University of Jyväskylä

MICHAEL OAKESHOTT THROUGH A POSTMODERN LOOKING-GLASS

A Pro Gradu Thesis

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Tiivistelmä

Tutkielmassani tarkastelen englantilaisen Michael Oakeshottin (1901-1990) poliittista filosofiaa *postmodernista* näkökulmasta. Pääasiallisena tarkoituksenani on avata uusia perspektiivejä tämän lähinnä konservatiiviksi mielletyn ajattelijan tuotantoon.

Lähtökohtanani tämän hyvin teoreettisen asetelman muodostamiselle toimi havainto, että Oakeshott käyttää samankaltaista retoriikkaa kritisoimaan *rationalistista*, modernia politiikan teoriaa kuin nyt on totuttu näkemään niin sanotussa 'tunnustuksellisessa' postmodernissa kirjallisuudessa. Tämän kritiikin tutkiminen postmodernin 'Valistuksen myytin' dekonstruktion yhteydessä muodostaa työssäni teoreettisen projektin, jota kutsun *postmodernin negatiiviseksi projektiksi*. Työni toinen lähtökohta on huomio siitä, että aiemmissa *moderneissa* tulkinnoissa Oakeshottin on usein nähty edustavan erilaisia politiikan teorian ja filosofian 'ismejä'. Mainitun konservatismin lisäksi erityisesti liberalismia sekä idealismia on tarjottu Oakeshottin tuotannon kantavaksi ajatukseksi. Tälle Oakeshottin ajattelun *ydintä* tai *perustaa* etsivälle tulkintojen kirjolle esitän vaihtoehdoksi koko etsinnästä luopumista; postmoderniksi lukutavaksi kutsunkin erityisesti modernien politiikan teorioiden 'perustoihin' epäilevästi suhtautuvaa asennetta. Tästä perspektiivistä toisaalta väitän ettei Oakeshottia voida siististi redusoida minkään ismin alle, koska hänen teoreettiset vaikutteensa ovat sekä 'mannerten' että ismien välisiä. Toisaalta esitän, että erityisesti Oakeshottin myöhäisemmässä tuotannossa postmoderni - 'ei-perustaa etsivä' - asenne on keskeisessä asemassa. *Postmodernin positiiviseksi projektiksi* nimitänkin tämän asenteen jakavien teoreetikoiden tapaa kirjoittaa 'politiikasta' epäjatkuvuutta ja *kontingenssia* korostaen. Kyse on siis erityisesti sanastosta, jota postmodernin voidaan nähdä tarjoavan modernin, varmuutta kaipaavan politiikan teorian tilalle ja ohelle. Tässä suhteessa näen Oakeshottiin tutustumisen erityisen hedelmällisenä myös postmodernin teorian kannalta; suhde on olennaisesti kaksisuuntainen.

Työni etenee niin, että aluksi esittelen tutkimusprosessini tärkeimmät vaiheet sekä materiaalin käytön luvussa 2. Primaarimateriaali koostuu lähes koko Oakeshottin tuotannosta, painottuen toisen maailmansodan jälkeiseen aikaan. Sekundäärimateriaalin osalta olen painottanut muita postmoderniin viittaavia Oakeshott-tulkintoja, sekä erityisen havainnollisia moderneja luentoja. Jälkimmäisiä olen edelleen tarkastellut luvussa 3, jossa liberalismin *abstraktin individualismin* ja konservatismin *tradition* korostaminen Oakeshottin ajattelun ytiminä tulevat kritiikin ensisijaisiksi kohteiksi. Luvun lopuksi esitän käsitykseni niistä vuosikymmenien kuluessa tapahtuneista *muutoksista Oakeshottin käsitteistössä*, jotka avaavat mahdollisuuksia postmoderniin luentaan. Luvussa 4 korostan aluksi omaa tulkintaani postmodernista myös vaihtoehtoisena luentana *tilanteesta*, jossa teoretisoidaan. Välittömänä kontekstina 'postmodernille Oakeshottille' näen juuri toisen maailmansodan jälkeisen modernien illuusioiden romahtamisen, sekä ns. ideologioiden loppua koskevan teoreettisen keskustelun. Oakeshottin *'baconilais-kartesiolaista* insinööripolitiikkaa' voimakkaasti arvostelevia kommentteja luetaan erityisesti Arendtin ja Baumanin modernin kritiikkien yhteydessä. Tässä negatiivisessa luennassa näen jatkuvasti vihjauksen myös positiiviseen; negatiivinen projekti voidaan ymmärtää tulkinnalle ja toiminnalle *tilaa avaavaana operaationa*. Lopuksi pohdin Oakeshottin ja postmoderin yhteisluvun antia, vaikkakin vältän varsinaisten lukkoonlyötyjen johtopäätösten tekoa keskustelusävyisessä työssäni. Ehdotan Oakeshottin radikaalia *'bodin-hobbes-hegeliläistä'*-luentaa 'modernin politiikan teorian historiasta' ja valtio-käsitteen synnystä, hänen erityiseksi panoksekseen postmodernin positiiviseen projektiin. *Societas*-figuurin ympärille kiertyvässä tulkinnassaan hän korostaa ihmisten välisten yhteenliittymien *ymmärtämistä* satunnaisuuteen, historiallisuuteen, ihmisten 'älyllisyyteen' ja omatoimisuuteen perustuvina - vastakohtana *universitas*-valtion ja yhteenliittymän edustamalle lainomaiselle pakollisuudelle ja orgaanisuudelle. 'Politiikassa' postmoderni ei tarkoita pelkkää 'negatiivista dekonstruktiota', vaan vastuun palauttamista poliittisille toimijoille itselleen - universaaleihin lakeihin on turha vedota.

Asiasanat: contingency, Oakeshott, postmodern politics

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Appendix 1

Bibliography

1. Introduction

Michael Oakeshott (1901-1990) has been praised as the 'most original and significant English political philosopher of the twentieth century' and mocked as a 'High Tory' and a 'lonely nihilist'. In my thesis, I have chosen to read Oakeshott's oeuvre from a *postmodern position*.

Oakeshott started his academic career in Cambridge, later continued in Oxford, until he was elected to a chair of political science in the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1951. He wrote few books, but was an author of wide selection of essays and articles concerning history, philosophy and politics, many of which have been published posthumously. His doctoral thesis *Experience and its Modes* appeared in 1933, and staying productive to the old age he published his major work *On Human Conduct* in 1975 and an essay collection *On History* in 1983.

Oakeshott surely was not a public figure in the sense that he would have been known to 'everybody in the street'; he usually retreated from public debates. In the academic world, however, his work was noted and discussed. He really was not an author of one and only possible interpretation. On the contrary, if one can say that every text is open to various interpretations, in the case of Oakeshott this is probably twice as true. His general style of writing essays, preferably to books, and lack of explicit declaration of one leading idea makes his production particularly opportune to many divergent interpretations. This variation can be observed in the multitude of attempts to label Oakeshott under some 'ism'. The legend of his 'conservatism' is most widely known, but also 'idealism' and liberalism' are notable.

The choice of a postmodern position is by no means simple or in any sense 'given'. I am definitely not claiming that Oakeshott wrote *as* a postmodern, I just say that reading Oakeshott's oeuvre beside postmodern theory opens interesting perspectives to both. There is as little agreement of the 'meaning' of postmodern as there is agreement of the 'core' of Oakeshott's thinking, and the last thing I want to do is to claim to have found them. Both the concept of postmodern I use in my thesis and my view to Oakeshott's texts are constructed and reconstructed

several times during the reading process and - by some parts - they have melted together. Thus, I see the relationship between Oakeshott and postmodern as fruitfully and essentially *dual* one. However, as some kind of starting point I have to mention that following, e.g. Bauman and Pulkkinen I consider 'postmodern' as an *anti-foundational* attitude or disposition. This disposition I see also in Oakeshott's works.

Tuija Pulkkinen's doctoral thesis *The Postmodern and Political Agency* (1996) has been important for my understanding of postmodern, in general. My being able to use the 'modern' and 'postmodern' as operational concepts owes a great deal to her comprehension over the issue. Also, her stressing of postmodern as a "direction to go", instead of an attempt to create a 'new theory' as a 'philosophical system', and denial of fastening postmodern thinking essentially to any specific period of time have had influence in my postmodern standpoint. Nevertheless, there are naturally differences between Pulkkinen´s wider project of questioning the ontological assumptions of modern political theory and my reading of Oakeshott. For example, Pulkkinen's reflection on Foucaultian 'power constructs subjects' aspect does not get so much attention in the light of Oakeshott's production.

One can think then that the 'lonely nihilist' I want to examine and *defend* here is Oakeshott. Along, one could see me defending postmodern from its reputation of representing - as some modern theorists put it - 'merely negative destruction, mere aesthetics, and politically irresponsible pure nihilism'.

As to the construction of the thesis; I have done my best to write something that is also enjoyable to read for differing audiences. Thus, the 'big' story of my thesis is composed of three streams, which intertwine during the journey, but can also be read as having certain independence in relation to each other.

In chapter two, I pay attention to a 'general' academic audience and to the fact that this is a scholarly thesis resulting in an academic degree. If there is a 'target' audience in this chapter, perhaps it can be seen in other undergraduates of Political Science. The title, *The Story Constructed,* refers then to a review on those research processes I have performed. In particular, attention is paid to the choices for my primary and secondary material. It must be noted here, however,

that choosing among other postmodern materials than direct Oakeshott comments is left out of this chapter and will be discussed in chapter four. I do not wish to set a rigid division to 'textual' and 'contextual' parts in my thesis. Thus, there are no strict categorisations between, e.g. Oakeshott's biographical matters, institutional contexts or 'theoretical frameworks'. From my viewpoint, Oakeshott is an original mixture of Anglo-Saxon and continental political thinking - not writing under any specific 'ism' or any other specific context *determining* the 'right' limits for interpretation. However, without occupying any specific 'methodology' in my thesis, I find it necessary to illustrate the multitude of other discussions around Oakeshott. I hope to offer the reader some reference for comparison between my postmodern reading and other interpretations. Thus, along with my use of secondary material I hope to illuminate the essential question *why* I prefer the postmodern reading horizon to the other possible ones. I also want to sketch the conversations I wish to contribute. A general glance at this matter is given in the end of chapter two.

In chapter three, *Modern Oakeshott*, I concentrate on reflecting the above mentioned 'cases' of Oakeshott's 'conservatism' and 'liberalism' most carefully. The chapter can be read as my contribution to those discussions or, to be more exact, as their criticism. Again, if one wants to see a special audience for this chapter, probably it can be seen as composed of other interpreters of Oakeshott. Such being the case, the chapter may be a bit difficult to read for those who have not familiarized themselves with Oakeshott's texts before. However, I do not start summarizing Oakeshott's texts too much as I am writing a pro gradu thesis, not an overall story of Oakeshott. I also think that my choice for a closer investigation of his claimed 'political isms' helps me to concentrate more clearly on political aspects of Oakeshott's thinking, which surely is just one possible 'arrest' of his production. This offers also a useful background and mirror to examining Oakeshott's own attack against isms and his thoughts about ideologies - these views being important for the whole postmodern discussion. I see that the common factor in the 'ism' readings of Oakeshott is the tendency to look for some *core* from his production that would join him to the 'great traditions' of conservatism, liberalism (or idealism). To oppose this view, I suggest in the end

of the chapter that the changes in Oakeshott's thinking - like replacement of 'tradition' by the concept of 'practices' - have been significant enough to question seriously the 'legitimacy' of ism-interpretations. Most importantly, they have been significant enough to open possibilities for postmodern reading. After reflecting on some conceptual changes in Oakeshott's thinking as well as my views of the shifting horizons of Oakeshott interpretation during the decades, I finally proceed to the major theme of this work, i.e. to my postmodern reading of Oakeshott.

In chapter four then, I first try to illuminate the more general discussion around the concept of postmodern and my selections for other authors I examine in this context. I want to emphasize that from this point on we enter to the territory in my thesis where my responsibility as a writer can be perceived most forcibly. Therefore, my treatment of postmodern as a 'theoretical project' should be seen also in the light of research economical grounds; I concentrate on the 'political aspects' of the topic, as the authors I examine are for most part 'classified' as political theorists. As a 'theoretical project' postmodern is, of course, strongly connected to the criticism of the Enlightenment project. Neither of these 'projects' are unified and simple to define and they are very closely intertwined together. Still, to be able to present anything one has to make some simplifications.

To introduce the issue to the reader, I first make an 'overall view' on the modern/postmodern discussion and my interpretation of the 'contemporary situation' for theorizing. Then, I technically divide postmodern as a theoretical project to two. First, I read Oakeshott's strong attacks against rationalism and ideologies in connection to the criticism of the modern project presented by postmodern theorists (notably Bauman) and contemporary continental thinkers who, like Oakeshott, have not identified themselves as postmodern writers (notably Arendt). Here I also refer to theorists (Habermas) who still want to defend the project of modernity, and comment the discussion by these parts. George Orwell's famous *Nineteen Eighty-four* serves as a sort of culmination for expressing the 'fears' of modern as rationalization and totalitarianism. Whatever one thinks of the literary merits of this text, I think that it succeeds in summarizing quite adequately the 'situation for theorizing' after the Second World War. The situation, responses to which by the 'modern' and ' postmodern' theorists I see

as dispersing. Also, e.g. the following list of the most common ideas linked to the Enlightenment project are brought under critical examination: the idea of Cartesian cogito, the moral unity of humankind based on rational moral principles, unified, linear history, history as human progress, science as a unified methodology and a way to truth, and universal and common structure of language. It will be noted that Oakeshott explicitly opposes to all of these:

> "Rationalist politics, I have said, are the politics of the felt need,
> the felt need not qualified by a genuine, concrete knowledge of
> the permanent interests and direction of movement of a society,
> but interpreted by 'reason' and satisfied according to the
> technique of an ideology: they are the politics of the book."
> (Oakeshott in *Rationalism in Politics*, 1947.)

In 1947 Oakeshott still refers to 'direction of movement of a society' and society's 'rhythm and continuity', but in his critique of Cartesian cogito, ideological politics and 'scientism' he is already very explicit. A view of subject as *tabula rasa* using 'technical knowledge', e.g. deriving everything from 'rationalist principles' and assimilation of politics to engineering get his condemnation - with a rhetoric that calls forth comparisons with the texts written by the 'postmodern theorists'. Also, distinctively modern, ideological 'means/end' thinking in politics means self-deception and also politics of destruction.

Second, I move towards 'positive' interpretation of postmodern; 'it' is not mere negative project deconstructing and nihilising everything. Oakeshott is no 'prophet of doom', no 'anti-moral', favouring 'irrationalism', or full of romantic nostalgia of the past ('pre' or 'antimodern'), but thinking in a *contingent, historical situation* and seeing this situation as demanding responses. I claim that postmodern does not have to begin everything 'new', but it can be seen as an alternative *reading* of our situation. I see Oakeshott as giving two radical readings of our *ambiguous* history and situation; one of the 'negative' side of modern(ity) and also the 'positive' one. This positive side is carried along or 'intimated' throughout the whole of my thesis. For example, in chapter three many of Oakeshott's central terms are introduced while I reflect on earlier interpretations on Oakeshott. Special attention should be paid on Franco's reading of *civil association* and *societas*, since it also serves well

as 'basic information' for my 'final' postmodern account on these figures. In addition, the 're-evaluations' of concepts within the 'negative project of postmodern' are by their part contributions to what I call the 'positive project of postmodern'. So are the inescapable references to the contrast factors of the negative readings - speaking of 'the individual' in connection to the 'anti-individual', for example. In short, the 'positive project of postmodern' can be comprehended as the groundwater of this thesis. Since the most concepts and themes that I attach specifically to this project are discussed earlier than its 'actual scene' in chapter 4.3, I conclude my thesis with my thoughts of what 'contents' the project might get specifically in light of some Oakeshottian terminology. *Societas* and its 'place' in the field of postmodern theorizing will be discussed as well as the possibility of 'positive' and distinctively postmodern politics. Thus, to help the reader's noticing the 'positive project of postmodern' also from 'between the lines' I now hand some relevant points.

First, Oakeshott's comprehension of language, as a manifold of discourses, is relevant to the postmodern discussion. His distinction between different tones and a metaphor of politics as conversation can be seen to protect against *irrelevant* claims of authority (Gerenscer 1995). For example, relationship of theory, practice, philosophy and politics is typified by the ideal of conversation. They may inform and inspire each other, but none can appropriately dictate the other. Language and conversation are profoundly important in being a human, in general. Oakeshott says that the ability to participate in conversation is what make us human; not the ability to reason cogently, to make discoveries about the world etc. (Oakeshott in *The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind*, 1959). The non-foundationalist vision is also present then. Here Oakeshott even mentions something about the playfulness of voices; "each voice learns to be playful" and can learn to recognize itself as a voice among others. Language is not a transparent medium and the aim of Oakeshott's theorizing is certainly not to make society more 'transparent'. Accordingly, my general tune in this paper is more preferably 'conversational' than aiming at achieving any 'certain results'.

Second, the highly significant feature is that Oakeshott, by no means, wants to lay the blame on *Hobbes* or *Hegel* for advocating the negative sides of

modernity, but reads them as favouring the same important issue as Oakeshott himself: the importance of all human associations being comprehended as *intelligent* relationships - not as, e.g. 'organic' wholes produced by some general laws of human behaviour or history. Of course, Oakeshott does not forget to contemplate, e.g. the teleocratic tendencies in Hegel's philosophy, but the emphasis in his reading is different. When compared to the main body of postmodern literature this is surely a deviant position. If Oakeshott accuses some 'philosophies' for clearly advocating 'rationalism' etc., the object of this critic is the legacy of *Bacon* and *Descartes* or, to be more exact, their *vulgarization*. And, of course, ideological thinking which actually fails to 'count' as philosophy.

Third, from my postmodern position, the most important point in Oakeshott's texts is his anti-foundationalist attitude towards *all* human conventions. For Oakeshott, *human conduct* is the agent choosing intelligently in a contingent situation. This concept of human conduct also 'applies in' politics when it is understood in the framework of societas (or the civil association). As Mapel writes, Oakeshott uses the idea of *contingency* in two different ways; "not merely the particular actions but also the general rules, goals, and practices of agents are said to be contingent or non-necessary." (Mapel 1990.) In civil association subscribing to practices does not demand any consent to some pursuit of a 'common end' (or morally good). The 'constantly mentioned' *societas* is a formal kind of association and cannot choose any particular actions for an individual (more: it is based on the understanding of human contingency). Actually, all human associations - civil as well as enterprise associations - are also artificial, contingent and destructible. Oakeshott gives an account of *practices* that are always present in contingent situations. So, humans do not have to choose in a vacuum or without 'moral', though these practises never choose a particular action.

Then, e.g. Bauman's conception of 'habitat' as an 'environment' for choosing is brought to comparison with Oakeshottian practices and *societas* in the concluding chapter. Further, the question of legitimation in a situation that 'lacks' universal moral principles is brought to discussion. According to Lyotard, the 'basis' of it can possibly be found locally, from restricted speech communities, i.e.

through 'local determinism'. (Lyotard 1984.) Rorty seems to be saying, instead, that 'the contingent prevailing order' can be taken, suspect to certain reservations, as legitimate. (Rorty 1989.) With these ideas I interpret Oakeshott's concept of authority as legitimating 'framework', with the emphasis of this being also contingent, and no 'system' where from any specific 'commands' for actions can be deduced. Also, when Oakeshott in *On Human Conduct,* defines politics as "the engagement of considering the conditions specified in terms of their desirability and of recommending and promoting deliberate changes in these conditions, distinguished from deliberating the 'policy'", he seems to be referring to the very 'radical' potential of (postmodern) politics. In my view, he is saying that politics can change not only the policy, but also the very situation all the time. A 'politician', as well as humans in general, must reflect on many different levels: analyse their current situation, choose their 'policy' to the situation, and try to *alter* the 'rules of the game'. In brief, to advocate the postmodern attitude does not mean that one has to 'believe' in 'the death of the subject(s)' or 'end of history'. Or one does not have to be 'a complete nihilist'. In my opinion, postmodern's 'best offers' are the notions of 'freedom' of action and responsibility of one's actions - the sometimes disturbing knowledge that there is no ultimate legitimation for you action, but you still have to choose.

Before proceeding to open the points introduced in this chapter, I remark that my references to Oakeshott's texts are done a bit unconventionally in order to facilitate the reader's keeping pace with the specific time of writing of the text in question. When needed to avoid misunderstanding, the form of references follows this system: (Oakeshott 1946-50, *Political Philosophy,* RPM, 150). The year refers to the writing time of the essay (as seen, sometimes only assumed), the title is the specific *essay* title. The essay *collection* is indicated in the letter combination and the page number refers to the place of reference in that collection. The index of essay collections is given in Appendix 1. In addition, *On Human Conduct* (1975) is also referred as *OHC.*

2. The Story Constructed

"A proper story is like a river," writes Oakeshott in *The Tower of Babel* (1983) and continues: "sometimes it may be traced back to a source in the hills, but what it becomes reflects the scenery through which it flows. It has a history, and its history is marked by the appearance of new incidents or new characters; its colours change; it is told in fresh idioms; it may be concentrated into a ballad or a song only to be dispersed again in more prosaic tellings." He adds: "Mine is a proper story." (*On History,* 1983, 165.)

Although I cannot start the story told in this thesis as boldly as just described, I still hope my study catches some features of this refined definition. In my mind, every study is a kind of story whether it chooses to 'reveal' something of this character or not. However, writing inside the academical genre of Political Science usually obliges one to fill certain expectations of documenting one's story; the source being the inspiration, subject and/or point of departure for a story, the scenery reminding of the need to document the material used and the context discussed. The flow of the river through and around the scenery tells about the operations made for the study, and these should be - at least to some extent - traceable. In the following I will try to illuminate something of all those things.

2.1 Searching for the subject

If there is a key word in this thesis, I would say that the most appropriate candidate for this is *contingency.* In addition of 'serving' as an important concept connecting Oakeshott to the postmodern, it also portrays especially the beginning of my research process quite sharply. In my opinion, this point is actually far more important than usually comprehended in the 'level' of Master's degree in which a thesis is often seen as an exhibit of being able to follow certain 'scientific' research procedures; 'systematic collection of data', 'forming and testing of hypotheses' etc. In my case, the general idea to interpret Michael Oakeshott in

the light of postmodern and the theoretical emphasis of my work caused some additional difficulties for remaining in that kind of genre, and now, after many moments of feeling total incompetence, I want to give a 'prosaic telling' that retains something of the difficulty of writing; not only the success story that can be found in many guide books called 'Academical Writing'.

First, I want to complicate the word *the subject* a bit when seen in the light of my paper. Is it a question? Or, an answer to a question? If not, do you have to at least present it as it were one? To all *those* questions I would answer no, but instead say that at the beginning my subject was more like a faint interest in some kind of literature in preference to others. In theoretical works (if in any), there are no ready made 'questions' waiting to be answered. They cannot be found from 'recent works' by other theorists, i.e. you do not continue from the point other works end. Following Weber, Palonen writes that research always contains the choice of a certain *aspect* that also revises former interpretations of the subject, or constructs a new aspect, and thus transforms the subject as itself (Palonen 1994, 1997, 63, my translation). So, in this light, I would say that *the* subject is what *I* have to say about a topic area, and how I have actually *constructed* the topic and its context.

My searching process for the subject has continued this far and is actually still developing. Bauman's definition of postmodern applies to this study also:

> "Analysis of post-modernity cannot be anything more than a mid-
> career report." (Bauman 1987, 125.)

As I have become to think research and its process(es) more important than the actual material result of it, I have also realized this thesis as movement (or to use Oakeshott's term: a platform of understanding) towards some else writing processes. In Oakeshott's words:

> "To be alive is to be perpetually active. The purposes we
> attribute to particular kinds of activity are only abridgements of
> our knowledge of how to engage in this or that activity. This, for
> example, is obviously so in the activity we call 'science'.
> Scientific activity is not the pursuit of a premeditated end;

nobody knows or can imagine where it will reach." (Oakeshott
1950, *The Idea of a University*, VLL, 95).

In fact, when seen in retrospective, 'the contingency' of the beginning of my
research process is an amusing combination of Arendtian 'new beginning' and
Oakeshottian account of 'practises' and situations. The situation, or the
circumstances, facilitating this thesis were many.[1] My interest in postmodern
theory derives its origin from the year 1993 when I attended a work group
seminar in the University of Jyväskylä and discussed about Rorty and Vattimo's
Enlightenment critiques in my paper. The interest stayed and during my exchange
year in the University of Kent (1995/1996) I continued deepening my studies in
political and sociological theory and became acquainted with, e.g. Arendt and
Orwell's writings. Towards the end of the year I started thinking about the subject
of my thesis and swayed between many alternative subjects and research routes.

However, the very idea for starting to read Oakeshott came from prof.
Palonen who e-mailed me a list of names where from to start if I wanted to write
a theoretical thesis on politics, as the original wish of mine was. Bernard Crick,
R.G. Collingwood and Oakeshott were among the authors I was given a hint to
become familiar with, and of these I chose to read Oakeshott most carefully. I
made the decision more or less in random and many times, especially after my
first encounter with *On Human Conduct,* I have also regretted this choice;
Oakeshott's style of writing is famous for various reasons - being 'easy' is not
among them. Yet, I continued exploring his writings (perhaps only being stubborn)
and became also familiar with *The Voice of Poetry* (1959) and the essay
collection *Rationalism in Politics* (first published in 1962, expanded edition in
1991). Along with these, I started to observe something that still performs a great
role in my thesis; there were something reminiscent of postmodern texts in

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[1]Of course, if I would accommodate a different kind of vocabulary I could
say that the inspiration or 'cause' or 'reason' for my work was the need to graduate from
the university; either because the grants supplied by the state end (a cause), or because I
want to finish my studies and thus reach a certain goal in my life (a reason) and when
saying this I would not lie. But, here I have chosen to think the university as *societas,*
more preferably to *universitas.* Still, I admit that the *ambiguity* of our vocabularies as hard
to avoid here as anywhere else.

Oakeshott's writing and the other way round. The use of words (or rhetoric) and some of the themes explored appeared very similar to me.

This quite vague idea was then something to start with - the 'new' arising from the 'situation'. I was not about to 'rewrite' the whole Oakeshott or trying to look for the 'true' Oakeshott, but I was to find out if this idea had something to offer. As it turned out, the answer was yes, and I could make use of it. But, not without being ready to reject or alter it in the course of research and during the reading and re-reading the material; the idea was not an *argument* I was to look premises for, nor was it a hypothesis in the strict sense of the word.

My postmodern account on Oakeshott's texts is not to claim that I have now accommodated the latest intellectual 'trend' or a method of some sort and applied it to my reading and, as the result, achieved something totally 'new'.[1] Instead, my wish is more humble. I hope my *readings* of Oakeshott and the postmodern combines them in a way that makes some sense, and perhaps is even more comprehensive than presented this far. Of course, my reading is as contestable as every other interpretation; this is not the issue. Instead, my hope is that this work succeeds in acting as 'a voice in the discussion' - highlighting the Oakeshottian point that the important thing is to keep the conversation going.

2.2 Material

It goes without saying that when one writes a paper including a title "An author and my interpretation of his/her production" this production usually also forms the most important part of the material to be used. This rule applies also to my thesis, but this is only where the (difficulty of) process begins, or so it was in my case, anyway. Oakeshott's major texts were mostly rather easily available, with the

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[1]Marja Keränen's article *Tieteet Retoriikkana* (1996) includes a sharp notion of the ʹnewnessʹof rhetoric in Political Science. She argues that 'scientism' has replaced rhetoric from time to time and described it as a 'sublime' but already dead language game (ibid., 125). When referring also to the postmodern styles of repetition, Keränen's article gives an interesting background for a reader to ponder also the relationship between Oakeshott and his - to use the words of one of his critics - "high and dry" writing style and the postmodern.

regrettable exception of *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe*, 1939. But, then the necessity of limiting the subject appeared even more clearly in the need to limit the material used; at one point I was convinced of not being able to say anything about Oakeshott - or postmodern, for that matter - before getting to know all the 'classics' of Western political thought, or at least all of 'the traditions of liberalism or conservatism' or 'idealism' etc. This fear fainted away gradually, but not totally. Still, after reading 'a bit of this and that' and being given valuable hints (and materials) by seminar supervisors and other students, I started selecting among texts more carefully the ones that interested me and were of relevance to my (at this point still vague) idea of connecting Oakeshott with postmodern.

As the 'flow of the river through the scenery' in my thesis is not an application of some method to an analysis of a 'matrix', in the next, I will reflect on the choices and operations I have made to limit and sharpen the scope of my study. In addition, I want to give more assets for the reader to follow my story, as the nearest 'justification' for my 'method' of study can be expressed in the words of Rorty:

> "..it (philosophy) is a cultural genre...which centers on one topic rather than another at some given time not by dialectical necessity but as a result of various things happening elsewhere in the conversation." (Rorty 1979, 264.)

For Rorty, conversation is the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood; in the following, the context for my discussion is elucidated (ibid., 389).

2.2.1 Primary Material

> "The final stage of the Pragmatist's Progress comes when one begins to see one's previous peripeties not as stages in the ascent toward Enlightenment, but simply as the contingent results of encounters with various books which happened to fall into one's hands." (Rorty 1992, 92.)

> "I have the impression that, in the course of the last decades, the rights of the interpreters have been overstressed." (Eco 1992, 23.)

The quotations above can be found in the essay collection *Interpretation and overinterpretation* in which Umberto Eco's views of interpretation are challenged by three other authors. The book contains a brief but profound look over the debate on interpretation that has been intense ever since "in Britain somebody suggested, years ago that it is possible to do things with words." (Ibid., 24.)

This far, I have been advocating strongly for the concept of contingency in a variety of instances in my paper and the main emphasis will remain the same. However, to avoid the impression that the contingency here would only mean something like the 'first event of inventing' the general idea of my thesis, i.e. to interpret Michael Oakeshott in the light of postmodern and then choosing between the random material only to support the idea, I will now illuminate the question of selection and accentuation between Oakeshott's own texts as my primary material. The contingency here does not mean 'chance', a fortuitous relationship of events, but an Oakeshottian 'significant relationship'.

> "A relationship between antecedent and subsequent events which specify the characters of the subsequent events." (Oakeshott 1983, 71.)

For Oakeshott, 'historical understanding' is not any kind of metaphysical engagement, but:

> "..a conditional undertaking to seek and establish actual significant relationships between events by inference from

record, in an enquiry capable of doing this and no more than this." (Ibid.)

Alike, my 'looking back' *to* the research 'process' can be seen as an attempt to seek significant relationships between, e.g. some choices I have made for my material. In addition, the important point *in* my research process has been to look for these *significant*, i.e. contingent relationships[1] between differing materials. The latter point illuminates even better my choices for other 'postmodern' materials than choosing between Oakeshott's own texts and direct Oakeshott comments, but within certain limits it applies here also.

As mentioned, I started my familiarizing with Oakeshott's texts from his major work *On Human Conduct* (1975). After finding Oakeshott's style of writing simultaneously very difficult and elegant and getting the first impressions of some similarity to postmodern, I continued my reading with the essay collection *Rationalism in Politics* (1962, an expanded edition in 1991) where from the most famous pieces of writing: *On being Conservative* (1956), *Political Education* (1951, Oakeshott's inaugural lecture in LSE) and *Rationalism in Politics* (1947) were read most carefully. At this point, I was already quite convinced that Oakeshott had something essential to give to postmodern discussion with his sharp critique of rationalism and alternative view of politics. Nevertheless, this comprehension of mine was still quite naive. At the time I thought that I could somehow 'safely' examine Oakeshott's oeuvre from a 'postmodern viewpoint' as if that kind of viewpoint readily existed. And, of course, to some extent something reminiscent did 'exist' in those few articles in which Oakeshott was connected with the word postmodern. However, after reading more of the earlier interpretations I noticed that postmodern accounts on Oakeshott were quite rare and it was far more usual to analyse his work from other aspects and with different emphasis. The dilemma was ready; my postmodern account was strong and the more I read Oakeshott the more I got convinced of the possibility of postmodern interpretation. On the other hand, I could also understand *why*, e.g.

