

PANEL ONE

Dominic Green: “Atlantic Crossings: Roger Scruton, Christopher Hitchens, Paul Johnson”

Scruton, like Hitchens and Johnson, was a British writer who began on the left, ended up somewhere on the right, and was taken more seriously in the United States than in his native country. American conservatism, as a self-consciously intellectual effort, makes use of self-consciously intellectual writers, while British conservatism remains, as Scruton put it, more of a sensibility. We could call this the “Kirk versus Burke” difference. Scruton’s concern for tradition, organic society and community were not entirely compatible with the free-market libertarianism that dominated the American right in the 1980s and 1990s, and which Johnson embraced. Nor did Scruton concur with Hitchens on the wisdom of exporting democracy by force. But Scruton’s thought can be seen as anticipating currents of thought in the post-2016 American right.

Joshua Nichols: “Scruton as Leisurist”

Scruton’s whole philosophy of art, culture, religion, and politics is centered on the idea of contemplation, that important task every human ought and often participates in. Indeed, the very basis and nature of the liberal arts and of academic freedom is based in the old Aristotelian saying, “We work, so that we may have leisure.” This discussion will involve Leisure broadly construed, how Scruton applied this view of leisure in his various writings, and what we can acknowledge in broader American experience of life, liberty, and happiness.

Fisher Derderian: “A New Artistic Agenda: A Scrutonian Vision for Contemporary Art”

This talk explores the potential for a new direction in artistic philosophy and practice, inspired by Scruton’s views on art and aesthetics. The discussion will focus on how Scruton’s ideas can inform and shape contemporary artistic endeavors, advocating for a renewed artistic vision that resonates with today’s societal challenges and aesthetic values.

PANEL TWO

Ferenc Hörcher: “Scruton on the Conservatism of the Founding Fathers

Roger’s Scruton last piece of political philosophy, his *Conservatism. An Invitation to the Great Tradition* (2017) retraces in detail the origins of conservatism. It is in this context that he presents the somewhat surprising theses that “Jefferson was a conservative” and simultaneously that beyond their authors’ liberal position, The Federalist Papers “have also been an important input into American conservatism.” This talk presents and reflects on Scruton’s unorthodox understanding of the conservatism of the Founding Fathers. In spite of having lived for years in the US, he did not publish a Tocqueville-like reflection on democracy in America. Yet he had powerful and surprisingly positive views on American conservatism, claiming “the United States of America is in many ways the place where conservatism, as a social and political philosophy, has been most influential.” This talk will concentrate on the last piece of Scruton, and in it, on his somewhat paradoxical

interpretation of Jefferson and the Federalist Papers, stressing the liberal standpoints and conservative relevancies of both.

Hussein Aboubakr Mansour: “Navigating the Crossroads: Scruton’s Legacy and the Challenge of Third World Intellectualism”

Sir Roger Scruton’s philosophy stands as a bastion of Western classical values, emphasizing continuity, coherence, and cultural legacy. This philosophy starkly contrasts with the Third World intellectual endeavor, which, at best, condemns these values or, at worst, negates them altogether. These intellectuals, whose narratives paradoxically unfold within the very tradition they seek to challenge, remain underexplored in discussions about the origins of identity politics—a discourse often fantastically confined to American cultural dynamics. Yet, the influential roles of intellectual migrants like Edward Said and Frantz Fanon in shaping an American identity politics that threatens the Western canon are critical. Whether acknowledged or not, their intellectual legacy has begun to supplant the Western canon in numerous higher education institutions. Decolonization, once a slogan of African dictators or Middle Eastern eternal leaders, has become the ethos of radicals intent on dismantling Western culture, learning, art, literature, public spaces, and all that Sir Scruton cherished. Many students are now more likely to encounter the jargon of decolonization and orientalism than to engage meaningfully with the primary sources of Enlightenment thinkers or the foundational texts of Western thought. Is the battle for the Western canon already lost? Or is there a path to redemption? This lecture aims not only to offer a critique but also to pose deeper questions about whether Western conservatism can redeem itself and its now nativized ethnic intellectuals from destroying the very thing they both love.

