Bradleyan Idealism and the Political Theory of Michael Oakeshott

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Introduction

Along with figures like Isaiah Berlin, John Rawls, Friedrich Hayek, Eric Voegelin, Hannah Arendt and Robert Nozick, Michael Oakeshott was one of the most renowned political theorists of the twentieth century. Yet there persists a certain uncertainty about the precise character of his intellectual legacy. Interpreting Oakeshott is a difficult task. For example, Barber(See Barber, 1988) interprets Oakeshott's thought as being prejudiced against genuinely democratic politics, while Minch views Oakeshott's thought as championing a discursive form of democratic politics.(See Minch, 2009) Much of Oakeshott's work took the form of essays, and differing interpretations of his thought tend to focus on different essays. Interpreters inclined to see a link between his conservatism and the rise of neo-conservatism, for example, tend to focus on essays like "The Political Economy of Freedom"(See Oakeshott, 1962pp. 37-58), while interpreters viewing him as a contributor to aesthetic and religious discussions tend to emphasize essays like "The Tower of Babel"(See Oakeshott, 1962, pp. 59-79) and "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind"(See Oakeshott, 1962, pp. 197-247). The following discussion will tend to adhere more closely to the latter view than to the former. Oakeshott is identified with a critique of rationalism in politics, his assimilation of politics to the metaphor of conversation, and for his argument that politics in a democratic state should be closer, in terms of ideal-types, to a civil association, characterized by the absence of a specific shared purpose, than to an enterprise association, characterized by the presence of a declared shared purpose. Was Oakeshott a liberal, a conservative, a skeptic, an idealist or even something else? A recent resurgence of scholarly interest in his work has led to some fascinating discussions of this question but no definitive conclusion. Oakeshott has been conventionally described as a conservative. Devigne, for example, identifies Oakeshott as a conservative.(See Devigne, 1994) While suggesting that Oakeshott's reliance on tradition rather than ideologies or institutions may be inadequate, Quinton, nevertheless, insists that Oakeshott should be viewed as a conservative.(See Quinton, 1978, pp. 90-96) On occasion, Oakeshott so described himself but, on other occasions, he seems to have been less comfortable with the label. Many of the values he defends and seeks to conserve are essentially liberal values. Franco sees Oakeshott as a proponent of essentially liberal values.(See Franco, 1990; and Franco, 2004) Oakeshott clearly emphasized in his thought the vital character of freedom. In a couple of essays, he suggests some affinity for the values associated with neo-conservatism but more typically he seemed to distance himself from neo-conservatism in favour of something closer to traditional British conservatism. Even here, however, it is not clear whether he was more of a tory or a whig. His early work especially reflects the influence of the British idealist tradition, especially that of F.H. Bradley but much of his work also seems to reflect the influence of a tradition of skepticism. Gerencser emphasizes the element of scepticism in Oakeshott's thought.(See Gerencser, 2000) Focussing on the relations among contingency, modality and civility in Oakeshott's thought, Nardin writes, "I have tried to show that Oakeshott's most significant contributions as a thinker are philosophical, not practical, that his interests range far beyond the boundaries of politics as it is ordinarily understood, and that the very idea of politics is one he came to disparage as largely incoherent."(Nardin, 2001, p. 230) This essay will not aim to resolve the question. It is hoped that it will represent an initial step in a research program that will shed light on the question. This essay will examine the influence of the idealist tradition, especially as represented by F.H. Bradley, on the development of Oakeshott's political thought. Oakeshott may be and has been examined from liberal, conservative and skeptical perspectives and to some degree from idealist perspectives. At this point, the objective is not to argue for the superiority or the particular appropriateness of the idealist perspective but simply to consider whether an examination from this perspective might help to clarify aspects of Oakeshott's thought or to draw attention to aspects otherwise neglected.

