideological critique, the investigation into the ideal types of the politics

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[47] *Ibid*., 57.
[48] *Ibid*., 65.
[49] Franco, *Michael Oakeshott*, 98, 101-2; Isaacs, *Politics and Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott*, 105; Andrew Sullivan, *Intimations Pursued: The Voice of Practice in the Conversation of Michael Oakeshott* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2007), 161; Kenneth Minogue, "The Fate of Rationalism in Oakeshott's Thought," in *A Companion to Michael Oakeshott*, ed. Paul Franco and Leslie Marsh (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 239, 245; Robert Devigne, "Oakeshott as Conservative," in Franco and Marsh, *Companion to Michael Oakeshott*, 273; Neill, "Oakeshott, Modernity, and Cold War Liberalism," 48-49.
[50] Oakeshott, "On Misunderstanding Human Conduct," *Political Theory* 4, no.3 (August 1976): 357.

of faith and scepticism, of the individual and the anti-individual, and of civil and enterprise association, is not aimed at disapproving of any particular government. They belong to different categories of Oakeshott's writings. The revision of his early general philosophy is delayed because for him after the war the priority was not to revise his general philosophy in accordance with his new conception of political philosophy, but to counter the rationalistic manner of thinking cultivated in the war years but unsuitable for the times of peace. It is unsuitable because of its erosion of the British political tradition, of which a rationalistic account of civil association or individuality is no less a pale substitute for our knowledge of engaging in political activity than a similar account of enterprise association. This abstract liberalism thereby received an equally debilitating criticism in Oakeshott's comments on the minimal state or the atomistic individual. However, after the critique of rationalism had been completed, his late general philosophy began to find new directions inspired by his late political philosophy.

III. Belated Revisions of General Philosophy

1. The Remaining Task of Revising General Philosophy

Oakeshott's investigations in his late political philosophy after the late 1930s does not conform to the alleged subsumption of it by general philosophy in *EM*. Rather, his early general philosophy is an outgrowth of his early political philosophy which acquires an independent life of its own. Nonetheless, in Oakeshott's works political philosophy is more central to his philosophical concern than general philosophy is. Consequently, it is unsurprising that, after he revisited his political philosophy which in turn led to new demands on his general philosophy during the late 1940s and 1950s, Oakeshott had no hesitation in changing his opinions in general philosophy accordingly.

The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind (1959) is mainly focused on art as

an autonomous mode of experience which had been earlier subsumed under the category of practice. However, Oakeshott scholars have noticed that in this monograph Oakeshott abandoned many claims in his early general philosophy. Philosophy is now construed as a "parasitic" activity,[51] so that it is no longer the king of all modes of experience; neither is it its task to determine the degrees of abstraction or arrest exemplified by other modes.[52] Indeed, Oakeshott confessed that he did not "know where to place an experience released altogether from modality or a world of 'objects' which is governed by no considerabilities."[53] In other words, at this stage he was no longer willing to talk about philosophy as the most concrete and comprehensive experience.[54]

As we have seen in the previous chapter, these changes of opinions in general philosophy had long been anticipated in Oakeshott's revisions of his conception of political philosophy between the late-1930s and the late-1940s. Therefore, it is reasonable to judge that these alterations to his general philosophy reflect the theoretical needs of his political philosophy. Oakeshott had not incorporated them into his general philosophy until 1959 probably because it is only after *Morality and Politics in Modern Europe* was delivered in 1958 that he became more confident about the prospects of his political philosophy. It is also after this that any attempt to alter general philosophy accordingly is worthy of the effort. Consequently, it is misleading for Efraim Podoksik to claim that in Oakeshott's works political philosophy follows the footsteps of general philosophy, though their directions of change are the same.[55] On the contrary, the pace of his political philosophy had always been ahead of that of his general philosophy, until the two were finally synchronised to compose a coherent whole in *OHC*.

It is useful to recapitulate the new demands made by Oakeshott's new conceptions of

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[51] Oakeshott, *The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind* (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1959), 491.
[52] Franco, *Michael Oakeshott*, 126.
[53] Oakeshott, *Voice of Poetry*, 512.
[54] Gerencser, *Skeptic's Oakeshott*, 37-38.
[55] Efraim Podoksik, *In Defence of Modernity: Vision and Philosophy in Michael Oakeshott* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2003), 170-71, 204.

political philosophy before we examine how he actually carried out the construction of such a political philosophy in *OHC*, and how his general philosophy finally caters to the needs of this political philosophy. The most important requirement is that political philosophy should proceed from an inquiry into our ordinary understanding of politics, so that the connection between philosophy and our experience of political life is retained. Nevertheless, political philosophy is philosophical because it does not remain satisfactory on this level of common sense, but goes beyond it to another level where what is known in the previous level is transformed by being understood in a different manner. This conception of philosophy implies a weak form of dialecticism progressing from some levels to others, but does not presuppose the Absolute as the final destination or the ultimate criterion of philosophical activity. Furthermore, following this qualification of holism, different levels of understanding are not to be ranked as higher or lower, and the connection between political philosophy and political life is made even closer than before. The task left to general philosophy, then, is to show how such close relationships among different levels of understanding are still compatible with the categorial differences among them. Moreover, it must show this in a comprehensive account in which other important elements of his earlier general philosophy can find their place.

2. Where is the Absolute?

"Understanding is not such that we either enjoy it or lack it altogether," thus begins the first essay in *OHC*, for "we inexorably inhabit a world of intelligibles."[56] That this claim is put at the very beginning symbolises the tribute Oakeshott paid to his Idealist predecessors. This is but another way to express the Idealist doctrine that everything in our experience is something already mediated, that fact and the interpretation of its meaning are not two

[56] Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 1.

separable things but one and the same act of understanding. In the terminology of *OHC*, even if a "'going-on' is recognized as a 'given,' it is not a mere gratuity; it is itself an achievement in understanding and not therefore independent of reflective consciousness."[57] This doctrine paves the way for an account of our pre-theoretical knowledge, which falls short of being an autonomous mode of enquiry but is never the less a kind of understanding to a certain degree.

This primitive, pre-theoretical understanding is called "recognition." It is arrived at by "distinguishing and remembering likenesses and unlikenesses in what is going on," the results of which "may often be vague, obscure, and tentative, and often mistaken; that is, unlikes mistaken for likes and likes for unlikes."[58] At this point the dialecticism in Oakeshott's general philosophy intrudes. While this pre-theoretical understanding is our starting point, theoretical enquiry cannot satisfy itself by remaining on this level of understanding. The theorist must move. This movement is achieved when the tentativeness of the recognition of characteristics is alleviated, and it is alleviated when the "characteristics are detached from their contingent circumstances and are combined to compose the features of ideal characters."[59]

Understanding at this level becomes "identification," which Oakeshott called "a platform of conditional understanding."[60] It is conditional in the sense that the ideal character thus abstracted from the recognitions of contingent identities is used as the postulated condition on which our pre-theoretical understanding of those identities is improved by correcting mistaken identities.[61] Since this level of understanding does not question the postulates themselves, "their acceptance constitutes a suspension of the unconditional critical engagement of understanding in which the appearance of an assumption is a signal for it to be interrogated."[62]

[57] *Ibid.*
[58] *Ibid.*, 3.
[59] *Ibid.*, 4.
[60] *Ibid.*, 6.
[61] *Ibid.*, 7.
[62] *Ibid.*, 8.

Here we come to the core of Oakeshott's conception of philosophy or theoretical enquiry. In the metaphor of ascending a tower discussed in the previous chapter, philosophical activity is not primarily distinguished by the height to which it rises compared to other investigatory activities. In any case, in the absence of the Absolute as a criterion or destination, talks of heights do not make much sense. Rather, what makes it distinctively philosophical is the radical nature of the transformation it brings to our understanding at previous levels. By contrast, in *OHC* "the engagement of understanding is not unconditional on account of the absence of conditions, or in virtue of a supposed terminus in an unconditional theorem; what constitutes its unconditionality is the continuous recognition of the conditionality of conditions."[63] In other words, after the holism in Oakeshott's general philosophy is qualified, the focus naturally shifts from the radically subversive nature of philosophy to its perpetual movement. This is also true of the dialectical progression from our pre-theoretical knowledge to conditional platforms of understanding. The abstraction of ideal characters from contingent identities is certainly far less subversive than the manner in which the concepts of the State and the self in Oakeshott's early political philosophy contradict our ordinary commonsense about those concepts. Furthermore, as James Alexander rightly points out, even conclusions reached in philosophy, or the theoretical enquiry into the postulates of previous platforms of understanding, are themselves conditional.[64] Consequently, they are not so much different in degrees of conditionality as occupy different platforms between which there is no longer the kind of radical transformation envisaged by Oakeshott's earlier conception of political philosophy.

It has been controversial among Oakeshott scholars concerning whether the Absolute is still retained in Oakeshott's late general philosophy. Davide Orsi, following David Boucher, argues that the Absolute still serves as the criterion of coherence in our experience

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[63] *Ibid*., 11.

[64] James Alexander, "Oakeshott on Hegel's 'Injudicious' Use of the Word 'State,'" *History of Political Thought* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 162.

as it did from the very beginning of Oakeshott's works.[65] Terry Nardin, on the other hand, argues that, after the notion of the totality of experience recedes, it does not even serve as an ideal at which theoretical enquiry should aim.[66] To be sure, textual evidence may lend support to both interpretations. When Oakeshott said that "[t]he notion of an unconditional or definitive understanding may hover in the background, but it has no part in the adventure,"[67] this background notion may be understood as the aim of theoretical enquiry. In contrast, when he mentioned "the difficulties entailed in the notion of an unconditional understanding,"[68] it seems to follow that a notion problematic by itself could not adequately serve as the standard by which the satisfactoriness of a particular platform of understanding is to be judged.

Therefore, the only way out is to see what Oakeshott said about this notion of an unconditional understanding implies concerning other elements of his general philosophy. We have just seen that the qualification of holism naturally leads to a closer connection between pre-theoretical knowledge and conditional platforms of understanding. For, if the notion of the Absolute still plays an important role, and even if it is merely a criterion rather than the final destination, then talks of higher and lower, or more concrete and more abstract, levels of understanding seem to be inevitable. In this case, textual evidence is no longer equivocal. In *Political Education*, Oakeshott opposed a "self-moved" understanding of politics as a more concrete idea to that of rationalism in politics. In *OHC*, it becomes clear that when he used the same term to refer to the "self-moved" enterprise of understanding, the emphasis is shifted to the dialectical "movement" essential to theoretical enquiries.[69] Furthermore, with the Idealist concept of the Absolute fading away, the use of philosophical terms like "concrete" and "abstract" also lapses into ordinary usage. In *OHC* particular

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65 Davide Orsi, *Michael Oakeshott's Political Philosophy of International Relations: Civil Association and International Society* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 19-27.
66 Terry Nardin, *The Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 45.
67 Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 3.
68 *Ibid*., 29.
69 *Ibid*., 2.

performances, actions, and utterances are described as "concrete,"[70] whereas the ideal character of human conduct in general, and specifically of civil association, is said to be ideal "not in the sense of being a wished-for perfect condition of things but in being *abstracted* from the contingencies and ambiguities of actual goings-on in the world."[71] These changes of language use accord very well with Oakeshott's revised conception of political philosophy discussed in the previous chapter. Therefore, regardless of whether the Absolute still exists or not, and whether it is a criterion or a destination, what is important is that it no longer plays a significant role in Oakeshott's general philosophy. Consequently, a theoretical enquiry is no longer philosophical on account of the radical transformation of conclusions, but because it is always on the move. The motivation, nevertheless, remains to make closer the connection between the pre-theoretical understanding of political life and the philosophical enquiry into practical politics.

3. Whither *Ignoratio Elenchi*?

This revival of dialecticism in general philosophy does not imply a qualification of Oakeshott's critique of *ignoratio elenchi* in his early works. What it does entail is that the critique of category mistake does not necessitate the abandonment of the progression from one level of understanding to another one. We have seen that the activity of theorising proceeds from the pre-theoretical "recognition" to the conditional platform of "identification" by understanding a "going-on" in terms of the postulates abstracted from its characteristics in contingent circumstances. Oakeshott continued this account by further introducing the concept of "orders of inquiry."[72] This enables us to distinguish between those conditional enquiries which understand a "going-on" as an exhibition of intelligence or human conduct,

[70] *Ibid*., 43.
[71] *Ibid*., 109; my italics.
[72] *Ibid*., 12.

and those which understand it as a process or behaviour.[73] Apparently, the historical and scientific modes of experience in Oakeshott's early general philosophy would fit into this two-fold scheme of "orders of inquiry." Besides, when he argued against the reductionism of one order into the other,[74] this argument could be understood as a reformulation of the critique of *ignoratio elenchi*. More importantly, his subsequent comments on the categorial confusion involved in psychology and sociology are a rehearsal of the arguments in *EM*.[75]

However, whilst the critique of *ignoratio elenchi* is clearly preserved in the categorial distinction between "orders of inquiry," it is less so in the distinctions between different "idioms of inquiry" within a specified order of inquiry. These idioms, alongside the order of inquiry to which they belong, are entailed in conditional platforms of understanding. For, without choosing a certain idiom of inquiry, the identities specified by an order of inquiry would still be ambiguous.[76] After one decides to understand a "going-on" as an exhibition of intelligence, he has to determine whether it is to be understood in terms of ethics, jurisprudence, or aesthetics; alternatively, if it is to be understood as a mechanical process rather than a human practice, then he has to further specify whether it is to be examined from the perspective of physics, chemistry, or psychology. Using the term "sciences" in the general sense peculiar to German such as *Wissenschaft*, Oakeshott did not exclude the possibility of the theoretical reduction of one idiom of enquiry into another. In his own words, "while the 'sciences' which fall within an 'order' of inquiry are not categorially exclusive of one another and therefore may suffer 'reduction,' each is autonomous in being constituted in terms of theorems exclusively its own, and each is capable of its own conditional perfection."[77]

This account brings closer the relationship between different idioms of enquiry within an order of enquiry. Indeed, the relationship between the practical and the historical modes

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[73] *Ibid*., 13.
[74] *Ibid*., 15.
[75] *Ibid*., 20-25.
[76] *Ibid*., 16.
[77] *Ibid*., 17.

of experience, both of which are concerned with exhibitions of intelligence, is brought so dangerously close that Oakeshott was later to highlight their logical separation in another essay entitled "On History." In any case, under this account it is possible to maintain the connection between political philosophy and our experience of political life without sacrificing the doctrine of modal separatism. The philosophical enquiry into politics may proceed from a pre-theoretical recognition of political life to a conditional (practical or historical) understanding of politics, and then arrive at a theoretical understanding of the postulates employed in the exploration of political activity in the previous conditional platforms of understanding. In this process, a theorist may occupy a superior platform of understanding in the logical sense that he is concerned with understanding the postulates of a previous platform themselves rather than using them to explore a certain subject matter in that previous platform. However, his conclusions are no less conditional in that they can be subjected to a further enquiry into another set of postulates which he inevitably presupposes in conducting his present enquiry. Therefore, he would not be offensive to other adventurers in this intellectual journey if he committed a category mistake, which has already been ruled out as impossible the moment he is on board of a specified "order of inquiry." But he will be truly offensive if "he so far forgets himself as to assume the office of tutor to those he has left behind who have no such concern."[78]

4. The World of Practice

In the second section of the first essay in *OHC*, Oakeshott continued the exposition of his conception of theoretical activity by giving an account of the conditional platforms of understanding within the "order of inquiry" concerned with exhibitions of intelligence. He was concerned "with the identity 'human conduct,' with the engagement of theorizing it, and

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[78] *Ibid*., 26.

with its employment as an instrument for understanding contingent substantive actions and utterances."[79] As it turns out in the voluminous pages, "the engagement of theorizing it" corresponds to the philosophical exanimation of the practical mode of experience in Oakeshott's early general philosophy. On the other hand, when he came to deal with the understanding of "contingent substantive actions and utterances," it becomes clear that this understanding is what is called history in *EM*. It is noteworthy that during this investigation the logical differences between these two platforms of understanding are not highlighted. Instead, the reader is given the impression that they are dealing with two complementary but inseparable components of human conduct. This is disclosed by the preliminary definition of human conduct as "a human being responding to his contingent situation by doing or saying this rather than that in relation to an imagined and wished-for outcome and in relation, also, to some understood conditions."[80] It is only through a familiarity with the themes in Oakeshott's early general philosophy that one is in a position to discover that *this* is what is previously called "practice" and *that* is what corresponds to the "historical world of experience."

The world of practice is more readily discernible in Oakeshott's account. In his remarks on the difficulty of sustaining the impulse of theoretical enquiry into the postulates of the practical mode of experience, he acknowledged that

> no doubt there will be many who may properly find this task uninteresting; they prefer to inhabit and to respond to the invitations of the world of *pragmata*. And others may lament the compromise it entails: released from the conditions of doing, having recovered the critical initiative in which understanding is not an instrument to be used but an energy to be enjoyed, and their sails set to catch the wind of an unconditional engagement, they will be disposed to resent this submission to another set of

[79] *Ibid*., 31.
[80] *Ibid*., 32.

conditions.[81]

These conditions, as his subsequent discussion reveals, are the postulates of practical reasoning such as "free agency," "deliberation," "persuasion," and "explanation." More importantly, the enquiry into the postulates of practical reasoning is theoretical because these postulates are themselves subjected to analysis. In contrast, practical reasoning or "the world of *pragmata*" is conditional in the sense of using these postulates in its own enquiry without calling them into question. It is probably because this point had not been straightforwardly expressed that Oakeshott later made some effort to remove the possible misunderstanding of the world of *pragmata* as a primordial form of experience, from which all other forms of experience abstract ideal characters as their own specific "idioms of inquiry."[82] Rather, in accordance with the general framework of *OHC*, the world of *pragmata* is a conditional platform of understanding where practical reasoning presupposes the ideal characters of "free agency," "deliberation," "persuasion," and "explanation;" these ideal characters, in turn, are abstracted from the pre-theoretical recognition of the identities of what is going on in contingent circumstances. Consequently, this account accords very well with Oakeshott's revised conception of political philosophy in which the starting point of philosophical investigation is the pre-theoretical knowledge of political life rather than any other autonomous modes of experience.

From the discussion of these postulates onwards, readers familiar with Oakeshott's published writings in the 1950s and 1960s will have little difficulty in recognising themes in his critique of rationalism in politics. Deliberation, for example, "is not to be understood as a regrettable frustration of a demonstrative manner of thinking. It is the only kind of argument in which an agent can recommend an action to himself, and its reasons are the only kind of reasons which may legitimately be adduced for having made this rather than that

[81] *Ibid*., 33.
[82] Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1999), 21-29. First published 1983 by Blackwell.

choice."[83] As such, the so-called practical principles for action "are not flickering shadows of necessary truths or premises from which conclusions can be deduced. They are aids to deliberation, guesses of varying generality, made with different degrees of confidence and drawing upon evidence of varying quality, which, in deliberation, are not subjected to the test of a criterion superior to themselves but are made to criticize and illuminate one another."[84] More crucially, those who recall Oakeshott's reason for rejecting the claim to philosophical concreteness made by the practical mode of experience will immediately agree that an "action the outcome of which is always a new situation calling for new responses"[85] has always been the hallmark of practical reasoning.

Similar examples abound. The account of the features of persuasive arguments[86] is reminiscent of what Oakeshott said in "Political Laws and Captive Audiences."[87] Finally, the discussion about practical principles used by an agent to explain his own actions to other agents,[88] as has been touched upon in the previous chapter, reflects his earliest view which had not criticised the logical flaw of social and political doctrines, but regarded them as a limited form of explanatory enterprise falling short of being a genuine political philosophy.

Nevertheless, it is after Oakeshott further revised his definition of "human conduct" that we arrive at the reformulation of the core of his critique of rationalism in politics. Here "human conduct" is no longer solipsistically construed, but take into consideration the fact that the imagined, wished-for outcome in the future may be "composed of the choices and actions of other agents."[89] These transactions between agents postulate relationships which are more durable than those which would disappear after the transactions are completed, and which are not themselves transactional.[90] This kind of relationships he calls a "practice."

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[83] Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 44-45.
[84] *Ibid*., 45.
[85] *Ibid*.
[86] *Ibid*., 46-49.
[87] Oakeshott, "Political Laws and Captive Audiences," in *Talking to Eastern Europe*, ed. G. R. Urban (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964), pp. 291-301.
[88] Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 49-50.
[89] *Ibid*., 54.
[90] *Ibid*.

At this point it is useful to remind ourselves that Oakeshott's critique of rationalism in politics is based upon a distinction between practical knowledge and technical knowledge through which rationalism is defined as the claim that all knowledge is technical knowledge. Consequently, when Oakeshott proceeded to say that "[a] practice may be identified as a set of considerations, manners, uses, observances, customs, standards, canon's maxims, principles, rules, and offices specifying useful procedures or denoting obligations or duties which relate to human actions and utterances,"[91] it can be recognised that this identification is not a definition of "practical knowledge," but refers to the formation of "technical knowledge." In particular, "[i]t emerges as a continuously invented and always unfinished by-product of performances related to the achievement of imagined and wished-for satisfactions *other than that of having a procedure*, and it becomes recognizable when it has acquired a certain degree of definition and authority or acknowledged utility."[92] In contrast, what was previously called "practical knowledge" is "knowing how to participate in a 'practice,'" which "is not exclusive to conduct. It is present also, for example, in both 'historical' and in 'scientific' inquiry, both of which are engagements in theoretical understanding released from the considerations of conduct."[93] Oakeshott's reluctance to continue referring to the practical world of experience by the term "practice" coheres well with our previous observation that the critique of rationalism is not specific to politics or the practical mode of experience, but is applicable to all other forms of experience; and, moreover, that the knowledge of how to participate in a "tradition" is as essential to practical enquiry as it is to all other kinds of enquiry.

Consequently, when Oakeshott claimed that "[a]n action … is an identity in which substantive performance and procedural consideration may be distinguished but are inseparably joined,"[94] it should not be interpreted as an espousal of rationalism which had

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[91] *Ibid*., 55.
[92] *Ibid*., 56; my emphasis.
[93] *Ibid*., 57n.
[94] *Ibid*., 57.

been earlier repudiated by him, nor as the abandonment of unity in human conduct. Podoksik, for instance, argues along this mistaken line:

> Previously, Oakeshott regarded instrumental conduct as an abstraction which obscures the vision of conduct as a coherent whole. Purposive conduct was just a partial aspect of the totality of human life. Yet here the distinction is not between what is partial and what is concrete, so that the partial necessarily dissolves into the whole. It is rather between two independent aspects of conduct which cannot be reduced to each other. One corresponds to general conditions which qualify actions. The other refers to the sphere of the intentions and purposes of those actions.[95]

In Oakeshott's critique of rationalism in politics, the abstraction which obscures the vision of conduct as a coherent whole is not its instrumental or purposive features. In any case, in *EM* Oakeshott had already incorporated them into his exposition of the presuppositions of the practical mode of experience in terms of the transition from the world of "what is" to the world of "what ought to be." Rather, it is when technical knowledge is mistaken for the whole of knowledge required for conducting practical activity successfully that what is abstract usurps the status of what is concrete. In *OHC* the language of "abstract" and "concrete" lost their previously rigid philosophical connotations, but this does not mean that the doctrine expressed through such language was thereby jettisoned. The partial "practice" still arises out of the whole conglomerate of human conduct, and the claim that substantive performance and procedural practice are distinguishable but invariably joined exactly symbolises a synthesis of Oakeshott's early general philosophy and his later development of it in the critique of rationalism in politics. The rash judgment that it represents Oakeshott's rejection of unity in human conduct might be caused by Podoksik's interpretive scheme

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[95] Podoksik, "Without Purpose or Unity: Moral and Social Life in the Thought of Michael Oakeshott," in *The Moral, Social and Political Philosophy of the British Idealists*, ed. William Sweet (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2009), 263.

where Oakeshott's political philosophy follows the steps of his general philosophy in abandoning unity and purpose and embracing plurality and individuality. Unfortunately, as our interpretation demonstrates, this scheme is untenable.

5. The World of History

Readers who closely follow Oakeshott's argument thus far may be confused by the way in which the third section of the first essay in *OHC* begins:

> Hitherto, I have been concerned, in the main, with the identity 'human conduct' and with the engagement of theorizing it; that is, with understanding an ideal character in terms of its postulates. It remains now to consider the engagement to understand a substantive performance. And by this I do not mean the limited understanding of an action or an utterance required in order to respond to it, about which I have said something already. … I mean the engagement to theorise an already identified action or utterance in terms of its postulates.[96]

Has he not already discussed the engagement of theorising substantive actions and utterances in terms of their postulated ideal characters of "free agency," "deliberation," "persuasion," and "explanation?" Hasn't he already considered the theoretical enquiry into the presuppositions of the practical mode of experience? Oakeshott's answer is very intriguing. He explained the need of an additional platform of understanding than what had already been provided in virtue of the distinction between different "orders of inquiry." A particular mechanical identity, for instance, can be both identified and elucidated by a science of mechanics because it is an example of the laws of mechanics which, besides being capable

[96] Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 91.

of identifying the ideal characters of mechanical "goings-on," can also specify a particular mechanical process. By contrast, the substantive performance of an action or utterance, while capable of being identified by the ideal character of "human conduct," cannot be explained by the related postulates of "free agency," "deliberation," "persuasion," and "explanation," of which it is not a deducible example but an illustration of human intelligence at work.[97]

Again, this passage of argument gives the reader a false impression about the logical status of the engagement of theorising which is to be subsequently accounted for. Since the theoretical enquiry into the postulates of the practical world of experience is insufficient for the task of understanding specific exemplifications of human conduct, one may reasonably expect that Oakeshott would shortly provide another mode of enquiry which enables us to accomplish this task. What is actually offered, however, is a mode whose conclusions are not about the understanding of the desires, motivations, and intentions behind specific agents' performance of certain actions and utterances. This is a mode which aims at transforming these understandings (which belong to the world of *pragmata* and are thus themselves within a conditional platform of understanding) into an historical understanding. As Oakeshott later made it even clearer, "[i]f a *revenant* were to appear, to offer himself as an eyewitness or as a participant and were to say: 'It was not like that but like this,' he would be recognized as only one more, somewhat odd, survival whose utterance has to be translated from the idiom of exploit into the idiom of evidence."[98] Such an historical event is "not a merely recorded occurrence, not itself an assignable action or an assignable response to an action, but the contingent outcome of the choices and encounters of assignable agents and understood as this outcome."[99] Consequently, "it cannot be understood in terms of the intentions of a performer, his disposition, his beliefs, his reasons for acting or its so-called appropriateness as a response to his circumstances."[100] It seems to follow that, from the perspective of the

[97] *Ibid*., 92.
[98] Oakeshott, *On History*, 63.
[99] Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 107.
[100] Oakeshott, *On History*, 70.

world of *pragmata*, historical enquiry is not a conditional platform of understanding occupying the same level or different levels of the same height, but a *theoretical* enquiry which abstracts its object of analysis from what has already been identified in the previous platform and questions these abstractions themselves.

Nonetheless, it is important to recall that in Oakeshott's view the practical world of experience is not the primordial form of experience from which all dialectical activity of theorising proceeds. Rather, the starting point of philosophical investigation is the pre-theoretical recognition of the characteristics of what is going on. In addition, when later in "On History" Oakeshott revisited the idea of a practical past not mentioned in *OHC*, and made the comparison between practice and history by virtue of their divergent uses of the present (which is presumably something corresponding to the recognition of characteristics of what is going on in *OHC*), it becomes clear that these two modes of enquiry are parallel to each other in terms of their logical status.[101]

Perhaps, just as his new conception of general philosophy suggests, Oakeshott was forever *en voyage* and never settled his position for too long. Besides, if there had been hesitations about which kind of experience should serve as the starting point of philosophical activity in the late-1930s and 1940s, then one should not be surprised to see that there were also similar equivocations and ambiguities concerning the relationships among different levels of understanding in the 1970s and 1980s. Eventually what is important for our purposes is to observe that such problems are non-existent in his earliest exposition of general philosophy in *EM*. Yet they follow quite naturally from the new affinities obtaining among different forms of enquiry. These affinities, in turn, arise from the revival of a weakened form of dialecticism in his general philosophy and the qualification of the holistic Absolute, be it an intelligible criterion by which the theoretical satisfactoriness of a particular kind of enquiry can be measured, or a coherent aim towards which the dialectical progression

[101] *Ibid*., 8-9.

should move.