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[1] It should be noted that Oakeshott's use of the word 'contingent' as a significant relationship between events differs from a strong, traditional vocabulary that usually associates contingent with mere 'accidental' or 'unexpected'.

the 'ism' interpreters were many of the numbers, particularly in the light of Oakeshott's earlier works.[1] After much reading and rereading Oakeshott and his commentators as well as 'postmodern' and 'ism' literature, I decided of the limitations I was to make to my reading of Oakeshott.

First, I was writing my thesis to the department of politics, and thus my main interest was in Oakeshott's *political* philosophy. I was not reading, for instance, Oakeshott's religious texts too carefully then. Still, I must remark that there was not any strict categorizing of his texts into, e.g. 'philosophy of history' or 'philosophy of politics'. Since they are often overlapping and controversial terms in Oakeshott's oeuvre, I saw no relevance in starting to recategorize them.

The second operation I made limited the scope of texts further; a necessary operation, since Oakeshott's production is too vast and complex to be 'totally mastered' in the framework of writing one's first scholarly thesis. Thus, I selected among texts the ones I was to examine more deeply and read some other texts more 'superficially', without too much further examination. This operation I have done on the basis of two reasons. But first I have to say that getting possession of every text written by Oakeshott is impossible, this being especially so in case of some old newspaper articles that, as such, could be highly interesting and relevant.[2] Also, since many texts of Oakeshott have been published posthumously and there is no knowledge when this is finished, this is no time to try to write 'the whole story' of Oakeshott and this was not my attempt anyway. As to the selecting process; many interpreters agree that there has been a change in Oakeshott's thinking after the Second World War. They think that Oakeshott has gradually abandoned his idealist theoretical legacy and moved into

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[1] As to the discussion contexts: it seems arguable that many writers commenting Oakeshott write 'inside' some 'ism' genre and thereby (prefer to) contribute to discussion around, e.g. the British Idealism or Conservatism, the starting-point being other from mine then. It also seems neglible that these discussions sometimes have a 'self-feeding tendency' of taking as axioms some earlier comprehensions of Oakeshott. (Interpreter 1: Oakeshott *is* an Idealist, Interpreter 2: Oakeshott *the* idealist; one of the greatest representatives of the tradition of British Idealism, Interpreter 3: Oakeshott and his idea of Idealism, etc.)

[2] Here I refer especially to some book reviews written by Oakeshott and articles in *the Cambridge Journal* in the 1940s.

a new direction. Also, during the prewar phase dominated by *Experience and its Modes* politics were not central among Oakeshott's concerns (see, e.g. Covell 1986, 93. Gerenscer 1995). So, I take the Second World War as my point of departure, though I have to admit that it is a bit arbitrary and I have not quite been able to stick with it. Therefore, to be able to comment and criticize especially the latest 'ism' interpretations, I have read some texts deriving already from the 1920s. The 'traces' of reading Oakeshott 'backwards' in the course of the decades can be seen in the end of chapter 3 where I discuss the relevant changes in Oakeshott's thinking and his use of some central concepts favouring postmodern reading towards the 1970s.

The second reason is in close relation to the former one, i.e. after moments of doubt I was convinced *again* that the 'best examples' of this change in Oakeshott's thinking are *The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind* and the above-mentioned *Rationalism in Politics* and *On Human Conduct*. Here Oakeshott formulates his ideas of politics as 'conversation' and 'pursuit of intimations'; the view of politics that I see to be of great relevance to postmodern discussion. These form the main body of my primary material then, but naturally one can say that every text by Oakeshott I have read is included to my primary material. I hope to have stuck to this *material* body of Oakeshott's texts and have interpreted *mostly* them; not only interpreting other author's convictions of Oakeshott but using those earlier comprehensions more as my 'background' and secondary material. However, I will not spend too much space in my thesis to summarizing these or other texts by Oakeshott as these kinds of writings already exist in droves.

2.2.2 Secondary material; an introduction to discussion contexts

In the following, I comment my use of secondary material. The term 'secondary' is only used allusively as I have bundled all the literature and articles interpreting Oakeshott under this term, even I have naturally emphasized them differently. As already mentioned before, I give here a brief overlook to the spectrum as it is

likely to help the reader's task of placing my work to the conversation and evaluating it in the contexts other than my discussion. However, I leave this speculation in brief to avoid slipping into making a trivial commentary on a commentary, and also in basis of research economical reasons.

I have viewed the comments on Oakeshott from my postmodern position and divided them - somewhat roughly - into five 'categories'. This division applies both to the texts that deal with Oakeshott as their main subject of interest and to those in which Oakeshott appears as an 'author among others'. *Conservatism, Liberalism* and *Idealism* are the covering terms for the three 'ism' categories; these I will also treat as peculiarly *modern* interpretations of Oakeshott. In the next chapter, I will spend some time particularly reflecting on Oakeshott's claimed 'political isms' and analyse few examples in more detail. Also, the 'philosophical ism' is referred to when relevant for examining the discontinuities and changes in Oakeshott's thinking. I will not waste too much space on rejecting the most obvious 'mistakes', since that has been successfully done already by various authors who claim that many of those mistakes are based on false assumptions of Oakeshott as a political philosopher (something he would call a 'doctrinaire'). Or, repeating that Oakeshott surely is not advocating 'a minimal state intervention in line with Hayek'. Instead of restating everything already said, my treatment of the 'ism' issue should give a reflexion of the variety of discussion contexts around Oakeshott. In addition, this part serves as background and point of departure for examining Oakeshott's own attack against 'ism-thinking' in the *context of postmodern.* (On this point, see, e.g. Riley 1993.) I find this illumination necessary to do, since there seems to be a reasonably common tendency among many commentators of Oakeshott to neglect all other interpretation alternatives or to reject them with only a few lines - for these parts the discussions have only passed each other. It seems quite usual just to announce that Oakeshott has been labelled in various ways, but leave the issue without further examination (see, e.g. Fuller 1991, xv. Franco 1990a,1). Especially, as Gerenscer (1995, 238) noted, the 'ism' interpreters do not refer to the postmoderns who, by their part, have written shorter articles and are fewer in numbers. However, the counter-

tendency of concentrating on reception instead of Oakeshott's texts is also doubtful and I try to avoid falling into this pit hole, either.

Under the term 'Postmodern' I have gathered those few direct comments on Oakeshott and postmodern with some texts that stress those specific features - like contingency and agency - in Oakeshott's oeuvre that play a central role also in postmodern discussion. For example, the following readings of Oakeshott are placed in this category: Mapel holds the idea of contingency as the key idea of Oakeshott, Mouffe (a 'radical democrat') has referred to the usefulness of Oakeshott's idea of politics as a pursuit of intimations in case of women's issues, Palonen has analysed Oakeshott's concept of contingency in the wider spectrum of 'das Webersche Moment' and Rorty has used Oakeshott's ideas and called him 'a liberal utopist'. These accounts I largely use as my 'helping tools' (references) during my reading, though not totally without critique; e.g. Rorty's way of speaking of Oakeshott as 'a fellow liberal' causes some difficulties for me to digest. Gerenscer's treating of 'unconditional philosophical knowledge' as pointing towards scepticism in Oakeshott's view of philosophy has clarified my own views when considered the claim of Oakeshott's consistent idealism. Gerenscer says that in *OHC* Oakeshott refers to the "ongoing criticism of all claims, even those made by the theorists." (Gerenscer 1995, 733.) Further, Gerenscer's view about 'voices in conversation' as representing Oakeshott's denial of 'truths' as reaching the 'totality of experience' through philosophical reflection was helpful.

The fifth category consists of all other earlier interpretations not fitting into the former ones. This category includes especially book reviews, introductions to Oakeshott's books, obituaries, and texts that deal with Oakeshott's view of historical inquiry. I have voluntarily left this last category to work as my 'background' material, not because of the texts being valueless - I refer to them and they certainly have highlighted certain points for me - but because their 'arrests' of Oakeshott's production often do not centre on political aspects and their sometimes presented 'philosophical neutrality' makes them slippery to cling to.

To repeat, the division presented above is formal and inclined to impartiality and simplification. I am afraid this is especially so with the last 'category', where so different kind of writers like Bhikhu Parekh, Preston King, Josiah Lee Auspitz and Hanna Pitkin[1] are mapped together. In addition, the boundaries between 'ism' interpreters and 'postmodern' ones are not so clear always, as everyone with some familiarity with the 'postmodern' discussion can easily imagine.

Finally, I remind that I have not forgotten to reflect on all other material than Oakeshott comments used in my work, but from this point on this will be done 'inside the text' without building more walls to my story that now finally really gets going.

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[1]Pitkin has written not only sharply worded critiques on Oakeshott but also on Arendt. See, e.g. her *Inhuman conduct and Political theory* (1976) and *Justice, On Relating Private and Public* (1981). Actually, in both text the two authors are, to some extend, blamed from similar viewpoints, i.e. that of 'women' (feminism) and the 'poor'.

3. Modern Oakeshott

> Why, why can we never be sure till we die
> Or have killed for an answer
> Why, why do we suffer each race to believe
> That no race has been grander
> It seems because trough time and space
> Though names may change each face retains
> the mask it wore. (Peter Gabriel, 1972)

My intention in this chapter is to review the 'ism' reception of Oakeshott during the course of time. My point is not merely in trying to act as some kind of 'supreme judge' between the differing views or merely to pick out their strengths and weaknesses. More, it is to illustrate the variety of voices in the discussion where I should be able to separate my own 'postmodern' tone in a way that it will not just appear to the field as replacing one 'ism' with another. I do this through the examples that I find most interesting, since covering all the nuances is impossible.

There are various levels and aspects of examination in need of clarification before proceeding. Of these, my use of *modern* as an operational concept is the most important to remember while reading. As an operational term 'the modern' is seen in relation to my general postmodern disposition and also follows the account given by Pulkkinen:

> "The modern and the postmodern, for me, are modes of thought
> or cultural attitudes. Most generally the postmodern attitude is
> defined as anti-foundational. The modern attitude, which
> becomes discernible only with the emergence of the
> postmodern, is in search of foundation: it presents a purifying
> motion focused on a basic core." (Pulkkinen 1996, p. 45.)

Then, the leading idea is to examine those 'cores' in 'ism' interpretations of Oakeshott and, to be more exact, the tendency of those interpretations to look for some core in *Oakeshott's* oeuvre. The modern as a term will be complicated in the end of this chapter when I move from Crick's 'error' in his interpretation of Oakeshott towards reflecting those significant changes in Oakeshott's thinking that facilitate postmodern reading and, thus, this chapter is written a bit

'backwards'. The chapter starts with some newer interpretations and only then turns back in time. This 'helter skelter' composition is necessary for the flow of the rest of my story. The lingering among some recent interpretations may be understood as an additional illumination of the topic and a sort of 'still water' place in the whole story.

The word 'ism' is naturally far more complex than presented this far. So, I must remark that I am not trying to write any comprehensive intellectual history of either liberalism or conservatism (or idealism). Thus, my view of them as 'traditions of thought' is limited and presumably too simplified. However, for my purposes it seems enough to study them mainly in the limits given by 'ism' interpretations which, by its part, means an attempt to label Oakeshott to be writing under a 'covering term' of some ism. Of course, this division is as relative as any other. One could say that, e.g. Parekh (1982) represents an (ideal)ism interpreter of Oakeshott as he maintains that in *OHC* Oakeshott's comprehension of philosophical inquiry can be restored in 'the totality of experience':

> "The ideal character is in one move away from it; its postulates, two; their postulates, three; and so on. When a theorist reaches the highest, metaphysical stage, he is concerned only with the general and permanent features of the totality of experience, and specific goings-on, including politics, are no longer visible to him." (Ibid., 102.)

To me, this seems nonsensical as in *OHC* Oakeshott has no conception of philosophy being somehow 'higher' knowledge than any other. His term *unconditional* does not refer to any metaphysical or higher *destination*, but to an engagement of theorizing. In this connection, unconditional simply refers to the practice of theorizing, i.e. "an unconditional adventure in which every achievement of understanding is an invitation to investigate itself." (*OHC*, 11.)

However, as I have chosen mainly to examine the issue of political isms (as conventionally understood), to help my concentration more clearly on the 'political aspects' of Oakeshott's thinking, there are also 'friend/enemy' aspects present. The first 'cases' I work with are for most part 'friendly' readers of Oakeshott, i.e. interpreting him as a co-author of the ism they favour themselves. In the case of

Bernard Crick this arrangement does not hold good anymore. Still, I think this 'hostile' reading of Crick's offers a more fruitful context for investigating the possible 'fire behind the smoke' of Oakeshott's most 'sinister' reputation - the legend of conservatism. Thus, in the following I enter to the discussion that has been producing interesting variations like 'Michael Oakeshott, the liberal conservative' (see, e.g. O'Sullivan 1976, 139).

> "What may now be meant by the word 'liberal' is anyone's guess." (Oakeshott 1975, 1991, p. 349.)

3.1 The textbook version

> "Nor have these principles of state and society ever left conservatism, save under the spurs of emergency and sheer political necessity. Disraeli, Newman, Tocqueville, Bourget, Godkin, Babbit, all of them, down to such conservatives our own day as Oakeshott, Voegelin, Jouvenel and Kirk, have stressed nothing if not the bounden necessity of the political state holding as far back as possible meddling in economic, social and moral affairs; and conversely, in *doing* all that is possible in strengthening and broadening the functions of family, neighbourhood, and voluntary cooperative association." (Nisbet 1986, 38.)

The preceding quotation is an example of 'Moses-to-Lenin' thinking, which is one of the styles frequently appearing among Oakeshott commentaries (see, Arblaster 1989, 12). This kind of thinking has a habit to place Oakeshott neatly into a smoothly continuing tradition of political thought whether that being 'Burkean' conservatism, or 'liberalism' beginning from Hobbes or Locke. Or fitting his thinking around notions of 'tradition' or 'community', 'abstract individualism', or 'natural rights'. This textbook version of Oakeshott interpretations has been commented a lot and the most obvious 'mistakes' pointed out, but I still see some relevance to remind of this possibility of interpretation. (See, e.g. Riley 1985.)

One reason is the relative unfamiliarity of Oakeshott in Finland[1] and the shifting climate in which 'isms' have been discussed recently. Sometimes there seems to have been quite simplistic understanding of a new 'freedom' in the possibility for advocating liberalism (or neoconservatism, understood as 'right') in the altered political situation and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. There seems to be some sort of tendency to 'rehabilitate', or introduce, political thinkers in a very conventional way, and from this I hope to be able to separate my postmodern account thoroughly. A fair example of this kind of reading can be seen, e.g. in a very recently published book *Klassinen Liberalismi* ('Classic Liberalism', by Iivonen and Harisalo, 1997)[2]. I give a bit lengthy, but illuminating quote:

> "Liberalism presupposes rational thinking, deliberated imagination and strong doubt from human beings...Liberalism tries to foster rationality and diminish anti-rationality when society's common affairs are arranged." (idid, 23.)

> "Conservatism separates from liberalism essentially. In conservative thinking a human being is an inseparable totality with his material, moral, religious and other mental features...This is why liberalism simplifies a human being too much and...thus liberalism, by its part, explains the birth of the mass society and the idealization of economical growth." (Ibid., 57.)

> "Conservatism can be defined as thinking that respects those institutions in society that have naturally grown during a long period in time. Conservatism protects their autonomy and defends also the moral inheritance from generation to generation."(Ibid., 59, *here is a reference to both Oakeshott and Nisbet*, my translations.)

The comparison of the readings of Harisalo & Iivonen and that of Nisbet's may at first seem quite superficial, but I argue that this 'superficiality' is just the point as

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[1]However, Pertti Lappalainen's article *Menneisyys ja Politiikka* (Politiikka 2, 1989, 100-110) and his doctoral thesis *Politiikan mahdollistuminen* (1992) are to be noted.

[2]See also, Iivonen (1995): Hayek ja Suomi. In Hayek: Tie Orjuuteen. (The Road to Serfdom, 1944).

both the readings make themselves 'guilty to the same mistakes'.[1] Both see Oakeshott as representing 'conservatism', and for Nisbet, he additionally represents a 'companion' in the 'tradition'. According to Nisbet, Oakeshott "did not suggest renascence so much as steady continuation of a *well-established* conservative tradition." (Nisbet 1986, 98, my italics.) A tradition that would entail, e.g. "the hierarchy of authorities that forming a society." (Harisalo & Iivonen, 65.)The mistake of seeing Oakeshott as advocating for a continuation of a tradition with a foundation (*the core of conservatism*) is a bit strange - even as the gravest flaw of both readings appears to be the shallow familiarity with many of Oakeshott's texts. Especially, as they claim to have read their *Rationalism in Politics*.

> "And by some strange self-deception, he attributes to tradition (which, of course is pre-eminently fluid) the rigidity and fixity of character which in fact belongs to ideological thinking."
> (Oakeshott 1947, RP 1962, 31.)

But, perhaps even greater is the advocated view that there are some ready-made guidelines found in 'political philosophy' for 'practical politics':

> "Liberalism's promise for people is progress as peaceful and undisturbed process in the society. We hope that we could convince our readers of this and to warn of the political factors that endanger our culture." (Harisalo & Iivonen, 210.)

And what should be the state of conservatism today:

> "Burke is the prophet - the Marx or the Mill - of conservatism, and it is a mark of his continuing prophetic status that he has been cited and otherwise recognized by conservatives...It is the essence of a major ideology, as of a religion or theology, to stress continuity and consistency. Science seeks constantly to go beyond their founders, but ideologies do not. That is why Burke would have little difficulty in conversing today with the

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[1] In addition, it is illustrative that Harisalo & Iivonen's list of "this century's conservative thinkers" looks like this: Babbit, Nock, Kirk, Nisbet, Ortega y Gasset, Oakeshott and Scruton. (idid., 62.)

Jouvenels, Kirks and Oakeshotts of the 'pre-political', and also with the Thatchers and Reagans of the 'political strata'." (Nisbet, x.)

It seems to me then that sometimes the 'reason' of labelling Oakeshott under an ism does not need to be anything more 'complicated' than the good old want to justify a preferred policy and to do this by referring to some 'grand theory'. Interesting allies are born and dispersing in these readings: the unity suggested between Hayek and Oakeshott (or better: 'Hayekians' and 'Oakeshottians') was strengthened by Devigne. He interpreted their texts in the context of Thatcher government's actions, like tightening of monetary policy and weakening intermediate organizations. (Devigne 1994, 33.)

Still, the self-feeding tendency of this kind of ism readings has been resulting in neglecting Oakeshott's own words (see, p.16, footnote). About the 'coherent consistency' of Oakeshott's thinking; if one is to look for a 'consistency', perhaps it is better found in the following aspiration:

"The aim in philosophical reflection is to think philosophically, not to construct a 'philosophy'..For, paradoxically enough, it is easier to construct a philosophy than to hold fast to the enterprise of thinking philosophically, and what distinguishes the masterpiece is the second and more difficult achievement." (Oakeshott 1946-50, *Political Philosophy*, RPM, 150.)

The relationship between political philosophy and practical politics is not that of giving instructions:

"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..the conclusion that we must expect from political philosophy no practical political conclusions whatever. Political philosophy can provide no principles to be 'followed', no rules of political conduct to be observed, no ideals of policy or arrangement to be pursued." (Ibid., 153.)

3.2 Civil Association as a re-formulation of liberalism

In this passage I will examine the more sophisticated styles of placing Oakeshott under some ism. These notions do not assume uncomplexity and coherent continuity of tradition anymore, or at least not so firmly as the former accounts. Instead, they seem to have been developed around certain concepts of Oakeshott. Generally, one could maintain that in these readings the familiarity with Oakeshott's production is relevantly deeper. Among the commonest of these are the treatments of *civil association* as a restatement of liberalism[1] - my examples of this being Franco and Wendell's readings - and seeing Oakeshott's production as a reformulation of conservatism (e.g. Covell 1986, Devigne 1994, Manning 1997)[2]. I focus here on the former way of interpretation to avoid total bias towards the case of 'conservatism'.

As mentioned above, both Franco's and Wendell's readings of Oakeshott's liberalism really are more sophisticated than the quite simple textbook version of the issue. They avoid the most crude slips by making certain reservations to calling Oakeshott a liberal:

> "At first glance, it may seem mischievous or even mean-spirited to discuss the 'liberalism' of Michael Oakeshott. As is well known, he dislikes the hasty and abbreviated approach to politics implicit in 'isms' of any sort. Further, he himself uses the word 'liberal' in a narrower, historical fashion to designate a view, traceable to John Locke, which started from a position of 'natural rights' to argue for the limitation of sovereign authority, and which evolved into claims for material benefits from the state ("*Salus populi, suprema lex!*")." (Wendell 1985, 773.)

With these reservations I have no difficulty to agree with, and neither with the separation of Oakeshott from materialist, economist or utilitarianist versions of

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[1]In another discussion context, one might as well suggest that Oakeshott's 'enterprise association' would refer to the state comprehension of liberalism and 'civil association', more preferably, to republicanism or 'constitutionalism'.

[2]In his article, Manning wishes to illustrate the significance of Oakeshott's 'ideological conservatism' to the continuity of philosophical thematic in liberalism.

liberalism. But, the next reservation is already one that separates Franco's reading from Wendell's, for the benefit of the former. Namely, Wendell does not make a serious attempt to 'purge' liberalism from the "questionable metaphysical and ethical assumptions of the negative and abstract individualism." (Franco 1990b, 411.) Although, Wendell reflects on 'history of individualism', he still attaches his interpretation to the 'liberal idea of the individuality of value'. (Wendell, 780.) In his eyes, Oakeshott's project is to preserve[1]:

> "..both the Aristotelian idea of politics as the activity of attending
> to the arrangements of the whole, and the liberal idea of the
> individuality of value, as mediated by the Roman and Norman
> idea of fidelity to authority as the bond among citizens." (Ibid.)

In short, Oakeshott's reformulation of liberalism "reiterates the relevance of Aristotle's account for modern politics, while indicating its limitations for an individualist age." (Ibid.)

Especially two points bother me in this interpretation. First comes the view that, for Wendell, 'liberal' in the history of political thought indicates the view of the state being subordinate to, and arising from individual conscience or appetite (ibid., 773). I do not agree that Oakeshott (esp. in *OHC*) sustains this distinction between the state and the individual in this sense. Oakeshott's interpretation of, e.g. Hegel and Hobbes does not centre on this 'basic' difference and this is not the 'core' to be 'found' from Oakeshott's oeuvre as he, instead, regards affinities with the 'ideal state' as a difficulty. Thus, his account is no attempt to 'resolve' this tension with the emphasis on individualism.

> "..I would have done better to have made my essay on the Civil
> Condition even more abstract than it is and thus to have
> removed all danger of its being mistaken for a specification of a
> modern state. My difficulty was what my predecessors (notably
> Hobbes and Hegel) had written of it as if it were the kind of
> association which a modern state only distantly resembled but

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[1]My italics are on the word 'preserve' as Wendell really uses this concept. I have difficulties in seeing how Oakeshott's philosophy as continuos attempt of thinking would coincide with a *preservation* of an *idea* of politics.

which it should be made to become, and their reasons for thinking so. But this way of thinking of it made the use of the ambiguous political vocabulary of a modern state almost unavoidable and encouraged rather than excluded the consideration of contingencies." (Oakeshott 1976, 364.)

As civil association is no 'state' - in Wendell's comprehension of 'Aristotelian', 'Hobbesian' or 'Hegelian' senses - it does not accommodate the vocabulary of the 'whole' either; *societas* and *universitas* do not 'belong' to the same *vocabulary*. When a 'state' or association understood as *universitas* carries connotations of 'the whole' such as 'a culture' or 'a nation', *societas* does not share these 'burdens'.

"..*societas* of agents joined, not in seeking a common substantive satisfaction, but in virtue of their understanding and acknowledgement of the conditions of the practice concerned and of the relationships it entails." (*OHC*, 88.)

In my mind, you cannot abstract a free 'individual' and acknowledgement of authority from *societas* and apply it to the 'problem' of *universitas*. Thus, *the attribution of authority to respublica,* as a system of moral rules, is no 'mediator' between the 'whole' and the 'liberal idea of the individuality (ibid., 152-154).

Second, Wendell understands Oakeshott as borrowing "important political resources in our inheritance from the past" and cultivating those resources to philosophy which again becomes more relevant to "governance in our Western societies as they become even more democratic, or materialist and egalitarian." (Wendell 1985,786.) Again, one has to remind that, for Oakeshott, philosophy does not mean an instruction book for practical life, and neither does history mean a collection of 'lessons to be learnt'.[1] Although, the sour comment of

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[1]This is something Oakeshott calls 'practical past' in the sense that present, but future-oriented objectives, guide the reading of the past. I must remark that my work is not probably 'free' from this either. However, as Oakeshott opposes, e.g. teleological views of historical inquiry, I find it difficult to see Oakeshott being free from 'politicking' himself. About this, see, e.g. Koikkalainen who interprets Oakeshott (in *On History*, 1983) arguing against some essentially modern views in the 'political field' of historical inquiry (Koikkalainen 1998, Politiikan toimintatyylit-seminaari, 24.4, Tampere, 9-14).

Oakeshott's refers to the critic presented by David Spitz (1975), it also serves as a good reminder of the issue:

> "And he crowns this heap of rubbish by mistaking an historical essay for advice on how to do politics." (Oakeshott 1976, *On misunderstanding OHC,* 360.)

Paul Franco does not rely on the notion of abstract individualism in his reading of Oakeshott. On the contrary, for him, Oakeshott's restatement of liberalism includes the erasing of the negative and abstract individualism from liberalism. Thus, Franco succeeds in avoiding one of the most common defects in (liberal)ism readings. Franco's reading is powerful and influential as he published the first full-length study of the thought of Michael Oakeshott in 1990. This reading has many affinities with my own, but it also differs from mine in the wish of *which* discussion mainly to contribute and, accordingly, the interpretations of the same text vary on emphasis and 'results'. For example, *Contemporary British Politics (1948)* and *The Political Economy of Freedom* (1949) and a few other contemporary 'libertarian' writings are 'proofs' for Franco that Oakeshott has not in any phase been an 'antiliberal' (Franco1990b, 419). Also, Franco reads *On being Conservative* and sees this essay's principal targets being:

> "Burke and his modern followers, whom he believes have tied political conservatism too closely to controversial and even anachronistic speculative and religious beliefs." (Franco1990a, 149.)

With this detaching of Oakeshott from 'Burkean conservatism' I agree (see, e.g. Oakeshott 1958, *Kant, Adam Smith and Burke*, MPM, 59-72), but this is not the point when I consider Franco's reading of Oakeshott as an essentially modern interpretation. Namely, the dichotomy Franco sets to build operates within the dichotomy of conservatism/liberalism in a bit too uncomplicated way. The assimilitation of Oakeshott to the 'camp' of liberalism mostly bases on - at least so it seems to me - 'the profound unity of Oakeshott's thought' (the core). For Franco, this 'unity' means that one cannot say that Oakeshott was 'antiliberal' as he does not fit into to the 'category of conservatism'. Thus, conservatism and

liberalism are treated *as if* these were the only options to play with; you leave one camp and join the other.[1] (See, esp. Franco1990b, 411-420.) Then, naturally more 'traces' of Oakeshott's liberalism are seen in his:

> "..emphasis on liberty, individuality, and the rule of law; his invocation of Hobbes; and so on." (Ibid., 412.)

In my view, Franco's reservations are not sufficient then. It holds true that Oakeshott's critique of rationalism is not *only* critique of liberalism, but still liberalism is, for Oakeshott, a 'child' of modern rationalism among other ideologies. Thus, one cannot say him to "attempt to grasp liberalism as living, vernacular tradition" (ibid.), as a political ideology is no 'living' tradition for Oakeshott, but - at best - an *abridgement of* a 'living tradition'. When emphasizing the 'continuity' in both Oakeshott's thinking and the tradition of liberalism, Franco dismisses the formerly quoted doubt by Oakeshott about the 'meaning of the word liberal'. The 'messiness' of that meaning can also be read in connection with the messiness of 'tradition'; it may be very difficult to find any *genuine* liberal tradition in this age of all the 'neo isms'. Also, the point that Oakeshott's own use of the word 'tradition' has changed should be taken on account. Franco's reflection on the changing interpretation horizons during the decades is done mainly 'inside' liberalist discussions then[2] and, e.g. interesting transformations of the words 'progressive', 'radical' and 'reactionary' are largely superseded. I would say that the 'reactionary conservative' of the fourties can nowadays be interpreted as a 'radical' in a way that will not necessary change the actual 'content' of the earlier interpretation; the earlier 'reactionary' conservative (enemy of progressive socialist) now seen as 'progressive'. Or, a 'traditionalist' conservative as 'radically' stepping out of the whole Enlightenment discussion or being interpreted as a predecessor of the New Right, which has now largely occupied the phrase: "Away

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[1]Perhaps the third option would be 'socialism' but, as for Oakeshott, naturally much harder to 'accuse' of.

[2]I do not wish to devalue Franco's examination of Oakeshott in the framework of liberalism, on the contrary, it is highly interesting and parts of it will be summarized a bit later.

with the slogans we have inherited from the past." (Giddens 1994, 2.) The reflection on how these changes and the changes in Oakeshott's own use of concepts relate has been left halfway as 'the core' for Franco was Oakeshott's 'continuity in liberalism'. He does not clarify the issue of specifically 'British tradition' of liberalism - with 'its' many significant changes towards the idea of 'welfare state in this century, for example - too much (e.g. Freeden 1986). Instead, as Franco sees Oakeshott reformulating liberalism from *two* traditions - 'Hobbesianism' and 'Hegelianism' - one has to wonder if this reading has anything to do with the accentuated 'living tradition' of liberalism. Namely, in this situation where the concept of 'tradition' is very vague, at least we can maintain that Oakeshott does not want his thinking to be paralled with 'universal ideologies':

> "When a manner of attending to arrangements is to be transplanted from the society in which it has grown up into another society (always a questionable enterprise), the simplification of an ideology may appear as an asset."
> (Oakeshott 1951, *Political Education,* VLL,145.)

Next, I will shortly summarize some points of Franco's interpretation and leave my critique to the background. As I already mentioned, his reading has affinities with my own, and in its thorough knowledge of the body of Oakeshott's production it has many indisputable merits. I want to set Franco's reading alongside my own so that the reader will have a possibility to make comparisons between them. Also, as there are differences in the points we emphasize in Oakeshott's texts, this will bring up issues from Oakeshott's production that otherwise would not stand out so clearly. Thus, I ask for full attention during reading the following lines as many important concepts of Oakeshott are introduced.

In Franco's reading, Oakeshott's political philosophy, especially *OHC,* may be understood as an endeavour to synthesize Hobbes's sceptical doctrine of authority and the 'teleocratic' tendencies of the Idealists (Franco1990b, 418). Hegel's doctrine of the 'rational will', Bosanquet's doctrine of the 'real will', and Hobbes's political philosophy are brought under reflection. In overcoming the negative individualism which has dogged liberalism ever since Hobbes (ibid., 423), Oakeshott's great advantage is to see *freedom* inherent in *agency:*

"Rather, the freedom inherent in agency consists, first, in the fact that conduct is an exhibition of intelligence and not an organic or otherwise nonintelligent process; and second, in the fact that an agent's choice of a particular action is never completely specified or determined beforehand by the conditions or circumstances surrounding it. Now a moral practice does not compromise either of these conditions of free agency." (Ibid.)

