Rationality and Tradition in Roger Scruton's Thought

Abstract

Having been brought up in the analytical tradition of philosophy, Roger Scruton was desperate to delineate the philosophical-conceptual foundations of conservatism. This chapter is going to focus on Scruton's criticism of enlightened reason as one of the main pillars of a conservative edifice of modern politics.

The chapter has the following structure. First, it recollects a biographical episode of Scruton's life, which led him to distance himself from enlightened rationality. He happened to witness the street violence of May 1968 in Paris, in the heyday of progressivist ideological breakthrough. Apparently, it was this shocking experience which predestined his turn towards conservatism. Yet his one was a rather complex intellectual development. Relying on Burke's critique of the French revolution, Scruton's British version of conservatism argues that in the socio-political realm, individual rationality should often yield to manners, custom and traditional institutions. An analysis of Rousseau's concept of rationality prepares the ground for the presentation of two terms of Scruton's positive account of conservatism. One of those is social knowledge, based on practical wisdom. The other one is the concept of *oikophilia*. The chapter gives a shorthand account of both of these concepts, outcomes of his criticism of enlightened rationality. The conclusion consists of two, complementary claims. The first is that Scruton was a modernist, accepting much of the Enlightenment's teaching. The second is that he was an enlightened critic of the Enlightenment, like Burke. He, too, thought that enlightened rationality needs a counterpoise, which he found in Burkean traditionalism, in the notion of an inherited stock of social knowledge, and in his defence of *oikophilia* and local patriotism.

Scruton's disillusionment of Enlightened rationality in 1968

Scruton gave a detailed account of how he turned towards conservatism, in May 1968, in Paris, in an article written for The New Criterion, and published in February, 2003, and republished with minor revisions in his book-length autobiographical recollections, *Gentle Regrets. Thought from a Life*.[1] He was only 24 in that year, and he visited Paris to learn the ways of the world. What he saw in the Quartier Latin in those days was enough for him to reconsider his basic political convictions. A Cambridge-educated intellectual, he was supposed to identify himself with the cause of the left. Yet the vandalising performance of the students of Paris were more than simply disconcerting. It presented a view of the world, dramatized by the improvisations of the demonstrators, which was subversive, inconsistent and aggressive. What he saw was the victory of the revolutionaries: "policemen injured, cars set alight, slogans chanted, graffiti daubed. The bourgeoisie were on the run…"[2]

TO make sense of the personal experiences of street brutality, indirectly he could rely on an analysis of the events by Antonin Artaud, the author of the "theatre of cruelty", whose message was mediated by two personal acquaintances. The proposal of the theatre director was to look at the events as "the artistic transfiguration of…bourgeois life."[3] The other one came from the famous philosopher of the intellectual opposition, Michel Foucault. His *Les mots et les choses* was regarded

[1] Roger Scruton: Why I became a Conservative, The New Criterion, February, 2003., available at: https://newcriterion.com/issues/2003/2/why-i-became-a-conservative
Slightly revised version: Roger Scruton: How I became a Conservative, in Scruton: Gentle Regrets. Thoughts from a Life, Continuum, London – New York, 2005.33-56.
[2] Gentle Regrets, 34.
[3] Gentle Regrets, 34.

by the revolutionaries as their Bible.[4] Scruton characterized this cult book as "an artful book, composed with a satanic mendacity".[5] He criticised its message as simple rhetoric, with a direct conclusion: "Where there is power there is oppression. And where there is oppression there is the right to destroy."[6] Scruton was not alone to look at the actions in the streets as a direct translation of Foucault's message into action.

Yet he needed to find the right response to Foucault's subversive message. The logical question is how to distinguish oppression from the use of power. Scruton in these years started to study for the Bar, in order to obtain "a career in which realities enjoyed an advantage over utopias".[7] Although he finished his studies, he did not change career to become a lawyer. Yet an unintended side-effect of those studies was that he found the response to Foucault's celebrated message. It was the common law of England. "The common law of England is proof that… power can exist without oppression…English law, I discovered, is the answer to Foucault."[8]