6. General Philosophy Catering to Political Philosophy

Before concluding this chapter, it is worthwhile to observe briefly how Oakeshott's actual construction of a political philosophy in the third and the second essays of *OHC* can be understood by reference to the framework of general philosophy provided in the first essay. In introducing the third essay, Oakeshott concisely mentioned the acquisition of authority and power by the rising European states in modern history, but said that "[t]hese two themes and histories lie to one side of my main concern, which is to consider what has been thought about the character of a modern European state and about the office of its government."[102] What he wanted to consider is "some of the fortunes of this inquiry, begun in the sixteenth century, into the character of a state."[103] As we have seen in the previous chapter, his contention is that the most dominant characters of modern European states are the tensions and ambiguities between understanding a state on the analogy of *societas* and *universitas*, respectively. This essay then deals with the intimations of these two distinct understandings of a state in late medieval times[104] and in modern times.[105]

From the perspective of Oakeshott's general philosophy, it becomes clear that this essay does not begin from a historical platform of understanding modern European politics. Rather, in gathering what has been thought and said about the character of a modern European state, what Oakeshott was actually doing is the pre-theoretical "recognition" of characteristics: "recognitions of the character of a state of the office of its government which together compose the political consciousness of modern Europe."[106] Of course, he referred to his

[102] Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 189.
[103] *Ibid*., 197.
[104] *Ibid*., 206-224.
[105] *Ibid*., 233-313.
[106] *Ibid*., 320.

account provided in this essay as an "historical inquiry,"[107] but that is something at which he finally arrives, not something from which his journey begins. In particular, after this intellectual journey sets out from our pre-theoretical understanding of modern European politics, it must move from mere recognition to "identification" because in recognition likes may be mistaken for unlikes, and *vice versa*, whose misidentifications must be rectified and whose true characteristics reidentified. The famous bracketing of Thomas Paine with a group of thinkers including Edmund Burke and Lord Salisbury in terms of the ideal characters of *societas* (as opposed to *universitas*) is exactly an example of this exercise of "identification."[108]

However, the driving force of this essay is not an unconditional engagement of theorising typified by philosophical investigation, but a conditional platform of understanding which presupposes the ideal characters of *societas* and *universitas* in its explorative activities. As to the "idioms of inquiry" adopted in this conditional platform of understanding, Oakeshott would certainly insist that it is historical rather than practical. His peculiar interpretation of Hegel, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is widely regarded by commentators as at worst a distortion and at best a watered-down version suitable for his own theoretical purposes. To this comment Oakeshott would reply that this is precisely what history, according to his conception of its postulates, should do. Its aim is not to rehearse the intentions of all those past thinkers about politics, but to identify a contingent pattern in the development of an event from all the evidences available, which is not the design of any assignable historical agent, but an outcome of the historian's own making.

Finally, the second essay continues the unconditional engagement of theorising by questioning the ideal characters presupposed in the third essay in its exploration of modern European political history.[109] This exemplifies the dialectical progression from "recognition" and "identification" to the theoretical enquiry into the postulates themselves employed in the

[107] *Ibid.*, 199.
[108] *Ibid.*, 245.
[109] *Ibid.*, 109.

previous platform of conditional understanding. As such, the transformation of identities from one level of understanding to another is no longer comparable to the radical subversion of ordinary common sense exemplified by Oakeshott's early political philosophy. The latter, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is here replaced by the parallel between the theoretical identities of civil and enterprise associations and the historical ideal types of *societas* and *universitas*.

This makes the connection between political philosophy and the experience of political life much closer than before. Consequently, his late general philosophy, like his early general philosophy, lost its initial ideological motivation of responding to the more immediate intellectual context of his time. More importantly, his late general philosophy satisfies the demands of his late political philosophy so well that it is no longer adequate to talk of his political philosophy as a reflection of his general philosophy.

IV. Conclusion

We have finally arrived at a comprehensive picture of Oakeshott's general and political philosophy, their relationship to each other, and the different ways ideological messages are conveyed by their philosophical arguments which by themselves do not, *qua* philosophy, directly or logically entail practical recommendations. Certainly, the interpretive framework provided in this first part of my thesis is different from, and in some cases even incompatible with, those provided by other commentators. Nonetheless, the test of its plausibility consists not only in the extent to which the cited textual evidences support my arguments, but also in the contribution it can make to our analysis of the ideological movement of the traditionalists. In the second part of this thesis, this preliminary bird's eye view of the whole of Oakeshott's *oeuvre* will serve as a working hypothesis. Against this background we will be able to evaluate the ways in which Oakeshott's philosophical and ideological ideas were directly used, constructively or negatively criticised, deliberately or mistakenly misunderstood,

adapted for other practical purposes, or simply rejected, by these traditionalist thinkers. Some of these figures are more Oakeshottian or more active in contemporary debates about political issues, others are less influenced by Oakeshott or less adequately classifiable as public intellectuals. A fruitful understanding of their ideological significance in the history of British political thought, as well as the place occupied by Oakeshott's ideas therein, will vindicate the cogency of our interpretation of Oakeshott's works achieved so far.

Part II

The Traditionalists

Chapter 6

A Foreigner Explaining to the English What Their Freedom Was About: Kenneth Minogue and the Redefinition of British Conservatism

I. Introduction

The history of conservative thought can be studied on a variety of different levels. One can focus on conservatism at the height of philosophical sophistication. To do full justice to its idiosyncrasies and distinctiveness, the unit of analysis is usually an individual thinker. The danger in this kind of enterprise is that the researcher may find it difficult or profitless to relate such thinkers as Michael Oakeshott to their contemporary political events.[1] Consequently, the analysis is likely to become an interpretation of a philosopher within his own ideational context, with the link between conservatism and its implementation in politics lost from sight. Undoubtedly, Oakeshott identified himself as an academic philosopher and avoided the identity of a public intellectual. Nonetheless, this does not prevent the intellectual historian from transcending Oakeshott's self-identification and evaluating his contribution to the diversity of conservatism through the influence he exerted on his colleagues at the London School of Economics.

Alternatively, one can pay attention to more vernacular manifestations of conservatism in party politics and the policies pursued by the government. However, doctrinal coherence is not required for politicians to gain popular support and electoral success. The advocacy of a political proposal, such as the post-war consensus of the Welfare State, may depend more often on the expediencies and circumstances of the moment than on loyal adherence to an ideological principle.[2] In this regard, E. H. H. Green argues that Thatcherism had long existed *avant la lettre*, and the Conservative party's response to the Beveridge Report was

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[1] See, for instance, Edmund Neill, *Michael Oakeshott* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 81.
[2] E. H. H. Green, "Thatcherism: A Historical Perspective," in *Ideologies of Conservatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 237-38.

more of a “pragmatic” acquiescence than “normative” agreement. Therefore, the analyst cannot take these apparent exhibitions of conservatism too seriously lest the identity of conservatism be dissolved in the political history of modern Britain.

Between these two extremes lie the various think tanks associated with the Conservative party and the intellectuals contributing to their publications. Taking this level of public discussion as the point of entry has the advantage of being more closely connected with both the political and the intellectual contexts. Historically speaking, this kind of intra-party debates usually intensified when the Conservative party was out of power or at a loss of its future course of policy.[3] Because of this more immediate concern with practical politics, we can more confidently locate the context of current affairs to understand the changing and conflicting character of conservative ideas in a specific period, and the extent to which they were actually adopted by the government.[4] On the other hand, among the members of these think tanks many are also academics in universities. Their active participation in these debates constitutes an ideal material for exploring how the more abstract and scholarly exposition of conservatism found its channel into public debate. This is the level on which the second part of this thesis explores the tensions between different strands of conservatism during its revival since the 1970s.

One of these tensions is usually characterised as between the economic liberalism more closely associated with the Institute of Economic Affairs, the Centre for Policy Studies, the Adam Smith Institute, etc., and the Tory traditionalism represented by the Conservative Philosophy Group, the Social Affairs Unit, and more unequivocally the Salisbury Group. However, one must be careful not to attribute clearer ideological identities to these organisations than what their actual publications could allow. As the think tanks had interlocking membership, it is common to find an intellectual’s presence in a particular grouping unnatural. For instance, an important early study of these think tanks observes that

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[3] Green, introduction to *Ideologies of Conservatism*, 5.

[4] This approach is exemplified by Andrew Denham, *Think-Tanks of the New Right* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1996).

it is “ironic that the [Salisbury] Group’s most celebrated self-publicist, Roger Scruton, should have become, in the late 1980s, identified as a leading ‘Thatcherite intellectual,’ when he was, with the Salisbury Group, a leading advocate of that traditional, authoritarian, hierarchical Conservatism that the IEA, the Selsdon Group and all the younger Conservatives were arguing was no longer relevant to the modern world.”[5] Furthermore, even focusing on a relatively homogeneous set of intellectuals, one cannot extract a consistent doctrinal position therefrom as a convenient point of reference in characterising the nature of the tensions between different wings of conservatism. For example, defining “traditionalists” as those upholding patriotism, social order, authority and tradition, a more recent survey of Conservative thinkers comments that the main internal division among the traditionalists centred precisely on whether they thought what they defend is compatible with the classical liberalism espoused by the marketeers.[6] Therefore, a case can be made for taking a particular intellectual as the vantage point to shed light on the complexities of these doctrinal divergencies scattering everywhere within the conservative family.

In this regard, Kenneth Minogue (1930-2013) is of much academic interest in that his long intellectual journey arguably embodies almost all the elements across the spectrum of divergent versions of conservatism. Together with Shirley Robin Letwin (1924-93) and Elie Kedourie (1926-92), he defined himself as belonging to the same “curious tradition in which foreigners explained to the English what their freedom actually was about.”[7] Yet Minogue soon went beyond the neoliberal emphasis on the economic values of the market and the moral virtues of enterprise. This testifies the extent to which Oakeshott’s academic ideas influenced conservatism at the level of public discussion, notably through CPG.

More importantly, Minogue lived long enough to exhibit the changes of tone and

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[5] Richard Cockett, *Thinking the Unthinkable: Think-Tanks and the Economic Counter-Revolution, 1931-1983* (London: Harper Collins, 1994), 220.
[6] Mark Garnett and Kevin Hickson, *Conservative Thinkers: The Key Contributors to the Political Thought of the Modern Conservative Party* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 105-6.
[7] Kenneth Minogue, “The Escape from Serfdom: Friedrich von Hayek and the Restoration of Liberty,” *The Times Literary Supplement*, January 14, 2000, 11.

emphasis in his conservative critique of morality and politics. These changes are what Oakeshott's influences alone cannot sufficiently explain. The nature of these changes can in part be glimpsed from his increasing contributions to SAU, its magazine *Standpoint*, and *The Salisbury Review* of SG in his late years, in contrast to his earlier association with CPS, The Bruges Group, and similar think tanks back in Australia such as The Centre for Independent Studies. The evaluation of the degree to which Minogue became more sympathetic to Tory traditionalism without compromising the legacy he inherited from Oakeshott must await the next chapter on Scruton and SG. Nevertheless, the development of Minogue's political thought suffices to illustrate the richness of intellectual resources in conservatism during this period. It will turn out that the complication involved makes it difficult to characterise the tensions within conservatism in terms of ideal types which are not as flexible as the actual fortunes of conservatism suggest.

II. From an Academic to an Intellectual

Kenneth Robert Minogue was born in 1930 at Palmerston, New Zealand, but later attended high school and studied for an arts and law degree at Sydney, Australia. He came to London in 1951. After graduating from LSE and holding a temporary lectureship at Exeter University, he went back to teach in the department of government at LSE from 1956, remaining there for the rest of his academic career.[8]

Once formally registered as a student under Oakeshott studying the political thought of Edmund Burke, Minogue's early political persuasion is not hard to estimate. Nevertheless, before 1975 he seldom participated actively in debates about current politics, whether at the national or the party level. Part of the reason may be the uninspiring atmosphere in the post-war consensus of Keynesian demand-side economics. For example, reviewing a book on

[8] David Martin Jones, "Minogue, Kenneth Robert [Ken] (1930-2013), political philosopher," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/109259.

Burke, Minogue praised it because the author "makes no compromise with the welfarist notions no modern thinker can avoid."[9] Later, in a review of a biography of Harold Macmillan published during his premiership, Minogue complained that Macmillan's dullness is analogous to that of a party's dogmatic political broadcast, full of liberal and socialist thinking about a planned government giving welfare to the poor.[10]

However, if this were sufficient to explain Minogue's relative silence on current affairs, he would have already become much more interested in contemporary politics since Edward Heath rose to power in 1970. At least before his notorious U-turn in 1972, Heath's government had symbolised the hope of finally breaking new grounds towards a freer market economy than was possible in the consensus era.[11] Instead, it was not until Margaret Thatcher led the Opposition from 1975 onwards that Minogue began to publish political comment more regularly. Furthermore, most of his contributions to the think tanks associated with the Conservative party appeared after Thatcher's premiership had gained a firmer basis in the middle of 1980s thanks to the Falklands War, rather than in the very beginning of Thatcher's government. Consequently, there must be other reasons than the contemporary political atmosphere which underlay Minogue's decision to resist Oakeshott's insistence on the practical irrelevance and uselessness of academic enquiry. What made Minogue become a public intellectual unashamedly taking advantage of Oakeshott's political philosophy as a powerful weapon in the battle against ideological opponents?

1. The Genre of Minogue's Scholarly Writings

Minogue's earliest scholarly publications exemplify the seminal influences of the

[9] Minogue, review of *The Moral Basis of Burke's Political Thought*, by Charles Parkin, *Economica* 24, no. 94 (May 1957): 172.
[10] Minogue, "Portrait of a Politician: Macmillan among the Pink Mystics," *Beaver Book Supplement*, November 29, 1962, 3.
[11] For a brief account of Heath's premiership 1970-74, see John Charmley, *A History of Conservative Politics since 1830*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 197-202.

modal separatism in Oakeshott's early general philosophy. The distinction between explanation and understanding on the one hand, and practical recommendation on the other, proved exceptionally useful in Minogue's polemic against the pitfalls of a whole genre of academic disciplines such as comparative politics.[12] This distinction was to remain presupposed in all his subsequent writings.

Nonetheless, Minogue's changing attitude towards the Idealism underpinning Oakeshott's philosophical project reveals that Minogue gradually became more reluctant to ground the useful lessons learnt from his mentor on what by that time might have seemed an outdated philosophical burden. In the beginning he still expressed sympathy for the Idealist tendency of subjecting everything it studies to the universal context of the Absolute. Writing as if he were a friendly populariser of Oakeshott's early political philosophy, Minogue distinguished Idealism as the enterprise of explaining the individual in the context of the State from the misunderstanding of the State as the actual enslavement of individuals by a government.[13] However, by the time he published *The Liberal Mind* in 1963, his first monograph analysing the ideology of liberalism, he noted the difficulty inherent in Idealism:

> there is nothing especially objectionable about seeing the world in terms of whole and aspects, though when this becomes a metaphysical exercise, it rapidly turns into idealism and begins to undermine the independence of everything in the world. In idealist terms everything is simply an aspect of an all-inclusive whole which is usually referred to as the absolute. How does this general point affect the definition of the State as "society in its political aspect?" Obviously the definition is positing society as a whole which includes and determines politics. But in that case, we will have some difficulty in discovering the nature of this peculiar whole.[14]

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[12] Minogue, "The Language of Comparative Politics," *Political Studies* 6, no. 3 (October 1958): 270.
[13] Minogue, "Power in Politics," *Political Studies* 7, no. 3 (September 1959): 277.
[14] Minogue, *The Liberal Mind* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1999), 130. First published 1963.

This might sound like Oakeshott's self-criticism of his own early Idealism. Yet unlike Oakeshott, Minogue was not interested in repairing this philosophical scaffolding. This can be seen from Minogue's *Nationalism* (1967), a book on nationalist ideology. The explicit attempt in the concluding chapter to demonstrate the logical deficiency of all other modes of understanding nationalism than the historical and the philosophical, cannot but appear to be a deliberate parody of Oakeshott's "The Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence." Moreover, the reader is promised a section on the nature of the philosophical method of explanation. However, the book did not fulfil the promise, leaving only the empty formula of an "attempt to explain nationalism as an intellectual system belonging to an ordered universe."[15]

Despite his gradual departure from Oakeshott's Idealist philosophical framework, Minogue did not fall prey to the temptation of extracting Oakeshott's conclusions in political philosophy from their philosophical context and putting them to use in political debates. On the contrary, as a notable reviewer of *LM* regretted, it is unfortunate for Minogue to "avoid any real confrontation with any particular theory or argument" since he "does have things of interest and value to say."[16] To be sure, *LM* contains many Oakeshottian materials upon which Minogue was to rely heavily after he became more fully involved in Conservative think tanks. The Oakeshottian themes include the transition from classical to modern liberalism and from moralised desire to impulsive need,[17] freedom as a distinctive way of life and moral taste which a society contingently inherits,[18] and the restoration of the classical sense of vocabularies opposite to freedom, such as "despotic" and "slavish."[19] The influences from Oakeshott's *Lectures in the History of Political Thought* can also be seen in Minogue's *Nationalism*. For example, Minogue argued that the presupposition of politics

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[15] Minogue, *Nationalism* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1967), 133, 144-52.
[16] Steven Lukes, "Still No Substitute for Wool," review of *The Liberal Mind*, by Kenneth Minogue, *New Society*, January 30, 1964, 29.
[17] Minogue, *The Liberal Mind*, 96-97.
[18] *Ibid*., 145-55.
[19] *Ibid*., 164.

rule out nationalist ideologies from the category of political doctrine because of their ultimate aim to abolish politics itself.[20] Consequently, the nationalist conception of the political life has difficulty in understanding the possibility of loyal opposition in modern European government.[21]

Nevertheless, Minogue refrained from employing these academic resources to criticise current politics until 1975. He largely maintained his role as an academic in the university, refusing to take the rostrum as the opportunity to disseminate a political message, not even such a formidable one as the defence of liberty as a valuable legacy of the English's traditional way of life. Certainly, part of the reason is the incomparable philosophical power of Oakeshott. It is only after *On Human Conduct* was published in 1975 that Minogue was able to refine his earlier accounts of freedom, moral identity, and individualism accordingly, now with an eye to contemporary political controversies. However, the more important reason is that he had other more urgent and local things to do between 1967 and 1975.

2. Responding to the Student Revolt at LSE in the Late 1960s

One can hardly exaggerate the impact on Minogue made by the student militants around 1968 at LSE.[22] As an academic staff working there, he witnessed all the major disorders at first hand. Later he composed a detailed report for the Select Committee on Education and Science of the House of Commons, insisting on the integrity of academic freedom and the distinction between scholarly and political activities.[23] It is also significant that he commented on this event in *The Daily Telegraph* twice, arguing that the problem was not caused by the so called "generation gap" but arose from different understandings of

[20] Minogue, *Nationalism*, 36-37.
[21] *Ibid*., 128.
[22] For a comprehensive account of this event and its aftermath, see Harry Kidd, *The Trouble at L.S.E. 1966-1967* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).
[23] The House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Education and Science: Session 1968-69,* vol. 4*, Student Relations: Sub-Committee A, Evidence and Appendices* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1969), 377-92.

education;[24] and that the difference is between the academic and the ideological.[25] This is the beginning of Minogue's career of public intellectual. For one thing, the derisive tone could no longer hide itself behind the academic attempt to understand the nature of student unrest. After all, the event under analysis was not merely something bad, but what devastated the very identity of the academe to which Minogue had been fully devoted. For another, *DT* (and, associated with it, *The Spectator*) in the 1960s and 1970s played an important role in sustaining conservative ideas in public discussion.[26] After these two comments in *DT*, from 1970 onwards Minogue published more and more reviews of books ridiculing the intellectuals of the Left.[27] After 1975 he began to write political commentaries frequently till the 1990s. It is thus not wide off the mark to say that the student revolt at LSE was the crucial event which triggered Minogue's more passionate participation in media debates, and eventually in party politics through the think tanks.

Certainly, the process in which Minogue became a public intellectual was not instant. Nevertheless, in the course of preparing *The Concept of a University*, dedicated to Oakeshott, as a response to the darkness of the late 1960s, Minogue became increasingly conscious of the immense practical power of academic analysis. This is a book which depends substantially on Oakeshott's doctrines of modal separatism in attacking all forms of intellectuality which imitate scholarship. With the various autonomous modes of experience in mind, Minogue called the mistake of transposing ideas from one mode to another as "monism."[28] The debt to Oakeshott became unmistakable when the term *ignoratio elenchi*

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[24] Minogue, "As the New LSE Term Begins: Behind the Student Anxiety," *The Daily Telegraph*, April 27, 1967, 14.
[25] Minogue, "Fantasy World of Student Militants," *The Daily Telegraph*, February 1, 1969, 12.
[26] Peter Oborne, "Ken Minogue: Resisted the Relentless March of State Control; Professor Minogue Was One of a Small Group of Thinkers Who Fought for Individual Freedom," *Telegraph Online*, July 3, 2013, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A335764280/STND?u=duruni&sid=STND&xid=4497e79e.
[27] For example, Minogue, "Guide to Galbraith," review of *A Contemporary Guide to Economics, Peace and Laughter*, by J. K. Galbraith, *The Spectator*, November 27, 1971, 770; and Minogue, "Erotics in Wonderland," review of *The Party of Eros*, by Richard King, and *Counter Revolution and Revolt*, by Herbert Marcuse, *The Spectator*, October 28, 1972, 676.
[28] Minogue, *The Concept of a University* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2005), 89. First published 1973 by Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

was actually used to characterise the logical status of ideologies.[29] However, unlike Oakeshott, Minogue was ready to acknowledge more explicitly that "the reasons for a policy have some effect upon its nature, and in that sense academic criticism may directly affect the world. A Neutral … is a non-combatant: this does not mean that neutrals do not affect the world they live in, but they affect it in varied and complicated ways."[30] Consequently, what purports to be a beautiful and poetic description of the original meaning of "lecture" in a university, for instance, cannot help but be more than a historical interpretation:

> The ordinary lectures for the undergraduates are, then, not merely exhibitions revealing to students how someone who is presumed to know a great deal about a subject goes about giving an account of some part of it; they are also rituals which force scholars to re-examine their subject as a whole, and therefore a significant complement to minute or specialized researches.[31]

A reviewer of *CU* remarked that "it is a point of view that every academic will agree with. Anyone who disagrees is not an academic: he is probably an intellectual,"[32] who is diverted from the scholarly pursuit of knowledge and is eager to interfere with practical politics. The conservative nature of this book lies in the fact that it is when a tradition ceased to be a shared presupposition that those wishing to defend it are bothered at all to explain what it was before, and by implication, what it ought to be in the future. In Minogue's opinion, the problem with universities was that the students either did not have the aptitude to play the undergraduates' role properly, or had too much questions automatically answered by ideologies.[33]

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[29] *Ibid*., 158.
[30] *Ibid*., 182.
[31] *Ibid*., 58.
[32] "On Being an Academic." Review of *The Concept of a University*, by Kenneth Minogue, *The Times Literary Supplement*, June 29, 1973, 738.
[33] See n. 23.

To combat this and other decadent tendencies, Minogue contributed a regular column to *The Times Higher Education Supplement* between 1975-76. He seized this excellent opportunity to publish his comments on controversial events in education and beyond. From the congregation of Oxford University refusing to award an honorary degree to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto[34] to Crowther-Hunt's talk of planning, human resources, and national needs in educational policies;[35] from the Huntingdon affair at Sussex concerning academic freedom[36] to the demand on school education to be "relevant,"[37] and even the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament,[38] Minogue practised the craft of social criticism to perfection. Kenneth Minogue the Public Intellectual thus came into existence. When his attention shifted from education back again to the wider sphere of politics, he was no longer an ascetic Oakeshottian residing calmly in the ivory tower, but a Conservative apologist crushing ideological opponents ruthlessly under the flag of Thatcherism.

III. Associating with Think Tanks and Underpinning Thatcherism

After Heath's electoral failure, the mid-1970s was a time when Conservative think tanks began to sprout in the wake of a wider recognition that the post-war consensus was no longer feasible. They were to become the motivating force impelling changes in the fundamental assumptions on which political argument of whatever persuasion had to be based.[39] Thatcher and Keith Joseph founded CPS in 1974, though Minogue's closer involvement with it began much later. It is after 1983 that Minogue sat on the Board of CPS and contributed

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[34] Minogue, "Who Gains from the Bhutto Fiasco?" *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, March 7, 1975, 5.
[35] Minogue, "Crowther-Hunt and the Future Confident," *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, August 15, 1975, 5.
[36] Minogue, "Free Speech for Closed Minds," *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, October 31, 1975, 5.
[37] Minogue, "A Culture to Match One's Geography," *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, April 9, 1976, 5.
[38] Minogue, "Is LSE Light Horse Enough of a Defence?" *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, July 4, 1975, 5.
[39] For more details of the founding and operation of these think-tanks, see Cockett, *Thinking the Unthinkable*, 218.

to its publications, including *The Egalitarian Conceit* (1989), "Europe: Limits to Integration" (1992), and *The Constitutional Mania* (1993). In other words, when Minogue was active in CPS, the years during which Alfred Sherman played a central role had already been over. The CPS had already transformed its original character of an autonomous institute aiming at influencing opinion-formers, into a semi-official body of the Conservative party creating "stepping stones" for the government's policies.[40]

Consequently, the view that Minogue "has a good claim to being a founder of Thatcherism"[41] must be justified by his contributions to CPG. CPG was similarly established around 1973-74, where academic papers of a broadly philosophical character were presented and discussed. Importantly, Oakeshott was also a main figure in its meetings. Since the proceedings were informal and confidential, there is no recourse to publications if we want to understand its influence on Thatcher, whose regular participation and eagerness to learn made Minogue an ally to her later government in power. Nevertheless, Minogue's writings in the late 1970s give us a taste of the way Oakeshott's political philosophy influenced Minogue's broader interpretation of Thatcherism. This influence initially buttressed the arguments of economic liberalism which Thatcher learnt from her friendship with IEA; but later it led Minogue to transcend the ideological tendencies of Hayek. When Minogue further became increasingly concerned with the social conditions of freedom, he entered a territory about which Oakeshott did not seem to be much worried.

That said, up until the late 1980s, Minogue's public image was still more of a calm philosopher of Capitalism with sharp wits than a passionate and zealous cultural critic of Scruton's sort in SG founded in 1976. His presentation of the revival of classical liberal theory in a series of the BBC Channel 4 programme *The New Enlightenment* strengthened this impression.[42] It is also significant that his invited contribution to Maurice Cowling's

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[40] Denham, *Think-Tanks of the New Right*, 53-57.

[41] John O'Sullivan, "A Tribute to Ken Minogue: Remembering an Antipodean Founder of Thatcherism," *The Spectator*, July 2013, https://www.spectator.co.uk/2013/07/a-tribute-to-ken-minogue.

[42] Minogue, "May the Market Force Be with Us," *The Listener*, November 20, 1986, 8, 10.

Conservative Essays, a product of SG of which he was not a member, is quite out of tune with the Group's ethos and primary concern. Subsequently he rarely published political commentary in *SR* until the end of 2010s, namely well after the end of Scruton's editorship in 2001.[43] Finally, his contribution to the publications of SAU began to appear some 15 years after it was established in 1980 to conduct sociological analysis of the cultural problems afflicting modern society. This may reflect Minogue's hesitation to make connection with think tanks which were more concerned with the need for political and social authority than the advocacy of freedom and individuality. Therefore, tracing Minogue's development of his defence of Thatcherism will not only illuminate Oakeshott's political influence through the CPG as opposed to other more economically-minded and policy-centred think tanks. The limited boundary will also be made clearer beyond which Minogue's conservatism can no longer accommodate the territory so easily as it did with that of the free marketeers.

1. The Moral Significance of Choice in Individualism

Thatcherism was frequently attacked from the Left for its paradoxical combination of economic permissiveness and moral authoritarianism. The Thatcherites usually dismissed the attribution of this alleged paradox, stressing that a free and prospering economy depends for its viability exactly upon those virtues which the market alone could not cultivate. Minogue was no exception, and often defended Thatcher's government in precisely these terms.[44] Nonetheless, if one looks more closely at Minogue's argument, the content of the virtues believed to be essential to a liberal society ranges far wider than what the marketeers would think necessary or even be prepared to share.

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[43] For instance, Minogue, "Governmental Creep," *Salisbury Review*, Autumn 2003, 4-7, and Minogue, "Morality and the Bottom Billion," *Salisbury Review*, Autumn 2009, 11-13.

[44] See, for example, Minogue, "Not Guilty! The Moral Premises of Modern British Conservatism," *Quadrant*, December 1988, 11. He also published widely in other Australian periodicals and think-tanks, but a significant proportion of these writings concerned British politics rather than that of his native homeland.

CPS in its early years can serve as a contrasting example. Probably anticipating criticisms from the Left, in the very beginning there was an emphasis on the moral values which are essential to sustain the free market.[45] This emphasis was in the main narrowly focused on those "Victorian" virtues related to economic prosperity such as hard work, thrift, and self-reliance.[46] In line with the movement against welfare dependency, Minogue's shared espousal of these values is readily understandable.

However, the more philosophical source on the basis of which Minogue came to share the position of CPS explains why he was soon to transcend this primarily economic doctrine. Writing in 1975 on Oakeshott for his native Australian audience, Minogue remarked that "readers will recognise in much though not all of what Oakeshott has to say a version of the producer's ethic of enterprise, initiative and risk as elaborated by John Anderson at Sydney in the 1940's."[47] Indeed, had he not come to the Old World and become an Oakeshottian during his formative years in the 1960s, Minogue would have been confined to the "Learned Clan" of that towering philosopher Anderson in his homeland.[48] We will see in the next section that this impulse to go beyond what influences him most at a certain stage of his academic career is also present in Minogue's later attempt to break through the confines of Oakeshott's intellectual legacy. That Minogue quickly grew dissatisfied with the economic wing of neo-conservatism is therefore unsurprising.

In the early years of the rise of Thatcherism, Minogue published several important pieces of writing expounding the moral life of individualism as a traditional way of life which the British people inherited from their medieval institutions. As it was in the 1970s rather than the 1960s, Minogue had the advantage of supporting materials not only of Oakeshott's post-war essays but also the incisive arguments in *On Human Conduct*. Reading Minogue's works around this period makes one feel like having an approachable interpreter

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[45] Denham, *Think-Tanks of the New Right*, 45.
[46] *Ibid*., 46.
[47] Minogue, "Oakeshott and the Idea of Freedom," *Quadrant*, October 1975, 82.
[48] Minogue, "Chieftain of the Learned Clan," *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, January 17, 1975, 5.

at one's side when attempting to decipher the dense and arcane prose of Oakeshott's late political philosophy. Thus we read that "[o]ne way in which we may analyse the emergence of the modern world is in terms of the intensification of a disposition among more people than ever to construe life not in terms of a trial or a pilgrimage, nor in terms of filling one's station by doing one's duties, but as a game in which the point was to be a success at rising in the world."[49] Consequently, selfishness became distinguished from self-interest, vicious conflict from cooperative competition, and the common critique from the Left dissolves not only in the realm of economics, but also in that of politics. If the achievement of a free way of life consists in transforming conflict of interests into competition of skills, then the idea of loyal opposition is no longer mysterious. For this is what the political parties in Britain had been doing for a long while. One plays the game of politics not against one's competitor, but against one's own performance in exercising the art of government. That economic competition is an analogous game in human life becomes a natural, logical consequence rather than something fortuitous and thereby suspect of serving self-interest.

