

MICHAEL OAKESHOTT ASSOCIATION

'Oakeshott and Hume: The Limits of Abstract Reason'

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A detailed review of Coats' book is available at [Articles & Reviews](#)

There are so many common themes and aspects between Oakeshott and Hume that we must be especially on guard here to avoid sophomoric comparisons and contrasts for their own sake. I shall try to restrict my analysis here to comparisons and contrasts that shed light on the importance of Oakeshott's major themes, and the connections among them. The most salient observation in this connection is that while Oakeshott and Hume have very different conceptions of philosophy, they make similar critiques of abstract rationalism in the domains of politics and ethics.[1] This observation raises the interesting question as to what extent Oakeshott's critique of modern rationalism is dependent on is philosophic ideals and to what extent it can stand on its own. Exploring this question is also compelling simply from the intellectual curiosity to see similar, practical conclusions reached from such different philosophic starting points, one more neo-Hegelian the other more Ciceronian: and from the curiosity to see if this investigation may shed any new light on what is called the "theory-practice" problem in political theory. In order to avoid trodding ground already covered in the Oakeshott-Hegel chapter, let us start by comparing the respective views of Hume and Oakeshott on the ontological status of ethical and political life, and its relationship to philosophical reflection and analysis, and only then revisit Oakeshott's more general philosophic assumptions. At first glance, Oakeshott and Hume would appear to share similar views about the relative autonomy of practical existence – to include ethical and political considerations, and, in fact, this turns out to be the case. By the phrase "relative autonomy of practical existence," I mean to convey the idea that both think that there is

an important place in the historic evolution of healthy, balanced civilized practices and traditions, occupied by largely unreflective human action, or at any rate by human action devoid of explicit general purposes reached by some careful process of ratiocination. The critique that both thinkers make of an excessive rationalism (or "false philosophy" in Hume's lexicon) is precisely that it reverses the proper relationship of human conduct and critical thought and analysis, making the latter predominant and hence unbalanced.

Oakeshott's views on this subject are presented in some detail in the 1948 essay "The Tower of Babel". Let us review his argument in that piece, the third essay in the original edition of *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, an essay that he says is about the shape or "form of the moral life of contemporary Western civilization." [2] The burden of this Oakeshott essay is to show that (owing to the extremely rationalist moral outlook of its dual sources – forth-century Christianity and the residual reek philosophic schools), modern Western morality exhibits a mixture of traditional moral custom and self-conscious moral reflection and analysis in which the latter is improperly and unhappily dominant. [3] Interesting for our purposes in this comparison with David Hume, however, are not only Oakeshott's conclusions but the assumptions he makes about what constitutes a balanced and happy moral tradition. On Oakeshott's view, a balanced moral tradition is one in which reflective intellect acts as a critic of a traditional moral tradition, protecting it from superstition, but does not attempt to usurp a learned habit of behavior as the originator or spring of action or conduct:

it may perhaps be agreed that the form of our morality is that of a mixture in which the morality of the self-conscious pursuit of moral ideals is dominant . . . [1]n a world dizzy with moral ideals we know less about how to behave in public and private than ever before The truth is that a morality in this form, regardless of the quality of ideals, breeds nothing but distraction and moral instability. [4]

And the reason, it turns out, why such a rationalist morality is always in unhappy and unstable tension with itself, is because it ignores or denies a given in human life and experience – its poetic character:

the radical defect of this form is . . . its denial of the poetic character of all human activity . . . What the poet says and what he wants to say are not two things . . . they are the same thing; he does not know what he wants to say until he has said it . . . Nothing exists in advance of the poem itself, except perhaps the poetic passion. [5]

And what is the analogy between poetry and moral ideals?

Moral ideals are not, in the first place, the products of reflective thought . . . they are the products of human behavior, of human practical activity, to which reflective thought gives subsequent, partial and abstract expression in words.[6]

