**Critics of Contemporary Rationalism:**

**Voegelin, Oakeshott, Polanyi, Hayek, MacIntyre, and Others**

**Edited by Gene Callahan and Lee Trepanier**

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**Introduction**

**Gene Callahan**

This introduction explains the purpose of the book with a review of the relevant literature about rationalism and why it is important topic of study today. It also examines the various definitions of rationalism in the contemporary period. Finally, the introduction previews the contributors’ arguments in this book.

**Wittgenstein and the Athens-Jerusalem Conflict**

**Grant Havers**

This chapter looks at the later Wittgenstein who rejects the pseudo-objective rationalism of his earlier philosophy to justify a greater focus on the inescapable nature of human language. Yet this rejection of an objective reality beyond language is not a rejection of rationalism *tout court*. Rather, Wittgenstein repudiates the rationalism of “Athens” (Socratic-Platonic philosophy) which, in his view, had contributed to the mythical and dualistic separation of language and reality. Wittgenstein instead seeks a recovery of “Jerusalem” (biblical revelation) through his nuanced embrace of the ontological argument for God’s existence which, in his view, is at once rational and faithful (human and divine). The paradox which Wittgenstein articulates, particularly in his work *Culture and Value*, is that the truth of God (faith, religion) is intelligible only through the rationality of human interpretation, action, and language.

**Eric Voegelin’s Critique of Ideology**

**David Corey**

This chapter examines Voegelin’s critique of rationalism in terms of ideology and how Voegelin believes that Christianity was implicated in ideology’s rise. According to Voegelin, without the rise and fall of Western Christendom, there would have been no mass ideological movements. The critical role that Christianity plays in ideology reveals that political scientists must think in spiritual terms to diagnose ideology.

**Two Senses of Rationalism in Eric Voegelin**

**Daniel Sportiello**

This chapter explores Voegelin’s critique of rationalism as a type of Gnosticism and positivism. In the first critique, Voegelin argues that a radicalization of Christianity set the foundation for modern Gnostic movements like communism, fascism, and liberalism. In the second critique, Voegelin warns of positivism being the predominant paradigm of the social sciences. This chapter connects these two understanding of rationalism and how they are related to Voegelin’s interpretation of modernity.

**The Diagnosis of Scientism:**

**Eric Voegelin and Michael Polanyi on Science and Philosophy\***

**Colin Cordner**

This chapter unpacks certain key dimensions of both Voegelin’s and Polanyi’s diagnosis of rationalism as a form of scientific positivism, thereby allowing thinkers to distinguish science from scientism. By comparing Voegelin’s theory of consciousness with Polanyi’s theory of commitment, this chapter provides a system of explicit rules and propositions for the reader to follow. The chapter concludes by showing how one’s understanding of science influences one’s role in society as an engaged and responsible person.

\*originally published in *Appraisal, The Journal of the British Personalist Forum*. 9. 3 (March, 2013): 3-12.

**Personal Participation:**

**Michael Polanyi, Eric Voegelin, and the Indispensability of Faith\***

**Mark T. Mitchell**

This chapter focuses on the central role that faith played in both Voegelin’s and Polanyi’s works and how the scientific conception of knowledge is wanting. What Voegelin calls “scientism” and Polanyi labels “objectivism” is to reduce knowledge that can only be scientifically demonstrated and is connected to the pathologies of the twentieth century. The chapter concludes with how both Voegelin and Polanyi seek to recover a genuine understanding of science and how these two attempts contemplate each other.

\*originally published in *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 33.1 (March 2005): 65-89.

**Rationalism as A Political Style**

**Corey Abel**

This chapter examines Oakeshott’s critique of rationalism as an observation of practical life characteristic of modernity and how it affects political discourse and civic culture. Oakeshott argues that Christianity’s development towards creeds and doctrines was implicated in the West’s rationalist turn, anticipating the founders of the scientific method and its popularizers. The result is a reduction of morality to set of principles; dissociation of particular acts from streams of intelligent, conditioned acting; the privileging of expertise; and the theory of the mind as a *tabula rasa*. The chapter concludes with how to move people away from this understanding of rationalism and present alternatives to it, such as *phronesis*.