Franco interprets that as there is no agency, which is not the acknowledgement of a moral practice, *will* and *morality* mutually imply one another. Thus, there is no need for 'abstract individualism' and notion of 'consent' in Oakeshott's "thoroughly Hegelian conception of the relationship between freedom or will and a moral practice that overcomes the opposition between individual and government, will and law, and freedom and authority." (Ibid.) In Oakeshott's terms, moral practice is to be understood as a vernacular language of intercourse, and also in these linguistic terms must the *civil association* be comprehended. The emphasis of vernacular language is, for Franco, the greatest reminder of Hegel's notion of *Sittlichkeit*. He refers to the passage in the third essay of *OHC* about Hegel and writes:

"Oakeshott announces that he intends to grasp civil association as a living tradition, a way of life, and not simply as something fixed, finished, or essentially dead. This same intention informs Hegel's theorization of the *Philosophy of Right.*.Oakeshott himself makes clear the intimate connection he sees between Hegel's notion of *Sittlichkeit* and his own notion of a practice. It is only by ignoring this connection that a commentator like Judith Shklar can assert that Oakeshott's civil association, lacking the "intergrative force" of *Sittlichkeit,* corresponds more to Hegel's notion of "abstract right"." (Ibid., 425.)

Franco estranges Oakeshott's version of 'liberalism' from those for which 'peace' or 'security' are 'purposes' of state or authority as, for Oakeshott, civil association is no *'enterprise association'*. And even if one chooses to think 'civil association' (here in quotation marks) as an enterprise association, 'peace' and 'security' are not substantive purposes and, thus, cannot specify an enterprise association.

(Ibid.) I must remark here that Oakeshott is naturally highly aware of the history of various attempts to 'ground' the philosophy of 'civil association' as an enterprise association on this basis. I find Oakeshott's spiky footnote on this issue quite illuminating:

> ".., e.g. if civil association is identified as enterprise association then it cannot be association of equals and it is not self-contained association in the only important meaning of the expression. Association in terms of substantive performances is either necessarily incomplete or it is terminable." (*OHC,* 119.)

Franco continues that *agents* choose to engage in a substantive relationship and they must also be able to extricate themselves from it. Then, as a state is necessarily a compulsory association, it cannot be an enterprise association.[1] Again, as a living moral practice *of a special kind* civil association is to be understood as a practice composed entirely of *rules*; other moral practices do not share this exclusively rule-articulated moral character. With the characterization of civil association in terms of non-instrumental rules (laws, *lex)* Oakeshott arrives to the *differentia* of civil association. Here, Franco attaches his reading of 'reformulation of liberalism' to "recognizing rules in terms of their *authority",* i.e. to the point that the recognition of the authority of *respublica* (the manifold of rules composing civil association) is "simply accepting its conditions as binding regardless of whether one approves of them or not." (Franco 1990b, 425.).[2] Freedom, important for Franco's liberalism, is 'saved' as:

> "Civil authority and obligation do not compromise the moral autonomy of human beings, in the first place, because they relate to *lex,* and *lex* does not specify substantive actions but

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[1] Again, I must remind of not confusing Oakeshott's civil association to any 'ideal model' of a state, it is an *ideal character,* and should rather be understood as a 'competing' *instrument of understanding* the modern European states, which are complex and ambiguous historic associations. (See, *OHC,* 108-109). In the ism readings this nuance tends to get drown during the voyage.

[2] Politics in regard to the *respublica* of civil association is to "consider the desirability or otherwise of the conditions prescribed in a practice". (*OHC,* 161.) This point of Oakeshott's is highly relevant for my postmodern reading.

only adverbial considerations to be taken into account when choosing and acting." (Ibid., 426.)

The term *voluntas* is not needed in the discourse of authority in civil association. Here Franco sees Oakeshott departing radically from his predecessors Hobbes and Bodin, who "had a tendency to identify the *exercise* of authority with will and command." (Ibid. My italics, I think Franco could have emphasized even more the difference between 'exercising' and acknowledging authority as the emphasis on the latter is so intimately connected to Oakeshott's admiration of, e.g. Bodin and Hobbes as giving an understanding of a 'state' as *societas.*) Franco arrives then to a conclusion that it just because recognizing the authority of *respublica* does not involve approval of its conditions that the 'freedom' inherent in agency is preserved. Oakeshott interprets Hobbes as *not* being an absolutist precisely because his is an authoritarian; for him it is Reason, not Authority, that is destructive of individuality. The profound understanding and emphasis on authority and its separation from the idea of of approval by Hobbes is, for Franco, what makes Oakeshott an outstanding philosopher of freedom and individuality when compared , e.g. to Locke. (Ibid., 427.).

Lastly, Franco draws the line between Oakeshott's reading of 'liberal Hobbesian tradition' and the 'tradition of Idealist political philosophy'. The core of the latter tradition is seen as:

> "an attempt to reconcile the authority of the state with individual freedom by basing that authority not on individual consent but on the general or rational will." (Ibid., 427.)

He proceeds with an important reservation:

> "Oakeshott's relation to this Idealist tradition is somewhat complex. He certainly follows Rousseau, Hegel, and Bosanquet in rejecting individual consent, "the will of all", as the basis of authority. Nevertheless, he does not identify authority with the "real" or "rational" will, at least not when this will is conceived substantively. His reconciliation of freedom with authority depends instead (as we have seen) on showing that civil authority does not compromise the formal freedom inherent in

agency. In this latter respect, Oakeshott seems to diverge most from his British Hegelian predecessors, whose notion of the 'real will' does seem to point to a substantialist and teleological doctrine of human nature and whose doctrine of authority therefore does not clearly distinguish between authority and wisdom." (Ibid., 428.)

Now, Franco's main contention is that Oakeshott's political philosophy rests on Hegelian rejection of the atomism and negative individualism of traditional liberal theory. He also maintains that Oakeshott's theory of civil association remains a *liberal* theory "even while incorporating a more Hegelian, historical, even hermeneutic conception of the self." (Ibid.).

This liberal theory of Oakeshott he places then to the context of current debate on liberalism, especially to the 'communitarians' versus 'deontological liberals' debate.[1] An obvious merit of Franco's treatment of Oakeshott in this context is that he avoids placing Oakeshott very neatly in either of these 'sides'. Much more simple accounts on this have been posed, e.g. by Dahrendorf in his *History of London School of Economics*:

"On closer inspection, it actually turns out to be two strands tenuously intertwined, indeed more incompatible than its proponents liked to admit. The economists, most notably Friedrich Hayek, were classical 'a-social individualists'. Michael Oakeshott and some of his colleagues in the Department of Government, on the other hand, were Burkean, if not Hegelian, communitarians." (Dahrendorf 1995, 515.)

However, even though Oakeshott's political philosophy represents a 'steering course' between deontological liberalism and communitarianism, Franco still approximates Oakeshott to deontological liberalism[2] preferably to

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[1]In addition, Rorty's views are examined, but to preserve some logic in this thesis I will get to Rorty later in postmodern context, the context that is naturally one reason for Franco to reject Rorty's reading of Oakeshott.

[2]Rawls and Ackerman are commented in a footnote of *On History* (1983): I have exluded from this account [of considering the state as an association ruled by law, SS] the reflections of some recent writers (e.g. John Rawls and Bruce Ackerman) because, although they present a state as an association ruled by *jus*, they identify *jus* as a

communitarianism. He argues that Oakeshott's idea of civil association as a non-instrumental, non-purposive practice has more in common with the procedural or juridical ideal of deontological liberals. In this 'final' reading Oakeshott is seen as providing a more satisfying response to communitarian criticism than other deontolocigal liberals have given, as Oakeshott avoids the most obvious pitfalls of deontological liberalism. Most importantly, Sandel and Taylor's critique, maintaining that "deontological liberalism rests on an atomistic conception of the self as prior to and independent of society and its substantive commitments", is undermined when brought to comparison with Oakeshott's deontological liberalism that rejects the atomism of traditional liberal theory with incorporating a more historical conception of the self to liberal theory. (Franco 1990a, 230-231). Hayek's doctrine of procedural, non-purposive law is seen in close connection to Oakeshott's position, though "Hayek can hardly be said to have a very Hegelian view of the self or of liberty" and "fails to liberate himself completely from the materialism or economism which Oakeshott sees as so detrimental to a genuine understanding of liberalism." (Ibid.) Thus, the last of the communitarianist accuses, i.e. not only towards some of the most untenable assumptions in traditional liberal doctrine, but rather 'the liberal tradition itself' with its 'individualism, acquisitiveness, and materialism' do not withstand the confrontation with Oakeshott's liberalism.

> "This type of criticism of liberalism of course goes back quite far
> - it can be found in Rousseau, Marx, and Nietzsche, for example
> - but it has found more recent expression in such writers as Alasdair McIntyre and Roberto Unger. What does Oakeshott have in common with these radical critics of liberalism. Not a great deal, really. For he seeks to defend what they no longer find worth defending." (Ibid., 235.)

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consideration of 'fairness' in the distribution of scarce resources, and 'fairness' as what rational competitors, in certain ideal circumstances, must agree is an equitable distribution. Here, *lex*, if it exits at all, is composed of regulations understood in terms of the consequences of their operation and as guides to the achiement of a substantive state of affairs." (Ibid., 156.)

To conclude, some additions are needed to complete the picture of Franco's reading of Oakeshott. Franco does notice the affinities between Oakeshott's oeuvre and philosophical debate over the nature of human rationality and rationalism. He shortly refers to the rejection of the Cartesian preoccupation with certainty and method, the replacement of a technical conception of rationality with a more practical and contextual conception etc. in connection with authors like Bernstein, (especially) Gadamer, Habermas, Rorty and Arendt. Also, Franco sees Oakeshott as writing against the background of our 'predicament' (both moral and political) as rationalism and the "self-deception in the form of belief in the superiority of the self-conscious pursuit of moral ideals." (Ibid., 109-120).

However, these notions turn pale in comparison with the weight in which Franco attaches Oakeshott's political philosophy to the discussion context of liberalism. I refer here to my criticisim against this attachment presented in the beginning of this passage and leave the issue for now.

3.3 Bernard Crick as a critic of Oakeshott

From the crowd of 'ism' interpretations of Oakeshott the ones by Bernard Crick stand out in their explicit and persistent critical approach towards Oakeshott's oeuvre since the 1960s. For my *political* postmodern reading of Oakeshott, these critiques have been particularly rich material as they have allowed me to read friend/enemy and modern/postmodern aspects through a considerable period along with one author. Besides the 'socialist' versus 'conservative' and 'modern' versus 'postmodern' compositions there are interesting contextual factors present when Oakeshott and Crick are presented in a same 'portrait'. Of these, the institutional background in the form of the London School of Economics and Political Science is important and I will illuminate it later. My main assertion in this chapter is that when cut off the British political context of the 1940s and 1950s, the ism interpretations lose much of their capturing of the situation. Instead, they cling more to assumptions of some 'final basis' or 'core' that would incorporate Oakeshott to some ism. The situation approximates to that of 'universal

ideologies', i.e. to a simplification of a manner of thought (or living) when this manner is insulated from its context and abstracted to general principles (see, p. 32).

Before taking the turn back in time to the earlier Oakeshott reception by Crick, I have to remark that while reading of Crick's own oeuvre I have naturally concentrated on this precise Oakeshott material. So, in respect of Crick's own role as a political philosopher I have to admit that my view of the relationship between their 'natures' as philosophers is not quite as comprehensive as I would hope. For example, it might be very interesting also to analyse the 'similarities' between Crick's and Oakeshott's philosophical approaches, as there certainly are many. In my mind, the following sentence illuminates the issue vividly:

"The attempt to politicize everything is the destruction of politics.
When everything is seen as relevant to politics, then politics has
in fact become totalitarian." (Crick 1962, 151.)

The sentence was written by Crick, but I think Oakeshott would not mind his name mentioned in this connection. One can get a heuristic idea about the 'Arendt connection' here, and also read the quotation in the context of Anglo-Saxon political philosophy where politics is often seen as the 'necessary evil', but these speculations I leave without further examination in this thesis.

However, few points seem to stand out when the 'differences' between the two political philosophers are considered. For one thing, for Crick politics is always emphasized as the *primary* activity. In his essay *Freedom as Politics* *(Political Theory and Practice* 1963,1971), Crick points to the Arendtian account on the capacity in politics to initiate[1] (ibid., 35-62). Secondly, political philosophy is not 'neutral' for Crick, but writing a philosophical text is also a political act. On

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[1]In a footnote Crick adds: "Exaggeration, for surely politics is the institutionalizing of freedom, possibly its justification, not literally a *raison d'être.*" (Ibid., 49). For Crick, politics is also strongly connected to *polis* and people living outside polis are Aristotelian beasts or gods. Further: "A political system is a free system - though the order is thus: freedom depends on politics as politics depends on government." (Ibid., 50.) I am not quite sure how these accounts are merged to admiration of Arendt, but at least the latter quotation would not coincide with Oakeshott, for whom this kind of argumentation is 'muddle'.

his part, Oakeshott often speaks of politics as a 'secondary activity' and does not consider his texts as political acts.

> "Now it is not, I agree with Oakeshott, the special business of a political philosopher to offer advice to politicians or to presume to make people's minds up for them. For one thing, the minds are almost always made up already. But it is part of our business to follow truths and their implications, whether we see them as theories or doctrines, and to debate...on a level above both political opinion and political theory (as contingency and relativity)." (Crick 1963, 1971,13.)

'Philosophically' Oakeshott represents a "false friend of politics" then, "the non-political conservative" who "likes to be thought above politics." (Crick 1962,122-123.) Also, Crick emphasizes the relevance of conflicts and clashes of interests more than Oakeshott, though I do not see Oakeshott denying them.

One can get an illuminating example of these differences by reading their views of a shared subject, namely political education (see, esp. Oakeshott's essays in VLL, Crick and Heater: *Essays on Political Education*, 1977). Where one can see that they agreed is that people *should* get educated in politics[1]. And that, at least one of the 'results' of political education is a subject, who is initiated to the language of politics:

> "The fruits of a political education will appear in the manner in which we think and speak about politics and perhaps in the manner in which we conduct our political activity..The more profound our understanding of political activity, the less we shall be at the mercy of a plausible but mistaken analogy, the less we shall be tempted by a false or irrelevant model." (Oakeshott 1951, *Political Education,* VLL, 155.)

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[1]This statement is not so obvious as it may first seem, actually when Oakeshott gave his famous inaugural lecture in LSE he started with the sentence:"The expression 'political education' has fallen on evil days; in the wilful and disingenuous corruption of language which is characteristic of our time it has acquired a sinister meaning." (Oakeshott 1951, *VLL,* 136.)

But, whereas Oakeshott here after concentrates on reflecting on political education in the universities in a more abstract manner, Crick also operates actively in Political Association and connects 'theory' with 'practice' resisting the restriction of political education to the universities and for the elites (Crick 1977, 191).

3.3.1 Crick's contemporary critic

I find there is always a 'sword of Damochles' hanging above a writer trying to draw 'conclusions' from other writers' life experiences. In my thesis, I have ended up speculating over the 'biographical connections' between Oakeshott and other authors a few times, being well aware of the hazards lurking behind the corner. However, when speaking about the London School of Economics and Political Science background shared by Crick and Oakeshott I feel a bit firmer ground under my feet.[1]

Calling Crick a contemporary critic of Oakeshott is not quite unproblematic, simply because of the 28-year age gap between the authors. However, as I have restricted the area of contemporary critic to Crick's texts deriving from the sixties I feel this 'legitimate' to do. Moreover, his probably still most famous book *In Defence of Politics* was published already in 1962, so he was already an author very much in his own 'right' at the time. One does not have to restrict the reading of his Oakeshott critiques merely as pointed from 'a student' towards 'the professor', even in the light of the following quotation:

> "A spectre is haunting the LSE and (please don't forget) Political Science. For ten years the skeptical, polemical, dandiacal, paradoxical, gay and bitter spirit has been haunting, rather than filling, the Chair of Political Science formerly held by Harold Laski." (Crick 1963, 65.)

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[1]Not least, because of Crick's direct feedback (a seminar in the University of Jyväskylä, 8th January, 1998).

When Oakeshott was elected to the Chair of Political Science at LSE in 1951, after the death of Harold Laski, the whole school was very much in turmoil. The 'rivalries' and drawing of boundaries between the different subjects and styles of study were accelerated, the presence of Karl Popper was strong after his return from New Zealand in 1945, Sidney and Beatrice Webb's legacy was still influential etc. In Crick's case, however, the most important factor was the above quoted change from 'Laski's political science' to that of Oakeshott's. The 'problem' was not so much a dispute about 'what' should be taught:

> "Harold Laski and his successor, Michael Oakeshott, were much concerned with the 'old concepts'. Modern political science never took a hold at the school, or in most British universities for that matter." (Dahrendorf 1995, 226.)

It was that, in Crick's eyes, Oakeshott was implying that "*politics* was not quite for gentlemen", only political philosophy was (Crick 1998, in the University of Jyväskylä).[1] According to Dahrendorf, Oakeshott was not quite unaware or immune for the critique inside LSE:

> "And it seems perhaps a little ungrateful that he [Laski] should be followed by a sceptic; one who would do better if only he knew how." (Oakeshott 1951, quoted in Dahrendorf 1995, 368.)

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[1]Although my LSE discussion in this passage overlaps with the brief glance at 'political education' in passage 3.3, two things should be noted. First, all the essays in *VLL* can be seen as exhibits of Oakeshott's politicking in the 'field' of university politics in a same way that Koikkalainen (1998) sees him politicking in the field of history. The essays written in the early fifties can well be seen as a 'political position' in the discussion going on in LSE. Also, in 1970s, Oakeshott can be seen to 'comment' the development of the British Universities - not always so 'abstract' then. Oakeshott advocates strongly against understanding education as what Nietzsche called a 'culture philistine', i.e. merely acquiring information. Also, he opposes education as 'socialization', i.e. as promoting uniformity. Instead, a university should be "a place of learning", a place to join the conversation. In terms of *universitas* and *societas* definitely the latter, though in 'traditional terms' this may sound surprising. (*A Place of Learning*, VLL, 27-36*)*. Second, Crick emphasized in 1998, that he has later become to see that the difficulty was more between the 'Oakeshottians' and 'Laskians'. For example, Cowling's "high politics" and Minoque's "Hayekian market stuff" were to be opposed by the former student's of Laski.(Crick, in the University of Jyväskylä, 8th January, 1998.)

The scepticism of Oakeshott was not left without attention by Crick, but in the 1950s, it was foremost the relationship between practice and theory that was for Laski's favour:

> "As a student of Laski, I never had any doubt that one should go beyond all this insular empiricism and be *committed*.. I count myself lucky to have then encountered the stimulating teaching of Carl Friedrich at Harvard before returning to the very changed, high and dry atmosphere of LSE under Oakeshott."
> (Crick 1963, 1971, 1.)

Laski's socialist doctrine had made strong impression on Crick and the main complain appeared to be that a socialist was followed by a *conservative*. Crick was not alone with his thoughts of Oakeshott:

> "Oakeshott was conversational where Laski was forever the orator; he was concerned with detail where Laski preferred the great sweep; he dug deeply into the past, preferably that before the seventeenth-century revolutions, when Laski could never get enough of the present, the day, almost the minute; and of course Oakeshott was a true and conservative thinker."
> (Dahrendorf 1995, 386.)

From the viewpoint of Crick, Oakeshott mostly seems to have represented the "bad Tory" then. Thus, in light of the 'ism issue', I wish to stress that the most obvious thing constituting the friend/enemy line between Crick and Oakeshott is Crick's commitment to Socialist doctrines. In addition of being obvious, I also see the relevance of Crick's points *in the immediate context of writing*, i.e. mainly in the early sixties. Though there are not many answers by Oakeshott to this criticism, I think that certain aspects in Oakeshott's own postwar texts open them to this kind of critique and even 'legitimate' it.

The two essays by Oakeshott stand out for being examples open to contemporary polemics: *The Contemporary British Politics* (1948) and *The Political Economy of Freedom* (1949).[1] In my opinion, these articles by Oakeshott

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[1]The two Oakeshott's articles referred to are actually book reviews, but I think that Oakeshott's own voice stands out clearly enough to provide basis for

really are not the best exhibits of his brilliancy and originality. From the viewpoint of Crick, *the socialist*, Oakeshott fails oddly to distinguish between the actual political situation in the Great Britain, the aims of the Labour Government (or socialists or the Labour Party) and his generalization of Collectivism and its principles derived from the situation of war. Indeed, when Oakeshott draws parallels between Cromwell and Attlee, tyranny and the Labour Party and at the same breathe continues that "Conservatism has no incentive to promote despotism" the reputation of Oakeshott's conservatism becomes more intelligible. (Oakeshott 1948, 485.) Crick writes:

> "Perhaps the book he happened to be reviewing was the first book of pure-liberal economics he had read. "The third object of this economic policy is a stable currency, maintained by an application of fixed and known rules and not by day-to-day administrative tricks. And that this belongs to the political economy of freedom needs no argument: inflation is the mother of servitude." There is no need to deny that the 'fixed-money crank' is a type of conservative, but he is a rather embarrassing one. So too was his "there is good reason for supposing that labour monopolies are more dangerous than any others" - all good blunt party stuff." (Crick 1963, 68.)

I tend to see Crick's critique of Oakeshott fairly appropriate in the context of political debates of the time. Namely, despite Oakeshott's claim to avoid slipping between theory (or philosophy) and practice, he seems occasionally to have done so, and subjected himself to ism categorising. Oakeshott's treatment of central planning, socialism, and collectivism as clearly substantial and identifiable enemies makes it easy to understand that answers like Crick's were likely to rise. The party lines seemed quite clear when issues of unemployment and private property were considered, and surely Oakeshott's writings did not imply anything on a behalf of the British Labour Party (see also, Covell 1986, 97-98. Koerner 1985, 277-279). Oakeshott's *On being conservative* (1956) naturally strengthened the legend further in its sympathies for 'limited Government and politics', though

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interpretation.

he was clearly referring to the conservative *disposition* in the essay (see also, Rayner 1985, 325).

Further, Crick has made many observations of other kind worth considering. For instance, his questioning of Oakeshott's labelling of 'Federalism' under Rationalism seems adequate; the relationships between intimations and ideologies (or policies) are not always clear with Oakeshott. (Crick 1963, 1971, 72.) In the 1960s, Crick also criticized Oakeshott of having room for *one tradition* only in his thinking, importantly, that being the tradition of the governing class.[1]

Though I soon make some remarks about the change of the concept of tradition(s) to practices in Oakeshott's thinking, I only assert here that Crick's conclusion is - to say the least - plausible in relation to the earlier texts of Oakeshott (in the 1940s and 1950s) where he still speaks of community and tradition etc. Later, these kinds of interpretations do not seem to withstand anymore.

3.3.2 Shipped abroad

When thought in 'party terms' of the early sixties, Crick had placed Oakeshott to the camp of Conservatism and against the background of postwar British politics this seemed intelligible. However, this was not the only aim of Crick, for whom, Oakeshott's conservatism was beyond "the fringe of normal conservative experience." (Crick 1963, 66.) Crick does not reserve his critique to *The Contemporary British Politics* and *The Political Economy of Freedom,* but continues to read essays in *Rationalism in Politics* and other Oakeshott's writings without loosening the hold of the connotations of ism-thinking.

To repeat a bit, Crick says in *1962:*

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[1]Actually Oakeshott has answered to this kind of criticism by saying that he did not mean that there is, or should be, only one dominant tradition in Britain, for example. He says that "absence of homogeneity does not necessarily destroy singleness of community", and what he has been considering is "the manner in which society's legal structure is reformed and amended." (Oakeshott 1951, *Political Education,* VLL, 157). If this 'defence' is enough, will not be considered here. One can see, however, how Oakeshott's vocabulary is not 'postmodern' yet in many important respects.

"But in the unfamiliar mode of Oakeshottian irony we hear, in fact, a familiar hortatory voice telling us that for any politics there should be one dominant tradition.. The tradition then becomes seen as simply the tradition of the governing class." (Crick1962, 120.)

This I saw as a possible critique of Oakeshott at the time he was still using the concept of tradition. But, later this became more ambiguous when 'shipped away' from the original context:

"His understanding of politics is entirely that of preservative activity rather than one having any possibility of being innovative."

"It [the civil association] presumes an authoritative pre-existent consensus on values, whereas politics, in the Greek tradition, arises precisely because there are conflicts of values (traditions?).." (Crick 1991, 123-124).

To comment the first point; I do not think that Oakeshott is denying change. All human associations are contingent and always subject to change. Changes are made by 'rational' agents. They are not purely 'accidental' or beyond any control. But, I think that Oakeshott denies *the* change, the difference between *universitas* and *societas* being important here. In Crick's thinking, there may be an aspiration towards finding a *core* of politics, this core (or to say the least: an ideal) being conscious social change. This modern tone of thinking leads Crick to see Oakeshott's 'three key concepts' (tradition, politics and civil association) mainly as opposing this, in a tune of a conservative.

To the second point, then:

"The conditions which compose a moral practice are not theorems or precepts about human conduct, nor do they constitute anything so specific as a 'shared system of values'; they compose a vernacular language of colloquial intercourse.. Moral rules and rule-like principles are indeterminate, multiple, liable to conflict, and of unequal importance..That there should be many such languages in the world..is intrinsic to their character.This plurality cannot be resolved by being understood

as so many contingent and regrettable divergencies from a fancied perfect and universal language of moral intercourse." (Oakeshott 1975, *OHC*, pp. 63, 69, 80.)

In my understanding, Crick has 'shipped' his own original (and more plausible) critique out of its context. As a result, he has failed to see the merits of it, turning both the critique and its object to universalisms. Clearly, if he accuses Oakeshott of the rigidness of thinking, in the meaning of neglecting the 'reality' altogether, something of a sort can be said of Crick's relation to the 'reality' composed of Oakeshott's essays. Especially, when he extends the critique to comprehend also Oakeshott of 1970s. The quote by Oakeshott offers a satisfactory answer also to this criticism:

> "Further, it [Auspitz's commentary on Oakeshott, 1976, SS] notices correctly various changes of view and vocabulary in which, without being over-fussy, I have sought to make and to mark distinctions which I had earlier only half-appreciated. He notices that I have abandoned 'tradition' as inadequate to express what I want to express. And he appreciates that if such changes are read back into what I had written earlier they make it more exact. He notices how historical understanding, which appeared in *Experience and Its Modes* as a determinate arrest in experience, appears in *On Human Conduct* as the theoretical engagement in which we seek to understand assignable actions and utterances in terms of contingent relations from the inherent contingency of human actions regarded as challenges and responses in the adventure of seeking the satisfaction of wants; a view of the matter which obliged me to explore the notion of contingent relation with more care but with only qualified success." (Oakeshott 1976, 364.)

To finish, already in the 1960s, the tune in Crick's 'response' to Oakeshott's scepticism hints to a point very profound for my own 'postmodern reading', i.e. Oakeshott's counsel "wavering between conservatism and nihilism, and "falling into extreme skepticism and losing the trace of politics entirely in his critique of rationalist politics."

> "For, clearly, if all 'illusions' and pursuits of the ideal and 'new men' were stripped away, there would be nothing left: a kind of

suicide of the man, the book, the subject and the tradition."
(Crick 1962, 74.)

Here, I am hearing echoes of those voices which attack against postmodern from the 'modern position', in a bit similar way as Habermas accuses 'postmoderns' of neoconservatism (Habermas 1989, 1-45). Furthermore, according to Crick, Oakeshott wants us to adopt a particular way of looking at everything - at human conduct, to be more precise (Crick 1991, 121). Since I really cannot see Oakeshott advocating for any permanent foundations in *OHC*, this raises a question in me, if the above quoted sentence by Crick could be interpreted as modern fear, or angst, of non-foundationalism?

3.4 Towards postmodern reading of Oakeshott; shifting horizons of interpretation

This far, I have tried to illuminate the 'case of isms' and Oakeshott mainly through a few examples of his former interpreters. I hope this has had some success in pressing the similarities between the ism-interpretations in their modern attitude towards laying foundations for political thinking, and their eagerness to find those foundations from Oakeshott. Occasionally, there have been tendencies to search for 'proofs' for the diverging beliefs in the same texts by Oakeshott, and when perceived, these offer probably the best illumination of what I have been trying to say. Thus, I remind of the earlier examined 'classic example' of this. When Crick sees Oakeshott in the *Political Economy of Freedom* calling himself a "libertarian", but *really* rolling out "best Burkean bluster", Franco, instead, sees this particular piece of writing as beliing the "conventional portrait of Oakeshott" as a "Burkean conservative." (Crick 1963, Franco1990b).

The 'ism readings' have usually been floating around terms like 'community'/'indivualism' and 'artifice'/'organic' - Oakeshott either seen to follow Hobbesian nominalism, or conservative thinking of an 'organic and functional' society'. For many, Oakeshott appears to be following the tradition of Burke or joining with Friedrich Hayek to 'support the idea of a minimalist state intervention'

(Devigne 1994). Or defending first and most of all 'freedom of individual' and treating the idea of civil association as a base model for the 'liberalist state' (in the more crude forms: defending minimal taxation etc.). (About a detailed dispute of the latter accounts, see, e.g. Wendell 1985, Franco 1990.)

To my postmodern view, there exists no grave difference, if Oakeshott is seen as simply joining to the forever continuing tradition of political thought as an ism, or defending it 'traditionally', or 'restating' or 'reformulating' liberalism or conservatism. Though, of course, many of these readings bear notions of interest beyond simple ism-thinking.

The thing that really interests me, anyhow, is the staggering between the possibility of quite radical interpretation of Oakeshott as an anti-foundational thinker and the pertinacious clinging to the search of a core of his 'philosophy'. This twofold type of reading is well seen in Crick's latest contribution to the discussion. He hinted towards anti-foundationalism as the 'covering idea' of *On Human Conduct*, but on the other hand claimed that:

> "..Oakeshott's citizens are not really citizens at all but are the 'good subjects' of a *Rechtstaat*. They must not, if possible cannot, change the terms of this social contract. Who controls the legal state? Oakeshott seems to say two things: that if the laws are good laws and appropriate to a traditional community, there will be only a minimal need for a strong government or regular political activity; and that only those used to government should govern, and certainly the citizen class need not, should not, be coterminous with all the inhabitants of the state." (Crick 1991, 123.)

The same tendency was seen in Franco, who noted the affinities between Oakeshott and other not-too-modern(ist) thinkers, but still wanted to insist that the core in Oakeshott's oeuvre was his liberalism. I do not hope to claim that either of these or many other 'ism interpreters' of Oakeshott have been *ignorant* of both the changes in Oakeshott's thinking and in the 'interpretation horizons'. Instead, I am apt to detect a common feature in them, leading to neglect one or the other 'factor'.

I would strongly assert again that the differences in views concerning the relation of philosophy (or theory or political philosophy) and 'real life', or practicality, causes a lot of this confusion in connection to Oakeshott's texts. *If* one basically thinks that political theory (/philosophy) is a premeditator or 'prescription' for political activity, anything Oakeshott says about the subject does not seem to shake this conviction. Be that how 'anti-foundationalist' it wants, but *somehow* a text has to define its attitude and counsel to 'real politics'. Or, if every theory is seen as connected to 'causes' and 'explanations', the 'lack of concreteness' leads to:

> "rule out the possibility of theory influencing activity is to misunderstand much of modern politics. This is borne out by Oakeshott's dismissive treatment of Soviet politics." (Archer 1979, 156.)[1]

The conviction remaining largely the same whether one examines Oakeshott of the 1940s or 1975. This is not to say that Oakeshott has ever favoured the 'ideological style of politics', on the contrary. In the earlier years, his accounts were not yet formulated in a so 'sophisticated' manner that they would have provided sufficient assurance for this. However, as mentioned earlier, the changes in Oakeshott's use of terms have been notable and, to my judgement, quite sufficient for 'protecting' against the ism labels. Yet, before starting to 'list' some of these changes I still give the last example of a modern interpretation of Oakeshott.