Certainly, this account is an idealised version of British politics. Nevertheless, with this account it becomes clear that whenever Minogue insisted on the central place which morality and a common sense realism occupy in Thatcher's policies,[50] he had in mind not merely the uncompromising reality of market and the important virtues of industry recognised by monetarism, but the free way of life actually embedded in every sphere of the British society. Borrowing from Oakeshott's distinction between self-disclosure and self-enactment, Minogue argued that central to this way of life is the moral identity involved in an individual's free exercise of choice. In his own words, "[p]references can be ranked in order

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[49] Minogue, "Natural Rights, Ideology and the Game of Life," in *Human Rights*, ed. Eugene Kamenka and Alice Erh-Soon Tay (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), 29.

[50] For example, Minogue, "The Thatcher Experiment," in *The New Liberalism: The Future of Non-Collectivist Institutions in Europe and the U.S.*, ed. Centre for Political Research and Information (Athens: Centre for Political Research and Information, 1981), 103; Minogue, "The Context of Thatcherism," introduction to *Thatcherism: Personality and Politics*, ed. Kenneth Minogue and Michael Biddiss (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), xv; and Minogue, "The Emergence of the New Right," in *Thatcherism*, ed. Robert Skidelsky (London: Chatto & Windos, 1988), 136.

of desire, but choice is a much deeper idea, because it includes consideration not only of what satisfactions different courses of action may give, but also the sense of moral identity revealed in choosing whatever we way choose."[51]

It is this more comprehensive concern with morality that marks Minogue's political identity as conservative rather than liberal; and this, not in spite of, but exactly because of his seemingly relentless talk of individualism and freedom. This point can be observed more clearly from an important pamphlet published by CIS. There Minogue expressed a warning against the ideological tendencies latent in Hayek and his more dogmatic followers. Minogue used the term "ideology" in a specific sense derived from his important study *Alien Powers*, referring to

> the view that the evils of life are not part of an immemorial human condition which it is beyond human power to change, or a set of problems to each of which a specific solution may be hazarded, as politicians often suggest, but that they are part of a single system of dehumanization which determines everything that happens, and which cannot be changed except by a complete transformation.[52]

He usually used this analysis to attack the "apolitical" character of left-wing intellectuals. Nonetheless, in "Hayek and Conservatism: Beatrice and Benedick?," he contended that more recently the neo-liberals associated Hayek were prone to the temptation of regarding what they cherish as absolute truth in opposition to the hopeless falsity of socialists' planned economy. These liberals became unaware that their beliefs are a political doctrine to be argued for in the conventions of parliamentary debate, where both socialism and conservatism are no less respectable competitors for the best way to arrange society.[53] In

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[51] Minogue, *How Much Justice Does a Society Need?* (St. Leonards: Centre for Independent Studies, 1992), 12.
[52] Minogue, *Alien Powers: The Pure Theory of Ideology*, 2nd ed. (Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2008), 40. First published 1985 by St. Martin.
[53] Minogue, "Hayek and Conservatism: Beatrice and Benedick?" in *Ideas about Freedom*, ed. Khud

other words, the problem with economic liberals is that they tend to become as ideological as those on the Left. Conservatives may share liberals' support of market freedom. However, in Minogue's ludic conception of human life, promoting prosperity can hardly be the point of it. Failure no less than success serves as a great teacher of an individual's understanding of his own identity. Consequently, with regard to the free market and the "Victorian" virtues, the "conservative support for what we have inherited arises from … a concern with our own concrete identity, and this is a concern for which Hayek, whose strength lies in abstractions, cares little."[54]

2. The Complementary Role of Conservatism

While Minogue's argument above sounds like a practical translation of Oakeshott's "On Being Conservative," Oakeshott's optimism about the vitality and resourcefulness exhibited in the moral life of the individual is what Minogue gradually qualified over the years. Towards the end of the think-tank publication under discussion, there is a revealing passage:

> A human being in the early modern period was identified with his desires, but in that intensely individualistic period, desires were thought to constitute a coherent system by which possible choices might be rationally judged. The entire apparatus of religion reinforced that system and kept it within limits. But with the disappearance of religion from many people's lives, and the expansion of distractions and possibilities, it might more plausibly be said of the later generations of moderns that they are bundles not of desires, but of mere impulses. This is a very agreeable condition for those living within the prosperities of the West, but it is also subject to evident perils; and we just do not know from generation to generation how society is changing as a result of it. In such

Haakonssen (St. Leonards: Centre for Independent Studies, 1986), 13-16.

[54] *Ibid*., 16.

circumstances, liberals would be well advised to embrace some of the conservative elements of the political tradition to which they belong.[55]

In *LM*, Minogue once distinguished between the libertarian and the salvationist traditions of liberalism. The former refers to the inclination to question authority which cannot pass the test of rational justification, whereas the latter is exemplified by a variety of ideological projects aimed at perfecting society.[56] If the first half of Minogue's intellectual life was mainly concerned with refuting the salvationist element of liberalism, the late 1980s may signify the beginning of the second half of his career addressing the self-destructive elements in liberalism.

Certainly, Minogue's shift of emphasis was all the way accompanied by his continuing attack on the servile character of many aspects of contemporary politics. As a reviewer of *AP* points out, at times "Minogue displays an uneasiness about some conservative thought, noting that conservatives frequently share with ideologists a hostility to modernity and a preference for a past that both groups see as less individualistic, more rooted in integrated communities."[57] The defence of individuality Minogue inherited from Oakeshott is obvious when he referred to an American neoconservative, Allan Bloom, as on a par with Marx, being "both backward-looking critics of modernity who yearn to retrieve the shattered world of classical Greece."[58] Nevertheless, upholding modern individualism is not incompatible with being alert to the potential pitfalls of the free way of life. Minogue was a thinker realistic enough to point out the moral and economic costs any plan of social justice eventually must pay. In a similar way, he proved equally prepared to acknowledge the prices for enjoying the kind of liberty he had always been advocating. Substantive inequality is notoriously one of

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[55] *Ibid*.
[56] Minogue, *The Liberal Mind*, 57-58.
[57] Grant Morrison, "The Ideological Revelation," review of *Alien Powers: The Pure Theory of Ideology*, by Kenneth Minogue, *Modern Age*, Winter 1988, 74.
[58] Minogue, "The Graves of Academe," review of *The Closing of the American Mind*, by Allan Bloom, *The Times Literary Supplement*, July 24, 1987, 786.

them. For another, at one point Minogue frankly confessed that it is individualism itself which contains the seeds of license and impulse.[59]

The distance Minogue travelled in the journey towards the more traditional kind of conservatism can be more easily recognised if we view his writings in a longer temporal perspective. Writing back in 1965 on the possible effects of liberalism on religion, Minogue was still very optimistic about the ability of a Western free society to maintain its moral standards, which appear miraculous in the eyes of all other cultures in the world. He told the familiar story of the collapse of Christian sexual morality under liberalism's unending demand of justification and its impatience with mysteries. This habit of thought was attributed to the West's peculiar obsession with truth, which inevitably led to conflicts of beliefs between different spheres of life.[60] In this tension "between the passion for clarity and understanding on the one hand, and the ceaseless re-emergence of mystery and intellectual difficulty on the other," Minogue was not worried about the possibility of the absolute dominance of either one of these tendencies.[61] After all, "the university with its open conversation between equals all seeking similar but not identical paths" will keep the civilisation in balance and vitality.[62]

Thirty years later, Minogue was no longer willing to leave sexual morality to take care for itself. In a review of Andrew Sullivan's book supporting homosexuality, Minogue criticised the author's mistake in "ignoring the fact that marriage is not merely a framework for the satisfaction of desires. It creates families, and families involve children, and upon children depends the continuance of our civilization."[63] Furthermore, in defending his case, Minogue appealed to one of the famous tropes in conservative arguments. Extending the

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[59] Minogue, "Theorising Liberalism and Liberalising Theory," in *Traditions of Liberalism: Essays on John Locke, Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (St. Leonards: Centre for Independent Studies, 1988), 196-97.
[60] Minogue, "How Has Liberalism Affected Religion?" *The Aryan Path* 34, no. 12 (December 1965): 535-39.
[61] *Ibid*., 539.
[62] *Ibid*.
[63] Minogue, "A Politics of Homosexuality," review of *Virtually Normal: An Argument about Homosexuality*, by Andrew Sullivan, *National Review*, November 27, 1995, 64.

enfranchisement of an institution has the paradoxical consequence that the very inclusion of a new class of people destroys the original institution in which they first thought they desire to participate; so what they actually gain cannot not be what they wanted. Consequently, just as the opening of universities to all people regardless of aptitude or disposition resulted in a significantly increased number of students studying at institutions which ceased to be university in the proper sense; so "if homosexual marriage actually came to be taken seriously, this could well be the last straw leading to the collapse of an already weakened institution."[64] What makes this review noteworthy is that Sullivan was actually also an Oakeshottian intellectual. In other words, here Minogue was gradually going beyond Oakeshott's influence. After all, Oakeshott probably would not hold such strong views against homosexuality. Even in his early political philosophy marriage is only notionally mentioned as an essential part of the dialectical progression towards the State; no substantive account of Scruton's kind has ever been offered.

Minogue's attitude towards religion also underwent similar modification. Writing in 1983 when he was still confidently expounding the presuppositions of freedom by analogies to a game, formal equality was said to have "come down to us primarily in the religious form of a belief that all are equal in the sight of God, but in essence, it seems to me to be the kind of equality necessary to games players; for the more unequal the players, the less interesting the game."[65] But in 2000 he recognised that the whole ludic conception of life as "a test or challenge is deeply embedded in a Christian civilization."[66] Moreover, when asked in an interview "Do you think religion is essential to society?" Minogue took it to be more fundamental than we thought because there is usually a time lag between the collapse of Christianity and the disappearance of its associated virtues.[67]

This provokes the question of why in Minogue's thought the emphasis on the meaning

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[64] *Ibid.*
[65] Minogue, "Freedom as a Skill," in *Of Liberty*, ed. A. Phillips Griffiths (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 209.
[66] Minogue, "The Escape from Serfdom," 13.
[67] Minogue, "Can Individualism Survive in a Collectivist Age?" *Policy*, Summer 1995, 26-27.

of freedom peculiar to Western culture moved gradually to the attack on the permissive society. The brief answer is that, a generation after the revolution of the *soixante-huitards*, its corrosive effects on modern life began to manifest itself more unambiguously than Minogue had estimated. Therefore, before concluding this chapter, the next section deals with the trajectory of this alteration of tone in Minogue's writings and his changing attitudes towards Cowling and Scruton of the SG.

IV. The Late Minogue: Piety, Authority, and Reverence

In the preface to the reprint edition of *LM* published in 1999, Minogue regretted not realising that "a political program which consisted simply of thumbing one's nose at the pomposities of the Establishment would devastate what we may, as a shorthand, call culture and morality."[68] He could not be blamed for it, since that book of 1963 was written before the advent of the student revolts. Besides, he was not alone in this naïve opportunism. Even a major figure like "Bertrand Russell spent most of his life exploiting—and thereby destroying—the pleasures of debunking what was coming to be sneered at as 'conventional wisdom.' It was only late in life that he remarked that human beings need piety and, he might have added, authority and reverence."[69] Now that almost all those institutions such as armed services, universities, and churches had been dominated by leftist ideologies and ceased to be the generator of non-liberal ways of thought, Minogue was bound to launch his counter-attack.

The solution one adopts largely depends upon how one conceives of his problem at hand. Expectedly, Minogue's first move resorts to his famous analysis of ideologies, the main academic genre in which he wrote. In the preface to the second edition of *AP*, Minogue defended the relevance of his earlier dissection of the apolitical nature of ideology after the

[68] Minogue, preface to *The Liberal Mind*, viii.
[69] *Ibid*.

collapse of Communism in 1989.[70] The result is that feminism, homosexualism, nationalism, and even environmentalism were seen to be essentially intellectual descendants of Marxism. According to the prevalent discontents one chooses to take advantage of, the flexible (because vacuous) concept of the proletariat can be replaced by other targeted classes of people (xxiv). This tactic of criticising ideology is operative, for example, in Minogue's indictment of the betrayal of Christianity by liberation theology, which compares the Church's loss of interest in true religion with feminism's aversion to what most women are actually like.[71]

Nevertheless, as Minogue was aware, this kind of criticism is valid only with radical ideologies. If feminism as a political doctrine also follows the rule of the political game in the tradition of parliamentary democracy, proposing specific measures to redress particular incoherence in law, then he was prepared to accept it.[72] Yet this limited attack on ideological ways of thinking hardly suffices to combat the tendency of permissiveness. As we have seen earlier, the source of social disorder includes both the salvationist and the libertarian traditions of liberalism. Consequently, the dangers of the libertarian element are left untouched by denouncing the illusion of perfectionism cherished by radical ideologies.

It is here that Minogue's increasing participation in SAU after 1995 becomes informative. Founded in 1980, the role of the SAU in relation to cultural problems was somewhat analogous to that of the neoliberal think tanks such as IEA in the 1960s with regard to economic issues. Actually, SAU was established within IEA as an offshoot into the realm of social policy, though within a few years SAU became independent of IEA, and the catholicity of its publications grew more conspicuous. This can be seen from some of the SAU's contributors' attempt to "demonstrate that capitalism is not merely compatible with a Christian outlook, but is in fact the most 'Christian' form of political economy there is, at

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[70] Minogue, preface to *Alien Powers*, xvi.

[71] Minogue, "Does the Social Gospel Involve the Collapse of Christianity?" in *Religion: Contemporary Issues*, ed. Bryan Wilson (London: Bellew, 1992), 154.

[72] Minogue, "Ideology after the Collapse of Communism," *Political Studies* 41, no. 1 supplement (August 1993): 8-9.

least in relation to [when compared with] Marxism or Christian Socialism."[73] As such, the originally more limited moral virtues thought important to economic prosperity are now imbued with religious connotations and become part of the Christian way of life, so that "a significant role can be set aside for other 'non-market institutions—schools, the family, neighbourhoods, local communities, the church itself—to generate and maintain such values."[74]

In this context, it is unsurprising that Minogue's contributions to the SAU, and later its monthly magazine *Standpoint* established in 2008, exhibited a wider concern with the social problems of license and permissiveness, and a severer criticism beyond what his academic analysis of ideology could allow. For instance, in his first publication, Minogue took his theme from the student revolution in the late 1960s and attacked the abuse of drugs, the addiction to alcohol, and the unthinking defiance of authorities which afflicted various spheres of social life including family, work, school, clubs, churches and so forth.[75] The vacuum left by authority came to be filled increasingly by government regulation, followed by inevitable ramifications such as the loss of formality as well as intimacy, and the collapse of integrity throughout the professions.[76]

Apparently, these arguments retain an Oakeshottian flavour in that authority is construed not as something opposite to freedom, but as one of its important preconditions. Moreover, analogous to Oakeshott's view of the dialectic relation between Hobbes in the tradition of Will and Artifice in political philosophy and Plato in that of Reason and Nature, Minogue thought it wrongheaded to ask authority to justify itself by reason; for authority is needed exactly when an indisputable reason is not available.[77] However, as Minogue later

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[73] Denham, *Think-Tanks of the New Right*, 68.
[74] *Ibid*., 72.
[75] Minogue, "The End of Authority and Formality: And Their Replacement by Intrusive Regulation," in *This Will Hurt: The Restoration of Virtue and Civil Order*, ed. Digby C. Anderson (London: Social Affairs Unit, 1995), 65-66.
[76] *Ibid*., 68-75. See also Minogue, "To Hell with Niceness," *Standpoint*, February 25, 2009, and Minogue, "Slaves of the Bonus Culture," *Standpoint*, June 23, 2009.
[77] Minogue, "End of Authority and Formality," 66.

made clear, when he talked about problems of authority in social life, it has to be distinguished from the concept of authority as it is dealt with in the political philosophy of Hobbes, and *a fortiori*, Oakeshott.[78] This remark is revealing. Oakeshott was impatient with various misdirected leftist criticisms of his philosophical account of authority as "authoritarian." For him, that the justification of authority excludes the reasons for its desirability is strictly based on a philosophical distinction and has nothing to do with practical politics. Here Oakeshott's indifference to the problems of social morality contrasted starkly with Minogue who became increasingly concerned with these cultural problems. While "authority" as it is meant in social criticism never finds its place in Oakeshott's *OHC*, Minogue was by no means contented with being an academic philosopher alone and nothing more. In this spirit, he published another long pamphlet defending religion, morality, and patriotism against the erosion by the media.[79] Though tinted by Oakeshottian elements here and there, Minogue's criticisms went beyond his earlier delimited critique of ideology and narrower concern with the meaning of freedom.

Nevertheless, there is still a doctrinal distance between Minogue and the members of SG, despite the similarities in the views they expressed concerning contemporary issues in politics such as permissiveness and Euroscepticism. In the introduction to his edited volume *Conservative Realism* sponsored by CPS, Minogue characterised the key figures he thought representative of the brand of conservatism to which he belonged:

> What I have been calling 'conservative realism' ought not to be confused with Tory realism, a much more specific and locally rooted view of politics—one which might be described as 'poetic' rather than philosophical. Indeed, it is so specific a plant that Oakeshott, Kedourie and Letwin themselves could hardly claim it—Oakeshott because he was a philosopher, and Tory conservatism is above all not a philosophy, and Letwin

[78] Minogue, *The Servile Mind: How Democracy Erodes the Moral Life* (New York, NY: Encounter, 2012), 297.
[79] Minogue, *The Silencing of Society: The True Cost of the Lust for News* (London: Social Affairs Unit, 1997).

and Kedourie because, like many of the present contributors, they came from abroad.[80]

One suspects that the localness of Tory conservatism actually refers to Cowling, as he was based in Cambridge; likewise, the poetic character may best be exemplified by Scruton's prose. Concerning Cowling, Minogue's view of him has always been a complaint about his reductionist tendencies. Reviewing Cowling's *The Nature and Limits of Political Science* and *Mill and Liberalism* back in 1964, Minogue thought that the interpretation of an author's arguments through uncovering his intentions alone, without engaging the very arguments put forward, does not do justice to the author in question, and is somewhat akin to Marx's trivial unmasking of hidden interests behind a plethora of knowledge claims.[81] After more personal contact through the think-tanks, Minogue's strictures about Cowling's "Tory Marxism" softened over the years. Yet in Minogue's obituary of Cowling one can still perceive that this is one of the main gulfs between the LSE Right and the Peterhouse Right which is difficult for Minogue to bridge.[82]

Minogue's discussion of Scruton was relatively little in spite of the latter's feverish involvement in the SG 1978 and the Education Study Group of CPS, and shared participation in CPG. Reviewing another author's book, Minogue once mentioned Scruton in passing, criticising that his dogmatic conservatism "suggest[s] the radicalism of the 1960s" and, with its conviction that "there is only one right path in politics," is quite different from "anything that might be called conservative in Oakeshott."[83] Perhaps Scruton also softened his conservative views later, but the shift of focus in Minogue's later social criticism did make him more appreciative of Scruton's contribution to the revival of conservatism. Though not

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[80] Minogue, introduction to *Conservative Realism: New Essays in Conservatism* (London: Harper Collins, 1996), 6.

[81] Minogue, review of *The Nature and Limits of Political Science* and *Mill and Liberalism*, by Maurice Cowling, *Philosophy* 39, no. 150 (October 1964): 366-67. See also Minogue, "A Simple History," review of *Religion and Public Doctrine in England*, by Maurice Cowling, *Quadrant*, April 1982, 66.

[82] Minogue, "The LSE Right on the Peterhouse Right," *The Social Affairs Unit* (blog), September 19, 2005, http://www.socialaffairsunit.org.uk/blog/archives/000582.php.

[83] Minogue, "Confusing the Landmarks," review of *The Idea of Liberalism: Studies for a New Map of Politics*, by George Watson, *The Times Literary Supplement*, January 17, 1986, 65.

directly reviewing Scruton's own publication, Minogue regretted that Scruton has got enough denouncement, but not enough academic engagement which his conservatism deserves.[84] This may be a public statement by Minogue, but may as well be a personal regret of his own lack of effort in combating more fiercely the corruption of modern morality than he had thought necessary to do in his early, more optimistic intellectual life.

V. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have observed how Minogue inherited the strict separation between political philosophy and practical politics in Oakeshott's early general philosophy, and how he nonetheless went beyond the role of an academic and became a public intellectual. In the beginning, Minogue borrowed heavily from Oakeshott's late political philosophy in his support of Thatcherism. This is achieved mainly through his distinctive interpretation of conservative realism which supplements the neo-liberal, economic side of neo-conservatism. However, delving deeper into the social conditions of freedom, Minogue's political commentary gradually touched upon contemporary moral and cultural problems. This development is what Oakeshott's influence alone cannot fully account for, though on the other hand Minogue has always kept an intellectual distance with the more traditional, Tory conservatism exemplified by Scruton and other thinkers.

Nevertheless, in making the judgment that Minogue eventually did not follow Oakeshott's political philosophy in every aspect, we have relied primarily on Minogue's own understanding of Oakeshott. In later chapters, we will see that Minogue's interpretation and use of Oakeshott's ideas by no means monopolises the way conservative thinkers were influenced by Oakeshott. The next chapter deals with Scruton's more Hegelian account of freedom which Minogue, discarding Idealism very early, was reluctant to embrace; but

[84] Minogue, "Being Human," review of *Roger Scruton: The Philosophy on Dover Beach*, by Mark Dooley, and *The Roger Scruton Reader*, edited by Mark Dooley, *The Times Literary Supplement*, March 26, 2010, 5.

which Oakeshott's early political philosophy may readily accommodate. The chapter on Peregrine Worsthorne further demonstrates that the moral life of the individual in Oakeshott's late political philosophy does not necessarily refer to the free way of life exemplified by the middle class, but symbolises the ideal of an authoritative aristocracy traditionally maintained by the ruling class.

Chapter 7

Back to a Full Theory of the State: The Philosophical and Political Origins of Roger Scruton's Conservatism

I. Introduction

I have devoted the first half of this thesis to an intellectual portrait of Michael Oakeshott's development of his general and political philosophy. This is followed by a case study of Kenneth Minogue, who, participating in contemporary public debates, adhered faithfully to the late Oakeshott's portrayal of the moral life of the individual and the concomitant account of civil association. It is natural that the subsequent chapters should deal with thinkers who can provide a contrast. If we were to go on with other Oakeshottians such as Shirley Robin Letwin, such efforts would amount to little more than what the chapter on Minogue has already done in illustrating the significance of Oakeshott's political thought in the history of British conservatism. After all, if most conservative intellectuals are influenced by Oakeshott's late works, why should we refrain from identifying the late Oakeshott directly as a conservative as well? What is the point of having paid so much attention to the early Oakeshott?

These considerations may help us highlight more clearly the way in which our interpretive framework is laid out in the former part of this thesis. Our account of Oakeshott avoids the alignment of his political philosophy with any conservative or liberal ideological position. Having qualified those arguments which represent the late Oakeshott as a liberal, I do not thereby take Oakeshott's early philosophy (or what remains of it in his later writings) as a manifestation of conservative tendencies. This move is tempting especially considering Roger Scruton's philosophical conception of the gulf between conservatism and liberalism, as we will see in this chapter. However, what prevents us from understanding Oakeshott's development of his ideas as a partial transition from conservatism to liberalism is not

primarily the necessity of being faithful to his own insistence on the modal separation between philosophical enquiry and practical politics. This is not to deny the importance of what a thinker intends to express through his writings. In any case, we have already pointed out the reasons for thinking that there is still a practical role in society reserved for the philosopher in Oakeshott's early political philosophy.

Rather, our motivation consists in the more important need to accommodate different strands of conservatism in our historical picture. What makes Oakeshott interesting in this picture is precisely the fact that the difference between his early and late philosophy is useful to our understanding of the tensions within conservatism. The example of Minogue shows a tradition of conservatism directly influenced by Oakeshott's late political philosophy. Had we interpreted the late Oakeshott as a liberal, we would have been puzzled by Minogue's self-identification as a conservative. We would also have failed to understand the significance of his view that conservatism complements liberalism by enriching the concept of individual's choice, that is, by elevating the satisfaction of desire from the philistine level of irrational impulses to a serious matter of moral identity.

On the other hand, if we regarded Oakeshott's late political philosophy instead as a conservative doctrine, we would not only be at a loss as to what to do with his early political philosophy. We would also be unable to make space for another development of conservatism that focuses not on the individual as such, but on the associations, institutions, customs, and traditions in society which nourish the individual's moral identity in the first place. In the context of this development, it is the early Oakeshott's attempt at a full theory of the State or the social whole that would be properly conservative. The lack of discussion about the importance and complexities of various spheres of social life in his late writings, then, would rather be a sign of unfortunate infection by the liberal disease. Therefore, in order to take Scruton into account as well, it is necessary to set aside the question of Oakeshott's ideological position.

In short, the relationship between philosophy and ideology is itself a contestable

philosophical issue which lies outside the concern of our exercise in intellectual history. Our framework of interpretation refuses to decide whether Oakeshott's political philosophy is conservative or liberal, not because it presupposes that philosophy and ideology are logically distinct. After all, the public intellectuals to be integrated into our historical account are prepared to buttress their political commentary by philosophical arguments. Rather, it is because both the early and the late Oakeshott's writings are rendered conservative in different ways by Minogue's and Scruton's respective contributions to the development of conservatism, that it becomes necessary not to attribute any unitary ideological stance to Oakeshott. It becomes equally necessary to consider the early Oakeshott, and by extension the British Idealist and pluralist philosophy, as the context in which Scruton's political thought can be made intelligible.

Therefore, this chapter will be dedicated mainly to an analysis of Scruton's political philosophy. Through comparisons with Oakeshott and Minogue, we will be able to arrive at a more accurate characterisation of Scruton's position than his more casual and polemical works in conservative dogmatics would allow, though these more practically relevant sources will also be cited in support. Nevertheless, in this thesis our interest is not confined to political philosophy alone, but includes more concrete engagements with contemporary politics as well. This has already been exemplified by the chapter on Minogue. Consequently, Scruton's contributions to public debates, and the think tanks associated with him, will be the topic of the next chapter.

II. The Politics of Culture: A Radical Conservatism?

In the previous chapter, we have noticed that even a sympathetic expositor of conservatism like Minogue found in Scruton nothing which is conservative in the Oakeshottian sense. Minogue's main criticism of the ideology of the Left is that it attributes the causes of social problems to the ills of the fundamental human condition, and therefore

attempts to solve these problems by comprehensively politicizing our social life. When he complained about the radical overtones of the 1960s in Scruton's works, what he had in mind was Scruton's tendency to extend political discourse beyond what in Minogue's view should be the proper concern of politics.[1]

This impression is largely confirmed if we focus only on Scruton's more political, and thus less philosophical writings. In the statement of the first issue of *The Salisbury Review* (henceforth referred to as *SR*) in 1982, the organ of the Salisbury Group which Scruton edited from its very beginning to 2000, it is announced that

> We hope to carry similar articles in future issues, devoted to matters such as race, sexuality, death and religion, which, while deeply implicated in the conservative vision of society, are passed over in the prevailing liberal philosophies of the state. It is in the nature of conservatism that politics is not the only matter for discussion. Like classical socialism it maintains an outlook on all those aspects of culture and society that have been thrown into the crucible of change.[2]

This passage was a response to Maurice Cowling's call, in the first collection of essays published under the auspices of the SG in 1978, to combat the narrow conception of what is relevant to politics, and to enrich the conservatism of the present by incorporating those "discussions and considerations which are not primarily or necessarily political."[3] In that volume, Scruton also contributed an essay on "The Politics of Culture." He argued that the practical knowledge of the culture of a community is a prerequisite for the statesman's success because knowing what is right to do in politics involves locating the true voice of the society which he governs.[4] In this sense a conservative politics has to engage with social

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[1] See Ch. 6, sec. IV.
[2] Christopher Silvester and Roger Scruton, "Statement," *The Salisbury Review* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1982): 2.
[3] Maurice Cowling, "The Present Position," in *Conservative Essays*, ed. Maurice Cowling (London: Cassell, 1978), 23-24.
[4] Scruton, "The Politics of Culture," in *Conservative Essays*, 110-13.

and cultural issues apart from the more narrowly political ones.