It is remarkable that, indeed, Scruton was able to answer the theoretical question of Foucault, with the help of the living reality of English Common Law. To put it more precisely, by the implicit logic of it. In the common law of England, neither laws nor particular judgements are based on *a priori* principles. Instead, they are based on principles originating in immemorial customs. What is remarkable about this phenomenon, is that the unplanned nature of legal evolution ensures that the substance of the law reflects the actual logic of human symbiosis (a term used by Johannes Althusius) in the context of the European engagement with the rule of law. In the Common Law tradition Scruton was able to discover the inner logic of a coherent system, which was not built on a kind of premeditated legislation, and which was, therefore, the direct opposite of social engineering. HE was also aware of the difference between the framework of the common law and that of the modern Continental legal systems. Both the legal theory of the French Code Napoleon, and the principles of the Enlightened Prussian law books were based on what Max Weber calls a legal-rational frame of mind. The English Common Law, on the other hand, preserved its traditional nature, and with it a legal mindset which is able to uphold social peace and a settled way of life without initiating radical social transformations in the name of progress and Enlightenment.

After Scruton found the conservative ideal in the spirit of the common law, his next step was to find those thinkers who share a view of politics close enough to the Common Law model. And he soon found one such hero in the person of Edmund Burke, the first and characteristically British critic of the French Revolution. Burke famously represented an alternative rationality, in direct contrast with the voluntarist Enlightened social rationality of the French republican tradition, which Scruton rediscovered in the ideology of the revolutionaries of Paris, in 1968.

Burke's criticism of Enlightened rationality

Scruton's account of Burke is not black and white. This is because Burke's position itself was not always clear, as his general philosophy largely depended on his actual political stance, and as his reactions on the changing landscape of contemporary politics demanded reformulations and

[4] Michel Foucault: Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines, Paris, Gallimard, 1966, translated into English as The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, London: Tavistock Publications Ltd., 1970.
[5] Gentle Regrets, 35.
[6] Scruton, Ibid.
[7] Gentle Regrets, 37.
[8] Gentle Regrets, 37.

refinements – or, for that matter, even more radical reformulations as well. Let us have a look at two of Scruton's descriptions of Burke, focusing on Burke's criticism of Enlightened rationalism.[9]

The first of these reconstructions can be read in the chapter on Paris '68 in Gentle Regrets that we relied on so far. Here, the cause of Scruton's sympathy with Burke is a shared intellectual interest: that both of them focused on the philosophy of art and on political thought as well. Scruton here makes it obvious that his turn towards a conservative political philosophical position had an aesthetic starting point: his dissatisfaction with the recent trends of modernist architecture, including its background intentions of its "denial of the past, its vandalization of the landscape and townscape, and its attempt to purge the world of history".[10] He had to realize that like Burke, he is facing a reality, which destroys people's sense of "community, home and settlement".[11]

It was from Burke's account of the causes of the French Revolution that he learnt that there is a specific type of rationality behind the subversive ideology of the revolutionaries: "he persuaded me that the utopian promises of socialism go hand in hand with a wholly abstract vision of the human mind".[12] The political application of the French Enlightenment was in fact an exaggerated form of rationality, a "rational pursuit of liberty, equality, fraternity" which turned social order upside-down in vain, drifting fast towards a "militant irrationality".[13] This is because this rationality claimed collective validity, and the only form of collective rationality, which can be executed is in fact war. Now the twentieth century indeed proved the risks of waring ideologies, and '68 Paris revitalised similar threats as did the 1989 outbreak of collective violence.

According to Scruton, Burke's response to this form of militant rationality was a "subtle defence of tradition, prejudice and custom against the enlightened plans of the reformers."[14] Scruton's own approach to the notion of political preservation is once again via art and in particular, via literature. He refers to Eliot's Famous essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, which is important for him, as a devoted admirer of Eliot's own modern art. As he reads Eliot's essay, it is about adaptation in order to preserve; an idea, which is important for Scruton both in art – where much of his interest lies in the classics -, and in politics. As he understands it, conservative politics is about adaptation to the moment, in order to preserve the best of the past. As Eliot's sort of poetic modernism was not a denial of the past, but rather a continuum with it, an update of the classical idiom to fit the new environment. The survival of tradition depends on the authority of prejudices and the exercise of customs – all of which seemed to be irrational to the Enlightened thinkers, who threw them out from their conceptual repertoire. Instead, the "abstract rational systems of the philosophers" have been forced on society, causing tremendous calamities and political cataclysms.

