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Roger Scruton

I include the following extract from my Meaning of Conservatism *(1981), since it touches on questions and ideas that are not elsewhere mentioned in this volume.*

The conservative attitude demands the persistence of a civil order. What is this order? And why should it be conserved? . . .

. . . any organization in which there is genuine government possesses two aspects, of civil society and state. Neither aspect can exist independently, and the reader must accept therefore that the conservative vision of society – which it is the purpose of this chapter to explore – will already contain strong intimations of the conservative vision of the state.

Nevertheless, conservatism originates in an attitude to civil society, and it is from a conception of civil society that its political doctrine is derived. But a political doctrine must contain a motive to action, and a source of appeal. The conservative, unable as he is to appeal to a utopian future, or to any future that is not, as it were, already contained in the present and past, must avail himself of conceptions which are both directly applicable to things as they are and at the same time indicative of a motivating force in men. And this force must be as great as the desire for the 'freedom' and 'social justice' offered by his rivals. There are three concepts which immediately present themselves, and whose contemporary application we must examine: the concepts of authority, allegiance and tradition.

AUTHORITY AND POWER

. . . 'Authority' can mean many things. In particular, it can mean either established or legitimate power. In either sense it can be

granted, delegated, removed, respected, ignored, opposed. A person who has authority has it from a certain source – although it is well if he has authority in another sense, according to which it means not the legitimate or established principle of rule, but the natural gift to command allegiance. For the Marxist, 'authority', and the concept of 'legitimacy' through which it dignifies itself, are simply parts of the ideology of class rule, concepts belonging to and inculcated by a ruling 'hegemony'. They belong to that immense unconscious conspiracy whereby power has sought to entrench itself in accepted institutions, and whereby the historical nature (which is to say, the impermanence) of those institutions is masked. What is historical is presented as natural; power is represented as unchangeable power. But make no mistake, says the Marxist – the only *reality* here is power.

It is important to see that such doctrines, whether true or false, may be irrelevant to the practice of politics. What distinguishes political activity from the biological grouping of the herd is that the structure of the first is determined by the concepts of those who engage in it, whereas that of the second obeys only the inexorable laws of unconscious nature. And you can try as hard as you like to undermine the 'ruling ideology' which first placed legitimacy in the centre of common consciousness, but you will not succeed in making people remove from their minds a concept which – in their actual dealings with the world – is indispensable to them. People have the *idea* of legitimacy, and see the world as coloured in its terms; and it is how they *see* the world which determines how they act on it. Now the belief in legitimacy exists and will always exist as part of common political consciousness, and a society is not happy in which men cannot see that legitimacy enacted, in which they see *only* establishment, and only established power. The strength of this belief in legitimacy needs no comment. From the Norman Conquest to the contemporary reactions to trade-union power, the concept of legitimacy has governed political practice, and whether or not there is any reality which corresponds to this concept is a question that may be put aside as of no political (although of great philosophical) significance.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

In order to understand the conservative attitude to authority, we must examine a recent and now seemingly irrepressible political idea, the idea that there can be 'no obligation on any man which ariseth not from some act of his own' as Thomas Hobbes once put it. The most popular version of this idea sees the transition from power to legitimacy as residing in an unspoken, unknown and unknowable 'social contract'. Now no one, least of all a conservative, is likely to believe that government is possible without the propagation of myths. But this particular fiction – which at one time proved convenient in persuading men that the legitimacy of government lay elsewhere than in the divine right of kings – bears about as little relation to the facts as the view that my parents and I once surreptitiously contracted that they would nourish and educate me in return for my later care. Naturally, not every contract has to be explicit: there are implied contracts in law, brought about, for example, by an act of part performance. But even in implied contracts (except for those peculiar cases where a contract is implied by statute) there must be, somewhere, a choice, and a deliberation; a knowledge of consequences and a belief in, if not a mutual recognition of, an exchange of promises. The idea that there *must* be, at the heart of all political, and indeed all social organization, something in the nature of a contract (but a contract which, as it were, arises from social intercourse and does not – because clearly it could not – precede it), that idea stems from a singular pattern of thought which . . . bears directly on our theme.