In this account Scruton referred approvingly to Oakeshott's critique of rationalist ideology and managerial conception of the state, and "the voice of society" sounds like a reinterpretation of Oakeshott's notion of "the pursuit of intimations" during the post-war development of his early general philosophy. Nevertheless, Scruton's position can hardly be accommodated by Oakeshott's late political philosophy. The earlier passage cited from *SR* is notable for its implication about what distinguishes both conservatism and socialism from liberalism. It is the recognition, or the lack thereof, that more is at stake in a complete philosophy of the state than politics strictly conceived. In the context of this "politics of culture," the difference between Oakeshott's early and late political philosophy acquires an ideological significance. We have observed that he gradually narrowed the scope of the subject matter of political philosophy. Concomitantly, in his late works he confined his attention to the difference between the moral lives of the individual and the individual manqué (transformed into the anti-individual), and the parallel contrast between civil and enterprise associations. The role played by various social institutions between the state and the individual is a theme which the late Oakeshott did not attempt to analyse in detail. In an address summarising the arguments of *On Human Conduct* in 1975, Oakeshott even denounced the "drivel about something called 'society,' a fanciful total of unspecified relationships which only a simpleton would think of identifying with a state."[5] This deliberate neglect is a far cry from the solemnity of the early Oakeshott. For him a political philosophy would fall short of its title if it analysed only different forms of government without having something significant to say about family, school, marriage, war, property, and, in short, the social whole that is the State.[6] Judging from Scruton's perspective, this change in Oakeshott's philosophy of the State would amount to a transformation from conservatism to liberalism. On the other hand, given Minogue's close adherence to the late

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[5] Michael Oakeshott, "Talking Politics," in *Rationalism in Politics, and Other Essays*, new and expanded ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991), 450. First published in *National Review*, December 5, 1975.
[6] See Ch. 2, sec. II.

Oakeshott's political philosophy and his identification of it with the conservative tradition of political doctrine in Britain, it is little wonder that Scruton's "politics of culture" should have aroused so much of Minogue's suspicion.

Minogue was not alone in expressing reservations. Another Oakeshottian academic, Noël O'Sullivan, also thought that Scruton asked too much of politics and ran the danger of moving conservatism beyond parliamentary debates and towards anti-constitutional radicalism.[7] What is more surprising and ironical is that, even in the same first issue of *SR*, the reviewer of Scruton's *The Politics of Culture, and Other Essays* cautioned against the politicisation of culture and favoured the old-fashioned, limited conception of politics.[8] However, if we examine Scruton's earliest scholarly articles in political philosophy in addition to his more careless expression of the broad conception of politics, we will find that these representations of Scruton's view are inadequate because they are incomplete.

In "The Significance of Common Culture" (1979), Scruton justified the extension of the scope of politics without implying the politicisation of what in this account is rendered politically relevant or "accessible." He began with his own conception of the task of political philosophy:

> Now political philosophy is, at least in part, the elaboration of a theory of human nature in terms of which the sphere and aims of politics may be described. Any theory of human nature which does justice to the facts will not confine itself to the philosophy of institutions, and will not regard the sphere of politics as delimited by specific rights and privileges such as those I have just referred to [i.e. private property and education]. It may have to recognize the "political accessibility" of many things more basic to rational nature than the institutions of property and education, things in respect of which there

[7] Noël O'Sullivan, "The New Right: The Quest for a Civil Philosophy in Europe and America," in *The Nature of the Right*, ed. Roger Eatwell and Noël O'Sullivan (London: Printer, 1989), 179.
[8] Mark Le Fanu, "Adversarial Critic," review of *The Politics of Culture, and Other Essays*, by Roger Scruton, *SR* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1982): 44.

> can be no rights and privileges. It may have to make room for a politics of culture, where culture includes everything that an anthropologist might wish to subsume under that term.[9]

This formulation throws into sharper relief the nature of the incompatibility between Scruton and the late Oakeshott. For the latter, politics is precisely the activity of seeking coherence and balance in the existing rights and duties, of "attending to" rather than "making" legal arrangements.[10] Or, in the language of *OHC*, politics is the deliberation about the desirability of laws which are not commands to be obeyed in undertaking a shared enterprise, but adverbial rules of conduct to which individuals are obliged to subscribe in pursuing their self-chosen ends.[11] Scruton's dissatisfaction with accounts of politics of this "liberal" or procedural type concerns its narrow focus on the legal framework. Nonetheless, the broadening of this focus beyond what lies within the scope of the state's constitutional action does not thereby entail that the sphere of the state's legitimate interference now includes all the cultural activities in society. That is, it does not follow that Scruton's broadened account of politics should also advocate making statutory Acts for the sake of common goals such as the restoration of culture.

This point is important to our understanding of Scruton's objection to, for example, the establishment of National Curriculum from above in the Education Reform Act of 1988. This objection was notable because this Act was the first serious attempt, after nearly a decade of ineffective Conservative endeavours in education policy, to combat the "relevant" and indoctrinatory courses in schools which Scruton had also strongly criticised by devoting nearly all his pamphlets in the 1980s to this cultural cause. Due to the neglect of Scruton's more nuanced philosophical account of politics, the widespread representation of this Act, which also strengthened parental choice in the education system, as a contradictory

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[9] Scruton, "The Significance of Common Culture," *Philosophy* 54, no. 207 (January 1979): 51.
[10] See Ch. 5, sec. II.
[11] See Ch. 4, sec. III.

conglomerate of the free economy and the strong state simplifies and mislocates the real tensions between the neo-liberal marketeers and the neo-conservative traditionalists.[12]

Nevertheless, at this stage, neither did Scruton provide a guarantee that his extended conception of politics is, unlike socialism which shares this wider concern with the whole of our human condition, proof against the fallacy of politicising society. An argument to this effect should show that those cultural affairs which politicians should take into consideration are not of politics' making and cannot be decided by political means, probably but not necessarily in the fashion in which the early Oakeshott understood the relationship between law and morality. For Oakeshott, it is because the State has social morality so earnest in its mind that it refuses to touch upon those matters which its touch would mar. Certainly, Scruton's political commentaries exhibited a clear recognition of this limitation. For instance, he observed in a tone similar to Mingoue's that the cause of the catastrophe in the twentieth century lies in "the repeated attempt to create, by politics alone, that 'unity about a common purpose' which will be a final substitute for consensus."[13] Again, in relation to the encroachment of the welfare state and the erosion of the enterprise spirit, Scruton commented that "to imagine that our [economic] decline is a purely political problem is precisely to give way to the radical illusion … that all social problems might therefore be finally solved."[14] More importantly, politics is explicitly defined as the expression, reconciliation, and acceptance of conflicts of interest, so that the "political process is therefore only one part of life, and dependent for its success on a more general acceptance of the human condition."[15] This is a conclusion in line with Oakeshott's argument in "The Claims of Politics,"[16] as is the advice Scruton later gave to the East European countries longing for national revival after the collapse of the Soviet's control of these satellite states: "do your best to ensure that politics in general, and democracy in particular, are of no

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[12] More details will be explored in the next chapter.
[13] Scruton, front matter of *SR* 3, no. 1 (October 1984): 2.
[14] Scruton, front matter of *SR* 3, no. 3 (April 1985): 2.
[15] Scruton, front matter of *SR* 3, no. 2 (January 1985): 2.
[16] See Ch. 2, sec. III.

overriding importance in the lives of the people. Take as your goal not a particular kind of politics, but the depoliticization of society. Only in a depoliticized society is the practice of politics possible."[17]

Admittedly, these are merely assertions, not arguments. Yet, as the preface to his widely cited *The Meaning of Conservatism* (1980) makes clear, Scruton did not intend to provide answers to the philosophical questions raised by his political commentaries in these more practical writings.[18] It is thus pointless to direct criticisms at his works of "dogmatics" which are not meant to be a contribution to scholarship in the first place.

Even in the more academic "The Significance of Common Culture," Scruton was preoccupied with establishing the political relevance of culture only. He first made a detour to consider the epistemological features of the kind of knowledge involved in understanding a culture, and expressed F. R. Leavis' position in the language of analytical philosophy that this kind of knowledge involves certainty of one's emotions which is not reducible to scientific knowledge.[19] Then, he defended in a Hegelian manner the view that this cultural knowledge is acquired not within the individual himself, but through his participation or self-realisation in social life.[20] The importance of the politics of culture is thus justified by the fact that political arrangements may have an impact on those aspects of social life on which the well-being of the individual depends. However, once the "political accessibility" of culture is demonstrated, the question of whether culture, being thus politically "accessible," belongs to the legitimate range of state activity is set aside:

> So clearly there is a real question as to the political provision for the satisfaction of human desires. Whether one considers it the duty of the state to provide for this satisfaction is not in issue. It is of course possible to hold that the sphere of political

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[17] Scruton, "Editorial: Finding Central Europe," *SR* 8, no. 3 (March 1990): 47.
[18] Scruton, preface to *The Meaning of Conservatism* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1980), 9.
[19] Scruton, "Significance of Common Culture," 52-62.
[20] *Ibid*., 62-67.

significance is wider than the sphere of state authority. Some philosophers [referring to Friedrich Hayek in a footnote], believing that the legitimate activity of the state can only reside in the enforcement of a code of justice, would look to other lesser institutions, or to the 'civil society' itself, for the satisfaction of the determinate aspirations of individual men. But this issue, of the legitimate activity of the state, and of the relative autonomy of its subject institutions, is not relevant to our question. Whatever one's theory of legitimacy, the question of political accessibility will remain. For this is a question which must be answered if the value of any particular arrangement is to be discerned.[21]

Consequently, we must look in Scruton's later philosophical development for such a theory of legitimacy that can underpin his more casual remarks against the politicisation of those aspects of social life which are nevertheless politically relevant. Nevertheless, by now we can at least see the nuance in conservatism concerning the disparity between what is desirable in its vision of society and what is desirable to bring about through political means.

This difference is not identical with Oakeshott's modal separation between theory and practice, where a philosophical proposition undergoes a distortion of its meaning when it is transposed to the discourse of practical politics. In any case, we have seen that he gradually qualified the radically subversive nature of philosophy in his Idealist conception of it.[22] Scruton's account here is also different from the discrepancy between thought and action which takes a Machiavellian form in the hands of Minogue. For Minogue, what is morally right is not necessarily politically right and *vice versa*, and it is the failure to comprehend the significance of *Staatsräson* and the naïve conception of a politico-moral continuum that account for the ideologue's misunderstanding of politics.[23] What is important to our present purpose is to notice that even in his theory of political accessibility alone Scruton already

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[21] *Ibid*. 68.
[22] See Ch. 4, sec. II.
[23] Kenneth Minogue, *The Servile Mind* (New York: Encounter, 2010), 209-215.

recognised that its scope may well be distinct from that of state authority. Consequently, the impression of radicalism conveyed by his conservatism is wholly mistaken. Indeed, his important contribution is to remind us that such a wide concern of politics is not the sole possession of socialism, as the early Oakeshott and the late Minogue testify. We will see in the following sections that in Scruton's philosophical theory of freedom and corporate personality the difference made by the politics of culture manifests itself explicitly. It is also in his philosophical arguments that his departure from Minogue and Oakeshott can be more precisely characterised.

III. Freedom in the Moral Life of the Individual

The motivation behind Scruton's extended notion of political accessibility is to call attention to those aspects of social life which are essential to the happiness of individuals but received insufficient consideration by conventional politics. Nevertheless, he agreed with the traditional conception of a limited sphere of legitimate political action, favoured by Minogue and the late Oakeshott. Consequently, the difference between these thinkers probably consists in their attitudes towards the causes of the social ills associated with the modern human condition.

We may usefully begin with Scruton's handling of the issue concerning the welfare state. Since this is also one of the socialist tenets most frequently attacked by Minogue, it is here that the difference in their outlook is more likely to display itself. In the 1984 Latham Memorial Lecture, delivered in Australia and later published in *Quadrant* (a conservative magazine based in Minogue's home country to which he frequently contributed political commentaries), Scruton attributed the ineffectiveness of conservatism's attack upon the welfare state to its unwise reliance on arguments couched in the liberal language of politics:

> Faced with this triumph of impersonality [referring to the welfare state], however, the

> conservative in recent years has had a single stratagem. He says that we must affirm the individual against the state, that we must 'roll back the frontiers of the state,' as Winston Churchill once put it. Now, someone who says that we must affirm the individual against the state, is not going to carry much credence in the modern climate of opinion. For to those who stand to lose, this cry for the individual against the state looks like another cry for the powerful against the weak. The weaker individual is protected by the impersonal state (or at least so he has been persuaded to believe), and the only person who will gain by reaffirming the rights of the individual is the one with power. The majority of people, not being powerful, see no reason why the interests of the powerful should be furthered.[24]

The qualification in the parentheses is an important clue. In light of this, we can regard Minogue's whole intellectual endeavour as an attempt exactly to dissuade the "weaker" individual from the mistaken belief that the welfare state can protect him from poverty and unemployment, and guarantee the satisfaction of both his physical and mental needs. On the contrary, the despotism of the welfare state will further encourage the servile mentality which deprives him of the ability to enjoy a free way of life, the spirit of initiative and enterprise, and the resourcefulness necessary to his feeling at ease in the human condition of modernity. By contrast, for Scruton it is too rash to dismiss out of hand the understanding which the majority of people have of their own situation. "The complaint against 'alienation' may, of course, be so much self-indulgence: after all, it issues from people who are 'not at home in the world.' Nevertheless, we ought for that very reason to take it seriously: when self-indulgence becomes the norm, something is wrong with the society that engenders it."[25] From this perspective, we can understand Scruton's willingness to countenance most of

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[24] Scruton, "The Usurpation of Australia," in *The Philosopher on Dover Beach: Essays* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1990), 277. Previously published in *Quadrant*, November 1984.

[25] Scruton, "In Defence of the Nation," in *Philosopher on Dover Beach*, 308. Previously published in *Ideas and Politics in Modern Britain*, ed. J. C. D. Clark (London: Macmillan, 1990).

socialism's diagnosis of the problems of modernity (though not its radical solutions to them), for "it is the state of alienation which, in inviting despotism, makes despotism possible" in the first place.[26]

Therefore, the task lying before Scruton is two-fold. First, he must show that the root cause of alienation in modern society is not the institution of private property or freedom as such. If this socialist analysis were accepted, the solution could be nothing but despotic. Secondly, he must also point out where the liberal conception of freedom goes wrong, and substitute for it a conservative one which preempts the problem of alienation. This task is accomplished by the arguments in his philosophical essay "Freedom and Custom" published in 1983 by the Royal Institute of Philosophy. Since this article appeared in the same volume where Minogue also contributed his "Freedom as a Skill,"[27] it is instructive to pursue Scruton's argument to the point beyond which even Minogue's enriched (that is, compared to the marketeers) account of freedom could no longer accommodate.

Scruton began with a minimal version of the liberal theory of freedom. Through pointing out its insufficiencies at each stage, he inflated (as the analytical philosophers usually put it, sometimes not without pejorative connotations) this theory of freedom by successively incorporating philosophical resources until it eventually becomes a conservative one. The simplest liberal account construes freedom as the individual's ability to satisfy his desires freely without any constraints. Certainly, Minogue's conception of freedom is far from the naivety of this account; but his initial delineation of the distinctive features of freedom clearly conforms to this schema by maintaining that freedom is not about the catering for needs (central to socialism) but the satisfaction of desires.[28]

The inadequacy of this naïve account of freedom, Scruton argued, becomes evident after we distinguish between various kinds of desires, and come to recognise the possibility of an individual having certain desires which he nonetheless does not intend to satisfy

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[26] Scruton, *Meaning of Conservatism*, 124.
[27] Minogue, "Freedom as a Skill," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 15 (March 1983), 197-215.
[28] See Ch. 6, sec II (i).

(because they are fleeting or mere velleities, for example). Without the notion of intention, that of desire alone cannot account for the observation that "[a] political order which obstructs only those desires which a man has no intention to fulfil clearly removes less of his freedom than one which obstructs his intentions while leaving other desires to fulfil themselves at will."[29] Although Minogue's discussion about freedom is less systematic, it does take this complication into account. As the previous chapter has shown, he also emphasised that the individual he talks about is not a bundle of impulses but a person of rationalised desires.[30]

To continue with Scruton's argument, when an individual does not intend to satisfy some of his desires, it is not necessarily or only because these desires do not involve a long-term perspective or are not profound enough. It may as well because he is aware that the satisfaction of these desires does not result in the satisfaction of himself. Consequently, a self-conscious being "has, not only desires and intentions, but also a conception of his own satisfaction, and a conception of the desirable (of the value of the object of desire)."[31] Against the background of these philosophical distinctions, the virtues of the concept of freedom in Minogue's exposition become more evident. In distancing his position from vulgar individualism, he clarified the notion of free choice as not merely the freedom to satisfy whatever desires one happens to entertain, but also involves the decision to become a particular kind of person in thus choosing. Therefore, choice implies the responsibility for one's moral identity, and Minogue took this profound concern in the moral life of the individual as the most important feature which distinguishes conservatism from liberalism.[32]

In short, the difference between Scruton and Minogue does not lie in their understanding of the sophistication implicated in the freedom of self-conscious human beings. It consists instead in their answers to the question of what makes this kind of moral

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[29] Scruton, "Freedom and Custom," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 15 (March 1983), 184.
[30] See Ch. 6, sec. III (ii).
[31] Scruton, "Freedom and Custom," 185.
[32] See Ch. 6, sec III (i).

beings possible, or how the individual acquires the skill of exercising this freedom. As the previous chapter has shown, the importance which Scruton attached to tradition and custom was acknowledged by Minogue only gradually and implicitly in his late years, but is not incorporated into his original theory of freedom.[33] By contrast, rejecting both the Kantian account of autonomy and the existentialist doctrine of authenticity, Scruton's theory of freedom borrows heavily from the familiar Hegelian argument: the capability of free choice cannot arise from the moral resources internal to the individual, but has to be nurtured through his participation in the various institutions of social life, which are the presupposition of rational agency instead of its products.[34]

With the help of this argument, Scruton can side with liberalism in emphasising the importance of the individual's moral understanding of himself in any serious account of freedom; and in defending this first-person perspective against the dangerous socialist notion of the objective needs or "real" interests of which the individual may be unaware or misinformed, and which therefore has to be determined from the outside by a bureaucratic state. Nevertheless, at the same time this argument also enables Scruton to show that the real culprit leading liberalism to its antithesis, socialism, is its flawed individualism which alienates the individual from his social life in the first place:

> If we consider that, because men are free by nature, their freedom does not need to be acquired, then not only do we commit an evident logical fallacy; we naturally begin to think of institutions in a single, highly distorted way. They become not the precondition but the outcome of human freedom. (Or, if they are not the outcome of freedom, they are then dismissed as local tyrannies.) It is characteristic of liberal thought to see all institutions on the model of what lawyers call "voluntary associations"—even the institutions which constitute the state.[35]

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[33] See Ch. 6, sec IV.
[34] Scruton, "Freedom and Custom," 188-92.
[35] *Ibid*., 195.

Therefore, in his more casual writings Scruton seldom devoted much space to the concept of freedom. For him, it is more important to consider the associations, institutions, customs and traditions (especially those that are not voluntary) through which freedom acquires its value in a public world of meanings.

It is useful to take stock of our argument so far. I have pointed out that Scruton's extended account of what is politically "accessible" is the key to uncovering the hallmark of his conservatism. Contrary to the view of many commentators, this account does not imply the politicisation of social and cultural life. Nevertheless, nor does it possess the theoretical resources to guarantee against such politicisation. We are thus in need of a theory of legitimacy to delineate the proper scope of the state's activity which, at the same time, must be different from that held by Minogue and the late Oakeshott. Otherwise, such a theory of legitimacy could not buttress Scruton's distinctively wide conception of politics. We have noticed that Scruton's Hegelian theory of freedom goes beyond Minogue's analysis of this concept. Consequently, the remaining task of this section is to consider whether it is his theory of freedom that provides such the required account about the scope of legitimate state activity, and distinguishes Scruton's conservatism from other versions with a narrower conception of what is politically relevant.

In Scruton's argument the emphasis is shifted from the concept of freedom itself to its preconditions, namely the various social institutions which make possible the acquisition of the ability to live a free way of life. It may prove more immediately illuminating to focus on one of such institutions which is central to our present concern: law, or the medium through which government exercise its power. In this regard, Scruton's account agreed with Oakeshott and Minogue's formulation that the freedom as it has been traditionally understood and enjoyed in Britain is "a freedom to do precisely what is not forbidden by law," though he was more interested in the fact that "what is forbidden by law records a long

tradition of reflection on the nature and constitution of English society."[36] The potential of this formula for evaluating contemporary policies is far-reaching. For instance, commenting on the introduction of the Poll Tax and the Community Charge by the Conservative government, Scruton responded that the subject rightly "expects taxation to conform to its inherited idea of fairness, and this idea is not the logical outcome of a clear philosophy, but the muddy residue of a thousand years of dealing between sovereign and subject."[37] Consequently, his complaint about this new local tax was not primarily that it transfers resources from the private sector to where they are bound to be inefficiently used. Rather, he was concerned with the ramifications of this transfer for the subject's freedom. Noting the socialist tendency of this tax which is hostile to civil society and all the institutions lying outside the reach of the state, Scruton urged that "[a] truly conservative reform in local government would have had as its first concern the liberation of voluntary associations from a tax that is calculated to destroy them."[38]

It would be too hasty to characterise the difference between the conservatism of Scruton and liberalism simply as one between the protection of those social institutions, which are essential to the individual's self-fulfilment, from the encroachment of the state, and on the other hand the protection of the individual from the tyranny of both these institutions and the state. This would presume a too simplistic account of liberalism which is unable to accommodate its complicated history. Commenting on the erosion of the moral sense of criminal punishment in post-war Britain, Scruton admitted that the demoralisation of society is not a problem admitting of a political solution because "[n]othing short of a religious revival can turn the tide against decay."[39] To think otherwise is exactly to commit the fallacy of politicising society. Nonetheless, "[t]he external impediments to crime, unlike the internal constraints of moral feeling, are the true concerns of politicians. And it is here—in eroding

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[36] Scruton, *Meaning of Conservatism*, 18.
[37] Scruton, "Editorial," *SR* 8, no. 4 (June 1990): 42.
[38] *Ibid*.
[39] Scruton, "Editorial," *SR* 10, no. 2 (December 1991): 46.

the ethics and the institutions of criminal justice—that modern governments must take the blame."[40] In other words, for Scruton, the state should discharge its responsibility by removing these permissive trends in its law and institutions of punishment which have constituted an obstacle to the development of the individual's moral life. This view about the scope of state authority in effect sounds very similar to the Bosanquetian conception of the State as the "hinderer of hindrances" which, as we have seen previously, Oakeshott's account of law in his early political philosophy also echoes. However, other British Idealists and pluralists contemporary to the early Oakeshott also shared an account about state activity of this "removal of obstacle" kind. More importantly, some of them, like T. H. Green, even adapted the Hegelian framework to the native condition of Britain in shoring up their liberal credentials. The view that the various social institutions are essential to the individual's development of his ability to exercise freedom, as it turns out, is not unique to Scruton's conservatism.

Here we are in a position to revise our earlier judgment that Scruton's conservatism can be understood by embedding it in the context of Oakeshott's early political philosophy, whose full theory of the State exhibits a similarly avid concern with the institutions of social life. In fact, as late as 1948 when Oakeshott was beginning the revision of his earlier conception of political philosophy, he still discussed the scope of the state's activity in the following manner:

> The politician in office may be said to have a second function to perform. It is to take the initiative in seeking out the current mischiefs and maladjustments in a society and to set them right, not arbitrarily but by bringing to bear upon them the legal principles which constitute the recognized method of adjustment in any experienced and civilized society. And in order to perform this function he must have in his mind not only "the

[40] *Ibid*.

> individual" (who may be either the beneficiary or the sufferer of the mischief) and "the government," but also the vast mass of healthy relations between the members of a society (some established by law and others by custom) which, from any point of view except that of revolutionary *jusqu'aboutisme*, are more important than the few which are morbid.[41]

The reference to both law and custom suggests that Oakeshott, like Scruton, recognised in the individual's social life the importance of both the institutions which arise from voluntary association and those which are not the product of choice or consent. For, Oakeshott continued,

> we do not begin by being free; the structure of our freedom is the rights and duties which, by long and painful human effort, have been established in our society. Individuality is not natural; it is a great human achievement. The conditions of individuality are not limitations; there is nothing to limit. And the adjustments of those conditions are not interference; they are the continuation of the achievement.[42]

Instead of regarding these passages simply as conservative remnants which were to fade away in Oakeshott's late political philosophy, we should notice that they reflect the intellectual context of his formative years in the early 1930s, namely Idealism. As we have seen earlier, the influence of this context was by no means purely conservative. Consequently, although Scruton's argument shares the wider concern with social life in Oakeshott's early political philosophy, this is not the distinctive feature of his renewal of conservatism during the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, we have another example of the virtues of refraining from

[41] Oakeshott, "Contemporary British Politics," review of *Labour Marches On*, by John Parker, and *The Case for Conservatism*, by Quintin Hogg, in Luke O'Sullivan, *The Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2007), 216. First published in *Cambridge Journal* 1 (1948): 474-90.
[42] *Ibid*., 216-17.

prematurely assigning ideological identities to Oakeshott's philosophy in the framework of this thesis. Had this been done beforehand, we would have been easily misled in making an inadequate characterisation of Scruton's conservative political thought solely or mainly in terms of his Hegelian account of freedom.[43]

To conclude this section, the philosophical element which makes Scruton's conservatism distinctive must lie somewhere else. In the following, we turn to his renewal of the doctrine of corporate personality in the attempt to understand the nature of the evil of communism and other totalitarian regimes. Here Scruton finally provided his philosophical argument concerning the nature of the state's activity, and further criticised the kind of liberalism (e.g. Minogue's conservatism from Scruton's perspective) which, despite having been enriched by Hegelian Idealism, is unable to recognise fully the moral (in addition to the legal) reality of social institutions. More significantly, even the early Oakeshott had already expressed doubts about the notion of corporate personality by the early 1930s. In other words, it is more probable that the distinctiveness of Scruton's conservatism consists in his departure from the mainstream in the tradition of English jurisprudence.

IV. Corporate Personality and the Cold War Political Context

An intuitive way of understanding conservatism is to construe its central tenet as the conservation of what is valuable in the inherited institutions of a society. We have seen that in Minogue's view what is worthy of conservation is the individual's free way of life which has been led and enjoyed by the British people, and indeed, by all those spreading across the whole Anglosphere. Scruton would not disagree with this laudable interpretation of conservatism, but preferred to give more importance to the conditions which make this

[43] It is undeniable, of course, that in Scruton's less philosophical works it is often his Hegelian elements that are more conspicuous. See Stefan Collini, "Hegel in Green Wellies: Roger Scruton's England," review of *England: An Elegy*, by Roger Scruton, in *Common Reading: Critics, Historians, Publics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 196-208.

freedom possible. Celebrating the unique virtues of his own culture distinct from the rest of the world, Scruton revealed its underlying secret thus:

> the idea of corporate personality and the comparable English concept of the trust lie at the root of Western institution building, and have become cornerstones of law and politics throughout the Western world. Such concepts are among what is most distinctive of our civilization and constitute a prime explanation of its success.[44]

The tone is less triumphant than Minogue's not without a reason. In fact, Scruton's narrower reference to the "comparable" English law of trust contains a critique of English lawyers' reluctance to recognise the moral personality of corporate groups over and above their legal identity. Consequently, he was more broadly concerned with similar ideas in the wider Western culture (than the Anglosphere) which may provide a corrective to the English tradition; the ideas, namely, surrounding the notion of corporate personality.

The priority in Scruton's argument is not to establish that the moral personality of associations is important to the individual's self-realisation. Certainly, this proposition is no less important and is closely connected with his Hegelian account of freedom examined in the previous section.[45] Nevertheless, what is distinctive in his conservatism lies rather in his reference to the real personality of the state. In his political commentaries, Scruton utilised fairly frequently the distinction between the state as a person and the state as a thing to portray the corruption of politics brought about by socialism (or at least its ideological, anti-constitutional moments approaching communism). For instance, concerning the welfare state, he argued that the fostering of the "illusion of a 'natural right' to home, health, wealth and comfort" transforms the state into "a kind of machine, a centre of distribution, an alien

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[44] Scruton, "Spengler's *Decline of the West*," in *Philosopher on Dover Beach*, 24. Previously published in *The World and I*, September 1988.

[45] For his argument on this matter, see Scruton, "Corporate Persons," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplements* 63 (1989): 264-66.

object which sometimes grants, and sometimes withholds, what is thought of as an independent right."[46] Again, with regards to criminal punishment, Scruton reacted strongly against the view that the cause of crime is rooted in "society" and hence the purpose of law is to reduce its crime rates. If we accept these assumptions and understand the task of punishment in terms of rehabilitation and deterrence, then the "state ceases to appear as the citizen's friend, and begins to take on the aspect of a bureaucratic process, a conspiracy of the enlightened to render impotent the natural feelings of the ordinary man."[47] Conversely, to conceive punishment as an institution which gives the criminal what is his desert, is to "uphold the ideal of the state as person, as will and as end in itself: that is the ideal of conservatism."[48]

That Scruton put more emphasis on the personality of the state than that of the associations (where the individual nurtures his capacity of freedom and moral personality) is understandable in the political and military confrontation between the West and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. As a philosopher, it was his task to find a metaphysical (as opposed to empirical or historical) explanation for the unaccountability of the Communist government. The commonplace criticisms of particular undesirable features of the social life under Communist rule is something that should be left for second-rate political commentators to express. Scruton's philosophical answer is that when a state is depersonalised and becomes a thing, it loses the ability to hold responsibility for its wrongdoing. On this basis, he urged the new governments of East European countries to ascribe "legal personality to all potential wrongdoers—including the Communist Party, the Secret Police and their agents" because it is important to "prosecute all these for their crimes, and to sue them for their civil wrongs: even to the point where their assets are forfeit."[49] Furthermore, at a time when the West was taken unawares by Mikhail Gorbachev's talk of

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[46] Scruton, *Meaning of Conservatism*, 50.
[47] Scruton, "Editorial," *SR* 2, no. 1 (Autumn 1983): 46.
[48] Scruton, *Meaning of Conservatism*, 82.
[49] Scruton, "Editorial," *SR* 8, no. 2 (December 1989): 47.

perestroika, Scruton still poured relentless condemnations on such "reforms" of the Communist Party, for "they seem designed precisely to reinforce this extra-legal character of the party, to ensure, in other words, that it is never the party itself that is arraigned before a court of law, but always some 'mistaken' or 'criminal' element within it. This is the root cause of the party's lack of accountability."[50]

However, to make sense of these examples, it does not seem that we need to commit ourselves to Scruton's stronger view about the moral personality of the state. Is not its legal identity sufficient to make it accountable to both the individuals and their associations and institutions? What did Scruton mean when he said that the state is a person "not only in the legal sense but in a deeper sense, once captured in the institution of monarchy but displayed more widely and more discreetly through the rule of law"?[51] To answer these questions and to characterise Scruton's departure from the English tradition of jurisprudence, we have to consider his philosophical essay "Corporate Persons," published at the turning point of political history in 1989, in the intellectual context of British Idealism and pluralism.

