The Leviathan and the Contours of Conservative Imagination: The Role of Thomas Hobbes in the Works of Schmitt, Strauss and Oakeshott

R. Ömür Birler
Department of Political Science
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

R. Ömür Birler
Dept. of Political Science
Carleton University

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From centuries ago Thomas Hobbes still speaks to us in a strangely familiar and captivating idiom. Having traversed the consuming effect of time, our generation seems willing to study him in order to perceive more clearly the subtle inflections of his voice.

During the past decades the literature devoted to Hobbes has expanded rapidly both in volume and breadth of focus, covering the most diverse topics of his natural and civil philosophy. The reasons for this preoccupation are complex and elusive. To some extent, the preoccupation stems from the fact that Hobbes stood at the beginning of various intellectual and social trends that have culminated in our own time. According to C. B. Macpherson, Hobbes was one of the first advocates of "possessive individualism," whereas Habermas identifies him as one of the ancestors of technological rationalism[1].

Such interpretations undoubtedly possessed great plausibility and persuasiveness, but they fall short of telling the entire story. It appears that neither Hobbes's vocabulary nor our own is restricted on this range of discourse. While attractive to the scientific mentality of a technological era, and its immediate political reflection, i.e. liberalism, Hobbes's voice also reaches us from the foundation of a different aspect, conservatism. Nonetheless, it appears that the influence of Hobbes's philosophy on contemporary conservative thought has attracted little attention so far. The following pages seek to explore this relationship by focusing on three eminent figures of twentieth century conservative thought, Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss and Michael Oakeshott.

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[1] Habermas, J. 1963. *Theorie and Praxis*. Neuwid: Luchterhand; Macpherson, C. B. 1962. *The Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

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Dept. of Political Science
Carleton University

In the pursuit of this aim, this paper emphasizes the role of Hobbes in the making of conservative thought, rather than discussing the 'conservative' elements within his own thought. It is the intention of the following pages to show that Hobbes and his *Leviathan* constitutes not only the foundation of modern liberal thinking but also for its most relentless critics. Schmitt, Strauss and Oakeshott, who share a common interest in the works of Hobbes, shape their own theories in a distinguished way by taking different aspects of his political philosophy as departure points. In other words, this shared interest becomes the primary source that delineates the heterogeneous character of the twentieth century conservative thought, as well as its complex response to liberalism.

In the progress of the paper, I will discuss the influence of Hobbes on each thinker individually. In this rather descriptive part, I will devote attention on each thinker's specific works on Hobbes along with references from their entire corpus. Following these sections I will conclude my paper with a discussion on how to understand the works of Schmitt, Strauss and Oakeshott in the framework of conservative thought.

Leviathan versus Behemoth: Carl Schmitt

Carl Schmitt, once the undignified thinker of Nazi Germany, has regained his popularity over the last decade. His works on Weimar have been even viewed as the most stunning criticisms of liberalism and parliamentary democracy ever written. Yet, the recent focus on Schmitt which concentrates on his famous 'friend/enemy' distinction, his fascination with the political 'exception,' and his claim that liberalism is incapable of successfully realizing democracy, suffers from neglecting the importance of Schmitt's place in the development of conservative thought and thus widely misses the fuller

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Dept. of Political Science
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implications of his works. In this respect, it is crucial to locate Schmitt and his criticisms into a broader picture of the history of conservative thinking and to trace his influence by simply following the dialogue. I argue that the common theme of this dialogue is *Leviathan*.

Carl Schmitt's longtime interest in Thomas Hobbes can be easily inferred from his writings. The extent of his interest is particularly clear in his lectures on *Leviathan*, subsequently turned into a book, that Schmitt delivered in 1938, at the time of his fiftieth birthday and of the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Hobbes' birth[2]. His association with Hobbes became so firmly fixed in Schmitt's own mind that both his disciples and his critics now take it for granted. Nonetheless, this affinity appears to be a complex one if one considers Schmitt's severe criticism of liberalism.

