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**Review of: The Cambridge Companion to Oakeshott by Efraim Podoksik (ed.).  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012**

Beckstein, Martin

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**Efraim Podoksik (ed.) (2011) *The Cambridge Companion to Oakeshott*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 386pp., £19.99, ISBN 978 0 521 14792 7.**

Following publication of a similar work by Penn State Press, Cambridge University Press has published a companion of considerable quality on the British philosopher Michael Oakeshott. Having reviewed the first volume with reference to the second in the previous issue of PSR, I now briefly review the second with reference to the first.<sup>1</sup>

Edited by Efraim Podoksik, CUP's volume focuses on Oakeshott's philosophical work leaving his life largely out of the picture. Biographical information is provided only through a brief chronology of short notes. In lieu of shedding light on Oakeshott's thought by considering the philosopher's extra-academic activity, substantial space is reserved in the book for contextual analyses of Oakeshott's interventions in historical discourses. Thus, one part (Part III) of CUP's Companion is dedicated to comparative perspectives on 'Oakeshott and others'. Otherwise, the organisation of the book very much parallels Franco and Marsh's volume, in that first articles are collected on Oakeshott's understanding of philosophy, history, science, aesthetics and education (Part I), and second on his political philosophy (Part II).

Whereas Franco and Marsh include pieces of scholarship that will be of greater interest for advanced scholars, the strength of CUP's Companion is its clear conspectus of Oakeshott's philosophy. Unfortunately, the editor provides little guidance to the reader in his Introduction, which will be regretted by students unfamiliar with the content and significance of Oakeshott's thought. Podoksik affirms that the book has a plan and direction (p. 3) without explaining exactly what this plan and direction is supposed to be, yet the organisation of the book (in particular, the fact that the articles dealing with the intellectual influences on Oakeshott are placed at the end) will not strike everyone as self-explanatory. Also, one may have wished to know more about why the editor and some contributors hold Oakeshott's philosophy in particularly high esteem, while other contributors are abrasively critical. In the essay meant to provide a 'general overview of Oakeshott's political theory' (p. 5), for instance, William A. Galston concludes that Oakeshott ultimately 'cross[ed] the line separating philosophical radicalism from outright implausibility' (p. 242). In the face of such dissenting voices, the editor only recalls the truism that the recognition of the value of a philosophy is a matter of subjective judgment (p. 1), which is unsatisfying, if only because it tends to imply that readers sympathetic to Oakeshott need not take seriously the objections raised by critics.

However, despite the deficits of the Introduction, Podoksik has certainly done a good job with assembling the contributions to the CUP's Companion. It serves as a very good starting point to familiarise oneself with Oakeshott's thought. By portraying Oakeshott as a particularly controversial thinker, it is also likely to motivate further research.

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<sup>1</sup> *A Companion to Michael Oakeshott* (2012), edited by Paul Franco and Leslie Marsh. For the mentioned review, see PSR (2014) 12 (1), 96-7.