Scruton began his argument with a delineation of the various features manifested by corporate personality in general, showing that the recognition of such personality by law is not only merely a small part of the complex phenomenon of social life but also arises from, rather than precedes, the moral reality of this personality. In particular, corporate persons have their decision-making process, are capable of free and responsible action, have moral and legal rights and duties, possess law-making capacities, are objects of praise and blame, undergo prosperity and decline in history, exhibit habits of mind, and stand in human relations with persons both natural and corporate.[52] Certainly, personality is a matter of degree, and it is not the business of Scruton's argument to defend the indefensible claim that all associations and institutions possess corporate personality in the sense of exemplifying every feature in this list. Nevertheless, with this full picture at hand in advance, he was able

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[50] Scruton, "Editorial: Finding Central Europe," 45.
[51] Scruton, *Thinkers of the New Left* (Essex: Longman, 1985), 208.
[52] Scruton, "Corporate Persons," 245.

to consider the reasons underlying the unwillingness of the tradition of English jurisprudence to recognise the legal personality of corporate groups, especially the state. One of them is that the concept of trust in English law makes that of corporate personality unnecessary:

> It is true, as [F. W.] Maitland has demonstrated, that the device of corporate personality is not strictly necessary for the protection and control of associations—the English law of trusts being a rival method, whose very existence might tempt us to the view that "personality," like "trust," is a mere creature of the law which discerns it, and not something that exists "in itself."[53]

However, referring to the celebrated Taff Vale case in the beginning of twentieth century, Scruton argued that there is an inherent tendency in law to recognise personality even though the recognition may not fall under that description, and even though the Parliament may attempt to resist this tendency.[54] What Scruton's comments further suggest is that this resilience of law would be difficult to explain if the personality it acknowledges were merely a legal device designed for the sake of convenience but not a moral reality in the first place. In other words, it is on account of a significant development in the moral life of a people that law (at least in the conservative vision), seeking to reflect morality and enforce justice in the dealings among the subjects and the state accordingly, is predisposed to recognise the moral fact of group personality through whatever legal devices may be available from their national tradition.

Nevertheless, largely borrowed from Maitland, Scruton's renewed argument so far is not conclusive. For example, in considering Maitland's position, Ernest Barker expressed doubts about the "nebulous" talk of real personality beyond the legal sense,[55] and thought

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[53] *Ibid*., 246.
[54] *Ibid*., 246-47.
[55] Ernest Barker, *Political Thought in England 1848 to 1914*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), 153-54.

that the theoretical advantages of moral personality can still be preserved when it is reduced to a legal notion:

> even if we reduce the group to the category of a juristic person, we may still hold to Maitland's main tenet, and plead that such personality grows and is not made. In other words, these juristic persons can exist, and do exist, before there is any legal act of incorporation or "creation," just as law itself can exist, and does exist, before there is any legal act of legislation. Law, Gierke writes, is the result of a common conviction not that a thing shall be, but that it is; and in the same way we may hold that juristic personality is the result of a common conviction not that corporate persons shall be allowed to exist, but that they exist already.[56]

It is certainly possible to question the ontological status of this pre-existing personality which is not moral but legal, as Oakeshott did in 1934. However, the early Oakeshott's criticism of Barker's compromising account is mainly launched from the general perspective of the shared doctrines of philosophical Idealism,[57] not based on his particular views in political philosophy. Therefore, we can set Oakeshott aside for the moment until we are in a position to consider his objection to corporate personality in *On Human Conduct*. The significance of Barker's position is that, without understanding the reason which led thinkers such as Barker to deny moral personality to corporate groups, Scruton's argument would still be incomplete and in need of further philosophical arguments.[58]

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[56] *Ibid*., 154.

[57] "Professor Barker suggests, further, that legal personality, unlike psychological or moral personality, is a construction, not a datum; but that it is not on that account less real. But he would appear to be on dangerous ground when he says that psychological and moral personality are 'an immediate datum of perception and consciousness.' A better line of attack would, perhaps, be to take personality in all its forms as a 'mental construction,' one form being not less 'artificial' than another." Oakeshott, review of *Natural Law and the Theory of Society 1500 to 1800*, by Otto von Gierke, tr. and intro. Ernest Barker, in *Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence*, 99. First published in *Cambridge Review* 56 (1934): 11-12.

[58] To be sure, Scruton did engage closely with Barker's two metaphysical arguments against the attribution of moral personality to corporate groups. Nevertheless, since these issues, like the early Oakeshott's criticism of Barker, belong to the philosophy of mind, they lie outside our present concern with political philosophy. See Scruton, "Corporate Persons," 247-53.

The reason, Scruton suggested, can be attributed to the "suspicion of the German *Genossenshaft*, with Hegelian and Fichtean overtones. It is a small step, the English liberal supposes, from Gierke's *Genossenshaft* to the corporate state."[59] Here we begin to deal not with the corporate personality of associations in general, but the moral personality of the state in particular. It will prove instructive to consider Barker's critique of Bernard Bosanquet's views in this regard because Bosanquet's position lies halfway between those of Barker and Scruton. For Bosanquet, we may literally talk about a group mind which exists in the minds of its members in virtue of a uniting idea; though this group mind cannot exist apart from the members of this group, it nevertheless exists over and above the aggregation of those individual minds.[60] This position is less extreme than Scruton's view that a corporate person may outlive all of its present members yet, like a natural person whose identity persists through time, remain the same person; and it is bolder than Barker's refusal to grant any moral reality to group persons.

It is noticeable that, of such a philosopher as Bosanquet whose views about corporate personality were at best moderate, Barker's evaluation still focused primarily on the potential danger of the State's immunity to moral criticism, let alone the metaphysically more stronger position such as that of Scruton's:

> [Bosanquet] argues, in the first place, that a distinction has to be drawn between the acts of the State as such, and the personal acts of its statemen or agents; and he insists on the impropriety of applying to acts which belong to the first sphere the moral terms which belong to the second. …. It cannot be bound by the system of rights and duties which it makes binding on its members …. At most, we can criticize its actions on the ground that they embody a low conception of the good, or that they involve means inappropriate to realize a true conception; but in such criticism we criticize the State

[59] *Ibid*., 247.
[60] Barker, *Political Thought in England*, 61.

not in relation to any wider good or any more general morality to which it should conform, but in regard only to its own good and its own morality.[61]

In response to this theory of the State, Barker sympathised more with another view which gives greater weight to the responsibility of the State. Referring to the French system of administrative law before whose court the State may be held accountable for its wrongdoing, he argued that "[i]f a citizen can thus treat his own State as legally responsible for damage, it is difficult to see why a State, which can undergo legal responsibility, should not also undergo moral responsibility, if there is any body of moral opinion to affix responsibility."[62] Here Scruton may query again whether in attributing moral responsibility to the State Barker would inevitably presuppose its moral personality as well, the possibility of which Barker had already rejected. Moreover, the early Oakeshott may also reply that Bosanquet's refusal to apply the same moral praise and blame to the State which are applicable to natural persons is rooted in his own metaphysical doctrines. Consequently, it is irrelevant to criticise his theory of the State on the basis of its possible political ramifications. Just as a critique of the account of "self-realisation" in political philosophy has to show its inadequacy as a philosophical analysis rather than as a practical aim of individuals, so a critique of Bosanquet's account of the "State" has to demonstrate what is philosophically unsatisfactory about understanding our criticism of the State in terms of its own conception of the good rather than in ordinary moral terms.

More importantly, in Barker's portrayal of Green, no such problem arises. Green took the relation between the State and the groups in society as seriously as that between the State and the individuals, and construed the task of the State as the adjustment of rights both internal to a group as well as among groups. However, he prevented the apparent finality of the adjustments made by the State from being confused with irresponsible government, by

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[61] *Ibid*., 64.
[62] *Ibid*., 65.

invoking the idea of universal brotherhood in the discussion about the relation between the State and the groups beyond the level of society.[63] In other words, the problem concerning the unaccountability of the State is solved without the idea of corporate personality playing any role in this account. In contrast, Scruton's approach is diametrically the opposite. Armed with a full commitment to the idea of corporate personality, it is precisely the applicability of ordinary moral evaluation to the state as a person that makes it accountable to its own deeds. With comparisons to Bosanquet in mind, it becomes clear that for Barker the introduction of the state's moral personality brings more problems than it solves, whilst for Scruton this introduction is exactly the solution.

This difference in attitudes towards the moral personality of the state can be understood more clearly by considering the different conceptions of the state and its legitimate activity in Barker's and Scruton's political philosophy. For Barker,

> failure to distinguish State and society may lead to unlimited State regulation of life. It is safer to distinguish, as we in England have always distinguished, between society (with its 'social' atmosphere, its 'social' morality, and its 'social' institutions) and the State (with its political institutions, its laws, and its officials). … But roughly we may say that the area of the one is voluntary co-operation, its energy that of good will, its method that of elasticity; while the area of the other is rather that of mechanical action, its energy force, its method rigidity. If we drew such a distinction—if we thus conceive the State as regulating externals by force, then we necessarily adopt a more cautious attitude to the State.[64]

It follows that if we do not conceive the state according to such a mechanical analogy, our attitudes towards it would naturally be different. From Scruton's perspective, the problem is

[63] *Ibid*., 32-33.
[64] *Ibid*., 54.

not that we should not understand the relationship between state and society in this dichotomous way, but that the dichotomies thus drawn are too narrow. Not all associations in society are voluntary or contractual, and neither does the view that the state is a moral person thereby entail that it is "an association of individuals, already united in various groups each with its common life, in a further and higher group for a further and more embracing common purpose."[65] Rather,

> we should distinguish among associations between the voluntary, the involuntary and the non-voluntary; between the contractual and the non-contractual, and, within the contractual, between those constituted by a contract among their members, and those which contract with their members; between those with an independent purpose, those with an internal purpose (e.g. the Church), and those with no purpose at all; and, within all those, between the personal and the impersonal.[66]

With the help of these distinctions, extracted from Gierke's works and further fine-tuned, Scruton was able to show that the state, while being a compulsory association, can nevertheless both have no purpose at all and be personal. It is the possibility of this conjunction of non-purposefulness and moral personality of the state that is neglected in the late Oakeshott's account of *societas* and *universitas*.[67] The distinctiveness of Scruton's conservatism, therefore, lies in his attempt to theorise these concepts anew to understand the

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[65] *Ibid*., 155.

[66] Scruton, "Corporate Persons," 245.

[67] "Some who, in later times, have been disposed to understand the character of a state as a corporation aggregate have thought it proper to theorize it in terms of a 'real' personality (a fictitious person could be created only by a superior legal authority), or a 'common' or even a 'real' will. But postulates of this sort are not required in order to make it intelligible. The character of a state suggested by the analogy of a corporation aggregate is nothing more abstruse than that of a many of intelligent agents become one in the joint pursuit of a common substantive purpose and in the enjoyment of the means necessary for undertaking the managerial decisions entailed. It is not (or we need not suppose it to be) many persons transformed in one Person. It is a many speaking with one voice, not because all the tongues have miraculously become one Tongue, or because all the intelligences concerned have become one Mind, or all the wills one Will, but because (unlike *socii*) they are agreed, not merely to speak the same language, but to say the same thing and are equipped with the means of committing themselves to or acknowledging such common utterances as their own." Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 205.

imminent political threat of Soviet Communism.

In contrast, Barker's context was more strictly intellectual. The contribution of lawyers to the debates over corporate personality was only one among many currents of thought defending the rights of groups against the authority of the State. The concerns with guilds in socialism, with devolution to national groups in liberalism, and with the Church in conservatism, are all contemporary trends in political philosophy at Barker's time.[68] Despite his inclination to limit the activity of the State, he responded to these trends by defending the legitimate sphere of the State's action against exaggerated claims on behalf of group rights of whatever kind:

> It is harder, but it is very necessary, to see that voluntary co-operation is only made possible by the State, and, what is more, that the more there is of voluntary co-operation, the more need there is of the State. …. One has only to look the facts in the face to see that the great extension in modern times of voluntary co-operation, both between master and man, and between master and master, also meant a great extension of government. Government has had to keep pace with industry: government has had to solve its problems by Factory Acts, Company Acts, and Acts innumerable.[69]

For Scruton, the individual's social life includes associations such as the family and the Church which cannot be understood through the analogy of firms or the model of voluntary co-operation in common pursuit of an external purpose. As a result, neither does his view about the legitimacy of the state focus on the adjustment of rights and duties in the legal framework. Yet, again, purposefulness and personality are not necessarily linked with each other. In Scruton's account, it is not the task of the state to promote morality directly, not because we have to side with Green's contention that "the State proper, the State as such,

[68] Barker, *Political Thought in England*, 222.
[69] *Ibid*., 101.

can only promote morality indirectly, by the removal of obstacles, or, in other words, by the guarantee of rights, which are not morality but the conditions of morality."[70] Rather, it is because the associations and institutions, through which the individual acquires his own moral personality, are also real persons which are the making of the state. It is the failure to respect the autonomy of social institutions that transforms the personal state into a thing, whose mechanical and irresponsible interference with the social life turns both natural and corporate persons into things and is thus rightfully resented by both the individual and the groups.[71] Personality requires mutuality, and the state must prepare itself for being persuaded by the society it governs, as much as the individual and the groups must be prepared to listen to the will of the state.

To conclude, Scruton's account of the state's personality is not only concerned with limiting the authority of the state, but also protecting it from the subversion of radical ideologies. The example of criminal law was indeed related to the terrorist activities of the IRA in the 1980s. In this context, the attribution of moral personality to the state was certainly not motivated by the fear of an uncontrollable state. What the state does in restoring the moral sense of desert in its institutions of punishment is not primarily to remove the obstacles which lie in the way of the individual's moral development (though this is of course important). Rather, it is first and foremost to maintain the state's identity as a real person: to express its will, to convey to the criminal the moral significance of punishment, to stand in a human relation to him, and to regard him as equally a rational being who can understand the reasons of punishment and can be persuaded, instead of a malfunctioning part of a machine to be fixed or "reformed" regardless of his understandings and intentions. In short, in place of the Kantian kingdom of ends in liberalism, Scruton provided a "world of corporate persons and free association" as the philosophical antithesis of collectivism, and as the conservative answer to both the internal and external threats to Britain's inherited

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[70] *Ibid*., 55.
[71] Scruton, "Gierke and the Corporate Person," in *Philosopher on Dover Beach*, 71-72. Previously published in *The World and I*, March 1989.

culture and national interest.

V. Conclusion

This chapter has provided a characterisation of Scruton's political philosophy which serves as the basis for understanding his conservative ideology. Through the intellectual context of Oakeshott, Minogue, and British Idealism and pluralism in the early twentieth century, we examined in order Scruton's "politics of culture," his account of freedom and the individual, and his theory of corporate personality. It is clarified that Scruton's extension of what is politically relevant to the whole culture of a society does not imply the socialist politicisation of society, and that this broader conception of "political accessibility" is also shared by the early Oakeshott and the late Minogue. The difference between Scruton's account of freedom and Minogue's, too, is insufficient to pin down the distinctiveness of Scruton's conservatism. For the Hegelian seriousness about the various associations and institutions can also be found in some of the British Idealists and pluralists whose ideological identities, if such a practical concept can be applied to their philosophies at all, are liberal or at least not necessarily conservative. Following this thread of thought, Scruton's views about the moral reality of corporate personality, especially that of the state, are examined in relation to these thinkers and found to be the true hallmark of his conservative political philosophy in British political thought.

Chapter 8

Roger Scruton the Intellectual: Reidentifying the Tensions in the New Right

I. Introduction

In Chapter 6 we showed that Minogue's popularisation of his account of freedom is best understood in the context of the late Oakeshott's political philosophy; but Minogue's growing concern with the moral and cultural problems caused by permissiveness—with the preconditions of freedom—goes beyond what Oakeshott's late political philosophy can accommodate. Chapter 7 then noted that Scruton's theory of freedom is more substantial than Minogue's primarily because Scruton placed more emphasis on the various social institutions through which the individual's ability to exercise freedom is cultivated. This Hegelianism can in principle be embedded in the framework of Oakeshott's early political philosophy. However, the genuine hallmark of Scruton's political thought consists in his philosophical doctrine of corporate personality, which even the early Oakeshott's broader political philosophy is reluctant to incorporate. The purpose of these two chapters is to illustrate the fruitfulness of our interpretive framework based on Oakeshott's philosophical works. The framework is useful not merely in relation to the similarity other thinkers bear to Oakeshott. It is even more so in identifying the distinctiveness of these thinkers.

Nevertheless, since the previous chapter is concerned with Scruton's political philosophy only, we are still unable to judge whether corporate personality also characterises the peculiarity of his conservative ideology. Therefore, we must consider Scruton's more practical and polemical writings about contemporary political issues. Due to the limitation of space and Scruton's prolific output, I shall examine only his political commentary within the field of education policy. This focus is reasonable because almost all his published pamphlets during the 1980s and 1990s dealt with the theme of education. This shows how

important he took this area of public policy to be. However, in these think-tank publications one searches in vain for any application of the idea of corporate personality to education politics. As the next chapter will show, this task was instead taken up by the journalist Peregrine Worsthorne, whose conservatism is even more traditionalist and more of the old world than Scruton's. In contrast, despite various derisory remarks on the neo-liberal wing of Conservatism, Scruton's views on education actually exhibited a sincere attempt to accommodate what is valuable in free market ideology. This is surprising given the Hegelianism in his political philosophy.

The findings of this chapter and the next will enable us to relocate the tensions between different branches of the New Right, and further strengthen the usefulness of our interpretive framework. Our route from Minogue to Scruton and then to Worsthorne might at first sight appear to follow a simplistic one-dimensional spectrum between freedom and authority. The disparity between Scruton's political philosophy and conservative ideology complicates this distinction. If we had accepted the conventional characterisation of the New Right in terms of the contradictions between neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism, we would have been blind to the nuances which mark the conservatism of these followers of Oakeshott. Similarly, had we accepted a particular interpretation of his philosophy (such as that provided by Minogue) and regard his influence as primarily liberal, we would not have been able to appreciate the wider significance of Oakeshott in post-war conservatism. In this regard, while Scruton's conservative ideology further manifests the limitation of Oakeshott's influence and more generally the limited power of philosophy to guide politics, Worsthorne's conservatism is entitled to claim itself as another reasonable development of Oakeshott's political thought not in spite of, but because of being more traditionalist and less philosophical than Scruton's version.

II. Existing Analyses of Conservative Ideologies in Education

As E. H. H. Green points out, intellectually speaking, Thatcherism had long existed *avant la lettre* in the 1950s and the 1960s to the extent that at the time the Conservative response to the post-war consensus was more of a "pragmatic" acquiescence than a "normative" agreement.[1] From a long-term perspective, this kind of intra-party debate usually intensified when the Party was out of power or uncertain of its future course of policy.[2] Educational thought was no exception. It is therefore unsurprising that current literature in this field has focused on the uneasy tensions between different groups of Conservative intellectuals who had a special interest in education.

Just as the reduction in expenditure upon the Welfare State under the premiership of Margaret Thatcher draws most attention from commentators, in the area of education the Education Reform Act 1988 (henceforth ERA) has also proven to be the most radical and controversial piece of legislation since the Education Act 1944. Following Andrew Gamble's general characterisation of the New Right as involving contradictions between the free economy and the strong state,[3] it has been customary among analysts of education policy to argue that similar ideological inconsistencies between neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism existed in the ERA, among different think-tanks, and even within a single thinker on education. For example, at the level of policy, Denis Lawton noted that

> The Act [ERA] is interesting because it faces two ways ideologically: the clauses dealing with open enrolment, local management of schools, Grant Maintained Schools and City Technology Colleges are all concerned with increasing parental choice and encouraging schools towards market competition; on the other hand, the sections dealing with Higher and Further Education, and the ILEA [Inner London Education

[1] E. H. H. Green, "Thatcherism: A Historical Perspective," in *Ideologies of Conservatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 237-38.
[2] Green, introduction to *Ideologies of Conservatism*, 5.
[3] Andrew Gamble, *The Free Economy and the Strong State*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), ch. 2. First published 1988.

> Authority] increased central control.[4]

With regard to the philosophies espoused by groups of Conservative intellectuals, Clyde Chitty referred to the division between "neo-liberalism [which] prioritizes freedom of choice, the individual, the market, minimal government and *laissez-faire*" and "neo-conservatism which prioritizes notions of social authoritarianism, the disciplined society, hierarchy and subordination, the nation and strong government."[5] Finally, at the individual level, Ken Jones observed that

> these two tendencies are contradictory, and at points their contradictions have recognisable effects at the level of policy and action. In reality, however, they generally complement each other, even to the extent of inhabiting the mind of the same individual. In education, figures for the most part associated with the cultural right, such as Baroness Cox … can appear as authors of free market publications, and the models of school organization worked out by libertarian think-tanks can swiftly be adopted by "cultural" thinkers like Roger Scruton.[6]

This delineation of the New Right in education became popular in the late 1980s and the early 1990s,[7] and remained the conventional wisdom well into the 2000s.[8] Furthermore, in their more recently renewed accounts of the history of education in Britain, these educationists have persisted in putting forward the same distinction and classifying different

[4] Denis Lawton, *The Tory Mind on Education 1979-94* (London: Falmer, 1994), 92.
[5] Clyde Chitty, *Towards a New Education System: The Victory of the New Right?* (Sussex: Falmer, 1989), 212.
[6] Ken Jones, *Right Turn: The Conservative Revolution in Education* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), 38.
[7] See Stephen J. Ball, *Politics and Policy Making in Education: Explorations in Policy Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1990), 34; John Quicke, "The 'New Right' and Education," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 36, no. 1 (February 1988): 8; and Keith Crawford, "A History of the Right: The Battle for Control of National Curriculum History, 1989-1994," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 43, no. 4 (December 1995): 437.
[8] For example, Sally Tomlinson, *Education in a Post-Welfare Society*, 2nd ed. (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2005), 26-27; and Daniel Callaghan, *Conservative Party Education Policies 1976-1997: The Influence of Politics and Personality* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2006), 10-11.

thinkers accordingly.[9] As such, it is safe to say that the unravelling of the paradoxes in neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism has been the leading approach to studying the New Right in education during the 1980s and before.

Unfortunately, even though a few commentators like Jones quoted above noticed that their distinction does not neatly classify Conservative intellectuals, they did not explain why and how the mutually contradictory tendencies of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism can be complementary, or at least taken to be so by some of the Conservative intellectuals. Commenting on this shortcoming in analyses of the New Right, Scruton pointed out in an editorial of the *Salisbury Review* (henceforth *SR*) that

> [a]nalysis is rendered especially difficult by the fact that the phenomenon of "Thatcherism" has so far defied the impoverished conception resources of its commentators. The press experiments with labels—"right-wing," "authoritarian," "libertarian,"—unmindful of their meaning, and therefore indifferent to the contradictions that arise when they are conjoined.[10]

In other words, it is risky and requires further evidence to characterise an intellectual trend in terms which even its protagonists themselves rejected as contradictory and inadequate. To make matters worse, it does not even help to construe the tension instead in terms of the division between those who took neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism to be compatible with each other (e.g. Minogue as we noted previously) and those who were reluctant to do so (Scruton are usually listed here).[11] Concerning education, if Scruton turns out to defend a reconciliation of parental choice and teacher authority in schools but argue against the

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[9] Chitty, *Education Policy in Britain*, 3rd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 47; Jones, *Education in Britain: 1944 to the Present*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 104; and Ball, *The Education Debate*, 3rd ed. (Bristol: Policy, 2017), 81.

[10] Roger Scruton, "Editorial," *The Salisbury Review* 4, no. 1 (October 1985): 47.

[11] See Mark Garnett and Kevin Hickson, *Conservative Thinkers: The Key Contributors to the Political Thought of the Modern Conservative Party*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 105-20.

marketisation of university education, it becomes clear that the problem lies deeper. Therefore, we need a more nuanced characterisation of the complexities within the New Right which is based on other distinctions than that between neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism as it is usually defined.

This does not mean that there are no intellectuals associated with the New Right who did not criticise neo-liberalism or who took it to be incompatible with neo-conservatism. Rather, my argument is that it is more important to understand the reasons and underlying principles by which New Right thinkers considered marketisation a desirable solution or otherwise to a particular problem of public policy. In this regard, Scruton's conservatism is especially interesting because education is the area where he departed from his usual contempt for the marketeers and actively advocated similar policies of privatisation.[12]

Before portraying the distinctive characteristics of Scruton's pamphleteering activities during the 1980s, the next section will first outline the historical context in which the organisation and standards of education became a political issue in the previous decade or so under the intellectual influence of the *Black Papers* (henceforth *BP*). We will then be in a position to see how thinkers usually taken to be neo-liberals such as Stuart Sexton come so close to Scruton and his colleagues at *SR*. This will finally help us identify Scruton's unique contribution to the New Right in education.

III. The *Black Papers*, 1969-77

The *Black Papers* were a series of five pamphlets edited by C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson from 1969-70 onwards, with Dyson replaced by Rhodes Boyson in the last two volumes published in 1975 and 1977. *BP* were originally part of a journal of literary criticism, *The*

[12] "For many of Mrs. Thatcher's advisors, it seems, the answer to every social problem is "privatise." Even if this answer is sometimes the right one—as, for instance, in education, where the state monopoly has been the opportunity for organised subversion—it is also sometimes the wrong one." Scruton, "Editorial," *SR* 7, no. 4 (June 1989): 51.

Critical Quarterly, and were mostly preoccupied with the ramifications of 1968 student revolts in universities. Nevertheless, *BP* soon gave more attention to primary and secondary education, their standards of achievement, and their organisation. The historian of education Brian Simon once argued that this shift of focus was an evasion of responsibilities by the editors who, as university lecturers, were reluctant to blame themselves for the failure of higher education and place the burden instead on the lower levels of education which had produced unqualified university students in the first place.[13] For our present purposes, we can set this issue aside. Our historical account is not concerned with the intentions of *BP* contributors, nor with the question of whether their positions are tenable. The task before us is to give an account of what they did or did not claim, and how their ideas were subsequently developed by thinkers associated with the Conservative party.

BP are important to our historical account because they exerted a strong influence on the public debate over education during the 1970s and beyond. This can in part be attributed to their successful dissemination. The Conservative intellectual Angus Maude played an important role in their circulation both inside and outside the Party, and especially among Members of Parliament; but the wide readership of *BP* also included headteachers and teachers in schools, and was further extended ironically through the publicity accorded by the hostile Secretary of State for Education Edward Short.[14] Moreover, *BP*'s persuasive power was stronger than ordinary pamphlets as well. For, many of their contributors, not least the editors themselves, made the journey from the Left to the Right in the course of this development of ideas. Finally, some of *BP*'s late contributors, such as Boyson and Sexton, were to wield both intellectual and political influence on the education policy of the Party during the 1980s. Therefore, a characterisation of *BP* is an essential context for understanding Conservative education policy, which was highly influenced by the associated think-tanks, and identifying Scruton's peculiar contribution to it.

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[13] Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order 1940-1990* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991), 396.
[14] Christopher Knight, *The Making of Tory Education Policy in Post-War Britain, 1950-1986* (East Sussex: Falmer, 1990), 50.