In his *Beyond Left and Right,* Anthony Giddens (1994) deals with the change and blurring of meanings of words like 'conservatism', 'liberalism', and 'socialism' mainly during the nineteenth century. He examines the alterations in those concepts that have been often connected also to Oakeshott, radical/progressive/reactionary and modern/traditional, for example.

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[1] If one wishes to be witty, it might be added to this slightly 'Soviet sympathetic' article by Archer that as we *now* know more of the 'social realism' of 1950s in Soviet Union, with the uncountable amount of the victims of Stalin terror, it is probably 'better' that Oakeshott did not examine the 'reality of Soviet politics' any less 'naively'.

The opening question promises a lot to a reader who has in fresh memory Oakeshott's reflection on the words 'progressive' and 'reactionary' as "models of ambiguity." (Oakeshott 1975, *Talking Politics*, RP 1991, 440.)

"What can it mean to be politically radical today?" (Giddens 1994,1.)

Giddens sets a task to explore the state of political radicalism that had long been bound up primarily with socialist thought. In that doctrine, to be 'radical' was to have a certain view of the possibilities inherent in history and radicalism primarily meant "breaking away from the hold of the past." (Giddens 1994, 1). Giddens explores the situation where the idea of controlling the drive of history onwards has collapsed. In my terms, I see him taking this situation as 'our predicament' to which certain responses have arisen in the form of various 'neo isms'.

He makes sharp analyses of the tensions inside the term 'political right'. In the situation where one often hears notions like 'right defeated socialism', he points to the fact that 'the right' does not hold the same meanings in differing contexts and countries. Importantly, when Oakeshott's thinking is considered, the separations are made between the New Right (as neoliberalism) and neoconservatism in their, for most part, American form (also German). And, between Old conservatism, conservatism, and liberalism in their contemporary British forms. Not getting too deeply in these, as such, interesting divisions, I quote Giddens's summarization over the topic:

> "Crudely put, the left - and most liberals - were for modernization, a break with the past, promising a more equal and humane social order - and the right was against it, harking back to earlier regimes. In the conditions of developed reflexivity which exists today, there is no such clear divide. It is not the need for a radical political programme that disappears - this is not the 'end of history'. Conservatism in the shape of neoconservatism and philosophic conservatism can be drawn on positively, if critically to shape such a programme. In a new context, and in unconservative ways, we might assert again the old slogan mentioned before: too conservative not to be radical! Or to put it the other way around: too radical not to be conservative!" (Ibid., 49.)

Giddens notices that an old 'progressive radical' can be nowadays interpreted as a relic of a modern project and the other way round, not necessarily changing the 'actual content' of the 'object' under interpretation, but 'only' the interpretation horizon. Against the background of these thoughts then, one might expect that Giddens would show greater sensitivity towards the changes in other thinkers' production in time. Unfortunately, this is not quite the case and I find that a few 'slippings' are worth mentioning.

First, under the rubric *Neoliberalism*, where neoliberals are seen to "admire economic individualism" in contrast to Old Conservatism, Oakeshott is once again connected to F.A. Hayek as the "leading thinker" of neoliberalism.

> "The idea of spontaneous coordination - coordination without commands - as portrayed by Hayek has a definite connection to Oakeshott's conception of tradition." (Ibid., 34.)

However, this is only a by-plot with Oakeshott. Giddens defines him as the "leading inspiration" of philosophic conservatism which simultaneously claims to defend Old Conservatism and introduces a selection of innovations. Giddens cites Roger Scruton, who "gives due obeisance to Oakeshott's work" and says that conservatism depends on "three main organising concepts: authority, *allegiance* and tradition." (Giddens 1994, 28, my italics). Again, the equating of Oakeshott's thinking with that of 'Oakeshottians' seems to cause some trouble.

Neither, does Giddens escape the twofold composition of Oakeshott interpretations:

> "Oakeshott's critique of rationalism, which has affinities with the later Wittgenstein and with Hans-Georg Gadamer, is not directed against 'reason' as such, but against the identifying of reason with technique. All forms of knowledge, no matter how general they appear to be, are saturated by practice, by what cannot be put into words because it is the condition of linguistic communication. Here we have a much more sophisticated account of the 'resistance to exposition' of conservative thought than the version noted earlier, for Oakeshott's ideas on this point

are in accord with some of the main themes of modern philosophy." (Ibid., 29.)

Giddens puts Oakeshott's 'traditionalism' in quotation marks and asserts that this 'traditionalism' does not relate to "glorifying the past or providing vague assertions about things that have stood the test of time." (Ibid.)

I agree. Still, why again call this a "more elaborated" account than "it was in its original statement by Burke", and assert that "whenever Oakeshott refers to 'traditional' knowledge, he draws in a notion of continuity and inheritance sitting uneasily alongside the observation that everything is temporary." (Ibid., 46, my abridged version.)

From this statement, Giddens continues to explore "the concept of tradition itself." (Ibid.)

> "In understanding what tradition is, we should first of all try to grasp where its authority comes from, the means whereby it is able to claim allegiance. The distinctive quality of tradition, which separates it from custom or habit as well as from technical or expert knowledge, is that it presumes an idea of *ritual* or *revealed truth* - and this defining trait is also the origin of its authority." (Ibid.)

Further, he proceeds to examine the 'sociological origins' of tradition as 'truth' and ends up in the current situation of "detraditionalization processes" where this status of tradition can no longer be sustained. In Giddens's eyes, we should not try to "defend traditions in the traditional way, because this produces fundamentalism." (Ibid., 48.) Thus, for him:

> "Once this situation has come about, even the most sophisticated form of conservatism, philosophical conservatism, becomes incoherent." (Ibid.)

Now, let me stay a little while with this quotation of Giddens. Three words appear to be the keys for understanding the logic of Giddens's treatment of Oakeshott. that actually looks 'incoherent' and inconsistent to me. The *situation* refers to the general framework for Giddens's theorizing, i.e. to the period of

detraditionalization, globalization and post-traditional social order. *Philosophical conservatism* was something Oakeshott represented and had something to do with 'defending of traditions'. *Incoherent* is supposed to be the swearword of these representatives of conservatism but really appears to be that to Giddens himself. Thus, I think the answer to the question, why he has to press Oakeshott under a term of conservatism, becomes clearer in the framework of Giddens's own theoretical 'reformulating' of the project of modernity and opposing that of postmodern (or his view of it, to be more precise):

> "Can one say that there are certain more or less universal ethical principles emerging which tend to unite all perspectives outside the domains of the various fundamentalisms? I believe one can.. A world dominated by the influences of globalization and social reflexivity might seem one of hopeless fragmentation and contextuality. This is the view of postmodernism; and it isn't difficult to see why some of its advocates have been so attracted by Nietzsche." (Ibid., 252.)

As Giddens takes Oakeshott's *civil association* as an inspiration for his idea of *the* state in a "global order" of "cosmopolitan communication", it becomes understandable that he does not want to associate Oakeshott with those who *purport* to think without leaning on, or establishing, foundations.[1] He neglects - as one of the many - the 'development' in Oakeshott's own thinking and carries Oakeshott through the shifting horizons of interpretation with his unchanged legend of conservatism. 'Better to have some foundations than no foundations at all' seems to be the guiding light. The scepticism of Oakeshott is undervalued as it does not fit to the framework of modern thinking. Giddens's comprehension of scepticism and postmodern touch upon each other:

> "A Nietzschean view is sometimes lauded these days as allowing for that recognition of the 'other' - that necessary

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[1] I will not get deeper to Giddens's use of Oakeshott's *civil association* in a sociological framework as I do not find it too interesting and it is not relevant for my reflections here. It must be noted also that Giddens is not naturally concentrating on Oakeshott in his book, but examines Oakeshott among other authors in the context where the 'meanings' of 'right' and 'left' are under strong alterations.

cosmopolitanism - which makes possible a multinational world. It does nothing of the sort. What it leads to, in fact, is precisely a world of multiple fundamentalisms; and this is a world in danger of disintergration through the clash of rival world-views. Methodical doubt is not the same as empirical scepticism." (Ibid., 253.)

Since the 'ultimate task' of Giddens appears to be saving 'us' from this faith of 'disintegration' and 'uncertainty' with the slogans of 'global cosmopolitanism' and 'universal right to happiness and self-actualization', it seems hard to understand other authors - than these complete nihilists, of course - giving up the role of a theorist as a *legislator* (see, Bauman 1987).

The question to Giddens can be raised in a fashion of Gianni Vattimo, who speaks about fundamentalism as 'archaism':

"The idealization of the period of origins, as the perfect condition, is as empty as the similar idealization of the future is. It does not only affect the idea that through the origins we would be in a transitional relation to a process developing from these origins incessantly to us. Namely, archaism simply demands us to skip the problem caused by such a process. Above all, the question is: if we have arrived to these - nowadays so familiar - problems of alienation, contradistinctions and other similar hardships, from these origins, why on earth should we jump back to them?" (Vattimo 1989, 48, my translation.)

Giddens succeeds in questioning fundamentalism as a 'response' to our 'predicament'. However, he fails to pose the same question to the project of modernity and, in my mind, loses the grasp on Oakeshott.

To end this chapter, I will now illuminate some of those earlier mentioned conceptual changes in Oakeshott's thinking that appear to undermine the 'legitimacy' of ism interpretations. I hope the 'reputation' of Oakeshott's conservatism is now evidently the one among isms that I find most intelligible when Oakeshott of the 1940s or 1950s is considered. Getting back in time, I give a lengthy quotation of Oakeshott written in 1929:

"But the conception which alone achieves the realm of fact is that which views the state as the necessary totality or identity which the *prima facie* variety and difference of human life implies. All activity directed towards the satisfaction of the needs of concrete persons is state activity. Government frequently contributes to this satisfaction, law is the regulation of a certain limited aspect of it, the Church (whether or not established), the trade union and the family are its organs. Anything less than this is an abstraction; sometimes, like the abstractions of law and economics, useful; at others many of the abstractions of so-called political science, serving only to obscure the truth. This does not mean that the state is anything other than its members - that is a subject which I have not discussed and which I think impossible to discuss until we have abandoned the moral and legal conception of the individual as that which is isolated, for a more concrete conception which takes him to be that which is complete." (Oakeshott 1929, *The Authority of the State*, RPM, 85.)

In the precedent passage one can see elements of two of Oakeshott's ism reputations. Most forcibly the British conservatism but also idealism are present. Instead, I find it difficult to perceive too much 'traces' of Oakeshott's 'liberalism' in any other writings than the often mentioned 'libertarian' writings of the late 1940s. Of course, if one wants to compel Oakeshott under that specific ism, one could see the abandoning the notions of state as 'anything other than its members' as pointing to that direction. However, since Oakeshott never assumes an 'abstract individual' in his texts, it becomes difficult to assimilate his thoughts at least to the main stream of liberalist authors. In addition, the British liberalism of the nineteenth century retreated from favouring the 'limited style of government' (alongside with 'party conservatism') and started to "increasingly value something with which such a style is ultimately incompatible", i.e. 'progress' and 'improvement' of mankind (O'Sullivan 1974, 13). Therefore, I think that one cannot sustain Oakeshott's 'liberalism' very convincingly in any period of his career. And having already considered two 'liberalist' readings of Oakeshott, I now concentrate on those changes of concepts that effect his 'conservatism' and 'idealism'.

It may be asserted that even the association to 'Burkean conservatism' is not too far-fetched when reading the early writings of Oakeshott. The state as a *totality* with such *organs* as family and Church point this connection out. In the nineteen twenties, the Christian religion was quite central concern to Oakeshott and some forums he was published in - *Modern Churchman*, for example - were in line with this conventional understanding of the British conservatism. (See, the five essays in *RPM* deriving from the 1920s). The idea of society as a whole and emphasis on consistency and unity in philosophy are compatible with both idealism and conservatism. Also, when seen in the friend/enemy 'field' of the time, 'Oakeshott the non-realist', in his interest in history and 'world of ideas', can plausibly be seen as an idealist (see, e.g. Collingwood 1939, 1987). The 'intercontinental mixture' in early Oakeshott's thinking may be comprehended as a combination of German idealism and the British conservatism. In the 1920s, Oakeshott had twice visited the universities of Marburg and Tubingen in order to pursue his studies in theology and philosophy after attending an 'Introduction to Philosophy' course lead by the Idealist McTaggart in Cambridge (Grant 1990,13). Oakeshott was exploring our 'Weltanschauung' via Christianity and views of history in a tone very admirable to 'Hegelian idealism'. However, in my mind, this was only the starting point in Oakeshott's whole production. It was not the leading idea for Oakeshott always to supplement his earlier idealist or conservative accounts in order to perfect them 'finally' in *OHC,* as many of his interpreters insist. It should become clear that the later Oakeshott has little to do with this 'original' position:

> "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..In this sense..patriotism is the basis of all morality, in
> short, is the greatest emotion and intellectual effort of which we
> are capable." (Oakeshott 1925, *Some Remarks on the Nature
> and Meaning of Sociality*, RPM, 60-61.)

The next decade was then the 'culmination' of Oakeshott's idealism in *Experience and Its Modes* (1933, 1985). Politics, as a concern of intellect, was clearly in the

background when compared to that of philosophy as the 'totality of experience'. Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* and Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* were mentioned as the works that had made the most striking impact on the young Oakeshott. In the doctoral thesis, he sought to make a "restatement of its [Idealism] first principles" in a situation where idealism was dismissed. (Ibid., 6-7.). Oakeshott's vocabulary is filled with the concepts familiar from the British (and German) idealism:

> "Reality is a coherent world of concrete ideas, that is of things. Consequently, it is one, a single system, and it is real only as a whole. My view is, then, that reality and experience are inseparable; that reality is experience, a world of ideas and therefore not a world of mere ideas; that experience is reality..;that reality is what is satisfactory in experience; that reality is, consequently, a coherent world of ideas. This alone is real because this alone is independent, absolute, complete and able to maintain itself. Reality, in short, is what we are obliged to think.." (Ibid., 58.)

Philosophy is a pursuit of experience "without reservation or presupposition" and does not belong to the world of "present fact" but to the world of "logical fact". Thus, it is not too difficult to agree with Parekh that *in the 1930s* Oakeshott's idea of philosophy reminds one of the "the highest, metaphysical stage." (Parekh 1982, 102.) The terms familiar to German idealism, like that of 'transcendence', appear in a British form:

> "Experience, having superseded, put behind itself or merely avoided whatever is abstract and incomplete, having freed itself from whatever is seen to hinder the full realization of its character, becomes philosophical experience." (Oakeshott 1933, 1985, 346.)

For the later accounts on politics, an important feature in *Experience and its Modes* is just the separation of the various modes of experience. These modes are products of "arrests in experience" and the truth they assert is always relative to the degree of completeness in experience (ibid., 77). These modes deal with the whole of experience, but 'only' from their limited points of view (see also,

Parekh 1985, Modood 1980). The modes that Oakeshott takes to be most fully developed, at the time, are historical, scientifical and practical experience. The last of these is the one Oakeshott becomes to associate with politics. Practice is a world of volition, and conceived under the category of change. Its 'truths' are expressed in morality and religion, good and bad, body and mind, etc. These truths are not really truths at all from the standpoint of philosophy, as in practical world the truth is conceived as pragmatic. Thus, for early Oakeshott, practice as the "conduct of life" is a messy business. The individuals in a world determined by the category of change are "merely designated individuals" and lack "complete individuality." Practice is incoherent, it lacks totality and can be seen, as such, inferior to philosophy. (Oakeshott 1933, 1985, 296-311).

> "However unavoidable it [practical experience] may be, it is not, from the standpoint of the totality of experience, necessary. From that standpoint, indeed, it is no more than a *cul-de-sac*, a regrettable mistake, perhaps a youthful folly, which, if it cannot be avoided, must be superseded." (Ibid., 311.)

In sum, the concern in philosophy was to view the totality of experience as a whole, and this was to be kept unencumbered with the "mood and postulates of practical experience." (Oakeshott 1933, 1985, 320.) Importantly, when seen from the 'viewpoint' of politics and political philosophy, he makes the strict separation of philosophy from the world of practical experience:

> "What is farthest from our needs is that kings should be philosophers." (Oakeshott 1933, 1985, 321.)

This account remains largely the same in Oakeshott's later texts. But, the *tone* in which he speaks of practical experience as 'present as such', and thus 'momentary' when *compared* with the 'totality of experience' in philosophy, is radically changed later with the heavy 'framework' of idealism losing its hold in Oakeshott's thinking as a yardstick for everything.

Towards the end of the 1930s, Oakeshott starts to show growing interest in politics and political philosophy. Curiously enough, the interest is often manifested 'in reverse':

> "So many good people nowadays take an interest in politics and
> even arrive at some kind of political action that the view that it is
> the duty of everyone to do something of the sort has become
> almost a commonplace, and not to recognize the claim of politics
> is taken to indicate some defect of character or sensibility.
> Nevertheless, this alleged obligation of everyone to take part in
> political activity is, I believe, a gross delusion; at best it is based
> upon a perverted social sense, at worst upon a false scale of
> values." (Oakeshott 1939, *The Claims of Politics*, RPM, 91.)

The passage can be read through Oakeshott's conservatism, as favouring the 'limited role' of politics in a 'society' and human life, and also in relation to his idealism, as keeping political activity 'inferior' to the totality of experience. I see, however, one additional factor to be taken seriously in this connection, i.e. the public sentiment before the outbreak the Second World War. Oakeshott does not condemn the "quasi-political activity" as the exercise of vote, or the informal discussion on politics:

> "Most intelligent people will wish to be informed about what is
> happening in the world of politics and may perhaps wish to cast
> a vote. The more difficult question is the alleged obligation of
> everyone to take some more extended and more active part in
> politics." (Ibid.)

Thus, the mobilization of everyone to the service of society in form of politics, as if it were the only option to express a "sensibility for the communal interests of a society or of mankind", is refuted by Oakeshott (ibid.). When read against the background of all these three 'contexts', one can more fully understand Oakeshott's account of politics as a "highly specialized and abstracted form of communal activity":

> "But at times of political crisis, when a society seems to be in
> danger of destruction, and when the work of protection appears
> to be more important than anything else, there is a special
> temptation to believe in the overwhelmingly superior importance
> of political activity. Nevertheless, this is also a temptation to be
> avoided.. On occasion, a society may be preserved and may
> survive by means of political action, but to make it live requires

a social activity of a different and more radical character; and its life is as often threatened by political success as by political failure." (Ibid., 94.)

Oakeshott reserves the role of 'recreators' of values in a 'society' - still understood more or less as a community - to poets, artists and to a "lesser extent" to the philosophers (ibid.). Poets, artists and *philosophers* must be saved from demands of supplying a political programme or an inspiration for political action.[1] Their business is to provide an "actual remedy for more fundamental defects by making a society conscious of its own character." (Ibid.) Recreation is valued more highly than protection by Oakeshott. This introduces also a slight deviation from a political conservative doctrine; Oakeshott now starts to 'value' also change in comparison to merely maintaining the status quo. However, the 'value' of an individual, even as a 'recreator', is still a kind of derivative from the 'whole of society':

"Societies, in fact, are led from behind, and for those capable of leadership to give themselves up to political activity is to break away from their true genius." (Ibid., 95.)

I have studied the next two decades of Oakeshott quite comprehensively in connection with Crick's critique and concluded that Crick's notions on Oakeshott's conservatism were fairly convincing. The concept of tradition, notions of continuity and community are reminders of Oakeshott's conservatism, though, for him, e.g. tradition was not anything fixed: "everything is temporary, but nothing is arbitrary." (Oakeshott 1951, *Political Education*, VLL, 151.) Also, Oakeshott's notion on political philosophy seemed to remain mostly within the idealist 'framework' until the mid-nineteen fifties. As politics was the activity of "attending to the general arrangements of a set of people whom chance or choice has brought together" (Ibid., 136), philosophy of politics was:

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[1]This is a kind of heuristic guess again, but assuming that Oakeshott had read, e.g. Nietzsche and Heidegger after the visit in Germany (and probably attended Heidegger's lectures, see Grant 1990, 13), the dragging of Nietzsche to the service of national socialism, and Heidegger's 'behaving' during the 1930s, may well have invoked comments like this one.

"A philosophy of politics I should describe in general terms, as - *an explanation or view of political life and activity from the standpoint of the totality of experience.*" (Oakeshott 1946?, *The Concept of A Philosophy of Politics*, RPM, 126.)

A few important remarks have to be added, though. Particularly, the context of World War II, as a sort of watershed in Oakeshott's production, seems worth mentioning. During the wartime, Oakeshott served in the Army, and Grant's comprehension is that the 'influence' of war to Oakeshott's writing can be especially seen in two points. First, the inadequacy of mere technical knowledge was emphasized in the army as an observation of the difference between a trained and an educated man. The latter being the regular officer in advantageous position to the intelligent civilian who learned only the technique of military leadership, not getting educated in the feelings and emotions as well as practices of his profession. (Grant 1990, 16, see also, Oakeshott's footnote in *Rationalism in Politics*, RP, 1962, 34). Grant continues that, though military life "always held a deep fascination" for Oakeshott, the impression was not an "altogether romantic one." Being "one of the most pacifistic of serious political thinkers of our time", Oakeshott maintains that "military organisation, being necessarily directed to a single overriding end, is the worst of all possible models for peacetime society, where the ends pursued are as various as those who pursue them." (Ibid.).

Along with the growing interest in politics, these considerations are widened in Oakeshott's condemnation of scientific and ideological 'politics' as rationalist and mischieved. When thought within the discussions of time, especially the 'end of ideology' debate in the late 1950's (see, e.g. Laslett 1956, 1970 and Laslett, Runciman, Skinner 1972), Oakeshott can be seen as defending the possibility of *political* philosophy and emphasizing its importance - the hold of idealism as the 'model philosophy' fading rapidly. Yet, when reflecting the discussion, the edge of Oakeshott's critique is targeted against the 'political science' in effort to "provide 'correct' diagnoses of political situations, 'correct' predictions of the consequences of human actions and 'correct' political decisions." (Oakeshott, *Political Discourse*, published first in RP 1991.)

"This enterprise is pursued, now, by many different methods: in the so-called comparative study of social organizations, governments and instruments of government; in the elucidation of ideal types - 'democracies', 'police states', 'one-party governments', 'totalitarian regimes'; in the search for what is common and essential to typical situations - such as, 'war', 'revolution', 'rapidly developing economies', 'stable societies', and so on, in the collection of statistics and in the calculation of probabilities. And this enterprise has come to describe itself as 'the end of ideologies'." (Ibid.)

Also, although Oakeshott of the 1940s and 1950s still speaks of traditions, continuity in a society, community, total experience, etc., he also starts reading Hobbes more seriously, introducing scepticism and interest in the changes of European political vocabularies to his philosophy. The critique of progress and other notions often connected to the Enlightenment project starts to emerge.

"The root of so-called 'democratic' theory is not rationalist optimism about the perfectibility of human society, but scepticism about the possibility of such perfection and the determination not to allow human life to be perverted by the tyranny of a person or fixed by the tyranny of an idea." (Oakeshott 1947, *Scientific Politics*, RPM, 109.)

Further, the *peculiar* in Oakeshott's 'nondoctrinaire conservative position' also starts, in my interpretation, to 'build' the 'positive vocabulary' ('useful' for postmodern theory), instead of merely feeling defeat or despair in "torments and agony" style of Adorno (Bauman 1992, 20), for example.

"The conservative disposition provokes neither of these conditions: the inclination to enjoy what is present and available is the opposite of ignorance and apathy and it breeds attachment and affection." (Oakeshott 1956, *On being Conservative*, RP 1962,170.)

My argument is that during the 'Sattelzeit' of his own Oakeshott abandons so many of his earlier concepts connected to 'conventional' conservatism - society is put to quotation marks, community abandoned from the vocabulary of a modern European state understood as a civil association, contingency and change are

emphasized at the expense of continuity, and the term tradition is replaced by practice(s) in *OHC* etc. - that it becomes legitimate to reject Oakeshott's reputation as a representative of British conservatism. These changes do not naturally proceed somehow 'linearly', or follow some 'teleological logic' in order to culminate in *OHC*, and all the earlier accounts are not dropped in the way.[1] For example, the substitution of tradition for practices starts in putting tradition to a more 'modest' place among other concepts. In *Rational Conduct* (1950, RP 1962), Oakeshott elucidates human activity as springing from an "already existing idiom of activity", i.e. from "a knowledge of how to behave appropriately in the circumstances." (Ibid., 101.) *The* idiom is not tradition any longer, but:

> "Human activity, then, is always activity with a pattern; not a superimposed pattern, but a pattern inherent in the activity itself. Elements of this pattern occasionally stand out with a relatively firm outline; and we call these elements, customs, traditions, institutions, laws, etc." (Ibid., 105.)

In 1965, Oakeshott put 'tradition' to quotation marks when looking back to his own oeuvre:

> "I called them a 'tradition', meaning to indicate that these beliefs were not a self-consistent set of 'principles', that although they

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[1]Generally, Oakeshott does not comment the changes in his own vocabulary, with the exception of the reply *On Misunderstanding Human Conduct* (1976) cited also in this thesis. As said, the changes do not succeed 'orderly' as there is no 'coherent' system in his writings. If in possession of 'all' Oakeshott material, a much more accurate research of these matters would be interesting to carry out. A few fragmentary remarks, though. Contrary to, e.g. Grant's comprehension 'contingency' made its first appearance in the essay *On being conservative* (1956, RP 1962), not two years later. I understand that here he 'translates' tradition to terms of contingency: "But a man's identity (or that of a community) is nothing more than an unbroken rehearsal of contingencies.." (Ibid., 171.) In *The activity of being an historian* (1958, RP 1991) contingency is put to more central place while emphasizing the 'intelligibility of contingency' in historical understanding. (About this and 'Oakeshott's contingency' in general, see esp. Palonen 1988, 289-292.) Further, I would say that the 'final' abandonment of the word 'society' relates to Oakeshott's considerations on 'education'. His critique of understanding 'education' as 'normalizing' and 'socializing' is in close connection to antipathy of a "single, all-inclusive society". (Oakeshott 1972, *Education: The engagement and its frustration*, VLL, 65.) In addition, the rejection of the term 'social' calls forth comparisons with Arendt.

might be expected to be relatively stable they were not incapable of change, that they were not idioms but maxims which we believed ourselves to have learnt from experience, and that they did not all appear before us in the form of propositions but often in institutions and practices. Practical discourse is the process in which (among other things) we elicit from this 'tradition' decicions about what to do and justifications of acts or proposals to act." (Oakeshott 1965, *Rationalism in Politics*: A Reply.)

Further, already the fact that Oakeshott does not explicitly define himself a conservative too often after the essay *On being Conservative* should be taken on account. Neither does he refer to idealism as his main (and only) philosophical legacy. Some interpreters date this 'philosophical turn' of Oakeshott to the publication of *The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind* in 1959. And again, I do not feel any difficulty to agree with this reading. In Modood's interpretation, the essay introduced a new comprehension of philosophy as a 'parasitic activity' replacing the earlier view of philosophy as the logical ground of all the modes of experience and their unity. (Modood 1980, 318, see also, Auspitz 1976.) Actually, I think we can read this essay even as a sort of *statement* of departing from the idealist legacy; Oakeshott 'lists' a few clear points for separating his conception of philosophy from those held by many 'others'.

First, philosophy should not pretend to act as the only authentic voice or assure that all human utterance is finally in one mode. Philosophy is one mode in the conversation of mankind, partnered by many others: poetry, science, history and practical activity, as most notable. Philosophy is not in search of 'truth' as there is no any. Neither is there a hierarchy of voices in conversation. Thus, philosophy does not occupy a place of a 'judge', or a yardstick, anymore. The activity of philosophizing is emphasized firmly and the body of philosophical 'knowledge' - as detached from this activity - denied. (Oakeshott 1959, 9-15).

The affinities between *The Voice of Poetry* and Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958) seem highly interesting to me.[1] For instance, both theorists criticize the assimilating of thinking activity to "the ability to reason cogently", i.e. the form of "reckoning with consequences". (Arendt 1958, 1989, 283.) Similarly, the *world* inhabited by humans as a plurality is stressed - within the concept of action by Arendt, and in the form of plurality of voices in the conversation by Oakeshott. When seen theorizing against the background of the project of modernity and the political situation of the time - only a bit more than a decade after first atomic explosions and, directly, after the first "earth-born object made by man was launched into the universe" (Arendt 1958, 1989, 1) - Oakeshott takes an important step in his thinking. In my opinion, one can see him as combining elements and concepts from the 'legacy of Hobbes', 'idealism', 'historicism', 'existentialism' and 'late-Wittgenstein', or 'Anglo-Saxon' and 'Continental' intellectual styles, etc. For instance, sometimes Hobbes and even Kant 'live happily together' in Oakeshott. In the search of *desire* and avoidance of the greatest aversion as death, the *self* meets others and:

> "It will more often happen that failure is avoided only by an acknowledgement of the subjectivity of the other self which involves taking into alliance what refuses to be treated as a slave; that is, by offering a *quid pro quo* which is itself a recognition of subjectivity." (Oakeshott 1959, 22.)

Considering that the 'combining of elements' requires the activity of thinking by Oakeshott - not some kind of mechanical synthesis of some isms - his position can be seen as an original one.

For me, then, postmodern reading of Oakeshott seems a plausible alternative among the multitude of all the ('neo') isms. In the situation where Leo Strauss' (1968,1989) conviction that liberalism must be seen as contradistinction to conservatism seems to exhaust of meaning and where Oakeshott has been 'appearing' all over the place.

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[1]In her interpretation on Hobbes, Arendt also refers to Oakeshott's *Introduction to the Leviathan* (Arendt 1958, 1989, 299).

4. Postmodern Oakeshott

In this chapter, we enter to the area that I consider as the main substance of my thesis. This is not to say that the reader should forget or ignore everything said before, on the contrary. Many points have already been intimated in the earlier chapters and will 'only' be dealt in greater detail. However, postmodern as the *context* of discussion is now the 'determining' one and some of the conclusions drawn above operate as 'background information'. Emphatically, I have examined the changes in Oakeshott's vocabulary as weakening the claims of his ism interpreters. From now on, this change is much taken as granted. Yet, to remind both of this 'new direction' by Oakeshott and my own postmodern interpretation of it, I begin with a quotation that well illustrates the versatility of the issue:

> "And the denial of a hierarchical order among the voices is not only a departure from one of the most notable traditions of European thought (in which all activity was judged in relation to the *vita contemplativa*), but will seem also to reinforce the scepticism. But although a degree of scepticism cannot be denied, the appearance of frivovility is due, I think, to a misconception about conversation. As I understand it, the excellence of this conversation (as of others) springs from a tension between seriousness and playfulness. Each voice represents a serious engagement (though it is serious not merely in respect of its being pursued for the conclusions it promises); and without this seriousness conversation would lack impetus. But in its participation in the conversation each voice learns to be playful, learns to understand itself conversionally and to recognize itself as a voice among voices. As with children, who are great conversationists, the playfulness is serious and the seriousness in the end is only play." (Oakeshott 1959, 14.)

Next, I will shortly sketch *my* discussion context around the term postmodern. The illumination is not too covering of the field, but it will be done in the extent I find necessary for framing my account on Oakeshott in this connection. Not least, because lately 'postmodern' as a term and an idea has been under so many attacks in public discussions that it may be a little hazardous to attach oneself to

the favourers of the term. As nobody can even say, too definitely, who the other favourers are and what exactly 'is' postmodern, it becomes necessary to define one's own relation to 'the' debate.