The British idealists were a number of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century British thinkers who, whether or not they viewed themselves as Hegelians and/or Kantians, nevertheless acknowledged that they shared a critical view of the then prevailing empiricist and materialist philosophical tradition in Britain, finding elements in the Hegelian critique of that tradition which they could employ in their own work. While differing in some respects, the appellation was and is conventionally applied to a group of thinkers including T.H. Green(1836-1882), Edward Caird(1835-1908), F.H. Bradley(1846-1924), Bernard

Bosanquet(1848-1923), David Ritchie(1853-1903), J.M.E. McTaggart(1866-1925) and Henry Jones(1852-1922), as well as more recently and somewhat more debatably R.G. Collingwood(1889-1943) and Michael Oakeshott(1901-1990). Boucher and Vincent note that "Despite internal divisions of opinion, Idealism was a philosophy that was deeply responsive to many of the concerns of Victorian and Edwardian Britain. It directly addressed many of the religious anxieties of the time. It provided a coherent and attractive alternative to conventional utilitarian and naturalistic thought." (Boucher and Vincent, 2000, p. 3) The British idealists challenged the conventional caricature of their position by suggesting that they did, in fact, not deny the existence of rocks and trees and physical objects external to themselves. They did take the view that the human mind does not simply represent a blank slate, an absolutely neutral entity moulded only and entirely by sensations from interaction with an external world. In the late nineteenth century, thinkers like Jowett, Caird, Green, Bradley, Bosanquet and others presented ideas new to Britain, many of them inspired by readings of Kant and Hegel, to students and readers. In the late nineteenth century, these ideas were spread in philosophy by works like Bradley's Ethical Studies(Bradley, 1927) and Green's Prologemena to Ethics(Green, 1883), and in politics by works like Green's Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation(Green, 1895) and Bosanquet's The Philosophical Theory of the State(Bosanquet, 1910). In spite of some apparent differences, the British idealists shared certain attitudes, among them the view that the apparent conflict between individualism and collectivism could be reconciled through some sort of dialectic such that the limitations of either individualism or collectivism could be avoided and individuals could recognize that finding their true selves could only be accomplished in a community but one that did not suppress individuals' true selves. One can see this dissatisfaction with classical liberalism's individualism and utilitarianism in the development most prominently associated with Green but not exclusive to him of what may be referred to as reform or new liberalism, an expression of liberalism that did not see attention to the "common good" as necessarily either a disingenuous cover for authoritarianism or a well-intentioned but misguided step along a slippery slope to authoritarianism. Connelly observes that ". . . the idealists were united in their opposition to positivism, naturalism, and empiricism. They argued for an a priori element in knowledge; they had a preference for holistic explanations and rejected various forms of atomism; and they repudiated the claims of formal logic. In broad terms, then, they tended to oppose the same things, shared some common interests, and shared some positive doctrines."(Connelly, 2007, p. 249) From the 1920s on, the British idealist school lost much of its influence and standing although figures like Oakeshott and Collingwood continued to have some influence in spite of being associated with a school that was clearly no longer in fashion.

F.H. Bradley and his Thought

　　　Paradoxically, given the focus of this paper on Bradley's influence on political philosophy, Bradley wrote very little specifically on politics. Nicholson remarks that "What Bradley denies, however, is that political philosophy provides the kind of principles from which practical policies or decisions can be deduced in particular cases. This does not commit him to saying that philosophy has no other bearing on politics; nor does he in fact divorce philosophy from politics."(Nicholson, 1984, p. 128) Others among the British idealists, like Green and Bosanquet, displayed much more interest in politics both as a subject for reflection and writing, and as an object of practical involvement in society than did Bradley, although poor health may have precluded Bradley from actively engaging in the sort of social work common among the British idealists. Disproportionately, the British idealists came from Evangelical backgrounds. With the advance of scientific work, like that of Darwin on evolution, and the development of Scriptural scholarship, such people were confronted with the issue of whether and how to reconcile religious belief with these intellectual currents. Those who were attracted to idealism were characterized by varying degrees of dissatisfaction with the Evangelical movement's focus on personal salvation, and by a commitment to the presupposition that intellectual rigour meant that in principle there need be no disjunction between the realm of reason and that of revelation. In other words, for the British idealists, it was not necessary to choose between unquestioning confidence in the authority of faith and tradition, on the one hand, and agnosticism or atheism, on the other. Vincent and Plant suggest that:

　　　　　Religion was a critical aspect of the metaphysical basis of Idealist theories of politics, and
　　　　　paradoxically it is religion which provided the Idealists with the link between metaphysics
　　　　　and politics. The Idealists situated their view of collective action, the common good and
　　　　　freedom within a metaphysical theory which claimed to state, in a more rational form, the

real essence of Christianity and to do this in a way which largely by-passed the historical basis of that religion --- a basis which was being increasingly contested during the second half of the nineteenth century.(Vincent and Plant, 1984, p. 6)

