Politics & Eternity

Francis Oakley

"The *Leviathan* is the greatest, perhaps the sole, masterpiece of political philosophy written in the English language. And the history of our civilization can provide only a few works of similar scope and achievement to set beside it. Consequently, it must be judged by none but the highest standards and must be considered only in the widest context. The masterpiece supplies a standard and a context for the second-rate, which indeed is but a gloss; but the context of the masterpiece itself, the setting in which its meaning is revealed, can in the nature of things be nothing narrower than the history of political philosophy.

"Reflection about political life may take place at a variety of levels. It may remain on the level of the determination of means, or it may strike out for the consideration of ends. Its inspiration may be directly practical, the modification of the arrangements of a political order in accordance with the perception of an immediate benefit; or it may be practical, but less directly so, guided by general ideas. Or again, springing from an experience of political life, it may seek a generalization of that experience in a doctrine. And reflection is apt to flow from one level to another in an unbroken movement, following the mood of the thinker. Political philosophy may be understood to be what occurs when this movement of reflection takes a certain direction and achieves a certain level, its characteristic being the relation of political life, and the values and purposes pertaining to it, to the entire conception of the world that be-

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doi:10.1162/DAED_a_00251

longs to a civilization. . . . Any man who holds in his mind the conceptions of the natural world, of God, of human activity and human destiny which belong to his civilization, will scarcely be able to prevent an endeavour to assimilate these to the ideas that distinguish the political order in which he lives, and failing to do so he will become a philosopher (of a simple sort) unawares.

"But, though we may stumble over the frontier of philosophy unwittingly and by doing nothing more demonstrative than refusing to draw rein, to achieve significant reflection, of course, requires more than inadvertence and more than the mere acceptance of the two worlds of ideas. The whole impetus of the enterprise is the perception that what really exists is a single world of ideas, which comes to us divided by the abstracting force of circumstances; is the perception that our political ideas and what may be called the rest of our ideas are not in fact two independent worlds, and that though they may come to us as separate text and context, the *meaning* lies, as it always must lie, in a unity in which the separate existence of text and context is resolved. We may begin, probably we must begin, with an independent valuation of the text and the context; but the impetus of reflection is not spent until we have restored in detail the unity of which we had a prevision. And, so far, philosophical reflection about politics will be nothing other than the intellectual restoration of a unity damaged and impaired by the normal negligence of human partiality.

"To establish the connections, in principle and in detail, directly or mediately, between politics and eternity is a project that has never been without its followers. Indeed, the pursuit of this project is only a special arrangement of the whole intellectual life of our civilization; it is the whole intellectual history organized and exhibited from a particular angle of vision. Probably there has been no theory of the nature of the world, of the activity of man, of the destiny of mankind, no theology or cosmology, perhaps even no metaphysics, that has not sought a reflection of itself in the mirror of political philosophy; certainly there has been no fully considered politics that has not looked for its reflection in eternity. This history of political philosophy is, then, the context of the masterpiece, for the masterpiece, at least, is always the revelation of the universal predicament in the local and transitory mischief.

"If the unity of the history of political philosophy lies in a pervading sense of human life as a predicament and in the continuous reflection of the changing climate of the European intellectual scene, its significant variety will be found in three great traditions of thought. The singularities of political philosophies (like most singularities) are not unique, but follow one of three main patterns which philosophical reflection about politics has impressed upon the intellectual history of Europe. These I call traditions because it belongs to the nature of a tradition to tolerate and unite an internal variety, not insisting upon conformity to a single character, and because, further, it has the ability to change without losing its identity. The first of these traditions is distinguished by the master-conceptions of Reason and Nature. It is coeval with our civilization; it has an unbroken history into the modern world; and it has survived by a matchless power of adaptability all the changes of the European consciousness. The master-conceptions of the second are Will and Artifice. It too springs from the soil of Greece, and has drawn inspiration from many sources, not least from Israel and Islam. The third tradition is of later birth, not appearing until the eighteenth century. 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 its followers may be excused the belief that in it the truths of the first two traditions are fulfilled and their errors find a happy release. The masterpiece of political philosophy has for its context, not only the history of political philosophy as the elucidation of the predicament and deliverance of mankind, but also, normally, a particular tradition in that history; generally speaking, it is the supreme expression of its own tradition. And, as Plato's *Republic* might be chosen as the representative of the first tradition, and Hegel's *Philosophie des Rechts* of the third, so the *Leviathan* is the head and crown of the second."