So now we have it – an unstable morality is one in which self-conscious criticism and application of an ideology or set of explicit rules has become the originator of action rather than its critic. Its mistake is not to see the “poetic character of all human activity” – that is, that human activity at its most skillful and balanced – preserves a fluidity between how something is done and what is done. And this it does, because abstract intellect cannot stand on its own; it arises as a pattern of activity itself coeval with some specific practical activity, and which it can subsequently detach itself from and act as a universal critic of, only in a kind of illusion in which it takes itself for more than it is, and at a heavy price. At this point let us bring in Hume’s views on custom and reflection, both for their similarity to Oakeshott’s views, and to see if they shed more light on what he is saying. (Or if Oakeshott sheds light on what Hume says.) Hume’s most sustained views on this subject are to be found in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), a mature work of which Hume wrote, “in my own opinion is of all my writings . . . incomparably the best.”[7] This work attempts to demonstrate that although some human action may be done for its own sake (courageous actions, for example) there will also always be found, upon investigation, some public utility or social good as the basis of the virtues of all moral systems, whatever their particular historic form or shape. But more important for our purposes is Hume’s premise (implicit and explicit) that moral practices arise through a gradual shaping of human sensibilities in the responses of taste and sentiment, not primarily reason: The social virtues must, therefore, be allowed to have a natural beauty and amiableness, which . . . antecedent to all precepts of education, recommends them to the esteem of uninstructed mankind and engages their affections.[8]

And on the secondary role of analysis, both in the formulation of moral practices, and as a spur to action, here is Hume in the first appendix to the *Enquiry*:

the distinct boundaries of reason and of taste The former conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood: the latter gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue . . . Reason being cool and dispassionate, is no motive to action, and directs only the impulse received from appetite or inclination Taste . . . is the first spring or impulse to desire and volition.[9]

Clearly, then, both for Oakeshott and Hume, rational analysis is always secondary in the living practices of balanced systems of morality, owing to the way they have evolved historically. Donald Livingston has characterized Hume's views on this score in very Oakeshottian language. Referring to Hume's views in the essay "of Some Remarkable Customs," Livingston says:

In this essay we have again the familiar Humean point that the character of human life is poetic. Political association is not the result of applying rationalist propositions (such as . . . natural rights), which are always arbitrarily selected parts or fragments of common life spiritualized as a whole. What reflection cannot establish or even recognize can be enjoyed as a *modus vivendi* of men knowing how to conduct themselves within the prescriptive order of an inherited way of life.[10]

The similarities here in the view of practical and moral skill are striking, although they are reached by different routes. Although Oakeshott writes from an idealist perspective which views even sense-experience as incipiently conceptual, he is able to approximate Hume's respect for the autonomy of practical common life through insistence on the poetic character of all human activity; through recognition that each pattern of activity has its own unique principle of mediation, arising in the interplay of its own form and content,[11] and of which philosophic reason can only investigate the presuppositions. But also interesting for our purposes in this comparison are the connections between Hume's view of the ontological status of moral practices and his more explicitly political views.

In brief, Hume's aversion to the centralizing, aggrandizing universal Rationalist state and his preference for federative arrangements that preserve some local autonomy, derives from his conviction that its proponents are making fundamental misreadings about the character of human experience and about the actual historic role of rational analysis in the growth of civilized practices. They overrate the independence of individual rational analysis as well as the independence of the individual, consenting "will". For Hume (as for Oakeshott and Hegel), individuals find themselves "situated" in concrete (and more or less coherent moral practices within which and upon which they may consciously reflect to greater and lesser degrees. Here is Donald Livingston summarizing, again in very Oakeshottian language, Hume's views on these subjects, based in part on his reading of implicit assumptions in Hume's six-volume *History of England*, as well as explicit arguments in the *Enquiry on Morals*:

For Hume, the principle is merely an abridgement of the practice And so far as principles are useful at all in ordering practice, the must themselves be interpreted, not by another abstract rule, but by participants skilled in the practice itself

Again we have the familiar Humean point that knowledge by philosophically unreflective participation is prior to knowledge by reflection. Understanding this is difficult for the false philosopher, who inevitably tends to think that the object of reflection is the original source of belief and conduct.[12]

Making explicit these assumptions of Hume and Oakeshott about the circumscribed role of rational planning, foresight, and analysis in the evolution of concrete moral and political practices, provides explanatory force in showing their aversion to a number of Enlightenment political and moral ideas and in showing the logical connections among their own political themes. Both Oakeshott and Hume attempt to give theoretical accounts of political liberty, not through abridged and abstract principles that cannot stand on their own (such as "natural rights" and "the social contract") but through logical and chronological investigation of actual, historic practices of liberty, such as those of the English and British peoples. Oakeshott and Hume share (with Hegel) the view that abstract ideas, such as "the social contract," as the basis for the historic genesis of practices of freedom, presuppose the very ideas which in fact generated them. Here is Livingston summarizing Hume on the misperceptions of contract theory: The formal reasoning of contract theory is empty because the contract is framed in a hypothetical state uncontaminated by any prejudice or custom of an actual social and political order The contract can serve as a guide for political action only if given some content by the very prejudices that were methodically eliminated in the first place.[13]