The idealists believed that individuals could only truly attain their genuine selves in community with others. Without entirely regarding themselves as either Hegelians or Kantians, they consciously appropriated elements from the thought of Hegel and/or Kant. As Taylor observes, while their thought and work reflect the influence of Hegel's thought, they differed, nevertheless in some respects from Hegel. (See Taylor, 1975, especially Chapter 20, "Hegel Today") In the thought of Green, for example, the Evangelical focus on personal salvation is supplanted by a version of the Social Gospel. In the case of Bradley, Richter observes that ". . . the difference between Green and Bradley was one of temperament, the one modifying and rephrasing, the other, rejecting their parental Evangelicalism. Green always preferred to comprehend rather than to exclude; Bradley's thought can best be understood, as Mr. Richard Wollheim has convincingly argued, in terms of a series of negative reactions to positions he found unsatisfactory."(Richter, 1964, p. 38)

Bradley's two best-known works are Ethical Studies, originally published in 1876, and Appearance and Reality, originally published in 1893. It would be a mistake in the case of Bradley or of any of the British idealists to interpret their work as straightforward adoption and application of Hegel's dialectic. Each tended to use some form of dialectic, and Bradley's is probably closest to that of Hegel but none literally adopted Hegel's. Interpreting Bradley's thought is especially difficult because, as Wollheim notes, Bradley advanced his argument both critically and dialectically.(See Wollheim, 1959) In other words, Bradley outlines arguments that have been commonly put forward, subjecting each to critique and frequently finding arguments wanting as being one-sided before developing a position that is presumed to reconcile opposing one-sided positions. Bradley rejects the empiricist tradition which works from an understanding of mind and sensation. This, the idealists contended, reduced logic to psychologism. Wilson observes that "Idealists did not deny the outward reality of things. They were setting out to demonstrate that, pace Locke, the human mind is not a blank on to which sensations are projected as magic lantern slides might be shown on a screen. Rather, the human mind --- and more, our capacity to perceive --- edits and to some degree creates what we see."(Wilson, 2003, p. 569) The empiricist tradition assumes that from an accumulation of facts one can infer the nature of reality. Bradley, in contrast, argues that, while such inferences tell us something about appearances, their inherently partial and one-sided character constrains the capacity to move beyond appearance towards reality. Bradley asserts that reality can only be comprehended as a whole, even though in practice there exist various distinct modes through which experience may be approached. He acknowledges the influence of Hegel but is careful to avoid labels like idealist or Hegelian. In the final chapter of Appearance and Reality, for example, he writes, "The conclusion which we have reached, I trust, the outcome of no mere compromise, makes a claim to reconcile extremes. Whether it is to be called Realism or Idealism I do not know, and I have not cared to inquire. It neither puts ideas and thought first, nor again does it permit us to assert that anything else by itself is more real."(Bradley, 1897, p. 485) Bradley concludes the chapter by writing, "There is a great saying of Hegel's, a saying too well-known, and one which without some explanation I should not like to endorse. But I will end with something not very different, something perhaps more certainly the essential message of Hegel. Outside of spirit, there is not, and there cannot be, any reality, and, the more that anything is spiritual, so much the more is it veritably real."(Bradley, 1897, p. 489) Appearance and Reality is also of relevance to the consideration of Oakeshott's work for the discussion of modes of experience. Bradley, for example, writes, "We have found that no one aspect of experience, as such, is real. None is primary, or can serve to explain the others or the whole. They are all alike appearances, all one-sided, and passing away beyond themselves."(Bradley, 1897, p. 429) Bradley observes, "We have now surveyed the different regions of experience, and have found each to be imperfect. We certainly cannot say that the Absolute is any one of them. On the other hand each can be seen to be insufficient and inconsistent, because it is not also, and as well, the rest."(Bradley, 1897, pp. 412-413)