The pattern of thought is this: Human beings, as free, autonomous agents, fall under the rule of Justice. Which is to say, to put it very roughly and . . . in the abstract terminology of Kant, that they must be treated as ends and not as means. To treat them as means only is to disrespect their freedom, and hence to sacrifice one's right to any similar respect from them. The fulfilment of a contract is, not the highest point, but the clearest case of just relations. A promise is made, another given, knowingly and in full cognizance of consequences. To promise in such a situation, and to rely on the other's fulfilment, while withholding any intention to return, is to treat the other as a means, to abuse his trust, and hence to act unjustly towards him. Here we can see that one man has assumed a right over another to which he is not entitled; for although the other granted him that right, he did so only conditionally, only on the understanding that he acquired a similar right in return. So now we can distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate claims; the 'rights' so vociferously claimed by Mr Boffin in *Our Mutual Friend* are evidently of the latter kind. The interest of contract is that it consists entirely of rights freely granted, and in that freedom (so both common sense and common law have always suggested) lies their legitimacy. To transfer the language of contract to the social sphere provides us at once, then, with a means to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate power. The criterion may be complex in its application, taking in many subtleties and qualifications as society develops in response to it; but its essence is simple. Does power arise out of and express the contractual basis, or does it claim some right which transcends it? The power of the police might be seen in this light as legitimate, that of the Mafia as not.

It is difficult to be persuaded by such a view. For the very possibility of free and open contract presupposes a sufficient social order, not because it would otherwise be impossible to enforce contracts (although that too is true), but because without social order the very notion of an individual *committing* himself, through a promise, would not arise. Already we have supposed shared institutions and a conception of human freedom, which could hardly have their origin in the very practice of contract which they serve to make possible. This is not to say that one cannot *see* society in this contractual way, in the way of contemporary American liberalism, and so construe all forms of social organization as assemblages of their members, with choice or consent as the ultimate binding principle. But for this vision to capture even the smallest part of what is recognized as the 'authority' of state, the social arrangement must be given plausible historical antecedents (such as those of New England) with which to mystify the inquiring mind. Perhaps the most remarkable thing that has happened in American politics during this century is the recognition that the powers of state in fact transcend their supposed contractual basis, and must therefore look for their authority elsewhere.

AUTHORITY AND FAMILY

But let us again step down from the political to the private realm. Consider the family. I have already suggested that it would be

absurd to think of family ties as contractual, or family obligations as in any way arising from a free relinquishing of autonomy, or even from some unspoken bargain which rises into consciousness, so to speak, at some later stage. Even as a metaphor, the language of contract here fails to make contact with the facts. . . .

The family . . ., is a small social unit which shares with civil-society the singular quality of being non-contractual, of arising (both for the children and for the parents) not out of choice but out of natural necessity. And (to turn the analogy round) it is obvious that the bond which ties the citizen to society is likewise not a voluntary but a kind of natural bond. Locke, and the other great individualists, who thought otherwise, were also constrained to think that the world contained many 'vacant places' which could be filled by those who chose to withdraw from their inherited arrangement. As we now know, every country sports the sign 'engaged'. And besides, is it not psychological naïvety to think that I, now, at thirty-five, rooted in my language, culture and history, could suddenly do a volte-face and see myself as English only by *accident*, free at every moment to change? If I go elsewhere I take my Englishness with me, as much as I take my attachment to family, language, life and self. I go as a colonial or as an exile, and either sink like the Tibetans or swim like the Jews.

The analogy with the family is useful if we are to understand the role of authority in politics. It is clear from the start that a child must be acted upon by its parents' power: its very love for them will accord to them that power, and parents no more escape from its exercise by being permissive than does an officer cease to command his troops by leaving them constantly at ease. A child is what it is by virtue of its parents' will, and consequently the parent has an indefeasible obligation to form and influence the child's development. In this very process is power, and it is of necessity an established power, since it resides already with the parent at the child's first coming into the world. Now there is a sense in which every child does not only need its parents to exercise that power, but will also demand that they do so, to the extent that it cherishes their protection. There can be no ministering to the love of a child, and no granting of love, that is not also, in the first instance, an exercise of established power. For how is the child to recognize, from all those beings that surround it, the object which is its parent, that is, its principle of protection and its source of love? Surely, it must feel the influence of a will in its life, of a desire *for* its

life, besides its own. It must feel the constraint of another's love for it. And it is only in recognizing the existence of an objective power over what it will do that the child is pulled out of its self-immersion into the recognition of its parent as an autonomous being, a being who not only gives love but gives it freely, and towards whom it owes love in return. The kind of personal love that we envisage as the end of family union requires, as its precondition, the sense of established power – the child's unformed recognition that, in respect of at least one other being, he is helpless – combined with the growing awareness that the power of that being is also an exercise of freedom. And it is a similar recognition of constraint, helplessness, and subjection to external will that heralds the citizen's realization of his membership of society; in this recognition love of one's country is born.