Hume did allow for the idea of foundings and even federative-type contacts among existing political entities. Livingston's exploration of Hume's ideas on these themes sheds some light, and allows for further speculation, on where Oakeshott stood on the issue of political foundings versus the spontaneous, historic evolution of states. Hume's view on the issue, according to Livingston's interpretation, is that while smaller political groupings evolve historically or "poetically" without any model or master plan to guide them (other than perhaps the general desire for peace and stability), explicit and conscious founding acts do occur as federative associations among pre-existent political associations, even by explicit contract. Nevertheless, political arrangements are never as deep for Hume as the culture that produces them: Law, like language . . . evolves spontaneously, guided by custom and tradition. It is not due to the insights of speculative philosophers and the craft of constitution makers [14]

Hume does not celebrate the founders of states But what the founders established is what many generations have prepared men to approve of. "In vain, are we asked in what records the charters of our liberties is registered It preceded the use of writing, and all the other civilized acts of life!" [15] These Humean views are

similar to Oakeshott's on the same subjects, although Oakeshott is not even inclined to discuss "foundings" at all, holding rather rigidly to the view that there are simply no abrupt, unmediated historical changes,[16] and that what appears to be new or ex nihilo will be found upon inspection to be the reworking of some evolved, historic practice somewhere. This is, for example, his way of treating Jefferson's "inalienable rights" – tracing them back to Locke, who in turn, was simply abridging the historic rights of Englishmen in the Second Treatise: For the inspiration of Jefferson and the other founders of American independence was the ideology Locke had distilled from the English political tradition. They were disposed to believe . . . that the proper organization of a society and the conduct of its affairs were based upon abstract principles and not upon a tradition . . . These principles were not the product of civilization; they were natural, 'written in the whole volume of human culture.'"[17] The differences between Oakeshott and Hume here may be largely semantic, although Hume's common-sensical approach does more justice to explicit acts of political founding, such as (anachronistically) the American federal union prior to the war of 1861-1865.[18] Nevertheless, it should be clear that there is a marked and important difference here between Oakeshott and Hume, on the one hand, and modern theorists such as Rousseau, for example, who show strongly the influence of ancient Greek rationalist models of statesmanship and political foundings, a theme we explored in the chapter on Oakeshott and Hegel. For example, Rousseau's estimation of the potential influence on the souls of citizens of the "great legislator" in *The Social Contract*,[19] and of the statesman in the *Discourse on Political Economy*,[20] bespeak an important difference with Hume (and Oakeshott) over the real springs of historical change and the relative importance of political leadership and constitution building in the process of civilizational change. I have tried to show, thus far, that Hume's understanding of the primacy and relative autonomy of unreflective custom to rational speculation, sheds light on the importance of Oakeshott's more theoretical and less accessible critique of Rationalism in politics and morals. Let us now turn to a major difference in emphasis in their approaches to the analysis of politics and morals, and I do not refer to the differences in their conception of philosophy and philosophic experience. As I've noted before, although Oakeshott writes within a neo-idealist perspective[21] that demands that, carefully speaking, all experience be viewed as to a lesser or greater degree conceptual, Oakeshott's strict insistence on the limits of philosophic reflection in practical, historical, and aesthetic experience allows him to come to very similar conclusions as Hume about the danger and effects of the overextension of abstract rational analysis in human conduct. Rather, the important difference between Oakeshott and Hume we turn to now involves

the role of utility in human conduct and morality. As I shall try to show, Oakeshott has a much more "aesthetic" (mystical, even) perspective on human experience, in general, that is more tolerant of the idea that certain things can be genuinely be done for their own sake (without illusion). In my view, Hume's utilitarianism pulls him in a more eudaimonian, and, hence slightly more Rationalist, direction with regard to morals and politics. Let us begin with a closer look at Hume's Enquiry on the Principles of Morals. Hume's argument in The Enquiry, which he attempts to demonstrate with many illustrations and explorations, is that, (1) what civilizations call morally good and obligatory is, in general, what is approved and found agreeable, and that, (2) what is approved in the (philosophically unself-conscious) common life of a people is generally what is good for the public utility; [22] that is, what is useful for the preservation and happiness of a whole society: "moral obligation holds proportion with . . . usefulness." [23] The obligation to respect private property is a salient example for Hume: Who sees not, for instance, that whatever is produced or improved by a man's art or industry ought, forever, to be secured to him, in order to give encouragement to such useful habits and accomplishments. [24] And the same rationale applies to social virtues such as benevolence, compassion, and constancy as well.

