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Symposium on Roger Scruton's
*Conservatism: An Invitation
to the Great Tradition*



COVER ART:

Pieter Bruegel the Elder
The (Great) Tower of Babel, c. 1563
oil on wood panel
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Editorial Introduction to a Symposium on Roger Scruton's *Conservatism—An Invitation to the Great Tradition*

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Sir Roger Scruton, doubtlessly one of the most accomplished and productive thinkers of conservatism in the present age, has published a new book: *Conservatism—An Invitation to the Great Tradition*. What's special about this book? Why bother to read it, given that it isn't his first book on the subject? Well, first because all of his books he has written in previous years were highly instructive and pleasurable reads—why should it be different this time? Second, *An Invitation* is not only Scruton's most recent, but probably ripest and most impressive, articulation of his conservative creed. Third, and perhaps most importantly, Scruton's new book differs from his previous ones in terms of genre. Unlike *The Meaning of Conservatism* (1980) or *How to be a Conservative* (2014), it isn't primarily a direct scholarly exposition of conservatism. Unlike *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands* (2016), it isn't an indirect one either. Unlike *On Hunting* (1999) or the chapter 'Eating Your Friends' in *Arguments for Conservatism* (2006) the new book is not primarily a political intervention or a vindication of some morally disputed activity. Instead, with *An Invitation*, as the title suggests, Scruton takes up the challenge of handing down an intellectual tradition to infidels.

Handing down an intellectual tradition is a demanding task. It cannot be achieved by constructing a powerful argument or by means of persuasion alone. Ultimately, the success of the endeavor depends upon one's ability to familiarize readers with a comprehensive way of thinking, to equip them with the means to internalize it, and to motivate them to pass that way of thinking on to the next generation in turn.

To hand down the intellectual tradition of conservatism is a particularly demanding task because conservatism is a bittersweet sort of nectar. Whereas liberalism or socialism accept a sobering aftertaste to court their consumers upon the first sip, conservatism has a reconciling finish but starts off with an astringent sensation—just think of Burke's puzzling dictum that change is a necessary means to prevent

change in politics, or the maxim Hume considered false in fact but true in politics, namely, 'that every man must be supposed a knave.'

Probably no existing thinker knows better than Scruton about the unfavorable first impression conservatism may make even on curious natures, and that adherents to other intellectual traditions are likely to turn away brusquely already when hearing the term 'conservatism' unless followed by an immediate *revoco*. That's why Scruton, in this new book, narrates the (hi)story of conservatism as a concomitant feature of a much more popular creed, as a 'qualification of' or 'hesitation within' liberalism, as he puts it (pp. 23, 33). He points to conservative considerations in the work of thinkers typically considered liberal, such as Harrington, Locke, Montesquieu and Smith, in order to encourage 'well-meaning liberals to take a look at what those [the conservative] arguments really are' (p. 6).

This symposium assesses Scruton's literary technique and rhetorical strategy, but it also discusses the narrative of the conservative tradition on offer. For even though it is nominally addressed to liberals, *An Invitation* is bound to intercede in the dispute over authenticity among self-identified conservatives and scholars of conservatism. It provides an account of conservatism after all, and it does so by selecting and harmonizing certain thinkers and themes while marginalizing others. One shouldn't be surprised, accordingly, that praise goes hand in hand with friendly suggestions for modifications, skeptical questions and critical considerations.

Thus, the lead essay, by Eno Trimçev, reads *An Invitation* as Scruton's 'definite statement on the politics of our time.' Commending it for its willingness to proceed from what is already given in the here and now, Trimçev argues that the horizon of empirical conservatism should be enlarged by turning to its metaphysical roots—for this might be necessary to illumine the conservative core experience of order, the experience of what Scruton calls 'sacrality.' In a

similarly constructive vein, Kevin Mulligan proceeds from the assumption that political philosophies must be based on social philosophies, and—wondering whether Scruton’s thought since recently has taken an ‘axiological’ turn—explores Max Scheler’s philosophy as a promising source of inspiration for such a task.

David Corey recommends pushing the point of conservatism’s qualifying nature a little bit further to include also the Marxist and transhumanist calls for liberation from economic exploitation and biological necessity. Conservatism, Corey suggests, is most adequately grasped as a family of reactionary movements to political forces trying to pull entirely down some barrier to freedom. The next essay, by Noël O’Sullivan, tracks the development of Scruton’s conservative thought through his entire oeuvre, seeing in it an ‘intellectual level almost unrivalled by contemporary conservative thinkers.’ At the same time, he argues, Scruton’s conservatism has remained short on a plausible answer to the question of political legitimacy; its problem diagnosis, that the west is suffering from a moral, political and spiritual alienation is ultimately based on an immodest epistemology that doesn’t fit well with the conservative tradition; and that Scruton’s remedy, the re-enchantment of the west, has some problematic quasi-populist implications.

In addition to the historical and theoretical dimensions, Kieron O’Hara engages with the strategic ones of *An Invitation*. He fears that Scruton’s narrative of conservatism’s prehistory and philosophical birth might ultimately serve more to look after the ash than keeping the flame of conservatism alive. Singling out Islamism and political correctness as the main challenges of the 21st century, O’Hara argues, might not inspire the non-conservative addressees effectively enough. Efraim Podoksik’s essay focuses on Chapter 3, ‘Conservatism in Germany and France,’ discussing whether Scruton’s new book succeeds in walking the fine line between appealing to liberals and sketching out a conservatism that is distinct and cannot simply be incorporated into the liberal framework it is meant to qualify substantially.

Nicholas Capaldi attempts to understand, explain and transcend the semantic controversy between liberalism and conservatism along Hayekian and Oakeshottian terms in order to reaffirm and further elucidate why *An Invitation* is such an important book. He emphasizes, however, that Scruton’s account is firmly situated in the Anglo-American branch of the conservative tradition, and in this finding, is backed by Ron Dart and Nathan Cockram, who, in their respective essays, make a case for the continuing rele-

vance of more orthodox varieties of Toryism. Finally, Leslie Marsh, the managing editor of *Cosmos + Taxis*, raises some important questions about the pressing issue of toleration. While tolerating the intolerant cannot be an option for any political regime aiming at stability, it is controversial that rediscovering and defending our political *and religious* inheritance, as Scruton claims in his last chapter ‘Conservatism Now,’ could be a viable alternative.

The issue concludes with a reply by Sir Roger Scruton. Whether and to what extent *An Invitation* will succeed in transmitting the conservative tradition favored by Scruton to the present and following generations remains to be seen. But even those who are reluctant to accept this intellectual inheritance will have to admit that it cannot simply be ignored. It ought to be taken seriously in academic and public discourse. This symposium hopes to contribute to this process.

Conservatism: Empirical or Metaphysical?

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INTRODUCTION: THE GREAT CONSERVATIVE TRADITION IN OUR TIME

Roger Scruton's *Invitation* does precisely what it sets out to do: it invites us to examine the intellectual roots of *our*—Anglo-American, French and German—conservatism. The invitation is extended to non-conservatives: the curious who may be spurred on by conservatism's stubborn refusal to wither away; the student of the history of ideas interested in the sub-section 'intellectual conservatism'; the politician (p. 155) who, endowed with a practical instinct for the political, may desire an education on political things that is least of all available in political science curricula, and; the "well-meaning [liberal]" (p. 6) who may have noticed that his political enemies are neither troglodytes nor devils. The book is a conservative reading list—a cottage industry of its own for a movement perpetually anxious to demonstrate its intellectual roots—with something for everyone who has an inkling of the broader conservative persuasion; from the higher peaks of philosophical conservatism with Aristotle and Hegel to the enemies of political correctness who may want to beef up on Newspeak references. To my mind it is best read as a companion-piece to Scruton's defense of conservatism in contemporary terms (2014a) and his what-not-to-read list—again from the Anglo-American, French and German currents—of thinkers of the New Left (2015). This trilogy that comprises the intellectual past, present and other of conservatism may be read, I suppose, as Scruton's definite statement on the politics of our time. The picture that emerges is of conservatism as it usually presents itself: a territorial conservatism, that grows out of concern for the homestead and dedicated to the defense of the legal, cultural, and institutional achievements of that culture. And rightly so; conservative resistance cannot begin other than from what is already *there*. This is appropriate on another level too; Scruton is a philosopher *and* a conservative, and if these two have one thing in common, it is the desire to re-establish harmony between themselves and the world (cf. p. 6).

I wonder, however, if that harmony is slightly too quickly established. The contemporary world, after all, is 'out of joint' in a two-fold sense. First, if "we"—the pre-political "first person plural" (p. 4)—and the moral and institutional "constraints" (p. 5) in which this "we" operates, are "social artefacts" (ibid), then the being of "we" today is technologically mediated 'all the way down' (as Heidegger has made clear). Whatever that may mean for our politics, if the primary duty of the conservative is to defend the "we" as the first feature of *Dasein* (pp. 11-12) by beginning *from* it, then the technological constitution of our "we" must form part of that starting point. That suggests, at the surface level, tinkering with Scruton's intellectual history, in order to include, say, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Ellul or Leon Kass, and to engage with others that have suggested ideas to compensate for our technicity, from Giorgio Agamben and Alain Badiou to Nick Land and others. That engagement, I am sure, would change our understanding of the nature of conservatism by upending its subject (Scruton's "we"), tinkering with its objects, or the things that the "we" uses to maintain itself (Scruton's *patria*, common law, tradition), and with its antagonistic others (his account of the New Left, say, or post-war British dirigisme and religious fundamentalism). This is a perilous enterprise to be sure; it could drive a wedge between conservatism and liberalism with which conservatism is supposed to be in a symbiotic relationship (p. 55) and grapple with post-modernism by virtue of the attempt of post-modern thinkers to take on the technological challenge. This engagement, then, could bring conservatism well out of its comfort zone.

The second disjuncture between Scruton's conservatism and our times is, domestically, what John Rawls called "the fact of pluralism" (Rawls 2001, p. 23). This is a two-level problem specific to conservatism—for liberalism and post-modernism have already sought to grapple with it. It is a problem on the surface, because its assertion as a "fact" disallows its omission by Scruton's "empirical conservatism" (2014a).¹ And it is a problem in depth, because the pre-political "we" which conservatives are constrained to take as

a given, has become problematical or highly political. Here conservatism is forced to face another unseemly competitor—multiculturalism—with which it shares its first assumption that a person’s good is defined by active membership in a community.² Although a recent mutation of the great liberal tradition, this encounter brings conservatism in company that it would rather avoid for its illiberal implications (Barry 2000). By beginning from the “we”, the conservative intellectual tradition may have to broaden too—to cover, say, German Romanticism—and, perhaps inexorably, towards the great adversary of the conservative tradition in Scruton’s account, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. For the contradictory pulls of conservatism that Scruton begins to lay out are, I think, best embodied in Rousseau’s fundamental stance of submitting the Enlightenment to a radical critique from within the Enlightenment—not as its outside enemy, but as its internal “defector” (Melzer 1990, p. xii).

These observations can be accommodated without touching the core of the *Invitation*. But, always from this situated, historical perspective, the sort of invitation extended by Scruton may be put into question altogether. Scruton says up front that we are well-advised to look into the past of conservatism because the world of yesterday is “[vanishing] into air” (p. 1). He invites the curious to enter the Museum of Conservatism. But that is not what Scruton wants; his is an empirical conservatism of the highest contemporary relevance. Yet, as I have already sought to indicate, our time is not simply characterized by *this* or *that* new quality—the ‘bad’ quality of vanishing institutions, for example, which is balanced by a ‘good’ quality: its openness (*ibid.*)—but by its different, techno-mediated, nature. For example, the plausible argument has been made, that contemporary liberals are not suffering simply from a curable case of hallucination when they profess their belief in “the right of individuals to define their identity for themselves, regardless of existing norms and customs” (p. 8), but that this is immanent to the internal logic of liberalism; a logic that is only intensified by the technical production of socio-human artefacts (e.g. Jardine 2004, Part I).³ If that is, in some important way, correct, the past cannot shed its light on the present and future *just so*; intellectual probity requires from us to refract the tradition through our historicity; Heidegger’s or Foucault’s refractions come to mind as examples. However that refraction may look like, it does put into question, I think, the conservative nature of Scruton’s history of conservative ideas.

I. SCRUTON’S EMPIRICAL CONSERVATISM

But, let us row back from this complex question which cannot be settled here and examine the content of the conservative tradition according to Scruton. Conservatism as we know it, Scruton tells us, emerged as a response to the Enlightenment. This philosophical tradition begins with Adam Smith and its representative thinker is Hegel. The tradition, however, also has a pre-history whose representative thinker is Aristotle. Scruton carefully traces its transformations, from a defense of tradition against calls for popular sovereignty, to its defense of religion and high culture, its later alliance with classical liberals against socialism to its contemporary efforts to champion Western civilization against its enemies (p. 127). To each of these correspond a kind of conservatism: pre-historical, Enlightenment, Philosophical and Cultural Conservatism.

Modern conservatism, Scruton tells us, began as a *limit-instituting break*; a necessary counter to the excesses of liberal individualism. And, as the beginning is the god-like “savior of all things” (Plato 1980, 775e), this beginning constituted a principle that unfolds throughout its variegated history. The initial counter-individualism transformed into a counter to materialist doctrines of progress culminating into an attempt to apply the brakes as mightily as possible on the utopias that followed. If, in all its transformations, “something has remained the same, namely the conviction that good things are more easily destroyed than created” (p. 127), conservatism mobilizes in the effort to limit the excesses of the new in order to bring it in harmony with the old. Indeed, even in its broadest sense, insofar as conservatism connects to universal aspects of the human condition (p. 9), these aspects are to serve as sentinels that guard the borders of our political thought against any trespassing (see the list on pp. 11-12; trust and competition, custom and choice, kinship/homeness and free association of rational beings, and, more generally, universality and particularity). If liberal individualism and socialist utopias evidently trespass against one or more of these, conservatism is that sober part of the Western tradition that recalls man back to his senses. Firmly located within the terrain marked out by its *Grenzprinzipien*, conservatism strives to articulate that space by bringing them in harmony with each other.

At its origin, then, conservatism unfolds in the encounter with liberalism. Others—socialists, or religious fundamentalists, for example—are its enemies. The dividing line between liberalism and conservatism, however, is the

one instituted by Rousseau; it runs *within* the Enlightenment order “as a dispute within the broad ideas of popular sovereignty, the liberty of the individual and constitutional rights” (p. 22). This is therefore a family quarrel; as I read Scruton, conservatives disagree with *the beginning* of liberalism in the ideas of absolute or unattached, individual freedom and contract, and, consequently, with some of *the means* of liberalism, e.g. a world-wide political order that corresponds to its beginning from man *as such*, rather than *these men*.⁴ But conservatism and liberalism agree on *the end* of our order, say, a “constitution of liberty” (p. 5) or limited government, representative institutions, separation of powers, and a list of basic rights. It follows, I think, that of the two, the conservative is the more complete and mature family member: liberalism stands, as it were, on the single leg of individualism while conservatism nicely supports itself on two legs—individualism and kinship (e.g. p. 14). As Edmund Burke showed, however, the first, purely liberal leg, is dependent on the second (p. 47). Liberalism, therefore, requires conservatism as a correction, while conservatism possesses all the ingredients for a complete modern political order by itself. Add to this its maturity—conservatism plausibly reaches back to the beginnings of political thought with Aristotle while liberal thought is coterminous with its time—and conservatism emerges as the elder brother in all the senses of that word.

I want to make two points on this: firstly, contrary to my conclusion from Scruton’s account that conservatism provides a more complete account of order, in Scruton we get a sense that conservatism cannot stand on its own; that it is *a part*, not *the whole* of order. Certainly, this quality of conservatism is congruent with its self-understanding. “Modern conservatism,” Scruton plausibly tells us, “began life ... as a *qualification* of liberal individualism” (p. 23); it is “a hesitation within liberalism” (p. 33). But then, it is unclear how conservatism can be “about our whole way of being” (p. 6); it is, strictly speaking, not possible *to be* a conservative, for man is a whole, and not a part. In this account, ‘conservative’ is one of the many qualifiers of what a man is; an account made plausible by the well-noted concern among conservatives to make politics only a part—and often not a very important part at that—of their life. In contradistinction to most of his enemies perhaps, the conservative pushes conservative political ideas only prudentially if he even has any inkling of politics at all.

My preliminary conclusion on the completeness of conservatism is further undermined by its re-active, past-gazing, limit-instituting nature. From its beginnings in the

Enlightenment, conservatism has not instituted order; it is meant, rather, either to institute a self-limiting principle to varieties of liberal regimes which, on their own, become “feverish” (Plato 1991, 372e) or to sharpen their self-defense in face of false prophets, e.g. socialism. From a temporal perspective, it constitutes one (past-oriented) of two dimensions of order. Therefore, there can be no conservative regimes but only regimes that have more or less conservative features.

This unpretentious self-understanding of conservatism rubs against the second point which I conclude from the relationship of conservatism to liberalism. The difference between the two, I think, can be re-stated in the following way: conservatism is that sort of liberal order that orders its visible appearances—artifices of human will, e.g. its man-made laws and institutions—in light of the invisible—an instance “independent of human will”, often “extra-human,” e.g. divine law (Freeden 1994, p. 334). Following Scruton, who distinguishes this metaphysical conservatism from empirical conservatism and defends the latter (Scruton 2014a, last chapter), we can call the types of liberal order proper to each *metaphysical* and *empirical liberalism*.⁵ Importantly, the two liberalisms *look* the same—they are both committed to the limited government, representative institutions, separation of powers, and a list of basic rights mentioned above. Where they differ, however, is in their *justification*: the one is metaphysically-propped while the other is wholly empirical. Now, although Scruton defends an empirical sort of conservatism, even in the *Invitation* where he does not deal with metaphysical conservatism at all, he designates as the possibly primary contribution of conservatism the insight that “we rational beings need customs and institutions that are founded in something other than reason” (p. 14). The paradigmatic thinker of this conservatism could well be John Locke—rather than a Hume (p. 28) or even a Burke (p. 42)—whose liberalism follows from his theology (e.g. Waldron 2002). Remove God from Locke, and you have something not unlike a Macphersonian justification for capitalist relations of production; a purely empirical, and ultimately inconsistent, liberalism that inevitably degenerates below the most corrupt dreams of any liberal (e.g. Manent 1996, pp. 39-52) as inevitably as the Platonic *kallipolis* (with the caveat, of course, that Plato knows this). As Waldron makes clear, it is our reading of God’s Law—“sufficiently made known to all mankind” (Locke 1997c, p. 304)—that is the condition of possibility of our equality; that denies that we have an absolute freedom even in the state of nature; that enables us to consent to

government and; when government trespasses on that Law, that allows us to overturn it for “The Law of Nature stands as an Eternal Rule to all Men, Legislators as well as others” (Locke 1997a, p. 135). The objective existence of the Law as drawn from its metaphysical source, and the faith of *these* people in it, has assured that the English always came “back again to our old Legislative of King, Lords, and Commons” (Locke 1997a, p. 223). The opposite order of empirical liberalism, which is the order that Scruton shrinks from, may well have its paradigmatic thinker in Thomas Hobbes.⁶ Not God, but a “[dictate] of reason” formalistically understood, dictated equality for Hobbes (Hobbes 1988, p. 107). Here men are born free to follow their inclinations and to do whatever is conducive to their preservation; they have no natural obligations because society is derivative. In the former, metaphysical liberalism, men are born in obligation to their idea of God and must act in accordance with His plan; in place of instinctual drives, they have reason—to form an “*idea* of a supreme Being...and the *idea* of our selves, as ... foundations of Our Duty” (Locke 1971, 4.3.18); in place of property to dispose of as they wish, they are His trustees; in place of rights, they have, therefore, first duties and obligations; and, in place of anarchy, they have, always and everywhere, the Law. It seems to me, then, that to the two justifications of liberal order—one empirical and one metaphysical—correspond not two kinds of conservatism, but what we usually understand by liberalism and conservatism simply.

It seems to me that Scruton’s empirical conservatism comes into tension with the sort of metaphysical liberalism that Scruton’s own conservatism wants to support (e.g. Scruton 2014b, p. 176). His account obscures more than reveals the constitutive principle of *this* political order with a meek “something other than reason” (p. 14) or “obligations that are not freely chosen (obligations of piety)” arising out of the home in which we are born. If “this something else” (ibid.), as Scruton puts it, is to do the work, that is, re-institute the self-limiting principle of liberal order, it has to be brought back to the center of gravity of political order as Locke did rather than work negatively as one of the limits of human nature, beyond which the children of Adam—*these* of all beings—ought not to go.

This is not to say that empirical conservatism is practically impossible or undesirable; Scruton’s work, among so many others, testifies to the contrary. But it is to make more of Scruton’s remark that the much-loved institutions of empirical conservatism, like the Anglican Church are in deep trouble. The trick of a healthy, empirical conserva-

tism is like that of the happily married couple that do not examine each other’s flaws too closely, for “[l]ooked at from close to, it is all nonsense, fragments ... about as coherent as the heap of broken crockery that remains after a lifetime of marital quarrels” (Scruton 2014a, p. 179). But, as Scruton well knows, precisely this insistence on looking closely is one of the sins of our times when “institutions, procedures and values ... one by one vanish into air” (p. 1). And, this, not merely in the narrow sense of our own capricious times, but in the larger historical time within which conservatism has unfolded: the era of Enlightenment. The Enlightenment, after all, was based on the premise that what the classical tradition held for a cardinal sin—the merger between philosophy and politics, which would mean inevitably the triumph of politics over philosophy—is actually a virtue or, indeed, *the* virtue. In Bartlett’s nice image it undertook to “reconstructing [the Cave of *the Republic* of Plato] such that the sun’s light might penetrate to its every corner” (Bartlett 2001, p. 5). That this proposition has long been recognized to be theoretically erroneous is almost beside the point politically; the merger of philosophizing and politicking has taken place practically and conclusively with the revolutions of the eighteenth century (pp. 58, 72). As their contemporary defense of reason and free inquiry suggests (see chapter 6), empirical conservatives have, however reluctantly, accepted that arrangement.⁷ This remaking of the Cave—here by removing its natural ceiling, thereby installing electric lighting, and everywhere by transforming its chains through public education—has made politics primary and architectonic; a complete vision which favors “the advocacy of comprehensive plans” (p. 81). The progressive politics of reason turned out necessarily to be an empirical politics of social engineering without end, swinging widely between self-righteousness and disenchantment; the very opposite of the conservative ‘politics of spirituality’ (p. 121).

But what does this have to do with Scruton’s empirical conservatism? Well, it means for one that now political things must be scrutinized up closely, whether we like it or (like Scruton, e.g. 1993, p. 50) not. Arguments about how things are ‘by nature’ with which this book abounds (ibid.), no longer do the work conservatives want them to. It means that we modern rationalists cannot accept institutions “with no explanation other than [their] own existence” (Scruton 2014a, p. 179); that we are forced to ask that *dreadful* question which separates us from the larger tradition of Western political philosophy: Why should we accept ‘what is,’ simply because it is ‘by nature’? This ques-

tion is necessary in a two-fold sense: (a) in the practical sense that the natural Cave together with its natural prisoners (Scruton’s “we”), after all, has already been transformed into a human artifice in the two ways stated at the beginning of this essay, and; (b) in the theoretical sense that the foundations of our order are theoretical and not practical (cf. Manent 1996, p. xv). It is, of course, true, for example, that the idea that political life may be “free from the marks of power and domination, is no more than a delusion” (p. 61). But why should we accept *these* “marks of power and domination” unless their justification is not merely based on kinship and tradition? And why should the authority of English kinship and tradition be acknowledged by those subjects of Her Majesty’s Government that have not grown with them, unless they are shown to be just? After all, what is expected of a non-Englishman is a *conversion* from his God to Scruton’s; a conversion that surely cannot be carried out through Scruton’s God-deprived, cost-benefit calculating, at-arm’s-length holding empirical conservatism.

Secondly, it means that the politics of empirical conservatism—a defense of the “collectively inherited good things that we must strive to keep” (Scruton 2014a, p. 6)—is incoherent and untenable. If the conservative knows one thing, it is that virtue cannot be created through ideological exhortation or government fiat. Therefore, a direct, unmediated defense of our—or rather Scruton’s—inheritance will do nothing to save it while leaving conservatism unable to grapple with the reasons that those traditions were left behind. And, importantly, the reasons may indeed have been, at times, poor; but together with the reasons go a whole host of feelings, sentiments and experiences that the conservative, by Scruton’s own account, cannot simply ignore.

The task that conservatives seem to be facing, then, is not the conservative task of putting a break on the actions of others, but the radical task of instituting a conservative, i.e. metaphysical, liberal order. But clearly, that political task is impossible without monumental intellectual dishonesty after our loss of faith as Scruton notes in the last chapter of *How to be a Conservative*. Has conservatism, then, reached its end-point? Or, how should conservatism appear to us?

II. CONSERVATISM RE-CONSIDERED

Looking at the conservative trilogy of Roger Scruton, it may be worth asking with Iris Murdoch: “what is he afraid of?” (Murdoch 1985, p. 72). In view of his more political writings, the answer seems clear enough: it is a conservative fear of the disappearance of collectively inherited in-

stitutions. Its causes are also straightforward: the fools, frauds and firebrands of much of contemporary theory, the 68ers, immigration, but also unfettered consumerism, free marketeering and militant globalism. Scruton responds with an empirical, territorial conservatism which directly defends inherited English institutions. Significantly, however, his defense consists of attempting to let them be rather than justifying them. I find this evasiveness appropriate to the task at hand, if in tension with the very empiricism of Scruton’s conservatism. I will argue here that the directedness implied by Scruton’s empirical conservatism—a defense of *these* institutional achievements, a presentation of *these* conservative ideas—ought to be evaded. My aim is to contribute to an enlarging of the conservative horizon by reconsidering what Scruton’s conservatism by virtue of its empiricism tends to obscure: its dependence on far deeper, non-empirical sources (see also Cullen 2016, p. 203).

If Murdoch’s question of fear is posed one more time with a view to the entirety of Scruton’s work, I tentatively suggest a very Hegelian fear of an unmendable rupture of reality: into subjects and objects, meaning and knowledge, blissful faith and busybody rationalism, where the second of these terms is threatening to overgrow the first. And, if so, this is good. The tensions running through Scruton’s thought—his single theory of cognitive dualism, the attack on the empirical perspective on the *Lebenswelt* and the empirical defense of the same, the call to live as if there is a God (O’Hear 2016, p. 51) and the dogged insistence on “honesty” and dispelling “illusions” (e.g. Scruton 2016b, p. 254)—may be thought of as fissures that live in the shadow of that fear. On one side stand the things he can be certain about: science, empirical conservatism and the utility of living as if there is a God. On the other stands his *pharmakon* for that fear; my name for it, perhaps against Scruton, is metaphysics. The remedy is decisive for Scruton himself who does not submit but responds to his fear by philosophizing in the realms of aesthetics, religion etc. Yet, his empirical conservatism, it seems to me, is a submission to this experience of contradiction; a wholly self-contained conservatism of the surface even though the “surface of the world” is what it is by pointing beyond itself (Scruton 2016a, pp. 17-18). But just because we cannot empirically master the depth as Scruton points out, does that mean that we cannot know it? Is there not a whole classic and medieval tradition which affirms the contrary? Is not the task to recover the nature of metaphysics (e.g. Patočka 1989), the rationality of those classic and medieval symbols, and the language—once present, now largely lost—appropriate to

them? And, given the nature of the materials involved, the temporal posture required, and the “unoriginal” nature of the thought it calls forth (Voegelin 1990, p. 122), is this task not simultaneously philosophical and conservative?

It seems to me that although the aim of the *Invitation* is to shed light on the sources of conservatism (p. 2), Scruton’s empirical conservatism resembles liberalism in that both are “constitutionally incapable of coming clean about the deeper sources of their own thinking” (Taylor 1989, p. 88). The reason is simple: the thing is empirical while its sources are metaphysical. Here is, I think, the ground on which the quarrel between conservatism and liberalism ought to take place. To pursue a thought that is present if not explicit in Scruton, conservatism is precisely that liberalism that is capable of coming clean about its sources. So that we do not think that this is all too highfalutin, from Locke to Tocqueville, from Huxley to Solzhenitsyn, from de Gaulle to Havel and finally to Scruton himself, history is full of figures that have engaged with the sources of their convictions. In this sense, a conservatism that is true to itself dare not be one more *Ideologie der bestehenden Ordnung* (to tweak Meier’s phrase in Meier 2017, p. 7) for the simple reason that the *Ordnung* understands itself as empirical. In the following I will try to sketch something of this larger conservative horizon from an experiential, a historical and finally a political perspective. It seems to me that this project may be more harmonious with the entirety—as opposed to the merely political part—of Scruton’s work. I conclude that conservatism can only engage in an indirect, evasive or qualified defense of political things for they are not the heart of the matter. There is, therefore, a distinction to be drawn between the straightforwardly conservative nature of conservative politics and the radicalism at the heart of conservatism.

Let me begin with the experiential perspective. In his mercifully brief remarks on method, Scruton tells us that ideas are neither self-contained nor by-products of economic forces (p. 9). Instead they arise from “biological, social and political conditions that lie deeper than rational argument” (p. 10). Let me go a step further and suggest, half-tentatively, that they are engendered by experiences of order.⁸ And, if it is somewhat true as Scruton, I think, suggests, that conservative ideas are becoming opaque, then we would be well advised to return to their “deeper” engendering source. This is not to say that ideas by themselves are not important, but that they lose their reality unless they arise from and constantly refer back to their engendering experiences.

What, then, is the conservative experience of order? Scruton suggests, quite rightly I think, that it is the experience of *Unverfügbarkeit*.⁹ Hard to translate, it refers to the experience of letting what is un-appearing and higher organize and direct what is appearing, multiple and, by itself, chaotic; that the order in which man lives, is not made, but found or gifted; that to live well is to submit to principles higher than man.¹⁰ In other words, that reality has a metaphysical structure. Importantly, Scruton adds that this experience is mediated by appearances alone. Therefore, the job of conservatism—and philosophy and religion too—is to protect these appearances. Hence, his empiricism.

But to protect them as appearances is to illumine how they refer to what is beyond them; to drive a wedge between what they appear to be and what they are: “Surfaces,” says Scruton, “are deep ... the things of the world appear to be objects, but, insofar as they are meaningful, they are not what they appear to be. They are subjects” (Scruton 2014b, p. 113). That requires, I think, speaking about them in some sort of metaphysical vocabulary in order to make present the reality to which they point. As Robert Grant puts it “[s]cience is not hostile to the sacred, merely blind to it, and not out of spiritual tone-deafness, but simply as a precondition of its own particular heuristic” (Grant 2016, p. 61). Therefore, not only is Scruton’s empiricism derivative for the experience itself is the heart of the matter and *it* is of a metaphysical nature, but our talk of the appearances that enable this experience ought not to be merely empirical. The immediate political task of conservatism to defend these appearances is dependent on the broader and deeper task of recovering a metaphysical language appropriate to these experiences of order. Notice, first, that this is a conservative task in the sense that the appropriate languages were once widely available and have now become lost or peripheral. And, secondly, that it is a philosophical task in the sense that what is at stake, in the end, is making sense of our experiences of order.

The conservative experience can be made transparent by religious, philosophical or literary speculation; it is however ubiquitous in those practical experiences of the sacred so beautifully analyzed by Scruton and common to all including, I think, the experience of raising children. As *the* conservative experience of order, it is, as Scruton says of religion, something “to which you are converted, or into which you are born” (Scruton 2014a, p. 174). And since we, children of the Enlightenment, tend to become desensitized to this human experience due to, among other things, our empiricist and contractual language (e.g. Gauthier 1977), it

is one that most of us are converted to, if at all, in our mature age.

This experience is the reason why in practical life conservatives tend to find the sources of order in activities that can be made present or objectified only with difficulty such as “conversation, friendship, sport, poetry and the arts” (pp. 114-15). And it is why in theoretical life they tend to work with resources that are not apparently available within the existing order, e.g. the larger, including pre- or non-Enlightenment, traditions of political philosophy. From the surface of things, of course, this seems to be a deep political disadvantage in an age defined by the attempt, however illusory, to move in the opposite direction. But precisely her experience tells the conservative that the apparent surface is not all there is to the human things.

It is unfortunate, it seems to me, that in Scruton’s world-picture these appearances grow epiphenomenally on the physical world of objects (Scruton 2014b, p. 67); although, to be sure, they are irreducible to it. In this, he is wholly modern; he begins, say, like a Hobbes from the natural reality underlying the world of subjects, rather than a Socrates from the world of opinionated subjects already chock full of transcendentals, or a Heidegger from the meaning of things as they appear to us. And if the empirical is the facts of the matter, it follows that a conservatism that is intellectually honest ought to be empirical. But *the appearance* of conservatism occurs at the moment of recognition that appearances are not simply what they appear to be; that space, time and causality are not what is essential to the world *qua* appearance. Conservatism is an appearance in the world of politics of the experience of the non-apparent nature of that world. *This* is what is of primary and direct concern to it because *this*—rather than the confrontation with some ideology of the moment—is what allows it to be. Conservatism is, therefore, in principle *radical* in its vision, even if, in practice and derivatively, it appears as *conservative* action.

The experience of *Unverfügbarkeit* means that the fundamental stance of conservatism towards reality is one of piety; a virtue well-illustrated in Scruton’s work.¹¹ This may flip into reactionarism and intransigence, of course, when rival, wholly positivistic interpretations (e.g. socialism) threaten that principle. This intransigence, however, is incidental to conservatism and in contradiction with its ownmost pious nature. For a conservative knows that precisely due to its *Unverfügbarkeit*, policy-making and politicking cannot rationally determine the nature of reality; this, again, is the teaching of the pious Locke (1997b).

From the perspective of its engendering experience, then, conservatism is talk of the sacred—or, of what is other than merely appearing, be it God, Being or *das Unverfügbare*—in the necessarily profane political language of our liberalism. Often that referent is God in which case conservatism is a kind of meta-theology in a political key. That is, from the point of view of appearances it is very much a liberalism dedicated to the ‘constitution of liberty’; an empirical conservatism working to complete really-existing liberalism. From the point of view of its being, however, it is wholly unlike the liberal self-understanding; while liberalism searches for answers to the political problem in institutional arrangements (*there* in the world),¹² conservatism is a “bid for the soul” (p. 121) to which institutional arrangements are only one, very far from perfect means.

This ‘double nature’ of conservatism institutes, firstly, a difference with liberalism and, secondly, a contradiction within conservatism. Regarding the first, if the language of liberalism moves along the plane of the solitary, self-interested individual, owner of one’s body and free to fulfill its inclinations in order to preserve it as comfortably as possible, the language of conservatism moves along the plane of the faithful citizen, bound to God and Fatherland and entrusted by Them to cultivate her heritage in accordance with Their purposes. If the problem of the former is one of rights and particular will, the problem of the latter is one of obligations and general will. If the former thrives on the acquisitive virtues (e.g. hard work and hardnosed self-interest), the latter relies on the generous virtues (e.g. sacrifice and faithfulness) that presuppose the sacred. Finally, if liberalism and socialism, in different ways, merge politics with reason, conservative politics is ‘political spirituality.’ Therefore, their fundamental attitudes vis-à-vis political reality are, wholly opposite to each other, even if, as Scruton points out, the one appears to be a mere ‘correction’ of the other.

Secondly, the two sides of the conservative ‘double nature’ bring conservatism into a two-fold contradiction: in the inner sense, between its (sacred) being and its (profane) language, and in the outer sense with respect to its times. Conservatism is that political movement which, reminiscent of medieval times, can have only a derivative political theory; a great political disadvantage in the age founded by Machiavelli and Hobbes.¹³ If its political theory would be primary and architectonic, it would exhaust itself on the surface of things. That is why, perhaps, conservatives often find political language inappropriate to what they want to

say; and they tend to move towards culture, aesthetics, and poetry as Scruton's works show.

The central objects—or, I should say subjects—of Anglo-Saxon conservatism, then, are indeed those that Scruton counts: impartial law, the environment, culture and democratic procedures—“these and many other things” (2014a, p. viii). But these are raised only insofar as they enable *these* peoples better than the alternatives to live what conservatism treasures. Notice that, firstly, once *these* peoples radically change, the objects of conservatism may change as well. And, secondly, that what defines conservatism and distinguishes it from its competitors is not its political stance—that is, its attitude with regard to the objects of order—but its formative relationship through them to what is above, beyond, and ultimately higher than them. When *that* experience goes, the subjects that enabled it wither into objects and are bound to follow.

This raises the question of the second or historical perspective of our conservatism born out of the Enlightenment. To stay with our religious example, if the Enlightenment signaled the prohibition or privatization of faith, conservatism first appeared due to the compulsion of theology to turn to politics: first, in a negative sense, to provide a political defense of the sacred; second, in a positive sense, to restore its formative power in the souls of men; and, third, in a theoretical sense, to provide it with a rational justification. These correspond, roughly, to empirical, religious and philosophical conservatism. If the West as we know it originated when politics called philosophy to account in the trial of Socrates (Meier 2017), it reached its apogee in the Enlightenment when politics called religion before its tribunal. Out of the originary moment political philosophy emerged as a political defense of the philosophical life; out of the culminant moment conservatism emerged as a political defense of the pious life. The two defenses, radically different as they were, had in common a metaphysical view of reality and, consequently, an essentially pious attitude towards the real *tout court*. That is one reason, perhaps, why Plato and Augustine, or Aristotle and Aquinas tend to speak to the conservative in ways that sometimes baffle her adversaries.

Conservatism is, therefore, the achievement of a kind of self-reflexivity by theology in a secular age. It does so by instituting a distance between the theological and the political from which to contemplate and defend the *The Face of God*. And, the other way around, it is a mask that theology can wear when facing the political. That is, even when political struggles between conservatives and liberals or social-

ists intensify to their most extreme, and empirical conservatives engage with their full being in the political, we still do not have conservatism proper. Conservatism achieves its nature in asking the question “Why God?” in the secular context born of the Enlightenment. If conservatism appears (to others) as risk-averse, to be a conservative is to take a double-risk: the personal risk of living the sacred in a secular world, and the political risk of exposing it to profanation. It, therefore, ought to proceed with caution. Conservatism is theology made *politic*.

Accordingly, if the ordering experience of *Unverfügbarkeit* is historically coeval with man—while politics, for example, may be secondary (cf. p. 11)—the conservative experience occurs temporally at a third step, when the claims of the latter profess to exclude the former. Conservatism emerged historically when theology was obliged to defend itself before the tribunal of the political in necessarily political language. Hence, although seemingly not the heart of the matter, the political is historically constitutive of conservatism. But ultimately conservatism cannot allow itself to be defined wholly by one or the other of its two dimensions for then it would no longer be conservatism. That means, it is forced to keep politics open to origins and ends that remain unincluded in it; and, therefore, to provide it with a positive orientation. In the final analysis, even if conservatism originates temporally in the political turn of theology, conservatism is not theology (first) masquerading as politics (second), but it takes place in the space of the mask; it is, therefore, wholly political.

