# *Some Correspondences Between Oakeshott's "Civil Condition" and the Republican Tradition*

> respublica, *a practice of civility specifying ... conditions to be subscribed to in choosing performances, and therefore the common or `public" concern, not the common purpose of* cives.
>
> -Michael Oakeshott, "On the Civil Condition"

The individualist flavor of much of Oakeshott's writing suggests affinities with eighteenth and nineteenth century liberalism,' yet in his definitive essay on the civil condition he employs Latin words (redolent of Republican Rome) such as *respublica* to denote his ideal characters.[2] What correspondence may there be between what might be called the "republican tradition" in European political history and Oakeshott's theoretical and historical account of the European *ethos* of

1. Thanks to Connecticut College, The Earhart Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities for support to do research upon which this article draws.

For development of this theme, see, for example, Wendell J. Coats, Jr., "Michael Oakeshott as Liberal Theorist," *Canadian Journal of Political Science,* 18:4 (December 1985), 773-787; and Paul Franco, *The Political Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). See, also, Alan Ryan, "Hobbes and Individualism, in G.A.J. Rogers and Alan Ryan, eds., *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; 1988); 105.

2, Oakeshott says explicitly that he is employing "somewhat archaic" expressions to denote ideal characters when possible, to avoid confusion with their current historic counterparts, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 109. Nevertheless, we may observe that these are Roman, not Greek, "archaic" expressions; that in spite of disclaimers, the rhetorical effect of these expressions is still felt; and, finally, that Oakeshott has written elsewhere of the genius of the Romans for ruling. ("The Rule of Law," in Michael Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays,* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983, p. 164.) See, also, on Oakeshott's view of the Romans, Maurice Cranston, "In Memoriam: Michael Oakeshott, 1901-1990," *Political Theory,* 19, 3, (August 1991), 326.

individualism that evolved *in* the break-up of the medieval realms? And what light, if any, is to be shed in discovering such correspondence?

A brief initial answer to this last question is surely required to justify and guide the rest of the inquiry. In my view, there are two sets of advantages to be gained here. One, which I leave to others to pursue, involves the insights to be found in an individualist account of civil obligation which does not even mention the idea of rights, or the priority of rights over duties, but takes its bearings instead from the authority of law. The other advantage, and my interest lies here, will be to gain insights into the differences between what I call the republican and democratic characters, and more generally, into certain tendencies of advanced democracies.

## I

I shall proceed by laying out some differences between these two *personae* as I understand them, and employ Oakeshott's account of the differences between civil and enterprise association in *On Human Conduct'* to support and refine some of these differences.

One immediate obstacle to proceeding is the meaning of "republican," and especially the differences between Greek and Roman versions;[4] whether the Greek version is to be traced to Aristotle's mixed regime,' or to Socratic intellectual virtue,' or

3. Most of this discussion is contained in the center essay of *On Human Conduct,* "On the Civil Condition." Some of it is also in the third essay, "On the Character of a Modem European State,"

4. For a discussion, see Quentin Skinner, The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty," in G. Bock, Q. Skinner, M. Viroli, eds., *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 291-309.

5. For this view, see Paul Eidelberg, *A Discourse on Statesmanship: The Design and Transformation of the American Polity* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1974); and Leslie G. Rubin, *The Republic of Aristotle; Politics and the Best Regime,* Ph.D. Thesis, Boston College (University Microfilms International, 1985), especially, Introduction, Section B, "The Political Virtues of Middle-Class Rule," 4-11. This is also my own view-that "republic" makes a meaningful distinction when used to denote Aristotle's "generic" or mixed regime of "middling" citizens capable of the common defense. For a recent assertion of the view that this is a meaningless distinction, see Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 30, Note #70.

6. For this rather unusual view, see Thomas L. Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern*

directly to Sparta;' and the differences between the ancient Greek, Roman, and Renaissance humanist versions of republicanism on the one hand, and more modern versions following Montesquieu, Hume, and the *Federalist* on the other.[8] Since my primary aim *here*[9] is to discover what light Oakeshott's account of civil association may shed on differences between what I am calling the "republican" and "democratic" *personae,* I shall sidestep much of this debate over the meaning of republican, and simply say what I take it to be for the purpose of distinguishing it from democracy.