– From Michael Oakeshott, ed., *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesisticall and Civil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), viii – xii. Used by permission of Oliver Letwin, the Literary Representative of the Estate of Michael Oakeshott.

June 1953, and the dread summons to the Examination Schools at Oxford, through the grim portals of which we dutifully trooped, attired in regulation subfusc and doing our best to maintain, in the teeth of the undergraduate trump of doom, a requisitely stiff upper lip. In common with those others who had been reading for a degree in the Honours School of Modern History, one of the battery of examination papers I had to tackle over the course of the coming week was one on "political theory." Though the History School in its wisdom had seen fit to make it a required subject, it was in my day unpopular with dons and students alike, and it was destined later on to be dropped. Part of the reason for that unpopularity was the fact that it was structured around three formidable set-texts that formed a sort of Procrustean bed on which the minds of students were to be stretched – or narrowed: Aristotle's *Politics* (in merciful translation), Hobbes's *Leviathan* (or, rather, a selection from that great work tendentious enough to come close to mandating a particular interpretation), and Rousseau's *Du contrat social* (in French). But part of the reason, too, or so I sense, was the epiphenomenal way in which the subject tended to be taught: a bit too exclusively, to use Michael Oakeshott's terms, as the mere generalization in a doctrine of a particular experience of political life in a given era.

At my own college, however, we had been spared the dreariness of that approach. Instead, the subject had been treated as political philosophy *tout court*, not excluding at least a few dim reflections in the Oakeshottian mirror of eternity. And imagining myself at that time to be a fellow of thwarted philosophical temperament for which the course of study mandated in history afforded no other outlet, I had embraced the subject with alacrity. For me, indeed, it turned out to be something of a life-changer, a moment of modest epiphany on the road to a personal intellectual Damascus. From my close encounter with those required classic texts I took away a great deal, and especially so from Rousseau. But in retrospect at least, I conclude that in the long haul, and perhaps oddly, I may have taken away more from my anxious wrestling with Michael Oakeshott's lengthy introductory essay to the Blackwell's edition of the *Leviathan*, the edition we had all been instructed to purchase. It is from that brilliant essay, then, that I have selected the above excerpt as one that has resonated powerfully in my own thinking down through the years, and one that deserves to endure.

If Oakeshott's essay is indeed a brilliant one, it is also one, when I first encountered it as a nineteen-year-old, that I found great difficulty in understanding. My first, somewhat breathless take on it probably amounted, in fact, to little more than an instance of what Arthur O. Lovejoy once derided as "metaphysical pathos," that is, an instinctive, emotional response to "the loveliness of the incomprehensible" that, he wryly noted, has "stood many a philosopher in good stead with his public." "The reader doesn't know exactly what they [such philosophers] mean, but they have [for him] all the more on that account an air of sublimity, [and] an agreeable feeling of awe and exaltation comes over him as he contemplates thoughts of so immensurable a profundity."[1] With time, of course, that feeling of awe and exaltation eventually evaporated. But as I began to grasp more clearly what Oakeshott was really about, it was replaced by an intellectual impetus that, along with related promptings deriving from my rather eclectic extracurricular browsing in other philosophers, nudged me, at a time when the field was trending in a very different direction, toward the somewhat unfashionable pursuit of what is usually characterized as the "internalist" approach to the history of ideas. That is to say, I became fascinated less with external contextual issues of one sort or another than with the internal interconnections and affinities of sympathy among ideas, and with what Lovejoy called their "particular go," the logical pressure they are capable of exerting on the minds of those that think them.