At this stage, Hume's argument becomes even more explicitly Ciceronian, [25] with the claim that private interest and public interest actually coincide when viewed carefully and properly: Or what theory of morals can even serve any useful purpose, unless it can show by a particular detail, that all the duties which it recommends, are also the true interest of each individual. [26] Whatever contradiction may vulgarly be supposed between the selfish and social sentiments or dispositions, they are really no more opposite than selfish and ambitious, selfish and revengeful, selfish and vain . . . it would be difficult to show why a man is more a loser by a generous action than by any other method of expense. [27]

In the course of demonstrating the implied public utility in systems of moral and political virtue, Hume also takes up the issue of actions done for their own sake, and it is here especially that a contrast with Oakeshott in both emphasis and style is apt. Now, Hume is prepared to concede, at least tentatively, the idea of actions done for their own sake. He takes as an illustration the case of personal courage:

The utility of courage, both to the public and to the person possessed of it, is an obvious foundation of merit. But to any one who duly considers of the matter, it will appear that the quality has a particular lustre, which it derives wholly from itself. [28]

Yet by the end of the discussion, Hume, in essence, takes back the idea of things done for their own sake, by suggesting (1) that they are done for the immediate pleasure they provide, antecedent to

calculations of utility, and (2) that the sentiment of approbation that such actions provide is similar in kind to those that generate acts of public utility:

There are some instances . . . of merit, that are valued for the immediate pleasure which they communicate to the person . . . No views of utility . . . enter into this sentiment of approbation; yet it is a kind similar to that other sentiment, which arises from views of a public or private utility. The same social sympathy . . . gives rise to both.[29]

Now, there are several points in Hume's analysis here that are very "un-Oakeshottian." First, Hume does not, carefully speaking, talk about actions done for their own sake. Rather (as J. S. Mill would later do in *On Utilitarianism*), Hume, in typical eudaimonian and utilitarian fashion, "psychologizes" the discussion by talking of "immediate pleasure." Second, Hume does not talk of actions done solely for their own sake, as Oakeshott does, for example in his discussion of friendship (as the reader may recall from the chapter on Oakeshott and Montaigne). Hume always extracts some practical utility from all "virtues," and then goes on to suggest that there are some, such as courage and benevolence, which are also done for the immediate pleasure they provide simply on account of their "nobility." (Probably the idea of an action done solely for its own sake, i.e., simply for the aesthetic or ritualistic appreciation of "getting it right," would be meaningless for Hume until it were psychologized.) Finally, Oakeshott's analysis of a healthy or balanced morality (as we have just seen in our summary of the argument in "The Tower of Babel") goes no further than the formal suggestion that it is one in which conscious reflection plays a secondary, critical role. Oakeshott never goes as far as writers like Hume, Smith, or Hegel in finding a consistent implied pattern of rationality in unreflective human conduct. Oakeshott's more skeptical and perhaps religious sensibilities seem always to resist attempts at a deep unravelling of the springs of human conduct and history. Oakeshott seems ever more content simply to "let the mystery be." And this difference in sensibilities can perhaps explain the difference in their assessments (in spite of their similar view of the limits of rational analysis and social planning) of the importance of practicality in human affairs. There is a detached, aesthetic mood in Oakeshott's writing which has no counterpart in Hume; a curiosity for, and appreciation of, seeing practices practiced correctly, solely for their own sake. We saw this in Oakeshott's early distinction (in the chapter on Oakeshott and Augustine) between the "religious" and the "worldly" man; and in his later writings on knowing how to be at home in civilized practices: For a direction of attention, as it is pursued, may hollow out a character for itself and become specified in a 'practice'; and a participant in the activity comes to be recognized not by the results

he achieves but by a disposition to observe the manners of the practices.[30] This difference over the relative importance of practical life and practical results is also reflected in the respective attitudes of our two thinkers with regard to artistic and poetic experience and to the writing of history. Hume's view of the importance of poetry is ultimately a consequence of its practical effects in exciting the passions of human beings in support of various virtues: the great charm of poetry consists in lively pictures of the sublime passions, magnanimity, courage, disdain of fortune .