These considerations bring us to the political perspective of conservatism. To hold true to itself, that is, to be all that it could be, conservatism needs to attend to both—the face and the audience—without *being* either. Conservatism takes place in the interval between the two. Faith, after all, is unworldly; it must address the polis in a language other than that of confession and penitence. Politics, of course, is a worldly art; it does not demand of faith poverty, chastity and ‘purity of heart’. Both religious faith and profane politics understandably see the occupiers of that in-between ground with suspicion as “double-minded” (*dipsychos*, e.g. James 4:8). In other words, political conservatives may form an own group, different from the community of religious believers or secular citizens, which obeys to principles other than those of eternal faith or everyday politics simply.

The task of conservatism, then, is to clear the ground between the two; to wrest that ground from the penumbra—*here* of faith, *there* of politics—and give it a principle of its

own. That task is wholly political for it is dedicated to giving the ground a specific form; a form that depends on the particularities of a place. Hence, political conservatism is not a conservatism that is valid always and everywhere as in the experiential perspective or singular and particular as it emerged in historical time in the Enlightenment. Political conservatism exists in the plural; it is a multiplicity of particular forms that have transpired only in those cases where that *in-between* ground has been successfully wrested. One strategy of ground-clearing may be some sort of refraction of the light of faith into political language under the condition that the new form sublates them both. Something like this may have happened in the case of the American founding. Another may be the “topographical imagination” (Malachuk 2016, p. 8) of concretely imagining the City of God like the American Transcendentalists and especially Thoreau did, at least for a while. A third strategy still may be irony. The strength of irony is its allowance for political indirectness or evasiveness (cf. the irony of Maurice Cowling in p. 134 with Scruton’s honesty in 2016b, p. 254). Irony enables the holding of seemingly incompatible things together because both are necessary and true (Haraway 1991, p. 149). It thus can permit, in principle, the upholding of Scruton’s “obligations of piety” (p. 62), in profane language. To do that, it may address the political with the Socratic irony that does not fully believe what it says to others. But to believe itself, that is, to believe in the very possibility and desirability of the good earthly order as a part of the pious life, it may address itself with the Rortian irony that does not fully believe what it says to itself (Rorty 1989, Part II). And, it must be ironic in the Socratic and Rortian sense simultaneously, about the *topos* of its true interest; a conservative is, of course, both pious and political, but she may not be both at the same time. It is in this fundamental sense that the conservative is a champion of the liberal regime; or, rather, of that kind of liberal regime which intends to protect rather than devalue the sacred by instituting the private/public distinction. Hence the conservative sympathy with the American as opposed to the French Revolution—conservatives may well be revolutionaries, but not of the kind inaugurated on July 14th, 1789. In the final analysis, our terms do not deceive us: a conservative is not a liberal, but a friend—indeed an ardent friend and ally given the alternatives—of liberalism. His liberal adversaries are therefore right to sense uneasiness; like Hobbes’ seditious individuals who behind the mask of piety “did not challenge the sovereignty in plain terms, and by that name, till they had slain the king” (Hobbes 1969, p. 27), the conserva-

tive is constrained to be a liberal by the historical circumstances; his mind is *elsewhere*.

For Scruton, of course, this *elsewhere* does not exist. Yet his mind is constantly, indeed fundamentally, *there*. This predicament is only partially ameliorated by the fact that we apply transcendental categories “to each other” too and not merely to “items that are not of this world” (Scruton 2016a, p. 27). What an odd name for God who is not an object but a subject, and that kind of oddball subject that is distinct but not separate from us, in us but higher than the things that make us, and yet fully accessible to our reason (Wallace 2016)! The chasm that opens up in Scruton’s dualistic theory cries out for mending. Conservatism properly understood, then, is to engage in the institution of political myths in order to: firstly, *drive a wedge* between the political sphere of objects, literality, and matters of apparent life and death, and the truth; secondly, *convert* its inner opposition into a productive tension; thus, thirdly, allowing for *playfulness* even in matters of seemingly deadly seriousness. In other words, conservatism is constrained to be metaphysical, not empirical.

Of course, public irony may be just one of the devices that allows conservatism not to exhaust itself into combat *on* and *for* the surface—against political correctness, for example—but to hold a footing on what is *other than* surface. Even in Scruton’s account conservatism is allied with philosophy in the theoretical and religion in the practical world if by those terms we understand two activities that deal precisely with what natural science and positivistic political doctrines are blind to. But in this triumvirate, its place is the least certain (while the place of religion as sanctioned talk of the sacred, is the most certain) for, as empirical conservatism, it is constrained to speak about the common things in a language and context that is no longer appropriate to them. Therefore, conservatism may well be lost the moment it puts all its chips on the political table through empirical conservatism.¹⁴ Conservatism, of course, are bound to endure—witness the ever more farcical recurrence of socialisms in our times. But does conservatism as such have a principled home beyond the accidental “dank and life-infested corner” (p. 138)?

The answer, I think, is a qualified yes. Conservatism can find shelter if it knows how to apply for shared space in the antechamber of philosophy or religion. Having said something about the latter, let me now say a word about the former. The ground that political conservatism seeks to form overlaps with the ground of theory. As already noted, reflexivity is embedded in the originary experience of conser-

vatism. On one hand, if conservatism is to play the mediating role between its two poles, even when it raises properly political questions (e.g. on rights and duties), it is constrained to place these questions in light of the comprehensive questions (e.g. on God, man, world and society). That is, *das Unverfügbare* of this source of conservatism is not the God of the theologians but the Being of the philosophers. Sharply distinguished from objects and goals as they appear in the world of practice, its *topoi* were located from the beginnings of philosophy outside of politics—‘the political’ is only one of many such historical crystallizations as the mode of organizing those appearances that are related to the *polis* (de Beistegui 1998); the ‘God of the philosophers’ (Scruton 2012a, p. 15) is another. The inner contradiction threatening conservatism disappears here: not only is the object of theoretical speculation wholly *unverfügbar*; but the theorems that it forges in order to understand it are for their own sake, and not for the sake of action (e.g. Oakeshott 2003, p. 33). Therefore, theory can be the (re)discovery of reality as *unverfügbar*; that human beings, contrary to the revolutionary political conclusions of early modern skepticism, are not free to make the order they live in. But, in the final analysis, we ought not to mistake theory for political conservatism; it may be a source, never a kind of conservatism.

It is on these borderlines, between the thing and its sources that the *Invitation* treads. It seems to me, however, that Scruton’s invitation lacks this self-awareness; and this lack transforms the *Great Tradition* from a cue to thinking free from the empiricist straitjacket to a tool in the arsenal of political battle. But the *Tradition* is an unwieldy political tool as its use in the academic culture wars since the sixties demonstrates; its uses lie *elsewhere*. It is the theoretical turn that allows us to see, for example, that the culmination of Aristotle’s moral and *political* philosophy, was not “the mature man” (*spoudaios*)—say, a Scrutonian empirical conservative—but the philosopher of *bios theoretikos* (Aristotle 2004, 10.6-9; 10.7-8)—say, an Oakeshottian of *Experience and its Modes* (1995). He does not, like Scruton’s empirical conservative, seek to know in order to act, but engages in contemplation “for its own sake” (Aristotle 2004, 10.7, 1177b1) wholly free of any (by)products or changes in the external world. There is, therefore, no straight developmental line between the two; a conversion is required to see the superiority of the latter: “[f]or Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, when asked who was happiest said: ‘None of the people you think; he would seem a strange person to you’” (Aristotle 2005, 1.4). This turn of (visible) life towards its (invis-

ible) sources—this *intensification* of life by not submitting to its surface contradictions—with which our *Great Tradition* abounds,¹⁵ goes to the core of conservatism as I see it. Where these reasons drop altogether out of view, a non-contradictory philosophical conservatism is no longer possible.

But, to understand these thinkers in this light is to attempt to understand them as wholes and not as a collection of intellectual weapons in the conservative political arsenal with which the *Invitation* serves us. And it is to take the order to which they were responding as a whole too; that is to say, as *unverfügbar* for, as Scruton makes clear, order has a structure that is simultaneously apparent and inapparent. Together with, say, institutions, ideas belong to its more evident parts. They are *there*, readily available for all to reject and assent; but when uncoupled from the originary experiences that engendered them, theirs is an illusory reality. At the same time, we can point to a myriad of non-apparent constituents of order: the moral sentiments of a David Hume or an Adam Smith (pp. 28, 38), feelings of anxiety, alienation, hopelessness or boisterous enthusiasm of a Rousseau, the movements of the human soul analyzed by a Plato and; the metaphysical symbols (e.g. God, Geist) that lend the inner life its reality and freedom (Wallace 2016). It should be evident that the study of politics cannot be constrained to appearances alone for: first, the two levels may well work against each other, and; secondly and more importantly, the non-apparent dimension is the Aristotelian final cause of order (Scruton 2012a, p. 10). Thus, Scruton’s assertion that ideas “do not arise only from other ideas, and often have roots in biological, social and political conditions that lie deeper than rational argument” (ibid.) goes very deep indeed; far deeper, it seems to me, than he lets on. And it is of central significance, to Scruton’s account (cf. his discussion of Hume and Smith) that the conservative grounds order in its non-apparent dimension.¹⁶

If conservatism in our time is achieved in a conversion away from the empirical perspective on the world of subjects, then a conservative history of ideas ought to connect them to the deeper reality that engendered them. Afterall, what is at stake for the conservative is not the *outward* relation of ideas to their historical setting (e.g. Skinner 1988), but the changes that occur *in* the human beings that express them. That necessitates taking the ideas not as ideas, but as traces of another reality altogether, that is, as symbols (e.g. Taylor 1989 or Voegelin’s *History of Political Ideas* and subsequent work) And this history—with heroes such

as the ones in the *Invitation* and others—remains to be written.

It may well be that such a history could not function as an *Invitation to the Great Tradition of Conservatism* for it would be, first and foremost, a work of theory. But it would appear to be conservative from the world of practice, which could well satisfy the condition of metaphysical conservatism to have a foot in both camps the better to stay upright.

NOTES

- 1 This problem is not necessarily a burden for conservatism; as Scruton points out, for example, most conservatives in contemporary Britain have been “immigrant voices” (p. 131).
- 2 It goes without saying that by multiculturalism here is meant something other than the multicultural nature of Enlightenment rationalism (2014a, pp. 79-92).
- 3 But already examined by Rousseau in his imaginative history of civilization as the ever-accelerating, uncontrollable and ultimately unsatisfiable *amour-propre* in the *Second Discourse*.
- 4 See Scruton’s wording on p. 5.
- 5 I use the term “empirical” in order to stay with Scruton’s differentiation between “empirical” and metaphysical conservatism, I think the more appropriate term would be “rationalist” liberalism. But perhaps this use can be partially justified in the foundation of this type of liberalism on the lower goods of the body as opposed to the higher goods of the spirit.
- 6 Only if we accept the conventional, rationalist interpretation of Hobbes. For two non-materialist, non-mechanistic interpretations, see Oakeshott (1991) & Schmitt (1996).
- 7 Recall Michael Oakeshott’s oft-quoted comment on Friedrich Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom*: “A plan to resist all planning maybe better than its opposite, but it belongs to the same style of politics” (1991, p. 26). It seems to me that when read independently of Scruton’s larger work, the *Invitation* bears testimony to conservatism’s gradual slide from Oakeshott to Hayek, as one more Enlightenment doctrine derived from abstract principles among others.
- 8 On this point, I rely on Eric Voegelin’s justification for abandoning his standard history of ideas project (e.g. Voegelin 2006, p. 63ff.)
- 9 Scruton suggests “experiences of the sacred.” I prefer the German *Unverfügbarkeit*, because the sacred seems

to imply a specific sub-category (experiences of God, death, art, sex etc.) of *Unverfügbarkeit*. But, importantly, the implication is that they lead us to see reality as a gift. That is, our experience of the whole is of the whole as *unverfügbar*.

- 10 The words are mine, not Scruton’s. But I think they are congruent with his philosophical project “to create the space at the edge of reason, where faith can take root and grow” (Scruton 2014b, p. 192).
- 11 Does this also suggest that Scruton’s *conversio* occurred not in the political moment of May 1968 in Paris as by his own account (Scruton 2005a, p. 3) but, in a philosophical moment, when he ceased being a Kantian with regard to Avicenna and medieval metaphysics (Scruton 2012a, p. 14) or, even more likely, over time as he slowly recovered his faith (Scruton 2005b, p. 221)?
- 12 Contrast Kant’s virtue-free optimism that the political problem “can be solved even by a nation of devils (so long as they possess understanding)” (Kant 1991, p. 112) with Scruton’s virtue-laden, sacral view of human government (Scruton 2014b, p. 176).
- 13 While this may be a political disadvantage, it is not necessarily a philosophical shortcoming. As Eric Voegelin once remarked “[t]he conclusion that the Middle Ages were unpolitical is possible, however, only on the basis of the gratuitous assumption that the ideas of the modern national state hold a monopolistic claim to the term *political*. We might as well turn the tables: we might take the politics of the Middle Ages as the standard and arrive at the conclusion that perhaps our political problems are not quite so important as they seem to us, considering that mankind was able to avoid them for well over a thousand years” (Voegelin 1997, p. 36).
- 14 Recall Hegel’s teaching that religion is safe as long as it refuses to respond to the battle cry of the Enlightenment, for Enlightenment “[fails] to grasp the content of faith” (Hyppolite 1974, p. 431).
- 15 Indeed, if we recall Plato’s parable of the cave (Plato 1991, 514a ff.), it is with such a ‘turning’ that *Great Tradition* began.
- 16 For a better known, though clearly not the only example that explores these suggestions further, see Taylor (1989).

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Conservatism, Value and Social Philosophy

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INTRODUCTION

Sir Roger's political philosophy derives much of its strength and plausibility from the ways in which he relates what might be called his social philosophy to the normative claims which make up his conservatism. In what follows, I shall assume that political philosophy must indeed be based on a social philosophy. This is not a common assumption since social philosophy is a neglected discipline. Nor has the recent interest in social ontology done much to help the cause of social philosophy. If we assume that political philosophy must be rooted in a social philosophy, then one interesting philosophical question concerns the variety of possible relations between social and political philosophies. The latter, like moral philosophies, may employ any of the many different families of (what, *faute de mieux*, are now called) normative concepts—the concepts of goods and evils, values and disvalues, virtues and vices, right and wrong, rights, obligations, prohibitions and oughts. And (again like moral philosophies) they may sometimes be characterised by the relative importance they assign to one of these couples. The role a political philosophy assigns to the different families of normative concepts is sometimes independent of the position such a philosophy occupies on the conservative—radical spectrum. In Scruton's political philosophy, the most prominent normative family is that of duties and obligations. Values are also appealed to, albeit mainly *en passant*, but the recent chapter "Realms of Value" (Scruton 2015) perhaps marks a new, "axiological" turn in his thought.¹ If so, what follows is intended to support the turn.

What might a conservative, political philosophy, which is rooted in a social philosophy like Scruton's but which puts value first, look like? In what follows, I outline some elements of such a philosophy. This will bring into focus some of the main features of Scruton's views but will also, I hope, indicate some of the strengths of a philosophy of this type.

The view to be outlined is that of one of Scruton's most important predecessors, the early realist phenomenolo-

gist, Max Scheler. As we shall see, the social philosophies of Scheler and Scruton have much in common. In particular, they agree that, as Scruton once put it, "human individuals derive their personality in part from corporations" (Scruton 1989, pp. 240-241). But Scheler, like other heirs of Brentano, clearly assigns to the value-disvalue couple the fundamental place in all normative questions. In some respects, Scheler's views complement those of Scruton, in other respects they go well beyond them. The basis of this proximity, I believe, is their attachment to forms of personalism. Their conservative personalisms distinguish them from the most influential twentieth century political philosophers. It is all the more curious that Scruton is an heir of Kant and Hegel, and Scheler, in all respects, is thoroughly anti-Kantian and anti-Hegelian.

SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

Scruton distinguishes, following Hegel, between the *state* and *society*, which he often refers to as *civil society*. Scheler's classification of the types of social coexistence uncontroversially adds to these two categories those of *masses* and *communities*. The four categories are distinguished in many ways. For example, by reference to their participants and by reference to the "cement" which binds these participants together. Involuntary imitation and the contagion of emotions and ideas are what tie together the members of a mass. Tradition and blind trust play the same role in a community. And the elements of a society are linked together by contractual relations and the conventions they follow. The groundless trust of the community has its counterpart in the groundless mistrust of society. In a society, where shared responsibility exists, it has its source in individual responsibility. In a community, shared responsibility is not founded in anything else. The individuals in a state or nation both enjoy individual responsibility and share responsibility for the collective person they belong to. But this last responsibility is not one they take on; it is one they grow into.

The elements of society are adults in full possession of their senses; the members of communities comprise both adults and minors. Scheler's account of states and their members is perhaps the most original feature of his social philosophy and it is here that we find the most striking agreement between the Bavarian and the English philosopher. A state, they agree, is a collective person (corporate person (Scruton 1980, pp. 50-52; 1989), *Gesamtperson*). The cement to which collective persons owe their unities, according to Scheler, is collective intentionality, the first-person plural and co-meaning, co-judging, co-acting, co-feeling and co-willing. A collective person is not only founded on many communities it has some of the features of a community. It is not only founded on a society but has some of the features of a society. The collective person which is a state is, Scheler adds, a *merely* social person.

What is it to be a social person? Within an individual person both an intimate and a social person may be distinguished. The former is the locus of shame, guilt and conscience. The latter is, in the first place, the origin of what Reid called social acts—promising, ordering, declaring, asking etc. More broadly it is the origin of all forms of intentionality directed to others. One type of collective person, the state, is a merely social person and that in the narrowest sense of the term. But Scheler thinks that collective persons other than states are both social and intimate persons, for example, nations and so nation states, and the Church. As an element of society, an individual possesses no intimate self or person. Hence the traditional comparison between society and the stage.²

One major objection to the very idea of collective persons derives from the philosophy of individual persons. If an individual person or human being is or has an ego, self or subject (transcendental, metaphysical or higher; empirical or lower) which underlies those accidental changes which are mental acts and states, then either the same is true of collective persons or "person" becomes equivocal. That a collective person is or has an ego which underlies and explains its unity is absurd. And if "person" as applied to individuals and states is equivocal, the view that states and other collective persons are at best fictitious persons has much to recommend it. Scheler, however, thinks that an individual person is merely an enduring unity of interdependent mental acts and that the same is true of collective persons. In other words, since there is no substantial self, individual and collective persons enjoy the same degree of reality. Since Scruton thinks that "personhood...is brought into being by our use of that very concept" he is no friend

of any form of substantial self or of the view that a person is what underlies mental acts and states.³

VALUE-AESTHETIC, EPISTEMIC AND LEGAL

Value, thick and thin, monadic and relational, crops up in political philosophy in a number of different ways, ways which are not always easy to distinguish given the even greater number of canting, contemporary uses of the term. Fundamental normative disagreements, differences or alternatives are sometimes formulated in terms of the ranking or relative importance of values, as when Scruton refers to Tocqueville's "warning against putting equality above freedom in the scheme of ultimate values" (Scruton 2018, p. 75). One link between social philosophy and value comes into focus if we remember the different relative importance attached to the category of masses by Fascism and Communism, to the category of society by Liberalism, to the category of community by Communitarianisms and to the category of the state by Conservatism. Or the importance to both Communism and Liberalism of the category of society, of which both "classes" and other "interest groups" are parts. Another link is the attribution of different thick or material values to the different items distinguished by social philosophy. Thus social persons, both individual and collective, are the bearers of values such as honour, good name, reputation, fame and *gloire* as well as of a number of related disvalues.

A very different connexion between value and social philosophy has to do with the different thick values which concern, which are the business of the different types of social unities and their members. Five principles put forward by Scheler belong here. The first deals with the state and law.

Every political philosophy which allows for states and their positive value agrees that law and its value are a fundamental concern of the state. Scheler's version of this distinguishes between positive law and its value, on the one hand, and the value of Right (*Recht*) or pre-positive law, on the other hand. Like other early phenomenologists, he (sometimes) rejects the identification of pre-positive law with Natural Law. Unlike Hume and Hayek, the early phenomenologists do not think of pre-positive law as simply the result of cultural evolution. But what they call the pure theory of right focuses on just the phenomena which, according to Hume and Hayek, constitute pre-positive law: the creation of claims and obligations by promises, the transfer of property etc.. The value of the judiciary and the

police and of the institutions they belong to derives from the value of law, positive and pre-positive.

The twist Scheler gives to this sort of view is the claim that the law's business is only with the social person and her social acts and actions and not at all with the intimate person and her mental acts and states. There are crimes of passion but no passion is a crime. Hatreds, preferences, beliefs and so on are not crimes (cf. Scruton 2015, p. 169). The existence of what he calls a state-free (*staatsfrei*) stratum of experience is the foundation of the right to exchange opinions and an essential limit to the reach of the state. Some such limit is frequently recognised by Liberals and Conservatives. It is perhaps what Burke has in mind when he says that the influence of government should be limited to what is truly and properly public. It is what Acton has in mind in his account of an inner sphere exempt from the power of the state. What is peculiar to Scheler's version of it is simply his use of his distinction between the intimate and the social person and his distinction between law and its value.

The second and third of Scheler's principles concern the relation between the state, on the one hand, and aesthetic and epistemic value, on the other hand.

What is or should be the fundamental conservative objection to state-financed art, state-run universities and schools? One type of objection is that every form of *Kulturpolitik* or *état culturel* contributes to the decline of art. Theatre, opera and music are mediocre, at least in part, because they are financed by the state. Similarly, where education and *Bildung* are run, indeed driven, by state functionaries, this leads inevitably to the creation of pseudo-disciplines such as victimological literary criticism, postmodernist sociology and anthropology, gender-studies, cultural studies and—long one of Scruton's butts—peace-studies, all of which pander to democratism. (Why exactly *do* pseudo-disciplines like to refer to themselves as “X studies”?). Such pseudo-disciplines, the objection continues, are more and more influential outside the universities. Where the elites are in large measure professors employed by the state, they will, other things being equal, tend to pimp for the state. No institutions which aim to further aesthetic sensibility, knowledge, artistic creativity and skills, runs the conclusion, should be state run. There should be no state-controlled universities. A slightly less extreme conclusion is that, at the very least, Faculties of Letters (Arts, Humanities, *Geisteswissenschaften*) should be privatised, because of their role in popularizing French faery stories about the omnipresence of a large variety of micro-oppressions and French reductions of human beings and persons to bod-

ies (bio-politics). (Of course, no conservative is in favour of any but the most gradual of privatisations). Similarly, when Scruton argues for a steady liberation of schools from the clutches of the state he emphasizes that this is required if they are not to be captured by the enemy, if they are not to become instruments of social engineering (Scruton 2015, pp. 171-2, 28).

Whatever one should think of such views and the complex empirical claims on which they are based, they are one and all claims about the *extrinsic disvalue* of state-subsidised education, research and art. Similarly, many replies to such objections—that without state support there would be no more opera, original drama, no more educational opportunities, that French theory is a set of enormously important and deep contributions to postmodern self-understanding, necessary steps on the road to human emancipation and its many, many causes—are claims about the *extrinsic value* of state-subsidised education and art.

Scheler's objection is very different and is of a type often overlooked. The *intrinsic* values of art, aesthetic experience and of knowledge concern above all the *intimate* not the *social* person or self. Awareness of the intrinsic value of knowledge (cf. Scruton 2015, p. 125) and the subsequent acquisition and possession of knowledge concern above all the intimate person. Similarly, awareness of intrinsic aesthetic value and its subsequent enjoyment and exploration concern above all the intimate person or self. “A book”, Proust says, “is the product of a self other than the self we display in our habits, in society, in our vices” (*Contre Sainte-Beuve*). Now conservatives and liberals, as already noted, have long accepted that matters of conscience are beyond the purview and reach of the state, if anything is. An individual's conscience is above all the conscience of the intimate person. And what is true of the intimate person's conscience is true of that person's relation to knowledge, art and their intrinsic values.

To this type of objection to state control of art and knowledge, their creation, transmission and development there is a reply which follows from a popular radical belief: the personal *is* political, whatever is personal is political. In other words, the intimate person is just as much a political and so a public matter as is the social person.

Scheler's fourth principle, which is less controversial than those already mentioned, is that the welfare, flourishing and bodily integrity of the members of the different communities making up a state are the business of the state. His fifth principle is that value of the law and the value of the welfare, and flourishing of communities and their mem-

bers constitute the whole of the state's business. The intrinsic value of the law is a cultural and spiritual (*geistig*) value, like the intrinsic values of art and of knowledge. The values of the welfare and flourishing of communities and their members are vital values. The state's business, then, is with these vital values and with only one of the three types of cultural value.

Each of Scheler's five principles connects a social category and a value category. This, as we shall now see, is also true of his sixth principle. But this principle, unlike those already mentioned, concerns what might be called a thin or formal rather than a thick or material type of value.

The distinction between what is what is intrinsically valuable *tout court* and what is intrinsically valuable *for* someone is the axiological counterpart of the distinction between duties which are binding on all and an ought or duty a particular person, in a particular situation, has just because she is the person she is. Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen calls being valuable for someone personal value (Rønnow-Rasmussen 2011). Scheler (rather clumsily) contrasts universally valid values with individually valid values and employs the latter category in his analyses of individuality, love of others, self-love, models (as opposed to leaders) and counter-models and vocations. A person's vocation, what she ought (not) to do with her life, is as good an example as any of something which is intrinsically valuable for that person.

One of the things which may be intrinsically valuable for an individual is a collective person—a state, a nation, a nation state, an imperial state, a country. That this is possible and is indeed the case in states and nations is Scheler's sixth principle. As far as I can see, Scruton does not appeal to anything like the category of individually valid values in his philosophy of conservatism. But he does provide one of the main motivations for taking this category seriously. This is to be found in his detailed and eloquent descriptions of the different possible affective responses and attitudes towards nations, countries and states—love, respect, reverence, piety, allegiance, identification, loyalty and other attachments. Suppose, now, we think that affective responses constitutively involve impressions of value. What better candidate for the impression of value constitutive of loyalty or patriotism than the impression that some collective person is intrinsically valuable for me?

It is important to distinguish the role of the phenomenon of the value of a collective person for an individual person *within* political philosophy and its role *outside* political philosophy. Individuals of many political persuasions may re-

act affectively in just the same ways as Scruton's conservatives. But personal or individually valid values play no role in any Liberal or Socialist political philosophy, for these philosophies, like the most popular moral philosophies, are exclusively universalist.

The recognition of the central place in any Conservative political philosophy of the personal value of collective persons means that such a philosophy and its adherents are open to three quite distinct objections. One, already mentioned, is that the very idea of a collective person, a state, nation or nation state, is an absurdity, if it is taken to amount to more than a useful fiction or abstract concept. One consequence of this is the irrationality of the affective responses of Scruton's conservatives. Thus Scheler's friend, the Austrian Liberal, Richard von Mises, dismisses the view that the state is either warm or cold (Nietzsche's cold monster) since it is merely an abstract concept and so divinisation or adoration of the state (*Staatsvergottung, Staatsanbetung*) is irrational (von Mises 1927, p. 51).

A second objection, also already mentioned, is that the very idea of personal or individually valid values (or norms) is an absurdity. The third objection, which is an objection to friends of conservatism rather than to conservatism, is that embrace of the latter absurdity is evil or otherwise morally bad. One of the most frequent radical reproaches is that conservatives are evil, individually or collectively egoistic, lack compassion, are people who are feathering their nests and those of their own, jingoistic, chauvinistic, nationalistic, or otherwise morally dubious. "The modern conservative", says G. K. Galbraith, "is engaged in one of man's oldest exercises in moral philosophy; that is, the search for a superior moral justification for selfishness".⁴

The practical motives someone has for endorsing conservatism or indeed any other political philosophy are, of course, irrelevant when it comes to evaluating that political philosophy. But the radical reproach does raise an important question. If one thinks that the distinction between personal or individually valid values and impersonal or universally valid values corresponds to a real difference and that the two categories are not empty, then an important normative question concerns their relative importance. Scheler's answer to the question is that the "right relation between value-universalism and value-individualism" is that the recognition and realisation of universal values is a minimum which must be satisfied before the recognition and realisation of individual values (Scheler 1966, p. 484).

QUALIFICATIONS, QUESTIONS & QUIBBLES

I have given some reasons for thinking that, on the assumption that something like the social philosophy of Scheler and Scruton is correct, a value-first conservative philosophy à la Scheler has much to recommend it to conservatives. But is Scheler's social philosophy plausible? One may well think that it is guilty of a mistake which might be called the *personula fallacy*⁵ (by analogy with the better known *homunculus fallacy* in the philosophy of mind). For according to Scheler, every individual person *contains* an intimate and a social person and the same is true of collective persons other than the state. On this view, the intimate person feels guilt but the social person makes promises. If this is a mistake, because it is the same person who is ashamed and makes promises, then it should be replaced by the much less baroque claim that every individual person has an intimate sphere and a social sphere, a formulation which Scheler does indeed sometimes employ.

My summary of some of Scheler's views has simplified these in many respects. In particular, I have passed over in silence his extreme Platonism and naïve realism about value, two views notoriously unpalatable to philosophers influenced by Kant or Wittgenstein.⁶

One reason for thinking that a value-first political philosophy is not quite Scruton's cup of tea is that in his criticisms of the one sided emphasis on duties in Kant's moral and political philosophy and its failure to allow a role to customs and tradition, Scruton follows Hegel (Scruton 2018, pp. 56-7). From Scheler's point of view, Kant's main mistake is to try to ground value in deontic norms and his universalist understanding of deontic norms which disallows anything like individually valid values or duties. For Hegel, Scruton writes, abstract right,

although valid in itself, must also become concrete, united with the historical attachments of real moral agents, if it is to issue in definite guidance. Without the concrete demands of the moral order the idea of right remains in the intellectual stratosphere, failing to come to earth in any real application. From the confrontation between abstract right and concrete morality the sphere of ethical life emerges (Scruton 2018, p. 57).

The relevant historical attachments, I have suggested, cannot be properly understood without the category of

what is intrinsically valuable for an agent or its relatives such as the category of subject-bound, occasion-bound and time-bound duties or oughts (Goethe's *Forderung der Stunde*). These are the categories which underlie the types of ethos on which Scruton, following Hegel, insists so eloquently. But they are not to be found in Hegel's writings. The category of individually valid values seems to make its first appearance in the writings of Schleiermacher. "The most systematic presentation that we have of the conservative vision of political order", says Scruton, is "Hegel's political philosophy" (Scruton 2018, p. 58). This may well be true of all those political philosophies which are value-blind.

Another reason for thinking that a value-first political philosophy is not really taken seriously by Scruton is suggested by a feature of his numerous accounts of the everyday world. Thus his recent (Scruton 2018, *passim*) discussion of the relation between what Husserl called the *Lebenswelt* and Sellars the manifest image, on the one hand, and what science tells us, on the other hand (what Scheler, long before Husserl and Sellars, called the relation between the natural and the scientific world-views) pays little attention to the category of value although value qualities are arguably much more central to the *Lebenswelt* than secondary qualities. An exception is his account of the role of intrinsic aesthetic values in the *Lebenswelt* (Scruton 2018, pp. 136-139). But when he describes traditional knowledge he describes it in terms of deontic knowledge, knowing *what to do*, without mentioning the knowledge of value which, one may think, underlies this (Scruton 2015, p. 21). On the other hand, when he says that "a concern for the priceless and the non-exchangeable is exactly what defines the conservative view of society" (Scruton 2015, p. 57) he is indeed endorsing just the type of view I have attributed to Scheler.

Scruton has always been a European philosopher. His penetrating account of a variety of European conservatism brings into focus traditions which are almost invisible to political philosophies the horizons of which are fixed by Rawls, Nozick and Williams and is the product of wide sympathies and reading.

Let me nevertheless quibble. His sketch of English conservatism does not mention T. E. Hulme who is perhaps the only anglophone conservative to have been influenced by Scheler. His account of German conservatism (Scruton 2018, ch. 3) does not mention Arnold Gehlen, whose account of the rôles of "moral panics" in progressive thought has turned out to be remarkably prescient. Two Austrian conservatives not mentioned are the Hungarian philoso-

pher Aurel Kolnai, whose political philosophy and sensibility resemble those of Scruton more than those of any other twentieth-century figure, and Eric Voegelin, whose account of political religions anticipates the conclusions of many recent historians, such as Michael Burleigh. Like T. E. Hulme, Gehlen, Kolnai, Voegelin and, for example, Dietrich von Hildebrand are all, in their social and political philosophies strongly influenced by Scheler. One of Scheler's heirs who is discussed by Scruton is the conservative liberal, José Ortega y Gasset (Scruton 2018, pp. 125-6). But Scruton entirely overlooks one of the central claims of Ortega's *The Revolt of the Masses*, that mass-man—and there is, he thinks, a mass-man in each of us—rejects or is indifferent to epistemic norms and values, that is to say, is foolish.

I mentioned above the tendency of many of the political enemies of conservatism to damn conservatives for their moral failings, for being evil. The opposite tendency is that of the conservative who thinks of her progressive, political enemies—or at least the Social Democrats, the Liberals, Radicals and Parliamentary Socialists—as fools, cognitively vicious, rather than as either particularly evil or unintelligent. And Scruton refers in the last paragraph of *Conservatism* to the “burden of disapproval, which [Conservatives] believe comes from their habit of telling the truth” and which their opponents ascribe to ‘nostalgia’ for an old and misremembered way of life “or to a failure of compassion towards the new ways of life that are emerging to replace it” (Scruton 2018, pp. 154-5).⁷ Conservatives who think that they have the habit of telling the truth or who like to think that a conservative is a leftist who has been mugged by reality clearly attach a certain importance to avoiding the foolishness or epistemic vice described by Ortega, whatever other defects they may have.⁸

NOTES

- 1 Cf. Scruton 2015, pp 25, 57, 63, 119-20, 125, 128.
- 2 Scheler's account of masses builds on earlier French analyses, as his account of the differences between communities and societies builds on the account first given by Tönnies. His account of the distinction between intimate and social persons and selves is anticipated by William James' descriptions of social selves. On the long history of the view of states as collective persons, cf. Scruton 1989, Déralthé 1988, pp. 397-410, Skinner 2018, pp. 12-44.

- 3 Scruton 2016, p. 102; on the mereological view, cf. p. 68. Scruton mentions without endorsing the view that “belief in the ‘self’ may be no more than the shadow cast by self-referring language” (Scruton 1989, p. 250)
- 4 Galbraith 1963:
<http://wist.info/galbraith-john-kenneth/7463/>.
- 5 Thanks to Jean-Yves Tilliette for this suggestion.
- 6 The views I have ascribed to Scheler are formulated at many places in his oeuvre. Scheler 1966, pp. 509-557 or Scheler 1973, pp. 511-472 is a good place to start.
- 7 Another quibble. In his brief but very welcome discussion of Chateaubriand and Tocqueville (Scruton 2018, pp. 72-78), Scruton underestimates, I believe, the breadth of the former's understanding of what Nietzsche and Scheler were to call democratism, an understanding which may well have influenced Tocqueville. Cf. Fumaroli 2003.
- 8 Thanks to Olivier Massin for the discussion.

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Roger Scruton on the Prehistory of Liberalism

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Sir Roger Scruton's erudite and highly readable book, *Conservatism: An Invitation to the Great Tradition*, begins with the observation that conservatism seems increasingly irrelevant today, crowded out by a newly ascendant populism, on the one hand, which vaults previously unimaginable candidates into high office, and an ever-agitated liberalism, on the other, which dominates the media and the university. Conservatism in this context seems to have "a beleaguered air," writes Scruton, as if it has nothing useful to offer (p. 1).¹ The purpose of Scruton's book is to dispel such appearances. Conservatism is "as valid and relevant today" as ever (p. 2). In fact, Scruton is confident that conservatism will be a "necessary ingredient" in any credible solution to the problems of our age (p. 155). Yet people nowadays are surprisingly ignorant about conservatism's essential message and timeless wisdom. Scruton therefore offers this book in the hope of encouraging people, especially well-meaning liberals, to discover afresh what conservative arguments actually are; and he contends that "politicians everywhere" should make the conservative tradition part of their education (*ibid.*).

In my view, Scruton's book largely succeeds both as a history of modern conservatism and as a penetrating analysis of its complex relationship to liberalism. But because the book is uncommonly concise (a mere hundred and fifty-five pages), some of its arguments are quite compressed; and chances are that readers especially on the left will fail adequately to appreciate all that is there. This is particularly the case with Scruton's first chapter about the prehistory of conservatism, where a line of political thought ranging from Greek antiquity to the mid-eighteenth century is traced in a mere twenty-three pages. Initially, this has the look of a potted history, but it is not. It is rather a lightly sketched but sophisticated answer to a thorny methodological problem: How can one best understand the "beginnings" of political phenomena such as conservatism, which appear in some ways altogether new and in other ways derived from past ideas and conditions? Scruton's unique way of resolving this problem is part of what makes his account

of conservatism so fresh. In what follows, I want to describe his historical method along with the insights it makes possible. I then want to raise a friendly question or two about some aspects of conservatism that Scruton's method may unwittingly obscure.

I. SCRUTON'S HISTORICAL METHOD

Scruton draws attention to his historical method briefly in Chapter 1 of *Conservatism* by mentioning that he intends to avoid two errors. One is that of the Marxists who see ideas as mere epiphenomena, the byproducts of economic forces and class relations. The other is that of certain intellectual historians, who view ideas as "caused" in some sense by antecedent ideas. Both approaches are overly deterministic and too narrow to capture the origins of something as complex as conservatism. For example, the fact that conservatism contains within it strong echoes of Aristotelian political philosophy, an intellectual source far removed from modern economic relations, reveals the inadequacy of the Marxist approach. Similarly, the fact that conservatism takes on distinctly new forms after significant cultural changes in religion, economics, and politics reveals the deficiency of the intellectual-historical approach. Scruton's method is therefore more eclectic. He writes, "to understand the pre-history of conservatism,... one should accept that ideas have far-reaching influence over human affairs; but one should recognize also that they do not arise only from other ideas, and often have roots in biological, social and political conditions that lie deeper than rational argument" (p. 10).

The opening sentences of Scruton's Chapter 1 epitomize the historical method just described. Those sentences announce without fanfare that modern conservatism has three quite different sources to which the historian must attend. First, it is "a product of the Enlightenment." Second, it emerges from "aspects of the human condition that can be witnessed in every civilization and at every period of history." And, third, it is "heir to a philosophical legacy at least

as old as the Greeks” (p. 9). This is to say that conservatism *does* emerge from previous ideas; but also from unchanging, empirical facts about the human condition; and from the circumstances surrounding a specific, monumental, historical event: the Enlightenment.