As Cropsey, among others, captures Schmitt's own mortal enemy is liberalism, which he demonizes as the pacifist, all tolerating, rationalist-atheist antithesis of 'the political' conceived as he defined it[3]. In spite of his clearly expressed enmity against liberalism, Schmitt situated Hobbes at the core of his political philosophy. Favorable commentators of Schmitt such as Julien Freund and Gunter Maschke as well as Schmitt's liberal democratic critic Helmut Rumpf have noted the importance of this relationship[4]. Common to their interpretation is the identification of Schmitt with a demystified view of civil society that is post-mediaeval but also anti-pluralist. Like Hobbes, Schmitt was seen as a thinker who is trying to shore up political authority without revealed religion amid social strife. Like Hobbes, Schmitt too underscored the centrality of violence in the

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[2] Gottried, P. E. 1990. *Carl Schmitt: Politics and Theory*. New York: Greenwood Press. pp: 39.
[3] Cropsey, J. 1995. "Foreword," in *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: The Hidden Dialogue*, by J. H. Lomax (ed.) Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. pp: x.

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human experience; he associated sovereignty with power being exercised on behalf of groups locked in conflict.

In *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt sets forth his most famous thesis on the "essence" of politics: "The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy[5]." Yet despite the apparent novelty of this proposition, one finds the shadow of Thomas Hobbes cast quite prominently over this famous treatise. As Hobbes himself had maintained, in Chapter 15 of his *Leviathan*, in humanity's natural condition, in the state of nature, "every man to every man, for want of a common power to keep them all in awe is an Enemy." And one also easily recognizes that the language of 'friend' and 'enemy' is quite prevalent in *Leviathan*, for instance, "when either [a groups of people] have no common enemy, or he that by one part is held for an enemy, is by another part held for a friend, they must needs by the difference of their interests dissolve, and fall again into a war among themselves" (II, 17). Indeed, Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction is intended to serve a theoretical-political role analogous to Hobbes' state of nature. If Hobbes predicated the modern state on the state of nature, Schmitt declares that "the concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political[6]."

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes sought "to instill in man again 'the mutual relation between Protection and Obedience'[7]" and so forestall the strife and chaos that arises when armed autonomous groups confront each other. This is not far removed from Schmitt's own intentions. With a particular outlook on humanity Schmitt offers the way out of the

[4] Rumpf, H. 1972. *Carl Schmitt and Thomas Hobbes*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot. See also, Maschke, G. 1982. *Der Leviathan in der Staaslehre des Thomas Hobbes*. Cologne: Hohenheim Verlag.
[5] Schmitt, C. 1996. *The Concept of the Political*. Chicago : University of Chicago Press. pp: 26.
[6] Ibid. pp: 19.

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Carleton University

problems of the state of nature, civil war, or impending civil war. Regarding the "genuine" political philosophers who take the view that the human being is essentially dangerous, Schmitt writes, " their realism can frighten men in need of security[8]." This is precisely the point. McCormick rightly points out that Schmitt recognizes, as did Hobbes, that by frightening people one can best "instill" in them, that principle, " the *cogito ergo sum* of the state," *protego ergo obligo* [protection therefore obedience][9]. In other words, fear is the source of political order. Human beings once confronted with the prospect of their own dangerousness will be terrified into the arms of authority.

Thus, "for Hobbes, truly a powerful and systematic political thinker, the pessimistic conception of man is elementary presupposition of a specific system of political thought[10]" Schmitt's twofold task then is to elaborate on Hobbes' view of humanity and revive the fear as the key concept in the reformulation of the political: 1- to demonstrate the substantive affinity between his conception of the political and Hobbes' state of nature, and 2- to convince individuals –partisans and nonpartisans alike- that only a state with a monopoly on decisions regarding what is 'political' can guarantee peace and security. Schmitt's profound attempt is to realize this project by avoiding the differentiation between the object and the subject, which he perceived as the undermining elements of Hobbes' project in the first place.

To demonstrate the validity of Hobbesian state of nature, Schmitt starts his work by revealing the radical subjective characteristics of the liberal politics. According to Schmitt, liberal politics is associated with the absence of a centralized power and thus it

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[7] Ibid. pp: 52.
[8] Ibid. pp: 65
[9] McCormick, J. P. 1997. *Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism: Against Politics as Technology.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp: 253-54.

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is under his discretion of each participant to judge "whether to adversary intends to negate his opponent's way of life and therefore must be repulsed or fought in order to preserve one's own form of existence[11]." In other words, the fact that there exists no centralized power implies an absolute lack of standards by which one can judge another as an enemy. This is obviously a revival of the Hobbesian scenario of the condition of the mere nature where all are judges of their own fears.