For the next few pages, I would suggest that the best reading strategy is to treat those as an introductory, dense essay written to serve as a mediatory bridge to the 'postmodern mood' before proceeding to the specific relation between Oakeshott's oeuvre and postmodern.

4.1 Postmodern discussion

As a general term, postmodern has been attached to almost every 'field' of (post)modern human life by now. From the 1970s on, we have heard of postmodern style of life, postmodern literature, architecture, movies, etc. In fact, postmodern as an *attribute* could be conceived as some kind of fashion, or something quite superficial and shallow. However, this 'newspaper-style of 1980s' is far from the postmodern position I advocate here. I do not discuss of postmodern as an epoch *after* modernity, either. Or, treat postmodern as a 'new philosophy'. Moreover, I do not bother reflecting on those possibilities too much here, as it has been done more profoundly numerous times before.[1]

In general, I still follow Pulkkinen in her definition of postmodern - the paying attention to the constructedness of all foundations in thinking - as I find it extremely useful when *interpreting* Oakeshott and other theorists whom I discuss. The 'linguistic turn' in philosophy, Nietzschean (or Foucaultian) genealogy and constructivism, and 1970's 'crisis discussion' in philosophy and politics (and 'social sciences'), can fairly be seen as the intellectual background and climate also for my discussion. (See, Pulkkinen 1996, 45-59.)

However, as a thought *event*, postmodern *Stimmung* is also situated to time and place. Again, I stress that I wish not to claim that postmodern is tied to any specific time period. The least, in the sense of claiming that 'postmodernity' has

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[1]For more systematic and wider examinations, see, e.g. Best and Kellner 1991, Bauman 1992, Pulkkinen 1996, and Thiele 1995.

now replaced 'modernity' in our world. Nevertheless, a time dimension is naturally present in a 'loose form'. I mean that one can easily find, e.g. 'anti-modern' attitudes from the earlier centuries already but very few of us would name, e.g. the Romantic movement postmodern. I would interpret that postmodern is 'possible' only after some experiences that 'postulate' a certain sense of contemporariness. Thus, one might suggest that sentences like 'Chaplin expressed the feeling of modern alienation in his *Modern Times*', or 'we live in a shadow of the atomic bomb', or 'information technology improves the possibility of direct citizen activity in politics' etc. can easily be comprehended as a part of 'Western commonsense' (see, Rorty 1989); the vocabulary that almost everybody having some sense of what has been going on in mass media and 'public discussions' can be expected to *recognize* - regardless if one is willing to 'sign' all or any of those sentences.

I do not want to suggest that along these kinds of utterances, and their 'theoretical reflection', 'we' could grasp 'our situation'. There is no point to assert that there would be some kind of *one* situation, where 'we all' live and act in - these situations are multiple and change all the time. Yet, perhaps it is not purely futile to place the above-mentioned sentences to modern/postmodern 'axle'. Not in a meaning that one could say if any of those are distinctively 'expressing' either modern or postmodern 'experience', *but* how the situation(s) are responded to. Thus, in order to outline the discussion - more or less - 'inside' academic political philosophy (and to some extent 'theoretical sociology'), I find it useful roughly to bundle the participants under three differing, figurative rubrics.

I call the first set of thinkers *'the postmoderns'*, including both the theorists who define themselves as 'postmodern(ist)s', like Bauman and Pulkkinen, and those who are often *referred as* postmodern. The latter 'type' seems to be more common nowadays and, to my view, Richard Rorty its typical representative:

> "I have sometimes used "postmodern" myself, in the rather
> narrow sense defined by Lyotard as "distrust of metanarratives."
> But I now wish that I had not. The term has been so over-used
> that it is causing more trouble than it is worth." (Rorty 1991, 1.)

The sort of statement by Rorty is an excellent reminder of the 'state of dissolution' within the term postmodern that *I* use. It should be noted that a theorist's *name* does not offer any kind of guarantees that a particular 'idea' or a sentence presented by him or her 'being' postmodern. I (or she or he) *am* not 'postmodern', though some assertions 'I' make, or vocabularies 'I' use may sometimes be defined 'as' postmodern.[1] It is good also to remember that the accounts presented even within the 'confessional' postmodern theorizing differ vastly. Very likely, e.g. Pulkkinen would refuse calling Bauman 'postmodern', as for the latter the postmodern also signifies a fairly distinctive time period - 'sociologically'.

However, despite Rorty's opposite view, it is not so hazardous to 'divide' the theorists that have rather explicitly entered the 'crisis discussion' (of the 1970s) to the 'postmoderns' or 'moderns' as when dealing with earlier writers. Then, standing out clearly that I do not restrict my use of the term to those writers or thoughts presented in this particular discussion, I emphasize again that the 'reasons' for treating, e.g. Oakeshott and Arendt as 'postmodern writers' are to be seen against the background of 'modernity'; both as a situation to theorize in and about and as a theoretical project they set themselves against, in many respects. And, not 'only' against - in a negative sense - as I wish to show in the case of Oakeshott.

In addition, 'the end of ideology' discussion forms a curious background for relating Oakeshott to the postmodern. According to Peter Dews, one can find some striking parallels between "Lyotard's account of postmodernity and 'the end of ideology' debate which preoccupied English-speaking political scientists in the late fifties and early sixties." (Dews, in Bernstein 1991, 248.) The "trenchant" similarity between the end of ideology "apologists" (!) and the "champions of postmodernity" sometimes unites them to a 'common enemy':

> "Indeed, Rorty's present position is an odd mixture of avant-
> garde "radical" postmodern playfulness and what looks like old-

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[1]My relatively free citing of various other authors, e.g. Skinner, under the rubric postmodern is a good example of this. Though not referred as 'postmodern authors', some of their sentences are set forth in postmodern context.

fashioned cold war liberalism. But just as it became evident that Bell and his fellow travellers were masking a new form of ideology under the slogan "the end of ideology" so this is true of Rorty. This becomes even more striking when we consider the politics of some of Rorty's new heroes: Sidney Hook, Karl Popper, *Michael Oakeshott*, and Lezsek Kolakowski." (Bernstein 1991, 249, emphasis added.)

Relating to the critique of the 'modern project' or modern(ity), I find it a matter of taste if one wants to see, e.g. Nietzsche as 'postmodern', or even Weber as one. Perhaps one could, if it is to 'believe' Bauman's simple definition of postmodern as signifying modern becoming 'aware' of itself. Or, Rorty's:

"Neither twentieth-century Marxism, nor analytical philosophy, nor post-Nietzschean 'continental' philosophy has done anything to clarify this struggle [our current problems]. We have not developed any conceptual instruments with which to operate politically that are superior to those available at the turn of the century to Dewey or Weber." (Rorty 1991, 26.)

In fact, I do not see any reason to contradict with above presented views but as the main 'subject' of my thesis still is Oakeshott and postmodern I have 'run into' some thinkers more easily than others.

I do not want to deny the possibility of 'the third option', either. As Tuija Parvikko writes, it may not always be meaningful to operate only within the division to modern and postmodern. Contrary to Pulkkinen's view, Parvikko says that, e.g. Arendt can be seen as representing something else than a modern thinker without camping her to the 'postmoderns'. I could easily see this suggestion applying also to Oakeshott. (Parvikko 1996, 190). However, I do not quite agree with Parvikko's interpretation on Pulkkinen's postmodern as mainly 'Foucaultian' in the sense that it would see *all at once* as political. At least, I discern my postmodern view of this kind of interpretation. 'The new beginning' is not denied in postmodern, but it will not be dealt as a 'foundational act' or 'living in with a project'. (See Bauman 1993, 220.) In the case of Oakeshott, of course, it is emphasized that the 'new beginning' cannot mean anything drawn from 'pure technical knowledge'. Furthermore, I do not want to start setting any more 'new'

or 'old' isms to this discussion. Thus, I neglect the discussion of 'post-structuralism' (Foucault), 'weak thought' (Vattimo) and 'pragmatism' (Rorty) as covering terms for 'postmodern strands', as one quite usefully are comprehends those sometimes.

Summarizing what has been said this far, I see the situation(s) demanding responses *(as always)* and, e.g. the Second World war' as well as the events in the Eastern Europe seem to have 'raised' many in the modern/postmodern axle.[1] For example, the 'answers' by Habermas and Lyotard - both former Marxists - differ significantly. In those I see a dividing line between 'modern' and 'postmodern attitudes', though drawn in the water. I stress that I find the relation between Oakeshott and the postmodern in a 'project' of 'deconstructing' and criticizing certain, *arrested* parts of the 'Enlightenment project'. But, also in *offering* something 'back', although no foundations or a 'secure hope for a better future'. Sometimes, the 'offer' is not anything grander than the reconciliation "to the idea that the messiness of the human predicament is here to stay." (Bauman 1993, 245.)

Thus, in this point I wish to highlight that the postmodern means an alternative *reading* of a situation for me, not a 'description of reality' or 'revision of an old theory'. Also, the 'situation' is not anything 'out there' to be directly theorized about, but is similarly constructed in the reading or - if one wishes to use the term - 'textual reality'. Arendt's words are illuminative:

> "..the crisis in philosophy and metaphysics came into the open when philosophers themselves began to declare the end of philosophy and metaphysics. Now, this could have its advantage; I trust it will once it has been understood what these 'ends' actually mean, not that God has 'died' - an obvious absurdity in every respect - but that the way God has been thought of for thousands of years in no longer convincing; and not that the old questions which are coeval with the appearance of men on earth have become 'meaningless', but that the way

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[1] In Oakeshottian terms: political philosophy always arises from 'concrete political situations'. These situations do not naturally (only) mean what we usually tend to call 'real life politics', but earlier theorizing etc. No causality or 'right' interpretations present here.

they were framed and answered has lost plausibility. (Arendt 1971, 1984, 10.)

To move on, I call the other 'party' in this conversation *'doublethinkers'* (of philosophy and social sciences). Here, I map together writers like Jürgen Habermas and Karl Otto Apel who clearly see the many disadvantages in the 'modern project' or 'modernity', but want to defend some noteworthy features of it. A large part of contemporary sociological theory (e.g. Beck and Giddens) also defends the project of modernity, though also analysing the defects of 'late modern' or 'post-industrial' society, or 'reflexive modernity'. Naturally, there are many differences between the authors here too, and this is no more an 'exact analytic category' than the one before. Usually, though, the linking feature between these theorists is the hostile attitude towards the term 'postmodern' and the anti-foundationalism they see it representing. When thought in 'battle-terms' between 'moderns' and 'postmoderns', one can see the latter party as resisting the attempts to *ground* any 'norms' rationally. The 'moderns', instead, tend to seek and defend the project of grounding such norms through the vehicle of speech communities, for example. (See also, Bernstein 1991, 7-8.)

One additional 'dividing line' between the sides can be seen in the attitude towards some radical, 'earlier' theorists. I quote:

> "But whereas Foucault takes Nietzsche as an inspiration, Habermas though agreeing with Nietzschean criticisms of the "subject-centered reason" of traditional rationalism, sees him as leading us to dead end. Habermas thinks of Nietzsche as making clear the bankruptcy, for purposes of human "emancipation," of what Habermas calls the "philosophy of subjectivity".." (Rorty 1989, 62.)

I have discussed the 'modern' attitude in length in preceding chapters, so I will not examine it more deeply here. Still, I wish to separate this 'category' from the third one, as I think their philosophical accounts usually contain 'depth' - not too often found in the last category.

Then, I name the last of my 'sets of theorists', the *'still believers'*, who are often called information theorists etc. They tend to suggest that new technology

and especially computers are going to *lead* us to a better and 'more democratic' world; much of the newspaper discussion of the 'effects of computerization' seems to fit in this classification. Further, contrary to the conviction of some 'doublethinkers', I would suggest the *celebrators* of 'a postmodern world', or 'end of history', to fit better under this rubric than to the 'postmoderns'. For instance, I see Fukuyama's joyful manifesto to be lacking a profound critical stand towards the project of Enlightenment (and 'modern society'). Actually, it only succeeds to carry the 'modern hubris' along, while trying to occupy, e.g. Nietzschean terms. In some respects, also the contemporary 'right-wingers', like Daniel Bell, with their cry for 'traditional values' as a counterblow for the 'postmodern age' can be treated in this connection. Thus, since I do not personally find this last 'set of thinkers' (or thoughts) very interesting, the emphasis will be on the 'postmoderns' and to a lesser extent on the 'doublethinkers' as I next continue to examine Oakeshott and postmodern in relation to the *dream* or *myth* of Enlightenment.

To finish, however, I now hope to counterbalance the seriousness of my thesis a bit. I wish to give a playful mirror image for the Enlightenment project to reflect on - the 'Lottery-machine'.

In the Finnish lottery you have to pick seven numbers from the crowd of thirty-nine to win a great deal of money. As in all lotteries, you cannot use any system to anticipate how the balls carrying the numbers will drop each time. To tame the *contingency* of this 'wheel of fortune' people often have their personal gimmicks; birthdays, telephone numbers or 'lucky numbers' are written to lottery coupons from week to another. I suspect, however, that usually these taming attempts are not too serious, but more represent the *Homo ludens* (see, Oakeshott *Work and Play*, 1995). Instead, I am not so sure of what one should think about this 'lottery-machine' so strongly advertised nowadays. The 'working idea' of the machine is that it should be able to count *differing* probabilities for the lotto numbers. It should do this by 'restricting the area of numbers where from the winning numbers are more likely to be picked'. This is done by calculating how often a certain number has occurred before in the winning lottery coupons. What I find fascinating is that this machine has actually become a commercial success. When thought as a 'metaphor' of the Enlightenment project and reflected in

relation to the discussion parties I (re)constructed above, this may open new aspects to the Nietzschean slogan 'to know you are dreaming, but still keep on dreaming'.

4.2 The Negative project of postmodern

"The object of this essay is to consider the character and pedigree of the most remarkable intellectual fashion of post-Reneissance Europe. The Rationalism with which I am concerned is modern Rationalism. No doubt its surface reflects the light of rationalisms of a more distant past, but in its depth there is a quality exclusively its own, and it is this quality that I propose to consider, and to consider mainly in its impact upon European politics. What I call Rationalism in politics is not, of course, the only (and it is certainly not the most fruitful) fashion in modern European political thinking." (Oakeshott 1947, *Rationalism in Politics*, RP 1962, 1.)

It is along with these lines written after the Second World War that I see Oakeshott forcibly to join the 'negative project of postmodern'. The project that is often treated almost as a synonym for the 'whole' postmodern theory, i.e. *criticizing* and *deconstruction* of the 'modern' or 'Enlightenment project'.

Although the Enlightenment project is no more easy to define than the 'postmodern project', I think the latter 'project's' frequency to use this very word as the 'target enemy' entitles one to use the dichotomical expression 'negative', in the sense that the postmodern can be clearly seen to operate *against* something. In my reading, this 'something' is 'the Enlightenment' as a *theoretical project still* advocated and defended by some theorists under that particular name. The Enlightenment is not only tied to signify a covering term for some doctrines of political philosophy occurring in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. (See, Hollinger 1994, 7. Best and Kellner 1991, 241.)

Naturally, this 'enemy' is equally (re)constructed in every reading. Therefore, I prefer to speak of the 'myth' or the 'dream' of the Enlightenment here. The term is quite common among the postmoderns and, in my opinion, it is useful in order

to avoid any bias towards 'representation of reality'.[1]

I would claim that whatever 'parts' of this project (or these projects) the postmodern authors choose to focus their criticism on, the uniting trait is that their writing is directed against notions that assume the *truth of one subject* in form of some 'transcendental subject' like History, an atomic individual, totality of society, etc. Equally, the critique concerns any *totalizing 'explanations'* of 'human history' or 'situation', whatsoever.

Returning specifically to Oakeshott's 'contribution' to this 'negative project of postmodern', I naturally speak of political philosophy and it's relation to the 'dream of Enlightenment'. The object of Oakeshott's 'deconstruction' is clear:

> "This assimilation of politics to engineering is, indeed, what may be called the myth of rationalist politics. And it is, of course, a recurring theme in the literature of Rationalism." (*Rationalism in Politics*, RP 1962, 4.)

To this 'myth of Rationalism' he connects many of those familiar concepts that have been under scrutiny by other postmodern theorists; notions of history as Progress and 'rationalization purporting to elicit the 'truth' (ibid.), 'atomic individuals' etc. (Oakeshott 1976, 358). These and several other *arrested* parts of Oakeshott's critique of rationalism I will examine in relation to the 'negative project of postmodern' in this chapter then.

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[1]When considering Oakeshott and his special relation to the 'negative project of postmodern', an interesting example can be found in Gerenscer's article "Voices in Conversation" (1995). Gerenscer refers to a broadcast talk (*Leviathan the myth*) Oakeshott gave in 1947 and quotes his words of the civilization as: "a collective dream...And the substance of this dream is a myth, an imaginative interpretation of human existence, the perception (not the solution) of the mystery of human life. It is for literature and art to recreate (this myth) in each generation and even to make more articulate the dream powers of a people." Gerenscer continues that "Oakeshott's ironism is manifest in his depiction of civilization as a dream from which it is the perversity of science to desire to wake us but which could only achieve the nightmare of 'dreadful insomnia' (Oakeshott quote)." (Ibid., 740-741.) Compare with the vocabulary by Bauman almost fifty years later: "All in all, postmodernity can be seen as restoring to the world what modernity, presumptuosly, had taken away; as a *re-entchantment* of the world that modernity tried hard to *dis-entchant*." (Bauman 1992, x.)

First, however, I wish to emphasize that Oakeshott's critiques do not compose any 'coherent system' that we might directly interpret as his 'negative doctrine'.The relationship between the 'projects' is *constructed ultimately by myself*. For example, on the basis that often the 'rhetoric' used by Oakeshott and many (confessional) postmodern authors relate 'negatively' in their choosing to speak 'pejoratively' of many concepts that the 'modern party' would colour differently. To stress the issue, I give a quotation in which Oakeshott answers to a critique of his *OHC* presented by David Spitz. Spitz's main claim is that Oakeshott presents two "*substantive* and related doctrines" in the book. (See, Spitz 1976. Oakeshott 1976, 357.)

> "The most direct statement of the doctrine is in the negative: "Oakeshott does not believe there is such a thing as society or community." And I think (but I cannot be certain) that he means that I do not believe in something he does believe in, namely, a universal "collectivity" or community of human beings such as "the collective thing" he finds denoted by the expression "the human species," or other unconditional "collectivities" (such as "the common life of a people") which are "something larger and inclusive of discrete or atomic individuals," "collective things" which "produce" individual men and women, teach them their rôles and "transmit" rationality and moral sense to them, and are communities *within* which are situated all such conditional human associations as churches, business corporations, and something he calls "the state." And if all this is what he says I do not believe in, he is dead right; with this verbiage I will have nothing to do.. But further, detecting that I have no use for his notion of unconditional "society or community," Spitz goes on to assert that, *because of this denial,* I must and do reject the possibility of men and women being related in terms of a shared common purpose, of being "comrades in at least some common cause".. All this is, of course, a total misrepresentation of what I have written and an absurd *non sequitur.* " (Ibid., 358.)

Second then, I wish to remind that, for me, postmodern is not a 'mere' negative project deconstructing and nihilising 'everything'. 'The negative project of postmodern' does not just randomly arrest some notions of the 'Enlightenment project' and deny or 'negate' them - postmodern is no more a 'dialectical method' than a 'method' in any sense. As said before, postmodern may be interpreted as

an alternative *reading* of 'our situation'. And I see Oakeshott as offering two radical readings of our *ambiguous* history and situation; he describes the 'negative' sides of modern(ity) and also the 'positive' ones. 'Progress' is not replaced with 'anti-progress' or 'decay', or 'reason' with 'unreason', but their meaning and use are 'reevaluated'. Not from a viewpoint that "is in principle immune from their allure" (Lyotard 1984, 12), but in the *context of modern(ity)* as an *ambivalent* situation to theorize in and about for the 'postmodern mind'. (See above, pp. 71, 73.) And when we speak of 'the negative side', the attention is turned towards *the postmodern interpretation,* or 're-description' of the 'dark side' of modern - the interpretation that certainly differs from the modern one. It pretends no neutrality and may, of course, sometimes be suspect of exaggeration. In Oakeshott's words:

> "And it is characteristic of political philosophers that they take a sombre view of the human situation: they deal in darkness. Human life in their writings appears, generally not as a feast or even as a journey, but as a predicament.. Even those whose thought is most remote from violent contrasts of dark and light (Aristotle, for example) do not altogether avoid this disposition of mind. And some political philosophers may even be suspected of spreading darkness in order to make their light more acceptable." (Oakeshott 1946, *Introduction to Leviathan,* RP, 225-226.)

In many respects then, when we speak with dichotomical terms of negative and positive, we are dealing with extremes. For instance, Oakeshott's views of human life as a 'feast' or 'journey' are dealt as only offering 'contrasts' in this chapter. The confrontations may sometimes sound quite harsh, but remembering that this discussion goes more in terms of 'ideal types' I do not find too many hindrances in the way. Thus, I give one more dividing line to the conversation between the 'moderns' and 'postmoderns'. The quotation by Oakeshott can be compared with, e.g. Giddens's longing for a 'cosmopolitan order' and analysis of 'fragmentation' and 'disintegration' as our predicament.

> "And the question, which has made itself heard since the middle of the last century, whether 'democratic' institutions can be

made to 'work' is an ill-considered question: what is really being considered is whether 'popular' institutions can be prevented, in contemporary circumstances, from selling themselves entirely to the politics of faith [=more or less a synonym for 'rationalist style in politics', SS]." (Oakeshott 1952?, *The Politics of Faith and The Politics of Scepticism*, 1996.)

Now, I will turn my gaze towards this 'alternative reading of modern European politics'. In the following two passages, I will be using Orwell's famous *Nineteen Eighty-four* as a sort of auxiliary, 'binding' reading for Oakeshott's 'diagnosis' of 'our predicament(s)', first the notion of the 'Mass man'.[1] Although in some respects the relation between Orwell and Oakeshott is a bit far-fetched, I think that this particular book succeeds in condensing many of those 'fears' that seem to have bothered most political philosophers - from Adorno and Horkheimer to Arendt and Oakeshott - after the Second World War, which is the immediate context for Oakeshott's first 'postmodern' writings.[2] After this more 'general plane' discussion I proceed with examining the concepts of 'technical knowledge', 'progress' and 'universitas'. Since all three terms have already made several 'appearances' in the text, I will keep my presentation short here and use slightly differing (and rather limited approaches) to each. Finally, in the concluding passage *'Rationalism in politics'* it is time to take a little breath, catch a glimpse backwards, and open a little space to move on.

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[1] The unmarked quotations are from Orwell (1949): *Nineteen Eighty-four.*

[2] When I read this novel as a sort of 'parallel story' for Oakeshott's description of our *predicament(s)* in modern politics. It should be noted that the important feature of the book is that it is *not* an image of a *totally* 'succeeded' totalitarian regime in a way Arendt once put it:"In a perfect totalitarian government, where all men have become One Man, where all action aims at the acceleration of the movement of nature or history, where every single act is the execution of a death sentence which Nature or History has already pronounced, that is, under conditions where terror can be completely relied upon to keep the movement in constant motion, no principle of action separate from its essence would be needed at all." (Arendt 1951, 1967, 467.) Otherwise, Winston's story could not be told.

4.2.1 The Mass man

"He was alone. The past was dead. The future was unimaginable. What certainty had he that a single human creature now living was on his side?" (Orwell)

"We are more free than ever before to look around in all directions; nowhere, do we perceive any limits. We have the advantage of feeling immense space around us - but also an immense void." (Nietzsche)

During the second stage of his reintegration, that of understanding, Winston thinks he knows the answer O'Brien is expecting to the question: "Now tell me *why* we cling to power. What is our motive?" He first pondered the well-known litany in his mind:

"Party did not seek power for its own ends, but only for the good of the majority. That it sought power because men in the mass were frail, cowardly creatures who could not endure liberty or face the truth, and must be ruled over and systematically deceived by others who were stronger than themselves. That the choice for mankind lay between freedom and happiness, and that, for the great bulk of mankind, happiness was better. That the Party was the eternal guardian of the weak, a dedicated sect doing evil that good might come, sacrificing its own happiness to that of others."

Then he started answering faintly:

"You are ruling us for our own good..You believe that human beings are not fit to govern themselves, and therefore-"

And therefore what? Nothing. O'Brien had pushed the lever and the electric shock stopped him from speaking since *it was of no matter* what he would have answered, neither to himself nor to O'Brien. Both of them knew that he was going to tell a *lie*. He did not settle to the criteria:

"The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (*i.e.* reality and experience) and the

distinction between true and false (*i.e.* the standards of thought)
no longer exist." (Arendt 1951, 1967, 474.)

He still 'knew' that "two plus two plus four", not in a sense that this 'truth' would open to his 'mind' through some 'inner logic of reasoning', but he still faintly remembered this option from some other 'final vocabulary' than the one now offered for him as the *only* possibility (see, Rorty 1989, 186). We know, however, that finally Winston gave up and became to 'love' the Big Brother not merely to obey 'him'. He draw 2+2=5 on the dusty table. And between these two alternatives Winston did a lot of wavering.

It is precisely this wavering that is of interest in Winston's situation as we now go on to examine Oakeshott's notions of the 'mass man' as the 'negative reading' of a modern 'character'. Notions that in many respect are much more disturbing than those by authors for whom, e.g. Orwell's book merely describes and exaggerates the horrors of totalitarian regimes - the Nazi Germany and especially the Soviet Union as their 'real life' forefigures - having nothing to do with 'our democratic societies'. Namely, for Oakeshott:

> "the disposition to be an anti-individual is one to which every
> European man has a propensity; the 'mass man' is merely one
> in whom this propensity is dominant." (Oakeshott 1961, *The
> masses in representative democracy,* RP 1991, 381.)

The disposition Oakeshott refers to is not then anything 'outside' or 'inside' us. For Oakeshott, an 'anti-individual' does not mean the same as, e.g. the 'authoritarian personality' in the sense that some people would fit the type and others were 'exempt' from that kind of suspicion. Oakeshott's notions on the mass man should not be confused with those popular 'explanations' of the events in the Second World War that leaning to the earlier theories of 'mass psychology' and 'psychoanalysis' sought to 'human nature'. For example, in the form of 'repressed aggressiveness' that had burst up into mass phenomena under some particularly stressful influences from the 'social environment' such as the economical

depression.[1] Instead, we should understand the mass man as *the context of moral sentiments and beliefs* relating to the 'rationalist' or 'ideological style' of politics and thinking about government in terms of *universitas*. (Oakeshott 1958, *Morality and Government in Modern Europe,* MPM.) Oakeshott does not claim that the moral dispositions should be thought as the *causes* of those dispositions revealing themselves in the utterances of political writers, but he wishes to emphasize the two-way interaction between morals and politics. In short:

> "Consequently they [moral dispositions] may be used to elucidate one another as text and context. And since our concern is with political reflection and belief, moral belief appears as the context. It is, moreover, in my opinion an exceedingly revealing context, more important than any other."
> (Ibid., 28.)

Oakeshott's reading of this moral disposition of the 'mass man' begins with a "piece of historical description". (*The Masses in representative democracy,* RP1991, 364.) Departing immediately from a bit more common readings, his story does not start with "the French Revolution or with the industrial changes of the late eighteenth century." Instead, he sets the scene for the emergence of the mass man in relation to "an emergence of a very different kind, namely, that of the human individual in his modern idiom." (Ibid.).

I will not get deeper to examine this figure of 'modern human individual' in Oakeshott's oeuvre here, but only sum up a few points that are relevant for our understanding of the mass man. First, Oakeshott dates this emergence of modern individuals to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in western Europe. Of course, he dates the 'escape' from communal ties further off, to a modification of medieval conditions of life and thought, and does it with much more detail. The 'dating', however, is done on the basis that during the mentioned centuries:

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[1]Neither do I interpret other authors' views in this manner here. Though, e.g. Arendt in her *Totalitarianism and Its Origins* speaks of 'the psychology of the European mass man' I think it is better understood in an Oakeshottian manner as a historical (an 'ideal character') description. This is not, however, to deny that, e.g. Arendt's analysis derives influences from 'Le Bon-style' mass psychology. (See, Arendt 1967, 316.)

"What began to emerge, then, was conditions so pre-eminently favourable to a very high degree of human individuality, and human beings enjoying (to such a degree and in such numbers) the experience of 'self-determination' in conduct and belief, that it overshadows all earlier occasions of the sort. Nowhere else has the emergence of individuals (that is *persons accustomed to making choices for themselves*) either modified human relationships so profoundly, or proved so durable an experience, or provoked so strong a reaction, or explained itself so elaborately in the idiom of philosophical theory." (Ibid., 364, emphasis added.)

Noteworthy for my considerations here, this disposition also "gathered to itself an appropriate understanding of the office of government" as *societas* (ibid.). The climax of this manner of governing emerged in England in the 'parliamentary' government and elsewhere in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (ibid.).

Now, the contrast Oakeshott is building starts to take shape more accurately. 'Individuals' recognized this new modern manner of living - an invitation of making one's own choices - as an enjoyment. The other side of the coin is that:

".. there were some people, by circumstance or by temperament, less ready than others to respond to this invitation; and for many the invitation to make choices.. came to be recognized as a burden." (Ibid., 371.)

The 'individual *manqué*' was the one who could not transform the "familiar anonymity of communal life" into an individuality. What was identified as 'progress' in the same condition of human circumstance was also identified as 'decay'. Importantly, then, *both* characters just described are 'modern'; the disposition of the 'individual *manqué'* is no relic of a past age. (Ibid.).

The *predicament* of this 'derivative' modern character was then the environment, inviting to make choices, recognized as hostile. From this predicament he sought 'salvation', "and he found what he sought, in some measure, in 'the government' in terms of universitas. Already, "the 'godly prince' of the Reformation and his lineal descendant, the 'enlightened despot' of the eighteenth century, were political inventions for making choices for those

indisposed to make choices for themselves." (Ibid., 371.) But still, the 'moral victory' of an individual bore heavily upon the individual *mangué* and "what had been the discomfort of ill-success was turned into the misery of guilt." Even though some resignated in this situation, there were some in whom the impulse to "escape from the predicament by imposing it upon all mankind" was generated and the militant 'anti-individual' emerged. (Ibid.).

In this point, we are not far from Winston's situation. Namely, in Oakeshott's story the 'mass man' was 'born' in the recognition of the numerical superiority of the 'anti-individual'. The 'mass man' is *specified* by the disposition to "impose upon all a uniformity of belief and conduct" leaving no room for either "pains or the pleasures of choice." (Ibid., 373.) The numbers are a *condition of success* with which this character has imposed itself, not a condition of the character itself.

Now, let me return to Winston and *O'Brien*. In relation to Winston he appears currently as the 'anti-individual' for whom he can address the question:

"And you consider yourself morally superior to us, with our lies
and our cruelty?"

And wait, somewhat angry, the inevitable answer by Winston who admits to consider himself superior. However, he can also rely on the dominating disposition of the mass man in Oceania and perform in a manner that resembles the modern idiom of 'leadership'. A *leader* who is a concomitant of the 'anti-individual' (there is no place for a 'ruler' in universitas); "enough individual to seek personal satisfaction in the exercise of individuality, but too little to seek it anywhere but in commanding others." (*The masses..*, 374.)[1] The relationship between the 'leader' and the mass man is twofold; the belief held by the 'leader' is that humans *need* to be told what to think. In Orwellian world, this belief seems to be held by O'Brien towards Winston.

"Indeed, from one point of view, 'the masses' must be regarded
as the invention of their leaders." (*The masses in representative
democracy*, 373.)

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[1] This modern idiom of a leader actually 'belongs' to 'representative democracy' in Oakeshott's interpretation, this will be specified a bit later.