That preoccupation was fueled by the strength of Oakeshott's insight into what may be called the *ecology of ideas*. It was generated, that is to say, by the firmness of his insistence that we should not succumb to the partiality of vision that would lead us to sunder our thinking about politics from "the single world of ideas," "the entire conception of the world that belongs to a [given] civilization," by his emphasis, accordingly, on the subtle network of affiliations that link political philosophy with seemingly disparate realms of intellectual discourse: with ethics, with epistemology, with natural philosophy, even with metaphysics and theology, for "there has been no fully considered politics that has not looked for its reflection in eternity." That same preoccupation was intensified, moreover, by Oakeshott's related and more specific claim that while "the unity of the history of political philosophy lies in a prevailing sense of human life as a predicament from which humankind must seek deliverance," its "significant variety" is reflected in the fact that within its overarching unity can be discerned three great, discrete "traditions" or principal "patterns" into which philosophical reflection about politics has fallen, each distinguished by its own "master conceptions," and each possessed of its own great masterpiece standing boldly forth as its supreme expression. And it is, he says, to the tradition distinguished by the master-conceptions of "Will and Artifice" that *Leviathan* belongs, standing to it indeed as its very "head and crown."

All of this is framed, of course, in highly schematic fashion, and it would be fair to say that it has not gone down all that well with historians of political thought at-large. Their eyes fixed demurely on the gritty specificities of historical documentation, they have tended to view Oakeshott's traditions as at best "analytic exercises" or "ideal characterizations" imposed on the past, rather than formations that are "self-evidently historical" or reflecting features appearing in "genuinely historical narratives."[2] Oakeshott himself, moreover, appears to have experienced his own seepage of doubt on the

matter. In the late 1950s, responding to a query of mine, he noted that he had not chosen to develop elsewhere the all too brief delineation of three traditions given in his introduction to *Leviathan* "because I have come to recognize . . . [that triadic pattern] as an over-bold generalization which would have to be qualified in all sorts of ways in order to be made to stand up satisfactorily." At the same time, nevertheless, he affirmed that he had not come "to doubt the usefulness *at a certain level*, of this way of speaking about the history of political philosophy."[3]

This latter reassurance was enough for me. By then, I had hooked into the "certain level" to which he alluded. For me, it was nothing less than "my America! my new-found-land," the seductive level at which the subtle interconnections between political thinking and other realms of philosophical discourse can often stand out in bold relief, beckoning one to stray further and to tease out the intellectual affinities linking such disparate modes of thought as those pertaining to moral philosophy, natural philosophy, and natural theology. Having identified the *Leviathan* as the head and crown of the tradition distinguished by the master-conceptions of Will and Artifice, Oakeshott went on to identify the roots of that tradition as lying in "the politico-theological ideas of Judaism," as having drawn its inspiration from the "Judeo-Christian conception of will and creation," and as having "crystallized into a living tradition" as a result of the pioneering work of the school of late-medieval scholastic theology usually labeled as "nominalist." That tradition of thinking had been launched in its fullness by the great English philosopher-theologian William of Ockham. And, on the advice of Étienne Gilson, at that time the leading historian of medieval philosophy, I had come to focus my doctoral research on one of Ockham's leading nominalist followers, Pierre d'Ailly, and was moving on to explore the trail laid down on into the sixteenth century by such affiliated late-scholastic figures as Jacques Almain and John Mair.

By the late 1950s, then, whatever Oakeshott's second thoughts, I myself had little or none, and was happily engaged in tracking and fleshing out the implications of his original intuition for the late-medieval and early-modern thinkers with whom I was concerned. My appetite for so doing had been whetted by the dyspeptic witness to the endurance of the tradition of Will and Artifice into his own day, afforded by the seventeenth-century Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth. Pointing a hostile finger at Ockham, d'Ailly, and Descartes, he lamented the contemporary reemergence of the voluntarist ethic "promoted and advanced by such as think nothing so essential to the Deity as uncontrollable power and arbitrary will." He linked it also (and interestingly) with the contemporaneous revival of "the physiological hypotheses of Democritus and Epicurus" (that is, atomism), and with their successful application "to the solving of some of the phenomena of the visible world" (contemporary scientific endeavor).[4] That last suggestion helped lead me to move on to probe the arguments of such early-modern scientific thinkers as Mersenne, Gassendi, Charleton, Boyle, and the great Newton himself. I came to be concerned especially with their distinctive conceptualizing of the uniformities of nature as "laws" of a quite specific type, an enterprise in which I was further encouraged by my encounter with the explorations of the relationship between natural philosophy and natural theology, ideas of nature and notions of the divine, pursued in their differing but congruent ways by such modern philosophers as A. N. Whitehead, R. G. Collingwood, and Michael Foster, as well as by the related broodings of biochemist