The reference to Eliot's essay also shows that Scruton is not a traditionalist, however, in the strong sense of the world. He is fully engaged with the contemporary world, and does not deny the real advantages it offers to us. And his reading of Burke does not present the Irish author as a simple nostalgic thinker, who could not accommodate himself to the modern conditions of politics. In the third essay of his book on Modern Culture, which deals with the Enlightenment, and which has a motto from the British poet, Philip Larkin's poem, *Church going*, he returns to a description of

[9] Fort he presetn author's account of the same topic see:
[10] Gentle Regrets, 39.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Gentle Regrets, 40.
[13] Ibid
[14] Gentle Regrets, 41.

Burke.[15] Here, too, Scruton presents Burke's argument as "a sustained defence of 'prejudice'" against the 'reason' of Enlightenment thinking.[16] Yet he is pronounced about the modern component in Burke's thought, as well. In Scruton's interpretation, the Irish critic of French revolutionary manners turns out to be an enlightened person himself: "Only an enlightened person could think as Burke did".[17] Scruton's point is the interior paradox of both prejudice and tradition: once you recognize either of them as part of your own package, you are not part of them. And that is exactly what Burke does, and that is what turns him into – a conservative. There is no conservatism in the context of a living, and therefore unreflected practice of prejudice and tradition. Scruton lists Burke among the internal adversaries of the Enlightenment – he is one of the enlightened critics of Enlightenment rationality. In this respect he is comparable, and he is indeed compared to those mostly German critics of the mostly French Enlightenment, who were fully aware of the losses resulting from the triumph of the Enlightenment over "inherited attachments".[18] The comparison of Burke with Herder is not obviously true or convincing as a general claim. The comparison holds, however, Scruton thought, as far as their views in defence of local customs were concerned.

Interestingly, he finds that this internal schism in his relationship to the Enlightement makes Burke's position the stronger, and defends his notion of rationality against the instrumental rationality of the universalist trend within the Enlightenment. While Scruton was not against Kantian rationalism, and described the Enlightenment as identifiable by "a respect for reason", he went with Herder to lament the losses of those values which seem to be "most precious in the human soul – namely, the local, the loyal and the rooted."[19]

In other words, Scruton's elaborate view of Burke and the Enlightenment is rather complex. It is based on his critical stance about the potential of the sciences of making sense of the human condition. As he saw, the Enlightenment identified itself with the rise of modern science, as exemplified by the oeuvre of Kant. The progress of science made possible a focus on individual liberty, but the social and political program initiated by that negative concept of freedom led to the destruction of established authority and a growing scepticism about divine command. 18th century German culture produced an alternative to the Enlightenment as established in France and embodied by the thought of Kant – this is what Scruton calls Herder's advocacy of 'culture' against 'civilisation'. This challenge offered a different perspective on human nature. For Kant, who represented the forefront of the enlightened trust of modern science, the distinctive feature of the human being is reflexivity or rationality, the capacity to produce a verified account of the external world, and of the place of the human being in it. Yet the human phenomenon is more than the result of causally necessary external events. In his moral philosophy Kant stressed that human beings are also agents with a free will, who are able to sustain their own realm of subjectivity. To give a full description of the human agent, one needs to be able to hint at the internal dimension of human consciousness as well. Scruton reconstructs the genealogy, or intellectual history of the subjective aspect of human consciousness. It originates from Vico, the Italian professor of rhetoric, and leads through Schleiermacher, the romantic theologian, to Wilhelm Dilthey, a thinker of scientific method and historical understanding. Already Vico's New Science hinted at a specific form of understanding, which belongs to the human sciences and poetry, in contrast with the Cartesian account of rationality. Schleiermacher pushed forward this idea, arguing for a specific way of understanding,

[15] Roger Scruton: Enlightenment, in : Modern Culture, Continuum International Publishing Group, London – New York. 1998/2005.
[16] Modern Culture, 25.
[17] Modern Culture, 25.
[18] Modern Culture, 25.
[19] Modern Culture, 22.

called hermeneutics, a way of thought adapted to the nature of human actions and human reflection. Finally, Dilthey elaborated a whole theory of the specific way of understanding characteristic of human societies, which he called "*Verstehen*" (understanding, interpretation), a term he used as a counterpart of "*Erklären"* (explanation), the particular form of knowledge which is the result of the investigation of science. While science focused on the individual being, both the hermeneutic approach and Dilthey's *Verstehen* gives an account of the human being in a constant interaction with others. This is why this kind of understanding can give a more reliable picture of the role played in our life by "institutions, customs, laws and culture".[20] It is through Dilthey's understanding, that a conservative approach to the social world seems to be more promising, than the revolutionary fervour inspired by Kantian and French enlightened rationality.