In his Ethical Studies, Bradley works in a similar fashion. First, he puts forward both the determinist and free-will positions on morality. Of course, if determinism applies, then persons have no discretion to exercize, and discussing moral deliberation becomes pointless. On the other hand, to suggest that free will is entirely unfettered seems implausible. As he typically does, Bradley finds the opposing positions each one-sided, and seeks to develop a position that reconciles them without seeming a mere compromise. Bradley then examines two approaches to moral deliberation. One suggests that morality is a subjective

matter arrived at as a product of intuition. The other suggests that moral deliberation can be approached scientifically through a utilitarian calculation aiming at maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. This latter approach was associated with liberals like Bentham, James Mill and John Stuart Mill. Bradley critiques the position advanced by John Stuart Mill, and appends a note critiquing the position advanced by Sidgwick in his Methods of Ethics published in 1874 while Bradley was writing Ethical Studies. The debate that followed between Bradley and Sidgwick is encapsulated by Boucher and Vincent who suggest that ". . . Bradley and Sidgwick reveal, in the course of the debate, the strengths and weaknesses of nineteenth-century utilitarian and communitarian perspectives."(Boucher and Vincent, 2000, p. 82) Boucher and Vincent assert that Bradley ". . . represents a more distinct anti-theoretical strand in moral philosophy, also identifiable in current writers like Bernard Williams or Alasdair MacIntyre, and from a different angle in Michael Oakeshott, which suggests that rationalist moral philosophy is part of the problem, rather than the solution."(Boucher and Vincent, 2000, p. 81)

Bradley proceeds to consider ideas like "duty for duty's sake", finding elements that can be developed but also ways in which once subjected to critique such notions remain, nevertheless, one-sided. The most often cited chapter is the fifth, "My Station and its Duties". Based on this chapter, some see Bradley as an arch-conservative but here, too, Bradley should be seen as thinking on paper. Some, like Sidgwick, suggest that Bradley contradicts himself by criticizing some of the arguments implied by the notion of "My Station and its Duties". Bradley, however, is deliberate, rather than careless, in doing so, writing that "If put forth as that beyond which we do not need to go, as the end in itself, it is open to very serious objections, some of which we must now develop."(Bradley, 1927, p. 202) Nicholson challenges the common interpretation of Bradley, typically based on a reading of the fifth chapter, as an arch-conservative, maintaining that "If one asked whether Bradley's theory as a whole supports conservatism or radicalism, one could argue as hard for the latter as the critics do for the former. The idea of self-realisation as a full and conscious member of a truly infinite whole seems to imply, for instance, strong support for democratic government; and it is significant that Bosanquet both endorses the premises and conclusions of Ethical Studies and argues for democracy and the extension of the franchise."(Nicholson, 1990, p. 40)

As was the case with a number of Bradley's fellow idealists, his approaches reflect the influence of notions of process and development inspired at least in part by the emergence in sciences like biology and paleontology of the theory of evolution. For Bradley, humans are always engaging in development as an act of self-re-creation. Morality entails, he asserts, the conscious pursuit of the good. The result, according to Bradley, is that "Morality is an endless process, and therefore a self-contradiction; and, being such, it does not remain standing in itself, but feels the impulse to transcend its existing reality."(Bradley, 1927, p. 313) In his discussion of Bosanquet's views on religion, Sprigge observes that "His [Bosanquet's] answer is much the same as Bradley's in Ethical Studies, that the essential difference between mere morality and morality united with religion is that in morality the good is simply something to be sought, whereas religion adds to this the belief, sense, or faith that it is somehow already eternally there as a component of reality."(Sprigge, 2007, p. 197)

For Bradley, morality is a rational activity aiming at the realization of the ideal self. Milne remarks that, for Bradley, "Morality is a way of acting in which the self or personal identity of the moral agent is realized."(Milne, 1962, p. 59) In other words, it is less concerned with the issue of pursuing certain means in order to bring about certain ends, such issues being seen as calling for a degree of practical knowledge that is outside the expertise of the moral philosopher, than with the implications of decisions and conduct for the formation of character and the affirmation of the self. Wollheim notes that, for Bradley, "To expect the moral philosopher to pontificate on moral matters qua moral philosopher involves a serious theoretical error: that of confusing two entirely different kinds of judgment, reflective and intuitive."(Wollheim, 1959, p. 249) Bradley wishes to avoid the suggestion that morality is about the conduct of individuals in isolation. For Bradley, an individual in isolation is not fully human. To live morally and to realize one's ideal self requires living with others as a member of a family, a community and a nation. Bradley suggests in "My Station and its Duties" that living a genuinely moral life as a social being requires an appreciation of obligations owed to society. Bradley's subsequent discussion makes clear that, while such obligations are necessary, they do not exhaust one's moral obligations.