**Oakeshott, Strauss, and Voegelin on Hobbes**

**Timothy Fuller**

This chapter looks at how the rationalism of liberalism led to its crisis with Oakeshott, Strauss, and Voegelin responding to this situation. For all three thinkers Hobbes plays the pivotal role in the development of liberalism. This chapter consequently examines how Oakeshott, Strauss, and Voegelin all understood Hobbes and thereby liberalism itself.

**The Critique of Scientism: Ryle and Oakeshott on Tacit Knowledge**

**Kenneth McIntyre**

This chapter explores how Ryle and Oakeshott criticize rationalism, particularly as manifested as scientism: all knowledge is modeled after the natural sciences. Rye distinguishes “knowing how” knowledge from “knowing that,” while Oakeshott categorizes knowledge into practical and technical (rationalist). Both see tacit knowledge – knowledge learned from practical or “knowing that” – as necessary and in some ways superior to rationalism for a pluralist society.

**Comparing Oakeshott's and MacIntyre's Concepts of Practical Knowledge**

**Ferenc Hörcher**

This chapter examines Oakeshott’s and MacIntyre’s criticisms of abstract-universalist rationalism and then compares their accounts of practical knowledge and practice as an alternative to it. While both are indebted to Aristotle, they belong to two different worldviews: for Oakeshott, it is Ryle, Wittgenstein, and the long tradition of British conservatism, together with a certain inspiration from classical German idealism while for MacIntyre's middle period it is the Catholic Aristotelian-Thomist tradition. They therefore conceptualize Aristotle differently due to their different personal "cultures" which leads to different understanding of practical knowledge and practice.

**Between Rationalism and Relativism:**

**Gadamer and MacIntyre on Truth and Finitude**

**Nathanael Blake**

This chapter examines how both Gadamer and MacIntyre criticizes the rationalism pervasive in the social sciences. Gadamer defends the possibility of truth in the social sciences while denying there was a definitive methodology for apprehending and articulating truth. While he is sometimes accused of being a relativist, he rejects this charge and insists there was an alternative to rationalism and relativism. In developing his own philosophy of morals and ethics, Alasdair MacIntyre acknowledges a debt to Gadamer, and like Gadamer, MacIntyre sometimes has been mistaken for a relativist.  However, he claims that his critique of rationalism does not lead to relativism. By adopting a natural law approach, MacIntyre sought to provide an alternative to rationalism and relativism, like his predecessor Gadamer.

**Was Hayek a Gnostic?**

**John von Heyking**

This chapter examines whether Hayek’s thought is rationalist or Gnostic, as understood by Voegelin. On the one hand, Hayek defends liberty on Burkean tradition and “spontaneous order”; on the other hand, Hayek holds a progressive view of history that is in common with Mill and Kant. By asking whether Hayek is a Gnostic, this chapter reviews the adequacy of his theory of society and history and to what extent it was “immanentist.”

**Hayek and Oakeshott on Rationalism**

**Gene Callahan**

This chapter both compares and contrasts the ideas of two leading critics of rationalism: Hayek and Oakeshott. It explores whether both understood rationalism in the same way, where their analyses of rationalism overlapped, and in what sense were they different. The chapter argues that Hayek and Oakeshott understand the problem of rationalism differently because of their different philosophical outlooks rather than other historical, cultural, or political factors.

**Kolnai and Oakeshott**

**Zoltan Balazs**

This chapter explores how Kolnai and Oakeshott understand rationalism. Whereas Oakeshott emphasizes the rationality of reasoning as a practice as well as the constrained but real rationality of traditions, Kolnai thinks that this was insufficient, being more concerned with the odd rationality of evil that must be countered by the objectivity of the moral order. Rational reflection is indispensable to make sense of any experience we happen to have, yet reality always exceeds the capacities of reason, which grants the freedom and dignity of reason.

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