Taking my bearings from Aristotle's account of the mixed or political regime in Books III and IV of the *Politics;* Cicero's account *ofrespublica* in *De Officiis,* -Machiavelli's account *of* the Roman republic in the *Discourses* on Livy, and from the *Federalist* (following J. G,A.Pocock's claim that the civic humanist outlook endured in America even as it was dying out in Europe, albeit in *a* modified form[10]), I suggest that *one* of the distinguishing features of the republican *persona is* concern for the "common advantage" or "public interest" alongside of, *or as the context for;* particular policies and programs. (Is preservation of this distinction not the logic behind Madison's various institutional contrivances in *Federalist* #10?) The hallmark, then, of this character, *is* the willingness not merely to live with (as *a* source of putative "alienation" *a la* Rousseau or Marx) the tension *between* particular political goals *and* concern

*Republicanism,* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988).

7. See, for example, Elizabeth Rawson, *The Spartan Tradition in European Thought,* (London, Oxford University Press, 1969).

8. See, for a discussion, Judith Shklar, "Montesquieu and the New Republicanism," in G. Bock, Q. Skinner, M. Aaron, eds., *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 265-279. See, also, Marizio Viroli, "The Concept of *Ordre* and the Language of Classical Republicanism in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in Anthony Pagden, ed., *The Languages ofPolitical Theory in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), especially 165.

9. In forthcoming work, *Theory of a Republic and Related Essays, I* do address the issues of this debate.

10. J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment; Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 506-552.`

for the general framework of authority within which they are achieved. Rather, it is the concern intentionally to nourish this tension as a discipline for vitality and stability, a concern manifested in, for example, a sense of limits, resistance to extreme specialization in the personality, willingness to serve in the common defense, and so on." And taking my bearings from Plato, Aristotle, Tocqueville, and some contemporary critics of modern pluralist democracy,[12] I contrast this republican tendency with the democratic tendency to reduce a constitution to a mechanism for the ministration of immediatefelt needs, usually physical and material ones, and to exclude or demote concern for formality when it comes to fidelity to authoritative procedures (except where these affect the allocation and distribution of governmental benefits). To put this last point in Platonic terms, democracy is the regime of the body and its needs, because democracy loves equality, and bodily existence is the one thing we all have in common.[13] Hence, democracy's very conception of fair play or due process leads it over time to define public reality as primarily physical and material.'[14]

Now, I believe that Oakeshott's account of civil association in *On Human Conduct* makes an interesting (if oblique) contribution to this discussion in its distinction between "civil" and "enterprise" association as ideal types useful for specifying the character of actual, historic states. Oakeshott distinguishes *between* civil relationship as

11. In the forthcoming work mentioned in note #9 above, I explore these criteria and others, including the difference in time-sense between the republican and democratic *personae.* (It should be clear that I am not employing "republic" in Rousseau's sense of a simple and undivided Spartan-like devotion to the common good; this orientation, or habituation, seems to me to be more accurately described as "aristocratic.")

12. ". . . there is a political context that is not itself competition, within which political competition takes place." Theodore J. Lowi, *The End of Liberalism,* 2nd edition (New York: W.W. Norton. and Co., 1979), 37.

13. This is my understanding of one of the implications of Book VIII of Plato's *Republic.* See, also, on this point, Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 109-115.

14. This is my understanding of one of Tocqueville's recurrent themes in *Democracy in America.* See, for example, Vol. 2, Book 2, Chapter ll, "Peculiar Effects of the Love of Physical Gratifications in Democratic Times," in any edition.

association in terms of rules as rules, *and* what he calls enterprise association, or association in terms of the management of the pursuit of a common purpose (or, in some versions, association in which bargainers intermittently transact with one another for *substantive* satisfactions).[15] An example of an enterprise association might be a firehouse, whose purpose is the *substantive* engagement to put out fires, and about whose enterprise we can observe two characteristics that do not appear in civil association. First, while it may have rules of behavior, these rules do not identify the purpose of a firehouse, and might be very similar to the rules of a police station, for example; and, secondly, the substantive purpose is not continuous, but is exhausted in the act of putting out a fire, and is thus dependent on something outside itself for its perpetuation, i.e., the occurrence of another fire. Civil association, by contrast, is association in terms of the recognition of general rules as a practice of intercourse, or a common language by analogy, and neither explicitly nor implicitly in terms of accomplishment of substantive purposes, and hence, self-sufficient association. It is, in principle, interminable even if it can be, and sometimes is, terminated.

