

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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