As we argued, the hermeneutic approach to the human phenomenon, initiated by Schleiermacher, can be seen as a reaction to the exaggerated hopes of enlightened reason. Yet Scruton is careful to distinguish the sort of criticism provided in the German philosophical tradition from the Marxist criticism of an acclaimed bourgeois ideology, which is claimed to bear the mask of culture, but which is much more about the use of power against the mass. Scruton is ready to admit, in fact proudly claims, that the Enlightenment is part of our own self-consciousness, today, in the West. However, its achievements, of which a focus on the liberty of the individual is certainly is crucial, have their disadvantageous consequences as well. In order to show the unalienable rights of the individual, the Enlightenment succeeded to cut some of the major links which connects the individual to society. This is why the Enlightenment was from the very beginning criticised from the inside of the movement. Vico is just one example of this, Rousseau another one. Burke, too, just as the German line from Schleiermacher to Dilthey, were inspired by this very enlightened criticism of what came to be called methodological individualism, characteristic of the liberal heritage of enlightened thought. This criticism called attention to the social-political relevance of the community in human life. Communities cannot be sustained on the principles of the social contract and on the assumptions of instrumental rationalism. The hero of enlightened individualism is lost in loneliness, "a stranger among strangers".[21] This is because the tradition of the community is destructed by the power of individual rationality. "Communities depend upon the force which Burke called prejudice; they are essentially local, bound to a place, a history, a language and a common culture."[22] They need protection from the challenge of the universal appeal of enlightened rationalism.

Scruton's criticism of Rousseau and liberalism

In an important article, Scruton focuses on the relationship between the rationally defined individual and his abandoned community, as embodied by Rousseau. Scruton presents the foundation of liberalism in this article in the context of a philosophical criticism of the social ideas of the French enlightened thinker.[23] Scruton's biting criticism identified the subversive theories of Rousseau as part of the Enlightenment's overall attack on society. This war against society was waged in the name of nature. Now of course nature and society can be constructed as polar opposites. Yet this is only possible if you look at society with the eye of the social constructivist, who is proud enough to suppose that he (usually they were males) is able to rearrange society so as to better fit our concept of nature. Yet to test society with the standards of our *a priori*, or science-based concept of nature is nothing less but social constructivism. This is of course, a later term, but it more or less covers the

[20] Modern Culture, 27.
[21] Modern Culture, 27.
[22] Modern Culture, 28.
[23] Scruton: Rousseau & the origins of liberalism (The New Criterion, 1998) Republlished in The Roger Scruton Reader, compiled by Mark Dooley, Continuum, London and New York, 2009., 43-55.,

mindset of Rousseau and the active practice of the French revolutionaries. Both the philosopher and the revolutionary felt authorized to encroach on the affairs of society, in order to achieve a better harmony between it and their own concept of nature. This happened because French intellectuals found their societies lacked certain features which they deemed would have been essential. Certainly, those societies had serious flaws, and certainly, intellectuals had strong arguments against those flaws. The more so if they experienced political persecution for their unorthodox views – we know, that Rousseau, too, was a target of Versailles. The Enlightenment created the modern republic of letters as a rebellion against accepted opinion, in the name of reason. Rousseau was in the centre of this newly conceived circle of French intellectuals: he was even much more radical, than most of the others. He could not tolerate the intolerance of the regime that he lived under. His criticism was close to an attack on society, or at least against "the inherited forms of social knowledge".[24] As a philosopher, he mobilized his creative rational genius to destroy the forms of traditional institutionalised knowledge within his urban (Genevan) and national (French) community.

Scruton, on the other hand, wanted to preserve the "inherited forms of social knowledge". Both the common law and British parliamentary procedures were, of course, part of the traditional political and legal culture of his home country, Britain. To study the existing discourse of law turned out to be crucial for him. Later he added to that background knowledge a systematic investigation of British parliamentary procedures. The two together count as the foundations of British liberty: "I remain convinced that the core of our political inheritance, which is the common law and the culture of compromise that grows from it, retains its ancient sovereignty over both the government and the feelings of the English-speaking people…".[25]