However, it is wrong to regard the organisation of *BP* as a prototype of Conservative think-tanks mushrooming from the mid-1970s onwards. For one thing, among its contributors there were MPs and parliamentary candidates of the Labour or Liberal Parties (not to mention socialist intellectuals such as Iris Murdoch) who also argued against the rationalistic imposition of the comprehensive plan,[15] or called for safeguards of teachers' standards as a prerequisite of introducing choice and diversity in education.[16]

More crucially, concerning the organisation of the education system, the position held in *BP* was quite consistently based upon a notion of equality of opportunity and parity of esteem which can be regarded as a continuation of the post-war consensus in education. For example, the first post-war Labour Minister of Education Ellen Wilkinson once defended the tripartite system established under the Education Act of 1944, albeit in a socialist way where all kinds of education, analogous to their corresponding varieties of labour and profession, are equally valuable in their contribution to the good of the whole society.[17] Academic education should not be thought of as the most desirable form, and the meaning of selection is to give pupils the opportunity of receiving the kind of education which best suits them individually. Against this background the Labour Party's move towards comprehensive education and the ideal of equality of outcome during the 1960s can be regarded as a modernising attempt to go beyond the post-war consensus.[18] This move made the defence of selection and meritocracy in education the unique possession of Conservatives. Consequently, it is understandable why Labour's new education policy left some old socialist thinkers like Murdoch puzzled at a reform of education which removed opportunity from precisely those working-class pupils whom socialism had been most eager to help in the beginning of the Labour movement.[19]

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[15] C. S. Hilditch, "'Prove All Things:' A Test for Comprehensives," in *Black Paper Three: Goodbye Mr Short*, ed. C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson (London: The Critical Quarterly Society, 1970), 41-48.
[16] Renee Soskin, "From a Disillusioned Liberal," in *Black Paper 1977*, ed. C. B. Cox and Rhodes Boyson (London: Temple Smith, 1977), 21.
[17] Jones, *Education in Britain*, 22.
[18] *Ibid*., 55.
[19] "[F]ew things are more agonizing and anxious-making, both in childhood and later, than to feel that one has

On the other hand, it is arguable that the real Tory view lurking behind the post-war consensus is hostile to the idea of social mobility brought about by equal educational opportunity. For instance, the defence of Toryism by the conservative journalist Peregrine Worsthorne is not based on a nostalgic attachment to the relatively rigid social hierarchy of Victorian times. Rather, in his argument, since democratic socialism favours more intervention in the lives of the governed, it is more in need of an authoritative governing class than conservatism is.[20] Unfortunately, the meritocratic élite's qualification to make political decisions comes solely from the process of selection where *carrière est ouverte aux talents*. This makes meritocracy unable to fulfil such a role of social leadership. The formation of such an élite leads its members to think that they deserve what they themselves have earned through their own efforts. Consequently, their sense of social responsibility is seriously weakened, which, indeed, can only be passed on to the next generation by an hereditary class. To make matters worse, the socialist effort to prevent the rich from buying a privileged education for their descendants only serves to redirect their consumption towards more materialist ends. It is precisely socialism that further diminishes what is left of the élite's political authority.[21] Although published in 1971, this conception of the social function of education as the transmission of class culture and style, to be lost in modern meritocracy, is reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's defence of class as opposed to élite in 1948.[22] In other words, from the perspective of conservatism until the end of 1960s, it is the adoption instead of the eschewal of equality of educational opportunity that appears "modernising" (itself a relative word). Therefore, it is inappropriate to regard the development of ideas in *BP* one from a negative criticism of the radical Left to a positive support for the New Right.[23]

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not had the academic advantages which one deserved. Such agony was felt by many of the original leaders of the labour and trade union movement, who fought hard for just selective education: it is indeed bizarre to see their successors treating academic schooling as an enemy." Iris Murdoch, "Socialism and Selection," in *Black Paper 1975*, ed. Cox and Boyson (London: Dent, 1975), 8.

[20] Peregrine Worsthorne, *The Socialist Myth* (London: Cassell, 1971), 53-54.

[21] *Ibid*., 68-69.

[22] T. S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1948), ch. 2.

[23] Jones, *Right Turn*, 42.

A significant part of the contributors were not Conservatives in the first place, and it is unsurprising that the modernisation of the old Toryism was not their concern and did not appear in the pages of *BP*.

If *BP* were mainly a continuation of the post-war consensus on education policy, it is similarly misleading to say that "the [education] system that the Black Papers advocated in the 1970s comprised only five to eight per cent of the state school population."[24] From the very beginning, a contributor to the first *BP* argued that

> It is one of the more grotesque ironies of our times that a Labour Government claiming a particular interest in the needs of the poor and lowly as well as a special concern for high national standards in work and living should have determined a policy for secondary education which will beyond a doubt lead to a decline in standards and a reduction in the opportunities open to able children—from whatever social background they come.[25]

From then on, the ideal of equal educational opportunity was revealed as the underlying motivation of a variety of their policy recommendations. For example, the psychologists Cyril Burt, Richard Lynn, and H. J. Eysenck, frequently demonised in education studies, explained that the introduction of intelligence tests to complement the selection by high scores in English and arithmetic had been exactly designed to select bright working-class children for academic education: their talents might otherwise remain unnoticed under the influence of research which claimed that their aptitudes were hereditary.[26] Again, the denouncement of progressive methods was not directed at this particular style of instruction

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[24] *Ibid*., 4.

[25] R. R. Pedley, "Comprehensive Disaster," in *Fight for Education: A Black Paper*, ed. Cox and Dyson (London: The Critical Quarterly Society, 1969), 45.

[26] Cyril Burt, "The Mental Differences Between Children," in *Black Paper Two: The Crisis in Education*, ed. Cox and Dyson (London: The Critical Quarterly Society, 1969), 20; Richard Lynn, "Comprehensives and Equality," in *Black Paper Two*, 28; and H. J. Eysenck, "The Rise of the Mediocracy," in *Black Paper Two*, 35-36.

per se, which may be conducive to the education of abler children. Rather, the criticism was about the detrimental effects progressivism may have on the majority of ordinary pupils for whom "the discipline, structure, system and purposeful direction of the 'old-fashioned' formality are preferable."[27] Certainly, this meritocracy is justifiable only if all the forms of education given to different groups of pupils are equally valuable and lead to equally respectable occupations for them. In this regard, the contributors to the *BP* also followed the post-war consensus about the parity of esteem. Less education may be better for some of the young who would benefit more by pursuing careers in business and other occupations distinct from the professions;[28] and, apart from the standards of a basic minimum, a diversity of curricular choices provided by specialist schools (or in different streams of a single school) should provide an alternative for the common curriculum advocated by supporters of the comprehensive ideal.[29]

It may have become clear that the discussion about different manners of organising education was usually linked with a deeper concern with the content of education received by pupils. Thus, we should be alert to those accounts which argue that among intellectuals of the New Right there were usually different emphases between the "structures" and "standards" of education;[30] or, that by the end of the 1960s there was a division "between the so-called 'Preservationists,' who wanted to maintain the grammar schools and some form of 11-plus selection, and the so-called 'Voucher Man,' who were keen to experiment with new and untried ways of organizing education."[31] To use these terminologies for convenience, we have seen that the so-called preservationists complained about comprehensive organisation because they believed that the standards of the then existing selective system had been superior to what was to replace it. Nevertheless, is it true that the advocates of the voucher idea did not agree with this way of thinking?

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[27] Stuart Froome, "Reading and the School Handicap Score," in *Black Paper 1975*, 11.
[28] Cox and Boyson, "Letter to MPs and Parents," in *Black Paper 1975*, 5.
[29] Cox and Boyson, "Comprehensive Schools: Background," in *Black Paper 1977*, 60.
[30] Callaghan, *Conservative Party Education Policies*, 28.
[31] Chitty, *Education Policy in Britain*, 31.

Looking at the historical evidence more carefully, there was rarely the kind of uncompromising libertarians who pursued the marketisation of education purely as an end in itself, and were indifferent to the change in standards resulting from the introduction of parental choice among schools. Early in the first volume of *BP*, it was clarified that the benefit of parental choice extends far beyond those children attending good schools; for the standards set by those schools will become a norm to be emulated by others in the fierce competition for limited pupils.[32] In other words, had there been no such outstanding standards exemplified by any school in the present educational scene, there would have been no motivation for introducing any policy devices to make the coordination of educational resources imitate the condition of a free market. The editors of the second *BP* expressed this view more manifestly. They emphasised that it is not the concept of liberty which is at issue; after all, it is a commonplace that market freedom does not necessarily leads all customers to choose what is the best for themselves. Rather, it is only because the standards of education are already there that it makes sense at all to advocate parental choice and other measures approaching privatisation:

> Private schools are a necessary aspect of our liberties, but their positive importance to education is our chief concern. This importance is not confined to the pupils who attend them, but extends to everyone who benefits from the competition they provide. The great public and direct grant grammar schools set a standard of achievement which is internationally recognised, and without which the standards of other institutions might imperceptibly start to slide.[33]

Nonetheless, the feasibility of market solutions does not imply that it is also necessary to implement them. Therefore, in recommending the marketisation of education, the

[32] J. M. Cobban, "The Direct-Grant School," in *Fight for Education*, 40.
[33] Cox and Dyson, "Letter to Members of Parliament," in *Black Paper Two*, 14.

contributors to *BP* usually based their argument on the deplorable erosion of present standards by state schools. For example, Ralph Harris, the head of the Institute of Economic Affairs (henceforth IEA) from 1957 to 1988, defended statutory devices such as tax rebate which enable parents to contract out of state education and avoid unjustly paying school fees twice. The reason is that "in a 'democracy' where both parties can cynically disregard the preference of 49% of the electorate, and where public officials need be even less sensitive to the captive taxpayer," this is the only effective way to make them responsive to what parents actually want.[34] Scandals like the notorious William Tyndale affair during 1974-75 further gave golden opportunities to the proponents of free market in education who were prepared to see such permissive schools "denuded of their pupils."[35] Consequently, it is an exaggeration to say that there was an unbridgeable division between the preservationists and the marketeers, or that their different emphasis on the standards or structures of education is more significant than what they did share with each other.

Similarly, it is misleading to take the introduction of a national curriculum as a neo-conservative element which is at odds with the neo-liberal notion of *laissez-faire* and the minimal state. If most of the promoters of the privatisation of education were deeply motivated by the maintenance of standards, it is unlikely that they would have regarded a concern with curriculum and examination as something in tension with their own recommendations of parental choice. Their reason for demanding a nation-wide basic curriculum and examination had nothing to do with a desire for central control. Instead, it is because they believed that in the past there had been "an understood curriculum throughout the whole country" that had disappeared "when the liberation of the pupil and the development of interests and projects waxed supreme;"[36] Consequently, they reluctantly suggested that "minimum standards of attainment in language and arithmetic must be

[34] Ralph Harris, "The Larger Lessons from Enfield," in *Black Paper Two*, 71.
[35] Cox and Boyson, "Letter to Members of Parliament," in *Black Paper 1977*, 19.
[36] Cox and Boyson, "Letter to MPs and Parents," 4.

nationally set and tested."[37] Nor does this concern with curriculum and examination essentially entail regulation by the government. Boyson, Parliamentary Under-Secretary in the Department of Education and Science (henceforth DES) 1979-83, talked of examinations which "are set on established and recognised syllabi," but this does not mean that they are to be devised by the state bureaucracy.[38] Similarly, Sexton, who was also a special adviser to the Secretary of State for Education and stepped down together with Keith Joseph in 1986, argued for the need of "minimum standards and a minimum curriculum" in a framework where "variety and diversity can abound in accordance with the aspirations and abilities of children;" for, variety and diversity "do not mean a free-for-all where educational standards are forgotten in a desire to be different."[39]

These talks of "structures" and "standards" of education might give the impression that the Black Paperites prioritised the rights of pupils and parents at the expense of the freedom of teachers and schools. Certainly, Boyson once welcomed the trend that "[p]opular schools would continue and expand and unpopular schools would decline and close."[40] Yet in the third *BP* the editors quoted with approval a newspaper commentary lamenting the inclusion of parental choice in a district which had led to good schools becoming better and bad schools worse.[41] A closer look reveals that the parental choice under discussion was introduced as part of a comprehensive scheme in that area. What was being complained about was the rush to ill-thought-out experiment which made the introduction of parental choice ineffective. More precisely, marketisation cannot encourage the schools to become competitive if parental choice is mixed with the control of schools by the Local Education Authority (henceforth LEA). The schools' freedom of self-management is also essential to any pilot schemes of privatisation.[42] What the marketeers really expected is that the existing

[37] Alfred Levy, "Decline in Mathematics," in *Black Paper 1977*, 29.
[38] Boyson, "In Defence of Examinations: The Unanswered Case," in *Black Paper Three*, 102.
[39] Stuart Sexton, "Evolution by Choice," in *Black Paper 1977*, 86.
[40] Boyson, "The Developing Case for the Educational Voucher," in *Black Paper 1975*, 27.
[41] Cox and Dyson, "Letter to Members of Parliament," in *Black Paper Three*, 4.
[42] See also Sexton, *Our Schools: A Radical Policy* (Surrey: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1987), 23; and Caroline Cox, Jessica Douglas-Home, John Marks, Lawrence Norcross, and Roger Scruton, *The Reform of*

bad schools will also be forced to improve themselves. Without the right to adjust their provision of education, unsuccessful schools will certainly become worse in a free market. This result was not really desired by the marketeers who were no less deeply concerned with the standards of education than the preservationists were.

Furthermore, we have seen that the New Right's talk of freedom involved an emphasis on the so-called Victorian virtues. In relation to economic prosperity, these include hard work, thrift, self-reliance, and so forth. In the field of education, the contributors to *BP* were also concerned not so much with parental choice *per se* as with the implied parents' responsibility to educate their own children. Faced with the intractable problem of disruptive behaviour in the classroom, the teachers maintained that the "home environment remains the most powerful influence in the development of the child, and the responsibility for the growing wilfulness and ineducability of modern youth can, in most cases, be laid at the feet of the parents."[43] Concerning truancy among older pupils, these contributors also maintained that according to the Education Act 1944 the nature of school attendance above the age of fifteen was actually voluntary; consequently, "the unwritten 'school contract' arose whereby the parent undertakes to send his child to school with the right attitude of mind to enable the school to fulfil its part of the contract—namely to provide an education."[44] G. H. Bantock, a traditionalist Leavisite, lamented even more clearly both the diminution of family rights by state education and more importantly the transference of responsibility to educate children from their parents to the teachers,[45] who had assumed the role of a representative of the state instead of an independent professional *in loco parentis*.[46] Therefore, it is inadequate to argue that *BP*'s advocacy of parental choice and the pupils' right to receive education of high standards neglected the school's freedom to design its own curriculum and the teacher's professional status.

British Education: From Principles to Practice (London: The Hillgate Group, 1987), 35.

[43] "Teachers Speak Out," in *Black Paper 1975*, 33.

[44] John Price, "Is Education Compulsory?," in *Black Paper 1977*, 73.

[45] G. H. Bantock, "Conflicts of Values in Teacher Education," in *Black Paper Three*, 107.

[46] G. W. J. Crawford, "The Primary School: A Balanced View," in *Black Paper Two*, 96.

This consideration of parental responsibility completes our characterisation of *BP*'s position which blurs the usual distinction between neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism. The support for improving educational standards through parental choice actually combines two kinds of argument. The first puts the pressure from parents on the schools, which are forced to improve themselves in order to compete for more pupils and funds. This policy measure is feasible only on the condition that the high standards of achievement are already exhibited by some schools and can thus serve as the norm for competition. The second is no less important for children's success in education, for the parent "who deliberately chooses to send his son to a certain school is more likely to give him the right kind of encouragement."[47] Ultimately, parental choice is meant to return the responsibility to educate pupils to their parents which had been misunderstood to belong to teachers. This complicated argument is well summarised by Boyson, whose apparently libertarian outburst noted earlier now gives way to a more balanced account:

> The very fact that schools were dependent on individual parental choice for their continuance would ensure both accountability and variety. Meanwhile the involvement of the parents in choosing a school would ensure a family's close continued contact. This continued contact was what the Plowden Report suggested was, next to the innate ability of the pupil, the most decisive factor in the success of a pupil's schooling.[48]

As we shall see, given the richness of educational thought manifested by *BP*, Scruton's views on education were for the most part symptomatic rather than innovative. Nonetheless, this also means that the minor part where he did stand out will be of paramount significance in redrawing the distinction between neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism. Before considering Scruton's works, it is instructive to give a glance at the Conservative think-tanks and

[47] J. M. Cobban, "The Direct-Grant School," 39.
[48] Boyson, "Educational Voucher," 27.

intellectuals in the 1980s to see how *BP*'s ideas, which began as a continuation of the post-war consensus on education policy, became more widespread and further developed. With this broadened historical context, we will then be able to locate and embed Scruton's thoughts about education more accurately in the complex currents of the New Right.

IV. The Conservative Intellectuals and Think-Tanks in the 1980s

Certainly, education policies during Thatcher's premiership such as ERA cannot be wholly attributed to the Conservative think-tanks and their associated intellectuals.[49] Nevertheless, the influence exerted by them, some of whom had also been contributors to *BP*, created a climate in which *BP*'s ideas could now enjoy wider sympathies.[50] We have observed that it has been customary to note the division between the preservationists and the voucher man from the late 1960s onwards when *BP* attracted much attention in education debate. Similarly, the Conservative intellectuals and think-tanks during the 1980s have also been conventionally grouped in either neo-conservatism or neo-liberalism. For example, beginning with the marketeers, Lawton referred to the

> *laissez-faire* capitalism with total reliance on market mechanisms to control the relation between supply and demand in education. Stuart Sexton and the Institute for Economic Affairs, as well as publications of the Adam Smith Institute and other neo-liberal groups, have argued along these lines, in more or less extreme versions. But not the Hillgate Group, Roger Scruton and the neo-conservatives who see education as too important a matter to be left to choice and the market.[51]

It is the task of this section to examine the extent to which these think-tanks and intellectuals

[49] Callaghan, *Conservative Party Education Policies*, 64.
[50] Denham, *Think-Tanks of the New Right*, 110.
[51] Lawton, *Education and Politics in the 1990s: Conflict or Consensus?* (London: Falmer, 1992), 18.

disagreed with each other, and more importantly, how their agreement inherited the legacies of *BP*.

It is useful to begin with Sexton. After stepping down from the DES in 1986, he established the Education Unit (henceforth EU) under the auspices of IEA, which makes him usually identified as a representative of neo-liberalism in education. In the first pamphlet published by IEAEU, Sexton made clear the motivation of introducing marketisation to the organising of schools immediately at the outset: in order to "produce the quality and choice that we expect in education, to improve our schools, we need to change the way that we fund and manage them," and "making the education service fully responsive to parental choice and student needs … is the way to better standards."[52] This was in line with *BP*'s view of which he had been a contributor. Even if Sexton is a neo-liberal, he is so not in the sense of advocating parental choice for its own sake and being indifferent to what will result therefrom. In any case, he was not obsessed with the notion of freedom, and emphasised instead that parental choice means "a return of responsibility for education to the individual parent and family."[53]

Again, there is the problem of how it is possible, without the help of central regulation, to ensure standards by the freedom of parents to choose what each of them wants for their children. As Antony Flew—a philosopher and frequent contributor to CPS's pamphlets and *SR* among other organs of Conservative think-tanks—also acknowledged, "there can be no guarantee that that choice will be made as someone else would have preferred to see it made."[54] Flew's optimistic reply was that, although it is truly Conservative to "protect children from the folly or fecklessness of their parents," we have "absolutely no reason to fear that under the voucher any children would become worse off than they are now."[55] Initially, Sexton was likewise shamelessly confident in stating that the "exercise of parents'

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[52] Sexton, *Our Schools: A Radical Policy*, 2.
[53] *Ibid*., 28.
[54] Antony Flew, *Power to the People!* (London: Centre for Policy Studies, 1983), 8.
[55] *Ibid*., 12; see also Boyson, *Battle Lines for Education* (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1973), 10-11.

choice in a free market is more likely to be right than the bureaucratic decisions of some 'decision makers.'"[56] However, in a later IEAEU pamphlet he disclosed his reasons in a discussion of the defence by independent schools of separate science subjects (instead of a conglomerate one) up to the level of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (henceforth GCSE): "Fortunately this part of the Act [the National Curriculum of the ERA] does not cover the independent schools, and the independent schools belatedly exercised their undoubted authority in such matters and said that three separate sciences did matter."[57] This point echoes well *BP*'s position that the interplay of market forces can maintain standards only if these standards have already been exemplified by some of the existing schools. It is reasons of this kind that led Flew to "believe that, *in the real world of Britain today and tomorrow*, parental choice and parental power would make for a general and substantial rise in levels of educational achievement."[58] Therefore, in terms of both components of *BP*'s argument mentioned earlier, Sexton had so far followed the same track faithfully.

Sexton began to advance beyond the *BP* era when he applied this pattern of thought to further aspects of education. For instance, the reform of teacher training had already become a concern of the *BP*, where a philosopher of education confessed that his subject is of no practical value to teacher students.[59] A decade later Sexton argued further and more positively that if "Eton or Winchester can take in a young man or woman with a good degree, but no teaching experience, and turn them into some of the best teachers in the land, surely the state-maintained schools can do the same."[60] It is noteworthy that this view of teacher education was also endorsed by the Hillgate Group (henceforth HG),[61] which was composed of Scruton and a number of former members of the Education Study Group (henceforth ESG)

[56] Sexton, *Our Schools: A Radical Policy*, 48.
[57] Stuart Sexton, *Our Schools: Future Policy* (Surrey: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1992), 3.
[58] Flew, *Power to the People!*, 8; italics mine.
[59] R. T. Allen, "And Madly Teach—to Teach," in *Black Paper 1977*, 44-47.
[60] Sexton, *Our Schools: Future Policy*, 20.
[61] Caroline Cox, Jessica Douglas-Home, John Marks, Lawrence Norcross, and Roger Scruton, *Learning to Teach* (London: The Hillgate Group, 1989), 8.

at CPS. HG is usually deemed a think-tank on the far Right in the neo-conservative direction partly because CPS regarded its pamphlets as going out of control and refused their publication.[62] Therefore, this agreement concerning teacher education again seriously qualifies the usually definition of the tensions within the New Right.

More importantly, some of Sexton's argument in favour of market forces amounts to a reinforcement of state authority in the manner of Scruton's conservatism. This is where the Conservative think-tanks and intellectuals went substantially beyond *BP*'s aversion to the abuse of power by the education establishment. Explaining the advantages of the privatisation of national examinations, Sexton argued that

> Whether or not GCSE is a good thing, much of the [teacher's] union opposition to it has not really been to it at all but has been a convenient stick with which to beat the government, given that it is the 'government' which is introducing it. Had the change been seen to be made by the examining boards themselves, then any opposition to it would have been directed to those boards and not to the government, and had there been opposition it would have been genuine opposition based upon the merits or otherwise of the GCSE, and nothing else.[63]

This view of government had long been defended by Scruton in his conservative political doctrine:

> The state has the authority, the responsibility, and the despotism of parenthood. If it loses those ties, then it must perish, and society along with it. The state must therefore withdraw from every economic arrangement which puts it at the absolute mercy of individual citizens. This counsel has been many times ignored, and never more blatantly

[62] Callaghan, *Conservative Party Education Policies*, 69-70.
[63] Sexton, *Our Schools: A Radical Policy*, 25-26.

> than in modern times. Through the vast and rampant civil service, through local government, through nationalized industry, through all the advisory bodies and meddlesome councils that surround it, the government disperses its power among ignorant multitudes. If it cannot coerce them, then it is at the mercy of any force (a union, for example) which can.[64]

Consequently, such acts of non-intervention as the devolution of the design of education recommended by Sexton must, according to Scruton, "be represented, not as a confession of powerlessness, but as an exercise of power."[65] That the "neo-liberal" Sexton should embrace this "neo-conservative" argument illustrates again that the usual definition of this division are of little utility in understanding the nature of the New Right in education. This is also the place where the educational thought of the 1980s surpassed the legacy of *BP* (which was not purely a part of party politics) and became distinctively Conservative.

However, it might be wondered whether we could still preserve the distinction between neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism; whether we could classify both Sexton and Scruton into those who took these ideologies to be compatible with each other, as opposed to those who disagreed with this compatibility, such as the more purely libertarian Adam Smith Institute (henceforth ASI) and the No Turning Back Group of Conservative MPs (henceforth NTBG) associated with ASI. Due to the limitation of space, here we can only note that their formulation of the marketisation position does seem to exhibit an indifference to the variety and diversity of schools and curricula resulting from parental choice. They were even prepared to allow parents "to choose whether they want their children to become proficient in 'anti-racism' and 'anti-sexism,' or taught skills which can help them to find jobs and derive fulfilment from life."[66] Nevertheless, it is difficult not to sense a contempt beneath their

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[64] Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1980), 111.
[65] Christopher Silvester and Roger Scruton, "Editorial," *The Salisbury Review* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1982): 38.
[66] Michael Brown et al., *Save Our Schools* (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1986), 23-24; see also Adam Smith Institute, *Omega Report: Education Policy* (London: Adam Smith Institute, 1984), 12.

apparently neutral reference to the "peace studies" and "world studies"[67] which Scruton had been combating ferociously in other think-tanks specialising in national defence.[68] It is also evident that their conception of the "standards" of education is defined by the populist belief that "all parents want their children to receive a good education that will qualify them for good jobs,"[69] which certainly has nothing to do with those courses which tend to produce radical ideologues unemployable in any ordinary occupation. In any case, for our present purpose of challenging the customary interpretation of the paradoxes within the New Right, it is enough to show that the division between neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism is inapplicable in certain cases. What remains to do is to demonstrate further that there is not even a question of reconciling these two wings of the division in the educational thought of Sexton and Scruton, so that it is misleading at the outset to query whether they take them to be compatible or not. To show this point, and to explore more deeply the places where Conservative educational thought went beyond the inheritance of *BP*, we must consider a "neo-conservative" representative of the think-tanks during the 1980s—HG, mentioned at the beginning of this section in the quotation from Lawton.

Fortunately, another towering figure in the sociology of education policy, Stephen J. Ball, also conducted a comparative analysis of Sexton's IEAEU writings and the pamphlets of the HG in more detail than Lawton's brief account. In this comparison, Ball acknowledged that the "Hillgate Group concur with virtually all of this [i.e. Sexton's] neo-liberal theology." However, to underscore HG's neo-conservatism as opposed to neo-liberalism, he added that HG's intellectuals "are not content just to prescribe a form of market control based on parental choice; they also wish to shape and constrain choice by the proscription of certain

[67] Brown et al., *Save Our Schools*, 10-11.
[68] Caroline Cox and Roger Scruton, *Peace Studies: A Critical Survey* (London: Institute for European Defence and Strategic Studies, 1984); Roger Scruton, Angela Ellis-Jones, and Dennis O'Keeffe, *Education and Indoctrination: An Attempt at Definition and a Review of Social and Political Implications* (Middlesex: The Education Research Centre, 1985); and Scruton, *World Studies: Education or Indoctrination* (London: Institute for European Defence and Strategic Studies, 1985).
[69] ASI, *Omega Report: Education Policy*, 12.

aspects of the school curriculum and the prescription of others."[70] Therefore, the resulted national examination "can be seen as a way of imposing uniformity on schools, when the neo-liberals value diversity."[71] Summarising these tensions within the New Right, Ball concluded that the HG's intellectuals

> are clearly caught somewhere between a minimalist and strong state position; between parental choice and 'the duty of the state;' between free market diversity and rigid adherence to the absolute verities of 'true' knowledge; between trust and distrust of autonomous teachers and trust and distrust of parents/consumers.[72]

Let us examine these four points one after another by reference to the details in HG's publications.

Concerning the division between the minimal state and central control (the first point), between variety and uniformity (the third point), this apparent inconsistency usually results from an ignorance of what diversity means in this context, and from the socialist assumption that the only method to achieve a desirable social end is direct government intervention. Though a national curriculum was a central concern of HG's intellectuals, their starting point is the *BP* doctrine about the parity of esteem: "schools should be encouraged to return to a system of differentiated education, with separate classes, and if necessary separate institutions, to cater for the many and diverse gifts of the nation's children."[73] As Sexton also clarified, the standard of "high quality" means "not that of the politicians, nor Cabinet Ministers, not even the Prime Minister," but "what all of us, society, acting individually and collectively expect for our children, and perceive as being of a standard and depth

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[70] Ball, *Politics and Policy Making*, 46.
[71] *Ibid*., 52.
[72] *Ibid*., 56.
[73] Caroline Cox, Jessica Douglas-Home, John Marks, Lawrence Norcross, and Roger Scruton, *Whose Schools? A Radical Manifesto* (London: The Hillgate Group, 1986), 11.

appropriate for the *individual* child."[74] Consequently, though diversity presupposes the educational worth of different subjects instead of a relativism of "anything goes,"[75] this does not entail that the state must impose a uniform curriculum from above. In the words of HG,

> the best way to guarantee the continuance of a sound curriculum is not—or at least not initially—through state control. We must first open schools to the demand of their product, allowing their teaching to be influenced by the entrance requirements of universities; by the possibilities of employment; by the wishes of parents and the natural interests of the child. Until this is done, and until a stable consensus emerges, the attempt to impose a national curriculum by law will be construed as yet another exercise in arbitrary state control.[76]

This explains why, during the Government's introduction of the Education Reform Bill (the precursor of ERA; henceforth ERB) into public discussion, HG hoped that "the present proposals for a national curriculum will be given provisional status, to obtain only so long as the GCSE is not reformed into a genuinely objective examination, capable of imposing the right measure of national conformity."[77] It should be clear now that this "conformity" is not something imposed from above, but the consequence of "the privatisation of examinations, with employers, universities, and other interested bodies, getting together to set the examinations that they would wish students to pass."[78] Here Sexton is usually taken as an opponent of the uniformity in the "neo-conservative" conception of national curriculum and examination. But even in the interview which Ball conducted with Sexton and quoted in his own research, Sexton said that

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[74] Sexton, *Our Schools: Future Policy*, 2; my emphasis.
[75] *Ibid*.
[76] Cox et al., *Whose Schools? A Radical Manifesto*, 7.
[77] Cox et al., *The Reform of British Education*, 19.
[78] *Ibid*., 20.