From Bradley to Oakeshott

To suggest a connection between Bradley and Oakeshott reflects not a great leap. In Experience and its Modes, Oakeshott acknowledges Bradley's influence, pointing out that his approach ". . . derives all that is valuable in it from its affinity to what is known by the somewhat ambiguous name of Idealism, and that the works from which I am conscious of having learnt most are Hegel's Phänomenologie des Geistes and Bradley's Appearance and Reality."(Oakeshott, 1933, p. 6) Franco observes that "Nothing seemed deader at this particular moment, especially in Cambridge, than the absolute idealism of Bradley and Hegel, having been demolished by the criticisms of Moore and Russell."(Franco, 2004, p. 24) Oakeshott acknowledges that he is, at least, out of fashion, noting, "I am aware that in these days many readers will require no other evidence than this confession to condemn my view out of hand. For the abuse which was formerly the lot of philosophy in general is now reserved for philosophical Idealism, which (it is the common opinion) is decadent, if not already dead."(Oakeshott, 1933, p.6) In Experience and its Modes, one finds again understandings expressed by Bradley. Oakeshott insists that ". . . experience (by which I mean the single and indivisible whole within which experiencing and what is experienced have their place) is always a world. . . . What is given in experience is single and significant, a One and not a Many."(Oakeshott, 1933, p. 322) He further insists that ". . . experience implies thought or judgment; it is always and everywhere a world of ideas. Sensation, perception, intuition, feeling and volition are never independent kinds of experience, they are different levels or degrees of judgment."(Oakeshott, 1933, pp. 322-323) Like Bradley, Oakeshott maintains that the experiential world is essentially a single whole, and argues that coherence is the applicable criterion for assessing truth. As a practical matter, however, both concede that there exist distinct modes of approaching this world of experience but maintain that a given mode represents an abstraction from the real world of experience, partial in itself. In Experience and its Modes, Oakeshott discusses scientific, historical and practical modes, each of which captures a partial sense of experience. Nevertheless, he declares, "I have nowhere pretended that the whole actual or possible modification of experience is confined to the three modes which I have chosen to consider in detail. History, Science and Practice were selected, not because between them they comprise the total possibility of arrest in experience, but merely because they appeared to be the chief among the more highly organized worlds of abstract experience at the present time."(Oakeshott, 1933, p. 331)

As an aside, it may be noted that Collingwood's Speculum Mentis (Collingwood, 1924), while referring to forms and genuses rather than modes, can be read as adopting a similar approach except insofar as Collingwood sees philosophy as being concerned with the determination of a hierarchy of modes. Franco notes that "Published some nine years before Experience and its Modes, Speculum Mentis bears a number of striking resemblances to Oakeshott's book. It too is cast in the form of a philosophy of the forms of experience. And it too draws heavily on the tradition of idealist thought I have sketched above."(Franco, 1990, p. 20) Their particular approaches to the understanding of experience led Bradley in The Presuppositions of Critical History(Bradley, 1935; Bradley, 1968), Collingwood in the work posthumously compiled in The Idea of History(Collingwood, 1946), and Oakeshott in Experience and its Modes(Oakeshott, 1933) and in On History and other essays(Oakeshott, 1983) to reflect on the philosophy of history. Of course, this was not entirely coincidental. Hegel's attention to notions of history and process was one of his attributes that attracted the British idealists attempting to reconcile notions of development and evolution emerging in biology from the work of Darwin and in geology from the work of Hutton and Lyell with religion. Rubinoff suggests that "Collingwood considered that the separation between thought and immediate experience which marred the philosophy of Bradley was overcome in the philosophy of M.B. Oakeshott. In Oakeshott's philosophy, as represented by Collingwood, experience is defined as a concrete whole consisting of both subject and object and containing within itself both thought and mediation. As a result, reality is no longer divided into that which knows but cannot be known and that which is known but cannot know."(Rubinoff, 1970, p. 357) Nardin(See Nardin, 2001, pp. 2-3) suggests that Oakeshott's consideration of the role of contingency, as distinct from either accident or necessity, in historical understanding led to the extensive consideration of contingency in the effort to theorize about human conduct in On Human Conduct.(Oakeshott, 1975a) It is also interesting, although it remains unclear what to make of it especially since it has been suggested that Oakeshott authored his introductory essay for Leviathan simply because other titles in the series of editions of classics in political theory had already been assigned(See Franco, 2004, p. 10), that both Collingwood(See Collingwood, 1942) and Oakeshott(See, for example, the essays included in Oakeshott, 1975b) would ultimately become profoundly inspired by Hobbes.