Certainly, the British system was different from the French one – yet Scruton seems to share Burke's conviction, that the subversion of the inherited institutions and procedures was contra-productive and irrational in France, too. Yet Burke could not convince Rousseau about this, partly because the French thinker died too early for that.[26] But partly, also, because Rousseau proved to be the paradigm case of the progressive public intellectual, who is much better in criticising than in defending existing values. Scruton points out that Rousseau's refined sense of paradox made him a perfect subject for questioning existing states of affairs, and that as a philosopher he did not appreciate prejudice, which is a prerequisite to protect existing things. [27] He makes use of the two concepts as catchwords for two different ways of thinking, in fact of two different forms of rationality: "Paradox is the mark of *a priori* thinking—thinking from first principles in a situation where human nature has been encrusted by custom and habit." On the other hand, accepting prejudice is the prerequisite of conservatism. Instead of preserving the existing social frameworks, Rousseau prefers to measure them against *a priori* standards. While he had no chance to test his own theory against the standards of peaceful social coexistence, Burke and Scruton both had the chance to see how Robespierre and his comrades translated the bright logical paradoxes of the philosophers into bloody deeds of social unrest, massacre and bloodshed.

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[24] Scruton: Rousseau, 47.

[25] Scruton: Philosophy and Public Culture. A public lecture at Princeton University, April 3., 2017. Available at: https://www.roger-scruton.com/archive/lectures-speeches/usa/439-philosophy-and-the-public-culture-a-public-lecture-at-princeton-university-april-17

[26] Even Hume, who was an exact contemporary of Rousseau, and who did his best to offer him an asylum from the vexations of the French emperor in Brigtain, was not able to convince Rousseau of the utility of well functioning tradition-based institutions.

[27] Scruton quotes Rousseau from Émile: „J'aime mieux être homme à paradoxes qu'homme à préjugés." Scruton: Rousseau and the Origins

Burke was applying the essential early-modern British experience of civil war and bloodshed, caused by religious zeal, the uncontrolled outburst of religious enthusiasm, in his interpretation of the outbreak of the French Revolution. He was not alone to suspect Rousseau's radical thought behind the acts of the revolutionaries. Scruton calls the fervour of the avant-garde of the revolution a "quasi-religious quest", a search for the perfect social arrangement, "a God's-eye view of all our brief arrangements".[28]

We read in Hume, that the Enlightenment struggled against the double-enemy of superstition and enthusiasm.[29] The same way Scruton describes "a holy war waged against superstition in the name of God".[30] Yet the interesting thing is that Hume certainly did not become a devote believer in a fight against superstition, and he did not want to get rid of customs and habits by any price. Hume rather took a sceptical position as far as the search for perfection in politics was concerned. The same way Scruton always kept his scepticism as far as political redemption was concerned. He started out from the assumption of the fallen nature of the human species, and in particular, of the human individual. He also rejected the idea of a social contract, which played such a major role in the work of Rousseau. Burke shared with Hume these doubts about the possibility of a social contract, as did Scruton himself. The human being remains, inherently fallible, that is his basic, conservative assumption, and modernity is no exemption from this rule. This makes all efforts to fight superstition reasonable, while for him custom itself should not be seen as part and parcel of the package of enthusiasm and superstition to be overcome. Instead, custom is, in fact, the remedy against mistaken actions. It is through custom, that individuals can partake of the wisdom of their community. Yet there are different forms of scepticism. Hume's scepticism determines his more detached attitude towards political phenomena – this is, what makes him the unbiased critic of things Whig and Tory alike. Yet Hume's scepticism also distances him from the religious phenomenon: he finds religious piety too close to superstition and enthusiasm. Scruton, on the other hand, seems to draw a different lesson from his sceptical experience. To realise human frailty is a good reason to see why a pious attitude to the world and God might be well-founded. "Piety is not confined to the temple and the altar. It is an attitude to life, based in a recognition of our frailty and a respect for the dead."[31] Scruton is especially keen to show that piety, the key virtue to a sense of religion, leads not only closer to God, but also closer to our community. And it is the Roman concept of *pietas* which comes back in his claim that through piety we can reconfirm our respect for the dead. In this respect he refers back to Cicero's idea of *pietas*: "religion is the term applied to the fear (*metus*) and worship (*caerimonia*) of the gods. *Pietas* warns us to keep our obligations to our country or parents or other kin."[32] And of course he is also referring to Burke's famous account of an extended social contract, or rather a covenant among the different generations of our community: „Society, Burke pointed out, is an open-ended partnership (he even said "contract") between generations. The dead and the unborn are as much members of society as the living."[33] Scruton recalls Burke's legal notion of trusteeship as an explanatory vehicle to show how societies can survive so long: you can rely on the achievements

