

whatever; I hold neither of those positions.

*Cogito:* Would your politics give rise to no plan for human society?

*Scruton:* In so far as there is such a thing as political conservatism, it consists precisely in the repudiation of the idea of a plan, and a recognition that rational conduct in society comes through the adoption of forms, customs and traditions which are not of one's own devising.

*Cogito:* To a lot of people tradition implies the oppression of the individual.

*Scruton:* Yes, but then that is where it is necessary to be more subtle about this question about what the individual is. For the old-fashioned Millian liberal, that is right. Mill talked of the "despotism of custom", and thinks of custom as on the side of oppression of the individual who is trying to release himself from bondage. I think that the matter is far more subtle. If one can be forgiven for using Hegelian language, I think there is a dialectical relation between an individual and the community of which he is a part.

*Cogito:* Does talk of tradition not sound reactionary given the current British government's support of free-market liberalism?

*Scruton:* I do not know if your interpretation of the *realpolitik* of the Conservative party is right. Its actual appeal is the idea of the continuity of the British nation and of British sovereignty, the idea of law and order.

*Cogito:* Are you then well disposed towards the current movement of neo-Aristotelianism?

*Scruton:* Aristotle's vision of what man is, and particularly his philosophy of virtue, has got much in it that is of use to us and I think his idea of what a moral education is, is right.

*Cogito:* What consequences do his ideas have?

*Scruton:* That happiness consists in self-discipline, in acquiring habits that mediate between excess and deficiency. As I argue in my book on sexual desire, you cannot be an Aristotelian without seeing a lot of the point of traditional sexual morality. You cannot be a sexual libertarian and an Aristotelian.

*Cogito:* Aristotle believed that virtue could be acquired through habit. What do you therefore think of proposals to teach philosophy in schools, a subject in which critical thinking rather than factual retention is important?

*Scruton:* I am against teaching philosophy in schools for the reasons you are suggesting. It is fine to teach people to question, but first you must give

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them some certainties. Without certainties the whole point of intellectual endeavour would never be grasped. Unfortunately, and in our time