A brief remark is warranted about Scruton’s emphasis on the Enlightenment before turning to a closer look at each of these three sources of conservatism. That conservatism in its modern form is a product of the Enlightenment is the first claim of Scruton’s book; and he repeats it often. It is therefore a matter of some importance. Why? The answer, I suspect, relates to the tendency of so many liberals today to dismiss conservatives as useless relics of a bygone age, political dinosaurs who lumber out of some premodern tarpit now and again to wreak havoc on social progress. If Scruton can convince readers that conservatism is a distinctly *modern* outlook he will have gone some way toward reasserting its relevance.

But *is* conservatism a modern outlook? Scruton may be right to say so, but the history is complex and, I believe, ambiguous. The word “conservative” (*conservateur, conservatrice*) had been used in France since the fourteenth century to refer to an agent that conserves something. Often this referred to a preservative in food, but it also had political applications. The prince, for example, could be referred to as “*conservateur des biens et de la liberté de ses sujets*.”² Similarly, an English writer in 1745 referred to “parliaments” as “the greatest conservatives of our constitution.”³ This use was alive and well during the aftermath of the French Revolution. It lay behind Napoleon’s creation of a “conservative Senate” in 1799 charged with preserving the constitution. And it is, I believe, the proper interpretation of the final sentence of Napoleon’s declaration from 19 Brumaire 1799: “The rights of *conservative, tutelary, and liberal ideas* have been restored through the dispersal of the dissidents who oppressed the Councils” (Stewart 1951, p. 765). The question is whether Scruton’s claim that modern conservatism dates from the Enlightenment refers to this originally French meaning of conservatism which dates back to the fourteenth century or to something else. I believe Scruton to be saying that conservatism gradually took on a new and contextually charged meaning in response to certain political writers of the Enlightenment beginning with Hobbes. And this is the “conservatism” that emerges as a political *movement* in the early nineteenth century. But exactly how and when the concept of a “conservative” morphed in concrete European history from something that preserves or

der and liberty in general to something that relates more narrowly to the Enlightenment is unclear.

II. PERMANENT ASPECTS OF THE HUMAN CONDITION

According to Scruton, the prehistory of modern conservatism begins with certain insights into the human condition that predate modernity, insights which are indeed cross-cultural and perennial, but which were in danger of being obscured during the Enlightenment. These insights include the fact that humans are social by nature, born to parents (or at least to mothers) and often to extended families that play a crucial role in protecting and nurturing. Humans are also social insofar as we naturally form attachments—not only to family but also to friends, places, customs and social institutions. For Scruton, awareness of man’s natural sociality is “the most important input into conservative thinking,” giving rise to “the desire to sustain the networks of familiarity and trust on which a community depends for its longevity.” Scruton continues: “Conservatism is what its name says it is: the attempt to conserve the community that we have—not in every particular since, as Edmund Burke put it, ‘we must reform in order to conserve,’ but in all matters that ensure our community’s long-term survival” (p. 12).

Scruton faintly gestures toward another insight related to man’s sociality, which is that humans are by nature meaning seekers, more so, evidently, than any other creatures. We are deeply concerned that *who we are* and *what we are doing* is meaningful. Yet it is only in society that we find meaning. Meaning is a relational phenomenon, not something we conjure up for ourselves as mere individuals. Scruton hints at this when he says that social attachments “create the sense that we are at home in the world, among familiar and trustworthy things”—that this “is precious to us,” and that its loss is “an occasion of anxiety and mourning” (ibid.). To the extent that this is true, we can say not only that social membership is important for a community’s long-term survival, but also that it is vital for human fulfillment.

Another aspect of the human condition Scruton stresses is our competitiveness. This contrasts sharply with the practices of cooperation that occur in many of our social relationships, but it is undeniably real: “Competition is fundamental to our nature,” writes Scruton, “being both our way of solving problems, and the most important cause of them” (ibid.). Scruton attributes the failure of much uto-

pian thinking to the neglect of this basic insight. Because competition is a permanent fact, human beings need ways of containing and moderating competition, lest it tear society apart. But how? This has been one of the most intractable problems of political life across the ages. Scruton observes that “kinship moderates competition, replacing ‘I’ by ‘we’ in all disputes that might spill over into violence.” And yet kinship also *creates* violence, the “rivalry between families, like the Montagues and Capulets” (pp. 12-13). Similarly, tribes and religions serve to moderate violence. Yet it is a commonplace that they also cause it when tribal and religious “peace” requires war against the outsider, or the heretic. For Scruton, awareness of the fact that humans are inescapably competitive is not yet an answer to all the problems this fact implies, but it is nevertheless something that should inform political philosophy; and his view is that it does indeed inform conservative thought.

A final insight into the human condition that Scruton wants to stress is that humans are by nature rational, but not purely rational. We are capable of calculation and of remarkable leaps of insight. Most of all, we are capable of *learning*, which means, potentially at least, learning how to live together in justice and peace. Yet (and I take this to be one of the principal teachings of Plato’s *Republic*) human reason seems capable of leading us not only to well-ordered social arrangements, but also to the most horrendous outcomes. This is because the good life for man does not spring from reason alone, nor is it ultimately directed to reason alone. We have myriad attachments that are pre-rational—attachments to such things as family, neighborhood, and country—for which rationalist reformers often fail to account. And we have, moreover, a deep longing for something transcendent and immutable that is likewise beyond the limits of human reason. To deny our longing for transcendence is dangerously to misunderstand human nature. This is why it is so often the case (as Scruton points out, paraphrasing Burke) “that rational plans in the brains of ardent believers... lead of their own accord to disaster” (p. 14).

What we learn by taking seriously the above insights is that at least one element of the “pre-history” of modern conservatism is not modern at all, but quite ancient. This does not mean that Scruton is wrong in his insistence that modern conservatism is a product of the Enlightenment. Conservatism is capable of appropriating past insights in the context of new socio-political conditions. In other words, the *facts* that are discovered in the prehistory of conservatism are virtually timeless, but their *relevance* to

modern conditions is new. As Scruton observes, “most of the ideas purveyed by modern conservatives are foreshadowed in Aristotle’s great work. But they have been adapted to a situation that Aristotle himself could not have foreseen” (p. 9). Let me turn now to this new situation.

III. THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Scruton focuses heavily on the Enlightenment as an epochal event giving rise to modern conservatism. But he does not focus exclusively on the Enlightenment. Instead, he sees this event as part of a much broader sweep of history, what I shall call “modernity.” Whether one is trying to understand liberalism or conservatism, this broader sweep of history matters because most of the problems of political organization to which Enlightenment thinkers responded were created by the birth of modernity in the Reformation. Scruton implicitly recognizes this. He says that the new situation, unforeseen by Aristotle, was “the emergence of the nation state, the loss of a unifying religion, and the growth of the ‘great society,’ composed of millions of cooperating strangers under a single rule of law.”

Many people today fail to appreciate the extent to which the Reformation was a *political*, not merely a religious, event. That is because, whatever its problems with decadence and corruption, the Catholic Church was a key part of the network of powers that held European civilization together during most of the Middle Ages. For this reason, the Reformation caused a major political crisis. Suddenly, territories that had not yet made the modern transition into autonomous nation-states (a transition which France and Spain had already accomplished) were in danger of being attacked by their neighbors. This is, incidentally, *the* principal theme of Machiavelli’s two great political works, the *Prince* and the *Discourses*: how can Italy become a state and thereby secure itself against foreign domination? And even after consolidation was achieved, there was the problem of settling the differences between religious factions *within* each state. This was the problem taken up most famously by Thomas Hobbes in the *Leviathan*. If we count Hobbes as the first major Enlightenment thinker in politics—as I believe Scruton does—then we have to acknowledge that the problems with which Hobbes wrestled were problems resulting from an earlier, cataclysmic event: The Reformation.

In my own thinking about modernity, I find it useful to differentiate a number of waves, each focusing on a specific barrier to freedom. The first wave of modernity focused on religious freedom and produced the fateful rupture be-

tween the Protestant and the Catholic Church, and between Protestant and Catholic areas of Europe. The second followed almost of necessity. It was the wave of state formation aimed at securing freedom from foreign domination. It resulted (eventually) in what is now called state sovereignty. The third wave was the effort to secure domestic freedom from internal religious and political factions by settling the grounds of domestic sovereignty. This third wave arguably marked the beginning of political “Enlightenment” because it involved—as Scruton recognizes—the decision to ground domestic sovereignty in something other than religion, even if religion would still be used in an Erastian way to bolster sovereign authority. The ground of authority starting with Hobbes was individual *reason* (albeit motivated by fear) issuing in consent. Instead of deriving authority downward from divine right or hereditary right, Hobbes set the course for grounding it upward from the reasoning capacity of the individual.

What about these events prompts the rise of conservatism? Scruton’s answer to this question is one of the subtlest aspects of his account, and it is the crux of the difference between contemporary liberals and conservatives. To understand it, we must look not simply at grand historical events but also at the philosophical ideas and political innovations of the Enlightenment thinkers themselves.

IV. THE PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF MODERN CONSERVATISM

We have already observed that modern conservatism has philosophical roots stretching all the way back to the Greeks. But its philosophical roots also have medieval and Enlightenment sources. The medieval roots, insofar as these factor into Scruton’s account, can be treated very briefly. They include theories of the relationship between church and state authority, between *sacerdotium* and *regnum*, theories which had gradually emerged since the Investiture Controversy. They also include theories about the “law of nature,” the *jus naturale*.

Both church-state theorizing and natural law theorizing were present in Thomas Hobbes’s political works. But whatever the apparent continuities between Hobbes’s thought and that of the Middle Ages, the discontinuity mattered more, according to Scruton. For Scruton, Hobbes inaugurated a new way of thinking about political legitimacy. He assumed that legitimate government must rest on the consent “of freely choosing individuals, motivated by their beliefs and desires” (p. 18). Hobbes also inaugurated a new

understanding of the individual. His individuals were solitary, appetite-driven, unrelentingly competitive, and prone to violence. Yet they were also capable of rational calculation and could thus see that their survival depended upon the establishment of a sovereign authority who might “keep them all in awe” (Hobbes 1996, p. 88). This unique philosophical anthropology led Hobbes to a new conception of domestic sovereignty: an all-powerful, absolute ruler, established by the individual consent of the people, and thereafter untouchable except in the eventuality that he should fail to protect his people from each other and from external threats.

According to Scruton, modern conservatism’s prehistory in the Enlightenment runs from Hobbes to Harrington, to Locke, and to Montesquieu. But his argument at this point is complicated and easy to misconstrue. It is not that these thinkers are the forebears of conservatism while others give rise to liberalism. It is rather (less tidily but more truly) that each of these thinkers contributes simultaneously to liberalism and conservatism in different ways, and sometimes in the same way. Careful attention to Scruton’s concise treatment of each thinker will reveal how this works.

The picture we get in Hobbes—of solitary individuals experiencing fear in a primitive state of nature and using reason and consent to erect a sovereign power—feeds into conservative and liberal thinking alike, but in different ways. Both liberals and conservatives would accept, by and large, Hobbes’s emphasis on the free individual as a component, if not the only component, of political legitimacy. Scruton stresses that this general agreement put an end to the earlier, medieval view that “the freedom of the individual is a privilege, conferred by the monarch in return for military or courtly services” (p. 16). Liberals and conservatives would also agree that the absolutist character of Hobbes’s sovereign power was excessive. “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely,” Lord Acton wrote in 1887, giving voice to a sentiment that many conservatives embrace today, even though Acton was an ardent Liberal.⁴

However, liberals and conservatives would diverge, at least to some extent, over Hobbes’s portrait of the “individual” and the role he plays in initiating legitimate authority. While the liberal tradition built upon Hobbes’s view, even if tempering it by the more constraining view of natural law in Locke, conservatives took a more ambivalent view. For most conservatives, Hobbes’s “natural condition of mankind” seems a fiction that dangerously overlooks one of the most basic insights into the human condition, namely the natural sociality of man. By denying man’s sociality,

Hobbes obscures the sources of meaning that human beings care about most, as well as the natural grounds of political legitimacy—not individual, rational consent, but the ability of a government to protect the things we love and to maintain our customary way of life. Scruton writes, “we rational beings need customs and institutions that are founded in something other than reason, if we are to use our reason to good effect” (p. 14). And he continues, “this insight, indeed, is probably the principal contribution that conservatism has made to the self-understanding of the human species” (ibid).

At the same time, Scruton admits that there is a “countervailing tendency in conservative thought,” that conceives of the community not “as an organic network bound by habit and submission, but as a free association of rational beings all of whom have, and cherish, an identity of their own” (ibid.). Such is the difficulty of relating conservative and liberal thought to the major figures of the Enlightenment. The details are messy. Scruton is therefore right to insist that “we will understand modern conservatism as a political movement only if we see that some elements of liberal individualism have been programmed into it from the outset” (p. 23). Conservatism does not uniformly oppose liberal individualism, though it does in some instances and to some extent.

Scruton’s treatments of Harrington, Locke, and Montesquieu emphasize a number of familiar themes that influence liberalism and conservatism alike. In Harrington, he points to the advocacy of a republican government organized for economic increase and especially his promotion of a government “of laws, not of men.” In Locke, he points to the importance of the natural law as a source of individual rights and even (*pace* Hobbes) a limiting force upon government. He points also to the “separation of powers” in government and traces this through its more refined appearance in Montesquieu. Almost all these ideas would, according to Scruton, “have a radical influence on both liberal and conservative thinking” (p. 21). Two important exceptions include the whole idea of a “state of nature,” which conservatives tend to reject, and the concomitant idea that civil society is the product of a contract, whether actual or tacit.

Though Scruton does not say so in this first chapter on prehistory, it is worth remarking that some conservatives also harbor reservations about the phase of Enlightenment thinking running from Harrington, through Locke, and Montesquieu. For here marks the beginning of what would arguably become an overemphasis on man’s economic na-

ture. When taken to an extreme, this turns man into little more than *homo economicus* while obscuring other, more meaningful aspects of human nature: our aesthetic sensibility, our love of learning, the importance of local relationships and the forms of sympathy that attend them. Scruton does stress elsewhere, in his chapter on “cultural conservatism,” that some conservatives did eventually distance themselves from the imperatives of economic progress in favor of preserving cultural forms of meaning. But it is probably worth stressing that this aspect of conservatism’s prehistory is as ambiguous as some of the other aspects Scruton takes up. Not all conservatives place economic increase or commerce at the center of their philosophy.

After describing the emergence of modern conservatism out of Enlightenment political thought, Scruton finds himself in a position to offer a thesis, one that I find quite relevant to contemporary political debates. His thesis is that “modern conservatism... began life in Britain and also in France as a *qualification* of liberal individualism” (p. 23). In other words, conservatism was not simply opposed to liberal individualism, but was rather opposed to the tendency to excess in liberal individualism, the tendency to become so zealous about individual liberation that one becomes more or less blind to the profound but fragile value in much that constrains us. Liberalism has always tended to be destructive of what should be maintained in tradition, custom, and other social sources of human order and meaning.

Scruton’s thesis here can be profitably unpacked by differentiating three areas of doctrinal excess in which conservatives would make their qualification, the liberal concepts of “individualism,” “freedom,” and “reason.”

IV. THE CONSERVATIVE QUALIFICATION(S) OF LIBERALISM

Insofar as liberals operate with an understanding of the individual derived from Hobbes, they ground their philosophy in a dangerous fiction. This is not to say that the entire modern emphasis on the individual—on individual conscience, rights, and self-actualization—is all wrong. On the contrary, almost all conservatives accept some form of individualism. But conservatives also see how unrealistic and ultimately destructive is the notion that every individual must personally consent to every obligation placed upon him for such obligations to be legitimate. This is not the way human beings come into the world; it is not the way political communities arise and are maintained; and it is (crucially) not a recipe for individual fulfillment. Scruton

allows Blackstone, Hume, and Dr. Johnson to give voice to this qualification in his chapter on the prehistory of conservatism. But it is a repeated theme throughout the book. It was “the aim of Burke’s argument in the *Reflections*,” claims Scruton in a later chapter, “to uphold the priority of the ‘we’ over the ‘I,’ and to warn against what happens when the forms of social membership are taken away and society disintegrates... into ‘the dust and powder of individuality’” (p. 51). Similarly, it was one of Hegel’s principal criticisms of Rousseau, that “the self does not exist prior to society, but is created in society through the resolution of conflict, and through custom, morality, and civil association” (p. 59). And, once again, with respect to Simone Weil: “Human beings have roots, Weil argued, by virtue of their active participation in a collective, which conserves in living form a social and spiritual inheritance, and which continues to offer presentiments of a shared future” (p. 123).

Scruton’s emphasis on this conservative qualification of liberal individualism is especially timely today as a growing movement on the political Right in Europe and America advocates a wholesale rejection of liberalism on the grounds that its philosophical anthropology is flawed. Apparently forgotten by these reactionary critics is that the philosophical anthropology of liberalism has been the subject of criticism (or, to use Scruton’s term, qualification) since the mid-eighteenth century. Liberalism was never an isolated phenomenon. Conservatism did and can continue to balance it. Here in part lies the significance of Scruton’s claim that conservatism is a product of the Enlightenment. If we forget this fact, we are likely to mischaracterize the actual practice of liberalism, mistaking its extreme philosophical articulation for its more tempered practices.⁵ Worse yet, if we go so far as to deem conservatism “irrelevant,” as Scruton fears we are doing, then we shall unwittingly contribute to the radicalization of liberalism by removing its most effective check.

Conservatism’s role in qualifying the liberal conception of freedom is similar. Liberals have a tendency to approach freedom in absolute terms. Not only is each instance of freedom thought to be absolute, requiring no adjustment to circumstances or to competing human goods, but the whole modern quest for freedom that began with the Reformation has gradually morphed into a quest for absolute emancipation from anything and everything felt as a constraint, an emancipation from the human condition itself. In short, we want to be God. Against this conception of freedom conservatives articulate a corrective. In the first place, no particular instance of freedom can be absolute (set

loose from all contingency) because freedom must always compete with other human goods: social and political order, the predictability and trust that is required for human action, the obligations that accrue from human relationships, and the discipline that is required for all practices of excellence. Not only is absolute freedom incompatible with these other goods, it is also incompatible *with itself* insofar as various freedoms do not fit harmoniously together without regulation. In order for liberals to enjoy one freedom (say, freedom from vast social inequalities) they must temper other freedoms (say, freedom from government interference in the economy).

Secondly and just as importantly, absolute emancipation is neither possible nor desirable for human beings. The most productive and personally rewarding exercises of freedom always occur within limiting structures. Just as the sonata form both constrains and also makes possible the distinct excellence of Beethoven’s *Appassionata*, so do the customs, traditions, obligations and other received constraints make possible the true freedom of the individual. Scruton underscores this insight in the thought of Dr. Johnson. He writes that “freedom for Johnson was not an escape from obligations, but a call to obey them, whether or not they have been consciously chosen.” Johnson’s way of “valuing eccentricity and independence as a sign of a deeper obedience than any sheepish conformity,” remains according to Scruton, “at the heart of English conservatism to this day” (p. 31).

Finally, conservatism serves to qualify the liberal Enlightenment view of reason. The problem with that view, as Scruton rightly observes, is that too much trust is placed in the power of reason alone to guide individual action and to reform age-old social structures. As the conservative Michael Oakeshott pointed out in his brilliant essay, “Rationalism in Politics,” liberal reformers tend to overlook the tangle and variety of human experience, the delicate compromises and practical balancing of competing goods that go into historical arrangements (Oakeshott 1991). Instead they are apt to oversimplify, to offer sweeping solutions and radical changes based on their reasoning in the moment. Such reforms rarely work; and Scruton points to the French Revolution as the quintessential demonstration of this fact (contrasting it with the American Revolution, which he reads as more conservative in orientation).

All in all, Scruton’s account of the origins of modern conservatism is sophisticated and illuminating. Again, he points to three quite different sources. Conservatism is, first, a product of the Enlightenment. Second, it draws

upon important insights into the human condition, insights relating to sociality, conflict, and reason. And, third, it emerges out of a philosophical tradition stretching backward to the Greeks and forward to the foundational texts of liberalism. By understanding conservatism in relation to these three diverse sources, Scruton reveals the extent to which it is simultaneously fixed and dynamic. It is fixed because it contains core ideas that do not change. But it is dynamic because the political conditions to which it responds are constantly changing. In the remainder of Scruton's volume, he identifies four distinct phases of modern conservatism. He writes: "Modern conservatism began as a defense of tradition against the calls for popular sovereignty;" next it became "an appeal on behalf of religion and high culture against the materialist doctrine of progress;" then it "join[ed] forces with the classical liberals in the fight against socialism;" and currently it has become "the champion of Western civilization against its enemies:" political correctness and militant Islamism. Scruton is thus able to capture conservatism in its continuity and change.

This brings us back to Scruton's motivation for writing. By reminding conservatives and liberals alike of the origins of modern conservatism and its ability to adapt to changing circumstances, Scruton makes a powerful case for its abiding relevance in our liberal regime. Without conservatism, liberalism goes too far; it destroys too much, too fast, not recognizing the damage this does to social order and individual well-being. Ultimately liberalism, when left unchecked by conservatism, destroys its own social and philosophical foundations and thus becomes unsustainable as a way of life.

V. SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT SCRUTON'S ACCOUNT

Does Scruton's sophisticated method enable him to illuminate conservatism completely or does he leave some aspects of its nature obscure? Conservatism is, of course, a tremendously complex and variegated phenomenon; and completeness is a lot to ask of any account. But still, to inquire into the degree of completeness is a useful test of accuracy. My argument here is that Scruton's method may (for all its virtues) miss something in the complicated relationship of conservatism to "reaction."

In a sloppy and polemical sense, the word "reactionary" can refer to "anyone who opposes changes that the Left desires." But there is also a more precise use of the term according to which a reactionary is someone who wants "to

re-establish a political order that has been overthrown in the name of left-wing ideals" (see Scruton 1983, pp. 394-95). According to the sloppy definition, one would be hard pressed to distinguish a reactionary from a conservative—and this is often the intention of those who use the word in this way. According to the more precise definition, however, they are easy to tell apart: conservatives desire not to re-establish what has been overthrown, but to conserve what is good in the present. Thus, in Scruton's *Dictionary of Political Thought*, from which I have already been quoting, conservatism is defined as "a desire to conserve existing things, held to be either good in themselves, or better than the likely alternatives, or at least safe, familiar, and the objects of trust and affection" (*ibid.*, p. 90).

In Scruton's chapter on the prehistory of conservatism, he takes pains to draw a stark contrast between conservatism and reaction. He does so by quoting a line from Burke: "We must reform in order to conserve." What does this mean? It means that conservatives understand (what reactionaries do not) that adaptation is sometimes necessary "in order to conserve what we are and what we have" (p. 3). In more specific terms, Scruton is referring to the basic attitude one takes to "the revolution," not just the French Revolution, the excesses of which invite the harshest of criticism, but the entire "modern revolution" which vaults the freedom of the individual to the highest of all political goods. Reactionaries regard this revolution as something fundamentally wrong and believe it must be undone before anything good can be politically achieved. Conservatives by contrast adapt to the revolution "in a spirit of conservation and renewal" (p. 22). By casting their relationship in this way, Scruton is able to say definitively: "Conservatives are not reactionaries."

But is there not a single element of reaction in modern conservatism, however faint? Certainly, one can see why Scruton would want to drive a wedge between conservatives and reactionaries. Not only does reaction have a bad name, but it is also, by definition, irrelevant in the modern political dispensation. It makes itself irrelevant by pronouncing a candid "No!" to Enlightenment liberalism. Reactionaries are not interested in contributing valuable insights to contemporary political debates; they are interested in *ending* contemporary debates and returning to the *status quo ante*, the way things were before liberalism rose victorious.⁶ Just to the extent that this is true, Scruton's argument about the abiding relevance of modern conservatism necessitates a dissociation of conservatism from reaction. The closer conservatism comes to reaction the less relevant it can be.

But careful reflection on the various strands of modern conservatism may lead one to wonder whether conservatism is completely divorced from reaction after all. Put another way, the question is how thoroughly and consistently “adaptive” modern conservatives really are. Today it is possible to identify a host of different conservative strands: religious conservatives; foreign policy conservatives—which come in two varieties, American-style isolationists and hawkish realists; law-and-order conservatives, who sometimes border on Hobbesian absolutism, at least when it comes to police powers; constitutional conservatives; economic freedom conservatives; anti-majoritarian or anti-democratic conservatives; social-hierarchy conservatives; and traditional-values conservatives, especially insofar as tradition opposes such innovations as sexual liberation, gender fluidity, and human enhancement. This is a markedly different list of conservative types from the four types offered by Scruton, though there is some overlap.

Why and how am I able to offer a different list? The reason is that whereas Scruton divides modern history into four phases to which conservatives respond—Enlightenment Liberalism, the Industrial Revolution, the rise of Socialism, and the rise of Political Correctness in the west along with religious extremism in parts of the West and the Middle East; I divide modern history into nine waves of liberation to which conservatives respond, sometimes assenting, sometimes dissenting. I have presented the list of nine waves elsewhere, but I shall do so again here in order to comment on its relevance to the questions at hand: What types of conservatism exist? And what relationship do these types have to reaction?

Here are the nine waves of modern freedom followed by a characteristic thinker or two who advanced each wave.

1. Freedom from religious persecution (Luther)
2. Freedom from foreign domination (Machiavelli, enshrined at Westphalia)
3. Freedom from civil war (Bodin, Hobbes)
4. Freedom from arbitrary rule, tyranny (Milton, Locke)
5. Freedom from government interference in the economy (Smith, Say, Cobden)
6. Freedom from rule by another, i.e., by some person or group that does not include oneself or one’s representative (Publius, Rousseau, Kant)
7. Freedom from tyranny of the majority (Tocqueville, Mill)
8. Freedom from exploitation by privileged sub-political groups
 - a. in the social sphere (Mill)
 - b. in the economic sphere (Marx, Hobhouse, Dewey, Croly)
9. Freedom from biological necessity (Nick Bostrom and transhumanists)

The first insight afforded by reflection on the nine waves is that the distinctly modern phenomenon of revolution is more dynamic (one might even say more metastatic) than Scruton’s approach allows. He focuses on the massive political revolution that occurred during the Enlightenment, and on two economic revolutions: The Industrial Revolution and the Marxist-type socialist revolution. But such broad periodization obscures the extent to which modernity can also be viewed as a long series of smaller revolutions running from the Reformation to today.

A second insight follows from this first one. Just as the modern revolution of which Enlightenment liberalism is but a part did not stop with the rise of liberalism but kept unfolding, so too did *conservatism keep unfolding* in reaction to the new frontiers of freedom. And this allows us to classify conservatives by how they react to any one of the revolutionary waves, either “adapting” or by “reacting,” which means saying “No!” Each of the nine waves of freedom except for the ninth has produced conservatives who adapt and conservatives who “react.” The reactionaries refuse further development; they want to arrest the revolution at a certain point and oppose any further change. To just the extent that the revolution moves forward without them, they desire to turn the clock back to the way things were before. This is, to be sure, a form of reaction. It is not as radical as the kind of reactionary who, with De Maistre, rejects modernity *in toto*. Compared to De Maistre, the modern reactionary seems more adaptive. But he is not completely adaptive. He is a reactionary at the moment of his refusal to assent to the revolution in one or more of its later phases and in his desire to return to the *status quo ante*.

This has direct implications for whether some conservatives partake in the character of “reaction” or not. Scruton follows the widely accepted understanding of a reactionary as someone who wants to go back to the most fundamental *status quo ante*, to the dispensation prior to Enlightenment liberalism itself. But if the revolution is not merely a singular cataclysmic event, but also a gradually unfolding series of events, then it is possible to be a reactionary in relation

to any of the nine waves. All the conservative types I listed above are defined by their refusal to evolve politically beyond their fixed attachment to one of the nine waves. And, empirically speaking, we do indeed see distinct strands of conservatism that make such a refusal. This suggests that some forms of modern conservatism have reaction built into them.

If there is a downside to this method of understanding conservatism—a method that I believe to be slightly more empirically explanatory than Scruton’s method—it is that the problem of conservatism’s “relevance” today becomes more complicated. The core ideas associated with conservatism through the ages, ideas centering on human sociality, the ineradicably of competition and violence, and the ambiguous quality of human reason, are as relevant today as ever. I doubt that their relevance will ever fade. But when modern conservatives exercise the “reactionary option” that I have just described, they become by definition less relevant—less relevant at least to political debates surrounding new forms of freedom they categorically reject. They are simply overtaken by the revolution. On this matter, Eric Voegelin (1990, p. 512) once made an apt and humorous point:

One can’t get away from the revolution. Whoever participates in it for a time with the intention of retiring peacefully with a pension which calls itself liberalism will discover sooner or later that the revolutionary convulsion to destroy socially harmful, obsolete institutions is not a good investment for a pensioner.

In the constantly unfolding revolution that courses through modern history, all one has to do is stand still to become a reactionary (and to just that extent a less relevant voice).

VI. CONCLUSION

At the outset of Scruton’s chapter on the prehistory of conservatism, he stressed that he wanted to avoid two methodological errors. The first was the intellectualist error of supposing that conservatism emerges strictly from the history of ideas. The second was the Marxist error of supposing it emerges not from ideas at all but from the social antagonisms surrounding the modern means of economic production. In retrospect, Scruton was wise to avoid these errors, not only because they each fail in their own way to account for the complex emergence of modern conservatism, but also because they each lead to a mode of dismissal. In the distinctly modern way of life in which we find our-

selves, liberalism simply dominates; and liberals place a tremendous value upon progress, including the progress of political ideas. In this milieu, conservatism will appear as nothing but regressive if it is understood strictly in terms of the history of ideas. Because history is moving forwards, not backwards or standing still, conservative ideas are, *ex definitione*, irrelevant.

The Marxist dismissal is slightly different but nevertheless fatal. If all political “ideologies”—including, e.g., feudalism, mercantilism, liberalism, conservatism, and socialism—are mere epiphenomena, stemming from class differences in relation to the means of production, then conservatism can have no inherent truth. It is reduced to propaganda on the part of the “haves” to justify their privileges in the face of the “have nots.” Conservatism in this guise is little more than a powerplay, plainly unjust and doomed to irrelevance as soon as the “have nots” succeed in destroying unjust privilege.

Scruton is right to search for a historical method that is not so negatively charged, one that can help readers understand what conservatism *is*, rather than why it should be dismissed *a priori*. And I have argued that his account largely succeeds. By grounding conservatism in a body of timeless insights into the human condition, he frustrates the intellectualist dismissal of conservative ideas as retrograde. By showing that conservatism is no mouthpiece for Enlightenment liberalism (as Marx would expect) but in fact a *qualification* of liberalism—and not only liberalism, but also crude industrialism, socialism, political correctness, and religious fundamentalism—Scruton shows that conservative ideas transcend any particular set of economic relations. Indeed, they address much more than economics; and what they have to offer is not ideological propaganda, but wise counsel.

However, I have argued in the final section of this reflection that Scruton’s account of conservatism tends to obscure certain empirical realities about its relationship to liberalism and reaction. Because liberalism is better understood as dynamic and evolutionary rather than static, conservatives have the opportunity to “react” not only at its inception, but at any point along its trajectory, as it shifts focus from one form of liberation to another. I have thus argued for the possibility of a “reactionary element” in modern conservatism. And I wish to close by suggesting that this element should not be dismissed (especially not by conservatives) as irrelevant. Let us remember that “relevance” is a relative concept which always invites the question: relevant *to what?* In Scruton’s *Conservatism*, relevance seems

to be defined by the contribution conservatism can make to human flourishing in regimes where the dominance of liberal ideas is accepted as a *fait accompli*. (The conservative “adapts”). But Scruton has relatively little to say about what conservatives should do when late liberalism generates ideas and political movements that are positively inimical to human flourishing. My own view is that at such pivotal moments when liberalism is in all likelihood speeding towards its own destruction, the burden of conservatism is to be “relevant” in a new way—not relevant to the present, destructive ambitions of liberalism itself, but relevant instead to those pockets of local civilization within each liberal regime where individuals still endeavor to pursue human fulfillment in well-ordered communities of freedom, responsibility, and meaning.

NOTES

- 1 Hereafter, references to this text will be cited parenthetically.
- 2 I owe this observation to Dr. Martin Beckstein, and it is well attested in early French dictionaries.
- 3 Oxford English Dictionary under “conservative.”
- 4 For Acton’s famous remark and its immediate context, see (Hill 2000, pp. xi, xxiv, and chapter 17).
- 5 A recent example is Deneen 2018.
- 6 On reactionaries as defenders of the status quo ante in relation to conservatives who defend the status quo, see most recently Alexander 2018, pp. 1-24.

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The Toryism of exile: Culture, Politics and the Quest for 'home' in Sir Roger Scruton's Elegiac Conservatism¹

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Whether Roger Scruton has constructed what a sympathetic commentator called 'an ironclad system of Tory dogma' (Dooley 2009, p. 2) may be questionable, but there is little doubt that he is, as another sympathizer has claimed, 'one of the most accomplished public intellectuals to have emerged during the latter half of the twentieth century'.² Above all, Scruton is unrivalled amongst contemporary conservative thinkers for the literary, aesthetic and philosophical scholarship with which he has explored what a coherent conservative commitment entails. The mature outcome of this exploration is *Conservatism: An Invitation to the Great Tradition*, of which perhaps the most striking feature is Scruton's rejection of any form of conservatism of compromise in favour of a conservatism involving nothing less than 'our whole way of being, as heirs to a great civilisation, and many-layered bequest of laws, institutions and high culture' (Scruton 2017, p. 6).³ In what follows, the earlier philosophical and political writings which have led Scruton to this conclusion will be considered. Once that broader setting has been explored it will be possible to assess the strengths and limitations of Scruton's conservatism as a whole. Before doing so, however, it will be useful to note the three revelatory personal experiences which have inspired it.

SCRUTON'S THREE DAMASCENE REVELATIONS

Scruton's first and earliest Damascene moment was his discovery of culture. This occurred while he was still at school and, ignoring the cautionary words of a school friend, read Spengler's *Decline and Fall of the West*. The precise moment of revelation, Scruton records, came when he read Spengler's prophecy that: 'One day the last portrait of Rembrandt and the last bar of Mozart will have ceased to be—though possibly a coloured canvas and a sheet of notes may remain—because the last eye and the last ear accessible

to their message will have gone' (Scruton 2006a, p. 24). In fairness to Scruton, he adds that not long afterwards he succumbed to the spell of analytical philosophy while a Cambridge undergraduate, acquiring a critical sense which led him, when he re-read Spengler, to find 'nothing more than megalomaniac fantasies, implausible analogies and false distinctions founded neither in logic nor in fact' (Scruton 2006a, p. 26). Nevertheless, his conversion to culture would remain central to his thought for the rest of his life.

Scruton's commitment to culture was transfigured, however, by a second Damascene moment in 1968 while, aged 24, he was in Paris. This moment occurred during the May riots when he witnessed levels of violence he had never previously encountered. Earlier that day he had been reading de Gaulle's *Memoires de Guerre*, from which he learned that in times of crisis it is not enough to protect frontiers and institutions. What is vital is to save the sacred, in the form of language, religion and high culture. With de Gaulle's message in mind Scruton loathed the violence and records that 'for the first time in my life I felt a surge of political anger, finding myself on the other side of the barricades from all the people I knew' (Dooley 2009, p. 14). It was at this moment that Scruton took issue with a girlfriend who admired Foucault and rallied instead to the defence of the bourgeoisie maligned by continental radicals.

Scruton's third Damascene moment was the most dramatic of all since it was the one in which he not only discovered the nature of community but the meaning of life. This moment was his discovery of fox hunting with horse and hounds. It occurred while he was riding Dumbo, a small and nondescript pony borrowed from a friend who owned a minor country house in the Cotswolds, for various previously unexciting expeditions. What happened was that Dumbo suddenly sprang into life after he and his rider unexpectedly encountered the meet of an English fox hunt. In that moment, Scruton recounts, he finally transcended such liberal orthodoxies as contractualism, egalitarianism,

abstract universalism and sentimental guilt, penetrating beyond them into the primordial social realities of the natural order of social existence. What characterizes the primordial realities is hierarchy, office, uniforms, spontaneous moral discipline, and continuity between the human and the animal world. 'I *can* say', Scruton wrote, 'that my life was changed by the experience' (Scruton 1999, p. 45).

Explaining precisely what changed his life, Scruton writes that it was the realization, as soon as he joined the hunt, that he had for the first time ceased to view life as a spectator. In particular, he ceased to admire the very English world of Bloomsbury intellectuals like Virginia Woolf—intellectuals often mistakenly regarded as the voice of the modern English educated class, when in reality they are merely the voice of an alienated urban elite which has completely lost contact with the land Scruton 1999, p. 64). No longer an intellectual 'observing from afar', he experienced instead a sense of membership and active participation in 'a piece of England which was not yet alien to itself'. There he found 'innocent and unaffected membership, a corporate smile as spontaneous as the wagging tails of the hounds and pricked ears of the horses. And I wanted to join' (Scruton 1999, p. 45).

Having joined the hunt, something even more extraordinary happened. Not only did Scruton cease to be a spectator, but he also ceased to be an ordinary human being. He became instead one half of a centaur, since 'When we sit on a horse we are judged as one half of a centaur' (Scruton 1999, p. 42). It is, Scruton insists, only

In those centaur hours... that real life returns to you. For a brief, ecstatic moment the blood of another species flows through your veins, stirring the old deposits of collective life, releasing pockets of energy that a million generations laboriously harvested from the crop of human suffering. And this ultimate union between species transfers to our human mind, not the excitement of the animals only, but also the innocent concreteness of their thoughts (Scruton 1999, p. 69).

Presumably with the standpoint of the centaur in mind, Scruton writes that the English class system ceased to seem divisive since hunting unites all participants, however menial their role, in an aristocratic—and necessarily hierarchical—form of liberty (Scruton 1999, p. xii). This is especially true, Scruton writes elsewhere, when the huntsman is a gentleman, since 'In the figure of the gentleman social hierarchy and social mobility are reconciled', radiating as the

gentleman does 'the image of a society every single member of which can aspire to the upper class' (Scruton 2000, p. 65).

Even better, however, the 'centaur hours' on horseback generate the primordial unifying experience of seeing the 'divine idea' shine from other human beings, from animals, and from nature at large. 'Rarely does this happen', Scruton noted, 'But it can happen all the same, and is never more likely to happen than when hunting amid the herd and the pack, on the lively scent of a fox who streams through the hedgerows, staking out the landscape with a matrix of primeval desire' (Scruton 1999, p. 79). To those who object that the fox might not find the experience so inspiring, Scruton replies that theirs is a sentimental response which fails to understand that the fox is merely encountering the natural order of existence (as experienced, presumably, by centaurs in particular).