Clearly, Schmitt wants to demonstrate that this situation implies the likelihood of explosion of civil war and Hobbesian state of nature. In a sense, he must revive the fear that led to the termination of the state of nature in order to prevent the reversion back to it. Ironically his (re)formulation of the myth needs to be grounded on its own roots once again. Therefore, it would be plausible to argue that Schmitt seeks to make real the terror of what is and what might be, so as to strengthen the existing order. Under these circumstances the subjects must reaffirm the pact that delivers them out of the state of nature into civil society, by transferring their illegitimately exercised subjectivity regarding the right to decide who the enemy and the friend is back to the qualitative total state. It is "the state and the state alone decides on internal enemies and external ones as well[12]."

Regarding the internal enemies, Schmitt seek to reverse the "barely visible crack" caused by the differentiation between the public and the private. In this respect, he rejects the pluralist view the state as merely one interest group among many others in society or even as a servant thereof.[13] The state must stand above society as a quasi-objective entity,

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[10] Schmitt, C. 1996. *The Concept of the Political.* pp: 65.
[11] Ibid. pp: 27.
[12] Ibid. pp: 28-9/ 45-6.
[13] Ibid. pp: 44.

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rather than accelerating the internal conflict by existing as a subject among the others. This, in turn, is the decisive characteristic of the qualitative total state.

One could conclude that Schmitt's search for the resurgence of the constant threat of conflict, of war, and of terror is to prepare a fearful ground for the (re)formulation of the myth of Leviathan. His entire theory can be seen as a vigorous effort to fix that "barely visible crack." In doing so, however, Schmitt takes a step forward, and clearly aestheticize the violence caused by the sovereign state. In this regard the issue of the aestheticization of violence is inherently conjoined with the question of myth: A myth in which the subjects give up their existential uncertainty regarding the totality of human nature, for the more tolerable tension that is caused by the overwhelming power of the state. Schmitt most certainly reverses the erroneous choice of the myth of Leviathan; his theory replaces it with an overpowering myth: The myth of the political.

The Infamous *Leviathan*: Leo Strauss

Schmitt is by no means the sole conservative critic of modern politics. In the works of his young student, Leo Strauss, the central themes analyzing the character of modernity and explaining how it ultimately led to the "crisis of our time" remain the same. Strikingly, following Schmitt, Strauss also finds the roots of crisis in Hobbes' thought, yet his analysis is substantially different from that of Schmitt. Strauss, in his *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, argues that the original and real foundation of Hobbes's political philosophy is a moral attitude, and not a scientific doctrine and consequently that

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this philosophy is not a naturalistic one[14]. Although this statement may reveal similarities -both see the discrepancies between the moral philosophy and the scientific methodology applied by Hobbes- between the two thinkers, Strauss severely criticizes the fundamentals of Hobbesian moral philosophy, rather than relocating them as Schmitt attempted to do.

In this regard, one of the central concerns of Strauss was to analyze the character of 'modernity' and explain how it ultimately led to the "crisis of our time". This analysis can be understood as a function, yet a simplified function, of the "quarrel between the ancient and the moderns." Strauss, following the tradition of the greatest critics of modernity, warns against the imminent doom and seeks to bring the ancient wisdom back. According to him, from the perspective of old wisdom, the ideas that have been the guiding lights of our civilization are tragically flawed. They need to be supplemented or moderated by the sobriety of the ancients. For Strauss, modernity is fundamentally the subversion of ancient wisdom. More particularly, it is the subversion of the esoteric philosophy. This constitutes the core of Strauss' teaching: to recover the role of the philosophy by pointing out to the impasse of modernity.

The centrality of Hobbes to Strauss's understanding of "the crisis of our time" is evident. First, for Strauss, Hobbes jettisoned the entire tradition of political philosophy oriented toward human excellence, thus freeing the state from any obligation other than safeguarding individual natural rights[15]. As a consequence, he reduced justice to the protection of rights rooted in nature. Second, Hobbes transformed political philosophy

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[14] Strauss, L. 1952. The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis. Translated by E. M. Sinclair. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp: 13-15,123-124.
[15] Strauss, L. 1952. The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis. Translated by E. M. Sinclair. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp:189-94.