and sinologist Joseph Needham – in his great multi-volume *Science and Civilization in China* – about the failure of the Chinese to develop a natural science comparable with that of the early-modern West. For that failure he linked with their prior failure to develop a comparable concept of laws imposed upon nature, and that, in turn, with the lack in the dominant Chinese intellectual traditions of any clear notion of a personal, legislating creator-God.

In the context of focusing on differing ways of understanding the (physical) laws of nature, Whitehead had pointed out the crucial contrast between laws of nature perceived as immanent in the structure of reality itself, and such laws as imposed on the universe, as it were, from the outside. He was specifically concerned, it is true, with the analysis of cosmological assumptions; but from my own work on the late-medieval nominalist thinkers, it was by then clear to me that the distinction he was drawing was as valid and relevant in the juridical and ethical sphere as it was in the scientific.[5] The theory of law as immanent, he said, involves the assumption that things are interdependent in such a way that when we know the nature of things, we also know their mutual relations one with another: "Some partial identity of pattern in the various characters of natural things issues in some partial identity of pattern in the mutual relations of these things." The laws of nature are the formulations of these identities of pattern. Thus, it can be adduced as a law of nature that animals unite to produce offspring, or that stones released in midair strive to reach the ground. This view of the laws of nature involves, he concludes, "some doctrine of Internal Relations," some notion that the characters of things are the outcome of their interconnections, and the interconnections of things the outcome of their characters.[6]

The doctrine of imposed law, on the other hand, adopts the alternative metaphysical theory of *External Relations*. Individual existents are regarded as the ultimate constituents of nature, and those ultimate constituents are conceived to possess no inherent connection one with another but to be comprehensible each in complete isolation from the rest. The relations into which they enter are imposed on them from without, and these imposed behavior patterns are the laws of nature. It therefore follows that these laws cannot be discovered by a scrutiny of the characters of the related things (no amount of study of bodies at rest, for example, will tell us anything about their possible motion), but can only become known through the painstaking empirical charting of regularities. Nor, conversely, can the nature of the related things be deduced from the laws governing their relations.

Had I cherished any lingering doubt about the fact that the notion of law as immanent aligned with Oakeshott's tradition of Reason and Nature and the alternative notion of law as imposed with his tradition of Will and Artifice, and I cannot recall if I did, it had to have been dissipated by what I then encountered when I read R. G. Collingwood's *Idea of Nature*. For in that lucid little book, he argued that "in the history of European thought there have been three periods of constructive cosmological thinking," by which he meant three periods

> when the idea of nature has come into the focus of thought, become the subject of intense and protracted reflection, and consequently acquired new characteristics which in their turn have given a new aspect to the detailed science of nature that has been based upon it.[7]

He calls the three ideas of nature that these periods have produced "the Greek," "the Renaissance" – by which, in fact, he really means "early modern"[8] – and "the mod-

ern." With the last we will not be concerned; suffice it to say that he regards it as based upon the analogy between the processes of the natural world as studied by natural scientists and the vicissitudes of human affairs as studied by historians. But so far as the two earlier "ideas" go, he argues that whereas the Greek view of nature as an intelligent organism was based on an analogy between the world of nature and the individual human being, the Renaissance or early-modern view conceived the world analogically as a machine. Instead of being regarded as capable of ordering its own movements in a rational manner and in accordance with its own immanent laws, the movements it exhibits are imposed from without, and "their regularity . . . due to 'laws of nature' likewise imposed from without."[9] Collingwood therefore concludes that this view presupposes both "the human experience of designing and constructing machines and the Christian idea of a creative and omnipotent God."