> in fact if you look at the independent schools there is a remarkable similarity between the curriculum of the various independent schools because that is what the customers want. Dictated by exams, dictated by companies, by whatever you like. But they provide what the customers are looking for.[79]

Therefore, it is misguided to take the attitudes towards national curriculum and examination as a point of divergence between neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism. After all, the agreement between Sexton's and HG's arguments is part of the early consensus during the *BP* years when the demise of the quality of secondary education, for example, had been attributed to the failure not of the state, but of the leading universities to set the standards of examination high enough.[80]

This misleading interpretation of the tensions within the New Right in terms of the attitudes towards a national curriculum may be caused by the mistaken view that, since the marketisation part of ERA was highly influenced by neo-liberals of Sexton's sort, the curricular part must have been the product of neo-conservatism. However, at least some commentators within the education establishment are also aware that the New Right actually involved a third movement, the Conservative modernisers, who include the then Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Baker, and who were opposed by both the neo-liberals and neo-conservatives.[81] In fact, the centralising part of ERA primarily resulted from Baker's invitation of the very experts and advisers to enter "through the front door of the DES" to devise the programmes of study and their corresponding assessment whom both Scruton and his colleagues had been attacking since the early 1980s.[82] In other words, the implementation of the National Curriculum and its subversion by political opponents was actually a realisation of the nightmare long feared by the "neo-conservatives" rather than a

[79] Quoted in Ball, *Politics and Policy Making*, 57.
[80] Max Beloff, "Oxford: A Lost Cause?," in *Black Paper Two*, 135.
[81] Denham, *Think-Tanks of the New Right*, 117-18.
[82] Jones, *Right Turn*, 30.

dream of theirs coming true.[83] Therefore, the attribution of responsibility for the centralised curriculum to HG and Scruton instead of Sexton and IEAEU, is more probably intended as an ideological criticism of the internal contradictions of the New Right than a scholarly attempt to understand the nature of this intellectual movement.

It is noteworthy that the misattribution of responsibility for educational reform occurred in higher education as well. The managerialism of this sector is often attributed to the New Right, but the fact that contributors to *SR* also denigrated this trend should prompt us to look for its origins.[84] Indeed, long ago in the first volume of *BP*, it had been warned that an often ignored effect of militant student revolts is the erosion of academic autonomy. Without the protection provided by academic freedom, the students' demand of relevant education would, in an age of state finance, easily lead to the state becoming the "real consumer," with the students themselves turned into "the goods to be delivered."[85] The ramifications became more apparent during the 1970s. Consequently, in the fourth *BP*, it is the radical Left instead of the modernisers of the New Right that was accused of giving rise to the bureaucratic ethos.[86] The irony is that the Left's complaint about the "useless" academic curriculum in the universities should be answered, and their needs for "relevance" catered for, by the modernising branch of the New Right.

Here it is pointless to criticise the internal incoherence of the Conservative doctrine. Consistency is deemed a relevant criterion only by anti-political ideologies which demands quasi-religious truth or a guaranteed "final solution" in politics. For example, the critique that parental choice does not ensure higher standards is an attack on a strawman. After all, no sensible person would imagine that there is any policy device which is sufficient to guarantee a uniformly high standard in educational achievement. If sufficient educational resources could necessitate higher achievement, how should we explain the fact so many

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[83] Cox et al., *Reform of British Education*, 9.
[84] Peter Whitely, "Education in the Age of Management," *SR* 15, no. 2 (Winter 1996): 9-13.
[85] Imre Lakatos, "A Letter to the Director of the London School of Economics," in *Fight for Education*, 29.
[86] Bernice Martin, "The Mining of the Ivory Tower," in *Black Paper 1975*, 58.

pupils from the upper classes performed poorly? As a doctrine of a *political* party concerned with realistic decision and action, it is unsurprising that Conservatism resorted to different expedient policies in view of different understandings of current circumstances.

This is where HG, like Sexton discussed above, transcended *BP* by elucidating the different conditions under which the government should devolve or assume political power in education. *BP* complained simply about the Secretary of State's lack of control over curricula, which permitted its abuse by the educational establishment without consultation with parents.[87] In contrast, HG argued further that "the responsibility for what is taught in a school must be removed from LEAs and from their bodies of self-appointed 'experts' and returned to those to whom it naturally belongs—to the heads, and, through the heads, to the teachers."[88] This recommendation involves a complication because the concentration of powers in the Secretary of State for Education was advocated merely as a temporary means to give away these powers again when those directly responsible for the tasks of education become "genuinely answerable for their exercise, and genuinely concerned to enforce them."[89] Consequently, there is no question of an exclusive choice between concentration or devolution imagined by critics of the New Right, but only that of timing and expedience. In HG's words:

> Critics will also represent the Government's proposals as involving increased centralisation, since they undermine the power of local authorities. Such criticism, in our view, is wholly misguided. Abuses of power can be rectified only by the exercise of a higher power. Parliament must therefore take the initiative in recovering the powers of wrongly constituted or abusive bodies. Once recovered, however, power may be devolved. And the aim of the Government's proposals is to devolve power as far as

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[87] Ronald Butt, "Politics and Education," in *Black Paper 1975*, 44.
[88] Cox et al., *Whose Schools? A Radical Manifesto*, 10.
[89] *Ibid*., 13.

> possible, so that it vests ultimately in parents.[90]

Similarly, in his criticism of the unnecessary statutory powers given to the Secretary of State in ERB, Sexton noted that the

> Secretary of State should be prepared to devolve management, not to apply lots of rules and regulations, not to apply lots of conditions and take powers for more conditions, but merely to keep just one reserved power, namely that of withdrawing such devolved management if the governors make a mess of it.[91]

However, careful readers may have noticed that in these passages it is still unclear whether ultimately the power and responsibility for education should lie in the hands of (head-)teachers or parents. This is the second and the fourth (the last) items in Ball's accusation of HG's internal tensions, and brings us to the questions concerning the meaning of teacher's profession, the exact source(s) of his authority, and the place of the responsibility for educating children. As we shall see immediately, it is in the attempt to answer these questions that Scruton's educational thought made a distinct contribution to the New Right during the 1980s.

V. The Distinctiveness of Scruton's Defence of Private Education

We are finally in a position to evaluate Scruton's contribution to the education debate during the 1980s. Based on our previous discussion, for the most part Scruton's views about education clearly belonged to the current of thought exemplified by both *BP* and later the various Conservative think-tanks. He maintained the inequality of educational outcome,[92]

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[90] Cox et al., *Reform of British Education*, 33.
[91] Sexton, *A Guide to the Education Reform Bill* (Surrey: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1988), 47.
[92] Scruton, *Meaning of Conservatism*, 147.

and defended selective education, noting the importance of parity of esteem both in education (for the individual pupils) and in occupation (for the society as a whole).[93] Concerning the market in education, he also stressed that the provision of a norm of achievement "is the most important reason for defending private education,"[94] and urged readers of *SR* to appreciate "the good sense issuing from the IEA's education unit."[95] This seems to imply that the contributors to *SR* held some opinions about education different from the "neo-liberal" think-tanks such that it requires an insider to encourage his colleagues to appreciate what is valuable in thinkers belonging to another intellectual camp. As we have just noted, these neo-liberal intellectuals, such as Sexton, shares with Scruton a Conservative conception of the free market in education as ultimately an exercise of state power. Therefore, to understand what is distinctive about Scruton, it may be illuminating to consider him in an additional context—SG.

In an editorial protesting against the censorship by opponents which forced *SR* to search for a more tolerant publisher, Scruton reminded its readers of the two purposes of his and his colleagues' continued efforts in sustaining this controversial journal. First, to explore the complicated social issues which had proved more interesting to the radicals than to those who were more constitutionally-minded; and second, to define a conservative answer to these issues in terms of concepts which transcend their liberal counterparts.[96] It is with the first purpose in mind that Scruton composed so many pamphlets defending a conservative doctrine about education, an area of policy which he took to be second only to national defence in its importance to a country.[97] As to the second aim, it requires a more meticulous reading of his works to identify the peculiarly conservative aspects of his educational thought.

In the conventional strategy of distinguishing neo-liberalism from neo-conservatism,

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[93] *Ibid*., 157.
[94] Scruton, "Standards in Schools," in *Untimely Tracts* (London: Macmillan, 1987), 51. Previously published in *The Times*, July 5, 1983.
[95] Scruton, review of *Education Tax Credits*, by Antony Flew, *SR* 7, no. 2 (December 1988): 67.
[96] Scruton, "Sense and Censorship: The Case of *The Salisbury Review*," *SR* 4, no. 3 (April 1986): 45.
[97] Scruton, front matter of *SR* 9, no. 3 (March 1991): 2.

while the former gives precedence to the concepts of freedom and choice, for the latter it is responsibility and authority that are conceptually prior to other considerations. We have seen that this approach does not work well. Since as early as *BP*, parental choice and parental responsibility have gone hand in hand. Consequently, in reminding us that the education of children is their parents' own responsibility rather than that of the teacher or the state, Scruton was claiming a position which is not distinctively Conservative, let alone distinctly Scrutonian.[98] Of course, he did use this claim to explain further the attraction of progressive methods from the perspective of the teachers in an age when the parents' responsibilities were transferred by the state onto their shoulders, which made these responsibilities "easier to discharge."[99] Nevertheless, even this more profound development of the idea surrounding parental choice and responsibility had already been anticipated by *BP*. There it had already been argued that the most suitable environment for letting the pupils just be active and self-expressive is not the school but "their own home."[100] The implication is that only when the family fail their children in this aspect are the teachers required to compensate for this deficiency.

If responsibility is not the peculiar concept in Scruton's conservatism about education, authority may be another useful clue. Certainly, this does not refer to the "authoritarian" imposition of a national curriculum and examination which, we have noted, has never been advocated by the New Right in the form formulated by its critics. Rather, Lawton once noticed that for Scruton one of the problems of state education is its negative effects on the nature of teacher authority. Regrettably, probably because "'parental choice' has become a central plank of Conservative education policy, not necessarily for Scruton's reason but also because the Conservatives became increasingly captivated by the ideology of 'the market,'" Lawton did not delve deeper into this neglected gem in educational thought, but focused his

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[98] Scruton, "*In Loco Parentis*," in *Untimely Tracts*, 223. Previously published in *The Times*, May 14, 1985.
[99] Scruton, "Expressionist Education," *Oxford Review of Education* 13, no. 1 (1987): 40.
[100] Crawford, "Primary School," 97.

analysis on what did leave its influence on education policy instead.[101] Scruton's formulation of this problem is so important that it is worthwhile to quote it in full length:

> One of the undesirable consequences of making education compulsory at law is that it becomes impossible to construe the teacher's authority as acquired by parental delegation, so that the two institutions of home and school do not so readily call upon the same fund of natural deference. The teacher's authority is seen as arising independently, and if it can rely on no agreed 'fiction' for its validity other than the inherent right of the state to command obedience, then the institution of school is in danger of losing its autonomy, and becoming prone to whatever disaffection may attend to authority of the state.[102]

It is with this reference to parental delegation of authority to teacher that Scruton's educational thought begins to set foot in untrodden territories.

This point becomes more obvious when we juxtapose *BP* with Scruton. In the last *BP*, the editors argued briefly that the teacher's qualification in a subject constitutes only the authority to transmit to his pupils the knowledge about the world in relation to that subject; but his authority to teach must further depend on "his assumption of responsibility for that world."[103] This distinction can be understood by distinguishing between the corresponding willingness on the part of the pupil to believe as true what his teacher particularly professes about that subject, and his willingness to learn anything from his teacher at all in the first place. In terms of this distinction, Scruton's primary concern is the latter kind of teacher authority. Nevertheless, unlike *BP*, he perceived more acutely that in private education the teacher's authority is constituted in a more complicated manner and enhanced through the parents' authorisation to initiate the pupil into the specific part of the intellectual world in

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[101] Lawton, *Tory Mind on Education*, 14.
[102] Scruton, *Meaning of Conservatism*, 148.
[103] Cox and Boyson, "Values: Background," in *Black Paper 1977*, 93.

which the teacher specialises. The teacher's passion about his subject alone is not quite enough to persuade the pupil to begin to learn. In the words of one of a Scruton's colleagues in *SR*, it is "one thing for a teacher to impose the discipline of a subject on a student who wants to learn that subject," it is "quite another to force them to study a subject that they have no wish to study," for this "second kind of discipline belongs to parents."[104]

This doctrine constitutes a more profound reason for introducing market forces into education and ensuring parental choice and responsibility. In linking the maintenance of standards with the effects of parental delegation of authority to the teacher—namely the maintenance of order in the classroom and the pupil's readiness to learn—Scruton's argument illustrates an additional way of improving standards by the privatisation of education which is more internal, direct, and different than the elimination of bad schools via the market mechanism usually favoured by the neo-liberals. This is point is also recognised by the ill-famed headmaster Ray Honeyford. Combatting the encroachment by the Race Relations industry upon the organisation of schools, whose demographic composition was urged to reflect the racial proportions in the whole population, Honeyford observed that such "institutions are widely regarded, even by many 'immigrant' parents, as ghetto schools," and applauded "those concerned West Indian parents who have set up their own Saturday schools, institutions which teach the basic skills formally within a context of respect for authority—a concept correctly understood by the vast majority of West Indian parents as being central to the process of real education."[105]

Certainly, we have seen previously that early in 1975 Boyson had already been aware of the importance of a closer partnership between schools and parents in improving the standards of pupils' achievement. He further argued that such parental participation occurs not only in the choice exercised by parents to send their children to independent schools, but also "when pupils are successful in the 11-plus grammar school selection examination and

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[104] Lionel F. Cerny, "Discipline," *SR* 4, no. 2 (January 1986): 40.
[105] Ray Honeyford, "Multi-Ethnic Intolerance," *SR* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1983): 13.

parents are given a choice of school," but not "when pupils are directed to a neighbourhood comprehensive school which parents dislike."[106] However, his analysis did not touch upon the specific question of teacher authority. Consequently, in worrying about the possibility that "progressive parents are directed to send their son to a traditional neighbourhood primary school," or with "the more frequent cases when traditional parents are directed to send their son to the progressive neighbourhood primary school,"[107] Boyson was insensitive to, and lacked the intellectual resources to deal with, more serious situations in which the parents are indifferent to the responsibility of educating their children in the first place, and, "when their children are given bad marks, abuse the teacher instead of disciplining the child."[108] What Scruton and his colleagues warned is precisely that we should not idealise parental choice if the parents fail to understand that the point of exercising their freedom of choice is to delegate their authority of educating their own children to the teacher.[109] To make matters more intractable, this part of the teacher's authority cannot be easily substituted or compensated for by his qualification in a specialism, nor even by his commitment to the transmission and continued renewal of this particular part of knowledge and culture, let alone by a degree in education studies. One need only "think of the respect and authority which teachers—perfectly ordinary teachers in perfectly ordinary village schools used to command, and compare it with their present low standing" to see this point.[110]

Nevertheless, whilst strengthening the teacher's authority in the classroom, Scruton's account also seems to limit its scope to what lies within the parent's authorisation. This can be seen in his attack on some teachers' propagation of questionable subjects such as "Peace Studies" and "World Studies" which "are exceeding the limited authority conferred on them by virtue of the fact that they act in no higher capacity than *in loco parentis*."[111] Again, this

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[106] Boyson, *The Crisis in Education* (London: Woburn, 1975), 148.
[107] *Ibid*.
[108] Agnieszka Kolakowska, "Schools for Scandal," review of *The Wayward Curriculum: A Critique of British Teacher Education*, by Dennis O'Keeffe, *SR* 9, no. 3 (March 1991): 44.
[109] *Ibid*., 43.
[110] *Ibid*., 43-44.
[111] Scruton, Ellis-Jones, and O'Keeffe, *Education and Indoctrination*, 49.

point was later elaborated by contributors to *SR* that the "law, by requiring all parents to send their children to school, makes the teachers surrogates of government, arrogating to themselves the right, duty and power which belong to parents, and thus behaving immorally."[112] It appears to follow that it is parents who trump all other roles on the educational stage in determining what kind of education their children should receive.

Here we are finally led to the question concerning the professional status of teacher. In the previous section, we have noticed that it is unclear whether in the New Right's reform of the organisation of education it is the teachers or the parents who ultimately possess the power of decision-making. For instance, Flew contended that teachers will "become, or become again, like other traditional professionals" only if they are "directly employed by, and hence accountable to, their true clients: not, that is, the central state; nor yet the LEA's; but the parents."[113] In contrast, in the second *BP*, Bantock insisted that the school is "a quite separate institution with a specially trained personnel to run it," and that "teacher is not simply a substitute mum or dad."[114] Where does Scruton's account of teacher authority stand in this divergence of opinions?

Scruton believed that ideally "the teacher would receive a salary commensurate with the other professions and a social status equal to theirs," and added that for this to realise "the teacher would not be a servant of the state."[115] However, it is a pity that he did not develop his educational thought further. Unfortunately, without a detailed account of the teacher's professional status, Scruton's views about the source of teacher authority alone inevitably make his position nearer to neoliberalism. This result is surprising considering his political philosophy which "favour voluntary associations, churches, charitable societies, clubs and private schools—institutions whose goals, funds and membership depend only on themselves, and not on the state."[116] The autonomy of these institutions is precisely what

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[112] Cerny, "Discipline," 40; see also Frank Palmer, "Optional Discipline," *SR* 4, no. 4 (July 1986): 18.
[113] Flew, *Power to the People!*, 2-3.
[114] Bantock, "Discovery Methods," in *Black Paper Two*, 116.
[115] Scruton, "*In Loco Parentis*," 223.
[116] Scruton, "Editorial," *SR* 13, no. 1 (September 1994): 37.

his philosophical doctrine of corporate personality is meant to highlight and substantiate. By implication, if the norm of educational standards provided by the teacher should be independent of the political interference from the state, it should also remain intact in the face of the arbitrary influences of market forces.

This unfinished theoretical task was taken up by Scruton's colleagues at *SR*. Developing this line of argument further, the long-serving literary editor of *SR*, Ian Crowther, argued in a clearly anti-libertarian fashion that

> to regard professionals as purely suppliers of services to the sovereign consumer is necessarily to undermine what it should be in the conservative interest to uphold, namely, the authoritative guidance which professional institutions provide, alike to those who serve in them and to those who are served by them. It is because the "consumer" does not always know best what is good for him, for example, as litigant, patient or student, that lawyers, doctors and teachers (among other professionals) are made answerable to traditional standards and practices.[117]

In other words, without a resilient tradition of institution building, the teaching profession in a society would easily succumb to the control exercised by the state or the dictates coming from the market. From the viewpoint of intellectual history, this is where the tensions of the New Right are really located. In the area of education policy, they are exemplified in the differing emphases Conservative intellectuals place on the various forms and sources of authority which the teacher may assume: from the parents as customers, or from the teaching profession itself. As Scruton once confessed, no one "has ever imagined that it is easy to reconcile a free economy with custom, tradition and institution building," but "conservatives have refused to regard the first as enemy of the second" because "the centralised economy

[117] Ian Crowther, "Conservatism Ancient and Modern," review of *Modern Conservatism*, by David Willetts, *The Moral Foundations of Market Institutions*, by John Gray, and *Conservative Texts*, edited by Roger Scruton, *SR* 11, no. 1 (September 1992): 58.

is a far greater threat to the fabric of social life than any number of entrepreneurs."[118] Therefore, Scruton's advocacy of teacher authority in terms of the delegation parents give in exercising their freedom of choice, may be regarded as primarily a means to release the teacher's professional status from that of civil servants. For, only after the teacher is no longer bound by the state is the possibility of an independent profession left open. How this profession could insist on its own standards and norms under the pressure of market mechanisms is a question which Scruton did not consider despite his powerful doctrine of corporate personality.

If we follow Crowther's footsteps in completing this theoretical puzzle, our position will become increasingly traditionalist and thereby less compatible with the neoliberal elements of the New Right. For example, Robert Grant, another contributor to *SR*, provided an account of the structure of a professional relationship with which to make the profession's independence possible:

> I need your skills as a lawyer (doctor, priest). In asking you to act for me, I ask you to set aside the normal motives to which I might appeal if I required something simpler or more material (meat, bread, candlesticks). I ask you to consult not your interests, but mine. To enable you to do so without thereby imperilling your interests and those of your dependants, I and your other clients propose to take those immediate considerations off your hands and to see that you are supported at a level sufficient to make economic ambition superfluous. You will then be *free to devote yourself to what we ask of you*, and we understand, indeed, that in setting yourself up as a professional governed not by straightforward financial considerations, but by *an ethic enforced by the corporation to which you belong*, this is precisely what you undertake to do. What we are doing, in fact, is not "paying for your services," but conferring financial

[118] *Ibid*.

independence on you so that you may, so to speak, provide your services *gratis*.[119]

The generalisation of this argument will lead us finally to Worsthorne's defence of hereditary aristocracy and its traditional spirit of public service which, the next chapter will show, is contemptuous of the neoliberal talks of freedom and market. In education specifically, it is also Worsthorne who explicitly applied the doctrine of corporate personality to argue against equality of educational opportunity. For this liberal notion of equality is confined in its vision to the rights of the individual, and forget that "institutions also have legitimate interests, not to say rights, to which individual interests and rights have to be subordinated to some degree."[120] More importantly, one of these overriding rights of institutions is the "need to maintain a corporate character capable of arousing love and loyalty."[121] Consequently, it is not outrightly unjust for an admissions panel to accept a pupil, not on the grounds that his educational achievement is superior to other candidates, but because his parents are prepared to donate a new library building to the school. From the corporate perspective, having some members whose long-standing attachment to this institution has been cultivated from youth onwards makes the loss of another merely bright pupil a small price to pay. Scruton did not go this far not because he found a way to reconcile the tension between the parental delegation of authority and the professional autonomy of teachers. Rather, it is because he also had a plethora of other political problems to deal with and thus spent insufficient efforts on educational thought that he eventually did not make explicit the profound implications of his philosophical doctrine of corporate personality.

VI. Conclusion

[119] Robert Grant, "Education, Utility, and the Universities," *SR* 19, no. 3 (Spring 2001): 7; my emphasis.
[120] Worsthorne, *By the Right* (London: Brophy, 1987), 43.
[121] Worsthorne, *The Politics of Manners and the Uses of Inequality* (London: Centre for Policy Studies, 1988), 29.

This chapter has provided an analysis of Scruton's ideological writings on education in the context of *BP* and the Conservative think-tanks and intellectuals during the 1980s. We found that in terms of education policy the "preservationists" and the "marketeers" actually shared many arguments to the extent that the conventional distinction between neoconservatism and neoliberalism must be revised to accommodate recalcitrant historical materials. This revision began with Scruton's advocacy of teacher authority on the basis of parental delegation. Without a theory of the status of professional institutions following from his philosophical doctrine of corporate personality, Scruton's account tends to make the provision of education at the ultimate disposal of parents instead of teachers. On the other hand, subsequent completion of this theoretical puzzle by his colleagues at *SR* makes Scruton's position less tolerant of the neo-liberal faith in the free market. Paradoxically, it is Worsthorne who made explicit what corporate personality means to education; but it is also he who claimed to owe much of his political opinions to Oakeshott—a thinker, we have seen, quite suspicious of the idea of corporate personality. To understand both Oakeshott and the development of post-war conservative ideologies more thoroughly, the next chapter turns to Worsthorne's journalism and its relationship with Oakeshott's middle works published immediately after the war.

Chapter 9

An Alternative Interpretation of Oakeshott's Political Philosophy: Peregrine Worsthorne's Defence of Aristocracy

I. Introduction

Peregrine Worsthorne was born in 1923 in an upper-class family. His father General Alexander Koch de Gooreynd was of Belgian origin, while his mother Priscilla Reyntiens was the granddaughter of the 12th Earl of Abingdon. Worsthorne's mother was more widely known as Lady Norman. She divorced Worsthorne's father when Worsthorne was still a child and soon married Sir Montagu Norman, then the Governor of the Bank of England. Because of this split and his parents' total devotion to public life, it was the butler of this family who in effect brought up Worsthorne for several years. This background significantly influenced Worsthorne's views about various aspects of the way of life as members of the ruling class led it.

Worsthorne began his career in journalism as a sub-editor on *The Glasgow Herald* in 1946, and later worked for *The Times* after 1948, serving as a correspondent in Washington between 1950 and 1952. He joined *The Sunday Telegraph* and became one of the principal columnists from its launch in 1961, working there for nearly three decades and assuming its editorship in 1986. Worsthorne's influence over political opinions was mainly wielded by his commentaries in newspapers, thus it is solely based on his own professional credentials as a columnist. This makes him quite different from thinkers such as Minogue and Scruton, who contributed to public debate through the authority lent by their academic positions (a Professor at LSE in the case of Minogue) or eminent qualifications (a Cambridge philosopher in the case of Scruton).

This chapter considers the nature and source of Worsthorne's political thought. First, integral to his journalism is the advocacy of inconsistent but apposite views at different times.

Is Worsthorne thereby precluded from expressing a coherent conservative viewpoint? Second, his works provide a highly creative interpretation of Michael Oakeshott's political thought. Is Worsthorne's position more a result of Oakeshott's formal teaching and personal inspiration in Cambridge and before that in the war, or more informally rooted in his own experience of the aristocratic life?

In the introduction to this thesis, it was emphasised that existing secondary literature has underplayed the role of Oakeshott in the development of post-war conservatism, especially as exemplified by more political and less academic figures preoccupied with current affairs daily. This chapter will strengthen this point. Worsthorne's understanding of Oakeshott constituted the foundation of his multi-faceted critique of Thatcher and her followers, just as much as Minogue used what he learnt from Oakeshott to buttress Thatcherism. Although some of Worsthorne's later expositions of English aristocracy as the true embodiment of the moral life of the individual go beyond what a generous interpretation of Oakeshott's political philosophy could allow, this case study interestingly illustrates different translations of Oakeshott's philosophical works into practical politics.

II. The Peculiarity of Being a Columnist

In their portrayal of the thinkers associated with the Conservative Party, Mark Garnett and Kevin Hickson say of Worsthorne that "by his own admission, his journalism often expressed contradictory and inconsistent viewpoints, making him seem more of a dilettante than a serious political thinker."[1] However, it is important not to take Worsthorne's self-evaluation too seriously. Whatever contradictions and inconsistencies his journalistic writings may contain, Worsthorne did emphasise that "[w]riting a political book is a different matter" because in a monograph "one tries to argue a thesis, as [he] did in *The Socialist*

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[1] Mark Garnett and Kevin Hickson, *Conservative Thinkers: The Key Contributors to the Political Thought of the Modern Conservative Party* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 116.

Myth."[2] Consequently, even if his journalism was theoretically messier, this in no way means that there cannot be found a central tenet in his more neatly argued books such as the one he mentioned, or his latest *In Defence of Aristocracy* (2004), to be discussed in the next section.

Furthermore, the reasons Worsthorne gave for frequently setting aside the considerations of coherence in his journalistic production may reveal the actual nature of the contradictions and inconsistencies he attributed to his own columns. One of these reasons is the limitation of time and the concomitant pressure to overcome the lack of new ideas.[3] A more important one is what the professional necessity of being a columnist forced him to do. As Worsthorne said:

> My primary responsibility as a journalist is to find something worthwhile to say that has not been said a hundred times already. If there is a fresh pro-trade union point to be made, which seems to me to have some merit, then I am delighted to make it.[4]

In other words, while the task of a leader writer or a committed political commentator is to defend the official position of the newspaper for which he works, in Worsthorne's view his job as a columnist was rather to enlighten public debate, or less pretentiously, simply to make a stir in the current intellectual climate. Certainly, at times even this kind of columns may consistently reflect some of his deep-seated beliefs, such as the insistence on the importance of inherited class stratifications. In relation to the trade union issue mentioned above, Worsthorne emphasised that an hereditary element is no less important in the working class than in Parliament, and noted that Arthur Scargill complained against Ian McGregor because the latter "does not understand the traditions of the British coal industry; lacks the knowledge

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[2] Peregrine Worsthorne, *By the Right* (London: Brophy, 1987), 9.
[3] Worsthorne, *Peregrinations: Selected Pieces* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980), 3.
[4] *Ibid*., 5.

or the imagination to feel in his bones what can and cannot be decently done."[5] Nevertheless, generally speaking it is inadequate and careless to regard every Worsthorne's column as representative of his own political thought.

Still another reason underlying the apparent incoherence of his journalism concerns the professional requirement to write comments which are appropriate both to the contemporary circumstances and to the integrity of being a columnist. For instance, concerning Thatcherism, Worsthorne confessed interestingly that

> At a time when Mrs Thatcher is riding unduly high, a columnist should see his job to cut her down to size; at another time, when her reputation has unduly slumped, the proper thing to do may be to build her up.[6]

In fact, Worsthorne's dismissal of Thatcher and her ideological followers appeared more frequently than his defence of them against their critics. This disproportion may again implicitly disclose his true attitude in this respect. Nevertheless, what is intriguing about Worsthorne's apparently incoherent journalism here is that his attempt to "build her up," while sincere in supporting Thatcher's government, was no less critical than his criticism of the Thatcherites. Therefore, a close attention to this issue will clear the way to a deeper inquiry into Worsthorne's political thought about aristocracy.