Oakeshott does not actually define what he means by a substantive purpose, but he tells us what it is not-for example, the attempts to achieve security, *tranquillitas,* peace, or moral virtue." These, by implication (perhaps following Aristotle's observation in the *Ethics* that action is particular) are too general to be unambiguously accomplished in concrete actions, and therefore would appear not to be by themselves either substantive wants or substantive purposes, on Oakeshott's usage. Furthermore, we may observe that a general purpose such as "security" cannot be achieved once and for all, and thus cannot be considered "substantive" in Oakeshott's account, even though the amount of resources a society devoted to such a purpose might be what distinguished it from another society. ( Oakeshott's discussion here is reminiscent of the Augustinian theme that a general condition such as contentmentis always aby-productofthe accomplishment of more specific aims and obligations; as we shall see in a moment, this theme recurs in

15. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct,* 111-115.
16. Ibid., 119.

Oakeshott's critique of modern rationalism.) *Civil* association thus means association in terms of practices of conduct too general to be capable of independently specifying common purposes or substantive wants, and, hence, on Oakeshott's usage, moral rather than instrumental or prudential. [17]

Oakeshott establishes civil association (or *civitas)* as an ideal character by making explicit its logical postulates: it is association in terms of explicitly articulated *rules,* where rules are understood as more general and enduring than commands or directives addressed to identifiable individuals, and requiring particular actions from them (a function of administration); [18] and where rules are also understood as authoritative assertions (vs. theorems or conclusions of reasoning), which call only for consideration in acting, because, in their generality, they are incapable of soliciting specific acts of obedience: "rules . . . prescribe norms of conduct...they cannot tell us what to do or say. ..." [19] The rules of civil association Oakeshott calls *lex,* and notes that by identifying the basis for association *(civitas), lex* formally relates individuals *(cives)* not otherwise related, "solely in terms of their common recognition of rules which constitute a practice of civility." [20]

Having established civil association as association in terms of practices of authoritative rules incapable of requiring exact performances from its associates, Oakeshott proceeds to derive the other essential institutions and activities logically necessary for such a civil condition. Before following Oakeshott (as expeditiously as possible) through these subsequent derivations, it is fortifying to remind ourselves of why this is interesting, and why we must proceed carefully. The drama of what Oakeshott is doing might be stated thus: in a democratic age, hostile to abstraction, inclined to identify the vocabulary of politics and governance with an enterprise about the concentration of power to distribute substantial benefits to various groups, and to attribute legitimacy to those who can deliver

17, Ibid., 122.
18. Ibid., 124-125.
19. Ibid., 126.
20. Ibid., 128.

the "goods," Oakeshott is trying to discipline our attention sufficiently long to derive or rejuvenate an entire civil vocabulary from an initial idea of being associated in terms of a "practice of civility," or in terms of the recognition of "rules as rules." There is an added incentive to proceed through this web of abstraction: we might place Oakeshott's account within the context of more well-known accounts in Western political thought, by saying that he proceeds to tell a story about civil freedom which begins from the (anti-contractarian) assumption that the freedom to associate or disassociate is not very realistic with regard to comprehensive associations called "states." These are often in practice compulsory to most who inhabit them. Hence, to search for a basis for freedom in contingent acts of choice within a framework of general laws is attractive and realistic. Against Hobbes, Oakeshott will also argue that the freedom of *cives* arises *not* in the *silence,* but in the *generality* of the laws, or terms of association. (In a move that I believe is unique to political theory based upon individualist and nominalist assumptions, this allows Oakeshott to retain the ancient idea of *civitas* as the comprehensive and self-sufficient association, as well as the benefits of logical coherence which flow from this starting point.)