Knowing then that the 'numbers' are on his side, O'Brien can state firmly (for his 'enjoyment' and for 'our' fear):

> "If you are a man, Winston, you are the last man. Your kind is extinct; we are the inheritors. Do you understand that you are *alone?* You are outside history, you are nonexistent."

He may introduce himself to Winston - not only as a 'direct' oppressor - but also as the *'curer'*: "But don't give up hope. Everyone is cured sooner or later." And as the 'skilful and benevolent *manager'* (Oakeshott 1975, *OHC*, 205). "He had always plenty of money nowadays. He even had a job, a sincere, more highly paid than his old job had been." And it is to these 'types' of modern 'rulers' that Oakeshott's critique of the 'Enlightenment dream' and negative reading of modern politics in relation to the mass man are firmly attached to.

First, the manager. In Oakeshott's reading, the *"enlightenment government* may be recognized as a new response to what had been called 'the problem of the poor'." (Ibid., 304, emphasis added.) Not 'poor' in the sense that having less money or property would have deprived them from their 'rights'[1] but recognized as:

> "..a wantonly wasted asset, as Peter Chamberlen's 'richest treasure of the nation', as the most useful and most ill-used

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[1]Contrary to the conviction of some interpreters who hold Oakeshott as a 'right-winger type of a conservative' in relation to the question of the 'poor', it must be said that Oakeshott remarks in a footnote: "The 'poor' were also a problem for those who understood a state in terms of *societas*." They have been understood as a threat to civil association because of their erroneous belief that they had nothing to lose but poverty. The belief that made them the willing instrument for a man pulling the state to the 'direction' of *universitas*. However, in Hegel, "who was an unequivocal modernist", Oakeshott finds a more sophisticated view of the matter: "Modern poverty was a relative not an absolute condition and it was the counterpart of modern wealth rather than a sign of personal inadequacy." Oakeshott's account is that: "..great disparities of wealth were an impediment (though not a bar) to the enjoyment of civil association; and this hindrance could and should be reduced by imposing civil conditions upon industrial enterprise (similar perhaps to those designed to prevent fraud of the pollution of the atmosphere), and where necessary by the exercise of a judicious 'lordship' for the relief of the destitute." (*OHC*, 304-305.)

members of a thitherto sadly managed corporate enterprise, as Robert Owen's infinitely pliable 'poor' indispensable to the undertaking in which 'nature erring and varying' was to be transformed into 'nature altered and wrought' in the service of mankind." (Ibid.)

Naturally, these 'poor' could not be consulted about their 'own good'. As an illuminative example, Oakeshott quotes St. Simon who uttered that 'the problem of social organization must be solved *for* the people.' (Ibid.) For Oakeshott, the 'rationality' of enlightened rule displayed itself as the inheritor of 'Baconian vision' to 'make nature yield', and in the 'scientific' quality of the management of the enterprise. (Ibid.) The *alleged purpose* was the 'well-being' of the associates understood as the 'common good'. The term which gave a "state a quasi-moral character in terms of which it became recognizable as a secular version of a 'holy community'." (Ibid., 298.) It was 'progressive' engagement directed by 'reason' - familiar rhetoric heard also today. And the 'salvation' in the secular lied not in a final earthly or heavenly salvation but in the *project* of continuous promotion of interest.

In short, the "modernistic (so to say, Baconian) reading of the human condition" created a problem of those "who had failed to keep up with their times" (Ibid., 303), i.e. to acquire the 'capacity' and 'skills' of 'rational conduct'. Thus, e.g. 'education' in the enterprise association heading towards 'ever increasing prosperity' was understood merely as a means to a chosen end. The Baconian notion of 'education' as a concern with 'things not words' combined with the notion of 'socialization' was more about extending the 'powers' of the state understood as *universitas* than bringing 'light' to those worse off. (Oakeshott 1972, *Education: The Engagement and its Frustration,* VLL, 75.) The 'Enlightenment' was not then a "charitable project" and not "at all conceived in the terms of civility but those of lordship. Its inspiration was a 'rational' horror of waste." (*OHC*, 305.) 'The 'mass man' as the 'poor' was to be 'managed' in an enterprise style towards 'productivity' in 'political economy'. Oakeshott's interpretation of the 'Enlightenment' comes surely closer to that of, e.g. Foucault's and Bauman's than that of Habermas's. In this context, O'Brien's 'real' answer

(soon to be 'forgotten' by Winston) to the question about the motive of the Party to seek power becomes intriguing:

> "The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are entirely interested solely in power."

In another version of a state understood in the terms of *universitas* the 'mass men' are considered as:

> "..invalids, all victims of the same disease and incorporated in seeking relief from their common ailment; and the office of government is a remedial engagement. Rulers are *therapeutae*, the directors of a sanatorium from which no patient may discharge himself by a choice of his own." (*OHC.*, 308.)

It is noteworthy that in this 'curer'/'patient' kind of relationship the 'disease' is understood as an attribute of 'human nature' itself. Oakeshott lists a few specified names that have occurred as the candidates for the disease: "morality, sin, guilt, liability to error, pride, egoism, anxiety, *anomia,* etc." (Ibid.) Hereby, the answer by Winston could have continued: 'You are ruling us for our own good, and therefore we, who have fallen to insanity from the right path of normality, have to be recovered in your great group therapy.' (See, ibid., 309-310.) Needless to underline what should be the forthcoming critique of the 'modern project'. When the 'therapists' are identified as sociologists, social psychologists and psychiatrists, and the 'mass men' as the subjects of 'enlightened' government' seen as "doltish children, sunk in ignorance, prone to idleness and folly and in need of instruction" (Ibid.), one may guess what is to be said about, e.g. the presentation of Kohlberg's 'stages of moral consciousness' or Loevinger's 'stages of ego development' in the framework of political philosophy (see, Habermas 1979, 76-77).

Today, however, perhaps the most disturbing 'mass man related' challenge is cast by postmodern theory towards the *concept* of 'democracy'. By Arendt, 'democracy' was disillusioned as a *'means'* to prevent totalitarian governments from rising to power. The masses had not formed a "majority taking an active part

in government" and neither had these "politically indifferent" masses been "truly neutral" and thus harmless (Arendt 1967,312). Yet, I could imagine that even more disturbing, for many, is the strong doubt casted on the 'democracy' as an 'end' to be pursuited. The 'good of the majority' may not only appear suspect in the ends like 'the ultimate triumph of communism' or 'abolishment of Jews from the Earth'. And the answer Winston is anticipating may not be restricted to: 'Therefore, we, the vanguard of the communist party lead the way'. Our much more homely slogans, like 'in the name of democracy we this and that', or 'in order to promote democracy in the world we..,' appear under a strange light in Oakeshott's writings about the 'mass man'. Just to remind that, for him, the 'disposition of the mass man' or 'morality of collectivism' (Oakeshott 1958, MPM, 25) was not anything remote and to be 'observed' only in the writings of Marx and Engels (or in totalitarian regimes), though those have the been extreme readings of human condition and politics towards that *direction*.

And direction is the keyword to Oakeshott's diagnosis for 'our predicament' here. The pull between the disposition of the 'individual' and the 'mass man' is the context for the pull between the understanding of government as a 'parliamentary government' and a 'popular government'. In the latter, the manifold word 'democracy' does not "stand for a certain view of the authorization or constitution of government", but "for the activity of governing turned in a certain direction." (*The Politics of Faith and The Politics of Scepticism* 1996, 131.)

I just leave a few points under consideration here. First, the 'rights' of individuality were of no use for the 'mass man'. Thus, "what he came to demand were rights of entirely different *kind*." (*The Masses in representative democracy*, 378.)

> "He required the right to enjoy a substantive condition of human circumstance in which he would not be asked to make choices for himself...And looking into his own character he identified this [condition] with Security - but again, not security against arbitrary interference in the exercise of his preferences, but Security against having to make choices for himself and against having to meet the vicissitudes of life from his own resources." (Ibid.)

The Security was called 'the public good' and "'popular government' is precisely, a modification of 'parliamentary government' designed to accomplish this purpose." (Ibid., 379.) *Not* as a concrete manner of government established and practised; but as a disposition to impose modifications upon 'parliamentary government' to meet the aspirations of the 'mass man' (ibid.). According to Oakeshott, the 'enterprises' heading to this direction include such 'measures' as the 'vote' (universal adult suffrage), a change in the character of the parliamentary representative to a *mandataire*, and understanding of parliament as a 'work-shop', instead of a debating assembly. The two-fold relationship between a 'leader' and the 'mass man' begins to form:

> "Just as it lay in the character of the 'mass man' to see everyman as a 'public official', an agent of 'the public good', and to see his representatives not as individuals but instructed delegates, so he saw every voter as the direct participant in the activity of governing: and the means of this was the *plébiscite*."
> (Ibid.)

The "new art in politics" in the 'popular government' is then exactly the modern idiom of 'ruling' as *leading*. Leading is about knowing what will collect most votes and "making it in such a manner that it appears to come from 'the people'." A 'leader' offers his 'voters' the illusion of a "choice without a burden of having to choose."In this Oakeshott's negative reading of 'democracy', the "massive political parties of the modern world are composed of anti-individuals", and the 'mandate' is a "familiar trick of ventriloquism" in which a 'leader' has "drawn up his own mandate" and "put it into the mouth of his electors." (Ibid.). In sum:

> "Moreover, it is known in advance what offer will collect most votes: the character of the 'mass man' is such that he will be moved only by the offer of release from the burden of making choices for himself, the offer of 'salvation'. And anyone who makes this offer may confidently demand unlimited power; it will be given him." (Ibid.)

In Oceania, Winston was finally reintegrated. *O'Brien knew his ultimate fear.*

"In your case," said O'Brien, "the worst thing in the world happens to be rats."

In 'our' case, if I interpret Oakeshott correctly, the knowledge of our fears may not be the one to be afraid of.

4.2.2 Transparent language

We just left Winston in a reintegrated condition to Oceania. In my interpretation, however, he was not yet 'reintegrated' into a totalitarian *system,* but a *project* in a way of perfecting the system. It was not likely that Winston had 'really' been the last man in 'need' of burning "all evil and all illusion out of him" and bringing "him over to our side, not in appearance, but genuinely, heart and soul." (Orwell 1949, 258.) Instead, we can read from the Appendix in Orwell's book that the end of the project loomed "so late a date as 2050" when the "Oldspeak had been once and for all superseded, the last link with the past severed." It may not then be too unfair to claim that the project, in which Winston was now a working component, was chiefly that of *language.* In his time, the 'language-engineers' like Syme - "a philologist, a specialist in Newspeak" - were still busy in work:

> "Relative to our own, the Newspeak vocabulary was tiny, and new ways of reducing it were constantly being devised. Newspeak, indeed, differed from almost all other languages in that its vocabulary grew smaller instead of larger every year. Every reduction was a gain, since the smaller the area of choice, the smaller the temptation to take thought." (Orwell)

The project was heading towards, what I call, a totally *transparent language* in which there would be only *correct* 'meanings' or 'uses' available per word. These words would be the 'correct' descriptions of the 'nature of things' as no other 'reference points' or 'contexts' were available. This was done through reducing the vocabulary ('bad replaced with ungood'), but even more importantly for my considerations here:

"The second distinguishing mark of Newspeak grammar was its regularity. Subject to a few exceptions which are mentioned below, all inflections followed the same rules." (Orwell)

This Orwellian kind of extreme 'dystopia' would, according also to Oakeshott, require a more radical reform than "removal of some of the accrecations of time which have become meaningless or obstructive, or by the exclusion of conspicuous anomalies." (Oakeshott 1996, 119.) An "inventor" of a 'system' of this sort should come "forward with an entirely new style of politics, an artifice analogous to a new language with a vocabulary and a syntax of its own." (Ibid.) For Oakeshott, the attempt to *simplify* politics is analogous to the undertaking of simplifying language:

> "The restriction of vocabulary and syntax such as belongs, for example, to 'basic English', or (on another plane) the creation of our 'English' language from which all Latinisms have been excluded. This, indeed, is the kind of simple politics which the physiocrat had in mind who conjectured that it would suffice to have that amount of capacity and patience which a child good at arithmetic employs, in order to be a good politician or a truly good citizen." (Ibid.)

The endeavour of removing ambivalence and ambiguity in "the complex manner of politics" is to lose "in richness and variety" but "recover in the absence of distraction." (Ibid., 118.) And in the situation where it is "an illusion to suppose that the expressions which compose our political vocabulary were ever 'simple', to suppose that they have an 'original meaning' which has become debased" (Ibid., 15) and the 'extreme kind of inventing' unlikely, the "choice before us is between one or other of the styles [politics of faith or scepticism, SS] which at present distract us." (Ibid., 120.) I quote:

> "And there is no doubt that the selection of one and exclusion of the other would eliminate the ambiguity of our political vocabulary. This, indeed, is the character of all the concrete proposals for removing complexity from European politics. Marxism, for example, is a simple-minded project of this kind. It bids us forsake all manners of political activity save that which is

> appropriate to a certain version, the Baconian version, of the politics of faith. The enterprise of communism is to simplify not merely political activity, but all activity whatsoever; all problems are reduced to one problem." (Ibid.)

For Oakeshott, then, the modern, 'suspicious' long-term 'political' projects and undertakings of simplifying language relate closely. However, these kinds of attempts have been "inherently self-defeating: it is an escape from the consequences of complexity which leads nowhere." (Ibid., 120.) *If* the enterprise of creating an unambiguous political vocabulary (and 'language system' and 'political activity') would succeed, it would mean "abolishing politics" completely, not any 'practising' of 'right' politics. (Ibid., 94.)

Perhaps, these considerations are fairly obvious if we are to think the 'cruder' versions of these 'political projects' such as the just mentioned 'enterprise of communism' and the related attempts to get rid of 'false consciousness' and 'corruption of language' etc. I would claim, however, that when placing Oakeshott to the contemporary 'field' of political philosophy it becomes important to separate his accounts of language from those philosophers that "speak of language as a quasi-divinity." (Rorty 1991, 52.) First, naturally, of those who in a neo-Kantian fashion speak of philosophy as involved with "language as mirroring nature." (Rorty 1979,393.) Or, the ones for whom philosophy represents a sort of 'meta-language' in the respect that it would offer a panorama over a 'conversation' of "diverse idioms of utterance" which, according to *Oakeshott,* "enjoy an oblique relationship which neither requires nor forecasts their being assimilated to one another." (*The Voice of Poetry,* 1959, 11.)[1] Speaking from the viewpoint of 'postmodern theory', however, the philosophical *projects* I now concentrate on are the ones that can be seen as aiming (or 'resulting') at reducing of political agency

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[1] So much has been written about the connections between postmodern theory and the critique of the "dream of the philosophical project of logic" of "making the language transparent to the language itself as part of the philosophizing" (Pulkkinen 1996, 47) that I will focus my saying a bit differently and drop, e.g. 'pure' analytic philosophy out of the picture. In addition, I will later return to Oakeshott's notions of the differing voices in a conversation, as I interpret that in OHC his accounts of the 'boundaries' between especially 'voice of poetry' and 'practical activity' (..politics) are blurred when compared with some accounts of the late 1950s.

via theorizing 'about' 'language'. Thus, I must emphasize that, although 'political activity', (vernacular) 'language' and 'moral practices' ('moral languages') relate closely in Oakeshott's thinking, there is nothing to suggest that he would interpret, e.g. political activity to be *derived* from the basic, 'possible' moves allowed by the 'universal' structure of moral language' - or 'communication', for that matter. Then, we may well target Oakeshott's accounts against the following kinds of 'system building':

> "The task of universal pragmatics is to identify and reconstruct universal conditions of possible understanding. In other contexts one also speaks of "general presuppositions of communication," but I prefer to speak of general presuppositions of communicative action because I take the type of action aimed at reaching understanding to be fundamental. Thus I start from the assumption (without undertaking to demonstrate it here) that other forms of social action - for example, conflict, competition, strategic action in general - are derivatives of action oriented to reaching understanding. Furthermore, as language is the specific medium of understanding at the sociocultural stage of evolution.." (Habermas 1979, 1.)

First, it must be noted that one cannot find the 'momentous' terms like 'general presuppositions', 'fundamental', or 'sociocultural stage of evolution' from Oakeshott's writings. For example, languages of moral practice do not constitute "anything so specific as a 'shared system of values'" (OHC, 63) - they are always in plural. Least, there is to be found any direction towards, e.g. a final destination of 'emancipation' in his theorizing of language and politics.

Instead, I see Oakeshott coming much closer to the later Wittgensteinian accounts which rejected the assumption that 'philosophy of language' "might explain the unhidden on the basis of the hidden." (Rorty 1991, 60; Rorty interprets also young Heidegger in this way.) There are no 'common humanity' or 'rational moral principles' to be derived from 'universal language structure'. When language and politics are considered Oakeshott's emphasis is on *actions* of agents:

"It does not impose upon an agent demands that he shall think certain thoughts, entertain certain sentiments, or make certain thoughts, or make certain substantive utterances. It comes to him as various invitations to understand, to choose, and to respond. It is composed of conventions and rules of speech, a vocabulary and a syntax, and it is *continuously invented by those who speak it and using it is adding to its resources*. It is an instrument to be played upon, not a tune to played upon." (*OHC*, 58, emphasis added.)

As *historic* and contingent achievements of human beings, languages never compose a finished or fixed 'structure'. Instead, "it is only the uneducated who insist that each must have a single unequivocal meaning indifferent to context." (Ibid., 63.)

Thus, I assert that when seen against Oakeshott's thinking, e.g. Habermas' ideas of "comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness, and rightness" as "universal validity claims" of communication can be interpreted as an attempt of restricting political activity (see, Habermas 1979, 3). Also, I would say that Vattimo's critique of Apel's and Habermas' - more or less 'enlightened' - models as efforts to set up "a society of unlimited communication", i.e. a "transparent society" may get interesting 'extra-light' when read together with Oakeshott. (Vattimo 1989, 31, my translations.) In Vattimo's interpretation, the model of "unlimited communication society" is one to which the term 'community' adds the meaning of a normative ideal. This kind of 'society' is transparent exactly as it attempts to clear the "barriers and obscurity" from communication in order to "radically diminish the causes of conflicts" by following a certain view of the psychoanalysis. (Vattimo 1989, 31). The model assumes not only an instrumental character but a final and fundamental role for "social communication" and "anthropology" (or 'social sciences') in the "project of emancipation". Thus, Vattimo says that the ideal of transparent society only works from a viewpoint of some central subject. In this case, the supremacy position of the 'community of scientists' is very similar to Peirce's model of logical socialism. (Ibid., 34.) I give a quotation to illuminate the issue in more detail:

"Rationalization means overcoming such systematically distorted communication in which the action supporting consensus concerning the reciprocally raised validity claims - especially the consensus concerning the truthfulness of intentional expressions and the rightness of underlying norms - can be sustained in appearance only, that is, counter-factually. The stages of law and morality, of ego demarcations and world-views, of individual and collective identity formations, are stages in this process. Their progress cannot be measured against the choice of correct strategies, but rather against the intersubjectivity of understanding achieved without force, that is, against the expansion of the domain of consensual action together with the re-establishment of undistorted communication." (Habermas 1979, 120.)

Compared with Habermas, then, Oakeshott does deviate in many crucial points. Especially, the totalizing concepts of ego ("the myth of necessarily ego-centric agent is a denial of agency"), process, progress and collective identity are to be avoided. The attempt to build a transparent relationship between "external nature, society, internal nature and language" (ibid., 66) is, of course, successful if one remains *inside* the particular language game Habermas' is building (see also, Lyotard 1984, 66). However, at the moment of doubting the 'universal watertightness' of any of those concepts, in relation to *human conduct,* the model collapses. For example, rejecting the term of 'society' as "an alleged totality of human relationships", Oakeshott criticizes 'sociological theory':

"In the more sophisticated versions, the explanatory 'laws' are the alleged psychological or bio-evolutionary 'laws' or causal conditions said to be postulated in the correlations of characteristics. But, however this may be, and whether or not a 'general sociological theory' is made to emerge from this engagement to understand 'social processes', it is remote from anything recognizable as an engagement to theorize human conduct.. ['Sociological theorems', SS] can be represented as theorems about the actions and utterances of human beings only in a masquerade of categories." (*OHC*, 25.)

Further, the concept of 'society' also denotes the "quest for community" and, e.g. in many theories of a "so-called 'atomized' society" one can recognize the "urge

to impose upon a state the character of a *solidarité commune"* as a "relic of servility." (OHC, 320-321.) It may be that we should not reject, e.g. Habermas' project as a simple attempt to exercise universitas-type of lordship in means of theorizing. Yet, the notions of Oakeshott, connected with Vattimo's direct critique, at least form an interesting perspective to the topic. In my mind, Oakeshott's interpretation of Plato's more-than-famous cave-metaphor condenses much of the modern 'legislative' type of philosophizing:

> "According to Plato (in some accounts, at least), the theorist who now reluctantly returns to the cave from this greatest of all intellectual adventures carries with him an unconditional understanding of the world in terms of its ultimate postulates (or, as he says, its 'causes'). This understanding, it goes without saying, is vastly superior to that of the cave-dwellers. But it is represented as something more than merely superior. It is alleged to be a complete *substitute* for that and for every other conditional understanding. Thus, the theorist returns, not with something useful in his pocket (as a man might carry a copy of Horace to console him as he goes to prison, to exile, or to war), but with a gift of inestimable value to mankind: a definitive understanding and language to supersede and *to take the place of* all other understandings and languages." (Oakeshott 1975, *OHC*, 29.)

In sum, when I read Oakeshott's thoughts of language as targeted against the notions of 'transparent language' I do not mainly refer to the question *if* there 'exists' a 'natural structure of language' that would 'correspond' to the 'nature of things' in the 'physical world', or to other such considerations. Being "reconciled with to the notion that.. philosophy, like language, was just a set of indefinitely expansible social practices, not a bounded whole whose periphery might be shown" (Rorty 1991, 57), one preferably speaks of *projects* that aim or 'result' at reducing political agency. If political discussion is all about reaching consensus about certain 'things' in the framework of some universal language structure, or if language is just a neutral mediator between the 'present state of human collectivity' and some 'universal goal', there is not too much 'space' for the 'agents' to make their own moves. And even fewer changes to try to alter the

'rules of the game' as those rules somehow seem to lie outside human touch. Palonen calls these kinds of projects 'Babel-projects' and writes that:

> "A Babel-project, i.e. a project of creating a common language, may not necessarily be unrealistic. But it means simplifying of 'language' to a mere mediator of signs and meanings that soothes the 'handling of affairs'." (Palonen 1988, 44, my translation.)

According to him, 'society' is the commonest name for a Babel-project nowadays (ibid., 46). And, as I did not see Oakeshott much departing from this point of view, the all-too-familiar clauses, like 'he is living at society's expense', or 'the government has to decide about the allocation of society's resources for the next year', become typical examples of the 'politics of faith':

> "In the politics of faith, each word in our political vocabulary (the word 'government' included) acquires a maximum meaning appropriate to the 'perfection' pursued, and enjoying that maximum meaning it comes to stand for all forms of legitimate activity and so none in particular." (Oakeshott 1996, 94.)

In Oceania, the project was assumed to culminate in a system in which there "was, indeed, no word for 'Science', any meaning that it could possibly bear being already sufficiently covered by the word *Ingsoc*." (Orwell 1949, 312.) However, as long as the supremacy of this kind of 'transparent language' does not prevail:

> "For us, for whom ambiguity of language is the reflection of ambivalence of activity, it is less appropriate [to 'straighten out' things' by eliminating 'equivocality' of words, SS]. It is our predicament to be able to enjoy a complex manner of government only at the cost of an equivocal political vocabulary." (Oakeshott 1996, 132.)

4.2.3 Technical knowledge

> But "The Bell Curve" is scarcely an academic treatise in social theory
> and population genetics. It is a manifesto of conservative ideology; the
> book's inadequate and biased treatment of data displays its primary
> purpose -- advocacy. The text evokes the dreary and scary drumbeat of
> claims associated with conservative think tanks: reduction or
> elimination of welfare, ending or sharply curtailing affirmative action
> in schools and workplaces, cutting back Head Start and other forms of
> preschool education, trimming programs for the slowest learners and
> applying those funds to the gifted. (Stephen Jay Gould, The New
> Yorker, 1994.)

> Genes are a superstition approved by the State. (Tuomas Nevanlinna,
> HS 1998.)

Now, if from the modern(ist) point of view, "relativism of knowledge" is "a problem to be struggled against and eventually overcome in theory and in practice" (Bauman 1987, 4), then Oakeshott's critique of modern "doctrine of human knowledge" as the "hidden spring" of ideological and rationalist style of politics may well be added to the hindrances on the way (*Rationalism in Politics* 1947, RP 1962, 7). In order to focus my saying a bit differently from the previous chapters, I will wrap the illumination of Oakeshott's specific accounts around so-called 'natural sciences' - with the assistance of a brief but dense example.

In 1948, Oakeshott reviewed an essay "on the pursuit of scientific knowledge in relation to the arrangements of society" by a geneticist C.D Darlington. Darlington's argument is represented as starting from the comprehension of "scientific knowledge" as all "discovery" that "involves destruction of hitherto accepted knowledge, and has to overcome the inertia of what is already established", i.e. "the genuine and habitual ignorance by the politician." (Oakeshott 1948, *Science and Society*, 689.) Being convinced that "science is good for men", the *problem* arises from the reception of discoveries as "organized societies" tend to averse change, and thus, their "application". Especially, "modern statistical methods" should guide "political enterprise"; the Government departments being "busy collecting numbers" is not sufficient while "the politicians" fail to "properly appreciate the method." (Ibid., 690-91.) Finally,

Darlington insists "that.. scientific knowledge.. can be reduced to the terms of genetics" and the quoted assertion runs as follows: ".. the fundamental problem of government is one that can be treated by exact biological methods. It is the problem of the character and causation of the differences that exist among men, among the races, classes and individuals which compose mankind." (Ibid., 691.)

Now, we may attribute the most simplemindedly drawn lines of Darlington's argument to the possibility of his belonging to the "strict sect" of believers to the "theory of evolution" that needs no further consideration here.[1](ibid., 690.) And naturally, the 'relationships' between this kind of argumentation and *scientism* in politics has been criticized by the 'modern' political philosophers in lengths. Yet, I suggest that - precisely, in all its 'eccentricities' - the 'model' examined in the light of Oakeshott's notion of 'technical knowledge' supports the separation of postmodern views from accounts more easily subject to following kinds of observations:

> "And when he turns to show that rationalist politics must fail because man is, in part, irrational, the possessor of 'irrational faculties', 'emotional interests and impulses', Professor Morgenthau is guilty of a similar mis-statement of his own position. And it is a dangerous mis-statement, because it makes him appear the opponent of reason, whereas he is only the opponent of rationalism.. It is most important that the line of reflection which Professor Morgenthau is pursuing, perhaps the most profitable in political thought at the present time, should not be confused with the mysticism of the higher nonsense, because, in fact they have nothing in common." (Oakeshott 1947, *Scientific Politics*, RPM, 106.)

Then, it must be emphasized first that Oakeshott does not wish to claim that "the manner of thinking in natural sciences" would just simply aspire domination in the 'conversation' (Oakeshott 1947, *Rationalism in Politics*, RP 1962, 29). (Compare

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[1]Yet, the kindred arguments are still entertained in vast scale - the 'unity of knowledge' in science is sought as a chain from 'quantum physics through molecule biology to genes and further to human mind and culture'. For the latest contributions see, e.g. Wilson (1998): Consilience, The Unity of Knowledge, reviewed in Helsingin Sanomat, 15th August 1998.

with Gadamer 1988, 409.) For instance, Morgenthau's notion of "scientism" is obscured when he attributes "the achievements of scientific enquiry about the physical world" to it, and also to "scientific enquiry the role of having misled the world with regard to its own character." (Oakeshott 1947, RPM, 99.)

Scientism, for Oakeshott, is 'a superstition of scientific enquiry' which does not coincide with the 'idiom of activity' that we call science (ibid.).

> "Scientific activity is not the pursuit of a predeterminated end; nobody knows where it will reach. There is no achievement, prefigured in our minds, which we can set up as a criterion by which to judge current achievements or in relation to which current engagements are a means.. Individual investigators may, and usually do, premeditate particular purposes, set themselves particular problems. Nevertheless, as we have seen, their activity does not spring from these purposes and is not governed by them: they arise as abstractions out of knowing how to conduct a scientific enquiry, and are never *interdependently* premeditated. Nor does the coherence of scientific activity lie in a body of principles of rules to be observed by the scientist, a 'scientific method'; such rules and principles no doubt exist, but they are only abridgements of the activity.." (Ibid., 102-103.)

As just noted, Darlington assumed the destruction of 'earlier' knowledge in his model and so cut the "traditional" or "practical knowledge" that "cannot be formulated in rules" and "exists only in use" out of his scheme.[1] (Oakeshott 1947,

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[1] To remind: for Oakeshott every activity - political activity included - involves both technical and practical knowledge. Thus, in the answer to a modern(ist) critic wishing to bring forward the "logic of scientific explanation" as proper to "testing of a justification of a practical argument" (see, Raphael 1965, 397) he wrote: "I have no horror of principles- only a suspicion of those who use principles as if they were axioms and those who seem to think that practical argument is concerned with proof. A principle is not something which may be given as a reason or a justification for making a decision or performing an action; it is a short-hand identification of a disposition to choose." (Oakeshott 1965, 92.) In the context of these reflections on *practical discourse*, he also indicates to Aristotle, Hegel and Dilthey as his 'forefigures'. (Ibid., 90.) Further; Franco notices the affinities between Oakeshott and Gadamer's rejection of the Enlightenment contrast between reason and tradition and emphasis on the "importance of practical knowledge or *phronësis* over against the modern belief in the sovereignty of method or technique *(technë).*" (Franco 1990a, 138.) Reminding that both authors have been accused of 'sociopolitical conservatism' he wishes to emphasize the departing of Oakeshott's

Rationalism in Politics, RP 1962, 8.) From the Oakeshottian point of view, Darlington's 'model' becomes very close to representing full-blown Scientism *as well as* Rationalism, i.e. "the assertion that properly speaking, there is no knowledge which is not technical knowledge." (Ibid., 11.)

Then, the *combination* of apparently conflicting elements, like 'biological causation', 'discovery', 'exact biological methods' and 'fundamental problem of Government', in the same argument does not seem so odd anymore. For the postmoderns, the 'basic elements' of a rationalist doctrine of human knowledge, as mere 'technical knowledge', are in themselves odd enough. For a point of comparison, I just give a summary of Oakeshott's 'caricature' of a Rationalist disposition:

> "The general character and disposition of the Rationalist are, I think, not difficult to identify. At bottom he stands (he always *stands*) for independence of mind on all occasions, for thought free from obligation to any authority save the authority of 'reason'. His circumstances in the modern world have made him contentious: he is the *enemy* of authority, of prejudice, of the merely traditional, customary or habitual.. his disposition makes both destruction and creation easier for him to understand and engage in, than acceptance or reform..The sovereignty of 'reason', for the Rationalist, means the sovereignty of technique. The heart of the matter is the pre-occupation of the Rationalist with certainty.. And this is precisely what technical knowledge appears to be. It seems to be a self-complete sort of knowledge .. between an identifiable intitial point (where it breaks in upon sheer ignorance) and an identifiable terminal point, where it is complete..It has the aspect of knowledge that can be contained wholly between the two covers of a book." (Ibid., 1-12.)

'traditionalism' from that of Burke. There is no "doctrine of the wisdom or rationality of tradition implied" by Oakeshott and "the degree of contingency" allowed considerably greater. (Ibid., 139.) I agree, but as stated before, in 1940's Oakeshott's concept of 'tradition' was still too vague to resist all approximations to 'conservatism'. Thus, I have favoured the term 'practical knowledge' to 'traditional knowledge' here.