. . . And can it possibly be doubted that this talent itself of the poets, to move the passions, this pathetic and sublime sentiment, is a very considerable merit . . . [it] may exalt the person possessed of it above every other character of the age in which he lives?[31]

Oakeshott, by contrast (as we have seen in previous chapters), sees poetic and artistic experience as being about the generation and enjoyment of contemplative images, devoid of any practical (i.e., political, moral, religious) significance:

As I understand it, the poet is not saying anything at all about 'things' He is not saying 'this is what these persons, objects and events . . . really were or are', but 'In contemplation I have made these images, read them in their own character, and seek in them only delight!'[32]

Oakeshott's aesthetic detachment from practical existence and the world of "results" is also apparent in the differences between Hume and himself concerning what occurs in the writing of history. Since Oakeshott thought and wrote a great deal about "history," and since Hume wrote a six-volume history of England, and thought historically about the evolution of European religious and philosophic consciousness, a comparison of their respective views does not seem gratuitous. Characterizations of Oakeshott's view of historical experience range from Collingwood's now well-known remark that the section on historical experience in *Experience and its Modes* represented "the high-water mark of English thought upon history,"[33] to Hume scholar David Livingstone's characterization of Oakeshott's Idealist view as "historical nihilism." [34] Perhaps we might more profitably characterize Oakeshott's view of history as a very pure view and detailed account of the logical implications of his neo-Idealist view that since all we ever know is a present world of ideas, the historical past must be a present world of ideas mediated in some distinctive way by the historian who creates it in thinking and constructing it from available evidence. Oakeshott still held to this viewpoint when he had published three scholarly essays on the subject in the last decade of his life: Both future and past, then, emerge only in a reading of the present . . . I shall argue that a mode of past is to be distinguished in terms of the modal conditions of the present to

which it is related, and that among those conditions is a proper procedure in which it may be evolved.[35]

To distill the arguments of some 250 pages, written over a half-century, we might say that "history" for Oakeshott is a distinctive and highly evolved mode of inquiry which has been achieved in only the past two hundred years (i.e., since Hume wrote). It's (sic) distinctiveness is to be found implied here and there in the works of various historians,[36] in more and less pure forms. What Oakeshott has done is explore and make explicit in philosophic inquiry, the implications, characteristics, and postulates of this rather new form of inquiry, a form of inquiry which evolved out of (and detached itself from) concern with the "practical past" and which has had to defend itself, especially from concerns with the "scientific" past. In other words, historical inquiry, is a relatively new mode of inquiry that explains by constructing and relating events in ways unconcerned with their moral lessons for the present; with their utilitarian implications for the present; with either teleological or nomological ("covering law") processes; and even relatively unconcerned with the "verstehen" attempt to get at the historical participants' own understanding, since most of that was predominately practical – that is, occurring in the realm of desire, aversion, good, bad, and so on: An historical event . . . cannot be understood in terms of the intentions of a performer It is a by-product of a past composed of antecedent events which have no exclusive characters . . . no inherent potentialities to issue in this rather than that, but which an historical inquiry may show . . . they have in fact done so.[37]

. . . an historical event is not a happening or a situation which occurred or could have occurred, and its character cannot be understood in advance of an historical inquiry.[38]

Rather, historical experience for Oakeshott is the creation by the historian of a story that constructs, relates and gives meaning to events by allowing them to "touch" or be contingently joined. It is to tell a story (based on available evidence) that shows how events emerged from one another; a story with no beginning or end, and so detailed as to make superfluous the importation of any extraneous covering law explanation, in the fashion of say, Marxist and social-science "history." To use one of Oakeshott's own analogies, writing history, carefully speaking, without any mortar or cement, is like building a country "dry wall" of stones the shapes of which, are made to fit with one another, and the outcome of which is a new unity with no other basis for its coherence than the contingent fitting of stones:[39]The identity in terms of which as assembled passage of historical events . . . may be understood as a passage of change is nothing other than its inherent continuity . . . distinguished from some changeless items . . . from an enduring purpose or end . . . and from the normalities or the 'law' of a