[28] Scruton: Rousseau
[29] David Hume: Of Superstition and Enthusiasm, in: Hume: Essays, Moral, Political and Literary, Liberty Classics, Indianapolis, 1985, 1987. 73-79.
[30] Scruton: Rousseau
[31] Scruton: Rousseau
[32] Cicero: Cic.Inv. Rhet. 2. 66. Quoted in Oxford Classical Dictionary, https://oxfordre.com/classics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.001.0001/acrefore-9780199381135-e-5079
[33]

of the preceding generations, but you also have an obligation to take care of the heritage and preserve it for the nex generations which come after you.

Piety as a respect for the dead and a vigilance to keep those customs which are crucial for your community are two of the crucial concepts that describe the rationality of the long-term success of communities, according to the lessons Scruton draws from a criticism of Rousseau and an appreciation of Burke. Mainstream liberalism cannot stand the test of these two concepts – for the root assumption of that ideology is that „we can jettison all institutions, traditions, and conventions and decide how to make them anew".[34] Now this trust of individual, instrumental human rationality reaches a kind of hubris according to Scruton, and misunderstands the mechanism of society, in which individual habits add up to social customs, and they are much harder to change than enlightened intellectuals might have expected. Yet the destruction of institutions can lead to the disfunctioning of the political sphere, endangering the everyday life of the masses, as it happened in the French revolution after 1789, and in the Paris revolts of 1968.

Interestingly enough, however, when Scruton explains the mechanism of the indirect knowledge which characterises the market or the law, his references are to classical liberals, or liberal-conservatives. He refers to the Austrian economists, e.g. Ludwig von Mises, and their criticism of the centralised economic model of socialism, to Oakeshott's attack on rationalism in politics, and to von Hayek's account of the social knowledge embedded in the theory and practice of the law. He relies on a tradition of old-school liberalism, which is quite easy to negotiate with social conservatism, and the logic of the rule of law and a market economy plays a crucial role in that tradition.

Embodied Social Knowledge

It is from this tradition of Austro-British liberal conservatism that Scruton takes over and develops his own notion of social knowledge. In what follows I would like to show that he has got a powerful positive teaching about the form of knowledge that he associates with conservatism, which points well beyond a criticism of socialist *dirigisme*, or the individualist way of liberal thinking.

He defines the term the following way: "By social knowledge, I mean the kind of knowledge embodied in the common law, in parliamentary procedures, in manners, costume, social convention, and, also, in morality."[35] So he regards social knowledge as embodied knowledge – a term, which plays a major role in recent trends of epistemology.[36] Scruton is aware of the French phenomenological school of the recent past, and in particular of Merleau-Ponty, who played a major role in working out the theme.[37] But he is also aware of the fact that the whole French philosophical occupation with the concept of the "other", from Sartre up to Levinas. This interest was to a large extent due to the indirect influence of Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, which was transmitted to Paris by Alexandre Kojève in a lecture series between 1933 and 1939. Hegel, indeed, played a major role in the birth of Scruton's concept of social knowledge. Yet I am inclined to think that his reading of Hegel was only helpful to make explicit a practice he was already familiar with by the time he started to study Hegel in a systematic manner. I would think that his own tradition, the common law

[34] Scruton: Rousseau
[35] Scruton: Rousseau
[36] Shapiro, Lawrence and Shannon Spaulding, "Embodied Cognition", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/embodied-cognition/>.
[37] THis is how Scruton describes Merleau-Ponty's take on the concept of embodied knowledge: „For Merleau-Ponty the Other is both outside me and within, revealed in the phenomenology of my own embodiment." Roger Scruton: Confessions of a Sceptical Francophile, available at: https://www.roger-scruton.com/articles/284-confessions-of-a-sceptical-francophile

of England, and the convention-based parliamentary procedures of the British Parliament must have played more important role in his choice. We know his lifelong interest in the history and political arrangement of Britain, and in particular, of England, as illustrated in his books on the nation, on England and on settling.[38] When Scruton writes about embodied knowledge he certainly the knowledge accumulated within a particular society. A sort of knowledge that has never been made explicit, with the help of a strictly defined symbolic language, like the ones used in the natural sciences or in mathematics. Instead, this knowledge dwells in the attitudes of people, in their interactions with each other, and generally, in the relational patterns of a field of practice.