Seemingly, Darlington's 'discovery' rests on the very *foundation* of the modern quest for *certainty*, i.e. the notion of 'instrumental mind', Cartesian *tabula rasa.*[1] It is only that, in Darlington's view, this modern(ist) theory of knowledge, i.e. the human mind that must contain in its composition a native faculty of 'Reason' (Oakeshott 1950, *Rational Conduct*, RP 1962, 86), seems somehow to be the privilege of scientists.[2] 'Biological method' can well be placed on the same continuum, perhaps, as *the* technique or method of reliable 'reasoning' leading to the 'secure base of genes' etc. In sum, however, the model stands and falls along with its 'first' assumption of the 'abstract' or 'emptied mind'. For Oakeshott, this notion is "in some respects, the relic of a belief in magic."[3] (Ibid., 93.)

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[1] I will not elaborate Descartes' or Bacon's 'science' more deeply here as Oakeshott is only among so many others who 'trace back' the modern foundations of 'mind' and 'method' to the intimations in their writings. (See, e.g. Arendt 1958, 1989, Bauman 1987.) Still, it must be noted that Oakeshott emphasizes the 'scepticism' of Descartes: "Descartes never became a Cartesian." (1947, *Rationalism in Politics*, RP 1962, 17.) And that the influence of Bacon on the character of a Rationalist "have sprung from the exaggeration of Bacon's hopes rather than from the character of his beliefs." (Ibid., 16.) Oakeshott's comprehension is that more 'commonplace minds' confused 'explanation' with 'justification'. Rorty refers to the same 'confusion': "Kant did not, however, free us from Locke's confusion between justification and explanation, the basic confusion contained in the idea of a 'theory of knowledge'." (Rorty 1979, 161.)

[2] Perhaps, because of their better gene-inherintance and its effect on the 'brain'?

[3] Also to be noted that, according to Oakeshott, there is still one important aspect "of the history of the emergence of Rationalism", i.e. the changing connotation of the word 'reason'. Rationalist's reason as a faculty of calculation is different from the Reason of older 'tradition' of Stoicism and of Aquinas. Yet, Oakeshott attributes much of "the plausibility of Rationalism" to the "tacit attribution to the new 'reason' of the qualities which belong properly to the Reason of the older tradition." (RP 1962, 18, footnote; something to ponder with, e.g. Darlington's 'science is good for men'.) In addition: "To those of Hobbes's contemporaries for whom the authority of medieval Christianity was dead, there appeared to be two possible ways out of this chaos of religious belief. There was first the way of natural religion. It was conceived possible that, by the light of natural Reason, a religion, based upon 'the unmoveable foundations of truth' [quote from; Herbert of Cherbury: *De veritate*, SS] and supplanting the inferior religions of history, might be found in the human heart, and receiving universal recognition, become established among mankind. Though their inspiration was older than Descartes, those who took this way found their guide in Cartesian rationalism, which led them to the fairyland of Deism and the other fantasies of the *saeculum rationalisticum*, amid the dim ruins of which we now live." (*Introduction to Leviathan* 1946, RP 1991,

To finish, I just make a few clarifying remarks. The earlier quoted 'danger' of Morgenthau's becoming an opponent of 'reason' gets its context in Oakeshott's objection to identify the concept of 'reason' or 'reasoning' to 'premeditating' between means and ends. For Oakeshott, 'mind' did not 'exist' as a universal abstraction, but only in activity. Reasoning in *particular* is not denied; only rationalist type of 'reasoning' that can only have its opponent in 'irrationalism' also comprehended to exist in the human mind (or 'lack' of it) or 'nature'. Also, there is no danger that the fictional enterprise of reducing of human knowledge to mere "rules, principles, direction, maxims" which can be written "down on a book" and "learned and taught in the simplest meanings of the words" would ever succeed (*Rationalism in Politics*, RP 1962, 11). Thus, a pure scientist or rationalist model of 'administrative politics' cannot be established. Oakeshott's concluding comment on the Darlington review concentrates his view on the 'politics of methods' or 'rules':

> No statistics, however well-handled, will by themselves tell a man what to do, much less what he ought to do. It is safe to say that politics which did not embody a genuine love for erring human beings and even a delight in their endearing stupidities (as well as a desire to relieve society, with the aid of scientific and other knowledge, from some of the consequences of error and stupidity) would be evil. And politics which considered only the results of scientific investigation would not be evil; they would merely be impossible." (Oakeshott 1948, 691.)

Instead, the *specific* trouble posed by 'natural sciences' to political activity occurs because:

> ".. when the scientist steps outside his own field he often carries with him only his technique, and this at once allies him with the forces of Rationalism. In short, I think the *great prestige of natural sciences* has, in fact, been used to fasten the rationalist disposition of mind more firmly upon us, but that is the work, not of the genuine scientist as such, but of the scientist who is a

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290.)

Rationalist in spite of his science." (Oakeshott 1947, *Rationalism in Politics,* RP 1962, 29-30, emphasis added.)

And when understood as a *persuasive argument* with backing of a certain prestige of natural sciences, Darlington's 'scientist' or 'rationalist' attempt to draw a 'demonstrative political argument', in the form of setting a sort of axiom to truth of genes (or statistic information, or whatever), introduces another danger for political activity:

> "..a craving for demonstrative political argument may corrupt us by suggesting that we have not got to make choices, sometimes on little more than the courage of our convictions, or by suggesting that we can pass off responsibility for making these choices upon some axiom or 'law' for which, in turn, we have no responsibility. And, what is equally important, this craving for demonstrative political argument may make us discontented with ordinary political discourse which, because it is not demonstrative we may be tempted to regard as a species of unreason." (Oakeshott, *Political Discourse,* RP 1991, 95.)

4.2.4 Progress

As noted earlier, I strongly object to views that assimilate postmodern attitude to advocating something called 'the end of history'. If the term is used, it should be understood similarly to Arendt's insight to Nietzsche's declaration of the 'death of God'. That is, the *Enlightenment* manners of 'thinking' about 'history' have lost their plausibility - topmost the notion of 'unified, linear history' usually portrayed as 'progress'. Lyotard's disbelief in the 'grand narratives' (Lyotard 1984, see also Pulkkinen 1996, 49), Vattimo's reflexion on 'universal history' as only working from the viewpoint of some central subject (the 'Western man')[1], Rorty's (1991)

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[1]Earlier, I have mentioned Vattimo's critique of the 'transparent society' to be working similarly. Then, Habermas' theory was under scrutiny but in a sense the same critique applies here also, as it is often noted that Habermas still believes in progress etc. I will not examine his views further here as, in this respect, this 'favourite enemy' of the postmoderns has been objected convincingly enough, e.g. by Lyotard who says that Habermas's concepts are basing their validity on 'the great narrative of emancipation'.

refusal to worship anything as a quasi divinity - history included - and many other postmodern views about the matter are well-known. Since not even the most sharply tongued critic of Oakeshott would call him a 'pro-progress' type of a 'historian' or a 'political philosopher', his comprehensions may well be interpreted to have affinities with those views.

Strictly speaking, Oakeshott refers to 'progress' in two slightly differing 'contexts'. Although I find them overlapping and not always too well-considered, I still try to maintain the 'division' to some extent. First, when reflecting on the concept of 'historical change' as a "third postulate of *historical understanding*" Oakeshott strongly attacks against the assimilation of the term "to that of progressive change." (Oakeshott 1983, 105.) Here, his critique is mainly targeted towards other 'historians' by whom "a passage of historical change is said to be a 'dialectical' *process*, where it is spoken of as 'development' and when it is represented as 'progressive' or 'purposive" and along, teleology (or something akin to it) is being invoked." (ibid.) With resemblance to Collingwood's criticism of the "Enlightenment historians" (1970, 79, also 'cross-references'), e.g. Toynbee and Spengler, as representatives of 'naturalism' or 'historical positivism', and Kant, in imagining the "past" constituting a "single teleological process..as..the human race to be embarked upon such a purposeful journey" are brought under scrutiny (Oakeshott 1983, 102).[1] Of course, any *modernist* model of 'organic change' or 'law-binded causation' will not do as an historical understanding of change for Oakeshott, and his lines of arguing against all those are refined and

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(See, Lyotard 1984.)

[1]In my interpretation, Collingwood remains more committed to the 'modern type of thinking' and the closest links can be drawn to the *early* Oakeshott; e.g. *The Experience and Its Modes* are examined in a positive light by Collingwood. In the posthumously published *The Idea of History* (1946, main body of texts written in 1936), Collingwood *starts* with a criticism surprisingly resemblant to the 'postmodern thinking' but *ends* with searching the possibilities to continue speaking about progress and carries some essentialist views - like the 'animal nature' of humans - with him. Then, e.g. 'moral progress' may occur, because "part of our moral life consists of coping with problems arising not of our animal nature but out of our social institutions, and these are historical things, which create moral problems only in so far as they are already expression of moral ideals." Solving the problems of the discrepancy between 'social institutions' and 'moral ideas' can be counted as 'moral progress' then. (Collingwood 1970, 330.)

interesting. Yet, I will not get deeper in these considerations. For my purposes here, it is now enough to recognize that 'in the field of (political) historical thought' the congenials in our time are more preferably found from the so-called 'revisionist school' - as both Oakeshott's admirers (Lappalainen 1989, 101) and critics (King 1981, 87) suggest. And to sum up, that according to Oakeshott, it is a historian's mistake to try to understand 'historical change' in any kind of 'process terms'; 'progress' very much included.

Second, Oakeshott speaks of a "*belief* in progress" that is "an understanding of the practical past, present and future." (Oakeshott 1983, 105.) Here, the 'past' is not understood as 'dead' - like (a proper) historian sees it - but as "so-called 'living' past [practical past, SS] which may be said to 'teach by example', or more generally to afford us a current vocabulary of self-understanding and self-expression." (ibid., 19.) I quote:

> "And when considerable passages of this recorded past have been assembled by putting together fragmentary survivals they have been made to yield important conclusions about ourselves and our current circumstances; that it is a past which displays a 'progressive' movement to which our own times belong; that it exhibits a darkness to which our own enlightenment is a gratifying contrast; that it tells a story of decline and retrogression of which we are the unfortunate heirs." (ibid., 19.)

In short, 'progress' (as well as 'decline') is a *story* told in 'present'. Such a story does not open with a conditional, 'Once upon a time' but with the unconditional, 'In the beginning.' (*OHC*, 105.)[1] In my interpretation, a fascinating line in *OHC* condenses much of the postmodern critique towards the idea of progress:

> "It is, of course, true that a story may be used to point a moral, to serve as an authority for future conduct, to teach it hearers how to perform actions likely to have wished-for outcomes, to assure them of a golden destiny,... But to do this is to give up the story-teller's concern with the topical and the transitory and to endow

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[1]Compare with Lyotard (1984, 19): "The very idea of development presupposes a horizon of nondevelopment." And the horizon is often set to 'primitive' people.

occurrences with a potency they cannot have without surrendering their characters as occurrences. It is not to tell a story but to *construct a myth*." (ibid.)

Naturally, the 'Enlightenment historians' have had much to do with this construction of the 'myth of progress', because "in order to retain the teleological integrity of their story they were obliged to ignore, as non-events, many of the vicissitudes of the historical story." (Oakeshott 1983, 106.) Yet, I interpret that Oakeshott, the 'political philosopher', wishes to direct our attention to the myth *in use*. And naturally, as far as 'the Enlightenment historian' and the 'modern political philosopher' go in the same *persona* the critique applies.[1] Here, 'the idea of progress' appears as an attempt to build a linear bridge from the 'past' to the 'present' conduct or situation - and more ambitiously - to the 'future' showing the right path for 'activity'. In Arendtian terminology, one might speak of reducing 'political activity' to the terms of 'fabricating'. Thus speaking, it seems that in political 'activity' a starting-point is fixed, an end in sight - and all between - means. (See, Arendt 1989, 153-159, compare with *OHC*, 35-36.)

Bearing the former considerations in mind, Oakeshott's reading of J.S Mill seems to me a sort of 'classic' example of postmodern 'subversive' interpretation. Very commonly, Mill is recalled as "the greatest advocate" of "the philosophy of

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[1]Yet, as I said, Oakeshott does not bother to be too clear with his considerations on these matters. As King points out: "Oakeshott is certainly reacting against Hegel and Marx while nonetheless being much subject to the influence of the former." (King 1981, 87.) On the other hand, he writes in *Introduction to Leviathan* (1946, RP 1991): "The cosmology it reflects in its still unsettled surface is the world seen on the analogy of human history. Its master-conception is the Rational Will.. and Hegel's *Philosophie des Rechts*.. masterpiece.. of the tradition." And then again, when considering Hegel's 'system' in connection to 'civil association' teleology etc. are not mentioned too often. My suggestion is that a sort of 'key' to this 'discprepancy' in his thinking may be found when reading his lines from the Skinner-review (*The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 1980, 450): In short, an historical understanding (like any other) is conditional, and this seems to me a good account of the provenance in terms of which these writings may be understood historically. But to suggest that an historical understanding is the only mode of understanding, would of course, be ridiculous. It is not, for example, the understanding that these writers had of one another's writings." Actually, as my own account on Oakeshott and Postmodern is more 'philosophical' than 'historical' I do not find too much to argue about that. The confusion just occurs as Oakeshott does not always differentiate between his own 'roles.'

individuality", or the least, depending on the judgement of his 'success', as "defending individuality." (Parekh 1982, 113.) Oakeshott's reading is different:

> "Nevertheless, it is instructive to observe how, under cover of the rhetoric of individualism, Mill shuffled his way towards a collectivist theory of government." (Oakeshott 1958, *J.S. Mill: Between Individualism and Collectivism,* Harvard lectures, MPM 1993, 79.)

Without getting in details, Oakeshott's main argument is that, though Mill himself thought to be refining 'Benthamian Utilitarianism' with his concept of 'self-improvement' and 'the principle of the sovereignty of individual', actually, "each of Mill's departures from Benthamism may be recognized as an often inadvertent step in the direction of collectivist theory." (ibid., 81.) The argument continues: "The foundation of Bentham's principle of toleration was undermined instead of being reinforced..as the formality of Mill's notion of self-improvement' invited the intrusion of notions which would deprive it of its individualist basis." (ibid.) Oakeshott's last account is that - through his two other theories of government - Mill arrives last to "thoughts on government.. bureaucratic rather than democratic":

> "Some individuals were further on the way to perfection than others, and (although they should not be allowed to impose their views upon their inferiors) they are proper rulers of mankind; at least their views should be allowed to carry extra weight. And where-ever there is expert knowledge it should be recognized in goverment. Mill, of course, is very far.. from any conception of the rule of the Saints; but his peculiar theory of individuality in the end left him looking in that direction." (ibid., 83.)

The question then arising is that *which* departures from 'Benthamism' exactly invoked the deviations. And Oakeshott answers:

> "One of the beliefs with which Mill left Benthamism behind was his belief in progress and the ultimate perfectability of mankind. He shared with some of his contemporaries a belief that the history of the human race should be regarded as a unilinear advance in which an ever higher degree of civilization gradually

established itself, an advance which would terminate in a condition recognized to be perfect. And it is in terms of this belief that he came, in the end, to construe his convictions about the value of independence and diversity and eccentrity. He had no absolute objection to uniformity; he believed that in the end true opinions would establish themselves and that there was a single condition of well-being appropriate to all men.. In the final analysis, the individual for Mill is not an end in himself: he is an instrument and a servant of racial progress." (ibid., 82.)

Here, then, the 'belief in progress' appears as the 'restricter' of 'thought' in Mill. The horizon of "uniformity of perfection" is established "unmistakably" and therefore, e.g. allowing the freest possible play of opinion is only derived from the *duty* of the individual to participate in what he understands to be "the age-long debate in which 'truth' will finally emerge." (ibid.) And, if Mill is interpreted as a modern legislator-type of a political theorist, the 'guiding-light' for all 'political activity' is just as 'clear' as it can be when we are reflecting on the "Enlightenment metaphysics" and "eschatological horizon of truth and priviliged access to it by.. History." (Pulkkinen 1996, 49.)

4.2.5 Universitas

Employing his 'philosophical imagination', Rorty writes 'metaphorically':

> "Epistemology sees the hope of agreement as token of the existence of common ground which, perhaps unbeknown to the speakers, unites them in a common rationality..For epistemology, conversation is implicit inquiry..Epistemology views the participants as united in what Oakeshott calls an *universitas* - a group united by mutual interests in achieving a common end." (Rorty 1979, 318.)

And indeed, the Oakeshottian 'recycled' version of the Roman private law term *universitas* - along with *societas* - can be observed most strongly to be 'living its own life' in the texts of other authors. In this thesis, I have attached the term to the rationalist style of 'politics' and made use of it in various connections, but to

remind and avoid misunderstandings a few points still.

First, in Oakeshott's use, both the terms are:

> "..recruited to *serve* again the purpose for which they were invented, that of distinguishing and making intelligible the many-in-one of human associations. For what neither can do alone when used in connection with a state, they may perhaps achieve in the tensions of partnership. Irreducible, unable to combine, and rejected as alternative accounts of the character of a state, they may be recalled as the specification of the self-division of this ambiguous character. A state may perhaps be understood as an unresolved tension between the two irreconcilable dispositions represented by the words of *societas* and *universitas.*" (*OHC* 1975, 200-1, emphasis added.)

And I have interpreted that the 'pull' of rationalist thinking in politics is the modern yearning of 'certainty' introducing the *attempt* to clear up the ambivalence from the vocabulary of political discourse (like 'law', 'ruling' and 'politics'), and to impose a single character upon the state - that of *universitas* (ibid.).

Oakeshott does not restrict his reading of *universitas* to 'modern times' but examines, e.g. 'Medieval intimations' of the 'modern state' in considerable detail[1]

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[1]Oakeshott's review on Skinner's "Foundations" was generally admiringly toned. However, Oakeshott wonders how Skinner defines the "starting place of this alleged 'shift' and *what it is alleged to produce*" in "political thought which by the end of the sixteenth century had produced 'a recognizably modern concept of the State'." (Oakeshott 1980, 451.) First, in England where the "absence of a distinct notion of constitutional law and the late appearance of anything like a *beamtenstaat*" this "notion of a state as an impersonal apparatus of power" never "found a comfortable home." (Ibid., 452.) Second, if the "'shift' in political thought suggested here is that from the idea of a ruler 'maintaining his State'" to "'modern concept of the State'" as "an office.. maintaining the mere peace and security of the association ruled", then, e.g. "Luther, Calvin, some of the humanists and the technocrats - did little to promote the emergence of this alleged recognizably modern concept of the State." (Ibid., 452-53.) In short, Oakeshott criticizes Skinner from underestimating the 'intimations' which pulled the modern state towards the *universitas*-type of association. I think that part of this criticism is due to Oakeshott taking 'literally' the title of the book. He finds it odd to say "that 'Bartolus and Baldus together constructed the entire legal foundations on which the modern theory of the State rests'" and 'corrects': "They floated an excessive and rather implausible notion about Roman law of no great interest to most of the rest of Europe, but one which was circumstantially useful to their clients." Instead, "should not this story begin with the earlier disposals and partial disposals of imperial and papal claims in France, England and

all around Europe, and from very different kinds of 'records from the past' - not only texts by 'political theorists'. Thus, his accounts are naturally much more subtle than I can accommodate from my point of view. For example, the various intimations of Catholic and Protestant Christianity and different churches are consciously 'forgotten' here. Only some hints are given, for the reader, when I speak of 'salvation' etc. With the greatest probability I am the right one to blame if some of the accounts seem odd or simplified. Therefore, I also wish to remind that even Oakeshott's list of the 'characters' (usually somehow recognized in the 'histories of political thought') he studies in the context of *universitas* varies, e.g. from Aquinas to de Maistre and Fortescue, to Hartlib and Chamberlen, to Rousseau, Lenin etc. And, the 'projects' from Cromwell's to an Owenite Village of Co-operation. Needless to say then that *universitas* is no figure of one interpretation.

Yet, to approach the last of the 'predicaments' I have been reading 'out' from Oakeshott's texts, the concept of *enterprise association* - the 'mode' of human association that corresponds to *universitas* when tried to impose upon the 'state' - needs to be notified a bit more carefully.

In short, the enterprise association is an ideal character of the most familiar mode of all durable human relationships. It is a mode of relationship of *free* agents joined in terms of the pursuit of some imagined and wished-for 'common satisfaction' that may be some 'common purpose', ".. some substantive condition of things to be jointly procured, or some common interest to be continuously satisfied." (*OHC*, 114.) Agents thus related may be 'believers in a common faith', allies in the promotion of a 'cause', they may comprise an army or a 'village community' etc. However, "pursuing a purpose or promoting an interest is" nothing other than responding to continuously emergent situations by making choices in the hope that the wished-for outcome will emerge. (ibid., 115.) And 'decisions' are only:

> "contingently related with the common purpose or interest concerned; *they are not deducible from the choice to be*

Castile?" (ibid.)

> *associated in pursuit of it* ..Consequently, enterprise association
> cannot be relationship merely in terms of a common purpose; it
> must be in terms of what I shall call 'the management' of its
> pursuit." (Ibid., emphasis added.)

Thus, there are rules in enterprise association also, but they are instrumental in relation to the pursuit of purpose or interest. 'Politics' in such an association means choosing a 'policy'; it is a 'managerial engagement'. And the whole association may be understood as a 'means to an end'. In principle, it is terminable at the moment the 'target' is achieved. It is *'free'*, because an agent joins it by his/her *own choice* (and enters, if not having 'given up' the 'right'; compare with theories of 'social contract'). Thus, an enterprise association will not do as the 'proper' mode of association for the state which is the only 'compulsory' association and "compulsory enterprise association is a self-contradiction.. there is no such thing as collective choice." (ibid., 119.)

Most of this sounds already familiar and is written to clarify some earlier reflections on *universitas*. Still, I wish to add - as a sort of curiosity - one particularly interesting reading of 'history' by Oakeshott beside this formal characterization of the instrumental rules of enterprise association. Let me cite:

> "The 'law' objected to by the 'anarchist' is not (as he is apt to
> think) civil but instrumental law, and he further misunderstands
> it by attributing to it the character of a command which calls for
> a substantive performance in response. But when Péguy looked
> forward to a revolution in which all authority would be abolished
> (*Ma révolution supprimera toute authorité*), he meant release
> from the Baconian yoke, release from the *Organization du travail*
> which he mistook for 'capitalism' and misidentified with a modern
> European state. And this also was the 'redemption' sought by
> Ernst Jünger and Ernst Toller and other 'anarchists' of the
> German school whose writings echo Hölderlin's indictment of the
> *civitas cupiditatis*: the outcome of trying to make the state a
> paradise has always been to turn it into a hell. The writings of
> Proudhon (by far the most intelligent explorer of the idea of
> 'anarchy' in modern times) are a prolonged condemnation of a
> state understood in the terms of purposive association, which he
> identifies as *une uniformité béate et stupide, la solidarité de la
> sottise.*" (*OHC*, 319.)

Lastly, *I* interpret that the accommodating of the terms 'enterprise' and 'managerial' in a formal consideration of a mode of association is not at all so formal as 'disguised', because of the connotations they arouse.[1] Although in *On Human Conduct* and the other texts of the 1970s the grasp of Oakeshott is fairly 'historical', I venture to suggest that something else may be read out of these 'in between the lines'. If we recall that in "Baconian of St. Simonian *illuminati* of a state understood as development corporation, the idea of a state as *universitas* declared its modernity." (*The Vocabulary of Modern European State* 1975, 217.) And that "the Enlightenment Government" was "the most comprehensive version of a state understood in terms of *universitas* and of government as a teleocratic engagement" accommodating "all that had gone before" and "intimating all that was to come after." That is: "... when a *factory* rather than a landed estate was recognized as the appropriate corporate analogy for a state." (*OHC*, 308, emphasis added.) Then, something like a 'line' starts getting form. Not getting further to these 'work ups' of my own, however, I stop here in order to avoid the lapse into the trap of invoking 'teleology' or 'causation'. I only ask to recall in mind the earlier reflections and leave a proposal hanging in the air. Could the celebrated 'entrepreneur' of today get kindred meanings to Arendt's *animal laborans* when envisaged in the Oakeshottian light?

> "This, perhaps, was the dream of a generation that was not only full of energy and fascinated by an enterprise in which it thought of itself as a pioneer, but whose imagination more readily embraced satisfactions than the new wants those satisfactions would generate. But it is the dream we have inherited; this is the tide that carries us along. It informs all our politics; it binds us to the necessity of a 4 percent per annum increase in productivity; and it is a dream we have spread about the world so that it has become the dream common to all mankind." (*Work and Play* 1995, 31.)

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[1] I use the term 'disguised' as Oakeshott must have 'consciously' chosen the concepts. Still, at least I could not trace any particular and argued 'reason' for choosing just these terms; "I will call this 'enterprise association', because it is relationship in terms of some common purpose.." (*OHC,* 114.)

4.2.6 Rationalism in Politics

When arousing suspicion on Taylor's confident project to "satisfy our craving for meaning" by reinvoking the embracing of God, Skinner, 'the modern unbeliever', quoted a passage:

> "Dennis continued going to mass, for the sake of the family, for the sake of a quiet life, but it had no meaning for him. Nothing had, except small, simple pleasures - a glass of beer at the local, a soccer game on TV - handholds by which he kept moving from hour to hour, from day to day." (Lodge 1980, quoted in Skinner 1991, 149.)

Though, the depressing feeling was experienced by a disillusioned member of the Catholic Church, I think it may also describe something of the mood of 'the postmodern unbeliever' at this point of my thesis. During the travel through the 'negative project of postmodern' with Oakeshott some *Enlightenment myths* have been encountered and, if my efforts have had any success, some 'disbelief' in them strengthened. Still, the leading idea has not been to arouse the feeling of despair or 'passivity, on the contrary. Thus, let me revise a bit.

Through my postmodern looking-glass, I have tried to locate Oakeshott's comprehension of "where the political cancer is hidden." (Ankersmit 1996, 5.) I have interpreted that the gaze of his "Lynceus's sharp eye" (ibid.) was directed towards the myth of 'Rationalism in Politics.' Oakeshott has given several synonyms for this myth: 'Politics of Faith', 'Politics of Uniformity', 'Politics of Perfection', 'Politics of the felt need', 'Politics of collectivism'[1], 'Politics as

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[1]Still, I wish to emphasize that naturally 'collectivism' does not only refer to the ideology named 'communism' and alike. It is a pull towards the disposition of collectivism, sometimes interpreted in 'surprising' quarters, as seen in Oakeshott's reading of Mill. Also to be noted: "But, while formerly it was tacitly resisted and retarted by, for example, the informality of English politics (which enabled us to escape, for a long time, putting too high a value on political action and placing too high a hope in political achievement - to escape, in politics at least, the illusion of the evanescence of imperfection), that resistance has now itself been converted into an ideology. This is perhaps, the main significance of Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* - not the cogency of his doctrine, but the fact that it is a doctrine." (RP 1962, 21.)

engineering' etc. Though I have not systematically examined the slightly differing connotations of each, I believe their placing in my text gives enough basis for the reader's own reflection. The general tone of mine has been quite serious in this chapter as the starting-point in time, as the 'situation for theorizing', was set right after the Second World War.

In my mind, the most serious reading of Oakeshott's 'rationalist politics' may perhaps best be expressed with the familiar term of 'ideological politics'. To the 'ideological style of politics' and 'its' falsely entertained belief of being 'premeditated' (not an abridgement from 'tradition'), Oakeshott attaches the ideas of its alleged 'greater precision and demonstrability.' Earlier, I have tried to argue that the politics of a 'premeditated end' and 'means' is a politics of 'destruction' of earlier 'knowledge'. Yet, we may unfortunately understand the destruction much more concretely. I only mention here that, e.g. Bauman fairly directly 'blames' the 'project of modern(ity)' for the Holocaust.[1] Although the context is different, I think Arendt's comprehension is clarifying:

> "The very substance of a means-end category, whose chief characteristic, if applied to human affairs, has always been that the end is in danger of being overwhelmed by the means which it justifies and which are needed to reach it. Since the end of human action, as distinct from the end-products of fabrication, can never be reliably predicted, the means used to achieve political goals are more often of greater relevance of the future world than the intended goals." (Arendt 1969, 84.)

Yet, I would say that one of the best uses for acknowledging the general features of Oakeshott's 'rationalist politics' is a perspective (or Pulkkinen's 'direction to go') that sensitizes the interpreter to read certain 'things' out from texts and situations. Clearly, this enables one also to detect the many differences between the authors I have dealt as 'postmodern'. For instance, referring to the "founders of American independence", Oakeshott wrote:

> "A civilization of pioneers is, almost unavoidably, a civilization of

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[1]Of course, the confirming of my interpretation of Bauman would again demand wider illumination of *his* oeuvre.

self-consciously self-made men, Rationalist by circumstance and
not by reflection, who need no persuasion that knowledge
begins with a *tabula rasa* and who regard the free mind, not
even as the result of some artificial Cartesian purge, but as the
gift of Almighty God, as Jefferson said." (*Rationalism in Politics*,
RP 1962, 27.)

Importantly, it should be noted that using a *perspective* in this sense suggests
nothing towards so-called 'value-nihilism'; it does not *equalize*. Though, e.g.
Arendt would speak of the mentioned 'act' otherwise, Oakeshott's account really
does not mean that all 'rationalist politics' would appear just as 'good' or 'bad'.

Further, I have also emphasized that 'the negative project' means the
alternative reading of 'our' ambivalent situations. I have suggested several
readings for our predicaments, in need of no further elaboration here.
Nevertheless, I hope one theme has remained clear. In my interpretation, all the
writers of postmodern agree in one form or another that the 'project of modernity'
(or the 'dream' of Enlightenment, or the 'myth of Rationalism in Politics') operate
to reduce the political agency. Or, to destroy political activity when understood
differently from following the policy, or managing. I believe to have suggested
anything like the total destruction of the 'Enlightenment beliefs' or 'concepts', but
their "serious re-evaluation." (Pulkkinen 1996, 48.) As Oakeshott put it, when
speaking of the 'two historic self-understandings' of humans beings associated in
a state:

> "In a modern European state they are not friends, but nor are
> they exactly foes; perhaps, as was said of England and France
> in the sixteenth century, their relationship is that of 'sweet
> enemies'." (*OHC*, 326.)

In short, although the disposition of the 'rationalist-style of politics' may in the
Oakeshottian view seem stronger, many accounts towards the positive reading of
'our situation' have already been given. Then, for the 'postmodern disbelievers'
feeling even 'complete' loss of faith in the dream of Enlightenment:

> "If the doctrine deprives us of a model laid up in heaven to which
> we should approximate our behaviour, at least it does not lead

us into a morass where every choice is equally good or equally deplored. And if it suggests that politics are *nür fur die Schwindelfreie,* that should depress only those who have lost their nerve." (Oakeshott 1951, *Political Education,* VLL, 150.)

4.3 The positive project of postmodern

I cannot envisage better words for describing the very *predicament* for the postmodern mind to theorize *from:*

> "We have been brought up in the shadow of the sinister warning of Dostoyesky: if there is no God, everything is permissible. If we happen to be professional social scientists, we have been also trained to share the no less sinister premonition of Durkheim: if the normative grip of society slackens, the moral order will collapse." (Bauman 1992, xvii.)

In my interpretation, it is exactly by those whom Oakeshott called the *Schwindelfreie* that this 'situation' has been experienced as an *invitation* to response in political theory. And from those responses has 'emerged' something I have named 'the positive project of postmodern'. Much has been said of this 'positive project' already, but I still emphasize a few 'main points'. I will next give some accounts of more 'official character' before bringing Oakeshott back to the picture.