Consider the other side of family loyalties. We are apt to think of children as having a responsibility towards their parents, a responsibility that in no way reflects any merely contractual right, but which is simply *due* to the parents as a recognition of the filial tie. This sense of obligation is not founded in justice – which is the sphere of free actions between beings who *create* their moral ties – but rather in respect, honour, or (as the Romans called it) piety. To neglect my parents in old age is not an act of injustice but an act of impiety. Impiety is the refusal to recognize as legitimate a demand that does not arise from consent or choice. And we see that the behaviour of children towards their parents cannot be understood unless we admit this ability to recognize a bond that is 'transcendent', that exists, as it were 'objectively', outside the sphere of individual choice. It is this ability that is transferred by the citizen from hearth and home to place, people and country. The bond of society – as the conservative sees it – is just such a 'transcendent' bond, and it is inevitable that the citizen will be disposed to recognize its legitimacy, will be disposed, in other words, to bestow authority upon the existing order. He will be deterred from doing so largely by acts of arbitrary power, or by a general 'unfriendliness' in the public order, of the kind experienced by the deprived and unfostered child.

Authority, in the sense that we have considered, is an enormous artifact. By which I mean, not that authority is intentionally constructed, but rather that it exists only in so far as men exercise, understand and submit to it. The condition of society presupposes this general connivance, and a conservative will seek to uphold all

those practices and institutions – among which, of course, the family is pre-eminent – through which the habits of allegiance are acquired. As we shall see, this necessary corollary of conservative thinking is incompatible with any suggestions that the conservative is an advocate either of liberal ideals, or of the so-called 'minimal state'. . . . No serious person *can* believe that there ought to be a power greater than that of the state, a power that can, if it chooses, put itself beyond the reach of law. The conservative believes in the power of state as necessary to the state's authority, and will seek to establish and enforce that power in the face of every influence that opposes it. However, his desire is to see power standing not naked in the forum of politics, but clothed in constitution, operating always through an adequate system of law, so that its movement seems never barbarous or oppressive, but always controlled and inevitable, an expression of the civilized vitality through which allegiance is inspired. The constitution, therefore, and the institutions which sustain it, will always lie at the heart of conservative thinking. The conservative places his faith in arrangements that are known and tried, and wishes to imbue them with all the authority necessary to constitute an accepted and objective public realm. It is from this that his respect for tradition and custom arises, and not from any end – such as freedom – towards which these practices are seen as a means. This point is of the essence, and I shall elaborate it further.

ALLEGIANCE

Consider, then, the concept of allegiance. It is allegiance which defines the condition of society, and which constitutes society as something greater than the 'aggregate of individuals' that the liberal mind perceives. It is proper for a conservative to be sceptical of claims made on behalf of the value of the individual, if these claims should conflict with the allegiance necessary to society, even though he may wish the *state* (in the sense of the apparatus of government) to stand in a fairly loose relation to the activities of individual citizens. Individuality too is an artifact, an achievement which depends upon the social life of man. And indeed, as many historians have pointed out, it is a recent venture of the human spirit for men and women to define themselves as individuals, as creatures whose nature and value is summed up in their unique

individual being. The condition of man requires that the individual, while he exists and acts as an autonomous being, does so only because he can first identify himself as something greater – as a member of a society, group, class, state or nation, of some arrangement to which he may not attach a name, but which he recognizes instinctively as home. Politically speaking, this bond of allegiance – which, seen from the heights of intellectual speculation as 'my station and its duties', is experienced as a peculiar certainty in the activity of day to day – is of a value which transcends the value of individuality. For the majority of men, the bond of allegiance has immediate authority, while the call to individuality is unheard. It is therefore wrong to consider that a stateman has some kind of duty to minister to the second of these, and ignore the first. If the two impulses are not in conflict, as they perhaps were not, for example, in the society described by Fielding (and defended by Burke), then well and good. But if the second threatens the first – as it must do in a society where individuality seeks to realize itself independently of the institutions and traditions that have nurtured it – then the civil order is threatened too. And the business of politics is to maintain the civil order, and to prevent the 'dust and powder of individuality' that was once described as its ruin.