Yet embodied is not the only adjective used by Scruton to define the social knowledge he has in mind. He also adds that the relevant practices are "inherited forms of social knowledge".[39] Inheritance in this case means that these institutionalised practices come from the past, and therefore they can be seen as long-term forms of accumulated knowledge. But Scruton is careful to note that this epistemological accumulation is different from the way money or scientific knowledge is accumulated. Conceptual knowledge can be encapsulated in texts on screen or in printed books. Social knowledge, on the other hand, exists only in and through its repeated exercise: "it is social, tacit, practical, and can never be captured in a formula or plan."[40] Once again, we should pay attention to the adjectives: social knowledge is tacit and practical. I would argue that the term tacit in Scruton's description refers to the famous work by Michael Polányi, with the title Tacit Knowledge.[41] But then the question may be raised, what is the source of his term practical. I have got two suggestions. Either Scruton refers to Michael Oakeshott or to Aristotle (or perhaps to both). Oakeshott, who distinguished practical knowledge from technical knowledge, defined the first the following way: "it exists only in use, is not reflective and (unlike technique) cannot be formulated in rules."[42] Obviously this is something quite close to what Scruton identifies as social knowledge – the more so, if we take into account that Oakeshott proposes to call practical knowledge also traditional knowledge. His example is cookery, claiming that the art of good cooking cannot be learnt only from books. The disciple has to learn by imitating those who have already acquired the art of cooking. Yet Oakeshott certainly does not limit the relevance of the term to cookery. He also claims: "what is true of cookery, of painting, of natural science and religion, is no less true of politics", referring what Pericles had on offer in the funeral oration written by Thucydides. According to Scruton it addressed the issue of "the value of practical and traditional knowledge" as its main theme.[43]

Oakeshott's understanding of practical knowledge is not far, in fact, from Aristotle's notion of *phronesis*, often translated as practical knowledge or practical wisdom. Aristotle describes the practically wise person as one who has the ability "to deliberate correctly about what is good and advantageous for himself… /and/ about what sorts of things further living well as a whole."[44] It is deliberation and judgement which defines for him practical wisdom, and his description takes into account human imperfection. Aristotle's examples include Phidias, and Polyclitus, two sculptors, both

[38] Roger Scruton: The Need for Nations, Civitas Institute for the Study of Civil Society, London, 2004., Roger Scruton: England: An Elegy, Chatto and Windus, London, 2000, Roger Scruton: News from Somewhere. On Settling, Continuum, London, New York, 2004.
[39] Scruton: Rousseau
[40] Scruton: Rousseau
[41] Polanyi, Michael. 1958. Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
[42] Michael Oakeshott: Rationalism in politics, in: Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays, foreword by Timothy Fuller, Liberty Press, Indianapolis, 1991., 5-43., 12.
[43] Ibid, 13., n. 6.
[44] See VI.5-13. in Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics, translated by C.D.C. Reeve, Hackett Publising, Indianapolis, Cambridge, 2014., 1140a25-1145a15.

of whom famously embodied the best virtues of their craft. He, mentions Pericles, as well, as an example of the practically wise statesman, who has "a theoretical grasp on what is good for themselves and for human beings.[45]

Scruton quotes Burke, who famously criticized those, who rely "on their own private stock of reason", instead of relying on "the general bank and capital of nations, and of ages."[46] Although Scruton, as we saw above, also criticised Burke, about a wrong formulation of accumulation, his strong point is that social knowledge is, by definition, more reliable than a private stock of reason, when social matters are concerned. This point is crucial in his criticism of liberalism. As Scruton points out, the liberal approach is rooted in the Lockean-Cartesian-Kantian trust in individual human rationality, and this is not shared by Scruton. As he understands it, liberalism "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."[47] Let us next try to explicate this notion of "hard-earned legacy of consensual solutions".