process of change.[40] Now, given Oakeshott's view of "history," it is clear that some of his differences with Hume are simply ones of nomenclature. Much of what Hume wrote in the essays, and in some of *The History of England*, would be, on Oakeshott's view, the construction of a practical (i.e., moral and utilitarian) past, and a scientific (covering law) past. On the other hand, there are detailed sections of *The History of England* that are relatively free of political and practical considerations for Hume's own time (i.e., the refutation of "Whig history"), and which would, I think, qualify as a historical inquiry for Oakeshott.[41] Also, Hume and Oakeshott would both agree about the irrelevance of teleological, divine, and providential considerations to the writing of secular history. There are, however, certain ideas in Hume's implied understanding of the historical nature of all human understanding (as reconstructed by Donald Livingston in *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*[42]) that raise problems for Oakeshott's understanding of philosophic and other experience, but also give a different kind of support to the critique of Rationalism in politics and morals that we find in Oakeshott's account. Livingston argues (drawing in part on a section of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* omitted in later editions[43]) that for Hume all understanding is ultimately narrative and temporal:

Even tenseless standards are, for Hume, abstractions from temporal standards which alone have primordial authority . . . Likewise, tenseless standards have no a priori authority of their own that is independent of the temporal standards from which they are derived.[44]

Our primordial perception of the world is narratively structured. We may abstract tenseless concepts out of narrative concepts, but even those are embedded in some narrative context.[45]

Now, Oakeshott does not make this kind of argument about tensed human understanding, and, were it true, it would create problems for Oakeshott's whole conception of the different modalities of experience. About the only absolute or fundamental claim Oakeshott makes in *Experience and its Modes* is that "what comes to us" is always a single world of ideas mediated on some principle that arises in an unavoidable and uneliminable tension between its formal and substantial claims.[46] But interesting here is the support which Hume's view of things provides their mutual critique of Rationalism in politics and morals. Oakeshott typically makes the argument that the mistake of the Rationalist is the attempt to remove a part from some concrete activity, and then use it as an abstract standard for judging all sorts of other activities. His "proof" for the mistake here is usually to note the loss of stability and practical skill in this "procedure." But on Livingston's construction of Hume's implicit claims about the temporal and narrative structure of all human understanding, there is a different

and added critique of all Cartesianism in politics and morals (which would extend to Platonists and others as well), namely that there should always be a prejudice in favor of time-tested institutions, because they best reflect the internal structure of human understanding itself, including true philosophic understanding: Hume's . . . conception . . . yields the maxim; the mere fact that a practice is established is a reason to continue it, the standard of reason being social utility and narrative time being a value constitutive of social utility.[47] Tenseless standards are always viewed by Hume as codifications of existing temporal standards which have an authority of their own which is independent of the tenseless standards derived from them.[48] And here is Hume himself, in the same mood:

To tamper . . . or try experiments merely upon the credit of supposed argument and philosophy, can never be part of a wise magistrate, who will bear a reverence to what carries the marks of age; and though he may attempt some improvements for the public good, yet will he adjust his innovations as much as possible to the ancient fabric . . . [49]

In my view, Hume's arguments in the context (especially as reconstructed by Donald Livingston) are emblematic of the benefits to be had from the kind of comparisons and contrasts with Oakeshott I have just made. Precisely because of their very different philosophic starting places (as well as their distance apart in time), when and where they both agree – for example, on the dangers of Rationalism in politics and morals, there is good reason to pay attention.[1] I owe this way of phrasing the general difference between Oakeshott and Hume to a suggestion by Professor Donald Livingston, Department of Philosophy at Emory University, in private correspondence, dated November 25, 1997. I have relied heavily on Livingston's two books on Hume because I believe his general view of Hume – that Hume's philosophy is neither positivist nor antihistorical (as some well-known secondary literature suggests) – is fundamentally correct. Whether Livingston's finely articulated understandings of Hume's implied meanings (about narrative time and other subjects) would be recognizable to Hume as his own, I do not know. [2] Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, Methuen ed., 60.

[3] Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, 73-79.

[4] Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, 74. (Emphasis added.)

[5] Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, 72. (Emphasis added.)

[6] Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, 72-73. (Emphasis added.)

[7] David Hume, *Enquiries*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), ix.