This was doubtless one cogent way of characterizing the profound change in viewpoint that eventuated in the development of the classical or Newtonian science, emphasizing the role played in that development both by the Christian idea of omnipotent God and by the concomitant idea of divinely imposed laws of nature. But it had the effect of riveting my attention not only because of that, but also because, just as Whitehead's conception of laws of nature as immanent and imposed aligned with Oakeshott's first two traditions, so, too, did Collingwood's three ideas of nature map with great precision onto all three of Oakeshott's traditions. This was striking and exhilarating stuff, the more so in that Oakeshott's traditions had been formulated not only independently of Collingwood's ideas of nature (though around the same time), but also with an eye to the history of theories of knowledge, rather than to the history of natural philosophy or cosmological assumptions.[10]

My mounting excitement about the apparent alignment between various conceptual schemata arrived at by philosophers working independently of one another and used to categorize phenomena belonging to areas of discourse as various as natural theology, philosophy of nature, theories of knowledge, and theories of natural law (both physical/scientific and moral/juridical) came to something of a peak around 1960. For around that time, while browsing in back issues of *Mind*, the English philosophical journal, I came upon three extraordinary and powerfully – if eccentrically – argued articles written in the mid-1930s by Michael Foster.[11] Foster had been a philosophy don of no great prominence at Oxford but, unlike most of his colleagues at the time, had completed a doctorate, and at a German university, no less. He marched, accordingly, to the beat of a very different and, for his day, discordant philosophical drum.[12] These articles were surrounded incongruously in the pages of *Mind* by articles that were technical or highly specialized in nature and almost always of very different philosophical inspiration. One, indeed, was a piece by A. J. Ayer purporting to demonstrate the "impossibility of Metaphysics" and the pseudo-propositional status of any attempt "to describe . . . the existence of something beyond the realm of empirical observation." Foster's contributions stand out, then, in bold relief, almost as aliens from a different intellectual planet. Part of their eccentricity, at least in that improbable context, stems from the fact that they are explicitly theistic in inspiration and putatively historical in aspiration; part stems also from the countervailing fact that the historicity of their argument can only be described as deductive *a priori*, dependent upon extrapola-

tion from the internal logic of ideas and largely bereft of the density of documentary evidence with which even the most theoretical of intellectual historians are prone to fortifying their case.

It is Foster's explicit purpose in these articles to argue that the rise of the early-modern science of nature is in many ways to be understood as an ultimate deliverance of the penetration into philosophic modes of thought of the biblical notion of God and the affiliated Christian doctrine of creation, the relationship of that God to the universe. And that specific argument is embedded in a set of assumptions about the complex of interconnections existing among natural theology, natural philosophy, and scientific methodology. Whether it is the Greek philosophical assumption of divine immanence or the biblical notion of divine transcendence and omnipotence that is in play, there "can be," he explains, "no doctrine of God which does not contain or imply a doctrine of the world," and no doctrine of the world or natural philosophy, in turn, that does not imply the particular sort of method to be employed in the scientific study of that world.[13] And he sees those implications to be "necessary." That is to say, he portrays the interconnections in question as involving nothing less than logical entailment.

From Oakeshott's original intuition, then, along with what I had encountered in the late-medieval and early-modern philosophico-theological texts themselves, enriched and informed by my readings in these modern philosophers, there came eventually to crystallize in my mind a certain, powerful conviction. The conviction, in effect, that in any systematic, coherent, and comprehensive body of philosophical thought, one should be able to recognize and chart the sinuous linkages that must necessarily exist between the notion of the divine one arrived at or started from and the philosophy of nature and affiliated scientific method one espoused, as well as between that philosophy of nature and the congruent epistemology, moral philosophy, and vision of political society that should properly go with it. I saw those interconnections as involving, at their strongest, direct logical entailment and, at their weakest, a measure of intellectual affinity. And I concluded, thinking especially of Oakeshott's tradition of Will and Artifice, which it had been my concern to explore and/or flesh out, that a historian would do well to keep a weather-eye cocked for the cognate others whenever *any* of the following turned out to be present in a body of thought: First, a biblical (or Koranic) view of God that stresses above all his freedom, transcendence, and omnipotence. Second, a natural philosophy of mechanistic sympathies that stresses the conditional nature of all knowledge based on observation in a created and contingent world that could have been other than it is. Third, a nominalist epistemology congruent with a world composed of autonomous singular entities, an understanding of the uniformities of nature as (natural) laws grounded in the mandate of a legislating divine will, a similarly voluntaristic understanding of the (moral/juridical) natural law and, by analogy, of human positive law. And finally, an essentially "mechanistic" understanding of political society as an artifice ultimately based on a specific type of consent, the creation, in effect, of a concatenation of individual (atomistic) acts of human willing.