It is worth noticing in passing that Scruton's discovery that an equine pastime could enable him to escape being a spectator in life and get closer to God did not in fact involve, as he seems to assume, the discovery of a uniquely English view of the role horses might play in life. A no less English view is found, for example, in the notably English conservatism of Michael Oakeshott. For Scruton, hunting on horseback is a uniquely English pursuit in which the voice of God may be heard by the rider and an ultimate sense of meaning experienced while pursuing the fox. For Oakeshott, in contrast, the distinctively English interest in horses lies in a day at the races, during which the more modest yet intellectually demanding pleasure may be experienced of assessing the merits of different horses with a view to simply picking a winner (without necessarily betting on it). Oakeshott's well-known *A Guide to the Classics*, written jointly with Guy Griffiths, is devoted to what was then the supreme challenge of picking the winner of the Derby. In it, Oakeshott emphasized precisely the detached view of horses which Scruton rejects in favour of sharing in their existence.

Bearing in mind this sketch of the Damascene moments that inspire Scruton's conservatism, it may now be asked how well he has succeeded in drawing together the thoughts they provoked into a coherent conservative philosophical project. As might be expected, Scruton's third Damascene moment has left him exposed to the charge of offering no more than an idiosyncratic 'little England' version of conservatism without relevance for the urban and industrial lives of the majority in contemporary mass liberal democracy. It will be suggested, however, that this dismissive assessment does not do justice to four intimately

interrelated claims—some of which were briefly touched upon above—Scruton makes about conservatism which must be considered. The first and most ambitious claim is that the principal task of conservatism is to acknowledge the extent to which western modernity suffers from a condition of spiritual alienation that can only be alleviated by reenchanting the world in a way that enables it to be experienced as a home. The second claim is that this alienation can only be mitigated at the political level by constructing a civil order based on the pre-political experience of national loyalty, rather than on contractual or voluntarist relationships. The third is that the pre-political order must itself conform to the natural order of society as that is apprehended by genuine conservatives. The fourth claim is that the natural order is rooted in the sacred, and that conservatives must be duly aware of this sacred origin.

It will be convenient to divide the consideration of Scruton's conservative project into two parts, one of which concerns the diagnostic part of his thought and the other his remedial proposals. Anticipating what follows, the diagnostic part is the vision just referred to of the contemporary western world as afflicted by an all-pervasive moral, political and social alienation. The remedial part of Scruton's project is the hope of saving western civilization from spiritual alienation by restoring a positive sense of the world as an enchanted home in which human beings may flourish. Whether this vision yields either a credible diagnosis or a viable set of remedies for our putative condition are the questions that must now be considered.

SCRUTON'S PHILOSOPHICAL DIAGNOSIS OF THE CONTEMPORARY WESTERN SPIRITUAL MALAISE

Although the centre of Scruton's conservatism is a vision of modern western life as a condition of profound spiritual alienation, his concept of alienation is entirely distinct from Marxist alienation. Unlike Marxist alienation, it does not originate with capitalism, class stratification, private property or market competition. Scruton rejects the Marxist concept for two main reasons. The first is that Marxist theory entails a reductionist 'third person' perspective which lays claim to scientific objectivity but serves in practice only to detach the concept of alienation from the actual experience of unhappiness of members of the population. By doing so, the third person perspective opens the way for an elitist and inescapably authoritarian theory that privileges the experience of an intelligentsia whose members feel en-

titled to foist their arbitrary conception of liberation on the entire populace.

Scruton's second reason for rejecting the Marxist theory of alienation is that its exclusive emphasis on material causes ignores spiritual ones. At one level, these causes include the decline of religion, the loss of a sense of national identity, a state enforced egalitarianism and the destruction of the autonomous institutions of civil society, including educational institutions. At a deeper level, however, Scruton concentrates attention on four underlying spiritual features of western culture which destroy any prospect of human well-being. These must now be considered.

(1) The first feature is a philosophical and literary one which echoes Nietzsche's critique of the western intellectual tradition. In the *Xanthippic Dialogues*, Scruton provides a fictitious account of the radical critique by Xanthippe, Socrates' wife, of her husband's initiation of the destructive western quest for a more truly real reality than that yielded by our senses and moral, political and aesthetic imagination (Scruton 1993). This quest Scruton elsewhere describes as the work of the devil because the quest culminates in the contemporary postmodern deconstruction project, which has meant that there is now no 'we', or first-person plural, but only a series of subjective and relative standpoints. This, Scruton writes, is indeed the devil's main message. Since there is now no genuine first-person plural,

We are alone in the world, and the self is all that we can guarantee against it. All institutions and communities, all culture and law, are objects of a sublime mockery: absurd in themselves, and the source of absurdity in their adherents. By promising to "liberate" the self, the devil establishes a world where nothing *but* the self exists (Scruton 1994, p. 480).

But how, it may be asked, has the devil brought this dire situation about? Scruton's answer is that it is by promoting four forms of hubris which now dominate western culture. The first form is the assumption, widespread since Descartes, that the only possible foundation for certain knowledge is 'first-person' or subjective experience. Scruton terms this the 'first-person illusion', entailing as it does a separation of subject and object which not only leaves the subject with no content, but treats the world (including other selves) as alien to us (Scruton 1984a, p. 281). Perpetuated by both rationalist and empiricist philosophers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the first-person

illusion culminated in the egoism of Fichte's philosophy. It was, however, severely undermined by Kant and Wittgenstein, the two philosophers whom Scruton credits as the most important influences on his own thinking (Scruton 1996, p. 7).

Kant's achievement, Scruton maintains, was to show that the choice between the two dominant modern philosophical traditions, empiricism and rationalism, was unreal, since 'each philosophy was equally mistaken, and that the only conceivable metaphysics that could commend itself to a reasonable being must be both empiricist and rationalist at once' (Scruton 1984a, p. 137). In Wittgenstein's case, his achievement was to reject the possibility of a private language and in that way bring the final demolition of 'the main current in modern philosophy', which is the Cartesian theory of the subject and 'the consequent divorce between subject and object, between subjective certainty and objective doubt'. The Cartesian error was failure to realize that all meaning presupposes a shared language and is therefore in principle public. It is to Wittgenstein, accordingly, that we owe 'the detailed demonstration of the untenability of the Cartesian vision, and especially of the Cartesian dualisms that [run] through [modern] epistemology, metaphysics, ethics and political philosophy' (Scruton 1984a, p. 3). Unfortunately, however, Wittgenstein's demolition of the first-person illusion has done nothing to dispel the second form of hubris in which the devil's malign influence is manifest.

The second form consists in the belief 'that science has the answer to all our questions, that we are nothing but dying animals and that the meaning of life is merely self-affirmation, or at best the pursuit of some collective, all embracing and all-too-human goal' (Dooley 2009, p. 7). Above all, the worship of science complements the destructive subjectivism in ethics inaugurated by the first-person illusion by reducing morality and law to mere reflections of the material order. Although Marxist doctrine is a familiar illustration of this destruction, Scruton maintains that modern sexology commits precisely the same hubristic error, which is to ignore the concept of personality. Instead of being treated as a world of meaning and awareness expressed in rights and responsibilities, personality is treated instead as merely a material set of needs and desires. In place of the person, that is, is put the 'bald, unmoralised' image of human nature characteristic of the scientific perspective (Scruton 1996, p. 470).

Unsurprisingly, Scruton's extensive critique of sexology in one of his most philosophically ambitious books, *Sexual*

Desire, has polarized opinion. The aim of the book has encountered little objection: it is to relate biology or embodiment to sex in a way which emphasizes its essentially interpersonal and caring nature, thereby elevating sex from a purely animal level by reconnecting it with man's higher spiritual faculties (Scruton 1986a). Some of Scruton's conclusions, however, have been controversial. On the one hand, a sympathizer has described the book as 'perhaps the most imaginative philosophical work on the subject in English'.⁴ A critic, on the other hand, caustically observed that Scruton's attempt to elevate sex above animality led him to the problematic claim that neither animals nor rapists feel sexual desire or experience sexual fulfilment since they do not enjoy the caring interpersonal relationship which is the essence of sex. If this is true, John Carey observed, it is true only because Scruton's entire book depends on the simple philosophical manoeuvre of so defining his terms as to exclude anything that happens to contradict his beliefs' (Carey 1986, p. 43).

The third form of hubris is found in modern architecture in particular. 'When I discovered culture', Scruton writes, 'it was not the culture of the past that interested me, but the culture of the present. I sought out modern music, modern poetry, modern painting and modern novels. But I rejected modern architecture' (Scruton 2006a, p. 199). Scruton rejected the modern movement in architecture for a reason that lies at the heart of his conservatism, which is that it destroys the city as a home (Scruton 2006a, p. 204). By describing the city as a home, he means a place in which 'strangers [can] live committed to strangers' (Scruton 2006a, p. 206). Architectural modernism destroys this home because, in a spirit of hubris, it rejects everything that had once made the city a centre of life, worship, industry and exchange in European history, not because it had any well-thought out alternative, but simply because an architectural elite was intent on implementing a vision of human equality by any means, 'including the coercion of the rest of us' (Scruton 2006a, p. 200). Le Corbusier, for example, 'never asked himself whether people wanted to live in [the] new utopia, nor did he care what method was used to transport them there' (Scruton 2006a, p. 198). It should be added that Scruton does not deny that architectural modernists like Le Corbusier have produced great or beautiful buildings—he commends Le Corbusier's Chapel at Ronchamp, and the houses of Frank Lloyd Wright, for example (Scruton 2006a, p. 206). Its failure lies, rather, in the absence of any concern to harmonize with existing urban décor in order to retain the essence of the city as a common home.

The fourth form of modern hubris is the deconstruction project of the New Left intellectuals whom Scruton has branded *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands*, in the title of perhaps his most polemical book (Scruton 2016). Key European representatives are identified as Sartre, Foucault, Habermas, Althusser, Lacan, Deleuze, Badiou and Zizek, on the European continent. In Britain, echoes of the New Left project are found in Hobsbawm and Thompson, while in the USA Galbraith and Dworkin are guilty of harbouring the same destructive project. The hubris which unites these representatives of contemporary western radicalism is, Scruton maintains, an incapacity for serious political thought due to the systematic detachment of it from the real world (Scruton 2016). The source of this detachment is a uniformly arrogant desire to overthrow bourgeois society despite the contrary wishes of most ordinary people, of whom Scruton claims to be the defender despite the fact that his own intellectual world is far removed from theirs.⁵

What the New Left intellectuals offer is in fact nothing more than a vague, wholly unspecified ideal of liberation for which no philosophical defence is offered, but only a series of strategies that permit the intelligentsia to dismiss dissent as a form of false consciousness. Above all, what characterizes the New Left concept of liberation is failure to accommodate the inescapable stage of spiritual and social alienation through which the modern self must pass in order to achieve maturity. In a mistaken attempt to evade this, they offer instead the destructive socialist and nationalist ideals of liberation that have produced the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century (Scruton 1996, p. 465).

(2) The second fundamental feature of modern western culture which destroys the human world is the dominance of the liberal concept of the self, according to which the self is a given, preformed entity that bears rights prior to social existence. For a self of this kind the only legitimate ethical limits on personal identity are self-chosen ones. This self can therefore properly be described as impious, in the sense that it can attach no moral significance to anything not chosen or made by it. Its consequent fate is a profound sense of isolation in a world inevitably regarded as intrinsically meaningless since the universe is thought of only as a mass of resources for exploitation by modern technology. To the liberal concept of the given self, it will be seen later, Scruton opposes Hegel's conception of an essentially social self that can mature only through a progressively deepening awareness of, and commitment to, its social identity.

(3) The third destructive feature of modern western culture is an instrumental conception of social and political institutions as only acceptable in so far as they serve as a means of fulfilling bargains made for the temporary satisfaction of individual purposes. In the case of marriage, for example, the instrumental view means that a supra-individual existential commitment is unintelligible. In the case of the state, it means above all that the unifying pre-political experience of nationhood is completely ignored. His defence of this experience, Scruton emphasizes, must not be mistaken for a defence of nationalism, which is 'a belligerent *ideology* which uses national symbols in order to conscript people to war'. What he defends, that is, is the actual experience of national loyalty, which 'involves a love of home and a preparedness to defend it' (Scruton 2006b, p. 15). There is, however, some ambiguity about what Scruton considers to be the precise nature of the nationhood in which he finds the key to modern western political identity.

On the one hand, Scruton writes that England is not a nation at all; nor is it an empire. It is, on the contrary, a 'country' whose law is 'the law of the land' (Scruton 2000, p. 257). But on the other, when Scruton attempts to describe what a country is, the concept of national loyalty returns because it is the pre-political 'rock' consisting of the attitudes that enable people to co-operate with their opponents [and] to agree to differ and to build institutions that are higher, more durable and more impartial than the political process itself. It enables people to live, in other words, in a depoliticized society, a society in which individuals are sovereign over their own lives yet confident that they will join in defence of their freedoms, engaging in adversarial politics meanwhile (Scruton 2006b, p. 19).

In support of this view, Scruton appeals to the

recent experience of trying to impose democratic institutions on countries sustained by no national loyalty. Almost as soon as democracy is introduced a local elite gains power, thereafter confining political privilege to its own gang, tribe or sect, and destroying all institutions that would force it to account to those that it has disenfranchised. This we have seen in the Middle East, in the Russian Empire and Africa (*ibid.*).

The lesson to be learned is that 'Accountability to strangers is a rare gift and in the history of the modern world only

the nation state and the empire centred on a nation state have really achieved it'. When this lesson is ignored, the same destruction of willingness to accept accountability to strangers is also evident in such supra-national bodies as the European Commission, the United Nations, the World Health Organization and the International Labour Organization, in none of which is anyone empowered to ensure the accountability of the ruling elites (Scruton 2006b, pp. 19–20).

What remain unclear, then, are the answers to two problems. One is the kind of relation between 'country', 'land' and nationhood necessary for the existence of liberal democracy. Scruton's propensity to generalize obscures the differences, for example, between the history of liberal democracy in Britain, Germany and the USA. The other problem is to determine the sense in which nationhood is a pre-political or 'given' identity. In the case of Islam, for example, some aspects of a political identity have emerged even though Islamic doctrine, as Scruton acknowledges, is anti-territorial (Scruton 2003).

(4) The fourth underlying pathology of modern western culture is a radical sense of discontinuity between the human and the natural world, on the one hand, and a concomitant inability, on the other, to acknowledge the religious inspiration of human cultural achievement in its higher forms. When religion is forgotten, the result is a vulgar age in which culture can no longer confer meaning on life but is reduced to whatever entertains. Although Scruton's vision of mass society closely resembles T. S. Eliot's wasteland, his own version of that vision is considerably subtler than Eliot's. Unlike Eliot's simplistic dismissal of all things democratic, Scruton qualifies his view of a spiritual wasteland by acknowledging a variety of integrating tendencies that prevent the complete fragmentation and atomization emphasized by Eliot. He is sympathetic, for example, to 'the emergence of professional sport as a central drama in popular culture' (Scruton 1998, p. 97).

Scruton's qualified sympathy for popular culture is based in particular on his principal claim about human nature, which is that there is implanted in us 'the need to join things, to be a part of some larger and justifying enterprise which will ennoble our small endeavours and protect us from the sense that we are ultimately alone' (ibid.). From this point of view, Scruton finds a redeeming feature of the life of football fans and pop music devotees in what he sympathetically regards as their enthusiastic attempt to satisfy a primal need for a group identity (Scruton 1999, p. 72). Scru-

ton even defends football hooligans on the ground that, far from being 'the peculiar and perverse criminals painted by the press', they are 'simply the most fully human of football fans—the ones who wish to translate the vivid experience of membership that has been offered to them into the natural expression of a tribal right' (Scruton 1998, p. 98).

The same desire to satisfy the primal need for group membership found in football fans is also found in popular culture at large. This culture, Scruton observes, is synonymous with youth culture, which has now become 'the official culture of Britain, and probably everywhere else' (ibid.). The defining characteristic of youth culture, from which parents have absconded, is a desperate attempt on the part of its members to create a sense of identity that involves a more truly inclusive ideal of 'home' by removing 'all barriers to membership—[that is] all obstacles in the form of learning, expertise, allusion, doctrine or moral discipline' (Scruton 1998, p. 100). In practice, however, the outcome is not really a home, since 'as a home it must dedicate itself to the task of reproduction' (ibid.).

An especially striking feature of the quest for identity in modern youth culture, Scruton maintains, is the rise of teenage gangs. The identity offered by gang culture, however, belongs to a fantasy world in which there is no place for the rites of passage hitherto provided by every society to mark the transition from youth to an adult sense of responsibility. Instead, gang culture leaves its members locked 'in the present tense', without any means of 'crossing the fatal barrier into responsible adulthood' (Scruton 1998, p. 101). In short, although the gangs provide a sense of membership in what would otherwise be a condition of social fragmentation, they do so by restricting their members to an endless stage of irresponsible rebellion. Even more disastrous than gang culture in this respect, however, is the ersatz sense of membership and belonging fostered by social media. This is perhaps the most impoverished kind of group identity of all partly because it is passive, partly because it involves no sense of responsibility, and partly because no genuinely corporate identity is created.

How then is the deep-seated alienation of western modernity to be overcome?

The remedial part of Scruton's conservatism: the philosophical and political task of rescuing western humanity from spiritual alienation by reenchancing the world.

As was remarked at the outset, perhaps the most striking feature of Scruton's conservative project is his commitment to a conservatism involving nothing less than 'our whole way of being, as heirs to a great civilisation, and many-lay-

ered bequest of laws, institutions and high culture' (p. 6). This inevitably means that the principal task of conservatism is a comprehensive cultural one. Just how comprehensive this task is, however, is a matter which has been significantly extended from Scruton's relatively early conception of it to his more recent one. Although the alienation theme was present, primary emphasis in Scruton's earlier work was more narrowly political and social, focusing on the defence of civil association and nationhood. In *The Meaning of Conservatism*, for example, Scruton's commitment was to defending the concept of citizen as subject as the central concern of conservative political thought, and therefore with government in the first instance, rather than with such concepts as freedom, equality, social justice and culture at large (Scruton 1980, p. 40).⁶ There was, in addition, a concern with religion, although Scruton appeared uncertain about which religion he had in mind. In the conclusion to *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Popular Culture*, for example, Scruton turned to the Chinese sage Confucius. In Confucius' favour Scruton notes in passing that Confucius, like Scruton himself, 'was fond of horses and hunting' (Scruton 1998, p. 136). More to the point, however, is that unlike Christ, Confucius was not a religious reformer and offered no dream of salvation. He was, instead, 'but an ardent conformist in all matters both temporal and spiritual, and his counsels and maxims... are concerned with the orderly conduct of life in *this* world, rather than with hopes and fears for the next' (ibid.). Whether spiritual teaching which offers no prospect of salvation or redemption could ever reconcile western individuals to the world is, however, questionable.

Not long after his Confucian phase Scruton announced his commitment to Christianity. The nature of his Christianity, however, might (like his Confucianism) not have much general appeal since in *A Short History of Modern Philosophy* Scruton had earlier expressed his sympathy for Kant's distinction between genuine religious thought, which aims at the true understanding of God and the self, and spurious or 'fetishist' religious thought which simply projects entirely subjective principles and yearnings onto the universe (1984a, p. 218). The outcome of this distinction is a concept of religion which offers no personal consolation of any kind. It is perhaps best displayed in Scruton's admiration for what he terms Spinoza's wholly impersonal 'religion of disenchantment', according to which we have no special or privileged place in the world. In such a religion, Scruton notes approvingly, Spinoza emphasized that it would never occur to the man who truly loves God that

God should love him in return (Scruton 1986b, pp. 109-110).

More recently, however, concern with religion has been overtaken by a concern with the sacred, as Scruton has extended the conservative task into nothing less than a defence of western civilization in its entirety against its two main enemies. These are political correctness, on the one hand, and religious extremism, on the other. The religious extremism especially to be feared is the militant Islamism promoted by the Wahhabi-Salafi sects (p. 127). So far as political correctness is concerned, Scruton has described what it entails with an eloquence that merits quoting in detail. 'On the surface', he observes,

political correctness seems like a way of standing up for victims, be they women, minorities, gays, transsexuals or whatever. In reality, however, it is about *creating* victims. . . People in the grip of political correctness are in search of the one who has sown the hatred and rejection that they sense all around. They are experts in taking offence, regardless of whether offence has been given. . . As judge, prosecutor and jury they are the voice of an unquestionable righteousness. Their goal is to intimidate their opponents by exposing them to public humiliation (Scruton 2018a).

Even more disturbing, however, is that political correctness is merely one manifestation of the quasi-religious phenomenon of scapegoating, which is the search for sacrificial victims whose death will end the pollution their presence is deemed to have caused. The phenomenon of scapegoating, Scruton remarks, has recurred throughout history, whenever the bonds of society have weakened and social trust been replaced by mutual suspicion. Following the example of Christ, the best known victim of scapegoating, the only correct response is to 'speak peaceably, even to our accusers', and to retain a commitment to dialogue and argument even in the face of unreason (ibid.).

Before going further, it is necessary to step back from such undesirable features of modern culture as political correctness in order to focus attention on Scruton's reasons for 'totalizing' conservatism into a comprehensive defence of western culture. A short answer is to be found in the concluding words of his survey of modern philosophy, when Scruton writes that:

Perhaps the principal task for philosophy in modern conditions is to vindicate the human world, by show-

ing that the social intimations that underly our understanding are necessary to us, and part of our happiness. Through understanding our concepts, as they inform and are informed by our social experience, we may find a path back to the natural community (Scruton 1994, p. 495).

But who then are the modern philosophers who can point the way back to the ‘natural community’?

It might be thought that Scruton would turn for assistance to a phenomenologist like Heidegger, since Heidegger shares Scruton’s desire to create a sense of ‘dwelling’ by reconnecting with soil and earth. Scruton brusquely dismisses Heidegger, however, on the ground that he probably never hunted foxes on horseback, and therefore never experienced ‘the upward thrust of a horse’s hoof as it impacts through the saddle’. Without this experience, Heidegger never understood what *Dasein* really involves, remaining confined instead within an abstract mode of philosophizing that yields no genuine contact with reality (Scruton 1999, pp. 69-70; pp. 25, 73). Heidegger failed, in short, to learn the very English lesson that all abstract thinkers must learn in order ‘to renew their awareness of the really real’, which is that they must ‘hunger for the sight and smell and touch of things, and [realize that] nothing brings [this] sensuous reality into focus more clearly than hunting’ (Scruton 1999, p. 70).

Since phenomenology is certainly not born in the saddle, either in Heidegger’s case or probably in that of other phenomenologists as well, one may ask whether there are any non-hunting modern philosophers who can save the west from spiritual alienation. Scruton turns in particular to two thinkers. One is Burke, to whom Scruton frequently acknowledges his debt. The other is Hegel. Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, Scruton observes, is ‘perhaps the most succinct work of political philosophy ever written’ (Scruton 1984a, p. 211). Scruton’s admiration for Hegel is inspired by three aspects of his thought which combat demonism, the first of which is Hegel’s rejection of the first-person illusion in favour of his insistence on the sociality of the self. ‘The great truth that Hegel dramatizes in all his philosophy’, Scruton observes, is that ‘the self is an artefact, dependent upon the [dialectical] process whereby it becomes an object of its own awareness (the process of *Selbstimmung*)’ (Scruton 1984b, p. 1059).

The demon of radicalism is combated in a closely related second way by Hegel’s positive view of the master/slave relationship outlined in the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*.

Only through this struggle for mutual recognition is the modern self realized, in a dialectical resolution of conflict from which ‘we emerge into custom, morality, and civil association’, these being ‘the immovable “given” of the human condition’ since without them there simply cannot be ‘the self-conscious awareness that . . . enable[s] us to question our existence’ (ibid). Putting the same point slightly differently: an integral part of Hegel’s escape from hubris is his rejection of the voluntarist assumption that only self-created restraints on human beings are morally valid. At the political level, Scruton notes approvingly, the dialectic of recognition is provided for by Hegel’s concept of civil association, which gives institutional form to it within the overall structure of the state.

Hegel’s third antidote to modern hubris is piety, already evident in his rejection of the modern liberal belief in the pre-social, ‘given’ nature of the self, but also evident in his concomitant rejection of any kind of abstract, absolutist conception of the self in favour an insistence on the essential historicity of human identity, and indeed of philosophy itself (Scruton 1984a, pp. 206-211).

Hegelian political philosophy, however, is only one aspect of the more comprehensive philosophical reconstruction by which Scruton hopes to reenchant our spiritually alienated world. The key to this reenchantment is a fusion of aesthetics, the sacred and the political. In this respect, Scruton’s conservatism relies on the possibility of making the seamless transition from aesthetics and the sacred to the political with which Scruton credits Burke (Scruton 2006a, p. 39). Only if this transition is made, Scruton maintains, can the world become a home and life become meaningful. It is this belief in the ideal of civilization as a home, Scruton notes, that links his own form of conservatism to ‘the romantic core of conservatism as you find it—very differently expressed—in Burke and Hegel, in Coleridge, Ruskin, Dostoevsky and T. S. Eliot’ (ibid.).

Although Scruton commends Burke for basing his conservatism on aesthetics, it is above all from Kant, as Mark Dooley remarks, that Scruton learned that aesthetic judgement is a fundamental feature of human rationality, since ‘in all our endeavours, we seek order, harmony and symmetry.’ Because this search requires in turn that we “‘fit in’ with our surrounds, our neighbours and the wider community”, aesthetics is a ‘path to membership, or that through which we can rediscover a place called “home”’ (Dooley 2009, p. 5).

The link between aesthetics and the sacred is explained in detail by Scruton in his essays *The Philosopher on Do-*

ver Beach. 'The experience of the sacred,' he writes, 'is the sudden encounter with freedom; it is the recognition of personality and purposefulness in that which contains no human will...' For the modern secular intellectual, this experience is 'awakened more easily by art than by prayer; it is an attempt to call the timeless and the transcendental to the scene of some human incident . . .' For the majority of us, however, this experience involves an awaking that can only be achieved with 'the willing co-operation of the whole community'. Without this, man lives without the sacred, in a depersonalised world 'in which all is permitted and where nothing is of absolute value.' This, Scruton maintains, 'is the principal lesson of modern history' (Dooley 2009, pp. 6-7).

This, in outline, is Scruton's remedial project for curing western spiritual alienation—a project which involves fusing the sacred, the aesthetic, the moral and the political in a way which reenchants the world and makes it feel like home. To what extent, it must now be asked, is Scruton's all-embracing conservative project intellectually and politically viable? There are at least three major philosophical problems and two specifically political ones.

THE PROBLEMS

The first philosophical problem is Scruton's vision of western modernity as mired in a condition of spiritual alienation. Ironically, by making spiritual alienation his central concern Scruton risks de-politicizing conservatism by transforming it into a sophisticated quest for identity by a thinker who reflects that 'life itself has put me outside any kind of belonging.'⁷ Although Scruton is not alone in this self-diagnosis, those who share the experience underlying it tend to be members of a spiritually alienated European intellectual elite rather than typical members of the British public. As Scruton himself records, Iris Murdoch once indicated to him that he had 'a central European sensibility'. Scruton did not dispute this, adding with some pride that he acquired this sensibility through 'an elaborate training, perhaps, in the art of being disinherited' (Scruton 2006a, p. 190). In fact, this training in the 'art of being disinherited' is so profound that, despite Scruton's rejection of the elitism of the New Left, it almost completely removes his own thought—whether philosophical or political—from the human occupants of the ordinary world he claims to be defending. From a cultural standpoint, his elevated aesthetic perspective may be admirable, but from a political standpoint the danger is of systematic disconnection from the

philistinical day to day realities of the contemporary world. What completes this disconnection is Scruton's claim to privileged knowledge of the 'natural order' of the world and society acquired during the 'centaur hours' he experiences while hunting on horseback.

The second major philosophical problem, apart from elitism, is Scruton's belief that it is possible to make a seamless transition from a personal experience of spiritual alienation to advocacy of a conservative political position based on the fusion of the aesthetic and the sacred. This neglects the fact that power has no place in the aesthetic sphere, although it is central in the political one. What requires further comment, however, is the equally central position Scruton assigns to the 'sacred', by which he means more than religion, at least as that is conventionally understood. The sacred is associated with two closely related ideas, the first of which is the recognition of other selves as subjects and not objects. Scruton regards this recognition as sacred in the sense that if I treat another person merely as an object or thing, 'I have desecrated what is otherwise sacred, the untouchable centre of the will' (Scruton 2018b). In India, of course, they regard cows as more sacred than persons, which suggests that what is sacred is a source of disagreement. There is, however, a second idea which Scruton links to the sacred. This is the idea of purity. When I treat another as an object, he writes, I not only desecrate the sacred, I am also guilty of pollution (ibid.).

Scruton's intense concern with pollution and purity may have a personal root in the quasi-religious desire he has expressed to 'atone for a confused and selfish life' (Scruton 1999, p. 22). His deep interest in the subject is also evident in his novel *The Disappeared* (Scruton 2015), which he has explained was indirectly inspired by the Rotherham grooming scandal. 'I saw the concept of purity', he observed in a newspaper article (Scruton 2018b), 'as crucial to what had happened'. The abusers in the Rotherham case, he continued in the same article,

Regarded their victims as being in a state of pollution, or najasa. Losing their purity, the girls had nothing more to lose. Abuse, in such circumstances, ceases to be considered as abuse and becomes instead a kind of ritual re-enactment of the victim's loss of status. The story I told was about purity—the story of one girl's bid to retain it, another's to regain it, and of their abusers' sister, in her bid to defend it to the death (ibid.)

The origin of Scruton's concern with purity, however, is less relevant than two major difficulties created by his conception of it. The first is a tendency to blur the difference between the Islamic and the Christian conceptions of purity. As Scruton acknowledges in the passage just quoted, the concept of purity relevant to the Rotherham grooming case was shaped by the Islamic ideal of ritual purification, in which Scruton rightly notes that 'cleanliness is regarded... as the avenue to an inner purity [which] is [not only] at stake in sex and love [but] also has a profoundly religious connotation, being a readiness towards God... from whose grace we might otherwise irrecoverably fall' (ibid.). From the Islamic ideal of ritualistic purity, however, Scruton moves rapidly to the very different Christian ideal of purity as selflessness. He finds the latter ideal exemplified by Wagner's saintly Parsifal, who is

a simple person, who can neither exploit nor manipulate others, but who constantly surrenders his interests, endeavouring to restore right relations wherever he can. Purity, for Parsifal, means the recognition of the other as the true centre of attention, so that compassion takes over from every other form of power' (Scruton 2018b).

Parsifal's Christian purity is of course admirable, but Scruton's almost seamless shift—in an admittedly brief article—from discussing the ritualistic code of Islamic purity which inspired his novel to the Christian selflessness he admires in Parsifal tends to postulate a single, all-encompassing concept of purity that ignores the different meanings of the ideal in different cultures.

The second difficulty created by Scruton's treatment of purity is that he not only ignores cultural differences in its meaning but also ignores the essential ambiguity of the ideal in any of its forms, whether Christian, Islamic, Judaic or purely secular. It was this ambiguity that Aquinas emphasized when he wrote that the nature of every finite being is necessarily mixed, so that the pursuit of purity rapidly becomes destructive due to oversimplification. Aquinas' insight was reformulated more recently by Santayana, who contended that the West had never understood Satan properly because Satan had always been identified as evil. On the contrary, Santayana maintained, Satan's problem was precisely that he could not bear evil but only valued purity. Alas, wherever Satan looked, he inevitably encountered imperfection or impurity in the world, and accordingly came to hate not only the world but the God who

could create and tolerate the imperfection and impurity it embodied. Hence Satan's revolt—a revolt which eventually left him isolated, bitter and resentful because he was unable to come to terms, as God himself came to terms, with the necessary limitations, and hence the impurity, of all finite existence (Santayana 1899/2018).

Setting Islamic purity to one side and concentrating on the Christian ideal exemplified by Parsifal, it may be suggested that a more viable ethical ideal for conservatism is the ideal of integrity displayed in the life of Montaigne. Like Parsifal, Montaigne is deeply compassionate, but his compassion is the worldly compassion of a thinker at peace with human frailty and complexity. Montaigne is devoid, too, of the impulse towards atonement and self-purification with which Scruton sympathizes. Above all, Montaigne's integrity, unlike Parsifal's purity, can affirm the value of the ordinary and the morally unheroic. At the end of his *Essays*, Montaigne made this clear when he wrote that 'The best and most commendable lives, and best pleasing men are (in my conceit) those which with order are fitted, and with *decorum* are ranged to the common mould and humane model: but without wonder or extravagancy.'

Finally, Scruton's philosophical conservatism presupposes the existence of a natural order. Whether the natural order is best known through a metaphysics of eternal essences, as Plato believed, or is best discovered by 'centaur hours' on horseback, as Scruton believes, is not a relevant issue at present. What matters is that the concept of a natural order immediately creates a distinction between those who know it, on the one hand, and on the other, the benighted cave dwellers, as Plato labelled those who do not know the natural order. The political relationship, however, excludes the distinction between those who know and those who don't, since this is merely a formula for authoritarian rule. The political relationship is, rather, between those who will settle their differences peaceably by compromise and practical agreement without trying to rule each other out of court by claims to privileged knowledge of the true order of society.

Turning from the philosophical to the specifically political problems presented by Scruton's thought, the first is his consistent evasion of the central problem of modern western political theory, which is the problem of legitimacy: the problem, that is, of how freedom and authority are to be reconciled without coercion in the non-voluntary order of the state. For Scruton, this problem becomes submerged in the all-embracing enterprise of reenchanted the world in order to escape from feelings of spiritual alienation. Not

only is the problem of legitimacy in danger of being smothered by the alienation theme but, in addition, Scruton systematically evades it because of his insistence that ‘the concept of freedom cannot occupy a central place in conservative thinking’ (Scruton 1980, p. 19). Instead, he writes that the value of liberty is ‘subject to another and higher value, [viz.] the authority of established government’. There are indeed extreme conditions, such as the threat of revolution, in which established government may take precedence. What Scruton fails to consider is that in peaceful times, when established government is not threatened, the preservation of liberal democracy depends on the existence of a criterion by which the legitimacy of established government is to be judged. More precisely, he fudges this vital issue by the vague claim that: ‘history could be taken to suggest that what satisfies people politically—even if they always use words like “freedom” to articulate the first instinctive impulse towards it—it is not freedom, but congenial government’. The problem is that there is no necessary connection between ‘congenial government’ and ‘constitutional government’ since it is quite possible for some to find a Stalinist or even a Nazi regime perfectly congenial. Indifference to legitimacy accordingly leaves a conservatism of this kind, as was remarked above, unprotected against a slide into authoritarianism.

No less disturbing than Scruton’s neglect of the problem of legitimacy, however, is his insistence on an intimate link between conservatism and a pre-political sense of nationality as the only solid foundation for liberal democracy. The danger in this case is that the way is paved for a populist appeal to pre-political neo-tribal sentiment. In fairness to Scruton, it must be acknowledged that he is entirely right to distinguish between nationality and nationalist ideology, as well as to emphasize that the rise of the modern European state is inseparable from the rise of the sentiment of nationality, and that any attempt to detach the state from this root is prone to end in disaster. Margaret Canovan rightly criticized liberal theorists for ignoring the national context of the state, and for presenting liberal democratic history as the story of a rational consensus from which the shadow of Machiavelli and Hobbes was eliminated (Canovan 1996, p. 14). The problem, however, is that Scruton advances a different, more questionable thesis, which is that *political unity depends on a prior, pre-political natural unity*, in the form of the sentiment of nationality. It is this latter contention which creates the danger of fostering a populism rooted in belief in the primacy of nationhood over civic identity. This danger is especially evident in Scruton’s latest book on con-

servatism, in which he redefines the principal conservative enemy as no longer the ‘internal’ threat posed by liberalism and egalitarian socialism, but the external threat posed by mass immigration, and especially by Islam. In order to encounter this new threat, he writes, the ‘multicultural’ offer of toleration is insufficient. Instead, we need a renewed emphasis on integration in a genuine experience of community as ‘home’, which can only be achieved by a nationally based cultural identity. His hope is that this nationally based identity will be available to Muslims as well as native English citizens. In practice, however, Scruton’s nationally based solution may only serve to intensify the growth of a majoritarian populist form of identity politics (Scruton 2017). In Scruton’s form, it would indeed be a highly cultured kind of populism but might be less rather than more tolerant of cultural deviance on that account.

TOWARDS A VIABLE CONSERVATISM

There is a valuable lesson to be learned from the difficulties created by Scruton’s all-embracing cultural vision of conservatism. It is that a viable conservatism, far from being committed to the salvation of western culture, must be much more philosophically modest, as well as more accommodating of the cultural limitations of contemporary life. But what does this more modest conservatism entail? A very brief answer may be found by turning to Michael Oakeshott and David Hume. It has four main components.

The first component is a vision of modernity which does not submerge politics in a cultural project of reenchanted the world that ultimately threatens to reduce conservatism to a high-minded identity politics. Politics must be extricated, that is, from Scruton’s overriding concern with spiritual alienation, and the autonomy of the political order acknowledged. In Michael Oakeshott’s conservatism, for example, a step is taken in that direction by eliminating the concepts of alienation and reenchanted. Instead, there is simply a vision of life as an adventure, and of modernity as a condition in which there are, as always, both successes and misadventures. In this vision, the task of the conservative politician is not to foster a more spiritual culture that makes the world a warmer and homelier place, but only to provide a stable political environment in which as many individuals as possible can enjoy different adventures, even if they don’t involve much high culture or any centaur hours. But how is such a modest framework to be provided? Here we may turn to David Hume to provide the second com-

ponent of a modest conservatism. This is that it must be a politics of prudence.

Hume's defence of conservatism as a politics of prudence is a profound piece of minimalist political philosophy which does not depend on a spiritual ideal of culture, or on a vision of a natural order, or on a theory of human nature. It depends, instead, on a pretence. More precisely, Hume's contention is that the defence of prudence *is based on the pretence (or what he calls a 'maxim') that all men are evil (or 'knaves', to use his own term)*. This pretence or maxim is in fact a presupposition of prudence, *not an ontological assertion about the actual goodness or badness of human nature*, or a complicated analysis of the natural order, or of the relation between the moral and the political.

The pretence Hume has in mind, that every man is a knave, in many ways overlaps what might be learned from some of Aesop's fables (especially the one about the fox who wants to be trusted by the foolish chickens). To do justice to the nature of the pretence, however, it is worth quoting Hume's own masterly sentences from his essay 'On the Independence of Parliaments':

Political writers have established it as a maxim, that, in contriving any system of government, and fixing the several checks and controls of the constitution, every man ought to be supposed a *knave*, and to have no other end, in all his actions, than private interest. By this interest we must govern him, and, by means of it, make him, notwithstanding his insatiable avarice and ambition, cooperate to public good. Without this, they say, we shall in vain boast of the advantages of any constitution, and shall find, in the end, that we have no security for our liberties or possessions, except the good-will of our rulers. . . It is, therefore, a just *political maxim, that every man must be supposed a knave*; though, at the same time, it appears somewhat strange, that a maxim should be true in *politics* which is false in *fact* (Hume 1963).

At the risk of overemphasizing Hume's paradoxical view of how a conservative concept of political prudence is to be defended, it may be noted that, being specific to the political relationship, the pretence involved does not apply to moral relationships, and is certainly not intended to correspond to the facts of the human condition in general.