The rationale of *oikophilia*

It was in Scruton's book on Green Philosophy, that he worked out a full-blown version of his philosophy of oikophilia.[48] This book is based on a contrast between social engineering with central control and a policy based on local affections, resulting in *homeostasis* and resilience.[49] The philosophical argument in favour of the latter perspective lies in the nature of practical reasoning. To show the relevance of preserving the local customs Scruton once again refers to "common-law rights – notably rights of way, green lanes and rights of commons –" in order to show that through them common law "ensured that the countryside remained open", and the owners' self-interest "did not undermine the experience of collective settlement."[50] Among his further examples we find a narrative of civil society initiatives to preserve the landscape of the countryside, as well as the townscapes and city centres of ancient towns. According to Scruton, much of that effort was based on a common sense aesthetic preference for the old-style, instead of the rigid functionality of the modern. An example of that preference is to be found in G. M. Trevelyan's book *Must England's Beauty Perish*? which was published in 1926, calling attention to urban sprawl and the destruction caused by road constructions. A further reference for Scruton is the architect Clough Williams-Ellis, who in his book *England and the Octopus*, called attention to the dangers of modern urban developments. All of those individual efforts together exercised an impact on the government majority to vote in Parliament for the Town and Country Planning Act after WW2, "establishing Green Belts,… and laying down nationwide constraints on building in rural areas".[51] This law helped to preserve historic town centres around Britain.

Scruton also compares two, rather different initiatives which led to the establishment of new settlements, Milton Keynes, from 1967 and Poundbury, from 1993. He claims that Milton Keynes, a government investment, followed the paradigm of the sprawl, and turned out to be a negative example, spreading "over eighty-eight square miles of aesthetic pollution", causing "an ecological disaster of the first order, and a monument to state planning."[52] His counter-example is Poundbury,

[45] Nicomachean Ethics, V.6.
[46] Scruton: Rousseau
[47] Scruton: Rousseau
[48] Roger Scruton: Green Philosophy, How to Think Seriously about the Planet, Atlantic Books, London, 2013.
[49] Green Philosophy, 325.
[50] Green Philosophy, 334.
[51] Green Philosophy, 345.
[52] Green Philosophy, 347.

intitiated not by the government, but by the cooperation of an architect and the Prince of Wales, and characterised as “small, compact, with a centripetal plan that leaves each landowner free to build within aesthetic side-constraints.”[53]

All of these are, in fact, not more, than particular historical precursors, incidents, empirical data. The philosophical explanation is yet to come. Why should be a policy based on local attachments be more promising than a rationally planned economy, based on the central control of local developments? Scruton addresses this issue in a philosophical chapter, taking on board beauty, piety and desecration. His focus on aesthetic value might look like a subjective choice, explained by his own taste. Yet his proposal to take aesthetic judgement as a model for a resource of inherited social knowledge is based on the assumption that there is something like a common standard of taste, which enjoys priority before individual aesthetic preferences. His example is the traditional European city. The success of its sustainability, the fact that it serves as a renewable habitat is due to the fact, that it is an example of what happens “when people are guided by a shared tradition that makes aesthetic judgement central, and which lays down standards that constrain what everybody does”.[54] The point he wants to make is that if aesthetic choice is an expression of, or at least is in harmony with a common standard, based on inherited social knowledge, it can lead to decisions, that are helpful for the long term survival of the local community. Or to put it in another way: inherited social knowledge is helpful to make common aesthetic judgements, which will help to preserve the local natural or built environment. Manners, or local customs are continuous with aesthetic choices, and they can serve as a guide even to correct a tradition from the inside. Both beauty and local manners are helpful as coordinating devices, “whereby individuals can adjust to each other and live on terms”.[55] That is, aesthetic choice serves as an invisible hand to arrange human relationships instead of the use of power by a central authority.

Conclusion

Scruton lost his illusions about enlightened rationality as a young man in 1968 in Paris. His philosophical reliance instead on inherited and embodied social knowledge and local attachments, based on established, common aesthetic judgements and local manners, is meant as the conservative alternative to the enlightened ideal of individual, instrumental rationality, advocated by thinkers like Rousseau or Kant. Scruton does not offer a devastating critique of Kant. Instead, his scapegoat is Rousseau whom he identifies as a forerunner of not only the French Revolution, but also of liberalism, and its latter day perversion in the aggressive ideology of 1968 Paris. While Rousseau tried to build his social and moral philosophy on the concept of the social contract, Scruton relies on inherited, embodied forms of social knowledge. In this he regards himself as the follower of Burke, whom he takes an enlightened critic of enlightened rationality. In the final session the paper argued, that Scruton’s concept of *oikophilia*, the love of the local environment, is an alternative form of communal rationality, and as such much more viable than the hand-geared social planning of central state or party authorities, or global capitalist investments.

[53] Green Philosophy, 347.
[54] Green Philosophy, 260.
[55] Green Philosophy, 261.