Because of the generality of *lex,* there is another institution postulated by Oakeshott's idea of civil association-a procedure of adjudication for "resolving uncertainties and disputes over how norms of *lex* relate to contingent situations."[21] However, adjudication without enforcement procedures is of little worth; hence, adjudication postulates *ruling* or policing civil association, understood as requiring an "identifiable agent to make a specified choice in an assignable situation."[22] The frequent requirement for new laws postulates legislation, or the authoritative enactment of new *lex;* the requirement for new *lex* postulates an activity conducted in a persuasive (not demonstrative) idiom, involving deliberation and judgment, concerned with the relative desirability of new proposals against old *lex,* and this is, properly speaking, *politics.* But politics is clearly to be distinguished from questions of obligation and

21. Ibid., 131.
22. Ibid., 141.

authority, the "twin pillars of the civil condition," and the real "public concern" *(respublica)* of *cives:*

> ... the only understanding of *respublica* capable of evoking the acceptance of all *cives* without exception, and thus eligible to be recognized as the terms of association, is *respublica* understood in terms of its authority.[23]

Thus, for Oakeshott, the civil condition is not association for the pursuit of common purposes, but a "moral condition" concerned with "the terms upon which the satisfaction of wants might be pursued." Hence, in the civil condition, "public" and "private" refer to relationships, not persons and performances, and "they meet in every substantive engagement," the private interest concerned with its success, the public interest concerned with considerations of *lex* in the way it is conducted.[24] (One could say that in persons and performances the concrete relation of public and private comes to light-this is why in actuality they are always mingled.) This condition also postulates *cives* capable both of self-restraint, and the ability to focus their attention so as to be able to pursue their private interests in contingent situations "while thinking in terms of civil intercourse," or "caring for the condition of the civil condition."[25]

To relate all this to something less abstract and more familiar, it is difficult not to be struck by its similarity to Cicero's claim in the second book of *De Officiis* that the republic was lost when the proper distinction between public and private was lost, or to Trenchard's and Gordon's view from the "country" in the name of Cato some eighteen centuries later:

> And though in pursuing Views, Men regard themselves and their own Advantages; yet if they regard the Publick more, or their own in Subservience to the Publick, they may justly be esteemed virtuous and good.[26]

23. Ibid., 154.
24. Ibid., 146.
25. Ibid., 177 and 186.
26. *Cato's Letters* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1969) Vol. 2, #39, "Of the Passions," 49.

But unlike Cicero or Trenchard and Gordon, Oakeshott is not engaged in practical politics. His is a theoretical enterprise to draw out and make explicit the postulates of a (rare) historical practice; and the "force" of his argument comes in showing the logical (not practical), necessity of understanding *respublica* as a set of general conditions to be observed in every private, substantive engagement, if the meaning of civil freedom as assent to the authority of general laws is not to be contradicted or denied.

To summarize this first and foremost affinitybetween Oakeshott's account of the civil condition and the republican outlook, I have tried to show that it resides in defending the centrality of the sustained capacity of citizens simultaneously to consider the likely effects of proposed legislation and policy both for their own private interests, and for the authoritative context or system of general laws and practices within which their substantive interests are pursued. In my view, the very"amateurishness" of this orientation makes it republican-like in providing resistance to extreme specialization in the personality directed exclusively toward securing substantive success in specific enterprises or activities.

## II

A second correspondence (or affinity) between Oakeshott's account of the civil obligations of individuals and the republican tradition is the emphasis on what he calls the historic European disposition (of individual human beings since at least the Italian Renaissance) to be distinct, to "live a life for a man like me." I want now to try to show that, despite differences in emphasis, this *ethos* is consistent with, or friendly towards, the practice of republican deference, in a way that it is not consistent with the idea of democratic equality of conditions described, for example, by Tocqueville in the second volume of *Democracy in America:* "But for equality, their passion is ardent, insatiable, incessant, invincible." J. G. A. Pocock has argued in a discussion of the effects of the republican tradition in America that "deference was not a hierarchical but a republican characteristic," arising in the respect different kinds of people held for different kinds of virtues and talents, permitting the individual to know

himself "through the respect shown by his fellows for the qualities publicly recognized in him," [27] and distinguished from the democratic developments toward conformity and uniformity Tocqueville was beginning to observe in Jacksonian America:

> ... but once men were, or it was held that they ought to be all alike, his only means of self-discovery lay in conforming to everybody's notions ofwhathe ought to be andwas. This produced a despotism and opinion, since nothing but diffused general opinion now defined the ego or its standards of judgment. [28]

It is interesting here to compare Pocock's discussion of deference (as found in Harringtonian and neo-Harringtonian republicanism) with Oakeshott's treatment of Montesquieu's hypothetical constitutions in *De l'esprit des lois.* Oakeshott makes it clear that what Montesquieu calls a "republic," distinguished by the principle of "virtue," would not qualify as civil association but rather as a corporation aggregate in its Spartan-like attempt to educate and manage the lives of its citizens around a common substantive idea of the common good, and a renunciation of each's own self *(soi-meme).* [29] Rather, it is the ideal-type Montesquieu names "monarchy" which Oakeshott sees as the closest (among Montesquieu's three ideal constitutions) to civil association, and this because "it is association in respect of fidelity to one another in terms of a system of rules of conduct," in which "every enterprise is `private' and none is immune from the `public' considerations specified in *la* loi," and because Montesquieu himself implied that it best accommodated "the dominant moral disposition of the inhabitants of modern Europe: the historic disposition to be 'distinct.'"" Oakeshott also goes on to suggest that civil association has affinities with the political visions of, among others, Machiavelli, Locke, Sidney, Burke, Madison, Benjamin Constant, and Tocqueville. [31] One might observe in

27. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment,* 515 and *538.*
*28. Ibid., 538.*
29. Oakeshot, *On Human Conduct, 247.*
30. Ibid., 250-251.
31. Ibid., 244-246.

passing that in the context of North American republicanism, Oakeshott's views may be seen as *more congenial* to what Forrest McDonald calls the "tobacco plantation country" version, characterized by a "leisure ethic," personal independence, and strict attention to the structure of political institutions as the basis for liberty, *than to* the puritanical New England and Southern Baptist versions of republicanism and their emphasis on personal moral rectitude as the basis for "public virtue."[32]

To summarize, my point here is that Oakeshott's account of the *ethos* of the individual that evolved in the break-up of the medieval realms, an *ethos* to cultivate the freedom (to choose) inherent in moral agency, can be at home in a situation of what Pocock calls republican deference, in a way it cannot be at home within a democratic *ethos of* equality of conditions, where all are assumed to want basically the same things, and, hence, to be always in competition with one another, even if in the name of "human solidarity." Thus, a second affinitywith republicanism in Oakeshott's account of the civil condition lies in the correspondence of the individualist desire to be distinct with the deference shown in republics to a genuine diversity of talents and callings-for example, the kind of deference shown in America to a natural aristocracy of political talent prior to Jacksonian democracy, and not much apparent since.[33] One might also extend the argument to suggest that the desire to be distinct and self-reliant leads away from the extreme civic and psychic dependence upon one another and *upon strong leaders,* censured by republican critics of democracy from Thucydides to opponents of the New Deal.

There is yet a third correspondence in Oakeshott's work with republicanism, but to show it I must move outside of the essays in *On*

32. Forrest McDonald, *Novus Ordo Seclorum: The Intellectual Origins of the Constitution* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1985), 73-75.

33. See, for example, the characterization of Whig vs. old Federalist rhetoric in Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age ofJackson* (Boston Little Brown and Company, 1945), 265-282.

*Human Conduct,* and back *to* his earlier writings on modem rationalism and the antidotes for its excesses. It has to do with seeing clearly the things that make up a human life, and with avoiding political illusions. It also has affinities to the idea of republican balance in the face of urbane contrivances to expand and expand the realm of things which can be defined as solely what conventional opinion says they are. *The* kind of thing I have in mind may be illustrated by Pocock's characterization of the "country Whig" critique of the corrupting eighteenth century enterprise to create wealth primarily through credit:

> Virtue must involve the cognition of things as they really were, the power of Credit was irredeemably subjective and it would take all the authority of society to prevent her from breaking loose to submerge the world in a flood of fantasy .. the individual would exist...only at the fluctuating value imposed upon him by his fellows. . . .[34]

Or, one might look to the educational writings of Rousseau on the illusions of cities which confused the theatre and role-playing with civic life, and required the perspective of the country to regain balance. Or, for a more contemporary illustration of this kind of critique one might look to some of the literature of the past two decades concerning the illusions involved in the disastrous American attempt to apply the hypothetical logic of academic, nuclear deterrence theory to actual guerrilla warfare in Southeast Asia.[35] Or, finally, for perhaps the best known illustration of the blindnesses of which compounded urbane opinion is capable, one might simply recall Hans Christian Andersen's story of the emperor's "new clothes." What is common to all of these examples is the urbane tendency to equate conventional opinion with all of reality, or reality outside the *city's* walls.