As Oakeshott pointed out, this was the intellectual configuration characteristic of Hobbes's own thinking, for he elaborated "a comprehensive system where before there were only scattered aphorisms," and I suppose that for any philosopher of systematic leanings, the conclusion I had arrived at would amount to little more than an obvious truism. Systematic philoso-

phers, however, seem to be in short supply these days, and most philosophers seem to be as specialized in their focus and as partial in their vision as are the rest of us in other fields. Not being a philosopher myself, moreover, I had arrived at my conclusion the hard and indirect way, after slogging through the dense undergrowth of sometimes inconsistent argumentation in the later-medieval and early-modern thinkers on whom I had been pursuing my research. Truism or no, that conclusion, when I finally arrived at it, was for me (however naively) something of an energizing epiphany. It came, accordingly, to shape the further direction of my research in one of the two fields in which I was engaged, as it also came to inform the perspective from which I approached it. In particular, and at a time when social history was in vogue and, with it, in the history of ideas, a species of social and linguistic contextualism, it encouraged me to swim against the tide and to commit instead to a protracted effort to excavate the occluded history and probe the obscure meaning of a somewhat recondite but really quite crucial scholastic distinction that had come to enjoy wide currency and great longevity.

Having surfaced at the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the realm of the theology of redemption, that distinction had quickly made its way into natural or philosophical theology, moral philosophy, epistemology, natural philosophy, and legal philosophy. It had come to play an important (if perhaps unexpected) role in the realm of early-modern scientific thinking, as well as in the thinking of the French, English, and Spanish prerogative lawyers of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. This foray into the archaeology of ideas eventuated in a book entitled *Omnipotence, Covenant, and Order*, in which I emphasized the truly profound influence exerted by the distinction in question on the course of European intellectual development, and pondered the implications of its apparent absence from the theological and philosophical traditions of medieval Islam. Discriminating between God's power considered as absolute and as ordained (or ordinary) – *potentia dei absoluta et ordinata* (*seu ordinaria*) – this distinction was used to vindicate the biblical idea of the divine freedom and omnipotence while still protecting the Greek philosophical intuition that the world was stable, rational, and intelligible, open to penetration in some degree by the human intellect. But, in so doing, it helped promote a shift to a vision or understanding of the underlying order of things – natural, moral, legal, salvational – vastly different from what had come before. That vision was not, that is to say, one of a quasi-necessary order infused with or reflective of the immanent presence of the divine, embedded in a Lovejoyesque great chain of being and emanating from the very natures or essences of things. Instead, it involved a notion of order that was radically contingent, possessed in itself of no luminous intelligibility, grounded in divine will, covenant and promise and, so far at least as the natural order is concerned, discernible only via empirical induction.[14] This latter vision, unlike the former, which resonated to Oakeshott's tradition of Reason and Nature, possessed a strong intellectual affinity with his tradition of Will and Artifice.

Of course, given the stupefying scramble of events that characterizes it, the past wages its own stubborn war of attrition against the neatness and force of all such abstract schemata. Inconsistencies and contradictions are present in the work of even the most powerful of thinkers. One would be wise, accordingly, to keep firmly in focus the fact that people in the past did their thinking (as, perforce, do we today) not necessarily as, logically speaking, they *should*, or even as in an ideal philosophical

world they *would*; but rather (within their own intellectual limits, and given the customs, challenges, complexities, and confusions of their time), simply as they *could*.