- [8] David Hume, *Enquiries*, 214. (Emphasis added.)
- [9] David Hume, *Enquiries*, 294. (Emphasis added.)
- [10] Donald Livingston, *Philosophic Melancholy and Delirium: Hume's Pathology of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 348. (Emphasis added.) [11] I have developed this theme from *Experience and its Modes* elsewhere. See Coats, Michael Oakeshott and the Character of Experience." Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Michigan Microfilms, 1978. [12] Donald Livingston, *Philosophic Melancholy and Delirium*, 122. (Emphasis added.)
- [13] Donald Livingston, *Philosophic Melancholy and Delirium*, 187. (Emphasis added.) See also David Hume, "Of the Original Contract," in *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene F Miller, rev. ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), 465-87. [14] Donald Livingston, *Philosophic Melancholy and Delirium*, 198.
- [15] Donald Livingston, *Philosophic Melancholy and Delirium*, 198. (Emphasis added.)
- [16] "'The historian' is disposed to decline the search for 'origins' . . . because to inquire into 'origins' is to read the past backwards and thus assimilate it to subsequent or present events . . . Instead of provoking the inquirer to discover the manner in which one concrete situation is mediated into another, it provokes him merely to an abstract view of the past . . ." Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, 160. See also Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 115-16. [17] Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, 27. (Emphasis added.)
- [18] Oakeshott would probably say that Hume was not consistent about the difference between the historical and practical "pasts." Of this, more below. [19] "He who dares to undertake the making of a people's institutions ought to feel himself capable, so to speak, of changing human nature . . . The great soul of the legislator is the only miracle that can prove his mission . . . the true political theorist admires, in the institutions they set up, the great and powerful genius which presides over things made to endure." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, ed. and trans. G. D. H. Cole (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1950), 28 and 41. (Emphasis added.) [20] "The most absolute authority is that which penetrates into a man's inmost being . . . It is certain that all peoples become in the long run what the government makes them." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, ed. Cole, 297. (Emphasis added.) [21] For a refutation of the view that Oakeshott later gave up the idealist outlook of *Experience and Its Modes*, see the latter part of chapter 3 ("Oakeshott and Hegel").
- [22] Public utility, as a basis for morals, distinguished from, for example, the postulation of a moral instinct or from deductions from mere self-love.
- [23] David Hume, *Enquiries*, 206. (Emphasis added.)

[24] David Hume, *Enquiries*, 195. (Emphasis added.)

[25] In the *De Officiis*, Cicero attempts to demonstrate that conflicts between what is useful (*utile*) and what is morally right (*honestum*) are only apparent. He proceeds on the (pagan) assumption that what is morally right is always so for the whole republic, not the individual devoid of civic obligations. Even Machiavelli would not accept Cicero's usage, often calling (in *The Prince*) "learning how not to be good," what Cicero calls moral rectitude, such as advice to rob a tyrant. See Cicero, *De Officiis*, book 3, any edition; and Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapter 15, any edition. [26] David Hume, *Enquiries*, 280. (Emphasis added.)

[27] David Hume, *Enquiries*, 281. (Emphasis added.)

[28] David Hume, *Enquiries*, 254. (Emphasis added.)

[29] David Hume, *Enquiries*, 260. (Emphasis added.)

[30] Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, 137. (Emphasis added.)

[31] David Hume, *Enquiries*, 259. (Emphasis added.)

[32] Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, 230. (Emphasis added.)

[33] R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), 158-59.

[34] Donald W. Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 94-97. [35] Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays*, 8-9. (Emphasis added.)

[36] Oakeshott's cites somewhere Tocqueville's work on the "ancien regime" as an early instance of historical inquiry. [37] Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays*, 64-65.

[38] Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays*, 93

[39] In my view this analogy breaks down if taken any further, since "dry walls" are made for practical purpose. [40] Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays*, 112. (Emphasis added.)

[41] In my view, Hume's treatment of less well-known specific events, such as conspiracies or battles (distinguished from characters such as Cromwell explained in terms of "types"), best fit Oakeshott's definition of proper historical inquiry. See David Hume, *The History of England*, I-VI, (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1982).

[42] Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, 94-97. [43] Donald Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, xiii. [44] Donald Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, 138. (Emphasis added.) [45] Donald Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, 234. (Emphasis added.) [46] This is the thesis of *Experience and Its Modes*; for amplification see note 11 above.

[47] Donald Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, 340. (Emphasis added.) [48] Donald Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, 138. (Emphasis added.) [49] Quoted in Donald Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, 340-41.