Now my point here is that much of Oakeshott's critique of the modern world of the past three and one half centuries is a version of

34. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment,* 437 and 464.

35. See, for example, my essay, "Liberal Democracy and the Time-Stream: The Case of M.A.D." in Wendell J. Coats, Jr., *The Activity of Politics and Related Essays* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1989), 150-152.

the view that it is not seeing clearly or impartially, evident in his liking for the French expression, *"autres temps, autres folies;"* and, in addition, that this desire to see clearly, to grasp firmly the structure of political and other reality, is also the source of the republican claim to independence and, hence; stability in time another "republican affinity" in Oakeshott's thought. This last point about republics has been especially developed in J. G. A. Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment,* but, in my view, it is implicit in the idea of civic corruption in old cities and advanced democracies as a form of extreme dependence on the opinion of one another which leads to myopic vision, or the belief that the city's opinion is a power that can "master the universe." (Given the power of public opinion in democracy, this problem is compounded in democratic urbane life:

Consider briefly Oakeshott's critique of modern rationalism in this context: Rationalism Oakeshott indicts as a vulgarization of some of the ideas of Bacon and Descartes, which issued in a belief about the sovereignty of technique in practical affairs. It is characterized by the desire for certainty and control; by the belief in distinct beginning and ending points; and by belief in the universal applicability of its techniques. But, in fact, Rationalism's approach to knowledge and practice is illusory:

> The superiority of technical knowledge lay in its appearance of springing from pure ignorance and ending in certain and complete knowledge. ...But, in fact, this is an illusion. As with every other sort of knowledge, learning a technique does not consist of getting rid of pure ignorance, but in reforming knowledge which was already there .technical knowledge is never, in fact, self-complete.... And ifits self-completeness is illusory, the certainty...is also an illusion. [36]

According tō Oakeshott, Rationalism's major error is to mis-

36. Michael Oakeshott, "Rationalism in Politics," in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (New and Expanded Edition), ed., Timothy Fuller (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991), 16-17; for an extensive summary of Oakeshott's understanding of modern Rationalism, see my essay, "Michael Oakeshott's Critique of Rationalism in Politics," in *The Activity of Politics and Related Essays.*

perceive the nature of practical skill, skill that arises in the fluidity of each craft's own distinctive form and content ("the poetic character of all human activity"[37]), a fluidity ruptured in the misguided and impatient Rationalist attempt to abstract a technique from one concrete activity (e.g., marketing), put it in a book, and apply it universally to other activities (e.g., politics or war):

> ... the new man, lately risen to power, will often be found throwing away his book and relying upon his general experience ... as a business man or trade union official. but still, it is not a knowledge of the political traditions of his society. . . .[38]

This illusion, in turn, leads to modern versions of the "Tower of Babel" which misperceive the limits of politics, leading political practitioners to attempt to satisfy by political means substantive needs (including psychic ones) that is not, in the nature of things, possible. Oakeshott says that when Rationalism invades political and moral life, it is characterized by a problem-solving attitude, directed by "felt needs" interpreted by techniques or abridgements called ideologies (or moral codes).[39] In his discussion of "felt needs" Oakeshott might appear to be getting close to a critique of what may be called "democratic passions," but we must be careful here given his resistance to general political explanations. "Felt needs" turn out to be irritations generated by abstractions (the gap between the code and the current situation), rather than by genuine concrete knowledge:

> book in hand . . . the politicians of Europe pore over the simmering banquet they are preparing...but their knowledge does not extend beyond the written word which they read mechanically ... it generates ideas in their heads but no tastes in their mouths.[40]