I have sketched the formation of allegiance in the family bond, and the residue of respect or piety which grows from that, ripe for transference to whatever might present itself as a fitting social object. The primary object of allegiance is, as I argued, authority, which is to say power conceived as legitimate, and so bound by responsibility. In the family this authority and responsibility have their foundation and end in love, but from the beginning they transcend the personal love of individuals. (There is, surely, a great mystification involved in the Freudian idea of the 'family romance'. Freud was getting at something of immense importance, which is the connection – perceived also by Hegel and Wagner – between the prohibition of incest and the existence of the family as 'home'. But this surely need not persuade us that the natural bond is always and inevitably erotic. In this area the distinctions, and not the similarities, have the greatest meaning.) Authority and responsibility arise from and sustain the sense of the family as something greater than the aggregate of its members, an entity in which the members participate, so that its being and their being are intermingled. Man is increased and not diminished through his participation in such arrangements. Mere individuality, relinquished

first to the family, and then to the whole social organism, is finally replaced by the mature allegiance which is the only politically desirable form of 'freedom'. It is obvious that such allegiance is a matter of degree, being fervent at some times, passive or failing at others. The possibility of conservatism supposes only that it exists to some degree, and in most active people.

It would seem, then, that the healthy state or nation must command the allegiance of its subjects. Patriotism of some kind – the individual's sense of his identity with a social order – is politically indispensable.

. . ., it has to be recognized that patriotism is not simply a stance towards the international world. It is in the first instance a condition of private life, and occupies a unique place in the deliberations of the citizen. To understand it we must refer again to two axioms of conservative thought. I call them axioms, although, naturally, they are implicit and unspoken in the instincts of *homo conservans*.

THE NATIONAL FOCUS

The first axiom is the simple principle that, lacking an overmastering ideal . . . conservatism must necessarily take many forms. Solon, asked what is the best form of government, replied 'For whom? And at what time?' It is a *particular* country, a *particular* history, a *particular* form of life that commands the conservative's respect and energy, and while he may have an imaginative grasp of other real or ideal arrangements, he is not immersed in them as he is immersed in the society that is his own. No utopian vision will have force for him compared to the force of present practice, for while the former is abstract and incomplete, the latter is concrete, qualified by familiar complexities that may be understood without describing them. To the extent that there are arrangements that have been proved in social life, and which have power to command the loyalty of their participants, to that extent is there variety among the forms of conservative politics. Moral scruples may turn the conservative from condoning the practices of others of his kind; but his preferred form of political life will not be a deduction from abstract principles sufficient in themselves to forbid what he finds distasteful. . . .

THE PRIORITY OF APPEARANCE

The second axiom is more difficult, although equally fundamental to the conservative creed. This is that the political activity of the citizen is determined by his own conception of his social nature. The *reality* of politics is not to be found outside the motives of those who engage in it, and whatever Marxists may say about the relation between base and superstructure, or about the economic causation of social behaviour, its truth does not bear on the *political* understanding of humanity. . . .

The argument may be illustrated by an analogy from the science of linguistics. Suppose that a linguist presented a law of English speech, which told us when a man will say 'The house is white', and when he will say 'Something is white'. Given sufficient theory, this law would provide a complete account of the relation between those sentences, since it would tell us all the facts about their utterance: when, where and why. But in another sense it would be incomplete. For there is a connection between those sentences that may have nothing to do with causality, and yet which is of the first importance, a connection of meaning. It is this connection which is grasped by the man who understands them, and he may have a *complete* understanding of them while being ignorant of the linguist's laws. And conversely, the linguist may have a full knowledge of causal laws, and yet lack the native speaker's understanding of what is said. For his laws may not issue in a dictionary.

Similarly, whatever the economic, social and biological determinants of a man's behaviour, that behaviour is *understood* by him and his fellows in another way: in terms of its *meaning*. To describe this meaning one would have to use the concepts available to the agent, and not the specialized classifications of a predictive science. Moreover, a man's intentions and acts derive from his own conception of the world; there can be no 'impartial observer' of human behaviour, if that means an observer who has no imaginative understanding of the concepts which determine agency. To engage in political activity is to understand, and in varying degrees to share, the common way of seeing things. This may require an act of imaginative identification; but it does not involve (and indeed is largely incompatible with) the application of any neutral 'science of man'.