The point is not to suggest that there are no differences between Bradley and Oakeshott but to make the point that Oakeshott carried on the notion of distinct modes of experience, partial abstractions from

concrete experience in themselves but essentially autonomous from each other. The outcome of this is the view that philosophy per se can say little directly in regard to what should or should not be done in the practical sphere. Franco observes that "All of this suggests a view about the irrelevance of theory to practice that was deeply at odds with the reformist outlook of British idealism but was to be embraced enthusiatically by Oakeshott."(Franco, 2004, p. 28) Similarly, Boucher and Vincent, in their survey of British idealists, write that "In marked contrast with other Idealists in this book, with the exception of Bradley, and probably more faithful to the spirit of Hegel, Oakeshott declares philosophy, or any theoretical mode such as history or science, incapable of offering injunctions for practical conduct. The world of practice to which politics, religion and the moral life belong is modally distinct, and generates its own prescriptive conclusions for action."(Boucher and Vincent, 2000, p. 214) McIntyre similarly emphasizes the manner in which Oakeshott's understanding of the possibilities and limitations of philosophy helped to shape his notions of political philosophy.(See McIntyre, 2004) In his Ethical Studies, Bradley expresses doubts about the capacity of the philosopher as philosopher to provide guidance in regard to practical matters, or, for that matter, for rationalist approaches to provide means or techniques for dealing with issues in the sphere of practice, and Oakeshott expresses similar reservations. Fuller notes that, for Oakeshott, "Philosophy is the engagement of continuous re-examining and, therefore, has no platform of its own of which it is not at the same time resolutely critical. As a consequence, philosophy can offer no guidance to anyone."(Fuller, 1993, p. 24) In his essay "The Concept of a Philosophy of Politics", Oakeshott writes that "A philosophy of politics, then, is unable to give guidance for action, and it cannot be supposed to fail as a philosophy because it fails to give guidance for action."(Oakeshott, 1993, p. 137) Throughout Oakeshott's work, one sees reference to this theme.

It underlies his critique of rationalism in politics. Oakeshott asserts that the rationalist commits the error of failing to recognize that practical knowledge represents craft, and requires a feel for the object of that craft capable of adjusting to complex and transitory circumstances. The rationalist, Oakeshott argues, denigrates the demands of such knowledge, seeking to supplant it with technical knowledge or what might be termed book knowledge. He writes that ". . . Rationalism is the assertion that what I have called practical knowledge is not knowledge at all, the assertion that, properly speaking, there is no knowledge which is not technical knowledge."(Oakeshott, 1962, p. 11) Wells argues that Oakeshott's critique of rationalism as a threat not only to traditions that might be wanting but to all traditions is related to the concern of the British idealists that empiricist science might undermine not only non-empiricist approaches to knowledge and understanding that might be inadequate but all non-empiricist approaches to knowledge and understanding.(See Wells, 1994) The rationalist, as depicted by Oakeshott, is guilty of the mistake of confusing distinct modes, trying to alter one mode by subjecting it to standards and formulations proper to quite different modes. Not only do such concerns pervade many of the essays in Oakeshott's Rationalism in Politics but they remain prominent in his later work. In On Human Conduct, they underlay his distinction between the theorist and the theoretician who Oakeshott depicts as ". . . a fraudulent tutor; and the certificates he issues are counterfeit, acceptable only by those who share his belief in the truth of his theorems and share also his delusions about their character."(Oakeshott, 1975a, pp. 26-27) In The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism, a manuscript found among Oakeshott's papers at the time of his death and published posthumously, these concerns are reflected in his critique of ideological politics.(Oakeshott, 1996)