Perhaps the most that can be said in linking Oakeshott's criticism of

37, Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics,* 479.
38. Ibid., 35-36.
39. For Oakeshott's discussion of "Rationalist morality," see the 1949 essay, "The Tower of Babel," in *Rationalism in Politics,* 465-487.
40. Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics, 27.*

Rationalism and his account of civil and enterprise association is that the prevalence of the illusory belief in the sovereignty of political technique to satisfy substantive wants, makes it more difficult to gain a hearing for the idea of *respublica* as a practice of authority, rather than a corporation aggregate to exploit as efficiently as possible the resources of the earth, with no need for a vocabulary of obligation detached from concerns of practical management.

To follow up this last point, the understanding of human balance and civic balance as a tension between formal and substantive considerations is obscured by the prevalence of practical discourse and activity directed solely toward the practical. Although Oakeshott would hardly condone so "unhistorical" a comparison, it is difficult not to observe that his critique of the errors of modern Rationalism, the Baconian project in general, and the view of the state as an "enterprise association," all can be taken as aparticular historical version of the old Socratic insight that the vocabulary of politics and justice arises in a complex interaction of both formal and substantive considerations, and is rendered superfluous when applied to sub-stantive or sub-political considerations solely. At any rate, this is my understanding of the reason why Socrates, Glaucon, and Adeimantus must build increasingly complex cities (in words) before they can identify justice in the dialogues of Plato's *Republic-because* it is only in the more complex cities that there is a sufficiently complex interplay between formal and substantive considerations as to require a relatively high-order abstraction such as "justice" to describe it.

To summarize this third "republican affinity" in Oakeshott's thought, I shall simply observe that I have tried to show that Oakeshott's critique of modern Rationalism has parallels with republican critiques of democracies and cities, which systematically exclude from public discussion insights of the countryside, over time distorting political and other reality at the expense of political and related skills. Foremost among these parallels is a critique of the illusory belief that what was a certain and self-contained technique of ideology was, in fact, partial and incapable of standing on its own.

## IV

There *is* one last theme in Oakeshott's discussion of civil association that *is* interesting from the standpoint of republicanism, especially its requirement for citizens capable of separating questions of authority from those of substantive interests. This is Oakeshott's treatment of morality. Oakeshott, we saw earlier, *con*siders civil association to be association in terms of *moral* conditions because it is association in terms of laws and practices of authority too general. to be construed as instrumental to, or prudential for, the satisfaction of specific, substantive wants in pre-established, identifiable acts.[41] Such a treatment of morality has some structural similarities with the Kantian categorical imperative, and perhaps with Rousseau's "general will," but there are crucial differences. Oakeshott's *cives* is a being *divided* between loyalties to the success of his substantive interests, and loyalties to the practice of civility within which they are pursued. There is here no frequent hope as in the Ciceronian and Rousseuan accounts, of an identification of the public and private interests; nor *is* there any "dialectic" idea, as in the Rousseuan and Kantian accounts, that we are "free" in obeying a law which we give to ourselves. Rather, for Oakeshott, the chance to practice morality arises *in* the,. ability to distinguish formal from substantive considerations, while holding them in tension without the misplaced. desire to see the tension permanently resolved. Similarly, the preservation of civil freedom depends on the continued widespread ability to separate formal issues of legitimacy from the satisfaction of substantive wants. In this last sense, Oakeshott's account of civil association is certainly consistent with republican traditions of mutual deference among a genuine diversity of talents, distinguished from the more democratic view that we are all characterized by the same basic wants, are thus basically equal, and, hence, "political" only in our mutual strivings for position within the "group solidarity.'

Perhaps Oakeshott might be viewed, within the context of this essay's concerns, as a kind of classical liberal (a residual medievalist

41. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct,* 122.

even) who tried to account for individual freedom in terms of Roman ideas about obligations to the authority of law rather than Greek ideas about the development of personality-which latter ideas, when combined with modern millenialist ideas of social and historical progress,[42] have produced political theories no longer especially friendly to the freedom of either individuals or republics.

Wendell John Coats, Jr.
*Connecticut College*

42. For a discussion of millenialist tendencies in the United States, see the classic work by Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation* (Chicago: The University Press, 1968).