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from the search for the highest and best regime (i.e., creating regimes in speech) into a source for political action[16]. Political philosophers in the Hobbessian mode claim an indubitable knowledge, which is universally applicable and would transform the world. Moreover, Strauss believes that the sort of knowledge required in this new age changed, and social science became the science of liberalism to the extent that it exposed conditions as they are. Hobbes presented the vision of political order, fashioned by enlightened humans, capable of actualizing here and now: a just order, created out of mutual consent and dedicated to the protection of natural rights. Political philosophy had become political science –theory had degenerated into *teche*.

Following this account, one could conclude that for Strauss the explanation of the modern crisis lies in the decline of political philosophy in the proper sense. In this respect a deeper examination of the "political philosophy," as Strauss understands it, is necessary. In a functional sense, Strauss defines political philosophy as an activity which seeks knowledge for the purpose of changing the present, as far as practicable. Just as philosophy in general is concerned with replacing opinions (*doxa*) with knowledge (*episteme*), political philosophy is "the attempt to replace opinion about the nature of political things by knowledge of the nature of political things[17]" which is the primary knowledge about the right or good political order. Yet, Strauss also wishes to locate political philosophy historically and to distinguish it from the wider category of political thought. While the latter, he suggests, is "as old as human race and political life itself," the former "appeared as a knowable time in the recorded past" and "has been cultivated

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[16] Strauss, L. 1953. *Natural Right and History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press pp: 34-35, 169-175.
[17] Ibid. pp:11-12.

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since its beginnings almost without any interruption until a relatively short time ago."
Today, political philosophy is in a state of decay and perhaps of putrefaction, if it has not
vanished altogether[18]." As a specific historical phenomenon, political philosophy was
"originated by Socrates" elaborated by Plato and Aristotle, and continued, at least in an
attenuated form, until contemporary times. Hence, political philosophy, Strauss believes
is a branch of philosophy proper.

Hobbes, as Strauss understands him, was not the original break from this classical
conception of political philosophy; it was Machiavelli. However only with Hobbes and
his depiction of Leviathan this break reached its height and became the authoritative
discourse of modernity. The transformation from philosophy proper to politics could only
be successful with Hobbes's abandonment of the "idea of nature." And because he had
accomplished this project so triumphantly," he was compelled to abandon "the idea of
philosophy as the attempt to grasp the eternal[19]." How, then, is the goal of philosophy to
be understood? According to Strauss, it cannot be essentially different from the goal of
politics; it differs only as the teacher of political from its practitioner; it becomes a higher
form of politics. Philosophy, originally the humanizing quest for the eternal order, "has
become a weapon, and hence an instrument."[20] Hobbes took over, through Bacon, the
politicization of philosophy by Machiavelli.

At this point it is useful to underline that Strauss's main criticism to Hobbes is the
element in his thought that paves the way for the conversion of philosophy into politics.
Strauss is clearly occupied with preservation of philosophy. Hobbessian politics, he

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[18] Ibid., 12-13, 17.
[19] Ibid. pp: 12.
[20] Ibid. pp: 34-5.

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asserts, denies the antagonistic relationship between philosophy and politics by renouncing the quest for the true knowledge of the things as a false project. The outcome, according to Strauss, is the transformation of philosophy into a form of ideology or propaganda.

According to Strauss, Hobbes, together with Locke, began three waves of modern liberal thinking that led to him the confluence of philosophy and politics and the destruction of public certitude in the good society.[21] This first wave of modern philosophy put forwards an idea of natural right and promoted a vision of a good society, of the "ought." In other words, Hobbes was the first modern thinker to turn his attention back to the essential question of the philosophy again. However, for Strauss, these were debased visions of the political good, whereby philosophy utilized rational, scientific precepts to espouse a polity in which the political was identified with strict individualism.

Therefore, Strauss turns his face to a meticulous study of what he calls "the great tradition." His purpose is to revive the true meaning of philosophy proper, which could be the only true remedy for "the crises of our time." It should be noted that Hobbes was Strauss' first comprehensive, modern political philosopher. Hobbes's influence on Strauss, particularly with regard to his lifelong quest for the old Socratic question of "What is philosophy?" is undeniable.

The Skeptic's *Leviathan*: Michael Oakeshott

Oakeshott, the well-known critic of political rationalism, like Schmitt, is in

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[21] Strauss, L. 1975. "Three Waves of Modernity," in *Political Philosophy: Six Essays by Leo Strauss*. H. Gilden (ed.) Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill. pp: 82.