But that duly conceded, having in my own historical work drawn inspiration from the philosophico-historical promptings of such as Oakeshott, Whitehead, Collingwood, and Foster, perhaps I might be permitted to indulge, and by way of conclusion, a robustly *internalist* hope that the history of ideas, currently so preoccupied as a discipline with linguistic and contextual issues of one sort or another, will not contrive somehow to shortchange or ignore the context that is the most intimate and immediate of them all: that constituted by the totality of a given author's thinking and conveying the "single 'passionate thought' that pervades its parts."[15] It is the hope, in effect, that as a discipline it may prove in the end to be a big enough tent or sufficiently broad church in its sensibilities to accommodate the type of creative, intuitive insight that such philosophers generated in so stimulating a profusion.

Even in their more "historical" moments, rather than proceeding in more sublunary, evidence-based, historical fashion, they often moved deductively to assert what in terms of the internal logic of ideas *must* have been the case. But we should not miss the fact that their intuitions not infrequently turned out to have been (historically speaking) very much on target, and their emphasis on the internal interconnections and affinities among ideas almost always illuminating. One of the great contributions, after all, that the pursuit of humanistic studies can make to our understanding of the profoundly mysterious world in which we dwell is the degree to which it attunes us to the presence of such interconnections and prompts us to discern, in what may well appear to be nothing more than a "transitory mischief," the chastening intimations of a woe more universal and a misery more enduring. Certainly, to return to the text that so energized me as a student, and so far as the history of political thought is concerned, it remains my belief that we would do well to be alert to its linkages with other realms of discourse and, if only as in a glass darkly, to look hopefully for its reflection in the Oakeshottian mirror of eternity.

ENDNOTES

1 Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936), 11.

2 Thus David Boucher, *Texts in Context: Revisionist Methods for Studying the History of Ideas* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985), 137.

3 In a private letter sent to me, dated 23 April 1959. Emphasis appears in original.

4 Ralph Cudworth, *Treatise Concerning Immutable Morality* (New York and Andover, Mass.: Gould & Newman, 1838), 9 – 11, 18.

5 A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 142 – 147.

6 Ibid., 142, 144.

7 R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 1.

8 As Collingwood himself concedes (ibid., 4): "The name is not a good one, because the word 'Renaissance' is applied to an earlier phase in the history of thought, beginning in Italy with the humanism of the fourteenth century and continuing, in the same country, with the Platonic and Aristotelian cosmologies of that century and the fifteenth century. The cosmology I now

have to describe was in principle a reaction against these and might, perhaps, be more accurately called post-Renaissance."

9 Ibid., 6.

10 I owe this information to Oakeshott in a private letter he sent to me, dated 23 April 1959.

11 They are Michael Foster, "The Christian Doctrine of Creation and the Rise of Modern Natural Science," *Mind* 43 (October 1934): 445 – 468; Michael Foster, "Christian Theology and Modern Science of Nature (i)," *Mind* 44 (October 1935): 439 – 466; and Michael Foster, "Christian Theology and Modern Science of Nature (ii)," *Mind* 45 (January 1936): 1 – 27.

12 Perhaps not surprisingly, the articles in question neither inspired support in the immediate aftermath of their publication nor generated opposition. Instead, they slipped quietly down some sort of Orwellian memory hole. In the event, it was to be thirty years and more before they began to attract any attention, and almost sixty years before they were gathered together and republished along with a series of commentaries and critiques. That republishing event signaled the fact that, having for long years enjoyed no more than "cult" status, Foster's arguments were finally beginning to gain some sort of intellectual traction. See Cameron Wybrow, ed., *Creation, Nature, and Political Order in the Philosophy of Michael Foster (1907 – 1959): The Classic "Mind" Articles and Others, with Modern Critical Essays* (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1992).

13 Thus Foster, "Christian Theology and Modern Science of Nature (i)," 440.

14 Francis Oakley, *Omnipotence, Covenant, and Order: An Excursion in the History of Ideas from Abelard to Leibniz* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984).

15 Michael Oakeshott, "Introduction," in Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesisticall and Civil*, ed. Michael Oakeshott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), vii – lxvi.