

“Michael Oakeshott on Ethics and Reason”

Fourth Biennial Conference

The 4th international conference of MOA took place in Jena (Germany) from December 14th to 16th, 2007. Academics from eight different countries discussed Michael Oakeshott's work. The discussions were organized in three panels and inaugurated by Michael Henkel's and Martyn P. Thompson's opening addresses.

The focus of the first panel was on the concept of practical reasoning and Oakeshott's understanding of prudence (Judith Swanson, Rainer Schmidt), experience (Wendell John Coats), modes (Stuart Isaacs) and education (Matthias Riedl). This panel was chaired by Elizabeth Corey and Bart van Klink. Comparisons between Oakeshott's concept of practice and Aristotle's and Wittgenstein's approaches had an especially stimulating effect in the ensuing round of discussions.

The second panel, chaired by Cory Abel and Till Kinzel, dealt mainly with a comparison between Oakeshott and his German contemporaries, in particular Georg Simmel (Efraim Podoksik), Hannah Arendt (Michael Becker), Hans-Georg Gadamer (Kenneth B. McIntyre), Leo Strauss (Clemens Kauffmann) and Martin Heidegger (Michael Großheim). The several contributions provided insights into both the differences and the similarities between these various political philosophies, especially in terms of their concepts of practice and prudence. They also shed light on Oakeshott's manner of absorbing and transforming the lines of argumentation explored by his contemporaries.

The leading question for the third panel, chaired by Martyn P. Thompson and Oliver W. Lembcke, was directed towards Oakeshott's legacy for the present day. Much of the discussion was devoted to identifying a theoretically appropriate understanding of the relations between Oakeshott's concept of civil association (Silvia Lechner) on the one side and citizenship (Steven Gerencser) and the concept of values

(Ferenc Hoercher) on the other. In the wide-ranging discussion that followed, many of the discussants underlined the necessity to differentiate properly between times of normalcy and crisis situations (a point central to Peter Finn's paper).

Practical philosophy as a reaction to imminent crises of the political order had already been the focus of Jürgen Gebhardt's key note address at the beginning of the conference. This address, like all of the other contributions to the conference, was followed by lively, sometimes controversial but always fruitful discussions. The discussions were stimulated by an especially inspiring working atmosphere, in which the different talks as well as the other contributions by the participants showed just how much Oakeshott's philosophical ideas are up to date, relevant and, indeed, path-breaking for theoretical approaches to the challenges of modern times. The conference was the first step towards making Oakeshott's "voice" more prominent within German philosophical discourse. Hopefully, other steps may soon follow.

Dr. Oliver W. Lembcke

Dr. Michael Henkel

Organizers