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agreement with Strauss: it was Hobbes who marked a fundamental break from ancient and medieval political philosophy by posing individual will, instead of natural law, as the basis for politics. However, contrary to the common view that places Hobbes and his theory as synonymous with political rationalism, Oakeshott's interpretation of Hobbes is strikingly different. For Oakeshott, Hobbes was a philosophical rationalist, not a political rationalist[22]. The difference between the two notions is remarkable since this also reveals the fundamentals of Oakeshott's unique interpretation of Hobbes, as illustrated in his introductory essay on *Leviathan*.

The established contrast between philosophical and political rationalism in Oakeshott's account also refers to another divergence of his thought from popular interpretations of Hobbes. The identification of Hobbes's philosophy with the beginning of modern social science puts him in the tradition following Bacon's empirical and inductive science. However, Oakeshott rejects any simple relationship between Hobbes's philosophy and modern empirical science. For Oakeshott, Hobbes is not one of the founders of a new philosophy of materialism or scientific mechanism, but one of the last medieval, Scotist nominalists[23]. In other words, instead of understanding Hobbes as a revolutionary against this scholastic tradition, Oakeshott asserts that he is indeed its inheritor. This interpretation clearly distinguishes Oakeshott's understanding of Hobbes from the Schmittian and Straussian versions.

It is important to understand that by placing Hobbes into a tradition of

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[22] Oakeshott M. 1991. "Introduction to Leviathan." in M. Oakeshott. *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*. ed. by T. Fuller. Indianapolis: Liberty Funds pp: 236, 244-45.

[23] Oakeshott M. 1991. "Introduction to Leviathan." pp: 239, 244, "The Moral Life in the Writings of Thomas Hobbes" pp: 299, 304-5, in M. Oakeshott. *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*. ed. by T. Fuller. Indianapolis: Liberty Funds.

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scholasticism Oakeshott draws the framework of his entire analysis. It is a tradition of thinkers from St. Augustine through the medieval British nominalists, to Montaigne, Pascal, and on to Kant, a tradition supremely aware of the limits of philosophic reason. For Oakeshott the significance of Hobbes lies in his being the first thorough expositor of an alternative to the rational-natural tradition which he associates with Plato and Aristotle and the natural-law theorists who followed them. Hobbes, according to Oakeshott, by being the heir of the nominalist-skeptic tradition explores political life in terms of the master conceptions of "will and artifice[24]". Thus, the fundamental reason behind interpreting Hobbes's methodology out of the orthodox school is precisely for pointing out his skepticism about the limits of human nature, a nature which was motivated by two powerful feelings of 'pride' and 'fear'. For Oakeshott it is true that in spite of man's moral imperfection, he is powerful enough to create a civilized life out of the fears and compulsions that belong to his nature. However, in the final analysis the myth of *Leviathan* appears with an emphasis on the flaws of man; "it recalls man to his littleness, his imperfection and his mortality[25]." Therefore Oakeshott concludes that "the world is the best of all possible worlds, and everything in it is a necessary evil[26]".

It is not surprising that in Hobbes, "who was born is in fear, and died in mortal fear of hellfire," Oakeshott discovers a kindred spirit. Hobbes was the most skeptical of a century of skeptics. Oakeshott believes that Hobbes's masterpiece, *Leviathan*, is one of

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[24] Oakeshott M. 1991. "Introduction to Leviathan." in M. Oakeshott. *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*. ed. by T. Fuller. Indianapolis: Liberty Funds pp: 227-28.

[25] Oakeshott, M. 1975. "Leviathan: *a myth*" in M. Oakeshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association*. Oxford: Blackwell. pp:154.

[26] Oakeshott M. 1991. "Rationalism in Politics" in M. Oakeshott. *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*. ed. by T. Fuller. Indianapolis: Liberty Funds pp: 30-33.

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the greatest literary expressions of the Christian myth of the fall of man through pride[27].