The third component of a modest conservatism was touched on above: it is the need to acknowledge the autonomy of the political order, rather than submerging it in the

task of saving western civilization from spiritual alienation. In this connection it is instructive to refer to Stuart Hampshire's *Innocence and Experience* (1991), which concludes with a remarkable chapter on 'Morality and Machiavelli' in which he argues that two principles of natural justice are, as it were, built into the concept of the political. These two principles, without which politics would be mere power, are that the views of the political other must be given equal weight with one's own, and that no political participant is entitled to be judge in his own cause. The principles of natural justice inseparable from the political mean that although acknowledging the autonomy of politics entails refusing to subordinate politics to the moral norms of private life, it does not entail rejecting the ethical dimension of the political provided by natural justice.

The final component of a modest conservatism is a political commitment to the limited state: the state, that is, which seeks to ensure the elimination of arbitrary power and the existence of representative and accountable government. Although the most rigorous contemporary formulation of what the limited state involves in the context of a modern western society is Oakeshott's model of civil association, Scruton's own earlier formulations of conservatism identify the limited state, rather than the salvation of western culture, as the central theme of conservatism. This more modest view is evident in, for example, Scruton's commendation of Hegel's distinction between civil society and the state. It was while he was a columnist for *The Times* during the 1980s, however, that Scruton made some of his most illuminating contributions to the conservative theory of the limited state. His short but frequently acute articles covered an extraordinarily wide range of topics on history, aesthetics, morality, education and international relations, amongst many others (Scruton 1987). They also vary greatly in tone.

On a light satirical note, for example, Scruton ridiculed Mrs. Thatcher's appointment of a Minister for Children's Play by devising an imaginary entry for *Gulliver's Travels*, in which the Queen visited by Gulliver creates a 'Minister for the Furtive Kiss' in order to enhance children's sense of Initiative and Responsibility, the two most important virtues the conduct of life requires (Scruton 1987, p. 31). On an equally satirical note, Scruton takes issue with the telephone as 'the vessel of anxiety', on the ground that human beings 'were never meant to start up nervously at the ringing of a mere machine'. Worse still, this hideous machine has separated human beings 'so far from those they love as to take pleasure in their disembodied voices. They were never meant', he adds, 'to conduct their business so rap-

idly that letters cease to be effective' (Scruton 1987, p. 204). Scruton nevertheless rejoices in the red telephone box designed by Giles Gilbert Scott, the architect of Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral, on the ground that it deploys traditional concerns with 'stability, certain forms, materials and colours [which] have authority for us' in order to 'mask the latest horrifying advance of science, and so integrate it into the life it threatens' (Scruton 1987, p. 203).

More seriously, Scruton's political journalism accurately identifies the foundation of moderate conservatism when he writes that 'The basic premise of conservatism is that worthwhile institutions are hard to build and easy to destroy, and that a life without institutions is seriously impoverished. Institutions are created not by plans or theories, but by the co-ordinated action of several generations . . .' (Scruton 1987, p. 15). Institutions, he wrote elsewhere, 'are not things but persons: they have a life, a will and a responsibility of their own', which means that their true nature is unintelligible to the instrumental rationality that dominates the modern world (Scruton 1987, p. 264). It is against this background that Scruton defends, often all too briefly, the requirements of the limited state. These, he notes, mean that moderate conservative doctrine inevitably precludes an unqualified commitment to democracy since the will of the people may conflict with such requirements of the limited state as the rule of law and the preservation of civil society. In outline, other requirements include, in the English case, a national church; a mixed constitution and system of representative institutions; the common law and an independent judiciary; the free market; and the autonomous institutions—especially the educational institutions—of civil society. About these institutions in their existing form, however, Scruton is not in the least complacent. On the contrary, he is frequently deeply critical, as when he criticizes the Tory Party for falling under the 'ideology of business' (Scruton 1987, p. 169). He also defends the right of minorities to a political voice, criticizing in particular the lack of Asian and black Tory members of parliament (Scruton 1987, p. 212).

The general tenor of Scruton's sketch of moderate conservative doctrine is admirably caught in the appreciative *Times* article he devoted to C. H. Sisson in 1984, to celebrate Sisson's impending seventieth birthday. Scruton seized in particular on Sisson's response to his short years of army service in wartime India during the decline of the British Raj. Sisson, Scruton records, 'was stirred to the depths by the experience of political power deprived of the limiting influence of a civic culture' (Scruton 1987, p.

134). India, for Sisson, was the antithesis of the civic culture which Britain at its best displayed. There, 'power, violence and suffering were not made tolerable by the common understanding and moderating influence of civil institutions' (ibid.). Here, then, Scruton speaks with the authentic voice of moderate conservatism.

CONCLUSION

It would seem, in conclusion, that if Scruton has in fact constructed 'an iron clad system of Tory dogma', in the words of the sympathizer quoted at the outset, it is at the risk of transforming Tory dogma into a cultural form of identity politics which effectively confines conservatism to an elite, and apolitical, spiritual world insulated from the humdrum, largely unspiritual complexities of social and political reality. It remains true, however, that the range of philosophical, aesthetic and sociological insight Scruton has displayed in the course of performing that transformation has raised him to an intellectual level almost unrivalled amongst contemporary conservative thinkers and rendered him the most instructive for any student of conservatism. It also true, as was indicated above, that the lineaments of a more modest and viable conservatism have been sketched by Scruton himself in his earlier writings. For the present, however, it is perhaps permissible to end by referring to a recent event in Scruton's own life that is likely to compel him to look more closely at whether he should return to his earlier, more modest conservatism, or whether he should adhere to the grandiose project of saving the west from spiritual alienation to which he has committed conservatism in his more recent work. The event is Scruton's appointment by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to chair a new commission of Building Better, Building Beautiful. It is likely, as one commentator noted, that Scruton will have extensive popular support, since 85% of participants in a recent survey showed little support for high-rise developments in urban areas, while many more supported garden cities. But as the same commentator remarked, 'There are a surprising number of powerful people in building and planning who actively prefer what is... unfitting and disproportionate, so he will not find many allies [in that sphere].'⁸ If Scruton sticks to his larger conservative project in this situation, it may safely be said that the aesthetic education of man will not be easy.

NOTES

- 1 Scruton records that he came to suspect not long after his school days ended that ‘French and German culture would mean more to me than English. But those facts confirmed me as an exile. When later I travelled far from home, it was to understand it as home; England was the place to which I had never truly belonged, and to which I could belong only by returning from foreign regions, inspired by my own “thoughts from abroad” (Scruton 2000, p. 42).
- 2 ‘Profile’. In: *Sunday Telegraph*, Feb. 4th 1990.
- 3 Unless otherwise specified all pagination refers to Scruton 2017.
- 4 ‘Profile’. In: *Sunday Telegraph*, Feb. 4th 1990.
- 5 Cf. the comment in Profile, *Sunday Telegraph*, Feb. 4th 1990: ‘Much in Scruton’s career can be seen as the efforts of an outsider to appreciate, without envy, the pieties of normal people, from which he knows he is ever excluded.’
- 6 On government as the central concern of conservatism, see p. 16.
- 7 Interview with Catherine Bennett *The Sunday Correspondent*, June 17th 1990.
- 8 *Daily Telegraph*, 3rd November 2018.

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Conservatism Then and Now

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To be invited to a grand tour of the conservative tradition by so eminent a guide as Roger Scruton is a joy and a privilege indeed (Scruton 2017a).¹ There can be no-one more suitable to take us on the journey from Aristotle to Burke and through to the present. We see how conservatism has changed its aspect as its opponents, the thoughtless innovators, have changed theirs, and how it has swung between the narrowly political and the broadly cultural, between the confident and the elegiac, and between the intellectual centres of England, Scotland, America, France and Germany.

In five concise and elegantly-written chapters, Scruton is a delight. In this paper, I am going to focus on Chapter Six, 'Conservatism Now'. Here, the question is how the tradition described by Scruton has adapted to our present woes, and therefore how it remains relevant to the current fervid state of politics. This is an important question to answer, because conservatism has been rather left in the dirt by the temporary hegemony of neoliberalism (p. 146), the rise of identity politics (p. 129), and the aspirational attractions of virtue-signalling ideologies such as feminism and environmentalism, even before the financial crisis came and upended everyone's *bien-pensant* assumptions. Conservative leaders seem bereft of ideas, whether they are hapless, like Mrs May, or experienced, like Mrs Merkel. Conservatives need a bit of advice, and conservatism needs a bit of a boost. In this paper I will argue that, however impressive is Scruton's historical commentary, he does not provide the necessary materials to convince the curious but agnostic reader that now is the conservative moment. He has, of course, provided some of these elsewhere in his extensive *oeuvre*, but I take the purpose of *Conservatism: An Invitation to the Great Tradition* to be a slim, accessible one-stop-shop for the inquiring and curious non-conservative, and assess it as such. It therefore needs not only to explain, but also to inspire.

Part of the problem is that Scruton doesn't so much define conservatism as describe the forms it takes in its historical contexts. This is of course a perfectly legitimate expository strategy, but it leaves open various questions,

of which three are particularly resonant. Does conservatism problematise or resist change, as Freedman says it does (1996, pp. 317-416), and Honderich says it doesn't (2005)? If it is concerned with change, why is that? In previous work, I have argued that epistemological reasons are sufficient (O'Hara 2011, and cf. pp. 41, 51, 107, 112), and that epistemic humility is the essential bulwark against dogmatism (cf. p. 140), but there are many alternative views, such as the role of religion as a guarantor of a transcendent order (Kirk 1985) or the consequences of the imperfection of humankind (Quinton 1978). And thirdly, does conservatism have a set of ideas that are unique to it, or is it rather a commentary on the cultures in which it finds itself (Brennan & Hamlin 2014)?

Scruton represents the Burkean tradition as an offshoot of Enlightenment liberalism (pp. 14, 22-23, 104), a view with which I heartily concur (O'Hara 2010, pp. 82-86). So whereas a liberal will defend our ancient liberties because they are *liberties*, a conservative will defend them because they are *ancient* (cf. p. 31). Liberty is what we do around here. It seems to follow from this kind of view that conservatism is, as Huntington argued, a situational or positional ideology (Huntington 1957). The careful delineation of the tradition from Burke to Hegel to Coleridge to Eliot to Oakeshott to Scruton himself is clear against this background, and makes it obvious why we should exclude reactionaries such as de Maistre (p. 68) or Waugh (not mentioned in the book), even if sometimes it is not clear why, for example, Tocqueville is a liberal who added to conservative thought (p. 75), while Hayek is a conservative proper (p. 105). These are terminological issues only. However, the focus on the post-Enlightenment tradition makes it harder to transpose the conservative ideology to new contexts and reason about it. What is Iranian conservatism like? Are Islamists really conservative as they pretend (a question Scruton has addressed elsewhere—2002)? How should we treat socialists who use apparently conservative arguments, e.g. to defend the current structures of the NHS or the welfare state? Was the attempted coup against President Gorbachev

an example of Soviet conservatism? What (if anything) makes these types of conservatism less legitimate than the Burkean tradition?

Interesting as these questions are, they are not Scruton's. The problem is that the focus on the *tradition* makes it harder to say what conservatism stands for *now*, because the tradition hasn't happened yet. We just don't know who the key thinkers are, or what creative solutions they are working on. At least with a definition, however hand-waving and imprecise, we can see a way to working out what ideas might be brought to bear on the problems of our time, or even just to perform the prior but still significant task of diagnosing those problems using conservative resources. Conservatives might be faced with complex dilemmas, different routes forward that are apparently equally consistent with their ideology. This would not be an objection—indeed, such dilemmas are where one would expect innovative conservative thinking to arise.

For example, take one of the major issues on the desk of any serious European politician at the time of writing: Brexit. A respectable conservative position, probably the majority position, is that the rule of the European Commission (the 'Belgian Empire', as one prominent conservative thinker referred to it in a conversation with me) is alien to the norms of British governance in its methods, its principles and its aims. It is undemocratic, unaccountable, and dirigiste. The EU's direction of travel is fundamentally different to that championed by virtually all in British political and cultural life (even those who are ardent pro-Europeans), and the British are wise to try to restore their sovereignty, even if there are associated economic costs. Indeed, given that the nation state is still the political entity that (by and large) connects most directly with people's socio-political consciousness (p. 151), *all* members of the EU should be working at a minimum to increase their own sovereignty at the expense of the centralising tendencies of Brussels.

Nonetheless, another respectable conservative position is that stability is vital not only for business and the economy, but also for citizens' navigation through an increasingly complex social environment. The UK has been in the EU or its predecessors for 45 years now, and very many British institutions, with responsibilities ranging from security to food safety to scientific research to strategic funding of infrastructure in poorer regions to data protection, are bound up with the operation of the European Commission and intense cooperation with fellow EU members. Relations may be tense at the national level, but when it comes to, say, po-

licing organised crime, there is no substitute for the relevant senior police officers from across the continent sitting together around a table, fully confident of a legal framework in which they can share data, request arrests and extradition, and plan cross-border surveillance. 45 years in the life of a nation, even one as venerable as the United Kingdom, is not nothing.² Conservatism does indeed take its character from local questions (p. 2), but equally one of Burke's objections to the French Revolution was its attack on European manners. Furthermore, the achievement of Brexit (if it is achieved) has been on the back of a deeply unconservative constitutional fix, side-stepping Parliament to make a decision by an ill-constructed and irresponsible referendum³ which turned the question into a numbers game, divorced from the geographically-based politics championed by Scruton (so that, for example, the interests of the Northern Irish or the Gibraltarians were subsumed into the national count, which means that they were rendered irrelevant by their numerical insignificance), and which left all options open without providing any steer as to what Brexit might actually mean or who should implement it. The direct result has been that, far from Mr Cameron keeping his wretched party together, all potentially governing parties have been split asunder, and the feeblest incompetents have risen to the top.⁴

It seems reasonable to say that a conservative could go either way on Brexit consistent with his conservatism. Scruton has been a principled Brexiteer since Britain joined, but it may be that to future historians, Brexit will appear the radical option, and Remain the conservative road not taken. The tradition has veered in the 'progressive' direction before, for example when—against the advice of Hayek—postwar conservative governments accepted that the state should play a major coordinating role in the economy and civil society, as with Butskellism in the UK (pp. 106, 114). And when conservatives have not followed the progressive trend, it is sometimes regretted, as William Buckley regretted conservative opposition to the civil rights movement (p. 141).

There is a lot going on in the world, and politics is in flux. The liberal elite are appalled at what the *sans-culottes* are voting for, and have frozen like rabbits in headlights. The rather absurd Axis of Evil has been superseded by a far scarier Axis of Incivility, centred on the three major superpowers, the US, China and Russia, each of which in their different ways at the time of writing pursues aggressive nationalist policy goals while showing impatience with due process both internally and internationally. Many impor-

tant mid-sized nations, including Egypt, Hungary, India, Iran, Israel, the Philippines, Poland and Turkey, are following this lead. The deregulation of finance that began in the 1980s, driven partly by ideology and partly by technological advance, led in the end to overreach and the crisis of 2007-8, whose effects are still playing out unpredictably. The loyalty of citizens of the major democracies to their traditional institutions has been declining for years, and we have now arrived in the world of identity politics, where loyalty is replaced by selfish assessment of interests, and a wholly inner-directed reconstruction of self. People now think nothing of reinventing themselves as a particular set of attributes, however absurd, ideally demonstrating their status as first class victims of a set of social arrangements that have been the reference points for virtually all human societies for tens of thousands of years (p. 10), which they claim must therefore be overthrown by next Tuesday. The institutions of democracy are not being defended by those who benefit from them (p. 153), making democratic societies vulnerable to the insinuations and intrigues of malign actors, whether home-grown or foreign. Meanwhile, as all this nonsense unfolds, a few individuals not only make immense wealth from universal surveillance, but have become the most powerful private actors on the planet. That they use their sinister powers to do nothing worse than send us ever-more-relevant spam is perhaps fortunate, but the techniques that they have pioneered are also being used in far viler fashion in China and elsewhere.

The world, in short, is headed directly down the toilet. It is therefore unfortunate that the main issues that Scruton identifies as justifying conservatism's status as "the champion of Western civilisation against its enemies" (p. 127) are political correctness and religious extremism (Ibid.). I do not doubt that these do indeed have some weight, and I am on Scruton's side in both of these struggles. But—given the mess narrated above—is that it? If we are to make conservatism a relevant political position once more, then surely conservatives' ambitions should transcend the no doubt firmly-held beliefs of retired Colonels in Budleigh Salterton, and appeal to a wider set of interests, even if it takes them out of their comfort zone.

This is made worse, I think, because the argument against religious extremism warps fairly quickly, becoming identified with "the challenge presented by mass migration" (p. 147) and "the growth of Islamic communities that reject crucial aspects of the nation state" (p. 148). It is important to stand up "to an armed and doctrinaire enemy, in the form of radical Islam" (Ibid.)—absolutely. But is 'radi-

cal Islam' the opinion of the masses who have migrated to Europe? Or just of a few? Is Islam itself inimical to our liberal societies (pp. 149, 152), or just the Wahhabi variety (p. 152)? There is a general political problem here, about how to deal with a troublesome minority of a visible minority. We can be safe by excluding the entire superset, which would be easy because they are visible, but at the great cost of unfairness to the innocent (although most terrorists are Muslim, a minute number of Muslims are terrorists; cf. virtually all rapists are men, but only a tiny proportion of men are rapists). Scruton is absolutely right that politics cannot always be about inclusion; it must involve exclusion as well (p. 50), if only to ensure societies have roots and to maintain harmony between public laws and customs and the private choices made by individuals (pp. 6, 83, 123). However, the moral problem is how to exclude humanely and justly. Scruton doesn't really engage with that *desideratum*. Furthermore, if the charge against Islamists is that they are importing an alien ideology into an unprepared society, can't that same charge be levelled against the neo-conservatives, whose attempts to introduce capitalism to Russia or democracy to Iraq look pretty similar in that respect (pp. 148-149)?

Similarly, the sticky mess of political correctness seems impossible to scrape off, like something on the sole of one's shoe, and Scruton has my support in railing against it (pp. 128, 151). However, it is a symptom of a deeper issue, that of identity (p. 129). Scruton has always written of politics as requiring a first person plural, a 'we' (pp. 3-4). Identity politics has taken that idea and run with it, in a direction that is not very congenial for conservatives, while simultaneously inventing the ludicrous neologism of 'othering' to name the sin of exclusion. A world without exclusion will be a world in which trust is at a premium and cooperation extremely difficult (p. 5), and where we will struggle to maintain what Smith called "mutual sympathy of sentiments" (cf. pp. 37-38). Heavyweight books have recently appeared on the topic by Fukuyama (2018) and Appiah (2018), and there is plenty to unpick; Fukuyama, like Scruton, is an admirer of Hegel. But sadly, Scruton's *Conservatism* is not going to be cited in these debates, and the opportunity for dialogue has been missed.

So, what are the elephants in the room that Scruton should have mentioned in his final chapter? The first metaphorical elephant is a literal metaphorical elephant: the Republican Party of the United States. There is now a powerful identification between conservatism and Republican politics (p. 105). 'Conservative' now covers everyone

from big Staters like Ronald Reagan and George Bush Jr, to religious and cultural fundamentalists like Pat Robertson and Ted Cruz, to tax hawks like Grover Norquist and Jeff Flake, to defence hawks like John McCain, to libertarians like Rand Paul, to unprincipled characters like Lindsay Graham, to people with no identifiable political views whatever, like the 45th President of the United States.⁵ The label is becoming meaningless. A wholly regrettable strand of academic psychology has grown up off the back of this that claims to uncover psychological characteristics of self-identified ‘liberals’ and ‘conservatives’ (based only, needless to say, in the US) using a methodology of surveys and leading questions (cf. e.g. Jones et al 2018).

Scruton does note in passing that the word ‘liberal’ has changed its sense (p. 105), but his focus on conservative *tradition* means he can side-step the question of whether the same has happened to the *meaning* of the c-word. If he is to interest people in the rich strand of politics he defends he surely has to sever the rhetorical connection with the Republicans. US politics is severely broken, and the Democrats do not smell of roses, but the chief culprits are certainly the Republicans. The key moment was the 1992 Republican primary, when Pat Buchanan relentlessly attacked President George Bush Sr over his wholly sensible reversal of the silly 1988 campaign promise not to raise taxes, to address the ballooning deficit. Newt Gingrich’s Contract With America further reduced the space for the political compromise essential for a party-political system, as did the Tea Party. George Bush Jr, despite being elected on a bipartisan platform, governed in a strongly partisan way, even before the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center (O’Hara 2005, p. 286). Republicans are far more responsible than Democrats for trying to shut government down, for gerrymandering their constituencies, for making it harder for people, especially black people, to vote, and for ignoring due process (the refusal of Republicans in the Senate even to consider Barack Obama’s candidate for the Supreme Court, Merrick Garland, in 2016, was a disgrace, dragging an institution that is supposed to be above politics into the Washington swamp, where it is now mired). Their dismissal of the science of man-made climate change (however uncertain it is) as a Chinese plot is little short of lunatic (what do the Chinese gain, never mind the scientists?). Plenty of Republican politicians seem to me at least to be certified religious extremists, and should therefore be in Scruton’s crosshairs, even on his own account (p. 127). Finally, the ease with which the party’s establishment surrendered decadesworth of principled, practical politics to fall behind

the monstrous Donald Trump was jaw-dropping—at least the British Labour Party’s capitulation to the slightly less ghastly Jeremy Corbyn was prompted by a huge and now unstoppable influx of new activists, and not a shameless *volte face* on the part of the establishment.

The Republicans appear to be as unconservative a party as one could imagine, quite happy to promote nakedly partisan advantage however it undermines the stability of the US or threatens the balance created by its artfully crafted constitution. Whatever the Republicans are for, they are against politics as it has been traditionally understood in the US for many decades. The dreadful state of quotidian US politics is obviously below the philosophical level at which Scruton is writing, and one would not expect him to address it directly. He could, however, make the point, against increasingly common usage, that being a conservative neither implies nor is implied by being a Republican (or a British Conservative Party supporter, for that matter). In so far as he does address it, however, he seems to embrace Republican orthodoxy rather than to distance himself from it. He writes in support of the American constitutional originalists, who believe that the original intentions of the writers of the constitution and the Bill of Rights should be paramount (p. 142). I don’t despise this view, especially as the crafters of the constitution, especially Madison, seem to me to be as wise a group of political thinkers as we have known (p. 43). However, it won’t settle everything. When Warren and Brandeis published their ‘discovery’ that there was a ‘right to be let alone’ in the constitution (1890), for example, this was prompted by a new problem caused by the development of the box camera, which seemed to invade privacy in a wholly new way, and there was no reason to think that the framers of the constitution anticipated the problem or would have fallen on one side or the other of the debate.

The constitution needs interpretation: that is how written law works, text invites interpretation. Even the originalists interpret the text, and interpret the beliefs of the framers through the text. Unfortunately, the originalist position often seems more like a *post hoc* rationalisation of a pre-existing view, such as opposition to abortion or gun control, rather than a conservative reassertion of a long-accepted truth. The well-known conservative principles, from Burke and elsewhere, that societies have to adapt to changing circumstances, and that they are associations which include the as yet unborn, surely rule out the originalists’ dogmatic insistence which goes far beyond Scruton’s phraseology that “all such extrapolation must be guided by respect

for the overall intentions of the constitution” (p. 142). Indeed, to the extent that ideologues of all persuasions have adopted “the habit of importing interpretations of constitutional clauses to satisfy this or that ... prejudice” (Ibid.) for some time, it doesn’t seem like “a violation of the democratic traditions of the American people” (p. 143) at all.⁶ On the other hand, if we understand the “overall intentions of the constitution” widely, then surely these would include rendering conflict tractable, the nation adaptable, and bringing the parties of the time together with dignity and patriotism—these have not been conspicuous aims of large parts of the post-1992 Republican Party. If Scruton’s aim is to persuade people to the conservative cause, the endorsement of originalism is hardly going to provide any *independent* ground for changing minds.

Consider, for example, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia’s originalist argument in *DC v Heller* (2008) that the second amendment guarantees an individual right to guns, independently of any kind of commitment to militia service. The second amendment reads “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” Scalia conceded that ‘to bear arms’ can mean to belong to an organised military force, but insisted it is not its core meaning. Scalia’s interpretation, therefore, imputes to the framers a particular interpretation of the term ‘to bear arms’, and assumes that the mention of a militia in the amendment’s wording is an inexplicable *non sequitur*. Even if these were the case, can we really be sure that any of the framers, transported to the present, would be untroubled by a situation where semi-automatic weapons are routinely used to blow away innocent people at random, and in which an American is more likely to be shot by a toddler than killed by a terrorist? Maybe, but it is hard to see this as a given. They might, perhaps, have agreed that one could always bear arms but not unlimited quantities of every type (e.g. not automatic or semi-automatic weapons), or they might have argued that only men could bear arms but not women; I don’t know what they would have said in 2019, and indeed no-one does. Resistance to the use of the constitution to force through the legalisation of abortion, or redistributive economic or social policy, can surely be expressed without the imputation of a (quite likely straw man) position to politicians and lawyers of over two centuries ago who are no longer around to demur. The framers’ opinions are not trumps,⁷ and the dogmatic use of reconstructions of their opinions hardly seems *conservative* at all.

A second elephant is the financial crisis. Scruton’s general approach is to support free markets and economic liberalism, and this is obviously correct. A functioning market, where people can freely exchange their own property on their own terms, is about as conservative an institution as you can get. However, not all markets are beneficial, if they “reduce the labourer to a mechanical shadow” (p. 40). They should also rest upon moral and legal norms and practices that support honest behaviour and good faith (pp. 42, 55, 57, 135), and whether we can ground entire social philosophies on the tendency of groups to display spontaneous order alone is a moot point (pp. 107-108).

The financial markets of today are very different from the architecture erected after WWII to render international capital flows legible and, to an extent at least, controllable. This architecture was undermined over several decades, not least by the City’s invention of the Eurodollar and Eurobond markets in the 1950s and 1960s, and capped by Big Bang in 1986. The aim of all these was not to fix anything wrong, but rather to remove opportunity costs by getting rid of ‘artificial’ restraints on trade. Combine this deregulated world with innovative prowess, now enabled by technology, that created financial instruments of such complexity as to defy human-scale rational understanding and decision-making, and we get a world that is neither legible nor controllable. These derivative instruments—of great value for hedging risk—became ever-cleverer ways of borrowing from future earnings, spending the money we confidently expect future generations to earn. Scruton is silent on whether this kind of innovation is a good thing, or whether it should be capped, and if so, how. He is also quiet about potential responses to the crisis. Was austerity the answer? I suspect it should be on the conservative view, as a means of respecting generations yet to be born, and of addressing moral hazard (cf. p. 110). Yet it is probably the orthodoxy of mainstream economics that austerity was a bad response to the crisis and a self-defeating policy.

Liberalism and the deregulated financial order have been (mis)sold to voters as a means of generating wealth permanently; I think conservatism is an ideology that could help communicate that economic activity is not a God-given right, but rather is a by-product of productive work and service, and that we cannot simply *expect* increases of wealth to happen as by a law of nature, or hold our governments solely responsible when they don’t. Margaret Thatcher risked all in her first term to explain this point to a fractious nation. This is not a small point: the Soviet Union fell because it failed to generate sufficient wealth to persuade its

people to put up with it. If the ‘social contract’ has degenerated into a vague promise of ever-greater prosperity, then liberalism is indeed in trouble.

A third elephant is technology, and technological change. Social networking, big data, the decreasing relevance of space and time, total surveillance (wait until the Internet of Things meets face and voice recognition) and personalisation are all rapidly and radically changing the ways in which we interact and associate. Technology has destabilised politics, leading to what Margetts et al have called chaotic pluralism (2016); it was the failure to appreciate how technology might affect the dynamics of a political party that led directly to the election of Mr. Corbyn as leader of the British Labour Party, and the destruction of that party as a means for implementing social democracy. Technology is certainly helping undermine further the loyalties and understanding rooted in land and place, which have always featured front and centre in Scruton’s philosophy. The faith placed in digital modernity (O’Hara 2018) lacks serious opposition, and the digitisation of virtually every kind of human interaction, allowing it to be studied, measured and optimised, is increasingly common. From *The Economist* of 18th August, 2018, about online dating:

Reducing romance to number crunching may sound crass. It will doubtless have its limits. But many phenomena that appear complex from a human perspective often turn out to be simple seen through disinterested data. The trick is finding the data that do it best, which is perhaps the most interesting area for dating apps to compete in: is it heartbeat on first meeting, measured through a smartwatch? Time spent on first dates? Netflix queues? Subway stops missed on the way home?

Is this a world the conservative should welcome or revile? Or simply understand to be outside his ideological purview—none of his business? It gets a mention in *Conservatism* (p. 1), but no elaboration. It is certainly a revolution, but even revolutions can be the means of ensuring continuity (p. 33). Maybe the requirement to maintain the Internet and the Web as a functioning information space might be the means for returning social thought from the rights-based individualism that makes claims on society, and back towards a contributory, duty-based conception (p. 53). Maybe the social machines about which I have written (Shadbolt et al forthcoming) might be the ‘little platoons’ of the future (p. 47). Or alternatively, will the technology

usher in greater complexity and invite further bureaucratic incursions from the state into social life (p. 104)? Will new forms of association lead to further decline of the traditional moral order, following those attacked by Ortega y Gasset in the 1930s (p. 126, and cf. Margetts 2016).

There is a fourth elephant that would have fitted well into this book’s Chapter Six as well, which is the environment. Scruton has, of course, written eloquently and at length about that elsewhere (2012)—still, a pointer would have been useful.

In short, the problem with Scruton’s invitation is not that it is inaccurate, or partial, or uncompromising. The first five chapters are wonderful. But the selectivity of the sixth chapter, and its conspicuous neglect of virtually everything that concerns non-conservatives, mean that it is unlikely to make very many converts. This is a real shame: Scruton’s wider message is needed at the moment. “The *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* is neither historically transitory nor morally corrupt: it is simply the highest form of ethical existence, in which humankind’s enduring but imperfect nature is realised to the full” (pp. 66-67). Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

NOTES

- 1 Unless specified, all page references are to Scruton 2017a.
- 2 I believe I am adapting a quote here from Scruton himself in a different context, although annoyingly I can't find it amongst the dozens of books he has published.
- 3 Referendums are fundamentally bad ideas when transplanted into political cultures where they are alien, as I argued in (O'Hara 2006), and with which I believe Scruton agrees (2017b).
- 4 Fair cop: many years ago I thought that Mr Cameron might lead a revival of conservatism (O'Hara 2007). It goes without saying that, even if he wished to, which is doubtful, he failed spectacularly.
- 5 Scruton writes that "Ideology proposes a kind of politics of war: the message is, you are either with us or against us, and we shall win in any case. This goes counter to the entire political tradition of Anglo-American representative government, which involves the acceptance of certain procedures and institutions as 'given'—i.e. as creating the framework within which disagreements can be negotiated" (p. 113). Absolutely right, although I would say that this applies to means-based ideologies, rather than all ideologies (I take conservatism to be an ideology). The point here is that ideologies are not the only way to undermine representative government. Donald Trump has no discernible ideology, and yet makes the same presumption that politics is war.
- 6 Scruton's point would be clearer if he hadn't already praised prejudice earlier in the book (p. 48). At that point he is using the term in Burke's specific sense, but even so we're left with a knot to entangle, as to why a liberal prejudice 50 years ago should have lower status than that of prejudice in the philosophy of a Whig who was writing at a time at which liberalism and conservatism had not yet gone their separate ways.
- 7 Nor, to emphasise the pun, Trump's.

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Scruton on Conservatism in Germany and France

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Conservatism is one of the most paradoxical notions within Anglophone political thought. When it is used to signify a mode of political practice in English-speaking societies, it appears to be a very efficient device that certainly dares speak its name. A leading British political party proudly calls itself 'Conservative', and so does a powerful ideological current in the United States of America. But when conservatism chooses to look inward and bring into consciousness its own identity, its self-confidence is usually shattered. For very often the practitioners of the political machinery that calls itself 'conservative', discover that this word is ill-suited for their convictions. The reason for this discontent is obvious: whenever what passes as 'conservatism' in the Anglophone democracies is examined as a pattern of thought and brought to the degree of clarity sufficient for honest self-reflection, it reveals itself as almost indistinguishable from liberalism, with some caveats here and there. Anglo-American conservatism is continuously drifting towards the point of identity loss, readily adopting as its main premises the broad liberal principles, such as individual liberty. But to be considered a full-fledged ideology, conservatism cannot act simply as a gradualist, traditionalist, or sceptical variety of liberalism; it needs to be seen as a clearly-outlined alternative to liberalism. Seeing no such alternative within the leading strains of Anglo-American conservatism, the students of ideology who wish to formulate its postulates often find themselves at loss.

On this landscape Roger Scruton is a brilliant exception: a British philosopher who is a conservative not in name only, but someone whose thorough self-examination leads him to imagine a conservative world view which instead of remaining merely a correction to liberalism, may serve as an alternative to all its main varieties, including what is known as classical liberalism. And in his *Conservatism* Scruton endows this vision with historical depth, as he attempts to re-enact conservative imagination by means of a rich narrative of the history of conservative idea, where instead of the Burkean conservatism-lite with liberal overtones, one is offered a conservative tradition capable of

standing on its own feet that does not bow to liberalism in search for legitimacy. The ideal of individual liberty still plays part in this tradition, yet other themes take a more central stage: those of community, order and obligation. Scruton's ingenious narrative forces the reader to rethink his perception of the genealogy of Anglo-American political thinking, discovering that many familiar names usually perceived as the forefathers of various strains of progressive thought, such as utilitarianism or modern republicanism, can be considered, and with good reason, as part of the grand conservative tradition. Scruton very appropriately includes Adam Smith among them and, perhaps a bit more surprisingly, Thomas Jefferson. From these eighteenth-century thinkers, an interesting genealogy is drawn spanning via nineteenth-century literary figures, such as Coleridge, Arnold and Ruskin, towards twentieth-century thinkers, including Eliot and Leavis.

But no one who wishes to comprehend the conservative tradition in the Western thought may avoid stepping beyond the Anglophone sphere. For however skilfully one may perform the act of giving shape to Anglo-American conservatism, one fundamental fact remains: conservative moments in Anglo-American political thought and experience have hardly ever been able to emancipate themselves fully from liberalism. More often than not, they parasitised on the liberal world view, which rose to the dominant position in these societies. To explain this point somewhat simplistically, the difference between the projects of imagining the 'liberal' and 'conservative' genealogies is this. The liberal tradition can be shaped quite effortlessly, and without recourse to interpretative excuses. Hume, Smith, Burke, Bentham, James Mill, John Stuart Mill, Matthew Arnold and Bernard Bosanquet, all of them can be easily shown to have been liberals at heart in the broad sense. Yet, whenever the conservative story is told, it usually has to attach the word 'also' to its main protagonists: Bentham was not only a radical liberal utilitarian but *also* an authoritarian at times as well as a critic of the idea of rights; Arnold was not only a self-proclaimed liberal, but *also* a critic of the liberal

political mainstream of his time; Bosanquet not only argued for a relatively minimalist state, but his philosophical arguments against methodological individualism *also* contributed to a departure from classical liberalism, etc.

Many authors who wrote on the Anglo-American conservative tradition simply accepted this situation as given. For this reason, most of their descriptions are in fact stories of conservative *liberalism*. And already long ago Karl Mannheim correctly suggested English conservatism had traditionally been diluted by liberalism. In his view, understanding conservatism required studying it where it manifested itself in its paradigmatic form, and for him, such place had been nineteenth-century Germany. This interpretation had a too limited range: important strains of conservative thought emerged also in other areas of continental Europe, such as France and Russia. But Britain was always a case apart. And to the extent that the elaborate illiberal conservative discourse occurred there, its intellectual origins lay on the continent. One can mention in this respect S.T. Coleridge and Matthew Arnold who drew inspiration respectively from Germany and France.

It is no wonder then that Scruton too, unwilling to stop half-way in his elaboration of the conservative world view, does not limit himself to discussing Anglo-American conservatism, and finds inspiration also in the conservative traditions that developed in continental Europe. Names of continental authors are spread throughout the entire book, and there is also an entire chapter (no. 3) dedicated specifically to conservatism in France and Germany. In it, German conservatism is represented by Hegel who, as argued, remedied the liberal abstract exaggerations of Kant and ‘rescued the human individual from the philosophy of individualism’ (p. 66). He modernised the conservative culture of obedience by developing a theory of political order as the communal expression of ethical life, which is ‘the public and outward aspect of morality’ (p. 61). Similar to Burke, he saw family as a key element of political order and the source of unchosen obligations. And while upholding the autonomy of civil society with its protection of contracts, Hegel also upheld the identity of the state as a corporate person.

As for France, Scruton mentions the writings of de Maistre, arguing that the Frenchman’s value for conservatism lies in his attack on the Enlightenment fascination with rebellion against all authority and with the idea of the man-made political order, while acknowledging that this critique is put forward with ‘a certain remorseless extremism’ (p. 69). Then Scruton discusses Chateaubriand who is credited with the defence and advocacy of the Christian faith, com-

bined (in his thought and life) with the yearning for aesthetic and spiritual renewal out of the legacy of revolutionary egalitarianism (p. 73). Finally, Tocqueville’s name is brought to exemplify a critique of the democratic urge for equality in the modern age.

Some other continental thinkers are mentioned in other chapters in different contexts. These include Herder who is presented as a proponent of ‘cultural conservatism’, Simone Weil with its reformulation of patriotism, and José Ortega y Gasset who addressed the problem of the decadence of our civilisation.

All these names make Scruton’s account of conservative thought richer and more distinct. The continental European contribution to conservatism allows to sideline the motif of individual liberty which is too prominent among Anglo-American thinkers classified as ‘conservatives’ and to set instead other parameters: community, order and hierarchy. Scruton accomplishes this task with a much higher degree of sophistication than the standard liberalised accounts of conservatism. Nevertheless, even Scruton’s treatment of this important aspect of the conservative tradition appears to be essentially incomplete.

The instances of continental conservatism in Scruton’s book are carefully disentangled from the context in which they emerged and flourished. Hegel, for example, is not an unambiguous choice to represent German conservatism as such. Many conservative *tropoi* can be indeed squeezed out of his writings. But to the extent that they are conservative, they are not specifically Hegelian, reflecting rather an instinctive critique of individualistic utilitarian liberalism common to the German philosophy of that period. Of all other figures sharing those intuitions, Hegel was perhaps *least* conservative. As Terry Pinkard argues in his biography of Hegel, in strictly political terms the German philosopher—an avid reader of *Edinburgh Review* and sympathiser of Whigs—should be considered as a moderate liberal reformer who was allied with the reformist faction in the Prussian government in the hope to push towards gradual opening of the state which would secure basic liberties, including the freedom of press.