Concerning his criticism of Thatcherism, in the introductory chapter of his first collection of columnist writings *Peregrinations* (1980), Worsthorne observed that the main tension within the Conservative party consisted in the conflict between its social and economic ideals, between the Tory paternalists and disciples of the free market. The former was aware that the privileges enjoyed by a ruling class is justifiable only if it is prepared to shoulder the responsibility of public welfare. However, it was precisely the *laissez-faire*

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[5] Worsthorne, *By the Right*, 48.
[6] *Ibid*., 9.

ideas advocated by the marketeers that transfer the fate of the bottom class to the invisible and impersonal forces of the economic system. Since the willingness and ability to protect the unsuccessful "is precisely what the Thatcherites boast about not having," from Worsthorne's perspective the New Right may prove more detrimental to the traditional order, "more dangerously radical, than the old Labour Party."[7]

Being himself a member of the English aristocracy, it is unsurprising that Worsthorne referred to the neoliberal conception of what government should and can feasibly do as a defeatist "scepticism about the potentiality of the State for getting anything right as to rule out imaginative statecraft altogether."[8] Similar to the axiom in Scruton's conservatism which gives priority to "appearance," Worsthorne thought it vitally important for Conservatives to recognise that the "nanny state" so frequently derided by the neoliberals is a necessary myth shared especially among the younger generation. Any government which fails to take into account what is genuinely believed by the governed will not be able either to win their hearts or to understand practical politics, regardless of what really is or should be the case. Worsthorne took this point so seriously that he even conceived the myth of the welfare state as equivalent to "what the imperial mission was for a short time in the nineteenth century."[9] Like Scruton, for Worsthorne it is essential to *present* the libertarian experiment of allowing the free market to determine economic coordination as a "more effective protection" of the working class and the creation of "the necessary surplus wealth to cushion the pains of change" in the structure of the industries.[10]

However, unlike Scruton, Worsthorne further thought that any theory of government must *incorporate* wholeheartedly the new sensibilities which give so high a priority to doing good to the weak, and to put these sensibilities to good use.[11] This was not simply because most people's "loyalty to the state, pride in Britain, emotional commitment to the idea of

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[7] Worsthorne, *Peregrinations*, 17.
[8] Worsthorne, *By the Right*, 91.
[9] Worsthorne, *Peregrinations*, 132.
[10] *Ibid*., 276-77.
[11] *Ibid*., 130.

being British, are all vastly affected by the success or failure of society in giving effect to these feelings of social concern."[12] More importantly, Worsthorne believed that this was what the old ruling class had succeeded in doing and could be replicated in the planned society of the future, and confessed that the traditional aristocracy was "more an ally of socialism than of capitalism."[13] This comment and Worsthorne's much later ridicule of Thatcherites[14] can be judged to reveal more truly his position within the conservative spectrum. Indeed, that he still adhered to this position in his own memoir at a time when he thought "Party politics now seem unworthy of notice" suggests that the motivation merely to shed fresh light on public debate was no longer present.[15] The same is true of his *In Defence of Aristocracy*, composed long after his retirement and the end of Thachter's premiership.

Matters become more complicated if we turn to Worsthorne's support of Thatcherism. If the conservation of what is valuable in the old ruling order is the sole criterion to judge the performance of Thatcher's government, then Worsthorne did not contradict his own criticism of Thatcherite economic policies in applauding the government when its conduct conformed to this ideal of hereditary aristocracy. The Falklands war is a case in point. Here Worsthorne expressed approval consistently because the reason for embarking on it had nothing to do with "utilitarianism or the pursuit of happiness" and everything to do with "a wholly different tradition of sacrifice and obligation," of duty and honour.[16]

On the other hand, if we set aside the questions about the ruling class and focus on economic issues instead, Worsthorne, as Garnett and Hickson argue, appeared to be always against the fashion, now critical of politicians in the One Nation tradition and now of the Thatcherites.[17] Consequently, it seems difficult to identify his true attitude in this regard. It

[12] *Ibid*.
[13] Worsthorne, *Tricks of Memory: An Autobiography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1993), 229.
[14] Worsthorne, *In Defence of Aristocracy* (London: Harper Collins, 2004), 103-4.
[15] Worsthorne, *Tricks of Memory*, 275.
[16] Worsthorne, *By the Right*, 103.
[17] Garnett and Hickson, *Conservative Thinkers*, 116.

is indeed arguable that Worsthorne praised the Conservative party's internal ideological conflict instead, and concurred now with the doctrines of One Nation, now with Thatcherism. He conceived this tension as the party's priceless asset without which its economic policies could not have been so flexible as to cater to the different needs of different epochs. Referring to the post-war consensus of the Welfare State, Worsthorne said that

> Such an attitude was absolutely right in the 1950s, and by associating Conservatism with it Mr Macmillan helped to ensure his Party thirteen years in office. Twenty-five years later, however, it had become equally clear that national affluence and ease had ceased to have any connection with past efforts; that is to say, were no longer deserved, could no longer be morally justified, and it is by associating Conservatism with this very different but no less valid realisation that Mrs Thatcher stands fair to ensure her Party another long period of office. Not being cursed with an ideology, the Conservative Party can always adjust to changing circumstances.[18]

In other words, passages like this do not clearly illustrate whether Worsthorne's support of Thatcherism is inconsistent with his criticism of neo-liberal economics. Therefore, it is better to examine more illuminating cases where Worsthorne defended Thatcher's attack on socialism *because* in doing so she ensured that the poor are protected more than they would have been under welfarist policies; for his reasons are interestingly similar to, though more general than, his criticism of neoliberal economics.

Worsthorne pointed out that critics of Thatcher mistook her source of appeal if they thought that her public support mainly came from the haves and the privileged. On the contrary, it was largely because "she has succeeded in discrediting egalitarianism by associating it with the destruction of all the old familiar landmarks" that the have nots looked

[18] *Ibid*.

up to her.[19] He went on to explain that many of the policy reforms favoured by the Labour Party did not really help those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Progressive education, for example, benefits more the children from families of sophisticated intellectual background than those growing up in poverty, "who desperately need old-fashioned instruction [and] strict discipline."[20] In any case, whether it benefits the descendants of the upper class makes no difference to their future, which is assured in some family firm or the like. Similarly, feminism, "easy divorce, free love, [and] sexual permissiveness" made more sense for middle-class women, and "the same can be said of most of the fashionable notions of the Fifties and Sixties."[21]

It is this aspect of Thatcherism that Worsthorne contrasted with the untenable assumption held by the Conservative governments before her "that the only way to defend wealth and privilege was to bribe the masses into passivity, by paying out more and more danegeld."[22] What the post-war Conservative party failed to grasp is that "ordinary people accept wealth and privilege far more readily than they accept, say, coloured immigration, because wealth and privilege are part of the British heritage in a way that coloured immigrants are not. …. In each case, it is simply a question of liking the familiar and disliking the unfamiliar."[23] The degree to which Thatcher's political support really came in this way is irrelevant. Nonetheless, given that Worsthorne's defence of the merits of Thatcherism in this instance corresponds very neatly to his critique of its inadequate political language of freedom and choice in 1978 before she came to power, his rebuttal of her critics may appear as much an expectation of what her government ideally should live up to as a clear endorsement.

This critique appeared in the important collection *Conservative Essays* edited by Maurice Cowling, entitled "Too Much Freedom." Superficially, the title is easy to understand.

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[19] Worsthorne, *By the Right*, 32.
[20] *Ibid*., 52.
[21] *Ibid*.
[22] *Ibid*., 33.
[23] *Ibid*.

However, its content cannot be simplified into a call to restore the authoritative leadership exercised by the traditional ruling class and to denigrate the value of individual freedom. First, Worsthorne admitted that there is nothing wrong in setting the wealth producers free, promoting choice in education and health, or resisting Labour legislation which was an affront to individual liberty.[24] Second, again like Scruton, Worsthorne was nevertheless more concerned with the effective strategy of winning electoral support, apart from the exposition of a political philosophy. In Scruton's view, "rolling back the frontiers of the state" cannot appeal to the powerless since they would rather believe that the impersonal state will give them more advantages than believe in a slogan which appears to benefit the powerful most. Thus, it was more important to preserve the personality of the State in the face of the encroachment of socialism. Similarly, for Worsthorne,

> Mrs Thatcher is confusing the experience of a crucially important minority of the British people, who really have suffered a diminution of freedom, with that of the great body of the nation, who have done the opposite. Indeed, if one were to probe into the hearts of many potential and actual Tory supporters—and others besides—one might well discover that what worried them most about contemporary Britain was not so much the lack of freedom as its excessive abundance; not so much the threat of dictatorship as the reality of something unpleasantly close to chaos.[25]

Consequently, at least in terms of political rhetoric, Thatcher and her Shadow Cabinet should focus on what really concerns the weak, who are the majority: the need for a strong government instead of one which knows nothing other than to encourage them to say "*laissez-nous faire!*"

What makes the title of Worsthorne's essay misleading is the fact that towards the end

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[24] Worsthorne, "Too Much Freedom," in *Conservative Essays*, ed. Maurice Cowling (London: Cassell, 1978), 149.

[25] *Ibid*., 147.

he emphasised the underlying value of such authoritative exercise of strong leadership: *individual freedom*. Here, he drew a sharp boundary between socialism and his own position, maintaining that socialism confuses the task of helping the poor with infecting the whole society by their values of dependence and passivity. Worsthorne did not deny that the strong ought to help the weak. However,

> [n]o healthy society should allow itself to see the world through the eyes of the unfortunate who have no great interest in perceiving, let alone exploiting, the highest value of civilization: individual freedom. Indeed, being for the most part those who have failed to make use of freedom, either because of fate or circumstance, they are likely to be the part of society least enamoured of that supremely challenging ideal and most susceptible to all the temptations to undermine it.[26]

If the central concept of Worsthorne's political thought is, like Minogue's, individual freedom, then why did he, unlike Minogue, express so much contempt towards those whose catch phrases were liberty, choice, market, and *laissez-faire*? Moreover, if Worsthorne's inspiration also came from Oakeshott's account of the moral life of the individual and the individual manqué (transformed into the anti-individual in modernity) as much as Minogue's ludic conception of freedom owes to Oakeshott's understanding of the playful nature of civil association, then why did their evaluations of Thatcherism differ so much? To answer these questions, we must leave Worsthorne's journalistic writings and turn to his monographs and autobiography. This will further clarify his distinctive understanding of Oakeshott's political philosophy.

III. The Moral Life of the Individual as the Ruling Class's Value

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[26] *Ibid*., 153.

Worsthorne's first book-length exposition of his own political position, *The Socialist Myth* (1971), contains various themes to which many of his later writings return continuously. The central tenet is that a Labour government, by its very nature, is destined to assume office against "a background of widespread anti-Establishment feeling, of distrust of State authority, of doubts about existing institutions," which is fostered by its own efforts in the earlier electoral battle.[27] However, once in power, the success of its collectivist policies depends more heavily on a context of respect for official authority and a voluntary acceptance of governmental orders than the Conservative party does. Whilst in capitalism the welfare of the people is largely determined by market mechanisms, in socialism a public servant "is much more like God" in deciding who are to receive the resources which have significant roles to play in the crucial areas of their lives.[28] For these important decisions to be willingly obeyed, those in power have to be "a rather special kind of person, somebody with just that bit of extra character, a leader of men."[29] Consequently, the problem facing a Labour government working under the existing constitutional framework is not that of freedom, but of nurturing a ruling class capable of commanding consent.[30] Clearly, this argument about the presupposition of democratic socialism is the precursor of Worsthorne's later critique of Thatcherism discussed in the previous section.

Unfortunately, argued Worsthorne, socialism is prevented from fulfilling this task of integrating the old aristocracy into its new ruling class by its internal contradictions. For socialism is not only concerned with implementing welfarist policies. The other side of this coin is an egalitarian ideal which finds it difficult to tolerate unearned privileges or rights that are not shared by all people. Yet, "if socialism means equality, or even only equality of opportunity, then the more socialist a society becomes, the less necessary it is for those on

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[27] Worsthorne, *The Socialist Myth* (London: Cassell, 1971), 4.
[28] *Ibid*., 41.
[29] *Ibid*.
[30] *Ibid*., 39.

top to feel any personal responsibility for those below."[31] In other words, not only does its egalitarianism pose an obstacle to the continuation of the traditional hereditary aristocracy. Its successful implementation will also bring about a new ruling class lacking the sense of public service and the motivation to repay their debt by helping the poor. Nevertheless, this is precisely the source of their authority to rule which the Labour government desperately needs.

Furthermore, Worsthorne claimed that it was well known during the 1950s and the 1960s that socialist intellectuals repeatedly expressed contempt for the rich and especially their consumerist lifestyle, apart from the various forms of media through which this capitalist evil was spread downwards to the working class.[32] However, at the same time, "the rich are seen by the Labour Party as economic agents only—people who have to be allowed wealth so as to be able to produce it," with their social role purposefully frustrated via the attempt to stop them from using their money to accumulate cultural and social advantages.[33] Consequently, it is unsurprising that their lives become plutocratic instead of aristocratic when they are not allowed to buy private education for their children, or to bequeath their wealth to the next generation so that it can devote itself wholly to community leadership without worrying about the urgency to earn any money. Again, it is precisely a ruling class embodying the aristocratic values that the Labour government immediately requires for its welfarist policies to work effectively.

What is noteworthy in Worsthorne's argument is that the language, and the examples he used, both contain implicit allusions to T. S. Eliot's *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture* and explicit references to Oakeshott's essays in *Rationalism in Politics*. The feasibility of this intellectual marriage is not obvious at first sight. With regard to Eliot, the allusion is obvious from Worsthorne's discussions of first, the "moneyed élites" resulting from the Labour government's different attitudes towards the economic and the social roles played by

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[31] *Ibid.*, 58.
[32] *Ibid.*, 70.
[33] *Ibid.*, 68.

the rich;[34] and secondly, the "old educated class" who were "deeply shaped by other non-intellectual traditions … which in many respects were in conflict with prevailing progressive ideology."[35] This allusion to Eliot is more evident when Worsthorne contrasted élite and class with each other. In favour of class, he claimed that "a class structure has, as against an élite structure, certain virtues which a liberal society would be foolish to discard."[36] In addition, the example he provides about the members of a committee who meet solely for a particular purpose and does not really meet each other in a wider holistic and cultural sense, was borrowed directly from Eliot's social criticism.[37] In his final book, Worsthorne eventually acknowledged this debt to Eliot and the importance of the allusion in his own political thought.[38]

The influence from Oakeshott is very different, which Worsthorne publicly confirmed in his early career. For example, in discussing Sir Thomas More, Worsthorne referred to Oakeshott's "Rationalism in Politics" and explained the sense in which More "was an educated gentleman, whose roots lay in a social background that helped to induce an instinctive understanding of the art of politics. The difficulties inherent in the exercise of power, in governance, were something that he understood, not from books, but from life."[39] Worsthorne continued by commenting on the events at Pinkville during the Vietnam War, and was confident that had Lieutenant Calley been a British officer and gentleman, he would not have committed such outrageous deeds as was alleged. In justifying this claim, Worsthorne alluded to what Oakeshott thought lies beyond the capability of a civilian officer having undergone just a few years of military training: "the habit of authority engendered over generations, a professional pride and ingrained self-discipline, a tradition of leadership which only an officer class is likely to be able to nurture."[40] For such an English officer

[34] *Ibid*., 73.
[35] *Ibid*., 116.
[36] *Ibid*., 227.
[37] *Ibid*., 238-39.
[38] Worsthorne, *In Defence of Aristocracy* 5, 40-41.
[39] Worsthorne, *The Socialist Myth*, 120.
[40] *Ibid*., 189-90.

misconduct on the battlefield is unimaginable, not necessarily because he possesses superior moral virtue, but "because of something much simpler, something, if you like, laughable; because that kind of behaviour simply is not done, simply is not cricket."[41] Finally, in his autobiography, Worsthorne said of that essay of Oakeshott that "[n]o other piece of political writing has influenced me more."[42]

Nevertheless, what Worsthorne took from Eliot and the middle Oakeshott appears to be in uneasy tension with what the late Oakeshott is generally taken to maintain. According to Worsthorne, the value of class stratification consists in the rootedness it gives to its members, in the development of "distinctive styles of living in which they feel naturally at home."[43] With regard to the upper class in particular, the aristocratic virtues embodied in their understanding of the conduct of life "are designed for societies with a rather grander idea of the purpose of politics."[44] By contrast, the moral life of the individual as delineated by the late Oakeshott is precisely exemplified by the type of people who are released from the existing social role and regard the journey of life as an adventure without eternal or fixed points of anchorage. Similarly, from Oakeshott's perspective, the kind of government which corresponds to people with this temperament is one whose end is rather bland; it is an umpire supervising the adherence to and infringement of procedural rules, without having a political objective of his own to impose from above.

It would be too easy to resolve this tension by maintaining that the late Oakeshott discarded many of the beliefs he had held when he wrote the post-war essays during the 1940s and the 1950s; or that Worsthorne's understanding of Oakeshott's political philosophy was misguided so that there is no reason to regard Oakeshott as a conservative simply because Worsthorne took him to be an orthodox representative thereof. If one looks deeper into Worsthorne's writings, it becomes evident that, in translating Oakeshott's political

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[41] *Ibid*., 188.
[42] Worsthorne, *Tricks of Memory*, 88.
[43] Worsthorne, *The Socialist Myth*, 245.
[44] *Ibid*., 196.

philosophy into practical politics, he did not take the moral life of the individual as the value which is embodied (or should be embodied) by most people in a society, be they bourgeois or working-class. It is this move that is distinctive of Worsthorne's political thought. Therefore, the remaining task of this section is to evaluate the extent to which Worsthorne's writings contribute to a fresh but reasonable interpretation of Oakeshott.

Earlier we noted that Worsthorne's major complaint about Thatcherism is its ignorance about the ramifications of its neoliberal policies, especially with regard to the poor. These ramifications are not primarily material, and the changes to life thus brought about are not confined to the working class. What makes Worsthorne particularly concerned with the weak is his belief that the privileges of the strong can be justified only if they can discharge their responsibility of protecting the lower class. More crucially, when the rootedness of class stratifications and its historical continuities are weakened by political reform, "everybody gets cut adrift, the poor even more than the rich, the underprivileged even more than the privileged, since it is always the weak and stupid who are least able to adapt to new ways or abandon old habits."[45] To generalise this argument, Worsthorne contended that the "same goes for the monarchy and all the other ancient institutions without which ordinary people would feel cut off from their roots."[46]

Described in this way, the weak in Worsthorne's political thought seem to be the counterpart of the individual manqué in Oakeshott's. Nevertheless, contrary to Oakeshott's and Minogue's ambivalence towards the values of dependence, passivity, and rootedness exhibited by the lower class, Worsthorne thought that there is no need to change their lifestyle but every need to respect them as they are. The inability of both the New Right and the New Left to appreciate the lives of the poor for themselves, he argued, should be attributed to the decadence of religious belief. Rather than understanding poverty as a misfortune or lack of luck, which is preordained by God and should be humbly accepted by

[45] Worsthorne, *By the Right*, 32.
[46] *Ibid*., 33.

mortal beings as such, members of the lower classes are regarded as "objects whose lives must be radically changed either by moral regeneration through exhortation and challenge (Thatcherism) or through egalitarian social engineering (socialism)."[47] Consequently, although Worsthorne also recognised the moral depth involved in individual freedom and choice (which we have seen Minogue expound in detail), he did not think that this liberty is what the weak must learn to exercise. In his words, "Conservatism is, of course, about much more than capitalism; about much more than economics. And even its economic aspects have a moral aspect, since the area of choice made possible by capitalist affluence allows the individual to make good—or bad—in all senses."[48] However,

> If it is meaningful at all to talk about a Tory ideology, it is simply this: a recognition of the inevitability of authority and hierarchy, and a determination to guarantee the availability of enough men and women who can meet this requirement, and enough popular support for them to be able to get on with the job of governing. It sees its function, in short, as twofold: to promote policies designed to nurture habits of command and habits of deference; to produce a relationship which allows the leaders to lead and the led to be led in such a way as to result in mutual satisfaction.[49]

Clearly, what is missing from this picture is the status of the bourgeoisie. The reason is readily understandable: as in the case of the lower class, Worsthorne did not think that the moral life of the individual is exemplified by, or is really suitable to, the middle class. That vision of life is quite "beyond the range of the bourgeois or proletarian imagination;" for an aristocratic class is not "frightened into public life by fear of socialism, or driven into it on behalf of the worker," but born to govern the state by their values of action, struggle,

[47] *Ibid.*, 40.
[48] Worsthorne, *Peregrinations*, 224-25.
[49] Worsthorne, *The Socialist Myth*, 97.

creativity and progress.[50]

What makes Worsthorne's position intriguing is that he claimed to owe the account of the moral life of the individual and the individual manqué to Oakeshott. This is a rather polite way of expressing gratitude to the discussions he enjoyed with Oakeshott. Referring to Oakeshott's "The Masses in Representative Democracy" published much later after the war, Worsthorne boldly claimed "to have had a hand in its composition" because during the war they "spent many jolly evenings developing this abridgement … offering [other socialist officers] an alternative interpretation of modern history."[51] In Worsthorne's view, it is the English aristocracy which resolves "that conflict in favour of the instruments of parliamentary government—the instruments appropriate to individuality—and, what is more, resolving the conflict so decisively that, so far, there has been no serious attempt to reopen it."[52] In other words, if we confine our attention to English history only and translate the abridgement of different moral lives into this concrete setting, "in England it was a group of aristocratic individuals, rather than a group of bourgeois individuals, or a group of proletarian individuals, who, with miraculous bloodlessness, carried out the Glorious Revolution of 1688."[53] However, the question is whether Oakeshott did approve of Worsthorne's way of using this account of two conflicting moralities in modernity.

One may have reason to doubt that Worsthorne here is relying more on his own personal experience than on Oakeshott's philosophical account of the moral life of the individual. Reading through his autobiography, one cannot help but suspect that many of the political claims Worsthorne made elsewhere were more an abstraction of what he had really felt and undergone in his life. For instance, the proposition that nobility is associated with an active life of "struggle and exertion" rather than a passive one of "ease and indulgence,"[54] reflects Worsthorne's childhood memories of his mother's disapproval of his father's idle lifestyle

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[50] Worsthorne, *In Defence of Aristocracy*, 39.
[51] *Ibid*., 64.
[52] *Ibid*.
[53] *Ibid*., 66-67.
[54] Worsthorne, *Peregrinations*, 199.

and her admiration of his step-father's embodiment of the ideal of public service.[55] That domestic service need not imply subservience and, under an aristocratic culture, can carry with it a dignity, honour and job-satisfaction transcending material reward,[56] is also based on his personal contact with the butler of his family, whose confrontation with Winston Churchill due to the latter's bad table manners was never forgotten by Worsthorne.[57] Again, the demoralising effects on the hereditary system, caused by the proposed fiscal measures which preserved the wealth and privilege of the upper class but prevented it from passing them on to the next generation,[58] is what Worsthorne understood through the reactions of his upper class comrades towards the end of the war when the Attlee government won the election.[59] Finally, unlike Minogue whose understanding of reason of state largely came from reading Machiavelli, Worsthorne, when working for the *Times*, had the opportunity to attend regular meetings with government officials which were meant "to give the *Times* man an insight into the real reasons behind British foreign policy; reasons which were quite often different from those ministers were giving in the House of Commons."[60]

These personal experiences constitute the basis on which Worsthorne substantiated his account of aristocracy. In relation to reason of state, Worsthorne recognised that before the war "the appeasers were not acting out of cowardice but out of a kind of sober courage, by comparison with which Churchill's eagerness to embrace war begins to seem almost irresponsibly vainglorious."[61] In more general terms, Worsthorne saw the members of the traditional aristocracy as individuals who were able to "do the nation's dirty work," "to authorize difficult and sometimes cruel actions for the common good," "to resist giving way not only to every grievance but also to manifestly worthy causes as well," and "to rub

[55] Worsthorne, *Tricks of Memory*, 6-7.
[56] Worsthorne, *By the Right*, 112.
[57] Worsthorne, *Tricks of Memory*, 32-42.
[58] Worsthorne, *The Socialist Myth*, 63.
[59] Worsthorne, *Tricks of Memory*, 78.
[60] *Ibid.*, 130.
[61] *Ibid.*, 32.

society's nose in the painful realities of keeping a great nation on course."[62] In light of this moral character the ordinary bourgeois politicians almost fail to show any independence and creativity, with their careers wholly depending on retaining, and more usually conforming to, popular favour. Certainly, here Worsthorne was talking about the aristocratic ideal. That Churchill's family in fact had a prominent lineage and Neville Chamberlain, the arch-appeaser, was actually from the middle class only strengthens the fact that family education does not absolutely determine the character of the next generation. In any case, it is more likely that Worsthorne's attribution of the moral values of the individual to the upper class came from what he learnt in his life experience rather than the theoretical discussions he had with Oakeshott. After all, it is unrealistic to expect a journalist who admitted his "inability to master complex theories" to take into account Oakeshott's late political philosophy, which are much more abstract in language than his post-war essays on which Worsthorne primarily depended in his defence of aristocracy.[63]

The difference between Worsthorne's style of political thought and the nature of Oakeshott's political philosophy sheds further light on the incompatibility of their doctrines, in spite of their shared understanding of what the contrast between the individual and the individual manqué theoretically amounts to. For Worsthorne,

> [a]ll supposedly opposite ideas are in reality only different sides of the same coin, the value of which depends on neither being defaced. A proper understanding of ideas, therefore, requires a willingness to search for affinities, not conflicts. In terms of practical politics it may be desirable to mobilize ideas into conflicting armies. But in terms of discovering the truth, it is necessary to do precisely the opposite.[64]

The example he used was the conflict between the concepts of equality and individual

[62] Worsthorne, *In Defence of Aristocracy*, 20-21.
[63] Worsthorne, *Tricks of Memory*, 88.
[64] Worsthorne, *Peregrinations*, 15.

freedom, which is the most central contestation between ideas after the war. By contrast, from the Oakeshott's philosophical viewpoint, conceptual conflicts take an opposite course. In terms of theoretical exposition, the philosopher's task is to pursue an idea until its logical limit manifests itself. Throughout his life, Oakeshott was averse to the idea of compromise and regarded any *rapprochement* as a sign of philosophical weakness. He maintained that it is only in practical politics that opposing ideas must live together in order to get anything done in practice. From Worsthorne's perspective, however, this cohabitation of opposing ideas is on the contrary suitable for the pursuit of objective truth instead of practical politics.

Therefore, we can see why Worsthorne was eager to respect the existing lifestyle and values of the weak as much as he was anxious to defend those of the strong. For him, conservatism means the achievement of a mutuality between them where both the deference of the one and the leadership of the other are essential ingredients of a healthy society. Nevertheless, it is doubtful that Oakeshott would be concerned to philosophise not only the moral life of the individual, which he actually did in *OHC*, but also that of the individual manqué. In his late conception of the nature of political philosophy, there is no longer the dialectical impulse to arrive at the State or to transcend the contradiction between the individual and the individual manqué. As such, it is Worsthorne's journalistic work, not Oakeshott's late political theory, that accidentally achieved the philosophical task which the early Oakeshott had set himself to accomplish.

IV. Conclusion

Although Worsthorne is the least systematic conservative thinker considered in the second part of this thesis, his journalism provides a corrective to dominant interpretations of Oakeshott. Had we been confined to Minogue's understanding of Oakeshott's practical significance, we would have regarded Oakeshott's late works as primarily neoliberal in implication. Again, if we had not gone beyond Scruton's political theory and analysed his

ideological pamphlets, we would not have had the opportunity to find that a neoconservative emphasis on morality, authority, and corporate personality, though not wholly compatible with Oakeshott's early political philosophy, may be inspired by his post-war essays. Thus, the analysis of Worsthorne completes our portrayal of Oakeshott's place in the history of British political thought.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

The first half of this thesis has provided an intellectual portrait of Michael Oakeshott's political and general philosophy which focuses more on its internal context to explore his underlying motivation for the theoretical modifications he continually made to his works. In this account, it becomes inadequate to attach a specific ideological label, either liberal or conservative, to Oakeshott even if we consider only a particular stage in the long development of his thought. Rather, his emphasis on the moral and political significance of individualism in our modern social life was expressed in his own peculiarly academic, philosophical manner.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that Oakeshott had no role to play in the history of British conservatism. A complete picture of his works constitutes a useful framework for understanding the traditionalists associated with the Conservative Party via various think-tanks and media, examined in the latter half of this thesis. Because of the comprehensiveness of this framework, we are able to discern where these thinkers were strongly influenced by Oakeshott and where they went beyond his influence. Roger Scruton is a case in point. Without the framework of Oakeshott, we would not have been able to judge that Scruton's Hegelian account of freedom can be embedded in Oakeshott's early political philosophy, and therefore that the distinctiveness of Scruton's conservative thought consists in the idea of corporate personality which even the early Oakeshott found reluctant to incorporate into his own works.

More importantly, we are enabled by the neutrality of this framework to observe how both Kenneth Minogue and Peregrine Worsthorne were inspired by Oakeshott's defence of the moral life of the individual, but put it to divergent uses. This finding breaks the simplistic continuum between the two extremes of liberty and authority, which has been employed by commentators to distinguish the neoliberal New Right from its neoconservative wing. Although Minogue's and Worsthorne's versions of conservatism are incompatible with each

other, in different ways their thought illustrates that the apparent tensions between freedom and authority are but two sides of the same coin. For Minogue, authority and other moral foundations are what makes the exercise of freedom possible in the first place. For Worsthorne, it is the aristocratic class's ability of exercise freedom that justifies its enjoyment of the authority to rule. Our consideration of more practical writings by Scruton and other think-tank intellectuals in education politics further offers a more nuanced and objective understanding of the complicated development of different branches of conservatism.

It is regrettable that due to the limitation of space and time this thesis is unable to deal with more conservative thinkers to exhibit the richness of twentieth century conservative political thought. In particular, Shirley Robin Letwin is also an important figure. Repeatedly referred to by both Minogue and Worsthorne in relation to her defence of Thatcherism and the ideal of the gentleman, respectively, the character of her conservatism may provide further clues to the contrast between Minogue and Worsthorne. Moreover, Maurice Cowling's call to widen conservatism's source of inspiration is mentioned several times in this thesis in introducing the various traditionalists. Indeed, his own thorough investigation of the public doctrines in modern England is perhaps another important text besides his 1978 essay with which to understand Scruton, who once studied at Peterhouse, Cambridge under Cowling's mentorship. Finally, earlier thinkers such as F. R. Leavis and T. S. Eliot are also essential to understand the history of conservative thought; they are not necessarily or unambiguously conservative but their thought is nevertheless frequently borrowed by more recent conservative thinkers examined in this thesis. It is hoped that future research will consider these figures as well.

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