This great myth has fed two streams of thought. In one, man is conceived as a proud, self-sufficient and heroic figure; in the other he is a creature frustrated in his helplessness, tragic in his loneliness. For Oakeshott, to this latter tradition Hobbes belongs. Although Hobbes, according to Oakeshott, thought that man as an individual possesses the natural right of following without reservation the dicta of his ego, nevertheless he affirmed that the social condition of man renders this impossible, if human life is the ultimate value, and if a disastrous war of all against all is to be avoided. Hobbes reasoned that the egoism of man is not a defect, i.e. the burden of sin, but in accord with the natural order of things. In Oakeshott's words "man is, by nature, the victim of solipsism, he is an *individua substantia* distinguished by incommunicability.[28]"

In order to guarantee the peace and security necessary for creative thought and action, and in order to preserve his identity, Hobbes made man surrender his natural right to civil society for the establishment of a *defendor pacis*. The L*eviathan,* Oakeshott maintains, is the supreme expression of the tradition to which the contemporary existentialists belong. However, their affection and their self-conscious effort at novelty tend to obscure a vision that Hobbes saw and depicted succinctly[29].

Oakeshott denies that man's imperfectability id a "tragedy"[30]. It is only human nature. What must be taken as the actual tragedy is indeed "the natural condition of man."

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[27] Oakeshott M. 1991. "Introduction to Leviathan." in M. Oakeshott. *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*. ed. by T. Fuller. Indianapolis: Liberty Funds pp: 232-33.
[28] Ibid. pp:233.
[29] Oakeshott, M. 1947. "The Collective Dream of Civilization," *The Listener*. 37: 966-67.
[30] Oakeshott, M. 1948. "Scientific Politics," *Cambridge Journal* 1: 352-363.

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Therefore for Oakeshott politics cannot and should not stem from any "rationalistic" creed concerning the primacy of man's reason or the perfect ability of his nature. On the contrary, it needs to evolve from a radical doubt of man's capabilities and good intentions. Politics, thus, represent an effort to thwart the tyranny of a single individual, and to prevent great concentrations of power.

Inspired by Hobbes skepticism, Oakeshott's works identifies 'political rationalism' as its greatest opponent. In general what he understands from political rationalism is the attempt the authority of all tradition, custom, prejudice, habit or inherited convention. For him it is the desire to call everything into question. Rationalism in politics, according to Oakeshott, is the principal obstacle in the way to perceive the world in which the appreciation for the things inherited from the past appears as most humanly orientation. This orientation, for Oakeshott, values tradition, prescription and continuity while stressing the intricacies of human practice that defy formulation in explicit rules.

Then the task of politics, Oakeshott argues, is to enhance consistency to overcome the predicament of the natural condition of mankind, i.e. constant conflict. It appears that Hobbes's prescription for stability is utmost important to Oakeshott. For him in politics, "man sail in a boundless and bottomless sea; there is neither starting-place nor appointed destination. The enterprise is to keep afloat on an even keel[31]." In other words, the only possible value of the political action is to take part in an effort to keep the boat sailing.

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[31] M. Oakeshott. 1991 *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*. ed. by T. Fuller. Indianapolis: Liberty Funds. pp: 127.

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Hence, manners, customs and all alike are the indispensable elements in Oakeshott's politics.

Ironically, Oakeshott finds in Hobbes the foundations of his insistence on a conservative disposition in politics. It is true that *Leviathan* is the redefinition of the Christian myth of fall. But for Oakeshott, Hobbes transforms this myth by drawing upon the elements of the original and by reestablishing them. Hobbes, therefore, is not only the source of skepticism Oakeshott's thought, but also paradoxically the very source of his conservative disposition.

Conclusion

In this paper I intended to provide a brief account of conservative thought in the works of three figures, Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss, and Michael Oakeshott. In this respect two implicit arguments constituted the axis of my paper. First, the conservative political thought (or 'disposition' if I use Oakeshott's term) springs from the radically restrained answer to the question of "What is the nature of knowledge? Second, in providing an answer to this question, conservative thinkers –who indicate profound differences in the way they understand *the political*- share a common assumption that understand human nature as both morally and intellectually imperfect. The works of Schmitt, Strauss, and Oakeshott which demonstrate intense discrepancies, yet share an intellectual merit, are outstanding examples of reflections of these points. I argue that what brings these three thinkers together is a remarkable concern for the 'evil' in human nature, which was prominently manifested in the famous work of Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*. In other words, it is a well-known myth, the myth of modern state that constitutes the common ground of Schmitt, Strauss, and Oakeshott and their criticisms of modern world.