If one wishes to see Prussian conservatism in its purer form, one should rather examine the ideas of thinkers such as Friedrich Julius Stahl and Adam Müller. True, these thinkers may be less helpful to formulating a programme for contemporary conservatism. The former—a critic of Hegel—was an unabashed adept of Christian monarchy and foe of what he considered ‘rationalism’, that he attributed to Hegel. And the latter was too nostalgic about the

mediaeval feudal past to be relevant for the modernising societies. Yet, if Hegel is to be understood as a conservative, he must be examined in the context of this very conservative tradition that includes thinkers such as Stahl, Müller, or even Karl Ludwig von Haller, and as the one who when weighed on some imaginary ‘conservative scales’ should be put rather on the periphery of that tradition.

Or, much space in the book is given to the account of Simone Weil’s adoption of Catholic conservatism and her call for social integration by means of true patriotism (as distinct from nationalism) which is evoked to overcome the rootlessness embedded in the modern civilisation. To cite Scruton:

She identified the chief evil of modern civilisation as *déracinement*, and attempted to analyse the *enracinement* (putting down of roots) that had protected humanity in the past, and might again protect it in the future, from social corrosion. This aspect of her thought was influenced by the agrarian conservatism of Thibon and Giono. Human beings have roots, Weil argued, by virtue of their active participation in a collective, which conserves in living from a social and spiritual inheritance, and which continues to offer presentiments of a shared future (p. 123).

Now, this emphasis on rootlessness in Weil’s thought is indeed not accidental, and it is nurtured in the tradition of the French conservatism of the first half of the twentieth century. Another figure who immediately crops in one’s mind is Maurice Barrès, a conservative republican and the author of the novel *Les déracinés*. Barrès was an integral nationalist and anti-Semite, and these views indeed repelled Weil, a Jewish thinker attracted to Catholic mysticism. Her search for new rootedness by means of patriotism was meant to provide a humane alternative to *that* kind of conservatism. And yet hers was a philosophical performance within the same universe of discourse. And if French conservatism is to be taken as a broad tradition, both Barrès and Weil should belong to it, even if they represent its two different poles.

Similar selectiveness can be spotted not only in the way Scruton chooses thinkers but also in the way he arranges the constituent concepts of illiberal conservatism. As I see it, illiberal conservatism contains two axes on which it dissolves the phantasms of atomistic individualism. One axis is horizontal, referring to the place of an individual within the community. Here the conservative critique of liberalism

is focused on the notion of organic or solidaristic community. But left alone, communitarianism is not the principal characteristic of conservatism; for it plays a no less important role in various strains of socialism. To become itself, conservatism requires the second—vertical—axis that refers to hierarchical relationships within the society, signified by the notions of authority, order and obligation (‘tradition’ being an ambiguous case, capable of bearing both the horizontal and vertical meaning). Scruton does indeed refer to these notions, especially in the later chapter of the books, as his story of conservatism unravels. Yet it is the idea of community that takes the centre stage almost from the beginning, and remains there up to the end. The horizontal axis of conservatism here is more salient than the vertical axis.

This is hardly accidental. The way I read Scruton’s work (and it is likely that I read him very differently from how he understands himself) is that he attempts to find for conservatism a conceptual location which will be situated at the most distant point from liberalism without leaving the liberal galaxy altogether. It is as if Scruton were the captain of Voyager 3 that reaches heliopause but refuses to cross into the interstellar space. Scruton moves as far as he can to formulate a distinctly illiberal conservatism but only to the point which does not require abandoning liberal values altogether. This is why the horizontal aspects of conservatism are emphasised in comparison to its vertical aspects, and why the thinkers adopted from the continent are those who are in fact friends of liberalism: the moderate reformist Hegel, the centrist aristocratic liberal Tocqueville, the tolerant proto-Romantic nationalist Herder and the crypto-Catholic anti-nationalist Weil.

This is by itself merely a feature of the book rather than its fault. In the final account, Scruton writes a philosophical pamphlet and not a scholarly account of the history of conservatism. He does not deny having a *credo*, and there is nothing wrong in trying to reconstruct a rich tradition of thinking through which the *credo* can better understand itself. The question is, however, whether this project of outlining the parameters of illiberal conservatism while disentangling it from the explicitly *anti*-liberal elements present in the tradition can be considered as potentially fruitful. In other words, does the suggested form of speaking about politics and life sharpen or blurs our vision of the contemporary social and political reality?

In order to answer this question, one should determine where the dividing line of the current moral-political dilemmas lies. For the most part of the twentieth century,

in the eyes of adepts of the Western civilisation, such a dividing line lay between liberty and tyranny. And since the ideal of liberty is the key element of broad liberalism, it is not surprising that the victory of the Western principles after the end of the Cold War made liberalism into the dominant ideology. Two decades after, there are many authors who wish to believe that this dividing line is no longer relevant, and that new realities require new dichotomies, such as globalism versus localism. But I believe that this diagnosis is erroneous. Explaining my view in detail would require a separate article. Here I will limit myself to a few remarks which are most essential for elucidating the issue under consideration.

Globalism, populism, localism, nationalism, illiberalism and all other fashionable -isms of today are the consequence of the attack that the liberal order suffered in the first fifteen years of the twenty-first century, and its own inability to recognise that it suffered an attack. The twentieth-century slide into illiberalism had nothing to do with ‘inner contradictions’ of liberalism but was a consequence of contingent political choices made by political leaders, of whom two stand out—Vladimir Putin and Barack Obama. In terms of the contemporary categories of globalism etc., they share nothing in common. But both are easily paired when one sticks to the older conceptual dichotomy of liberty versus tyranny. Neither of the two statesmen launched a direct attack against the principle of liberty but both were driven by a deep-rooted conservative suspicion of liberty and spontaneity. To push the direction of the events away from the free way of life, Putin began to implement a kind of Bismarckian conservatism in Russia and outside, without possessing the Bismarck’s habits of modernising and his gentlemanly qualities. What Putin performed openly, Obama was doing in a clandestine way. A former *community* organiser, he felt much more at ease in the *hierarchical* world. He bowed to mediaeval kings, made his White House into the place of polite sycophancy, and disdaining from republican coarseness, did his utmost to corrupt the spirit of the American constitution at home and damage American standing as the leader of the free world abroad. This allegedly progressive president brought about the international multi-polar dynamics which in practice meant punishing the forces across the world that tried to emulate the liberal model while encouraging the forces that posited themselves as ostensibly anti-Western using the value-language quite similar to that of European anti-liberal conservatives. Obama thus turned out to be the best ally of the conservative Muslim Brotherhood at the expense of Sunni

secularisers, of China at the expense of democratic India, and of conservative Iranian mullahs at the expense of pro-Western students. As a result, the conservative forces consolidated their position, without the world noticing it. Moreover, this conservative counter-revolution across the world injected such a strong degree of illiberalism into the Western society itself that even the recovery from Obama proceeds under illiberal slogans and in the conditions of severely damaged civility.

The intellectual prestige of liberalism having been shattered, philosophical conservatives of today offer their solutions. Most of these conservatives are in fact liberals in the broad sense. The reason for my assertion is simple. A conservative must be agnostic towards the alternative of tyranny and liberty. And the true conservatives such as Putin and Obama are indeed agnostic in this respect. But for most Anglo-American conservative thinkers of today the fundamental principles of liberty are of overriding value. This is why, while escaping the Scylla of abstract liberalism, they also wish to avoid the Charybdis of anti-liberal conservatism. But the question is whether there is a sufficient space between proud liberalism and proud anti-liberal conservatism in which an illiberal conservative option can thrive.

Scruton’s intellectual achievement is that he convincingly demonstrates that such an option exists on the level of reflection. But can it also exist as a long-term cooperative enterprise? Is it possible to maintain illiberal conservatism for long as a thriving ideology, taking care that it includes Hegel and Weil but excludes Stahl and Barrès, let alone Russian conservative thinkers, such as Nikolai Karamzin and Konstantin Leontyev? I doubt it.

I understand Scruton’s uneasiness with pure liberalism, even if I am more relaxed than he about the liberalism’s inherent radicalism. But liberalism is a very rich intellectual tradition which is capable of assimilating in itself the critique of individualism, the emphasis on community and the preference for authority and order. All these forms of critique can be and have occasionally been made parts of the liberal tradition. Yet it is the principle of liberty which allows all those elements to obtain civilised forms and it is this principle which is severely undermined, where conservatism is driven first and foremost by disdain of liberalism rather than fear of tyranny, even if it continues to pay lip service to liberty. I do not impute this character to Scruton’s own conservatism, because I still consider him to be a *liberal* conservative, perhaps *malgré lui*, but this evolution will be unavoidable for any conservatism that presents itself in explicitly illiberal clothing.

Will the Real Conservatives Please Stand Up

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Roger Scruton is a self-identified ‘conservative’ who has written an introductory account that surveys the various versions thereof and locates his own version within it. His own version is quintessentially British, and he does a splendid job of describing it.

What I want to do, first, is to give a parallel but slightly different account designed to highlight why it has become necessary even to write this kind of book.

Let us begin clearing the ground by challenging that framework. The term ‘liberal’ like its original counterpart ‘conservative’ has come to meaning many different things. Part of the reason for this is that such terms do not denote clearly separable things in the non-human world like different species of birds. In order to understand the terms ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’ we need to review the historical context in which they arose.

Both terms came into use during the nineteenth century. Generally speaking, ‘conservatives’ wanted to preserve significant parts of the inherited social framework, which in this case was the traditional notion of a holistic conception of the community endowed with a collective good and in which individuals were to be understood in terms of their social role and their personal interests were subordinate to the collective good. Specifically, self-designated conservatives opposed the aftermath of the French Revolution and sought to restore the status quo ante (origin of the distinction between ‘right’ and ‘left’.)

The opposition to conservatism came from self-designated ‘liberals’ who favored specific social change (end of feudalism and the development of industrial/technological market economies) and espoused the priority of individual liberty over communal solidarity. Historically, some designated liberals originally favored the French Revolution (e.g. Kant, Mill) but later opposed it because it did not lead to individual liberty.

‘Liberalism’ and ‘conservatism’ evolved into public policy positions and/or theories and thereby went on to take a life of their own independent of the French Revolution.

Liberals argued amongst themselves and quickly split among those who favored or who saw liberty as an intrinsic value (‘libertarian’ or ‘classical’ liberals), those who saw equality as the fundamental value (‘modern’ liberals), and those who equated equality with community (socialist/Marxist). It can be argued that ‘modern’ liberals, socialists, and Marxists, in one way or another, need to appeal to some new(er) conception of community.

We turn now to the philosophical dimension. Beginning in the 18th-century and coming to fruition in the 19th-century there was an intellectual movement known as the ‘Enlightenment Project’ (EP), the belief that there could be a social science with a derivative social technology (Comte). ‘Science’ and ‘Reason’ came to be associated with social technology in opposition to ‘mere’ inherited tradition usually tied to religious institutions. Conservatives obviously opposed the EP. Classical liberals (and libertarians) opposed the EP but only because they saw it as incompatible with liberty (Mill’s critique of Comte). Modern liberals, Socialists and Marxists all endorsed the EP but clearly expected it to produce different results.

On some policy issues, classical liberals and conservatives could agree (opposition to social technology), but not on others; they could never agree philosophically. On some policy issues all liberals could agree (especially in opposition to conservative philosophy based ones, e.g. divorce, then homosexuality, etc.) but not on others (e.g., government regulation of the economy based on alleged economic truths); modern liberals could endorse a technocratic state but classical liberals cannot. On some issues modern liberals could ally themselves with socialists and Marxists (e.g., redistribution of wealth).

What started out as a policy dispute in a rapidly changing world evolved into a theoretical dispute. But it did so because the EP (scientism or positivism) came to dominate the intellectual world in such a way that you were only respectable in debate if you were armed with a theoretical position from which you allegedly drew policy conclusions.

The historical context of the original distinction is ignored, or dismissed, as being ‘merely’ historical and not ‘scientific’.

Generally speaking, ‘conservatism’ has insisted upon the ethical if not ontological priority of the community. In an attempt to transcend the usual rigid intellectual dichotomies, Capaldi and Lloyd (2016) have chosen to identify “narratives” instead of rigid ideologies and they have used the contrast between advocates of ‘liberty’ as opposed to advocates of ‘equality’; the historically evolving nature of this contrast or “conversation” is expressed therein.

In its infancy, the advocacy of liberalism was directed against the feudal notion that society as a whole had a collective identity and individuals were to be understood in terms of a more or less fixed social structure and role. At one time, ‘conservatism’ meant this notion of inherited social structure and role. By the nineteenth century and as a product of the French Revolution, other writers identified as liberal began to put a stress on ‘equality’ in addition to individual ‘liberty’. Initially, the advocacy of equality went hand-in-hand with the denial that people had special privileges because of social rank. Subsequently, ‘equality’ came to mean in the eyes of some that liberal polities had a special obligation not only to respect but to promote or equalize by obligating the more prosperous to transfer wealth to the less prosperous or the needy. This led to the distinction between ‘classical’ liberals (who emphasized ‘negative’ rights) and ‘modern’ liberals (who emphasized ‘positive’ rights). Some ‘modern’ liberals believe that they are in possession of theoretical knowledge of the social world in general and economics in particular that guides and justifies their social technology.

The terminology is now hopelessly confused and confusing. In order to be a respectable scholar in the post-EP world you need to identify others and yourself by reference to some theory. So, readers as well as writers will ask are Hayek and Oakeshott ‘liberal’ or ‘conservative’ or confused and confusing.

The second point I want to emphasize is why and how our political and social discourse has become distorted. The only meaningful account of human thought I have found is located in the works of Wittgenstein, Hayek, Oakeshott, I think Scruton, and a few others. It can be summarized as follows by reference to the notion of spontaneous order (an epistemology that is a crucial part of British intellectual history. Advocates of spontaneous order are opposed on intellectual grounds to ‘scientism’ or ‘positivism’ and to EP and therefore to the whole notion that there can be a social science or social technology. To be sure, there are inevita-

bly going to be policy debates and we cannot escape being participants within them, but the debates cannot meaningfully reflect theoretical debate. We can only understand those debates and ourselves immersed within them as part of an evolving historical context. Our disagreements and our agreements reflect disagreement or agreement on some part of the historical context and how it applies to present and future contexts.

Historical context is a vast collection of previous practices or rules of thumb, and we are called upon to decide which previous practice(s) is analogous to the present context (think common law adjudication). This inevitably evolves and changes the inherited historical context as new practices emerge. Hayek and Oakeshott inevitably participate in the debate but this does not lead them to believe that their personal reading or advocacy of a specific public policy issue is necessarily correct; nevertheless, they believe they have correctly identified and exemplified the practice of explaining practice and practical disputes.

Now things are about to get worse. Those still smitten by positivism will insist that there is and must be a scientific (not an historical or anthropological one) account of the evolving practice. Since neither Hayek nor Oakeshott offers one they both have been ignored or marginalized as irrelevant to the debate or worse yet guilty of contradiction because they confusedly espouse positions.

Hayek and Oakeshott will patiently explain that their espousal of a philosophical position is no more, and can be no more in any case, than their understanding of the continuity (not the entailment) of their recommendation with previous practice. If they critique other philosophical positions it is because from their professional point of view those positions are misunderstandings of previous practice, especially the practice of science (think Kuhn and Feyerabend). If they are opposed to public policy positions it is usually because those positions rest on spurious grounds (theories devoid of practical grounding). If they favor specific public policies they nevertheless claim no special status for their personal support. Understanding the activity is different from skillfully engaging in it, and such engagement cannot itself be reduced to an algorithm (Wittgenstein on following a rule). I can exhibit (show in Wittgenstein’s sense) my skill, or lack thereof, and I can conceivably give a good history of the practice, but I cannot rationally demonstrate (prove) my skill. In Oakeshottian terms, policy debate assumes agreement on the problem or issue at hand, surveys the alternative courses of action with their pros and cons, and rhetorically attempts to persuade others to see things

from a particular point of view. This is clearly anti-utopian. We are constantly called upon to retrieve our intellectual inheritance and to amend it from within itself and sometimes in ways they may seem alien to previous explications.

In the foregoing exposition, we have aimed to recreate how Hayek and Oakeshott would understand, explain, and transcend the semantic controversy between liberalism(s) and conservatism(s), etc. both as intellectual positions and as policy positions. In the course of doing so, hopefully we have achieved more. Assuming our history is more or less correct, we have exhibited in simple fashion what they mean by spontaneous order, why they see scientism (positivism) as incoherent and dangerous, the sense in which practical knowledge is fundamental and theoretical knowledge is always parasitic upon it, why total conceptualization is impossible, why evolutionary historical understanding is fundamental, and how we are to understand the relation(s) of theory to practice and malpractice.

Third, Scruton understands all of the above, and in explicating what it means to be an Anglo-American conservative he insists that modern conservatism encompasses the recognition of individual freedom and autonomy (p. 8). I could not agree with him more but only as long as we recognize that this is only true of the Anglo-American inheritance. In the context within which I routinely interact with self-proclaimed conservatives (e.g., the Philadelphia Society), I encounter writers who (a) deny the postulate of autonomous individuality, (b) believe that it is a pathological condition [they refuse to countenance a distinction between being self-defining and being totally desocialized), (c) insist upon the ontological priority of community, (d) defend their position by appeal to controversial theological or metaphysical doctrines that are no different in status from the rigid and intolerant ideologies of liberalism. While many of us can agree that some social practice or other is important and in danger of being destroyed by advocates of social technology, our agreement is based upon different premises.

Finally, I want to commend Scruton for his masterful exposition of the common law and of the rule of rule as unique elements of the Anglo-American legal inheritance, and his account of how individual freedom is a product of those institutions and not of a theory. Precisely because human freedom is housed in a context of law and national sovereignty, it is easy to understand Churchill's refusal to surrender, to understand Brexit,¹ and to understand the resistance to political globalization and legal homogenization.

NOTES

- 1 Brexit involves complex policy issues that cannot be seriously discussed in this context. However, I wish to note the following: (a) I am currently writing a book on the "Rule of Law" and in which the thesis is that the Anglo-American version is based on individual liberty (Oakeshott's "civil association") and the "rule thru law" in Continental jurisprudence is based historically on a collective good; (b) part of the inspiration for the book is Scruton's lecture on the several reasons why many Brits voted in favor of Brexit (See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=niaC3UESpd4>).

Anglo-Canadian Toryism and Anglo-American Conservatism: A Dialogue with Roger Scruton

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If Lockean liberalism is the conservatism of the English-speaking peoples, what was there in British conservatism that was not present in the bourgeois thought of Hamilton and Madison? If there was nothing, then the acts of the Loyalists are deprived of all moral substance. Many of the American Tories were Anglicans and knew well that in opposing the revolution they were opposing Locke. They appealed to the older political philosophy of Richard Hooker. They were not, as liberal Canadian historians have often described them, a mixture of selfish and unfortunate men who chose the wrong side. If there was nothing valuable in the founders of English-speaking Canada, what makes it valuable for Canadians to continue as a nation today?

– George Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism*

It was the rise of Puritanism in late Elizabethan England, the advancing tide of Calvinist theology and ethics in the last two decades of the 16th century, not the Renaissance of the early and middle decades of the century, that marked the real rupture with the medieval culture.

– C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama*

Roger Scruton is one of the most published, articulate and probing conservatives in the last few decades. The telling points he raises cannot be ignored and many of the arrows he shoots hit the bull's eye well and wisely. There is always a need for thoughtful conservatives to counter variations of trendy liberalism (of various and varied colours, shapes and sizes) and Scruton speaks his speech well on such a stage. The role that Scruton played in the founding and editing of *The Salisbury Review* (1982-2001) and his two books

on conservatism, *The Meaning of Conservatism* (1980) and *How to Be a Conservative* (2014) position him well to speak about such a tradition. It was, therefore, with much delight and anticipation that I received Scruton's most recent compact missive, *Conservatism: An Introduction to the Great Tradition* (2018), to review—needless to say, there is much to ponder in such a fast moving overview of conservatism.

Conservatism: An Introduction to the Great Tradition is certainly not Scruton's first attempt to summarize, in a compact and thoughtful manner, the history, principles and content of the stages and seasons of the conservative vision of the good life. In fact, each of Scruton's multiple publications, in either an implicit or explicit manner, delve into the conservative way (and what we have lost by ignoring, caricaturing or distorting such a time worthy heritage). The all too sad litany of forgetfulness of the past as a result of a progressive notion of human history has clear cut the forest of centuries of wisdom and time tried insight—such a reality is, rightly so, called memoricide. We legitimately lament the clear cutting of our forests but a much deeper lament should accompany the clear cutting of the past (and the implications of such a short sighted approach to culture and civilization). But, let us turn to *Conservatism* to get a fix and feel for what Scruton thinks we need to conserve and who are the saints and worthies of such an ethos and heritage.

Conservatism is divided into the Preface (which sets the stage for the historic drama of sorts), chapter 1. "Pre-History", 2. "The Birth of Philosophical Conservatism", 3. "Conservatism in Germany and France", 4. "Cultural Conservatism", 5. "The Impact of Socialism", 6. "Conservatism Now" and a handy primer of a reading list and bibliography of sorts. The "Pre-History" chapter is, in fact, more modern history (mostly 17th century and forward) and the Anglo-American connection (more Anglo than American) that makes for a must read to connect essential dots between

what might be called 2nd generation liberalism (Locke, Smith, Hume, Burke and tribe) and the emergence of 3rd generation liberalism (or what we call welfare or social liberalism and not to be equated with socialism or variations of communism). The scampering across the landscape of Germany and France, ever mining for conservative leanings, widens the reach and stretch of Scruton's sense of the broader conservative epic tale of the "Great Tradition".

What, though, is this "Great Tradition" that Scruton so ably and nimbly describes from within the historic English, American, French and German contexts and are there other ways of interpreting such a Tradition without bowing the knee to a trendy and politically correct liberalism in the culture wars? I must admit, by way of a brief comment, that Scruton is more like the proverbial fox than hedgehog in this fast moving overview of conservatism, then and now. But, this should not be seen as a fault. There are fox-like books that cover much terrain and do not dig deep, and much can be learned from them (such is this missive). There are, also, hedgehog books in which much depth is the name of the intellectual probes but a certain breadth is missing. *Conservatism* traverses much historic and contemporary landscape and this is the beauty and bounty of the book—those looking for depth will be disappointed in such a general overview, but the obvious purpose of the primer is to point to such places where the deep wells and mother lodes can be found—such are the pointers in the bibliography. So, *Conservatism* is a fox like approach to the conservative way and should be read as such and, as a corrective to the illness of memoricide and amnesia, it is good medicine to take and inwardly digest (to mix a metaphor).

The question that never fails to interest me when books are written and published on conservatism, liberalism, social democracy, democratic socialism, socialism, communism, populism, nationalism, fascism and Nazism to name but a few ideologies is what do people mean by such terms and the use of such language? Since this is a book about conservatism, what is meant by the term, what is being conserved and why? And, are there others ways of interpreting the pathways of the conservative ethos and history? But, let us heed and hear how Scruton does the deed, then we can reflect on whether the tale can be told in other ways while holding high the "Great Tradition" of conservatism.

I mentioned above that Scruton points to Locke, Smith, Burke, Hume and clan as seed planters of conservatism. The language of liberty for such thinkers factors significant in such a tradition and such a notion of liberty can collide with the state. This does not mean that such thinkers were

atomistic individuals with little or no sense of community, history, ethos, customs, traditions and a common law—Burke's "small platoon" and other such metaphors point the way to a grass roots and bottom up way of approaching and living a meaningful life. There is, of course, something quite admirable about such a way of being and anarchists on the left and libertarians on the right share some of these worthy tendencies. Scruton went the extra mile to highlight how Jefferson in the USA and those who penned *The Federalist Papers* were suspicious of a too centralized government, hence a commitment to decentralize levels of authority and power. Such a notion of freedom when further extended can and often does lead to *laissez-faire* economics, lighter taxes, competitive market and a minimal state. Needless to say, there are serious tensions that exist when trying to preserve stable and historic communities in an age and ethos in which human and natural resources are but commodities to be bartered, trucked and traded on the ledger of profit and loss. There is no doubt Scruton is acutely aware of this troubling and trying dilemma as he astutely observes: "belief in a free economy and free trade inevitably clashes with local attachments and community protection" (p. 4). The language of liberty and freedom, as conservatives understand it, must be defined by something deeper than merely free un-historic or a-historic individuals entering contractual relationships that are disconnected from the legal and communal prejudices (not to be equated with being prejudiced) of the past. There is, in short, public customs, social membership, law, institutions, family, religion and many other associations that shape and clarify what freedom and liberty mean in a more mature way and manner. There is no doubt Scruton, rightly so, is committed to the notion of liberty and freedom but is wary of how such language has become distorted and emptied of any meaningful content. There is an obvious juggling act at work and some impressive balls are kept in thoughtful harmony. There is, though, again and again, a certain suspicion of the state that Scruton brings to the fore in a negative way—this either-or tendency can be rather troubling. Is it necessary to pit society against the state, bottom up politics contra top down politics? This sort of dualism is not really worthy of a good conservative much less a historic Tory. Needless to say, both society and the state have much to contribute and both have their limitations. But, let us move on.

Scruton does linger long, though, in his chapter on "The Birth of Philosophical Conservatism" on Smith's Sinai like revelation of the "invisible hand", the Austrian school of

Hayek and clan (civil society not the state is the finest and best way forward) and Burke's support of the American Revolution contra the French Revolution (Burke being a Rockingham Whig). The troika of Smith, Burke and Hayek tend to dominate and set the agenda as the pater familias of the conservative way in this birthing chapter of conservatives, such conservatives, as mentioned above, 2nd generation liberals, 1st generation liberalism being the protestant versions within the reformation (as C. S. Lewis noted in the quote that opened this review). Scruton is right, of course, when he pits and juxtaposes the cultural, economic and religious conservatism against the, increasingly so, aggressive and hard secular liberalism of Rousseau (more a nuanced and tamed civil religion), the French Revolution and Thomas Paine. There is an obvious sense in which the anti-religious and command economy tradition of the French Revolution anticipates Marx and the Russian Revolution, and when Smith, Locke, Burke, Hume, Johnson and Hayek are compared to such an extreme left of centre ideology, they are very much conserving an older tradition. But, we might add, is there something older to ponder in the "Great Tradition" than an enshrining of 17th century 2nd generation liberalism?

I found, as I have most of Scruton's hasty fox-like chapters, his section on German and French conservatism, of some interest. Hegel is featured as the conservative contra Kant, Hegel being truer to the dialectic of historic communities, blending the tensions of the individual and community in a way Kant does not. It would have been of some value to ponder, within the German Enlightenment, the perennial insights of Goethe, Lessing and Schelling, although Scruton, to his credit, lands lightly on Herder later in the book. The merging and blending in this chapter of Smith's "invisible hand", Burke's "prejudice" and Hegel's "cunning of reason" serve and suit well the unfolding argument of Scruton. The turn to three French conservatives of different hues reveal the layered nature of conservatism: Chateaubriand, Maistre and Tocqueville illuminate different directions conservatism went in the French experience of the revolutionary era. The more reactionary conservatism of de Maistre must be seen and understood within the context of the excessively anti-religious and violent French revolution—one extreme often begets another (such is the pendulum theory of politics). The more liberal conservative approach of de Tocqueville and his affinities with aspects of the American journey make him a bridge building conservative. Chateaubriand, as Scruton rightly notes, was a superb apologist for the restoration of the Christian vision

and the brittle and reactionary distortions of the French Revolution. Needless to say, it is impossible to be a minimal conservative and ignore the essential role of religion. The brutal assault on the Roman Catholic Church in the French Revolution distinguishes such an ideology as the worst form of secular liberalism and, legitimately so, Chateaubriand and de Maistre opposed such a single vision and one dimensional way of interpreting public life and the forward march of history.

I found the chapter on "Cultural Conservatism" of much interest for the simple reason that many cultural conservatives raise serious and sustained questions about England as the workshop of the world, the market economy, capitalism and the dimming of a higher and fuller vision of what it means to be human. Coleridge had little patience for the "catechism of commerce" and Blake was appalled by the "dark satanic mills" of industry. Many of the cultural conservatives are often at odds with the economic and religious conservatives of the 16th-17th centuries (and their ideological commitments which often had Calvinist and puritan leanings, Locke and Hobbes emerging from such historic contexts). What is worth the conserving, we might ask, in some older ideals, principles and content that predate the Reformation of the 16th century and the outworking of it in the 17th century? There is, in fact, an older vision worthy of conserving that we find, in different ways, in Coleridge (and the High Romantics such as Wordsworth and Southey), Ruskin, Arnold, Eliot, Leavis and the Southern Agrarians in the USA. The cultural conservatives do, in many important and significant ways, collide with those who seek to conserve the market and some of the damaging implications of it for culture, society and civilization.

I should mention, before I venture yet further, that many of the magisterial reformers of the 16th century had a high view of either the city state or nation state. Thomas More was Lord Chancellor of England, Erasmus wrote many a tract to the monarchs of his time, Hooker held high the role of the state and Luther/Calvin recognized a needful tension existed between church and government—such was the vision of the magisterial reformers. Those who tend to demean the state and elevate society are more indebted to the Anabaptist-Mennonite way than the magisterial reformers of the 16th century. But, let us turn to those Scruton gives the nod to as cultural conservatives.

I mentioned above that Coleridge had many a suspicion of the captains of industry and the impact of their "catechism of commerce" on society. Scruton's insights on Coleridge, his doubts about the market, the role of the

“clerisy” and his commitment to the established church are well known (although many literary types tend to ignore Coleridge’s religious commitments). I have been fortunate to spend time at Coleridge’s residences at Nether Stowey, Keswick and Highgate—he, like the other Lake District Poets, certainly had their commitments to the small platoon of parish life, but they were not anti-statist. In fact, Disraeli (a disciple of sorts of Coleridge), in his political attempt to overcome the disparity of the two nations, viewed the state as an essential medium of doing so. This is a form of conservatism that does not unduly dismiss the state as an agent of justice. The fact that Coleridge viewed commerce, in many ways, as a “tearing, rending and shattering” of historic communities and parish life does need to be noted. Robert Nisbet, in his beauty of a book, *Conservatism*, states, “Southey, in his *Letters from England*, published in 1807, reads like a late nineteenth-century socialist in his indictment of the ills brought upon England by the factory system and the hideously congested towns and cities resulting from this system”. There can be no doubt the Lake District poets and political philosophers were conservative in a way the Manchester school of economics was not. So, who was the real conservative?

Scruton, rightly so, touches on Arnold and the emerging merchant class he calls the “philistines”. The role of education for Matthew Arnold and his father was the raising up of students who were formed and shaped, at their best, to internalize and live forth an ennobling vision of character formation and the role of such virtuous character in personal, family, religious and public life. The ledger of profit and loss, like notions of liberty and freedom, had to have deeper roots if civic and public life were to produce thoughtful citizens. John Ruskin, like the Lake District Poets, saw all so clearly the dimming and diminishing of beauty and the arts, as only the useful, pragmatic and utilitarian dominated the day. Scruton mentioned T. S. Eliot in his section on cultural conservatives, also, and Eliot had a fondness for the Caroline Divines (who were certainly no Lockean-Hobbesian-Smithian-Burkean liberals). Scruton completed his tour of cultural conservatives with Leavis and the American Agrarians, noting Leavis’ lack of religious tendencies (in this sense quite modern) but his inroads into the “Great Tradition”, the southern Agrarians in the United States taking a stand against Northern urban secularism and, again, a more mobile market economy.

It is to Scruton’s credit that he has highlighted the tensions within conservatism between the market driven ap-

proach and those suspicious of such tendencies and conservatives who have a higher view of the state and those wary of it. I cannot help but conclude this section with another passage from Nisbet’s *Conservatism*: “Disraeli in almost total agreement with his revered Coleridge, expressed his hatred of ‘a sort of spinning jenny, machine kind of nation’. With much reason, at the end of the century, G. B. Shaw commented on how much fiercer many conservative criticisms of capitalism were than were those of Marxian socialists. The reason is apparent. The Marxians at least accepted the technical framework of capitalism for their coming socialism. For conservatives in many instances, that was the loathsome part of it all” (p. 65).

The section of “The Impact of Socialism”, legitimately so, goes after the misuses and abuses of Marxism and a command economy in various states. There is another dualism in this suggestive chapter, though, that leads towards a problematic either-or approach to the economy, society, civic life, associations and the state. The free market is idealized as the path forward on the liberty loving path and socialist traditions are portrayed as oppressive and totalitarian (of which there is some obvious truth). But, are there only two options to choose from: market or command economy, society or the state, diverse associations or centralized authority? Surely, mature conservatives are more nuanced and refined in their thinking than such ideological constructs—such was the way of many cultural conservatives (and, I might add, political and religious conservatives). It might have been valuable in such a chapter if Scruton had landed and lingered at the political traditions of Norway (where I lived for a time), Sweden, Denmark and Switzerland (where I also lived when younger)—some valuable discussions from such countries are the delicate interplay and dance of sorts of state and society.

The final chapter in *Conservatism*, “Conservatism Now”, lights down on the conservatism of the London School of Economics as embodied in the life and writings of Michael Oakshott, Peter Bauer and Kenneth Minogue, Maurice Cowling from Peterhouse receiving an ample hearing and audience. The American conservatives, William Buckley, Russell Kirk and Samuel Huntington are welcomed into the embracing fold as is the French thinker, Pierre Manent and Scruton himself. The final few pages deal with the potential and actual threat of Islam, Islam, Scruton suggesting, having “pre-political loyalty” that transcends both national boundaries and the state. It is quite pertinent to point out that this is an issue for most major and minor religions as they seek to negotiate the precarious balance between the

Ultimate, Pen-Ultimate and Ante-penultimate. More's much heralded statement when confronting Henry VIII points to such a portal between time and eternity: "The King's good servant but God's first". There are, of course, extremist Muslims just as there are extremist Jews and Christians: Secular and right of centre Orthodox Jewish Zionists can be just as violent as jihadist Muslims and the uncritical support by many American conservative evangelicals of President Trump has many an affinity with hawkish Muslims.

I find, when I walk the walk with Scruton, in this timely missive on the Great Tradition, a certain shrinkage of thought, space and time occurs—there is something quite protestant about the "Great Tradition" as articulated by Scruton, a tradition that only seems to emerge, in any serious way, after Cromwell. Surely, the "Great Tradition" has much to do with a deeper appreciation of Classical civilization, the Patristic synthesis of such an ethos from the 2nd to 7th centuries CE and the Medieval-Renaissance fleshing out of such a way of being cultured and civilized. There is, in short, a sort of what Lewis called a "chronological snobbery" in Scruton's read of history (not as crude, though, as many cause de jour liberals), something most protestant and lacking a catholic ambience, palette and way of thinking and being. Scruton is right, of course, in seeing secular forms of liberalism as problematic, some aspects of socialism as worrisome, trendy politically correct ideology as narrow and violent forms of jihadism as not acceptable. But, if the protestant synthesis of the 16th-17th centuries is the foundation stones of the "Great Tradition" there is a decided lack of greatness to it. There is, in fact, something older and deeper to be conserved than simply freezing a read of a moment in the Western Tradition and calling it the "Great Tradition".

There are, by way of conclusion, a few questions worth the raising as I end this review.

First, and this might be too much of an academic and too detailed question of sorts, but given the fact Locke is often quoted in a positive way in the book and Hooker mentioned as somewhat dated, how reliable is Locke's varied quotes from Hooker in his *Second Treatise of Government*? Hooker is not necessarily dated, when read from a certain perspective (I teach Hooker in my upper level political theory courses), but Locke and Hooker (as Grant noted in the initial quote in this review) are tracking a different trail. It would have been valuable if some more substantive analysis

by Scruton had been done on the points of convergence but also divergence between Hooker and Locke (and the difference it makes in theology, philosophy, liturgy, ecclesial and public-political life).

Second, there was not much of a serious or sustained discussion of global warming, environmental, ecological issues in *Conservatism*, and the ecology-economy dialogue was lacking. I know Scruton has written on the topic (*Green Philosophy*) but I'd be interested to know how a conservative like Scruton might agree or part paths (and why) with an obvious conservative like Prince Charles, who has, obviously, made green politics an essential part of his classical (Tory?) ethos, way of life and vision. How might *Green Philosophy* and *Harmony* (Prince Charles) walk the same path and where diverge on the trail?—certainly a must ponder issue of meaningful conservatives as we ever trek into the future.

Third, I would have been most interested, given the fact that religion and Christianity is so central to the Western and Great Tradition to have heard something from Scruton about the Radical Orthodox that was launched by John Milbank in the early 1990s and remains a way of reclaiming and recovering the Great Tradition. Milbank and the Radical Orthodox tribe track and trace the Great Tradition in a much more historic and profound way and manner than Scruton, and it would have been valuable to read Scruton's read on a view of Christianity and Anglicanism that is more catholic and antedates the 16th and 17th centuries version of what is being conserved. The Radical Orthodox dig much deeper and more historic in their theological, philosophical, ecclesial and liturgical probes than Scruton, but when such approaches shift to political theory and praxis, there seem to be many affinities—the publication of Phillip Blond's *Red Tory: How Left and Right Have Broken Britain and We Can Fix It* (2010) does have overlap with Scruton. The railings of Blond against both multinational corporations and the managerial and social welfare state seem to have definite convergences with Scruton, although their understanding of the Great Tradition would part paths in some important ways. But, a discussion of Scruton in dialogue with the Radical Orthodox and Blond would be of much worth and note. I might add that Blond's language of Red Tory does pilfer from the historic Canadian context, and this leads to my next point of interest.

Fourth, I mentioned above a couple of times Robert Nisbet's *Conservatism: Dream and Reality*, first published in 1986. Nisbet's primer on the topic is broken down into four sections: 1) Sources of Conservatism, 2) Dogmatics of Con-

servatism, 3) Consequences of Conservatism and 4) Prospects of Conservatism. It is significant that Nisbet, like Scruton, mostly covers French, English, American and German conservatism. I, as a Canadian, wonder where Canada fits into such a discussion. Canada seems to be quite invisible and yet Canadian conservatism is hardly an echo of either English or American conservatism. The fact that Canada never severed the historic umbilical cord with England and France in the same way the Americans did means Canadians conserve an ethos and tradition older than the 16th and 17th centuries form of conservatism. It is this older, perhaps, Toryism that makes Canada distinctively different from the conservatism of the United States. It should be noted that two of the most prominent Canadian public intellectuals of the 20th century were both Anglican High Tories: Stephen Leacock and George Grant. Leacock dominated the first half of the 20th century and Grant the 2nd half of the 20th century. Both men dipped their buckets in a way of understanding the commonweal and the commons and the role of the state in protecting such national interests that separates them, in many ways, from a weaker view of the state that has been argued in Scruton's *Conservatism*.