First, I suggest that in a sense one can understand also the 'negative project' as positive. What I mean by this 'tautology', then, is that all the critiques are not naturally to be comprehended automatically as negative, but also as contributing new aspects to the conversations. Even more important, I see that in its deconstruction of totalizing explanations and 'inevitable' destinations' the postmodern critique opens more space for dissident voices and 'pluralism'. This becomes near to what Bauman calls the 'constructive job' of postmodern critique as a "sort of a site-clearing operation." (Bauman 1992, ix.) Moreover, the word positive stands for the change in the general *mood* of the anti-foundationalist postmodern mind. It avoids the falling in agony, or choosing to stick on to

Enlightenment hopes in the situation where many 'truths' of the modern project have lost their plausibility. Excellently put by Pulkkinen:

> "For the postmodern no angst is produced by the fact that judgements ultimately rely on humans themselves. The lost God is there no more. The attitude is affirmative and light, positive and willing to accept the *responsibility of judgement.*" (Pulkkinen 1996, 49, emphasis added.)

Then, the word positive denotes also that the postmodern (political thinking) is clearly *for* something, not only 'against'. If the modern project, in many respects, was an attempt to reduce or destroy human/political agency, postmodern is for 'empowering' agents with 'political responsibility'. And last, but not least, it means the *positive* reading of our *ambivalent* or *complex* situation to theorize 'of, in and about'. In my interpretation, 'postmodern' does not somehow simply emerge out of nowhere to 'signify' something. And it is not, e.g. to 'leave modernity' permanently behind, or feel that somehow *now* 'modernity' has been 'superseded' as, e.g. Bauman in some instances seems to be saying. (Bauman 1992, 188.)

In this respect, I find reading Oakeshott's oeuvre beside, e.g. 'confessional' postmodern theorizing particularly fruitful. There is no feeling that 'nothing good' has ever come out from the modern political philosophy. It helps to emphasize, not the 'continuity of the tradition of political thought', but that there are no so 'sacred' or 'established' texts which could not be re-evalued. Thus, without actually taking a stand for or against the 'righteousness' of Oakeshott's interpretations of, e.g. Hobbes and Hegel as the advocates of understanding the state in terms of an association of intelligent agents, I find those at least compelling and space opening for interpreting 'the past' as something else than a total triumph of 'modernist thought'. So, if we interpret one meaning of the 'positive project of postmodern' as offering back the *trust* on individual political judgements without trying to establish any 'new right way' of politics. Then perhaps, we may understand the vocabulary that seems to have been 'developing' around postmodern reflections as another offer. Lacking an attempt to establish a system of concepts suitable for postmodern politics, one meaning for this 'positive project of postmodern' may still be understood as a possibility to

reflect on politics without a compulsion to base one's judgements to firmly anchored meanings of any word or 'idea'.

In this ending chapter of my thesis, the 'positive project of postmodern' denotes also the shift of emphasis on *my* discussion context on Oakeshott. The references to modern authors are few and the 'conceptual fund' keeps floating around the discussion of 'anti-foundationalist politics.' However, the 'twinness' of the 'negative and positive projects' is still clear. This far, I have tried to illuminate that in many relevant respects Oakeshott's *negative* reading on modern political philosophy and 'situation' both *resembles* the 'deconstruction' project of postmodern and *'adds'* a personal touch to the project introducing, e.g. the term *universitas* to the discussion on postmodern. The same, by far, goes with the 'positive project of postmodern'. Oakeshott's reading of the *feast* side of life as a 'journey' - not modern angst or search for truth - operates with resembling terms that one usually encounters when reading postmodern literature on politics. As Oakeshott's usages of 'human agency', 'contingency' etc. have been largely dealt earlier, I also keep my presentation considerably shorter here. I first examine the most powerful 'new metaphor' (or recycled) which I see to have been 'added' to the project - that of *societas*. Finally, I will shortly reflect the prospects of 'postmodern politics' when seen in the Oakeshottian light, and end my wandering around the postmodern discussion.

"In political activity, then, men sail a boundless and bottomless sea; there is neither harbour for shelter nor floor for anchorage neither starting-place nor appointed destination. The enterprise is to keep afloat on an even keel; the sea is both friend and enemy; and the seamanship consists in using the resources of a traditional manner of behaviour in order to make a friend of every hostile occasion." (Oakeshott 1951, 150.)

4.3.1 Societas

"There was once, so Schopenhauer tells us, a colony of percupines. They were wont to huddle together on a cold winter's day and, thus wrapped in communal warmth, escape being frozen. But, plagued with the pricks of each other's quills, they drew apart. And every time the desire for warmth brought them together again the same calamity overtook them. Thus they remained, distracted between two misfortunes, able neither to tolerate nor to do without one another, until they discovered that when they stood at a certain distance from one another they could both delight in one another's individuality and enjoy one another's company. They did not attribute any metaphysical significance to this distance, nor did they imagine it to be an independent source of happiness, like finding a friend. They recognized it to be a relationship not in terms of substantive enjoyments but of contingent considerabilities that they must determine for themselves. Unknown to themselves, they had invented civil association." (Oakeshott 1975, Talking Politics, RP 1991, 460-1.)

In the following then, I will discuss Oakeshott's *societas* and *civil association* in relation to the positive project of postmodern. The 'nature' of political activity in 'civil association' will be discussed. Also, especially, Rorty's views of *societas* as a 'liberal utopia' and Bauman's idea of 'postmodern condition' as an undetermining and undetermined *habitat* are examined. In addition, I will comment some misunderstandings of Oakeshott's *societas,* like attaching a demand for *consensus* to the term. The groundwork for this passage has been done particularly in the *Introduction* and chapters 3.2 and 3.3, so I will only 'translate' Oakeshott's terminology when needed to clarify the emphasis of my own interpretation.

First, I emphasize that similarly to the negative side of the 'project' we are now equally dealing with an extreme reading of the 'ambivalent situation'. *Societas* represents the positive 'legacy' of the modern political thought for Oakeshott. The counter tendency for the 'politics of collectivism', or the 'politics of faith', is the 'politics of individuality and 'scepticism'. Naturally, 'secular thinking' is central in Oakeshott's reading of scepticism. Its earliest triumph is seen as the recognition of the distinction between politics and religion (*The Politics of Faith and Scepticism,* 1996, 81). For Oakeshott, the 'politics of faith' is "the continuous

reassertion of the unity of politics and religion" and scepticism operates to "remove religious 'enthuasism' from politics." (Ibid.) Yet, as this 'sceptical' interpretation is familiar enough in the current political theory, it becomes important to notice that the sceptical style of government and understanding does not refer to 'constitutionalism'. In the early 1950s Oakeshott described the Constitution of the United States of America and the French Revolution as "two of the tree revolutions" that "began in the style of scepticism", but soon diverted into the path of faith[1](ibid., 80). No 'guarantees' can be founded to any specific constitution, or to a strand of thought called modern 'republicanism', which Oakeshott examines as the "strangest" of all "follies of the politics of scepticism." (ibid., 83.) Oakeshott embraces the interpretation of republicanism by, e.g. Paine as he believed it to be the one form of government which does not exercise power in the service of the perfection of mankind. But, the politics of Natural Rights became messed with republicanism, and so did the Faith in "the simple device of universal suffrage and popular government." (Ibid., 84.) 'Republicanism' that entertains the belief that there is a "particular manner of authorizing and constituting government which will infallibly result in one and only one manner of exercising the power of government (and that a desirable one)" is not to be linked with Oakeshott's thinking (ibid.). Instead, in the early modern period it is a "*sense of mortality*" that distinguishes the sceptical politician - from Bacon Oakeshott turns to Montaigne (ibid., 76).

Oakeshott carries out the comprehensive examination of civil association and societas in *On Human Conduct.* And, the list of the 'modern' *societas* theorists ranges from Bodin, Hobbes, Spinoza, Kant, and Fichte to Hegel. In the book, Oakeshott attaches his understanding of *societas* to "a continuous attempt to seek a theoretical understanding of the *experience of living in a state*" as an *agent* - not a 'subject of a Rechtstaat'. (*OHC,* 198.) The 'pull' of individuality and 'scepticism', does not refer to any "banal individualism" (ibid., 242), but the search how this *historic disposition* or 'free individual' was reflected in the character attributed to states. I will not start 'verifying' Oakeshott's readings of different

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[1]This is Oakeshott's modified account on the case of 'United States' when compared to the comprehension presented in *Rationalism in Politics*, 1947.

theorists here either, but only cite a piece of writing that illuminates the general style of his interpretation:

> "Central to Bodin's is the recognition of a state (République) as an association of human beings distinguished by a certain mode of relationship; and his concern (or one of his many concerns) is to investigate this relationship in terms of its postulates. The first of these is the character of associates. He identified a human being as a 'free agent'; that is a distinct intelligent being whose actions are choices to procure imagined and wished-for satisfactions and who acts not in a void but in a situation of his own." (Ibid., 252.)

The theorists, whom Oakeshott examines in a 'positive' light, have understood a *civil condition* and a 'state' in terms of *civil association* that postulates "self-determined autonomous human beings seeking the satisfaction of their wants in self-chosen transactions with others of their kind." (Ibid., 315.) It is important that Oakeshott speaks of, e.g. Hegel's understanding of *der subjektive Geist* not only as a philosophical idea, but also as a *contingent human disposition,* and of 'human invented states' as 'homes' for the "lost and distracted human beings." (ibid 257.) Also, as in the case of Bodin, he stresses the agent's acting in a *situation of his own* not in a *void.* I suggest then that Oakeshott's explorations to the 'history' of modern political thought may also be seen as searching for the vocabulary that would enable an understanding of a state, human associations, human conventions and a human agency as radically *contingent: "A man's culture is an historic contingency."* (1975, *A Place of Learning,* VLL, 29.) Though, not leaving the 'agent' with the feeling of 'nothing matters', but - compatibly with postmodern - empowering the agent with full responsibility and offering some 'reference points' for choosing. This does not mean, however, a try to 'escape' to any 'shelter', as such an escape is impossible (ibid., 20). Also, in his theorizing, Oakeshott makes 'use' of some arrested parts of 'modern' political writing as well as 'Roman vocabulary' making them his 'own'.[1] Most importantly, 'even' a state that we often comprehend as a 'macro-structure' beyond much human touch is at

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[1] By this I do not mean that he would somehow 'distort' the 'reality' of texts, see chapter 4.1.

least reminded to be something else than a fixed, rigid entity. It is a contingent relationship between agents.

Then, I see that to understand Oakeshott's concept of *societas* as 'postmodern' it is good to recall a text from 1958:

> "From birth we are active; not to be active is not to be alive. And what concerns us first about the world is its habitableness, its friendliness or hostility to our desires and enterprises. We *want to be at home in the world,* and (in part) this consists in being able to detect how happenings will affect ourselves and in having some control over their effects." (Oakeshott 1958, *The activity of being a historian,* RP 1991, 158, emphasis added.)

After all 'sensitizing' for the postmodern perspective, one probably notices here Oakeshott's link to 'continental existentialism' that undeniably is one of the most important intellectual influences of postmodern.[1] Thus, I only stress that *civil association* indicates more towards the "affirmative attitude" of postmodern than Sartrean feeling of *angst* (Pulkkinen 1996, 49). The 'worldliness' of Oakeshott's thinking can be naturally compared to that of Arendt's, but I see that the radical departure from thinking any essentiality in human characters makes him even more 'disposed' for a postmodern interpretation. For Oakeshott, *contingent, historic* humans are more preferably 'thrown into the history' than Being thrown into the world. The specific in his understanding of humans "as natural and artificial as the landscape" is that there is no *unconditional* 'human existence' that would postulate "free, 'transcendent', purposive activity" for an agent,[2] but that *freedom inherent in agency* is always *conditional (On History* 1983, 20-21). Then, as 'freedom inherent in agency' is not burdensome but an 'enjoyment'[3], there 'has

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[1] Of Oakeshott's links to 'continental existentialism', see esp. Worthington 1995, 1997. Compared to, e.g. Arendt and Sartre, see esp. Palonen 1998.

[2] In his discussion of this "doctrine of human existence", Oakeshott refers to "Heidegger and some others, rather than to more commonplace pragmatists." (On History, 20.)

[3] "Instead of deploring our condition we would be better employed considering exactly what price we pay for our unsought and inescapable 'freedom'. I have called this price 'responsibility', although the word has an inappropriate moral overtone.

to be' something upon which to exercise one's 'self-determination'. I think Bauman's concept of *habitat* gives a fair comparison point for Oakeshott's *practices* in postmodern theorizing:

> "The focus must be now on agency; more correctly, on the *habitat* in which agency operates and which it produces in the course of operation.. Unlike the system-like totalities of modern social theory, habitat neither determines the conduct of the agents nor defines its meaning; it is no more (but no less either) than the setting in which both action and meaning assignment are *possible*." (Bauman 1992, 190-191.)

For Oakeshott, the 'sea' consists of *practices* which are those *considerabilities* agent 'takes on account' when choosing. The practices vary from "manners, uses, observances, customs and standards" to "canon's maxims, principles, rules, and offices specifying useful procedures or denoting obligations or duties which relate to human actions and utterances." (*OHC*, 55.) The 'emergence' of practices means "establishing relationships more durable than which emerge and melt away in transactions to satisfy a succession of contingent wants", and thus, "contingency is somewhat abated." (Ibid., 74.) But, not *removed*, contingency is always present as practices are not stable and are themselves 'products' of choices (ibid., 100). As *agency* is 'activity' between a performance and practice, deliberating and choosing a response to a contingent *situation* is to make it one's own. (See, Mapel 1990, 395.)

I wish to stress that though practices may differ in their dimensions, complexity and density and firmness as an institution they *never* tell an agent what specific choice he shall make. The freedom is equally 'present' whether we are speaking of acting "scientifically, legally, judicically, poetically, morally, etc."

It suggests that we might refuse to pay for the freedom inherent in intelligent activity and that this refusal would somehow be a dereliction of duty. However, it would be merely a failure to recognize a necessary condition..When the human condition is said to be burdensome what is being pointed to is not the mere necessity of having to think, to speak and to act (instead of merely *being* like a stone, or growing like a tree) but the impossibility of thinking or feeling without having slowly and often painfully learned to think something." (VLL, 20.)

(*OHC*, 56.) The contingency of a specific action will not disappear in *respublica* that provides no "shelter from some of the uncertainties of human life." (Ibid., 152.) Then, I remind of the 'differentia' of civil association as a *relationship* in terms of rules prescribing conditions to be subscribed to by *cives* (Franco 1990b, 425). And this relationship is 'defined' as the attribution of *authority* to *respublica,* regardless of approval of the conditions it prescribes. Authority is independent of the 'origin' of the *lex*; it cannot be understood as a "once-and-for-all endowment" - it is no 'contract'. Neither does *Respublica* require its rules to be 'trusted' nor its authority to be 'believed'. (*OHC*, 171.) I suggest that *civil association* (or respublica or state understood as *societas*) does not need any 'mystifying', but can be understood as a 'living' situation(s). I quote:

> "A *respublica* is the *work of local human intelligences* and it is recognized to compose a more or less coherent system of rules. But, considering the provenance of any such system of rules and the circumstances in which it was put together, it cannot be expected to display any notable elegance or economy of design; nor can it escape being ragged at the edges, intimating situations to which it has no precise response. And it is recognized to be undergoing continuous modification in use and continuous amplification in judicial conclusions about its meaning in contingent circumstances." (Ibid., 177, emphasis added.)

Thus, it is my assertion that, although living in Oakeshott's 'civil association' does not *require* 'political responding', political *activity* is making the civil condition momentarily one's 'own' in the 'full sense'. It is to 'put out to the sea' of *respublica*:

> "Thus, the situation which presents itself to political deliberation, a practice of civil intercourse in use, is neither quiescent nor agitated; it is a situation of continuous responses to circumstances in terms of rules. And it is this situation which provides not only the subject of political deliberation but also the intellectual equipment available to be employed when critical attention fastens upon some small or large part of it and deliberate innovation is canvassed. There are some general ideas ready to be invoked, although they do not all pull in the

same direction, but criteria of approval or disapproval are necessarily absent." (Ibid., 178.)

This 'ideal type of politics' is, for Oakeshott, the "engagement of considering the desirability of the conditions of conduct prescribed in *respublica*, of imagining and wanting them to be in some respect different from what they are, and of recommending and promoting a change from what it is to the imagined and allegedly more desirable condition is one which may have an outcome in a deliberate change." (Ibid., 161.) And *respublica* is the 'sea' of 'contingent considerabilities' that can be used as "aids to reflection", but the sea is also 'boundless' as there is no "indisputable criteria of choice." (Ibid., 178.)

A political proposal may "emerge from a frustrated effort to produce a satisfaction, from a disadvantage which has, perhaps, festered into a profoundly felt grievance", but it must "lose this character and acquire another (a political character) in being understood as a proposal for the amendment of the *respublica*." (ibid., 170.) Political utterance is addressed 'in the last resort' to those who occupy the public office that have the authority to do what is proposed to be done and it is conversation with 'office holders'. In this sense, politics is a 'public activity' in *respublica*, but importantly Oakeshott denies it a character of a so-called public place; *respublica* is not to be understood as spatial. (Ibid., 166. Compare with Arendt 1977, *Public Rights and Private Interests.*).

Chantal Mouffe[1] (1993) has observed the possibility of blurring the distinction between 'public' and 'private' in the Oakeshottian terms. I cite the referred point:

> ".. every situation is an encounter between 'private and 'public',
> between an action or an utterance to procure an imagined or
> wished-for substantive satisfaction and the conditions of civility
> to be subscribed to in performing it; and no situation is the one
> to the exclusion of the other." (OHC, 183.)

I understand this as an interesting 'postmodern interpretation' and see no reason to disagree. For Oakeshott, 'privacy' as well as 'publicity' are circumstantial, not

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[1]'The radical democrat' is treated as postmodern here, because her accounts on Oakeshott are highly interesting in this respect.

'fixed'. Politics in civil association means an exploration of the intimations of situations, and "a lively political imagination may recognize them before they are half over the moral horizon." (ibid., 180.) So, 'innovation' certainly belongs to the character of civil association:

> "If the system were without 'play' between its components, if it intimated nothing which it did not enunciate, or if this consideration were read as an unconditional principle, it would of course, prohibit innovation. But this is not the case with a *respublica*, or indeed with any practice." (Ibid.)

Thus, though 'considering the desirability of conditions of *respublica*' is less exciting than deliberating the policy of an enterprise association, it can also be understood as an *art* to be enjoyed. The engagement to deliberate the changes in 'rules of a game', does not only require knowledge about how to win, but also 'how to play' in a contingent situation (Oakeshott 1975, *Talking Politics*, RP 1991, 455). In politics, then, the responsibility that belongs to the understanding of the human condition as inherently free is *not* a burden to be suffered.

To conclude, I will now comment some 'postmodern' readings of Oakeshott. Moreover, I consider the question of 'legitimacy' in a situation where the 'universal principles' to be appealed in legitimation are absent. First, Mouffe also suggests that the "notions of *respublica, societas* and political community" are to be seen as "discursive surfaces" not as "empirical referents", and accordingly, the 'non-essentialist' agent could be seen as the articulation of "an ensemble of subject positions." (Mouffe 1993, 71.) Neither do I disagree with this suggestion as, for Oakeshott, an 'agent' is no 'closed identity' but a "fugitive; not a generic unity but a dramatic identity without benefit of a model of self-perfection." (*OHC, 84.*) Also, when we are dealing with understanding in terms of 'ideal characters', the 'empirical references' in the usual sense are missing. As Oakeshott put it of *societas* and *universitas*: ".. no modern European state has ever been of this character." (ibid., 319.) However, when Mouffe suggests that all aspects of (Carl Schmitt's) friend/enemy relation disappear from *respublica*, I think she misinterprets the case. I quote:

"For his conception of politics as a shared language of civility is only adequate for one aspect of politics: the point of view of the 'we', the friend's side.. Therefore, while politics aims at constructing a political community and creating a unity, a fully inclusive political community and a final unity can never be realized since there will permanently be a 'constitutive outside', an exterior to the community that makes its existence possible.. Forms of agreement can be reached but they are always partial and provisional since concensus is by necessity based on acts of exclusion. We are indeed very far from the language of civility dear to Oakeshott!" (Mouffe 1993, 69.)

This seems to be a fairly common reading of Oakeshott and some 'credit' of it may be probably attributed to Rorty as his interpretations are usually the first 'harbours' en route to examining Oakeshott in connection with postmodern. I stress that I am generally sympathetic to his 'freestyle' usage of the Oakeshottian terminology. I only cite to give a contrast to the 'negative project':

"Hermeneutics views them [the participants] united in what he calls *societas* - persons whose paths through life have fallen together, united by civility rather by common goal, much less by a common ground." (Rorty 1979, 318.)

Also, in the consistent joining of Oakeshott to the 'heroes' of a historicist and nominalist culture Rorty has with indisputable merit opened new perspectives to both 'postmodern' and Oakeshott's oeuvre, especially, with his emphasis on 'conversationalism' (Rorty 1989, xvi). However, from his 'ethnocentric' point of view, Rorty too easily assimilates Oakeshott to the project of undermining "the idea of transhistorical 'absolutely valid' set of concepts" of "philosophical foundations of liberalism" as a "way of strengthening liberal institutions." (Ibid., 57.) As Mapel points out, the uncritical appeal to 'our' traditions as a tendency to replace epistemic foundationalism with social foundationalism makes it suspicious to associate Rorty too closely with Oakeshott (Mapel 1990, 403). Alhough Rorty's confessional ethnocentrism hardly suggests any 'value unity', perhaps it is still good to remind that there are no necessarily 'liberal values' or 'liberal we' suggested in Oakeshott's *societas*. In a sense, it also suggests that 'the contingent prevailing order' as acknowledging the authority of *respublica* could be

taken as 'legitimate'. But solely, because a *state* understood in terms of *societas,* i.e. as a manifold of 'moral languages', 'associations' etc. is the only 'morally tolerable' possibility for a 'self-determining' individual, the membership in a state being compulsory.[1] The *societas* is no 'community' of 'liberals' either and no consensus is 'required':

> "It is not a suppositious sum of all approved purposes, a purpose which remains when all competing purposes have cancelled one another, or one which represents a consensus or harmony of purposes from which discordant purposes have been excluded, or one upon which all or a majority of associates are agreed, or any other such imagined, wished-for and sought after substantive condition of things." (*OHC*, 143.)

If one wishes to be 'questionable' from the postmodern point of view and still *speak* of 'legitimation' when reflecting on the understanding of a 'state', then Oakeshott's terminology also becomes useful. At least, it does not refer to the similar kind of understanding that Lyotard here describes:

> "Take any civil law as an example: it states that a given category of citizens must perform a specific kind of action. Legitimation is the process by which a legislator is authorized to promulgate such a law as a norm." (Lyotard 1984, 8.)

Postmodern may take as 'understood' that consensus as a horizon is never reached, or to be pursued (ibid., 66). Moreover, the "heteromorphous nature of language games" is recognized (ibid.). For Lyotard, "narration is authority itself" denoting just this "unbreakable *we,* outside of which there can be only *they.*" (Lyotard 1989, 321.) And he sees that the 'delegitiming of the Grand Narratives' "revives the vitality of small narrative units at work everywhere *locally* in the present social system." (Jameson in Lyotard 1984, xi.) Then, putting Bauman's diagnosis of postmodern for the 'last comparison point' to Oakeshott:

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[1]Also, not of 'necessity', but both the readings of a state as *societas* and *universitas* have 'this far' interpreted it compulsory.

".. no social group or category, either dominating or struggling for domination, seems to have any overwhelming demand for the kind of authoritative versions of truth, judgement or taste the intellectuals are capable of providing; or, rather, no social group is likely to make such versions authoritative by endorsing them with its own domination." (Bauman 1987, 194.)

I just remind that, for Oakeshott, the contingent 'modern state' understood in terms of *societas* is always *'locally* in the making'. It is an intelligent association of human beings, and a *manifold* of discourses and moral practices that an agent has to make his 'own' in choosing. 'The manifold' offers 'legitimations' only in the sense that one needs not to choose without any 'moral' or intimations of situations. Yet, the responsibility is to be 'beared' or 'enjoyed' on one's own.

4.3.7 Postmodern politics

To finish my thesis, it is now time to draw a brief 'mid-career report' of my small voyage on the 'boundless sea' of postmodern politics with Oakeshott. How does the prospect of 'postmodern politics' look like in my view? Presently, the looking-glass throws back the light from Oakeshott to postmodern, so I will pass the first turn of reply to the author himself:

"By 'play', I mean activity pursued on certain specified occasions, at fixed times and in a place set apart and according to exact rules, the significance of activity lying not in a terminal result aimed at, but in the disposition which is enjoyed and fostered in the cause of the activity. This manner of activity is contrasted, in general, with 'serious' activity or with what may be called 'ordinary life'. Without 'earnest' there can be no 'play'; without 'play' there can be no 'earnest'. Consequently, 'play' is not merely or directly opposed to 'serious' activity; its relationship to 'ordinary life' is that of an ironical companion. It exhibitis in itself the tensions, the violence and the 'seriousness' of 'ordinary life', but they are a mockery of their originals and when reflected back "upon ordinary life" they have the effect of deflacting its 'seriousness' by reducing the significance of the ends pursued." (Oakeshott 1996, 111.)

Foremost, postmodern still appears as a *direction to go* for me. Yet, after the examination of Oakeshott's oeuvre alongside the authors highly critical of the modern(ity), my sense of *ambivalence* is even stronger. The diagnosis of 'our' situation has been hovering between the two poles that Oakeshott named *The Politics of Faith* and *The Politics of Scepticism.* The ambiguity of Oakeshott's reading has been adapted to the pulls between the *modern* and *postmodern,* and the negative and positive projects of postmodern. The 'blurring of terms' seems now mutual, though the emphasis has been on introducing the specific in Oakeshott to the postmodern. Accordingly, I hope my reading has strengthened the earlier interpretations pointing to the same direction. However, there really are no simple conclusions to be drawn from this voyage. So, I wish to spend the last lines by elaborating the happily unresolved 'tensions' in the notions of *political agency* and *activity* in close proximity to the quoted passage above.

I have reflected on the postmodern understanding of 'human agency' and suggested that, for Oakeshott, 'being a human' does not mean any 'fixed' and 'coherent' identity. Yet, I have more concentrated on examining *political* agency as contingent and situated and passed the further discussion on this subject, leaving favourably the wider philosophical elaboration on, e.g. 'gender' issues and 'Foucaultian' views for the 'experts'. (See, e.g. Pulkkinen 1996.) In my view, Oakeshott can fairly be seen as contributing to the deliberation on the political, *judging* self as necessarily situated (ibid., 250). Compared with Arendt, I see Oakeshott more radically departing from all 'inner-capacity' connotations of the 'ability to think' and judge, especially in the major work *On Human Conduct.* However, the conceptual similarities between the two authors are obvious in their 'creative' usages of 'classic' political vocabularies that I would enjoy seeing to be powerfully added to the 'projects of postmodern'. Applying their terminology, the pull between the dispositions of a modern 'corrupted' political agency and a 'postmodern' political agency could be described in terms of *Homo faber,* man the maker of things, and *Homo ludens,* man the player. (Oakeshott 1995, *Work and Play.*) For both, it was *Homo or Animal laborans* representing the very predicament of the contemporary human condition. However, as the *Homo faber*

thinks in "no terms but those of means and ends" and is only capable of understanding *instrumentality*, he (or she) forefigures well the 'politics as engineering.' (Arendt 1989, 154-5.) In addition, *Homo faber* indicates the understanding of a *mode of associaton* as *universitas*, though not necessarily a state. By his part, *Homo ludens* characterizes the 'postmodern' pull which I see as an 'increased space' and 'opportunity' for playfulness; whether with 'political identity', or enjoying the freedom inherent in agency - terminology of *societas* 'naturally' following.

The 'political activity' constructing, and constructed by these dispositions could then be described in terms of *fabricating* and *playing*. The former term already bears the heavy connotations of violence discussed in the 'negative project of postmodern' and can be seen as a powerful metaphor of the 'dark side' of modern. And the latter I find also 'already' quite firmly occupying a place in a 'postmodern vocabulary', at least if one sees the playing with contingency of the situations and the diversity of 'language games' figuring postmodern. For Oakeshott, playing means an activity enjoyed for its 'own sake'. When he speaks of philosophy, science, history and especially poetry as "not preliminary. to doing something" he blurs the 'boundaries' between those activities and also politics when radically connecting play to 'the politics of scepticism.' (Oakeshott 1995, 6.) Political 'imagination', in its sensitiveness to the intimations of the situations, may 'innovate' something not yet 'visible' for too many. As to the postmodern, with some reservations we may join this emphasis also to 'political theorizing'. In the case of Oakeshott, e.g. Mouffe refers to the unawaringly "radical potential of his arguments." Oakeshott's discussion on the "legal status of women" through the vehicle of understanding political activity as "the exploration of sympathy present but not yet followed up, and the convincing demonstration that it now is the appropriate moment for recognizing it" is observed as useful for the extension of 'democratic principles'. (Mouffe 1993, 16.) Though Mouffe speaks of 'principles and traditions', her basic idea is resourceful; Oakeshott's notion of heterogenous, open and ultimately indeterminable character of the traditions can be used 'inside' 'democratic tradition' as playing some parts of tradition against others (ibid., 18).

I now pose the question a bit differently. Why do I still speak of, e.g.

fabrication while I should be considering the 'distinct' postmodern politics? Should I not only be referring to 'the positive project of postmodern'? For the time being, after becoming sensitive to Oakeshottian 'influence' towards political theorizing, the answer to those questions is *negative*. For me, postmodern looking-glass is radically confirmed as a perspective that explores the intimations of situations. And by 'denying' the pull of modern(ity) either 'in politics' or theorizing 'of' politics one would loose the capability to interpret situations. Oakeshott understood the *nemesis* of the politics of scepticism in its tendency to reduce all activity to mere 'play'; to overwhelm the belief that there is *nothing* serious in mortality. As the same accusation by far applies to postmodern, perhaps there could be something to be picked up for the considerations in the situation where the 'pull' has been recognized between the 'modern' and 'postmodern' styles of politics. Maybe the only comprehensible relationship to be explored is not between '*earnest*' and 'play':

> "In short, if we regard these poles of our political activity as positive and negative, it is necessary to recognize that while the style of faith stands for 'everything', the complete control of the activities which compose a community, the style of scepticism stands, not for 'nothing', but for 'little'." (Oakeshott, 1996.)

5. Epilogue

Throughout my travel, I have entertained the view that in a "postmodern treatise the ambition is not to conclude by closing cases but to open up closed cases by exploring possibilities of thinking otherwise." (Pulkkinen 1996, 248.) So, I left my case with Oakeshott and the postmodern very much open as an invitation to enter 'an episode in an interminable adventure' - as Oakeshott might express it. Naturally, this not mean the same as saying nothing; *much* has been said and one *conditional* story told. Yet, as a gift of making epilogues is given to us, I cannot resist a tempation to excersice my *postmodern responsibility* in a bit unconventional form. I found Robert Hollinger's (1994, xv) list of questions so amusing that I cannot help but 'answer' this 'interview' and check the boxes with crosses. The table drawn around the questions is drawn by the *modern* me.

The question:	Yes	No	?
Is postmodern*ism* against the Enlightenment?		X	
Is postmodernism a form of irrationalism or nihilism?		X	
Does postmodernism abandon the ideas of society and the social?	X		
Does postmodernism reject the idea of the self?			X
Does postmodernism relinquish the search for community?	X		
Does postmodernism attack the modern ideas of freedom, reason and emancipation?			X
Is postmodernism the cultural ideology of late capitalism and postindustrial society?		X	
Does postmodernism reject the ideas of objective reality, truth, and knowledge and thus try to overthrow modern science and technology?		X	
Does postmodernism take anything seriously, or does it turn everything into a game?	I'll pass.	The *modern*ist has got her answers.	But where does this lead?

APPENDIX 1

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