Daniel Cullen: “Mere Conservatism: Roger Scruton and America”

The topic will take off from the late Peter Lawler’s musing about whether Scruton is best considered a Conservative Liberal or a Liberal Conservative. The issue is important for thinking through what, if anything, Scruton’s conservatism has to say to Americans and, especially, American conservatives who continue to debate whether the United States had a liberal or conservative founding. My essay will take up Scruton’s distinction of “empirical conservatism” and “metaphysical conservatism” and argue that the latter remains the core of his political philosophy and, for Americans especially, its central enigma.

PANEL THREE

Daniel Asia: “Roger Scruton: on Music and High Culture”

Roger Scruton wrote many articles and books about music, probably more than any other philosopher, with the possible exception of Rousseau. For Scruton, music mattered to him personally and to our understanding of ourselves in the world. More particularly, Classical music mattered. My talk will review Scruton’s contributions to our understanding of music of the West, as part of high culture, and why he thought it was so important, both musically and philosophically.

James R. Harrigan: “Pop Culture: Why Scruton Got it Wrong”

Justin Shubow: “Roger Scruton’s Philosophy of Architecture.”

The leading philosopher of architecture of his time, Roger Scruton spent his life thinking and writing about the aesthetics of the built environment. He published such books as *The Aesthetics of Architecture* and *The Classical Vernacular: Architectural Principles in an Age of Nihilism*, along with numerous pieces of popular journalism on the subject. A staunch foe of Modernist architecture, Scruton argued for the superiority of the classical tradition, which he believed to be unparalleled in its capacity to produce beauty and harmony, and to make us feel at home in the world. Controversy exploded in Britain when he was appointed chairman of the UK government’s Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission, which addressed the poor design of homes and places. A similar controversy has erupted in recent years in America as both President Trump and Congress have promoted classical and traditional design for federal buildings and U.S. courthouses. This talk will survey Scruton’s ideas about architecture as well as how his followers should respond to recent events in America.

PANEL FOUR

Daniel J. Mahoney: “Scientism and Common Life”

This talk deals with the threat that scientism or scientific materialism poses to common life and human dignity. Scruton had a great deal to say on this subject. The reduction of the mind to the brain, the denial of free will in the name of various determinisms, the cult of scientific expertise at the expense of practical judgment, and the repudiation of personhood and the soul as such, pose a grave threat to civilization as such. This talk relates all this to developments in the United States and the Western world.

James Bryson: “Religion and human flourishing in America and the Modern World.”

This paper considers Scruton’s turn to religious and theological questions later in his career as he wrestled with the place of religion in the modern world, a struggle on which the American experiment, he thought, shed important light. His turn to religion went together with his life long preoccupation with art—music and opera above all. To assist with the argument of this paper, therefore, I will also consider Scruton’s exegesis of the works of Wagner, in whose vision he saw all the central modern existential tensions—religion or art; duty or freedom; individual or community—embodied.

Speaker: Phillip Magness: “Postmodernism, Critical Theory, and other Fashionable Nonsense: Measuring the New Left turn in Academia”

In his classic text “Fools, Frauds, and Firebrands,” Roger Scruton traced the decline of analytical rigor in the academy to the influence of the New Left, a group of politically active but ultimately empty rhetoricians who had come to dominate large swaths of the humanities and social sciences.

Scruton asked how this literature, distinctive for its low rigor and often a lack of basic coherence, had come to dominate ostensibly intellectual endeavors. In this paper, I deploy empirical methods to answer Scruton's question. Using citation analysis, I show that various New Left figures rose in prominence by linking themselves to external political events between the mid-20th century and the present. These findings suggest that the New Left's rise to a dominant position in the academy derives from political fashionability and happenstance, rather than any intrinsic merit to their arguments or philosophies.