It will be 100 years in 2019 (1919-2019) since Leacock published his judiciously thought through *The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice*. Leacock had done his PhD at University of Chicago on "The Doctrine of Laissez-Faire" and the thesis was completed in 1903. Leacock was very much a distinctive High Tory, and in the thesis, he reflected on the insights of Smith, the more extreme versions and caricatures of Smith and the Countercurrent to Smith (William Thompson, John Gray and the Humanitarian School of Carlyle, Cobbett, Coleridge and Oastlen). Leacock had a certain affinity for a more centrist read of Smith that needed to be balanced by the countercurrent clan. Leacock taught at McGill University from 1903-1936 in the Department of Political Economy, but with the publishing of *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912) and *Arcadian Adventures of the Idle Rich* (1914) he became one the leading literary lights in Canada, England and the broader commonwealth. *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* both upholds the beauty of small town Mariposa (small platoon) but also gently mocked and satirized its parochial tendencies. *Arcadian Adventures of the Idle Rich* was Leacock at his Swiftian-Dickensian best-wealth, corporations and the captains of industry spread havoc with small town, rural existence, large cities centres of class disparity and wealth, the measure of worth hinging on who had what. This was

Leacock at his Canadian Tory best—*The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice* reflected on both the good and problematic nature of both the market and command economy. Leacock argued state and society needed to work together with the goods they can contribute to the common good of the people—this was no right or left ideological diatribe—this was Canadian Toryism at it balanced and via media best. WWII brought the state more and more into the public domain, funding more forthcoming than in the strain of the depression years. One of Leacock's final books, *While There Is Time: The Case Against Social Catastrophe* (1943) took the position that just as the state had minimally intervened and contributed in the depression years, more so in the war years, the state had a role and responsibility to contribute to a variety of social programs in the post WW II years—this did not mean Leacock fawned at the shrine of socialism or communism—he was quite critical of both ideologies. But, he was also not an uncritical fan of the market economy versus the state—much too reactionary a position for him. I mention Leacock for the simple reason that Canadian Toryism has been somewhat more nuanced than much Anglo-American conservatism, and such a position is often missing in books by those like Scruton and Nisbet.

I will also briefly mention George Grant. Grant stood very much in the unique Tory tradition that Leacock lived, moved and had his being from. Grant, more than most Canadians, was one of the most prominent guests on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in the decades following WWII. Grant's first book, *Philosophy in the Mass Age* was published in the late 1950s, and in this most readable of a book, he explained how the modern project was brought into being by the merging of the Calvinist puritan approach to theology and economics, the transfer of such an ideology to the founding of the USA and the secularization of such a liberal project. The USA, therefore, for Grant, became the embodiment of the modern liberal project in which will-liberty-power came to dominate the day—his was no romantic attachment to the emerging American empire. The publication of Grant's *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (1965) is, probably, one of the best read Canadian political manifestos from a Canadian Tory perspective that begins with Pearson (Liberal) defeating Diefenbaker (Conservative) in the 1963 Federal election, Pearson's genuflecting to Kennedy and Grant's horror at the sight of Canada bowing to and being compliant with American goals and aims. When Grant died in 1988 (it's 30 years since he died this year and 100 years since he was born), he was recognized as one of the most

prominent Canadian public intellectuals of a Tory bent, his commitment to the role of the state and society walking arm and arm as an ever a modest proposal. I might add that for Grant, Simone Weil (who Scruton mentions) was his inspirational Diotima.

I have brought this review to an end with a few reflections on Canada for two rather simple and obvious reasons: first, when conservatism is discussed, as mentioned above, England, France, Germany and the Americans (Canada is also in North America) are predictably highlighted and Canada is ignored. Why, I often ask myself, is this the case? Second, historic Canadian Toryism does not fit neatly into the procrustean bed of English, French, German and the forms and types of conservatism found in the United States. Canada can come, therefore, as a way and means of broadening the tent of the rather typical understanding of conservatism. I have mentioned Leacock and Grant as portals into such a fuller and more comprehensive approach to the Great Tradition.

In conclusion, Roger Scruton's *Conservatism: An Invitation to the Great Tradition* should be most welcomed as a fit and fine fox-like ramble across the terrain of a certain type of conservatism. The ideas, names, places and overview make for a fine primer for those keen to know more. I'm not convinced, though, that the Great Tradition that conservatives seek to conserve can be reduced to the emergence of 1st-2nd generation liberalism of the 16th & 17th centuries (and the working out of such a DNA and genetic code) into the 18th-19th-20th and 21st centuries. It is quite possible to raise serious questions about politically correct progressive liberalism, jihadist Islam and socialism-communism from other places than the form of conservatism that Scruton and clan call home. It is not very liberal of a liberal not to critique liberalism, but most liberals (whether of the 1st-2nd-3rd or 4th seasons and phases) seem to lack the ability to do so. I think, in some ways, the gold mine of the Canadian High Tory way has yet much to offer and a meaningful dialogue on the issue has not really yet begun. Scruton's reflections on Oakeshott are a needful way to end this review of book worth many a read:

Oakeshott advocated a politics of 'intimations'—intuitive understandings of how things are and how they might be changed, which arise from such an active engagement in the political order and openness to conversations with others. The aims of political associations, Oakeshott insisted, are not imposed but discovered, and this means that politics is an art of lis-

tening and enquiring, rather than barking out orders or reading from a sheet of a priori rules (Scruton 2018, pp. 112-113).

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The Forked Road: Scruton, Grant and the Conservative Critique of Liberalism

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I. INTRODUCTION

Sir Roger Scruton's book *Conservatism: An Invitation to the Great Tradition* (2018)¹ is a welcome addition to his recent work on the topic. Unlike his classic *The Meaning of Conservatism* (1980) and his more recent *How to be a Conservative* (2014), *Conservatism* takes the reader on a historical journey through the multifaceted forms of political, philosophical and cultural conservatism from its birth in the enlightenment era to the present. And while primarily focussed upon conservatism as it has developed in the Anglo-American tradition, Scruton also devotes a full chapter (i.e. Chapter 2) to a discussion of conservatism in France and Germany. I found this a fascinating chapter, as it not only discusses forms of continental conservative thought which are often ignored (at least in English), but it also weaves thinkers typically identified with this form of conservatism like Le Maistre and Hegel into the more general themes of the book. One minor quibble I had with the book is that it is quite short and compact, and some of the arguments are skirted over quite quickly. However, this is not atypical for an introductory text.

One of the themes which Scruton develops over the course of the book is that conservatism, at least in its Anglo-American guise, is a 'qualification' (p. 23) of classical liberalism. By this, he means that while conservatives endorse the central tenants of the post-enlightenment liberal political order—they hold that liberalism *per se* fails to place them in proper moral and political context, and it is the task of the conservative to put these moral and political qualifications in place. As a means of exemplifying how conservatism can act as a qualification, Scruton (pp. 58-61) argues that the liberal theory of political authority is wholly inadequate. It is so because the device it uses to morally justify authority—the social contract—abstracts away from the source of moral significance from which agents could determine whether the sovereign is just in the first place—

the community. So, while the edifice of civil liberties constructed through the liberal point of view is entirely justifiable, it is not justifiable on the liberals' own grounds. It needs the conservative point of view for this.

My aim in this paper is to critically assess Scruton's claim that Anglophone conservatism is a qualification of liberalism by way of putting his argument against the contractarian conception of political authority into dialogue with another conservative critic of the social contract—George Parkin Grant. Grant, in his book *English-Speaking Justice* (1974), took aim, from a distinctly high Tory point of view, at the updated social contract theory of legitimacy articulated by John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* (1971). Putting Grant and Scruton into a dialogue in this manner will allow me to argue in favour of two points, which are the key claims of the paper. The first is that Scruton and Grant share a common complaint against the liberal. Each thinker, in a slightly different way and from different initial premises, argues that the social contract, as theoretical device, is, in fact, unable to account for what it claims to account for: the moral limits of political authority as expressed in legitimacy. The second point I wish to make is that despite this common negative ground, Grant would part ways with Scruton when it comes to theorizing conservatism as a qualification of the liberal project. In my view, Grant would see this characterization, and Scruton's commitment to 'liberal individualism' (pp. 23-24), as rooted in the same enlightenment-era view of the human which leads the liberal astray in the first place. This objection, moreover, highlights what I take to be a deep tension in the Anglophone conservative tradition, one which admits of no easy solution. Grant and Scruton, if I am correct here, walk the same path, and then part ways at a theoretical fork. From the path they walk we can learn something about each, and about the tradition as a whole.

II. BACKGROUND

Before a discussion of Scruton and Grant can begin, some background needs to be put in place. We need a working conception of the liberal theory of political legitimacy, which is their shared target.

1.1 Political legitimacy

To get my argument off the ground, we need to have some prior notion of political legitimacy to work with. I'm concerned here with political legitimacy as a moral status² by which coercive political authority is judged; a sovereign is legitimate if and only if it meets some specific moral criteria or other. Legitimacy, then can be expressed as a conditional:

If the sovereign has met moral conditions Φ , then it is legitimate.³

The theory of legitimacy, then is the working out of what constitutes this phi. I will here assume (though this is contentious) that legitimacy entails obligation, in the sense that agents who are subject to a coercive authority are thereby obliged to comply if and only if it is legitimate. In other words, I take obligation to be the converse relation to legitimacy, and thus produced by the same moral status. Obviously, much more could be said here, but this is adequate as a working definition.

1.2 Classical liberalism

Classical liberalism provides a simple and compelling way of filling out the condition I posed as central to a conception of political legitimacy. For the liberal, the sovereign is legitimate if and only if it is the product of the consent of the parties' subject to its authority:

Social Contract legitimacy—If the sovereign is the product of the consent of the individuals' party to it, then it is legitimate.

Broadly speaking, for the liberal, consent, expressed by way of a social contract, is the key moral status involved in the generation of political legitimacy, because it is the key property reconciling freedom with authority. This is shown by way of a particular argumentative device, which is the so-called state of nature. The idea is that while agents, *qua* individual, have natural rights in the state of nature, which

is just the absence of political authority, they are unable to enjoy them in the absence of a sovereign, who is able to enforce these rights against trespass. So, the inconveniences of the state of nature compel rational agents to consent to a contract whereby a sovereign is given a monopoly on the coercive enforcement of these natural liberties. Thus, on the liberal view, the legitimacy of this contract is secured by way of consent, because consent implies an exercise of natural freedom, rather than its diminution.

What is important to note for my purposes here are two points. First, as an argumentative device designed to specify the moral conditions under which authority is legitimate, implies that consent is an aggregate of individual acts of will, which further implies that individuals possess the freedoms required to consent to the contract are pre-social, and unattached to any specific sociocultural setting or historical inherence. Second, as it is generally understood, the pre-political rights are taken by liberal theorists to be universal and exceptionless.

III. WALKING TOGETHER: SCRUTON AND GRANT ON THE SHORTCOMINGS OF LIBERALISM

In my view, Scruton and Grant each see the liberal theory of political legitimacy as inadequate. Moreover, they view it as inadequate for what is essentially the same broad reason. The liberal attempts to model legitimacy through the device of the social contract. However, for both of these thinkers, the contract—as an abstract model—can't capture the embedded practices and institutions which constitute the condition of the possibility for legitimacy to arise. In this section, I will unpack both Scruton and Grant's versions of this general argument schema.

3.1 Scruton

Scruton's criticism of the classical liberal conception of political legitimacy in *Conservatism: An Invitation to the Great Tradition* is, in essence, a compressed and clear exposition of an argument that can be detected in a number of his political writings stretching back to *The Meaning of Conservatism*. The main thrust of this criticism is broadly Hegelian in inspiration, mixed with a tinge of Burke and Oakeshott. Reconstructing Scruton's argument for the inadequacies of the liberal conception will then open the door for a reconstruction of his positive views of legitimacy, which I will subsequently piece together from a variety of his writings.

3.1.2 Scruton's critique of the social contract

As we have seen, classical liberalism attempts to ground political authority in the hypothetical choice situation of the state of nature. In such a state, individuals would be unable to enjoy their pre-political rights, and thus if rational, would transfer the right of enforcement, by consent, to a sovereign. The sovereign, however, is bound by this contract to limited power—the power to enforce these pre-political rights. Anything else is tantamount to tyranny. For the liberal, then, the state of nature has two primary functions. First, it is a theoretical model which, by way of rational choice, specifies the scope and limits of legitimacy. Second, as hypothetical, it binds all rational agents, at least in principle.

Scruton takes issue with both upshots. The problem, as I read him, is that the social contract is too thin to capture the scope and limits of political legitimacy, and it is too thin because it abstracts away from the sources of normative significance. As a first step in understanding this objection, let's begin with a passage from his (2003, pp. 59-74, 64):

The social contract begins through a thought experiment, in which a group of people gather together to decide on their common future. But if they are in a position to decide on their common future, it is because they already have one: because they recognize their mutual togetherness and reciprocal dependence, which makes it incumbent upon them to settle how they might be governed under a common jurisdiction in a common territory. In short, the social contract requires a relation of membership, and one, moreover, which makes it plausible for the individual members to conceive the relation between them in contractual terms. Theorists of the social contract write as though it presupposed only the first-person singular of free rational choice. In fact, it presupposes a first-person plural, to which the burdens of belonging have already been assumed.

In this passage, we are given the fundamentals of Scruton's complaint against the social contract: the very possibility of a contract rests on a pre-existing network of relations between the agents' party to it. In other words, the contract presupposes that agents already have obligations towards each other; the obligations typical of a moral community. The argument here is Hegelian in nature. According to Hegel, reciprocation is fundamental to the first-person sin-

gular: to be a moral agent to begin with presupposes that others see me as owed what is due, and that I see others as due what they are owed. Otherwise I am simply not a moral agent; communal reciprocity is a precondition of having a moral life at all, let alone entering into a contract. The broader point of significance is that for Hegel, and for Scruton, freedom comes from, e.g. is generated by, social recognition. Thus, the social contract theorists, who start with the foundational assumption that agents are free and have a determinate moral status on their own, *before* entering into a community—get things exactly backwards. We don't have a moral status outside of the community; we are indelibly shaped by what he calls the 'burdens of belonging'.

The upshot of this is that the social contract, for Scruton, is a totally inadequate device for modelling political legitimacy and the obligations it generates. To recall, I put the social contract view of legitimacy in the conditional form which I take to reflect the normative problem of political legitimacy:

Social Contract legitimacy—If the sovereign is the product of the consent of the individuals' party to it, then it is legitimate.

If the Hegelian argument Scruton endorses is correct, then the social contract theory of legitimacy is false because consent, understood as a moral status where each party is recognizes as moral agent, is parasitic upon an already existing moral community. So, if each party does indeed consent to be ruled by a sovereign, they are only able to consent because they are already members of this community. Thus, it is the mutual obligations of this community which generate the normative significance which the contract exploits. As such, therefore, Scruton's objection to contractarianism is that it is too thin to generate the type of moral obligations implied by political legitimacy, and too thin because too abstract. By using the state of nature as argumentative device, social contract theorists syphon away as irrelevant any conception of a shared community, therein placing the atomized agent in an artificial choice situation. But Scruton's point is that this artificial choice point abstracts away from the community which is, given the Hegelian point of view, the very condition of the possibility of autonomous moral choice to begin with. Thus, it is totally inadequate to the task it sets itself, and this is because one of its key assumptions is false; i.e. that the primary unit of moral significance is the pre-communal agent.

3.1.3 Scruton's positive view: 'the legitimacy of procedures'

If, for Scruton, we can't ground legitimacy in a contract, then what exactly is political legitimacy? The answer, which has already been foreshadowed in the past section, in the notion of the so-called 'burdens of belonging': the community of ends within which a particular agent is situated and made the agent she is. In this section, I want to reconstruct Scruton's theory of legitimacy in some detail.

By way of beginning, we need to return to some of Scruton's earlier political writings. A good place to start is a passage from his (1998, pp. 43-56, 49-50), where he says the following:

...the assumption that we can jettison all institutions, traditions, and conventions and decide how to make them anew [is dangerous]. This is the root assumption of liberalism, and it reoccurs in every version of the social contract.... It implies that we can make rational choices, knowing what to do and how to do it, without the benefit of social knowledge—in other words, without the hard-earned legacy of consensual solutions ... we know what to do only when we have a sense of right and wrong, and implicit awareness of the unseen multitudes whom our actions affect, and an instinctive knowledge of what is admirable or despicable, that are perceived through the channels of tradition.

In this passage, Scruton is affirming what was already argued above in the negative: that in order to know what to do, and how to be moral, we must rely upon our inherited ways of life. The liberal wants to jettison these ways as irrelevant, but we've already seen why this is a non-starter, because any contract we make is already downstream of communal identity. What Scruton is saying here, as I take it, is that we must look to this inherited stock of social knowledge in order to determine what is of moral significance for us, because each of us is indelibly structured—as agents—by this community.

That the community, and its network of obligations is, for Scruton, fundamental to how we understand our moral standing, and the moral standing of others, provides a clue to how he understands political legitimacy. On his view, the legitimacy of a sovereign is a matter of whether it recognizes the moral standing of its citizens, understood as a community. More specifically, it is legitimate only if it conforms to the pre-existing network of obligations which are

constitutive of the moral agency of a concrete community. Importantly, this means that as I read him, Scruton is arguing for a historicized or pluralistic conception of legitimacy. For on the assumption that the type of reciprocity required for moral standing is compatible with a variety of fundamental moral premises, then the shape of the network of obligations constitutive of the community will exhibit local variation. That this is his view is suggested by the following passage (Scruton 1993, pp. 17-23), which is perhaps the most straightforward statement of his view of legitimacy:

...our ultimate model for a legitimate order is one given historically, to people united by their sense of a common destiny, a common culture, and a common source of the values that govern their lives.

What allows agents to determine whether they are obliged to obey a sovereign is whether that sovereign approximates the network of obligations which constitutes the community. For on the present conception, the *community* is the unit which determines the moral standing of our political institutions, not individuals. So instead of seeing legitimacy as the aggregated consent of separate agents, Scruton sees it as the end result of an essentially communal process; the process of constructing institutions which are morally acceptable *here*, and to *us*, *qua* moral community. Legitimacy, therefore, has a distinctly Burkean flavour for Scruton, inasmuch as it involves not merely the living, but an inheritance passed acquired from the dead, to be passed to the unborn.⁴ Moreover, because it's not predetermined what shape the community will give to its conception of moral agency, we can't determine whether a sovereign has met the standards required for it to be legitimate outside of the sociohistorical processes that produced it. As a result, there is a plurality of different forms of legitimate regime, each attached to a time, place, and third-person plural—the 'we' of the community whom are subject to it.

Pluralist conception of legitimacy: If a sovereign approximates the local conditions required for moral agency demanded by the community subject to it, then it is legitimate.

One might assume that this pluralist understanding of legitimacy implies that Scruton is committed to a form of relativism about the moral foundations of apolitical authority. This, however, would not be correct. For while it is true that communities are always embedded in a time, place

and history, and will differ, sometimes radically, in the institutional realization of a particular form of life, it doesn't follow that every possible community will have the same moral status. Indeed, while some communal forms of life will be conducive to the realization of a Hegelian autonomy, others will not.⁵

Pluralism explains the conservative attachment to a specific tradition and set of institutional arrangements. These are important for the conservative because they express the moral foundations of the local community which is constitutive of self-realization. We can't abstract to some universal axiom which governs all possible human associates because legitimacy is, for reasons adduced above, always attached to a time and place. Anglophone conservatism, therefore, is an attachment to at least some of parliament, the Monarchy, common law and the Church of England precisely because these are the institutions which both reflect and help give rise to the form of moral agency—liberal individualism—held to be foundational in the English-speaking world. This moral anthropology can't, for Scruton, be wrenched away from these institutions, precisely because the historical development of these institutions and the cultural setting which produced them is a precondition for the form of liberty we enjoy here and now.

3.2 Grant

Like Scruton, George Grant was an articulate defender of a form of English-speaking conservatism and a critic of liberalism. Grant agrees with what he calls liberalism in practice, which he identifies as individual rights and consent of the governed. The protection of individual rights requires an independent judiciary and rule of law, whereas the second requires representative institutions. Grant takes the affirmation of these to be something 'all decent men accept as good' (Grant 1998, p. 4). However, he takes umbrage with what he calls liberalism in theory, by which, he means the theoretical foundations of individual rights and consent of the governed.

Perhaps his clearest criticism of liberal theory is to be found in the book based upon a series of lectures he gave at Mount Allison University in 1974 and published as *English-Speaking Justice*. In this book, Grant takes aim at the modern liberalism of Rawls (1971). As I shall demonstrate, Grant argues that the Kantian version of contractarianism Rawls deploys as a means of grounding the moral justification for a distinctly liberal form of political authority is ill-suited to this task. It is ill-suited, moreover, because its formal Kantianism abstracts away from the type of meta-

physical assumptions which would be required for such a justification. In short, as I shall argue, Grant takes aim at Rawls in a manner mirroring Scruton's criticism of classical liberalism.

3.2.1 Rawlsian contractarianism in brief

Because Grant is taking aim at a specific target (i.e. Rawls 1971), it will be necessary for me to sketch out what Rawls was attempting to establish in this book.

Rawls' starting point, inspired by Kant, is a particular view of political morality—or justice, as he terms it—called constructivism. Broadly speaking, the constructivist view of justice is that what is just is what agents would agree to under certain conditions, i.e. under conditions abstracted away from the types of contingencies which make people prefer themselves to others. The broad idea here is that our pre-theoretical intuitions about justice demand principles that are chosen in light of the interests of all agents, and not tailored to one's own particular circumstances. It demands universal principles.

Rawls argues that we can model the choice situation through which universal principles are chosen through the device of a contract, which will determine the major principles of justice constitutive of legitimate political authority. In order to ensure that the contract is made in a way that expresses the moral point of view, he argues that it must be made from a particular choice position, which he calls the original position. In the original position, agents know that they want to secure the best possible arrangement for themselves in order to lead a good life, where this implies basic goods—security, liberty, material goods. But they are placed under a 'veil of ignorance', and therefore don't know their race, gender, class or natural talents. Rawls argues that in such a situation. All rational agents would converge upon two basic principles of justice: one, equal liberties (freedom of expression, equality of opportunity, etc.), and two, the so-called difference principle (cf. Rawls 1971, section 12, and especially, pp. 75-90), which is that material inequalities are acceptable only if they benefit the worst off. Thus, to return to the schema I have used to model legitimacy, the Rawlsian view can be summarized as follows:

Rawlsian constructivist legitimacy—If the state adheres to the two basic principles of justice which would be chosen by parties behind a veil of ignorance, then it is legitimate.

The veil of ignorance, and the subsequent contract are, for Rawls, entirely hypothetical and are intended solely to specify the normative constraints placed upon the state. Nevertheless, one can see the similarities between the Rawlsian argument for legitimacy by consent, and the argument for legitimacy by consent which I attributed above to the classical liberals.

3.2.2 Grant on Rawls

While *English-Speaking Justice* is a very rich text, impossible to explicate in a brief paper like this, I think it is possible to extract two major criticisms of Rawls from chapter 2, which is devoted to the latter. In what follows, I will unpack these criticisms, and argue that they contain a core of common themes with Scruton's criticism of liberalism surveyed above. I also hope that this will be of independent interest, as I think Grant's arguments are deeper than much of the secondary literature on Rawls, much of which has the technical narrowness typical of a scholasticism. I also think this is important because many contemporary discussions of Grant are dismissive, facile or in some cases, both.⁶

First argument: the poverty of the choice situation

The centrepiece argument of *English-Speaking Justice* takes aim at Rawls' attempt to derive his two principles of justice through the device of the original position. Grant argues that the original position, shorn as it is of any substantive metaphysical assumptions about human nature, does not support the two principles of justice in the way that Rawls assumes it does. The only thing supporting these principles are Rawls' intuitions about the nature of justice, and these intuitions do not amount to an argument. They simply reflect the prejudices of the American progressivist class. So, *A Theory of Justice* singularly fails to discharge its main purpose.

Let's unpack this line of reasoning in detail. It is one of Rawls' explicit aims to avoid deriving a theory of justice from substantive metaphysical assumptions about what constitutes the good life for humans, or any related assumptions about human nature.⁷ He wants to derive the principles from placing agents under a veil of ignorance, coupled with the assumption that agents, as interested in pursuing their own conception of the good, want to maximize the resources available to them. For Grant, however, it's not clear why, under these two assumptions, we arrive at the two principles of justice as universal norms. Grant (1998, pp. 42-43) writes:

How can the content of justice he advocates be derived from his contractual theory? He advocates many liberties and equalities ... surely any decent human being will agree that liberty and equality are at the heart of political justice... but Rawls's book claims to be more than a catechism of such goods; it claims to be a theory of justice. That is, its claims to be giving us knowledge of what justice is, and how we know that a regime of liberty and equality are its core. ... The fundamental question about Rawls' book is whether justice can be derived from calculation of self-interest in general ...

Rawls claims to be providing an argument for the conclusion that political justice *just is* his two principles, and that anyone placed in the original position will come to this conclusion. However, this assumes that Rawlsian contractarianism can answer in the affirmative what Grant calls 'the fundamental question'—that the bounds of a just political regime can be derived from self-interest in the original position. Grant argues that this assumption is incorrect.

Why can't the Rawlsian answer this question in the affirmative, according to Grant? The answer, in brief, is as follows. Rawls wants to ground legitimacy in contract, but it's a contract shorn of the metaphysical foundations adopted by earlier contractarians like, for instance, Locke and Kant. Thus, because it is so shorn, it cannot provide us with the content of justice as Rawls claims it can. For we can only have knowledge of whether the sovereign is legitimate if we have knowledge of ultimate moral ends of the type Rawls doesn't supply. So, he can't give us what he promises. Let's unpack this line of thought. The key passage in the argument summarized above is the following (Grant 1998, pp. 33-34):

... why does Rawls' account of 'person' make equality our due? Why are beings who can calculate and cannot avoid choices worth of inalienable equal rights? After all, some humans can calculate better than others ... His writing is typical of much modern liberal thought in that the word 'person' is brought in mysteriously to cover up the inability to state clearly what it is about human beings that makes them worthy of the highest political respect ... In short, Rawls affirms a contractarianism against a utilitarian account of justice, but wishes to free that contractarian teaching from the metaphysical assumptions upon which it was founded in the thought of its great exponents.

On Grant's reading, Rawls wishes to make our consent to a contract under minimal assumptions the source of political legitimacy. However, his attempt to do so is 'free' of the metaphysical assumptions required to derive legitimacy from such a source. For instance, one of the 'great exponents' of contractarianism, Locke, grounds the normative force of contract in the natural law. The natural law is a key premise in Locke, because knowledge of God's natural law is what allows us to *determine*, in the first instance, whether the sovereign is acting in a legitimate manner. Natural law, however, constitutes a 'substantive' view of the good life which Rawls won't countenance. So does Kant's axiology of the good will (cf. Kant 1991). Thus, Grant argues, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, we have no recourse to knowledge of any metaphysical principle or principles, i.e. no knowledge of 'what it is about human beings' which would allow us to determine whether the two principles are indeed constitutive of justice, and thus that humans are due equal respect. The choice situation of the original principle would allow us to understand whether these principles are able to maximize self-interest, but this, argues Grant, is entirely beside the point. What we want to know, rather, is whether or not a regime constituted by Rawls's two principles *is* just, and knowing this requires recourse to something that Rawls doesn't provide.

Thus, concludes Grant, when we look at the Rawlsian original position, we are looking at a contract which is taken away from the sorts of assumptions which would be required to determine whether the contract is, in the last analysis, just. This is why Grant thinks that it is completely unclear, on the Rawlsian picture, whether humans are due equal respect of the type implied by Rawls' second principle of justice. Indeed, if we are cut off from the metaphysics of human good, then what reason do we in fact have to respect the Rawlsian universalizability imperative in the first place? Kant grounded these imperatives in a thick moral theory—a moral anthropology, to borrow a term from John Gray (1995)—of the type Rawls eschews. So why, Grant asks, should we even grant Rawls this neutered form of Kantianism? This is, to my mind, a powerful critique, and cuts to the very heart of the Rawlsian project. Grant suggests that the Rawlsian invocation of Kantian universalizability as reflective of our pre-theoretical intuitions about justice is just a regimentation of Rawls' own bourgeois and American progressivist sensibilities. And if his argument here is correct, that seems quite plausible.

Turning to the Rawlsian form of what I have called the legitimacy conditional, then, what Grant argues is that Rawls

has no right to conclude that any regime which abides by his two principles is just, because he has not determined the all-important antecedent matter, which is a moral anthropology of the type needed for humans to know what they owe each other in the first place. His conditional is false. The choice position we face behind the veil of ignorance is morally impoverished.

Second argument: moral nihilism

Grant's second critique of Rawls picks up where his first argument left off. If our sense of equality, on the Rawlsian picture, derives from our intuitions, then where do these intuitions come from? They come, according to Grant, from an earlier, Christian conception of morality, a conception which has been more or less killed off by the enlightenment and the scientific revolution. The west, therefore, is mired in the midst of a great 'civilizational contradiction' of the type predicted by Nietzsche:⁸ our moral understanding of the person, and of the bounds of authority, derive from a tradition which has long since been extinguished by progress.

Consequently, argues Grant, moral nihilism beckons. For our present systems of morality, as exemplified by Rawls (and the argument outlined above), are shorn of the very foundations by which they could support the conclusions they draw. Thus, once the afterglow of Christianity recedes into memory, there is nothing, at least in principle, standing in the way of a contractarian defence of things we now find abhorrent. Our entire moral ontology is a narrow pursuit of a universalized self-interest. What if, given the new technological vistas, self-interest changes scope? What's to stop the nature of the contract changing, to allow the presently abhorrent? This is, according to Grant, especially pressing in our scientific society, which desacralizes the human. No ends in technological and scientific view of world. We are relying on an older view of moral foundations which has been extinguished by technological progress. Radical contingency beckons—what of technology changes the horizons of what is possible for self-interested individuals to acquire? Why won't we then change what is rational? This is an open possibility for Rawls, as Grant reads him.⁹

3.2.3 Defusing an objection

One might object that Grant's critique outlined here is conflating two different types of contractualism. More specifically, one might charge Grant's emphasis on self-interest as betraying a misunderstanding of Rawls: Rawls, the objec-

tion goes, is a *moral* contractualist—a constructivist—not a Hobbesian contractarian. As such, Rawls derives his principles of justice from a choice situation in conjunction with a moral premise which operates as a normative constraint on acceptable choice. This moral premise is that all agents are de equal respect, and thus, only universalizable principles are acceptable. Thus, when Grant asks whether we can derive justice from ‘a calculation of self-interest in general’ (Grant 1974, p. 43), we can see that he misunderstands the Rawlsian project.

Responding to this objection will allow us to gain a deeper appreciation of Grant’s criticism. In reply, I contend that Grant is not, in fact guilty of this misreading of Rawls. Grant is aware that ‘liberty and equality’ are at the heart of the Rawlsian project, which I take to be his way of putting the Rawlsian universalizability constraint. He understands that Rawls is engaged in a Kantian and moral form of contractualism, which is based not upon self-interest, but upon the idea that agents must be treated with equal respect. Grant’s criticism is a ‘second-order’ criticism, aimed at the Rawlsian version of a Kantian constructivist morality. In effect, Grant accuses Rawls of attempting to take universalizability as a basic premise or axiom without any justification. His criticism is that without a substantive and ‘thick’ moral theory standing in the background and justifying this appeal to equality—a substantive theory of the type employed by Kant—Rawlsian constructivism, in effect, collapses into a form of rational choice. For agents in the original position are asked to maximize their basic goods only subject to the equality constraint. Grant’s point is that without a substantive moral theory, the equality constraint—at least from the perspective of the agents in the choice situation—looks arbitrary. This, moreover, is why he also thinks that the Rawlsian divorce of the principle of equality from substantive moral commitments is, in Rawls, dangerous—if decoupled from a thicker moral theory, then why can’t agents shift the goalposts of what is involved in equality?¹⁰ Why can’t agents, that is, remove potential persons from agency? In the end, then, I think that understanding the ‘second-order’ form of Grant’s criticism allows him to avoid the objection in question.¹¹

3.3 Walking the same path

As will already be apparent from my reconstructions, Scruton and Grant share a great deal in common when it comes to criticizing liberalism. Scruton and Grant both take their respective targets to be unable to adequately theorize the origin of political authority. As I’ve reconstructed his argu-

ment, Scruton criticizes the contract for presupposing what it purports to explain: communal obligations. For Grant, the Rawlsian contract, arising from the original position, is in a similar predicament insofar as is unable to generate the normative constraints it purports to so generate. For both thinkers, therefore, while civil liberties are desirable, they must be theorized in a manner altogether different from the theoretical starting point made by liberals. For these starting points are, *qua* normative conceptions of authority, completely inadequate.

Each thinker, moreover, locates a similar source of the inadequacies of the liberal conception of political authority. For Scruton, as well as for Grant, the liberal conception of political authority fails because it attempts to ground the norms constitutive of legitimacy in form of thought experiment—the contractual choice situation—which is too thin, metaphysically speaking, to do the work it is tasked with. According to Scruton, the contractarian tradition reifies the individual, and makes her the seat of legitimacy in the form of consent. However, on his view this is a fatal mistake, because there is no contractual choice situation in the first instance without an antecedent community. The social contract tradition therefore gets the source of legitimacy the wrong way around—a contract is legitimate because it abides by the terms of community, rather than the community being legitimate because it abides by the contract. It is the community which allows the agent to enjoy her freedom in the first place, not the state of nature. Thus, the grave mistake of the contractarian is to assume that a basic conception of the individual, abstracted away from everything else, is sufficient to generate legitimacy. Similarly, Grant takes aim at what he takes to be the hole in the heart of the Rawlsian original position. For Grant, the individual agent, shorn of any notion of the good, is not in a position to know whether or not Rawls’ two principles are in fact just. For any notion of justice must refer to a theory of the good—a philosophical anthropology—of the sort that Rawls eschews. Consequently, for Grant, the Rawlsian contract commits the same grave mistake that Scruton identified in his analysis of the classical contractarian tradition—it abstracts the agent away from the conditions which are the very condition for the possibility of identifying a legitimate regime. Rawls is guilty of the same error of abstraction as the classical liberals, insofar as he believes that the starting point for a theory of political legitimacy is the individual agent and her desire for value maximization.

In sum, then, Scruton and Grant walk down the same path when it comes to theorizing the pitfalls of liberalism.

For each thinker, as I understand them, the fundamental problem with the liberal picture of legitimacy and political authority is a fatally abstract and empty starting point. The liberal starts with individuals in a state of nature, not realizing that this is to get things exactly backwards. We must look to something antecedent—the community for Scruton, our knowledge of ends for Grant—in order to see where these norms are generated.

IV. PARTING WAYS: SCRUTON'S QUALIFICATIONS, GRANT'S REJECTIONS

In the previous section, we saw two conservative criticisms of liberalism—those of Sir Roger Scruton and George Grant—which, if I am correct, converge in important ways. To put it metaphorically, while the two authors are separated by time and place, they walk a similar critical path. They also, moreover, share more than a critical path. Each author displays intellectual traits which make it plausible to categorize both as belonging to the Anglophone conservative tradition. As I shall argue in this final section of the paper, however, Scruton and Grant part ways when it comes to articulating their respective conservatism as a positive doctrine, and I shall also argue that this parting of ways represents a deeper tension in the tradition.

Scruton's historically-oriented discussion of conservatism in his (2018, pp. 23-24) makes it clear that he sees modern conservatism to be an outgrowth of the enlightenment, in the sense that he understands the conservative to be 'qualifying' the central principles of liberalism:

Modern conservatism ... began life in Britain and also in France as a qualification of liberal individualism. The conservative argument accepted the bottom-up view of legitimacy, as conferred on government, at least in part, by the consent of the people. It accepted some version of natural law and natural rights, as defining the limits of political power and the freedoms of the sovereign individual. And it was by and large in favour of constitutional government and what Jefferson was later to describe as 'check and balances' through which the various powers and offices of government could hold each other into account.

By and large, argues Scruton, the Anglophone conservative endorses 'liberal individualism'—a starting point which sees the 'sovereign individual' as defining the limits of political power, and like the classical liberal, he takes legiti-

macy to be a matter of respect for some form of natural law. However, (2018, p. 24):

... modern conservatism ... opposed the view that political order is founded on contract, as well as the parallel suggestion that the individual enjoys freedoms, sovereignty and rights in a state of nature, and can throw off the burden of social and political membership, and start again from a condition of absolute freedom. For the conservative, human beings come into the world burdened by obligations, and subject to institutions and traditions that contain within them a precious inheritance of wisdom, without which the exercise of freedom is as likely to destroy human right and entitlements as enhance them.

As we have seen, Scruton rejects the contract as the seat of legitimacy; the human agent is indelibly social, and it's the web of social obligations of which she is thrown which is the seat of legitimacy. The fallacy of the free agent in state of nature is that it artificially abstracts away from the bonds of membership which allow the agent to be free.

Grant, as I understand him, agrees with Scruton with regards to the failings of the social contract theory of legitimacy. However, I argue that he would not be satisfied with Scruton's description of conservatism as constituting a qualification of liberalism. The reason he would reject this, as base, is that Grant understands Anglophone conservatism to be the product of a distinctly pre-enlightenment political tradition, the Christian Platonist tradition of Augustine and Hooker. Grant makes this clear (1998, p. 44) in the following passage:

In philosophy we are given sufficient knowledge of the whole of the nature of things to know what our interests are, and to know them in a scheme of subordination and superordination. In this account, justice is not a certain set of external political arrangements which are a useful means of the realization of our self-interests; it is the very inward harmony of human beings in terms of which they are alone able to calculate their self-interest properly.

Philosophy equips us to know what justice—political authority within the bounds of right—is composed of. We are able to know what our 'interests' are—what is best for us as political agents, by inquiry into the metaphysics of ends. In short, for Grant, justice is knowledge of the divine or-

der or *logos*—and what is just for the temporal order is given by the divine order, in the sense laid down by Augustine and the cardinal virtues. In short, Grant reaches beyond the enlightenment to the thicker notion of justice encapsulated by the pre-modern saying ‘justice is each man getting what is his due’. The conservative, for Grant, is the defender of a distinctly pre-modern inheritance, the tradition of natural law and ecclesiastical politics; someone who ‘invokes the ancient doctrine of virtue’, according to which ‘virtue is prior to freedom’ (Grant 1965, p. 74). Agents are free, on this conception, only if they are aware of the virtues and the inner harmony of the soul, because following Plato, Grant sees this inward harmony as a prerequisite of freedom.¹²

Grant criticizes the conservatism of Burke and the enlightenment more generally on grounds rooted in this broadly Neo-Platonist view of human ends. In his view, Burkean conservatism is simply ‘the defence of property rights and chauvinism, attractively packaged as appeal to the past’ (Grant 1965, p. 71). It is so, moreover, precisely because, as a distinctly enlightenment form of political theory, it takes rational self-interest to be the both the highest end for humans, and a limiting condition upon political coercion (in the form of consent). For Grant, this conception of humanity leads to an essentially negative understanding of human ends and, as a result, political obligation (in the sense that the contract becomes collective security for self-interest) which is entirely at odds with the nature of things as reflected in the virtues. As such, it is the enlightenment which is the harbinger of moral nihilism: if self-interest determines what we owe each other, then when our self-interest changes, so do our norms. Unfettered reason has a tendency towards vice and excess.

