

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome!

My colleague, Oliver Lembcke, and I are delighted to see you here at the 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Michael Oakeshott Association which is being carried out in conjunction with the Hellmuth-Loening-Zentrum für Staatswissenschaften (Center for Political Science) in Jena. The fact that you have come here from eight different countries confirms that Oakeshott is a thinker of world renown.

While Oakeshott's work has increasingly become the focus of scholars in English-speaking countries and in Central and Southern Europe in recent years, a development which is especially evident in the growing number of publications dealing with Oakeshott, he is still fairly unknown in Germany despite the efforts especially of Wilhelm Hennis. And this applies to both Political Science as well as Philosophy. So one of the underlying ideas of this conference is to counter that deficit.

There are a number of different reasons why it seems particularly appropriate to introduce Oakeshott to this country's scholars at this specific period in time. During the 1970s, the attempt to „rehabilitate Practical Philosophy“ stirred up relatively little interest, and essentially it wasn't even mentioned in most of the scholarly discussions in Germany. But since then it has been possible to observe an intense interest in topics derived from a traditional approach to Practical Philosophy. During the late eighties and the nineties, this interest was especially triggered by the question of justice which was discussed within the framework of the so-called communitarianism debate, but recently attention has been drawn to more fundamental questions. For example, several newer studies focus on the peculiarity of practical rationality and rational decision-making, and the long-forgotten topic of prudence (*phronesis*) has become the central theme of many discourses. In addition, phenomena, such as the struggle for recognition as a practical process, are also at the center of attention.

And last but not least, the correlation between ethics, politics and law has been intensely discussed in a number of different ways, for example, by viewing the concept of constitution which has been of major interest in German political science for a number of years now.

It is obvious that these topics frequently encounter and coincide with Oakeshott's themes. Even a brief glance at Oakeshott's work proves his *oeuvre* to be a highly fertile „offer“ which is attractive to scholars not only because of the challenge it provides but also by provoking the discourses I have mentioned.

Introducing Oakeshott's considerations to German scholars seems to be particularly interesting, because originally his work was greatly stimulated and influenced by German philosophical traditions. Here in Jena we are first reminded of Hegel whose Practical Philosophy and Cognitive Science left a lasting impression on Oakeshott. It has even been written that Oakeshott's main work *On Human Conduct* represents a „slimmed-down version“ of Hegel's *Philosophy of Law*. However, Oakeshott also dealt intensively with the works of German contemporaries. Consequently, it is no wonder that more and more parallels and convergences are being discovered between Oakeshott's observations and those of German and ethnic-German thinkers. For instance, there are substantiated written references connecting Oakeshott with Gadamer, Arendt, Hayek or Wittgenstein. In the meantime it is possible to say that the research dealing with these connections is still in its early stages, and some of it is even shrouded by a kind of mythical nebula. This is specifically the case for the relationship between Oakeshott and Heidegger. Therefore, it is a further goal of this conference to increase our knowledge of these aspects, perhaps not so much by discovering so-called German „influences“ which affected Oakeshott, but by increasing our knowledge of both the connections as well as the divergences in regard to content. With these topics in mind, our conference should not only be concerned with

introducing Oakeshott to German scholars. It should also be our intent to show that German scholars have contributed significant findings to the international discussion of Oakeshott.

Oakeshott, the world-renowned English thinker, who also had German roots - Martyn Thompson will talk about this in a moment - Michael Oakeshott was a true European. His philosophy is closely tied to European political developments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and his work can be understood as a philosophical interpretation of the present. Consequently, it stands to reason that we ask what we can learn from Oakeshott about the contemporary political situation in Europe at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We also want to deal with questions of this nature in the coming two days, European questions which, in the globalized world of today, are by no means limited to Europe alone.

Before I hand over to the Vice Rector of the Friedrich Schiller University, Professor Mummendey, Oliver Lembcke and I would, once again, like to express our warmest welcome to all of you. I am looking forward to a very productive conference with many intense and constructive discussions.

Michael Henkel