All of this produces a paradoxical situation that contributes to the difficulty in interpreting Oakeshott's thought. On the one hand, the notion that philosophy cannot recommend practical courses of action almost necessarily exercizes a "conservative" influence on thought, indicating that practice and tradition should be conceded a certain deference. Oakeshott critcizes a political morality of rationalism founded on abstract principles, and contrasts it with a political morality of habit and sentiment which he sees as more appropriate to the practical world of politics. This leads to at least a "conservatism" of sentiment, a preference for tradition not predicated so much on a Burkean reverence for tradition as on a Augustinian or Humean skepticism. It also leads to a critique of any sort of ideological politics, including an ideological conservatism. While Straussians and Voegelinnians find such a conservatism lacking, others find Oakeshott's approach to conservatism appealing. Sullivan, for example, observes that "This radical acceptance of what we cannot know for sure is what he put at the heart of his idea of the conservative temperament, and it is why many modern, and especially American, conservatives find him so difficult a figure. This disposition is alien to them: it is fickle, aloof, humane, where they are consistent, engaged, and rationalist. Oakeshott couldn't care less about politics as such, who wins and loses, what is now vulgarly called the 'battle of ideas'."(Sullivan, 2006, pp. 198-199) Not all share Sullivan's enthusiasm. Barber, for

example, suggests that Oakeshott's approach conceals an implicit foundation thicker in its commitments than even Oakeshott himself appreciates.(See Barber, 1988, Chapter 6, "Conserving Politics: Michael Oakeshott and the Conversation of Political Theory") Covell, in contrast, questions whether even such limited conclusions as Oakeshott expresses --- the preference for civil association over enterprise association as a model for the political sphere, for example --- are supportable on the basis of Oakeshott's, as Covell interprets him, neutralist principles.(See Covell, 1986, Chapter 4, "Michael Oakeshott")

Like the idealists in general, Oakeshott views morality and politics as being intimately linked, and like the idealists and like the position enunciated by Bradley specifically, Oakeshott sees morality in terms of self-realization. Oakeshott also carries over from Bradley the notion of experience as being necessarily contingent. Morality is the conscious pursuit of the good by the human will, according to the British idealists. Persons, from this perspective, engage in self-creation. There are, however, differences between Bradley's understanding of morality and Oakeshott's. Bradley maintains that in seeking to act morally persons are defining themselves, actualizing and revealing their essential natures. Oakeshott adopts a more complicated position. Isaacs observes that "Morality has no 'end' for Bradley save that of 'self-realisation'. . . . However, where Bradley writes of realising 'the' self, implying a 'true' self, Oakeshott discusses realising 'a' self."(Isaacs, 2006, p. 49) In On Human Conduct, Oakeshott suggests that ". . . conduct is not only actions related to the achievement of imagined and wished-for outcomes, although it is always this. It is, also, actions in respect of being exploits in the self-enactment of agents; that is, actions understood in terms of the motives in which they are performed."(Oakeshott, 1975a, p. 70) Oakeshott goes on to observe that ". . . moral conduct is not only agents engaging in transactions with one another in the recognition of the authority of considerations to be subscribed to in choosing and seeking satisfactions, it is also an agent enacting himself in terms of the motives in which he permits himself to act."(Oakeshott, 1975a, p. 70) Oakeshott views conduct as reflecting deliberation on the part of independent agents in the face of contingent circumstances. He distinguishes between "conduct as self-disclosure" in the case of which conduct reflects a deliberate calculation of seeking some desired end in the face of the uncertainty posed by contingent circumstances (in such cases, conduct is undertaken as a means to some anticipated end.), and "conduct as self-enactment" in the case of which conduct is undertaken not as a means to some other end but for its own sake. (See Oakeshott, 1975a, p. 73) Because "conduct as self-enactment" reflects conduct defined by motive uncompromised by calculations of contingency and the possible responses of other agents, it can be especially revealing about the nature of self. One can identify throughout Oakeshott's work an interest in spheres like religion, poetry and aesthetics which would have seemed to an outside observer as occasional, perhaps eccentric and unsystematic, interests until the publication late in his career of On Human Conduct at which point Oakeshott related notions raised earlier in essays like "Religion and the Moral Life"(See Oakeshott, 1993a, pp. 39-45), "Religion and the World"(See Oakeshott, 1993a, pp. 27-38) and "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind"(See Oakeshott, 1962, pp. 197-247) more methodically to his overall approach to politics and philosophy.