I argue that Grant would have similar reservations regarding Scruton’s conservatism as he does to Burke’s conservatism. As we have seen, Scruton places a form of ‘liberal individualism’ at the heart of conservatism. His conservatism is self-described as a qualification of liberalism; it is a liberalism embedded in a time and place. Given Grant’s rejection of the essentially negative understanding of human ends, however, he would view Scruton’s commitment to individualism as a surrender to the enlightenment view humanity as essentially self-interested calculators, and thus vulnerable to the same form of moral nihilism which he takes to infect Burke’s thought.¹³ While as we have seen, Scruton does in fact hold that human freedom is ‘thick’ in the sense that it is essentially structured by a community, it is, importantly, not the same community of con-

cern to Grant. Scruton’s community is, as far as I can see, the spontaneous orders of Smith and Hayek, an aggregate of individuals producing something supervenient. It is not the pre-enlightenment community of those who wish to see the temporal order structured by the divine order. Scruton thus implicitly aligns himself with a tradition which Grant rejects.

V. CONCLUSION

I have argued that when it comes to criticizing the liberal contractarian theory of legitimacy, Scruton and Grant walk a common path. However, I have also argued that the two thinkers part ways at a fork in the path created by their respective conceptions of a positive vision for Anglophone conservatism. I would like to bring the discussion full circle by relating what I have said back to some themes prominent in Scruton’s (2018).

If I am correct here, then Scruton’s historical introduction to conservatism, framed as it is in terms of a reaction to and qualification of the more radical developments of the 18th century enlightenment, could be seen as representing only a partial picture of the Anglophone conservative tradition. Certainly there is a great deal of truth in what Scruton says in his description of the evolution of conservative thought, and there is no greater living exponent of the tradition, in my view at least. Arguably, however, Grant’s vision is also part of the Anglophone story, and certainly provides, if anything, the theological-philosophical stage upon which the story of the development of civil liberties in Britain and its colonies progressed. The evolution of the common law, parliament and the unwritten constitution, for example, certainly would not have developed the way they did outside of the peculiarities of the English religious settlement, and its stormy relationship to its non-conformist offshoots. While much more could be said here, I mention it because I think that this parting of ways suggests an unresolved tension as the heart of this particular conservative tradition. There is a tension, in Anglophone conservatism, between what I will call the neo-classical and Platonist elements of its ecclesiastical origins, and the liberal individualist elements of the tradition which stem from the enlightenment. Which element or pole should we emphasize? Should we follow Scruton’s liberal conservatism, or Grant’s high Toryism?¹⁴ My concluding suggestion is that we should, as a starting point, look to the great compromises of the English settlement as an exemplar, and attempt to navigate a course between the poles.¹⁵

NOTES

- 1 Unless otherwise specified, all references are to Scruton 2018.
- 2 That is, I am concerned with the conditions under which political authority is right. The theory of political legitimacy is, broadly speaking the attempt to specify these conditions.
- 3 My discussion of the liberal theory of legitimacy in this section is based on Peter 2017.
- 4 Burke (2001, p. 261) writes: “[Society] is a partnership in all science, a partnership in all art, a partnership in every virtue and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.”
- 5 The issue is complicated. However, at least prima facie, it is plausible that societies which do not countenance political institutions which enshrine legal protects to what we would call civil liberties, at least in some for or other, will not be conducive to a Hegelian form of autonomy.
- 6 A good example of the latter is Ignatieff 2009, which contains what I consider to be a grotesque and ideologically driven caricature of Grant, worthy of a Liberal Party election pamphlet. Sadly, this is not atypical. For a serious and thoughtful engagement with Grant’s thought see Dart 2016.
- 7 Cf. Rawls 1971, section 22 ‘the circumstances of justice’.
- 8 As far as I can tell, Grant is discussing Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* and *Beyond Good and Evil*. The ‘great delayer’ quote is from *Ecce Homo* books CW 2 (cf. Grant 1998, pp. 78-79).
- 9 Cf. Grant 1998, pp. 74-78 but also part III more generally.
- 10 Indeed, this is what Grant argues in the third section of *English-Speaking Justice*, where he criticizes the recent *Roe vs Wade* decision.
- 11 Thanks to Martin Beckstein for suggesting this objection.
- 12 Unfettered choice is not equivalent to freedom in this tradition. It is, rather, a form of bondage, because true freedom requires that one act in a way consonant with the rationality which makes one human.

- 13 This is the importance of what was, for Grant in the mid 60’s, the waning British connection in Anglophone Canada; Britain was what defined Canada in opposition to the liberalism of the United States, a connection to a society with ‘ways of life from before the age of progress’ (Grant 1965, p. 70). The gradual loss of this connection, therefore, spelled the end of any possibility of resisting a technocratic liberalism of which the United States is the primary exporter.
- 14 In suggesting that there is a tension between the Toryism of Grant and the liberal conservatism of Scruton, I don’t mean to here endorse one or the other, or suggest that one and only one is the ‘true’ conservatism. I merely wish to point out the tension, as it is a springboard for further inquiry.
- 15 I would like to thank Martin Beckstein and Leslie Marsh for comments and encouragement.

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Diachronic Identity: Intimations, Perturbations, Antifragility and Toleration

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Having already been privy to most of the contributions for this symposium, there is little that I, for one, can add to the fine-grained discussion emanating from so many differing perspectives. What's on offer here may just be me nattering to myself; therefore not all aspects of it invite a response, but of course it's your prerogative.¹

Conservatism (little "c") in its most trivial sense is concerned with continuity—it is therefore an identity claim (p. 3). Though identity in the canonical Lockean tradition is *asocial*, one can still theorize about what the necessary and/or sufficient conditions might be for a given socio-cultural tradition to persist in some recognizable form over time—i.e. diachronic identity.² Such discussion would not be incompatible with conservatism understood as an epistemic stance³ (the more narrowly proscribed *political* conservatism), or the more ubiquitous variant, *cultural* conservatism (pp. 80, 82, 83, 85), or indeed *social* conservatism. If one understands each of these related dimensions in (to some degree) spontaneous order terms, then politics' proper sphere should for the most part be downstream from culture (p. 4). This therefore makes a nonsense of the lazy caricatural characterization of conservatism as necessarily reactionary (p. 3). Dynamicism is woven into the very fabric of a viable socio-cultural order: "[c]ivil society must have a self-sustaining order of its own—the order associated with Smith's 'invisible hand', Burke's 'prejudice', and Hegel's 'cunning of reason'" (p. 65), an evolving non-axiomatic consensus (pp. 5, 34). Burke's famous phrase (see note 2) is applicable across all domains (p. 12). Adam Smith, of course, grasped the logic and immense computational efficiency of the market order (p. 47).

Both classical liberalism and conservatism found common cause in inverting the idea that legitimacy issues forth from some epistemic monopoly or other (pp. 17, 24, 36, 104, 112)—i.e. the Enlightenment (pp. 9, 14, 135)—whereby the actions of multitudes of *individuals* imply an emergent and complex socio-cultural order. One might think of Burke's

insight as an instance of what Taleb (2014) has termed antifragility; i.e. a property of all complex systems that have endured. In other words, dynamic and healthy complex spontaneous order benefits from *some* degree of volatility, randomness, disorder, risk, unpredictability, opacity, and uncertainty—be it in business, politics, medicine, or life in general. Therein lies the rub: to what degree can a system, *any system*, absorb perturbances and still maintain its identity, integrity, or coherence? A complex society composed of complex minds, each with its own permutation of beliefs, approvals and disapprovals, preferences and aversions, hopes, fears, anxieties, and skills, will *always* contain conflicts and tensions. It is the classical liberal-conservative axis that most appreciates that the best we can ever do is manage and contain them on reasonable but defeasible grounds.⁴ Can one draw a firm and tenable distinction between the essential and the incidental within a tradition or web of belief? And to what degree can a cultural ecosystem assimilate new perturbations? (p. 3).

The standard argument, which you as my philosophy tutor thirty years ago so starkly presented to me, is that spontaneous orders corrode traditional patterns of behavior. The question that exercised me for years after was "what were traditional patterns if not spontaneous orders?" This was my first conceptual encounter with the notion of societal perturbation and culture as an *ecosystem*, and marked my nascent interest in more technical, non-philosophical articulations, i.e. under the auspices of complexity theory, which came much later, though always informed by my interest in classical liberal social philosophy (Marsh and Onof, 2007; Doyle and Marsh, 2013).⁵ Perhaps what you had in mind back then was the Friedmanian *zeitgeist* of the Thatcher-Reagan years, whereby it seemed that the market should subsume or impinge on all other orders and/or become the dominant arbiter of all value—a view mistakenly ascribed by many to Hayek and his progenitor Adam Smith. You (and John Gray—2007) point to this classic and supposed

tension in *An Invitation*: “belief in a free economy and free trade clashes with local attachments... ” (pp. 2, 4). Two decades later, in your “Hayek and Conservatism” chapter for *The Cambridge Companion to Hayek*, you finessed this idea which had been puzzling me: “Those who believe that social order demands constraints on the market are right. But in a true spontaneous order the constraints are already there, in the form of customs, laws, and morals” (Scruton 2006, pp. 219–20). Moreover, you go on to say that “Hume, Smith, Burke and Oakeshott—have tended to see no tension between a defence of the free market and a traditionalist vision of social order. For they have put their faith in the spontaneous limits placed on the market by the moral consensus of the community” (ibid.).⁶

Expressed in these ways, you provided me with a most elegant solution to the conundrum that I posed earlier. As we are “situated” (pp. 25, 28) and cognitively “bounded” (pp. 29, 39, 47) beings (to use more recent jargon), the very precondition of knowledge, generally speaking, is the exploitation of the epistemic virtues accorded by society’s manifold of spontaneous orders, a manifold that gives context and definition to intimate, regulate, and inform action (p. 48). Hume, Smith, Burke, Oakeshott and Hayek all recognized the market order, one amongst many, as the most effective *communication* system, i.e., the coordination problem (p. 47). And, as you rightly point out, the Smith of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* presented an infinitely richer understanding of “invisible hand” explanations that was typically coopted in isolation from the Smith of *The Wealth of Nations* (p. 42; cf. Hardwick and Marsh 2014). Conservatives and classical liberals stand shoulder-to-shoulder regarding the Rule of Law: “a market economy presupposes honest people hence must be backed up by the moral and legal strictures” (pp. 41, 42, 51). However, a *fundamentalist* conception of market institutions, as Gray put it, is “a hubristic neglect of the human need for common life” (Gray 2007, p. viii). Moreover, he writes, this paleo-liberalism displayed more affinity with the “Old Left project of doing away with, or marginalizing politically, the human inheritance of cultural difference” (Gray 2007, p. 153).⁷ They both promote bloodless abstractions, “reducing human beings to their over-civilised shadows” (p. 96).⁸

Thus the fissure that opened up between these two strands (liberalism and conservatism) seemed to be of an ontological nature.⁹ Whereas classical liberalism took the individual to be an irreducible unit “exalted into an absolute value” (pp. 29, 15, 46), modern conservatism offered the needed corrective in understanding the individual to be on

an ontological *par* with society (pp. 23, 59), transmuting the abstract individual into one as an expression of individuality—or as Bosanquet and Oakeshott put it, “adverbial”.¹⁰ Or, as you (and Hayek) put it, the political order is legitimized “not by the free choices that create it, but the free choices that it creates” (pp. 31, 62).¹¹ Individuality allows for “eccentricity and independence... a sign of a deeper obedience than any sheepish conformity” (p. 31).¹² This, by the way, seems to be in tension with your claim that “liberals and conservatives are temperamentally quite distinct. Liberals naturally rebel, conservatives naturally obey” (p. 55; the moral psychology of Jonathan Haidt, as expounded in Marsh 2018, offers empirical validation for your claim). In any event, as you rightly say, the relation between (classical) liberalism and conservatism is not one of absolute antagonism, but rather of symbiosis (p. 55).¹³

Social conservatism, as I have argued (Marsh 2018, pp. 182–83), does and can accommodate change, but change that is already prefigured or *intimated* within a given tradition. Unless the current state of society exactly as it stands is itself a value, then why not remedy incoherencies? What would typically be claimed in the name of human rights can be redescribed as an Oakeshottian “intimation” that was being ignored. Three cases in point: the 15th Amendment (ratified 1870), the Married Women’s Property Act (1882), and most recently gay rights. These supposed human rights were *historically specific grievances within a tradition of political behavior that needed to be remedied within that very tradition. A tradition that becomes broadly conscious of its being out kilter of with itself is a tradition best-placed to redress a specific anomaly.* This seems to be in tune with the conundrum I posed earlier and your neat answer.

Moving on to cultural conservatism, what I find particularly interesting is your view that “culture becomes an object of conservation only when it has already been lost” (p. 90). Ruskin, writing at a time when “political economy” was passing into economics, and economics into the technical form we know today, was widely mocked for the technical blankness of his work. This, I think, misses the point. Ruskin refused to separate ethics and economics, repudiating the whole picture of economic activity as detached from human well-being. In their different ways—different from Ruskin and from one another—William Morris and Marx repudiated that picture, too. Arnold, whom you quote, “saw in the art of the past a spiritual wholeness and social cohesion which were, he believed, vanishing from the world of industrial capitalism” (p. 85) and which did *not* require religious faith (p. 87), “turning a stream of fresh and free

thought upon our stock notions and habits” (ibid.). Again, this was a managed dynamicism, albeit via state action. Culture was an essential guide to the exercise of political power (recall my earlier claim that politics must be downstream from culture). Cultural conservatives à la Disraeli actually required intervention by the state to ameliorate the poor’s condition (p. 89). The spiritual crisis of the post-Nietzschean world manifest as *Eigenschaftslosigkeit*¹⁴ animated Robert Musil. Musil, writing as the Austro-Hungarian Empire was precariously teetering on the verge of collapse, self-described his orientation as a “conservative anarchist” (Musil 1913/1995). This is very puzzling indeed. Historically, how is the phrase “conservative anarchist” best construed? Nietzsche called the state “the coldest of all cold monsters”; to him it was a tool of collectivism and a promoter of inferior values. I should think it was Musil’s repudiation of the state-collectivist aspect of politics that constituted his anarchism. His conservatism, however, harked back to the (perhaps idealized) period before the cultural degeneration of Austria began. As a severe cultural critic, his conservatism may have been an appeal to an older, purer, less socially corrupt time. It’s still an odd combination: anarchism and conservatism. The society whose values Musil would have wanted to conserve still needed a state to maintain civil peace and prevent external aggression. Presumably his rejection of the state was only a rejection of the collectivist state. That would mean that Musil was only qualifiedly an anarchist. The term “conservative anarchist” has some currency in our time, but suffers from a muddled association with libertarianism. The conservative anarchism I wish to proffer stresses community, shared values and interests, Burke’s “little platoons” (p. 51) or more widely civil society, which could in theory operate without the state. Operating without the state = anarchy. So, one can see conservatism here as shorthand for communitarianism, and communities running their own affairs minus the state. It should be noted that communitarianism does not entail collectivism, which generally involves anonymous masses controlled as an “enterprise association” by the state.

I now turn my thoughts to your discussion of toleration (p. 150), which to my mind is *the* pressing existential issue of the day, and cuts across the various identity claims as I’ve outlined. I am referring to the unfettered perturbations that Douglas Murray (2017) has so grimly and it must be said, humanely, documented.

The UK, France, Germany, Sweden and Canada¹⁵ have internal competing sources of authority now—i.e. Sharia (pp.

127, 129, 148, 153)—and therefore are deeply perturbed, as some brave souls from within the tradition have acknowledged (Tawhidi 2018). This situation has been aided and abetted by the Jew- and precariat-hating Trojan Horse that is the so-called “regressive Left”¹⁶ (Nawaz 2016) and their elitist managerial counterparts (or as you put it “literary cabal”—pp. 44, 47, 117). We need a better expression of the dynamics of toleration to counter the infertile sloganeering of the ever-decreasing circles of identitarian intersectionalism, the upshot being that both the extreme Left and the extreme Right converge on Jew hatred. As you say, in order to justify itself, the teleology of the ontological slum that is identity politics is to relentlessly conscript every institution and even language to its purpose (p. 110).¹⁷

The paradox often pressed against tolerance is that it must tolerate the intolerant and, under the democratic possibility that an intolerant view may gain majority support, submit to its own demise. To counter this contingency should we not introduce a logical structure into tolerance?

1. There is value in allowing the free expression of opinion. Even of intolerant opinion.
2. But the institution of tolerance within which such free expression takes place has a greater value than the free expression of particular opinions, specifically of those opinions that do not respect the value of tolerance. They can therefore be constrained or suppressed.

Put another way,

- (a) if the tolerant don’t tolerate the intolerant, then the tolerant are reneging on their basic premises; but
- (b) if they tolerate the intolerant they are logically obliged to do so even to the point where the intolerant destroy the system of toleration.

I’m inclined to accept a two-level view of tolerance/free speech or something like it, but how one plausibly argues for this is another matter. In the wake of *Charlie Hebdo* what is the way forward?

- a. A pragmatic or consequentialist approach. (My view: censorship usually blocks truth-seeking or self-government or both).

Or,

- β. A deontological or rights-based approach. Everyone has a moral right to free speech which is to be respected and protected *regardless* of the social cost.

The problem has a double dimension: it relates to the current state of political debate, the political sociology of tolerance where tolerance is being leached by its opponents; and the philosophical dimension of how this state of affairs can be countered, or at least addressed philosophically.

The most conservative society imaginable is consistent with liberal toleration. Presumably in a society with that degree of coherence and homogeneity, intolerance would not likely be a problem since there would not be enough disagreement to provoke intolerance. Liberal toleration can be particularist in the scope and limits of what is tolerated. And conservatism can be universalist in its view that all societies are historically and socially specific and none can escape this predicament. Also, there's the possibility that liberal toleration can be an element of a particular (conservative) tradition.

So is toleration then indexical to a socio-cultural-political ecosystem? Japan, say, doesn't court "cultural" diversity because it is already pretty much homogenous. Eastern Europe seems to have had enough of the external over-perturbations to their system, as you and I know full well, having independently in the '80s kept lines of communication open to dissidents and, in my case, refuseniks.¹⁸ Conservatism itself is indexical, too (p. 2). The army coup against Gorbachev was undertaken by people who wished to conserve the 70-year-old system. Of course we recognize toleration as a part of our "traditional manner of behavior": the liberal state accommodates the views and actions of socialists, communists, nationalists, Muslims, &c. It is not concerned with substantive conceptions of the good (Rawls). The liberal state should never initiate intolerance. But if intolerance is preached or practiced by any group of citizens, then the activities of that group are not to be tolerated. I see no paradox or incoherence here. Paradox or incoherence could only arise if the liberal state did what *ex hypothesi* it cannot do, namely promote a substantive conception of the good. Not tolerating the activities of a group on that rationale would introduce self-contradiction into the nature of the liberal state. But this cannot happen. A state that did this could not—definitionally not—be liberal.

The progressivist-rationalist conceit takes progress to be coextensive with *improvement*—morally, socially, techno-

logically, economically and scientifically. Conceived thus, it is clearly a "grand narrative" notion which, on closer scrutiny, is subject to all the weaknesses of such constructions. It is impossible to determine whether a change for the better in one part or aspect of the ecosystem is progressive for the system overall, since there is no Archimedean point from which progress can be assessed. *Every change alters some state of affairs, destroying or modifying it.* Wholesale change can only but inaugurate unintended consequences, as attested by the litany of horrors that so marked the twentieth century. Musil's protagonist in *The Man Without Qualities* captures this idea, in that every progressive step is also a retrogressive step (Musil 1930–1932/1995). This is also echoed by the master of paradox, Chesterton: "The theory of a complete change of standards in human history does not merely deprive us of the pleasure of honouring our fathers; it deprives us even of the more modern and aristocratic pleasure of despising them" (Chesterton 1908, p. 26).

When Enoch Powell delivered his 1968 Birmingham speech, the psychology driving his perturbatory concerns was fully understandable. Sadly (given how formidable a mind he was), he had the *wrong* demographic in mind, operating on a suspect metaphysic: that is, mistakenly conflating a *contingent* property with an essentialist metaphysic.¹⁹ The post-colonial level of perturbation that he was so concerned about turned out to be a good infusion of antifragility into the notion of Britishness, since the UK's newest residents were ones that fully subscribed to the extant *core* values of liberality. Samuel Huntington, Bernard Lewis, Christopher Hitchens, Robert Wistrich, and Walter Laqueur, though, did get it right.²⁰

NOTES

- 1 Unless otherwise specified, all references refer to Scruton 2017.
- 2 Burke’s “association between the dead, the living and the unborn” (p. 45; cf. your comments on Eliot, p. 93). “A state without the means of some change, is without the means of its own conservation” (Burke 2009/1790, p. 21).
- 3 An attitude or disposition (Johnson and Oakeshott respectively) or as you put it “a hesitation” (p. 33), all in a similar vein to (Marsh 2018).
- 4 “Liberty is not the foundation of social order but one of its by-products” (p. 52).
- 5 Ken Minogue was not averse to ribbing me about what he took to be improbable confluences of thought. He did eventually come round to appreciate that non-Cartesian cognitive science has a great deal of resonance to situated liberalism or conservatism if you like.
- 6 Many of these aspects are discussed in more detail in Abel and Marsh (2014, pp. 107-140) and in Hardwick and Marsh (2012).
- 7 I had this very conversation with John Gray at Jesus at the time of the original release of Gray 2007.
- 8 The globalist’s fantasy is embodied in the now defunct but not forgotten HSBC slogan “The World’s Local Bank”. The city in which I currently live has been subject to extreme perturbation within a very short period of time: there is palpable sense that swaths of it have become a generic (*οὐ-τόπος*) “everywhere and nowhere”, exhibiting the dislocated transience characteristic of an airport terminal. Insofar as the southern American experience is concerned (pp. 99-100), I’d recommend that you read the work of novelist-philosopher, Walker Percy, a kindred spirit to Eudora Welty and Flannery O’Connor.
- 9 “There is no such thing as society”—Margaret Thatcher in *Woman’s Own*, September 23, 1987. By contrast, identity in the Marxist tradition, in giving due recognition to ubiquitous sociality, has tended to posit inflated social ontologies. The political class’ (and other elitist groups’) sneering, scolding and hectoring of the precariat is a dreadful case of bad manners as you and Walker Percy understand (pp. 48-49), not to mention the hubris of Major, Blair, Merkel, H. Clinton, Trudeau, Macron, Juncker et al., spending down “trusts and endowments on their own self-made emergency” (p. 45). They now quell dissent via blasphemy law (M-103 in Canada) and via the unholy alliance of big data corporations in cahoots with governmental censorship—digital authoritarianism, the dark side to technocracy.
- 10 Bosanquet and Oakeshott were, of course, deeply influenced by the Hegelian tradition (pp. 62-67).
- 11 “It is probably no more justified to claim that thinking man has created his culture than that culture created his reason” (Hayek 1952/1979, p. 155).
- 12 A prominent case in point: consider the (“pussy-hatted”) sheep-like disproportionate support offered by the middle and upper classes for the Women’s March, tone-deaf to its Jew-hating leadership, a now commonplace mainstreamed dissimulation disguised as merely criticism of Israel and buttressed by useful idiots. These days the most interesting public free thinkers tend to fall on the classical liberal-conservative axis—many of them exiles from the illiberal Left.
- 13 Marsh 2018, p. 171 follows Freeden (1994) in marking the idea that ideologies are porous and as such are morphological.
- 14 The term *Eigenschaftslosigkeit* connotes the dual idea of diagnosis/remedy and evidence of profound alienation (Payne et al. 2007, p. 147).
- 15 Islamic Party of Canada:
<https://archive.li/Z0Nk4#selection-1057.0-1187.1>
- 16 The precariat being the very people servicing their lifestyle. A prominent herd-like referent for the “regressive”/illiberal Left is as per note 12.
- 17 Though the writing was on the wall twenty years ago in the UK, no-one in the most dystopian of scenarios could have envisaged the scale (numerically and time-wise) of the willfully overlooked depravity of Rotherham, Rochdale, Peterborough and other towns and cities besides, partly a function of the degradation of language into euphemistic hollowness. The “regressives” are conspicuously silent because most of the perpetrators are at the apex of the identitarian stack whereas the victims happen to be of the most dispossessed of the precariat.
- 18 In the mid-80s I was actively involved with the Women’s Campaign for Soviet Jewry (Gerlis 1996), taking in medical supplies, media, and items that had actual currency (scotch, Levis &c.). It was around this time, through you, that I discovered Kathy Wilkes’ Eastern European activities; I briefly met her via the good offices of Bill Newton-Smith. For those who might not know anything about her

see: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2003/sep/19/guardianobituaries.obituaries>. (I consider her *Real People* a minor classic). Years later I worked for the now defunct Sabre Foundation, an outfit that Jesse Norman was critically involved with as well, that began by shipping up-to-date science books to the then Eastern Block.

- 19 Niall Ferguson and I are in accord on this matter, the identitarian analog of the current “regressive” Left: <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/yes-i-agree-with-enoch-except-1581758.html>. You too say as much (pp. 7, 38, 50). Consider too the soft bigotry of the *Gutmenschen* (vanity dressed up as selfless conviction), “grievance studies” and “social justice” hucksters (with their worn-out “dreary orthodoxies”—p. 73), who as self-appointed representatives of historically “oppressed” groups, have, in effect, demeaned these groups’ moral and intellectual agency. One of the oddest paradoxes is that in their advocacy and despite their proclaimed “liberal” credentials, they are for all intents and purposes, cultural conservatives.
- 20 As per usual, much of the aforementioned discussion is the residue from a daily panel-beating with my colleague Dave Hardwick—though he may or may not agree with what’s been said here.

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Response to Symposium

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In response to this rich collection of essays, all animated by an enquiring spirit and a serious respect for the conservative position, I find myself somewhat at a loss for words. My little book on conservatism, subtitled, in its American imprint, ‘an invitation to the great tradition’, was intended to be the briefest possible summary of a vast and important body of thought. I was aware that I could not do justice to the many conservative arguments, some of them both profound and of enduring relevance, and I was aware too that I would have to take short cuts, and to leave out of consideration many writers whom others would think to be more important than some that I have included. What surprises me, however, is that so short a guide should have prompted such far-reaching arguments in response to it. My intention in this brief reply is to point to aspects of my work that were missing from my little book, and which should, I think, be brought into the debate that it was intended to catalyse.

Several writers have queried whether my over-arching vision of conservatism, as a ‘qualification within liberal individualism’, really does justice to the abundance of conservative thought, and to its foundations in a metaphysical of the human condition. Thus Eno Trimčev suggests that, in contrast to the empirical conservatism that I expound and defend, there is a metaphysical conservatism that is far older and more solidly based in the science of being. He mentions Heidegger, Patočka and Voegelin among moderns, along with the original political thinkers of ancient Greece. Conservatism of this metaphysical kind is a theoretical pursuit, part of the search for knowledge, which may have little to do with daily politics, but much to offer by way of clarifying our place in the world. My response is to admit the criticism. There are indeed metaphysical questions to which I need an answer, and which my emphasis on the dialectic between conservatism and liberalism leaves out of account. And a chapter to this effect would have certainly been a useful addition to the book.

And such a chapter would have offered an answer to two other commentators also. It would have enabled me to respond to Kevin Mulligan’s view that there is an un-

acknowledged proximity between my vision and that of Max Scheler, and to Nathan Robert Cockram’s view (echoing Trimčev) that there is a far older and more metaphysical foundation to be offered for the conservative vision than the argument (associated with Smith, Hume, Burke, Hayek and others) from the tacit nature of social knowledge. Cockram associates this metaphysical foundation with George Parkin Grant, whose *English-Speaking Justice* was, in fact, a powerful influence on my original account of conservatism, in *The Meaning of Conservatism* (1979). In response I say only that Grant’s path towards the Platonic realm is one that I have always hesitated to take, on account of a principle that I first announced in *The Meaning of Conservatism* and to which I have adhered, one way or another, ever since, namely the principle of the Priority of Appearance.

Politics occurs in the realm of seeming, not in the realm of being, and belongs to the social construction of the *Lebenswelt*, an enterprise that is touched upon by Kevin Mulligan in his insightful comparison with Scheler. Like Scheler I am a personalist, one who believes that what we humans fundamentally are is what we are for each other, in the person-to-person encounter. And, as Mulligan rightly perceives, this is the underlying theme of my recent work, notably *The Soul of the World*. This is why I feel such affinity for Sartre, despite his politics, and why I believe that the real content of what I am trying to say about the social and political condition of the world, cannot be summarised in philosophical argument alone.

Noel O’Sullivan is aware of this and therefore refers to two works that are not, strictly speaking, works of philosophy, namely *On Hunting* and *The Disappeared*. His account of my thinking is strongly influenced by his reading of the autobiographical fragments that I have let slip from time to time, *On Hunting* being one of them. What he says about that book is certainly interesting, though maybe he does not sufficiently acknowledge that it was written, as the life described in it has been lived, in a spirit of irony. Political philosophers tend to write of people as abstractions—

for instance as the rational choosers of game theory, or the classes and masses of Marxism. Those are respectable topics, of course. But when trying to blue-tack the fluttering fabric of politics to your bedroom wall you have to use individuals, imagined in their particularity, and burdened with their perceptions. Nothing else makes the fabric stick. That is what Sartre did in *La Nausée* and Nietzsche, in a very different way, in *Ecce Homo* and the *Anti-Christ*.

On Hunting describes my exit from the academic world into the green fields of England, learning to love my country properly for the first time. And like everything I have loved, the leftists immediately stepped in to destroy it, as though they had been waiting all along for me to make a move in this direction. (All conservatives, it should be remembered, are incipiently paranoid.) Responding to the malicious ban on hunting I became a bit more of a liberal. I understood what motivates the left in modern politics, namely the hatred of privilege, and also the hatred of those who possess it. I understood too that we have no real protection against the left, other than the culture of liberty. Nietzsche saw the problem clearly, in his analysis of *ressentiment*. But being a raging narcissist, he did not bother to look for a political solution. On the whole liberals don't see the need to stand up for ancient liberties—not even, as we have seen recently, the liberty to speak your mind. They tend to sympathise with leftists, and see liberty not as an intrinsic good, but as a necessary means to impose a culture of equality. What Burke had in mind in defending the 'little platoons', and what Hegel had in mind in distinguishing civil society from the state, have both slipped from the liberal agenda. Liberals see the social contract as a way of transferring individual sovereignty to the all-knowing, all-powerful and benevolent state, which will then use its power for the benefit of everyone, foxes included.

You get used to hatred in time, but one reason why I have had to endure more than my fair share is the issue of immigration—towards which political philosophy has turned a blind eye. The story is well enough known. I was editor of the *Salisbury Review*, the only journal founded explicitly as a journal of conservative thought. I received an article from an exasperated headmaster in a Yorkshire school, relating the immense difficulty he experienced in integrating children from a rural Pakistani background into the classroom, and providing them with the knowledge and skills that he was duty-bound to deliver. I published the article, and that was the beginning of the end of my academic career.

What the headmaster, Ray Honeyford, said was true and now universally acknowledged to be so. No one knows what to do about it. However, in common with Pierre Manent and others, I think that the underlying issue is the test case for the intellectual integrity of contemporary conservatism. Kieron O'Hara rightly complains that, in my final chapter, I identify only this and political correctness as the issues to be addressed—though he acknowledges that I discuss some of the other things that are important to him, notably environmental philosophy, elsewhere in my writings. But I want to insist that, if conservatism is to be about realities, then the arrival of the Islamic worldview in the heart of our settled nation states, founded as they are on national rather than religious loyalty, is one of the matters that will define, for us living now, exactly what conservatism can mean in the future.

That brings me back to *The Disappeared*, which is the story of a Northern English city, not a million miles from that where Honeyford was a teacher, nor a million miles from Rotherham, whose sorry tale of sexual abuse it strives to encapsulate. Writing this story was my way of confronting what Samuel Huntington skates over in *The Clash of Civilisations*, and what is merely caricatured in Rawls's attempt to marginalise our many 'conceptions of the good'. It took me back to another of my topics, again absent from this 'invitation to the great tradition', namely sexual desire and its place in a fully personalised and political world.

Nicholas Capaldi asks the real conservatives to stand up, and I applaud the gesture. But it is in this area that they are most reluctant to do so. What *do* we think about sex, the family, sexual liberation, and those vestiges of the 'ethic of pollution and taboo' which keep coming to the surface, as in the MeToo movement, and as in the cases of sexual abuse in cities like Rotherham? The abusers described in *The Disappeared* regard their victims as being in a state of pollution or *najāsa*. Losing their purity the girls have nothing more to lose. Abuse, in such circumstances, ceases to be considered as abuse and becomes instead a kind of ritual re-enactment of the victim's loss of status. The story I told was about purity—the story of one girl's bid to retain it, another's to regain it, and of their abusers' sister, in her bid to defend it to the death. But purity is not a concept that features in liberal political philosophy. And this marks an interesting distinction between liberals and conservatives. Liberals have no idea what to say about purity and pollution; conservatives know what to say, but daren't.

Writing fiction you are looking at the other who is also you. This is a part of seeing what is at stake in politics.

Self-knowledge begins from knowledge of the Other, and this is one of the lessons that has come down to us from Hegel, and one of the reasons why he is, for me, the peak of conservative philosophy. Efraim Podoksik issues a mild reproach that I have not considered the other German thinkers on whom the indigenous conservative tradition depends—Stahl, Müller, von Haller—and argues that, set on the scale that those authors define, Hegel does not offer much in the way of conservative *avoir-du-poids*. That may be true, but unlike them Hegel provides a way of conceptualising the modern world that has proved invaluable to all of us, conservatives, liberals and socialists alike.

There are thinkers with interesting conclusions but few philosophical arguments, like Russell Kirk. And there are those, like Hegel, with real arguments that might lead as easily in a liberal or socialist as in a conservative direction, but on whose conceptions the mind can feed. My ‘invitation’, being short, had to choose between them, and that explains why I was so selective in the chapter devoted to the continentals. There is nothing in that chapter on Italy, despite Croce and Pareto, and nothing anywhere in the book on the Czechs—Masaryk, Patočka, Havel, three of my favourite thinkers. As for the Russians—Soloviev, Berdyaev, etc.—it seemed best not to mention them. That way I did my bit for Russian paranoia.

There is an important point to be made, however, that is not made so far as I can see by any of the commentators, and which again concerns the literary, rather than the philosophical side of the conservative vision. Many of those whom I identify as central figures in the tradition are not, strictly speaking, political philosophers—certainly not in the manner of Hobbes or Locke. Johnson was a poet, a critic and an astounding cultural presence. Burke was a politician and a master of political rhetoric. Chateaubriand was a world-historical figure comparable to Goethe. And on the continent the conservative virus was injected into the political organism largely by such literary figures, whose spiritual influence spread rapidly through the culture, reminding people of what they fundamentally are. Chateaubriand’s *Mémoires d’outre-tombe*, for example, contains no philosophical arguments, no exhortations, no recipes for the rescue of humankind. Yet it conveys more vividly than any philosophical discourse the reasons why France exists and deserves to exist, as a real first-person plural. As Trimçev reminds us, my emphasis on the ‘we’—the pre-political unity that makes politics possible—unites me with such figures from the romantic movement. And to discuss the matter fully would take me into a cultural hin-

terland where conservatism elides into liberalism and both into the mystical adulation of the self. Maybe the reader should be glad that I didn’t go there.

In conclusion, though, it should be said that the commentators are right to recognize the shortcomings of my book, and to criticize me, as several do, for not saying as much as I should say about the global economy, and about the rise of a new kind of capitalism that seems to confer sovereignty on multinational businesses, and to downgrade the nation state to the status of a mere petitioner before the geeks and nerds on their cyber-thrones. Things are moving fast, and it could be that my potted history is a history of a vanished way of thinking. That may also be because thinking itself has vanished, in a world where people don’t think but tweet instead. I would like to believe, however, that it is liberals and reactionaries, rather than true conservatives, whose voices fill the twitter-sphere, and that the few sanctuaries remaining are occupied by quiet conservatives who both know the truth, and are resolved not to complain about it on Twitter.

Editorial Information

AIMS AND SCOPE

COSMOS + TAXIS takes its name and inspiration from the Greek terms that F. A. Hayek famously invoked to connote the distinction between *spontaneous orders* and *consciously planned orders*.

COSMOS + TAXIS offers a forum to those concerned that the central presuppositions of the liberal tradition have been severely corroded, neglected, or misappropriated by overly rationalistic and constructivist approaches. The hardest-won achievements of the liberal tradition has been the wrestling of epistemic independence from overwhelming concentrations of power, monopolies and capricious zealotries. The very precondition of knowledge is the exploitation of the *epistemic* virtues accorded by society's *situated* and *distributed* manifold of spontaneous orders, the DNA of the modern civil condition.

COSMOS + TAXIS is a joint initiative run under the auspices of the Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine at The University of British Columbia and the Political Science Department at Simon Fraser University. All content is made freely available.

COSMOS + TAXIS is not committed to any particular school of thought but has as its central interest any discussion that falls within the *classical* liberal tradition as outlined above.

COSMOS + TAXIS publishes papers on *complexity* broadly conceived in a manner that is accessible to a general multidisciplinary audience with particular emphasis on political economy and philosophy.

COSMOS + TAXIS offers a forum distinctively engaging the growing confluence of interest in situated and distributed liberalism emanating from the Scottish tradition, Austrian and behavioral economics, non-Cartesian philosophy and moral psychology, philosophy of social science, social epistemology, and political philosophy.

COSMOS + TAXIS invites submissions on a wide range of topics concerned with the dilemma of upholding ethical norms while also being mindful of unintended consequences.

COSMOS + TAXIS publishes a wide range of content: refereed articles, topical issues and book symposia, though to moderated discussion articles, literature surveys and reviews. If you'd like to make a thematic proposal as a guest editor or suggest a book review, please contact the managing editor.

Books for review should be sent to:

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Submitting an article to COSMOS + TAXIS implies that it is not under consideration (and has not been accepted) for publication elsewhere. COSMOS + TAXIS will endeavor to complete the refereeing process in a timely manner (i.e. a publication decision will be made available within three months). All submissions should be in digital format, and emailed to:

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Papers should be double-spaced, in 12 point font, Times New Roman. Accepted papers are usually about 6,000-8,000 words long. However, we are willing to consider manuscripts as long as 12,000 words (and even more under very special circumstances). All self-identifying marks should be removed from the article itself to facilitate blind review. In addition to the article itself, an abstract should be submitted as a separate file (also devoid of author-identifying information). Submissions should be made in Word doc format.

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ELEMENTS OF STYLE

1. Submissions should be in English, on consecutively numbered pages. American, Canadian and UK spellings and punctuation are acceptable as long as they adhere consistently to one or the other pattern.
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3. All notes should be as end notes.
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