This is an aspect of Oakeshott's thought that has recently attracted attention from a number of commentators. Worthington, for example, asserts that "Oakeshott's account of the self reflects many aspects that might be called existentialist. The idea of eternity or salvation in the present and the self-creative qualities and limitations identified by Hobbes, which Oakeshott himself referred to as pre-empting twentieth century existentialist thought, support these observations."(Worthington, 2005, p. 167) Worthington goes on to argue that ". . . Oakeshott, like Hobbes before him, did not dwell upon the self as an isolated identity adrift in a meaningless universe or out of contact with an otherwise meaningful cosmos. He set out to understand both how a self becomes itself as well as how it communicates this self to other selves who find themselves in the same predicament, but who may respond in very different manners."(Worthington, 2995, p. 168) Adopting an approach similar in some ways quite different in others, Corey(Corey, 2006) examines parallels between Oakeshott's critique of Rationalism and Voegelin's critique of Gnosticism. She identifies respects in which each draw on Saint Augustine's sense of the potentialities and limitations of the human predicament. Oakeshott and Voegelin, she concedes, do diverge when it comes to Hobbes, Oakeshott being attracted by Hobbes' skepticism and nominalism and Voegelin being repelled by Hobbes' aspirations to science. Sullivan, as well, sees an appreciation of both the limitations and potentialities of human life as being fundamental to Oakeshott's thought, reflecting that "What Oakeshott's philosophical and spiritual journey suggests is, finally, the irreconcilability of these two claims to truth: the incommensurability of divine revelation and human thought, the undefeated and mysterious opposition of sound and silence. And, perhaps above all, the pleasant distraction of the aesthetic, without which the opposition would be finally unbearable."(Sullivan, 2007, p. 209) Adherents to

such an approach point to the manner in which in "Leviathan: A Myth"(See Oakeshott, 1975b, pp. 150-154) Oakeshott describes Hobbes' <u>Leviathan</u> as an artistic masterpiece for the manner in which Hobbes approaches the way in which the combined effects of pride and fear may be destructive of civilization, and to the manner in which these themes are emphasized by Oakeshott in "The Tower of Babel".(See Oakeshott, 1962, pp. 59-79) Oakeshott's theories of aesthetics seem to have been influenced by Collingwood's <u>The Principles of Art</u>(Collingwood, 1938), and Bradley's continuing influence seems most obvious when it comes to Oakeshott's discussion of religion. In both the cases of Bradley and of Oakeshott, discussion of religion is detached from any notion of faith or belief in the supernatural or transcendent, and instead identified with a shared public commitment to the pursuit of a moral life. Nardin remarks that "Religion for Bradley is not a matter of knowing, as knowledge is ordinarily understood, but of doing: it is the experience of 'religious consciousness', which requires us not merely to think but to act. Oakeshott shares Bradley's view of religion as an aspect of practical experience."(Nardin, 2001, p. 63) A theory has been advanced by Gerencser(See Gerencser, 2000) and by Soininen(See Soininen, 2005) that over time the influence of idealism on Oakeshott's thought waned as scepticism became more influential, and that this resulted in changes in Oakeshott's attitudes towards politics. Certainly philosophical scepticism influenced Oakeshott's thought but it is not clear that this was at the expense of the influence of idealism. Minogue, for example, suggests that "That the world men live in is through and through a thing of their own creation is the main understanding Oakeshott has taken from the tradition of German idealism. . . . Oakeshott has taken from this tradition the element of scepticism never far below its surface, and only held at bay by an apparatus of beliefs about an ultimate reality which notionally guaranteed the final reliability of truth."(Minogue, 1975, pp. 124-125.) It has been observed that Oakeshott's politics differed markedly from that of such British idealists as T.H. Green but actually Bradley did not display Green's commitment to advocacy for social change.

Conclusion

　　　Cowling goes so far as to suggest that "Oakeshott began as an Idealist who happened to write, as Collingwood had, at a time at which English Idealism was no longer in the ascendant. His work is unintelligible except in that context."(Cowling, 1980, p. 256) Like his counterparts among the political thinkers made all too aware by two world wars in the twentieth century and by an extended cold war defined by a clash between opposing ideologies and a nuclear stalemate of an ultimate fragility to civilization, Oakeshott confronted this fragility. Recognition of this fragility imposed a certain urgency but what is striking and interesting for our purposes is that Oakeshott and other thinkers adopted such varying approaches. Appreciating the idealist influence on Oakeshott is necessary if one is to have any hope of understanding his thought accurately. It may or may not be sufficient but a genuine appreciation of Oakeshott's thought almost necessarily must commence with some recognition of the influence of British idealism especially in the form enunciated by Bradley.

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